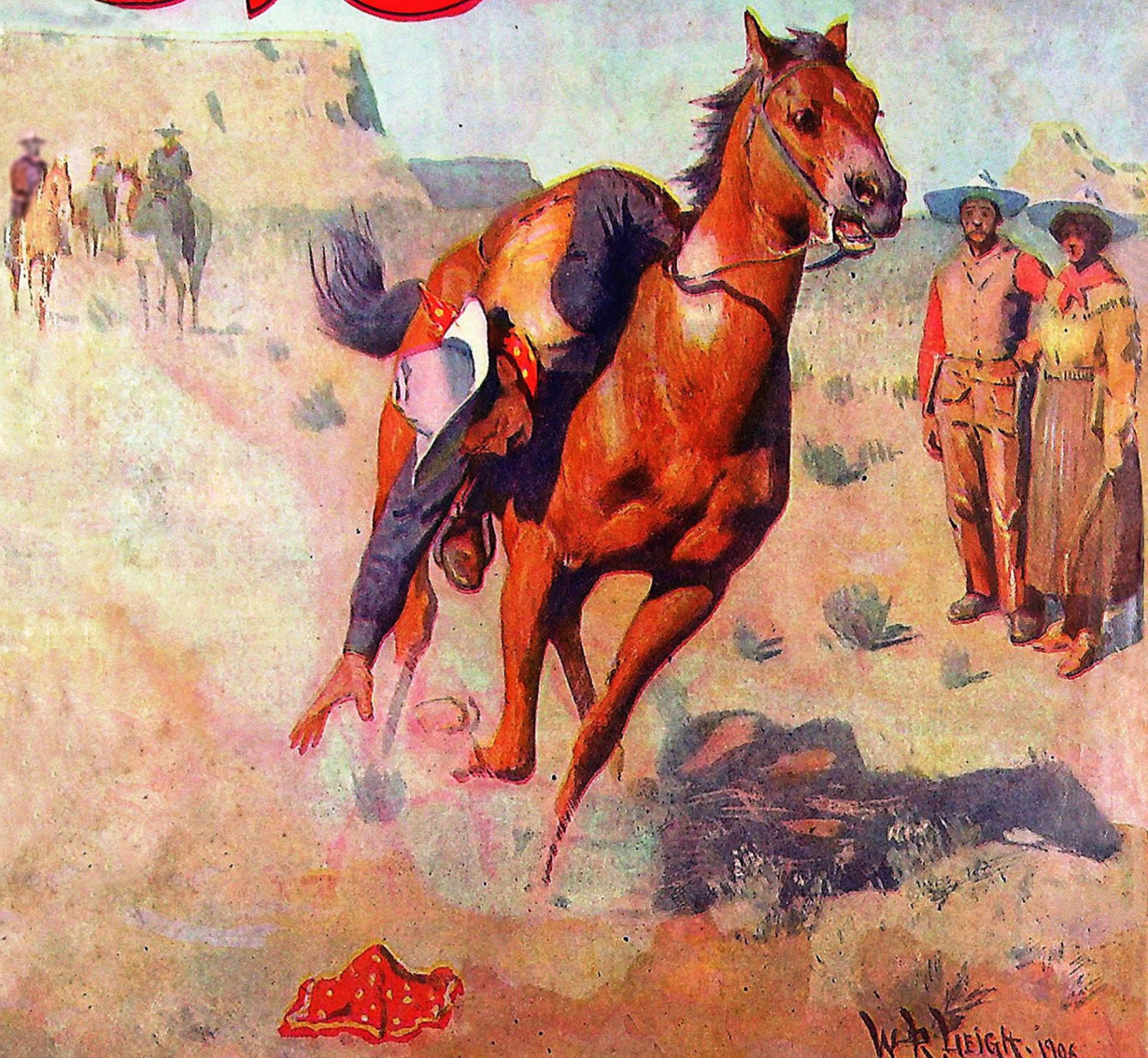
AUG., 1906

10 CENTS

The Popular Magazine



THIS SPECIAL WESTERN ISSUE COMES NEAR BEING OUR BEST NUMBER YET

A Chat With You

AT Backworth, a mining town in Northumberland, has been founded a "fiction university." It aims to teach its pupils the art of story-writing. To us, the school seems rather superfluous, for we believe that any one can secure such training at a little more labor, perhaps, but at no cost whatsoever, save for paper and stamps. If a man writes stories, and submits them to magazines, he may be reasonably certain that they will get a careful reading. If he has ability, it will be recognized sooner or later. If he hasn't the ability, no "fiction university" can impart it to him. "You can lead a horse to water, but you can't make him drink. You can lead a man to college, but you can't make him think."

* * *

ACCOMPANYING at least three-fourths of the manuscripts we receive from unknown writers come letters requesting a criticism of the story. We are sorry that we cannot grant every one of these requests. We are sure that those who submit stories to THE POPULAR are readers and well-wishers. We would like to write to each one of them personally, but—we can't. There are too many of them. There are not enough trained literary critics in America to conduct the correspondence that would result. We can talk to you all in this column, however, readers and authors together. We want all who submit manuscripts to THE POPULAR to know that they are addressing an appreciative editor. At the same time, we will give a few rules concerning our views on story-writing. This will perhaps take the place of a personal reply to the thousands who have asked for it.

* * *

STORIES must be *interesting*. They must be interesting not only to the author and his immediate friends, but to a stranger who happens to glance at them. A story must catch hold of the reader's attention at the very start, and keep hold of it till the end. A story that a man must force himself to read for the first page or so is useless, no matter how fine the latter part of it may be.

Stories must be *convincing*. The things described in them must *seem* real. When, upon reading a story, the incidents strike you as improbable, there is something radically wrong. Stories have been successful in spite of the fact that many of their incidents were wildly improbable, not to say impossible. But the reader never thought of the improbability while he read the story. The story was *convincingly* told. If a story strikes the reader as impossible in incident, it is no defense for the writer to say that the thing actually happened in real life. You must make it seem real to the reader.

A story to be really good must have a good plot. It must describe conflict of different personalities.

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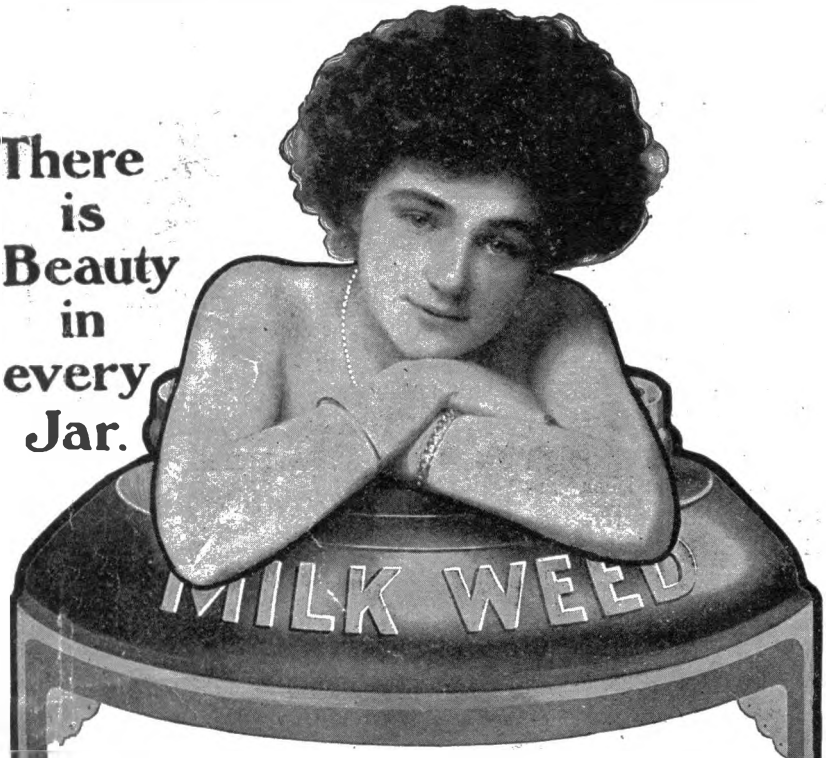

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SEE YOU CAN HANG IT UP

show a struggle of some kind with a triumph of some kind at the end of it. A tale without a plot is no tale at all. It may be a good piece of descriptive work, or character study, but the interest in this sort of thing is passive. The interest in the story with a strong plot is vital.

A story should have "human interest." Its characters must be real people, with real, human feelings. The plot and treatment must be of such a character as to convince the reader that the people in the story are something more than mere puppets, that they are creatures of flesh and blood like himself. The reader must understand the feelings of the characters in the story, and sympathize with them. This is the hardest thing of all for the writer to achieve.

A STORY which complies with the four rules mentioned above will attract attention everywhere. If we receive a story that has in it all these qualities, we are sure to write to the author about it, whether we can publish the story or not. Of course, there are certain other things that govern the selection of stories for THE POPULAR. We are trying to get not only good stories, but the right kind of stories. We are trying to give our readers the style of story that they prefer. In the first place, we want a story that has in it some flavor of incident and adventure. We do not want stories that leave a bad taste in the mind of the reader, or that are essentially tragic in theme. We don't want stories that deal with the morbid and unnatural, and we don't want love-stories pure and simple.

"IN THE CAUSE OF FREEDOM," by Arthur W. Marchmont, which starts in next month's issue of THE POPULAR, is a story which illustrates the points we have mentioned. It catches the interest of the reader at the first chapter, and it holds it till the last. It has a plot that is unique in its way, and unexpected in its denouement. Mr. Marchmont captured the reading public of England and America with his novel, "When I Was Czar." This new story is laid in the Russian atmosphere with which he is familiar, and eclipses his former work in interest. "The Ultimate Rogue," by Cecil Whittier Tate, is the novelette for next month. It is a really remarkable piece of fiction, the tale of a man with a dual personality, half villain, half hero. The scene of the story is the far north. The arctic has a fascination of its own. In spite of peril and hardship, those who have once visited it are always anxious to return. No one who reads "The Ultimate Rogue" can help feeling the charm of the magnetic north. "Grandpa Addicks," by Arthur Colton, is a short story with a strong and unusual plot. The originality of this story, the strong interest in the mystery which it contains, and the unhackneyed nature of the plot make it exceptional in a magazine filled with unusually good stories. The same number of THE POPULAR will also contain a polo story by George Hibbard, "For the Good of the Side." Polo is one of the most exciting games in the world, but it is very seldom indeed that a writer can convey the thrill and sense of excitement that the players feel. Mr. Hibbard has succeeded in this case. In the September number of THE POPULAR we will announce some of the plans for the fall and winter months. We are going to put a lot more money into the magazine this fall than we have ever done before. Next month we will tell you of some of the things that we have planned to do.

"IN THE CAUSE OF FREEDOM," a great Russian serial, by Arthur W. Marchmont, will begin in the September number.

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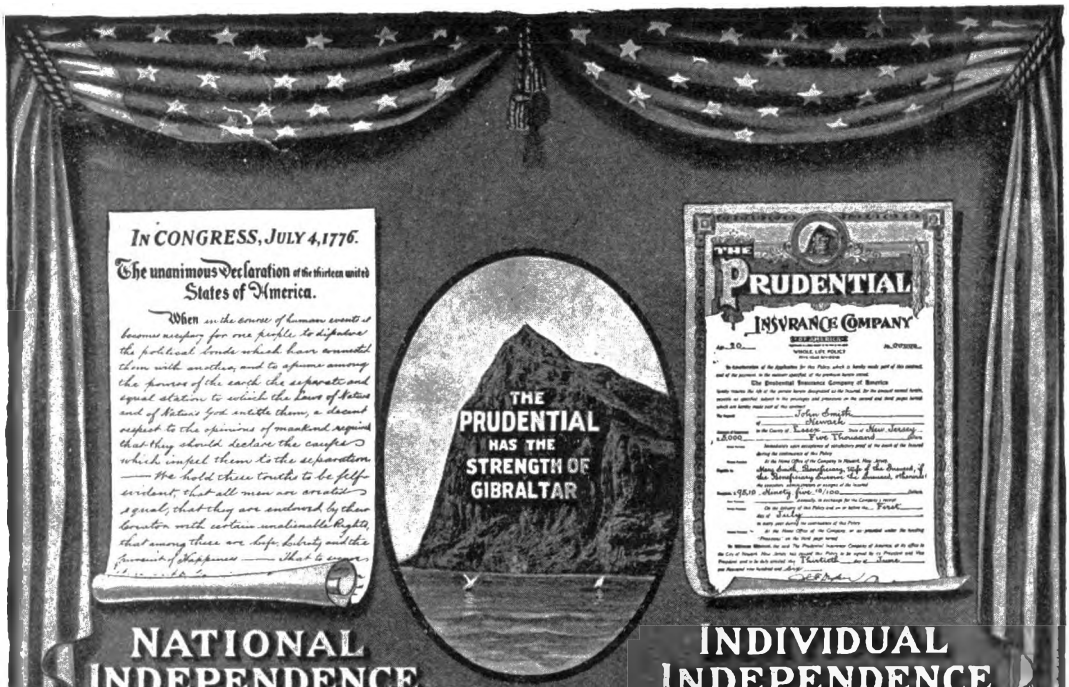

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THE POPULAR MAGAZINE

VOL. VI AUGUST, 1906. No. 4.

When Shandal Came to Deadrock

By George Parsons Bradford

Author of "The Skipper of the Seraphim," "The Tolliver Tangle," Etc.

Since civilization has pushed its way into the remote corners of our country the old time frontier town and the lawlessness that characterized it have become things of the past. Yet there are still a few places where men permit themselves to be swayed by the primitive passions, and where the best form of life insurance is dexterity with the six-shooter. Such a community forms the background of Mr. Bradford's vigorous and eventful story.

(*A Complete Novel*)

I.

THE COLD GRAY DUSK OF THE EVENING AFTER.

He awoke suddenly out of a profound and dreamless sleep; not by degrees, as a normal man awakens from his night's comfortable repose, but, you might put it, spontaneously.

A moment past he had been oblivious to the world; now he was wide-awake, staring open-eyed at the unfamiliar dusk that held within the little room, filled with a tremulous sense of alarm, as if stark calamity lurked in ambush for him on the farther side of the closed doors of his memory.

For a little time he lay quite still, watching the bright, quivering square of light thrown upon the dingy ceiling from some distant electric arc, his strong, lean, brown fingers clutching in agitation at the rumpled and untidy bed-clothing, gradually becoming conscious that time had slipped a cog; that a portion of his life had dropped away from him, like a cast garment, never to be regained.

It was twilight, but whether the twilight of dawn or of night he could not say. Behind this moment the past was as a blank, dense and impenetrable.

His eyes ached. He shut them, and was aware that the lids burned like fire against the sensitive eyeballs; groaning, he opened them again, and threw himself over upon his side.

A bright flame seemed to dance before him, and in his head something jumped like the exposed live nerve of a tooth. His lips parted, and he felt that they were hot and cracked and swollen; and in his mouth, stronger than the burning ache of his parched throat, was a bitterness surpassing the bitterness of aloes. When he lay motionless the pain subsided a little; but not much.

After awhile he steeled himself to the effort, sat up on the side of the rickety, wretched cot, which had served him for a couch; arose, and put shoul-

der against the wall, digging his nails into the palms of his hands in order to force a return of clear consciousness.

For a bit the room swam dizzily about him, and the floor rocked like the deck of the transport in that storm which they had encountered just this side of Honolulu.

The illusive disturbance subsided, leaving him with a clue—at last. The transport! Now, with that for starter, he could figure back and get his bearings. He made a mental note of it—the transport—and cast a weary glance about the little room.

It was perhaps as large as six by eight, and boasted no furniture beyond the cot, a seatless chair, a decrepit table with a lamp, and a cast-iron washstand, supporting a tin basin and pitcher. Peg seized the pitcher, put it to his lips, and drank both long and deep.

The water, though stale and tasteless, was to him like nectar. He swallowed it in great gulps, the muscles of his lean, brown throat working convulsively.

Afterward, when the last drop was gone, he felt better—just a little. Stepping cautiously to avoid rousing the floor to renewed activities, he went over to the window. It was unglazed and uncurtained.

Peg stared disconsolately out through the empty framework, vaguely grateful for the salty sweetness of the sea air that stirred in gently from the broad, heaving bosom of the invisible Pacific—out there, beyond the Golden Gate.

Below him black squares of roofs fell away irregularly down a steep hillside, like blocks scattered carelessly about by some gigantic child. As he looked, swirling reefs of grayish mist crept up between them, stealthily, enveloping the glittering corner arcs with iridescent halos, in the end obscuring everything near and far, leaving naught visible save a tossed and tumbled sea of clouds. San Francisco was enjoying one of her periodical sea-turns.

The damp, cool air was very good for him; he breathed deeply, filling his lungs with it as if to wash them clean, and began to think, to cast back into the blankness of the immediate past.

The transport had made port the day before yesterday. He felt passably sure of that fact. It was late in the afternoon when she had discharged her cargo of time-expired men—upward of one thousand of them, more or less honorably released from the United States Army service, having soldiered out their period of enlistment.

Peg remembered distinctly the queer feeling of having solid ground under his feet when first he landed. He remembered standing on the wharf, in company with "Goat" Murphy and "Hefty" Logan, watching the swift dispersal of their comrades, who, armed with devastating thirsts to a man and with rolls of bills of greater or less dimensions, proportioned to their luck or skill at poker and fantan on the homeward voyage, had taken possession of San Francisco like a swarm of vivacious but devouring locusts.

After that he, with Goat on one side and Hefty on the other, their arms affectionately twined about each other's necks, had danced joyously through the streets, proclaiming their lightness of heart with one accord in strident voices, so that all the world and his wife had been made aware that the three of them were glad to have served out their term of bondage, and to set foot again on God's country.

Such preliminary ceremonies having been attended to, they had settled down to the sterner businesses of life. Peg remembered a brief and misty session in a One-Price Clothing Emporium, where he had purchased a complete and expensive outfit of mufti, barring shoes; religiously, and to the mystification of the salesmen, he had clung to his army shoes. He smiled wanly at the memory.

And then they had gone forth again, Peg and Goat Murphy and Hefty Logan—rechristened "Angel-face," on account of his limpid and ingenuous eyes—to conquer. And they had conquered.

There had been vainglorious goings-

on for many lurid hours, a kaleidoscopic nightmare of rejoicing, a reeling panorama of colored lights and new, yet somehow friendly, faces, while a night had turned gray and then into broad day; and the day had rioted on into night again—all clouded with the incense of cigars, and redolent with the reek of beer and liquor.

And then abruptly came the dead wall that barred out after memories. In his bemused brain there was no chronological exactness, but Peg fancied that he could remember everything up to nine of the previous evening. Afterward there was darkness—the darkness of night.

He tried vainly to piece it out. Always those three had been inseparable—Goat and Angel-face and himself. But at a given time they, together with the rest of the mad world, had dropped away.

Now he stood alone and friendless in a strange land. A day, twenty-four hours, had been cut out of his life. He felt cheated, as though some one had fraudulently deprived him of a portion of his allotted span. He grumbled, leaning there against the window-frame, blinking out into the fog-ridden night.

A whole day gone! He wondered as to the time. Presently he became aware that he had gone to bed without yielding to the refinements of civilization by removing his clothing. This was nothing new, nor strange; a soldier does not pack pajamas on a hike. Still——

He felt for his waistcoat pocket, where his watch should be, and missed both. Then he saw that he had removed his coat, waistcoat, and shoes; his collar and tie had vanished. He felt in his trousers pockets; and they were empty and swept and garnished.

Seven devils of fear entered into Peg, and he began feverishly to search through every nook and corner of his clothing, not excepting the coat and waistcoat that hung over the back of the chair.

Fires now blazed in his eyes, and his breath came short and fast, while a dull and ugly red burned beneath the tan of his cheeks, as he figuratively turned himself inside out and threw what he had found on the dirty bed-clothing.

The lack of light hampered him until he came across a few matches. He struck one—it was sulphurous and of an evil odor—and lit the kerosene lamp. By its dull, saffron radiance he looked over what he had brought to light from his pockets.

Despair, chill and terrible, seemed to constrict his heart's action.

There was somebody's knife, with one broken blade; a pipe which he had never seen before—or, wait! yes, it was Hefty's—a packet of cigarette papers and a half-empty bag of Durham; eight matches; a cheap purse with a broken clasp, which he did not remember; three playing-cards, much begrimed; eighty-five cents in nickels and dimes; and nothing more!

Peg stared blankly, mute and aghast. He had landed with more than two thousand dollars; back pay and poker winnings. And now he was stripped clean as a whistle! It was bad enough to miss a day out of one's life; but this was infinitely worse.

"It's a long walk back to Dallas," he mused aloud.

And the sound of his voice seemed to rouse him. Excitedly he took up the coat, and with the good blade of that knife, which was not his, ripped out an inner seam. Then, thrusting his hand within, he felt about eagerly. Vain hope! His papers, honorable discharge, letters and all, were gone.

Later he recognized that the coat was not that which he had purchased at the One-Price Clothing Emporium.

He and Goat and Angel-face had retired to the private room of a drinking mill, after that important purchase, solely in order that Peg might have a decent retirement wherein to sew the papers in a safe place.

Goat and Hefty, he recalled, had jeered him for his precautions, but he had sewn stolidly on, disdaining even offers of liquor until the job was complete.

But this—this was Hefty's coat! He identified it without hesitation, as he

did the trousers he wore, and the waistcoat. There had been an exchange, then, between Angel-face and himself—an unfair exchange.

He remembered that Hefty could not buy a fresh outfit, because he had been in like case with Goat—"broke," through too earnest devotion to fantan, and wholly dependent upon Peg's bounty and grace.

And Peg had spent his money freely, lavishly, upon them, because they were his "bunkies," and he liked them; and they could have had anything that they'd asked for. And this was how they had used him!

A sullen rage smoldered in Peg's heart. He stood ready to absolve Goat of complicity. Anyway, he had always liked Goat Murphy the best of the bunch. It was Hefty Logan—"little Angel-face"—who had done this thing: Hefty, with his wide, brown, naive girl's eyes, and his deceitful air of true camaraderie. Hefty!

Peg rose to his feet and pronounced Hefty anathema. Then, struck by a lingering echo of hope, he fell upon his knees, grabbed his shoes, and discovered that there, at least, the exchange had stopped.

Hefty had left Peg his shoes. Obviously, he would. They were old and worn, and fit objects for derision. But Peg had clung tenaciously to them for a purpose. He had never taken any one into his confidence in this regard. It was in the nature of a cache, a hostage to ill-fortune.

He rose again quickly, seized the lamp, and stepped swiftly and silently to the door, which he flung open, and peered down the strange hall.

It was plainly that of a blowsy tenement, and for the moment tenantless. But from belowstairs came a hoarse cacophony of voices; overhead a man and a woman bickered as discordantly.

There was a lock to the door—of course unfastened. Peg now turned the key, and, as an additional precaution, hung his coat over the keyhole.

Later, sitting on the edge of the bed, he took up a shoe, and with the broken blade of the knife unscrewed two tiny screws from the heel. These removed, he was able, with one twist of his strong fingers, to wrench the lifts apart.

Something fell, whirling and glittering. Peg's heart leaped as his knees smote together just in time to catch the coin. Another instant and it had rung upon the floor.

Now it lay in the palm of his hand, a golden double-eagle. A like operation on the other shoe was productive of another coin of the same value. Forty dollars altogether—enough to stay his stomach for a few days, if not sufficient to get him transportation across the continent. However, it was much better than nothing at all.

Peg became conscious of a giddiness in his head and a clamoring in his belly that cried aloud his need of food. He refitted the heels to his shoes, donned the shabby coat that had been Hefty's, took one last glance around the room, and extinguished the lamp.

The halls were black as night; only here and there a penciling of light fell athwart them from a door standing slightly ajar. Slowly, cautiously, with one guarding hand stretched out before him, the other feeling along the shaky banisters, he made the tortuous descent—how many flights he never knew; they seemed interminable.

In the end, however, he stood in the misty, murky street; and knew himself lost. It was a toss-up whither he should drag his weary feet.

Disconsolately he turned to the left—toward Market Street, as it happened—moving along dispiritedly, an ominous scowl on his brows.

"Likely they gave me knockout drops," he muttered once. It seemed a plausible theory. He hugged it to his heart, his brain colored with visions of just vengeance.

"I'll get him!" he swore wrathfully, with regard to the untrustworthy Angel-face. "I'll get him, or—or—well, I'll get him, anyway. Then you'll see!"

After a few moments he stumbled into the glaring white front of a cheap eating-house.

That night, as he strolled, glum and lonesome, about the streets, he heard a man on a corner say "Deadrock." The word caught Peg's fancy; he stopped and sized up the speaker—a fellow of rough-and-ready cast, who argued excitedly with others of his ilk.

Peg stepped nearer to listen.

II.

AT DAWN—TWO WEEKS LATER.

To the north there was hill country, backed by mountains; to the east, hills; to the west, again hills piled high upon hills—a lofty mountain range: the whole forming an irregular semicircle that encompassed a broad, arid area with a ragged horizon.

To the south, however, stretched the desert—vast, silent, eternal, lifeless, and trackless.

The railway broke from the western mountains and swept across the level sands, abruptly vanishing into the eastern hills, crossing near its head this gigantic arm of the desert that lay like a broad and breathless bay, thrust in a rugged coast.

Midway along the line the brain of a railway engineer had seen fit to plant a way station.

It was called "Calumet." Such, at least, was the word spelled by the black letters painted across the front of the little four-square shanty that stood by the trackside, behind a scant stretch of plank platform—for all the world like a house whose front stoop had outgrown it.

An offshoot of wire from the procession of telegraph-poles that marched parallel with the steel track ran down through one window of the shanty. A blue and white enameled sign, badly chipped, indicated that here was a station of the Western Union. Also, the door bore the words, indifferently lettered and spelled: "Offise."

Some distance to the west, along the tracks, was a huge, fat water-tank, elevated on stiltlike legs, its painted complexion peeling off in great flakes and strips and exposing the iron beneath, giving the tank a most dissipated and haggard aspect.

That is all there is of Calumet—a forgotten flag-station, planted in the desert, near the head of the bay. The northern foot-hills are but a few miles away.

At first it was very dark and very still. The moon, whose light had made the shadow of the station seem a pool of ink upon a silver platter, had dipped behind the horizon. A wide, windless, cloudless sky arched above, wonderfully brilliant with many stars, whose softly falling and pallid light was all that served to show the irregular, upflung line of the encircling hills, and pick out the blurs of black that stood for the station and its forlorn companion, the tank.

Then, very suddenly, a pale light filled the void betwixt earth and sky; the eastern mountains became as black and solid battlements against the horizon; in the west the darkness seemed to deepen, to grow more softly dense.

The stars flickered feebly; were blown out one by one by the breath of dawn. A sweeping sense of coolness was in the air, with the effect of a gentle breeze—though, in truth, the atmosphere had not stirred from its eternal calm.

Stronger and stronger grew the light. Abruptly the spirelike peak of a far hill caught the first rays of the sun: it glowed like a flame of rose. Great shafts of iridescent light radiated across the firmament, like the ribs of some celestial fan, or spokes in Phœbus Apollo's chariot-wheels.

The marvelous, clear air of the desert underwent its daily transformation, paling swiftly from black to purple, from purple to violet, from violet to amethyst, to sapphire, until finally, with a bound, the sun had cleared the hill-tops, and, losing the first vigor of its ascent, soared more sedately aloft in the brazen empyrean, and flooded the desert and the bare, baked flanks of the hills with golden, dazzling light and withering heat.

The earth glowed in its fierce glare,

and seemed to steam; wherever the eye turned the goose-heat kept the air in constant agitation. The gigantic, malformed hills basked, arid, desolate, glorious with all the hues of the rainbow.

And so it became day; and in that dawn a freight-train thundered out of the west and swept, crashing, down across the incandescent sands.

With a shrieking of air-brakes and a series of tremendous bumps it came to a halt in front of the lonely way station. Immediately a brakeman popped out of the caboose, like a jack-in-a-box, and ran forward between the tracks.

Two others followed him with less enthusiasm; but with their assistance he threw open the door to one of the cars, and, jumping in, began to cast forth, to a tune of cheerful blasphemy, a number of bulky packing-cases, which were promptly hustled across the ties and deposited on the platform.

This operation concluded, the first brakeman closed the door and secured it. Turning, he made his way languidly back toward the caboose.

One of his companions clambered leisurely to the top of the cars, while the third followed the first, slouching along with bended shoulders and wiping sweat from his forehead with the back of a hairy hand.

Suddenly he stopped and glared across to the platform, his vision centering upon two brand-new trunks, well strapped, standing some distance from the boxes just unloaded.

"Well," he inquired amazedly, "where in thunder did *them* come from?"

He got no answer. The trunks remained an inscrutable enigma. It required no arduous process of reasoning to deduce that they had been cast off from some passing train. But wherefore? To what end did they rest there, alone, without apparent ownership or title to existence—that is, existence in that particular spot?

The brakeman gave it up with an oath. After all, it was none of his business.

At that moment the engine, which had been gulping thirstily from the tank, cleared its throat and whistled bronchially. The man started to run back to the caboose, but paused to shake a heavy fist at a bedraggled and begrimed figure which, without warning, had crawled out from beneath the cars, directly at his feet.

"Here, you hobo!" threatened the brakeman. "You keep out from under them cars, or I'll——"

"Peace, angry one!" said the figure placidly, erecting itself to its full height. "Who wants to sneak back under your old cars? Anyhow, I'm through traveling on this here line—the management's rotten!"

The train was pulling out, gathering momentum with every instant. His sworn enemy verbally insulted the man who had dared the perils of a stolen ride on the trucks, and swung aboard the caboose steps just in time.

"I bet you've got a nasty mind," commented the disgusted wayfarer, showing his contempt for the brakeman by turning his back the while he carefully dusted and rubbed himself off with a red bandanna handkerchief.

"God-forsaken hole!" he mused, again resuming a standing position. "What the devil for did I get off here, anyway? Calumet, eh? H'm. Well, 'taint so far from Deadrock, that's one comfort."

He shook himself, stretching his limbs to work off the cramped feeling induced by his long ride on the trucks, and strode across the tracks, wrinkling up his brows as he caught sight of the trunks. Near them he paused and looked them over, wagging his head solemnly.

"L. S. M., N. Y.," he read the initials on the end of one. "I feel called upon to remark that L. S. M.'s powerful careless, leaving his valuables around like this. Some one might tote 'em away."

He laughed silently, gazing at the empty desert plain. Square of shoulder, long of limb, slim of flank he was, carrying himself with the bearing of confidence. He wore corduroy trousers, a blue flannel shirt, open at the throat, and carried a dingy coat over

his arm—a coat that, like his broad-brimmed hat of drab felt, and like its wearer, perhaps, had known more prosperous times.

Out of the blue shirt his throat rose like a column of bronze, supporting a head well-shaped, clean-modeled. His face, tanned as darkly as his neck and hands, may have seemed a trifle emaciated; the clear, deep-set eyes, glinting blue through their narrowed lids, wore something of a hungry expression. His lips were firm, straight, thin, drooping humorously at the corners.

This was Peg Shandal, making his way back to Dallas and the Texas plains, whence he had enlisted in a temporary fit of disgust with the life of a cattleman.

But the trunks continued to bother him; he frowned reproachfully at them. "Where there's smoke there's fire," he said thoughtfully. "Taking you there as smoke, the fire—your owner—ought to be somewhere in the neighborhood. Yet that ain't likely," he concluded, surveying the desolate station. "Nope. But we'll take a look around, all the same."

He stepped lightly over to the door of the office and pushed it open, finding nothing but a bare, unceiled room, containing a single chair and a table, whereon were a set of telegraph instruments, a pile of blanks, an ink-bottle and pen. The floor was strewn with a litter of cigarette butts. Somebody's discarded hat hung on a peg. The windows were unglazed and lacked shutters.

"Nothing doing," concluded Mr. Shandal. "Wonder where the key-tapper is."

He stepped outside again and started around the shanty, apparently with a vague idea of discovering a trail from the station north to the hill country.

"Wonder how you get away from this hole in the ground when you ain't got no car fare," he debated.

Abruptly, rounding a corner of the house, he stopped as if shot. His mouth opened wide, then closed. He stared, stupefied, incapable of utterance.

At his feet—he had almost walked upon her—sat a girl, fast asleep. He saw at a glance that she was young and remarkably good to look upon. A second glance showed him that she could, by no stretch of the imagination, be considered as a daughter of the West—that particular part of the wild and woolly West, that is. She was too delicate, her complexion too reminiscent of peaches and cream—quite untanned—her attire too dainty, chic, smart, to lend color to any supposition that she belonged in the picture of Calumet.

Indeed, anything more incongruous would be hard to conjure up in one's fancy than this product of the cultured East calmly slumbering in the bosom of the desert, alone, unprotected, bewitchingly pretty.

She sat upon a suit-case that lay upon its side on the edge of the platform. Her shoulders rested against the rude plank wall of the station. Her hands were clasped idly in her lap. Her feet, extended before her, were encased in small, patent leather oxfords, with sensible heels.

A broad-brimmed hat, trimmed but moderately, shaded her face from the slanting rays of the morning sun. Her head was drooping forward languidly, as if overburdened by the weight of her hair, which was radiant, like modeled gold. Long, curling, dark eyelashes quivered on the fulness of her cheeks; her lips were slightly parted—two scarlet lines, with a glimpse of pearl between.

A thin dust veil fell back from her hat; a long, tailored, silk duster protected the thin, silk traveling-gown. Her hands were gloved. A small, coquettish, green and white striped silk parasol lay across her lap, beneath her fingers.

"Well," announced Peg, beneath his breath, "I'll be"—a sense of the fitness of things coming to him as he realized that it is not nice to swear in the presence of ladies, even sleeping ladies—"jiggered!" he ended lamely.

Perturbed by this wholly unexpected apparition, he watched her in silence for many moments, remarking the signs

of long and hard traveling that she wore—the dark circles of fatigue beneath her eyes, the slight pucker, as of pain, between her brows, the droop in the corners of her red lips, the utter languor and lassitude of her pose. Finally——

"I'd give a hoss to know what she's doing here at this hour," said Peg; "or at any other hour, for that matter. She's pretty dern' positive to let me in the mystery when she wakes up—that is, if she ain't scared stiff by the sight of me. I reckon I ain't any particular shakes of a howling beauty just now. But far be it from me to wake her up until she's slept all she wants to. I'll just go inside and stand guard."

Accordingly, he entered the office, noiselessly dragged the chair over to the window from which he could command a view of the sleeping beauty, tipped it back on the wall, and sat down therein, rolling and lighting a cigarette.

Thus, watching her dreamily through the coils of smoke, he began to nod. He himself had traveled far and hard that night, and weariness was as a weight upon his shoulders. His chin fell forward, he breathed deeply and heavily and regularly.

Outside, the girl slept on as peacefully.

And about them the desert blazed intolerably, in a surprising silence.

III.

IN THE MORNING GLOW.

A clatter of hoofs roused Peg—always the lightest of sleepers. He opened one eye, then the other, and yawned. Hearing the bumpety-bump of a wagon on the rough trail that wound out of the hills to the platform, he shifted noiselessly in his chair and looked for the girl.

She was awake now, and standing up, trembling with excitement, watching the approach of the vehicle that was invisible to Peg. Her back was turned. Peg saw that she was of medium height.

"Now I know," he thought lazily. "Her folks are coming for her. Those are her trunks. She took an early train, got here sooner'n she looked for. *I* see."

Curiosity kept him quiet. He waited the outcome with great interest, wondering what manner of people this pretty girl would have to visit in the vicinity of Calumet.

The rattle and bump of the approaching wagon and the clatter of hoofs, deadened to a soft drumming by the thick desert dust, grew in volume. In a moment or two the vehicle dashed up to the platform and came to a halt.

A man leaped out—a tall, shambling figure, wearing neutral-tinted trousers and short, clumsy, unblackened boots, and a heavy cartridge-belt, which sagged with the weight of two cumbersome .45 caliber Colts.

His face was bristly with a week's growth of black beard; his eyes were small and close-set to the arch of his thin nose, which was sunburned and peeling. The rest of his face was brick red.

"Husky," Peg summed him up, "and tough. Funny sort of a customer to meet *her!*"

But it became apparent that he was wrong in his surmise; for a glance at the teamster's face showed Peg that the man was thoroughly surprised—as surprised as Peg himself had been to see the girl.

"Good mornin', ma'am," he said, gaping.

"Good morning," returned the girl with composure. "Are you the—the station-agent?"

"No'm. He ain't well. Got into some trouble over in Deadrock and——"

"Deadrock!" she echoed. "That's where I want to go. Is it far?"

The man scratched his chin, glancing her up and down with offensive familiarity.

"'Tain't so fur," he replied: "not more'n twenty mile as the crow flies—farther by trail."

"Why!" exclaimed the girl, her tones betraying her dismay, "twenty miles! I

thought Calumet was the nearest station to Deadrock!"

"So 'tis, but 'tain't used to no alarmin' extent, ma'am. Folks mostly travels by way of Cornstalk, on the northern road. That's ten miles farther, but 'tain't so hard to get accommodations in Cornstalk. Yuh see, Cornstalk's a city, an' th' stage runs from thar to Deadrock, so nobody in his senses ever tries to get thar by way of Calumet."

His tone was not unkind; the girl, searching his face with anxious eyes, gathered some comfort from it apparently, but none at all from his manner. There was a pause; she bit her lip, looking off with troubled eyes to the nearer hills. At length——

"I've been here all night," she hazarded, reaching out for sympathy.

"All night!"

"My train got here after seven. There was no one about—and nowhere to go. I had to stay. It was dreadfully lonely." Her voice quavered.

The man moved nearer, his eyes glowing. Without looking, the girl divined the unpleasant nature of that gaze, and hastily she moved away.

"But of course you will take me to Deadrock?" she pleaded.

"Oh!" He laughed lightly. "Well, I reckon so."

"And of course I can pay you for your trouble. I've plenty of——"

"You have?" the fellow asked, with sudden interest. "Is thet so? Now, how much?"

"Why—why—I have enough."

"Lemme see."

The man stepped forward again, putting forth a hand toward the bag which dangled from the girl's wrist. And again she stepped quickly back.

"No!" she cried. "I'll—I'll pay you, of course. How—how much might you charge?"

"I might," he returned grimly, "charge 'most anything. It all depends. How much yuh got? Yuh may's well lemme see. 'Tain't goin' tuh profit yuh none tuh ack skeerish."

"No!" she panted desperately. "Why, what do you mean? No!"

"Yuh behave," commanded the man, with a clumsy attempt at playfulness. "Hyeh, nobody's goin' tuh hurt yuh."

"Don't! Don't touch me! Don't! You hurt——"

He had grasped her gloved wrist in fingers that clutched like a vise. At the same instant he swung her toward him, reaching around her waist with an eager arm. After all, he may have reasoned, she was going to Deadrock; and the women who traveled to Deadrock were of a class——

Peg, at the first hint that all was not well, had risen from his chair and approached the window, and now leaned over the sill.

The teamster's back was turned, and he stood within reaching distance. On his hips the revolvers dangled invitingly—at least they seemed to, in Peg's eyes. Peg reached forth swiftly with both hands and clasped his fingers over the butts.

At the same instant the girl's hand fell across the teamster's lips with a stinging slap. Surprised, the fellow released her—or she slipped away. He stepped back with an oath, and received a blow between the shoulders that all but sent him sprawling.

Peg quietly lifted one foot over the low window-sill, followed it with his head and body and the other foot, and stood without, towering over the teamster, his big frame a-quiver with rage, eyes blazing, guns ready for action in either hand.

"You scoundrel!" he cried. "Stand still, or I'll blow your head clean off your shoulders!"

The man glared, raging, amazed. "Oh, all right," he conceded sullenly, at length. "But yuh needn't be so dam——"

"Shut up!" thundered Peg. "When I want to hear anything more out of you, I'll let you know. Be quiet, now."

He turned to the girl, thrusting one of the revolvers into his side pocket and removing his hat.

"I beg your pardon, ma'am," he said respectfully. "But I thought it about time to take a hand in this game."

Her face had gone very white, with commingled anger and fear; now she

stared at Peg, breathless. He waited an instant, and resumed:

"I don't know as I understand just what you're doing here, but I'm thankful to be of service. No, don't you say a word. I know you're obliged. Only, what shall I do with this blackguard? It's for you to say."

"Do with him?" she gasped, lowering her gaze to the threatening pistol in Peg's hand.

"Yes, ma'am," he replied. "Shall I puncture him, or just give him a plain thrashing?"

"Why, don't—don't——"

"Oh, don't you fear for me," said Peg lightly. "This thing ain't ace-high. I'll tie him in a knot for you, with one hand behind my back, if you say so." Peg looked hopeful.

"But, no!" she commanded, recovering her composure a trifle. "I don't wish you to fight *anybody*. Only I'm so glad——"

"I know all about that," Peg cut in. "But you might tell me the rest of it. Did I understand that you want to get to Deadrock? Be still, you there! Never interrupt a lady."

The man's sulky grumblings subsided. Peg again turned his attention to the girl. "Don't pay any attention to him, ma'am," he told her. "He ain't worth considering."

Briefly, almost tearfully, and all but incoherently, the girl stammered out her story. Peg listened intently, and gathered no more than that there was pressing necessity for her presence in Deadrock.

For his own part, he quite failed to understand what on earth a good-looking, sweet-faced, soft-voiced, and well-mannered girl like this could find to take her to a mining-camp like Deadrock—the newest discovery in the gold fields, and therefore the most disorderly.

Nevertheless, if it was her pleasure to go to Deadrock, it would be arranged for her—and no questions asked. It was not in Peg's code of etiquette to demand reasons for a stranger's actions.

"Very well," he said at length, when she had paused, "you make your mind easy, ma'am. We'll get you to Deadrock." Then to the man: "Now, my friend. But, bless my innocent heart, I don't know your name! What might it be?"

"Ackles," grunted the man.

"Thank you. Is this your team?"

"Yes."

"Don't answer if you think it would tend to incriminate or degrade," said Peg seriously—only his eyes laughed. "What's your business here, aside from insulting defenseless young ladies?"

Ackles gave him to understand that he had driven over from Deadrock to get the freight which had arrived by the same train that Peg had patronized.

Peg did not inquire closely into the fellow's reasons for having his goods delivered at that out-of-the-way station. In fact, he did not care.

"Then you want this stuff taken to Deadrock, eh?" he demanded; and received an affirmative answer.

"Well, you better get it on the wagon," he pursued. "We'll be starting in a very few minutes. And while you're about it, you might as well wrastle those two trunks aboard, too. I'm sorry to trouble you, but——"

"I'll be dam——"

"Don't you say that again! Do as I tell you, and be quick about it!"

"I'll see yuh in——"

"Stop right there!"

But the man was standing his ground sullenly. He had rights, said he; the wagon was his; he didn't propose to let any one use it without his consent.

"You don't, eh?" cried Peg. "You've got no time at all to reconsider. Hump yourself!"

He motioned significantly with the revolver. Ackles glanced aside at the girl, and fancied that Peg would not dare shoot in her presence.

"If yuh want them trunks put in thet wagon," he announced, "yuh can tackle the job yuhself."

With his hand at his hip, Peg fired with seeming carelessness. The report of the weapon seemed curiously muf-

fled, out there in the open; as it sounded the girl cried aloud, sharply.

Ackles swore viciously, and jumped back a few paces, limping on one leg. His complexion took on an added hue of red, and his eyes narrowed to mere slits as he bent over, inspected a boot from which the heel was suddenly missing, and again stood up to face Peg.

Shandal merely nodded as their eyes met. For a moment Ackles strove to return that straightforward, purposeful gaze. Then doggedly he turned away.

"All right," he said, slouching up the platform toward the trunks.

"If you're quite satisfied——" said Peg courteously.

Released from the strain so abruptly, the girl sank down again on the suitcase, laughing nervously into her hands. Peg looked down upon her with uneasiness in his attitude; she continued to giggle softly—a shaking heap of feminine finery at his feet.

He could not see her face, for it was covered with her hands, but her hat had fallen aslant on her yellow hair, the veil trailing rakishly to one side. Peg could see the nape of her firm, white neck, where the hair curled in little, interesting tendrils; and an ear, pink and white and remarkably perfect in contour, also framed in little curling strands. He caught his breath sharply.

"Sorry I had to do that, ma'am," he said loudly. "But I couldn't help it. There ain't but one way to treat some of these ruffians, you see, and—and ——" He paused in perplexity. "What the—that is, what are you laughing about?" he demanded.

"Oh!" cried the girl. "Don't—please—I shall cry—water—I——"

It was Peg's first experience with female hysterics; but he had seen a fellow soldier go quite to pieces after being under fire for many hours, and could sympathize with the victim of such a nervous outbreak. Dimly comprehending its nature, he turned swiftly away and pursued the fallen Ackles down the platform.

"Here, you Ackles man!" he cried. "Got anything to drink?"

"None of your——"

"Now, talk pretty!" Peg advised. "You've got a bottle concealed about your person? Well, hand it over, and be quick about it, my friend."

Surlily Ackles complied. Peg flung him a word of warning as to his probable fate if he did not bestir himself with the trunks, and ran on to the water-tank, unscrewing the top of the flask as he went.

The scent of the liquor was sharp in his nostrils. He started to pour it out on the ground, hesitated a moment, set his teeth in a determined way, and all but emptied the pint vessel, leaving just enough in the bottom to flavor the water, tepid and half stagnant, with which he presently filled it.

Then, returning to the girl, he bade her drink. She accepted gladly, grimacing a bit at the first taste, then swallowing greedily two-thirds of the mixture.

"Thank you," she said gratefully, and threw Peg a brief, dazzling smile which almost unbalanced him.

With the remainder of the stuff in the flask the girl gently bathed her face and temples. "I'm better now, thank you," she said, rising.

"That's good." Peg looked away helplessly. Ackles was struggling with the baggage, scowling and breathing foul blasphemy on the pure desert air—fortunately too far away for the girl to hear. Already, Peg noted, the man had one trunk in the wagon-bed. In a few minutes they would be ready to start.

He felt that the girl was about to express gratitude; he could see emotion in her limpid eyes, words swelling upon her moist lips. In his helpless dismay an inspiration came to him.

"You'd better get into the wagon," he said quickly. "We'll be pulling out of here before long. Now, please don't say a word. I've got my hands full with this Ackles article. You'd only hinder me, ma'am. No offense, I hope?"

She accepted his hand and jumped

lightly into the wagon. "No offense," she repeated, smiling.

Her eyes bewildered Peg; he felt that he had best not encounter their direct gaze too frequently, and kept his head slightly averted, simulating an intense interest in the movements of the embittered Ackles, as he handed the girl her coat, parasol, and suit-case.

Then swiftly he strode away to bully-rag the teamster. The girl, sitting stiffly on the uncomfortable driver's seat of the vehicle, and facing away, heard, with a wan smile, his uncomplimentary remarks reflecting upon the character and disposition of the vanquished one. Now and again she was aware of a heavy thump in the wagon-bed, and knew that a trunk or box had been deposited therein.

After some minutes, quite without warning, Peg jumped in and sat down beside her, taking up the reins.

"Where d'ye want this stuff left, stranger?" he inquired. "I'll be happy to oblige you in any little way I can. You might tell me somebody to get to drive this outfit back to you; I'll give him your guns, too. Anything else?"

Ackles had been standing in the rear of the wagon, his hands on the bed, preparatory to jumping in. At Peg's words he paused, astounded, then made a motion as if to carry out his original intention. Peg faced about sharply and produced one of the revolvers.

"No, stranger," he said steadily; "no!"

"By God!" raved Ackles, "yuh ain't goin' tuh leave me hyah alone?"

"Punishment for being naughty," explained Peg gravely. "Next time you'll know better."

Ackles, for once unawed, strode to the horses' heads, catching the reins near the bridles. "This hyeh's my outfit," he snarled. "Yuh'd better be careful. They's a law agin' hoss-stealin'."

"Don't let that worry you," said Peg. "I'm not stealing. I'm just hiring. Here!" He stood up, running his hand into a pocket and feeling for his money.

He knew just exactly how much was left to him out of the forty dollars with which he had tramped out of San Francisco, eastward bound—one of the double eagles and about five dollars in silver. Five dollars wasn't enough, he knew, to give color to his excuse of hiring the team. And he hesitated over the twenty.

Abruptly he became aware that the girl was fumbling in her hand-bag; out of the corner of his eye he saw her produce a roll of greenbacks of interesting girth. "Here," she cried, tugging at his arm, "you must let me, Mr. —Mr.——"

"Shandal's my name," he told her; "but that's all right. No—this is my treat. I'm hiring this outfit, ma'am. No; I couldn't think of it."

And before she could protest, he had sent the golden coin whirling through the air, to fall at Ackles' feet.

"Is that enough, you yaller dog?" he demanded, with large airs. "Or do you want more?"

Ackles said nothing; he was beyond coherent speech. Peg sat him down, took up the reins, motioned with the pistol for Ackles to stand aside—whereupon Ackles did so—and chirruped to the horses.

The animals raised their drooping heads and waited for the crack of the whip about their ears. Peg pulled in a trifle on the reins and held them with a steady hand.

"Get on, you brutes," he said pleasantly.

They moved, at first slowly, then, when he spoke again, more briskly.

When some distance away, Peg turned and saw Ackles just straightening up, holding the double eagle between his fingers. His face was black with wrath, and, observing Peg, he brandished a furious fist.

"I'll skin yuh alive!" he shrieked venomously.

"Ah, go on!" Peg derided gently.

IV.

IN THE GLOAMING.

From the start-off there was not much said between the two. In fact, it was too hot for conversation. Once,

when they were just leaving the station, the girl asked rather timidly, as if she doubted her right to question the judgment of a person so apparently self-reliant as Peg:

"Are you—are you sure you know the way, Mr.—Mr. Shandal?"

He glanced amusedly at her, sideways, beneath the brim of his hat. Their eyes met, and the girl turned away with a face the color of pink roses—the heat, of course.

"Certain sure," he replied tersely. "I'm free to admit," he added, after awhile, "that I've never been this way before."

"Then how——"

"Oh, this isn't the first time I've had to follow a road as plain as the nose on Ackles' homely face, ma'am."

She favored him with an inquiring look, her lips half-parted with the unuttered query.

"I've been in the army, ma'am," he stated simply; "and on the plains, besides, before I 'listed."

"Then you're not——"

"No, ma'am. We were mustered out when we left Manila."

She forbore to question him further, respecting alike his quiet and unostentatious reserve and that unwritten law of the West—that every man's past history is his personal affair, to be inquired into only by the foolhardy.

The wagon clattered on at a fair pace, the green-striped parasol bobbing erratically as the vehicle swayed and slid and rolled like a ship in a choppy sea: a sight which acted upon the passionate Mr. Ackles, as he viewed it in perspective from the station platform, like a red flag to a bull.

Shortly they entered the foot-hills, following the well-defined wagon-way; later they traversed a wide and breathless gulch, its walls of earth and rock seamed and broken into great rifts and crevasses by the intense heat. Here they both languished in complete silence.

Some hours after noon they suddenly debouched upon a wide and grassy valley, hemmed about with monolithic mountains whose precipitous flanks were sparsely wooded with stunted pines, leaving bare great areas of sun-baked earth and rock, all chromatically brilliant in the fierce light and fiercer heat.

And here they found a little adobe dwelling, set down in the middle of the valley, at the junction of the Calumet trail with a broad and travel-beaten highway that stretched on either hand far into the fastnesses of those eternal hills.

Along it a string of vehicles, of all sorts and shapes and descriptions, moved slowly, each heaped high with every imaginable kind of household gear, and each with its appointed quota of haggard, eager-eyed men—all trending to one point of the compass, the north.

Peg felt no call to ask his way: this procession of wagons indicated more certainly than any words of man could have, whither lay the new Golconda of the golden West, whither journeyed all these dupes of the lure of gold.

In an enclosure, fenced about with barbed wire, was a well, around which ceaselessly plodded a dejected mule, blindfolded and harnessed to a long sweep; thus arduously was a little water dragged up from the greedy bowels of the earth. It stood about the cabin in many barrels, and the opulent owners of the well were rapidly becoming more opulent through retailing the precious element at the modest price of fifty cents per bucketful.

Peg drew rein at the cabin, descended, and procured food and drink for himself and the girl, with water for the drooping team, at an expense which drew from him a lingering sigh.

Nevertheless, as he conceived his duty, it stretched like a path straight ahead, always by the side of the girl, until he had served her to the fullest of his ability. So he made no plaint, other than the sigh.

They turned and joined the other wagons on the main-traveled road, where the fine and penetrating dust hung ever like a pillar of smoke, never falling, constantly seeming to become

more dense through the agitation of the hundreds of hoofs and wheels.

For several hours they crept on, at snaillike speed, between borders of empty whisky flasks and tin cans.

Toward nightfall, in the empurpled mountain dusk, Peg noted a stir in their companion vehicles, a general uplifting of spirits made vocal by the impatient gold-seekers; from which he deduced that they were nearing their destination. Others were whipping up their teams and pounding on at top speed; Peg followed their example.

Their wagon rounded the shoulder of a hill, and below them, at the bottom of a slight declivity, Deadrock seemed suddenly to spring into existence: a huge, mushroom growth of shacks and huts, occupying a small, dry, flat plateau, ringed by the dark and silent hills.

The sheer sides of tents glowed faintly with the lights within, and from door and windows issued broad streams of golden illumination.

A faint haze of glowing dust hung pall-like over all, brightest and thickest around an open space, on which faced all the more pretentious buildings—the dance-halls and gambling-hells, the prominent saloons, the eating-houses, and the places that called themselves hotels.

A startling racket, compounded of calls and shrieks and shouted songs, of the trampling of many horses' hoofs and the creaking of countless wagons, of the rattle of distant pianos and the blare and toots and whines of cornets and fiddles saluted their arrival in Deadrock.

It seemed to the girl that man there found no means of testifying to his existence save by shouting at the top pitch of his lungs. And the discordant din was caught up and thrown back, redoubled, by the towering hills.

Peg shook his head dubiously. This was even something worse than he, hardened as he was to the ways of the West, had apprehended.

He drew out a little to one side of the road, out of the rush of the amateur immigrants, and proceeded more slowly, debating within himself what he should do to find the girl shelter and quiet for the night—and food.

She was uncomplaining, but he knew from the limpness of her pose, from the way she drooped and swayed with the motion of the wagon, that she was faint with exhaustion.

"I beg your pardon," he said gently, after awhile, "but—was you looking to find any one in particular here, ma'am?"

The truth is that she had been half asleep. She started to wakefulness at the sound of his voice, but he had to repeat his query before she gathered the sense of it. Then:

"I—yes, I am expecting——" She faltered; Peg took pity upon her and tried to help her out.

"Some friend or relative, ma'am?"

She hesitated a moment, then gave him a blurted answer: "Yes—yes—my brother."

"You're sure he's here, ma'am?"

"Quite sure. He—he wrote me from San Francisco that he was coming here, on account of the gold discovery."

"And did he know that you were to join him?" Peg asked pointedly.

"Yes—no; that is, he did not. I didn't tell him. In fact, I—I really didn't anticipate anything just like this, you know."

"I see," said Peg grimly. Inwardly he passed strictures on the perversities of the mind feminine. "What might be your brother's name, ma'am?" he asked.

"Logan."

"What!"

"Logan—Arthur Logan," she repeated, in tones of surprise.

"Not Hefty Logan?" he demanded, aghast. "Not—not Angel-face?"

"I don't know any such persons," she said gravely. "My brother is Arthur Logan, and—and he—left home some years ago, and—and we have heard from him only now and then since."

Why, Peg wondered, that odd catch in her voice? Why that apparent irresolution?

"So when he said he was coming to Deadrock, I made up my mind to fol-

low and find him. It's really very important that he should be found."

"Yes'm; I see, ma'am," agreed Peg gravely, looking away.

"I don't think I'll have much trouble," she said anxiously. "Do you?"

"What, ma'am? Trouble? Oh, no'm; not a bit. That is," Peg temporized, still averting his face from her gaze, "I'll help you find him. Of course a mining-camp's a big place, and—well, there might be some pretty rough characters, and, perhaps, it would be best for you to sit tight in the hotel, where no one would—er—bother you, and let me look for your brother."

"I couldn't think of asking so much of you," said she quietly.

"It's nothing at all, ma'am," Peg protested. "I'll be proud to do anything I can to help you out, ma'am."

"But you have your own business to attend to——"

"Nothing of any importance, ma'am. I'm only prospecting—looking around. If I should stumble across a likely-looking claim while asking for Arthur Logan, I could stake it out without losing time, you know." And he smiled reassuringly.

"That is, if you don't mind," he amended. "I don't want to intrude"—anxiously.

"Mind!" she echoed warmly. "Why, I don't know how to thank you, Mr. Shandal."

Peg sheered off at a tangent, glad of the opportunity to divert her thoughts, and not caring to give her a second chance to refuse his services.

"Thanks?" he grumbled. "There you go again. I declare, I never did see anybody so plumb set on thanking people as you are!"

The girl laughed faintly. "But you deserve it," she returned, and then changed the subject, having a regard for Peg's obvious and strongly developed repugnance for expressions of gratitude. "Will we soon be there?"

"In two shakes, ma'am." Peg clucked to the horses, which broke into a trot, scenting fodder.

"And you think you can get me a room at the hotel?"

"There ain't no manner of doubt about it," asserted Peg, with a deal more confidence than he felt.

The wagon rattled on and into the outskirts of Deadrock, following the beaten track. Dimly illuminated tents stood out in the darkness on either hand, their surfaces blotted with the vague, fantastic shadows of the occupants and furnishings within. Dull, yellow light streamed out from the windows and open doors of rude huts and shanties; a multitude of men strolled about, without apparent aim, smoking, shouting.

Once or twice from the distance rattled a loud fusillade of shots, as some too boisterous one vented his enthusiasm by peppering the atmosphere. Peg was obliged to quiet the girl's alarm as to their cause and nature.

They passed huge mounds of freshly turned earth, beside yawning openings in the hillsides. Indefinitely, through the gloaming, they could see, here and there, a parcel of land set apart by four lengths of scantling tacked together and thrown haphazard upon the ground, to show that the spot was pre-empted for building purposes.

But all this soon gave way to the more thickly settled quarters of Deadrock. Here the uproar held high and continuous; it resounded in the ears of the girl, half asleep as she was, like the roar of surf breaking upon a distant beach.

In the course of time she was aware that the wagon had stopped in a large enclosure—a corral, packed tight with other vehicles, household furniture, men, and horses.

Peg was down, attending to the horses; and, as she watched him through lowered lashes, a man came out of the night and fell heavily upon Peg's neck, proclaiming with a strident voice that he was overjoyed to see him.

Shandal turned and grappled with the newcomer and called him by name—"Gallegher," the girl caught it. She heard Peg speak a few words in swiftly muttered undertone, punctured by

moderate expressions of amazement from Mr. Gallegher, and then the pair advanced to the wagon, both hat in hand.

"Miss Logan, ma'am," said Peg, "I want you to shake hands with my friend Mr. Pete Gallegher, of Texas. Pete's going to stay round with you here, while I go and hunt up a hotel for you. You needn't be afraid."

The girl bent forward and offered the embarrassed Mr. Gallegher a small, daintily gloved hand. Gallegher enfolded it gingerly in a huge palm, as if he were afraid of breaking it.

"Proud to meet you, ma'am," he stammered; and then—"Peg tells me you're the sister of a friend of hisn, ma'am," he added, as Peg disappeared into the gloom.

V.

A LODGING FOR THE NIGHT.

In a moment Peg was moving along with less stiffness and restraint, at length free to discard his company manners. He strode off briskly, out of the corral, and away through the flimsy homes of the gold-seekers toward that central square where, Gallegher had informed him, he would find the Grand Union Hotel.

Only once he paused, and then in a convenient shadow to adjust his armament, thrusting one of Ackles' revolvers—that containing the exploded cartridge—in the bosom of his flannel shirt, while the other he stuck handily in his belt.

Then he went on, frowning. From what Gallegher had told him, he knew that his worst apprehensions had been justified: Deadrock was packed tight with people who had no place to lay their heads at nightfall, if they were unwilling to roll themselves up in a blanket on the dry earth, with the open skies for bed canopies.

It followed that the hotels and lodging-houses were overwhelmed with demands for accommodations which they could by no means satisfy. Already three were sleeping in a bed, and even such accommodations were at a premium. But needs must when there is a woman in the case. Peg was determined. Within the next hour, come what might, he would have secured shelter for the sister of the man who had drugged and robbed him.

He came out into the plaza and paused, blinking in the sudden glare of light and half deafened by the uproar. Still, there was a gleam in his eyes and the flicker of a smile about his lips, and he stood looking about him. He rather liked it all. This was on the order of old times, the life he knew and loved.

He drew a deep breath; if only he had been unhampered, he would have enjoyed himself thoroughly. It was a bit of bull-headed luck, at that, to have chanced upon Gallegher at the very outset—tried and trusty Pete, with whom he had ridden range in the South long before he had enlisted.

Over across the square loomed the largest building in the town, a frame edifice of two stories, with a wide frontage and considerable depth. The main portion of the lower floor was entirely given over to the restaurant, gambling-hall, and saloon. The upper floor was divided into rooms by flimsy wood partitions — little rooms, barely large enough to hold a bed.

Across the façade ran a line of huge, crudely painted letters, declaring it the "Grand Union Hotel." Peg nodded at this, as if in recognition, and shouldered his way through the rabble in the square until he had reached the threshold of the place.

There he paused again, getting his bearings and shrewdly estimating the nature of the crowd within, ere attempting to accomplish the impossible.

The bar was invisible, hidden by a fringe of men three deep. Farther back, the click and whir of the ivory ball proclaimed the location of the roulette-tables, which would be flanked, Peg knew without seeing, by poker, klondike, and faro layouts. These, too, were quite invisible, and from them rose a clamor no less high than that which attended the ceremony of liquoring up at the bar.

Everybody upon whom Peg's gaze

fell seemed more or less exhilarated through devotion to strong drink. The atmosphere of the hotel, in keeping with that of the entire camp, was of strained excitement. The gold fever was here at its height; men hung enviously about their fellows who had made lucky strikes, listening to the oft-told tale of their luck; and day by day other chance-favored ones were straggling into camp to tell the story of their own good fortune.

There was gold in the very air; the shimmer of it blinded the eyes of men; the sound of the magic monosyllable rang ever in ears never weary of hearing. It was in the earth, to be had for the asking. One had but to turn up the dirt with a crooked stick—having thoughtfully selected the right spot—and sift out the ruddy scales by the bucketful.

Gold! Men spoke of it until they were hoarse, and then they whispered it. They sought for it until their eyes failed them. They dreamed of it until the longing for it maddened them. They lived but for gold. One could almost say that they ate and drank and breathed gold. And their increasing coveting of it brought to the surface all their worst and basest passions.

Shandal stepped into the barroom, and, waiting his opportunity, dexterously elbowed his way through the throng to the bar itself. Three uncouth and hollow-eyed, overworked bartenders trotted without cessation up and down within the enclosure, serving the patrons, slamming whisky bottles from one end of the counter to the other—whisky, always whisky.

Peg finally caught the eye of one; and as the man bent to get his order, Peg asked for the proprietor.

"Yuh'll find him dealin' faro at th' fust table," he was told.

This proved to be the case. Peg squirmed out of the mob and threaded a way toward the farther end of the room. Presently, by standing on tiptoe and peeping over the shoulders of the interested bystanders, he found a faro-table. At it sat a small, wizened man, thin-cheeked, hollow-chested, weary-eyed, chewing a corner of his ragged mustache as he drew forth the cards from the little box before him on the table.

His hands were small, white, delicate as a child's, his handling of the cards the perfection of grace; diamonds sparkled in the rings upon his thin fingers, and a huge stud decorated the bosom of his shirt—the cravat having been pushed aside in order to display its surpassing brilliancy.

As Peg, when he had finally secured a position by this man's side, bent over and spoke to him, the man looked up indifferently, nodded, and, with a "Wait till the deal is over, my friend," delivered in a melancholy, lack-luster tone, turned his attention to the game.

The last card was eventually drawn. Hackett—Peg had caught his name by now—turned in his chair and addressed Peg.

"Well, what is it?" he inquired.

"I want a room," said Shandal; "a single room with a good bed."

Hackett regarded him inscrutably for a moment. Then, raising his voice, he appeared to beckon to a waiting bell-boy.

"Front! Here, front!" he called. "Take this gentleman's luggage and show him up to the bridal suite. Will you kindly register, sir?" he added, again addressing Peg.

A roar of laughter went up about them. Peg flushed, but, undeterred and holding his anger in check, returned to the attack.

"I must have this room," he said quietly. "It is no laughing matter. It's for a lady."

Hackett eyed him imperturbably. "A lady!" he repeated, with polite interest.

"A young lady from the East, looking for her brother. She is worn out, and it is absolutely necessary for her to have rest and quiet. She got off at the wrong station, Calumet," he went on, seeing that Hackett was impressed with the genuineness of his plea, "and had to stay there all last night, alone. Then——"

"I'm sorry," interrupted Hackett, "but we can't do anything for you.

We're full up, my friend, and I couldn't make room even for you, unless you wanted to sleep on the floor. That's straight."

Their words had, of course, been distinctly audible to all those in their immediate neighborhood. And now, as Peg, recognizing the accents of finality in Hackett's voice, turned away disappointed and wondering where he should look next, a harsh and disagreeable voice questioned him.

"How'd yuh get her over from Calumet?" he was asked.

Peg glanced at the speaker—a large man with a heavy jaw and aggressive eyes, thick-set and burly in build, who stood immediately opposite Peg, the table intervening.

Holding his reply for a purpose, Peg looked him up and down coldly. Instinctively he divined an enemy in this specimen; and as instinctively his apparently casual glance rested for a brief moment on the waist-line of the speaker, seeing there two revolvers, handily placed in their holsters. This, then, was a "two-gun man," probably the camp bully.

"I don't know," said Peg, "that it's any of your business, my friend. But since you want to know," he added, looking the man squarely in the eye, "I may tell you that a brute of the same caliber as yourself happened along, and was kind enough to lend me his wagon and team. He's waiting out there, at Calumet, now. Maybe you know him —Ackles."

There was an instant's hush about the little group. The two-gun man's eyes narrowed and his solid jaw protruded just a trifle, in an ugly fashion.

"I reckon I know him," he returned. "He's a friend of mine. How'd yuh get his team away from him?"

"You're thundering inquisitive," commented Peg. "I took his guns away and—rented the outfit. What have you got to say about it?"

"I'll have the devil of a lot to say about it——"

Hackett, the proprietor-gambler, rose quickly and caught Peg.

"You get out of this," he cried. "Get out, I say!"—struggling vainly to drag Peg away from the table. "Take your chance and hook it," he whispered in Peg's ear; "that's Doc Hinstler, and he's drunk."

But his well-meant interference came too late.

"Stand aside, there, Hackett!" Peg heard Hinstler roar angrily.

In an instant there was a swift scattering of the bystanders. Peg saw Hinstler's hand move, with the quickness of thought, toward his belt.

His own hand was already tight upon the butt of his revolver. Without an instant's hesitation, knowing now that it was his life or the other's, he fired, holding the gun at his waist-line and pulling the trigger as rapidly as he could.

Hinstler fired once, the shot coming in between Peg's second and third. Then abruptly he flung the revolver from him, staggered a pace or two backward, and fell.

A babel of voices arose; the crowd closed in abruptly between the two. Peg found himself surrounded in the twinkling of an eye. He put out a hand, thrusting back the nearest, and stepped aside, ejecting the discharged cartridges from the revolver.

"Stand back there!" he cried. "Don't tread on my toes. It was a fair fight —he brought it on himself."

Suddenly he was aware that they were congratulating him, that their attitude was friendly. He listened in a daze, though outwardly collected and master of his faculties.

It became plain to him that from a total stranger he had in a single minute exalted himself into a popular hero. He had bested Hinstler—"Doc" Hinstler, the quickest man-killer west of the Mississippi. He had done what no other man in the camp would have dared do; he had accepted the issue with the bully, and had won.

The crowd parted, and Peg walked down the lane they made for him, and stood above the body of his fallen enemy. Hackett was kneeling beside the man, supporting him with an arm passed underneath his shoulders.

Hinstler's eyes, glazing, met Peg's without recognition. He coughed twice, rackingly, closed his eyes, turned his head to one side; then Hackett withdrew his arm, permitting the head to fall back upon the floor.

"Dead," he said briefly, nodding to Peg, with a glint of admiration in his quiet eyes. "How'd you do it? I never seen a man draw so quick as that."

"I know how," said Peg, pushing his advantage, but without swagger. "But I guess that's about all."

He turned away, but Hackett recalled him.

"Wait a minute, my friend!" he cried. "You were saying that you wanted a room for a lady?"

"Yes," Peg said curtly.

"Well, you can have it now."

Peg's expression became inquiring.

"You've made a vacancy," Hackett explained. "Hinstler won't want his private room no more, I guess. You can have it."

"Very well," agreed Peg. "Get his stuff out of it, will you? And, by the way"—he drew himself up, sweeping the faces of those near-by with a keen, searching glance—"I want this understood. This young lady is to know nothing at all about this business. The man that tells her is going to answer to me. I don't want to make no grandstand play, but that's flat!"

VI.

HIS LAST DOLLAR.

Gallegher, leaning against the wheel of Ackles' wagon, straightened up.

"Here he comes, now," he said.

The girl turned eagerly on the seat, looking in the direction to which Gallegher was facing. At first she saw nothing, but a moment later Peg came out of the shadows, stepping silently yet alertly, and halted by Gallegher, hat in hand.

"Was I long?" he asked the girl.

"Not very," she said, with an attempt at lightness. "Mr. Gallegher made the time seem very short, telling me about the days when you were a cowboy with him in Texas."

Gallegher flushed to the roots of his hair, and became very self-conscious. He sought vainly for something to say, but his wits wandered in chaos. Fortunately Peg came to the rescue and saved him the embarrassment of reply; laboring under an accusation of having been entertaining to the girl, Gallegher could never have found words.

"I've got it," put in Peg quietly.

Something in his tone, repressed as it was and in accord with his manner, caused Gallegher to glance at him sharply. Better acquainted with the man than was the girl, Gallegher divined that there had been some unpleasantness. His eyes filled with concern, but he had discretion enough not to question Peg at that moment.

"Where?" he asked briefly.

"The Grand Union Hotel," announced Shandal, with a gentle laugh. "I don't know as you'll think much of our hotels, ma'am," he addressed the girl, "but this is a heap sight better than nothing. It's a bit noisy just now, but I reckon you're tired enough to sleep, noise or no noise."

"I am," said the girl, "and starving—positively starving."

"Good Lord!" ejaculated Peg. "I clean forgot!"

"We'll fix that all right," Gallegher ventured. "There's a nigger in town who can cook up anything you please out of nothing at all. I'll go right after him."

"You do," Peg advised him, "and bring the stuff to the Grand Union. I'll drive on over and get Miss Logan's trunks up to her room."

Gallegher muttered a farewell and hastily lost himself in the night. Peg unhitched the horses, climbed back in the seat, and took up the reins.

"So the worst part of your troubles are over, ma'am," he said. "You get a good sleep, and to-morrow you and I'll find that brother of yours."

The girl smiled wanly. "I'm afraid," she said, "that I'm tired enough now to be selfish; rest seems to me more

desirable than anything—anything at all."

"I reckon you do feel some unhappy," Peg agreed. "I hope the noise won't disturb you none."

"I don't think it will—unless they get to shooting," said she, with a little shiver. "I thought I heard some more pistol-firing while you were away, but Mr. Gallegher said I was mistaken. Did you hear it?"

"Just the boys celebrating," he parried evasively. "You don't want to mind that, ma'am—that is, if there *was* any shooting."

"I'm sure there was," she said positively, and fell silent for a little, revolving something in her mind. "I trust," she ventured almost timidly, "that you are not getting into any trouble on my account, Mr. Shandal."

"Who? Me?" Peg was immeasurably astonished. "Don't let that worry you, ma'am. No such thing. Why, what put *that* into your head?"

"I don't know—that Ackles man, perhaps. Won't he be very angry?"

Peg chuckled. "Not so bad that he won't be able to get over it," he said. "Ackles is one of them four-flushers that we have to stand for out in these parts. He'll be meek as a lamb."

"I hope so."

"Oh, that's right, all right."

But Peg was not so confident, down in his heart.

In a moment or two more he drew rein in front of the Grand Union. Their arrival had evidently been eagerly looked forward to by those who had witnessed the affair around the faro-table; Peg cast a sharp eye over the mob that had assembled to give them welcome and opined inwardly that every damn' fool in the State had come to stare.

As for the girl, she was quite too tired to care; and if she did remark the size of the crowd, probably thought it nothing out of the way. She kept her eyes to herself, for the most part, and the comments of the miners, if they reached her ears, conveyed little intelligence to her sleepy brain.

Peg heard it all, however, and keenly longed to resent it, but, nevertheless, realized the market value, at that stage of the game, of maintaining an imperturbable front to the world.

He slipped out of the wagon without any ado and offered both hands to the girl. She rose, placed her fingers in his, and jumped to the ground with a grace which evoked admiring nudges, administered by one spectator to his neighbor.

The advent of such a woman as this was a thing unheard of in a settlement like Deadrock; her refinement and breeding were as undeniable as her bewitching prettiness. The natives had nothing but admiration and respect for her, from the moment she came into their view.

Even Hackett, the gambler, was stirred to gallantry. Standing in the entrance to the barroom—likewise the sole entrance to the hotel—he saw her, and moved forward instantly, raising his voice in a courteous demand that the gentlemen should stand aside and make way for the lady.

He was promptly obliged. A clear path was formed with much pushing and scrambling to get out of the way, and down this the girl stepped, Hackett leading, Peg, heavy-laden with her suit-case and other belongings, at her heels, his steady eyes vigilantly scanning the faces of those who formed the human walls between which he passed.

