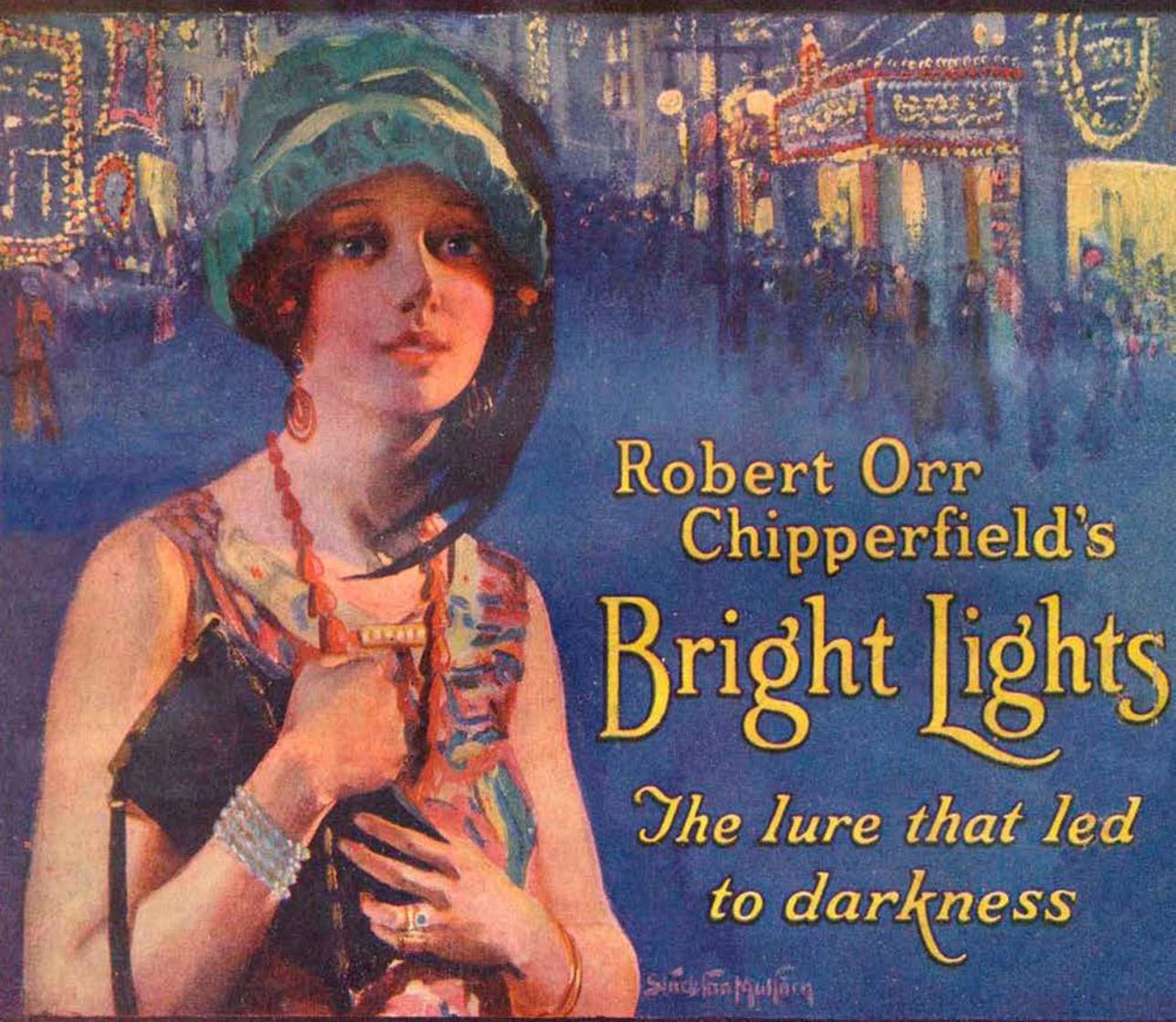


# ARGOSY ALL-STORY WEEKLY



Robert Orr  
Chipperfield's

## Bright Lights

*The lure that led  
to darkness*

*Robert Orr*

10¢ PER COPY

DECEMBER 8

BY THE YEAR \$4.00



"TO THE QUEEN'S TASTE"



## Can you do this with your Shaving Cream Cap— *or do you do this?*



YOU know how loose caps will slip through your fingers just when minutes are most precious. You can't lose the Williams' cap. It's always on—hinged on. And the tube hangs on.

Time-saver though the hinged cap is—it is a detail for speed compared with the lather. Williams' Shaving Cream bulks *instantly* into rich, busy lather—not suds. This lather so softens and lubricates your skin that the razor

seems to "glide" the hairs off. And besides being a faster beard-softener, it has a decidedly beneficial effect on the skin.

Williams' is white and absolutely pure. It contains no coloring matter whatsoever. Truly, you will find it the perfect cream in the perfect container.

THE J. B. WILLIAMS COMPANY, Glastonbury, Conn.  
Made in Canada at Montreal, by The J. B. Williams Co., Ltd.

# Williams' Shaving Cream

*For men who prefer the stick, Williams' Doublecap (absolutely new) and Williams' Holder Top Stick (the original holder stick) give the genuine Williams' in the most convenient stick forms. There are Re-loads for both.*

# ARGOSY-ALLSTORY

## W E E K L Y

VOL. CLVI

CONTENTS FOR DECEMBER 8, 1923

NUMBER 3

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### THE RETURN OF HOPALONG CASSIDY

WHENEVER one refers to Western literature of the highest order the character of HOPALONG CASSIDY, created by CLARENCE E. MULFORD, leaps into the foreground. There is no greater figure west of the Mississippi than this same HOPALONG CASSIDY, who reappears in a ten story series which

*BEGINS NEXT WEEK—DECEMBER 15th—IN THIS MAGAZINE*

THE FRANK A. MUNSEY COMPANY, 280 BROADWAY, NEW YORK, and TEMPLE HOUSE, TEMPLE AVENUE, E. C., LONDON

FRANK A. MUNSEY, President

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Single copies, 10 cents. By the year, \$4.00 in United States, its dependencies, Mexico and Cuba; \$6.00 to Canada, and \$7.00 to Foreign Countries. Remittances should be made by check, express money order or postal money order. Currency should not be sent unless registered

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# \$90 Drafting Course FREE

There is such an urgent demand for practical, trained Draftsmen that I am making this special offer in order to enable deserving, ambitious and bright men to get into this line of work. I will teach you to become a Draftsman and Designer until you are Drawing a salary of \$250.00 a month. You need not pay me for my personal instruction or for the complete set of instruments. But you must take advantage of this special offer at once.

## \$300 a Month Salary— \$450 on the Side at Home!



Chief Draftsman Dobe

That's the kind of money my drafting students make. Read what this one says:

*"As a beginner I am doing fine. Am earning a salary of \$300 per month, besides I made over \$450 at home the last two months, drawing plans for private parties. The practical drafting training you gave me by mail put me where I am in less than six month's study. Thank you for all your personal interest and help you gave me so far."*

(Signed) J. B.  
(Name and address upon request)

## I Guarantee

To Train You Until You Are  
Placed in a Position Paying  
up to \$250 and \$300 a Month

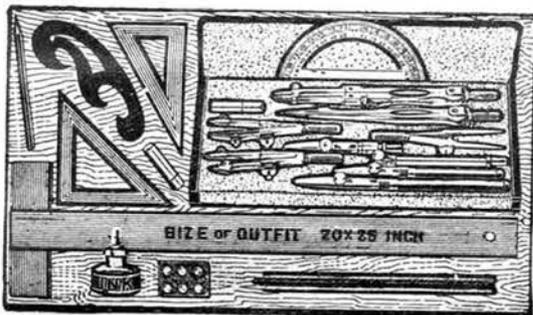
Write and I'll tell you how I make you a first-class, big-money-earning draftsman in a very few months! I do this by a method no other man nor institution can imitate. I give you personal training at home by mail until you are actually placed in a position paying up to \$250 and \$300 a month. Six thousand draftsmen are wanted every month.

## Free Book

Send Coupon Today 

No matter what plans you have for the future. Get this great book—"Successful Draftsmanship." Find out about the simply marvelous opportunities ahead now. How the world needs draftsmen, engineers, architects and builders. What great salaries and possibilities there are! Send coupon for free book today.

Chief Draftsman, Engineers Equipment Co.  
1951 Lawrence Ave. Div. 14-59 Chicago, Ill.



## This Outfit FREE

And more—I give you a whole set of drafting tools the minute you become my student. You get every tool you need. A magnificent set of instruments which will build your success in draftsmanship.

Chief Draftsman, Engineers Equipment Co.  
1951 Lawrence Ave. Div. 14-59 Chicago, Ill.

Without any obligation whatsoever, please mail your book, "Successful Draftsmanship", and full particulars of your liberal "Personal Instruction" offer to few students.

Name..... Age.....

Address.....

Post Office..... State.....



# Classified Advertising

## The Purpose of this Department

is to put the reader in touch immediately with the newest needfuls for the home, office, farm, or person; to offer, or seek, an unusual business opportunity, or to suggest a service that may be performed satisfactorily through correspondence. It will pay a housewife or business man equally well to read these advertisements carefully.

## Classified Advertising Rates in the Munsey Magazines:

	Line Rate	} Combination Line Rate \$4.00 less 2% cash discount
Munsey's Magazine	\$1.50	
Argosy-Allstory Weekly	} 2.50	
Minimum space four lines.		

Jan 12th Argosy-Allstory Forms Close Dec 15th

## AGENTS & SALESMEN WANTED

**Agents**—You can earn \$30 cash extra every week during your spare time and get your own clothes FREE BESIDES, taking tailoring orders. We are the only house that pays you DOUBLE. No experience necessary. Real cloth samples will be sent free. Write today before you forget. Est. 1896. A. E. STERN, Sales Mgr., 161 W. Harrison St., Department Z-832, Chicago.

**Agents**—Send for sworn proof of \$5 to \$15 daily, introducing New Style Guaranteed Hosiery. 57 styles, 17 colors. No capital or experience required. Just write orders, we deliver and collect. Your pay daily, also monthly bonus. Free auto offer besides. Complete outfit furnished. All colors, grades, including silks. MAC-O-CHEE MILLS CO., Desk 27022, Cincinnati, O.

**AGENTS—MAKE A DOLLAR AN HOUR. Sell Mendets, a patent patch for instantly mending leaks in all utensils. Sample package free. Toilette Manufacturing Company, Dept. 306-B, Amsterdam, N. Y.**

**WE START YOU WITHOUT A DOLLAR. Soaps, Extracts, Perfumes, Toilet Goods. Experience unnecessary. CABNATION CO., Dept. 200, St. Louis, Mo.**

**PORTRAIT, MEDALLION AND PHOTO JEWELRY AGENTS**—our goods will make you big profits; delivery guaranteed; prompt shipments; low prices; send for latest catalog. Adam J. Kroll & Co., 600 Blue Island Ave., Chicago.

**MAKE \$17 DAILY**—Finest Extracts, Food Products, Toilet Preparations, Household Necessities. Credit; Sample case Free. Write for amazing offer. PERKINS PRODUCTS, B-23, Hastings, Nebr.

**AGENTS—OUR SOAP AND TOILET ARTICLE PLAN IS A WONDER. GET OUR FREE SAMPLE CASE OFFER. HO-RO-CO, 118 LOCUST, ST. LOUIS, MO.**

**WE START YOU IN BUSINESS, furnishing everything. Men and women, \$30.00 to \$100.00 weekly operating our "New System Specialty Candy Factories" anywhere. Opportunity lifetime; booklet free. W. Hillyer Ragsdale, Drawer 93, East Orange, N. J.**

## AUTHORS—MANUSCRIPTS

**FREE TO WRITERS**—a wonderful little book of money making hints, suggestions, ideas; the A B C of successful Story and Movie-Play writing. Absolutely free. Send for your copy now! Just address Authors' Press, Dept. 19, Auburn, N. Y.

**STORIES, POEMS, PLAYS, ETC., ARE WANTED** for publication. Good ideas bring big money. Submit Mss., or write LITERARY BUREAU, 110, Hannibal, Mo.

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**PHOTOPLAYS WANTED BY 48 Companies; \$10 to \$500** Each paid for suitable ideas. No experience needed; details sent free to beginners. Sell your ideas. PRODUCERS LEAGUE, 388 Wainwright, St. Louis, Mo.

## MICHIGAN FARM LANDS FORSALE

**LAND OPPORTUNITY!** 20, 40, 80 ac. tracts; only \$10 to \$50 down; bal long time. Near hustling city in lower Mich. Investigate. Write today for free illustrated booklet. SWIGART LAND CO., Y-1245 First Nat'l Bank Bldg., Chicago.

## EDUCATIONAL

**YOU** read these little advertisements. Perhaps you obtain through them things you want; things you might never have known about if you had not looked here. Did it ever strike you other people would read your message—that they would buy what you have to sell; whether it is a bicycle you no longer need, a patented novelty you desire to push, or maybe your own services? Our Classified Service Bureau will gladly show you how to use this section most profitably and at the least cost. Write to-day to the Classified Manager, The Argosy Combination, 280 Broadway, New York.

## AGENTS & SALESMEN WANTED

**CASH IN ON THIS QUICK SELLER.** Wingo cleared \$1,080 with Never Fail Razor Sharpener in six weeks; Purdy, \$40.50 first day. Applewhite, also inexperienced, six orders in thirty minutes. No end to ready buyers. Exclusive territory for quick workers. Be first. Address NEVER FAIL COMPANY, 154 Allen Bldg., Toledo, Ohio.

**\$50,000 PICTURE MAN FRIEDMAN MADE TAKING ORDERS.** Beginners can make \$100.00 weekly with my canvassing spiel, experienced men make more. Free circular "Profits in Portraits" explains. Samples free. PICTURE MAN FRIEDMAN, Dept. A, 673 Madison, Chicago.

**HERE'S A BUSINESS**—Requires only table room. We start and help build business. Work for us painting Landscape photo print pictures. No experience, outfit furnished. Free literature. TANGLEY COMPANY, 193 Main, Muscatine, Iowa.

**GET OUR FREE SAMPLE CASE**—Toilet articles, perfumes and specialties. Wonderfully profitable. LA DERMA CO., Dept. D, St. Louis, Mo.

**LARGE CORPORATION WANTS a Service Man** in every town to paste up its signs on store-keepers windows. Excellent opportunity for reliable party. Steady work. No experience necessary. We also have attractive proposition for agents and salesmen. GUARANTEE SIGN SERVICE, 365 W. Superior St., Chicago.

**AGENTS.** Make \$10 to \$20 daily, selling small kitchen necessity. Over 200% profit. Sells rapidly everywhere to nine out of ten women. New plan makes sales easy. PREMIER MFG. COMPANY, Dept. 811, Detroit, Mich.

**WONDERFUL INVENTION**—Eliminates all needles for phonographs. Saves time and annoyance. Preserves records. Lasts for years. 12,000,000 prospects, \$15.00 daily. Free sample to workers. EVERPLAY, Desk 1212, McClurg Bldg., Chicago.

## HIGH GRADE SALESMEN WANTED

**COAL! BUY DIRECT. BANK THE REST. COAL!** Everywhere big saving, earn \$15 to \$25 a day, experience unnecessary, carload quantities. International Fuel Co., 29 Broadway, New York City.

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**PATENTS.** Write for FREE Guide Books, List of Patent Buyers and Record of Invention Blank. Send model or sketch and description for our free opinion of its patentable nature. Reasonable terms. VICTOR J. EVANS & CO., 762 Ninth, Washington, D. C.

**PATENTS.** If you have an invention write for our Guide Book, "How To Get A Patent." Send model or sketch and description, and we will give our opinion as to its patentable nature. Randolph & Co., 630 F, Washington, D. C.

**PATENTS. BOOKLET FREE. HIGHEST REFERENCES. BEST RESULTS. PROMPTNESS ASSURED. SEND DRAWING OR MODEL FOR EXAMINATION AND OPINION AS TO PATENTABILITY.** WATSON E. COLEMAN, 644 G ST., WASHINGTON, D. C.

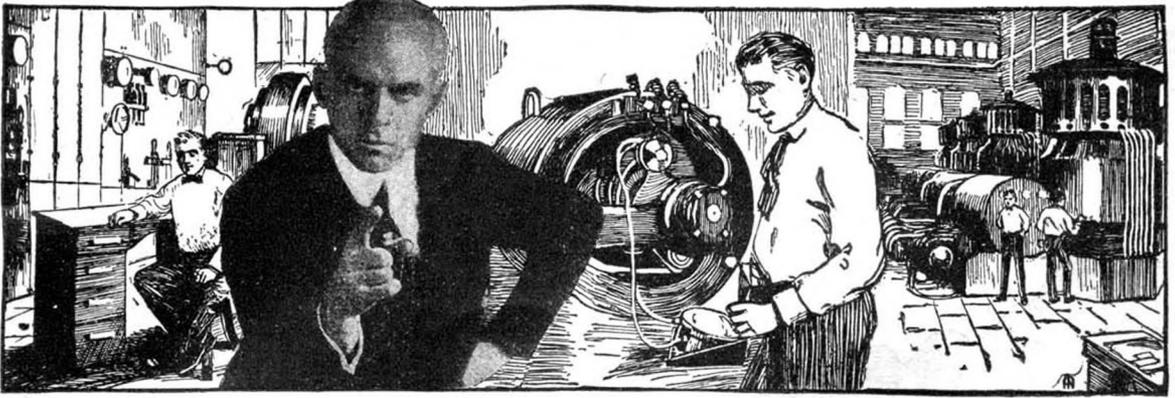
## SONG POEMS WANTED

**POEMS WANTED**—Sell your song-verses for cash. Submit Mss. at once or write NEW ERA MUSIC COMPANY, 123, St. Louis, Mo.

## TRADE SCHOOLS

**EARN \$10 TO \$15 PER DAY.** Learn Sign and Pictorial Painting, Showcard Writing, Auto Painting, Decorating, Paperhanging, Graining and Marbling. Catalogue Free. Chicago Painting School, 152 West Austin Ave., Chicago, Ill.

Classified Advertising continued on page 6.



# Electricity Needs You

## I WILL TRAIN YOU AT HOME

Stop right here. This is YOUR opportunity! Electricity is calling you, and the Electrical Business is in for a tremendous increase. But it needs more trained men—at big pay. By my Home Study Course in Practical Electricity I can train you for these positions.

### FREE!

#### BIG ELECTRICAL OUTFIT

A fine outfit of Electrical Tools, Instruments, Materials, etc., absolutely FREE to every student. I will also send you FREE and fully prepaid—Proof Lessons to show you how easily you can learn Electricity and enter this splendid profession by my new, revised and original system of Training by Mail.

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### Earn Money While Learning

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### Earn \$70 to \$200 a Week

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### Be a Big Paid ELECTRICAL EXPERT

What are you doing to prepare yourself for a real success? At the rate you are going where will you be in ten years from now? Have you the specialized training that will put you on the road to success? Have you ambition enough to prepare for success, and get it?

You have the ambition and I will give you the training, so get busy. I am offering you success and all that goes with it. Will you take it? I'll make you an ELECTRICAL EXPERT. I will train you as you should be trained. I will give you the benefit of my advice and 20 years of engineering experience and help you in every way to the biggest, possible success.

### Valuable Book Free

Become an Electrical Expert," has started many a man on the way to fortune. I will send a copy, free and prepaid, to every person answering this advertisement.

My book "How to  
**CHIEF ENGINEER COOKE**  
 Chicago Engineering Works  
 Dept. 5179, 2150 Lawrence Av.  
 CHICAGO, ILL.

**Act Now!** Good intentions never get you anywhere. It is action, alone, that counts. NOW IS THE TIME TO ACT.

L. L. COOKE, Chief Engineer

### CHICAGO ENGINEERING WORKS

2150 LAWRENCE AVENUE  
 Dept. 5179, Chicago, U. S. A.

Dear Sir: You may send me entirely free and fully prepaid, a copy of your book, "How to Become an Electrical Expert," and particulars about your Home Study Course in Electricity and the Free Radio Course.

Name.....

Address.....

Occupation.....Age.....



## He Earns \$200 a Week

Seems like a lot of money to the man in the routine job—\$200 a week—but not to the trained salesman.

Today, any number of men—and they're not unusual, either—are earning salary and commissions better than \$10,000 a year. They travel from one big city to another—live comfortably at the best hotels—mix daily with successful business men—and they are continually growing in a business way.

Perhaps you have thought that selling required some special gift. But it isn't true!

The successful salesman succeeds because he knows his line—and because he is master of the principles and methods of scientific salesmanship.

And you, too—if you have average intelligence—can acquire that understanding and you can go out and increase your earnings in a way that will actually amaze you

### FREE—Send for the book "Modern Salesmanship"

LaSalle training in Salesmanship is by the home-study method and is based on the successful experience of more than a thousand outstanding salesmen. An important part of the training consists in the solving of actual sales problems furnished by many of the leading sales organizations in the country. These companies have generously turned over to LaSalle their most effective sales methods—have revealed in detail the scientific selling processes responsible for their success.

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"The first two texts have given me so much that I am firmly convinced that if I never learned anything more from the course, I would have a full return for the entire investment, and I will tell you frankly that I would not take \$25,000 for my contract if another could not be had."

If you are in a routine job with limited possibilities and have a real desire to become a salesman—or if you are now actually in the selling field and anxious to build your earning capacity to the highest possible point—you will find it greatly to your advantage to send for "Modern Salesmanship."

The coupon will bring it to you promptly and without obligation. Put it in the mail TODAY.

### LASALLE EXTENSION UNIVERSITY

The Largest Business Training Institution in the World  
Dept. 1232-SR Chicago, Illinois

Gentlemen: Send without obligation to me information regarding course indicated below:

#### Modern Salesmanship

LaSalle is the largest business training institution in the world. It offers training for every important business need. If more interested in any of these courses, check here:

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Business Management                             | <input type="checkbox"/> Modern Business Correspondence and Practice |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Higher Accountancy                              | <input type="checkbox"/> Modern Foremanship and Production Methods   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Traffic Management                              | <input type="checkbox"/> Personnel and Employment Management         |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Foreign and Domestic Railway Station Management | <input type="checkbox"/> Expert Bookkeeping                          |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Law, Degree of LL.B.                            | <input type="checkbox"/> Business English                            |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Commercial Law                                  | <input type="checkbox"/> Commercial Spanish                          |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Industrial Management Efficiency                | <input type="checkbox"/> Effective Speaking                          |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Banking and Finance                             | <input type="checkbox"/> C. P. A. Coaching                           |

Name.....

Present Position.....

Address.....

Classified Advertising continued from page 4.

### HELP WANTED

**MEN—AGE 17 TO 45. EXPERIENCE UNNECESSARY.** Travel; make secret investigations, reports. Salaries, expenses. American Foreign Detective Agency, 320, St. Louis, Mo.

**ESTABLISH YOURSELF—AT HOME—AS A Photographic Expert.** Make \$75 a week while learning. Write at once for TEMPORARY offer. INTERNATIONAL STUDIOS, Dept. 2367, 3601 Michigan Ave., Chicago.

**RAILWAY MAIL CLERKS, STENOGRAPHERS, CLERKS, TYPISTS,** wanted by Government. Examinations weekly. Prepare at home. Write for free list and plan 301, payment after securing position. C. J. O., 1710 Market St., Philadelphia.