To his relief, however, all those eyes which encountered his own were friendly, albeit often envious in expression.

In a brief moment the procession had reached the stairway in the rear of the dining-hall and was ascending. Halfway up, Peg glanced back. The path no longer existed; the men had closed in solidly, and already their fickle attention was being diverted to the bar and gaming-tables.

Hackett bowed the girl urbanely into a small room which showed evidences of having been hastily put in order. Peg appraised it with an unprejudiced eye, and was forced to admit that the proprietor had done his best to make the apartment fit for the habitation of a woman.

The linen was fresh and astonishingly clean, for one thing; and the floor had been swept and washed, while a small rug—magnificent luxury!—had been placed by the bedside. A bureau ornamented the wall close by the window; and there were two chairs in addition to the wash-stand, whose essential cheapness, however, nothing could hide.

Peg deposited the suit-case at the foot of the bed, carefully laid the wraps, the gay parasol, and other feminine fripperies on the spotless counterpane, and beat an embarrassed retreat to the door.

On the threshold he turned and expressed himself as hopeful that Miss Logan would be comfortable, and was assured in return that she was charmed with her accommodations, and could imagine nothing for which to express a desire—save food.

As she spoke, that meal was forthcoming. A jet-black negro, bearing a well-laden tray from which ascended appetizing odors of fried chicken and coffee, appeared at the head of the stairs, the resourceful Mr. Gallegher bearing him company.

Grinning, they marched to the open door. The negro placed the tray upon a chair, and the girl, with an exclamation of delight, at once put herself in another, and fell to.

Peg considerately caught the arm of Mr. Gallegher, who displayed a disposition to linger and show himself amenable to the charms of conversation, and thrust him out into the hall.

"Come on," said Peg. "You ought to know she won't have no use for you and me until to-morrow morning."

Hackett and the darky having preceded them, they made their way to the head of the stairs, but, before descending, Gallegher demanded an explanation from Peg, rumors having reached him of the Hinstler affair.

Peg narrated the day's events, beginning with the passage at arms with Ackles at the Calumet station early in the morning, and omitting no essential details—save his own interest in the whereabouts of Angel-face Logan.

As he proceeded, the face of Mr. Gallegher darkened; the Ackles affair left him in a visibly dejected state of mind; the Hinstler trouble filled him with obvious and uncontrollable dismay.

"What the devil," inquired Peg at length, "is biting you, Pete? It ain't that you're worried about my being afraid of that Ackles proposition, is it?"

"Never in the world," affirmed Gallegher. "If there's anything you're afraid of, barring water, Peg, I ain't heard nothing of it. It's the combination that you're playing against," he expounded earnestly. "You're new to the camp and don't know nothing about the situation, so to speak, and so the very first thing you does is to get into a mix-up with Ackles, who ain't no more afraid of you than you are of him, and the next is to gun Doc Hinstler, who's got more friends of his own kind in the neighborhood than you can shake a stick at.

"To begin with, Ackles and Hinstler were not only dearly beloved sidepartners, but we're believing that they're members of the Kessel gang; and when the Kessel gang hears that you're responsible for the extermination of our friends, they'll come down on Deadrock like a regiment of Cheyennes in their war-paint, and your fighting chance won't be worth a pinch of snuff—nor mine, neither," Gallegher concluded.

"How so?" asked Peg cheerfully.

"Well, the Kessel outfit hangs out somewhere in the Mexican border country, south of here, and rustles cattle by preference when there ain't no hold-ups worth laying for up here. No one knows just where their headquarters is, and no one's stuck on trying to find out. It's a sure unhealthy locality for strangers. Now, when they come for you—as they will, certain—you don't suppose I'm going to pretend you ain't no friend of mine, do you?"

Peg gripped Gallegher's hand with force, touched by the other's loyalty. At the same time, he decried the suggestion of danger.

"You're an old woman, Pete," he

said lightly. "Ain't no chance of their doing anything of the sort, and you know it. By the way, you don't know this young lady's long-lost brother with the strawberry mark on his left forearm, do you? She says he's sure here."

"No; I dunno him," growled Gallegher dejectedly. "What's his full name—Logan what?"

"Angel-face and Hefty he answered to when *I* knew him," said Peg. "But *she* called him Arthur. I reckon it's Arthur. We got to sift him out, Pete."

"Sure; if he's in Deadrock, we will," responded Gallegher, with confidence. "All the same, if you've no objection, I'm going to take a little peep around and see how the land lies, Peg. Where'll I find you?"

"What's the squarest game in camp?" was the counter-question.

"Gould's, across the street—the Alcazar."

"Well, I'll be there when you come round."

"So-long, then," said Gallegher. "You don't forget your guns, Peg?"

"Sure not. So-long."

VII.

MIDNIGHT.

Outside the Grand Union, Peg found Ackles' team as he had left it. Engaging a couple of men to carry the girl's trunks up-stairs brought his cash down to one silver dollar and a couple of minor coins. Peg supervised the operation, and tapped on the door of the girl's room to apprise her of the fact that her baggage was in the hall without; receiving no answer, he very naturally came to the conclusion that she was already asleep—overpowered by fatigue. This, indeed, was the case.

He returned to the wagon, remounted the seat, and guided the weary team back to the corral, where he put them up in Ackles' name, advising the proprietor of the enclosure that he had hired the outfit from its owner.

When this had been attended to, it was nearly ten o'clock. Peg found himself wandering almost aimlessly through the camp, in half-hearted search for the Alcazar; he was beginning to be sensible of the pangs of hunger, but money was of more moment to him than food, and he contented himself with tightening his belt and a soft drink at the first bar he happened upon.

It was a clear, hot, breathless night, with Deadrock at the height of its glory. Every dance-hall and saloon and gambling-room blazed with light and noise.

Peg found the Alcazar and walked boldly in, resolved to put his luck to the test. The interior was blue with stifling smoke from cheap cigars and cheaper smoking-tobacco, rank with the stench of dead butts, foul pipes, and stale beer. Yet the tables were thronged; there was not a vacant chair to be had. The bar did a rushing business, and the din was terrific.

Shandal took up a position by the roulette outfit, behind the chair of a player who was losing heavily. He guessed that the man was not apt to continue long in the game. In this surmise he was presently justified; the fellow pushed back from the table, rose, and shaped an unsteady course for the door of the hell, muttering curses on his ill-fortune.

Peg slipped quietly into the vacant chair, dipped into his pocket with a casual air, and brought forth his dollar.

The wheel was then whirling in its ebony race; betting was suspended until the ivory ball should have made its fateful choice; Peg had an interval wherein to look about him and choose what number he might care to play.

In the end he very wisely concluded that there was no choice, since it was all chance. Blindly he thrust the coin on the nearest space; when he looked to see where it lay, he found that it was on the dividing line between two numbers. That meant that, should either number win, he would receive seventeen dollars and a half instead of thirty-five. With this double chance he was quite content.

He sat back in his chair and affected

an entire indifference—which, to tell the truth, he actually felt. Such a life as was Peg's is lived daily on a hap-chance plan, according to the fall of the dice; a man such as was Peg soon grows to regard the outcome of any temptation of fate with entire equanimity.

The ball ceased to click over the little compartments. There was a rustle of interest about the table, a chorus of half-suppressed exclamations; and Peg found himself the owner of seventeen dollars and a half plus his original stake.

In view of his needs, the amount was absurdly insignificant; he pushed the ivory counters languidly to another spot on the board. Again he won, but this time on a "straight" play, and calmly raked in chips to the value of over six hundred dollars.

The double coup struck a spark of interest from his quiet eyes; he bent forward and began to play with more attention. Also, his luck attracted the regard of his fellow players; they looked him over with the respect that men accord a local gun fighter. His prestige was great on account of his recent victory over the camp thug, Hinstler.

Without appearing to notice he heard one say guardedly: "Thar's the man who shot the doc."

A murmur of surprise went around the board; the croupier, who had been disposed to regard Peg with disgust, changed his attitude to one of respect. It is well to have an eye to one's behavior in the presence of a fighting man.

For an hour or so he pushed his chips about the painted cloth, with varying success, neither winning nor losing heavily after the first play. In the end he became aware of a steady presence at his elbow, and, looking up, beheld Gallegher.

"Well?" he asked, smiling.

"You better come away with me," said Gallegher.

Something in the way he spoke warned Peg that there was no time for trifling, and that Gallegher likewise did not want him to make too conspicuously hasty an exit. He nodded. "All right; wait till I soak 'em on this trip." And thrust a stack of counters on an even number—the thirty-six.

Two minutes later he rose, handed in his chips to the cashier, and received their equivalent in gold and bills—four hundred and ninety odd dollars.

"That's enough for one night," he said, yawning and stretching. "Have a drink, gentlemen?"

There was another interval—ten minutes or so—during the ceremony of liquoring up; and then, arm in arm with Gallegher, Shandal left the hall.

Once outside, beyond the reach of curious eyes, Gallegher quietly dragged him around a corner of the building.

"You come on," he said. "There's just about time for you to save your hair. My cayuse's around by the corral, and you can make Cornstalk by morning, if you ride hard."

"Steady," Peg interrupted quietly. "What's the row, my son?"

"Row enough," returned Gallegher anxiously. "Town marshal's after you; Ackles was picked up by a gang of cattlemen passing through Calumet, and is in town looking to raise your scalp; and the chances are ten to one that the Kessel gang will be down on you before morning."

"Oh, tut, tut!" said Peg impatiently. "You don't want to fly off the handle that way, Pete. You ought to know me better than that," he added, with reproach.

"I do. You're the dernedest fool this side of the Rio Grande," assented Pete grimly. "That ain't got nothing to do with the case. I'm trying to save your fool hide, and I've got everything fixed. You go on and hit the trail lickety-split and you *may* see Cornstalk. I'll take care of your girl. Otherwise——"

He paused, eying Peg's immoble face. "Huh!" he cried, thoroughly disgusted, "what's the use talking to a——"

"Go it easy," Peg soothed him. "Don't lose any sweat, Pete. You're an old maid, and you know it. What'd you think of me if I did turn tail and

make for the tall timber? If Ackles wants to see me, he'll get all that's coming to him, my son."

"You don't know Ackles"—gloomily.

"He knows me"—grimly.

"All right. Come along, then; I reckon I just naturally got to see you through."

Pete gave in with a snort. "Never did see such a rattle-brained cuss," he protested to the stilly night. "Never did——"

"Shut up," interrupted Peg. "Where can I buy a brace of guns?"

Half an hour later they emerged from the cabin of an early prospector who had more artillery than he really needed to protect his interests, and who was willing to share for a consideration. Ackles' weapons, now fully loaded and in perfect condition, were in a brown paper parcel under Peg's arm, while a new cartridge-belt, bristling with brass-capped ammunition and supporting two heavy Smith & Wessons—Peg's favorite weapons—hung about his hips.

It was now in the early part of the hour after midnight. The mining-town was in full swing still, though a distinctly lower note was perceptible in the chorus of gaiety that rang through it. Peg's thoughts went to the lonely girl in the ramshackle, packing-box room of the Grand Union, and he wondered whether or not she slept quietly through the racket.

His brain stimulated by the memory of her eyes, of the shy, sidelong glances with which, now and again, she had favored him in their day-long companionship, of the fragrance of her presence, he turned upon Gallegher with a demand.

"See here," he said roughly, to cover his embarrassment. "If anything goes wrong you'll see her through—find that worthless brother of hers, Pete?"

"Sure," Pete replied, with a tightening of his lips.

"Shake on that," insisted Peg, and they clasped hands in silence. Then:

"This Ackles critter?" Peg inquired. "Where'd you hear about him, or see him?"

"He's in the Alhambra, boozing and talking about what he's going to do to you. They've told him of the doc's misfortune, and, with that and the red eye, he's half wild."

"I reckon you mean half-witted," chuckled Peg. "And the marshal—what's his name, and what's he want with me?"

"Burgstaller—a beefy Dutchman, but a good man," Gallegher reported. "Heard some one say that he was looking for you with a warrant for manslaughter. He gave it out yestiddy that killings had got to stop in Deadrock—and what he says, he means."

"But can he *make* it mean anything?"

"He's got the nerve."

"H'm! Where we bound for now?"

"My shack. You can have half my blanket."

"All right," said Peg, after they had walked on for a moment in silence. "You run along and make up the bed, Pete. I'll drop in in the course of an hour or so. Trot, now."

"Darned if I do! What you up to now?"

"You run along like a good boy."

"Cut it out, Peg. You know I ain't that sort. What's the game?"

"I'm going to see Ackles," said Peg shortly. "You may's well save your breath, 'cause that's what's going to happen. The man doesn't live in Deadrock that can take my name in vain and boast about it afterward. That's dead straight. Now—going?"

"Like blazes. Come on, if you're so pig-headed."

They turned toward the plaza, Peg leading, Gallegher sulking a few steps in the rear, and moved briskly on through the scattered tents and huts.

Abruptly, as they debouched between two buildings upon the square, they walked into a little group of men standing in the glare of light from the wide-open front of the Alcazar. Peg heard a shuffle of feet and a low-voiced exclamation as they passed. In another instant there came the statement, terse and direct and positive:

"Thar's yuh man!"

Peg wheeled, revolver poised in hand,

ready for anything. Gallegher fell in at his side, likewise fingering the trigger of his weapon.

For an appreciable interval there was a dead silence, so far as the two groups were concerned. They faced one another without speaking, each silently sizing up its adversaries. Peg's first thought, that Ackles was among his friends, proved erroneous. His keen eyes failed to discern the lanky, stoop-shouldered figure of the teamster. To the contrary, indeed, not one of the men was familiar to his eyes.

The situation puzzled him momentarily. Turning his head, he warned Gallegher in a whisper:

"Step aside, you! Don't give 'em so big a target."

Gallegher, on the other hand, did not move; he laughed shortly and returned his pistol to the holster, as a heavy-set, fat-cheeked, bearded man walked out toward them, one hand spread, palm out, toward them, the other lying at ease by his side.

"Put up your guns, chentlemens," came the command. "You will yourselves unter arrest consider."

VIII.

I. A. M.

Peg echoed his companion's laugh. "The Dutchman," he told himself. Aloud he said: "Marshal Burgstaller?"

"Yes. Put up that gun."

"Oh, very well." Peg did as he was bid. "What do you want of me?" he demanded.

"I haff a warrant out for your arrest," said the German thickly.

"On what charge?"

"Manslaughter."

"The man attacked me."

"That iss all ferry well. You will explain that pefore a chury off your peers. I arrest you in der name off der law."

"Good," said Peg. "Might's well have all the trimmings. I reckon you got no use for my friend here?"

"Misder Gallegher? *Nein.*" Burgstaller shook his heavy, fleshy head ponderously from side to side. "He can go."

"Thanky." Peg turned to Gallegher. "Good night, Pete," he said. "Look here. I ain't easy in my mind about that little girl."

"Nor me," assented Gallegher. "What you want me to do?"

"Go up and sit it out on her trunks. You can sleep a bit, at that."

"Surest thing you know. Take good care of him, marshal. Good night, all." Gallegher moved away toward the hotel.

Burgstaller closed in at Peg's side. "You need nod giff me your guns," he said. "I haff your parole? You will attempt to escape not?"

"Sure not."

"Ferry well. We will by mine house go."

"Just one minute, if you please." Peg watched Gallegher's broad shoulders swinging across the square. "Look here," he resumed. "Will you do me a favor?"

"Dot derpends," the German said cautiously.

"I got a bundle here for a friend in the Alhambra. You don't mind if I take it to him? We can have a drink—you and your friends."

"I am entirely agreeable. Chentlemens, will you choin us?"

The gentlemen would, unanimously. They filed solemnly over to the Alhambra, Peg and Burgstaller bringing up the rear, their entrance into the dance-hall creating no especial comment.

With one accord they lined up in front of the bar—now, because of the lateness of the hour, partially deserted. Peg, placing himself, as if carelessly, at one end of the line, ran his gaze down the row of figures toward the farther end of the place.

A tin-pan piano-organ was grinding out a two-step, and the hastily constructed edifice echoed with the thunder of half a hundred booted feet, more or less in time to the music—so termed by courtesy.

Eventually Peg discovered his man, surrounded by a group of sycophants,

half reclining at the farther end of the bar.

Ackles had been drinking, but it at once became apparent that his potations had not sapped his senses; they had but served to inflame his passions, to rouse him to a humor uglier than was ordinary with even him. He had failed to note the entrance of Peg and the marshal, with their party—or, if he had observed, had failed to identify his chosen enemy. At that moment he stood, both elbows on the bar, staring down into his glass and muttering to himself.

Brief as had been Peg's stay in Deadrock, already the town was familiar with him by word-o'-mouth description. Peg realized this fact when he caught a startled exclamation from the bartender. At once he knew that it was then or never. With two strides he had left Burgstaller's side and was near the group around Ackles.

Within reaching distance he paused and shifted the parcel containing Ackles' revolvers to his left hand. Some one cried shrilly: "Look out, there!" and Peg gently tossed the package on the bar.

It landed with a thump, slid smoothly over the polished wood, and brought to a stop immediately under the teamster's nose.

The man jumped, and his eyes met Peg's as the latter spoke.

"There are your guns, Ackles," he called clearly. "Many thanks."

Ackles said not a word. The dirty crimson flush in his cheeks deepened as he took in the situation. Swiftly he moved his elbows and dropped one hand below the bar, but quick as he was, Peg was not less so. As Ackles' hand, holding a new pistol, rose above the wood, Peg fired.

The crash of the report was like the bursting of a small blast in that narrow, deep room. It brought with it an utter cessation of other sound. The piano stopped, and the cumbrously dancing men halted with one accord.

A kerosene-lamp immediately behind Ackles went out with a flare, its chimney shattered, its wick shot away. The group about the teamster suddenly dispersed like leaves caught in an autumn breeze, leaving the man alone, his gun fallen from a hand that lacked a thumb.

For a second Ackles stared stupidly at the maimed member. Then, with a roar, he sprang out from behind his corner of the counter, and, with his uninjured left hand, tried to draw his other revolver. There followed a second flash and report, at the instant that Ackles' fingers closed upon the butt.

The teamster fell back with an oath, his red-rimmed eyes almost protruding from his head as he stared at the place where his other thumb should have been. He roared an imprecation at Peg, who laughed composedly.

"I wanted to show you, you bluffer," said Peg. "You've been talking big about what you wanted to do with me. I think I've called your trick, my man!"

Ackles said nothing more. He reeled back, staring at his mutilated hands, to a chair at a near-by table, into which he sank with a groan. As he did so, Peg heard a shot, and out of the corner of his eye caught the flash of a revolver, just as a bullet shaved the back of his head.

His revolver had been in the hand hanging idly at his side. As he whirled about upon the fresh aggressor he fired again, from the waist. The bullet clipped the ear of one of the bartenders, whose smoking weapon fell with a crash as he clapped a hand to his wound.

Simultaneously the other man behind the bar fired, without effect. Peg realized that he had, with his eyes open, walked into a nest of Ackles' friends. What was worse, he had dragged the portly and good-natured marshal, Burgstaller, into the row with him. Quietly he shot the pistol from the bartender's hand and sprang back across the room.

It was well that he moved when he did and as unexpectedly. Had he not done so, the issue would have been ill for Peg. For, as he sprang back, a bullet shaved his clothing. Peg heard a yell and a groan, and saw Burgstaller reel and fall.

Simultaneously a revolver spoke over

Peg's shoulder. One of the marshal's friends had fired. A man standing behind Ackles, with a smoking pistol in his hand, threw out his hands, dropping the weapon, and pitched forward on his face.

There was a yell of alarm from the dancers and a concerted rush for the door, in which both parties to the altercation were roughly jostled out of the way. The two bartenders joined in the stampede, attempting an escape in the confusion, but as one passed, Peg struck him heavily under the ear with the butt of his revolver; the fellow went down without a sound. The other blundered into the arms of Burgstaller's friends, and was promptly suppressed.

In two minutes the saloon was empty save for Peg, the wounded Burgstaller, Ackles—sullenly nursing his useless hands—and the dead man. Outside in the plaza Deadrock gathered as one man.

One of the unwounded, a man named Allison, Burgstaller's deputy, called for a litter and water and whisky. Peg himself dropped on his knees by Burgstaller's side. He had a little rough surgery, learned in the school of experience, and it did not take him long to discover that the German's wound was serious, but not necessarily fatal.

The bullet, thrown by a revolver of heavy caliber, had torn clean through the man, missing any vital organs, and was lodged in the fat and muscles of his back; a competent surgeon would have no difficulty in extracting it by incision. The only danger lay in blood-poisoning.

"How is he?"

Peg looked up, to meet the speaker's eyes. A short, grim-mouthed, self-contained man, in miner's garb, was bending over him, anxious eyes intent on Burgstaller's livid face.

"I'm Eagan, justice of the peace," he explained briefly. "You're——"

"Shandal—William J. Shandal, of Dallas. He'll live, with care."

Eagan nodded shortly. "All right," he said. "We'll get him the care. The boys are bringing in a litter now." He paused, looking Peg over. "How did this start?" he asked bluntly. "And who's responsible for it? I was passing, heard the shooting, and dropped in."

"I'm responsible," Peg admitted. "It had to be, but I'm sorry that this was the outcome."

He got upon his feet and explained briefly the circumstances—a short statement, covering all essential incidents from the beginning of the affair at Calumet the previous morning.

"You're under arrest, then?" Eagan asked keenly.

"Yes."

"Well, you stay so. Hand me over them guns."

Peg hesitated. "I will if you insist," he demurred, "but you must know that it amounts to giving me over, bound hand and foot, to the Kessel gang."

Eagan snorted. "Who's been telling you about that?"

"Gallegher. He seemed to think that they'd jump us to get even for the Hinstler shooting."

After some minutes of thinking, Eagan looked up again, his face clouded. "Mebbe so," he conceded. "I'll let you keep those guns on one condition."

"Well?"

"You allow yourself to be sworn in as deputy marshal and stay here to be tried for this other business. Meanwhile, a man who can shoot the way you can is the man we need on the side of law and order." He paused—a small, sturdy, resolute man of some education. "What do you say? This gives you a fighting chance, if the Kessel boys do try to wake things up."

Peg laughed easily. "Oh," he replied. "I'm glad enough to. All I want is fair play. This business has been sort of shoved on me from the beginning. I'm not afraid of trial. The first time I shot in self-preservation, and here there would have been no trouble if Ackles hadn't tried to draw his gun when he saw that I had the drop on him."

The men with the litter had put in an appearance, and Burgstaller, un-

conscious, was being lifted gently upon it. Eagan watched the operation thoughtfully.

"Come along, then," he said, at length, "and I'll swear you in. Here, you." He turned to Ackles. "Get up and come with us. We'll lock you up on general principles for to-night. To-morrow morning I'll show you the road out of camp, and if you'll take my advice, you won't ever travel over it more than once—and that going out. And you, too," Eagan told the bartenders. "Come along, now."

IX.

IN THE TWILIGHT.

At three that morning Peg sat with Eagan in the latter's cabin, discussing affairs of state. The ceremony of swearing him in had been attended to; he had met and been made acquainted with his fellow deputies, of whom there were four—young, keen, and clear-eyed men, quick and steady on their feet, dispassionate of judgment, and resolute of demeanor.

Two were eastern-born and college-bred men, in whose ears the call of the West had proven too alluring to permit of their remaining in the East and submitting to the restrictions of a more settled civilization. The others were Westerners to the bone—rough-hewn and hardy fellows, brusk-mannered, yet soft of speech—one a Californian, the other a native of Colorado.

Now they were gone their various ways. Peg alone lingered with the justice of the peace, conversing amiably.

Between them on the table sat a bottle, flanked by a water-pitcher and glasses. From time to time Eagan refreshed himself from the bottle. Peg stuck to the pitcher. "I'm on the water-wagon for a time," he explained. "Red liquor's cost me too much money." And later, casually, he inquired: "Do you happen to know a fellow in these diggings named Logan?"

"Logan?" repeated the judge. "Logan? Derned if I do! What's his business? How long should you say he'd been here?"

"Must have come within the last two weeks or ten days," calculated Peg. "I left him in 'Frisco two weeks ago, 'most to the day. A boyish-looking little fellow, with big and wide-open brown eyes. Look's soft, but is hard as nails under his skin. Short and chunky. We used to call him Hefty—when we didn't call him Angel-face." He paused inquiringly.

Eagan shook his head. "Don't seem to place him," he negatived.

"I reckon he's here, all right," concluded Peg; "only you ain't seen him. He wrote his sister he was coming. Sister's that girl I was telling you about."

"Yes; you mentioned her name."

"She's a plucky sort, too," continued Peg admiringly. "Never turned a hair. Now you take 'most any other woman, and set her down to spend the night alone in Calumet station, and I bet you she'll carry on like a wet hen. S' far's I could make out, this one hadn't wept a weep; just took it as natural as could be. When I struck the station she was sitting around the corner sleeping like a baby; hadn't even been wakened by the freight. And pretty! *My!*" Peg enthused.

"Queer freak for a girl like that," commented Eagan. "You wouldn't think she'd travel pretty nigh across the continent to find a worthless brother. Now, would you?"

"You can't sometimes most always generally tell," opined Peg, with the seasoned judgment of a man of heart; "women's freakish. Anyhow," he concluded, "I'm glad she came. She's something to remember and be grateful for knowing."

He sighed sentimentally, staring at the smoke-clouded rafters of the cabin. "Blame' lucky coincidence for Angel-face," he thought grimly. "If 'twa'n't for her, he'd have a mighty unpleasant interview with me. Queer how things turn out: me meeting her and him her brother, and coming here to join us! Like a family reunion, sort of. I'd like pretty dern' well to make it more so."

He sighed again deeply, his eyes blinded by the shimmer of her hair, as he remembered it.

"But his being her brother makes it different," he assured himself. "You can't gun the brother of the girl you're in——" A blinding flash of intelligence illuminated the dark places of his mind. "Whoa!" he cried, in alarm. "You're running away, Peg. Pull in, man; pull in!"

In his consternation at this alarming discovery as to the state of his heart, he glanced furtively at Eagan, as if apprehensive that his mind had been read by that gentleman; and this theory gaining unexpected confirmation from the fact that Eagan was regarding him steadily, Peg blushed consciously.

"If you don't mind, and have a blanket to spare, judge," he said, rising, in the hope of averting embarrassing inquiries, "I'll turn in on the floor here."

"I don't think you will," Eagan contradicted gravely. "If I don't make any mistake, your work's cut out for you right here and now."

"How's that?"

Peg turned, wondering what was in the judge's mind. The latter raised one hand imperatively.

"Just listen!" he said tersely.

Peg obeyed. The night-long din of the mining-camp was begining to lessen; one by one the roisterers were seeking their beds. Only the larger and more important of the various resorts kept open, the others not finding enough profitable patronage to justify the continued loss of sleep.

And so it was possible to distinguish, loud above the lesser noises, a rattle of shots and a chorus of yells, apparently emanating from the vicinity of the plaza.

"What in thunder——" wondered Peg.

Eagan got to his feet abruptly, pushing back his chair and looking to the condition of his ordnance.

Peg, noting his action, followed his example, one by one withdrawing the Smith & Wessons from his belt. He tested the cylinders to assure himself that they ran smoothly, and, with his thumb-nail against the base of each, verified his conviction that each chamber held its cartridge.

"I'm ready," he announced steadily. "What's the game now?"

Eagan jerked his hat from a hook and jammed it down over his brows. "I dunno," he replied briefly; "but we're due to investigate. That sort of thing sounds ugly, and it's got to stop, anyway."

Peg followed him out, closing the cabin door behind him, to stand in the clear, starlit night and fill his lungs to the full of their capacity with the cool, fresh, clean air.

He remarked that the disturbance seemed to have subsided—that is, the shots had ceased. Now and again a wild whoop sounded shrill, but that was an ordinary thing, worth not a minute's passing consideration. Even the judge seemed somewhat reassured; he stood hesitant, frowning, and pulling at his short, dark mustache.

"Maybe it's a false alarm, after all," he temporized.

"Like as not it's just the boys going home," suggested Peg hopefully, his thoughts reverting with longing to the blanket he had proposed to occupy on the judge's cabin floor.

Some one was running toward them in the darkness. Eagan waited, muttering beneath his breath. Presently a figure became visible, dashing hotfoot down the narrow and winding lanes between the scattered tents and shacks. As it drew near, it slackened speed and finally came to a halt, puffing.

"Who's that?" it demanded, catching sight of Peg and the judge.

"Eagan," announced the latter, apparently recognizing the voice. "What's doing, Allison?"

Allison came more near to them, panting.

"The Kessel gang," he gasped. "They sifted in from somewhere about an hour ago. Morrow," he added, naming one of his brother deputies, "walked right into them in front of the Grand Union, and—well, they did for him. I heard it just now, and came

to round you up. Where are the others?"

"We'll have to go after them, I reckon," said Eagan quietly. "How many in the outfit?"

"Eight, I think," returned Allison.

Eagan turned to Peg. "Are you ready?" he inquired.

"Ready," affirmed Peg.

"Your friend was right," commented Eagan as they started off. "I didn't think they'd get wind of it so soon. Maybe it's just as well now as later. Is old Kessel with them, Allison?"

"I don't know—think so. They hitched and went into the Alhambra after settling Morrow's hash. We'll find them there, all right."

Eagan grunted and strode off at an angle, to pause before a tent and scratch on the canvas.

"Who's thar?" demanded a sleepy voice.

"Eagan. Get up, Burchard."

Burchard grumbled, got up, and struck a light. "Come in," he said. "What's doing?"

"The Kessel outfit," Eagan explained, "are jumping us. Get your guns and go after Hallam and Jones. Or you chase up Jones, Allison, and let Burchard find Hallam. Get back here as quick as you can—we'll wait for you."

"How about Morrow?" Burchard asked, buckling on his cartridge-belt and holsters.

"Wiped out. No, don't lose time."

Burchard swore and dashed out of the tent, Allison following. Eagan sat himself down on the edge of Burchard's cot and scowled thoughtfully. Peg walked to the flap, drew it aside, and looked out into the night. A volley of shots and a scream of mortal terror from the near-by square angered him.

"Oh, come on!" he cried impatiently. "What's the use of waiting for those fellows?"

"You wait," Eagan commanded. "You don't know this Kessel gang. They'll be eight to six, at that. You wait."

Peg obeyed, trembling with impatience. To him the minutes lagged with leaden feet ere the three deputies appeared with their recruit, Jones—an old man—tall, thin, wiry, miserly of speech.

"Hello, Jones," Eagan greeted him. "I want you to act as deputy. Come on. I'll swear you in on the way."

Jones grunted. "All right," he said, without much interest in his manner.

Burchard blew out the light, and the six left the tent. Five minutes later they came out upon the plaza. Standing silently in the shadow that lay between the Little Delmonico eating-house and a gin-mill described as "Jim's Place," they reconnoitered.

It was nearly four o'clock. Already the gray twilight that precedes the dawn was over Deadrock; and the camp had grown quite still—as peaceful as ever it was, that is to say. In the dim glimmer of twilight the wagons in the square bulked black, with unfamiliar outlines, and the still brilliantly illuminated fronts of the saloons and gambling-hells wore a haggard aspect, as if ashamed to face the light of the coming day.

But, as they looked, in the Alcazar the lamps were extinguished one by one, until there remained only a feeble glow in the rear of the saloon, where the proprietor sat counting up the day's gains.

Perhaps a dozen men—mostly attendants and professional gamblers—appeared in front of the place, talking together in subdued, weary tones for a moment ere separating, and, in twos and threes, moving off to the places that they called their homes.

The Alhambra, however, continued in full blast, even while the Grand Union itself was shutting up for the night—or, rather, for the morning. Allison, it seemed, had been correct in his statement that the Kessel gang would be found in that particular saloon; if any evidence in support were needed other than the disorder within, it was to be found in the horses tethered in front of the place.

Eagan counted them, nodding.

"Eight," he announced, in confirmation of Allison's estimate. "We've got

our hands full, boys. One of you go over and lead 'em off." He meant the horses. "The rest of us'll scatter and surround 'em."

Doubtless he had intended so to do. As it happened, however, the Kessel party had not retired to the saloon without the precaution of leaving a sentinel. For, as the judge and the deputies moved out into the plaza, they were observed by one who had been skulking in the shadow beneath a wagon, and who now set off toward the Alhambra, yelling at the top of his voice an incoherent admonition to those within.

Allison swore disgustedly and raised his revolver. The tongue of flame leaped out after the man, and he suddenly collapsed half-way to his goal. But it was too late. His shouts, followed by the shots, had afforded the Kessel party all the warning it needed.

A group appeared in the doorway, black against the lights. Eagan, running toward the Alhambra, stopped and raised his voice.

"You boys are under arrest," he cried clearly. "Stay where you are and——"

A brutal laugh cut off his words. Fire spat from somewhere in the group, and Eagan stepped back, cursing, as he raised his own weapon and returned the shot. Peg surmised that the judge had been hit, but concluded that the wound was only slight.

Instantly the square was echoing with the reports of firearms. The Kessel party darted toward the horses, shooting as they ran. Eagan shouted to his men: "Cut 'em off, boys!" and himself set an intrepid example by running at top speed in a course that would bring him between the horses and their owners.

Again the Kessels laughed at him derisively; and after the first few steps he stumbled and fell. Instantly he arose and darted behind a convenient wagon's bed, where he settled himself to peppering the invaders with both guns.

After that Peg's hands were too full with the business of keeping his own skin whole to permit his paying much attention to the actions of his fellows. The deputies, who had in the beginning started across the square in a body, were scattering, taking up points of vantage behind obstacles as Eagan had. The others—the Kessel gang—had gained their horses and were using them as shields, from behind which they kept up a continuous and galling fire.

Peg saw Allison, somewhat in advance, between Eagan and himself, fall to the ground, and heard him groan. He seemed not mortally hurt, however, for he rolled over on one side and used up the remaining cartridges in both his revolvers ere lying quiet and motionless.

Disdaining adventitious shelter, Peg himself ran on until well within accurate range of the enemy; then, crouching behind a hitching-post of considerable girth, he delivered a sustained and withering fire at the line of men and horses.

In the half light it was, of course, impossible to determine the effect of his shooting. Nevertheless, as he saw horse after horse start and jump or fall, and man after man go down, he was inclined to put a certain modest percentage of the hits to his own credit.

For five minutes or so the shots rattled and echoed around the buildings that fronted on the square. The sharp clatter of revolver-firing was now and again dominated by the heavier reports of the rifles with which, it developed, many of the desperadoes were armed. One by one, however, their guns were silenced; man after man fell wounded and dying or dead. At length but three remained to return the fire of the four surviving deputies—among whom was the justice of the peace, wounded but active.

Of these three one was using a magazine rifle with deadly effect. The muzzle of his weapon vomited what seemed an incessant stream of flame, crimson and gold against the dusk; between shots he jeered the attacking party, but the import of his words was lost in the din.

Having at length succeeded in locating the deputy named Hallam, and

putting him, at least temporarily, out of the conflict, the man turned his attention to Peg, who, by that time, had left the insufficient shelter of the hitching-post and darted forward to a house on the side of the square, around whose corner he lurked while firing.

A drumming of bullets against the corner of the frame edifice warned Peg that his position was discovered, and, just as he realized the fact, old man Jones put a bullet through the head of the outlaw's horse. It fell as the man jumped back, narrowly escaping the bulk of the dead animal.

Without the protection of its body, the outlaw darted rapidly forward toward Peg's shelter, evidently determined to fight it out face to face. Peg heard him coming, and stepped calmly forth, accepting the challenge.

The fellow came with a rush. He was still firing his rifle, but the motion of his running fortunately rendered his aim erratic.

Suddenly Peg heard the click of the repeating mechanism announcing the fact that the last cartridge in the magazine had been expended. The advancing man threw the gun aside without a word, and drew a revolver. Within twenty yards he paused and fired.

Something smote Peg's left arm with force sufficient to make him relax his hold on the revolver which he was keeping in reserve, numbing the limb from shoulder to wrist. He was conscious that it had been jerked back as if struck by a thick club; an agonizing pain shot through his shoulder.

Grimly he gritted his teeth, aimed, and pulled trigger.

His antagonist halted in the advance which he had resumed, and seemed to stagger; at the same time he fired again, the missle nipping by Peg's temple and tearing off his sombrero.

Deliberately Peg took aim. When his finger tightened upon the trigger, that part of the fight, which had resolved itself into a personal duel, was at an end. The man, a vague shadow among shadows, seemed to melt into the darkness. Peg saw him, a limp heap in the dust, and ran swiftly past.

Jones, by holding his fire and steadily advancing, had forced the second of the trio back into the Alhambra, where he had taken refuge behind the bar. The other man had just swung his foot into the stirrup and was trying to mount his horse—a process made difficult by the thoroughly maddened animal's rearing and plunging.

Peg endeavored to frustrate the fellow's flight by a couple of bullets, but the horse's frenzied movements precluded any surety of aim, and the sound of the shots only seemed to make the man more frantically determined to escape.

Wondering that a seasoned plainsman, such as this undoubtedly must be, should experience such difficulty in managing his mount, Peg ran on, reloading the cylinder of his weapon, in which the last cartridge had been exploded. It was a job attended by some difficulty and suffering, on account of his wounded arm, but Shandal gritted his teeth and endured and accomplished.

This was not the first time that he had been wounded and under fire; he was undismayed.

Abruptly the man gained the saddle, and the horse darted forward, almost knocking Peg over as he stood in its path, reloading. Somehow the cylinder of his weapon had become jammed; he could not get it back into position quickly enough. He fumbled with it desperately, but to no avail for the time being.

The fugitive, dashing by, fired thrice. The heat of one shot scorched Peg's face, but the bullet, like its fellows, flew wide. The rider's aim was execrable.

During the instant that he loomed over Peg there seemed something in his build oddly reminiscent. Peg felt vaguely that he had known him before; but there was no time to stop and ransack the galleries of his memory for the owner of the resemblance. Besides, there was nothing sure.

Horse and rider vanished between the shadowy buildings, apparently making for the western trail out of Deadrock—one little used and less known.

Peg gave him up with a sigh, calmed himself, succeeded in adjusting the cylinder of his revolver, and cast an experienced eye over the scene of the battle.

Of the Kessels, six were hors de combat. The seventh, still entrenched behind the bar of the Alhambra, was making Jones keep his distance. Of the forces of law and order, only Peg and Jones were in fighting trim—and Peg wounded.

Allison, it developed, was dead; Hallam was seriously wounded; Burchard scarcely less so. Eagan was sitting up, composedly cutting away the flannel shirt from a smashed shoulder. He looked up and nodded briskly enough, however, when Peg approached.

"Go on!" he cried imperatively. "The boys will take care of us. Grab one of them cayuses and light out after Kessel."

"Was that Kessel?" Peg asked.

"You bet it was. If you can get him, we'll have stamped this gang out of business forever. How d'ye feel? Can you make it?"

But already Peg had left him and was running toward one of the ponies still tethered in front of the Alhambra. If the fugitive were indeed Kessel, Peg felt it would be a feather in his cap too valuable to be ignored to effect the outlaw's capture.

As he was fumbling with the reins, Jones' antagonist behind the bar peeped over and took a pot-shot at Peg. For luck, Peg fired in return—and smashed the mirror behind the bar. Then he slung a long leg over the saddle, stuck his toes into the stirrups, and pounded the horse's flank with the flat of his hand.

It recognized the hand of a master on the reins, and broke into a long, sweeping lope. Peg encouraged it by voice and hand, guiding it in the general direction of the fugitive's course. In an instant they had left the plaza behind, and were darting among the huddled shacks.

Another moment, and Deadrock was falling behind them, while before, on the road that lay straight into the heart of the hills, Peg's keen eyes discerned the flying shapes of man and horse.

X.

BROAD DAYLIGHT.

Barely the quarter of a mile lay between pursuer and pursued—or so Peg estimated it, and with some surprise. Plenty of time had elapsed, he surmised, for the fugitive to have gotten well away, between the start of his flight and the moment that Peg swung into the saddle.

Apparently he had been delayed. Peg wondered by what. Unfamiliarity with the lay of Deadrock might account for it; the man might have succeeded in tangling himself up in that helter-skelter aggregation of nondescript dwellings. Very likely that was it, thought Peg.

The deputy marshal was only the better pleased, no matter how the delay had been brought about. It kept him the closer in touch with the man whom he was determined to run down, even though the chase led him into the rocky fastnesses of the mountains, into some terra incognita whence he might never find his way back to Deadrock, or into that strange and unknown desert country which lay to the south of the railroad—the so-called borderland between the United States and Mexico, haunt of thieves, "bad men," cattle rustlers, and undesirable characters generally.

Peg knew that region by reputation only; and it loomed in his imagination as a country possessed by infernal heat —a broken and terrible land, which the lawful trespassed upon at the peril of their lives, and where the lawless flourished as the green bay tree, secure in its impenetrable distances.

He earnestly hoped that the fugitive would not choose to seek security in that unpleasant place; but whether or no, Peg promised himself, he would pursue him. The capture of an outlaw as notorious as Kessel was something which it was given to few men to encompass; Peg determined inwardly to be one of the few.

With such an exploit to his credit his prestige in Deadrock, indeed, in all the country, would be secure; men would accord him his full meed of respect, as one too dangerous to irritate; and the days of his necessity for "gun fighting" —an occupation for which he had no predilection, whatever his skill thereat —would be practically over. He would live and flourish in peace and the good-will of his neighbors.

He bent over the saddle and patted the neck of his flying mount, whispering words of encouragement into the animal's ear. As the dawn grew in the skies and a brighter light filled the world, he could see that chance had dealt with him kindly in giving him a horse of good quality.

Ahead, the figure of the fugitive showed every moment with increasing distinctness. He sat the saddle easily, Peg noticed, and was a man somewhat under medium height, with a frame almost boyish and slender of build—though the shoulders beneath the flying coat were broad enough.

He was urging his horse to the top of its speed, sparing neither whip nor spur. That was a good sign—a very good sign, Peg felt. It meant that the animal was not the equal of the pursuing one, since spur and whip were necessary to keep the distance between them.

Now and again the fugitive would vanish for a moment, as his horse rounded the shoulder of some hill and sped on into the bare wilderness of rock and arid earth. But always Peg, reaching the same turning-point, would see him on ahead, lying low on his horse's neck and coaxing from it the utmost of its endeavor.

Peg himself applied his heavy hand and his heavy heels to the rumps and sides of his roan, without visible effect. The animal was willing, already doing its very best—no more could be won from it in the way of speed. He might, Peg felt, as well conserve his energies for that final moment when the issue would lie between man and man, between gun and gun.

So he settled himself to the task of riding his man down, convinced that it might be accomplished with patience and dogged persistence.

The slumbering hills awoke and echoed the fury of the chase; the sun rose above their crests and bathed the hollows, through which the trail ran, with the full power of its heat. Peg wilted under its unremitting fervor, but set his jaw and stuck grimly on.

An hour passed. The heat grew stronger; the rocky hillsides, already having absorbed their full capacity of it, flung the surplus back in the faces of the riders in great, stifling gusts. The earth rocked and reeled about them; the sun rode low in a sky of brass; the hills danced in ever-changing combinations of contour and color-scheme. Peg drooped in his saddle, animated only by his unshaken purpose to overtake, to conquer.

Another hour—it seemed an age. The roan was lathered from head to tail with sweat. Peg himself was bathed in perspiration, his clothing sodden; the saddle galled him; his knees ached somewhat; the blood throbbed furiously in his temples; his jaw lagged open as he gasped for breath; and the pain in his shoulder grew until it seemed unendurable.

Now and again the fugitive disappeared, only to come again into sight. Peg stopped worrying lest he should give him the slip. It was apparently not the desperado's purpose, who seemed to prefer a day-long agony of flight to a final, swift, and decisive argument.

And yet once again he passed from sight, turning down into the mouth of a wide, steaming gully. Peg's horse plugged on after him, sullenly. As they swept around the bend, the deputy marshal, glancing ahead, could see the bed of the gully—the dried bed of an ancient water-course—for the extent of a mile; and his man had vanished utterly, evaporated into thin air as though by the very irresistible heat of the sun.

Peg licked his dry lips and muttered an oath. What had become of the man?

Something cracked sharply by his

shoulder, and a bullet scraped the back of his neck, to flatten itself against the rocky wall of the gulch.

With a cry, Peg reined in and wheeled, his revolver ready. He fired at once, scarcely aiming. A horse shrieked and fell, its rider jumping from the saddle just in the nick of time to escape a crushing as the animal rolled in its death throes.

Kessel the invisible was cornered at last. Peg's heart leaped when he realized what he had accomplished. The ambush having failed to work properly, through the inaccuracy of the man's aim, Peg's doubts were at rest as to the finale.

He saw the slight, alert figure standing by the side of the fallen horse, revolver poised, in a little nichelike place in the precipitous rock, barely large enough to conceal horse and man from the road.

Peg laughed with triumph, and pulled sharply on the reins to quiet his animal, that he might fire with sureness.

Abruptly he cried aloud with amazement and dropped the gun. The redoubtable pseudo-Kessler echoed his cry and imitated his action.

"Hefty, by all that's holy!" cried Peg, staring, unable to credit his eyes.

And "Peg!" exclaimed Angel-face Logan, grinning mirthlessly.

XI.

LOGAN'S SISTER.

Peg slipped down from his horse, his eyes hardening. Logan shifted his revolver to his left hand and extended the right in friendly greeting.

"Who'd 'a' thought it?" he asked, gradually recovering from his surprise. "Peg, I *am* glad to see you!"

"Same here," said Peg grimly. "Drop that gun!"

"What?" Logan stared, his hand still outstretched but ungrasped. In a moment he comprehended that Peg was refusing to shake hands with him, and quietly withdrew the proffered palm. His smile lost a little of its warmth, and he himself drew back stiffly.

"Drop that gun!" Peg repeated with emphasis, motioning significantly with his own weapon.

"Anything to oblige," agreed Logan, releasing his grip on the butt. The revolver fell to the ground.

"Now stand back!"

"Certainly. You infernal ass! What does this mean?"

"Shut up! I haven't any wind to waste on you, Hefty." Peg stooped and took the gun into his own keeping. "Got any more?" he asked, looking Logan over with a cold and calculating eye.

"No."

Peg nodded, taking his word for it, since his eyes verified the statement. "Lucky thing for you your cayuse jumped when she did," he grumbled, out of temper. He climbed back on his horse, avoiding Hefty's puzzled gaze. "Come on," he said surlily.

"Come where?" demanded Logan truculently.

"None of your——" Peg changed his mind. "Back to Deadrock," he snapped. "Step lively, now, and don't ask any questions. We're going to get there by nightfall."

"Are, eh?" cried Hefty. "I'll see you farther before I trot to please you."

Peg looked him over gloomily. "I don't want to hurt you, under the circumstances," said he, "but if you don't move right smart, my son, I'll fill you full of ventilation."

"Plug away," returned Logan, undaunted. "I don't know what in thunder ails you, Peg, but not you, nor any man living, can talk to me that way. I won't go."

He sat himself solidly down on the ground, with a determined expression.

Peg fingered his revolver meaningly; Logan glanced down the gulch and yawned ostentatiously. There was a pause of irritating silence and inaction. Presently Peg threw a leg over the pommel of his saddle and sat around, facing Logan squarely.

"You better come," he suggested quietly.

"Go to the devil!"

A pause. "You're wanted in Dead-

rock. I'm deputy marshal, and it's my duty to take you back."

"What for?"

"What are you doing with the Kessel outfit?" Peg counter-questioned.

Logan looked up. "What Kessel outfit? What do you mean?"

"I want to know how you got so intimate with that gang you were with."

"I wasn't with them. I got into Deadrock just an hour before you fellows opened up the ball, and dropped into the Alhambra because it was open. When you started to clean out the place, I tried to vamoose, naturally. If I'd known it was you, I'd have stayed."

Peg sneered. "I can believe that," he said, with sarcasm.

"Why not?"

"Where's my money?"

"What?"

"Where's my money and my papers?"

"What the dickens——"

"You exchanged clothes with me in 'Frisco and took all my cash. What did you do with it?"

"You blamed fool!" cried Logan, rising, fists clenched and eyes blazing. "Do you mean to say you think I took your dirty money? Come down off that horse and I'll lick you within an inch of your life."

"Go easy, there!" Peg cautioned. "I'm in none too sweet a frame of mind myself, Hefty, and I won't stand for any sharp play. Stand where you are and answer my questions. If you didn't take my money, who did?"

"If you don't remember, it's none of my business."

There was the ring of truth in his manner—truth tempered by wrath.

"Steady!" Peg said aloud, as much to himself as to the enraged man who stood before him. "Let's get at this. Here's my side: I wake up in the evening in a 'Frisco tenement, wearing your clothes. My money's gone. What am I to think?"

"I don't care what you think. You ought to know me better."

"But can you blame me? Look here, Hefty, if it's on the square—and Heaven knows I'd rather think so than not—what did happen?"

Logan seemed impressed, his rage ameliorated, by Peg's earnestness. "All right," he conceded unwillingly. "But you've got to beg my pardon!"

"I'll do that now."

"Wait till you hear. You and I lost Goat in the morning. Then we went to a hotel and got a room with a double bed and turned in. But first you got the clerk to put your roll in the safe—took his receipt for it. In five minutes you were pounding your ear for all out—looked good for a twenty-four stretch of it. I dropped off myself, and while I was asleep you got up, took my clothes, and slipped out. I didn't know where you were—couldn't find hair nor hide of you when I waked up. Only your clothes were there—and I had to wear 'em. If you don't believe me"—he reached into an inner pocket of his coat—"here's the night clerk's receipt for your money. It's in the safe now, for all I know. I found this in your pocket when I went through 'em for breakfast money. You'd held out two hundred, and when I couldn't find you, I had to use it to get here."

"Oh, Lord!" groaned Peg. "You're welcome—and you ought to know it. Hefty, I'm sure humiliated."

Logan's face cleared; he bent upon Peg his old-time smile.

"Put it there!" he cried.

And they gripped hands heartily. After a time—"Now will you come back?" Peg asked.

"Surest thing you know," assented Logan cheerfully. "My, but it's going to be a long walk!"

Late that evening the two weary and haggard men—Peg suffering severely with his wounded arm and Logan footsore—made camp and came to a halt in front of the Grand Union.

Peg, who had shrewdly chosen to keep Hefty in the dark as to what reason he had for insisting that they stop there to "see a friend," got out of the saddle, hitched the horse, and led the way into the saloon.

The hour being early, the place was but half filled. Leaving Logan at the

door, Peg found Hackett, and held a whispered conference with him, the import of which must have been satisfactory.

"Come on!" he called to Logan, and led the way up-stairs.

The two pairs of heavy boots clumped loudly down the upper hallway to the door of the girl's room. Peg, his face aglow, tapped lightly.

"Who's that?" came the girl's voice.

"Peg Shandal, ma'am. I've brought the gentleman you wanted to see."

"What——" began Logan, thoroughly alarmed. "Peg, who's that?"

"Your sister," Peg laughed, beaming upon him.

"Sister! You're mad. I never had a sister in my life."

"Wait a moment!" cried the girl, behind the door. "Just a moment!"

"Lemme out of this!" Hefty turned and wildly scrambled to wrest away from Peg's detaining grasp.

"You stay, blast you, sister or no sister!" Peg hissed in his ear.

The door opened suddenly and the girl appeared before them. For an instant she hesitated, looking from face to face; and in that pause Peg heard Logan whisper, as if awe-stricken: "Louise!"

"Arthur!" cried the girl.

And Peg turned away and slipped off down the stairs; but before he could escape, Logan had caught him and brought him back to the girl

An hour later a crestfallen and dejected Peg left the hotel and went in search of the justice of the peace. He found Eagan sitting up on his bunk, nursing his shattered shoulder.

"Hello! Did you get him?" Eagan greeted Peg.

"I got the fellow I was chasing," said Peg; "but it wasn't Kessel. Who'd you think it was?"

"How in thunder would I know?"

"It was that chap Logan I was asking about. Listen here." Peg sat him down and explained matters briefly. "And the blamedest part of it all is," he concluded, "that she ain't his sister, at all. She's the girl he promised to marry, before he came west to try and make a strike that would enable him to support her in the way she's used to. He's had hard luck all down the line, but it seems that while he was in the army an old uncle of his died and left him independent. But Hefty wouldn't let 'em know where he was—'cept when he got to 'Frisco, he wrote the girl telling her he expected to win a pot here in Deadrock.

"That's why she came—to find him. Now it's all settled." Peg sighed profoundly. "They want to get married right off the bat. You're the only man in town who can tie the knot—if you're able. Are you?"

"I reckon I can make a stagger at it," assented Eagan. "Bring 'em around about eight o'clock. Look here," he added, as Peg started for the door, "what are you going to do now?"

Peg frowned uncertainly. "I don't rightly know," he admitted. "Guess I'll hit the trail. I did have other plans, but—but"—again he sighed from the bottom of his heart—"well, they didn't pan out exactly as I expected."

"Sit down," said Eagan peremptorily. "I want to talk to you."

Peg, wondering, obeyed.

"Now," said the justice of the peace, "you're going out to tank up—ain't you?—'cause the girl belongs to another fellow."

Peg flushed. "I reckon—that's—about the size of it."

"You're too good a man to slip off the water-wagon right now. If it's made worth your while, will you keep straight?"

"What's this?"

"Burgstaller cashed in this afternoon. Deadrock's got no marshal—and I'm no good for awhile to come. Will you stay and accept the office of Marshal of Deadrock?"

For awhile there was no answer.

"There's the danger, of course," urged the judge.

"That don't worry me. It's——" Peg's mind was full of thoughts of how it might have been different.

"Oh, well!" he said, at last. "I reckon yes—I accept."

The Spirit of the Range

By B. M. Bower

Author of "Chip of the 'Flying U,'" "Rowdy of the 'Cross L,'" Etc.

The Happy Family of the "Flying U" ranch plan to go a-merrymaking, but are interrupted by an episode of a startling nature, which affords them the opportunity of displaying the true American traits of always sympathizing with the under dog, and of never hitting a man when he is down

CAL EMMETT straightened up, with his gloved hands pressed tight against the small of his back, sighed "Hully Gee!" at the ache of his muscles, and went over to the water-bucket and poured a quart or so of cool spring water down his parched throat. The sun blazed like a furnace with the blower on, though it was well over to the west; the air was full of smoke, dust, and strong animal odors, and the throaty bawling of many cattle close-held. For it was nearing the end of spring round-up, and many calves were learning, with great physical and mental distress, the feel of a hot iron properly applied. Cal shouted to the horse-wrangler that the well had gone dry—meaning the bucket—and went back to work.

"I betche we won't git through in time fer no picnic," predicted Happy Jack gloomily, getting the proper hold on the hind leg of a three-months-old calf. "They's three hundred t' decorate yet, if they's one; and it'll rain as——"

"You're batty," Cal interrupted. "Uh course we'll git through; we've *got* to. What d'yuh suppose we've been tearing the bone out the last three weeks for?"

Chip, with a foot braced against the calf's shoulder, ran a

on its ribs with artistic precision. Chip's Flying U's were the pride of the whole outfit. The Happy Family was willing at any time to bet all you dare that Chip's brands never varied a quarter-inch in height, width, or position.

The Old Man and Shorty—and all the others who ever branded—had been content to use a stamp, as prescribed by law; but Chip Bennett scorned so mechanical a device, and went on imperturbably defying the law with his running iron, and the Happy Family gloated over his independent spirit and declared that they would sure hand a bunch of misery to the man that reported him. His Flying U's were better than a stamp, anyhow, they said; and it was sure a treat to watch the way he slid them on, just where they'd do the most good.

"I'm going home, after supper," he said, giving just the proper width to the last curve of the two-hundredth

he had made that afternoon. "I promised Dell I'd try and get home to-night, and drive over to the picnic early to-morrow. She's head push on the grub-pile, I believe, and wants to make sure there's enough to go around. There's about two hundred and fifty calves left; if you don't finish up to-night, it will be your own funeral."

"Well, I betche it'll rain before we git through; it always does when yuh don't want it to," gloomed Happy, seizing another calf.

"If it does," called Weary, who was branding—with a stamp—not far away,

"we'll pack the bossies into the cook-tent and make Patsy heat the irons in the stove. Don't yuh cry, little boy; there's nothing on God's green earth going to keep this bunch from that picnic."

"Aw, yes, *you* wouldn't see nothin' t' worry about, not if yuh was bein' paid fer it. They's a storm comin'—any fool can see that—and she's sure going t' come down in large, wet chunks. We ain't havin' this amatoor hell t'-day fer nothin'. I betche——"

"Please," spoke up Pink, coiling afresh the rope thrown off a calf he had just dragged up to Happy Jack, "won't somebody lend me a handkerchief? I want to gag Happy; he's working his hoodoo on us again."

Happy Jack leered up at him, consciously immune; there was no time for strife, and he knew it. With the picnic large in every man's thoughts, they were working their fastest.

"Hoodoo nothin'; I'm jest handin' out facts that yuh've got t' face *some time*. I guess yuh can't see that bank uh thunder-heads; I guess your sight's poor—strainin' your eyes toward the Fourth uh July ever sence Christmas. I ain't that big a fool; when I see trouble comin' I don't shut m' eyes——" He trailed off into profane words, for the calf he was holding showed a strong inclination to plant a foot in Happy's stomach.

Cal Emmett glanced over his shoulder, grunted a comprehensive refutation of Happy Jack's fears, and turned his whole attention to work. The branding proceeded steadily with the hurry of skill that makes each motion count something accomplished; for, though not a man of them except Happy Jack would have admitted it, the Happy Family was anxious.

With two hundred and fifty calves to be branded in the open before night, on the third day of July; with a blistering sun sapping the strength of them, and a storm creeping blackly out of the southwest; with a picnic tugging their desires, and with twenty-five long prairie miles between them and the place appointed, one can scarce wonder that even Pink and Weary—born optimists, both of them—eyed the west anxiously when they thought themselves unobserved.

Under such circumstances, Happy Jack's pessimism came near being unbearable. What the Happy Family needed most, just then, was encouragement.

The smoke hung thicker in the parched air, and stung more sharply their bloodshot, aching eyeballs. The dust settled more smotheringly upon them, filled nostrils and lungs, and roughened their patience into peevishness. A calf bolted from the herd, and a "hold-up" man pursued it vindictively. A cinder got in Slim's eye, and one would think, from his language, that such a thing was absolutely beyond the limit of man's endurance. Even Weary, the sweet-tempered, grew irritable, and heaped maledictions upon the head of the horse-wrangler because he was slow about bringing a fresh supply of water. Taken altogether, the Happy Family, on that particular third day of July, was not in its sunniest mood.

When Patsy shouted that supper was ready, they left their work reluctantly and tarried just long enough to swallow hastily what food was nearest. For the storm threatened more malignantly, and the branding was not yet finished.

Chip saddled Silver, his own private "drifter," eyed the clouds appraisingly, and swung into the saddle for a fifteen-mile ride to the home ranch and his wife, the Little Doctor.

"You can finish, all right," he encouraged. "It isn't going to cut loose before dark, if I know the signs; it's coming up against the wind. Better put your jaw in a sling, Happy; you're liable to step on it. Cheer up! Tomorrow's the day we celebrate, in letters a foot high. So-long."

He rode away in the long lope that eats up the miles with an ease astonishing to alien eyes, and the Happy Family rolled a cigarette apiece and went back to work rather more cheerful than they had been.

Pleasure—the pleasure of wearing good clothes, dancing light-footedly to

good music, and saying nice things that bring smiles to the faces of girls in frilly dresses and with brown, wind-tanned faces and eyes a-shine—comes not often to the veterans of the "Sage-brush Cavalry." They were wont to count the weeks, and the days, and at last the hours until such pleasure should be theirs.

They did not grudge the long circles, short sleeps, and sweltering hours at the branding, which made such pleasure possible—only so they were not, at the last, cheated of their reward.

Every man of them, save Pink, had secret thoughts of some particular girl. And more than one girl would, at the picnic on the morrow, be watching furtively for a certain lot of white hats and sun-browned faces to dodge into sight over a hill, and looking for one face among the group; would be listening for a certain well-known, well-beloved chorus of shouts borne faintly from a distance—the clear-toned, care-naught whooping that heralded the coming of Jim Whitmore's Happy Family.

To-morrow they would be simply a crowd of clean-hearted, clean-limbed cowboys, with eyes sunny and untroubled, and laughs that were good to hear, and whispered words that were sweet to dream over until the next meeting. The Happy Family as lovers were a distinct success.

To-morrow there would be no hint of the long hours in the saddle, or the aching muscles and the tired, smarting eyes. They might, if pressed, own that they burnt the earth getting there, but the details of that particular conflagration would be far, far behind them—forgotten. No one could guess to-morrow that they were ever hot, or thirsty, or tired, or that they ever swore at one another ill-naturedly from the sheer strain of anxiety and muscle-ache.

By sundown, so great was their industry, the last calf had scampered, blatting resentment, to seek his mother in the herd. Slim kicked the embers of the branding fire apart and emptied the water-bucket over them with a satisfied grunt.

"By golly! I ain't mourning because brandin's about over," he said. "I'm plumb tired uh the sight uh them blasted calves."

"And we got through ahead of the storm," Weary sweetly reminded Happy Jack.

Happy looked moodily up at the muttering black mass nearly over their heads and said nothing; Happy never did have anything to say when his gloomy predictions were brought to naught.

"I'm going to get on the bed-ground without any red-tape or argument, if yuh ask *me*," volunteered Cal Emmett, rubbing his aching arms. "We want to get an early start in the morning."

"Meaning sun-up, I suppose," fleered Pink, who had no especial feminine reason for looking forward with longing.

With Pink it was pleasure in the aggregate that lured him; there would be horse-racing after dinner, and a dance in the schoolhouse at night, and a season of general hilarity over a collection of rockets and Roman candles. These things appealed more directly to the heart of Pink than did the feminine element; for he had yet to see the girl who could disturb the normal serenity of his mind or fill his dreams with visions beautiful.

Also, there was one thing about these girls that did not please him; they were prone to regard him as a sweet, amusing little boy, whose dimples they might kiss with perfect composure (though of course they never did). They seemed to be forever taking the "Isn't he cunning?" attitude, and refused to regard him seriously, or treat him with the respect they accorded to the rest of the Happy Family.

Weary's schoolma'am had offended him deeply, at a dance the winter before, by patting him indulgently on the shoulder and telling him to "run along and find you a partner." Such things rankled, and he knew that the girls knew it, and that it amused them very much. Worse, the Happy Family knew it, and it amused them even more than it amused the girls. For this reason Pink would much prefer to sleep lux-

uriously late and ride over to the picnic barely in time for dinner and the races afterward. He did not want too long a time with the girls.

"Sure, we'll start at sun-up," Cal answered gravely. "We've got to be there by ten o'clock, so as to help the girls cut cake and round-up all the ham sandwiches; haven't we, Weary?"

"I should smile to remark," Weary assented emphatically. "Sun-up sees us on the road, Cadwolloper—and yuh want to be sure and wear that new pink silk handkerchief that matches the roses in your cheeks so nice. My schoolma'am's got a friend visiting her, and she's been hearing a lot about yuh. She's plumb wild to meet yuh. Chip drawed your picture, and I sent it over in my last letter, and the little friend has gone plumb batty over your dimples —Chip drawed yuh with a sweet smile drifting, like a rose-leaf with the dew on, across your countenance, and your hat pushed back so'st the curls would show—and it sure done the business for Little Friend. Schoolma'am says she's sure a good-looker herself, and that Joe Meeker has took to parting his hair on the dead center and wearing a four-inch celluloid collar week-days. But he's all to the bad—she just looks at your picture and smiles sad and longing."

"I hate to see a man impose on friendship," murmured Pink. "I don't want to spoil your face till after the Fourth, though that ain't saying yuh don't deserve it. But I will say this: You're a liar—yuh ain't had a letter for more than six weeks."

"Got anything yuh want to bet on that?" Weary reached challengingly toward an inner pocket of his vest.

"Nit. I don't give a darn, anyway yuh look at it. I'm going to bed." Pink unrolled his "sooguns" in their accustomed corner next to Weary's bed and went straightway to sleep.

Weary thumped his battered pillow into some semblance of plumpness, and gazed with suspicion at the thick fringe of curled lashes lying softly upon Pink's cheeks.

"If I was a girl," he said pensively to the others, "I'd sure be in love with Cadwolloper myself. He don't amount to nothing, but his face 'd cause me to lose my appetite and pine away like a wilted vi'let. It's straight, about that girl being stuck on his picture; I'd gamble she's counting the hours on her fingers, right now, till he'll stand before her. Schoolma'am says it'll be a plumb sin if he don't act pretty about it and let her love him."

He eyed Pink sharply from the tail of his eye, but not a lash quivered; the breath came evenly and softly between Pink's half-closed lips, and if he heard, there was nothing to betray the fact.

Weary sighed and tried again. "And that ain't the worst of it, either. Mame Beckman has got an attack; she told Schoolma'am she could *die* for Pink and never bat an eye. She said she never knew what true love was till she seen him. She says he looks just like the cherubs—all but the wings—that she's been working in red thread on some pillow-shams. She was making 'em for her sister, but she can't give 'em up, now; she calls all the cherubs 'Pink,' and kisses 'em every night and morning regular."

The Happy Family giggled appreciatively.

Weary watched anxiously Pink's untroubled face. "I tell yuh, boys, it's awful to have the fatal gift uh beauty, like Cadwolloper's got. He means all right, but he sure trifles a lot with that girl's affections; I'm sorry for Mame. Mama! don't he look sweet, laying there so innocent?" He still eyed him sidelong.

But Pink slept tranquilly on, except that after a half-minute he stirred slightly and muttered something about "Drive that darned cow back." Then Weary gave up in despair and went to sleep. But when the tent became silent, save for the heavy breathing of tired men, Pink's long lashes lifted a bit, and he grinned maliciously up at the dim whiteness of the cloth roof.

For obvious reasons he was the only one of the lot who heard with no misgivings the vicious swoop of the storm. So long as the tent-pegs held, he didn't

care how long or how hard it rained. But the others who awoke to the roar of wind and the crash of thunder, and to the swish and beat of much falling water, turned uneasily in their beds. To be late in starting for the scene of merrymaking which had held their desires so long would be a calamity they did not care to dwell upon.

At three o'clock Pink, from long habit, opened his eyes to the dull gray of early morning. The air in the tent was clammy and chill and filled with the audible breathing of a dozen sleeping men; overhead, the canvas was dull yellow and sodden with the steady *drip, drip, drop* of rain. There would be no starting out at sunrise—perhaps there would be no starting at all, he thought, with lazy disappointment, and turned on his side for another nap.

Pink may look an angel, but he is not one. His glance fell upon Weary's upturned, slumber-blank face, and his mind reverted revengefully to the baiting of the night before.

He sat up, raised his hand to the cloth roof directly over Weary's face, and drew his finger firmly down along the water-soaked canvas for a good ten inches—and if you don't know why, try it yourself some time in a tent, with the rain pouring down upon the land.

He repeated the operation again and again, each time in a fresh place, but always over Weary, until the rain came through beautifully, and to Pink's satisfaction.

Then he lay down, cuddled the blankets up to his ears, and composed himself to sleep, listening the while to Weary's uncomfortable shiftings away from one drip and under another, and to his muttered imprecations at the traitor who had done that thing.

At four it was still raining, and the Happy Family, waking unhappily, one after another, raised on elbows and listened to the dismal drip of water, remembered that it was the day of the picnic that they had worked and waited for so long, grunted profanities against the weather, and tucked themselves again under warm blankets and slept.

At six the sun was shining, and Weary, still shifting uneasily under his leaking roof, called the others jubilantly. He observed darkly that he wished he knew what son of a gun let the water through on him, and eyed Pink suspiciously; then he added that if the roof hadn't stopped spilling rain all over him, they'd all have slept till noon, most likely.

They went out and faced the clean-washed prairie-land, filled their lungs to the bottom with sweet, winelike air, and asked one another why the dickens the night-hawk wasn't on hand with the cavvy, so they could get ready and start.

At nine o'clock, had you wandered that way, you would have seen the Happy Family—a clean-shaven, holiday-garbed, resplendent Happy Family—roosting disconsolately wherever was a place clean enough to sit, looking wistfully away to the sky-line.

They should, by now, have been at the picnic, and every man of them realized the fact keenly. They were ready, but they were afoot; the night-hawk had not put in an appearance with the saddle bunch, and there was not a horse in camp that they might go in search of him. With no herd to hold, they had not deemed it necessary to keep up any night horses, and they were bewailing the fact that they had not foreseen such an emergency—though Happy Jack did assert that he had all along expected it.

"By golly! I'll strike out afoot and hunt him up, if he don't heave in sight mighty suddent," threatened Slim passionately, after a long, dismal silence. "By golly! he'll wisht I hadn't, too."

Cal looked up from studying pensively his patent leathers. "Go on, Slim, and round him up. This is sure getting hilarious—a fine way to spend the Fourth!"

"Maybe that festive bunch that held up the Lewiston bank, day before yesterday, came along and laid the hawk away on a hillside, so they could help themselves to fresh horses," hazarded Jack Bates, in the hope that Happy Jack would seize the opening to prophesy a new disaster.

"I betche that's what's happened, all

right," said Happy, rising to the bait. "I betche yuh won't see no horses t'-day —ner no night-hawk, neither."

The Happy Family looked at one another and grinned.

"Who'll stir the lemonade and help pass the sandwiches?" asked Pink sadly. "Who'll push when the schoolma'am wants to swing? or Len Adams? or——"

"Oh, saw off!" Weary implored. "Happy can think up troubles enough, Cadwolloper, without any help from you."

"Well, I guess your troubles are about over, cully—I can hear 'em coming." Pink picked up his rope and started for the horse corral as the belated cavvy came jingling around the nose of the nearest hill.

The Happy Family brightened perceptibly; after all, they could be at the picnic by noon, if they hurried. Their thoughts flew to the crowd—and to the girls in frilly dresses—under the pine-trees in a certain cañon just where the Bear Paws reach lazily out to shake hands with the prairie-land.

As they rode up onto the high level, with the sun hot against their right cheeks and a lazy breeze flipping neckerchief-ends against their smiling lips, the world seemed very good, and a jolly place to live in; and there was no such thing as trouble anywhere. Even Happy Jack was betrayed into expecting much pleasure and no misfortune, and whistled while he rode.

Five miles slipped behind them easily—so easily that their horses perked ears and tugged hard against the bits. The next five were rougher, for they had left the trail and struck out across a rough bit of barrenness on a short cut to Sheep Coulée.

All the little gullies and washouts were swept clean and smooth with the storm, and the grass roots showed white where the soil had washed away. They hoped the rain had not reached to the mountains and spoiled the picnic grounds, and wondered what time the girls would have dinner ready.

So they rode down the steep trail into Sheep Coulée, galloped a quarter-mile and stopped, amazed. The creek was running bank full; more, it was churning along like a mill-race, yellow with the clay it carried, and flecked with great patches of dirty foam.

"I guess here's where we don't cross," said Weary, whistling mild dismay.

"Now, wouldn't that jostle yuh?" asked Pink, of no one in particular.

"By golly! the lemonade'll be cold, and so'll the san'wiches, before we git there," put in Slim, with one of his sporadic efforts to be funny. "We got t' go back."

"Back nothing!" chorused five outraged voices. "We'll hunt some other crossing."

"Down the creek apiece—yuh mind where that old sand-bar runs half across? We'll try that." Weary's tone was hopeful, and they turned and followed him.

Half a mile along the raging little creek they galloped, with no place where they dared to cross. Then, loping around a willow-fringed bend, Weary and Pink, who were ahead, drew their horses back upon their haunches. They had all but run over a huddle of humanity lying in the fringe of weeds and tall grasses that grew next the willows.

"What in thunder——" began Cal, pulling up. They slid off their horses and bent curiously over the figure. Weary turned it investigatively by a shoulder. The figure stirred, and groaned.

"It's somebody hurt; take a hand here, and help carry him out where the sun shines; he's wet to the skin," commanded Weary sharply.

When they lifted him, he opened his eyes, and looked at them; while they carried him tenderly out from the wet tangle and into the warmth of the sun, he set his teeth against the groans that would come.

They stood around him uneasily, and looked down at him. He was young, like themselves, and he was a stranger; also, he was dressed like a cowboy, in chaps, high-heeled boots, and silver-mounted spurs. The chaps were sod-

den and heavy with water, as was the rest of his clothing.

"He must uh laid out in all that storm last night," observed Cal in a subdued voice. "He———"

"Somebody better ride back and have the bed-wagon brought up, so we can haul him to a doctor," suggested Pink. "He's hurt."

The stranger's eyes swept the faces of the Happy Family anxiously. "Not on your life," he protested weakly. "I don't want any doctor—in mine, thank yuh. I—it's no use, anyhow."

"The hell it ain't!" Pink was drawing off his coat to make a pillow. "You're hurt, somehow, ain't yuh?"

"I'm—dying," the other said laconically. "So yuh needn't go to any trouble on my account. From the looks—yuh was headed for some—blow-out. Go on, and let me lie."

The Happy Family looked at one another incredulously; they were so likely to ride on!

"I guess yuh don't savvy this bunch, old-timer," said Weary calmly, speaking for the six. "We're going to do what we can. If yuh don't mind telling us where yuh got hurt——"

The lips of the other curled bitterly. "I was shot," he said distinctly, "by the sheriff and his bunch. But I got away. Last night I tried to cross the creek, and my horse went on down. It was storming—fierce. I got out, somehow, and crawled into the weeds. Laying out in the rain—didn't help me none. It's—all off."

"There ought to be *something*——" began Jack Bates helplessly.

"There is. If yuh'll just put me away—afterward—and say nothing, I'll be—mighty grateful." He was looking at them sharply, as if a great deal depended upon their answer.

The Happy Family was dazed. The very suddenness of this unlooked-for glimpse into the somber eyes of Tragedy was unnerving. The world had seemed such a jolly place; ten minutes ago—five minutes, even, their greatest fear had been getting to the picnic too late for dinner. And here was a man at their feet calmly telling them that he was about to die, and asking only a hurried burial and silence after.

Happy Jack swallowed painfully and shifted his feet in the grass.

"Of course, if yuh'd feel better handing me over——"

"That'll be about enough on that subject," Pink interrupted with decision. "Just because yuh happen to be down and out, for the time being, is no reason why yuh should insult folks. You can take it for granted we'll do what we can for yuh; the question is, *what?* Yuh needn' go talking about cashing in; they's no sense in it. You'll be all right."

"Huh. You wait and see." The fellow's mouth set grimly upon another groan. "If you was shot through, and stuck to the saddle—and rode—and then got pummeled—by a creek at flood, and if yuh laid out in the rain—all night—— Hell, boys! yuh *know* I'm about all in. I'm hard to kill, or I'd have been—dead. What I want to know—will yuh do what I—said? Will yuh bury me—right here—and keep it—quiet?"

The Happy Family moved uncomfortably. They hated to see him lying that way, and talking in short, jerky sentences, and looking so ghastly, and yet so cool—as if dying were quite an every-day affair.

"I don't see why yuh ask us to do it," spoke Cal Emmett bluntly. "What we want to do is get yuh to help. The chances is yuh could be—cured. We——"

"Look here." The fellow raised himself painfully to an elbow, and fell back again. "I've got folks—and they don't know—about this scrape. They're square—and stand at the top. And they don't—it would just about—— For God's sake, boys! can't yuh see how I feel? Nobody knows—about this. The sheriff didn't know—they came up on me in the dusk—and I fought. I wouldn't be taken. And it's my first bad break—because I got in with a bad lot. They'll know something—happened, when they find—my horse. But they'll think—it's just drowning, if

they don't find—me with a bullet or two. Can't yuh *see?*"

The Happy Family looked away, across the coulée, and there were eyes that saw little of the yellow sunlight lying soft on the green hillside beyond. The world was not a good place; it was a grim, pitiless place, and—a man was dying, at their very feet.

"But what about the rest uh the bunch?" croaked Happy Jack, true to his misanthropic nature, but exceeding husky as to voice. "They'll likely tell——"

The dying man shook his head eagerly. "They won't; they're both—dead. One was killed—last night. The other when we first tried—to make a getaway. It—it's up to you, boys."

Pink swallowed twice, and knelt beside him; the others remained standing, grouped like mourners around an open grave.

"Yuh needn't worry about us," Pink said softly. "You can count on us, old boy. If you're dead sure a doctor——"

"Drop it!" the other broke in harshly. "I don't want to live. And if I did, I couldn't. I ain't guessing—I know."

They said little, after that. The wounded man seemed apathetically waiting for the end, and not inclined to further speech. Since they had tacitly promised to do as he wished, he lay with eyes half-closed, hardly moving, and watched idly the clouds drifting across to the sky-line.

The Happy Family sat listlessly around on convenient rocks, and watched the clouds also, and the yellow patches of foam racing down the muddy creek. Very quiet they were—so quiet that little brown birds hopped close, and sang from swaying weeds almost within reach of them. The Happy Family listened dully to the songs, and waited. They did not even think to make a cigarette.

The sun climbed higher and shone hotly down upon them. The dying man blinked at the glare, and Happy Jack took off his hat and tilted it over the face of the other, and asked him if he wouldn't like to be moved into the shade.

"No matter—I'll be in the shade—soon enough," he returned quietly; and something gripped their throats to aching. His voice, they observed, was weaker than it had been.

Weary took a long breath, and moved closer. "I wish you'd let us get help," he said wistfully. It all seemed so horribly brutal, their sitting around him like that, waiting passively for him to die.

"I know—yuh hate it. But it's—all yuh can do. It's all I want." He took his eyes from the drifting, white clouds, and looked from face to face. "You're the whitest bunch—I'd like to know—who yuh are. Maybe I can put in—a good word for yuh—on the new range—where I'm going. I'd sure like to do—something——"

"Then for the Lord's sake, don't say such things!" cried Pink shakily. "You'll have us—so dam' broke up——"

"All right—I won't. So-long—boys. See yuh later."

"Mama!" whispered Weary, and got up hastily and walked away. Slim followed him a few paces, then turned resolutely and went back. It seemed cowardly to leave the rest to bear it—and somebody had to. They were breathing quickly, and staring across the coulée with eyes that saw nothing; their lips were shut very tightly together.

Weary came back and stood with his head turned away from them. Pink moved a bit, glanced furtively at the long, quiet figure beside him, and dropped his face into his gloved hands.

Glory threw up his head, looked across the coulée at a band of range-horses trooping down a gully to drink at the creek, and whinnied shrilly. The Happy Family started, and awoke to the stern necessities of life. They stood up, and walked a little away from the spot, avoiding one another's eyes.

"Somebody'll have to go back to camp," said Cal Emmett, in the hushed tone that death ever compels from the living. "We've got to have a spade——"

"It better be the handiest liar, then," Jack Bates put in hastily. "If that old loose-tongued Patsy ever gets next——"

"Weary better go, and Pink; they're the best liars in the bunch," said Cal, trying unsuccessfully to get back his every-day manner.

Pink and Weary went over and took the dragging bridle-reins of their mounts, caught a stirrup, and swung up into the saddles silently.

"And, say!" Happy Jack called softly, as they were going down the slope. "Yuh better bring—a blanket."

Weary nodded, and they rode away, their horses stepping softly in the thick grasses. When they were passed quite out of the presence of the dead, they spurred into a gallop.

The sun marked midafternoon when they returned, and the four who had waited drew long breaths of relief at sight of them.

"We told Patsy we'd run onto a—den——"

"Oh, shut up, can't yuh?" Jack Bates interrupted shortly. "Yuh'll have plenty uh time to tell us afterward."

"We've got a place picked out," said Cal, and led them a little distance up the slope, to a level spot in the shadow of a huge, gray boulder. "That's his headstone," he said soberly. "The poor devil won't be cheated out uh that, if we *can't* mark it with his name. It'll last as long as he'll need it."

Only in the West, perhaps, may one find a funeral like that. No minister stood at the head of the grave and read: "Dust to dust," and all the heart-breaking rest of it. There was no singing but from a meadow-lark that perched on a near-by rock and rippled his brief song, when, with their ropes, they lowered the blanket-wrapped form. They stood, with bare heads bowed, while the meadow-lark sang. When he had flown, Pink, looking a choir-boy in disguise, repeated softly and incorrectly the Lord's Prayer.

The Happy Family did not feel that there was any incongruity in what they did, and they were unashamed to do what they could. When Pink, gulping a little over the unfamiliar words, said: "Thine be power and the glory—Amen," five clear, youthful voices added the "Amen" quite simply. Then they filled the grave and stood silent a minute before they went down to where their horses stood waiting patiently, with now and then a curious glance up the hill to where their masters grouped.

The Happy Family mounted and, without a backward glance, rode soberly away; and the trail they took led, not to the picnic, but to camp.

UNCANNY

MR. MANSFIELD tells a story of his early days that illustrates how the most effective scene may be spoiled by a very small thing. It happened during the performance of a Shakespearean play a corpse upon a bier had to be brought upon the stage. The body, covered with a pall, was represented by a dummy, the feet of which could be seen protruding from the covering. The bearers had set down the bier, and the business of the scene was proceeding as usual, when an uncanny portent was beheld. The corpse was moving! People in the audience began to titter; but the actors, knowing well that underneath the pall was nothing but a dummy, were awestruck—or, at any rate, profoundly puzzled—according to their respective temperaments. Mr. Mansfield then speaking incontinently "dried up," but his amazement was changed to furious anger as, amid a perfect yell of laughter from the audience, the theater cat crept from under the pall and made a dignified exit.

The Majesty of the Law

By Kennett Harris

Author of "The Beneficence of Jad," Etc.

The sad plight of a far Western community whose desire to abate a public nuisance conflicted with their public-spiritedness. The tale of a guileless tenderfoot and a joke that proved almost too successful

PERRY BRUMAKER dropped him off the stage one morning last July," said the stock tender. "Of course," he continued, "we seen right off that he was from the East. It wasn't that he wore them knee panties and double-decked caps or any such vanities, for he didn't have so much as a celluloid collar. No, sir; he was appareled in boots and blue flannel and Mexican spurs that jingled like a trace-chain, not to mention that he wore a pearl-handled .44 on each hip and was roofed in with one foot clear of felt all around, held on with a latigo string, puncher-fashion.

"That was the trouble with him—spurs too big, too much hat, and too numerous and ornate as to guns; and, if that wasn't enough, dog me if he didn't dust off his boots with a white handkerchief when he got off the stage!

"He was considerable of a runt, complected sort of light, with a mustache like a Norwegian's eyebrow, and most of the skin had peeled off his nose where the sun struck it. As soon as Bob Shann saw him he smiled in a satisfied way, Bob did.

"He seen sport ahead, and there hadn't been no sport to speak of in Persepolis for many moons—not since Duckworth and him had that little fracas over Duckworth's widow. She did Bob's washing, you remember, and left the brand of the flatiron on the bosom of his only white shirt, in regards of which Bob expressed himself too free concerning greaser washerladies, and Duckworth made his remonstrations too doggone ferocious.

"I tell you, gentlemen, no lady, greaser or otherwise, can do a shirt bosom justice and assimilate a two-gallon olla of mescal in the same evening, unless the shirt comes the first number on the program.

"But Duckworth was reckoned to be a bad man, anyway, while the Bostonian was naturally considered as harmless as a temperance drink—just for the time that it took him to dust off his boots. As soon as he had concluded that operation he looked up and seen Bob regarding him with earnest curiosity and a hand on his gun, which same was purely accidental and fortuitous, having no sort of intent and malice aforethought. All there was to it, Bob's hands being naturally large and hefty, he rested one of them that-a-way, the gun being there and inviting repose.

"The Bostonian no sooner gets on to the attitude than he jerks one of them sinful pearl perforating machines of his and whangs away at our friend.

"One shot took deadly effect in the window of Billy Entzminger's New York Store, and the second went somewhere in the general direction of the planet Mars. It probably would have went a few yards closer to Bob if Perry hadn't knocked up the Bostonian's arm and grabbed him round the waist.

"'Don't shoot, colonel,' yells Perry. 'It's all right. That gentleman is one of the prominent citizens of Persepolis and president of the Snake River Peace Congress. And, Bob, you put up that

section of stovepipe; it's making me nervous.'

"Bob had unlimbered, and was working for an unobstructed view of the man from the Land of the Rising Sun. Perry ain't much under two hundred and fifty on the hoof, and he's too thick to shoot through, so he's something of an obstruction.

"'Slide out of range and let me kill him,' shouts Bob, gesticulating with his artillery. 'It's too hot a day for me to take exercise climbing over you.'

"'It's a misunderstanding, you cock-eyed Comanche,' says Perry, still close-herding the shorthorn. 'This gentleman is not hostile; he allowed you was on the war-path, and wasn't taking no chances; besides which he's a-bringing in Eastern capital. He's got his hardware back in storage. Now, be good!'

"'If he's bringing in capital, I'm too public-spirited to massacree him until he's unloaded it, of course,' says Bob. 'But, if it ain't too much to ask, I'd like to know if I look any like a beer bottle stuck on a fence-post? Conceding his shooting to be something shameful, yet why practise on me?'

"'I saw you put your hand to your revolver,' replies the Bostonian, who was some pallid. 'I have been given to understand that it is the custom here to construe such an action as intending homicide, and that in such cases it was the part of wisdom to anticipate the consummation of the act by taking the initiative.'

"'I don't see why you wouldn't just as lieve paralyze an intending homicide as shoot at him, with that gift of language you've got,' says Bob. 'If I had it I'd quit packing a gun.'

"Just then Pap Durfy come out and pounded the hash call on a steel skillet, and there was a stampede that carried the stranger in with it to the dining-room.

"Perry and me stayed to unload the packing-cases, trunks, and miscellaneous truck strapped on behind the stage, which was the Bostonian's luggage.

"Perry confided in me that the soft-sole had an elephant gun in the three or four varieties he had with him. That showed forethought. I'd hate to meet an elephant straying around on the mesa and be unprovided with the correct instruments of destruction.

"He had been practising shooting on the way, Perry said, and had left a glittering trail of cattridge-shells and a smell like the Fourth of July clear back to Albuquerque. Perry opinionated that he was a warm stimulus to the powder trade and a heap credulous.

"'What's he want besides elephants here?' I asked.

"'He calculates to buy out all the copper prospects in the Suhuara range,' says Perry. 'He's expecting to meet Lonzo Walker. Lonzo's got him strung a-plenty by the correspondence method. Seen anything of him?'

"I told him how Lonzo was laid up sick at the Pennington hacienda from the effects of a mess of frijoles what he had cooked himself and felt a personal pride in. Whereupon Perry expressed a fear that the Bostonian would be getting into trouble, and asked me to chaperon him a few.

"I said I'd do what I could, and we went in to chew. As soon as we got in, the necessities for dry-nursing was impressed on us.

"'Look at them hyenas,' says Perry, indicating the table where the Bostonian was setting.

"Well, there was Hank Simmons, Carlos B. Green, Joe Marty, a boy from the Half-circle Bar 7, Charley Streeter, and Bob Shann, all with their guns out and laid alongside of their plates, as if it was quite the usual thing.

"The Bostonian had his pearl bric-à-brac out, too, similar to soup spoons, and his eyes were reposing on his cheek-bones, whilst Bob, a heap serious, was injecting a flood of gory anecdote into his wide-open ears.

"It tickled me, but Perry shook his head.

"'It's sure working him up too much,' he said. 'He's twitching like a spoiled horse. If one of them lunkheads make a funny pass at him there's going to be hell a-popping, as sure as

you're a foot high. I'm sorry I ever told him anything about Arizona—sun-kissed land.'

"I asked him what he had told, but he only shook his head and wouldn't answer.

"Just then the Half-circle Bar 7 boy and Hank Simmons give a simultaneous snort, and the both of them got up from the table, and went, stomping and strangling and sputtering, out of the room. Streeter and Marty and Carlos B. followed, their faces working; and the Bostonian's eyes stuck out worse than ever.

"'Hank shipped his coffee down the wrong chute,' we heard Bob explain. 'The puncher choked on the pie crust. He ain't used to high living. Well, as I was saying, the greasers all started to run, but I turned loose with that last cattridge, and dog me if I didn't plug——'

"I don't know what it was that Bob plugged—a quarter, likely—but just then he got off something between a grunt and a squeal, kicked his chair over backward, and loped out. The window was open, and some sounds floated in. First off I thought it was the burros in the Palo Alto corral, but there were whoops that I recognized mixed in, and I sized the combination up for expressions of merriment.

"The Bostonian got up and come over to our table. 'This is most extraordinary, Mr. Brumaker,' he says to Perry.

"'Don't you take no notice of them,' Perry says. 'They're locoed, the whole outfit.'

"Then he went on to elucidate that Lonzo was suffering from Texas or splenetic fever, and wouldn't be in no condition to travel, as like as not.

"'Kid, here, will look after you until Lonzo blows in,' he says. 'You can get a place to pound your ear right here at Pap's, and I'll pass the word on to Lonzo at Four Mile as I go by.'

"That seemed to suit our friend, and he went to hunt up Pap to show him his room. We went out and hooked up, and Perry hit the breeze. After awhile I moseyed back to Pap's, and found the Bostonian a-standing pensively on the door-step, waiting for me.

"Seemed like Pap's accommodations didn't suit him. He wanted a room to himself, and I thought he needed it. All the same, the show for seclusion seemed slim.

"'Isn't there a house I could rent?' he asked.

"Well, that was an idea, too. The growth of Persepolis had sure languished some and gone to backsliding in spots. I hadn't thought of that. There was several 'dobes out in the desert a few rods from the central part of the city, and for a man what had been vaccinated, and wanted a home right bad, they seemed just about the stuff.

"We went out to look at them, and pitched on a commodious one-story residence with a four-foot wall around it, and a well in the back yard. I got my Castilian assistant in the stable to dig and sweep it out; and we moved over the packing-cases and the rest of the plunder.

"Before the afternoon was over, all the place lacked was a few mottos on the wall and a parlor organ to make it look like home. The Bostonion was tickled to death with it himself.

"'I shall just camp here and cook my own meals,' he says; 'I'm used to roughing it. I have been in the Adirondacks several times, and I learned how there.'

"To show me how he roughed it he opened up one of the packing-cases and produced a slew of silver-plated camp machinery—a still for refining drinking-water, an alcohol-stove, something he said was a coffee-machine, a chafing-dish, and other coarseness; and he had canned truck till you couldn't rest—everything ever *was* put up in cans, except beer.

"I thought he was going to light up the alcohol-stove, open up some patey dee foy graw and champagne, and invite me to rough it with him—but he didn't. He had to have bread and potatoes, he said, and he wanted me to steer him against them delicacies. So

we went back to Pap's to see if we could rustle them.

"He had been so busy with his housekeeping, he'd sort of lost the wild, hunted look that he had at dinner, but on the way over to Pap's it come back.

"He started to accumulate statistics on law and order in Persepolis, and I give him a few. I couldn't help it.

"Perry ain't no slouch decorating and embellishing facts, and Bob Shaun, being modest, hates to see Truth going around without so much as a blanket and a string of beads when he's got a whole clothing-store of masquerade costumes to put on her. I reckon they both done their best, but when I jerk the strings off my imagination and let her soar untrammeled, I don't take a back seat for no one.

"'I think that my most prudent course will be to stay in my house and avoid contact with this lawless element,' says the Bostonian.

"'Such a course will sure mitigate against your popularity,' I says. 'If you don't show yourself a mixer they'll get hostile, and probably shoot you up a mess. No, sir, you can bach, but you want to show up at the citizens' club at the Silvery Moon this evening and act affable. It's expected of you. Affable, but dignified, is your play. You unbend, but you don't stand no monkey work. If they think they can run a sandy on you they will make you unhappy.'

"Well, along about eight o'clock he sashays into the Silvery Moon with affableness and dignity sticking out of him like a skin disease. Bob Shann jumped up the minute he saw him, and come at him with both hands out.

"'Chawmed!' says Bob. 'Sir, we are glad to see you and to welcome you to our innocent festivities. This is indeed a momentous occasion. Gentlemen, we have here among us this evening a distinguished stranger from the center and circumference of culchaw and civilization—I refer to Boston, it is needless to state. Gentlemen, here in Persepolis we may be some shy on psychic research and open plumbing, but we none the less appreciate them; and their exemplification in the person of our friend here we can only regard as an honor to our city and calling for the drinks. Everybody to the bar!'

"We went up uninimous; and the Bostonian, after dashing off a glass of ginger-ale as if it was so much water, spoke up in reply:

"'Gentlemen,' he says, 'I feel deeply flattered by the kind expression of your good-will. You may be crude in your manners, barbarous in your customs, bloodthirsty in your dispositions, profane in your language, immoral in your conduct, mendacious——'

"He stopped short in his remarks because Canby Jenks, of the Christmas Gift, was poking the open end of an adult's size gun under his nose.

"Canby was always chuck full of local pride, and his feelings was hurt by these preliminaries. Still, I don't think that he meant any harm. He calculated that he had the situation in his own hands; and he would have had with anybody else. But that crazy horse, disregarding the obvious drop on him, just turned pale and reached back after his own battery as deliberate as if he had all the time there was.

"If he hadn't been shaking he could have plugged Canby ten times over. Canby was so plumb paralyzed by the Eastern man's dumb foolishness.

"As it was, his shots went 'most anywhere you could mention. By God's providence, none of them went under the pool-table. I was most particular thankful for that.

"Well, he went rip, stark, roaring crazy in a second. He let out a yell that would have soured cream and turned loose with both guns at once.

"He had the premises to himself just as soon as we could get out. But he wasn't satisfied with them. He happened to come out through the doorway, but the side of the house would have done him as well. Three or four of us was still hunting cover, and he blazed away at us, and then turned and put out for his 'dobe, yelping like a coyote and snapping on the empty chambers of his guns as he went.

"We banged away at him, of course,

but, equally, of course, without any designs of hitting him; and we yelped a few ourselves. Then we heard his door slam to like a cannon, and a holy calm succeeded.

"Bob was the first one to shatter it.

"'Well, wouldn't that jar your susceptibilities!' he exclaims.

"And that seemed to be about the general sentiment. We decided that Mister Bostonian was a good man to leave alone, and that any intrusions on his privacy would be a heap unwarranted. On that conclusion we all took a sedative, and sought our respective couches.

"The next morning, as I was watering the horses, I heard shots ring out on the clear air, and, looking down the road that led past the Bostonian's 'dobe, I seen three fellows, crouched down low on their cayuses, circling out at a mighty lively gait.

"They came in on the run—Mexicans from Winchip's sheep-ranch. They said that they were jogging peaceably along when somebody fired on them from the house, and they wanted to know how about it.

"Before they had got through with their story, Billy Entzminger broke in sort of wild-eyed, complaining that a couple of rifle bullets had invaded the sanctity of his home, busting a crayon enlargement of his wife and wrecking a sixty-dollar sewing-machine.

"Doc Ammerman started over to investigate the trouble, and felt something hum unpleasantly by his right whisker. He retraced his footsteps, missing alternate ones.

"'Something has got to be done about this,' says Bob Shaun. 'What do you reckon is the matter with him?'

"'He's scared stiff, and he's declared a state of siege,' says I. 'Some goat has been feeding him the lurid annals of the past with green chilli seasoning. I'm in favor of finding out who it was and taking appropriate steps.'

"Bob was taken with a spell of coughing.

"'Let's appoint a committee to go out and reason with him,' suggests Carlos B. 'I nominate Pap Durfy, Bob here, and the Kid a committee of three to make medicine tending to an armistice.'

"'I amend that by substituting Carlos B. Green, Pap, and Bob,' I says. 'I've got my stock to attend to.'

"'Let's all go,' said Vic Jepson.

"So Bob tied a flour-sack to a stick, and we started out. We hadn't got fifty yards out into the open before the Bostonian opens fire—zip! zip! zip! splintering greasewood and kicking up sand all around.

"We broke and run back behind the blacksmith-shop, and, peeking around the corner, we seen the door of the 'dobe open, and the Bostonian come out with a gun at the ready, looking about him.

"I was looking through Pap's field-glasses, and I could see him as plain as I do you. It gives me a shock. His face was a dirty gray color, and his lips was sort of drawed back from his teeth, showing his gums, and his eyes was blazing. He was sure bad-looking.

"As I took away the glasses to say something, the Half-circle Bar 7 boy, who was getting some worked up, too, dropped down on one knee and steadied his gun across his arm. Billy Entzminger jumped for him, and grabbed him just as the gun went off and smashed a window in the 'dobe.

"The Bostonian slid back inside and slammed the door; and for the next minute or two he pumped that elephant destroyer so it sounded like a kid drawing a stick along a picket fence. He was improving in his shooting, too, for one shot hit the blacksmith-shop.

"'You little hump-nosed son-of-a-gun!' says the Half-circle Bar 7 boy to Billy. 'If you hadn't jolted my arm then I'd have got him sure.'

"'If you hadt blugged him you vouldt haf blugged de brosberity ohf Bersebolis, aindt it?' says Billy. 'Iss dat de vay to engourache gabital und de develobmendt ohf Suhuara cobber? You dake pod shods at a brosbective bay-roll?'

"'Billy's right,' says Pap. 'If we could afford to kill him, it would be dead easy, but Lonzo says he's little old

salvation for us, if he's handled right. Something has sure excited him. I wish Lonzo was here.'

"'Let him alone and starve him out,' advised Joe Marty.

"Whereupon I explained that he was provisioned for a month, with ammunition for a year.

"Well, we talked it up one way and down the other, but we couldn't hit on no plan. Every once in awhile some unsuspecting person coming to town or going out would get into the Bostonian's sphere of influence, and come splitting the wind and clamoring for reprisals.

"Lonzo didn't show up, and the situation was getting serious. Business was at a plumb standstill. Every so often the Bostonian would peg away at nothing in particular, just to show that he was keeping his tail up; and them demonstrations was sure disconcerting.

"Along about noon one of Pedro Gonzalez' burros in the Palo Alto was killed by one of them strays, and the White Light sign had a hole knocked in it you could put your fist through.

"A little later the new zinc water-tank Jud Kirby had put up on stilts to irrigate his garden was perforated, and let out all the water the windmill had pumped in a month.

"That was the last drop. Jud organized a public meeting right there, and it was decided to rush the 'dobe. Billy Entzminger argued against it on behalf of the Suhuara, and Bob Shann objected because it didn't seem like the right spirit of hospitality. I chipped in, and represented that, with the arsenal the Bostonian had, somebody valuable was likely to get killed for all the sinful shooting he had been doing hitherto. But it wasn't any use.

"'Ain't water-tanks valuable?' asks Jud. 'Are we a-going to sit tamely down and let our homes and signs be devastated, and our live-stock slaughtered in cold blood by a pink silk-shirted denizen of the Back Bay? Is the majesty of the law to be upheld in Persepolis or ain't it? Well, I guess yes.'

"That took 'em. The boys yelled and began starting down the street on the run.

"'Come back!' hollers the Half-circle Bar 7 boy. 'You don't want to start out that-a-way. If you want to get him easy, split up and crawl on to him from all sides under cover. He'll come out again as like as not, and you'll have an elegant show to salivate him without getting hurt. Who's this a-coming? Dog me if it ain't Lonzo!'

"It was Lonzo, shagging along on his little saddle-mule, sure enough. We all hollered to him, and I waved my arms energetic. The crowd sort of waited until he come up. Then I explained the situation to him.

"'For the Lord's sake, don't do anything rash, boys!' says Lonzo, a heap agitated. 'If you knew the trouble I had getting him here, and the elegant condition them mines are in at this minute, you wouldn't think of it.'

"'That's all right for you, Lonzo,' says Jud; 'but we've stood all of this funny work we care to. You don't need to take no part, but we're going ahead with the regular order of business.'

"'Let me talk with him first,' pleads Lonzo.

"'Well, if you want to do that you can,' says Jud, winking at the boys. 'We'll give you a show.'

"Lonzo cantered off; but he didn't no more than get to the firing-line when there was a puff of smoke from the 'dobe, and the mule begun to dance on his hind legs, and then lit into bucking, earnest and vigorous. When he come back we seen he had lost the upper part of an ear. The boys set up a yell.

"'That's all right,' says Lonzo. 'I don't blame him for shooting. He thinks that we're going to hang him.'

"'He's dead right,' says the Half-circle Bar 7 boy.

"'Well, we ain't,' says Lonzo, turning on him. 'Not if I have to fight the whole outfit of you. What he wants is somebody to inspire confidence,' he adds. 'If the sheriff was only here!'

"'Call a policeman,' says Jud sarcastically. 'How'd he know a sheriff from anybody else?'

"Billy Entzminger slapped his leg, and his black eyes snapped.

"'By goodness! dat vas nod sooch a fool's talk,' he says. 'Kom mit me, Lonzo, to de sdore, und I fix you oudt.'

"'Pin-n-ng!' sang a bullet along overhead; and a pane of glass jingled down on the sidewalk.

"'Come on, boys,' yells Jud. 'This is a-getting old.'

"'Wait!' shouted Lonzo. 'You said I should have a show. Billy and I have got a scheme. You wait half an hour longer, and if we don't bring him out, then you can go ahead.'

"There was some objections, but me and Bob and Pap and the rest of the conservative element what had copper prospects hung on, and the crowd agreed to wait.

"Lonzo and Billy went off into the store, and in ten minutes Billy came out, grinning, with a real live policeman, all same San Francisco, hanging on to his collar with one hand and swinging a club with the other.

"'Move ahn wid yez now, and don't be blocking up the sthreet,' says the cop—and, lo and behold you! it was Lonzo.

"He lets go of Billy's collar, and we all crowded up to look at him. He had on one of these full dress soldier helmets with the spike taken off, a long-skirted coat, belted in and decorated with brass buttons. They was army buttons, but you wouldn't have known the difference, or guessed that the big nickel star that he had on had been unscrewed from a heating stove—unless you had read the lettering on it. It was a lightning-change act for your whiskers.

"'Billy's going with me to make the complaint,' says Lonzo. 'He looks a little more like peace and civilization than any of you, so you may keep back.'

"He set out with a dignified stride and swinging his club, Billy trotting along beside him like a little pet dog.

"We watched them from the corner of the blacksmith-shop, expecting every minute to see the lunatic in the 'dobe go to shooting.

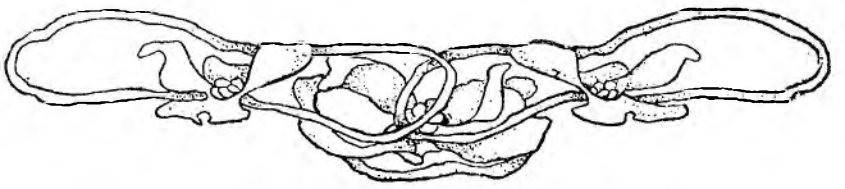
"It seemed like it took them an hour to get within forty feet of the door, only I know I can't hold my breath that long; and the first time I let it out was when the door opened.

"We all gave a gasp together then, for the Bostonian, instead of blowing the both of them into the life eternal, rushed forward, and, clinging fondly to the blue uniform, pillowed his head on the nickel star.

"We saw Lonzo pat his back tenderly and reassuringly, and reach down and take them two pearl-handled guns and drop them in his own coat-tail pockets. Then we broke loose and cheered.

"You needn't ask me what happened after that, for the Bostonian sort of staggered, and Billy and Lonzo led him back into the 'dobe. They all three left for the Suhuara next morning; and there was no farewells—nothing but a check for the damage.

"The Bostonian sent back for his plunder and stayed up in the mountains awhile; then he pushed on west till he struck the south branch of the Santa Fé; and we saw his form no more. He invested before he left, but he'll never get any copper out of them mines that will look as good to him as the imitation article that saved him from the wrath of Persepolis."



Bill Wilson, Renegade

By Captain Hector Orme Blanding
Author of "In Defense of Honor," Etc.

We are accustomed to look on the traitor, the renegade, as the most despicable creature on God's green earth, yet in some cases, were the truth known, it is quite possible that there might be found extenuating circumstances—not sufficient to excuse such conduct, of course, but to at least inspire pity as well as scorn

TWO troopers of Company C had pounced upon him in a low drinking-shop in Calle Real. They recognized him for Bill Wilson, the man they had so long hunted; not singly, but by regiments. Wilson was very drunk, and they had no difficulty in tying him up with pieces of rope loaned by the keeper of the shop, who greatly feared the *soldados Americanos.*

In high glee, they half-dragged, half-carried the drunken man to the *cuartel,* and asked for their captain. When they got an audience with him, they saluted and, repressing their delight as best they could, explained:

"This is Bill Wilson, sir. Often enough I've seen him when he was in the Fourteenth. Drank with him, sir. There can't be no mistake."

The captain looked unbelieving at first. "You don't mean to say that you've got the man who's been giving us all this trouble up in the mountains; the man who organized the ladrones—Wilson, the renegade!"

"That's him," chorused the troopers. "He's drunk, sir, as you can see. Blind, staggering drunk. That's the reason we got him so easy. He's a holy terror when he's sober."

"H'm," said the captain. "You'll be remembered for this, you two."

Then he gave some orders; and when Bill Wilson, renegade, awakened to consciousness again, he found himself in a filthy little cell, with latticed windows barred with iron. His head ached a great deal, and he felt that he did not care, after all.

He had always known that the end would come some day; and now that it had come, it did not greatly matter. A year before he had enlisted at San Francisco, hoping that a stray bullet would end him in some skirmish. The four months that he served in the cavalry had been crammed full of excitement, and many men had gone into the beyond; but Wilson, in spite of his daredevil recklessness, had remained without a scratch.

One day he got drunk on duty, and forgot that he was a trooper. Otherwise he would not have forgotten that there was a great gulf between him and Lieutenant Morse. He did not remember, and the lieutenant, with two teeth missing, sought the colonel.

Meanwhile Wilson became sober enough to realize what he had done, and promptly deserted.

Up there in the mountains he had fallen in with the ladrones. Having nothing better to do, he organized them into a well-disciplined band. Their sole object in living was to plunder. Wilson's object was to get out of the world without doing the deed himself. He planned raids on villages, and harassed the army of the United States; or, rather, that portion of it which was stationed at Cebu. Many times expeditions had been sent out after him, but the ladrones knew the mountains too well, and the expeditions failed.

Wilson had come down to Cebu to

arrange with the German trader who supplied his band with ammunition. He arranged matters satisfactorily, and should have sought the mountains again. Instead of so doing, he became intoxicated.

Well, it didn't greatly matter, anyhow, he argued. They would now hold a court-martial on his case, and after awhile they would have him stand with his back to a blank wall, and six men would blaze away at him with carbines.

He would have preferred to die a more honorable death, but it seemed that was not to be. At any rate, it was dying and forgetting. He drank to forget; and death would be one long intoxication.

So he made up his mind that he was to die, and thought very little more about the matter. He had settled the thing in his own mind, and determined that it should bother him no further. All he hoped for was that none of the folks back home should connect Bill Wilson, renegade, with——

He had been talking aloud, and it would not do to mention that name even in solitude. For he had left all that behind him when his faith in women had been shattered and the purity went out of his life.

He had been too believing, too idealistic, and had loved too much to the destruction of self. So when the crash had come, it left him absolutely nothing to live for, and a great deal that he wanted to forget.

Whisky brought forgetfulness; and in forgetfulness he went the gamut. He became a brute with a thinking mind. Forgetfulness would not come, only shame.

When the young captain came in to talk to him, Bill Wilson did not look up. He was not especially interested in the young captain. But the first words brought back something—the very something that he had been trying to forget. He looked up with a start; and saw the young man's face.

It was only with a mighty effort that he prevented himself from crying out. Something hard came into his throat, and he closed his eyes. The worst had come—recognition of what he had once been.

The young captain, however, looking at the heavily bearded ruffian before him, saw no one save Bill Wilson, renegade, a man to be loathed.

After awhile, Wilson realized that the young captain did not remember the things *he* remembered; and that his beard and mustache and sightless right eye had changed him beyond recognition. Then he became free from the worst of fears and answered the youth insolently, carefully choosing the most barbaric language that he knew.

Presently the young captain went away, and Wilson wished for whisky. The sight of the youth's face had changed everything. He would rather not die in that way, after all. In death, something might come out—no, it wouldn't do.

So when night came, he broke his bench and made a makeshift spade with which he burrowed into the soft earth of the cell. He labored for many hours, and dug himself into the starlight again.

He came out of the earth just under the feet of the sentry; and his hairy arms closed about the man on guard. In a moment he had wrested away the sentry's carbine and knocked him into insensibility.

Following this action, he tore off the soldier's blouse and donned it himself. The campaign-hat he pulled over his brows; and the Colt and cartridge-belt he girded about his own waist.

He tossed the senseless body into the hole he had dug, and cut across the compound toward the officers' quarters. At the edge of the barracks stood the officers' stables, which Wilson entered discreetly, saddling a horse that belonged to the senior major.

As he led the horse out of the stable he was held up by another sentry. "Attending the major for another darned ride along the coast," Wilson answered. "I'm getting tired of being routed out of my bunk every night."

"Oh! you're Major Jameson's orderly, eh?" asked the sentry. "Well, he is

somewhat of a fool about that, there ain't no doubt."

Bill Wilson had not been a member of this particular garrison without learning something about the peculiarities of its officers.

He knew it would be useless to attempt to get through the main gate. Luck would not stand him twice—he was too well known in the garrison for that. There remained but one thing to do—to jump the low wall by the stable.

In his time, Bill Wilson—who was not then Bill Wilson at all, but some one quite different—had ridden cross-country with the best of them; and won several prizes in steeplechases and for taking high jumps. The senior major's horse knew how to jump, and Wilson had seen the major riding him.

So Wilson talked to the horse in horse language, and prodded him with his heels; and the animal took a few trotting steps forward, and cleared the wall cleanly. In a moment horse and man were speeding up Calle Real and toward the edge of the town.

Wilson breathed more freely. He had not especially feared execution; but there were certain unfortunate tattoo-marks on his arm which, if seen, might cause comment and investigation, and then, God! the shame of it! Some people whom he loved 'way back there in God's country might come to know what sort of a rascal he had been. He knew that he was clean in their eyes so far. They did not know that when everything went black before him, when he lost his faith, he had gone black, too. Please God they would never know!

The roadway was silent and lifeless. The shutters were down before the shops. No lights burned in the houses. Save for the gutturals of the lizards, the occasional scream of night birds, and the piping and buzzing of the night insects, all was still and very quiet. Several mongrel dogs ambled out into the roadway, barking disconsolately and without effort. Occasionally a native policeman blinked sleepily from beneath the shelter of a balcony.

The man was not riding rapidly, for he did not wish to alarm the town by the clit-clattering of hoofs. The animal had settled down to a long, swinging lope, and the man, holding the reins in one hand, loosened the holster of the revolver, pulled out the Colt, and threw open the chambers. All was correct as should be, and he thrust the weapon back, watching the roadway carefully for signs of approaching people.

A sudden gust of wind from the bay caught the campaign-hat—much too small for him—and whirled it away into a little garden, surrounded by iron palings. The man pulled in the horse for a moment, then decided that the hat was not worth the risk of climbing into private grounds, and rode on hatless. They were well out of the town by now, and on the road to the mountains. He could join his followers by the morning if he rode steadily all night.

He reflected, then, with a sudden disgust for himself, that he did not wish to join his followers. Contact with white men, and enforced sobriety, had made him suddenly wishful for anything else save life among the dirty, unwashed, treacherous natives whom he led and ruled because they feared him too much to disobey, and also because he was able to successfully pit them against the *Americanos,* his brothers.

He recalled the nipa-thatched hut in the mountains, which was now his only home, the brown woman who watched him sadly with dog-eyes and called him "master," the stench of locusts frying, and the half-naked barbarians who lay about in the sun, glutting themselves on the fruits of their neighbors' toil.

Vividly in contrast came another life that he had lived once—a clean life, in which men drank his health as a good fellow, and women, many women, spoke of him affectionately, and came to him when they wanted a confidant who sympathized and helped. Clean living and ideals and belief—he had all these, then.

His face worked convulsively as he remembered the end of it all—the girl who had betrayed his love, and who had been betrayed in turn, to die in disgrace. He remembered how calmly he

had gone about killing the man who had ruined everything for him. With this man's death he was an outlaw, and —after all, did it do good to remember all these things? They had been done to and by another man.

That man was not Bill Wilson, nothing like Bill Wilson. He had been straight and slim, and had clear, honest eyes, and a woman's mouth; sensitive and almost beautiful. He had forefathers who had labored their lives through to make the world better; and sweet, kindly gentlewomen had been their wives and helpers. Bill Wilson—a drunken trooper, a deserter, a renegade. He had gone the gamut of vileness.

But at least he had done all these things openly. He had been no smug hypocrite, hiding behind a mantle of virtue, and praising God because of prosperity in dishonesty. He was no traducer of women, nor betrayer of friends. He had done his vileness in the sight of all men, and was accordingly despised by them.

What did he care, anyhow? He despised them all, this rotten, hypocritical crowd, who went to make up a smug, well-satisfied world. There were a few —yes—well, thank God, they didn't know, and wouldn't know!

Out of the distance he heard the sudden thud-thud of a horse coming toward him. He slipped his hand to his holster and held the Colt in readiness.

The horse loped on easily, and the man sat erect and straight, and wondered who rose at this hour of the night. No doubt it was some reveler returning from the *baile* out San Miguel way, and he would pass without even a look. It was just as well to be prepared, though.

The road led through a little defile at the point where the two must meet; and through the sheltering palm and ylang-ylang trees the moonlight filtered and cast ghostlike light on man and beast.

The night was very brilliant—the moon was at its full, and the Southern Cross wrote the religion of the western world in blazing letters on the azure. Myriads of satellites glinted and winked, and shooting fragments of other worlds appeared in a sudden blaze traversing the firmament.

The other man had entered the defile now, and the white light shone for a moment on two silver bars on either shoulder. Some thicker growths obscured him for a moment. Wilson held the Colt more firmly. The man coming toward him was an officer in the army —a captain by his insignia.

While yet yards apart, the moonlight showed Bill Wilson's heavy mane and bushy beard to the officer who rode; and Wilson saw a hand flash to a holster, and a revolver came out. The horses sprang together, and two men faced one another, each with a revolver pointed at the head of the other.

"You've—broken—jail!" cried the army man, some surprise and some admiration in his voice, but no fear whatsoever. "Well, now, my man, I guess you'll right-about-face and come back with me. It was fortunate I went riding to-night."

Bill Wilson shivered—perhaps it was the night wind. The hand holding the revolver, which was pointed at the officer, quivered and shook. The words died in his throat, for the man who spoke was the young officer who had brought back all these memories, and on whose account Bill Wilson had once again defied the laws of his country and broken prison.

Had it been some one else, he would have had never a chance to speak, for Bill Wilson was the quickest shot in the regiment, and the best. Without compunction, an ounce or so of lead would have burned into the captain's forehead, and that would have been the end of him; and Wilson would have gone on his way with two horses instead of one. But this—was different.

After a little silence Wilson spoke, and this time it was not with the uncouth verbiage of the enlisted ruffian, but after the fashion of one who had the right to ask the young captain to drink with him at his own club.

"Captain," he said quietly, "I'm not

going back to the *cuartel*. Nor am I trying to beg off. Just let me remind you that I am a good shot, and that I can fire just as quickly as you can. You have no advantage over me."

"Come back to the garrison or I will shoot you down," said the captain inflexibly. "I don't believe your gun is loaded. If it had been, you'd have shot long ago. You don't think I give you credit for honor——"

As he spoke, Bill Wilson saw only one chance for escape. He could not shoot this man—that was the last of his decency. He must escape. With a sudden movement of his heel, he sent his horse crashing into the captain's, and the officer, unseated by the sudden movement, toppled to the ground.

But he was up in a moment, and as Bill Wilson was vanishing around the bend of the road, the captain's Colt spoke out, and Wilson's horse staggered, made a few futile efforts to go on, then stumbled and fell.

The captain jumped into his saddle and dashed his mount forward, but at that moment a shot from Wilson's revolver sent the captain's animal down also, a piece of lead gone cleanly through the heart. The officer leaped clear of the saddle and ran forward down the road.

Wilson was in the act of leaving the road for the forest. The captain's Colt spoke out again, and Wilson clapped a hand to his side. He did not shoot back, however.

He knew he was hit, and a sudden savage resentment came over him. He wanted to return the officer's fire, to send down a lifeless heap this man who was so relentlessly hunting him like a savage beast.

Something forbade, and Bill Wilson, dead shot that he was, simply ran, though the officer, a fair target in the moonlight, stood in the road and blazed away at him.

Something red-hot touched all Wilson's nerve centers at once. Then all was black before him, and he crashed down among the chaparral.

The officer came running up, loading his revolver as he ran, and expecting a ruse. He maneuvered from behind trees and bushes until he had a fair view of the sprawling body and the revolver lying a few lengths away.

Reassured, he came up and knelt over what had once been some one other than Bill Wilson, renegade. A touch of the fingers on the left side of the body told him that the renegade would lead no more ladrones.

Feeling around in the blue shirt, his hand came upon something hard. He reached within, and drew from an inner pocket of the shirt a little volume, which he opened.

"Keats' poems!" he cried, in astonishment. "Well, I'm damned! Keats' poems! An original ruffian this." He meditated. "I'm rather sorry—but then—I wonder——"

He examined the book cursorily, finding it one of those editions-de-luxe which women generally buy for men. It had been kept in a chamois-skin case, and was practically new, though the pages showed incessant thumbing.

In the moonlight he could see quite well, and as he turned to the front of the book, handwriting stood out. "Now, I wonder," he said, "if this isn't a clue—what—what—God—no!"

The book dropped from his hands. After a moment he picked it up again, white-lipped. "My sister!" he groaned. "My poor little sister! No! poor Brereton! She sent him to the bad—yes!"

With a sudden movement, he was down on his knees and pulling back the right sleeve of the blue-flannel shirt. A tattoo met his eyes—a dragon rampant on a field of azure, and the motto: *"Non oblitus,"* beneath it. Many times had Bill Wilson cursed this tattoo which he bore on his arm.

"The Brereton crest—the Brereton motto—good God!" said the young captain, in his agony. Then, moved by a sudden impulse, he picked up the revolver of the dead man, and found that five shots remained. Groaning, he sank to the ground and covered his head with his arms.

After awhile he arose, and, lifting the body in his strong young arms, car-

ried it to a place where wood had been cut, and laid it upon the wood. Then he collected quantities of the dry chaparral and piled it around the wood. Taking his match-box from his pocket, he lighted the pile; then went away into another part of the forest.

Presently, maybe an hour or so afterward, he came back and found only a pile of ashes. He doffed his hat, and stood reverentially while he said a prayer.

"God bless you, old man!" he cried, and his voice was broken with sobs. "I'd rather have killed myself than you, but maybe it was better, after all. You may have been a renegade, but God makes His kings out of such renegades as you."

When he went back to the barracks, he said that he had been attacked by ladrones; but he said nothing of Bill Wilson.

And in the cool of the morning the wind scattered about all that was mortal of what had once been Bill Wilson, renegade, who died for the last part of him that had remained pure.

THE UNCONQUERED

THE Hereros, against whom the Germans have been waging war in West Africa, constitute but one example among many of savage races who have been dominated by the white man. For centuries they have trod their native wilds, untrammeled and untamed, and it looks as if, even now, they will be exterminated before being subdued. The Cuanhamas, who live in Portuguese territory, can lay claim to a similar distinction. They are a fierce, arrogant, and warlike tribe; and although their actual fighting strength is estimated in hundreds rather than thousands, their nominal masters have never led a successful expedition against them.

In British South Africa, again, are the Swazis, a branch of the Zulu race, who owe allegiance to their own chiefs only. Their country is an exceedingly difficult and mountainous one, over three thousand square miles in extent, and as their numbers are estimated at between seventy and eighty thousand, their subjugation would be no easy task.

Far to the northward, safe in the solitudes of the Sahara Desert, are the Tawareqs, the only people in the world who—men and women alike—habitually wear face-masks when out of doors. They owe their freedom from subjection to their extreme shyness. Berber and Moor, Kabyle, Gallas, and Somali, have each in turn tried to subdue them by force of arms, but in vain. Even the French have failed to establish relations with them, either friendly or otherwise. They are as unapproachable as antelopes, and as independent.

The Yaquis of Sonora, again, defy the power and might of Mexico to-day, as they have done for generations past.

In Central Asia, to the north of China, is the country of the Dzoungarians, a fierce, warlike people, and free as air. True, Russia has claimed, since 1871, to exercise a sort of quasi-sovereignty over them. But in reality the czar's government dares scarcely even pretend to make its power felt among them. After a similar fashion, too, the predatory Bedouin, of the deserts of Central Arabia, bids defiance to the authority of his norminal over-lord, the sultan.

Lastly, mention ought to be made of the Montenegrins, the bulk of whom are in reality savages of a very primitive, but also very fine, type. For four hundred years the Turks have maintained an almost continuous warfare against them. Yet to-day they are as free, and well-nigh as fierce, as the winter tempests that beat against the mountain walls of their native fastnesses.

Faraday Bobbs, Free Lance

By Louis Joseph Vance

Author of "The Blood Yoke," "The Private War," Etc.

V.—THE INDISPOSITION OF THE MINISTER

(A Complete Story)

BOBBS—Faraday Bobbs, if you please, more or less regularly attached to the staff of *Bannister's Weekly* in the capacity of photographer-errant—made a gusty entrance. He was in a hurry—in haste to be alone.

He slammed the door behind him. He turned the key. With one twist of his hand he sent a black slouch hat skimming across the room; it subsided into a corner by the window. With one wriggle he divested himself of his coat; it cuddled down forlornly in the middle of the floor. He smacked a folded newspaper vigorously on the surface of an inoffensive table, and left it there. He pulled a folded sheet of pasty-complexioned paper from his waistcoat pocket, and threw it beside the paper.

Then he stood contemplative for a brief instant, kneading his chin between a firm, sturdy thumb and a long forefinger—both badly discolored by chemicals. For the moment he knew only that something was lacking in his life—something without which that life were without savor.

Abruptly he remembered. "Gosh!" he exclaimed. With all the spirit and enthusiasm of a terrier excavating for a rat he attacked a heap of junk in one corner of the room, which he chose to dignify by calling his luggage

Things flew. An eruption of invaluable photographic paraphernalia filled the air.

Presently Bobbs grunted his satisfaction. He stood erect. The eruption subsided and the air cleared. With an expression of anticipative joy Bobbs contemplated the guerdon of success, holding gingerly and lovingly in one hand a particularly formidable and villainous-looking corn-cob pipe.

The other hand was fumbling at the young man's hip pocket. Presently it brought to light a corpulent, red-faced, collapsible tobacco-pouch. Bobbs opened it and gently but firmly filled the maw of the pipe, tamping down the granulated weed with an expert, considerate finger. He found a match, struck it, put the pipestem between his teeth, and the flame to the tobacco.

A whorl of virulent incense clouded the atmosphere; and another, and another. Bobbs threw back his head, half closing his eyes, inhaled deeply, expelled the fumes through his nostrils in a double jet, and sighed profoundly.

"Ah!" said the young man. "*Now* we shall think."

He pulled a chair up to the table, sat down, unfolded the newspaper and the smaller sheet, and spread them out. He read first one, then the other, clutched his hair convulsively with both hands, and sat quite motionless for twenty minutes, slowly encasing himself with a cocoon of smoke. At the end of that

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This series began in the April issue. The back numbers can be obtained through any newsdealer. Price ten cents each.

period he contorted his features into a ferocious scowl. It was evident that Bobbs' affairs were come to a most serious pass.

Beyond doubt; out of his own mouth came confirmation of the fact.

"And yet," said Mr. Bobbs disconsolately, releasing his hair and sitting back—"and yet a man *must* live."

Apparently this cryptic utterance comforted him; there became visible a decided diminution in the intensity of the frown. Again the young man bent over the larger sheet.

It was a page torn from a German daily which he had discovered in the files of the hotel reading-room. Its name is a matter of no moment; in fact, Bobbs doesn't recall it. But a single item, tucked away in a corner, seemed to have an invincible fascination for the eye and the imagination of the reader. Bobbs read it for perhaps the twentieth time, translating slowly in a meditative, drawling monotone:

INDISPOSITION OF A MINISTER OF STATE.

We regret to announce that Count Paul von Sturm, Minister of Foreign Affairs to H. I. M. the Kaiser, has been obliged to retire to his estates in consequence of a serious indisposition, the precise nature of which has not yet been definitely ascertained. It is feared, however, that the minister's absence from his desk will be prolonged, and an operation may be necessary.

Bobbs grinned. "Poor Paul!" he said unsympathetically. "Bless its little heart, it's indisposed, is it? Has it got a pain in its political tum-tum? And since when have Pera and Galata been the dear count's country estates?"

He dropped the tone of raillery for one of doubt. "I wish I could be *sure*," he complained. "If it were anybody but Paul, I wouldn't be so suspicious. But—and just at this time, too! I'm really afraid I'll have to look in. And Constantinople only round the corner, so to speak! Deuced awkward! Every time I want to have a little fun Bassett has to have a litter of brilliant ideas. Look at that!"

Bobbs snorted disgust, glaring at the smaller sheet of paper—a cable blank on which the ink was barely dry.

BOBBS, HOTEL GRAND BRETAGNE, ATHENS: Join Palliser at Bucharest fifteenth. Cover revolution in Transcaucasus.

FREEBOOTER.

Thus the message ran. Now, Palliser, as all men know, is the bright particular star of *Bannister's* staff of war correspondents. And "Freebooter" is the "nom de cable" of Bassett, the weekly's editor-in-chief. The message was imperative. Disobedience meant summary dismissal. Nor, Bobbs knew, would a plea by cable avail him aught. He must be in Bucharest on the fifteenth or pay the penalty.

So, torn by conflicting desires, in his extremity Mr. Faraday Bobbs appealed to the court of the last resort—left it to chance, as usual. The sovereign that flew to the ceiling rang there and dropped like a plummet to the floor. Bobbs bent over it breathlessly. "Heads!" he cried, eyes twinkling. "Poor 'Freebooter'!"

He pulled the bell-cord, summoning a hall-boy to the door. "My son," Bobbs told him, "get my bill ready. I'm leaving by the steamer for Constantinople to-day."

II.

Much-traveled men have pointed out that there are four spots on the face of the globe at any one of which, if you wait long enough, you are sure to meet everybody you ever knew. This is what "Huckleberry Finn" would call "something of a stretcher, but in the main accurate."

One of these places is at the corner of Broadway, Fifth Avenue, and Twenty-third Street; another is the Charing Cross Station; the third is where the Rue de la Paix runs into the Boulevard des Capucines; and the last, and possibly the greatest of all, is the bridge which links Stamboul and Galata, and which is known as the Galata Bridge.

And that is why Faraday Bobbs, toward the evening of his second day in

Constantinople—it was a Thursday, by the way—saw fit to station himself very near the center of the bridge, beside the gangway to the landing-stage for Golden Horn steamers.

Behind Stamboul's seven hills the sun was setting; at Faraday's back the Golden Horn stretched like a river of blood and liquid gold; before him, beyond the eastern bulwark of the pontoon, the Bosporus glowed darkly, a wonderful sea of ultramarine ink, merging in the distance toward Scutari into darker shades of deepest indigo. Above the flood arose the Asiatic hills, whence all Scutari's ten thousand windows flung quivering flames of rose back to the dying sun.

The sky was like a dome of polished amethyst, hung in the east with the purple banners of advancing night, mirroring some monstrous and gorgeous but hidden conflagration in the west. On the left Galata and Pera's hanging gardens were bathed in a clear and rosy glow, touched with shadows of purple; while to the right Stamboul's darkling terraces climbed tier upon tier to their clear-cut sky-line, whose every dome and spire and minaret was tipped with unearthly fire.

Faraday's mind, however, failed to respond to the uplifting beauty of the scene; sensitive though he was to every artistic influence, his thoughts were now of such a lowering cast that even a sunset in Constantinople had no power to stir him from his deep despondency.

He had been thirty-six hours in the imperial city, and had accomplished nothing. Not a shred of information had he gleaned in all his scourings of the city—and he had been active enough. Therefore he sulked and grumbled, cursing himself and his luck fluently in every tongue he knew; and their number, I think, was seven.

It was all of piece with his usual hare-brained way of doing things, anyway, he declared. It was just like a blame' fool like him to fly off the handle without the least provocation. Anybody else with the sense he was born with would have thought twice ere throwing up a good, substantial job on the bare chance of putting a spoke in Kaiser Wilhelm's wheel.

And that was by no means the worst of the case. The worst of it was that while there was still a possibility of his catching Palliser by wire to Bucharest and asking him to wait a day or two, or until Faraday could get there by the quickest route—while still there remained to the young man the chance of retrieving himself with his employers and so retaining his commission, he had not the least intention of doing anything of the sort.

No; Faraday Bobbs was made of sterner stuff—or more mulish. He had set his hand to the plow; he had come to Constantinople for a purpose; he would not withdraw now, nor at any time before he was definitely convinced that he had exhausted the last stratagem in his repertoire.

He had so far been unsuccessful; he now, in despair, was throwing himself upon the mercy of his ally, chance. As a general rule, he would also have counted upon time; but he had barely eighteen hours, if so much, before him—if, indeed, his riotous imagination had not hatched out a mare's nest.

So he grumbled and brooded and worked himself into a state of wholly uncharacteristic temper, and cast dour, forbidding glances at the mob upon Galata Bridge.

III.

An immense multitude shook the pontoons of the bridge with its hurrying feet. It streamed past like a river of bedizened humanity—or, rather, like twin rivers, running side by side, though bound in opposite directions. A veritable tide-rip of humanity it was, that swirled and eddied to and fro, back and forth, from side to side, on the narrow bridge.

Black, white, brown, yellow; Jew and Gentile, Turk and Armenian and Greek, Ethiopian, Kurd, Cossack, Tartar, Circassian, Albanian, Moor, Italian; the river flowed on with neither pause nor respite. The eye wearied with the indescribable diversity of it all. It was

a furious and ungovernable riot, a mad masque, of colors running the gamut of the solar spectrum; of sounds—a hundred tongues babbling simultaneously, each in a different language or patois; of nationalities; of ages, sexes, creeds, statures—a panorama of all civilizations since the world began.

A sullen detonation reverberated across the waters—the daily sunset gun. From a thousand minarets on either bank of the Golden Horn muezzins wailed their melancholy call to prayers: *"La il lah il Allah!"*

From the darkened, heaving bosom of the Bosporus a wave of coolness swept in upon the three cities. The multitude turned its faces to it gladly; and pressed on with vigor unabated.

"There is no God but God!"

The pious declaration fell upon deafened, calloused ears. Faraday turned with a lifting of his shoulders, a whimsical twisting of his eyebrows, and dropped his cigarette over the parapet. He faced toward Galata, looking for an opening through the crowd that he might slip across the bridge and join the east-bound throng, and so make his way back to his hotel. It is not good to be abroad in Constantinople after night has fallen. And as he hesitated a hand plucked at his sleeve, and a clear voice interrupted his glum reverie.

"Effendi!"

Faraday turned. A Moor of the desert stood at his elbow, a slender, straight man notable chiefly for his stature, which was under middle height, even for a Moor. His dingy white burnoose shone pallid in the twilight. Dark eyes, set in a face well tanned, thin and eager of cast, searched Bobbs' features with a curiously significant expression.

The man was rolling a cigarette between thin brown fingers. By his side was a heavy bundle, apparently of rugs.

"Well?" demanded the American sharply.

The Moor began to speak in French: "Real Moorish rugs, effendi—priceless, old as—— *Say yes, Bobbs, you idiot!*" This last in an undertone hurried and stealthy.

"Yes," replied Bobbs obediently, though startled beyond measure. He cast a swift glance at the passing throng; it pressed on, according neither of the two loiterers the slightest attention. Furthermore, and fortunately, not a single Turkish soldier of the bridge guards was within sight or hearing.

Faraday turned to the Moor with a question already framed upon his lips. But, ere he could utter its primal syllable——

"If you breathe my name, old man, I'll tip you over into the drink and run for it. And I know you can't swim! Shall I follow to the palace courtyard of the English lord?"

"Oh, yes," Bobbs assented, with a half-contemptuous, half-tolerant laugh —falling in with the character assigned him. "But it won't be worth your while, probably. But come along, if you want to, father of impostors."

And, turning upon his heel, he shouldered his way through the rabble to the farther side of the bridge, where he fell into step with the rank and file, and proceeded, with what haste he might, toward Galata.

He was consumed with an intense curiosity, having gathered not the least clue to the identity of the masquerader who seemed to know him; but, as he stepped briskly on, not so much as a backward glance betrayed his interest. Whether or not the man followed him he could not have said. He was of a quick intelligence, Bobbs—quick to perceive and adapt himself to the situation of the moment.

But when he had stepped off the bridge into the broad, plazalike Rue Karakoui, he felt himself constrained to pause, slightly at a loss. It did not seem possible to take the man to his hotel. And to cover the real cause of his hesitation, Bobbs fumbled in his pocket for a cigarette, and, having found one, stopped to light it. At that moment the Moor passed him, and his whisper caught Bobbs' ear.

It was a whisper un-Moorish enough in all conscience; neither in phrase nor in language did it jibe with the man's apparent station and nationality. Bobbs

could not repress a smile, despite what he felt must surely be a situation of uncommon gravity.

"Hump yourself, you dunderhead! Follow me and——"

The rest was lost as his guide passed on. Bobbs, keeping the glimmer of the white burnoose in the tail of his eye, finished the business of igniting his cigarette, and followed at a leisurely pace—gradually quickening it, however, to lessen the interval between himself and the man.

The latter, however, swung on actively enough, picking his way through the tangled crowds of pedestrians, mules, litters, dogs—especially dogs—without pause or irresolution, and led his wondering acquaintance a merry dance.

Up the Rue Yuksek Kaldirim he went, turning aside slightly beyond the entrance to the Grand Rue de Pera to avoid the lights and crowds of Tunnel Square, the terminus of the underground railroad; and so by détour into the Rue Karristan.

By the Pera Palace Hotel, however, he turned, and, leading Bobbs past the Petits Champs des Morts—the Turkish cemetery—plunged him into the filthy alleys and squalid by-ways of Kassim Pasha.

Now, here Bobbs was lost; and he grew uneasy. His guide, however, held on without a pause; and now that he was committed to the adventure, Bobbs had little choice but to go on. Once beyond the Petits Champs, he could no more have found his way back than he could fly. Little as he liked the neighborhood—and more than once his gorge rose as his nostrils were assailed by some more than ordinarily atrocious perfume of Araby radiating from an innocent-appearing garbage heap in the middle of the ways, more than once he shrank from entering the unlighted tunnel of some wretched street, and when he had entered, regretted that he was unarmed—he felt, in a way, helpless in the hands of his masquerading friend.

At length the fellow turned sharply from the thoroughfare—or the gutter that passed for it—and, diving beneath an arch, set in the walls between two buildings, disappeared entirely.

Bobbs, quite dismayed at the thought of being forsaken in that abandoned spot, broke into a run. He fairly hurled himself through the archway, into a cavern of Stygian blackness, and —brought up short in the arms of his guide. The latter laughed shortly.

"Here!" said he, in English. "Give me your hand."

"Confound it!" panted Bobbs, acceding with alacrity and grasping the hand with the wild clutch of a drowning man. "What do you mean by it, anyhow?"

His guide merely laughed, drawing him farther into the blackness. They trod an uneven stretch of flagging, between walls set so close together that there was hardly room for one man to pass another—walls reeking with mold and exuding a fetid, deathly odor.

"Blamed," said Bobbs resignedly, "if I think much of your taste in lodgings!" He waited for an answer, got none. The hand that held his own drew him steadily forward. "Who the devil *are* you, anyway?"

No answer, beyond a subdued chuckle. Bobbs suddenly stumbled over a raised step, and heard a door close behind him—swung by the hand of his guide, who had released him and fallen back.

"Go on," said the latter.

"Where to?" snapped Faraday.

"Just step out like a little man. You'll see."

"I'll not stir another step unless I know who you are."

"You've come pretty far in the dark, you ass!" suggested the other good-humoredly. "It won't hurt you to chance the rest of the way."

By his intonation, Bobbs guessed that the time for extreme precaution was past. "Not another foot," he contended obstinately.

"Oh, well," the other assented, in a manner that disclaimed responsibility, "you always were one of the won't-be-happy-till-he-gets-it sort. Here!"

The man scratched a match noiselessly, pushed back his head-dress, and held

the flame a bit above him. Bobbs leaned forward, staring breathlessly into the other's features. Then he grinned.

"Palliser!" he cried. "I might have known."

IV.

"Suppose," said his brother correspondent, with cynical politeness, "you go on up-stairs?"

The match was dying in his fingers. Bobbs turned hastily, but with a mind at rest, and saw, by the expiring flicker of light, a flight of rude, rough-hewn stone steps, worn smooth by generations of feet, leading upward into the night. Grumbling "Beastly hole!" he began to mount them.

Palliser did not reply; but Bobbs heard him shuffling up the steps behind, and was content. The photographer kept close to the wall, for it was a spiral flight, and he was humanly reluctant to risk a fall. It seemed to him that they ascended interminably. He was conscious that the air grew more close and dank toward the top. Finally Palliser broke the silence.

"When you butt into the wall, Bobbs," said he, "feel around until you find the door-handle, and then turn it."

His tone was satirical. Bobbs grunted a disgusted assent, and—promptly "butted" into the wall. Then he followed instructions. The door yielded and swung inward. Bobbs crossed the threshold, entering a room of scant proportions, as was shown by the unglazed windows in the wall, through which the faint starlight entered softly.

In the middle of the floor Bobbs paused and waited. He heard Palliser enter and bolt the door. Then a match was raked across the wall and applied to the wick of an oil lamp. The figure of the Moor sprang into relief against the darkness of the filthy walls. As the light grew, Faraday was obliged grudgingly—for he was hardly pleased by the thoroughness of his deception—to compliment his countryman.

"That certainly is a mighty good disguise, Palliser," he admitted. "It never struck me before, but, aside from your height, you seem cut out by nature for a Moor—features, complexion, everything."

"Kind provision of nature against the present emergency," returned Palliser. "Sit down."

"Where?"

"The floor, of course. Where'd you think? The ceiling? Have a rug. Blast the infernal things!" swore Mr. Palliser, bending to unknot the ropes about his parcel. "They weigh a ton."

"But why——"

Palliser extracted a rug from the bundle and jerked it across to Bobbs. Faraday caught it on the wing and promptly sat down, while his host helped himself to another.

"But why——"

"For the love of Moses, Bobbs, give me a white man's cigarette! I'm perishing for one; if I hadn't, I'd have been tempted to leave you alone in your grandeur there on Galata Bridge. Thanks."

Palliser caught the cigarette-case, helped himself, and put a match to the tobacco. A smile of ineffable content irradiated his features.

Bobbs tried it for the third time—"But why——"

"What the deuce are you doing in Constantinople, my son?"

"What the deuce," retorted Bobbs, with some heat, "are you doing out of Bucharest?"

"You first," said Palliser, eyes a-twinkle.

"After you," declared Bobbs, firm in his courtesy.

Palliser seemed to inhale the fragrant smoke for fully a minute. To the observer, the wonder was where he managed to store it all; indeed, for minutes afterward, Bobbs thought, his confrère continued to exude a steady trickle of smoke.

"Always a mule. But you do smoke a passable brand of tobacco." Palliser removed the half-consumed roll from his lips and examined it with the air of a connoisseur. "Where'd you get 'em?"

Bobbs glared. Palliser laughed.

"Oh, very well! Have it your own

way," he yielded gracefully. "You got Bassett's cable to Athens?"

"Yes."

"He wired me in Moscow. Can't say I was sorry to leave—rather hot up there, you know. My instructions were for Vienna, where I was to get a more complete cable. Bassett didn't dare send it to Moscow, for fear of the censor—even in code, you know. Well, then, I went to Vienna, opened communications with Bassett, and got my orders. I was to wait in Bucharest for you until midnight, the fifteenth. If you didn't turn up by that time, I was to hike it alone. I say, what have you been up to lately? Bassett's so infatuated with your particular brand of independence that he even went to the expense of insinuating per cable that you were due for the G. B. unless you joined me as per schedule."

Palliser chuckled. "I had a suspicion that your nose for news was pointing toward Constantinople—oh, I read the papers myself, you know!" he added, noticing Bobbs' look of surprise. "And I didn't want to see you fired. So, thinks Bobby Palliser, I'll take a hand in that game myself; besides, it will be easier getting to Transcaucasia via the Black Sea than across the frontier. *And* safer. Wherefore, I came—Monday. You were not in evidence. I decided upon a little sleuthing on my own account. Wherefore, I am likely to be particularly popular with the gendarmerie if they get hold of me."

Bobbs extracted a cigarette from his case and tossed the remainder to Palliser. "You have earned them," he said. "I've accomplished nothing. Fire away."

"Where's your apparatus?" Palliser cut off at a tangent.

Faraday colored like a schoolboy caught at mischief. "Left it at Athens," he explained. "It was safer. I brought with me only a single snapper and one roll of films. If I get one exposure I'll be satisfied. I didn't dare risk losing the other stuff."

"Good enough. How many trunks?"

"One—I can leave that in case of need."

"'Fraid you'll have to," agreed Palliser amiably. "I can't let you go back to the hotel. Too risky. Besides, I see the camera bulging your pocket. There's no real necessity. You can send the hotel a draft for your bill, and perhaps they'll forward the trunk."

"I don't mind losing it—for this. Get on, man! Don't you see you're keeping me on tenterhooks?"

"Sure I do. Very well, I'll behave." Palliser straightened up and lit another cigarette.

"By the merest accident," he began, "I called on the Greek minister here. He's an old friend of mine. And there I got a clue. You know this Macedonian rumpus? Powers combining to send a fleet and make a demonstration? Well, you know as well as I that old Abdul Hamid wouldn't have the backbone to stand out against those demands, if he stood alone. He doesn't: Bill of Berlin's egging him on."

"You *know* that?" Bobbs demanded eagerly.

"My friend the Greek minister does. That's enough."

"How?"

"I'm coming to that. Some time ago a Greek girl spy became an inmate of the sultan's harem. She's the source of information. Unfortunately suspicion was directed against her, and she was taken and thrown into a cell beneath Dolmah Bagcheh—the old palace, you know. To-morrow night is to be her last on earth—the usual way: bowstring and Bosporus. Her people don't dare take a step to free her. I, however—or, rather, we—are nonsuspects. I've undertaken to free her to-morrow afternoon, both for her own sake and ours."

"Why in the daylight?"

"It's our only chance. To-morrow the sultan is supposed to go to the Hamidieh Mosque to pray. You know the ordinary course: Abdul Hamid stays at home, and his highly salaried double receives the ovations of the public, to and from the mosque—also any bombs and bricks that may be coming his way. Nevertheless, the great body of the palace guards are drawn off for an escort for appearances' sake.

There's our chance." Palliser became thoughtful.

"Abdul makes the one great mistake of not paying his personal retainers," he proceeded. "They're months in arrears, every man Jack, and broke to the last mother's son of 'em. I don't know any better food in the world for the artful wiles of the briber. Now, I, *with* the funds of the Greek Government, had not the slightest difficulty in winning over the head of the Dolmah Bagcheh commissary bureau. He fell like a ripe plum. I'm—we're to go there to-morrow to sell rugs. Don't worry—I'll fix you up in a beyoot-i-ful disguise. I'll even make you passably good-looking.

"Djelal—the gentleman I've bought—will usher us into his private apartment. Then, according to his program, he'll release the girl, bring her to us, and escape with us through the old subterranean outlet from Dolmah Bagcheh. It opens on the Bosporus, as you know. There'll be a launch in waiting, and a yacht in the offing that will get us to Athens in two days—or faster than anything in the Turkish Navy can travel."

"But," objected Bobbs, "this is all very gallant and—and all that—but where the dickens does *Bannister's Weekly* come in?"

"You wouldn't disappoint Bassett for worlds, would you?" Palliser jeered. "*Bannister's* comes in through the tunnel leading from Dolmah Bagcheh to the Yildiz Kiosk. We'll drop in on Abdul unexpected-like and take his picture just because we think he has a nice face."

"But your friend with the unmentionable name?"

"Djelal Bey? He doesn't dream of anything of the sort."

"If he objects——"

"If he objects," said Palliser wearily, "I always carry a persuader, loaded, in my side pocket. Now, young man, you can go to the devil, or to sleep, or whatever you please. *I'm* going to sleep, and if you disturb me before daylight, I'll——"

Palliser got up on his knees and blew out the lamp. A moment later he was snoring ostentatiously.

"Palliser!" said Bobbs, after a bit.

Frantic snores.

"Palliser," murmured Bobbs, in honeyed accents, none too gently stirring his friend with the toe of his boot, "what will you do if I disturb you?"

"I won't let you go along," said Palliser drowsily.

"Very well"—meekly—"I'll be good."

V.

"There!" Palliser stepped back, uplifted paint-brush between his fingers, and eyed Mr. Bobbs through narrowed lids, his head tilted critically to one side. He pursed his lips, frowned vexedly, and, advancing, deftly but firmly imprisoned Faraday's nose between his thumb and forefinger. Holding him thus helpless, Palliser gently stroked the young man's eyebrows with the brush.

Under this treatment they assumed a bewitchingly glossy blackness. "Don't move," said Palliser soothingly. "Really, I feel proud of my job. You'd give any patriotic Moor the horrors, but I am bound to admit that you make a handsomer Moor than American. Now, stand up, please, and turn round. Slowly—there! I wouldn't have your temper for a farm, Bobbsy."

He feigned to ignore Faraday's vindictive glances, however. "You'll do," he said. "Round your shoulders and bend forward a trifle, and no one will suspect that camera beneath your burnoose. Did you get that gun? Good enough. Now, take up the black man's burden"—pointing to the bundle of rugs—"and come along."

Thoughtlessly Bobbs obeyed. He was too absorbed with the task of nursing his injured dignity to heed much else. It was not until, Palliser leading the way, the two had debouched from the tunnel into the highway, where the fierce white glare of the morning sun revealed every detail of their costumes pitilessly, and the necessity for giving no cause for suspicion had become imperative, that Bobbs realized that, in

his own phrase, he had drawn the long straw.

He said nothing, for he dared not speak. Palliser stalked ahead with lordly mien, threading a way through the mixed population of the reeking kennels. Bobbs followed, sweating under the burden of the rugs, softly cursing his inability to protest. He promised himself, however, a revenge on Palliser, and meditated it sourly.

The sun glare seemed to increase in fervor with every yard he traveled. Yet he trudged on patiently, unconsciously giving a most lifelike imitation of the rôle for which Palliser had cast him—that of a beast of burden. As for the little correspondent ahead, he had in him the nature of a born mimic as well as an inimitable facility with disguises. He played his part flawlessly. And thus it came about that their little procession—no uncommon sight in the streets of Pera—passed without notice.

Past the Artillery Barracks, past the Imperial Stables: Bobbs knew enough of the city's topography to feel sure that their journey's end was near. And now, pausing to shift his burden and wipe the perspiration from his eyes with the back of one hand, he saw the long, low, blank walls of Dolmah Bagcheh Palace on their right.

Somewhere, distantly, a gun boomed; and from the near-by minaret of the Valideh Mosque the chant of the muezzin trembled on the still, bland air.

"Noon," commented Palliser. "We're on the stroke. Hurry!"

A moment later they stood beneath the shadow of the walls, before a small postern, at which Palliser knocked. Almost instantly the door swung ajar. Bobbs was aware of the keen scrutiny of a pair of black eyes, visible through the brief opening. A word or two in French passed from Palliser to the man. And then——

"Very good, giaour," the man expostulated angrily, "but the agreement was for you alone. Who is this?"

"If you keep us waiting, Djelal Bey," returned Palliser placidly, "we'll attract attention."