**MEN—BOYS.** Railway Mail Clerks. \$133—\$192 month. List positions free. Write today. FRANKLIN INSTITUTE, Dept. E-1, Rochester, N. Y.

**BE A DETECTIVE—Earn Big Money.** Great demand everywhere. Travel. Fascinating work. Make secret investigations. Experience unnecessary. Write, GEORGE A. WAGNER, former Government Detective, 1968 Broadway, N. Y.

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**EARN \$110 TO \$250 MONTHLY,** expenses paid as Railway Traffic Inspector. Position guaranteed after completion of 3 months' home study course or money refunded. Excellent opportunities. Write for Free Booklet CM-30. Stand. Business Training Inst., Buffalo, N. Y.

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**EARN MONEY AT HOME** during spare time painting Jami shades, pillow tops for us. No canvassing. Easy and interesting work. Experience unnecessary. NILEART COMPANY, 2235, Ft. Wayne, Indiana.

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**EARN UP TO \$400 MONTHLY, LIVING EXPENSES PAID.** WE PLACE MEN AND WOMEN; TRAINED IN SPARE TIME AT HOME FOR HOTEL EXECUTIVE POSITIONS. EASY TERMS. FREE BOOKLET. STAND. BUSINESS TRAINING INSTITUTE, 200 CARLTON COURT, BUFFALO, N. Y.

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You can do it without losing a minute from work and with plenty of time left for recreation. You can do it no matter where you live, how

small your means, or how limited your previous education. Yes, you can!

One hour a day spent with the I. C. S. in your own home will bring you bigger money, more comforts, more pleasures, all that success means. Don’t let another single priceless hour of spare-time go to waste! Without cost or obligation of any kind, let us prove that we can help *you*. Just mark and mail this coupon. *Do it right now!*

**INTERNATIONAL CORRESPONDENCE SCHOOLS**  
Box 2224-C, Scranton, Penna.

Without cost or obligation, please tell me how I can qualify for the position or in the subject before which I have marked an X:

**BUSINESS TRAINING COURSES**

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Business Management                     | <input type="checkbox"/> Salesmanship                                     |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Industrial Management                   | <input type="checkbox"/> Advertising                                      |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Personnel Organization                  | <input type="checkbox"/> Better Letters                                   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Traffic Management                      | <input type="checkbox"/> Show Card Lettering                              |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Business Law                            | <input type="checkbox"/> Stenography and Typing                           |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Banking and Banking Law                 | <input type="checkbox"/> Business English                                 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Accountancy (Including C.P.A.)          | <input type="checkbox"/> Civil Service                                    |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Cost Accounting                         | <input type="checkbox"/> Railway Mail Clerk                               |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Bookkeeping                             | <input type="checkbox"/> Common School Subjects                           |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Private Secretary                       | <input type="checkbox"/> High School Subjects                             |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Spanish <input type="checkbox"/> French | <input type="checkbox"/> Illustrating <input type="checkbox"/> Cartooning |

**TECHNICAL AND INDUSTRIAL COURSES**

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Electrical Engineering | <input type="checkbox"/> Architect                                   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Electric Lighting      | <input type="checkbox"/> Blue Print Reading                          |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Mechanical Engineer    | <input type="checkbox"/> Contractor and Builder                      |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Mechanical Draftsman   | <input type="checkbox"/> Architectural Draftsman                     |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Machine Shop Practice  | <input type="checkbox"/> Concrete Builder                            |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Railroad Positions     | <input type="checkbox"/> Structural Engineer                         |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Gas Engine Operating   | <input type="checkbox"/> Chemistry <input type="checkbox"/> Pharmacy |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Civil Engineer         | <input type="checkbox"/> Automobile Work                             |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Surveying and Mapping  | <input type="checkbox"/> Airplane Engines                            |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Metallurgy             | <input type="checkbox"/> Navigation                                  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Steam Engineering      | <input type="checkbox"/> Agriculture and Poultry                     |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Radio                  | <input type="checkbox"/> Mathematics                                 |

Name.....

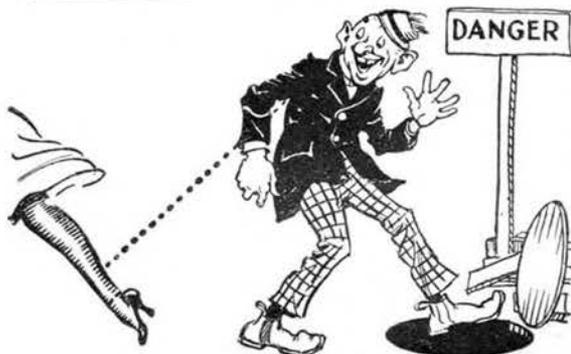
Street.....

Address.....

City.....State.....

Occupation.....

*Persons residing in Canada should send this coupon to the International Correspondence Schools Canadian, Limited, Montreal, Canada.*



## New Simplified Method of Learning Drawing

Amazing shortcut method now teaches you Illustrating, Cartooning, and Designing in half the usual time. You learn at home in spare time, yet your work receives the personal criticism of one of America's foremost Artists. No matter what your previous experience or education has been, this method qualifies you for the fascinating, high-salaried profession—Commercial Art.

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**Washington School of Art, Inc.**  
Room 4612, 1115-15th St., N. W. Washington, D. C.

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**\$5.95**      **\$6.65**

**Save 1/2**

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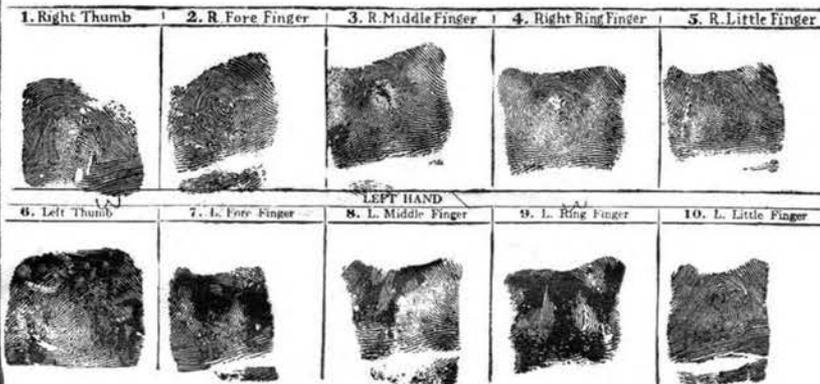
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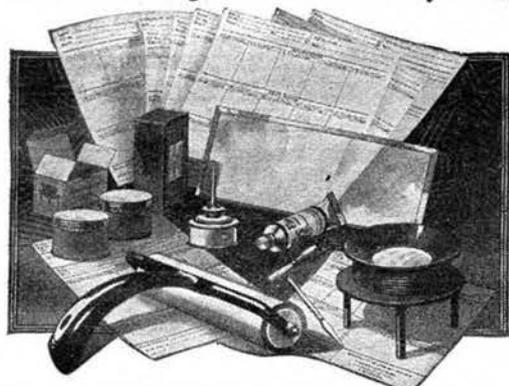
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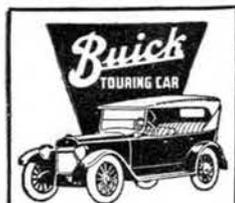
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**T**HERE'S been a need for this idea a long, long time. For your average pipe-smoker is the greatest experimenter in the world. He's forever trying a "new one"—confident that some day he'll stumble on the real affinity for his pipe.

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Thus a man could get the "whole works" in tobacco blends in one assortment—with the certainty that among them, he'd find his long-sought tobacco-affinity.

**A \$3.05 test for \$1.50**

It might take you years to "happen on" all twelve of these flawless blends, and it would cost you \$3.05 to buy a full-size standard package of each. But through the Humidor Sampler, you can get a liberal get-acquainted quantity of all twelve of these blends for \$1.50—with the attractive Humidor case included.

**Sent on 10-Day Approval**

Send no money. Your name and address on the coupon is all that's needed now. It will bring you the complete Humidor

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**Send No Money—Just Mail Coupon**

### A \$3.05 Test for \$1.50

If you were to try all 12 of these tobaccos in full size packages, the cost would be:

<i>Blue Boar</i> . . . . .	.25
<i>Capstan</i> . . . . .	.30
<i>Imperial Cube Cut</i> . . . . .	.30
<i>Old English Curve Cut</i> . . . . .	.15
<i>The Garrick</i> . . . . .	.30
<i>Carlton Club</i> . . . . .	.15
<i>Yale Mixture</i> . . . . .	.25
<i>Three States</i> . . . . .	.25
<i>Lone Jack</i> . . . . .	.10
<i>Wills' Latakia</i> . . . . .	.45
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But through the *Humidor Sampler* you get a liberal "get acquainted" quantity of each for \$1.50

If a man could only segregate these twelve decisive blends from the hundreds of duplicate blends—and turn his taste to testing these twelve blends exclusively—he'd settle his tobacco problems in a hurry.

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We said, "Why not pick out twelve of the world's finest and most distinctive tobacco mixtures—pack a liberal quantity of each in an attractive Humidor Box—and offer it to pipe-smokers, direct by mail, at a price no pipe lover can afford to resist!"

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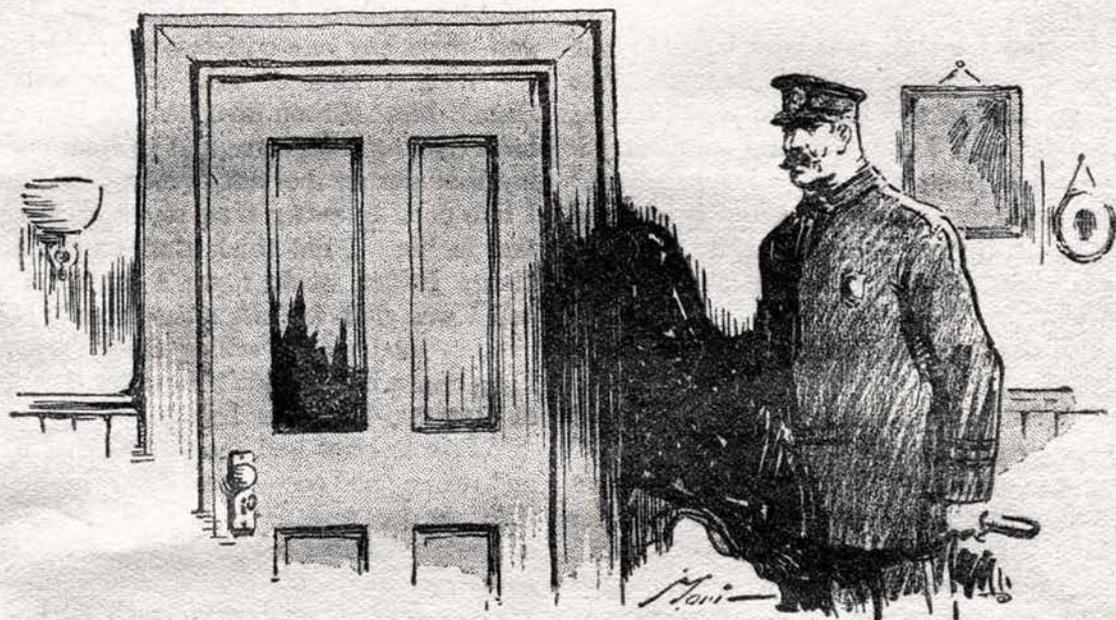
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# ARGOSY-ALLSTORY W E E K L Y

VOL. CLVI

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 8, 1923

NUMBER 3



## Bright Lights

By **ROBERT ORR CHIPPERFIELD**

*Author of "Above Suspicion," etc.*

### CHAPTER I.

#### YOUTH STUFF.

"I DECLARE, Mis' Moffat, I don't see how you do it! You look younger'n ever!" Mrs. Horton bustled into her shabby, comfortable boarding house parlor and held out both fat hands in cordial greeting to her bi-annually returning guest. "It beats me how you folks from the Middle West seem to keep two jumps ahead of the styles!"

The buyer from Columbia, Ohio, smiled, and the tiny, well massaged lines about her

dark, clear eyes and humorously curved mouth crinkled.

"We have to! Do you suppose Sol Feingold would have been sending me here more years than I care to count for the new lines in ladies' and misses' ready-to-wear, if I didn't look as young as the flappest finale hopper with a charge account—at least from the back?"

She laughed, displaying a row of strong, white teeth, and then sighed. "You're lucky to be in a business where flesh doesn't matter. How I'm going to resist the temptation of your pies, the Lord only knows!

But how is your family here? Simmy still with you, of course?"

"Yes; but I shouldn't wonder if somebody wasn't taking notice of him at last, though I can't figger who. Talking of fat, he goes to a gymnasium two nights a week reducing, and he dresses more snappy than ever. If he does get married, I declare I sh'll miss him round the house after all this time!

"Daisy Larkin's gone back home to take care of her mother; Ralph Best and Pete Cook went out to Chicago to start business together; and Laura Jennifer—well, it got to be too plain and quiet for her here." The motherly face clouded, but brightened again. "Henry Jordan's with me still, and little Fannie Gillespie and Myrtle Harris."

But one name had arrested Mrs. Moffat's attention.

"What do you mean—too plain and quiet for that Jennifer girl—Mrs. Horton?" she demanded. "Thirty a week was what she drew down modeling coats and suits for Marx & Lefkowitz; and she wasn't worth half of it when I bought some whipcords there last fall, slouching on the job and making eyes at the men buyers! Where did she move to—the Ritz?"

"She's got a little flat somewhere. I was real sorry to lose her, for Laura was a nice girl; but good times and the bright lights went to her head. Put the tea down here, Aggie, and take Mis' Moffat's grip up to her room."

Mrs. Horton turned with evident relief as a scrawny, middle-aged housemaid with untidy hair and a perpetually harried expression on her pointed face placed a tray awkwardly on the center table.

"You'd better toast a coupla pieces of that bread—"

"Not for me!" Mrs. Moffat interrupted decidedly. "Nothing between meals. Thirty-fours are the rage now, and I'm still a thirty-six! So the Jennifer girl turned out to be a weak sister? You've got another one that seemed to me to be heading that way, covering herself with cheap fake jewelry, and going without lunch for new clothes. I mean Fannie Gillespie."

"Indeed she ain't!" Mrs. Horton assert-

ed vigorously. "Fannie's a sweet little thing and good as gold. It's natural for her to like finery, and all them rhinestone diamonds—Well, you know how it is when a young girl first comes to New York from a small place—"

"Some girls," Mrs. Moffat corrected as she stirred her tea. There was amused affection in the glance she cast upon her landlady. "Ruffle up like a mother hen, don't you, when any one criticizes your chicks!"

"Well, I kind of take an interest in them," Mrs. Horton admitted. "I've had lots of young folks come and go from under my roof during the last twenty years, and I like nothing better than to see them settled in life. I did think that Fannie and Henry Jordan would make a match of it, and I was glad, for he's a fine, steady boy, making good money selling those fireproof filing cases; but he didn't show her the kind of attention her other friends do.

"Free lectures and the movies, and now and then a good concert, are about his limit, with maybe a little bunch of vi'lets or a pounda candy; while Fannie likes the Broadway shows and dancing where there's a cover charge. Not paying the bills, she don't know or stop to think of the price; and though Henry Jordan ain't stingy, he's the serious, quiet kind with a bank account and looking to the future.

"I guess he figgered she was too fly-away, or maybe she got the notion that he was too slow. Anyhow, a few weeks ago they stopped going out together and was just frozen politeness, and that's all. It ain't blowed over, and I've give 'em up."

She poured herself another cup of tea resignedly and the new guest laughed again.

"Which are you running—a boarding house or a matrimonial agency? I've often wondered! But the other one you spoke of—this Myrtle somebody. It seems to me I remember her. Big blonde, isn't she—with hands like a brakeman's?"

"She's a big, strong girl with yellow hair," Mrs. Horton amended defensively. "Myrtle plays a piano in a continuous motion picture house uptown, and I sh'd think that would make anybody's hands look like hams, thumping and banging eight or nine hours a day!

"She's kind of loud and flashy, but older, with a level head on her shoulders, and I never had a minute's worry about her. I did think she was kind of crazy 'bout Henry Jordan at first, but he couldn't see her, and she's too sensible to cry for the moon."

"I've got her now." Mrs. Moffat stemmed the garrulous flow with a nod. "Cold blue eye and circus clothes, but she will get on. Hello, Simmy Darley! Did you come home early because you knew I was going to breeze in?"

The front door had opened and closed, and the stoutish, slightly bald little man of fifty or thereabout who paused on the threshold was attired in the extreme of fashion as it was recognized along the Rialto. His waistcoat was resplendent, his spats the lightest tan, and the soft felt hat of the same shade which he held with his olivewood stick in one hand was of the most approved collegiate shape.

"Mrs. Moffat, this is indeed a pleasure!" He advanced with hurried, short steps, and his voice squeaked cheerfully. "I needn't ask if you are well! How is trade out in Columbia this spring?"

"Rotten, thanks!" Mrs. Moffat returned as she gave him her hand. "That's why I'm here, for a new line to speed it up. Ouch! Where did you get that Dempsey grip?"

"I told you Mr. Darley had been going to a gymnasium regular," Mrs. Horton remarked. "He was a real help moving furniture and hanging pictures for me after my spring cleaning."

"In all that magnificence!" With the frankness of old acquaintanceship Mrs. Moffat eyed him from top to toe, and Simeon Darley's rotund face beamed with naive complacency. "You look more like a book-maker than a bookkeeper!"

"You always would have your joke!" he protested deprecatingly. "Just keeping up with the youngsters, Mrs. Moffat—that's the thing nowadays! If you'll spare me an evening soon I shall be delighted to have you and Mrs. Horton come with me to one of the new restaurants. The latest dance is a variation of the toddle—"

"Listen to the man!" she exclaimed. "Don't tell me it's got you, too. After all

these years! I haven't toddled since I learned to walk, and late suppers don't sharpen my eyes for job lots being put over on me. How come?"

Mrs. Moffat added the question in a lowered tone after he had left the room; and her companion shrugged.

"He just wants to show you what a real sport he's getting to be," she remarked comfortably. "There's no harm to Simmy, if there is mighty little else. He tried to take up with Fannie after her and Henry Jordan quit going together, but she had him run ragged in a week, dancing till all hours, and then went back to her other friends. Here's Fannie now."

A slim, small girl with fluffy brown hair framing a pretty baby face had let herself in with her latchkey, but paused at the foot of the stairs on hearing her name and then ran lightly in. Her black pleated frock and small moire toque were the last word in smartness, but a splashing laval-liere of glassy stones glittered at her white throat, and the hand she extended was covered with meretriciously scintillating rings.

"Oh, how do!" There was a self-conscious note in her nervous little laugh. "You're late this season, aren't you, Mrs. Moffat? The styles have changed so, now that long skirts are in and bonnets instead of flats, that you'll find a lot of difference."

The older woman felt an impulse to draw in her feet, acutely conscious all at once of the brevity of her tweed traveling suit and the fact that her flat straw hat must be outdated at least a month; and the girl's appraising glance stung.

"Feingold's son came on for the earlier stock. I'm here for midsummer's line and first fall," she replied abruptly, and then, ashamed of her own chagrin, she added: "That's a very smart little gown and bonnet of yours, my dear. Does Ruthven like you to wear so much jewelry to business, though?"

"Oh, didn't you know? I'm not with Ruthven any more, but with Louise. Think of it, Mrs. Moffat, the most exclusive hat shop in town, and you ought to see the wonderful trade we have!" Fannie's china blue eyes sparkled. "Of course, I couldn't wear my rings and things there;

I don't even dare put them on before I start for home, but carry them in my purse. I have to dress in plain black like this, but it costs an awful lot, for I couldn't be seen in wholesale things, only imported models. You won't find anything with these lines at places like Marx & Lefkowitz; and this little turban—"

She paused, listening for a moment as a key grated again in the lock of the hall door, and then shrugged at the step which sounded in the entrance, continuing in a slightly higher tone:

"As I was saying, Mrs. Moffat, if you want anything really swell, you've got to pay for it; appearance is the whole thing in business and everything else. Mrs. Horton, can I press out my cerise crêpe de Chine? I've got a date to-night."

"All right, Fannie, but don't burn the board again, like a good girl." The landlady added in kindly solicitude: "Where're you going? That's a regular ball dress."

"Dance frock." Fannie tossed her fluffy, shining head. "I'm going with Mr. Rogers to a perfectly grand affair, mostly professionals, down at Brewster Hall. See you at dinner, Mrs. Moffat."

She tripped, humming, out of the room and up the stairs without a glance about her, although the footsteps had halted in the hall. Now they advanced once more, and a young man appeared. Hazel eyed, with a touch of red in his curly brown hair, and broad of shoulders beneath the plain blue serge coat, his was a boyishly engaging figure as his homely, clean cut features lighted with genuine pleasure at sight of the new arrival. The voice, too, in which he greeted her was buoyant with vigorous youth, and his handclasp warm and firm.

"I'm glad to be back myself, Mr. Jordan," Mrs. Moffat replied to him. "You are still selling filing cases, Mrs. Horton tells me, and making a good thing of it."

"Just plodding along." Henry Jordan nodded. "We handle all kinds of steel office furniture now, and we've had a great winter. What are you doing to-night? There's a dandy picture on at the International, and a fashion show added that you ought to see before you start out to-morrow. I'd like to take you and Mrs. Horton—"

"Not me, Henry—I've got a sight of mending—but Mis' Moffat 'll go with you. It was nice of you to think of it. Heavens!" She rose precipitately. "Do you smell that? Sure as you're alive, Caroline's burnt the cake again! Mis' Moffat, you just make yourself comfortable. Your room's ready any time you like—"

Her voice trailed back to them as she waddled off hastily toward the back stairs, and Henry Jordan turned, laughing, to the door.

"Just the same as ever, isn't she? I don't know what any of us would do without Ma Horton! You'll come to-night?"

"I'd love to, if you don't mind trotting a dowdy old woman around," Mrs. Moffat responded. "I feel quite smart back home, but I'm nothing but a hoosier here. Little Miss Gillespie looked so stunning just now that I realized how hopelessly out of date I was."

She cast a friendly, quizzical glance at him; and the young man flushed slightly, but he met her eyes with steady candor.

"You look all right to me," he said briefly. "I guess there's a lot more foolish things than being a day or so behind the styles. We'll go as soon as dinner is over, so as to get good seats, shall we?"

Later at the long table in Mrs. Horton's basement dining room Mrs. Moffat encountered again the remaining member of the household, a loud voiced young woman of Amazonian proportions, with brassy golden hair elaborately waved and an air of sophisticated boredom. Myrtle Harris was a professional at last, she assured Mrs. Moffat, but it was a dawg's life, and she didn't envy Paderewski or any of them other artists, knowing now what they was up against.

It hadn't been half as hard when she was plugging hits in the sheet music department of Silkworth's Five and Ten, though of course nothing like being a real performer in a theater. The Bronx Coliseum didn't get first runs, but she supposed that wouldn't matter, Ohio houses not getting them either, and Mrs. Moffat must come some night and hear her play.