"Enter," conceded Djelal sullenly. He held the door wide for them, and closed it instantly. Bobbs heard the bolts shot home hurriedly, as he was about to deposit his pack. But—"Not here, effendi," the Turk whispered affrightedly. "This way."

They traversed swiftly a small, deserted court, paved with flags, between which grass was sprouting, and in a thought had crossed the threshold of the palace itself. Again Bobbs caught the rasping sound of bolts; and now, seeing that he was in what was apparently a private apartment, he dropped the bundle of rugs without more ado.

"Palliser," he said, with enthusiasm, "if we get out of this I'll punch your head as sure as my name's Faraday Bobbs!"

"'Sssh!" the Turk cautioned them. He tiptoed swiftly to the inner door, beyond which lay the palace corridors, and, opening it suddenly, peered into the gloom of the passageway. If he had hoped, or feared, to discover an eavesdropper, he was disappointed; at that hour the palace was silent as a tomb. He turned, with visible relief, but still badly scared.

A tall, paunchy man he was, with a saturnine face naturally sallow, but now gone pasty with apprehension. The tarnished splendor of his robes of office lent his otherwise unimposing figure a sort of dingy dignity; and he maintained his composure with obvious effort, as, raising one arm, he indicated Bobbs with a trembling forefinger.

"My lord," he gasped, "what is this?"

"Friend of mine," returned Palliser coolly. "Brought him along to lend a hand if necessary. Don't worry—it'll be all right. Where's the girl?"

Again the Turk shook with a palsy of terror. "My lord!" he deprecated, in a hoarse whisper, spreading out his hands resignedly.

"What the deuce——" Palliser began. "It hasn't gone wrong? You don't mean——"

"My lord, I know not why, but, by his majesty's orders, last night the girl was conveyed from her cell below to one under Yildiz Kiosk. I cannot say, for I dared not ask, but it is probable

that his majesty wished to question her."

"Then take us there," Palliser cut in. He was pale with the pallor of rage; and his eyes were afire. "That fiend!" he cried. "Do you mean—torture?"

"I cannot say," mumbled Djelal Bey. "None can say, lord."

"Do you know where she is?"

"It is impossible," Djelal Bey began obstinately. And then he interrupted himself. His lips trembled, a little flush came into his cheeks, and his eyes grew humid as he stood and watched Palliser—watched the American as if fascinated.

For the latter had thrust a hand deep into the folds of his burnoose and brought it forth full of English bank-notes. And deliberately Palliser sat him down by a convenient tabouret, upon whose top he laid the money as he counted it aloud.

"Ten, twenty, thirty," he said, in French; and went on: "Forty, fifty, sixty, seventy, eighty, ninety, one hundred—two hundred, Djelal Bey," he concluded, looking up. "Two hundred English pounds sterling, and as much again, if you lead us through the Yildiz Kiosk tunnel to the girl."

There was a pause. Terror struggled with avarice within the Turk—the contest plainly betrayed by the play of his features. Finally, "Kismet!" he said. "Give me the money, effendi!" And stretched a flabby, clawlike hand to clutch the notes.

"Steady, steady!" said Mr. Palliser, withdrawing the money. "One-half now, Djelal, and the balance when we escape—or a bullet, I give you fair warning, if you play us false." He thrust the notes into the Turk's fingers.

"It's after half-past twelve," he added. "We've no time to lose. The Selamlik takes place at one, precisely, and lasts but fifteen minutes. Stow that plunder away, Djelal, you beggar, and hump yourself. One minute! there's an outlet from the Yildiz Kiosk, same's from here?"

"Yes, my lord," said the Turk humbly, "with his majesty's launch always in waiting."

"You know the way?"

"Thoroughly, effendi. Come."

He was visibly impressed with Palliser's injunction to make haste. And rightly so—for the way proved long.

With infinite precaution, Djelal Bey led them from the room, down the darkened corridors of the vacant palace, through a labyrinth of gloomy chambers and narrow halls; finally bringing them up abruptly before a blank wall at the end of a passage, where he fumbled with the panels. They shot back, disclosing a black hole that slanted sharply down.

The Turk entered, snapped a switch-key on the wall, and the tunnel was brilliantly illuminated by long rows of electric lamps. Djelal signed to the two Americans to follow, and, as they entered, secured the entrance as it had been.

Then, for as many, it seemed, as ten stifling minutes, they sped the length of that subterranean hole; and ere they had reached the end, Djelal, by another switch, left them in darkness.

"It is necessary, my lord," he whispered to Palliser—and his whisper trembled. "Come."

Again the walls yawned to the Turk's expert fingers. The Americans stepped upon a floor of stone, into the vague obscurity of cellars whose darkness was but slightly moderated by a few straggling shafts of light.

Djelal's whisper was hardly more than a breath: *"Wait!"* He turned and, before Palliser or Bobbs could stay him, vanished into the shadows.

The two Americans looked at one another with startled eyes. Then, incontinently, both smiled. Palliser's smile, however, was faint, and tinged with anxiety.

"I can't say I'm tickled to death with the situation," he said. "If that scoundrel is planning to trap us, he seems to have succeeded neatly. See if you can do anything with that sliding door behind you, Bobbs." For himself, he fingered nervously the butt of the revolver concealed in the folds of his burnoose.

VI.

For who in his senses would trust a Turk? When, however, he reflected that Djelal was already too far committed to withdraw and save himself by betraying the conspirators, Bobbs, fumbling with the glassy, knobless face of the tunnel door, felt comforted. Nevertheless, he, too, was grateful for the weight of the revolver in the belt next his skin; it was comfortable to know that it was there.

Nor had he been mistaken in his estimate of the Turk. As suddenly as he had disappeared, Djelal Bey rounded a corner—noiselessly, in his slippered feet—and stood before them. Mutely he raised his hands imploringly to heaven, then dropped them listlessly by his sides.

"It is God's will," he said. "It is over. We can do nothing."

"What do you mean?" Palliser seized the man by the arm. "Is she dead?"

Djelal regarded him with reproachful eyes. "Lord, how shall I say?" he mumbled. "The girl is gone—whither, I know not."

"Gone!" Bobbs stepped quickly to the fellow's side. "Djelal!" he said, and inserted the muzzle of his revolver in the Turk's ear. "Djelal, where is the girl?"

The Turk's knees trembled beneath him. "If I could tell," he said, "I would. My lord can slay me. But"—and here he brightened—"a single shot will bring the palace about your ears; and how then shall you escape?"

"There's truth in that," assented Bobbs grimly; "but it needn't worry you, for you'll be dead yourself, as you say. Where is the girl?"

The Turk remained doggedly silent; and this time his manner carried conviction. Bobbs withdrew the revolver. "I beg your pardon," he said generously; "I believe you now."

"We may as well go, then!" interjected Palliser.

"Go!" echoed Bobbs. "What did we come here for? Djelal"—turning to their guide—"where is the sultan?"

"The Selamlik——" the Turk began the customary lie, and remembered. "The world," he said, with a fleeting smile, "believes his majesty is praying in the mosque. In truth, he is in his study."

"Where?"

"At the farther end of this cellar, effendi. His majesty fears to live aboveground—even as he fears to be in the dark."

"Guarded?" demanded Bobbs.

"By night and by day, effendi, a sentry stands at his door."

The Americans exchanged glances—Palliser's doubtful and questioning.

Bobbs reassured him with a nod.

"You would earn the other two hundred pounds, Djelal?"

Djelal folded his hands in resignation. "Whatever my lords desire, their servant will accomplish, if his is the strength."

"Then lead us to the sultan's study."

"Effendi!" Djelal turned upon Bobbs in abject remonstrance. "What would you?"

"I wish to see his majesty face to face, for a single moment."

"But the sentry, effendi?"

"You will attend to the sentry for us, Djelal. You are known to him?"

Djelal Bey made it plain that he was known to all the palace guards, by virtue of his exalted position.

"Then you will make a pretext of speaking to him on some matter of moment. While you are talking, do this to him."

And Bobbs illustrated vividly.

The Turk glanced appealingly from one face to the other. "It can be done," he assented reluctantly. "This is your will, my lords?"

"It is my will," asserted Bobbs, with some hauteur. At which Palliser, despite the seriousness of the situation, choked.

"It spells death. His majesty is an infallible shot with the revolver, and he is always armed. Kismet, effendi! It is your will. I go."

With a final, despairing shrug of his shoulders, the man turned upon his heel and led the way.

VII.

Outside a door of heavy oak, reenforced with steel, the solitary sentry, lounging on his rifle, at the sound of approaching footsteps saw fit suddenly to straighten up and assume a more soldierly bearing. Above his head a single electric lamp rendered him conspicuous in the long passage, where there was no other light. Its farther end, where the stairs came down from the upper, or ground floor, lay in deep shadow.

The sentry inclined his head, listening intently, somewhat puzzled by the grating sound that struck his ears, following the stoppage of the footsteps. Then, realizing that the noise was made by the unlocking of the door to the farther vaults, he nodded his satisfaction; by this subterranean route, from Dolmah Bagcheh, ministers of state were accustomed to arrive for secret consultations with their sovereign.

Straining his eyes, the sentry was able to discern the moving door, as it yawned back. Three figures entered, one after another, with the easily recognizable personality of Djelal Bey in the lead. Two of the figures halted, the Turk alone advancing toward the sentry.

"Whom have you there?" demanded the latter, grinning a welcome at the newcomer.

"Two giaours with messages for his majesty, Ahmed." Djelal drew craftily nearer. "I have instructions to announce them as soon as they arrive. His majesty is within?"

"His majesty is praying in the mosque, as you should know," returned Ahmed severely. Then, having rid his conscience of the burden of this time-hallowed palace jest, he added: "Another giaour is closeted with his majesty, Djelal Bey, and——"

The sentence ended in a gurgle, as, with a single abrupt movement, Djelal crooked his arm about the man's throat and jerked back his head. For an instant the fellow struggled, but ere he had time to kick out, or strike, Bobbs and Palliser were upon him, the one tackling his legs below the knees, the other pinioning the man's elbows to his sides.

With his free hand, Djelal thrust a wadded handkerchief into the gaping mouth; and then, releasing the throat, swiftly and silently forced a second handkerchief between the teeth and knotted its ends at the back of the man's head. The military belts and sash sufficed for the arms and legs. In Mr. Bobbs' favorite "two shakes of a dead lamb's tail," the sentry was bound, trussed like a fowl for the oven, and gently deposited by the side of the door.

Trembling, Bobbs laid a hand upon the knob. It was the crucial moment. Would it yield? If it did not, then all their labor had been in vain; and their lives, belike, would pay the forfeit. Silently he turned it and pressed inward.

The door flung open. Almost before Bobbs could clear the way, Palliser had swept past him, in one bound reaching the center of the room. And even as he stopped, the correspondent wheeled and presented a brace of revolvers toward the occupants. An instant later Bobbs was by his side, while Djelal, shaken by fear as by a heavy chill, shut the door, and, possessing himself of the helpless Ahmed's rifle, stood at attention.

So swiftly was it all accomplished that Bobbs was conscious of a sensation of unreality, as though he dreamed the affair. And yet, his eyes, pained with the intolerable glare of light that drenched the underground apartment, assured him of its actuality.

Fumbling with his camera, he looked up.

The room was rather long than wide, and the two intruders occupied almost its precise center. Behind them there was no one—nothing but chairs, ottomans, tabourets, and divans.

Before them, in the immediate foreground, was a large flat desk. Beyond it, in a swinging, swivel chair, was a short, squat shape of a man, whose black frock coat and linen collar proclaimed the European, whose fez unmistakably marked its wearer for a Mohammedan, and whose hooked nose,

full, weak lips, and small, cruel eyes, deeply pouched, betrayed him unmistakably for Abdul Hamid the Second.

To his right, easily enough seated in a leather-covered lounge chair, was a second man, of whose nationality likewise there could be no possible doubt. By his blue, cold eyes, by his ruddy cheeks, by his light hair, his rigid shoulders, slim waist, and pigeon chest—he was a German of the Germans.

But a third figure, and one unexpected, caught the eye of Mr. Bobbs. And this was a woman. At sight of her a flush of triumph colored his thoughts, for, though never before had he seen her, he recognized on the instant that here, in this room, was the solution to the mystery of the Greek girl's disappearance. She had been brought here to be questioned by the sultan, in the presence of the representative of Kaiser Wilhelm.

She stood a bit to one side, leaning against the wall of the room and trembling with what appeared to be deathly terror. The uniform of the seraglio, for some unaccountable reason, in her case had been exchanged for the national costume of the Greeks. Her face was bare—and it was ghastly pale—and her long hair hung free upon her shoulders.

Her attire was torn and stained, discolored, Bobbs thought, with the sweat of the dungeon from which she had been brought; but even so, in its vivid gold and red and white and blue she figured incongruously in that strange place.

Of the three whom the Americans had surprised, perhaps the girl was the first to recognize the nature of the happening, to realize that this spelled freedom and life and air for her who had abandoned hope. With a little, tremulous cry she stumbled toward Palliser, her hands unconsciously joining in entreaty.

But the sultan was hardly less quick. Half out of his chair, he recovered swiftly and again sat down, his hand moving toward the revolver that gleamed naked on the desk's top.

Palliser gave him pause. "Have a care, your majesty!" he cried, in French. "If you touch that weapon, I fire. And you, monsieur"—to the German—"I mean you, you, Count Paul von Sturm—sit still, you fool, or on my honor I'll make you undergo that threatened surgical operation!"

Excited as he was, Bobbs could not forbear a chuckle. "Get the woman away," he said, in an aside. "Get her away, I say!"

"The picture?" demanded Palliser, without turning his head.

"Is taken," replied Bobbs, stowing the camera away beneath his burnoose.

"Then," ordered Palliser, "take the woman to the door, will you? Remove the key and put it in the outside lock, ready to turn when I get out."

He had spoken in English, but the Greek girl's sharpened senses had gathered the import of his words, it seemed, from their very intonation. She was at the door as soon as Bobbs.

The American grasped her tightly by the wrist. "Steady, there!" he told her, in a commanding undertone. For she was plainly maddened to the verge of breakdown. "Hold up, my dear. You're all right. We'll get you away. Just hold yourself in."

He swung open the door, removing the key from the inside as he did so. Djelal, surmising the situation on the instant—and he had need to be quick-witted—took charge of the woman, while Bobbs inserted the key in the outer hole.

"Ready, Palliser!" he cried.

"Sit still, messieurs!" cautioned the correspondent, beginning to retreat, without, however, turning his face or the muzzles of his guns from the enemy. He backed slowly across the threshold, and—*"Now!"* he whispered tensely.

Bobbs slammed the door, turned the key, and removed it. As he did so a bullet smashed through the panels. Already his majesty the sultan had opened fire.

The two Americans swung about; Djelal and the girl were just vanishing through the doorway to the vaults.

Bobbs and Palliser were scarcely behind them. As the Turk handed the girl again into Bobbs' care, and, turning, locked the second barrier, a furious clamor of bells rang through the palace.

Djelal Bey shuddered. "We have not a second to spare," he whispered. "That is the signal of treachery; when that sounds, every entrance and exit of the palace is closed. Come!"

He started running through the darkness, finding his way through the maze of passages as much by the blind intuition of terror as by knowledge of the place; as he said, he had no time to make mistakes. And with him more than with the Americans, there was deep intimacy with the sultan's methods of punishment to spur him to his quickest.

Overhead the bells whirred and clanged ceaselessly their sinister alarm. The three—Bobbs, Palliser, and the woman—sped breathlessly in the Turk's wake, and, ere they realized it, had won to momentary safety.

For abruptly Djelal Bey paused and, flattening himself against the walls of the passage, permitted them to pass him. As they ran onward, Bobbs heard the metallic clang of steel bars falling into place, and understood that at last they were in the sultan's private outlet to the Bosporus.

A moment later the Turk, running swiftly for all his greater age and looser mode of life, brushed past him and again took the lead.

In this manner, and in darkness of the blackest, they ran on for what seemed an eternity to Bobbs, yet which could not have been more than eight or nine minutes. In the end they stumbled, winded and all but spent, out upon the rocky floor of a little grotto, through the low entrance of which penetrated a faint, greenish light.

The floor itself was no more than four feet in width, ending abruptly in a pool of water, wherein floated, secured by fastening of the slightest, a small motor-boat.

Into this craft Djelal threw himself, to fall in a heap in the stern and lie panting and calling upon Allah. At sight of it, Palliser, on the other hand, stopped short. "What good's that to us?" he cried. "Can you run the thing, Bobbs?"

"Reckon so," said Mr. Bobbs, in a sorely needed breath. "Get in and cast off. You can steer, can't you? I'll take the engines; I was in a mix-up with a motor-boat off Tangier last summer," he proceeded between gasps, "and this shouldn't differ materially from any other."

"If it does, I suppose we're goners," said Palliser reflectively. "Anyhow, they'll fire on us from the banks as we get out."

The Turk moaned in a blood-curdling fashion. "Shut up, you old fool!" said Mr. Palliser disrespectfully. "If you don't, I'll come over and sit on that rotten old headpiece of yours. My dear"—to the Greek—"make yourself entirely at home and as small as convenient. We're going to run the gantlet for fair. Bobbs"—as the latter struck a match—"how goes it?"

Bobbs, bending over the engines, grunted a response that was drowned by a sudden snort and splutter. A thrill ran through the power-boat, and the pistons in the cylinders began to slide slowly to and fro.

"Ready there at the wheel?"

"Ready," replied Palliser.

"Heads down, then. Here goes!"

Bobbs cast off the cables and again turned to the engines. "Uncommon thoughtful of his majesty, you know, to keep this in such splendid shape for us," he mumbled. The little craft shivered violently, and then, with a crescendo whine, shot from the entrance to the grotto, far out upon the blue bosom of the Bosporus, like a bullet from a gun.

The four refugees crouched low, momentarily expecting a storm of shot to burst about their devoted heads. But nothing of the sort happened. In a twinkling the boat was a hundred, two hundred, three, five hundred yards from shore, and gathering impetus with every turn of the screw.

Half blinded at first by the sudden

transition from gloom to broad daylight, Palliser at length recovered, and, narrowly avoiding collision with a caique, swung the power-boat in a long, smooth, and graceful curve to the middle of the straits.

Turning, Bobbs glanced back. As nearly as he could judge, they had left the grotto somewhere below Bechic Tash—midway between the Dolmah Bagcheh and Cheragan palaces. Half a mile inland the white walls of Yildiz Kiosk glared in the immaculate fire of the afternoon sunlight. He fancied that in the crowd and troops massed between it and the Hamidieh Mosque he could discern indications of excitement and confusion.

And perhaps he could. For, as he looked, Palliser, with a cry, drew his attention ahead.

Immediately before them, with the black smoke pouring from her funnels, a low lying steamer yacht seemed poised motionless on the waters. She showed no colors, but from her taffrail fluttered a banner of purest white. "That's our boat," said Mr. Palliser calmly. "Pretty sight, isn't she?" And, bearing down on the wheel, he ran the motor-boat alongside.

As they ascended the gangway to the deck a terrific salvo of cannonading shook the firmament. Bobbs, the last to leave the power-boat, paused with his feet on the upper grating. Somebody was smiling down upon him from the deck; somebody in a blue coat and brass buttons.

"What the devil!" demanded Mr. Bobbs. "They're not firing a salute in *our* honor, are they?"

"Hardly." The officer spoke in French. "*That,*" said he, "is the allied fleet of the Powers, just arrived, firing a royal salute in honor of his Most Imperial Majesty, Abdul Hamid the Second."

"Oh!" said Mr. Bobbs non-committally. "And," he added to himself, "that explains why we got off with a whole skin. The arrival of the fleet must have been announced just about the time we struck that everlasting black hole back there."

And he descended to the saloon, where Palliser was crying with a loud voice for brandy and soda and cigarettes—assuming, of course, the regal and lordly manner of one who knows he is, as Bobbs had it, "the whole show." And he fell upon Mr. Palliser and smote him hip and thigh, even as he had promised.

Now, this is the truth about the Macedonian crisis, of which you read in the papers, perhaps as much as a year ago. If any there be that doubt, Mr. Bobbs refers them to the files of *Bannister's Weekly,* in which, in due course of time, there appeared the photograph of the German Minister of Foreign Affairs, Count Paul von Sturm, with his Imperial Majesty, Abd ul-Hamid Khan II., in close confabulation in the underground study of the latter, at a time when the one was supposed to be undergoing a serious operation on his estates, near Berlin, and when the other was—by proxy—glorifying Allah in the mosque.

The son of a woman slave into whose hands are committed the destinies of the Ottoman Empire has weathered many a diplomatic crisis. It is commonly reported that he welcomes a naval demonstration as a relief from the ennui to which he is a prey.

But it is manifestly a fool's part to continue to play a waiting game, especially when your opponents hold a trump-card such as the photograph hereinabove mentioned. And the sultan is an adept in the art of gracefully yielding at the last moment—and then pretending that he really meant to yield all along.

The "Long X" Man

By Bertrand W. Sinclair

Author of "The Day of the Dog," Etc.

In the sparsely settled sections of the far West a man is more apt to be taken on faith, without too close inquiry as to his antecedents, than in the great cities of the country, especially in the supercivilized East. This sometimes results in a rude awakening, as in Mr. Sinclair's story

WE never saw Eldridge at the Harwood Ranch until Stella and her mother came down for the summer. But some mutual friend presented him in Malta, and after that he began to turn up at the ranch with unexpected frequency.

A twisted ankle and some caved-in ribs, that I got out of a bronco mix-up, kept me crippling about home the best part of the summer, and gave me plenty of leisure to watch an interesting little drama. The man that could be around Stella Harwood and not be interested—well, I'd say there was something wrong with him. And, cow-punchers being as clanny as Highland Scots, when my friend, Tom Garrett, got into the game I was bound to be concerned.

It was an even thing for a while. Stella's infernal coquetry kept both of them hot-foot after her. I think she really cared for Tom, but she couldn't resist the temptation to play the game—it's a trouble-breeding gift that most pretty women have, this juggling with a man's feelings, and I suppose they can't help it.

But after a little there came a sort of a change; the old lady had taken a hand, and somehow after that Tom didn't seem to be as welcome at the Harwoods' as he had been.

How she managed it is not for me to say. There are plenty of ways an experienced woman can influence a girl; and Mrs. Harwood wasn't a woman you could overlook anywhere. She had a personality that carried everything before her when she had an object in view.

Mr. John Eldridge, with his far-flung acres and his big herds, looked good to her as a son-in-law, and she backed his suit with all her power. Against a combination like that what could a man do, especially when the girl was as changeable in her moods as the smoke of a camp-fire?

Things went this way for a while. Tom came less and less to the Harwoods', while Eldridge's gray nag dozed regularly at their hitching-rack far into the summer evenings.

By August I'd got so I could walk a little and ride a gentle horse. I'd go out and lope around the country, just to break the monotony of the lazy days at the ranch. Sometimes Stella came along, but generally I was alone, and it was one of my solitary jaunts the day I spied Tom Garrett on the out-trail from Malta.

He sat his horse in the listless, droopy fashion a cow-puncher never drops into unless he's packing a mighty big load of trouble. You don't have to be a mind-reader to know that a man is worried when he slouches with a good horse under him. From my roost on a pinnacle I hailed him, and he waited.

By the time I got to him he had pulled himself together, and met me with a smile; but the smile was mechanical, and his eyes held the somber look of a man in pain.

Though I had not seen him in ten

days, and had plenty of things to talk about, there was an atmosphere that shut my mouth. In a mile I don't think we spoke a dozen words. Then, where his road forked from the main trail, he checked his horse, drew a Helena paper from his pocket, and handed it to me.

"Down low in the second column," he said abruptly. "What do you think of it?"

I read; and while it wasn't entirely unexpected, it was rather a surprise, coming that way. It was the announcement—inspired, I suppose, by Mrs. Harwood—of the engagement of Stella to Eldridge.

"Well," I said, "they've kept it dark at the ranch. This is the first I've heard of it." I wanted to say more, but I couldn't; Tom Garrett wasn't the sort of man that takes kindly to sympathy.

He rested his hands on the saddle-horn, staring moodily at the ground.

"I don't like it," he finally said hesitatingly. "You know I hoped it would turn out different—but that doesn't matter now. What I mean is that Stella's going to get the worst of the deal. Eldridge hasn't it in him to make any woman happy. And if she had been let alone she would have seen it. I suppose, though"—bitterly—"the Harwood ranches and the P Cross looks like a strong combination to her mother."

"Go easy, Tom," I remonstrated; "she's my aunt, you know. Besides, they're not married yet. Do you know anything about Eldridge?"

"No," he reluctantly admitted. "No more than you do—that he dropped down here, from God knows where, a year ago. He spends plenty of money, and he's in a fair way to become a cattle king. I'm only giving you my impression of him—he sets my teeth on edge."

"Why don't you come and see us oftener? 'Faint heart,' you know," I rallied him.

"Perhaps you haven't observed the refrigeratorlike air that envelops my hostess when I do come," he answered sarcastically.

I was silent. My aunt's reception of Tom had, of late, grown decidedly frosty. And I partly shared Tom's feeling, though to all appearances Eldridge was a gentleman—and a rather good-looking, agreeable one at that. If Stella really preferred him to the clean-souled, big-hearted man beside me, why, she was her own mistress.

It was hardly a square deal, though, I thought, for my aunt to use her influence in any man's favor—a girl isn't always dead sure of what she wants; and there's generally the devil to pay when she discovers that she's been hoodwinked into tying up to the wrong man.

"Well, I must be traveling," Tom said. "I've some stock to ship, and, seeing I'm no cattle king, I can't afford to pass up business. *Adios.*" And he was gone, the pattering heels of his horse kicking up little white fluffs of dust among the clumps of sage and greasewood.

Here enters the Long X man.

When Tom left me I turned homeward across the hills. Between me and the ranch stretched a jagged ridge, a far-reaching arm of the mountain range that lay all purple-splotched against the western sky. Boulder-strewn it was and patched with groves of scrubby pine.

On top of this I rode around a cluster of trees, the footfalls of my horse deadened by a thick carpet of pine-needles, and came suddenly upon a rider in the edge of the scrub.

He leaned over the horn of his saddle, looking intently down on the trail that ran below. I was on the point of hailing him, when he straightened up and spoke.

"The darned measly skunk!"

I was within thirty feet of him, near enough to hear distinctly; the tone was vibrant with contempt. What he meant I do not know, for just then he glanced over his shoulder.

"Hello!" I was about to say, but the range password died in my mouth—he wheeled his horse and dived into the brush like a scared rabbit.

I whipped up, wondering, and got

to where he had stood, in time to see the tail of his horse flick behind a grove of pines two hundred yards down the slope.

I was tempted to follow, but refrained; it isn't always healthy to crowd a man who dodges you in the Montana hills. So I kept on my way to the ranch, slightly curious concerning the stranger who had shown such a sincere reluctance for my company.

On the door-step I met John Eldridge. Stella and her mother had gone out driving, one of the men told us, so we sat down on the veranda dropping into desultory talk. I spoke of the queer action of the man on the ridge. Eldridge listened with an interest the subject hardly deserved, I thought. And more than once thereafter his glance wandered furtively to the frowning line of hills.

This was on a Tuesday. On Wednesday a cow-puncher from Tom Garrett's place hailed me at the lower end of our horse pasture, big with news.

"Say! They had a touch uh high life at the P Cross, last night," he called across the fence. "Did yuh hear?"

"No," I made answer, riding nearer. "What happened?"

Twisting a cigarette, he sat sideways in his saddle, and told his tale with glee.

"A couple uh fellers rode t' the Cross last night, an' one of 'em went in t' see the head mogul. He hadn't more'n got inside when hell breaks loose. Eldridge was there with the goods. They had a little old duello all t' themselves, but he got the jasper, all right. The other feller hit the trail, and there's a posse after him now. They identified the one 'twas killed—he's wanted in New Mexico. An' they say the other feller's the Long X man—you've heard uh him."

I had. The Long X man had made himself notorious in the land, even to the extent of being "specialed" in the Sunday papers. I owned to a sneaking admiration for his spectacular daring, and he had my sympathy, for there was a price on his head.

"Eldridge thinks they meant t' hold him up," he said, in answer to my guess at their motive. "He had quite a bit uh money in the house, an' he thinks they was after it." Then, having finished his cigarette and his story, he gathered up his reins and rode away.

Eldridge brought the details in person that afternoon, and the women fussed over his hurt—a slight one; one bullet had scored his forearm. And from then on he was a hero. But he did not tell them that he had added one thousand dollars to the price already offered for a man's body, dead or alive. He had done so, and the sheriff, his forces swelled by the head-hunters, whose fingers itched for blood-money, nosed keenly the range for trace of the Long X man.

Something went wrong with my aunt's plans for the summer shortly after that. She must go back to Helena, she declared; and before going she felt called upon to give some sort of entertainment to the neighborhood at large—her way of celebrating victory, I suppose. Victory being the capture of an eligible cattle king for her daughter. (Eldridge carried the honors, it seemed to me.)

"A masquerade—that's the thing!" Stella proposed, when her mother owned herself nonplused for a choice of merrymaking. And a masquerade it was. They kept two cowboys on the jump for three days, delivering invitations. In the range country one must ride afar to bid guests to a feast.

I hadn't any particular business at the P Cross the day before the masquerade, but, happening to stray near there, I thought it wouldn't be more than decent to drop in on Eldridge, seeing that he was about to become my relative by marriage—the wedding was set for Thanksgiving.

There was no enclosure about the house; the prairie rolled up to the very door-step. So I dismounted at the old-fashioned gallery, and a cow-puncher lounging there told me Eldridge was within.

I passed through one empty room, and in the next found him in a big chair drawn up to a library table, head on his folded arms, asleep. A soft walker at

any time, my weak ankle constrained me to step lightly, and the floors were carpeted. He did not waken until I laid my hand on his shoulder and called him by name.

He straightened in his chair with a snarl—that is the only way I can describe it—and his hand flashed to a pearl-handled six-shooter peeping above the waistband of his trousers.

It passed while one could snap his fingers, and he was his own genial self again; but if ever a naked soul shone in the eyes of man, his did in that infinitesimal fraction of time. It was the glare of a trapped wolf at a man with a club.

"Oh, how d'ye do, Billy?" he said, and his tone was of relief, though he tried to hide it. "By Jove!" he went on apologetically, "I was startled. I was having the very devil of a dream when you woke me."

"Moral: don't sleep in the daytime," I returned lightly; and the matter dropped. But I got away from there as soon as I could without absolutely bolting. I was uncomfortable. If ever an enemy of mine looks at me as Eldridge did in that brief instant, I shall shoot first and argue afterward.

And as though the day was still pregnant with mystery, a mile beyond the P Cross I once more came upon my friend of the Harwood ridge. This time he was on the alert, for I caught a mere glimpse of him as he vanished. But the look of him and his horse was wonderfully clear in my memory, and I knew it was the same.

Masquerade night came with a black gathering of clouds in the southwest. I was out seeing that the horses of our guests were being cared for, when Tom Garrett came.

I was glad to see him, for I had doubted if he would come, even when invited; my aunt, having gained her point, was now disposed to be cordial to Tom. But he wasn't the sort to whine or hold a grudge, so he came—cheerfully, too.

All our spare chambers had been converted into dressing-rooms for the swarm of guests, so I haled Tom into my den in one wing, to have a chat and a smoke before meeting the folks.

"By the way," he said, as we sat there, "the Long X man is in a fair way to lose his scalp to-night."

My thoughts flew to the watcher on the hills. "How so?" I asked abruptly.

"I met a deputy scurrying across country as I came up," Tom told me. "Some of the fellows whose fingers itch for the reward were scouting the hills back of the P Cross yesterday. This morning they jumped up a stranger who answers the description to a dot.

"He stood them off, crippling a horse or two—the regular style of the Long X man. But they got more help and followed him, cornering him at an old 'dobe cabin near the river—his horse gave out. He's surrounded. They're going to starve him out, if they can't get him any other way. Poor devil!"

"He's an outlaw, of course, and I suppose he has it coming to him," I said; "but all the same it's tough to be hunted like a wild beast."

In a little while the dance was in full swing. Outside, it seemed as if the elements frowned on the glittering lights and the maze of gay figures that kept time with laughter and merry badinage to the sweet lilt of the violins.

Big rain-drops plashed against wall and window, and at rare intervals zig-zag streaks of lightning silently ripped their way through the sullen clouds.

It was nearing midnight, the hour of unmasking, when I, grown rather weary of the gaiety my lameness debarred me from fully enjoying, sought for a quiet place to smoke a cigarette.

I slipped into a little lounging-room off the library, a cozy place with a huge bay window and a glass-paneled door opening on the veranda. The window was banked with cushions and draped with heavy portières, behind which I had barely seated myself when Stella came quietly in.

She quickly discovered my hiding-place, and, sinking down beside me, demanded to know why I had deserted.

"Just to have a peaceable smoke," I replied. "Tired?"

"Certainly not," she declared, "but I saw you stealing away, and got curious. Isn't it a success, though, for this out-of-the-way place?"

"It is," I agreed. "Has any one recognized you?" Some freak had prompted Stella to dress as a nun, and not even her mother knew what was to be her costume. But I had smuggled the material for her, and so was let into the secret.

"Not a soul, except—except——" she faltered there.

"Eldridge, I suppose," I ventured.

"No. Tom Garrett," she exploded. "However do you suppose *he* knew?"

"Love's intuition, of course," I shot at her.

She turned her face to the window a moment. That was foolish, for I could not see her face—in the gloom I could barely distinguish her eyes gleaming through the slits in her white mask.

"Billy," she said presently, ignoring altogether my last remark, "have you noticed anything strange about Mr. Eldridge lately? He—he seems worried—and nervous. He"—she dropped her face in her hands and whispered—"he frightened me the other day. I stole up behind him when he was reading. He sprang up—and, oh, Billy! such a look he gave me! It was—awful!"

I said nothing for a second. I was thinking of Eldridge's face when I woke him the day before. If he looked at *her* in that fashion——

"Chuck him over," I said earnestly. "Chuck him over. If you're getting afraid of him now, how will it be when you are married?"

"For shame!" she said quickly. "I've given my promise. Should I break it just because"—scornfully—"like a silly old Scotch wife, 'I ha'e ma doots?'"

Lord preserve me from the flagrant inconsistency of a marriageable maid! She was angry because I had told her what I'm willing to bet she wanted to hear.

I don't know what fool thing I might have said next, but just then the door opened and two maskers came in out of the library. They glanced about the room hastily. In the soft glow of the shaded lamp, and behind the thick portières, we could not be seen. I would have arisen, but Stella gripped me tightly by the arm, so I sat still.

One, dressed in the gay costume of an Elizabethan courtier, was Eldridge, I knew—I had spotted him early in the evening. The other, in a plain black domino, I could not place.

"Well," said Eldridge softly, "what is it?"

"Listen," said he of the domino, "and don't you make a crooked move. You know *me!*"

Eldridge shrank back at the words. I could not see his face, of course, but his attitude spelled consternation.

"You darned measly skunk!" *I* started at that. The man in black had spoken softly, but there was no mistaking the words—or the tone; thin, clear, vibrant with contempt. It was my persistently dodging friend of the ridges—the Long X man!

"You're slippery, all right"—he lowered his voice, and the sentences came tumbling in their haste—"but you're at the end of your rope. You thought I'd be brought in feet first, eh? You'd give a thousand dollars for my carcass! Won't your dogs howl in the morning, though, when they find that cabin empty? Oh, I was a fool to send Hippy in to talk to you! That was one mistake—I'll make no more. You get just one more chance."

"What do you want?" muttered Eldridge.

"You know what I want, damn you!" the Long X man snapped at him. "Money! My money—the coin you're buying respectability—and a wife—with." Stella's fingers shut down on my arm like pincers. "Listen to me. I want my share of that S. P. job—the sixty thousand you sneaked away with. I give you thirty days to get it to the old cache—Tony's in Albuquerque. If you don't—do you savvy?—I post your history to the woman you're going to marry, and your whereabouts to the Wells Fargo Express. I'll learn you to welch on a partner, you sneak! That's all. I'm not taking any more chances with *you*."

"I'll do it," Eldridge mumbled, "if you'll give me a little more time."

"That's my last word—thirty days," the Long X man answered.

They faced each other in the dim light for a silent instant, Eldridge drooping like a withered plant, the other fearlessly erect. Then Eldridge dodged back, and there was a glitter in his hand as it came to a level with his shoulder. But the Long X man was on his guard, and two pistols cracked in that tiny room with the roar of Krupp guns. Then—darkness, and the slam of a door.

I don't know why, after the first stunned moment of inaction, I threw up a window and leaped outside, to stand bareheaded in the driving rain.

There was a babel of exclamation inside, but above it I could dimly hear the quick beat of hoofs on the sodden earth. For an instant, as a flare of lightning opened a brilliant door in the black wall of the storm, I saw him leaning low on the neck of his flying horse, his black domino a pirate flag whipped by the wind. I waved my hand, and with that the brilliant door snapped shut, and I saw the Long X man no more.

Mentally wishing him Godspeed, outlaw though he was, I went into the house, to find our shocked guests craning their necks to get sight of the gaudy heap on the floor, and Stella sobbing comfortably in Tom Garrett's arms.

FORTUNE-MAKING IN FIVE MINUTES

NOTHING in real life is more startling than the way in which fortune, sought or unsought, will suddenly smile upon an individual, and then with equal suddenness withdraw her favors. Such cases, of course, are to be seen by scores at gambling resorts like Monte Carlo. Quite recently a young Austrian officer won a hundred and fifteen thousand dollars at the tables in five days and lost every sou of it on the sixth.

The vicissitudes of fortune were never more vividly illustrated than by the evidence given recently in a bankruptcy case in the Sydney Court.

The bankrupt, a mining engineer, had won and lost no fewer than six fortunes in his lifetime. Once he made thirty-five thousand dollars in a single week by buying a mine and selling it again. So soon as he was paid the money he went to Wyoming and invested it, and some fifteen thousand besides, in purchasing an interest in another—a copper—mine. Before night came news that the copper lode had suddenly "pinched out." The investors were beggared.

The story of James Addison Reavis is of a different type. He spent more than twenty years in building up a fictitious claim to twelve million five hundred thousand acres of land in Mexico and Arizona. This enormous territory was originally granted to Don Miguel, a grandee of his court, by Philip V. of Spain, and it still belonged to his heir, if one could be found.

Reavis invented one in the shape of a beautiful Mexican girl. Fortune smiled upon him. The great Peralta claim was brought before the United States courts. John Mackay, the millionaire, financed it. A verdict was given for the girl, who was by this time Reavis' wife. Reavis was receiving the congratulations of his friends on his enormous inheritance when a telegram was handed in. It contained the news that a second examination had proved that the original deed of gift to Don Miguel was a forgery. The verdict was revoked, Reavis was tried, and sent to prison for a long term.

The Rockspur Nine

A STORY FOR OUR YOUNGER READERS

By Burt L. Standish

SYNOPSIS OF CHAPTERS PREVIOUSLY PUBLISHED.

During a match game to decide the championship between the rival baseball nines of Rockspur and Highland, John Smith, a Rockspur player, makes two misplays, thereby causing his side to lose the game. He has long been considered a Jonah by the other boys, and they are unsparing in their denunciations. Robert Linton, the son of one of the magnates of the town, makes a slurring remark about John's father, and when John hotly retaliates, Linton strikes him. On the spur of the moment John returns the blow, then remembers that he has promised his mother never to fight, and he refuses to do so, though Linton hits him repeatedly. The other boys look on him as a coward in consequence, and while Agnes Mayfair and her brother show him some kindness, he is pretty generally ostracized by the young people of the town. John determines that he will prove that he does amount to something, and that he can play baseball, and with this in mind he resolves to get Mart Powers, a retired baseball pitcher living in Rockspur, to coach him.

CHAPTER VII.

MAKING ARRANGEMENTS WITH POWERS.

DESPITE the fact that it was necessary for him to obtain his rest in the daytime, Mr. Smith scarcely ever failed to attend church, and invariably he was accompanied by his wife and son.

On this Sunday, however, John asked permission to remain at home, not wishing to show his disfigured face in church; and his mother, quick to understand his feelings in this matter at least, gave her consent.

That settled it, as Mr. Smith seldom thought of disagreeing with his wife in anything.

When his father and mother, dressed in their shabby Sunday best, had departed at the ringing of the second bell, John began to grow restless and eager to do something. He glanced at his face in a mirror, and wondered if he would attract much attention if seen on the streets of Lobsterville.

"I'd like to see Mart Powers to-day, and find out if he will help me," he muttered, walking up and down the dining-room. "I wonder if it would be wrong. I don't see why. Powers doesn't go to church, and I suppose I'd be sure to find him at Mrs. Skinner's."

Mrs. Skinner kept a boarding-house for the laborers who worked in the two mills, and Powers, being unmarried, stopped there.

John's conscience troubled him somewhat when he thought of attending to such a matter on Sunday, but his impatience got the best of him; and he locked up the house, ran across the road, and made a short cut for Mrs. Skinner's.

Lobsterville had an unfenced baseball-ground in the vicinity of the mills, and, coming in sight of it, John saw some young men batting flies there, despite that it was Sunday. He kept as far away as possible, and hurried straight to Mrs. Skinner's house.

There, however, he was informed that Mr. Powers was out.

"I guess ye'll find him up to the ball-ground," said the mistress of the boarding-house. "I'm ashamed to say he goes there 'most ev'ry Sunday. I

This story began in the July issue, which can be obtained through any newsdealer. Price, ten cents.

don't countenance it, but I can't govern my boarders when they're out of the house. I don't git no time to go to church myself, but I think ev'rybody who kin go should do so once a week, anyhow. Hev you been fightin', Johnny Smith?"

"No," answered John, turning away abruptly. "Thank you, Mrs. Skinner."

John hesitated about going over to the ball-ground, but his eagerness finally carried him in that direction.

As he approached, he saw that Dennis Murphy was among the lads who were catching flies, which Powers himself was batting. Dennis was the only member of the Rockspur Academy Club who did not attend the academy, and he was not a regular player on the team, having been taken on to fill a vacancy. His father was a laborer in the Upper Mill.

Dennis saw John, and, to the surprise of the latter, came over to him at once.

"Is it yersilf Oi see, Shmith?" he grinned good-naturedly. "An' how do yez foind yersilf this marnin'?"

"Very well, thank you, Dennis," said John awkwardly.

"It's a beautiful oie ye have, me lad," declared the Irish youth. "An' th' face av yez looks loike a map av County Cork. Whoy did yez ivver kape shtill an' let thot spalpane be afther choppin' ye up loike thot?"

"Because I never fight."

"Is thot it? Well, ye'll have to get over it, me b'y. Ye'll foind ye'll have to foight av ye get along in this worruld at all, at all. Nivver a blessed soul has respict fer a felly that kapes shtill an' lets another felly joomp on him."

"But I have promised my mother that I will not fight, and I can't break my word to her."

Dennis gave his mug a queer twist.

"An' do yez remimber thot when yez get a crack in th' oie?"

"Yes."

"Well, it's plain ye've not got Oirish blood in yez. An' Oi want to tell yez that ye'll nivver win th' respict av anybody till ye shtand up loike a man an' foight yer inemies. Phwat are yez doin' over here to-day? Oi thought yez always wint to church?"

"I could not go to-day—with this face. I came over to see Mr. Powers. I want to speak with him."

"All roight," said Dennis. "Oi'll tell him."

He did so, but Martin Powers took his time about giving John any attention. In fact, John had begun to feel that Powers meant to ignore him, when Mart gave his bat to Dennis and nodded to the waiting lad to approach.

"What do you want?" asked Powers, as John came near.

"I want to speak to you privately," was the answer, and John appeared rather frightened.

Powers stepped aside, and the boy followed. Having pulled on his coat, the man sat down on a bench made by placing the ends of an old plank on two boxes. John stood before him, wondering how to begin.

"Sit down," invited Powers, motioning to a place beside him on the plank. "Now, what is it?"

"I—I want to play baseball," blurted John.

The man grunted. "Then why don't ye play it?" he asked.

"I've tried it," confessed the boy, "but I've made a failure of it."

"I wouldn't wonder," said Mart, giving his slender, awkward figure a somewhat contemptuous survey.

"But I'm going to make a success of it, if I live," the lad hurried on, not heeding that look. "I have made up my mind to that, and I'll stick to it till I succeed."

"Well," said Powers, "you talk all right; but what have I got to do with it?"

"I want you to help me. I know you were a great pitcher once, and I think you can help me."

Powers was flattered somewhat.

"Well, I did make a rep. at twirling," he admitted. "I had a drop ball that the best of 'em couldn't do anything with."

"I want to learn to pitch," said John.

This caused Powers to look him over

once more, ending by a discouraging shake of his head.

"I'm afraid you ain't put up right to do it," he said. "Did you ever try?"

"Never had a chance. But I can throw a curve sometimes."

"Curves ain't everything in pitchin', youngster. You've got to have speed, control, judgment, a cool head, and an arm like iron. I don't believe you've got any of them things."

This was not at all encouraging, but the boy was persistent.

"I have speed, for I can throw a hot ball to catch. Can't I develop the other things by practise?"

"Judgment and a cool head should come natural. You ain't got no kind of an arm. I think you'd better give up the idea of bein' a pitcher."

"I will not give it up! I am going to try it, and I want you to help me."

"I ain't got time to spend on such poor material."

"But I'll pay you!" exclaimed John desperately. "I don't want you to do it for nothing. If you'll give me an hour's lesson every night, I'll pay you fifty cents a lesson, and I've got nine dollars to pay you with."

This made an immediate difference with Mr. Powers. Fifty cents each night for an hour's work after his day's labor was over was not to be despised, for it meant an extra revenue of three dollars a week as long as the nine dollars lasted, or till the boy became discouraged.

"Well," said Mart, "I dunno but I can afford to take hold and see what I can do with you at that rate. There may be more in you than I think. When do you want to begin?"

"To-morrow night."

"Why not take your first lesson to-day? I've got plenty of time, and——"

"It's Sunday; I can't do it to-day. I don't suppose I ought to have made a bargain with you to-day, but I just couldn't wait. I'll be ready to-morrow night after supper."

"All right," said Powers, rising. "Just come over to the boarding-house."

For the third time he took a survey of John.

"Legs too thin, arms lack muscle, neck too narrow at the base, and lungs undeveloped," he muttered aloud. "Boy, you need a good course of trainin'. If you're bound to become a first-class ball-player, you'll have to have it."

"All right," said John. "All I want is somebody to tell me what to do; I'll do it."

"It's something you'll have to stick to, youngster."

"I'll stick to it," declared John grimly.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE CUP OF BITTERNESS.

John came late to school the following morning, arriving barely in time to take his seat in the lower room before the first recitation was called. He knew he was regarded curiously by the scholars when he entered, and he kept his eyes cast down, feeling his cheeks burning. As soon as possible after being seated, he opened a book and fastened his eyes on it.

Rockspur Academy was a coeducational establishment—open to those of both sexes who were sufficiently far advanced to pass the rather rigid entrance examination. A tuition fee was required only from those students who did not live in town.

Both Dora Deland and Agnes Mayfair sat on the girls' side in the lower room, and John knew well enough that they would look at him. He had been enabled to hide the bruises on his face in the darkness Saturday night, but now all could see the marks of his humiliation.

The time till intermission passed slowly enough. Before intermission John had but one recitation, and while he recited he was aware that Miss Wilton, the assistant instructor, looked closely at his face.

At intermission Miss Wilton came directly to him. He tried to avoid her and slip out of the room, but she called his name, and he stopped, cap in hand, looking painfully awkward and confused.

"John," she said, "the marks on your face seem to indicate that you have had an encounter of some sort."

He was silent.

"Did it occur with one of the academy scholars?" she asked.

He nodded, nervously slapping his cap against his leg, and swaying from side to side, unable to stand still.

"I am very sorry, John, that you should get into a fight," said Miss Wilton reprovingly.

"I didn't get into a fight, Miss Wilton," the boy hastened to say. "I don't fight; never did in my life. My mother"—he reddened still more—"doesn't believe in fighting, and she's made me promise not to."

Some of the scholars were near enough to hear his words, and they tittered, causing the assistant instructor to give them a reproving look.

"Then how did you come to have those scars?" asked Miss Wilton kindly, although it seemed to John that there was something like pity for his weakness in her voice and manner, which hurt fully as much as contempt.

"Why, I had some words with a fellow," he explained, "and he struck me. Before I could think, I struck back; but I didn't do anything more, only tried to keep him from hitting me."

"You say it was a scholar here? Don't you wish to make a complaint against him?"

"No. It didn't happen anywhere around the academy, and I wouldn't make a complaint, anyhow."

She looked at him in surprise, then said: "Very well," and turned away.

John went out feeling decidedly uncomfortable, for he realized that Miss Wilton had fancied he was afraid to make a complaint against his assailant.

"She thinks I'm so scared of him that I don't dare say a word," he thought. "Everybody believes me a coward. I wonder if I am a coward!"

Often he had wondered and speculated about this, having doubts of his own courage, yet longing for something that would be a real test to prove whether he was a coward or a hero.

Outside the academy the boys were scattered about in various groups, some playing ball, some wrestling, some discussing Saturday's game.

John paused, quite alone, feeling a longing to join one of the groups, yet regarding himself as an outcast who was not wanted anywhere.

As he stood thus by a tree at the corner of the academy, a slender girl with an oval face and soft, dark eyes came up and spoke to him.

"I'm so sorry, John," she said sincerely. "You see, we did not know what had happened when we found you walking home Saturday night. Sterndale told Walter all about it. He said you would not beg for Linton, and that he had to interfere. I think it was brave of you not to give in to Rob Linton."

"Do you?" gasped John, looking to make sure Agnes Mayfair was not laughing at him.

"Yes, I do, and he's a ruffian to treat you so. I'm sure it was not your fault that Rockspur lost the game, and——"

"Yes, it was," he instantly declared. "I was wholly to blame for that. Something was the matter with me. I should have tried to hit that ball when Fisher put it straight over the heart of the plate, but I stood still and let it go by. Then I should have held that easy fly, but I thought I was going to drop it—and I did. It was all my fault, and I know it."

"Anybody else might have done the same thing."

"No, not anybody else. There are lots of fellows who would not have done it. I might not have made a hit, but I could have tried. In practise I never dropped such an easy ball as that in all my life. It happened just because I doubted myself—just because I didn't set my teeth and say I would hold it, anyhow. I've thought it all over, and I think I know what's been the matter with me all my life. I'm going to be different in the future."

He felt like unbosoming himself to this sweet-faced, sympathetic girl; but, at this moment, along came Dora Deland, stopped abruptly, stared at them, then called to Agnes:

"Aggie! Aggie! come here! I've been looking for you."

Agnes permitted her friend to lead her away, and, as they departed, the boy beneath the big elm heard Dora say:

"For goodness' sake, don't let anybody see you talking to him! I'd be ashamed to be seen speaking to him."

Her words struck John to the heart, giving him a pang of intense mental anguish. He clenched his hands and set his teeth in his under lip.

"Some time," he panted, "you'll be proud to be seen talking with me."

He took no part in the sports and games of the other lads, but stood aloof by himself, a creature shunned and scorned.

"There's Jonah!" somebody cried. "Hello, Jonah! Where'd you learn to play ball?"

"Why don't you go die, Jonah?" called another voice. "You're no earthly good."

"Just look at him!" shouted a third. "Isn't he a picture of misery?"

"Jonah! Jonah! Jonah!" they all yelled in unison.

"That's all right!" he muttered to himself. "Call me Jonah now; but the time'll come when you'll sing a different tune."

Rob Linton came along in company with his chum, Leon Bentley, the pitcher of the Rockspur club. Bentley was an inveterate cigarette smoker, the first two fingers of his right hand being stained a sickly, telltale yellow color.

"There's your particular friend Jonah, Rob," said Bentley, with a disagreeable laugh. "You did mark him up handsomely, but you didn't make him beg."

"I would have done it all right if Sterndale had let me alone—or I'd have half killed him," declared Linton, giving John a look of hatred, which, to his surprise, was returned with interest. "The insolent lout! See him glare at me!"

Rob turned suddenly and walked up to John, his manner menacing.

"Who are you looking at?" he demanded.

"Nobody," retorted John meaningly, still keeping his eyes on Linton.

Bentley grinned. "That's a knocker," he said. "He's coming back at you, Rob."

Linton caught his breath, and almost hissed:

"I wish we were alone. I'd like to finish the job I began on you. If you look at me that way, I may take a notion to wait for you at the bridge after school to-night and thump you till you can't crawl home."

"My eyes are my own, Linton," said John, drawing himself up with a fearless air that astonished both the lads; "and I shall use them as I please, without consulting you. If you think I am afraid of you, you are very much mistaken. You may be able to thump me, but you cannot frighten me now or ever again. You are nothing but a common bully, and some day you will get into trouble with some fellow who will give you the thrashing you deserve. After that, you'll realize that there are some folks you cannot frighten with bluster."

Rob was furious, and it seemed that he might strike John then and there; but Bentley held him in check, grasping his arm and drawing him away.

"Hold up!" Leon urged. "You'll get into trouble if you strike him here, for he'll be sure to run to old Alden with it. Wait till you get him alone in some good place."

At this moment Dick Sterndale and several members of the ball-team approached. Dick had seen Linton's menacing gesture toward John, and observed that the fellow was restrained by Bentley.

"See, here, Rob," he said sharply, coming up, "you had better let Jonah alone. He's a poor, weak, useless creature, and you should be ashamed to pester him."

Nothing that Linton had said cut as deep as these words from the captain of the Rockspur baseball club. Although John had told himself many times that he did not like Dick Sterndale, that he detested him, still, like nearly every other lad in Rockspur, he really admired the big, broad-shoul-

dered, magnetic chap, and secretly longed for his good-will and friendship.

John's face had been flushed while speaking to Rob, but now he turned pale, though he said nothing.

"He called me a common bully," cried Linton.

"Well, you have bullied him," declared Dick bluntly. "Let him alone! Do you understand?"

Rob relapsed into sullen silence, and the captain of the club turned to John.

"Smith," he said, "I've decided that we shall not want you on the ball-team any more. You do pretty well in practise, but you can't play ball, because you haven't any backbone."

"All right, Mr. Sterndale," said John, his voice having a strange ring in it that made Dick stare in surprise. "You say I am a poor, weak, useless creature without any backbone, and so you do not want me on the ball-team; but I'll make you change your mind just as sure as I live, and some time you will come to me and beg me to play on the team. Don't you forget it, either!"

Dick looked still more surprised, while some of the others laughed, and Danny Chatterton stuttered:

"Well, bub-bub-bub-by Jinks! Dud-dud-dud-did you ever hear the bub-bub-bub-bub-beat of that?"

"That's all right," said Dick, smiling. "Come on, fellows."

Rob Linton lingered behind the others, to whisper savagely to John:

"I'll settle with you to-night—at the bridge."

Poor John! His cup of humiliation and shame was full and running over, but the words of Sterndale had hurt him more than anything else. Dick had ordered Linton to let him alone, but this act of kindness had been followed by a contemptuous reference to John that caused the heart of the friendless lad to swell with an almost stifling sensation of injustice and wrong.

Thinking of this, John actually forgot Linton's threat to meet him at the bridge that night. He ate little when he went home to dinner, but replied to the solicitous inquiries of his mother with the assurance that there was nothing the matter with him. At school he stumbled and blundered in recitations so that he was sharply reprimanded, but he cared little for that.

He was thinking—thinking of the time when he would be able to turn the tables on those who now held him in contempt and bring them hovering around him, seeking his friendship; for more than ever was he determined to become a baseball-pitcher, and he vowed that he would be the best one ever seen in that town.

His mind was filled with these thoughts when, at the close of the afternoon session, he left the academy grounds alone, avoided by other scholars, and turned his face toward Lobsterville. Meditating on future triumphs, he passed the post-office and came in sight of the bridge.

And there, leaning against the railing, in company with his chum Bentley, Rob Linton was waiting for him.

CHAPTER IX.

THE COWARD AT THE BRIDGE.

For a moment John faltered and hesitated. Neither Linton nor Bentley had seen him, and by turning back quickly he fancied he might escape observation. He could find a way of getting home without crossing the bridge, for he might slip around by the South Road to the Upper Hill, where there was another bridge over Glenwood River into Lobsterville.

But only a moment did he falter, for the thought came to him that, even though he escaped Linton in such a manner temporarily, he could not always avoid the fellow, who would, if possible, regard him with still greater contempt as a coward.

So, setting his teeth, John walked firmly on toward the bridge.

Bentley was the first to see him, and he spoke to Linton, who turned round, his face dark and scowling. John walked straight on, as if to pass, but

Rob stepped out and confronted him, saying:

"Hold on, Jonah! I have a little account to settle with you."

The tall, awkward, undeveloped boy looked at his enemy in a fearless manner that was very provoking to Linton, who had always regarded John as a timid, spiritless chap, sure to cringe and cower under such circumstances.

"Get out of my way!" commanded John, but without lifting his voice. "I am going about my business, and you have no right to interfere with me."

Leon Bentley, who was lighting a cigarette, laughed.

"What do you think of that, Rob?" he cried. "He actually dares talk back to you!"

"I'll take some of his insolence out of him in short order," promised the young bully.

"You are the one who is insolent," retorted John. "Because your father happens to be rich, you think you can impose on me. You have given me the name of Jonah, and you have beaten me with your fists. You have scoffed and sneered at me, and led others to do the same. But that has not satisfied you, and now ——"

"And now I'm going to make you swallow your words," declared Rob. "You called me a common bully, and I'm going to make you take it back."

"You can't do that," flashed the Jonah defiantly. "And by your actions now you are proving that what I said was true."

Leon Bentley laughed again. He was standing with his feet wide apart, watching this scene and inhaling the smoke of his cigarette. One of his thumbs was thrust into the armhole of his vest, his coat thrown back to display a heavy double chain of gold strung across his breast from one side to the other. There were many rings on Leon's fingers. His necktie was a flashy, vulgar affair, and he wore a pink shirt.

"Jonah has spunked up lately," said Leon, permitting a thin, blue cloud of smoke to escape from his mouth as he spoke.

"I'll take the spunk out of him," announced Rob. "He's nothing but a miserable coward."

"You call me a coward," spoke John, "but you are a greater coward than I, and I will prove it some time. A bully is always a coward who takes delight in hurting others whom he thinks weaker than himself, and you, Rob Linton, are a bully."

This made Linton furious, and he tore off his coat, shouting:

"Strip—strip, you lout! You've got to fight."

"I shall not fight," calmly asserted John, thinking of his promise to his mother.

"If you're not a coward," said Rob, flinging his coat to Leon, who caught it with one hand, "you'll fight." And he advanced on John.

"If you are a coward," said John, putting his hands into his pockets, "you'll strike me."

Barely had he spoken the words when Linton struck him on the cheek with his clenched fist, causing him to stagger.

At this moment from up the street beyond the post office came the sound of excited shouts, the clatter of iron-shod hoofs, and the rattle of wheels.

Bentley uttered a cry.

"Look out, Rob! Here comes a runaway down the hill."

Linton looked, and saw the runaway coming at great speed, headed straight toward the bridge. A large roan horse was attached to the bounding, rocking carriage, which, at first glance, seemed to be empty.

"Good Lord!" gasped Rob, jumping toward the railing to give the runaway a clear road. "That's the old man's turnout, and his best horse. Worth six hundred dollars, at least."

Behind the horse and carriage several men were coming down the hill on a run, the one in advance, who was black-bearded and hatless, waving his hand and shouting:

"Stop that horse! Stop that horse! For God's sake, stop him!"

The man was greatly excited and distressed.

"That's the governor," said Linton, who had recognized his father; "but he won't get me to—heavens!"

He interrupted himself with that exclamation, for he had seen a crouching, deformed figure clinging to the seat of the carriage, and his heart leaped into his throat.

"My sister—Sadie!" he groaned. "She's in that carriage."

"That's right," shouted Bentley, who had caught sight of the girl at about the same time. "She'll be killed."

Rob's sister, some three or four years younger than himself, was an unfortunate cripple, having a hunch upon her back, while one leg was drawn up, so that the only way she could get about was with crutches. And she was in that carriage, Rob and his chum plainly saw, as they crowded against the bridge railing to give the runaway plenty of room.

"She'll be killed," repeated Leon, "if somebody does not stop that horse."

The runaway was now close to the bridge, coming at a furious pace, its eyes glaring and its aspect fear-inspiring.

Rob trembled and pressed still harder against the rail, faintly murmuring:

"Nobody can stop the beast. Poor Sadie! Lord help her!"

The girl saw her brother, and screamed in a shrill, terrified voice:

"Robbie, Robbie, stop the horse!"

"I can't do it," gasped her brother. "The creature would beat me down and go over me."

On first seeing the approaching runaway, John Smith's only thought had been to follow Linton's example and get out of the way. He drew back toward the opposite side of the bridge, his long fingers for a moment touching the spot where Linton's knuckles had again bruised his cheek.

Then he saw the bareheaded man who was running and shouting behind the carriage, and recognized Horace Linton. Almost at the same moment he observed the crippled girl in the carriage.

John wavered, hesitating, trying to think of something he could do. He had no thought, then, of flinging himself at the runaway's head and trying to grasp the bit, but he wondered if there was not some way he could check the terrified animal.

He knew it would be useless to get out into the middle of the bridge and wave his arms at the creature, which was half blind and mad with fear.

Then he flashed a look at Rob Linton, wondering what he would do to aid his helpless sister. He saw Rob, white as marble, crouching against the rail, and heard him groan:

"My sister, Sadie—she's in that carriage!"

"Why don't you try to stop the horse?" muttered John Smith. "I would if it were my sister."

The frightened child in the carriage screamed again to her brother for aid, but John saw that Rob made no attempt to respond.

That terrified shriek reached John's heart and inspired him with such courage and determination as he had never before known. He turned in the direction the runaway was going, and started to run, but it was not to avoid the horse and place himself beyond peril.

He glanced over his shoulder, increasing his speed as the runaway came nearer. And then, as the horse's head came up with him, he swerved toward the creature and flung himself at the bit, grasping it firm and sure with both hands.

CHAPTER X.

THE HERO AT THE BRIDGE.

He caught, clutched, clung. Feeling himself dragged off his feet by an upward fling of the horse's head, he still held fast to the bit. It was the only thing he could do then; to let go meant that he might be beaten down by those iron shod hoofs, and that he surely would fall beneath the wheels of the carriage.

In the moment before the horse came up with him he had seen something that sent his heart into his throat, but did not turn him from his resolution to try to stop the runaway.

A white horse, attached to a rickety wagon and driven by a middle-aged woman, turned in from the Mill Road to the bridge, directly ahead of the runaway.

There was room enough for one team to pass another on the bridge, but was there time for the woman to turn out?

Of course the woman had known nothing of the runaway till she was fairly on the bridge and in the path of peril.

John had reached the middle of the bridge when he grasped the bit of the frightened horse. Unfortunately for him and for all concerned, he caught the creature on the left side, so that, the moment his feet touched the planking of the bridge, over which the runaway was thundering, he pulled the horse's head to the left.

And, in trying to get out of the way, the woman in the ancient wagon did what was most natural, reining the white horse to the right.

Never before had the action of John Smith's brain been so swift and clear, and he saw in a twinkling that there must quickly be a terrible crash and catastrophe unless something prevented. Then, as his feet came down on the planking, he exerted all his strength in pulling the head of the runaway far round to the left.

He knew just what it meant if he succeeded in his attempt, but he regarded it as the only thing to be done as a possible means of averting a frightful tragedy.

The head of the horse was jerked round, and the creature plunged full and fair against the railing of the bridge, which gave way with a crash.

Through this breach horse, carriage, clinging boy, and screaming child plunged and went downward into the river.

John had succeeded in his desperate purpose, but possibly at the cost of his own life and that of the little cripple in the carriage.

Horrified men and boys ran out on the bridge and looked over. The plunge had been taken from the up-river side of the bridge, and the current carried the horse and carriage beneath the structure.

Where was the boy who had tried to stop the runaway? And where was Sadie, the little cripple he had attempted to save?

Calling to each other, the men and boys rushed to the other side of the bridge, Rob Linton, white-faced and shaking, among them.

For a moment nothing was seen, and then a mighty shout went up, for from beneath the bridge came a swimming boy. It was John Smith, and he was supporting Rob Linton's crippled sister, while he made for the shore as well as he could, although his strokes seemed rather weak and faltering.

Just then no one gave much thought to the horse and carriage. The attention of all was given to the human beings in the river, the despised Jonah of the ball-team, and the cripple sister of his bitterest enemy, whom he had risked his life to rescue.

"There he is," they shouted. "He's swimming ashore. And he has the little girl."

Then they set up a great cheer.

Two men ran down to the end of the bridge, where they found a boat and pushed off to reach the boy. It was well they did so, for his struggles were growing feebler, and he had been carried some distance toward the harbor, the current running out swiftly with the ebbing tide.

The men pulled hard, cheered by those on the bridge, till John was reached.

"Here, boy," one of them called. "Let me help ye."

"Take her," gasped John, and he was relieved of the burden that had prevented him from reaching the shore. The man lifted the girl into the boat, and then turned to give assistance to John, but the head of the lad had disappeared beneath the surface.

"He's gone down," shouted the man to his companion. "No, there he comes ag'in. Pull her down, Bumps!"

The other man had the oars in his hands, and he gave a pull that took the

boat to John, where the man in the bow reached over and clutched the lad firmly by the shoulder.

"Just git holt of the boat," he said. "If we can't pull ye inter it, we'll tow ye ashore."

This exciting scene had been watched with breathless interest by the crowd on the bridge. It seemed that half the town had followed the runaway to the bridge, reaching there in time to be eye-witnesses of the struggle in the river.

"Who is the boy in the water?" was the question asked by scores. "How did he come to be there?"

"It's Eb. Smith's boy—that tall, scared-looking chap," somebody explained. "He tried to stop the horse, and the animal smashed against the rail and took him into the river, along with the girl. He didn't leave her to drown, either. And most folks never thought that boy had courage enough to say his soul was his own!"

The current had carried the horse and carriage below the bridge, and the animal turned back in an attempt to swim to the east shore, but the carriage hampered him. Seeing this, some men hurried back over the bridge and found another boat, with which they pushed out to the rescue of the struggling animal.

Rob Linton saw everything, and his heart was filled with mingled emotions of terror, astonishment, thanksgiving, and anger. In spite of his other faults, Rob loved his unfortunate sister, though he had not possessed the courage to try to stop the runaway.

His amazement at the daring action of John Smith was unspeakable. He had seen the woman drive up to the bridge, and had choked with terror at the thought of the terrible smash that must occur.

Almost before Rob could realize it the horse had crashed against the railing and gone over into the river, taking the carriage, the daring boy, and the helpless girl with it.

"That's the end of them," Rob had panted, running out on the bridge. "If he had let the horse alone——"

Then, with the cheering crowd, he saw John emerge from beneath the bridge and swim feebly toward the shore, bearing the little cripple.

He heard men commenting with astonishment on the bravery of the boy down there, and he comprehended that John Smith, whom he despised, whom he scoffed and sneered at as a coward, had done a courageous thing and would be regarded as something of a hero.

A hand touched Rob's shoulder, and, even before Leon spoke, an odor of cigarettes told him that Bentley was at his side.

"Great Scott, Rob!" said his chum, "how do you suppose he ever dared do it?"

"Do what?" muttered Linton, without turning his head.

"Why, try to stop the horse. He grabbed it by the bit."

"He didn't know any better," declared Rob. "What good did he do? He dragged the beast's head round so it ran into the rail and took a plunge into the river. It's a wonder he didn't drown the horse and Sadie and himself by his foolish trick."

Leon Bentley took his hand from Rob's shoulder and drew back. Linton's inclination to continue to heap blame on John after the brave action of the latter seemed almost too much for his chum.

They saw John towed ashore, and beheld Mr. Linton, bareheaded and excited, hurrying to clasp little Sadie in his arms. Then Rob aroused himself from a sort of stupor that had fallen on him, and, with others, hurried from the bridge to the spot where this scene was taking place.

There were tears in the eyes of Horace Linton when he pressed the little cripple, all dripping wet, in his arms, and his voice choked as he said:

"My child—my little one! you are safe! Are you hurt, pet?"

"No, papa," she answered. "Only just wet and scared. But he told me not to be scared when we were in the water under the bridge. He said he'd save me—and he did."

"Yes, he did," echoed Mr. Linton, turning to John. "He tried to stop the

horse, and I shall not blame him for anything that followed. It seems to have been all for the best. My boy, I thank you. If there is any way I can pay you for——"

John, his water-soaked clothes clinging to his thin limbs, his face pale, drew himself up with an expression of pride, though he pressed one hand to his side, as if hurt.

"I did not do it for pay, sir," he said quickly; "so don't speak of that. I did the best I could."

"And that was as well as anybody could have done," Mr. Linton declared. "It has turned out very well, for I see those men over there are getting the horse ashore. If the animal is not hurt much, I shall consider myself a mighty lucky man."

"And a mighty lucky man ye are," said one of the villagers, "else ye'd not have that child alive in your arms. The boy saved her for ye."

"What's your name, my lad?" asked Mr. Linton, turning to the boy.

"Just John Smith, sir," was the answer.

"Fate must have tried to obscure you by your name, but you have conquered fate, and you are a hero."

The crowd set up a cheer; but, in the midst of it, the object of their admiration suddenly and unexpectedly toppled over into the arms of a man near him. John Smith had fainted.

CHAPTER XI.

FIRST LESSONS IN PITCHING.

Then, for the first time, they realized that the lad was hurt. He had been thrown against the railing of the bridge, and it was the injury to his side that made his struggles so feeble while in the water. Yet he had picked up the crippled girl, and, with the assistance of the men in the boat, had saved her.

John was taken home and a doctor was called. Of course the boy's kind-hearted mother was greatly distressed; but, upon examination, the doctor declared that no bones were broken, and expressed an opinion that John was not seriously hurt.

"He is a hero, Mrs. Smith," affirmed the good doctor enthusiastically. "The whole town is talking about what he did. They say Linton's boy, the girl's own brother, was there on the bridge with your son, and that he didn't dare try to stop the runaway horse. He jumped out of the way, while your boy got the horse by the bit and did his level best."

"I'm afraid that was poor enough," put in John, forcing a faint smile. "I suppose I'll be blamed for causing the horse to go into the river."

"Not a bit of it, my lad. If I have heard right, you kept the creature from smashing into another team on the bridge, and they say the horse wasn't hurt much. You're all right, my lad, and you have proved it."

Of course John was forced to tell his mother all about it when the doctor was gone; and his father, who had been away from the house when the boy was brought home, appeared in time to hear the story. He had heard a part of it from other lips, and John's modest narrative did not deceive him in regard to the real bravery of the boy's act.

"Well! well! well!" he exclaimed. "Who'd have thought you'd ever do anything like that?"

"Oh, my son!" sobbed John's mother, embracing him again and again, "I'm so proud of you! They'll never say again that you are a coward just because you won't fight with those other rough, brutal boys."

This was rather embarrassing to John, who really did not seem to think, now that it was all over, that he had made much of a success of his attempt to stop the runaway.

"Let me get on my dry clothes, mother," he said. "I've got to go down to the mill after supper. I'm to take my first lesson from Powers to-night."

"But you're hurt, and you can't go. You must stay right to home and go to bed."

He protested that he was not hurt much, that the doctor had said so, and that his side felt better already. The

good woman was much concerned about him, but he persisted in putting on his clothes, and ate supper with his parents, as usual.

They talked of what he had done, and tried to praise him, till he begged them to say no more. The doctor had given him something with which to bathe his side, which still pained him severely, though he concealed the fact from his parents.

After supper he succeeded in persuading his mother to let him go over to see Powers, and the proud woman watched him from the door till his tall form disappeared from view.

Powers had heard the story, which spread over the entire village in a remarkably short time, and he seemed to regard the boy with more respect than on the previous day.

"Didn't expect to see you to-night," declared the man. "They said you was hurt."

"I did hurt my side some," said John; "but I don't think it amounts to much."

"Murphy told me about that fellow Linton jumping on you after the Highland ball-game; and I hear he was going for you ag'in at the bridge when his old dad's team came along, with his cripple sister in the wagon. And he never made a try to stop the hoss; you was the one who done that. Say, you oughter take some sparrin' lessons and then break his face. I can give you the lessons. Why don't you do it?"

"Because I never fight," answered John.

"Well, it's time you did. You'll find you'll have to fight in this world, one way or another. You can't git out of trouble by sayin' you won't fight; the way to keep out of it is to show that you can fight like blazes, and then you'll be let alone."

This was in direct contrast to what John had been taught all his life by his parents, and now he more than half believed that Powers was right; but he would not contemplate breaking his promise to his mother, and declared that he had no desire to take lessons in sparring.

They went out to the ball-ground. It happened that they were early, and none of the mill-hands had gathered there to play ball, as they did almost every night.

"Now," said Powers, producing a ball and a glove, "we'll see what you can do. I want you to throw me some. Show your speed and git on a curve—if you can."

But when John tried to throw he was caught by a pain in his injured side, and had to give it up.

"I was hurt at the bridge," he said hastily, "and I find I can't throw to-night."

"Whew!" whistled Powers. "Was it as bad as that? Then I guess we can't do much. I'm sorry."

"So am I," said John sincerely, "but you'll find me on hand just as soon as my side gets so I can throw."

Dennis Murphy was seen approaching. The Irish youth greeted John with a grin and a flourish.

"Oi saloot yez," he cried. "Misther Shmith, ye are th' talk av th' town. It's mesilf said there wur good shtuff in yez whin ye would not beg fer Rob Linton, an' ye've proved this day thot Oi wur roight. If thot spalpane ain't ashamed av himself now he nivver will be."

"Then," said Powers, "it's likely he never will be, for a feller like that don't git ashamed very easy."

As Dennis was on hand to catch, Powers, who was eager to earn a fee for his first lesson, proposed that he should throw some curves and show John how it was done.