The entrance of Fannie Gillespie, radiant in a brilliant cerise gown which displayed

far too much of her girlishly thin shoulders, put a temporary end to the conversational efforts of Myrtle Harris; and the latter stared and then sniffed. The lavalier had given place to a necklace of paste diamonds which gleamed almost convincingly under the glare of the electric light, and a ring with a single blazing stone adorned one of Fannie's small, animate hands instead of the spreading cluster.

Mrs. Moffat eyed it doubtfully, and then with deepened gravity she studied the girl's pretty, doll-like face, and listened to her high pitched, nervously gay chatter as the meal progressed. There seemed something forced and unnatural about her vivacity, as if she were under some strain or pressure, for when her naïvely egotistical flow of small talk ceased for a moment she twitched and fidgeted, more than once glancing at the shaded area window as if she half expected to see a moving silhouette there.

Was the girl afraid of some one? Surely there had been shrinking dread in that look, and in repose her soft lips drooped at the corners and the lids fluttered over the wide blue eyes.

Mrs. Moffat shrugged and turned to reply banteringly to a labored compliment of Simmy Darley's, on her left. After all, Fannie was only one of the army of small town girls with more looks than brains, and no great talent or ambition to keep her forging ahead to a definite goal. If she were the incorrigible flirt she seemed and anticipated some unpleasant scene or other now, she would only be running true to type.

Henry Jordan devoted himself to his dinner with an appetite which argued well for his peace of mind, and afterward as he and the buyer from Ohio strolled toward Broadway in the soft dusk which still lingered before the late spring darkness fell his companion studied him as she had the girl. Young people interested her, and in her busy, successful life she had found time to make many of them her friends.

Quiet without being taciturn, light-hearted without boisterousness, he had attracted her on her former visits as much by his evident seriousness of purpose as by the uniform, thoughtful courtesy which ap-

peared so inherently a part of him. It was safe to conjecture, Mrs. Moffat reflected, that he would never make a fool of himself over any little empty headed flirt, nor swerve, if that square jaw and steadfast gaze counted for anything, from the future he had planned.

The fashion exhibit posed before her on the screen absorbed her keenest professional attention, but the feature picture with its erotic star, anæmic male lead, and hectic emotionalism seemed melodramatic and utterly silly. Mrs. Moffat was surprised to find her young host disposed to a serious discussion of it when, the performance over, they made their way to a soda fountain.

"Just a lemonade for me, please." She sighed at a rich chocolate concoction foaming from a near-by glass. "The girl was wonderful, of course, but didn't you think the story absurd? A plain, everyday sort of husband like that doesn't fly off at a tangent and commit murder simply because he has formed an ideal of his wife that she isn't capable of even comprehending, much less living up to."

Henry Jordan shook his head.

"I don't know. It didn't seem absurd to me," he remarked. "'Plain, everyday husbands' do that sort of thing every day, Mrs. Moffat, if you read the papers. The girl he thought she was never had lived, and maybe he felt that the real one shouldn't, either, when he'd found out how heartless and wicked she was. Maybe he thought he had a right to kill her, same's he'd throttle a wild beast if he had nothing else to kill it with except his bare hands, to keep it from harming other people the way it had him."

Mrs. Moffat eyed him in amused astonishment.

"You think it was natural for him to get worked up to the pitch of killing almost in a minute like that—a man who'd never before had the impulse to harm a fly? Do you believe such things happen in real life?"

"Yes, Mrs. Moffat, I do." His tone was still quietly, impersonally argumentative, yet it had deepened in gravity. "I believe there's apt to come a time in any man's life, no matter how harmless and soft heart-

ed he might be, when he'd like to kill somebody. Not just for his own satisfaction, I don't mean, but because he almost thought he had a right, that it would be better if they were dead."

Mrs. Moffat laughed outright.

"I shouldn't wonder if we'd all felt that way in the abstract, for a minute or two at a time, maybe, but not seriously—not with the actual idea of murder. Thank goodness, life isn't quite like what the movies would have us believe!"

Henry Jordan frowned thoughtfully for a moment, and then laughed too.

"I guess it's a good thing," he conceded. "Will you have another lemonade?"

Mrs. Moffat declined, and they walked the few blocks to the boarding house in comparative silence, past the glitter of lights on the great thoroughfare into the dim, shadowed side street where the faint glimmer of the stars worked eerie magic on commonplace stone and brick and mortar.

The buyer would have a big day before her, and long habit had accustomed her healthy faculties to obey her will, yet tonight for some reason she could not readily compose herself to sleep. It must be the long, nerve racking hours on the train, she told herself wearily, or the thought of tomorrow's ever recurring problem—the right choice at the right price, and not to be stung with a line of false alarms as Feingold's son had been.

The door downstairs opened and closed, and a not-too-light feminine footstep accompanied by a whiff of reeking scent under her own door announced the return of Myrtle Harris, and then long intervals passed, punctuated by slow strokes from a distant church clock, and still sleep would not come to Mrs. Moffat.

Midnight, then one, and then two. Was that the front door again? The sound had been so soft that the involuntary listener could not be sure, but in another moment the faintest of steps crept past her door and on up the stairs and from a discreet distance down the block there came the diminishing whir of a taxi.

Fannie Gillespie, of course! She had youth and health, but taxis at two in the morning didn't mean efficiency a few hours

later. She wouldn't hold her job down long with Louissette or any one else, for that matter, if she kept up this pace, innocent enough though it might be, in fact.

Yet what did the Fannies of this world matter to a busy woman with her own problems to face? In disgust with herself, Mrs. Moffat arose and, throwing on a robe, crossed to her open window and dropped into a low chair. The street was deserted, the infrequent lamps glowing through an orange haze beneath the cold, steely light of the stars and only the occasional rumble of a belated truck breaking the silence.

Yet was the street quite deserted? Wasn't that a moving shadow opposite in the deeper gloom of the areaway? Mrs. Moffat leaned a trifle forward and watched for long minutes, but if some one were lurking there he did not betray his presence again, and with a little shrug of impatience she returned to her bed at last.

Nerves, after all these years! Could it be that silly sex play? Far fetched as it was, it had impressed that intensely serious young man Henry Jordan. What was it he had said about the murderer? Something about his right to kill the woman who had first killed his own ideals and illusions? Youth stuff, of course, but still—

Trying dimly to recall his exact words, Mrs. Moffat fell asleep at last.

## CHAPTER II.

### CHOCOLATES AND CONFIDENCES.

THE next two days were busy ones for the buyer for Feingold & Son and she saw little of her fellow lodgers at Mrs. Horton's beyond a hurried greeting at meal-time. They were successful days, too, but strenuous, and late one afternoon utterly fatigued, she paused in the lower hall before ascending the stairs just as Fannie Gillespie entered behind her.

The girl appeared pale beneath the light flecks of rouge she had acquired since Mrs. Moffat's last trip to the city and there were faint bluish shadows about her big, childish eyes. The little droop remained at the corners of her lips even as she smiled

waveringly in response to the older woman's nod.

"It's been an awful long day, hasn't it?" There was a flat, dispirited note in the usually high pitched young voice. "I do get so tired everlastingly trying perfect dreams of hats on the homeliest, crossdest people! You ought to see the cars they come in, Mrs. Moffat, and their clothes—oh, and their jewels! I never thought there were so many diamonds in the world as I've seen since I went to work for Louissette! It's funny how some girls that aren't a bit attractive have everything, isn't it?"

"Well, they haven't—attraction." Mrs. Moffat smiled and added on an impulse: "Won't you stop in my room for a minute on your way up? I have a marvellous box of chocolates that Mark & Lefkowitz sent me and, of course, I mustn't touch one of them; I'd like to get temptation out of my way."

"May I?" The discontented face brightened. "I suppose you've been ordering heaps of things? I'd like to be able to go out and buy everything I thought was pretty!"

"Even if the pretty things were to be worn by somebody else?" Her companion led the way upstairs and into the pleasant front room on the second floor. "Sit down and take off your hat if you like. Here is your candy."

She placed a huge, beribboned box in Fannie's hands and motioned toward a chair, seating herself with a sigh in the low rocker.

"Oh, they're lovely! Won't you take even one?" The girl drew off her slightly worn gloves displaying again the bunched rings among which the single large stone gleamed like a headlight, and fell to munching the chocolates avidly. "I don't eat lunch very often now."

"It doesn't cost so terribly to dress the way Eileen Gaffney and the other salesladies at Louissette's do, and then I have to have so many things to go out in. No fellow wants to take a girl out unless he can be proud of her and if you're dowdy you don't get anywhere!"

"Is it worth it?" Mrs. Moffat asked quietly. "Going hungry, I mean, just to

dress to please other people and have good times that tire you all out so that you can't put your best effort into your work and get on?"

"Why-y!" The blue eyes opened wide. "What would be the good of working at all except so that you could have the good times? I like to have the boys I go out with proud to be seen with me, and I know some dandy fellows who think nothing too good for their girl! I've been to the swell-est parties lately and I don't mind being tired."

"I don't see any use in just working and working without a bit of fun; it 'll be years and years before I'll get old enough to be a manager or buyer and by that time I won't want to dance or care about theaters and the beaches."

"And you may not be qualified for a manager's or buyer's job if you don't work for it," Mrs. Moffat reminded her gently. "I suppose, though, you are figuring on marriage, as most girls do?"

Fannie shrugged.

"The fellows who want to get married only think of sticking you in a horrid little flat uptown or a cottage in the suburbs somewhere to do your own work and be lonesome all day and never have any real fun, just put every cent in the bank!" She made a little moue.

"Those that take you around can't afford to get married, but I'm not thinking of that, anyway, for ages yet, I'm having too good a time! The beaches are going to be grand this summer! I've got a friend who has a concession at the new one, Knickerbocker Park, that's simply thrilling; it's called the Avalanche Ride."

Mrs. Moffat shook her head at the hopelessness of further argument.

"I didn't know the beaches were open so early," she observed absently.

"Oh, yes! I found this in the sand last Sunday; wouldn't you think it was real?" She thrust out the finger upon which the single stone glistened. "First time I ever found anything pretty; I'm not lucky that way. You never saw anything so lovely, though, as the rings our customers wear—gracious! Is it as late as that?"

Her eyes had fallen on the traveling clock

on Mrs. Moffat's dresser and she jumped up, closing the depleted box reluctantly.

"Take it with you to your own room, my dear." Mrs. Moffat's glance had followed the gesture. "Are you going out again to-night?"

"Yes, but only for a little while, with a boy I don't care so much for any more. He's an auto race driver and he leaves for Detroit on the midnight. Oh, did you know there's a new boarder? He's dark and awfully good looking, and his clothes look as if they were made to order. I saw him last night when he came to make arrangements. I don't suppose he can be much of a sport or he wouldn't want to live in a quiet place like this, but he looked different, somehow."

"Not like Henry Jordan?" Mrs. Moffat lifted her eyebrows.

"Mercy, no. Henry's a dear and I used to be crazy about him, but he's the dreadful, serious kind I told you about, and doesn't know what it is to really have a good time. I must hurry and change my dress. Thanks for the lovely chocolates!"

She closed the door, nodding brightly, and hurried up to the top floor and her tiny hall room in the rear, while Mrs. Moffat rearranged her hair reflectively. Fannie Gillespie had changed in the few months since last she had seen her; then everything had been wonderful and the simplest pleasures delights, although already the love for the spurious finery within her reach had made itself manifest.

Now she was growing disillusioned, wearying of the simpler things, choosing her companions solely for their ability to spend money prodigally. Race drivers, concessionaires at amusement parks, "sports"—where would it all lead?

It was in vain that the older woman told herself it was nothing to her; the girl's piquant prettiness and innate candor and honesty as well as her very human longing for what she considered happiness had made their own appeal. What bitterness of further disillusionment would the next interval bring before they met again?

Mrs. Moffat was late for dinner and the others had all gathered about the long table when she made her appearance. Among

them was a new face and she recalled what the girl had said about an addition to the household.

Mrs. Horton presented him beamingly as Mr. Edgar North and the young man arose and bowed politely with a quick flash of his bright, dark eyes. The hand resting on the back of his chair was long and slender, but not too obviously manicured and his voice was pleasantly modulated as he acknowledged the introduction and then slipped into his chair with a graceful litheness of movement that suggested strength and control.

He was a bond salesman, it developed, recently sent up to the New York branch of a New Orleans house and his accent held the soft, rolling slur of the south in his slow, not too loquacious speech.

Myrtle Harris leaned both elbows on the table, ignoring her veal pot pie as she described the difficulties of an artiste's career to the engaging stranger; and Fannie, who had put on a filmy blue gown the color of her eyes and long paste earrings that pulled at her small pink lobes, hung with flattering attention on his infrequent observations, but if Mr. North was aware of the personal element he gave no sign, directing his conversation in the main to the landlady with an unaffected deference which delighted that honest soul.

"You dance, of course?" Fannie asked when Myrtle paused for breath.

The newcomer darted a swift glance at her in which she read an eager response, but he only replied quietly:

"I was raised to it, Miss Gillespie, though not, I'm afraid, the kind of dancing you do up No'th. I must try to learn, of co'se, when I have time."

Myrtle laughed loudly.

"You don't sell bonds in the evenings, do you?"

"Hardly, Miss Harris, but I've planned to study and attend some lectures at one of the colleges heah." He smiled, showing a flash of white teeth in his dark, smooth shaven face, and turned to Mrs. Horton. "I'm afraid I shall burn your lights ve'y late some nights, ma'am."

"Go right ahead!" Mrs. Horton responded cordially. "I like to see my young peo-

ple improving themselves. My late husband was a great reader, though the sporting extras never done him much good for he usually picked the wrong one. He could talk real well when I had time to listen to him and he got it all from magazines the folks left laying around. I always believed in education. What line are you thinking of taking up?"

"Finance and economics." It seemed to Mrs. Moffat that there was a hint of amusement in North's tone. "Can you tell me, suh, which of the colleges offer evening lectures?"

He had addressed Simmy Darley, and while the latter hurriedly disclaimed any knowledge of the city's higher educational advantages Fannie pushed away her saucer of rice pudding and arose with an annoyed swish of silk and tinkle of earrings to leave the room. Inadvertently Mrs. Moffat glanced at Henry Jordan and was surprised at the look of pain in his eyes as they followed the slender, departing figure.

Was he thinking again of a certain lost illusion of his own? It couldn't have been an overwhelming one or he would scarcely have remained under the same roof and in constant daily association with the girl who "used to be crazy about him," but it seemed evident that he was not yet wholly cured.

Mrs. Moffat spent the evening in her room casting up accounts and preparing a lengthy report for Feingold & Son and she was so deeply preoccupied that she was only subconsciously aware of the thud of the vestibule door. She glanced at the clock, noting idly that it was just half past ten and returned to her report once more when a muffled sob in the hallway made her turn in surprise, then arise and open the door.

"Is that you, Miss Gillespie? Is anything the matter, my dear? Can I help?"

The little figure muffled in the soft blue cape halted at the foot of the second flight of stairs and then turned and came slowly toward her.

"It's nothing, Mrs. Moffat, only I think men are horrid! I've had a perfectly awful time and it wasn't a bit my fault!"

As she came into the room, closing the door behind her, the older woman saw that

the tears which stood in the round eyes were those of anger rather than sorrow and her lips were crimson as though she had set her small teeth in them.

"What happened? Tell me if you like. Did you go out with the friend you spoke of this afternoon?"

Fannie nodded and slipped the cape from her shoulders as she dropped into a chair.

"Yes, but I only went to be nice to him because he begged so; I told you I didn't care for him any more." She pressed her hands to her flushed cheeks. "He was awfully good fun at first to run around with, and I liked it when we'd go in a restaurant just after he'd won some big race and people would whisper and stare, but he—he got to thinking everything was settled between us as soon as he gave up the road and opened a garage and then he began quarreling about everything, my jewelry and my other friends, and even the way I happened to look at people!

"We had one last row and I didn't see him for ever so long until just lately, but I wouldn't make up with him again the way he wanted me to, and I only went out with him for a dance to-night because he was going away. And then he had to make a perfectly dreadful scene!"

"Why?" Mrs. Moffat asked quietly.

"Just because Jack Rogers joined us and I danced with him—well, quite a little. He's simply elegant! But you must have seen him lots of times on the screen. Frank heard I'd been going around with him and all of a sudden he got in a terrible rage and—and wanted to fight him! Jack's the perfect gentleman, though, and he went right away and I came home all by myself. It was horrid of Frank—as if he had the right!"

She twisted her handkerchief nervously between her fingers and Mrs. Moffat recalled the odd tension in the girl's manner on the night of her own arrival.

"Are you afraid of this Frank?" She paused and added: "Has he ever threatened you?"

"Oh, no!" Fannie replied quickly as she rose, gathering her cape about her once more. Her eyes had darted toward the door with a curious fluttering of their lids, how-

ever, and she drew a hasty breath. "What could he do except make nasty scenes like to-night? I was so ashamed! Fellows say crazy, silly things about what they'll do when you won't bother with them any more, but they don't ever do anything, really."

"I guess I'll go to bed, for there's going to be a wonderful party to-morrow night, and I'll hardly have a wink of sleep before I'll be due at the shop again! I wish there wasn't anything but good times, ever!"

When she had gone on up the stairs Mrs. Moffat returned to her task, but she found it impossible to concentrate on Poiret twills and tricotines, marvellas, and duvetyn. The pretty, shallow young thing who had just left her was dominated by a serious emotion at last, and that emotion was fear! Of whom or what was she afraid?

The unhappy scene of that evening which she had so naively recounted had meant only a "horrid" quarter of an hour to her, nothing more, yet at the first suggestion that she might have been threatened Fannie had betrayed her apprehension even as she quickly—too quickly—denied it, and then retreated precipitately. If the girl were in any actual trouble—

She decided to have a frank but tactful talk with her on the morrow and learn what advice or help she might offer, and in the meantime the report for Feingold & Son must be put through. Forcing the problem of her young fellow lodger resolutely from her thoughts Mrs. Moffat wrote for an hour with her accustomed conciseness and exactitude and then retired to sleep soundly until Agnes knocked upon her door.

"Ha' past seven, Mis' Moffat." To her still drowsy perceptions it appeared that there was an odd quaver in the usually thin, sharp tones. "Will you dress real quick, please, ma'am?"

"What's the matter?" Thoroughly awake on the instant Mrs. Moffat rose and threw her robe about her. "Is anything wrong, Agnes?"

"I don't know. I'm afraid so." The voice quavered still more and Mrs. Moffat opened the door to find Agnes wringing her hands, with her apron askew and her wisps of hair standing out in greater disorder than ever. "It's Miss Fannie! I've knocked

and hollered till I'm hoarse, but there isn't any answer and Mis' Horton told me to—to fetch a policeman!"

### CHAPTER III.

#### BEHIND THE LOCKED DOOR.

"A POLICEMAN, Agnes!" repeated Mrs. Moffat, aghast. "What in the world for?"

"To—to break the door down!" Agnes whispered with a fearful glance over her shoulder up the well of the staircase. "It's locked from the inside and the key's still in the hole! Mis' Horton says the police have got to be here in case anything terrible should've happened. Deary me, in all the years— Hear her now, ma'am! I thought maybe you'd go up to her before she gets a stroke or something!"

"I will, at once, Agnes!" Mrs. Moffat had paused to listen to the subdued pounding and frightened entreaties in the landlady's usually placid tones and now she started to close her door. "I'll just get into a few things and you'd better call the officer without rousing the rest of the house."

"They're all up, only Miss Myrtle's in hysterics and the cook ain't much better!" Agnes turned to descend the stairs. "You'll hurry, ma'am?"

Waiting only to pin up her heavy braid, thrust her feet into slippers and put on a more substantial garment than the light bathrobe, Mrs. Moffat hurried up the stairs with her heart beating suffocatingly and a nameless fear clutching at her throat.

The girl must be there! She couldn't have gone out again, and besides, there was the door locked from inside! Why didn't she answer?

From behind a closed door on the third floor there came the strangling sobs of Myrtle Harris's noisy hysteria, and a heavy tread and hoarse breathing in Simeon Darley's room showed that the alarm had been conveyed to the middle aged bookkeeper, but Mrs. Moffat was scarcely conscious of the sounds that reached her ears. She knew only that the thumping and calling from above had ceased and that her feet seemed

weighted with lead so that she could hardly drag them, yet in reality she was all but flying along the hall to the next flight of stairs.

At their foot she drew back for an instant as the door of the front hall bedroom opened abruptly and the new boarder, Edgar North, confronted her fully dressed except for the coat, into the sleeves of which he was struggling.

"I beg your pardon, but isn't there some trouble?" he asked quietly, his dark eyes searching hers with evident concern. "I'll be very glad to be of any assistance—"

"I'm not sure." Mrs. Moffat stammered and then drew herself together. "Miss Gillespie can't be waked and Mrs. Horton is afraid she is ill. I am going up to see."

She started up the last flight, discovering the landlady sitting huddled on the topmost step, and Henry Jordan, coatless and collarless, leaning against the balustrade on the landing just over her head, his face haggard and gray in the cold, searching light.

"Oh, Mis' Moffat!" Mrs. Horton moaned, holding out her fat, trembling hands. "I've called and called, but Fannie don't seem to hear! Henry Jordan's almost kicked the panels through and he wanted to break the door down for me himself only I wouldn't let him! I know she come in all right, for I saw the light from under her door long after eleven when I took a last look through the house before I went to bed, the same as I always do.

"She'd have come to me if she felt sick, or anything. You don't think that she's—she's—"

"I don't know what to think, Mrs. Horton, but you'll just have to pull yourself together. We'll know soon what has happened." Mrs. Moffat held the cold, shaking hands in a firm grip and glanced up at the young man, surprised to find that her own voice was in such steady control once more. "You haven't heard the slightest sound from Miss Gillespie?"

He shook his head speechlessly, and then another voice sounded from just behind and below her.

"I don't like to intrude, being such a stranger, but is there any way I could be of service, Mrs. Horton?"

"Heavens, it's Mr. North! I'd forgotten all about you!" the landlady exclaimed. "Maybe we're only making a fuss over nothing, but Miss Gillespie—"

Words failed her, but Edgar North nodded understandingly.

"I know; Mrs. Moffat told me. You said something a minute ago about breaking the door down. Perhaps Mr. Jordan and I could fo'ce it—"

"Thanks, North, but Mrs. Horton thinks we'd better wait for the police." Henry Jordan found his voice, but it was strained and unnatural, and he spoke with what was evidently a tremendous effort. "They'd have to be notified, anyway, if there's anything desperately wrong!"

"To be sure," the young Southerner agreed in a low, shocked tone. "Is there a doctor on this street? If Miss Gillespie has met with some accident during the night—"

"Of course! Why didn't I think of that?" Mrs. Horton cried. "Dr. Vaughn lives just four doors away on the opposite side, and I'll be ever so much obliged if you'll run over and bring him here. Do bang on the door again, Henry! Maybe she's come to and can hear us now."

The other young man had turned and was running down the stairs, and Henry moved obediently toward the door at the rear of the hall which faced them with a blankness that seemed portentous in its silent menace. Mrs. Moffat noted his reluctant hesitation before he lifted his hand to knock, but the gesture was never finished, for at that moment a heavy door slammed far below and an elephantine tread resounded through the house as some one came up the stairs.

Mrs. Horton rose, and the two women instinctively drew together, while Henry turned and took up his former position at the rail. Feet pounded along the hall just beneath, Myrtle Harris opened her door, screamed shrilly, and closed it again, and the next instant a burly bluecoat appeared and ascended three steps at a time.