John was no less eager than his instructor, and so he agreed with haste.

Powers surrendered the catching-glove to Dennis, who remarked that he wished it were a mitt, if he were to take any hot ones from Mart.

Standing off at the proper distance from the Irish lad, Powers showed John just how to take hold of the ball in order to throw an out-curve. Then he placed his pupil behind him and a little to one side, and threw the ball.

John saw the sphere curve to the left with a sweeping motion, but Pow-

ers declared the curve was altogether too slow.

"That never would fool a batter who knew anything about curves," he said. "It takes a sharper curve than that nowadays to cut any ice with a good hitter."

Dennis returned the ball, and Powers again pressed it into his hand in the same manner as he had before, but threw it with a jumping movement of the body.

It was a speedy one, and for a considerable distance it seemed to go straight ahead. All at once, however, it took a sudden veer to the left, and the Irish lad nearly let it go by.

"That was better," commented Mart. "Now we'll try an in-shoot."

Again he showed John how he took hold of the ball, explaining everything carefully. He also explained that he threw the in-shoot with a wrist movement somewhat different from that used to produce the out-curve.

When he threw the ball it seemed to fly straight toward Dennis for nearly three-fourths of the distance, and then it suddenly shot to the right. So sudden was this movement that the ball appeared to turn at an angle from its straight course, instead of curving.

John uttered an exclamation of surprise.

"I'd like to understand the philosophy of that," he said. "I can understand why a ball might curve gradually, but I see no reason why it should go straight ahead for a long distance and then suddenly turn from its course. How do you explain it, Mr. Powers?"

"I don't explain it," answered the man. "You can talk about philosophy as much as you like, but I don't believe there is any philosophy that will explain some of the things a good pitcher can make a ball do. And I know that not one pitcher in a hundred actually understands why the ball does the things he makes it do. All they know is that by takin' hold of a ball in certain ways and throwin' it in certain ways they can make it curve or shoot in certain ways. I've read in papers explanations as to why a pitched ball curves, but no explanation I ever read was satisfactory to me."

"But there must be a reason for anything a thrown ball does," said John.

"Mebbe there is, but I don't think all the reasons are made clear yit. Last year I read in a sportin'-paper about a feller that could throw a ball so it would curve both ways, in and out."

"You don't mean that it curved both ways on the same throw?" gasped John.

"That's what the paper said, and it claimed it was no fake. I have my doubts, but I know a good pitcher can make a ball do mighty odd things. And no two pitchers ever throw the same curves in exactly the same way. They all have their peculiar tricks."

"What is the hardest ball to hit safely?" asked the boy.

"A good sharp drop. When used right, it fools batters more than anything else. I've seen some pretty good pitchers who couldn't throw anything but a drop and a straight ball. With good control, they was hard men to git safe hits off."

"Then," said John, "I want you to teach me how to throw the drop."

"But a drop pitcher never lasts long," Powers demurred. "It spoils the arms if you keep at it. That was what was the matter with me. I had a drop that was a fooler, and I used it so much that I killed my arm. Now I can't pitch more than one or two innin's without playin' out completely."

"I want to learn to throw the drop first," persisted John.

"All right," said Powers. "I'll do my best to show ye how."

CHAPTER XII.

THE SCIENCE OF SPARRING.

When the baseball lesson was over, Mart took John and Denny over to his room at the boarding-house. The place contained dumb-bells, Indian clubs, boxing-gloves, and apparatus of all kinds for physical exercise and development.

"I started out," said Powers, "to become an all-around athlete. There was

parts of my body in pretty bad form, but I built 'em up. Any feller that will stick to it can build himself up so he will be strong and have a good muscular frame."

"Then there ought to be some hope for me," observed John.

"There is, if you've got the backbone to stick to it. It's mighty slow and discouraging work. At first a chap can't see that he is doing anything but making himself lame. Even after the lameness wears off, it's likely to be a long time before he sees any results; but, if he keeps pegging away, the results come in time. Now, you ought to do something to develop your legs, chest, arms, and neck."

"Tell me what to do," urged John.

"All right," said Powers. "If you want to try it, I'll throw that in as part of the reg'lar lessons."

John was delighted, and accepted this offer with great eagerness. The thought of properly building up and developing his slender, ungainly form, of which he had been so many times ashamed, was very agreeable.

"But you want to remember that you've got to stick to it," said Mart, intending to impress this upon the boy's mind. "I want you to strip down and let me take your measurements. How old are you?"

"I'll be sixteen next month."

"And you're tall enough to be eighteen. Take off your coat and vest."

John obeyed, and Powers began by measuring the lad's forearm, upper-arm, and chest, jotting down the figures. Then he measured the boy's neck at the base.

"Too small—lots too small," he declared, shaking his head. "It narrows at the base, where it ought to broaden, and that's a sure sign of consumptive inclinations. Any of your folks ever die with consumption?"

"I had a cousin who did."

"No nearer relations?"

"Not that I know of."

"Well, you've got to look out, just the same. I want you to begin workin' on your neck and chest."

Then Powers showed his pupil some movements for developing the neck, such as bending the head backward and forward a number of times, then to the right and left, and then causing it to roll round and round, like a ball, on his shoulders.

"Just do that twice a day for ten minutes, mornin' and night, and I'll guarantee you'll see a difference in three months."

"Three months!" gasped John. "Does it take so long?"

"Sure thing. And that will only just be the beginning. If you develop your neck as it ought to be, you'll have to keep it up three years. Now, how's your courage?"

"All right," was the grim reply. "What else am I to do?"

"I want you to take breathin' exercises. You've got to expand that narrow chest of yours. You do your breathin' with the lower part of your lungs and let the upper part go without any use. The air-cells ain't developed in the upper part of your lungs, boy. You can take breathin' exercises any time when you're in the open air. You can do it walkin' to school and comin' home. You want to throw your shoulders back and lift your chest—like this, see.

"Lots of fellows slump all together and have a slouchy figure, just because they are too lazy to throw back their shoulders and carry themselves straight. After you've got 'em back and your chest lifted, fill your lungs. Draw in a deep breath, and make the upper part of your lungs expand, as well as the lower part. Fill your lungs gradually to the limit, and then let the air out slowly.

"Repeat this; keep it up. Then take a good long breath and hold it while you count. Remember just how many you can count, for that is the test that will tell if you are making progress. As you improve, you'll find ye can count more and more, and that'll show you what you're doin'."

John had listened intently to these instructions. He tried the breathing exercise then and there, but it brought

the pain to his side, and he could not keep it up.

"You'll have to wait," said Powers; "but you want to remember to begin as soon as your side is better."

"I will," promised the boy.

Then Powers stripped down to undershirt and trousers, and showed certain exercises with the dumb-bells for the purpose of developing the muscles in different parts of the body.

Without any apparatus, he showed John how to enlarge the calves of his legs by rising repeatedly on his toes and lowering himself. Then he followed with movements for strengthening the muscles of other parts of the legs.

At last Powers picked up the Indian clubs and swung them, John looking on in breathless astonishment. The man had a splendidly developed figure, and his pupil regarded him with great admiration, wishing in his heart that he might some day be as well-built and strong as Mart.

When Powers had finished with the clubs and rested a while, he got down the boxing-gloves and tossed a pair to Dennis, who quickly flung off his coat and vest.

"Now ye'll see him use me fer a punchin'-bag," said the Irish lad, grinning as he pulled on the gloves.

John sat on the bed, out of the way, his jaw dropping as he saw them come together and begin sparring. Dennis was lively on his feet, and was also rather clever with his hands.

Mart did not do all the hitting, nor did all of his blows count, for the Irish lad dodged, ducked, parried, and retreated.

"That's the style," commended Powers approvingly. "Now you are doing good foot-work."

"An' how is thot fer good fist-worruk?" cried Dennis, ducking and letting Mart's glove go over his shoulder, while he countered full on the man's jaw with his left, giving Powers a fearful jolt.

"That's- splendid!" gasped Mart, as he staggered. "How do you like—this?"

He feinted with his right, got a good opening, and hit the Irish lad a swinging blow with his left, dropping Dennis to a sitting posture on the floor.

This was like a real fight; but, to John's surprise, the Irish youth laughed, as he exclaimed:

"Thot wur a corker, Misther Powers! But Oi want yez to quit yer foolin'. Oi want ye to shtop makin' belave hit me wid won hand whin ye mane to hit me wid th' other."

"That's part of the game," retorted the man, laughing. "That's one of the points I've been teachin' you."

Dennis got up, and they went at it again. After a time, becoming tired, they took a rest and talked it over, Powers congratulating the Irish youth on his improvement.

"When I took hold of you," said Mart, "you didn't know nothin' about sparrin'. I taught you to guard and duck and counter and git away. Then I begun to show you how to become the aggressor, and I've taught you a good many blows, so you're a pretty good fighter. Now," he went on, speaking to Dennis, but really meaning his words for John, "a feller who knows them things is able to take care of himself pretty well anywhere. Every feller has a right to defend himself when he's attacked. Lots of peaceable-inclined persons learn to box just for that very reason. They don't do it to become fighters, but just so they may know how to defend themselves if they have to do so. I say it ought to be part of every boy's education, just as much as readin, writin', and 'rithmetic."

Despite the fact that Powers plainly showed by his language that he did not have much education himself, his words impressed the listening lad, for there seemed to be good sense and reason in them.

Down in his heart John had begun to believe that the boy who showed he was fully able to defend himself was much less liable to get into trouble than the one who refused to fight under any circumstances.

When Mart and Dennis were rested, they stood up and assumed a position

"on guard," beginning to practise certain leads, parries, guards, ducks, counters, and cross-blows. Powers named the movements they would try, and praised or criticized, according to the work of the Irish youth.

Then and there John Smith awoke to the fact that there was a fascinating science and art in this, and his interest grew astonishingly. When, at the conclusion, he heard Powers say that a scientific boxer could defeat an untrained man who was greatly his superior in size, weight, and strength, he departed, with a new idea and a new desire taking possession of him.

That night he had a talk with his mother, in which he told her of the science of boxing and how any man ought to know something about it in order to be able to defend himself.

The good woman shook her head doubtingly, expressing an opinion that there was nothing a person could learn about fighting that was not harmful and degrading. But John persisted with unusual eloquence, declaring that his only reason for wishing to learn was a desire to be able to defend himself.

"Mother," he said earnestly, "what if I were to come upon a big, brutal man who was beating a child, and he refused to desist when I commanded him to do so? What if he were to set upon me and attempt to beat me? Don't you think it would be a good thing for me to know how to defend myself?"

She was silent, but continued to shake her head in a slow, doubting manner.

John went on: "What if I held a position of trust, and should be left to guard a large amount of money, and a robber were to attack me? It would be my duty to do my best to keep the ruffian from taking the money, and I would have to do that. If I had taken boxing-lessons, I might be able to master the robber or drive him off; if I knew nothing of the art of self-defense, he might master me, perhaps kill me, and get away with the money."

This was the best he could do, and it proved enough. At his final words, Mrs. Smith heaved a deep sigh, saying:

"Well, well! if you are so set upon it, you may learn to box; but I do hope and pray it may not lead you to forget your mother's teachings and to take pleasure in fighting and such brutal things."

"You may rest assured that it never will, mother," he said sincerely.

CHAPTER XIII.

JOHN REFUSES TO BE A SUBSTITUTE.

John attended faithfully to his injured side, and, although far from well on the following day, he was determined to go to school.

Immediately after breakfast, Horace Linton drove up to the door with the very horse John had tried to stop, and made inquiries concerning the boy.

Mr. Smith, who had returned home from the mill and had not gone to bed, went out to greet the caller.

"I am glad to know the young man is not hurt much—very glad," said Mr. Linton. "He did a very brave thing, sir—a remarkably brave thing. Your boy, sir, has the making of a man in him."

"Thank you." Mr. Smith's face flushed with pleasure. "We have always thought a great deal of our boy, but we didn't know he had the courage to do a thing like that."

"Never can tell what's in a youngster till something turns up to bring it out," said Mr. Linton. "I have paid the doctor for his call last night, and if there is anything more that I can do, I shall be glad to do it—very glad, sir."

Mr. Smith said he knew of nothing, and then Mr. Linton asked for John. Mrs. Smith had listened to every word, taking care not to let herself be seen, and now she said to John:

"You'll have to go out, I s'pose, but that man is the father of the boy who has treated you so brutally. Don't fergit that. You're poor, but you're just as good as Horace Linton's son."

Horace Linton called John up to the carriage and shook hands with him. The lad's face was very red, but it grew

even redder when Mr. Linton thanked him and praised him for his brave act.

"My horse is all right, as you can see," he said. "Only got a few scratches, and Sadie doesn't seem to be a bit worse for her fright and bath. It didn't even hurt the carriage a great deal. I'm a mighty fortunate man, and I owe it all to you—all to you, my boy."

He pressed John's hands with his gloved fingers, and then asked the boy to get in with him and ride over to the academy. John hesitated, but Mr. Smith quickly told him to go ahead; and so, calling good-by to his mother, he climbed up to the seat beside the father of his bitterest enemy and was whirled away.

Through Lobsterville John rode in triumph behind the fast horse, and came to the bridge where the exciting adventure of the previous day had taken place. The railing had been mended, but it showed where the horse had crashed through.

"General is a very intelligent horse," said Mr. Linton, "and I never knew him to run away before. Usually I can leave him standing anywhere. I got out at Bucklin's store and stepped to the door to give him an order, when two dogs fell to fighting right under General's feet, and he was off before I could jump to the carriage. I don't think I was ever so badly frightened; but, thanks to you, my boy, it turned out all right."

Before the academy was reached, they passed some of the scholars who were on their way there, and John observed that they stared when they saw him in the carriage with Rob Linton's father.

It was a bright and sunny morning, and it seemed to John that the world had never looked more beautiful than it did then.

As they drove up Academy Hill, the blue water of the landlocked harbor reflected the sunshine. The breeze was light, but several sailboats were slowly creeping out toward the mouth of the harbor, making a picture to delight the eye.

Far to the west Ragged Mountain reared its rugged, rock-ribbed crest, and to the north of that lay the Powder Mill Woods.

As they came nearer, the white academy loomed amid the tall trees. The first bell had rung, and a good portion of the scholars were assembled. Beyond the academy, at the top of the hill, was the baseball-ground, where John had spent many happy hours.

Some boys were playing ball beneath the trees near the academy, and Rob Linton was one of them. He stared in mingled astonishment and disgust when he saw his father drive up to the gate of the grounds with John Smith at his side.

"Hey, Rob!" called Bubble, the fat boy, "see who's with your pa."

"Shut up!" growled John's enemy. "What do you want to bawl like that for and attract everybody's attention?"

"Oh, my!" grinned Bubble. "I bet he's told your pa what you did to him. Won't you catch it?"

Rob looked sour enough as John jumped out of the carriage, thanked Mr. Linton, and entered the grounds.

"Here comes the conquering hero!" cried Jotham Sprout.

John tried to look unconcerned, but his face was very red as he walked toward the academy, fully aware that he was being watched by a number of eyes. Before reaching the building, he met Walter Mayfair and Danny Chatterton.

"Hello, John!" called Walter, in a friendly manner. "I'm glad you weren't hurt much. You've set all the town talking by what you did yesterday."

"And how in tut-tut-tut-time you ever dud-dud-dared dud-dud-do it is more than I can tell," stuttered Danny, with a look on his face that was something of admiration as well as wonder. "Everybub-bub-bub-body thought you a cuc-cuc-coward, but now I gug-gug-gug-guess they'll change their tut-tut-tune."

Of course John was glad to have them speak to him in this friendly manner, but somehow there was a sting in

Chatterton's words and manner, and he could not at once forget that Danny had felt ashamed to sit on the same seat of the buckboard with him after the ball-game at Highland.

He observed that there was a marked difference in the treatment accorded him by nearly every one, and nobody called him Jonah that morning.

As usual, Dora Deland and Agnes Mayfair were together; but the moment Agnes saw him, she left her friend and hurried forward, her face illuminated by a look of pleasure.

"It was just splendid of you to do such a brave thing!" she exclaimed, putting a slender hand on his arm and looking up into his face. "Why, they say that Rob Linton didn't even make a move to try to stop the horse—and his own sister in the carriage, too! I'm so glad you did it."

John knew that other girls were looking at him, Dora among them, and never before had he felt so self-conscious and awkward.

"It wasn't anything," he declared. "Anybody might have done that."

"No," said Agnes positively; "no one who was not very brave would have dared try it."

Others came up and flocked about him to hear what he would say, and his position was embarrassing in the extreme. But he noted that Dora held aloof.

"She still despises me," he thought bitterly. "Perhaps it will be different some time."

He was relieved when the last bell struck and the scholars entered the building, he among the others.

During the first period of the school he was aware that many of the scholars looked frequently in his direction, but he paid close attention to his studies.

At intermission Miss Wilton came directly to him and warmly congratulated him; but still there was something that rankled in her final words:

"I was greatly surprised, John, when I heard all about it, for I didn't think you could do it."

He felt certain that his action was regarded as more of an accident than anything else.

Sterndale came to him and patted him on the shoulder in a patronizing manner, while he laughingly said:

"Smith, you're a wonder! I didn't think you were built on that plan. There may be something in you, after all."

This was like a blow in the face, but John shut his teeth and said nothing. To himself he thought:

"I'll show you that there is something in me, Dick Sterndale."

When he returned home at noon he found his mother in a very joyous frame of mind.

"Well, I declare!" she exclaimed. "You're even more of a hero than I thought you were, John. Mis' Pooler, Mis' Cuttle, Mis' Finny, and—what do you think?—Mis' Mayfair, have called this forenoon. They all said they didn't know but you was hurt bad, and they just run in to find out. You should have heard them praise you! And Mis' Mayfair never called before, either. She said she's always intended to, but had neglected it. She says her darter, Agnes, always said it was a shame the way some of the boys treated you, and her son, Walter, thought it wasn't right. Now, what do you think of that?"

"I think," said John, "that Mrs. Mayfair's excuse for failing to call before was rather thin. You know very well, mother, that she has not called because she regards us as poor people who are beneath her."

"Well, John, I think it was real good of her to call now and say all them nice things about you. You know she stands well in society here, and we are nothing but common people, and we mustn't try to git above our station."

This from his mother was unusual, for she had often declared that her boy was the equal of anybody in the village, and he saw she had been flattered by the calls she had received.

"I don't like to hear you talk like that, mother," he said. "We are honest and respectable, and I think we're just as good as Mrs. Mayfair, whose father

made his money buying rags and peddling tinware. In this country there is no caste that condemns a poor person to the lower walks of life because of poor parents. As for trying to get above our station, the poor person who has no ambition to rise in life is of very little account."

"Land! land!" exclaimed the good woman in surprise. "I never heard you talk so before."

"But I've often thought these things, if I have not spoken them," he said.

When school was dismissed that night, Sterndale asked John to go up to the ball-ground and practise with the others. But John declined, saying:

"I have other business, Sterndale."

"But you'd better put in some practise," urged Dick. "We may need you as a substitute on the team."

"As a substitute!" exclaimed John warmly. "I hardly think I'll accept such a position."

"Then are you going to give up playing ball?"

"No. And I promise you that the time will come when you'll ask me to play in the diamond—not to sit on the bench as a substitute to take the place of somebody who may get hurt."

And he walked away, paying no heed to the laughter his words had caused.

CHAPTER XIV.

FURTHER LESSONS FOR JOHN.

Every morning when John rose from bed he went through certain gymnastic exercises taught him by Powers. He worked to develop his neck, moving his head forward and backward a certain number of times, then to the right and left, and finally rolling it round and round on his shoulders.

He began earnest work to improve his legs, rising on his toes and lowering himself slowly, taking care not to strain the muscles at first, and gradually increasing the number of times that he did this.

Then he lowered his whole body to a squatting posture on his heels, his hands resting on his hips, and slowly and steadily rose to an erect position, repeating this till he began to feel the strain on the muscles above his knees.

This was followed by other movements to develop the legs still farther toward the hips and thighs.

Then he took, in regular order, his waist. Still with his hands resting on his hips, he swayed from side to side a number of times, leaned backward and forward, and rolled the upper half of his body round and round at the hips, after the manner in which he rolled his head, keeping his legs as steady as possible.

In working for physical improvement many persons quite neglect the waist, or give it very little attention, regarding it merely as a connecting part between the upper and lower halves of their bodies; and yet no one can be fully and perfectly developed without giving proper attention to this part of their organisms, where many weaknesses lie.

John followed with movements and exercises for developing the muscles of the arms, back, and chest; and at last, flinging his window wide open, he inflated his lungs with the pure morning air, breathing slowly, deeply, regularly, filling every cell to its full capacity, holding his breath to count, and then letting it escape slowly and easily from his lips.

He took care to draw in deep breaths through his nose, with his lips firmly closed, but he opened his mouth a little to permit the air to escape.

When this was over, he took a sponge-bath and a rub down, not being able to avail himself of the luxury of a tub, and went down to breakfast with his cheeks glowing and his eyes sparkling, feeling new life through all his body.

"I don't know as I ever saw you lookin' so well, John," his mother said one day. "And you eat so hearty!"

"Never felt better in my life," he answered, with a laugh. "I'm just beginning to understand what it is to live."

At John's request, Powers gave him his pitching lessons in secret. There

was an open lot down by the river back of Mrs. Skinner's hoarding-house, and thither the boy and his instructor retired each night, with ball and catcher's mitt.

The first night that John's side was in condition to permit him to throw, Powers gave the boy the ball, drew on the mitt, walked off a distance, and then said:

"Now, chuck some in to me, and let's see you curve 'em."

"I am not certain that I can make them curve," admitted the pupil. "I don't know just how I do it, but the ball curves when I don't mean that it shall."

"Well, send some in, and we'll see what we'll see."

John threw four or five times, but not once was he able to make the ball curve in the least. Powers shook his head, muttering something to himself. This seemed to provoke the lad, for he caught up the ball carelessly and hastily and threw it at Powers with all his strength.

This time the ball made a gradual, sweeping curve to the left.

Powers uttered an exclamation of satisfaction.

"You caught it that time, boy!" he cried. "Remember how you done it. Try it again."

But John was forced to try several times before he could make the ball curve again. At last, however, he succeeded, and then he excitedly shouted:

"I believe I've got it! I believe I know how I do it!"

He was right, for, after that, almost every ball he threw was a curve.

"That's first-rate," said Mart, stopping and coming up to the lad. "Now, show me how you do it."

John did so as well as he could, and the man observed:

"That proves I told the truth when I said different men are liable to take hold of the ball differently to get the same curve. The reason for it is, I s'pose, that they throw with different motions of the arm and wrist. Now, I take the ball between my thumb and forefinger, so, for an out, and don't let the other fingers touch it. Then I press it down against the cord connectin' my thumb and finger, pinch it tight with the end of my thumb, and throw with a side swing of the arm. You throw with a direct overhand movement, and so you get the same effect by takin' hold of the ball in a different manner."

"But do you think you can show me how to throw the drop?" John asked anxiously.

"I guess so. We'll try it, anyhow."

Then he explained with great care how to take hold of the ball and how to throw it, illustrating everything fully.

He made John catch a few drops, or attempt to catch them, for some of them deceived the lad completely by the wonderful manner in which they shot downward toward the ground after seeming to come straight on till they were almost in his hands.

"Now we'll change places," said Powers, "and you can try what you can do."

Despite his best efforts, John could not seem to get the knack of throwing a drop. Again and again Powers explained it in every particular, but it continued to baffle the lad, who grew impatient and disgusted.

"No use to throw your arm off tonight," said the instructor at last. "We'll stop now."

John wanted to keep on, but Mart would not permit it.

"You're not going to strain that arm at the very start," he said. "Put on your coat, and we'll go into the house."

In Powers' room the man brought out a bottle of wich-hazel and insisted that John should strip his arm and rub it well with that.

"When I was pitchin'," said Mart, "I used to take care of my arm jest as if it was a baby. I covered it as soon as I came out of the box, rubbed it down after the game, and kept it protected from drafts. If I'd let droppitchin' alone, I might be in the business now, for I wasn't a smoker or a boozer."

"Does smoking hurt a man who plays ball?" asked John.

"It does if he smokes much, for it shortens his wind; and them cigarettes will hurt anybody who sticks to the nasty things. There ought to be a law makin' it a State's prison crime to sell one of the things to a minor."

Having expressed himself in this decided manner, he asked John which he preferred to take up first—club-swinging or boxing. The lad hesitated a moment, but soon decided in favor of the latter, which caused his tutor to nod with satisfaction.

To begin with, when they had the gloves on, Mart permitted John to do his level best to hit him, while he did not strike back. It did seem that the boy might get in one blow; but, after several minutes of desperate trying, during which Powers had ducked, parried, retreated, and dodged, John gave it up, confessing that he could not hit the man.

"And it's easier to hit me in a small place like this than it would be where there was plenty of room," said Mart. "You see, it's all a matter of science, too."

"I see that," acknowledged John, breathing heavily. "Why, if I'd known what you do when Rob Linton started to thump me, he could not have touched me!"

"If you'd known what I do," growled Powers, "you'd been a thundering fool if you hadn't given him the worst thrashing he ever had!"

To begin with, Powers started by showing John the proper manner to stand, with his feet about fifteen inches apart, the right one at the rear, having the toes turned outward, while the advanced left foot pointed almost straight ahead.

"Keep your knees bent a little," said Mart, "with the right heel raised, so the weight will rest on the ball of the foot. When you advance, move the left foot forrud about ten inches and follow with the right at the same distance. When you retreat, step back about the same distance with the right foot and follow with the left. To avoid a rush, move the left foot about twelve inches to the right and then follow with the right, or move the right foot to the left and follow with the left foot, always facin' the other feller. By this style of steppin', the right foot is always behind the left, so you can dodge, attack, retreat, or avoid a rush. And all the time you're sparrin', always keep the left foot and the left hand in advance, workin' round the other chap. When you hit, work to the right to git out of reach of his right hand."

He illustrated the movements and positions as he talked, so that John understood fully. Then he placed the boy on guard and made him advance, retreat, and side-step, as if facing an enemy. John was rather impatient to begin learning the blows, but Powers held him in check.

"That comes later," he said. "First you've got to get your positions and learn how to keep 'em. Now, you want to hold the head right and keep your mouth shut. Don't get your tongue between your teeth, for you may be rapped on the chin and bite it half off. Breathe through the nose. Be ready to dodge your head to the right or left in a twinkling, but don't have the muscles of the neck stiff and rigid. Look the other feller straight in the eye, but keep your head turned a bit to the right, so both eyes will not be on a line with his left hand."

So Powers went on, devoting the first lesson entirely to the matter of getting John used to correct positions and movements of head, body, and feet.

The first lesson came to an end ere John was ready to stop, but Powers declared it was quite enough, as it was already growing dark.

That night John dreamed that he had another encounter with Rob Linton, in which he found it perfectly easy to parry and dodge his enemy's blows, making Rob a butt of ridicule for all the other boys of the village.

"That dream may come true some time," he muttered, when he awoke in the morning.

TO BE CONTINUED.

The Sword and the Spirit

By Charles Kroth Moser

Author of "The Game and the Lady," "In Chinatown," Etc.

On the stage and in books the doer of heroic deeds almost invariably looks the part, but not so in real life. Some of the most remarkable examples of personal bravery on record have been due to men and women from whom such actions were the least expected

WHEN Johnny Chambers came out of the East and settled in San Bernardino County, driven thither by wanderlust and the depleted condition of the Chambers coffers, he left behind him a little New England maiden, into whose hands he had given the keeping of his heart.

"I'm going to plant myself out there and grow up with the country," he told her during their last evening together, "and when I've gotten well rooted I'm going to send for you, Elise."

And with simple New England loyalty Elise patiently awaited his call to come when his dreams of modest fortune and a little home should be realized in a ranch of lemon-bearing trees, nestled snugly among the foot-hills of the San Bernardinos.

So Johnny planted himself in the new, virgin soil, and from the very first he found the broad, free life of the West greatly to his liking. Also, the men of the West found Johnny Chambers greatly to *their* liking, which was vastly more important. For he had spirit and energy and daring.

For which reasons his admirers, when he had been among them no more than two years, made him sheriff; and San Berdoo, as its citizens spoke of it, became largely a place of confession and avoidance to the numerous "bad *hombres*" that had formerly infested its waste-places and the unfrequented cañons in its mountains.

This new order of things, however, had no effect upon one "Red" Burge, stage-robber, murderer, bandit of the lonely trails, and general all-round devil-spirit. Red Burge never once halted in his labor of plundering every human being that came his way, and his way was wherever he and the opportunity chanced to meet.

In spite of the new sheriff's tireless energy and the determined courage that for a time kept him almost constantly on the outlaw's trail, Red Burge mocked his efforts to scorn and ran the cañons and sandy plains as free as a wild bird; he held up the Cucumonga stage as often as he had a mind, or halted the lone traveler on the Escondido road and made him "stand and deliver" whenever the mood seized him.

If the traveler demurred, Burge shot him down and performed the "delivery" himself. His two huge, black .45-caliber Colts were notched with a terrible record of the men he had met and sent to death.

Many a time Chambers and his posse ran him into the jagged, boulder strewn cañons; and there, in his lair, behind a barricade of unsurmountable stones, Burge stood at bay and fought like the devil he was until he drove the posse off with its dead, or in search of reenforcements. When the reenforcements came the monster was always in a new lair where no man could find him.

He knew every foot of the country, and so desperate was he that, single-handed, he was a match for a troop of the sheriff's man-hunters. It was

always so until at last even Chambers apparently gave up in despair of running him to earth, and went back to his lemon ranch—and Red Burge remained the scourge of the county.

There was a big price on his head, and many a man *dreamed* of claiming the reward—some day!—but felt the goose-pimples rise on his skin at the very thought of *hunting* it.

"The infernal scoundrel's got you all buffaloed; me, too, I reckon," the sheriff candidly told one of his deputies.

So matters stood when Johnny Chambers decided to send "back home" for Elise. He had expected to wait until the young lemon-trees were bearing a full yellow crop; but the emoluments of his high office assured him now of an income enough for the provender of two, and there was no need spending more years out on the ranch alone, watching things grow.

He drove down in the buckboard to meet her at the station at Colton. A mere slip of a girl she was, with big, soft blue eyes that seemed too innocent and trustful for this world, and a halo of fluffy fair hair surrounding a forehead set with the seal of the unsophisticated.

She looked absurdly babyish, even when contrasted with his twenty-five years of sun-tanned boyishness; Johnny gathered her in his arms at the station as though he feared breaking her in two.

They were married immediately in the little parsonage of the Methodist home missionary, at Colton, and their only honeymoon trip was the long solemn drive in the moonlight back through the hills to the little ranch-house.

It was all very new and very strange to Elise; so strange that for many days she went about as one in a dream. Nothing seemed real to her but Johnny, and even he was not the Johnny Chambers she had known in the prim, convention-ribbed little New England village where they had grown up together.

Even the ranch-house was new, garishly, blatantly new, for until her coming the sheriff had lived in a room over the water-tank in his tank-house, where he slept close under the rafters and was sung to sleep of nights by the *zo-o-o-oming* of the windmill whirling rapidly in the breeze, or the weird night-howling of the coyotes on the far hills. He began building the house only when he made up his mind to send for his sweetheart.

But in time Elise grew to like the life and the country—though she never could understand it. It was so utterly different from the life she had known: the life that shelters woman from her birth, that constantly smothers a woman's ways in a muffler of "Thou shalt nots!" and covers her eyes with blinders like a horse's that she may not see the things other people think she ought not to see.

Yes, the mere freedom of San Berdoo and its ways puzzled her, and she could not fit herself into them. The towns seemed brazenly, openly wicked; the men boldly, defiantly independent, ruthless, and strong. Such men frightened her; from their manner and exterior she could not tell a preacher from a horse-thief. Even her worshipful husband, who coddled her like a great mastiff standing watch over his master's child, frightened her a little.

But the ranch and its growing green things she loved. She loved also the bare brown foot-hills around it, and the grim mountains rising gradually higher and higher from the hills until their bared crests bowed just beneath old Cucumonga, with his grizzled, craggy brow towering into the sky ten thousand feet.

She loved, too, the dry, hot atmosphere—so clear that one could look off, far, farther, and yet farther, a thousand years away, into immeasurable space. And she even came to love the distant desert, with its wonderful morning and evening lights, its wide, brush-dotted waste, sweating and palpitating under the brazen glare of a molten, red-hot sun.

The couple lived so quietly among the growing lemon-trees, closed in from the world by the silent, rock-ribbed cañons and the sun-scorched slopes,

that not even Red Burge, the range-runner, was aware that the tiny, trim, unpainted ranch-house sitting in the crotch of the hills, like a crow's nest in an old apple-tree, sheltered the brave sheriff and his baby-faced bride.

It was well off the course of human travel, and more than once he cast a covetous eye upon it with a notion to wantonly claim tribute from its peaceful tenants; but some procrastinating spirit in the unseen world, perhaps, held him back.

For some little time the sheriff's official duties seldom called him away from home, and Elise was rarely left alone. On such rare occasions she felt no fear, for Johnny, whose word to her was as divine authority, assured her that in all those wilds there dwelt nothing to harm her—and she was not afraid of solitude or shadows.

The cowardly coyotes occasionally, it was true, skulked through the orchard and into the chicken yard, but she came to mind their visits no more than she would have minded straying puppies, for at the first sound of her voice they dissolved into streaks of rapidly vanishing gray along the distant slopes of the hills.

Oddly enough, it seemed even to the sheriff, the county had no tidings of Red Burge starring in fresh outrages. After Johnny's marriage, the bandit apparently had concluded that the game was no longer exciting enough, and had retired peacefully to one of his mountain haunts.

Men were even heard to express the hope that he had tired of pursuing his murderous calling in a county where every man's hand was against him, and that he had fled afar to seek in new fields for his bloody pasturage. They were not to be suffered to remain too long in such a hope.

When Elise left her native village to cast her fortunes with Johnny's forever, she cut most of the ties that bound her to her old home, and took few things with her to keep it in memory. But she did fetch along her portion of the family silverware—the fine old trumpery that had once adorned Great-grandmother Wyndham's colonial table, for New England family pride survived in her and was one of her strongest traits; it was something, in her code, to fight for to the last ditch.

At the final unpacking of her things, Elise had fished out from the bottom of her trunk a huge old sword, a monstrous weapon, crude and bloodthirsty-looking in the very air of its wide, heavy blade, with its sinister curve, and the clumsy iron scabbard, in which the teeth of Time had left many a mark.

Johnny had smiled indulgently at the silver—he burst into a roar of laughter at the appearance of the formidable old fighting blade.

"What did you bring that thing along for, little girl?" he asked teasingly, having no reverence in his soul for relics of ancientry. "Going to carve up the wild Indians and the buffaloes that roam the plains, were you? Or is it the rod to rule a rebellious husband with?"

"Now, don't you make fun of that sword, Johnny Chambers," she fired back, with a spark in her baby-blue eyes. "That's my Great-grandfather Endicott's sword, and they wouldn't let me take it, but I just sneaked it off the wall and brought it, anyhow. Besides, *you* don't know, it may come in handy some time."

"Sure," Johnny assented. "So might a cork leg; but who wants it hanging around waiting for the 'some time' to turn up? Oh, well, keep it, kid, if you like. Only you can't choke people into reverencing you out here by tying family heirlooms around their necks. Better bandage it up with blue ribbons and a pink rosette on its hilt, and use it to decorate the parlor. It'll look real homelike, then, won't it? Or some days, when the heat makes you real peevish, you can take it out and stab lizards and horned toads with it. Gee whiz! just think of granddaddy's noble war-blade being fouled with the gore of desert vermin!"

In spite of his teasing, the girl placed the sword in deer-horn brackets over the dining-room hearth and locked up the "family jewels," as Johnny called

the silverware, in the kitchen closet. The sheriff never mentioned the weapon as anything else but "the Sword of Bunker Hill."

They had been married nearly three months when, one hot morning, a vaquero came galloping up the trail from town, his bronco lathered white by the speed of his coming. The cowboy rode for the sheriff; Red Burge had broken loose again and played the devil.

He had held up the Barstow stage the night before, said the breathless buckayro, had killed the express messenger, shot a woman passenger to quiet her screams, and had gone off into the brush with several hundred ounces of gold-dust from the Barstow diggings and the mail-pouches.

A posse of citizens had already formed in the town, and they only waited for the sheriff to head them in scouring the hills for the inhuman outlaw.

"Th' boys are sure some man-hungry f'r his hide this time," the buckayro concluded his narrative. Elise heard the speech from the porch, and shivered at its brutal note.

Johnny hurried to the corral and saddled his horse. Elise followed him out, but he sent her back to fetch his belt and pistols and his Winchester. She was deathly afraid of firearms, and could never be persuaded even to touch them with her finger, but she took them to him now without a word, though her hands trembled.

"Good-by, little girl," Johnny said, bending from his saddle to kiss her. "If I'm not back to-night, don't worry. But I'll come back to-morrow night, whether we catch him or not, so's you won't think anything's happened to me. And don't you be scared here alone; there isn't a thing in these hills to hurt you."

She put her arms around his neck, with a face as white as milk, but with never a tear in the baby-blue eyes that were too hard hurt to cry.

"Johnny, promise me," she whispered, with dry lips, "that you'll—that you'll be—be—*careful!*"

"Sure I will, sweetheart." And the boy sheriff laughed lightly. He rode away, a very incarnated spirit of young daredeviltry.

Left alone, Elise spent the day busily; she would not allow herself time to become lonely. The cow, the chickens, the young colts in the corral, the tiny green lawn in front of the house, which she watered copiously with the hose—the small duties of her household all took up her time, until the day fell into a sudden, short twilight, and the darkness swooped down from the hills with the speed of winged ghosts.

And all the day her thoughts were not of herself, but her husband; and the fears that gripped her heart were fears for his peril. She had no fears for herself, for had not Johnny said that nothing could harm her? And Johnny knew.

But in the night the coyotes gave voice to their unearthly howls, more hideous than the wails of souls in purgatory; and the somber world apart from them seemed full of that ominous silence so suggestive of horrible deeds impending. Thoughts of Johnny ran in a fearful tumult through her brain, and she could not sleep. It seemed an endless night of misery.

When at last the dawn came, she arose, thankful for it, and wishing ardently that some one of human kind, even a dirty squaw from some of the squalid little Indian villages in the valley, would come along to keep her company.

The longing for another human face to help her bear the silence and the loneliness kept with her all the morning.

When it was hot, in the middle of the forenoon, she cleaned the *oyas*—the huge, unglazed Mexican water-jars—filled them with fresh water from the tank, dampened the jute wrapping around them, and set them out in the sunny porch, so that the heat, causing the moisture in the jute wrappings to evaporate, would cool the water in the jars for drinking purposes.

This task accomplished, she bethought herself that the "family jewels" needed polishing; she brought the

solid old pieces from the pantry, cleaned them until they blazed with silvery light, and then set them back on the pantry shelf; as she did so, it occurred to her that the pantry, having only a screen window no larger than a man's two hands, needed an airing. So she pulled the spring-door open, and kept it ajar by wedging the mop-handle between its bottom and the kitchen floor.

Next she took the famous "Sword of Bunker Hill" from its rack, and polished the blade until she caught a glimpse of her own face in its bright reflection. Some inherited whim of New England housewifery made her decide that the scabbard needed a sunbath; she placed it out on the porch and left the naked blade reposing on the dining-room table, to await the scabbard's ablutions.

These things accomplished, Elise suddenly remembered that Johnny said he would surely be home that evening; of course he would come. Ah, she would make him some old-fashioned pies, just like his mother used to make! Perhaps?—Elise had misgivings. She opened the back kitchen door, so that any chance breeze from the mountains could fan her cheeks as she worked.

The baby-blue-eyed little bride was just well settled into day-dreaming over her dough when——

"Huh! Kinder lonesome picnic you're runnin', ain't it?"

She looked up. A tramp stood in the door—the strangest looking tramp she had ever seen. A great, flaming, tousled mane swept down from underneath his drab plainsman's slouch hat, and fell almost over his shoulders. A beard of the same fiery hue covered all the lower part of his face and fell to his throat, where it had been sheared away as if with one snip of the scissors.

His eyes were little, green, sinister, snapping sparks of light; his nose was huge and blood-swollen. His clothes were dust-covered and unkempt; at his waist two holsters swung from his belt, the black butt of a revolver sticking out of each holster.

In spite of this terrifying apparition, and the brutal voice in which he had addressed her, Elise did not feel afraid. Every man one met carried pistols in this strange country, and they all looked rough, too. He was, of course, only a tramp; they even had tramps in New England, she thought. And tramps were harmless creatures, if you made them think you were not afraid. Besides, Johnny had said there was nothing to fear; so why should she be afraid?

"Where's th' old man?" the tramp asked again in the same gruff voice, and without waiting for her to answer his first question.

"Oh, he's down around the corral somewheres, I guess," she replied, remembering the dissembling tactics of the folks at home when Weary Willie appeared at the kitchen door. But this fellow did not seem deeply impressed with her fib. He leered at her knowingly, winked one wicked green eye, and drawled out, as though he thought himself irresistibly coaxing:

"Now, yer sure don't reckon as how he might 'a' gone out a little man-huntin' like to-day, do yer?"

"Yes, he has," confessed Elise spiritedly, and not sorry to have some one, even a tramp, to talk it over with. "And I hope they catch that vile Red Burge and send him to prison for all his life," she continued warmly.

The tramp grinned, and his evil face seemed so sardonic that for the first time Elise felt a pang of fear.

"I had a hunch them was yore sentymints," he said dryly. "Well, them's my sentymints, too; they'd sure oughter string him up—if they ketch him." He laughed boisterously as he stepped into the kitchen and helped himself to a chair.

"'Scuse my sociable an' homelike ways, lady," he said, in mock apology, "but I been travelin' some considerable sence sun-up, an' I think a mite o' rest 'ud do me good."

"What are you doing out here in these hills?" Elise asked, with a show of sympathy in her voice.

The tramp eyed her keenly, suspiciously. But she faced him so earnestly that in a second he realized the full

extent of her innocence. It filled him with glee; which he tried to suppress.

"Travelin' f'r my health, you sweet thing. There, now, don't git riled! You see, I sorter couldn't he'p it, like; I ain't no ways used to ladies of yore attainments, nohow. Yes, my physician tells me th' more I travel an' th' faster I go these days, th' longer I'm likely to live—though it's jest poss'ble that 'f I shouldn't travel fast 'nough, I'd likely die a few inches *longer'n* I've lived. Yes'm," he went on seriously, noticing her puzzled expression, "that's one o' th' symptoms o' my disease; th' dyin' part of it stretches yer neck." He choked down the laughter that seemed trying to smother him as Elise gazed pityingly upon him; her face was filled with sympathy.

"How terrible!" she exclaimed.

"Yes, lady, that's what I think, too; but there's them that don't. Howsomever, that's neither here nor there; the question before the house is as to what you got to eat. I'm amazin' hungry, an' I didn't come prepared to tarry long."

She understood now that he was making game of her; and, without in the least comprehending him, she instinctively realized that he was indeed a desperate character, and that he had her absolutely at his mercy. Mere unreasoning instinct told the simple girl that she had better obey his every order and trust to Providence to get rid of him; a sort of terror took possession of her and drove her to prepare him a substantial dinner.

There was no doubt that the tramp was hungry. He devoured his food like a famished wolf. He was tired, too; he leaned over on the table as he ate, and his limbs seemed to sink into every line of the chair, as though the fatigue of hard travel had exhausted them.

After a time, he shed his coat and laid it on the table in front of his plate. Beside the coat he placed his hat, a huge knife, and some fat, heavy-looking little canvas bags, which he took from his pockets.

Finally, he studied Elise keenly with his furtive eyes, watched her as a hunting hawk watches an uncoiled rattlesnake that may be feigning sleep; then, apparently satisfied, he removed the belt and heavy pistols from his waist and added them to the pile of things on the table.

Seeing how the little woman feared him, his commands increased in the brutality of their tones, and his manner became constantly rougher.

"Got any tobacco?" he growled, pushing his chair a little away from the table when the dishes in front of him were empty.

She brought him some of Johnny's plug-cut and some brown papers; and the tramp rolled a cigarette in such evident delight, that a man would have seen he was not used to the luxury in recent days. The tramp, relieved of his heavy coat and trappings, lolled in his seat, smoking and apparently enjoying himself.

"See here," he said, between puffs and picking up the empty, milk-stained glass as he spoke. "This stuff don't count for much. Bring me th' booze. Wine'll do."

Elise rebelled at that. Puritan rules held it unchristian to offer men liquor, and it was *dangerous* to feed it to tramps. She said there was none in the house.

"Get out," snarled the tramp. "Go get it, *pronto, muy pronto.*"

"No, I won't," she said; but at the vicious, ugly red glare that burned immediately in the tramp's eyes she faltered: "It's—it's out in the tank-house."

"Get it!" the man ordered curtly; then, as she started to obey, he seemed to change his mind.

"I'll tell you what I'll do: give me a kiss, little sweetheart, and we'll fergit th' wine." He strode toward her with his arms outstretched. Elise fell against the wall and clung to it with terror.

"Oh, go away!" she screamed. "Oh, don't! Don't you *dare!*" All the fear in her soul seemed to express itself in that cry, and she let her face fall into her hands, weeping. The man stopped in his tracks and began to grin. He

stood grinning, and looking her over from head to feet.

"Huh, I see! Ain't purty 'nough fer ye, eh? Well, I ain't as han'some as some, that's right. Well, never mind, kid, cut out th' weeps; I'll 'scuse ye this time, 'cause I'd druther have th' licker, anyhow. Go fetch it now, *pronto*—hurry!"

The girl, trying to dry her tears of mingled shame and resentment, started again for the wine. Hardly knowing that she expressed her thoughts aloud, she murmured at the door:

"Oh, me, if only my husband were here!" The man heard her.

"Huh! Huh!" he shouted, with a taunting peal of his sardonic laughter; "ef yer old man was here, he'd run like a jack-rabbit. Say, kid, ye jest natchu-'ally couldn't see him fer th' dust he'd kick up a-hidin' hisself."

The taunt acted like a whip-lash on a peaceful dog. All the fear went out of her immediately, and a perfect fury of rage flamed up in her breast.

For a moment she resolved not to bring the wine, but she reflected wisely that she was still in the ruffian's power, and that to disobey him might drive him to a frenzy.

She suddenly felt that he would have no compunction about killing her if she crossed him. Oh, if he would only go away and leave her alone until Johnny returned!

As she came back into the kitchen, her soft-soled house-slippers made no noise on the floor, and she started to set the jug of wine down, when she noticed that the tramp was not in the room.

She looked quickly about, holding the jug still in her hand; through the pantry door, which the mopstick still held ajar, she suddenly saw Mr. Tramp. He was standing with his back to her, busily stowing portions of the "family jewels" into his capacious trousers pockets.

The spirit of her Puritan forefathers leaped to the surface in this slender, baby-faced bride of three months; it was that defiant, rebellious spirit of '76, the turning of the worm, that raised the famous battle-cry:

"Millions for defense, but not one cent for tribute!" The tramp should never steal the "family jewels"!

She thought quickly; she glanced around—what should she do? There were his pistols, lying on the table; she knew she never could handle them. Suddenly it came to her—the sword!

She moved swiftly to the dining-room, caught up the huge weapon from the table, and left the jug in its place; she sprang out and confronted the tramp just as he was preparing to come out of the pantry. Instantly she brandished the broad, bloodthirsty-looking blade in front of him. The man stopped, utterly astounded.

"What are you doing?" the girl cried boldly.

"Oh," he answered, trying to speak easily, for he was not used to the menacing gleam of a blade that could cleave an elephant in twain, "I'm jest packin' away a few souvenyers of th' occasion to distribute to my frien's."

A great hairy paw the man raised to clutch at the sword as he made to dart past her—but Elise, not a girl but a woman now—drove the blade straight at him. He sprang back just in time to keep it from slashing into his blazing, fiendish face.

"You thieving hound!" the girl cried, slashing at him again. She missed, but drove him back into the little, solidly built, cell-like pantry by the viciousness of her attack.

The man would not have recoiled so from a pistol, but this great gleaming knife in the hands of a woman whose eyes blazed with fury frightened him.

As he stepped back into the closet his foot struck the smooth, round mop-handle that held the door open, and it slipped out—instantly the powerful spring swung the door shut!

Quick as lightning Elise realized—she shot the iron bolt into its socket, and the terrible tramp was trapped.

Her strength left her, and she fainted.

When she came to consciousness, but a moment later, her prisoner was trying to kick the solid oaken door into kindling-wood, but it was built to stay.

His fearful threats and curses made her ears burn with their vileness. There he would stay, she determined, till Johnny came.

The afternoon wore away endlessly, even as the night had done. Her prisoner raged in helpless fury; he threatened, cursed, implored, and offered bribes; but Elise was deaf to him. Occasionally she checked his violence by telling him she would take his own revolvers and shoot at him through the door. She would not have dared even touch them, but the tramp, having awful visions of her fury with the sword, believed her.

At last, toward evening, she caught the hoofbeats of Johnny's horse coming galloping up the trail. He rode wearily into the ranch, passed the house, and did not halt until he reached the corral. Elise stood beside him as he unsaddled.

"We failed again, dear," he said, as he kissed her. "We lost his trail where he reached the creek; he must have walked up the stream a long ways, and we couldn't find where he left it. The boys are still on the hunt, and I must go back to-night, so's to be with them in the morning. It's too bad; that Red Burge is a demon."

For a few minutes the happy girl was too overjoyed at Johnny's safe return to remember her own capture; but, as they neared the house, she said:

"Mr. Sheriff, I'm a better officer than you are, for I've caught a rascal myself. He's a tramp; the awfulest looking I ever saw. I shut him up in the pantry, and he can't get out, either—oh, it was terrible! He's got the wickedest green eyes and big red beard and —why, what on earth is the matter, Johnny?"

Johnny Chambers caught his wife's arm and dragged her on the run to the kitchen. The tramp was going through a perfect spasm of oaths.

"Open the door, Elise," Johnny commanded in a quiet voice, as he pulled out his revolver and stood in front of it. She slid the bolt quickly, and threw wide the pantry door.

"Hands up, Red Burge, or I'll bore you full of holes!" said the sheriff, covering Elise's tramp with his pistol, held as steady as fate.

That night, when Red Burge reposed on a hard cot in the San Bernardino county jail, and Johnny was home again, hearing for the first time the details of his wife's great victory, he took her in his arms with a new reverence.

"You brave little woman," he said, a break in his voice. She looked up at him, smiling.

"It was the Sword of Bunker Hill, Johnny," she said.

"Yes, girlie—and the Spirit of '76."

THE OBJECT IN VIEW

MRS. JENKINS had missed Mrs. Brady from her accustomed haunts, and, hearing several startling rumors concerning her, went in search of her old friend.

"They tell me you're workin' hard night an' day, Sarah Ann?" she queried.

"Yes," returned Mrs. Brady; "I'm under bonds to keep the peace fer pullin' the whiskers out of that old scoundrel of a husband of mine, and the magistrate said that if I come afore 'im ag'in, or laid hands on the old man, he'd fine me tin dollars!"

"An' so you're working hard ter keep out of mischief!"

"I'm what! Not much! I'm workin' ter save up the fine!"

Norroy, Diplomatic Agent

By George Bronson-Howard

Author of "The Red Pope in the Yellow Palace," Etc.

III.—ON THE NIGHT OF THE CHARITY BALL

(*A Complete Story*)

CHAPTER I.

THOSE WHO LEFT THE BALL.

NOW there were reporters galore at the New Willard on this particular night when the prelude of one of the most intricate cases of diplomatic trickery was enacted before their very eyes. Yet all that appeared in the papers anent it was something to the following effect:

Their excellencies, the ambassadors from Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador, and Peru, left the ball at an early hour to attend a conference at the White House. Baron von Knobloch, the minister from Saxonia, took his leave also at an early hour, being indisposed; but the most amazing defection of all was that of Mr. Yorke Norroy, who, after opening the ball with the President's daughter, disappeared with his friend, Mr. Carson Huntley, and was not again seen during the evening. In view of the fact that Mr. Norroy was ipso facto master of the ceremonies, his early departure caused some surprise.

And that was all of the affair that ever got into the press.

It was a scene that gave one with artistic sensibilities a feeling of lightheartedness and a desire to linger long. The ballroom of the great hotel was festooned with masses of smilax, while palms were banked at different entrances. From amid the greenery tinted electric bulbs shone down on the whirling dancers. Here and there, augmenting and softening the light from above, were golden candelabra, in which the tall white candles were so many white fingers pointing upward. Concealed somewhere, the Marine Band played.

And the gowns—the beautiful gowns—the white-pink necks and arms, the laces, the graces, the rhythmic swaying of the dancers, the girls! Everybody who was anybody—according to the arbiters of capital society—was there; and a great many who were nobodies had scraped together their price of admission and got evening clothes somehow.

Norroy had spent some considerable portion of his time in the past few weeks in assisting the patronesses of the ball in the mural decorations and the arrangements of the light effects. He was on the reception committee; he it was who led the cotillion which opened the ball; to him came puzzled folk who had forgotten just who so-and-so might be, and wanted to know. His immobile face was a beacon-light of knowledge to those concerned about the proper thing to do. And the sudden flickering out of the beacon-light was somewhat embarrassing.

Carson Huntley had passed him, a girl in white chiffon and lace on his arm; and Norroy nodded to him and slowly twisted his right thumb about. Huntley cast a troubled look at his companion, surrendered her to a fair-haired

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This series began in the June issue. The back numbers can be obtained through any newsdealer. Price ten cents each.

youth with pink cheeks, and hastily hurried to where Norroy stood, a slim, elegant figure, one white-gloved hand playing nervously with the links of the heavy gold fob that peeped from underneath his white waistcoat.

"I heard Baron von Knobloch a moment ago," Norroy said in his usual impassive fashion as they threaded their way through the conservatory and into the hall outside. "He told his daughter that he was off. Get your inverness and your tile, Huntley; I'm afraid there's work to do to-night."

At the cloak-room window they tendered their checks and slipped into their coats. Norroy smoothed his silk hat, and then adjusted his muffler. Followed by Carson, he made his way through the central passageway of the hotel, and emerged from it into the little foyer on the F Street side. Several electric hansoms were drawn up before it, and Norroy stepped forward to find that they were public conveyances.

"Come, Huntley," he said. "We don't need a hansom for the three blocks to the White House; but we may before the night's over. Jump in. The White House." This last to the cabman-chauffeur.

"But what——" began Carson Huntley in some amazement.

"Just exactly what I'm going to try to explain," returned Norroy suavely. He offered his cigarette-case, and both men lighted the long, thin paper tubes.

Norroy breathed out a white cloud of satisfaction. "Huntley," he said, "there was a secret session of Congress to-day. You know why?"

"It was——"

"Not so loud," warned his companion.

Carson's tone was lowered. "Well, as I understand it," he said, "it's a pretty big proposition. I'm not important enough in the service to have those things explained explicitly to me. But it seems to be the end of all this talk and maneuvering by the League of South American Republics, isn't it? South America wants to get into the game and be one great big nation instead of a lot of picayune republics; and they want the United States and England to stand by, be their allies, help them, and warn everybody else off. In return for which, the United States and England get free trade, while everybody else is shut off—principally our friends of Saxonia."

The electric cab had turned into the porte-cochère and landed them at the entrance of the White House. Norroy got out and Huntley followed him.

"You wait here, chauffeur," said Yorke Norroy. "What is your number?"

The man told him, and the two secret agents entered the White House by one of the side entrances.

The doorman, who knew them for friends of the President, gave them good evening respectfully.

"We'll wait here for a moment or so," said Norroy, nodding to him. "We're expecting some one." He drew Huntley across the passageway to a cushioned alcove.

"You've got the facts pretty well," he said, carefully picking some strands of white from the braid on his trousers. "As near right as you will ever get them. I'm not authorized to dispense any information on the subject. But you've got to have some understanding if you're going to help me. No one has any idea of this trouble that's liable to come except myself—perhaps I'm the only one looking for trouble."

He smiled slightly and lighted another cigarette.

"But let me tell you, Huntley, that this affair is the biggest of years. If the facts of this federation were to get out before we've had a chance to set our mines to working, Saxonia would throw millions and millions into South America; presidents would fall, governments be changed, and all sorts of dire things result. As it is, she has but the slightest inkling. She must have no more than that—you understand?"

The whir of another electric cab coming up the graveled path, and the sudden stopping of the machine like the impaling of a great beetle, were plainly heard. The doorman admitted

another man in an inverness cape-coat and a silk hat.

Norroy and Huntley, sheltered from view by the alcove, inspected him. It was the German secretary of legation, Count Friedrich von Ehlen. The German seemed quite at his ease, stolid and piglike in expression as ever. To Norroy he had always resembled a young porker, so pinkish and whitish was he.

"Is Señor de Llano here?" he asked, twisting his yellow mustache with his white-gloved hand. He referred to the ambassador from Peru.

The doorman, discreet soul, was paid to know nothing. "I will inquire of the President's secretary, sir," he said; and struck the bell. An official messenger in uniform answered it. He seemed to have been gone but for a moment when he returned with the information that Señor de Llano was *not* within.

"Mr. Gault, then—Mr. Hillen Gault. You know him—of the state department. He is here, is he not?"

"I will see, sir," said the messenger.

The German knocked the ashes from his dead cigar and lighted it again. He had succeeded in sending forth some very vile fumes by the time the boy returned.

"Mr. Gault is expected to be at leisure at one o'clock, sir," said the messenger. "He is engaged with the President just now."

"At one o'clock?" interrogated the Saxonian, then shrugged his heavy shoulders and turned to go. "At one," he said again. He nodded to the doorman, who pulled open the door. The Saxonian passed out into the night; and, after a moment or so, the cab whirred away again.

"Are things a little clearer in your mind?" inquired Norroy, as he rose from his seat and stretched his arms, yawning meanwhile. "I'm afraid I am getting sleepy—which will never do. Come, let's go up and beg a cup of coffee from the President's secretary; I've something to say to him, anyhow."

His companion laid a hand on his arm. "But, Yorke," he protested, "if I'm to be of any help, you'll have to explain things a little more to me."

Norroy sighed. "I don't know that you *will* be of any help, but you may. So you want explanations? Well"—he glanced at his watch—"it is now close on to eleven-thirty. Come outside."

They stepped to the door. "We shall be back presently," Norroy told the doorman. To Carson Huntley when they were on the outside he said: "Rather not talk of this inside; one can never tell about a house."

In silence they threaded the paths about the White House back to the White Lot. Over the way Lafayette Square lay purplish in the occasional glare of the electric lights. The frosted glass bulbs along the White House front gave it the aspect of a European château. Along Pennsylvania Avenue street-cars grated and faded away, motor-cars and electric hansoms buzzed and disappeared; the occasional clatter of horses' hoofs on the asphalt gave the only distinct note of noise.

The White House was lighted up only in spots. The East Room and the upper rooms on that side, save for one, were dark. The one room which was lighted reflected a greenish hue from its windows. The blinds were down, and occasionally men's shadows were thrown upon them in silhouette.

"The President's library," said Norroy briefly. "The President and the British ambassador, together with Hillen Gault, have been there since the South American bill was approved in secret session at five o'clock this afternoon. Gault is drawing up the treaty, instructed by the other two. Since the time they left the ball, the Brazilian, Peruvian, Ecuadorian, and Colombian ambassadors have been with them. The minister from the Argentine was not at the ball. He arrived sooner. Venezuela, Chile, Uruguay, and the smaller republics are not in the deal; but the men assembled in that room represent nine-tenths of the South American continent. They will sign that treaty with the United States and England tonight. That means that another United States will be formed in South

America along the lines of the American and English commonwealths. It means that England and the United States are the only two countries which will have free trade with the Confederated States of South America. It means that Saxonia is forever shut off from acquiring territory there—and that the Anglo-American League has a great ally. What else it means I can't tell you. But isn't that enough?"

A silhouette on the window-blind of a man raising his hand—a characteristic gesture—and both men smiled. "The President," said each, with a certain amount of tenderness.

"And Von Knobloch doesn't know," presently remarked Huntley.

"Know? Of course he doesn't know. And that's the game. But he suspects. Give him the details, and South America will be ravaged with fire and sword inside of a month. Every cent that Saxonia can raise will go to fomenting revolution and strife. You see"—Norroy shielded his lighted match with his hand that its flame might not attract attention—"Von Knobloch is in a bad way."

He ignited the cigarette and dropped the match. "He's failed to unearth a half-dozen things that have passed right here under his very nose. He's in a fair way to being discredited. Now, the foreign office has got some inkling of this affair, and warned Von Knobloch to get to the kernel of it. Von Knobloch hears of this meeting—somehow. Coming right on top of the secret session of Congress, he begins to suspect things. He follows the South American ministers here. He knows they are here. When Von Ehlen tells him they aren't, he'll understand that things are pretty secret. Now, he's got a desperate chance—and one great big card! He's going to play that card."

"What card?" asked Huntley.

"Hillen Gault," replied Norroy easily. "Come, let's get up to the secretary's room. I need his assistance."

Huntley wrinkled his brows. "Gault!" he said slowly. "Why, Gault's a good fellow—a gentleman. He's not the sort to turn traitor."

"Hillen Gault is in love," remarked Norroy sententiously.

"Ah!" Carson Huntley drew in his breath sharply.

"And with Beth—I beg her pardon—Bertha von Knobloch."

Norroy's companion laughed quietly. "That's old, Yorke; it was over long ago. Why, Papa von Knobloch threw him over, rejected him without the slightest hope; and Beth, being a good girl and mindful of the European customs—also that Hillen didn't have enough to support a wife—accepted her fate, and continued her gay flight as a débutante of last season."

Norroy yawned.

"Gault hasn't been with her for ever so long," continued Carson Huntley, slightly irritated by Norroy's contumacy. "The idea's absurd, Yorke."

"Is it?" Norroy tossed away his cigarette. "Wait and see; wait and see. If I'm not mistaken, to-night will prove what I say. You see, you're not the best person in the world to judge an affair when what you know is only common report. For that is all you *do* know about this case. Isn't it?"

"And you?" came in nettled tones.

"I make it my business to keep an eye upon whatever may be detrimental to affairs of state. So I've watched the Gault-Von Knobloch affair. At the time of his rejection, Hillen Gault was only a clerk of class four, at a miserable eighteen hundred dollars per annum. Had he been third assistant secretary of state, Von Knobloch would not have turned him down quite so hard. As a clerk, Hillen was a nobody. As the favorite state department official of the President he's somebody. Here he is drafting that treaty. It's true the secretary's away—but in that case the acting secretary should do this work. But you know our President, don't you?" Norroy smiled and showed his even white teeth for the benefit of Carson Huntley—his way of laughing noiselessly.

"But the affair's off," persisted Huntley.

"The affair is *not* off. Beth von Knobloch has been meeting Gault clan-

destinely. She insists that she can't marry him without the consent of her father—never mind how I know—and that's just how affairs stand. Hillen Gault, like all you impulsive, hot-headed Southerners, is simply mad over the girl. Now, Von Knobloch has directed that the Countess Beth marry that San Francisco millionaire, Easby, the soap fellow. Beth, like a nice, obedient child, is receiving Mr. Easby. Reports of their engagement are bruited about. Hillen Gault succeeded in getting himself quite drunk at the Metropolitan the other night——"

"You mean that you got him drunk," interpolated Carson Huntley keenly.

"And," pursued Norroy, unruffled, "he told everything he knew about his hopeless love-affair. He even threatened suicide or drinking himself to death. I tell you, Gault's simply crazy about the girl."

"Well?"

Norroy considered. "She's the only card Von Knobloch's got—and a high card she most certainly is. Now, don't ask me what his Teutonic excellency intends to do—I don't know. Let's get back."

They passed into the Executive Mansion by the way they had come, and Norroy sent up their cards to the President's secretary. Without delay, they were ushered into that official's sanctum and were greeted quite warmly by him.

"Surprising," said the secretary. "How's the Charity Ball managing to get along without you, Norroy? Thought you were its life and soul."

"In that case, it's lifeless and soulless. Most Charity Balls are." Norroy nodded in the direction of the President's library. "They get through at one o'clock, don't they?"

The secretary was pushing forward his swinging cabinet with its silver-mounted flasks and silver-rimmed glasses. "Yes," he said, "probably. How do you know?" He laughed, and Norroy helped himself to several fingers of brandy. "But then you've a reputation for knowing everything, you and Huntley, here."

The President's secretary was, of necessity, cognizant of Norroy's connection with the government. "Are you on this?" he inquired, when the three of them had touched glasses and set them down again.

"By choice," said Norroy. "I'm afraid there's a game. Can't exactly explain. You'll be mum until to-morrow morning about anything that comes up—eh?"

The secretary nodded.

In a few brief sentences, Norroy outlined his suspicions to the secretary. Finished, he leaned back and lighted a cigarette.

The secretary said nothing, but took another swallow of whisky. "It sounds —bad," he said presently.

Norroy nodded, and blew a smoke-ring. The silence that followed was broken by a staccato knock on the door. The knocker was told to enter. The door opening disclosed one of the messengers from below.

"A servant from the Saxonian legation, sir, says that he's got a message for Mr. Gault from the Countess Bertha von Knobloch. Says he can't deliver it to any one but Mr. Gault."

Norroy leaned across and whispered swiftly into the ear of the secretary. For a moment that official hesitated, but it was only for a moment. Norroy had a singular power of convincement.

"Bring him up. Tell him Mr. Gault will be here."

As the door closed behind the messenger, Norroy explained: "Huntley there doesn't look like Gault at all, but he answers the same general description. If the servant hasn't seen Gault, it's all right. He'll carry back the description of Huntley, which will fit Gault very well."

"But how do you know that the message isn't bona fide—isn't from the Countess Beth?" asked the secretary, a troubled look on his face.

"Because she wouldn't send a legation servant with it—wouldn't dare to. Anyhow, I left her at the ball, and she's still there, I haven't a doubt. She couldn't get a legation servant there,

could she? No, depend on it, this is some——"

The knock again. Norroy motioned to Carson Huntley. As the door opened, Huntley arose and faced the liveried servant in the dark blue and dull gold of the Saxonian legation.

"You have a message for me?" he said. "I am Mr. Gault."

The servant, evidently an old soldier, saluted stiffly and produced an envelope from his capacious inner pocket.

Carson took it, and dropped some silver into the man's hands.

"Ah—thank you, sir," the man said, in guttural accents. "An answer, sir?"

"I will read and answer it presently," said Huntley. "Thank you, you may go."

He opened the door. The messenger stood outside. Huntley beckoned him in, and drew him to one end of the room. "That note was delivered to me as Mr. Gault," he said. "You understand?" The secretary nodded to the messenger, and the discreet one bowed slightly. He escorted the Saxonian servant down-stairs.

When the door had closed again, Norroy arose and took the note from Carson's hands. "Ah! typewritten," he said. "Well, that's easily duplicated. You have envelopes like this, haven't you?"

"Yes—but you mustn't open that," cried the President's secretary excitedly.

"Mustn't?" Norroy laughed. "I beg your pardon. That is exactly what I *must* do. I have no alternative. This is a trick—and it means something. For personal ends, I would never open a letter addressed to some one else. For reasons of state, I would—and I shall."

As he spoke, he ripped open the envelope and took out the folded sheet of paper. "On embassy paper, I notice," he said. "Now, let me see." He wrinkled up his brows in the perusal while the two men watched him with a mingling of admiration and disapproval. Norroy nodded over the paper, and looked up.

"It's exactly what I thought," he said. "Listen:

"I am very ill, and must see you at once. I am getting one of the clerks to write this for me, as I am too ill to write myself. If you care as you say you care, come at once, at once. BETH.

"Twelve-thirty."

Norroy folded the paper and handed it over to the President's secretary. "Take an envelope like this one"—he handed the torn envelope—"and typewrite the address as it is typewritten here. When Gault is at liberty, give it to him. You will then see him make a bee-line for the Saxonian legation. You will, won't you?"

The secretary gazed at the papers. "I'm sorry this had to be done," he said.

Norroy rolled a cigarette between his thin, white-gloved fingers. "So am I," he agreed. "But it had to be. That note is dated twelve-thirty, to give the impression that it came but a few moments before Gault would receive it—for, of course, no notes would be delivered while the thing was in session. It is now twelve, or thereabouts. Here's your work cut out for you, Huntley."

He turned to his assistant of many like games played in the past.

"It's simply tit for tat. The Countess Beth mustn't be at the legation when Gault arrives. Seeing the prize within his grasp, he might lose control of himself entirely. So you will go back to the ball, find the Countess Beth, tell her you have a message from Gault, that he is desperately ill at his home out at Great Falls. Take an electric cab, bribe the chauffeur, have the thing break down when it's in the middle of the Great Falls Road, and keep the countess there until—say two o'clock. Then you can bring her back, arriving at the Saxonian legation at two-thirty. Explain to her anyway you like. She may never speak to you again, but what's the odds? This must be done. Otherwise, she'll get a message to come to the legation immediately, and it may be the ruin of Gault. And I don't want to see Gault ruined, I give you my word. Besides, I can't turn my trick if

she's there. Hurry, now, Huntley, hurry. She may have already received the message from her father. In that case, make the thing strenuous—but at all odds, hurry as though the devil were after you."

He handed Huntley his hat, and hurried him into his coat. "But," stammered Huntley, "how am I to explain?"

"Take your hat," said Norroy curtly. "And get some sort of a reasonable explanation out of your head. I haven't time to invent one. Rush, man, and take that electric hansom we came in—be quick, now."

Carson, realizing that nothing was left but obedience when Norroy used that particular cold, flinty tone, sighed heavily and left the room.

Norroy lighted the cigarette he had been fingering. "I don't think the Countess Beth is in this scheme," he said. "She's not that sort. But the pater is the law and prophets to the little Saxonian Dresden shepherdess. Dainty is the Countess Beth—can't blame Gault so very much. You see, after writing this note"—Norroy pointed to the paper which the secretary still clutched—"pater no doubt sent for his daughter to come home. Arriving home, he wouldn't find it the hardest matter in the world to coerce a dutiful daughter. Besides, I really believe she loves Gault and wants him."

"But I don't quite understand." From the expression on his face, the President's secretary certainly did *not*.

A white cloud of smoke, and through it Norroy spoke. He was not smiling. His tone was airy, perhaps, but it was as hard as polished steel.

"Father will trade off his daughter for the secrets that Gault has to bestow—the secrets of to-night. They will make of Baron von Knobloch anything—perhaps ambassador to Paris, who knows?—and redeem him in the eyes of Wittschaeft. Perhaps, too, Von Knobloch has some patriotism—how the devil am I to know? He may value his country above his daughter; but, anyhow, it's a mighty dirty thing he's doing."

The President's secretary leaned back and seemed to be gasping for air. "You—don't—mean—that. A man couldn't—sell his own daughter."

"Couldn't he?" Norroy's tones were slightly contemptuous. "You came into diplomatic existence when the President was inaugurated. For something like fifteen years I've followed the devious intricacies of the craft. Men will do anything when big things are at stake. *I* have done things officially which I would never have done personally. Witness my tearing open of that letter—a crime punishable by five years' imprisonment, and a dishonorable trick. But it was the country—it was diplomacy." Norroy's tones were slightly wearied. "It's not a nice game. It's like those poker-parties they have out West, where every man has a loaded revolver at his elbow. Diplomacy!—pfugh!" And he tossed his cigarette away with a gesture of disgust.

"But it's a disease. It gets into the bones; just as crooked gambling does. That's why we are all diplomats—that and because we need the money. And now I'm off."

"Do you mind telling me what you intend to do?" asked the President's secretary.

"Certainly not. I have your word for secrecy—even from the President. He doesn't like this double-dealing—chicanery, he calls it; the chicanery that keeps him a President." Norroy smiled. "I'm going to the German legation; I will enter secretly, and antedate our friend Gault's arrival. I shall try to find whether Gault loves his country's honor better than the Countess Beth—and—well, good night. Don't forget to fix that note and give it to Gault. He'll come."

"But how will you——"

Norroy smiled inscrutably, and said good night again.

CHAPTER II.

LIKE A THIEF IN THE NIGHT.

To Yorke Norroy the matter was quite clear. The facts in the case had only to be proven. Baron von Knob-

loch was altogether too dangerous a man to continue in Washington: he was getting to know entirely too much. Norroy felt that he would be doing the United States a service in having Von Knobloch recalled. And if this affair turned out to be a fiasco for the baron, recall was almost certain.

Then there was Hillen Gault. A man in Gault's position must be faithful, must value his country and his country's secrets above all things—even above love.

The matter of love had ever been taken lightly by Yorke Norroy where he himself was concerned, for this self-centered, cold-eyed agent had never allowed his ego to be dominated by another's; but he realized that other men were not like him, and knew that the fates of nations often hung in the balance when enamored diplomats babbled of their country's affairs to the women with whom they were infatuated.

Norroy knew enough of the hot-headed Southerner, Gault, to know that he would go to any means to gain the girl he loved. Whether he would sacrifice his official honor, his country's honor, was a mooted point. Norroy was not quite sure. He hoped not, for he rather liked Hillen Gault.

The perfectly self-evident plan that came to Norroy was that there must needs be a witness to the meeting between Baron von Knobloch and Hillen Gault. It was also quite patent that in the capacity of witness there was none so well suited to the part as Yorke Norroy. He must get into the Saxonian legation somehow. In this case the crudest plan was the best. There was no need of wasting craft in compassing something so obvious. Any burglar might make an entrance into the Saxonian legation: therefore, for the time being, Norroy would be a burglar.

He caught a hansom at Pennsylvania Avenue and Fifteenth Street, which whirled him rapidly toward his apartments on Connecticut Avenue. Once there, he was within a few blocks of the Saxonian legation. Having no further need for the vehicle, he paid the cabman and ascended to his rooms.

He did not trouble to remove his clothes. There was hardly time for that. Snapping on the electric arcs in his dressing room, he pulled forward his make-up box, added a stubby, closely clipped mustache to his make-up, and slouched a black felt hat over his eyes.