"What's wrong, Mrs. Horton?" he demanded. "Your Agnes says there's a girl here, one of your boarders, that you can't get any answer from. Which door is it?"

Silently Mrs. Horton pointed, and the policeman advanced.

"Keep back, all of you! Not a single one crosses that sill until I say the word. Now, then!"

There came a mighty thud and straining creak as his massive shoulder drove at the panel, but the stout lock held, and it was only after a second and third onslaught that it gave way with a crash and the door burst inward, carrying him with it before he could brace himself.

The shades had evidently been pulled down, for the darkness from within appeared to rush out upon them appallingly, and the jarring vibration echoed in the shuddering silence and died away, while they waited breathless and tense. Then just when it seemed that the ultimate moment of endurance had come, a smothered exclamation reached their ears.

"Holy saints! She's done the Dutch!"

Everything whirled before Mrs. Moffat's vision, yet through it she still seemed to see clearly the expression of hopeless horror upon Henry Jordan's face; but Mrs. Horton uttered a choking cry and collapsed at her feet, a quivering mound of flesh, as if she had been stricken by a blow.

The next few minutes passed in a kaleidoscopic jumble of hideous, confused impressions. She was aware that Simeon Darley passed her bellowing inarticulately, with the tail of his dressing gown streaking out behind him; that the young man from New Orleans had reappeared with a bearded stranger carrying a small black bag; and that somehow Agnes was beside her, bending over the unconscious figure of the landlady, wailing thinly and wringing her hands, while the sound of feminine weeping from below seemed to have been augmented into a chorus.

Then the stentorian voice of the bluecoat brought a semblance of order.

"Now, then, get back there! No one lay a finger on the body till the medical examiner— Oh, 'tis you, doctor! Come this way, please! The rest of you clear out; clear this hall and the stairs, but see that not a one of you leaves this house!"

Mrs. Moffat rose swaying from where she had dropped to her knees beside the

landlady, and in spite of herself her eyes turned with awful fascination to the broken door and the shadowy semidarkness that lay beyond. The wooden furnishings showed merely in vague outline, but the bed had evidently been relegated from one of the more elaborately appointed rooms downstairs when its style went out of fashion, for it was of brass, with square cut posts reaching almost to the ceiling from its towering headboard.

To Mrs. Moffat's dazed, fearful vision it seemed that from one of these something swung in mid air—something slim and white and unnaturally tall, that loomed like a specter, and involuntarily she took a trembling step forward.

The next moment a hand fell on her shoulder and the same loud, authoritative tone admonished:

"Keep back, lady! Get on downstairs, and take Mrs. Horton with you. Doctor, don't let a one of them in there till I go telephone to the station."

Henry and the new young man between them were lifting the landlady's flaccid bulk, and Mrs. Moffat followed slowly with Agnes down the two flights of stairs to Mrs. Horton's own rear hall bedroom on the second floor. Myrtle Harris's hysteria had subsided to heaving sobs as they passed her door, but below they came upon Caroline, the cook, crouched at the foot of the stairs, rocking herself back and forth in a paroxysm of woe.

"Whut was it, Mistuh Burke?" she had gathered her wits together to demand of the policeman as he descended in advance of the others. "Whut done got po' Miss Fan? Lordy, Lordy! Fust time you was evah in dis yere house, 'ceptin' fo' a tas'e o' mah cookin'."

"Lemme get by, Caroline, and hush up that noise!" he responded gruffly. "You better tend to Mrs. Horton—"

The landlady opened her eyes as they laid her upon her bed, and glanced shrinkingly about. Then her gaze fastened on Mrs. Moffat's tense face.

"Fannie! What happened to her?" she whispered. "She isn't— She can't be—"

Mrs. Moffat shook her head.

"I didn't see, but the officer said she was

dead. At least, he gave orders that no one was to go near the body, and he has notified some one over the telephone. That is all I know." She turned as Simeon Darley appeared in the doorway. "Did you go into that room?"

"Yes. God, it's frightful! Why did the poor child do it?" His voice was low and shaken, and the flesh sagged in grayish folds from his jaw as if his round face had been suddenly deflated. "It's—it's like a nightmare! What could have driven her to—"

"To what?" Mrs. Horton sat bolt upright. "What are you trying to say, Mr. Darley? Fannie didn't—"

"She's hung herself!" He drew a handkerchief from the pocket of his dressing gown and mopped his face. "You never saw anything so horrible! She's hanging there to the high, brass bedpost with the chair kicked away from under her—"

Agnes screamed and covered her face with her hands, and Mrs. Horton moaned; but Henry Jordan stood rigidly staring straight before him with unseeing eyes. Mrs. Moffat glanced at Edgar North, and he nodded gravely.

"Mr. Jordan and I saw her, too. It's—a terrible thing! I don't know about the formalities of the law up No'th, but if there is anything I can do for any of you ladies, for Mrs. Horton—" He paused, and, although pale-faced, his tones were steady.

"I don't think so, but you might ask the doctor to look in on Miss Harris on his way down," Mrs. Moffat suggested mechanically. "Agnes, I'll see to Mrs. Horton now. Get the cook quieted and back to her kitchen; everybody's got to have some coffee, whether they want it or not, to brace up and go through with this dreadful business. I suppose a crowd will begin to collect pretty soon if the policeman was seen to come in here, and then the doctor—"

"I'll put on my collar and coat, and North and I can go down and keep them away from the vestibule," offered Henry Jordan, passing his hand across his forehead. Mrs. Moffat saw that it came down glistening with moisture, and his voice sounded now like that of a man roused with difficulty from a dream. "I suppose they won't let us do anything—upstairs."

He stumbled from the room in the wake of Edgar North, who had preceded him, and Simeon Darley asked helplessly:

"What can I do after I phone to the office? And to think how happy she seemed at dinner last night, and then to find her dead, hanging like that!"

"For Heaven's sake!" Mrs. Horton moaned, covering both ears with her hands. "If you say anything more you'll drive me crazy! Something must 'a' happened when she went out last night, but why in the world didn't she come to me and tell me? Fannie was a dear, good girl, and she might 'a' known there was nothing she couldn't talk to me about! It's wonderful you can keep so ca'm, Mis' Moffat. I'm thankful you're here to help me, though it's terrible for you to get mixed up in this. Poor girl! Poor girl!"

The tears were coursing down her cheeks, and she wiped them away with the end of the pillow case as Officer Burke paused on the threshold.

"Come on, Darley; I'll need you till a couple of the boys get over here from the station house. I don't want anybody let up that top flight of stairs."

The importance of his mission filling him with sudden composure, Darley gathered his robe about him and departed, and as Mrs. Horton rose and tottered to her dresser, still weeping, her companion proceeded to her own room. There, while she dressed hastily and rearranged her hair, the hideous unbelievable fact kept pounding into her brain: Fannie Gillespie hanged herself!

The slim, white, wraithlike thing which had appeared to float there in the semi-darkness of the room had been her body, dangling from the bedpost as from a gibbet! The girl whose last words had voiced the wish that there wouldn't be "anything but good times, ever," was dead, thrust into the unknown by the act of her own hand there in the dark!

It wasn't true, it couldn't be! Even as she forced the truth with monotonous reiteration upon her consciousness, Mrs. Moffat found herself rebelling, refusing to accept it. Fannie's nervous, apprehensive manner, her evasion of the point-blank

question as to whether the man she called "Frank" had threatened her, and the very words of her reply, "Fellows say crazy, silly things about what they'll do when you won't bother with them any more, but they don't do anything, really"—all these returned to Mrs. Moffat's mind, but they offered no adequate explanation of the girl's suicide.

She had feared a quarrel, a distasteful scene such as had actually taken place on the previous evening, perhaps, but surely nothing more, surely nothing could have threatened her which left only the dread alternative of self-destruction!

Yet she must have had some reason for that sudden, desperate impulse! Did Henry Jordan suspect what it could be? He had borne the shock of the discovery with remarkable composure, even for one of his quiet, self-contained temperament, considering the fact that, up to a few short weeks before, he had appeared to be deeply attached to the girl. His face had expressed horror, pain, shrinking revulsion, but not an overwhelming surprise. Could he conceive of some motive for Fannie's mad act which had been hidden from her other associates, even from the motherly but not too discerning eyes of Mrs. Horton?

A car drove up to the curb and stopped, and heavy footsteps passed along the hall, accompanied by the low mutter of masculine voices, before she finished dressing; and when Agnes appeared at the door Mrs. Moffat was not unprepared for her announcement:

"The police doctor's come with another man, and there's more policemen in the vestibule and on the sidewalk keeping the crowd back. Do you hear them?"

Mrs. Moffat had indeed been subconsciously aware of an increasing babel of sound from below, and the shuffle and tramp of many feet on the pavement, but she had given it no heed in the turmoil of her thoughts. Now she stepped to the window and lifted the shade which flapped over the open lower sash. A small mob was eddying about the cleared semicircle held by several bluecoats before the old fashioned high stoop; delivery boys and children on their way to school formed the

inner ring, and the morbidly curious of the neighborhood were clustered in the background, while gesticulating knots of people had filled the doorways and opened windows across the street.

From either avenue were coming others in a continuous stream, attracted by the crowd already gathered and the sight of the police car drawn up at the curb; and Mrs. Moffat hastily dropped the shade and turned away.

"Mrs. Horton says will you please come down to the dining room for your coffee?" Agnes inquired. "Mr. Jordan's took Mr. Darley's place upstairs. Ain't it terrible about poor Miss Fannie? I don't know what they're going to do with her, but I heard the police doctor say something about an autopsy."

"I suppose that's the usual thing." Mrs. Moffat repressed a shudder. "Tell Mrs. Horton I'll be right down."

In passing she glanced at the chair beside the table. There only a few short hours before Fannie Gillespie had sat, her soft blue cape like a cloud about her, and the paste diamonds glistening bravely as they swayed pendent from her small ears. She had been looking forward to a "big party" to-night, and earlier she had remarked with the liveliest anticipation that the beaches "were going to be great this summer." Was that the mental attitude of a girl who contemplated death, who secretly faced a problem to which she could find only the most tragic of solutions?

In the meantime Mrs. Horton, having dressed, and stemmed her tears, had summoned Henry Jordan from his self-imposed duty in the vestibule and coaxed him to swallow a cup of steaming coffee, after which Officer Burke had ordered him to stand sentry for Simeon Darley on the top floor, and he passed the latter on the last flight of stairs.

"It's—it's hell, Henry!" The rotund figure seemed to have shrunken beneath the dressing gown and the stubby hands worked convulsively. "A shutter or something is banging in there as though her heels were drumming against the wall, and I could have sworn I heard something like a groan. It's a downright shame to leave her that

way! Don't go near the door again, my boy; it 'll break you all up!"

But when his footsteps had died away in the echoing well of the staircase, Henry Jordan, after a swift glance about him, had gone straight to the yawning aperture at the end of the hall where the shattered door swung on its twisted hinges and, reaching in, drawn it toward him. The key was still in the burst lock, its bit protruding almost to the ward from the outer side of the keyhole.

Henry bent and studied it, then with a second quick glance behind him he whipped out his handkerchief, wrapped it carefully around his hand and, reaching behind the edge of the door, withdrew the key.

Retreating to the center of the hall where the sunshine came down in a pallid streak through the skylight, he held the key by the bow and examined the lock end with puzzled attention while a slight frown gathered on his forehead; but a sound from below roused him with a start, and he hurried back to the door.

When he had replaced the key he pushed the door so that it swayed back to its former position, and then as he turned, his gaze fell for the last time on the vague outline of the pathetically small, inert form suspended high in the gloom within, and a groan forced its way between his set teeth.