Into the pocket of his overcoat he slipped a domino-mask, and into his hip pocket slid a revolver. From a case of assorted tools in a chest of drawers he selected a bunch of skeleton keys, a burglar's "james," and a cold chisel. He did not know that he would have use for these articles. He was merely taking precautions.

When he stepped out on Connecticut Avenue again, his white shirt-bosom still shone from under the loose, silk-lined coat he had exchanged for his inverness, and the black slouch hat was arranged in such a way as to give an appearance of affluence. Such hats were often worn with evening clothes. There was nothing suspicious about his appearance whatsoever.

He traversed the few blocks between his apartments and the Saxonian legation leisurely, blowing smoke-rings into the air.

Nearing the legation, he glanced at his watch; it was almost one o'clock. From the lower windows of the legation came no light. Norroy entered the iron fenced garden and traversed the graveled walk that curved toward the official entrance. Arriving at the steps, he ascended them as a gentleman might ascend the steps of his own home. In case of mishaps, however, Norroy thought it better to lurch and sway slightly, as an intoxicated man might do.

Having performed a sufficient number of these evolutions to satisfy any one who might be on the lookout, he finally extracted the skeleton keys from his pocket, and began trying them one after another in the two separate keyholes of the door. But evidently the lock was of no common make. In spite of his determined efforts, the door refused to yield an inch under the pressure of any one of his keys.

Norroy slid the keys back into his

pocket and whistled softly. Inwardly determining to get an impress of this most peculiar lock as soon as possible, in case of further emergencies, he descended the legation steps and looked about him.

The electric light, flickering and waning, bathed the front and sides of the building in its purplish light, and made any attempt to enter by stealth liable to detection by officious persons on the street.

Silently Norroy made his way across the lawn and to the back of the house. There was the entrance for those delivering goods, the same entrance being also used by the servants. Norroy sidled up to it and flattened himself against the wood-fittings in such a way that his shadow did not extend beyond the shadow of the house. His fingers explored the lock.

This time the matter was much simpler. The skeleton keys came out again; and one of them slid easily into place. With a gentle snap, the lock turned and the door swung inward. Norroy entered.

The next moment a pair of brawny arms were wound about him, and a low derisive chuckle came in German: "I got you now. I have been watching you. I was in the front when you tried to enter. Ah ha! but I was too smart for you, Herr Thief. I——"

It was almost impossible to hold Norroy tightly; as well strive to pinion an eel. He had remained quite passive in the man's arms until his fingers closed over the "james" in his overcoat pocket. A single quick play of the muscles after the Japanese fashion and he was quite free. His eyes, catlike in the darkness, told him where to strike. The little iron weapon came down with a thud on the man's tawny, bulletlike head. With a groan, cut off in the middle by unconsciousness, the man sank down in the passageway.

Norroy groped about for the electric button, and snapped the lights on. The man was evidently the "late" servant, detailed for duty after twelve o'clock.

Norroy cursed his stupidity for having forgotten the man; and opened the nearest door. It proved to be some sort of a coarse-linen closet, for here were the kitchen linen, the huck towels, ironing-boards, iron-lifters, and such paraphernalia. The closet was quite a little room in itself, and Norroy, summoning all his strength, lifted up the servant and dropped his limp body within.

He left the closet door ajar from purely humanitarian principles; but when he realized that the man might recover and raise an alarm, he abandoned humanitarianism, retraced his steps, and locked the closet door, leaving the key in the lock.

Norroy had been in the Saxonian legation many times on the occasions of balls, receptions, and other affairs given there. He had formed quite a friendship with the wife of Von Knobloch's predecessor, and had often assisted her in the decoration of the place for different affairs to be given. He was glad, somehow, that Von Knobloch's wife was dead. Norroy did not like disgracing men who had wives.

He made his way out of the servant's passageway and into the butler's pantry; from there the task of finding the morning-room, dining-room, and front hall was the easiest matter in the world. But Norroy had no desire to ascend the front stairs. He did not take advantage of his knowledge and enter the morning-room. He was looking for the back stairway.

In the half-light from a flickering candle, which he lighted in the butler's pantry, Norroy took out his hand-mirror, arranged his domino-mask, turned up his coat collar, and turned down his slouch hat. He looked sinister enough, he assured himself, to be a brigand in grand opera. He blew out the candle and advanced stealthily through the rear hall again.

After some search he came upon the back stairway, which he descended with extreme caution. His evening pumps made no sound.

He landed triumphant on the second floor. Electric lights in frosted, almost opaque, globules lighted the halls. Nor-

roy knew that the library was on the second floor, and that Von Knobloch's private office—"private, personal office," as some one had called it—adjoined the library. He was quite sure that it was in this room that the Saxonian ambassador would receive the third assistant secretary of state.

Norroy looked at his watch again. It was a quarter-past one. Plainly there was no time to lose. He must get into that private office somehow, if he was to hear what was necessary. His hand on his hip pocket—for purposes of intimidation only, should he be so unfortunate as to meet some one—he crept softly down the hall and paused several inches from the library door.

Dropping on hands and knees, he craned his head forward, so that but a segment of it showed, enough for him to get his bearings by squinting through one eye into the long, low room.

It was handsomely furnished in a solid, comfortable way. Long cases of books, of three shelves each, lined the walls. There were several tables, one piled with magazines and newspapers, the other ornamented with a great bronze lamp of Japanese design, shaded with a huge inverted glass bowl fringed with red streamers of cut glass.

At the far end of the library another great globe of the same sort was suspended by a brass chain from the ceiling, and was lighted up by a number of electric arcs within. A huge wood-fire burned just beyond it, and it was in front of this that the Saxonian minister stood, gazing into the flames, a dead cigar between the fingers of his left hand.

His back was to Norroy. A few paces away was the private office, the sliding doors slightly ajar. Norroy could see the slight gleam of the study-lamp. He wasted no time. Still on hands and knees, he crawled stealthily toward the partly open doors and wriggled through as noiselessly as a snake on a sand-bed.

Once within, he peered from behind the doors at the Baron von Knobloch, who still stood motionless before the library fire.

Norroy cast quick glances about the severely furnished office-room. It had no hangings, no closets, nothing behind which a person might hide. There was but one shelter from observation. With a sigh, Norroy took advantage of it. It was a huge leather divan at the end of the room, the tassels of which, hanging downward, secured from notice any one underneath.

Norroy slid into place, and some dust got into his nostrils. It was all he could do to prevent coughing.

How long he lay there Norroy does not remember. It seemed an incalculably long time, and the position was both uncomfortable and undignified. It seemed ages before the jar of an electric bell rang through the silent house.

Norroy heard the baron moving about in the study. Some few moments passed, and the electric bell jarred again. Then there was an impatient snort from the Baron von Knobloch.

"Heinrich—sleepy-head! fool!" the Saxonian minister presently shouted.

Again the bell jarred. Norroy knew now that the man he had rendered hors de combat was indeed the late servant. Presently he heard the baron's august footsteps in the hall and down the stairs. So silent was the house that even the creaking of the door might be heard. The salutation and answer were, of course, lost to the listener. Presently the voices came in closer proximity:

"Your excellency, I left hurriedly, and my keys were in my other clothes." The conversation was in German.

Norroy recognized the voice as that of a younger legation attaché: a youngster, and some sort of relative of the baron. "Why wasn't the servant——"

"Never mind the key. Where is she? I am waiting—have been waiting. Did I not tell you that she was to come with you?"

"She had already left the ball, excellency."

"Left the ball? Before one o'clock? It is impossible. Why, then, was the Countess Ehlen with her—her chaperon—I have not seen Ehlen and his wife—or heard them return."

"They are still at the ball, excellency.

The count returned after leaving you here."

"My daughter left! Who accompanied her?"

"No one knows, your excellency. I think no one. She got a message from some one. A chauffeur delivered it—I do not know."

Norroy smiled. Carson Huntley had done his work, and apparently done it well.

The Saxonian minister's voice was raised to an excited pitch. "You must find her. I charge you to find her and bring her here immediately. She must be found—*must*, I say, *must*. You understand?"

The electric bell jarred again.

"You *must* find her. It means much to the fatherland—how much you may never know. But find her—and——"

Again the jar.

"Go below; answer the bell. It may be the American, Herr Gault. If he asks for the Countess Bertha, tell him to ascend to the library. He will know. When he has come, you will return to the ball and find my daughter."

"But——"

"I order you—it is a command. You have but to obey."

There was a sound as of heels clicking together, a turn, and then of feet going down the carpeted stairs. The front door opened. Again the muffled sounds of voices, and of feet ascending the steps.

"Mr. Gault!"

"Baron Knobloch!"

The Saxonian minister's tone betrayed some slight concession to friendliness. The American's were stiff and formal.

"You have come to see me, Mr. Gault." It was not a question: it was an assertion.

"No, baron; to see your daughter."

"An unusual hour for calling on a lady, Mr. Gault!"

It might be inferred that Gault shrugged his shoulders. "May I ask that you let a servant inform the Countess Bertha that I am here?"

The baron waved his hand toward the study door. "If you will come into my office, I will have my daughter see you here. She is expecting you. But she cannot see you until I have spoken with you."

There was a slight silence, then Gault entered the office, followed by the minister from Saxonia. The latter closed the sliding doors.

"Be seated, Mr. Gault," invited the baron.

"Thanks. I'll stand up, if you don't mind. Well, sir?"

Gault was not in evening clothes; but his appearance was the sort that would enable him to mix with a party of those who were, without the fact that he was minus the conventional garments being noticed.

His hair was very dark, his skin a clear brown, his nose thin, slightly arched, and with sensitive nostrils. His lips were thin and very straight. His dark hazel eyes showed the passionate nature of the man, along with his pride of race; they were the eyes of a fighter, a ruler of men, but not master of himself. He was, perhaps, thirty-one in years.

"Mr. Gault," said the Saxonian minister, "my daughter tells me you wish to marry her."

"That is no news to you, sir," said Gault bitterly.

"To-night—I state this with her approval—Mr. Easby, of San Francisco, made a formal proposal to me for my daughter's hand. I gave it favorable consideration, and promised him an answer to-morrow. He has wealth, position—all that a girl of noble birth may need. I am not a rich man. I can give my daughter but a small dowry. My son in the army gets all of the little I have. You understand?"

"I understand. But why Easby? I am not rich; but I have more than when you forbade me to come here. My income is fair; I have some property recently left me; my social position is better than Easby's. And I love your daughter. Baron"—his lips were very white—"the Countess Bertha *shall not* marry this San Francisco rat." It was easy to see that Gault had lost his tem-

per. His fist came down on the table. "I mean that."

"Yes?" The Saxonian minister was ironical. "But my daughter will obey me. I have told her that you do not love her. She believes me."

"Then damn you for——" His tones changed. "But, there! that's rot. She knows that I love her; and what is more"—his voice rang with confidence—"she loves me; and you know that she does."

"As I told you, I have persuaded her that you do not love her. 'He could never make you a good husband,' I tell her. 'He is bound up in this, his country. He will not love your ways nor your country. He will not trust you with his secrets—nor me.' And so I have wrung from her a promise."

Gault was silent.

"I said to her: 'Let him tell me why the South American ministers meet to-night with the English minister and the President; why Congress went into secret session; what happened this night—and then, when he has shown his trust——'"

"Well?" choked out Gault.

"'You shall marry him,'" finished the Saxonian minister, with a wave of his hand. "Just a proof that you love my daughter; that I am giving her into safe hands."

"Selling her," grated Gault. "Selling her."

The Saxonian minister rose, also. "May I ask your meaning, Mr. Gault? Selling her? I do not understand."

"You don't, eh? It's plain enough to me." Gault was at white heat, but he held his temper remarkably well. "Just at present I'm a bigger man than Easby to you, for if I told you some things that you think are important it would mean a lot for you. You think that something important happened—something that would raise you in your superiors' estimation. I know you. I don't believe that the Countess Bertha knows of this. Thank God, she's not like you!"

For a moment Von Knobloch quivered, then: "I do not care what happened to-night. It was a test we had agreed upon. Your words——"

"Bah!" said Gault, and he made a gesture of disgust. "Why lie? You know as well as I that you are lying. A test, eh? No, you have put it that way. Perhaps it is easier for my honor to swallow it that way. A test—pshaw! Your daughter knows nothing of this. Let her tell me so, and I will believe you. Until she does——"

"And if she tells you that we have made this compact?"

"I shall refuse," replied Gault coldly.

"Refuse" — the Saxonian leaned across the table—"and show her that you care less for her——"

The Southerner's rage was not to be gainsaid this time. "You lie, Baron Knobloch. I love her better than anything in the world. I'd do anything for her—for *her*—that a man could do. She knows how much I love her. But I will buy no one's body for—*that*. What do you think of me, anyway?" He flared this out suddenly. "This is my country. I am one of its officials—an official who has sworn before his God to uphold, protect, defend—and all the rest of it—my country. For this is my country, you know. My father fought against it in '61, but we both fought for it in '98. For it's our country—and what I know, I know, and if I choose it, I will tell it. But what I know as an official, what concerns my country, what is secret, I tell no man—no man, *nor woman!* You understand me? Now, let me see the Countess Bertha."

The Saxonian minister arose and faced him. "You shall never see my daughter again—and you shall never marry her. I gave you a chance to-night to prove your love for her. You have insulted me—have said that I was——"

"That you are trying to bribe me, trying to work on my love for your daughter, trying to *sell* her to me—and so you are, and you know it. Now, see here!" He brought the palm of his hand down heavily before him, "you are mistaken. I *shall* marry your daughter. If you refuse, I shall lay the story of

this attempted bribery before my secretary of state, who will communicate with your foreign office and your emperor—and you will be recalled and disgraced. For it is a fearful crime to be found out, for you Saxonians. Now you understand. No, I am not above that. I want the girl I love for my wife—and you have put yourself in my hands——"

The little silence that followed was broken by the easy laugh of the Saxonian. "You have only your word against mine—your word is not as good as mine, for I am a minister and you a mere under-secretary. Should you tell this foolish tale, I shall state that it was your revenge because I would not allow my daughter to marry you."

Neither man noticed the form of Yorke Norroy wriggling from beneath the divan: that part of the room was in semidarkness. Both men were gazing steadily at one another. Norroy emerged, brushed himself stealthily, turned down the collar of his coat, and took off the black felt hat. Once more he was the gentleman of leisure. He seated himself on the divan and crossed his legs.

"So, you see, my young friend, you are foolish. You were asked only for a test. Leave this house refusing, and you shall not see the Countess Bertha again. Your threat to inform is quite futile."

"Not if he has a witness," said Norroy coolly, and as though he had been a participant in the conversation all along.

Both men started, clutched the table, and stared. They saw, leaning back quite at ease on the divan, a man in faultless evening attire; a domino-mask covered the upper part of his face, a mustache shaded his lower lip. In one hand was a cigarette-case.

"Will you smoke?" he queried.

As they did not answer him, he extracted a cigarette, snapped the case shut, and took a wax vesta from a gold-chased match-box. Lighting the cigarette, he inspected the room.

"Very cozy," he said. "I wasn't in a position to appreciate it before. Close quarters under this divan." He smiled quite pleasantly. "And, as I was saying, Mr. Gault has you somewhat at a disadvantage, baron. I rather think he will marry the Countess Beth. For, you see, I heard all of the conversation between you."

"You were under that divan all the time!" The Saxonian minister advanced threateningly. "You—you——"

"Don't call names, baron. It's the game. I might happen to be connected with the diplomatic service myself. Really, your actions were quite obvious after leaving the ball to-night. And, by the way, the Countess Beth will be here in a little while. A friend of mine is keeping her away from the legation until I have settled matters. It was done in quite the same way that you got Mr. Gault here—a false summons. You understand, baron. Please don't be violent. You've lost your little game, that's all."

Norroy turned to Gault. "I want to congratulate *you*," he said. "You came through with flying colors. And I think you deserve some reward; not that virtue isn't its own reward, but people like Christmas presents that aren't useful, if I remember rightly. Baron, you will oblige me by writing out in a firm, clear hand, a full consent to the marriage between your daughter and Mr. Hillen Gault. At the same moment, you will write a cablegram, asking for your recall from Washington and your appointment as minister to China—which position happens to be open. And as I'm in a hurry, don't waste any more time than is positively necessary."

The Saxonian minister had been staring ahead of him, blankly, incuriously. The last blow had been struck. He was a broken, beaten old man.

"You realize, of course," went on Norroy suavely, "what would happen were this matter laid *officially* before the secretary of state and the President."

The Saxonian held up his hand. "I realize," he said. "I have bungled. Your secret agents are cleverer than ours. I might have known." He turned to Norroy. "I will write," he said.

He fitted a key into the roll-top desk and pushed up the outside covering. On a sheet of personal note-paper he carefully inscribed his consent to his daughter's marriage with Hillen Gault. A cablegram was also filled out and signed. Norroy glanced over them when they were handed to him, and gave the note-paper to Gault. The cablegram he folded.

"This I will send myself," he said. "Please put the Saxonian frank on it, baron."

The paper changed hands again. When the minister gave it back to Norroy it was properly franked.

Norroy rose. "Come, Gault," he said. "We'd better be going now."

Down stairs the electric bell jarred. "Come, Gault," said Norroy again. "If you like, we will open the door, baron."

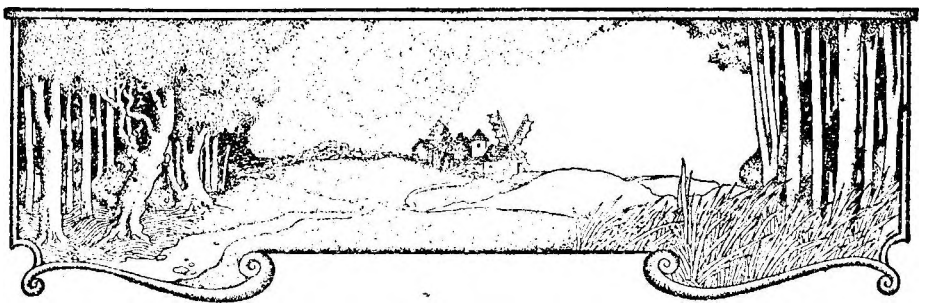
"I will come," said Von Knobloch lifelessly.

In silence the three men descended the stairs. The baron was the first to the door and flung it open. A girl, her cheeks flushed, her eyes blazing, stepped within. She was in a white opera-cloak trimmed with fur, and wore a tiara of rubies in her fair hair, over which was thrown a filmy head-covering.

"I was delayed." She turned, to face her father and Gault. Norroy had slipped outside unobserved. "A man came to me——" She saw Gault, and her eyes grew tender. "They told me you were sick, that you needed me——"

"Dear, I do need you," said Gault. "And everything's all right now. Your father has said 'yes'—and, dearest——" He held out his arms to her.

She saw in her father's eyes acquiescence, and without a word slipped into Gault's embrace, sighing contentment, her eyes downcast, her lips upturned to his.



OIL ON TROUBLED WATERS

THE hands of the clock were marking the hour of twelve, midnight. She had been waiting two hours for him; her anger, from a gentle simmering, gradually increased in temperature until the boiling-point was reached. She was ready for him. As he entered the room with a half-idiotic, half-good-natured smile on his face she opened her mouth to pour out the accumulated and thoroughly heated contents of the reservoir of her wrath, but before she could get out a drop he said:

"Say, Mary, d'ye think marriage's a lottery?" She was so taken aback that she could only murmur inarticulately that she didn't know.

"It ain't," he said. "How c'n marriage be a lottery when a f'ler has only to look round him to pick out the first prize, same's I did? No lottery 'bout that."

She brought him his slippers, and five minutes later she was opening a box of sardines for him with his best razor.

When the Light Failed at Carysfoot

By T. Jenkins Hains

Author of "The Black Barque," "The Wind-Jammers," Etc.

Virtue isn't always triumphant, as witness the case of the two lighthouse keepers whose adventures are herein described by Mr. T. Jenkins Hains. Though they displayed enterprise and imaginative powers to a very high degree, it was not in a way which would commend them to people with high ethical standards

THE United States Lighthouse Establishment, organized by Thornton Jenkins, Rear Admiral, United States Navy, had built many important lighthouses upon the coast of the States. The appropriations admitted the lighting of the dangerous coral banks of the Florida Reef, which rose from the blue Gulf Stream many miles off shore and stretched away from Cape Florida to Tortugas.

From Fowey Rocks to Sand Key the high, long-legged towers, built of iron piling driven into the rock and braced with rods, rose above the shoal water, and at night their huge lenses flashed forth a warning gleam for twenty miles or more over the sea.

Carysfoot was the second from the beginning of the reef: a tall, iron structure, the lantern or lens mounted atop of a wooden house built upon the platform at the end of the piling.

Inside of the house were the two bedrooms of the keepers, the oil room, storerooms, and kitchen. Large tanks of iron held hundreds of gallons of water caught from the roof.

Outside the structure the platform extended six feet clear all around, making a comfortable porch or piazza, with a high rail which hung out over the sea at a height of about a hundred feet.

A long iron ladder extended from a trap-door in the flooring to the sea below, stopping at a landing about halfway, where the keepers had a small wood pile, a flower-bed, and a few things which would stand exposure to the weather. At the sides of the platform above were davits, in which the two whale-boats hung.

Altogether, the little house and platform offered some inducements to men who were not particular about being alone for a long time.

It was many miles to the nearest land, clear out of sight from even the top of the tower; and to those who lived there it was like being at sea upon a small vessel which neither pitched nor rolled in a seaway, nor yet changed position in any manner. It was almost like living in mid-air.

It was a healthy life for the keepers. No germs of any known disease ever reached the distant lighthouse, and no sickness had ever occurred there.

On shore, it was a well-established axiom that among the off shore keepers none died - and few retired.

Every few months each could get a leave of absence on full pay and spend the time in any manner he pleased. The supply-ship stopped off the reef twice each year, and the lighthouse tender traversed the district as high as Cape Canaveral if anything was wanted.

So at least three or four times a year the keepers would hold communication with the outside world and converse with their fellow men.

The ships passing up the Hawk's

Channel from Key West went within a few miles of the reef, and steamers going north outside sometimes stood in close enough to be recognized; but the Carysfoot and Alligator Reefs were good places to keep away from, and no vessels except the spongers remained long in sight.

The spongers consisted of small sloops and schooners, which hailed from Key West, whose owners were the wreckers of the reef, and who spent the best part of the good weather in summer hunting the growths upon the coral which brought such good prices in the Northern drug-stores.

Few wreckers are piously inclined, some less so than others, but the outlying light was safe from thieves, for by hauling up the iron ladder the keepers were shut off completely from the world below. No one could, or would, climb those polished iron columns painted a dull red and as slippery as glass, unless something valuable was to be had at the top. So the keepers often left the trap-door open or unbolted, knowing their security.

Black Flanagan was the head keeper, a six-foot giant from Wisconsin, who had found his way to Florida while evading a Michigan sheriff. The work and confinement upon the light were not as irksome to him as might be expected.

His assistant was a preacher, a broken-down Methodist minister without a flock, whose religious tendencies were of an order which brooked solitude.

He had the reputation of being the most blasphemous man upon the Florida Reef, and his short sojourns ashore were marked by every excess capable of being committed by a human being within the law.

They called him "the howler," for, when he was drunk—which he invariably was an hour after he came ashore—he would stop at the village street corners and bellow for converts.

Any one within a mile would know what was taking place, and many would stop to listen. Failure to get responses brought forth such a torrent of profanity that he would have to be locked up until sober—when he would repeat the effort until his leave was over.

Then, solemnly and with ponderous dignity, he would take himself back to his home in the air over the blue Gulf Stream, and no one would see him again for several months. Black Flanagan would greet him with a grunt, and the two would take up the even life of lighting the lantern and putting it out.

Men were not struggling for their positions, and they took some comfort from the fact. They would probably live so for a long time, drawing good pay, with nothing whatever to do except clean and light the lamp.

It was a hot and sultry morning in August, and the keepers were hanging lazily over the rail of the platform, when they saw the wrecking-sloop *Sea-horse* coming slowly up the Hawk's Channel.

Her main-boom was well off to port, and she was fanning along before a very light air from the southeast, going not more than two knots an hour.

Upon her deck lay the crew of half-naked conchs, while at her wheel the giant form of "Bahama Bill," the mate, stood leaning against the shaft, smoking a short pipe.

The fact that the black man now and then looked astern at a thin trail of smoke caused Black Flanagan to notice him.

"There goes the *Sea-horse*," said he to his assistant; and they both came to the side of the platform nearest the passing vessel.

"Never seen thet big feller show so much consarn about what was astern o' him, hey?" said the preacher. "Looks like they were from the east-'ard." And he nodded significantly.

The sloop drew nearer, and the thin line of smoke rose blacker a dozen miles astern. Then there seemed to be signs of life aboard. Two men sprang up and began to drop large kegs overboard, making a great splashing. They kept this up for some minutes, and the keepers went inside the light for the telescope.

Astern of the sloop they made out small, black objects, which floated at intervals upon the swell, and were just discernible through the powerful glass.

For half an hour the men aboard the wrecking-vessel worked heaving cargo overboard, and, as they went along, the long line of tiny specks marked their wake.

"Corks," said Flanagan; "I thought so."

"They better hurry up," said the preacher; "the cutter's rising fast." As he spoke, he looked toward the steamer, which was now coming along in plain view, her hull rising slowly above the horizon, and her funnel pouring out a black cloud, which hung over the sea.

"They'll get caught fair enough. Half an hour, an' the officers'll be aboard."

"Well, they won't find anything. They'll never see them corks—she's already heading out to get them clear of the wake. When they catch her, she'll be an innocent sponger—an' we'll——"

They looked at each other and smiled.

An hour later the *Sea-horse* and revenue-cutter were upon the northern horizon heading into Biscayne, and the keepers were lowering their boats.

It is an unwritten law of the reef that a man may steal as much as he can from the United States, but he must not touch property belonging to an individual. A smuggler is not by any means a common thief.

Flanagan's ideas were different. He held that it was well to steal whenever the opportunity offered without danger of getting caught; and upon this principle he had little difficulty in converting his pious assistant, whose thirst had not been slaked for three full months.

Together they loaded three of the kegs into the boats by simply pulling up the fishing-lines whose ends were floated by beer-bottle corks.

The lines anchoring the kegs were lying upon the bottom in six fathoms of water, out of sight, and the small cotton cords were amply strong enough to raise them. Once getting a grip of the anchoring-lines, they had no difficulty in hauling the liquor aboard their whale-boats.

The temptation to sample the goods was so strong that they desisted after the third keg, and made straight away for the lighthouse to enjoy the plunder. They could come back again and get the rest at their leisure, for the corks would be in plain view during the calm weather.

What transpired at the lighthouse during the next three days is somewhat hazy. No light appeared at night, and the Key West steamer almost ran ashore on her trip south. She reported the light out, and the tender was despatched to see what had happened.

The day was clear and bright, and the keepers were on the lookout, seeing the steamer when fully fifteen miles away. Their liquor was promptly put out of sight, and everything made snug to receive the inspector.

While there were evidences of drink in the faces of the men, they showed a properly kept light, and swore solemnly that they had not left the tower, and that the light had not failed at all.

They mildly suggested that the captain of the Key West steamer may have been in a highly reprehensible condition to have accused two perfectly sober and diligent light-keepers of neglect of duty.

The pious one broke forth in prayer and exhortation for the delivery of deluded pilots from the wiles of the devil, and soon the inspector was glad to go aboard his vessel to return to Key West.

The *Sea-horse*, having been searched at Miami and found to be clear of contraband, was allowed to go her way. She stood out to sea, and headed down the Hawk's Channel just as the keepers lit the lantern for the evening watch. Black Flanagan was just sober enough to do this, and then turn in to continue his debauch with a pannikin of rum at his bed.

The *Sea-horse* anchored near the light and waited for daylight to pick up the floats.

In the gray of early morning the black mate turned out the crew, leaving the captain below, and, taking the small boat, put off.

It was calm, and the corks were plainly visible. They were promptly hauled aboard, and the sunken kegs stowed until the end of the line was reached.

Here the mate found three floats missing, and, being in a suspicious frame of mind, he looked toward the light, which was still burning, although the rays of the rising sun were coloring the eastern horizon a rosy hue.

"They've got 'em, all right," said he. "If we're quick enough, we might catch 'em—give way hard."

The small boat with three men was headed for the tower; and the *Sea-horse*, with her captain now thoroughly awake, lay by for developments.

The big mate lost no time gaining the tower. It was broad day now, and Flanagan had just staggered up the steps into the lantern when the small boat arrived alongside the piles below.

In his befuddled state Flanagan saw nothing, until, after putting the light out, he came stumbling back again. He arrived in the lower room just in time to see the black head and shoulders of the mate emerging upward through the trap-door in the floor.

The mate was not in a good humor; moreover, he had turned out early without eating his breakfast, and his great black head and giant arms seemed supernatural in both vindictiveness and size.

Flanagan thought he had taken too much, and that the horrors were upon him at last. With a yell, he launched himself upon the seaman, taking him at a disadvantage, and endeavored to smash him back into the void below.

But the mate was strong. He had come to the light expecting trouble. With a mighty effort he forced the keeper upward, and, amid a fierce snarling and threshing about, he soon engaged in a desperate struggle.

The "howler," hearing the uproar, sprang to the rescue, and joined in the fray just as the sailors, following their trusty mate, climbed through the door. In less than five minutes the keepers were lashed fast, and were being lowered down through the door into the waiting boat below.

What remained of their spoil was also found and lowered after them; and in the bright light of the tropic sunrise the *Sea-horse* put to sea, leaving the great tower of the Carysfoot light to the westward.

For nearly a week no light was shown from the tower. Strangely enough, no one reported the light out.

The sixth day a sponger, sailing past at dark, noticed the absence of light, and went to the tower to see what was wrong.

He found it deserted, and, being a very poor man, he made his boat fast to the piles and took possession, enjoying the fare and taking care of the lantern in proper style for several days.

All might have gone well with him for several months, but for the fact that the supply-steamer was due, and arrived before he thought it time to make a get-away.

Finding the keepers missing, and no account made for them by the inhabitant, the officers promptly accused him of murdering them, and forthwith took him aboard the vessel to be carried ashore and tried. He was promptly convicted of manslaughter and sentenced to imprisonment for life.

Meanwhile, the *Sea-horse*, having made the Bahamas, put the thieving keepers ashore to shift for themselves. After vainly trying to get passage back to their home, they finally managed to get a small boat and put to sea, to make the two hundred miles or more to the lighthouse.

They had been absent more than a month, and they arrived at Carysfoot one sunny morning, in time to see the two new keepers who had been appointed in their place take their whaleboat and start fishing along the reef to the northward of the tower.

Seizing the opportunity, they promptly gained the lighthouse and climbed into the landing, dropping the trap-door fast behind them.

The new keepers, seeing the strangers in possession of the tower, hailed them lustily, and started back to inquire their business.

For answer Flanagan leaned over the railing and gazed calmly down upon them with a quizzical look.

"What d'ye want?" inquired the tall keeper, in response to a hail.

"What are you doing in that light?" asked the new keeper.

"I am the keeper, and when you address me say 'sir,'" roared the tall man in stentorian tones. "Tie that boat to the spiles and git away from here, or I'll fall on top o' ye."

But the new keepers were not made of easy stuff. They gained the lower landing, and held forth under threats and persuasion for a day and a half, when the "howler," getting tired of their proximity, began attacking them with hot water and other missiles, which he hove or dropped from the platform above.

The new keepers could not get up, but they determined that the men above should not get down, and they built a bomb-proof shelter to protect themselves until help should arrive.

After two days, they finally gave it up and started for Miami, where they arrived and reported the state of affairs.

The inspector came along, but found the two worthies sober, and attending strictly to their duties.

They explained how they had been attacked by a huge smuggling vessel bound for the North, and how, after a desperate fight, they finally had been overpowered, taken forcibly from their abode in the light, where they had been attending to their duties, and put ashore in the Bahamas.

They described how, after a tremendous exertion, they had managed to get back again, only to find two strangers in possession of the tower. Naturally, they treated them as trespassers and took charge. The light had been kept regularly ever since, and they had no fault to find with the job.

After listening to their tale, there was nothing to do but to leave them to their duties, for nothing could be found against them.

Their absence from the light would have enabled the inspector to give them their discharge, but they could prove they had not left of their own accord. The forepart of their story would necessarily remain in the dark, for they would not talk of it, and the crew of the *Sea-horse* would rather have it kept quiet. Besides, it would be more than useless to try to find the vessel from their description. The tender steamed away for Miami to inform the authorities of the existence of the keepers.

"Virtue is usually triumphant," said the inspector to the judge, who ordered the release of the convicted prisoner. "But in this case there seems to be an exception."

"There are exceptions to every rule," quoted the judge wisely. "Light-keepers are rare birds—trouble will probably not happen again—I would therefore sentence them to life imprisonment in—well, I reckon there is no worse place than the Carysfoot light."

"I don't know but what you are right," said the inspector.

A Plunge Into the Unknown

By Richard Marsh

Author of "The Ape and the Diamond," "The Whistle of Fate," Etc.

CHAPTER XXXI.

DONNA LUISA REDIVIVUS.

IT had happened so suddenly that for a moment or two George Otway was not quite clear in his own mind as to what exactly had occurred.

The window had been opened, the girl had looked out, she had twice called his name, had been dragged back into the room, the window refastened—all, it seemed to him, inside two seconds; at any rate, with such surprising quickness that, before his attention had been fully roused, the incident was closed.

He remained motionless on the other side of the street, with his eyes fixed upon the window in question, half expecting that it would be reopened and a further scene in the drama enacted.

His expectations did not go wholly unrealized. For, presently, the window was partially opened, an arm protruded, the *persiennes*—those Venetian shutters which are associated with every house in France—were released and drawn to, and, presto! the window had vanished, and only the shutters remained. The action was significant; evidently precautions were being taken to prevent the girl making a second appeal.

Otway arrived at an instant decision. Crossing the street, he gave a vigorous pull at the bell handle which dangled against the wall. A clanging peal resounded through the courtyard on the other side of the heavy door.

He waited, but no answer came. He rang again and again. Finally, a small trap was thrown back, and a harsh feminine voice demanded, in French:

"Well, who is it? What do you mean by making all this clatter?"

Otway replied, in the same language:

"I wish to see Miss Thornton."

"And who, in the name of goodness, is Miss Thornton? There is no one of that name here. It is because of this person you try to break our bell—a person of whom one has never heard!"

"If you prefer that I should use a name which certainly is not hers, then I may say I wish to see Miss Villiers."

"Miss Villiers? Ah! Now we advance. You speak of the poor mad girl? But no one can see Miss Villiers; she is not in a fit state to see any one."

"She is in a fit state to see me. I insist upon your opening the door and admitting me at once!"

"Name of a dog! you insist! And pray who are you, that you talk as if the house were yours?"

"Never mind my name. It is enough for you that I am a friend of Miss Villiers, as you call her, and that, if you do not wish to have trouble with the police, you will instantly let me see her."

"My good man, you talk as if you aimed cannons at one's head. You will understand that this house is not mine; I am but the concierge. I obey orders, and only admit certain persons. If you will condescend to wait, I will go and inquire if I am to admit you."

"Go, then. Only understand that I intend to be admitted, and be so good as not to keep me long."

Muttering something beneath her breath, the concierge withdrew, the trap

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This story began in the December issue. The back numbers can be obtained through any newsdealer. Price ten cents each.

was closed, and George Otway was left to cool his heels at his leisure—left longer than he relished.

After an interval, which appeared to him to be unduly long, he sounded another peal upon the rusty bell. Still no signs of the returning concierge.

What might not be taking place within? What might they not be doing to Elsie while they kept him dallying at the gate? Before he gained the other side they might have put her beyond his reach.

He kept up a perpetual clanging till the trap was once more thrown back and the coarse voice was heard again.

"A thousand devils! you make hubbub enough to disturb the entire neighborhood. Do you think that at my age one rushes up and down a hundred stairs as if one was ten? For me, it is an affair to ascend to madame's apartment."

While she grumbled she unlocked the wicket—the fact that it needed unlocking was of ominous import. He found himself confronting a sturdy, keen-faced woman about forty-five years of age, whose upper lip was ornamented with a mustache which was almost of masculine dimensions. She scowled at him from under heavy, overhanging eyebrows.

"Well," she snapped, "you don't seem to be a person of so much importance that you should cause all this commotion. As I said to madame, if she does not wish to let you in, I will soon see that you are taught to behave. Yes, I, Marie Cagnol. But, madame, she is too good-natured; she says: 'I will see this noisy person.'"

"And who is madame?"

"I ask, who are you? You reply, it is no affair of mine. To your question I give the same answer."

She had admitted him into the house, and was now leading the way up what seemed to him to be endless flights of stairs.

Already fatigued by his journey, he began to fear that if they had much farther to go he would have to sit and rest, and, before all else just now, he wished to conceal all signs of physical weakness.

As it was, he had to momentarily pause to take breath.

"This madame of yours lives, then, at the top of the house? Is it necessary that one should mount forever?"

"What does it matter to you where she lives? If you had wished that she should live on the ground floor, you should have told her so. Did I not say to you that one does not rush up and down a hundred stairs? Now you see for yourself how it is."

As she said this she turned to him with a grin which was distinctly not a pleasant one. She rapped with her knuckles at the panels of the door in front of which she had paused, then opened it to speak to some one within:

"Here, madame, is the individual who will not give his name, but who talks of trouble with the police if I refuse to admit him."

Suddenly she discovered that the room had no occupant.

"Ah! madame is not here. Enter, then. No doubt madame will be with you in a minute, if you will only have the condescension to take a chair and to wait."

Acting on her suggestion, he entered. The moment he was in, the door was closed, and he heard what sounded singularly like the slipping of a bolt. Filled with a new suspicion, he tried the handle. The door refused to move.

"Outside there, open this door at once! What do you mean by locking me in?"

The only reply was a slight noise, which might have been a chuckle. He shook the door again and shouted a second time. This time there was not even a chuckle.

He looked about him. The room was brilliantly lit by electric bulbs. On one side were three windows, shaded by curtains.

Drawing the hangings aside from one of them, he was about to open it to learn what was without, when he became conscious of a sound behind him, and turned, to find that a second door, of whose existence he had been un-

aware, had been opened on the other side of the room, and that a woman had entered.

He stared at her in silence, knowing he had seen her before, yet unable for the moment to say just where. She, on her part, was silent, too, regarding him steadfastly, with a smile, which was rather a sneer, which he instinctively resented.

It was obvious that she did not need even momentary consideration to recall who he was.

"So, Mr. Lennard, we meet again!"

So soon as she spoke, he knew her: she was Madame O'Callaghan, the wife of young David Curtis' chance acquaintance, Major O'Callaghan. It was only because he was still not quite himself that he had not recognized her on the instant.

She was the woman who, coming with Elsie Thornton into the room of that house in Sefton Park, had introduced Elsie as Lottie Villiers—the woman who had filled him with such a sense of repugnance, who had lied to him, who, above all, had whisked Elsie away from underneath his very nose.

If he had only had his wits about him, it was her appearance which he would have been expecting. No wonder that she greeted him with a combination of a smile and a sneer.

Seeing that he still kept silence, she continued, endowing what seemed innocuous words with some venomous quality as she uttered them:

"The pleasure of meeting you again was one which I thought it not improbable would fall to my lot. Indeed, I had rather expected that our acquaintance would have been renewed before this."

"It is not my fault that it has not been renewed."

"No—your misfortune? That is rather prettily put."

"You omitted to furnish me with your address so that I might hand it to the police."

"Did I, indeed? What a singular omission! Very careless conduct on my part, wasn't it?"

Advancing farther into the room, she placed herself in a position in which she could see him more to her advantage.

The shabbiness of his attire, his generally disheveled appearance, the signs of recent illness which marked not only his face but also his attenuated form—these seemed to occasion her surprise.

"Really, Mr. Lennard, you don't look as if the world had been all lavender to you just recently. That's a shocking suit which you have on: a worse fit I never saw. And surely it is yours since you saw a decent barber. If I saw you, as a casual stranger in the street, I should have guessed that you had just come out of a workhouse: I give you my word that you look sufficiently ill-fed. I assure you that I should not be at all surprised to learn that the purpose of your presence here is to beg a hearty meal."

"As you know perfectly well, I am here to see Miss Thornton."

"To see whom?"

"To see Miss Thornton."

"Who is this who speaks of Miss Thornton?"

CHAPTER XXXII.

ELSIE.

The question was asked by some one else who had come into the room by the door through which Madame O'Callaghan had entered—some one whose voice stirred his pulses with a sense of familiarity which was almost painful.

When he looked to see who the speaker was, he felt as if he must be in some sort of waking dream when he found himself confronted by Donna Luisa D'Agostino, the Mother of Caracas.

As if to render the sense of illusion more complete, she was attired, if not in the identical gown of crimson satin which had made her so conspicuous a figure on board the *Queen of the Seas*, then in one which, to his masculine eyes, seemed exactly like it.

She was as huge as ever, and moved toward the center of the room with a clumsy, awkward gait which became her as ill as her costume.

She did not appear to be so surprised to see him as he had been to see her.

On the contrary, placing herself on a chair, resting her elbows on the table which was in front of her, removing the big cigar which she was smoking from between her lips, she addressed him as casually as if she had only been parted from him half an hour before.

"So again you are an uninvited guest of mine! And what is it you call yourself this time? Are you Rothschild? Or are you Pierpont Morgan?"

Instead of answering her question, he made a demand.

"Donna Luisa, I have to request that you will at once allow me to see Miss Thornton."

"Ah! It is that which is the lure which has brought you." She turned to Madame O'Callaghan: "So your blunder and that of your friends may not turn out to be such an imbecility, after all! It has been the misfortune of my life to have been the plaything of idiots. If, after all, one of them has been guilty of doing something sane, it is a recompense which I assuredly deserve."

Madame O'Callaghan said nothing, her very silence being eloquent of the fact that the Mother of Caracas was once again the ruling spirit.

Donna Luisa puffed at her cigar for a moment or two in silence. Then she spoke again to Otway.

"You will have heard that that expedition of mine failed?"

"I have heard nothing."

"No? Then I now present you with the information. It failed: in the first place, because it was conducted by individuals who were mostly fools—the kind of fools who make a mess of everything—and, in the second place, because I, being enraged, behaved also like a fool. You will recollect that I did you the honor to propose that you should become my husband."

"I confess that I was so unreasonable as not to be enamored with the future which you had sketched for me."

"So I imagined. What I did not expect was that you would take the line you did, or I would have taken my own precautions. When I learned that you and Miss Thornton had been sent overboard together, there was a bad half-hour for certain persons on the *Queen of the Seas*."

It required no effort on Otway's part to enable him to believe that statement. At the mere recollection, a look which was almost worse than murderous came into the speaker's eyes. There was an iron rigidity about the set of her jaw which suggested all sorts of unpleasant possibilities.

When, after an interval, she went on, it was with a hard bitterness which, for some occult reason, seemed to make Madame O'Callaghan wince.

"I gave my instructions to certain persons that you must be found, you and Miss Thornton, also. I did not care a snap of the fingers if the girl was found at the bottom of the sea, but I had set my heart on finding you alive. Judge, then, of my delight when I learn that they had found Miss Thornton, but not you.

"They find the girl upon what they declare to me to be an uninhabited island on which was a volcano in a state of eruption. The girl fights like a wildcat; yet they bear her away with them in triumph. Yes, in triumph!—think of it, the fools!—and of you they learn nothing, hear nothing, see nothing. I believe they were afraid of the volcano.

"I spent a small fortune on an expedition to discover you, and all they discover is that wretched girl. Believe me, I am pleased. And yet, it would seem as if I were to score off their blunder, after all, since you have discovered yourself."

"I again ask you to allow me to see Miss Thornton."

"You shall see her, I promise you. But, as a beginning, it is necessary that you and I should come to a little understanding. By way of preface I may mention that, as I have entered, for the scond time, into the bonds of holy matrimony, you need not anticipate the renewal of a certain proposition."

"I have to tender you my sincerest congratulations."

"You congratulate yourself, also, a little, eh? Well, that is by the way. I will not pretend that I have exactly the husband I would myself have chosen. There were certain circumstances which made it necessary that I should suffer him to marry me, so on that point I will say no more. I cannot, however, forget that, as your wife, I should have been in a position to do certain things which now are beyond my power. It becomes, therefore, desirable that I should place myself in a situation in which I shall possess as many as possible of the advantages which, as your wife, I should have enjoyed."

George Otway laughed outright. The calm matter-of-fact air with which Donna Luisa talked of subjects which are, in general, only delicately hinted at, was not a little entertaining.

"I would again remind you," he ventured, "that I am here to see Miss Thornton, who, I have reason to fear, is being detained in this house against her will."

"I will explain as clearly as I can. If you will pay me a hundred thousand pounds, you can leave this house at once, and you can take Miss Thornton with you, for all I care. If not, I shall get the money from your cousin, Mr. Frank Andrews; and, in return, I will undertake that you shall never again be George Otway, the millionaire."

"How will you prevent it?"

"For the present that does not matter. Let me assure you that I will prevent it."

Donna Luisa turned to Madame O'Callaghan.

"Ring the bell," she said.

Madame pressed a button. Almost simultaneously the door was opened, and Mr. Bianchi—of the *Queen of the Seas*—came into the room.

Donna Luisa addressed herself to Otway. "This is my husband."

He nodded smilingly.

"I guessed as much; Mr. Bianchi displayed so much anxiety lest any one else should occupy that august position. My heartiest congratulations, Mr. Bianchi, on your—deserved—promotion."

Mr. Bianchi was silent. He looked both sour and out of temper, as if he feared that he was being laughed at. Nor would one have guessed, from his demeanor, that he was overwhelmed with happiness at his good fortune.

His wife spoke to him in the same offhand fashion she used for every one. Indeed, had it not been for her positive statement to the contrary, one would almost have suspected him of being her servant rather than her lord and master.

"You perceive, here is the husband you robbed me of. In spite of you and of those fools, after all, I have him. I tell him that for a hundred thousand pounds he can live, but he will not promise to give me the money."

"He is stark mad; I have always said it. You had better get the money from his cousin, Frank Andrews. He will give it to you fast enough."

"I believe that, for once, you are right. I have asked you to come here in order that there may be no misunderstanding. For the last time, Mr. Otway, I have to tell you that if you will not give me the amount I require, to oblige your cousin—who will give it me, and more—you will be dead, and worse than dead."

Mr. Bianchi interpolated an observation of his own.

"He will be a great deal worse than dead, I promise him that. But he is one of those pig headed Englishmen, and mad even for an Englishman; he will not even listen to reason. You will not get him to believe that his life is in any danger. You had better make an end at once and get the money the quickest way—from the cousin."

George Otway, who had been turning one or two things over in his mind, and at the same time regarding the faces in front of him, had arrived at the conclusion that he was in a delicate position. It occurred to him that it might be as well to gain a little time, in order that he might be able to study that position in all its bearings.

"Before I will enter into a discussion

with you on any subject whatever, I must see Miss Thornton."

The three exchanged glances. Donna Luisa spoke:

"Let him see her. What does it matter? He is in our hands. Ring again."

Once more Madame O'Callaghan pressed the button. This time there entered four men. In two of them Otway recognized Major O'Callaghan and Mr. Howard, of the house in Sefton Park; in the other two he fancied he recalled members of the motley crowd which was on board the *Queen of the Seas*.

The major greeted him with an affable movement of his hand.

"Ho! my old friend Lennard. And how is my friend Curtis? Still willing to give lessons in poker? Our parting on the last occasion of our meeting was so abrupt that I really had not time to say good-by; I trust he's as strong as ever."

Otway did not answer. He regarded the speaker with contempt, and turned to the woman who seemed to have this curious collection of persons at her beck and call.

"Donna Luisa, I did not think that in your retinue you numbered quite such scum of the earth as this man represents. He is a card-sharper and a thief. I must ask you not to permit him to address himself to me. I shall certainly give him no answer if he does."

The Mother of Caracas made a little impatient movement with her cigar.

"I have already told you that I am not always able to choose my own society. I do not vouch for the characters of all the persons who are in my service. Sometimes, the worse their characters the better they are suited to my purpose. One of you bring down the girl."

Major O'Callaghan chose to think that the request particularly referred to him. He left the room.

During his absence Donna Luisa and Bianchi held a whispered consultation, at the end of which Bianchi said something to one of the two men—whom Otway seemed to remember as having been on the *Queen of the Seas*—in consequence of which, as it seemed, the man also quitted the apartment.

Immediately afterward there came into the room some one whom, for a second or two, Otway did not recognize.

It was a woman, only partially clothed, the garments she was wearing being ill-assorted odds and ends, like so many unclean rags.

Her hair, all unbound, strayed loosely down her shoulders, looking as if it had been untouched by a brush for weeks. Her face was white and drawn, there were hollows about the eyes.

She not only looked as if she had been insufficiently fed, but there was something about her which suggested that she was haunted by some unresting fear.

As she entered, she gazed about her with a dazed expression, as if her eyes were dazzled by the unaccustomed light.

Otway stared at her with incredulous wonder. It was only after prolonged inspection that it dawned on him as being even possible that this pitiable object, this frail wreck of a woman, could be all that was left of Elsie Thornton.

"Elsie!" he cried.

At the sound of his voice she turned and looked at him. As she did so, he was relieved of one fear. The obscurity of mental vision which had dimmed her perceptions when he had last encountered her in the house in Sefton Park had passed away, at least in part, for when she saw him she knew who he was.

Her countenance changed instantly, and was at once lighted up by a transfiguring smile. Her hands fell to her sides, her lips were parted, she stood straighter, her breath was quickened, traces of color came into her sunken cheeks.

Half beneath her breath, as if sudden joy had rendered her incapable of speaking loud, she whispered:

"You!"

When she spoke he began to tremble. He all at once was speechless. He could not even move from where he

was, but could only dumbly hold out his arms to her.

But it seemed that that was all she needed, and that the gesture was eloquence enough for her. For, as if in answer to his unspoken invitation, she came straight across the room and passed between his outstretched hands. And there, before them all, he folded her about with his arms and pressed her to his breast.

Looking up into his face, she said, with a sound which was half sob, half laugh:

"I called to you so often and you never came."

Then his voice returned to him.

"I heard you call, but I could not come, because I did not know where you were."

"I tried to tell you."

"And I tried to understand, but only this afternoon did knowledge come to me at last. Then I hastened to you as fast as the train would carry me. Come, let us go. We will talk to these creatures in a more effectual strain when we are out of the den which holds them."

"When!"

The echoed adverb came from the Mother of Caracas. She had been observing the proceedings with an air of complete indifference, as if this man and woman, who, after passing through the valley of the shadow of death, had found each other at last, were marionettes upon a mimic stage.

She used the butt of the cigar, which she had almost consumed, to light a fresh one.

Otway took up the challenge which her interjectional interposition seemed to have thrown down.

"Precisely, Donna Luisa, when—and when is now. Come, Elsie, let us go at once."

He began to move with her across the room, no one doing anything to stay them. Donna Luisa spoke to him as he went, apparently more interested in the proper ignition of her new cigar than in the topic on which she touched.

"Nothing, Mr. Otway, will give me greater pleasure than to learn that you do propose to go at once and that you intend to take Miss Thornton with you, only—there are certain details which must be gone through first."

By this time Otway, still with his arm encircling Elsie, had reached the door through which he had entered, to find it still closed against his egress.

He endeavored to speak with an assumption of authority which went far beyond what he really felt.

"I insist upon your opening this door for me at once."

"Certainly. The door shall be opened, against your check for a hundred thousand pounds."

She produced a check form from a pocketbook which she had taken from the bosom of her dress.

"Here is a check on a bank which I happen to know will honor your signature for considerably more than a hundred thousand pounds. You have only to fill it up for that small sum, sign it, and give me your word of honor that you will not attempt to stop payment, and you and Miss Thornton are free as air. Indeed, I shall be very happy to do anything in my power for your comfort."

"Do you think that you can blackmail me or force me to give you a monstrous sum as a ransom from a wholly imaginary danger?"

"If you are not a more foolish person than even I suppose you to be, you will give me what I ask, and that without the least demur. You see, Mr. Otway, it is actually a question of the old-fashioned formula—your money or your life. In any case, I shall have my money, even if you choose to lose your life, because, as you are very well aware, that cousin of yours will be willing to pay lavishly for certain news that you are dead at last—or as good as dead—or, perhaps, even better than dead. So, which is it to be: your money, or your life?"

The answer came from the girl in his arms.

"Don't give her a farthing!"

"I'll not; nor half a one."

The Mother of Caracas still remained outwardly impassive.

"Very good; so it's to be your life. We'll have it—and more than your life—before we've done with you, you may depend on it."

George Otway drew the girl still closer to him and met the woman's gaze with unflinching eyes. He was aware that Bianchi and his friends were smiling, as if in anticipation of pleasure to come. He was also conscious that each man of them held a revolver in his hand.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

AN UPPER ROOM.

"Make him safe, and keep him safe!"

The instruction was addressed to Mr. Bianchi by the Mother of Caracas.

Bianchi turned to the four men at his back, uttering only one word: "Gentlemen!"

He smiled at them, and they at him. All five, smiling together, moved across toward where George Otway stood, with his arm about the girl.

When they came to within three or four feet of him Bianchi spoke again: "If you please!"

And all five halted. Each man held a revolver, keeping a finger on the trigger.

Bianchi pointed out the fact to Mr. Otway. "You see?"

George Otway did see. He remembered that midnight incursion into his cabin on board the *Queen of the Seas*. He saw that now, as then, it would need very little to start those revolvers firing. Bianchi explained the situation in his own fashion.

"The question is whether, as the policeman puts it, you will go with us quietly, or whether we shall have to use persuasion."

"Where do you propose to take me?"

"No questions answered."

"Aren't there? You will have to answer one question, or a good deal of persuasion will be required. What do you intend to do with Miss Thornton?"

Bianchi shrugged his shoulders. "Is that all? A little matter of that sort doesn't count; I will go outside the rule and reply. Miss Thornton goes with you where you go."

"In that case——"

George Otway cut short his sentence at the beginning, looking at the girl with an unspoken inquiry in his eyes.

"Go with them," she said.

Otway considered, reading the purpose which was on the faces in front of him. Then, since he saw no alternative, he assented.

"I am at your service, sir."

Major O'Callaghan associated a coarse laugh with a horrible allusion to Miss Thornton. Stung into imprudence, stepping forward, Otway struck the speaker across the face. Almost simultaneously the major, raising his revolver, fired.

Otway became conscious of a sudden sensation, as of burning. His left arm dropped helpless to his side.

The major laughed again. "There's one arm done for. Repeat the same performance with the other and I'll do for that as well."

Elsie came hurrying to him.

"Has he hurt you? Take care! Never mind what he says! They will kill you."

"Though they kill me, no man shall speak as that man spoke and go unpunished."

The voice of Donna Luisa came from the table at the back of the room.

"You are mistaken, George Otway. Be under no delusion. Each man will say and do to you and to the girl exactly what he pleases. If you show resentment it will be you who will be punished, unless you fill up this little check for a hundred thousand pounds."

"That I will never do; on that point you have already heard my final decision."

"Then we will get the money from your cousin—probably within the next four-and-twenty hours. Gentlemen!"

"March!"

The command came from Bianchi, with a movement of his revolver toward the door on the opposite side of the apartment.

"Come!" whispered Elsie.

It was her command which he obeyed.

They went together to the door at which Bianchi had pointed, the five men close at their heels. Madame O'Callaghan sneered as they passed, smilingly:

"Good-by, Lottie, darling. Now, at last, you're going to be happy."

But Donna Luisa said, grimly regarding them over the ash of her cigar:

"Otway, you're a fool."

But neither Elsie nor her companion said a word. In silence they passed from the chamber, up what seemed to Otway to be endless stairs, until they came to a door at the top of a narrow flight, which some one opened.

"Enter!" directed Bianchi.

They entered. The moment they were in the door was shut behind them, locked, and barred. The place in which they were was in pitchy blackness.

"Where are we?" asked Otway.

Elsie replied, her voice sounding strangely in the darkness:

"It is the place in which they have kept me a prisoner for I don't know how long now; it is so long that I have lost all count of time."

"Was it at the window of this room that I saw you to-night?"

"That was the room below. They had taken me there to find out—once more—if I would do as they wished. So I ran to the window and called to you. Now I wish I hadn't."

"You must not say that. If you only knew how I have longed to come to you. Is this an attic?"

"I don't think it is even an attic; I fancy it must have been intended as a lumber-room, or something of that kind. It hasn't a window."

"No window? But I seem to feel fresh air."

"That comes from a trap-door in the roof; they have left it open. Sometimes the rain comes pouring through."

"The dear creatures! But if the rain gets in it is just possible that some one might get out."

"No one could; the opening is only a few inches square. And then it is so far above the floor. The ceiling slopes; where the trap-door is it must be twelve feet high. Give me your hand, I will show you where it is." She took his hand, leading him through the darkness. "Take care; we are near the wall!"

"How can you see?"

"I can't; but I know. I have been here so long that I know. Put out your hand, you will feel the wall. The trap-door is right above us. Look up. If the night is fine you will see the sky. I can see a star. Can you not see it, too?"

"I can see it very well. But don't they ever give you a light?"

"Never. When the daylight goes I see nothing until the morning comes. And, as I sleep so badly, you cannot think how long the nights seem, especially when it is cold or wet."

"Is the place decently furnished?"

"There is no furniture at all."

"No furniture? Then—do they keep you here in the daytime?"

"They keep me here always."

"Always! But there must be some furniture? Is there nothing which serves as chair or table or bed?"

"There is nothing; nothing at all. The place is quite empty."

"But how do you manage about sleeping?"

"As I can. I lie on the floor. Sometimes—when it is raining—it is wet. It is never very clean, and it is always hard. I do not get much sleep."

"Do they treat you better as regards food?"

"Sometimes a whole day passes without their bringing me any food at all; sometimes two days."

"But what have you done to them that they should behave to you as if they were devils?"

There was an interval of silence before she answered. She was so close to him that he could feel her trembling.

"They want me to do something which I won't do; they are so wicked themselves that they think it doesn't matter what a girl does; and because I won't obey them they think they can make me by treating me like this. But they never will; never! never! never!"

She spoke with a note in her voice which caused him—almost unconscious-

ly—to draw her closer to him. As he did so he leaned against the wall at his back, feeling all at once as if his legs were giving way beneath him. She was quick to detect that something was wrong.

"What is the matter? You are trembling. The wound is worse than you said."

His voice had suddenly become faint and tremulous.

"I don't think it's the wound. The truth is, I've not been very well just lately, and—the excitement has been a little beyond me."

Something—as he put it—had been a little beyond him. Even as he spoke she felt a quiver go all over him. She tried to hold him up, but, before she guessed what was about to happen, he had slipped through her arms on to the floor. She felt him lying, an inert mass, at her feet.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

DOLLIE AND HER HUSBAND.

The library at High Dene, at noon. Mr. Frank Andrews in a restless mood, flitting from chair to chair, standing, walking here and there. In his hand a letter, with which he continually fidgets. Reclining at full length on a couch his wife—Mrs. Frank Andrews—the Dollie Lee of long ago.

Nothing could be in more complete contrast than her demeanor and her husband's. He in perpetual motion, as if some internal machinery prevented his remaining still, even for a second; she in immovable repose, observing his incapacity to remain quiescent with a little smile of amusement.

If anything, she has grown prettier, and if certain rounded contours suggest undignified plumpness in the not distant future, they are not yet sufficiently accentuated to lessen her charms.

There is about her an air of daintiness which, in some odd way, recalls an exquisite child. It would have needed a shrewd judge of human nature to detect in this delightfully delicate little lady even a suspicion of guile.

"It begins to looks as if you were not mistaken, after all."

The remark came from Mr. Andrews, in a tone which more than hinted that the gentleman was not in the very best of tempers.

The lady, on the other hand, replied in mellifluous accents which were the very essence of sweetness; but, as is the case with so many sweet things, there was a drop of bitterness even in the saccharine quality.

"In matters of importance I endeavor to be accurate. In a matter of such first-rate importance I think you might have taken my accuracy for granted. It would have been at least more courteous."

"Courtesy be hanged!"

"If you please. Still, it seems a pity. What has courtesy done to you that you should wish to hang it?"

"Don't talk that fiddle-faddle stuff to me now. It's because you seem incapable of taking anything seriously that I laughed when you said you believed you had seen the fellow alive at Rouen."

"I did not say I believed—I said I had seen him."

"But you said it in a way which made it impossible to tell if you were, or were not, joking. You don't seem to realize what it means to us if George Otway is alive."

"Don't I? You are again mistaken."

"You wouldn't wear that don't-care-a-damn air if you did."

"Shouldn't I?"

Her lips were parted in a pretty smile which Mr. Andrews did not notice, and the meaning of which would have eluded him if he had. He went on:

"If George Otway didn't commit suicide, if that wasn't his body which was found in the Thames, if he is alive at the present moment, then you and I are beggars—and worse. He can call us to account for every penny of his we have spent; and since I certainly shall be unable to refund, I shall be a ruined man for ever and a day."

"I realize that very clearly, I assure you."

"Then do you speak so gaily because you suppose my ruin won't affect you?"

"My dear Frank, can you conceive it as being even possible that I should not wish to share your fall, whatever it might be?"

"Bah! talk sense! Do you think I don't know you through and through? If you could gain sixpence by drowning me to-morrow, you'd do it, and never turn a hair."

"I shouldn't do it for sixpence, really, Frank. You exaggerate; and I assure you you don't know me, although you think you do. Shall I ever forget what were my feelings when, in that Rouen circus, among those crazy people, with death staring us in the face, I first heard his voice? I recognized, on the instant, that he had played some extraordinary, some incredible trick upon us. He had detected me first. When I appealed to him for help, he regarded me with a smile in his eyes for which I could have torn his heart out. If I had not been so conscious that he was the only creature present who was capable of doing anything to save me I would willingly have helped him burn. As it was, I did my little best."

Mr. Andrews paced in silence up and down the spacious apartment, biting at his thumbs as he went.

"I had not credited him with so much malice."

His wife laughed, lightly, merrily, as if she had not a care in the world.

"You darling Frank! To be sure, he has treated both of us very badly—and yet, it is not so certain. We have had a pretty good time, upon the whole—at least, I know I have—and that fact cannot be altered even if I have to suffer for it afterward. It is not yet plain that we shall have to suffer—either you or I."

"When he is tired of masquerading, he has only to walk in at the front door, and there is an end of us forever."

"Precisely; but perhaps it mayn't be so easy for him to walk in at the front door as you seem to suppose."

"Do you mean because, in some way which I don't understand, you have mixed him up with that murdering scoundrel, Jacob Gunston? Even granting that the misapprehension has gone so far as you seem to suppose, he has only to prove himself to be George Otway to prick the bubble on the instant."

"Again I am not so certain. The matter has gone beyond a jest. He has been doing some very queer things, has our dear friend, and has got himself into such a tangle that only by process of law can it be unraveled. And if the law does get hold of him he'll have a very, very hard time. What a joke it would be if he came to be hanged."

"No fear of that; it's much more likely that hanging's the fate in store for us."

"I'm not so sure that I'd mind that, if I were hanged for him."

There was something in Mrs. Andrews' tone which caused her husband to cease for a moment from his restless peregrinations and to turn and stare at her with startled eyes.

"Dollie, take care! Walls have ears. And even if they haven't, there are things which, though spoken in jest, are left better unsaid."

"When you and I have to deal with a situation such as confronts us now, there are things which must be said. What do you suppose is the meaning of the letter which you have in your hand?"

"That we shall soon learn. Donna Luisa D'Agostino will tell us. The carriage has gone to the station to meet her. At any moment she may be here."

"Just so, and find us unprepared."

"Unprepared! How do you mean—find us unprepared?"

"My dearest Frank, this is a matter in which it is essential that you and I should see clearly, eye to eye. Don't play the innocent with me, but try to play the man—you can sometimes, you know."

"I don't know why you talk like that, unless you wish to exasperate me."

"Not at all. On the contrary, I particularly wish not to exasperate you. I want you to look facts in the face, that's all."

"I've half a mind to give the whole

thing up, hunt up Otway on my own account, and trust to his good nature to let me down lightly. If I'm not careful, you'll lead me into some infernal mischief."

"When you talk like that I begin to suspect you of a desire to exasperate me. Frank!"

"What do you want?"

"Come here!"

She held up her finger, with a siren gesture, beckoning to him with smiling lips and eyes. He hesitated, then crossed to where she lay, stretched out at full length upon the couch.

"Well, what is it?"

"Kiss me!"

"I don't want to kiss you."

"Oh, yes, you do; you always want to kiss me, and I want to be kissed. Kneel down, so that I can put my arms about your neck and hold you tight."

Without remonstrance he obeyed. Drawing his face to hers, she pressed her lips to his, as if she sought to inoculate him with her spirit by means of a kiss. "Frank, you know you love me."

"Sometimes I wish I didn't."

His voice seemed hoarse. She laughed, as if to herself, her lips still close to his.

"You can't help loving me whatever you wish. I hold you with bonds which are stronger than steel. To kiss me you'd sell your soul."

"I've already sold it."

"I know you have, you—goose! We've both of us done that—if we ever had any souls to sell. So, since we have nothing else to take to market, let us make as much as we possibly can out of what we've already disposed of. Now, Frank, listen. At the present moment you and I are two of the greatest persons in England. You don't want to become all at once nothing and nobody, a butt and a gibe, and to drag me with you."

"I emphatically don't."

"Then let Donna Luisa D'Agostino find us prepared."

"I tell you again I don't know what you mean by prepared."

"Evidently, from her letter, she has got George Otway, somehow, in her hands, and is willing, for a price, to murder him."

"Dollie!"

"She would murder him, not us. We should be as innocent as babes."

"Let me go. I knew you'd try to get me into some confounded hole."

"I won't let you go; and as for a confounded hole, you couldn't be in a more confounded hole than you're in already. It's only likely to be a question of price—so I judge from her letter. And it seems to me that, in our position, price ought to be no object. To have George Otway really dead is a consummation for which we should be willing to pay anything."

"But if I were willing to listen to anything so horrible for a single second, which I'm not, you don't seem to understand that this fiend of a woman would have us in her power."

"We should also have her in ours. Are you afraid she would blackmail us?"

"Afraid! It's not a question of fear, it's a certainty; she'd bleed us for all we are worth."

"My dear Frank, in any case it would be worth our while to pay her a fat annuity, but I'm not so sure that we need do it. George Otway once dead—and this time I give you my word that I will see, personally, that there is no deception—I don't see of what we need be alarmed."

"Not with that woman holding over us her sword of Damocles?"

"What sword of Damocles? She will be the criminal, not we."

"She will have acted as our agent."

"Well, what then?"

"If at any time we should refuse to comply with her demands, and you may be sure they will be monstrous ones, she has only to open her mouth, and we shall be within measurable distance of the gallows. My God! the very thought of it makes me shiver."

"Something makes you shiver, Frank dear; but I don't quite understand what. In the first place, she'll have to prove agency, which, as I shall manage matters, she won't find easy; and, in the

second, if any one goes to the gallows, she will. I expect, when it came to the sticking-point, the thought of it would make her shiver quite as much as it does you."

She softly smoothed his hair and smiled at him.

"Darling, you leave the whole management of the business to me. Only give me carte-blanche as to money, and it shall be done. I undertake to so arrange things that if it comes to a question of who has the whip-hand, this woman shall be in our power and not we in hers."

"Do you mean that you wish to see her alone and without my appearing on the scene at all?"

He was looking down at the hand with which she had just been fondling him, and did not see the very peculiar smile with which she answered him:

"I don't go quite so far as that, Frank dear. I think it ought to be obvious that you and I are acting together; I only want you to leave the actual diplomacy to me; that's all."

Soon afterward a servant entered to announce that the carriage had returned from the station, and that Donna Luisa D'Agostino and Mr. Bianchi were in the drawing-room. When the servant had gone, the husband and wife looked at each other, the husband being the first to speak.

"Who's Mr. Bianchi?" he demanded. "She said nothing about any one coming but herself. I should have thought the fewer witnesses the better."

His wife, who had risen from the couch, shrugged her pretty shoulders.

"What does it matter who he is? I suppose persons of that sort occasionally run in double harness." She laid her hands upon her husband's shoulders. "Now, Frank, you understand, you're to leave as much of the talking as you conveniently can to me."

"I'll leave it all, if you wish. I repeat that I'm perfectly willing not to put in an appearance on the scene."

"Thank you; but since this is a game which you and I must play together, I don't think that would be quite the thing."

Again her dainty features were lighted by that enigmatic smile.

CHAPTER XXXV.

THE PRICE OF BLOOD.

When Mr. and Mrs. Frank Andrews entered the great drawing-room, they found, in an armchair, a huge woman, clothed in a singularly lurid costume of crimson satin.

Mrs. Andrews, whose taste was proverbial, was so startled by the spectacle her visitor presented that, forgetting her good manners, she stared a moment in speechless silence.

Behind the lady's chair, standing like a soldier at attention, was a spare, dark-skinned man with beadlike eyes.

"Donna Luisa D'Agostino?" said Mrs. Andrews hesitatingly.

The woman in the armchair inclined her head. "That is my name." She motioned to the man at the back of her chair. "And this is my husband, Bianchi."

"Your husband? I see." Mrs. Andrews regarded Mr. Bianchi as if she did not quite know what to make of him or of his wife, either. "We have had a letter from you." Donna Luisa merely nodded. "In that letter you intimated a desire to favor us with a visit." The visitor nodded again. "We should be glad—since you are a perfect stranger to us—if you will explain what your letter means."

Donna Luisa's reply, if it could be called a reply, not impossibly took Mrs. Andrews aback.

"You speak for your husband, as I speak for mine?"

Mrs. Andrews endeavored to conceal any discomfiture she may have felt, and laughed softly. She turned to the gentleman in question.

"I don't know that I speak for him in any peculiar sense, do I?"

"Excepting that I am prepared to indorse whatever you may say," replied Mr. Andrews. "My wife and I are one," he added, addressing his visitor.

Donna Luisa's answer was a trifle grim:

"My husband and I are also one. We speak with a common mouth—mine. I only say this in order that we may understand each other. As to what I wrote you, the meaning is very simple. You possess this house, this property, this great fortune, you and your husband, because it is supposed George Otway is dead. He is not dead. He lives. There is the affair in a nutshell."

Mrs. Andrews' manner, when she spoke, was sweetness itself.

"But, pardon me, Mr. Otway is legally dead and buried. As I have already observed, you are a stranger to us. What proof have we that what you say is true?"

"The proof is easy, since he is at present a prisoner in my house."

"A prisoner in your house? Dear me! And on what grounds do you detain him?"

"I detain him because I want to make some money out of him."

Mrs. Andrews indulged in musical laughter, as at the best joke in the world.

"That is a very original idea. And how do you propose to make it?"

"You give me money to keep him dead."

"What quaint notions you have! And what a weird way of expressing them! What do you mean by keeping him dead?"

"That depends."

"On what?"

"On your own wishes."

"I see. But suppose that we wouldn't mind if he were actually dead?"

"If you will give me enough I will undertake that he shall be murdered."

Mrs. Andrews raised her pretty shoulders and shivered.

"You mustn't talk like that; you really mustn't. I couldn't bear to think of anything tragic happening to that dreadful man, badly though he's used us."

"It is only a word. I come from a country where they think no more of killing a man than of killing a rat. It is an affair of habit. We have it, you haven't—that is the difference."

"I only hinted that we shouldn't mind if he were actually dead. We couldn't dream of having anything to do with compassing his death. That would be too, too dreadful."

"I understand. You wish us to do all the dirty work ourselves."

"I did not say so. I did not know that there was any what you call 'dirty work' to be done. Please take it clearly from me that neither Mr. Andrews nor I can allow ourselves to be associated with anything which is in the least degree questionable."

Donna Luisa did what she probably seldom did do—she smiled, the smile revealing a set of large, square, discolored teeth.

"You are a clever woman; but in this case it is not necessary to be so clever. With me it is simply an affair of business. You keep your share of the bargain and I will keep mine."

Mrs. Andrews opened her eyes with an expression which was almost infantile in its innocence.

"Bargain? What bargain?"

"What will you give me to keep him dead?"

"I tell you again, I don't understand what you mean by 'keep him dead.'"

"In my country, when they want a person to give no further trouble, yet do not wish to do away with him outright, they place him in a position in which he loses his sight, his power of speech, his senses altogether. It is not their fault he gets in that state. It happens so. Then they say that he is better than dead."

"What a terrible idea! How the poor creatures must suffer!"

"Oh, yes, they suffer! They would sooner die a hundred times. I have seen it often, so I know." A look came on the speaker's face which was not pleasant to contemplate.

Mrs. Andrews stared at her visitor with wide-open eyes.

"And what becomes of them afterward?" she asked.

"What does it matter? They are changed beyond all recognition. They do not know who they are themselves; no one knows who they are; it is of no consequence."

"Then they don't die?"

"Not of necessity—not, sometimes, for years and years. They live often to be very old. Not long ago I saw in a street in London an old man carrying what you call a sandwich board. It seems he was not quite blind; he felt his way with a stick. Although he did not know it—no one knows it—he is the rightful owner of one of the greatest estates in South America. I spoke to him—he did not know me; it was very funny."

Mr. Andrews said something which, at first sight, seemed hardly germane to the subject under discussion.

"If you don't mind, my dear, I think I'll open a window."

His wife checked him as he was moving to effect his purpose.

"I don't think I would, Frank, if I were you. It's not very hot."

"I feel it stifling."

Mrs. Andrews raised her delicately arched eyebrows.

"Surely it's not quite so bad as that; I'm quite cool. I'm afraid I should feel a draft. Come, Frank, sit by me, and keep still."

Mr. Andrews shook his head. Instead of going to her, he leaned against a table, thrust his hands into his pockets, and frowned. The conversation did not seem to be giving him pleasure.

Wholly unmoved by her husband's mutinous behavior, Mrs. Andrews fixed her pretty, pleading eyes on Donna Luisa's face, as if she saw something in that saturnine countenance which, though it would have filled others with feelings of repulsion, afforded her no little satisfaction.

She continued, in the same soft, soothing tones in which she had spoken throughout:

"How interesting it is to hear you talk; it gives me a new sensation, you are so full of the unusual!"

She began to pick with the tips of her fingers at the embroidery on her frock, pursing up her lips as she did so, as if she were turning something over in her mind.

"I'm afraid it would scarcely do, however, to—as you put it—keep him dead; that is hardly what one would like. You see, one never knows."

"One never knows what?"

"If a person, as you phrase it, is better than dead, one never knows all sorts of things. If he is really dead, one knows everything."

"You would prefer that he should be dead?"

"Infinitely, oh, dear me, yes! That would be so much more satisfactory"—she sighed—"if Providence approved."

"It is only a question of money. He shall be dead in four-and-twenty hours if you give enough. In Europe there is so often trouble when a person is killed. In my own country it is not so. Even if they prove you did it, you are not yet at an end—not by any means."

Again the woman's visage was distorted by the grin which revealed her uncomfortable-looking teeth.

"Here it is different. If you kill a little baby that is not yet really alive, what a fuss there is made! You go about forever after as if you had a rope about your neck. That is why I should prefer to arrange that he should be better than dead."

"We shouldn't like that at all; it wouldn't suit us a bit. George Otway is supposed to be dead, and we should like him to be dead—really and truly—as he's supposed to be."

"Very good. It is enough. By this time to-morrow he shall be dead—really and truly—if you will only give enough."

Mrs. Andrews was still picking with the tiny tips of her slender fingers at the embroidery on her frock.

"What's the figure?"

"Two hundred thousand pounds."

"That's a deal of money."

"There's a deal to be done for it."

"That sum would be a complete and final quittance of all claims?"

"Of all claims, a complete and final quittance. The money once paid you would never see or hear of me again, and I should never see you. That would be better for both parties."

"So I should imagine." Mrs. Andrews looked up at her husband gaily,

saucily. "Well, what do you say, my dearest lord?"

As he answered, Mr. Andrews paced to and fro; his restless fit had apparently returned.

"What do we get for it?" he asked.

"I will see we get all that we want. The point is: it's a frightful lot of money."

"When must it be paid?"

It was Donna Luisa who answered:

"Now."

Mr. Andrews ceased to walk up and down, and stared. His wife observed her visitor with laughing surprise.

"Now? Do you mean that two hundred thousand pounds is to be given you this instant?"

"He will continue to live until it is given to me—that is what I mean."

Mrs. Andrews laughed aloud.

"What an extremely businesslike person you seem to be!—almost too businesslike, I fear, for us. Supposing you had the money, what guarantee should we have that you would carry out the letter of your bond?"

"You could come and see him killed."

Mrs. Andrews puckered up her charming features into a queer grimace. "That would be amusing; I should like to see him killed. Still, I'm not sure it would be altogether the wisest thing to do. I fancy that the best arrangement we could come to would be one on these lines. The price is a large one, but I think, Frank dear, that I speak for you when I say that we would be willing to pay even that price for a certain event. Am I not correct, Frank, in saying so?"

Her husband turned his face away from her before he answered.

"I'm willing to do exactly as you wish."

Her countenance was illumined by a happy smile.

"You always spoil me, Frank; you are so good." She addressed herself to Donna Luisa. "You perceive that we are not likely to haggle about terms, only—we don't want to have any risk of giving something for nothing. You say George Otway will be dead by this time to-morrow. Where can his dead body be seen?"

"In my house in Paris."

"Good; then I will see it there."

"What do you mean?—you will see it there?"

"I will run over to Paris by to-morrow morning's boat for the purpose of seeing George Otway dead. In the interim, Mr. Andrews and I will give you our joint undertaking to hand you two hundred thousand pounds on your proving to my satisfaction that George Otway is dead. Show me him dead, and you shall have the money there and then. Will that content you?"

Donna Luisa looked at the man standing erect, rigid, behind her chair. They exchanged glances. For the first time Mr. Bianchi spoke:

"Am I to understand, madam, that you and your husband will give us a written promise to pay us the amount so soon as you receive ocular proof that George Otway is dead, and that you, yourself, will be in Paris to-morrow to receive that proof?"

"You have stated very clearly, sir, what I would wish to be the basis of our understanding."

Bianchi spoke to his wife.

"I think that such an undertaking as madam refers to may be considered equivalent to a cash payment."

Donna Luisa acquiesced.

"I think so, also."

Later, Donna Luisa D'Agostino and Mr. Bianchi were being driven to the railway-station in one of the High Dene broughams. They were examining, with keen interest, a sheet of crested note paper on which something was written. Bianchi tapped it with his finger.

"George Otway's death-warrant," he muttered, half beneath his breath. He smiled.

Donna Luisa took the sheet of paper from him, with a characteristic comment:

"I knew that man would bring me good fortune when I saw him in my cabin on board the *Queen of the Seas*. I saw money shining at me out of his eyes."

Bianchi ventured on what was, perhaps, intended for a little jest.

"You perceive, my dear, that you will do almost as well as if you had made him your husband."

The jest—if it was one—fell flat, the lady repudiating the suggestion with scorn.

"That is nonsense. If I had married him, it would not have been necessary to kill him to obtain from him two hundred thousand pounds. If I had made him my husband he would have given me a million willingly to have afforded him an opportunity to divorce me, I know. When you deprived me of an opportunity of making him my husband you did me an injury not to be forgotten; for what, after all, are two hundred thousand pounds, especially when it must be shared with others?"

Bianchi knitted his brows.

"This time there will be but little sharing. I think that this is a matter which you and I can manage by ourselves."

"I think so, also."

Husband and wife looked at each other long and steadily, murder in their eyes. The woman slipped George Otway's death warrant into her waist.

In the drawing room at High Dene Mr. and Mrs. Andrews remained for a few minutes together, after their visitors had gone.

"You don't seriously mean that you will go to Paris to-morrow to see the fellow lying dead?" demanded the husband.

The wife was trifling with some of the numerous rings which almost covered her slender fingers.

"Why not? I assure you—since he overheard us at the stile—it has been my constant dream to see him lying dead. When they showed me the battered body they had taken out of the river I was glad, for I knew, by the look of what was left, that he had had a pretty bad time before he died. But from the moment when, in that Rouen circus, I learned that he had tricked us, and that all the while he lived, I have had one great desire—that I might kill him, giant as he is, with my own hands, and see him, at my feet, dead, so that I might spurn him with the toe of my shoe. And now my desire's to be all but realized. I sha'n't sleep all night for thinking that to-morrow I'm to see him really dead. I hope they'll kill him in some horrid way, so that to-morrow, when I see his carcass, it may be a carcass and nothing more."

Mr. Frank Andrews drew himself away from her. When he spoke, in his voice there was a tremor.

"Dollie, you only talk like that—you don't mean it?"

"Don't I? You know better. I do mean it, and you know I mean it. In me there is what I believe to be an inextinguishable thirst for blood. It has never yet been gratified; but, if I only had the chance, all those who've ever slighted me I'd like to kill; what a feast of killing I'd have! How lovely it would be to rest and dream—and dream—after one has had one's fill of killing!"

This time Mr. Andrews' discomposure was almost uncomfortably obvious. He drew farther and farther from his wife, observing her with fearful eyes. It seemed to him that, at least for the moment, she had all at once become insane.

And in Paris there was a sparrow which had been caught in a trap. In catching it, the trap had broken the bird's wing. Attached to the broken wing was a scrap of paper which told how Elsie Thornton and George Otway, held prisoners in a certain house in the Rue du Bois, were in urgent need of help.

Already the prisoners in that garret at the top of the house had given up hope. It appeared to them that God had forgotten them. They had been three days without food. Starvation stared them in the face. The little strength that Otway had had was almost gone, so that he could scarcely stand. It seemed to Elsie that he was dying before her eyes.

And speeding back to Paris was Donna Luisa D'Agostino, with George Otway's death warrant snuggled cozily against her breast, while she planned

with her husband how they could keep to themselves the price of his blood.

At High Dene Mrs. Andrews—once the Dollie Lee of Otway's fondest adoration—dreamed, still wide-awake, of seeing him dead.

And no man came to that sparrow which was caught in the trap.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

SALLIE PRICE HAS VISITORS.

When George Otway left for Paris to pry into the meaning of the vision of the house with the red blind, Sallie Price, so soon as she was left alone, went to the head of the staircase and listened while he descended.

Satisfied that he had reached the foot, she rushed back to her own apartment, and, flinging back the one window as wide as it would go, thrust her body half through it in an effort to catch a last glimpse of him as, far below, he passed along the pavement.

When, after he had vanished wholly from sight, she returned to the room and closed the window, her face seemed strangely white.

"Thank goodness he's got safely away!"

But, somehow, she did not look thankful; and, if her dominant feeling really was one of thankfulness, she had an odd way of showing it. Breaking into a passion of tears, she threw herself on the bed which he had so recently quitted, and cried as if her heart was breaking.

The mood, however, was but short-lived. Presently she sat up, and, wiping the tears from her still streaming eyes, addressed herself in tones of anger.

"What a selfish wretch I am, crying because he's safe! If he'd stayed, and they'd got him, then— " The sentence remained unfinished. Her glance fell on the still open cash-box. "He's only taken thirty francs. What's thirty francs to a man in his position—especially as he's fitter for a hospital than anything else?"

She examined the remaining contents of the box.

"A hundred francs, that's all. I don't know who's most in want of them, he or I. The worst of it is I'm so behind with the rent. There won't be much change left when I've paid up all that's owing, and then"—with a sigh—"what I shall do goodness only knows!"

Suddenly the expression of her countenance changed; she seemed to be straining every faculty in the act of listening.

"Who's that? I shouldn't wonder if it's the police. I do believe they're coming!" She had just closed the cash-box, and locked it in her trunk, when there came a knocking at the door. "Who's there?"

The door was opened. A voice inquired in English:

"May I come in?"

"Seems to me that you're in already. Who are you, and what may you please to want?"

"Am I speaking to Miss Price?"

"You are; but you needn't if you don't choose; nobody asked you to."

"I understand that you have an invalid in your charge."

"Do you? Then you understand all wrong, because I've nothing and no one in my charge except myself, and that's charge enough for me."

Instead of showing the slightest sign of being offended at the abrupt fashion of Miss Price's speech, the visitor laughed. There was something in the quality of his laughter which caused the lady to observe him with closer attention than she had hitherto condescended to show.

"He doesn't look as if he was a policeman," she told herself, "nor yet as if he was one of Sam Tebb's friends, either; and yet, if he isn't, who is he, and what does he mean by coming asking questions? One thing's sure, he's good-looking enough for anything."

Exactly what Miss Price meant by her latter remark was not altogether plain, but there certainly was not much fault to find with the stranger in the matter of his looks.

He was tall, well-built, young, and

his face was not by any means the worst part of him.

As he laughed at her she felt that she had seldom seen any one whose exterior was better adapted to inspire confidence at sight; and Sallie Price was a young lady of experience, better acquainted than she would have cared to own with the shady side of human nature.

It was this fact which possibly explained the acridity with which she still chose to regard the stranger.

"What may you be laughing at? Think I'm funny? Because, if so, you're wrong, and you'd much better take yourself off to where you'll find some one who really will amuse you."

"I beg your pardon for laughing; but I have come as a friend to see a friend, and your apparent assumption that my presence here must necessarily have an unfriendly meaning struck me as curious."

"Oh, it struck you as curious, did it? And you've come as a friend to see a friend, have you? And what friend might you have come to see?"

Again the stranger smiled; and Miss Price could not blind herself to the fact that there was something very pleasant in his smile.

"He has been recently known in Rouen as Bull's-Eye, the American Champion Shootist. Having learned how you have acted toward him the part of good Samaritan, and have even coaxed him back from death to life, I had hoped to find him here."

"Then he's not here, and that's all about it; and as for me playing the part of good Samaritan, you go and try that sort of talk on some one who likes it; I don't."

"I'm sorry to learn that my friend is not here; and I am also sorry, Miss Price, that you should show such a disposition to misconstrue everything I may say."

She noted—in spite of the lingering remnants of the smile—the look of genuine disappointment which had come upon his face.

"What's your name?" she demanded.

"Frank Thornton."

"Frank Thornton! Then you're one of her lot?"

"Her lot? What do you mean?"

She bit her lip; the words had escaped her unawares. She eyed him for a second or two in silence.

"Are you any relation to Elsie Thornton?"

"Elsie! She's my sister. What do you know of Elsie Thornton?"

"What do I know?"

Miss Price laughed queerly. She thought of the hours she had sat by George Otway's bedside with Elsie Thornton's name continually on his delirious lips. The stranger pressed her with a volley of questions.

"Where is she? Have you seen her? What has she been doing all this time? Is she well? How is it that my mother has heard nothing from her for so long?"

"I know nothing of your sister except that I have heard her spoken of. Tell me, what is the name of the man you have come to see?"

"George Otway."

"And you are, indeed, his friend?"

"When I owe to him all that makes life worth living! What a question to ask! Why, not long ago I was a felon, sentenced to a term of imprisonment for a crime of which I was innocent. I knew that if I could only regain my freedom for a few hours I could establish my innocence beyond all doubt or question. I made a mad attempt at escape. When I was within an ace of being recaptured I met George Otway, who was then to me an utter stranger. I told him my story. He then and there insisted on rendering me that help of which I stood in such pressing need. He donned my felon's garb——"

"Your felon's garb?"

"My felon's garb. He clad me in his own clothes, and, bidding me Godspeed, started me again on what, without his aid, would have been a hopeless venture. With his help I did all that I had set out to do, and more—induced the guilty to confess, made plain my innocence, and, obtaining the king's pardon for what I had never done, went back into the world without a stain

upon my character. If it had not been for George Otway, I might have been still a branded felon—and you ask me if I am indeed his friend!"

"And what became of him after he had put on your prison clothes?"

"They captured him, mistaking him for me. In his turn he escaped, came to France, became a performer in a circus. It was only yesterday that I learned that he had told my mother the whole story in a letter which he had written in Rouen. I rushed here post-haste, only, it seems, to find that he is here no longer."

"He has gone to her."

"To her?—to whom?"

"To whom? Stupid! I beg your pardon, but some people's denseness is enough to provoke a saint. He has gone to her for whose sake he did so much for you—to your sister, Elsie Thornton."

"But where is she?"

"She's in Paris."

"In Paris?"

"Yes; at least he said she was in Paris. I can't think of the name of the street. According to him it all came to him in a kind of a sort of a vision—where she was, and all about it—and nothing would suit him but that he should start off there and then. He did tell me the name of the street, but I can't think what it was."

"Try and think."

"I am trying, aren't I?—what do you suppose I'm doing?—but I was in such a state of flurry when he told me that it went in at one ear and out of the other. I know it was Rue du something, and that's all I do know. Hush! there's some one else coming up the stairs; I do believe it is them dratted police this time."

"Police!"

"Yes, police. There's plenty of idiots in this world, and to spare, and some of them have got it into their idiotic heads that he's a murderer—he who wouldn't hurt a fly! Jacob Gunston they think he is, and they've been hounding him all over the place, as if he was the biggest scamp that ever went unhung. It was only because I knew that they were after him again that I let him go to Paris, though he really wasn't hardly any more fit to go than if he was a baby. Keep still! Here they are! If it's them, don't you let out that you know any more about him than if he was the man in the moon."

There came a sharp tapping at the door. Without waiting for an answer, the handle was turned, and some one entered—an individual clothed with the air of authority which goes with the not particularly becoming costume of the French *sergent de ville*.

At his heels were two subordinates. Behind him was a person in ordinary civilian attire, whom the keen-witted Sallie Price immediately placed as an English detective.

He was big-bearded and burly, and contrasted strongly with the Frenchman, who happened to be short and generally undersized, with a hatchet-shaped face and pinched features, and a long, thin, waxed mustache, which stood out, like two pieces of wire, on either side of his evil-looking mouth.

The instant the Frenchman was in the room he addressed himself to Frank Thornton with a confident air, which, under the circumstances, was a little surprising.

"Your name is Jacob Gunston. I arrest you. You are my prisoner. Secure him!"

His subordinates showed a willingness to obey their superior officer's command, which some people might have found embarrassing. But his "prisoner" only smiled.

"Pardon me, I am not Jacob Gunston. My name is Thornton—Frank Thornton."

The *sergent de ville* displayed contemptuous incredulity.

"Your name is not Jacob Gunston? Of course not! It is all a mistake! I know; it is always a mistake. It is extraordinary how full the prisons are of mistakes! All the same, you are my prisoner. I arrest you on a charge of murder."

Frank Thornton still laughed.

"But I assure you that this time you

are making a mistake. I only arrived in France this morning, and my name is Thornton."

"You only arrived in France this morning? That is a pretty tale which you expect me to believe. This is the fellow, is it not?"

He beckoned to the Englishman, who had remained upon the door-step. The burly man looked Frank Thornton up and down. Stroking his beard, he addressed him in English:

"What do you say your name is?"

"Frank Thornton; my father is the vicar of Dullington, in Sussex."

"You are the person who jumped out of the Lewes train in Balcombe Tunnel?"

"I am that well-known blunder of the police. You, apparently, are one of the men who blundered. Do you propose to place another blunder to your credit by arresting me for a man whom I have never seen?"

"You have never seen Jacob Gunston—you?"

"Yes—I. I tell you again that I have never seen Jacob Gunston in my life."

"You expect me to believe that, when I know, as well as you know, that it was Jacob Gunston who helped you to escape from your father's house."

"You are under a complete misapprehension; that was not Jacob Gunston. Possibly you don't know it—being a policeman, you would be ignorant of simple facts—but Jacob Gunston happens to be dead."

"Dead!" The bearded man uttered a sound which was, perhaps, meant to be a derisive laugh. "I like that. He wasn't dead half an hour ago, and I do know so much. Here, you, Tebb," he called to some one who had seemingly preferred to remain modestly in the background, somewhere down the stairs.

Heavy footsteps were heard ascending. Soon there appeared—Sam Tebb. Bodily he seemed to have decreased to half his original size—a fact which was accentuated by a stoop which almost bent him double. Indeed, it seemed that it was only with the aid of a stick that he could walk at all.

No one would have taken him, then, to be the famous "pillar" of the Dandison Brothers; he would have been a rash individual who would have proposed to balance nine stalwart men on those poor, tremulous shoulders.

The detective addressed him with an air of authority which could hardly have been agreeable to Sam's notoriously sensitive feelings. "Come here, you, Tebb; step as lively as you can."

Mr. Tebb dragged himself into the room in a fashion which was hardly suggestive of liveliness.

The burly gentleman directed his attention to Frank Thornton. "Is this our man, or isn't it?"

Mr. Tebb's features, as he stared at the young man out of his bleared eyes, were expressive of supreme disgust.

"That? No. He ain't no more our man than I am—ain't nothing like him. Our man's hid under the bed or somewhere. Trust that young baggage of a girl to stow him out of sight if it's to be done, and to trick you if she can. I know her."

Sam's glance wandered round the room. Apparently his malevolence had increased with the decay of his physical powers. When he saw Sallie Price he snarled at her, like some toothless, but still vicious, cur:

"So it's you, is it? Curse you for a treacherous cat! Been harboring him, have you? Been harboring a bloody minded murderer? You won't save him. They'll hang him for all your harboring—hang him till he's dead. And if right was right, they'd hang you with him—you devil's daughter!"

In return, Miss Price regarded him with flushed cheeks and flashing eyes, and lips just a little curled.

"You've not improved, either in manners or appearance, Mr. Sam Tebb; and I can't congratulate you on the new trade you seem to have taken up. But when there's no more left of a man than there is of you I suppose he does what he can, poor wretch!"

Mr. Sam Tebb's temper seemed to be even worse than it used to be; the lady's retort deprived him of every vestige of self-control.

"You Jezebel!" he screeched.

He raised his stick, as if to hurl it at her, apparently oblivious of the fact of how much he himself stood in need of its support, with the result that, had not the detective supported him by slipping his arm about his shoulders, Tebb would have dropped onto the floor.

The burly man's comment on his behavior was plain, if not comforting—especially when one considered what a Goliath Mr. Tebb had recently been.

"None of that, you fool! You'd better keep your hands off the girl, even if you want to quarrel with her. By her looks, I should say she could thrash you with her little finger." He turned to the lady in question. "Now, my girl, no more of this nonsense. What have you done with Jacob Gunston?"

"Don't you call me your girl, because I'm not your girl; and if every girl was of my mind, they'd only use you policemen to wipe their boots on. As for your Jacob Gunston, don't know the gentleman—never set eyes on him since the day I was born."

"Oh, you haven't, haven't you? Then what have you done with your friend, Bull's-Eye, the American Champion Shootist?"

"Nothing."

"That's your tune, is it? Let me warn you that you won't do him a service by trying to keep him hidden."

"Much obliged for your warning—especially as I never asked for it."

The detective turned to the *sergent de ville*.

"You had better let your people search the room, though I'm afraid my man has given us the slip. Some one has warned the girl, so that she was able to get him away before we came."

Ready-tongued Sallie Price was derisive.

"That's right, don't bother about my feelings—I suppose I didn't ought to have any! Search the room! Search the house! Search the whole neighborhood for all I care! A nice lot of men you are, making free with a girl's belongings!"

Miss Price stormed on—now in French, now in English; now in a mixture of both. But her storming went unheeded, except by Mr. Tebb, who kept up a running interchange of courtesies with her.

They searched the room, turning everything upside down with a thoroughness which Sallie violently resented, or pretended to resent, because there was not improbably more than a touch of make-believe about her show of rage.

Having ransacked her room, the intruders proceeded to act on the girl's ironical advice—they first went through every other room on the same floor, then through every apartment in the house.

While the examination was going on, a *sergent de ville* was left up-stairs to keep Miss Price and Frank Thornton company—with the apparent intention of preventing their giving a hint to any person who might be concealed.

The examination concluded, the detective addressed a few parting remarks to the mocking Sallie.

"He's done us again, has Jacob Gunston; thanks to you, I fancy. But don't you make any mistake—he's pretty nearly got to the end of his tether. They're looking out for him all over Europe. He's made himself pretty notorious, has your friend. I know for certain that he was in Rouen an hour ago; and you may take it from me we'll know where he is in an hour from now."

TO BE CONTINUED.

The Elephant Trainer and the Emperor

By Philip C. Stanton

Author of "The Clown and the Catacombs," Etc.

This is another of Mr. Stanton's tales of an American circus troupe traveling abroad. In this he tells of a dastardly plot which imperiled a crowned head, and which was only frustrated through the presence of mind of one of the performers

WHEN George Stanley, trainer of the celebrated troupe of performing elephants of the La Shelle & Santley American Circus, came near having a hand in the making of history in Vienna, it was due to several causes. One of these was love of a woman. Another was Stanley's desire to collaborate as an author with a New York newspaper man, Bob Edgcomb. Still another was the dereliction of Jack Arliss, assistant trainer. Arliss was an Englishman, and Stanley was American, through and through.

To use Stanley's words, Arliss "absorbed as fine a collection of known and unknown animals into his system as a zoologist could wish for. If he had kept quiet about it, it would not have been so bad. When he got to paying attention to his 'bar beasts,' and getting careless with the elephants, what could be expected?"

Just before they had sailed from New York to Europe, Edgcomb had asked Stanley why the elephants marched up the gang-plank into the big ship with the tail of each foremost one in the trunk of the one behind.

The Emperor, the ten-foot Indian elephant, was in the lead. He was a king of his kind, wise above the generation of elephants; who feared no man, obeyed but one through friendship, and that one George Stanley, and through him Jack Arliss.

"Why do they march so?" repeated Stanley, with a chuckle. "Well, there is a drawback to every profession, you know."

The reporter had been sent to write a story for the Sunday supplement of his paper on the subject of "Elephants as Tourists—How the Most Highly Educated Animals Ever Exhibited Will Take Their Long Ocean Voyage."

Stanley's answer regarding the "drawback" was so wholly impromptu that it caused Edgcomb to look up in surprise. He reflected that the elephants must have been educated to the degree of proficiency by a man many shades above the average of animal-trainers.

They both had laughed, and Edgcomb had said:

"I suppose that's a stock joke in the 'big top,' Stanley?"

"No, I never heard it before," declared the trainer truthfully. Then he said that the real reason why the elephants marched "tails in trunks," forming an elephantine chain, was to keep the trunks of "the young chaps in the primer class" from straying in the air, also to make them all preserve a straight line, follow-your-leader fashion.

Stanley was plainly so bright an individual trainer that Edgcomb's attention was distracted for the time being from his inspection of the Emperor, whose name, shortened to "Emp," had been corrupted into "Old Imp" by the circus people.

The trainer was a man about thirty-five years of age, with a strong face—a handsome face it might have been

called, with its adornment of heavy, black, drooping mustache, somewhat essential to the part its owner played.

He was above medium height, with a figure whose trimness was emphasized by the military jacket he wore when in the ring with his massive pets. He was muscular, quick, and alert, and his black eyes were unusually bright.

"I was intended for the army," he said; and, after a pause: "I had a good education." Then, as if unwilling to say more of himself, he continued:

"Some people believe an elephant hasn't a conscience. Well, maybe some of them don't have any more than some men. The Emperor here has a heart as big as his body. He tries hard to be good, because he knows it worries an old friend of fifteen years when he breaks loose.

"Now, that time out in Indiana," he continued reflectively. "When he got loose one Sunday night and butted over a negro meeting-house, where the preacher had just pictured a material devil big as the meeting-house itself, he just couldn't help it. He and I didn't know each other so well then. He hadn't ascertained my feelings in regard to runaways."

Edgcomb was interested in both elephant and trainer. "I suppose he has his likes and dislikes?" he ventured.

"Just the same as you or me, no more, no less," said the trainer. "At first he didn't take any sort of fancy for Jack Arliss—that's my assistant. It's my opinion that Old Imp couldn't fall in with Jack's occasional lapses from sobriety. The old boy is strict temperance. Finally, by my showing him that I wanted the two to get together, the Emperor and he became good pals. Jack can handle him now almost as well as I can. It's a good thing, too, for if anything was to happen to me, without Arliss there'd be no elephant act—that is, with the Emperor in it.

"I don't know about this European trip," continued the trainer, after awhile. "You'd think, after all his years as a 'trouper,' the Emperor wouldn't be satisfied in any one place long."

"Well, isn't he?" queried the reporter quickly, pencil and paper ready.

"What, he? Not much. It's the quiet life for him all the time. He'd be happy in a Harlem flat. I'm mighty apprehensive about this trip across the water. I've spoken to Mr. La Shelle about it, and he says our act is the feature of the show. So it's the troopship and the Continental railway trains for us for our next engagement."

Edgcomb had an inspiration.

"We've got a chance to make some money on the side, George," he told the trainer. "You are going to all the big European capitals. You take a note-book along—I'll get it for you—and put down in it whatever you see or do, or what happens to the show of any interest in any of those places. I'll get your route and write the name of each big city at the top of the page, so all that you will have to do is to slap down occurrences under the heading. Something like: 'King Edward saw the Emperor to-day. "My word! what an elephant!" he said.' You know!" declared the newspaper man eagerly. "When you come back give me your notes, and I'll write them up into book form, and we'll share the profits."

"Do I look like a bloomin' author?" Stanley asked somewhat sarcastically.

Edgcomb disabused his mind of this idea speedily, pointing out to him that his notes would need to be only of the briefest nature; Edgcomb himself would elaborate them into literary form.

The trainer agreed to the proposition. It was partly his desire to win praise from his future collaborator that caused the remarkable occurrence in the Austrian capital.

To Vienna the circus had come with one undisputed series of successes. In Rome the elephant man had managed to write in his note-book:

Saw Pope and St. Peter's. Sick of spaghetti. Colosseum must have been a show nearly as good as La Shelle & Santley's. Italians pretty sporty.

In London this had been written in the note-book:

Some of the royal kids visited the show, and seemed tickled to death with the Em-

peror. Terrible foggy. Jack Arliss meets some of his kinsfolk and old friends, and stays half "soused" all the time. Zoological gardens O. K., but didn't see any elephants the equal of Old Imp. Jack Arliss has more relations than any man I ever saw.

When Vienna was reached, Stanley confided to himself regarding the result of his literary labors: "It reads kind of tame and domesticated—animal-like to me. I don't know whether Edgcomb can make anything out of it or not."

The newspaper man might have known that a chap who was accustomed to using an elephant prod was hardly capable of dealing with as subtle an instrument as a pen. However, George was determined to have something happen in Vienna. The first entry in the memorandum-book, under the red ink heading "Vienna," was this:

Show located in the Prater. Prater is a big park. All sorts of amusements. Kind of Coney, only inland. Jack Arliss fired by old man La Shelle himself. Hard luck. Don't see how I can do without him. Old Imp dead tired of traveling, and very crabbed. I am half-way afraid to work him, he's so cross. Double work since Arliss is dropped. Vienna a lively town. People stuck on the show.

Now, as a matter of fact, it may be stated, without idea of causing a slight to be put on Stanley's journalistic ability, he had overlooked something.

At the first afternoon performance in Vienna the Emperor had by no means recovered from his trip on the *West Bahnhof*. Stanley, knowing full well the old brute's idiosyncrasies, went very slow with him.

Arliss, who was half under the influence of liquor, provoked him somewhat needlessly when the trainer was not looking. The performance had passed off fairly well, with the exceptions of evidences of temper on the Emperor's part as displayed by occasional squeals and unusual movements of the great trunk.

In the interim between the afternoon and the night performance evidently the elephant had brooded over his bad treatment by his erstwhile comrade, and had made up his mind what to do. Arliss himself had devoted his time to accumulating a heavier load of liquor.

When at night the big elephant marched into the arena at the head of the herd he was apparently subdued; but if he had been watched closely, the little, wicked eye could have been seen turned often on Arliss.

It was when the big fellow was required to stand on his hind feet, and salute by lifting his trunk in the air, trumpeting loudly, that the climax came.

Stanley was in the center of the ring, the Emperor facing him, Arliss by the side of the big beast. Old Imp never cared for this part of the act, and Arliss had been accustomed to persuade him into doing it by simply striking him with the blunt end of the prod.

On this occasion, while the great audience was waiting expectantly, Arliss dug the sharp point of the prod into the tender part of the flank. The beast was just on the point of raising himself.

Like a flash, the elephant wheeled, the tremendous trunk twining around the assistant trainer's body like a huge, enraged serpent, the little eyes gleaming fiercely. In a second Arliss was lifted high in the air, held struggling above the cavernous mouth.

Women had begun to scream, men to shout cries of alarm, for it was evident this was not on the program.

Stanley had but time to utter two or three words of sharp command.

Old Imp hesitated a moment. The next he lowered his trunk with Arliss held in it tightly, and tossed him upward, so that he landed thirty feet away, stunned, on the tan-bark of the hippodrome course.

Turning and facing the trainer, still standing in the same spot, the elephant rose and saluted, as if nothing had occurred. The audience sat down; and La Shelle, who with his eagle eye had seen Arliss prod the brute, followed the senseless man when he was carried from the place.

"You were drunk," La Shelle told Arliss when he recovered consciousness.

"I'll cut it out from now on, boss," pleaded the assistant trainer.

"You'll have one more chance," said La Shelle.

Instead of accepting the chance, the assistant trainer had begun drinking harder than ever, until he was threatened with delirium tremens. Finally he was dropped from the pay-roll.

"No use for me to say anything to La Shelle; even if he would stand for you, Old Imp wouldn't—he'd kill you next time," said Stanley.

More references to the increasing temper of the big brute were jotted down in the note-book. The concluding statement ran:

Looks like he's due to turn himself loose in spite of me.

Arliss gone, a young man who was a simple "keeper" was promoted from the rear ranks to assist Stanley. Of course the Emperor had become used to this man's presence as a keeper, but whether, should anything befall Stanley, Old Imp would submit to his control was a question.

The elephant seemed to be merely indifferent about this substitute, who was a chap about twenty-five, strongly built, and entered on the pay-roll as William Blake, but known only as "Stumpy." Stanley selected him because he had plenty of pluck, was strictly businesslike, and obeyed implicitly what was told him.

After Arliss had left, Stanley swore big oaths, as befitted a man who had behemoths in his charge, and called the Emperor out of his name on various occasions.

"It does beat all, Mr. La Shelle, how big a crank the Emperor is getting," Stanley told the proprietor.

If the elephant had been a jungle resident he would have been called a "rogue." Now he was simply a "crank."

Certain actions of the elephant indicated to the trainer that the big brute was on the verge of an outbreak, such as elephants have occasionally. It was this knowledge that induced the trainer to consult seriously with La Shelle regarding the permanent, or at least temporary, retirement of the Emperor. La Shelle thought there was no just cause for apprehension.

"We don't want to lose one of our biggest drawing-cards, George," La Shelle said. "See that he behaves himself until after this engagement is over, and we'll decide what's to be done."

Well, La Shelle was owner, and what he said had to go, but Stanley was afraid. It was only by extreme watchfulness and the most careful handling he believed he could keep the elephant from doing great damage, perhaps costing human lives. The elephant was obedient to him—so far.

Meantime the faithful collaborator continued to fill up his note-book. He wrote:

Old Franz Joseph took a look at the show this morning. Came to look at the Hungarian stallions. They say the old chap's dead stuck on horse-flesh. La Shelle showed him around. He wore a blue uniform. Looks like a good-natured old chap. White side-whiskers. Came up to Old Imp and looked him over. Spoke English. I heard La Shelle ask him to attend a regular performance, and his majesty said he would be glad to. La Shelle tickled all over. His majesty spent some time in the menagerie tent. I never knew what good *Wiener Schnitzel* was before.

It was midsummer, and the weather was extremely warm. From fast friends, with occasional mild tiffs, Old Imp and Stanley were changed into almost foes at heart. They were hardly on speaking terms. Stanley knew that the brain in the massive head was not normal, and not only watched closely, but dinned into Stumpy's ears that safety lay only in watching.

Although the attendance at the circus had been such as to fill every seat with new faces every afternoon and night, so that even La Shelle's graven face assumed an expression of complacency, the ushers were talking among themselves about a certain box that had been occupied by one party during the whole Vienna engagement. It was a box directly on the arena, the most advantageous position for one to witness the doings in Ring No. 1.

It was in this ring that Stanley put

the big elephant through his paces, and it was remarked by the circus employees that the elephant act seemed to possess a strong fascination for the occupants of Arena Box R. E., Division C, No. 7. Rarely was it unoccupied during a performance. Sometimes it contained a woman and a man; generally it held only the woman.

Stanley himself had noticed her once, sitting with her chin in her hands, staring straight at him over the arena partition. Curiously enough, she was there at the next performance; he saw her nearly always. Foreigners were queer people, he said to himself; doubtless she was of the leisure class, and was simply amusing herself with a novelty until she tired of it.

Then, one afternoon, when the trainer had noted that the particular box was empty, and he had accompanied the big elephant back to the menagerie tent, he saw the lady standing near. He recognized her instantly by her light hair and oval face, and the black picture-hat with long ostrich-plume, and dazzling white gown she wore.

When Stanley first saw her, she was standing straight and tall, with her parasol held transversely across her knees, and a somewhat languid expression on her face.

Presently, as Stanley superintended the tethering of the Emperor to a stake in the menagerie tent, and while he still managed to keep her in the range of his vision, he saw that she had moved closer, and was watching the process curiously. He looked up to find her regarding him smilingly.

"Meinherr Stanley?" she asked. "Ah, yes, I have your name from the program. I have seen the performance often. I am much interested in elephants—in these, especially."

She spoke English well, though with a decided accent.

"They have the reputation of being pretty well educated, I believe, madam," replied Stanley affably.

"Ah, yes, I am much attracted by the big one—*Der Kaiser*, you call him," continued the lady eagerly.

She opened a small portemonnaie, and extracted a card, which she handed to him with a beautiful grace of manner.

"My card, Meinherr Stanley," she said.

He took the bit of pasteboard gingerly, and read on it:

COUNTESS STEPHANIE RADZETZKY,

Verein zur Unterdrückung der Thierquälerei.

"That means that I am an officer of the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals," she volunteered. "Now you see why I take such an interest in them."

While the lady had most pronounced golden hair, her eyes were dark and sparkling. Her face, Stanley, who was no fool in such matters, knew was aristocratic in every feature. Her teeth, which she showed frequently, were white and even. She was perfectly at home, and accentuated her speech with pretty little gestures. Her age, so Stanley decided, was somewhere between thirty and thirty-five.

For some time she stood inspecting the elephant, for she appeared to take little interest in any but the Emperor. All manner of questions she asked regarding the care of the big beasts. Afterward, Stanley remembered that she had seemed particularly inquisitive regarding the liability of sudden outbreak.

For quite a long time the lady stood talking before taking her departure, which she did after thanking the trainer for his courtesy.

"I am sure the elephants must have a very clevaire master to enable them to do the things they do," she declared on leaving.

Stanley merely took it as a matter of fact, though just after she had left this wise American muttered to himself:

"I wonder what she's trying to jolly me about."

At the same time he was also wondering if he would see her again.

His doubting on this subject was soon set at rest, for seldom a day passed that the lady did not make her appearance at the show, either in the menagerie "top" or the performance tent.

Once she showed Stanley some sketches of elephants which she said she had done, and in one of which he professed to recognize the big fellow.

The countess occasionally was with a man whom she introduced as her brother, but brother and sister never looked more dissimilar. Baron Heller was tall and thin, dark-haired, and with piercing black eyes. His face was sinister—"nasty," as Stanley said—but he apparently was suave and pleasant enough. As he spoke English indifferently, the sister did the talking. In some way she let fall that she was a widow.

Stanley was a bachelor, whose heart so far had resisted the smiles of women.

"Elephants can be trained; from all I hear, wives are different," Stanley once had said, when La Shelle had joked with him about his bachelor existence.

Though he swore secretly at himself for his foolishness, the trainer caught himself "sprucing up" more than ordinary, and realized that if the lady did not appear as usual the day seemed strangely uneventful.

"You're a fool, George Stanley, and at your time of life, too," he said meditatively. "She's a corking woman, though, Imp, eh? If it weren't for you, she wouldn't come near *me*, I bet," he said tentatively to the mountain of flesh before him. "You like her, don't you, Imp?"

The Emperor's special liking for her was evoked by the particular form of dainty without which she never appeared. It was preserved ginger, of which the big beast was inordinately fond. He would see her as soon as she appeared inside the tent, and signify by a snort of pleasure. Stanley got to recognize this as a signal that the lady was approaching, and would try to appear unconcerned.

While at times the Emperor was as usual, Stanley, who studied him more closely than ever, was forced to acknowledge that in these fifteen years of acquaintanceship he had never known the elephant to act in just such a manner.

The Emperor was vaguely restless, and, instead of lying on the ground at night, feet stretched straight out, like the rest of his brethren, he appeared too restless to lie down. He was strangely irritable, and if he slept at all, it was much too little, for an elephant cannot rest properly on his feet.

Stanley was more than uneasy. The trainer felt that his pet was approaching, perhaps had reached, that age, or stage of existence, when his kind become irresponsible—liable to injure their best friends.

But for this, Stanley might have had a most enjoyable time in Vienna. Every one who has been to Vienna remembers what pleasure can be had in an early morning drive through the Wiener Wald, the magnificent forest, redolent with pine, which skirts the Austrian capital. And when such a drive is taken with a divinity in the shape of a countess, a beautiful, fascinating woman also, it is something to be remembered.

The drive was at the invitation of the countess, and, though the brother participated in it, that did not detract from the enjoyment. Stanley's brain was in a whirl, not only over this, but over something which the lady had said on a former occasion, when they were alone, standing in front of the Emperor. She had turned with sparkling eyes, after an interval of silence, to the trainer, and said in a voice which seemed to convey a hidden meaning:

"I think a man that can dominate these—what you call tremendous—yes, that is it—these tremendous creatures, make them obey his every command, as if they were mice, must have the spirit of a hero in him, which they do not fail to recognize. Yes, that is my opinion."

Madame's accent was subtle, charming. Stanley had stammered out some unintelligible reply. Then the lady, as

if ashamed of herself for this sudden avowal, had let her eyes drop, and slipped away.

Events were moving rapidly with the circus people; their stay in Vienna was drawing to a close, and the great feature of their engagement was but a short time away. That feature was the visit of the monarch, Franz Joseph, who was to attend a matinée performance of the circus, for which arrangements had been made, and with notices of which the Vienna papers had been filled each day.

It was at first supposed that he and his entourage would attend a special performance. As an evidence of Franz Joseph's democracy and love for his people, it was known that the Austria-Hungary *Kaiser-König* would attend a regular performance. Only a certain number of the seats were to be reserved for him and his suite and bodyguard, the rest for the public as usual.

Franz Joseph was located at the summer palace, Schönbrunn, about two miles from Vienna. It was at the invitation of the countess that Stanley accompanied her and the baron to this place, to see the zoological gardens, which are the pride and great attraction of the Viennese.

What the frame of mind of the trainer was at this point can be surmised when it is stated that only one line regarding the acquaintanceship with Countess Radzetzky was scribbled by him in his note-book, for the benefit of his collaborator in New York, though considerable was written regarding the approaching visit of the emperor to the circus and the irritability of his namesake in the menagerie.

In connection with this extreme irritability, it may be narrated that Old Imp did a very strange thing one day when the countess had just given him a bit of preserved ginger.

The elephant took it, put it into his mouth for a moment, took it out again, and deliberately threw it into her face. Of course she was both surprised and frightened. The trainer later made the beast regret it.

A day or so later Stanley wrote in his book:

> Had some of the best beer I ever tasted at Dreher's celebrated brewery in the village of Kleine Schwecht, about four miles from Vienna, where I went with some friends.

He forgot to mention that the "friends" were the countess and her brother.

It was at Kleine Schwecht that something transpired which had a most important effect on later events.

Perhaps it was the beer that made Stanley unusually communicative. In some way the conversation had led up to the approaching public appearance of the Austrian emperor at the circus.

"I hope his namesake behaves himself that day," said Stanley.

Instantly the countess and the baron appeared interested.

"You have no fear that—that anything will happen?" asked the countess.

"I hope not," said the trainer, with a short laugh, continuing gloomily: "He's acting so queer here lately that I don't know what to make of him. I asked La Shelle for leave to let him stay out of the act. Of course it would spoil it."

"Well, and what did he say?" questioned the countess impatiently.

She and the baron were both leaning forward, breathlessly awaiting his answer.

"Oh, he wouldn't hear of it," stated Stanley carelessly. "If anything was to happen to me in the meantime, and they'd send the big fellow on with Stumpy, as La Shelle certainly would, I don't like to think what might happen."

The trainer saw the two exchange quick glances. The countess hastened to change the subject, then abruptly began to speak in German to her companion. An animated discussion took place between them, the baron apparently protesting, then submitting. Stanley caught the words: *"Todt machen"* [kill] and *"Der Kaiser."* He supposed they were discussing the elephant.

A crafty smile came over the face of the baron, who said in his broken English:

"We were speaking of the danger in which our beloved emperor might place himself."

"Oh, if I'm there I guess he'll be safe enough," declared Stanley vainglorioously; and again the two looked at one another.

No more was said then on the subject.

The countess was a regular visitor after that, and the Emperor got his preserved ginger with unfailing regularity.

One day the lady, who, Stanley was forced to admit, seemed to treat him with more than kindness, came to where he was pretending to be looking after the big elephant's comfort, and began, with a great show of indignation:

"These attachés, ticket-sellers, of your show—they refuse to let me have my regulaire box which I have bought for the whole engashment, for Thursday matinée."

She panted with indignation.

"I have the ticket; see!" she said.

Stanley glanced at the pasteboard.

"Your box is in the section reserved for Emperor Franz Joseph and his suite," he said.

"That is ze more reason why I shall wish to have it," she said. "You can help me?" she asked sweetly. "The kaiser is my friend—he would not object."

She bit her lip.

"You will help me retain it?" she said sweetly, resting her brilliant eyes upon him.

"That's something I have nothing to do with, countess," was the trainer's reply.

Her eyes took on a steely glitter. She appeared to be reflecting deeply, but referred to the matter no more, and left the place soon after. Stanley wondered if he had offended her.

Apparently he had not, for she was in the tent bright and early next day, and her brother, the baron, was with her, bowing effusively, wearing his sly smile, apparently as much interested in the big elephant as the sister, but keeping a safer distance. The Emperor swallowed his dainties from the fair hands, as usual.

"I have something of the utmost interest on which I wish to confer with you, after you have come out of the ring, Meinherr Stanley," she said. "We will wait for you."

It was Wednesday—the night before the scheduled visit of Franz Joseph.

Her air was mysterious. All through the performance Stanley was wondering what it could mean. Old Imp was more fractious than usual, more irritable. The trainer wondered if the elephant would turn on him, as he had done on Jack.

They were waiting for him.

"First, we must ask the pleasure of your company, to sup with us in the *Englischer Garten* restaurant," said the baron.

"Oh, but you must!" the lady insisted, putting a small, white, bejeweled hand on Stanley's arm.

He refused no longer.

In a private room of the place into which they had been ushered they were sipping the sparkling wine with soda-water—and waiting for the *gollasch* with the *paprika* sauce, esteemed such a relish by the Viennese, when the lady began.

"Meinherr Stanley, you have confided much to us regarding your fears on account of your big elephant," she said. "Our knowledge and the fact that our beloved emperor is to attend the performance had led us almost to set our fears before the mayor and prohibit the performance. Out of respect for you we have decided not to do this. The proprietor is still bent on having the elephant perform?"

"If I should refuse, La Shelle would start on with him himself, if necessary."

"*Bien!* We have decided to pay you an unusual honor, Herr Stanley."

She hesitated, as if to make the greater impression with what she was going to say.

"With me to-morrow morning you will visit our emperor, Franz Joseph, at Schönbrunn. I know him well. He would not refuse me audience. We will tell him of the danger—you think there is undoubted danger?"

"He's getting worse every day, countess. He may get through to-night's performance, and turn himself loose to-morrow. He may run amuck to-night," he muttered.

"Oh, take care!" she said, as if fearful of such a contingency.

"La Shelle doesn't realize how bad he is," stated the trainer.

"I wish that you tell the Kaiser the existing state of affairs," she began again. "You can make his majesty know of the danger. It is not necessary that he shall not see the performance. He can manage to arrive after the act in which the elephants appear is finished. He will be discreet. No one will know the reason."

"Also, we can beg his majesty to request the proprietor of your circus——"

The baron rose at this point to take a stroll—"Just a cigarette," he said; and the two were left alone.

"Why not have your big pet placed in the emperor's own zoological gardens at Schönbrunn?" she continued abruptly. "He would recover there. And you—you could also remain in Vienna—I know you are fitted for more than a trainer of animals. You——"

Her voice was soft and coaxing. Her eyes, at first gently pleading, were dropped. She sighed gently.

"You will go with me to Schönbrunn, will you not, Meinherr Jorge?" she pleaded.

No doubt it would be rank disloyalty to La Shelle, but it would ease the strain to which he had been subjected—how great a strain only he himself knew. And then—he would venture anything for her. Yes, he would go.

She held out a small hand with tapering fingers, so small he was almost afraid to crush it, but it was warm and soft. *She* knew he was born to better things.

It had been all arranged, when the baron and the *gollasch* arrived almost simultaneously. The countess spoke a few words to the baron. His face was creased with smiles.

Hungarian dishes and queer wines, sweet and intoxicating, followed. George Stanley was in an earthly paradise, in which he remained until the hour of separation.

"You will receive a note in the morning, telling when to meet me," said the countess. "Arrangements must be made. Until then, au revoir, my friend."

He felt the touch of her hand long after.

Next morning he received a daintily perfumed note, in which he read:

> At the Rotunda, at ten, will be waiting my victoria. Say merely to the driver the words "Countess Radzetzky." I shall be waiting to accompany you.
>
> Yours, STEPHANIE.

Here indeed was adventure. Edgcomb would not believe it. It certainly would sound incredible.

The trainer took one last look at Old Imp before starting. The beast was tossing bits of stuff over his back with his trunk, swaying backward and forward, paying no attention to the trainer whatsoever, muttering and rumbling like a volcano on the verge of eruption. It was time for something to be done.

Stanley found the carriage: a handsome one with liveried driver. He was promptly recognized, and they were on their way.

A long distance it seemed to Stanley—not now an elephant-trainer, but a stylishly attired American, bound for a rendezvous with a countess and audience with an emperor.

Only the cathedral did he recognize as they passed, then, some distance away, the Hofburg, and knew they were in the old section of Vienna. The streets were ancient, the buildings old and dilapidated. At the corner of one a man bearing striking resemblance to the baron was waiting. The driver evidently had instructions. He stopped.

"Countess Radzetzky?" the man inquired. "I take you to her," he said, as if he had learned the lesson like a parrot.

If George Stanley had not been completely blinded by love, if his suspicions had not been previously lulled by a soft voice, he would have refused to go farther. As it was, he did hesitate,

but not long. The thought of the countess being disappointed at his non-appearance caused him to follow the swarthy faced, gleaming-eyed, silent guide.

Vienna is noted for its *Durchgänge*—the thoroughfares or passages leading through archways, under private houses, across courtyards, from one street to another. And it was through the *Durchgänge* that the guide was leading the unsuspecting trainer.

Through a courtyard, silent and deserted, at last Stanley followed the other to a house set back in the street, and divided from it by a high wall.

The American halted.

"The countess in there?" he asked doubtingly.

Evidently the man's stock of English was exhausted, but he nodded. Other houses there were on either side, but no windows looked into the yard, through which they passed.

The guide knocked at the roofed-over door at the back; it was opened by a big man, with a dark, leering face, who passed for the janitor.

"Countess Radzetzky? *Ja*," he said, and a short colloquy followed between him and the other. He motioned for Stanley to pass, and they stood in a large, dark hallway.

The janitor pointed to a stairway, and Stanley ascended it, with the two men following behind. They were in another hall on the second floor.

A door at the side was opened by the smaller man. "Countess Radzetzky," said he.

It was somewhat dark inside, and as Stanley stepped forward he felt the big man bump into him with a violent shove. The smaller one sprang out like a rabbit. The door shut with a clang; Stanley heard it being secured with a bar on the other side. He heard the two men jeering at him.

Then only did he realize that the trip to Schönbrunn was a subterfuge.

Trapped! For what purpose just then he could not think, but he was a prisoner.

At first he stood, somewhat stunned and helpless, near the door. Suddenly he attacked it with blind fury, kicking and pounding it with feet and fists. It was of some heavy wood, so strong and firm that he might as well have pounded at the solid walls of the chamber. He heard departing footsteps, and all was silent.

It was no use, and he desisted, his knuckles sore and bleeding, his face hot, and turned his attention to his prison.

It was so dark in the place, the only light striking in from a small iron barred window near the top of the tall chamber, that he could scarcely see at first.

When his eyes became accustomed to the dim light, he saw that the room was absolutely bare—they had not left him even a chair, which might be turned into something to aid his escape. Evidently the place had not been occupied for a long time.

At first Stanley yelled lustily, but there came no response, and he merely tired himself, and gave it up. He paced up and down the room, swearing fiercely at himself for a fool, and cursing all womankind. A simple tool he had been made by a she devil, who represented herself as a countess. If only he could meet them again—well, he would not inflict bodily injury on a woman, but her confederate, the snaky-eyed, swarthy psuedo baron would get a double dose!

Stanley had time, after the first flush of anger had passed, to guess calmly at the reason why they wanted him out of the way. Realization came to him like a thunderclap. Of course it was in connection with the visit of Franz Joseph.

In a second he was pounding again at the strong door, kicking it, trying to break it down. It would not budge.

His eyes sought the small window high up—there was no possible means of reaching it and effecting escape there.

Then, with a sudden bound of the heart, he saw that, directly in line with the other window, and below it, was another. Investigation showed that in front of it were four iron bars, caging

him in like a wild beast. On the outside were iron shutters, closed tight.

In spite of his strength, he could not dislodge one of the bars, though he pulled and jerked at each separately until he was threatened with apoplexy.

It seemed like a nightmare to Stanley as the hours slipped away slowly with him as prisoner, knowing that devilment, at which he could guess, might be prevented if only he could be released.

Some time in the afternoon the iron half of a shutter at which he had kicked savagely showed signs of breaking its fastening. At last, after one almost superhuman thrust of his foot, it slammed back, and Stanley gave a shout.

The open shutter let in the air and light, but he was still no nearer freedom. The iron bars still held him inside. If only he could displace one!

He felt in his pockets. Stanley was a "handy" man, and he had a penknife with a file-blade attachment. It might be better than nothing, and quickly he was at work on the lower part of one of the bars. He knew with one bar out of the way he could slip through.

It was a poor tool, and it seemed often as if he must give up the attempt, weighing his work against the time, and redoubling his frantic efforts.

At last, when the bar was scarcely half through, with a mighty wrench it was snapped, and bent upward, leaving a space through which he might slip.

A brief scramble, a nerve-racking uncertainty, clothes torn, hat missing, he slid down the wall with bleeding hands —to freedom!

Emperor Franz Joseph had not disappointed the circus people or the Vienna population. Punctually he had appeared, and had taken his seat in the royal box, surrounded by his entourage and bodyguard, while the great circus military band played a stirring Hungarian march, and the early-arriving public, which packed the tent to the ropes around the arena, cheered themselves hoarse at the appearance of the gray-haired, kindly faced monarch.

Apparently every arrangement was perfect, nothing was lacking. Only a few of the circus people knew that the trainer, George Stanley, was missing; that Old Imp was cutting up extraordinary "didoes"; and that La Shelle, though wild with rage at the absent keeper, had instructed Stumpy to put the elephants, including the Emperor, through their paces as usual, for the benefit of the royal patron.

Stumpy did not like the appearance of Imp that day, but he was too plucky an American to shirk his duty. If prodding and determination would make the big elephant go through the performance, he would not shirk.

To the accompaniment of a round of applause and cheering, the big beasts filed into the ring. Old Imp seemed to move spasmodically, mechanically—the temporary trainer had a brave heart, but he was afraid—terribly afraid.

At first the elephants lined up on one side, with their leader facing them in what was known as "the review," during which the Emperor was supposed to walk up and down the line, as if inspecting a troop of soldiers. It was a feature which was immensely popular with the Viennese.

Old Imp took his accustomed position for a moment. As the band struck up the march, he should have begun his stately walk up and down the line, "in review."

He refused to budge, though ordered by Stumpy. Instead, he tossed his trunk angrily, swaying from side to side, working his big ears.

The march music was finished, and it was begun again. This time Stumpy supplemented the order by a jab with the prod.

The touch of steel aroused all the latent savagery in the big beast. With a shrill snort and trumpeting, followed by squeals of rage, he threw over his heavy trunk. It struck Stumpy but a glancing blow, but it knocked him head over heels.

Then, the Emperor's ears flapping furiously, eyes blinking, little flecks of foam dribbling from the lips of the yawning mouth, he faced around and seemed on the point of charging di-

rectly into the crowd of spectators nearest him.

Women were screaming and fainting all about, men, white-faced, were gazing fascinated, a whistle was blowing, and the show "rousters" were huddled on the opposite side, motionless, while the equestrian director was shouting frantic orders.

It was directly toward the box in which Franz Joseph was located that the elephant was facing. The old ruler, his face calm, was standing erect, the least concerned of any, the members of his suite crowded about him.

Then the elephant's trunk was pointed straight out. As he seemed on the very verge of charging on the arena boxes, he wheeled suddenly, with a terrific roar, and attacked the nearest elephant to him, butting and sinking his tusks deep into the animal's shoulder until the sawdust was reeking with blood, and the attacked elephant was mad with pain and terror, striving to protect itself from the giant.

On each of his fellows in turn Old Imp turned his fury, until they, too, were frantic and seemed as if they would charge on the crowd. The men in circus uniform, who had rallied with ropes and chains to conquer the crazy elephant, were brushed off, like flies.

The audience was in a panic. A mad rush for the exit, in which death was sure to follow, was threatened. The place resounded with screams and shouts, the squeals and snorts and horrible trumpetings of the elephants roused by their leader.

In the midst of this a man in civilian dress darted suddenly from an arena seat opposite the royal box, dodging behind the mass of struggling elephants, with the indifference to death of the fanatic, drawing a revolver as he ran, to the section reserved for royalty.

It was the opportunity for which he had been waiting.

Cries of *"Verrückter Elephant!"* ["Mad elephant!"] were changed to warnings for the royal patron's safety.

The crazed elephant, fighting with his fellows, was as alert to spy out the interloper as the spectators.

The fellow had slipped past him, when Old Imp turned, with a bellow of rage, and squeals following one another in quick succession, and shot after him, with trunk outstretched.

Ten feet, twenty feet they ran, with the man in the lead.

Then Old Imp had reached the victim, and he was held aloft, squirming and struggling in the trunk encircling him.

With a resounding crash, the brute hurled the man head foremost against a guy-pole. He lay motionless.

Another man-thing — puny, pigmy creature—all breathless and hatless, appeared suddenly before the startled eyes of the spectators. He was shouting words in a foreign tongue, and insanely running directly toward the crazy brute.

Another victim?

The elephant, red eyes gleaming with ferocity, showing the horrible lust for blood, gave squeals of joy at the prospect.

Trunk stretched straight out, knocking over those who would have restrained him, he sped toward the man with incredible swiftness.

The brute had almost reached the object of his wrath, already the watchers saw in imagination the man held aloft, perhaps crushed under foot a shapeless mass, torn limb from limb, or hurled to destruction as had been the other.

They were mistaken; they were spared such a spectacle.

Within trunk's reach the big brute checked his speed, hesitated, stopped short in his tracks, as if puzzled. The vast body trembled violently, the trunk was lowered; the elephant appeared as if vaguely remembering.

As Stanley stood facing death before them all, a woman, strangely unexcited by what had preceded, rose, with clenched hands, and muttered in German: "Courage, superb!"

"Up, up, Imp, up!" commanded the trainer, looking straight into the fiery eyes.

Fearlessness and authority triumphed—or was it friendship?

Slowly the beast moved forward, the

massive trunk was dropped and curved. Stanley stepped into the bend, and, holding tight, was lifted to the elephant's back.

So they passed from the ring, the big beast tottering strangely as he went. Stumpy, poor make-believe trainer, hurried up, limping and terribly shaken.

"You fool, keep away, you fool!" shouted Stanley. "Keep away, everybody," he yelled.

He checked, with a gesture, the bandmaster, who would have started the music to quiet the fears of the spectators.

They reached the menagerie tent, where Stanley fixed the big shackle on the elephant's foot, and breathed freer, standing with a face chalky white, but dripping with perspiration.

He might have saved himself the trouble of shackling the Emperor, for scarcely was the task finished, when the elephant sank to the ground.

Uttering cries of pain, almost humanlike in their anguish and despair, the great brute, resting on forefeet, dropped slowly on his side, the huge breast heaving pitifully. Once the trunk curled up, weakly groping for the trainer, then relaxed and fell.

The Emperor was in his last gasps. A shudder shook the immense body, the breath went out in a suffocating groan, his frame stiffened.

"What's wrong with him?" inquired La Shelle, who had followed trainer and elephant from the arena tent.

"Dead; poisoned," said Stanley. "I know who doped him for their own devilish purpose, but we'll get them, boss," he added fiercely. "I'm not ashamed to acknowledge I've been a mighty fool and dupe. But these sneaking foreign would be king-killers play such devilish tricks good Americans are easy for them."

Although the trainer did not spare himself in his recital to the authorities, the man and woman were not apprehended. They were not known previously as anarchists, but their antecedents were traced, and they were found to be Magyars—Hungarians of noble birth, who, for political reasons, wished to have removed the head of the Hapsburg House.

They were discovered to be members of the same group of revolutionists as Jori, arrested for planning to kill Franz Joseph at Botzen, and who hanged himself in prison.

It was the belief of the police that the woman had engineered the whole diabolical plot from beginning to end. Such is the policy of the government, however, nothing was published of the attempted assassination.

As for the tool, Kessler, a Slav, selected as the assassin proper, he needed no trial to convict him of the crime of attempted regicide. His neck had been broken.

Little by little Stanley picked up the threads until he wove them into a complete fabric. The preserved ginger had been the medium by which the poison irritant had been conveyed into the animal's system to excite him to ferocity in the absence of the trainers. The final doses had been administered the very afternoon of the performance. Stumpy told the trainer of seeing the "countess" give the brute piece after piece of the dainty.

It had been so plotted that in the confusion which would result from the elephant's outbreak the Kaiser would prove an easy victim to the pistol or bomb of the assassin. Jori had failed; but this plot could not admit of failure.

Trainer Stanley did have audience with the Austrian Emperor, after all. Franz Joseph knew a man when he saw one, and he sent for the subduer of the mad elephant. From him he heard the whole story.

"You are a brave man, Herr Stanley," the old emperor said, looking at him keenly. "I sympathize with you in the loss of so fine an animal as my namesake—in such a manner," he added.

The trainer was silent, merely bowing acknowledgment.

Not one line of this or a word more did Stanley write in his diary. One day he slipped into the cook tent and stuffed something into the stove, after which his face wore a satisfied expression.

The Malefactor

By E. Phillips Oppenheim

Author of "The Betrayal," "A Maker of History," Etc.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

THE library at Tredowen was a room of irregular shape, full of angles and recesses lined with bookcases. It was in one of these rooms that Wingrave found his visitor. She wore a plain serge traveling-dress, and the pallor of her face, from which she had just lifted a voluminous veil, almost matched in color the gleaming white of a small marble statue upon which she was gazing.

But when she saw Wingrave, leaning upon his cane and regarding her with stern surprise, a strange light seemed to flash in her eyes. There was no longer any resemblance between the pallor of her cheeks and the pallor of the statue.

"Lady Ruth," Wingrave said quietly, "I do not understand what has procured for me the pleasure of this unexpected visit."

She swayed a little toward him. Her head was thrown back, all the silent passion of the inexpressible, the hidden secondary forces of nature, was blazing out of her eyes, pleading with him in the broken music of her tone.

"You do not understand," she repeated. "Ah, no! But can I make you understand? Will you listen to me for once as a human being? Will you remember that you are a man, and I a woman pleading for a little mercy—a little kindness?"

Wingrave moved a step farther back.

"Permit me," he said, "to offer you a chair."

She sank into it, speechless for a moment. Wingrave stood over her, leaning slightly against the corner of a bookcase.

"I trust," he said, "that you will explain what all this means. If it is my help which you require——"

Her hands flashed out toward him—a gesture almost of horror.

"Don't!" she begged. "You know it is not that. You know very well it is not. Why do you torture me?"

"I can only ask you," he begged, "to explain."

She commenced talking quickly. Her sentences came in little gasps.

"You wanted revenge—not in the ordinary way. You had brooded over it too long. You understood too well. Once it was I who sought to revenge myself on you, because you would not listen to me. You hurt my pride. Everything that was evil in me rebelled——"

"Is this necessary?" he interrupted coldly. "I have never reproached you. You chose the path of safety for yourself. Many another woman in your place would doubtless have done the same thing. What I desire to know is why you are here in Cornwall. What has happened to make this journey seem necessary to you?"

"Listen," she made answer; "I want you to know how thoroughly you have succeeded. Before you came, Lumley and I were living together happily enough, and as hundreds of others live, with outside interests for our chief distraction. You came, a friend! You

This story began in the March issue. The back numbers can be obtained through any newsdealer. Price ten cents each.

were very subtle, very skilful. You never spoke a word of affection to me, but you managed things so that—people talked. You encouraged Lumley to speculate—not in actual words, perhaps, but by suggestion. Then you lent me money. Lumley, my husband, let me borrow from you. Every one knew that we were ruined; every one knew where the money came from that set us right.

"So misery has been piled upon misery. Lumley has lost his self-respect, he is losing his ambition, he is deteriorating every day. I—how can I do anything else but despise him? He let me, his wife, come to your rooms to borrow money from you. Do you think I can ever forget that? Do you think he can? Don't you know that the memory of it is dragging us apart, must keep us apart always—always?"

Wingrave leaned a little forward. His hands were clasped upon the handle of his cane.

"All that you tell me," he remarked coldly, "might equally well have been said in London. I do not wish to seem inhospitable, but I am still waiting to know why you have taken an eight hours' journey to recite a few fairly obvious truths. Your relations with your husband, frankly, do not interest me. The deductions which society may have drawn concerning our friendship need scarcely trouble you, under the circumstances."

Then again the light was blazing in her eyes.

"Under the circumstances!" she repeated. "I know what you mean. It is true that you have asked for nothing. It is true that all this time you have never spoken a single word which all the world might not hear; you have never even touched my fingers, except as a matter of formality. Once I was the woman you loved—and I—well, you know! Is this part of your scheme of torture, to play with me as though we were marionettes, you and I, with sawdust in our veins—dull, lifeless puppets?

"Well, it is finished—your vengeance. You may reap the harvest when you will. Publish my letters. Prove yourself an injured man. Take a whip in your hand, if you like, and I will never flinch. But, for God's sake, remember that I am a woman! I am willing to be your slave, nurse you, wait upon you, follow you about.

"What more can your vengeance need? You have made me despise my husband, you have made me hate my life with him. You have forced me into a remembrance of what I have never really forgotten—and oh! Wingrave," she added, opening her arms to him with a little sob, "if you send me away, I think I shall kill myself. Wingrave!"

There was a note of despair in her last cry. Her arms fell to her side. Wingrave was on his way to the other end of the room. He rang the bell and turned toward her.

"Listen," he said calmly; "you will return to London to-night. If ever I require you, I shall send for you—and you will come. At present I do not. You will return to your husband. Understand?"

"Yes," she gasped, "but——"

He held out his hand. Morrison was at the door.

"Morrison," he said, "you will order the motor to be round in half an hour, to take Lady Ruth to Truro. She has to catch the London express. You will go with her yourself, and see that she has a reserved carriage. If, by any chance, you should miss the train, order a special."

"Very good, sir."

"And tell the cook to send in tea and wine and some sandwiches, in ten minutes."

Once more they were alone. Lady Ruth rose slowly to her feet. Trembling in every limb, she walked down the room, and fell on her knees before Wingrave.

"Wingrave," she said, "I will go away. I will do all that you tell me; I will wear my chains bravely, and hold my peace. But, before I go, say a kind word, look at me kindly, kiss me, hold my hands; anything, anything, anything to prove to me that you are not a

dead man. I could bear unkindness, reproaches, abuse. I can bear anything but this deadly coldness. It is becoming a horror to me. Do, Wingrave—do."

She clasped his hand. He drew it calmly away.

"Lady Ruth," he said, "you have spoken the truth. I am a dead man. I have no affections; I care neither for you nor any living being. All that goes to the glory and joy of life perished in that uncountable roll of days when the sun went out and, inch by inch, the wall rose which will divide me forever from you and all the world. It was not I who once loved you. It was the man who died in prison. His flesh and bones may have survived—nothing else."

She rose slowly to her feet. Her eyes seemed to be dilating.

"There is another woman!" she exclaimed softly. Her voice was like velvet, but the agony in her face was unmistakable.

"There is no other woman," he answered.

She stood quite still.

"She is here with you now," she cried. "Who is it, Wingrave? Tell me the truth."

"The truth is already told," he answered. "Except my cook and her assistants, there is not a woman in the house."

Again she listened. She gave a little hoarse cry, and Wingrave started. Out in the hall a girl's clear laugh rang like a note of music to their ears.

"You lie!" she cried fiercely. "You lie! I well know who she is."

Suddenly the door was thrown open. Juliet stood there, her hands full of roses, her face flushed and brilliant with smiles.

"How delightful to find you here!" she exclaimed, coming swiftly across to Wingrave. "I do hope you won't mind my coming. Normandy is off, and I have nowhere else to go to."

She saw Lady Ruth and stopped.

"Oh! I beg your pardon!" she exclaimed. "I did not know."

"This is Lady Ruth Barrington," Wingrave said; "my ward, Miss Juliet Lundy."

"Your—ward?" Lady Ruth said, gazing at her intently.

Juliet nodded.

"Sir Wingrave has been very kind to me since I was a child," she said softly. "He has let me live here with Mrs. Tresfarwin, and I am afraid I sometimes forget that it is not really my home. Am I in the way?" she asked, looking wistfully toward Wingrave.

"By no means," he replied. "Lady Ruth is just going. Will you see that she has some tea or something?"

Lady Ruth laughed quietly.

"I think," she said, "it is I who am in the way! I should love some tea, if there is time, but, whatever happens, I must not miss that train."

CHAPTER XXXIV.

It seemed to Wingrave that the days which followed formed a sort of hiatus in his life—an interlude during which some other man in his place, and in his image, played the game of life to a long-forgotten tune.

He moved through the hours as a man in a maze, unrecognizable to himself, half unconscious, half heedless of the fact that the garments of his carefully cultivated antagonism to the world and to his fellows had slipped very easily from his unresisting shoulders.

The glory of a perfect English midsummer lay like a golden spell upon the land. The moors were purple with heather, touched here and there with the fire of the flaming gorse; the wind blew always from the west; the gardens were ablaze with slowly bursting rhododendrons.

Every gleam of coloring, every breath of perfume, seemed to carry him unresistingly back to the days of his boyhood.

He fished once more in the trout-streams; he threw away his stick, and tramped or rode with Juliet across the moors.

At night-time Juliet sang or played, with the windows open, Wingrave him-

self out of sight under the cedar-trees, whose perfume filled with aromatic sweetness the still night air.

Piles of letters came every day, which he left unopened upon his study table. Telegrams followed, which he threw into the waste-paper basket.

Juliet watched the accumulating heap with amazement.

"Whatever do people write to you so much for?" she asked one morning, watching the stream of letters flow out of the post-bag.

Wingrave was silent for a moment. Her question brought a sudden and sharp sting of remembrance. Juliet knew him only as Sir Wingrave Seton. She knew nothing of Mr. Wingrave, millionaire.

"Advertisements, a good many of them," he said. "I must send for Aynesworth some day, to go through them all."

"What fun!" she exclaimed. "Do send for him. He thinks that I am staying with Miss Pengarth, and I haven't written once since I got here."

To Wingrave, it seemed that a chill had somehow stolen into the hot summer morning. His feet were very nearly upon the earth again.

"I forgot," he said, "that Aynesworth was—a friend of yours. He came and saw you often in London?"

She smiled reflectively.

"He has been very, very kind," she answered. "He was always that, from the first time I saw you both. Do you remember? It was down in the lower gardens."

"Yes," he answered, "I remember quite well."

"He was very kind to me then," she continued, "and you—well, I was frightened of you."

She stopped for a moment and laughed. Her eyes were full of amazed reminiscence.

"You were so cold and severe!" she added, "I never could have dreamed that, after all, it was you who were going to be the dearest, most generous friend I could ever have had. Do you know, Walter—I mean Mr. Aynesworth—isn't very pleased with me just now?"

"Why not?"

"He cannot understand why I will not tell him my guardian's name. I think it worries him."

"You would like to tell him?" Wingrave asked.

"I think so."

Wingrave said no more, but after breakfast he went to his study alone. Juliet found him there an hour later, sitting idly in front of his table. His great pile of correspondence was still untouched. She came and sat on the edge of the table.

"What are we going to do this morning, please?" she asked.

Wingrave glanced toward his letters.

"I am afraid I must spend the day here," he said.

She looked at him blankly.

"Not really!" she exclaimed. "I thought that we were going to walk to Hanging Tor?"

Wingrave took up a handful of letters and let them fall through his fingers. He had all the sensations of a man who is awakened from a dream of paradise to face the dull tortures of a dreary and eventless life. His eyes were set in a fixed stare. An undernote of despair was in his tone.

"You know we arranged it yesterday," she continued eagerly; "and if you are going to send for Mr. Aynesworth, you needn't bother about these letters yourself, need you?"

He turned and regarded her deliberately. Her forehead was wrinkled a little with disappointment, her brown eyes were filled with the soft light of confident appeal. Tall and elegantly slim, there was yet something in the graceful lines of her figure which reminded him forcibly that the days of her womanhood had indeed arrived.

She wore a plain white cambric dress, and a simple but much beflowered hat; the smaller details of her toilet all indicated the correct taste and instinctive coquetry of her French descent.

And she was beautiful. Wingrave regarded her critically, and realized,

perhaps for the first time, how beautiful.

Her eyes were large and clear, and her eyebrows delicately defined. Her mouth, with its slightly humorous curl, was a little large, but wholly delightful.

The sun of the last few weeks had given to her skin a faint but most becoming duskiness. Under his close scrutiny a flush of color stole into her cheeks. She laughed not altogether naturally.

"You look at me," she said, "as though I were some one strange."

"I was looking," he answered, "for the child—the little black-frocked child, you know, with the hair down her back, and the tearful eyes. I don't think I realized that she had vanished so completely."

"Not more completely," she declared gaily, "than the gloomy gentleman who frowned upon my existence and resented even my gratitude. Although," she added, leaning a little toward him, "I am very much afraid that I see some signs of a relapse to-day. Don't bother about those horrid letters. Let me tell Mrs. Tresfarwin to pack us up some lunch, and take me to Hanging Tor, please!"

Wingrave laughed a little unsteadily as he rose to his feet. One day more, then! Why not? The end would be soon enough!

Sooner, perhaps, than even he imagined, for that night Aynesworth came, pale and travel-stained, with all the volcanic evidences of a great passion blazing in his eyes, quivering in his tone. The day had passed to Wingrave as a dream, more beautiful, even, than any in the roll of its predecessors.

They sat together on low chairs upon the moonlit lawn; in their ears the murmur of the sea; upon their faces the night wind, salt and fragrant, with all the sweetness of dying flowers.

Wingrave had never realized more completely what still seemed to him this wonderful gap in his life. Behind it all, he had a sub-consciousness that he was but taking a part in some mystical play. Yet, with an abandon which, when he stopped to think of it, astonished him, he gave himself up without effort or scruple to this most amazing interlude.

All day he had talked more than ever before; the flush on his cheeks was like the flush of wine or the sun which had fired his blood.

As he had talked the more, so had she grown the more silent. She was sitting now with her hands clasped, and her head thrown back, looking up at the stars with unseeing eyes.

"You do not regret Normandy, then?" he asked.

"No," she murmured. "I have been happy here. I have been happier than I could ever have been in Normandy."

He turned and looked at her with curious intentness.

"My experience," he said thoughtfully, "of young ladies of your age is somewhat limited. But I should have thought that you would have found it —lonely."

"Perhaps I am different, then," she murmured. "I have never been lonely here – all my life."

"Except," he reminded her, "when I knew you first."

"Ah! but that was different," she protested. "I had no home in those days, and I was afraid of being sent away."

It was in his mind then to tell her of the envelope with her name upon it in his study, but a sudden rush of confusing thoughts kept him silent.

It was while he was laboring in the web of his tangled dream of wild but beautiful emotions that Aynesworth came. A pale, tragic figure, in his travel-stained clothes, and face furrowed with anxiety, he stood over them almost before they were aware of his presence.

"Walter!" she cried, and sprang to her feet with extended hands.

Wingrave's face darkened, and the shadow of evil crept into his suddenly altered expression. It was an abrupt awakening this, and he hated the man who had brought it about.

Aynesworth held the girl's hands for a moment, but his manner was sufficient evidence of the spirit in which he had come. He drew a little breath, and looked from one to the other anxiously.

"Is this—your mysterious guardian, Juliet?" he asked hoarsely.

She glanced at Wingrave questioningly. His expression was ominous, and the light faded from her own face. While she hesitated, Wingrave spoke.

"I imagine," he said, "that the fact is fairly obvious. What have you to say about it?"

"A good deal," Aynesworth answered passionately. "Juliet, please go away. I must speak to your guardian - alone."

Again she looked at Wingrave. He pointed to the house.

"I think," he said, "that you had better go."

She hesitated. Something of the impending storm was already manifest. Aynesworth turned suddenly toward her.

"You shall not enter that house again, Juliet," he declared. "Stay in the gardens there, and presently you shall know why."

CHAPTER XXXV.

Wingrave had risen to his feet. He was perfectly calm, but there was a look on his face which Juliet had never seen there before. Instinctively, she drew a little away, and Aynesworth took his place between them.

"Are you mad, Aynesworth?" Wingrave asked coolly.

"Not now," Aynesworth answered. "I have been mad to stay with you for four years, to look on, however passively, at all the evil you have done. I've had enough of it now, and of you. I came here to tell you so."

"A letter," Wingrave answered, "would have been equally efficacious. However, since you have told me——"

"I'll go when I'm ready," Aynesworth answered; "and I've more to say. When I first entered your service, and you told me what your outlook upon life was, I never doubted but that the years would make a man of you again; I never believed that you could be such a brute as to carry out your threats. I saw you do your best to corrupt a poor, silly little woman, who only escaped ruin by a miracle; I saw you deal out what might have been irretrievable disaster to a young man just starting in life. Since your return to London, you have done as little good, and as much harm, with your millions as any man could."

Wingrave was beginning to look bored.

"This is getting," he remarked, "a little like melodrama. I have no objection to being abused, even in my own garden, but there are limits to my patience. Come to the point, if you have one."

"Willingly," Aynesworth answered. "I want you to understand this: I have never tried to interfere in any of your malicious schemes, although I am ashamed to think I have watched them without protest. But this one is different. If you have harmed, if you should ever dare to harm, this child, as sure as there is a God above us I will kill you!"

"What is she to you?" Wingrave asked calmly.

"She—I love her," Aynesworth answered. "I mean her to be my wife."

"And she?"

"She looks upon me as her greatest friend, her natural protector; and protect her I will—even against you."

Wingrave shrugged his shoulders.

"It seems to me," he said, "that the young lady is very well off as she is. She has lived in my house, and been taken care of by my servants. She has been relieved of all the material cares of life, and she has been her own mistress. I scarcely see how you, my young friend, could do better for her."

Aynesworth moved a step nearer to him. The veins on his forehead were swollen. His voice was hoarse with passion.

"Why have you done this for her?" he demanded. "Secretly, too! You, a man to whom a good action is a matter for a sneer; you who have deliberately proclaimed yourself an evil-doer by choice and destiny! Why have you constituted yourself her guardian? Not from kindness, for you don't know what it is; not from good nature, for you haven't any. Why, then?"

Wingrave shrugged his shoulders.

"I admit," he remarked coolly, "that it does seem rather a problem; we all do unaccountable things at times, though."

"For your own sake," Aynesworth said fiercely, "I trust that this is one of the unaccountable things. For the rest, you shall have no other chance. I shall take her to Truro to-night."

"Are you sure that she will go?"

"I shall tell her the truth."

"And if she does not believe you?"

"She will. If you interfere, I shall take her by force."

"I interfere!" Wingrave remarked. "You need not be afraid of that. The affair as it stands is far too interesting. Call her, and make your appeal."

"I shall tell her the truth," Aynesworth declared.

"By all means. I shall remain and listen to my indictment. Quite a novel sensation. Call the young lady, by all means, and don't spare me."

Aynesworth moved a few steps up the path. He called to her softly, and she came through the little iron gates from the rose gardens. She was very pale, and there was a gleam in her eyes which was like fear.

Aynesworth took her by the hand and led her forward.

"You must be brave, dear," he whispered. "I am compelled to say some disagreeable things. It is for your good. It is because I care for you so much."

She looked toward Wingrave. He was sitting upon the garden seat, and his face was absolutely expressionless.

He spoke to her, and his cold, precise tone betrayed not the slightest sign of any emotion.

"Aynesworth," he remarked, "is going to tell you some interesting facts about myself. Please listen attentively, as afterward you will be called upon to make a somewhat important decision."

She looked at him a little wistfully and sighed. There was no trace any longer of her companion of the last few weeks. It was the stern and gloomy stranger of her earlier recollections who sat there with folded arms.

"Is it really necessary?" she asked.

"Absolutely," Aynesworth answered hurriedly. "It won't take long, but there are things which you must know."

"Very well," she answered, "I am listening."

Aynesworth inclined his head toward the place where Wingrave sat.

"I will admit," he said, "that the man there, whom I have served for the last four years and more, never deceived me as to his real character and intentions. He had been badly treated by a woman, and he told me plainly that he entered into life again at war with his fellows. Where he could see an opportunity of doing evil, he meant to do it; where he could bring misery and suffering upon any one with whom he came into contact, he meant to grasp the opportunity. I listened to him, but I never believed. I told myself that it would be interesting to watch his life, and to see the gradual, inevitable humanizing of the man. So I entered his service, and have remained in it until to-day."

He turned more directly toward Juliet. She was listening breathlessly to every word.

"Juliet," he said, "he has kept his word. I have been by his side, and I speak of the things I know. He has sought no one's friendship who has not suffered for it. There is not a man or woman living who owes him the acknowledgment of a single act of kindness. I have seen him deliberately scheme to bring about the ruin of a harmless little woman. I have seen him exact his pound of flesh, even at the cost of ruin, from a boy. I tell you, Juliet, of my own knowledge, that he has neither heart nor conscience, and that he glories in the evil that his hand finds to do. Even you must know something of his reputation—have heard something of his doings, under the name he is best known by in London—Mr. Wingrave, millionaire."

She started back as though in terror. Then she turned to Wingrave, who sat stonily silent.

"It isn't true!" she cried. "You are not—that man?"

He raised his eyes and looked at her. It seemed to her that there was some-

thing almost satanic in the smile, which alone disturbed the serenity of his face.

"Certainly I am," he answered; "when I returned from America, it suited me to change my identity. You must not doubt anything that Mr. Aynesworth says. I can assure you that he is a most truthful and conscientious young man. I shall be able to give him a testimonial with a perfectly clear conscience."

Juliet shuddered as she turned away. All the joy of life seemed to have gone from her face.

"You are Mr. Wingrave—the Mr. Wingrave! Oh! I can't believe it. No one could have been so kind, so generous, as you have been to me."

She looked from one to the other of the two men. Both were silent, but whereas Aynesworth had turned his head away, Wingrave's position and attitude were unchanged. She moved suddenly over toward him. One hand fell almost caressingly upon his shoulder. She looked eagerly into his face.

"Tell me—that it isn't all true," she begged. "Tell me that your kindness to me, at least, was real—that you did not mean it to be for my unhappiness afterward. Please tell me that. I think if you asked me, if you cared to ask me, that I could forgive everything else."

"Every vice, save one," Wingrave murmured, "nature has lavished upon me. I am a poor liar. It is perfectly true that my object in life has been exactly as Aynesworth has stated it. I may have been more or less successful —Aynesworth can tell you that, too. As regards yourself——"

"Yes?" she exclaimed.

"I congratulate you upon your escape," Wingrave said. "Aynesworth is right. Association of any sort with me is for your evil."

She covered her face with her hands. Even his tone was different. She felt that this man was a stranger, and a stranger to be feared. Aynesworth came over to her side and drew her away.

"I have a dog-cart outside," he said. "I am going to take you to Truro——"

Wingrave heard the gate close after them—he heard the rumble of the cart in the road growing fainter and fainter. He was alone, now, in the garden, and the darkness was closing around him. He staggered to his feet. His face was back in its old set lines. He was once more at war with the world.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

At no time during his career did Wingrave appear before the public more prominently than during the next few months.

As London began to fill up again, during the early part of October, he gave many and magnificent entertainments; his name figured in all the great social events; he bought a mansion in Park Lane which had been built for royalty, and the account of the treasures with which he filled it read like a chapter from some modern "Arabian Nights."

In the city he was more hated and dreaded than ever. His transactions, huge and carefully thought out, were for his own aggrandizement only, and left always in their wake ruin and disaster for the less fortunate and weaker speculators. He played for his own hand only; the "camaraderie" of finance he ignored altogether.

In one other respect, too, he occupied a unique position among the financial magnates of the moment.

All appeals on behalf of charity he steadily ignored. He gave nothing away. His name never figured among the hospital lists; suffering and disaster, which drew humble contributions from the struggling poor and middle classes, left him unmoved and his check-book unopened.

In an age when huge gifts on behalf of charity were the fashionable road to the peerage, his attitude was all the more noticeable. He would give a thousand pounds for a piece of Sèvres porcelain which took his fancy; he would not give a thousand farthings to ease the sufferings of his fellows.

Yet there were few found to criticize him. He was called original, a crank;

there were even some who professed to see merit in his attitude.

To both criticism and praise he was alike indifferent. With a cynicism which seemed only to become more bitter he pursued his undeviating and deliberate way.

One morning he met Lady Ruth on the pavement in Bond Street. She pointed to the vacant seat in her landau.

"Get in, please, for a few minutes," she said. "I want to talk to you. I will take you where you like."

They drove off in silence.

"You were not at the Watertons' last night," he remarked.

"No," she answered quietly; "I was not asked."

He glanced at her questioningly.

"I thought that you were so friendly," he said.

"I was," she answered. "Lady Waterton scarcely knows me now. It is the beginning of the end, I suppose."

"You are a little enigmatical this morning," he declared.

"Oh, no; you understand me very well," she answered. "Everybody knows that it is you who keep us. Lumley has not got quite used to taking your money. He has lost nearly all his ambition. Soon his day will have gone by. People shrug their shoulders when they speak of us. Two years ago the Watertons were delighted to know me. Society seems big, but it isn't. There are no end of little sets, one inside the other. Two years ago I was in the innermost; to-day I'm getting toward the outside edge. Look at me! Do you see any change?"

He scrutinized her mercilessly in the cold morning light.

"You look older," he said, "and you have begun to use rouge, which is a pity."

She laughed hardly.

"You think so? Well, I don't want Emily to see my hollow cheeks—or you. Are you satisfied, Wingrave?"

"I am afraid I don't understand——" he began.

"Don't lie," she interrupted curtly. "You do understand. This is your vengeance—very subtle and very crafty. Everything has turned out exactly as you planned. You have broken us, Wingrave. I thought myself a clever woman, but I might as well have tried to gamble with the angels. Why don't you finish it off now—make me run away with you?"

"It would bore us both," he answered calmly. "Besides, you wouldn't come."

"I should, and you know that I would," she answered. "Every one expects it of us. I think myself that it would be more decent."

He looked at her thoughtfully.

"You are a strange woman," he said. "I find it hard sometimes to understand you."

"Then you are a fool," she declared, in a fierce little whisper. "You know what is underneath all my suffering, all my broken pride. You know that I was fool enough to keep the flame flickering—that I have cared always and for no one else."

He stopped the carriage.

"You are the most original woman I ever met," he said quietly. "I neither wish to care for any one nor be cared for by any one. Go home to your husband, and tell him to buy Treadwells up to six."

That same afternoon Wingrave, while out motoring, met Aynesworth, and passed without speaking. Something in the younger man's appearance, though, perplexed him. Aynesworth certainly had not the air of a successful man. He was pale, carelessly dressed, and apparently in ill-health.

Wingrave, after an amount of hesitation which was rare with him, turned his car toward Battersea, and found himself, a few minutes later, mounting the five flights of stone steps.

Juliet herself opened the door to him. She gave a little gasp when she saw who it was, and did not immediately invite him to enter.

"I am sorry," Wingrave said coldly, "to inflict this visit upon you. If you are alone, and afraid to ask me in, we can talk here."

Her cheeks became as flushed as a moment before they had been pale. She

looked at him reproachfully, and, standing on one side to let him pass, closed the door behind him. Then she led the way into her sitting-room.

"I am glad that you have come to see me," she said. "Won't you sit down?"

He ignored her invitation, and stood looking around him. There was a noticeable change in the little room. There were no flowers, some of the ornaments and the silver trifles from her table were missing. The place seemed to have been swept bare of everything except the necessary furniture. Then he looked at her. She was perceptibly thinner, and there were black rings under her eyes.

"Where is Mrs. Tresfarwin?" he asked.

"In Cornwall," she answered.

"Why?"

"I could not afford to keep her here any longer."

"What are you doing for a living—painting still?"

She shook her head a little piteously.

"They can't sell any more of my pictures," she said. "I am trying to get a situation as governess or companion or anything."

"When did you have anything to eat last?" he asked.

"Yesterday," she answered; and he was just in time to catch her. She had fainted.

He laid her upon the sofa, poured some water over her face, and fanned her with a newspaper. His expression of cold indifference remained unmoved. It was there in his face when she opened her eyes.

"Are you well enough to walk?" he asked.

"Quite, thank you," she answered. "I am so sorry."

"Put on your hat," he ordered.

She disappeared for a few minutes, and returned dressed for the street. He drove her to a restaurant and ordered some dinner. He made her drink some wine, and while they waited he buried himself in a newspaper. They ate their meal almost in silence. Afterward, Wingrave asked her:

"Where is Aynesworth?"

"Looking for work, I think," she answered.

"Why did you not stay down in Cornwall?"

"Miss Pengarth was away—and I preferred to return to London," she told him quietly.

"When are you going to marry Aynesworth?" he asked.

She looked down into her glass and was silent. He leaned a little toward her.

"Perhaps," he remarked quietly, "you are already married?"

Still she was silent. He saw the tears forced back from her eyes. He heard the sob break in her throat. Yet he said nothing. He only waited. At last she spoke.

"Nothing is settled yet," she said, still without looking at him.

"I see no reason," he said calmly, "why, until that time, you should refuse to accept your allowance from Mr. Pengarth."

"I cannot take any more of your money," she answered. "It was a mistake from the first, but I was foolish. I did not understand."

His lip curled with scorn.

"You are one of those," he said, "who, as children, are wise, but as young women with a little knowledge, become—prigs. What harm is my money likely to do you? I may be the devil himself, but my gold is not tainted. For the rest, granted that I am at war with the world, I do not number children among my enemies."

She raised her eyes then, and looked him in the face.

"I am not afraid of you," she declared. "It is not that, but I have been dependent long enough. I will keep myself—or starve."

He shrugged his shoulders and paid the bill.

"My man," he said, "will take you wherever you like. I have a call to make close here."

They stood upon the pavement. She held out her hand a little timidly. Her eyes were soft and wistful.

"Good-by, guardian," she said. "Thank you very much for my lunch."

"Ah!" he said gravely, "if you would let me always call myself that!"

She got into the car without a word.

Wingrave walked straight back to his own house. Several people were waiting in the entrance-hall, and the visitors' book was open upon the porter's desk.

He walked through, looking neither to the right nor the left, crossed the great library, with its curved roof, its floor of cedar wood, and its wonderful stained-glass windows, and entered a smaller room beyond—his absolute and impenetrable sanctum.

He rang the bell for his servant.

"Morrison," he said, "if you allow me to be disturbed by any living person, on any pretense whatever, until I ring, you lose your place. Do you understand?"

"Perfectly, sir."

Wingrave locked the door. The next hour belonged to himself alone.

When at last he rang the bell, he gave Morrison a note.

"This is to be delivered at once," he said.

The man bowed and withdrew. Wingrave, with his hands behind him, strolled out into the library. In a remote corner, a small, spectacled person was busy writing at a table. Wingrave crossed the room and stood before him.

"Are you my librarian?" he asked.

The man rose at once.

"Certainly, sir," he answered. "My name is Woodall. You may have forgotten it. I am at work now upon a new catalogue."

Wingrave nodded.

"I have a quarto Shakespeare, I think," he said, "which I marked at Sotheby's; also a manuscript Thomas à Kempis, and an original Herrick. I should like to see them."

"By all means," the man answered, hurrying to the shelves. "You have, also, a wonderful rare collection of manuscripts, purchased from the Abbey St. Jouvain, and a unique Horace."

Wingrave spent half an hour examining his treasures, leaving his attendant astonished.

"A millionaire who understands!" he exclaimed softly, as he resumed his seat. "Miraculous!"

Wingrave passed into the hall, and summoned his majordomo.

"Show me the ballroom," he ordered, "and the winter garden."

The little man in quiet black clothes—Wingrave abhorred liveries—led him respectfully through rooms probably unequaled for magnificence in England. He spoke of the exquisite work of French and Italian artists; with a gesture almost of reverence he pointed out the carving in the wonderful white ballroom.

Wingrave listened and watched with immovable face. Just as they had completed their tour, Morrison approached.

"Mr. Lumley and Lady Ruth Barrington are in the library, sir," he announced.

Wingrave nodded.

"I am coming at once," he said.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

They awaited his coming in varying moods. Barrington was irritable and restless. Lady Ruth gave no signs of any emotion whatever. She had the air of a woman who had no longer fear or hope. Only her eyes were a little weary.

Barrington was walking up and down the room, his hands in his pockets, his eyes fixed upon his wife. Every now and then he glanced nervously toward her.

"Of course," he said, "if he wants a settlement—well, there's an end of all things. And I don't see why he shouldn't. He hasn't lent money out of friendship. He hates me always has done, and sometimes I wonder whether he doesn't hate you, too."

Lady Ruth shivered a little. Her husband's words came to her with peculiar brutality. It was as though he were blaming her for not having proved more attractive to the man who held them in the hollow of his hand.

"Doesn't it strike you," she murmured, "that a discussion like this is scarcely in the best possible taste? We

cannot surmise what he wants—what he is going to do. Let us wait."

The door opened and Wingrave entered. To Barrington, who greeted him with nervous cordiality, he presented the same cold, impenetrable appearance. Lady Ruth, with quicker perceptions, noticed at once the change. She sat up in her chair eagerly. It was what she had prayed for, this—but was it for good or evil? Her eyes sought his eagerly; so much depended upon his first few words.

Wingrave closed the door behind him. His greetings were laconic, as usual. He addressed Lady Ruth.

"I find myself obliged," he said, "to take a journey which may possibly be a somewhat protracted one. I wished, before I left, to see you and your husband. I sent for you together, but I wish to speak to you separately—to your husband first. You have often expressed a desire to see over my house, Lady Ruth. My majordomo is outside. Will you forgive me if I send you away for a few minutes?"

Lady Ruth rose slowly to her feet.

"How long do you wish me to keep away?" she asked calmly.

"A few minutes only," he answered. "You will find me here when Parkinson has shown you round."

He held the door open, and she passed out, with a single upward and wondering glance. Wingrave closed the door, and seated himself close to where Barrington was standing.

"Barrington," he said, "twenty years ago we were friends. Since then we have been enemies. To-day, so far as I am concerned, we are neither."

Barrington started a little. His lips twitched nervously. He did not quite understand.

"I am sure, Wingrave——" he began.

Wingrave interrupted him ruthlessly.

"I give you credit," he continued, "for understanding that my attitude toward you since I—er—reappeared has been inimical. I intended you to speculate, and you did speculate. I meant you to lose, and you have lost. The money I lent to your wife was meant to remain a rope around your neck. The fact that I lent it to her was intended to humiliate you; the attentions which I purposely paid to her in public were intended to convey a false impression to society—and in this, too, I fancy that I have been successful."

Barrington drew a thick breath—the dull color was mounting to his cheeks.

Wingrave continued calmly:

"I had possibly in my mind, at one time," he said, "the idea of drawing things on to a climax—of witnessing the final disappearance of yourself and your wife from the world—such as we know it. I have, however, ceased to derive amusement or satisfaction from pursuing what we may call my vengeance. Consequently, it is finished."

The light of hope leaped into Barrington's dull eyes, but he recognized Wingrave's desire for silence.

"A few feet to your left, upon my writing-table," Wingrave continued, "you will find an envelope addressed to yourself. It contains a discharge, in full, for the money I have lent you. I have also ventured to place to your credit, at your own bank, a sum sufficient to give you a fresh start. When you return to Cadogan Square, or, at least, this evening, you will receive a communication from the prime minister, inviting you to become one of the International Board of Arbitration on the Alaskan question. The position, as you know, is a distinguished one, and if you should be successful, your future career should be assured."

Barrington broke down. He covered his face with his hands. Great sobs shook him. Wingrave waited for a few minutes, and then rose to his feet.

"Barrington," he said, "there is one thing more. What the world may say or think counts for very little. Society reverses its own judgments and eats its own words every day. A little success will bring it to your feet like a whipped dog. It is for yourself I say this—for yourself alone. There is no reason why you should hesitate to accept any service I may be able to render you. You understand me?"

Barrington's face was like the face

of a young man. The cloud of suspicion and doubts and fears was suddenly lifted. He looked through new eyes upon a new world.

"Thank God!" he exclaimed. "Not that I ever doubted it, Wingrave, but —thank God!"

Barrington left the house radiant.

Lady Ruth and Wingrave were alone. She watched him close the door and turn toward her, with a new timidity. The color came and went in her pale cheeks, her eyes were no longer tired. When he turned toward her, she leaned to him with a little seductive movement of her body. Her hands stole out toward him.

"Wingrave!" she murmured.

His first action seemed to crush all the desperate joy which was rising fast in her heart. He took one hand and led her to a chair.

"Ruth," he said, "I have been talking to your husband. There are only a few words I want to say to you."

"There are only three I want to hear from you," she murmured; and her eyes were pleading with him passionately all the time. "It seems to me that I have been waiting to hear them all my life. Wingrave, I am so tired—and I am losing—I want to leave it all!"

"Exactly," he answered cheerfully, "what you are going to do. You are going to America with your husband."

"What do you mean?" she asked sharply.

He shrugged his shoulders.

"I am rather tired of the game," he said; "that is all. I am like the child who likes to build up again the house of bricks which he has thrown down. I have procured for your husband a seat on the Alaskan board. It is a very distinguished position, and you will find that it will entail considerable social obligations in America. When you return, he will be able to claim a judgeship, or a place in the government. You will find things go smoothly enough then."

"But you!" she cried; "I want *you!*"

He looked at her gravely.

"Dear Lady Ruth," he said, "you may think so, at this moment, but you are very much mistaken. What you really desire is a complete reconciliation with your husband, and a place in the great world which no one shall be able to question. These things are arranged for you; also—these."

He handed her a little packet. She dropped it idly into her lap. She was looking steadfastly away.

"You are free from me now," he continued. "You will find life run quite smoothly, and I do not think that you will be troubled with me when you come back from America. I have other plans."

"There was a slave," she murmured, "who grew to love her jailer, and when they came to set her free, and take her back to her own people—she prayed only to be left in her cell. Freedom for her meant a broken heart."

"But that was fiction," he answered. "For you, freedom will mean other things. There is work for you to do—honorable work. You must fan the flame of your husband's ambition; you must see that he does justice to his great opportunities. You have your own battle to fight with society, but you have the winning cards, for before you go, you and your husband will be received as guests—well, by the one person whose decision is absolute."

She looked at him in amazement.

"My word of honor," he said quietly, "was enough for Lord Marendon. You will find things go smoothly with you."

"You are wonderful," she gasped. "But—you—you spoke of going away."

"I am going to travel," he said quietly—"rather a long journey. I have lived three lives. I am going to try a fourth."

"Alone?" she asked.

"Quite alone," he answered.

"Tell me where you are going?" she begged.

"I cannot do that. It is my secret."

She rose to her feet. She was very pale. She stood in front of him, and laid her hands upon his shoulders.

"Wingrave," she said, "I will obey. I will live the life you have shown me, and I will live it successfully. But I

will know this. Who is it that has succeeded where I have failed?"

"I do not understand you," he answered.

"You do," she declared, "and I will know. For years you have been a man with a thrall upon your heart. Every good impulse, every kind thought, seemed withered up. You were absolutely cold, absolutely passionless. I have worn myself out trying to call you back to your own, to set the blood flowing once more in your veins, to break for one moment the barriers which you had set up against nature herself. Some day I felt that it must come—and it has! Who has done it, Wingrave? It is not—Emily?"

He laughed.

"Emily!" he exclaimed. "I have not seen her for months. She has no interest for me—she never had."

"Then tell me who it is."

"Nature unaided," he answered carelessly. "Human intervention was not necessary. It was the swing of the pendulum, Ruth—the eternal law which mocks our craving for content. I had no sooner succeeded in my new capacity than the old man crept out."

"But nature has her weapons always," she protested. "Wingrave, was it the child?"

He touched the electric bell. Taking her hands, he bent down and kissed them.

"Dear lady," he said, "good-by—good fortune! Conquer new worlds, and remember—white is your color, and Paquin your one modiste. Morrison, Lady Barrington's carriage."

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

Mr. Pengarth was loath to depart. He felt that all pretext for lingering was gone, that he had outstayed his welcome. Yet he found himself desperately striving for some excuse to prolong an interview, which was, to all effects and purposes, concluded.

"I will do my best, Sir Wingrave," he said, reverting to the subject of their interview, "to study Miss Lundy's interests in every way. I will also see that she has the letter you have left for her within eight days from now. But if you could see your way to leave some sort of address, so that I should have a chance of communicating with you, if necessary, I should assume my responsibilities with a lighter heart."

Wingrave gave vent to a little gesture of annoyance.

"My dear sir," he said, "surely I have been explicit enough. I have told you that, within a week from now, I shall be practically dead. I shall never return to England. You will never see me again. I have given life here a fair trial, and found it a failure. I am going to make a new experiment—and it is going to be in an unexplored country. You could not reach me there through the post. You, I think, would scarcely care to follow me. Now, I must really send you away."

So Mr. Pengarth went, but Wingrave was not long destined to remain in solitude. There was a sound of voices in the hall, Morrison's protesting, another insistent. Then the door was opened, and Wingrave looked up with darkening face, which did not lighten when he recognized the intruder.

"Aynesworth!" he exclaimed. "What are you doing here? What do you want with me?"

"Five minutes," Aynesworth answered; "and I mean to have it! You may as well tell your man to take his hand off my shoulder."

Wingrave nodded to Morrison. "You can go," he said. "Come back when I ring."

They were alone. Aynesworth threw down his hat and crossed the room, until he was within a few feet of Wingrave.

"I had to come," he said. "It is humiliating, but the discipline is good for me. I was determined to come and see once more the man who has made an utter and complete fool of me."

Wingrave eyed him coldly.

"If you would be good enough to explain," he began.

"Oh, yes! I'll explain," Aynesworth answered. "I engaged myself to you

as secretary, didn't I? And I told you the reason at the time. I wanted to make a study of you. I wanted to trace the effect of your long period of isolation upon your subsequent actions. I entered upon my duties—how you must have smiled at me behind my back! Never was a man more completely and absolutely deceived. I lived with you, was always by your side; I was there professedly to study your actions and the method of them. And yet you found it a perfectly simple matter to hoodwink me whenever you chose."

"In what respect?" Wingrave asked.

"Every respect," Aynesworth answered. "Let me tell you two things which happened to me yesterday. I met a young New York stock-broker, named Nesbitt, in London; and, in common with all London, I suppose, by this time, I learned the secret of all those anonymous contributions to the hospitals, and other charitable causes, during the last year."

"Go on," Wingrave said.

"I have come here on purpose to tell you what I think of you," Aynesworth said. "You are the greatest hypocrite unhanged. You affect to hate your fellows and to love evil-doers. You deceived the whole world, and you deceived me. I know you now for what you are. You conceived your evil plans, but when the time came for carrying them out, you funked it every time. You had that silly little woman on the steamer in your power, and you yourself, behind your own back, released her with that wireless to her husband, sent by yourself. You brought the boy Nesbitt upon the verge of ruin, and to his face you offered him no mercy. Behind his back you employ a lawyer to advance him your own money to pay your own debt. You decline to give a single penny away in charity, and, as stealthily as possible, you give away in one year greater sums than any other man has ever parted with. You decline to help the poor little orphan child of the village organist, and secretly you have her brought up in your own home, and stop the sale of your pictures, for the sake of the child whom you had only once contemptuously addressed. Can you deny any one of these things?"

"No," Wingrave answered quietly, "I cannot."

"And I thought you a strong man!" Aynesworth continued, aggrieved and contemptuous. "I nearly went mad with fear when I heard that it was you who were the self-appointed guardian of Juliet Lundy. I looked upon this as one more—the most diabolical of all your schemes."

Wingrave rose to his feet, still and grave.

"Aynesworth," he said, "this interview does not interest me. Let us bring it to an end. I admit that I have made a great failure of my life. I admit that I have failed in realizing the ambitions I once confided to you. I came out from prison with precisely those intentions, and I was conscious of nothing in myself or my nature to prevent my carrying them out. It seems that I was mistaken. I admit all this, but I do not admit your right to force yourself into my presence, and taunt me with my failure. You served me well enough, but you were easily hoodwinked, and our connection is at an end. I have only one thing to say to you. I am leaving this part of the world altogether. I shall not return. That child has some foolish scruples about taking any more of my money. That arises through your confounded interference. She is poor, almost in want. If you should fail her now——"

Aynesworth interrupted with a hoarse little laugh.

"Wingrave," he said, "are you playing the simpleton? If Juliet will not take your money, why should she take mine?"

Wingrave came out from his place. He was standing now between Aynesworth and the door.

"Aynesworth," he said, "do I understand that you are not going to marry the child?"

"I? Certainly not!" Aynesworth answered.

Wingrave remained quite calm, but there was a terrible light in his eyes.

"Now, for the first time, Aynes-

worth," he said, "I am glad that you are here. We are going to have a complete understanding before you leave this room. Juliet Lundy, as my ward, was, I believe, contented and happy. It suited you to disturb our relations, and your excuse for doing so was that you loved her. You took her away from me, and now you say that you do not intend to marry her. Be so good as to tell me what the devil you do mean."

Aynesworth laughed a little bitterly.

"You must excuse me," he said, "but a sense of humor was always my undoing, and this reversal of our positions is a little odd, isn't it? I am not going to marry Juliet Lundy, because she happens not to care for me in that way at all. My appearance is scarcely that of a joyous lover, is it?"

Wingrave eyed him more closely. Aynesworth had certainly fallen away from the trim and carefully turned out young man of a few months back. He was paler, too, and looked older.

"I do not understand this," Wingrave said.

"I do," Aynesworth answered bitterly. "There is some one else."

"Some one whom I do not know about?" Wingrave said, frowning heavily. "Who is he, Aynesworth?"

"It is not my secret," Aynesworth answered. "Ask her yourself."

"Very well, I will," Wingrave declared. "I shall return to London tonight."

"It is not necessary," Aynesworth remarked.

Wingrave started.

"You mean that she is here?" he exclaimed.

Aynesworth drew him toward the window.

"Come," he said, "you shall ask her now."

Wingrave hesitated for a moment. An odd nervousness seemed to have taken possession of him.

"I do not understand this, Aynesworth," he said. "Why is she here?"

"Go and ask her your question," Aynesworth said. "Perhaps you will understand, then."

Wingrave went down the path which led to the walled garden and the sea. The tall hollyhocks brushed against his knees; the air, as mild as spring-time, was fragrant with the perfume of late roses.

Wingrave took no note of these things. Once more he seemed to see coming up the path the little black-frocked child, with the pale face and great sad eyes; it was she, indeed, who rose so swiftly from the hidden seat.

Then Wingrave stopped short, for he felt stirring within him all the long-repressed madness of his unlived manhood. It was the weakness against which he had fought so long and so wearily, triumphant now, so that his heart beat like a boy's, and the color flamed into his cheeks.

And all the time she was coming nearer, and he saw that the child had become a woman, and it seemed to him that all the joy of life was alight in her face, and the one mysterious and wonderful secret of her sex was shining softly out of her eager eyes.

So that, after all, when they met, Wingrave asked her no questions. She came into his arms with all the graceful and perfect naturalness of a child who has wandered a little away from home.

"I am too old for you, dear," he said presently, as they wandered about the garden—"much too old."

"Age!" she answered softly. "What is that? What have we to do with the years that are past? It is the years to come only which we need consider, and to think of them makes me almost tremble with happiness. You are much too rich and too wonderful a personage for a homeless orphan like me. But," she added, tucking her arm through his with a contented little sigh, "I have you, and I shall not let you go."

THE END.

The Adventures of Felix Boyd

By Scott Campbell

Author of "Below the Dead Line," Etc.

VII.—NO WATERLOO

(A Complete Story)

"DEAD ones,' Jimmie," said Mr. Felix Boyd, as he banged the cab door, after hurriedly giving the driver his directions. "'Dead ones'—that's what they call them in London. Dead in the sense of being deserted, Jimmie, and easily plundered. There's never a kick from a corpse, you know, treat the defunct as you will. It's a wonder to me that more of these furnished houses, left closed for months by people abroad or at the mountains or beach, are not looted of their valuables. Wake up, cabbie! This is a case of burglary—not a burial!"

Boyd impatiently hurled the last from the window of the cab, promptly accelerating the speed of the vehicle, and the Central Office man laughed in his throat.

"'Dead ones,' eh?" he rejoined, while the laugh terminated with a low growl. "The newspapers state that Jonas Cathcart himself has cashed in, say nothing of his Fifth Avenue mansion being a 'dead one,' as you call it."

"As a London cracksman would call it, Jimmie, rather than your humble servant," corrected Boyd, settling back on the seat. "Yes, I saw that Jonas Cathcart had been ferried over."

"He died yesterday."

"Well, well, he has left a million or two behind him, so there's some balm for tearful eyes. It should be mighty unfortunate, though, for the family, this other affair, provided the funeral is to be held in their Fifth Avenue residence."

"That seems most probable," put in Coleman.

"Yes. Some deference must be paid to his business friends, of which I presume he had a few, despite that he was a hard, grasping, close-fisted old money-getter, and as arbitrary as a Russian autocrat. I've heard that even his own children, of which he has several sons and daughters, stood in awe of him."

"They are at the beach, I suppose?"

"I imagine so, Jimmie, since August is a capital month to be out of New York City. They have a magnificent summer cottage down on Long Island."

"Did you ask any particulars about this burglary?"

"I did not delay for that, since ten minutes would land me upon the scene," replied Boyd. "I understood that one of the sons was at the house, however—Mr. Gilbert Cathcart—and that he had ordered me summoned."

"A telephone call?"

"Yes."

"I'm glad I happened along in time to accompany you."

"I infer that young Cathcart may have come up from Long Island to open the house and take steps to arrange things for the funeral."

"And so discovered the burglary, eh?"

"Very likely."

"Yet his father died early yesterday morning," remarked Coleman, as the

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This series began in the February issue. The back numbers can be obtained through any newsdealer. Price ten cents each.

cab whirled into Fifth Avenue. "I should think they'd have opened up here before to-day, in case the funeral is to be held in——"

"Here's the house, Jimmie," Boyd interrupted. "We soon shall know the particulars."

It was a handsome residence, occupying a corner lot, at which the cab had stopped. A high granite wall enclosed the grounds, half-hiding the dwelling, the stable, and a large conservatory. A closed carriage stood at the curbing, while at the figured iron gate in the wall was stationed a policeman, who came forward as Boyd and the Central Office man sprang out of the cab.

"They're waiting for you," said the officer, recognizing them.

"Who is in there, Hersey?" demanded Boyd, with a sharp glance at the carriage. "Or, rather, who came in that hack?"

"Miss Cathcart and the butler, I reckon. They just arrived from Long Island. You know they found Mr. Gilbert Cathcart——"

"Found him!" interrupted Boyd. "Didn't he arrive this morning?"

"Not much, sir, as I thought you knew. He came yesterday and opened the house, only to have his head nearly broken by——"

The officer cut short his explanation, for Felix Boyd had turned sharply on his heel and hastened through the gate.

A tessellated walk led to the broad marble steps at the front door. On all sides the grass was growing rank. Wooden shutters were secured at all the lower windows of the house, with the exception of two that recently had been removed and stood against the wall near-by. Plainly enough the house had been closed for weeks, and the surrounding grounds left without the care of a gardener.

Shut in from the outer world by the high wall, the enclosed estate seemed curiously quiet to Boyd, despite that the stir and traffic along Fifth Avenue could be plainly heard. He glanced toward the stable and conservatory, well back from the house, then at a bare brick wall that rose high above the rear line of the grounds, a wall forming the end of a block fronting on the cross street.

His brows knit closer when he saw there were no windows in this wall, and that the nearest view of the enclosed grounds was that offered by the second-story windows of dwellings across the street; yet he mounted the steps without speaking, closely followed by Coleman, and was about to ring the bell. The door was immediately opened, however, by a tall, bewhiskered man clad in black, and who bowed with punctilious gravity.

"Mr. Boyd, sir, I infer," said he. "I am Mr. Gypsum, the butler, who telephoned to you for Mr. Gilbert Cathcart. He is awaiting you in the drawing-room. This is bad business, sir, dreadfully bad business. And at such a time!"

Felix Boyd followed him without replying, and entered the room mentioned, with Coleman still at his elbow. They found Mr. Gilbert Cathcart seated in a large easy chair—a well-built, darkly handsome man of thirty, yet who then presented a startling picture.

He was very pale, and appeared quite exhausted. An ugly bruise marred his brow and lost itself in the waves of his dark hair. His cheek was gashed near one of his eyes, and the blood that had started from the wound had been only partly wiped from his face.

On the floor near-by lay several strips of rope and a number of cotton bandages, the latter blood-stained. Portions of a broken bottle strewed the rich carpet, on which liquor had been spilled, while on the mantel stood a second bottle with a cork lying near it.

Despite his ghastly appearance, which was doubly shocking in the poor light of the room, Cathcart smiled faintly and attempted to rise and extend his hand when Boyd entered.

"I'm glad you have come," he said quickly. "You are Mr. Boyd, I think, for I remember Detective Coleman by sight, though I've not lived in New York for nearly two years. Not a very inviting spectacle, am I? You can im-

agine I feel as badly done up as I look."

"That requires no very vivid imagination, Mr. Cathcart, I'll admit," replied Boyd, bending to clasp the man's hand and noting a blood-red ridge around his swollen wrist. "Don't rise, sir, if you're off-color."

"Oh, I've come round a bit since Gypsum poured an ounce of brandy in me," Cathcart pluckily declared, with a glance at the bottle on the mantel. "I'm fit to discuss this matter. I had Gypsum telephone you, Mr. Boyd, as soon as he released me—I recalled your splendid work below the Dead-Line some time ago, my father then being one of your clients."

"How long have you been here?" inquired Boyd.

"Since yesterday morning, though to me it seems like months," replied Cathcart, with an expressive grimace.

"Explain briefly," suggested Boyd. "Time may be worth something."

"I fear there is little to be gained by haste, Mr. Boyd, for the men got away long before daylight," said Cathcart. "I can tell my side of the story with a breath. My governor died early yesterday at our Long Island place, as maybe you already know."

"Yes," nodded Boyd. "I've seen the newspapers."

"He was stricken with apoplexy three days ago, and sank steadily till he grounded on bottom. Don't think me unfeeling, Mr. Boyd, in thus speaking of him. We had not been on good terms for years, yet the fault was more his than mine. He objected to the girl I married—a stage favorite then, but now all mine, God bless her! Yet the governor turned me down from the day I married her, and we've never spoken since. But I've never regretted the step I took—not I, sir! For my wife and babies make a heaven for me that the governor never could have made. He never loved, not with the sort of love which——"

"Stop a bit," Boyd interposed. "Aren't you wandering a little from the immediate business, Mr. Cathcart?"

"You're quite right, Mr. Boyd, and I'll be as brief as possible. I came on here from my home in Cleveland on hearing that the governor had had a shock, but I arrived only the evening before he died. Next morning—that was yesterday—our family decided that the funeral services must be held here, though the house has been closed for nearly seven weeks."

"I infer that you came up here from Long Island to open it."

"Exactly. None of the others could leave just then as conveniently as I, though my sister Estella and the butler were to join me here this morning. My object in coming ahead was to see to having the shutters removed and the first steps taken to put the house in order."

"I see," nodded Boyd. "You were to get help here, I take it."

"Certainly. Some of our regular winter servants, whose addresses I brought with me, remain in the city during the summer. I was to depend upon them, the others still being required at the shore house."

"Did you come directly here?"

"Yes, I did, in order to drop my grip. It then was about nine o'clock. I entered by the front gate and came into the house, observing nothing unusual, and closed the front door after me. As I was passing through the hall, however, I thought I detected the odor of pipe-smoke."

"Humph!" ejaculated Boyd. "The cracksmen still were here, eh?"

"Very much here!" replied Cathcart. "I'm no coward, Mr. Boyd, take my word for that, sir; yet I suspected something wrong at once, and instinctively halted. Before I could make another move, whatever it might have been, a man sprang out of the library near-by and attempted to down me with a sand-bag. I succeeded in evading him, however, and dashed through the rear parlor and into this room, aiming to reach the front door."

"I see."

"Here, however, I encountered a second crook, who floored me with a whisky bottle before I fairly saw him,

giving me a bruised head and cut cheek as tokens that they meant business."

"Very convincing evidence, Mr. Cathcart, I'm sure," smiled Boyd, with a glance at the broken glass on the floor.

"It served the purpose, at all events, for I went down and out as if kicked by a mule," replied Cathcart. "The next I knew I was bound hand and foot to a chair, with cords slashed from the windows. My head had been bandaged to stop the flow of blood, and a gag had been tied in my mouth."

"Then you had no talk with the men?"

"Yes, indeed, I had; for I spent the rest of the day and half of the night with them," said Cathcart bitterly. "I signified that I wanted to speak, and would make no outcry, and they finally allowed me to have my say. I then told them of what my mission here consisted—that the governor was dead, and his funeral was to be held here on Friday—but my appeals fell upon deaf ears."

"Yes, quite likely," Boyd dryly remarked.

"Had I been at all crafty, which I am not," added Cathcart, "I might have said that others would soon arrive here, and so have alarmed the miscreants to flight. I foolishly told the truth, however, and for my frankness received the ironical assurance that they would be out in time for the governor to be brought in. God help them, I say, if ever I lay hands on them!"

Felix Boyd smiled faintly and drew forward in the chair he had taken.

"Did you see more than the two crooks mentioned, Mr. Cathcart?" he inquired.

"No."

"Do you know when they entered the house?"

"From remarks I heard them drop, I think they must have broken in here night before last. They evidently did so with the intention of devoting yesterday to selecting what plunder they safely could remove last night."

"Very probably," admitted Boyd. "It is much too common a trick, that of sacking a closed house."

"Well, they did the job, all right, Mr. Boyd, and did not allow my intrusion to deter them," said Cathcart. "They locked me in the hall closet, still tied to the chair, and went through the house at their leisure. They robbed me of all my valuables also, and made off last night with their booty."

"About what time, Mr. Cathcart?"

"Two o'clock, Mr. Boyd, as nearly as I could judge; but I'm not sure, for there's none of the house clocks going, and the burglars took away my watch."

"Where did they leave you?"

"Still bound in the chair, which they secured to the leg of the piano, that I might not be able to reach a door or window. There I was found this morning by Gypsum and Estella—Estella's my sister; she has just gone up-stairs to see what damage has been done. Here, Gypsum, lend me your arm. I think I'm fit to stand on my legs now. I will go with Mr. Boyd to look into the evidence left by the rascals."

He attempted to rise, but Boyd quickly checked him, and waved the butler aside.

"No, no, Cathcart, you keep your seat," he quietly commanded. "I shall see at a glance all there is to be seen. I presently will return and take a description of the two burglars, whom I hope to be able to land for you. You keep your seat, meantime, and await my return."

"Well, well, as you wish," said Cathcart submissively.

"Look after him, Gypsum, and give him another sip of brandy," added Boyd, with a glance at the pale face of the wounded man. "He is still quite weak and badly off-color. I'll not be absent long, Cathcart. You, Jimmie, come with me."

II.

The Central Office man's face wore a quizzical expression when he followed Felix Boyd into the adjoining hall.

"I'm blessed if I don't think, Felix,

that this will prove to be a waterloo for you!" he quietly remarked, yet with a significance too obvious to be mistaken.

Boyd turned. There was a curious gleam in the depths of his gray eyes.

"A waterloo, Jimmie?" said he inquiringly.

"I mean the landing of the crooks guilty of this dastardly job," explained Coleman. "They are well away by this time, there's no denying that."

Boyd nodded and stared for a moment.

"True, Jimmie," said he, with odd dryness. "A waterloo, eh? It does appear to give promise of that, I'll admit; and yet—well, well, we shall see!"

Presently he entered the library, a large room directly across the hall from the rear parlor. Here the wooden shutters had been removed from one of the broad, plate-glass windows, and the devastation of the handsomely furnished room was revealed in a flood of morning sunlight.

The chairs, nearly all of which were covered with linen for protection from dust, were in disorder, some overturned, some tipped against the wall. But there was one chair which appeared to be in its proper place, and the moment it met his gaze Boyd's eyes lighted a little.

It was a large easy chair, and stood close beside a handsome, cloth-topped table in the middle of the room. The linen cover was somewhat awry, and wrinkled near the edge of the seat.

"Humph!" Boyd mentally ejaculated, as he observed the wrinkled linen. "That looks as if one of the crooks had been lounging in that chair."

He made no audible comment, however, but looked sharply about the disordered room. Two large desks, one a handsome roll-top, the other a curious, antique piece of polished mahogany, had been rudely broken open with a jimmie, or a small crowbar. The contents of the drawers, as well as the drawers themselves and those of the table mentioned, were scattered over the floor.

Several ornamental cabinets, also, had been broken open, the empty shelves of which indicated that articles of more or less value had been taken away.

"The cursed vandals!" Coleman exploded, when the scene of devastation met his gaze. "They certainly went the limit here, Felix."

"Over the limit, Jimmie, if I'm not mistaken," retorted Boyd, while his swift glances swept the room. "I don't fathom the object of the rascals in wading into these desks in this fashion. They have hacked them nearly to pieces."

"Probably they were looking for hidden jewelry, or possibly——"

"Ah, I have it!" Boyd quietly interrupted. "They suspected the existence of secret drawers which might contain articles of value, Jimmie, and they made sure of overlooking none. By this, too, they appear to have located one."

He had walked over to the antique desk mentioned, the top and back of which had been hacked away, while upon the floor near-by was a small, narrow drawer, that evidently had been pried out from the back of a larger one.

"I am right, you see," added Boyd, stooping to examine it. "This small drawer was operated with a secret spring. Note where the connection was broken."

"Yes, I see that." Coleman was staring down at the drawer. "Yet it's not large enough to have contained much of value."

"True," assented Boyd, after a moment. "This desk is a very old one, Jimmie, and I doubt if this feature of it has been in use for years. The crooks probably had their labor for nothing, or at least this part of it. Plainly enough, however, they were bent upon doing a clean job."

"An infernal job, Felix, I should call it," said the Central Office man. "I never beheld a more rascally piece of business. It looks to me as if——"

"If you don't object, Jimmie," Boyd interrupted, "will you ask Gypsum who removed the shutter from the window,

and when it was done? I'm a bit curious to know."

"Certainly."

"You might also take a turn outside, Jimmie, and try to locate the window or door through which these burglars forced an entrance," added Boyd. "It may expedite matters, if you can do so."

"I'll make the attempt at once," nodded Coleman, striding into the hall and back to the drawing-room.

Boyd watched the Central Office man through the hall, stealing to the threshold to listen for a moment. Presently he saw Coleman heading for the open front door. Cathcart, on the arm of the butler, followed, remarking, while he walked unsteadily after the detective:

"A breath of fresh air may brace me up. Steady, Gypsum, old man! Not so fast till I get my legs under me. Maybe, too, you can be of some service to Detective Coleman? A bit slower, Gypsum, as we go down the steps; I've no wish to further bang my head by a fall."

"All hands, eh?" murmured Boyd, still on the threshold of the library. "So much the better." For he had an ulterior object in dismissing Jimmie Coleman.

He stood and watched them till the sunlight fell upon the tall figure and bare head of Mr. Gilbert Cathcart, and in another moment the three men had vanished toward a corner of the house.

Boyd then turned back into the room, moving quickly, his knit brows and dilating eyes evincing a grim determination inspired in part, no doubt, by the recent prediction of his friend of the Central Office.

"A waterloo, eh?" he softly muttered, with a curious curl of his thin, red lips. "That sounded to me as if Jimmie would rather enjoy one failure on my part. In a way, I can hardly blame him, since the invariable success of a rival might well pique the pride of as loyal a friend, even, as—well, well, we shall see! I yet may fool him!"

Alone in the silence of the room he dropped to his knees at the easy chair near the table, and studied every crease and wrinkle in the linen cover, both on the seat and the two rounded arms.

With a lens hurriedly drawn from his pocket he then examined every square inch of the carpet directly in front of the chair. His head was bowed low to the work, much as a hound follows a trail, yet all the while were his eyes and ears on the alert for intruders.

Rising a little, he next studied the thin layer of gray dust on the table, gathered there through weeks, and at times he so varied his point of view as to cause the light from the window to reflect from the strip of polished wood that bordered the cloth top.

"H'm! and here the rascal rested his elbow at intervals," he presently muttered, while his dilated eyes still studied the almost visionary evidence. "Here the palm of his hand disturbed the dust, and here—humph! what occasioned this? Something flat and nearly square was laid here, the faint outline of which indicates—yes, it was a book the rascal was reading."

Starting quickly to his feet, as if the discovery and a deduction were simultaneous, Boyd darted to the book-laden shelves at one side of the room, along the edges of which he searched with his lens until, plainly enough, he discovered a spot where the accumulation of gray dust had recently been disturbed.

Yet he went even a step farther. With the utmost care he examined the tops of the nearest books without removing them, until he found one of a set of small, calf-bound volumes, the gilt-edged leaves of which were entirely free from dust. There was a flash of interest in his eyes as he took down the book and opened it.

"The very book!" he said to himself. "The same size as the one laid on the table. Quite a needless confirmation, however, yet—well, I'll be hanged! Who in thunder'd have thought it? 'Plutarch's Lives,' eh? This plainly indicates——"

His train of thought was abruptly broken. Light footsteps and the rustle

of skirts were heard in the hall. Boyd quickly replaced the book and turned toward the open door, just as there appeared, framed in the dark walnut casing, a picture of startled loveliness that halted affrightedly on the threshold.

She was a beautiful girl of twenty, with wide, blue eyes, a wealth of wavy brown hair, and a complexion as fair as that of a lily. Her paleness was accentuated by a black hat and veil, the latter thrown back, while a modish dress of the same somber hue threw into relief against the bright light of the hall the graceful lines of her tall, finely developed figure.

Checking with a bow and gesture the startled cry she appeared about to utter, Boyd hastened to reassure her.

"You are Miss Cathcart," said he, smiling. "Do not be alarmed. I am Felix Boyd, the detective called by your brother."

Miss Cathcart caught her breath with a little gasp of relief, and lowered her gloved hands from above her heart.

"Dear me!" she exclaimed softly. "I was quite shocked for a moment. Not knowing you had arrived, I took you for one of the burglars—yet I don't mean quite that, Mr. Boyd, for you in no way correspond with my idea of a burglar," she hastened to add, a tinge of color dispelling her pallor. "It was only my first foolish impression."

"A very natural one, Miss Cathcart, under the circumstances," Boyd smilingly rejoined. "Your brother informed me that you were up-stairs. Did you find that the burglars had visited the upper rooms?"

"Visited them!" echoed the girl, with a dismal shrug of her shapely shoulders. "Alas, yes! they have wrecked nearly every chamber in the house. Our bureaus and chiffoniers look as if they had been through an earthquake. The robbers cannot have found much to repay their knavery, however, for we leave but little of value here when we go to the shore. Probably that is why they so wantonly damaged the furniture."

"Very possibly," assented Boyd.

"You know of my father's death?"

"Your brother has informed me, Miss Cathcart."

"Poor, dear Gil, we found him in such a state! The robbers nearly killed him. I presume he has told you all about it. Is he still in the drawing-room, Mr. Boyd?"

There was an artlessness about her, together with a mingling of sympathy and sadness, that combined to touch Boyd far more seriously than appeared upon the surface. He smiled and shook his head, saying quietly:

"He has so far improved, Miss Cathcart, that he has accompanied an assistant detective to the rear of the house. I shall presently join them. I think your brother told me that he came on from Cleveland."

The girl detected no subtle motive for the last inquiring remark, for the face of Felix Boyd appeared as guileless as her own. She bowed and smiled faintly, readily replying:

"Yes, Mr. Boyd, he did. We wired him after my father was stricken."

"That was three days ago, Miss Cathcart?"

"Yes, sir. But Gil, poor dear, though he wired back that he would leave at once, arrived only after the end came."

"That was unfortunate," said Boyd, with sympathy. "He resides in Cleveland, I think he said."

"Yes, he has lived there since—since——"

"Since his estrangement from his father—pardon my speaking of it. It was mentioned to me by Mr. Cathcart himself."

Boyd's manner was too gentle and gracious for his words to give offense. The girl colored more deeply, yet hastened to reply, in a way that betrayed some slight confusion:

"Oh, it is no secret, Mr. Boyd. Father disowned Gil from the day of his marriage. We children all regretted it—not the marriage, Mr. Boyd, but my father's unjust severity—for Gil, dear fellow, is the pride of us all. And his wife—ah! she is the sweetest of darlings, and we could not blame him for loving her. But my father's will has always been a law among us—only Gil

disobeyed. I imagine that father has disinherited him, for he never forgave him; but we shall rectify that, one and all of us, that he may have all that should have been his. Ah! Mr. Boyd, there is none so dear to us as Gil. You say he is not in the drawing-room?"

An expression of serious concern had crept into the eyes of Mr. Felix Boyd, while he stood and listened to this artless outpouring of a heart too full of grief and sadness to be easily contained. He drew a deep breath, deciding to question her no further; yet he bowed and said:

"He is with my assistant out of doors. If you will excuse me, Miss Cathcart, I will join them. We shall return in a very few minutes."

The girl drew aside, smiling gravely, and Boyd passed by her and out of the house. In the vestibule he glanced back and saw her gazing sadly into the drawing-room, the tears glistening on her drooping lashes.

A momentary expression as hard as flint rose over Boyd's thin face, only to vanish as quickly as it came.

"Well, well, it may be done," he muttered, as he descended the steps. "Possibly it may be done—for her sake!"

He found Cathcart and the Central Office man at the door of a rear basement, engaged in an examination of a broken pane of glass, a portion of which had been removed, obviously to enable one to reach the key and bolts within.

"It was here that the rascals forced an entrance, Felix," cried Coleman, as the former approached. "There's no reasonable doubt of that."

"I guess you're right, Jimmie," Boyd quietly rejoined. "These scraps of putty on the steps are wet, moreover, and it rained yesterday morning. Plainly enough, then, the break was made the previous night."

"Just as I told you, Mr. Boyd," said Cathcart quickly.

"Yes, exactly." Boyd nodded vacantly. "I think you have given us the main points, Mr. Cathcart, without further search."

"I have done all I can, Mr. Boyd, I assure you."

"Barring one other bit of information, Mr. Cathcart?"

"What is that, sir?"

"A description of the two thieves."

"Ah, yes! I forgot that."

Boyd listened to the descriptions that followed, then glanced sharply at the Central Office man. "I know of a crook now at large, Jimmie, who answers that first description," said he. "His name is—Redlaw."

As he mentioned the name, Boyd's inscrutable gray eyes came back to those of Mr. Gilbert Cathcart.

"Jake Redlaw!" exclaimed Coleman.

"The same," nodded Boyd indifferently. "I think this is all, out here, Jimmie. We'll have a look up-stairs, and then see what we can do with the case. Shall I give you my arm to the house, Mr. Cathcart?"

Cathcart bowed and smiled, murmuring gratefully:

"Thanks—many thanks!"

It was noon when Mr. Felix Boyd and the Central Office man left the house and headed for Union Square. After crossing the avenue, Boyd glanced back at the house, then remarked with curiously dry gravity:

"A waterloo, Jimmie—yes, I believe your story! The rascals now are well away, there's no mistake. Not even a fine-spun thread by which to trace them. That was a nasty clip they gave young Cathcart. It might have disfigured him for life, if not have killed him. Yes, I fear that's what it may prove to be, Jimmie—a waterloo—nothing more nor less!"

III.

"Cautiously—this way! There goes our quarry, Jimmie, unless I'm much mistaken. Ah! I now am sure of it. He's as quick as a fox, and as shy as a girl in her teens. Watch out, old man, for he's all eyes!"

These characteristic utterances, muttered under his breath, while he gripped the sleeve of the Central Office man to guide him, came from Mr. Felix Boyd about ten o'clock on the evening of the

second day following that of the funeral of Mr. Jonas Cathcart.

Both men were in disguise, Boyd with a stubbly beard masking his clean-cut features, a woolen cap drawn over his brow nearly hiding the watchful eyes peering from beneath it.

Those eyes were fixed upon a man then crossing the Bowery, threading his way with hurried steps among several passing vehicles—a well-built, bearded man in a suit of rough tweed. Reaching the sidewalk, he strode quickly into the cross street for which he had been aiming.

With Coleman at his elbow, Felix Boyd made for the next corner and took the opposite side of the same street, with his man constantly in view. Here there was less light than on the Bowery, and the dull gray mist that hung on the sultry night air made detection less probable.

"You say you're sure of him?" inquired Coleman, who had been invited to share blindly in this espionage, and could only guess at his companion's intentions.

"Fairly sure, Jimmie," returned Boyd, with a low laugh.

"He certainly acts queer, as if he feared being shadowed."

"Not with reason, I suspect."

"Where is he bound?"

"Ask me something easier," muttered Boyd, his gaze never leaving his quarry. "I might possibly give you a clue to his mission, Jimmie, but as to his destination, I'm as much in the dark as—ah! he's away again!"

The man in the tweed suit had dodged into another and darker street, where, with the air of one whose earlier fears were somewhat dispelled by the more gloomy surroundings, he was striding rapidly toward the East Side.

Twenty minutes brought him nearly to the water-front, where he halted doubtfully for a moment on a corner, then struck diagonally across the street and approached a low, disreputable lodging-house, that rose but little above a confusion of miserable wooden buildings comprising most of that neighborhood.

Instead of entering by the front door, however, or through the foul saloon which occupied most of the street floor, the man gingerly opened an adjoining gate and vanished in the gloom of a side alley.

"Humph!" grunted Boyd, without a glance at his companion. "He had his directions, Jimmie, but was not familiar with the way. He is seeking some one up-stairs, since he avoided the saloon and that dingy office next to the front door. None of the front chambers are lighted, however, so the persons he seeks should occupy a back room. This way, Jimmie, and I'll see what the rear elevation offers."

Through the gloom of the alley, pausing only to glance at a slovenly side entrance to the house, the door of which stood partly open and revealed a narrow, uncarpeted hall, Boyd made his way to the rear of the building and halted in a back yard, slippery with mud and foul with unsavory odors.

"What infernal game are you after to-night, Felix?" Coleman demanded, his patience nearly exhausted. "Darned if I fancy a blind chase into rat-holes like this!"

Boyd glanced at the gloomy back yards and the wretched buildings behind him, then pointed up to the one lighted room of the house.

"My game, Jimmie—I think we shall find it there," was Boyd's quiet rejoinder. "Lend me your shoulder—ah! here's a barrel that will answer. Come after me, if you like, and move quietly. Other ears may be as keen as ours."

He had lifted a refuse barrel that he had stumbled upon in the darkness, and placed it near the wall of a low shed, the sloping roof of which was some five feet below the lighted window mentioned.

Mounting the barrel, he reached the roof, then aided Coleman with his hand, and the two crept noiselessly along till they neared the window.

A soiled cotton curtain hid the interior of the room, but through a broken upper pane could be heard, in accents of sullen, half-threatening command:

"Ring f'r a round o' drinks, pal. Ring

f'r the drinks before we get down ter this 'ere business, d'ye hear?"

Without a moment's hesitation, Boyd drew his companion nearer and softly whispered:

"I shall head off the waiter and relieve him of his job. If I run against a snag in there, Jimmie, or should an escape be attempted by this window—you may shoot to kill!"

The Central Office man muttered a grim reply, but Felix Boyd did not wait to hear it. Quietly slipping down the roof, he dropped to the ground, then quickly retraced his steps through the alley and entered the side door.

A burly, ill-visaged fellow, with neither coat nor vest, was just coming from a door leading to the barroom, and Felix Boyd stopped him in the narrow, dimly lighted hall.

"On your way to answer that ring from the back room?" he tersely inquired.

The fellow scowled and eyed him suspiciously.

"What's that to you?" he asked.

"Only this!" said Boyd, displaying a small silver badge under the lapel of his coat. "Take a word of friendly advice and do what I command. If you don't, my man, the whole house is as good as pinched. I have officers enough around it."

"That's different," was the reply, with a cunning leer. "What's your orders?"

"Who is in that back room?"

"You've got me."

"Don't you know them?"

"Not a know, boss. They took it four days back, an' have been in it ever since."

"I'll go and see for myself," said Boyd. "Wait here till I return—*here,* do you understand?"

"That's me," nodded the man. "I'm glued here."

Boyd quietly mounted a narrow stairway, then located the room by a thread of light under the door. He removed his coat, placing it on the floor in one corner, rolled up his sleeves, tilted his cap to the back of his head, and knocked on the door.

"Come in," growled a voice from within.

Boyd opened the door and swaggered into the room.

The bearded man in tweeds was seated in a chair near the wall. Two others—as rascally a pair as one would care to view—occupied chairs near a common deal table, on which an oil-lamp was burning. One of the men Boyd immediately recognized as a crook released from Sing Sing less than a month before.

This man gazed up at Boyd and said curtly:

"Trot three glasses up here an' a bottle o' red liquor, and be quick about it. Here's your dough f'r it."

"Nuthin' else?" asked Boyd, so pitching his voice that the Central Office man might hear it.

"If we want more, we'll ring f'r it—see? Now, git out!"

"Dry up, Redlaw! Don't be crusty here."

Boyd did not wait to hear the reply to this protest, but backed out of the room and returned to the man in the lower entry.

"Go to the bar, my man, and bring me three glasses and a bottle of whisky," said he. "On a tray, mind you, and not a word while you are out there."

"I'm dumb till you say squawk," leered the fellow, readily complying.

Felix Boyd waited till the man returned, then took the tray and its contents and stole up to the door of the rear room. He did not enter, however, but stood and listened, with his ear at the panel.

"Got it—sure we've got it!" Redlaw was exclaiming, with a derisive snarl. "D'ye think we've burned it up? Not much we have! It's got too much value f'r that. We've got it right here, an', what's more, we mean to keep it till we get our price."

Boyd readily recognized the voice that answered:

"Your price? The devil take you, I'm here to pay the price agreed upon!"

"Agreed upon before we got wise to

its value, eh?" sneered Redlaw. "The figure's gone up, sonny."

"Gone up! What do you mean by that?"

"It's five now, pal, instead o' one."

"Five thousand—you should know I cannot pay it!"

"No? Well, there's some as would pay that to get fingers on it, once it's missed and can't be found."

"My people?"

"That's what."

"You infernal——"

"Cut that out!"

"Is this the way you use a man who was fool enough to trust you, and knave enough to make this accursed deal with you? Listen to me!"

"Well?" Redlaw's tone was cold and sneering.

The other man's voice trembled with a suppressed ferocity, indignation, and remorse that presently brought a smile of satisfaction to the face of Mr. Felix Boyd.

"I was a cur to have made the deal," it continued. "I could not have done it if I had stopped to consider. I would sooner cut my hand off than take the advantage I thus aimed to obtain. I now want the document only to place it where it belongs, and in the way of those to whom it should come, that my own shameful dishonor may at least be concealed. I swear I will not avail myself of this infernal knavery."

"Keep cool, pal," said Redlaw. "That shift don't go down with us. You can't flim-flam us in that fashion. We'll hang onto the paper till we get our price."

"You'll never get it," came the reply, with augmented feeling; and he repeated: "You shall never get it! No man was ever more desperate than I now am. My honor, which I was mad enough to briefly forget, is now at stake."

"Bosh!"

"Once more, listen! I've a wife and children who are more dear to me than all that wealth could purchase. It was for their sake that I erred in my blind bitterness, and it is for their sake that my very soul now writhes with remorse. I'll pay you the thousand, that I may place the document where it may be found, and so hide my infamy."

"'Twon't do!"

"Then, so help me God, I'll confess the whole truth to the people I have wronged, and so foil your accursed designs!"

"No, no, you'll not do——"

"Either that, or, by Heaven, I'll throttle you, and so recover the——"

Boyd opened the door and entered the room.

Mr. Gilbert Cathcart, divested of his disguise, had sprung up from his chair as if to execute his interrupted threat. A more ghastly, desperate, and agonized countenance Felix Boyd never had beheld.

"What's the row with you fellows?" Boyd demanded, as he placed the tray on the table.

Redlaw had reached for a weapon, but now drew back his hand and said, with a curse:

"No row, waiter. Only a bit of a dispute. Leave the drinks and git—skidoo!"

Boyd fell back a step and rested his hands on his hips.

"Ain't going to be any rough-house here, is there?" he asked, with a sinister glance from one to the other.

"Not unless you stay here too long," snapped Redlaw sharply. "Git, I say, or there'll be trouble!"

Boyd's hands came from his hips, and brought in them a brace of revolvers.

"If you move, Redlaw, or your rascally pal, there'll be trouble here that you two haven't bargained for," he coolly said, while the deadly barrels of the weapons covered the men addressed. "Sit quiet, boys, if you're wise. Throw up that window, Jimmie, like a good fellow, and relieve me from suppressing this pair of jailbirds. Thank you."

Though Redlaw had uttered an oath, and his pal half-started from his chair, there was that in the voice of Felix Boyd that caused them both to wilt.

Coleman raised the window the moment Boyd spoke, and his head and

shoulders, with a leveled revolver, appeared above the sill.

Cathcart had dropped into his chair like a man bereft of his last ounce of strength.

"Thanks, Jimmie," Boyd coolly repeated, pocketing his weapons. "Just keep your eye on these chaps, and, if necessary, shoot them. I wish to relieve one of them of—ah! this should be the very thing."

He had deliberately pulled open Redlaw's coat, and from the inner pocket whipped out a folded document. Then, with a strange light shining in his eyes, he turned to Cathcart, from whose lips a groan of utter despair had suddenly broken.

"I don't want you, Cathcart," he said, with quiet impressiveness. "I want these two renegades. It's well for you, Cathcart, that I once met your gentle sister. It's well for you, Cathcart, that at the door I heard the most that you have said here. I am going to take you on your word, my man. There's your father's will, Cathcart. Take it and put it where it belongs. And then go home to your wife and little ones and be the man I believe you really are."

"By thunder, we'll blow the whole damn' business!" cried Redlaw.

"If you do, Redlaw, or your pal, I'll insure that you get an extra five years behind prison bars," Boyd retorted, as he tossed the document upon the table. "I think that will close your lips, gentlemen."

Cathcart raised his head, bowed upon his arms while Boyd addressed him, and hoarsely cried:

"Who are you, that you do this for me?"

The answer came with a drawl:

"I am—Mr. Felix Boyd."

"No, Jimmie, no waterloo. It must be a deeper and darker case than that, if my flag is to be lowered. Two times two, Jimmie—that was the size of the Cathcart problem."

The Central Office man glared at the smiling face of Felix Boyd, wreathed in a ring of pipe-smoke, then cried with his habitual growl:

"But why in thunder did you leave me all in the dark?"

"I didn't, Jimmie," laughed Boyd, elevating his heels to his office desk. "I let you in at the finish, dear fellow, and that's all there was to it."

"From your point of view, you wizard, but not from mine—not by a long chalk!" declared Coleman, his grim features relaxing. "Where you came into it, and how—that's what puzzles me. Come, come, you torment, out with it!"

Boyd laughed again and complied:

"It may be explained with a breath, Jimmie. I did not suspect Cathcart of anything wrong until I saw to what extent the library desks had been damaged, and that one of the desks had in it a secret drawer. Then, recalling that Cathcart had hastened to tell me of his estrangement from his father, as well as of the latter's bitterness, and remembering that the burglary had occurred immediately after the old man's death, it came upon me that the desk might have been searched for some valuable paper—most naturally, under the circumstances, Jimmie, the dead man's will."

"Humph! Simple enough when you see it."

"Yet burglars, unless in the employ of Cathcart, would not have sought for a document of that kind," continued Boyd. "Obviously, the burglary was a genuine one, however, and it was equally plain that Cathcart was not, at the outset, in league with the crooks. No man on earth would have stood for such a blow as he received with a bottle, let his designs be what they might."

"I should say not," growled Coleman. "It might have killed him."

"Then the only reasonable conclusion, Jimmie, assuming that I was on the right track, was that Cathcart had made some deal with the burglars after he was put down and out."

"I see."

"With that idea, as well as one that Cathcart expected to be disinherited and wished to destroy the will, if he could find it, I began my investigation. Upon questioning his sister, I made sure that he really had left Cleveland only

the night before the burglars entered the house, which fact further confirmed my previous theory."

"Certainly."

"Yet I soon found evidence proving his subsequent deal with them," Boyd proceeded. "The linen cover on an easy chair plainly indicated that some person recently had been seated in it for a considerable time. There was no dirt or sand on the floor near it, such as the boots of a burglar very likely would have left, and I decided that the occupant of the chair had arrived at the house in a cab."

"A neat point, Felix, on my word."

"Then followed a much better one, Jimmie," continued Boyd. "The dust on the edge of the table showed that a book had lain there. I guessed that the occupant of the chair had been reading it, and the dust on the shelves enabled me to locate the book, which he had replaced. I found it to be a copy of 'Plutarch's Lives.'"

"Thunderation!"

"Who would expect a burglar to be interested in 'Plutarch's Lives'?" chuckled Boyd. "The type of man who had done the reading was plainly indicated. In a nutshell, Jimmie, it was obvious that Cathcart had lied about being confined all day, but that he really had passed the time in reading and lounging in the library, while the crooks went through the house to give color to the burglary."

"As plain as two times two, Felix, just as you said."

"The next steps were equally simple," concluded Boyd. "If Cathcart had made a deal with the burglars, naturally he could not have paid them in cash the price such rascals would have demanded. Hence, a settlement must be made later, and the rascals naturally would retain the will, if found, to insure the payment. I watched Cathcart, and yesterday discovered that he had cashed a check on a Cleveland bank for a thousand dollars. Ten to one, then, that evening was the one appointed for the meeting. It was simple enough, then, to watch my man leave home, pick you up at the next corner, and—ah! well, you know the rest, Jimmie."

"I begin to think I know nothing at all, Felix," said Coleman, with a grimace. "I'm as blind as a bat."

Felix Boyd laughed deeply and laid aside his pipe.

"When a man feels like that, Jimmie, it is a sign that he is getting wise," he dryly rejoined.

"Well, possibly I am, but it hasn't showed on the surface yet!" And the Central Office man grinned.

"Give it time, Jimmie," retorted Mr. Felix Boyd, smiling. "I saw Cathcart this afternoon, and he assures me that the will is in proper hands; also, that he told the whole truth at home—and was gladly forgiven. I reckon, Jimmie, that he's a royal good fellow, after all. Yet, dear me! I came awfully near turning him down. It's a sweet sister he has in that Estella."

"Humph!"

"What was it you predicted, Jimmie? A waterloo, eh? No, no, dear old chap. No waterloo. No waterloo."

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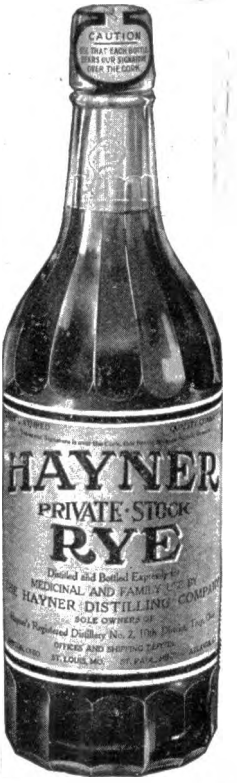

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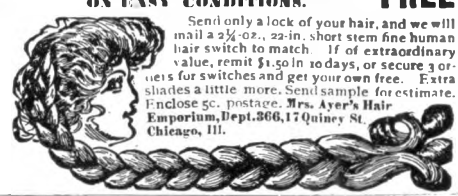

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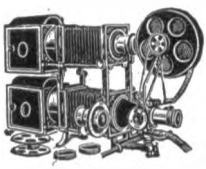

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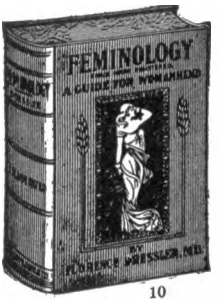

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