When Burke ascended the stairs a moment later, with the assistant medical examiner and another behind him, he found his deputy standing motionless beneath the skylight, his hands gripping the balustrade and his head bowed so that a deep, obliterating shadow fell across his face.

#### CHAPTER IV.

STEVENSON FROM HEADQUARTERS.

"**W**HO was Fannie Gillespie? Where did she come from? Do you know the names and addresses of any of her relatives?" The assistant medical examiner, a portentously grave young man with a high, bulging forehead and stiff, upstanding yellow hair, like a brush, above it, peered owlshly through his large rimmed glasses as he sat beside the

center table in the parlor and shot his questions at the still dazed landlady.

"Her full name is Frances May Gillespie, and she came from up State—from Bison, New York." Mrs. Horton replied in a tone that still trembled. "Her parents are dead, and I don't know—seems to me I did hear her speak of a brother, but I can't recall that she mentioned his name or where he lived."

"How long has she boarded here?"

"She come to me a year ago last March. That 'll be nearly fourteen months. Fannie hadn't been away from home long then. She'd been boarding with the aunt of a girl who worked in the same place as her, Ruthven's wholesale millinery, it was."

"She was employed there until the present time?"

"No, she's with Louissette now. I mean"—Mrs. Horton caught herself up with a shudder of remembrance—"I mean she was there yesterday."

The doctor nodded unconcernedly.

"How old was she?"

"Just twenty-one. She had a birthday on the twentieth of last month, and Caroline baked her a cake—"

"Just twenty-one." The doctor made a brief note. "Do you know if she was engaged to be married?"

"Oh, no! Fannie's a real popular girl—I mean, she was—and she had lots of gentlemen friends who took her out, but I never heard of her promising to marry any of 'em. She—she wasn't thinking of settling down yet; all she cared about was just having a good time." Mrs. Horton paused, and then added hastily: "Don't make any mistake, though. Fannie was a thoroughly good girl, and brought up careful, as anybody that knew her could tell. It was natural for her to like finery, and she copied the rich customers at the stores as close as she could, but all her jewelry was only fake that she bought herself, and she'd do without 'most anything for a pretty dress."

"Who were these gentlemen friends? What are their names, and where did they work? Did you meet them?"

Mrs. Horton shook her head at the broadside of queries.

"I don't know. Fannie talked about them, of course, but I don't recall their names, except three. I never met any of them when they called to take her out, for I don't hang around and poke my nose in my boarders' business. Let me see— She spoke of an auto racer named Frank Black, and Mr. Jack Rogers, a motion picture actor, and there was a Ben Newell, who was a new friend. He runs some kind of a scenic railway thing at one of the parks. Fannie knew the auto racer longer, I think."

"Who was her most intimate friend?"

"A girl that works with her at Louise's—Eileen Gaffney. She's been here several times on Sundays—a real pretty, stylish, lively girl—and I know they went out together often. I wouldn't have called them 'specially intimate, though; Fannie 'd tell you everything she knew straight off, if she liked you; she was that kind."

Tears welled up once more in the kindly eyes, and the doctor frowned, asking hastily:

"Do you know of any reason for the girl's suicide? Had she appeared to be in any trouble or difficulty? Low-spirited? Has she asked about any letters or telephone calls that didn't come?"

There was a third person present; the man who had arrived with the assistant medical examiner. Throughout the interview he had stood quietly by the window seemingly intent on surveying the crowd outside through the thick, coarse lace curtains, but now he turned sharply, a stocky, thick-set figure with sandy hair and a shrewd, genial twinkle in his brown eyes.

"No, she was the happiest little thing alive!" Mrs. Horton asserted. "She always asked who'd called her up and what letters had come for her, but she didn't seem anxious about any particular one, and she didn't know what low spirits was! Ever since Mr. Burke broke the door down for me and found what—what she'd done I've been asking myself why, *why*, until I'm 'most crazy!

"*That's* the only thing could have happened to her; that she went out of her mind, and yet there never was a saner, more clear-headed girl, for all her foolishness

about clothes and fun. She got nice money at Louise's, didn't go in any debt that I ever heard of and hadn't any serious love affair; there ain't a reason in the world why she should think of dying, much less making away with herself!"

The doctor glanced at his companion and rose.

"Then you don't know of any one to notify about her death?"

"Not unless you can locate some Gillespies in Bison. If you mean about the funeral expenses I guess I can take care of them; Fannie's been 'most like one of my own family and I couldn't think of her laying in any charity grave. I s'pose you'll—you'll have to take her away for an autopsy?"

The doctor nodded.

"We'll let you know when an undertaker can send for the body if no one claims it. I'll arrange to take it away at once."

He turned to the door and the other man joined him. Mrs. Horton rose, but they paid no attention to her, talking together for a moment in a quick undertone. Then the assistant medical examiner departed and his companion closed the door and came briskly back to her.

"Sit down again, please, Mrs. Horton. This is a pretty sad thing to have happen in your house and, of course, you are as anxious as we are to find out what motive the girl had for killing herself," he began in a sympathetically confidential tone. "Let's see if we can't get at some reason you haven't thought of yet. You say she was the kind of a girl to give her confidence to anybody if she liked them, but there might have been something in her life that she didn't talk about, something that happened before she ever came here. You remembered that she spoke of a brother even though you couldn't recall his name; can you think what she said about him, how she happened to mention him at all?"

Mrs. Horton's wet eyes clouded as she turned them upon him.

"I don't know as I ought to talk about her family and there isn't anything much that I could say. Of course you come with the police doctor, but—"

He smiled reassuringly.

"That's all right. I'm Stevenson, from headquarters, and we're only interested in family gossip in order to get a line on the girl herself. What did she tell you about this brother of hers?"

"I couldn't say in so many words, Mr. Stevenson, I can only give you the general idea I got, for she spoke of him in an off-hand kind of way. I gathered that he was quite a little older'n her and slow-going, and though she seemed fond of him, I guess they wasn't much alike.

"I know he was married, for Fannie didn't like his wife; she couldn't get on with her, and I always thought that was why she left home, though she was crazy about the city. I've known plenty country girls, but never one so hungry for the bright lights. I don't believe anything happened before she came here that she brooded over, any love affair, I mean."

"Who was the girl that worked in Ruthven's, the one whose aunt she boarded with before she came to you?"

"I can't remember the name, but it was uptown somewhere," Mrs. Horton replied. When the detective mentioned "headquarters" she had shrunk from him in horror, but his manner was so full of consideration and evident good will that in her bewilderment and deep trouble her unsuspecting mind opened to him. She reiterated: "Fannie hadn't anything to worry about from the past."

"That was a big jump for a little country girl without any pull, to go right from a cheap wholesale house like Ruthven's to such a swell shop as Louissette's." Stevenson seemed to be following a line of thought of his own. "How'd she make it?"

"Oh, that was luck—and her own pretty, smart air. She posed for the head for some pictures Ruthven was getting out advertising their early spring line just before Christmas, and Louissette saw them and sent for her. Fannie wasn't like a country girl, Mr. Stevenson; she had style and a proud little way of holding her head as if she belonged to society all her life! It wasn't only her prettiness made folks turn and look at her even in the simplest things she wore, there was something about her I can't explain and everybody admired her."

Mrs. Horton wiped her eyes on a damp rag of a handkerchief and the detective nodded.

"I get her type. Clothes mad and covered with fake jewelry—is this her stuff? All of it?"

He suddenly emptied a small, glittering pile from his coat pocket upon the table, and Mrs. Horton started, then leaned forward to examine it. Rings and earrings, brooches, a necklace and a pendant blurred before her eyes and their meretricious brilliance seemed to dull.

"I guess so," she responded uncertainly. "Fannie had an awful lot of it, but her liking for it was innocent enough, goodness knows! She'd have outgrown that foolishness later on, it was just because she'd wanted pretty things all her life, I guess."

"And sporty company? She didn't go with the kind of men that are usually attracted to a working girl, Mrs. Horton."

"I know," the landlady sighed. Then she added in quick defense: "They was all right or she wouldn't have let them take her out; Fannie could take care of herself anywhere, and she did! Men all liked her, young and old, but she didn't give any one a serious thought."

"There must have been some one." The detective smiled again. "You can't help seeing a lot when you run a boarding house, and you must have known who it was she liked best, or at least was kidding along. What's the most serious case she had?"

"None lately," Mrs. Horton disclaimed hastily and then checked herself. "Just a theater with one fellow, and a dance or a motor ride or a trip to one of the beaches in summer with another—that's the way Fannie's been going."

"'Lately,' you say; I mean before that." Stevenson's eyes narrowed as he gathered up the imitation jewels and thrust them back in his pocket. "You needn't be afraid to speak, this won't go any further. Who was it had a crush on her? You've got several men boarding here; was it one of them?"

Mrs. Horton's honest face flushed and her hands tightened in her lap.

"Mr. North don't count, he's just come, and as for Mr. Darley and Mr. Jordan, they

both liked her, I guess. I never was one to gossip, and nothing ever come of it, so there don't seem any use in talking about it now! Poor Fannie's dead—"

Her tone was filled with very real distress, but Stevenson pursued inexorably:

"That's precisely why, Mrs. Horton. Darley's the older man got up like a sport, isn't he? Was he in love with her?"

"Mercy, no! He did start to take her out a great deal just a few weeks ago, but Fannie was young and she liked young company, and I shouldn't wonder if he found it kind of hard to keep up with her; anyway, she began going around with her boy friends again and Mr. Darley stood aside, but they've stayed good friends."

"And the young fellow, Jordan? He showed her attention, too?"

"Yes. He's lived here near three years, as fine and steady a boy as you'll find anywhere! He never seemed to have time to bother with girls before Fannie came, he was too taken up with making good in his business, but she just kind of took him off his feet, I expect." Mrs. Horton caught herself once more. "Of course there wasn't any engagement or anything and maybe I only imagined it, but I thought he cared an awful lot for her. There wasn't any quarrel that I knew of, but they cooled off all of a sudden; she began going out more than ever and he only worked harder."

"What does Jordan do?"

"He sells steel office furnishings and he's been busy inventing some kind of a patent lock for filing cases. I don't know anything about it except that he gets his room in a clutter!" Mrs. Horton shrugged. "You see, Mr. Stevenson, I can't tell you anything. If Fannie went around with one gentleman friend more than another I didn't know it, and she was gay and light-hearted up to the very last minute. She's been out every single night this week."

"Do you know where, and who she went with?" Stevenson had been thoughtfully pacing up and down with slow, swinging strides, but now he halted in front of the landlady. "What time did she get in each night? You've got a quiet house here, haven't you? Don't you usually know what hours your guests keep?"

"I should hope so!" Mrs. Horton straightened in her chair. "Not that I'm nosey, but I sort of keep an eye on my young folks, and I've never had a minute's trouble in all these years until this terrible thing came! I take a look round every night before I go to bed and I can generally tell who's in and out."

"Fannie got in early Monday night, but Tuesday she went to a dance—I let her press a dress to wear; I remember because it was the day Mis' Moffat come. At Brewster Hall, the dance was, and she went to it with Mr. Rogers, the motion picture fellow. I don't know what time she came home then or the next night, for there wasn't any gas on in her room when I looked the last thing, and when she was late she never made any noise."

"You don't think she'd come in earlier and gone to bed?" the detective suggested.

"No. When she was home there was always a bright light in her room."

"Why?" Stevenson asked quickly. "What did she do? Write letters? Read?"

"I never thought about it," replied Mrs. Horton, surprised. "Fannie wasn't much of a letter writer unless she mailed them outside, and I never saw her with a book in her hand except a fashion magazine, maybe. She was always neat and dainty, though, I guess perhaps she was mending and fixing her clothes. Last night she musta got in early, for I saw the gas going in her room, but everything was quiet. If she was in any trouble it musta come up while she was out and I just can't understand it!"

There was a little pause while she lifted her handkerchief to her eyes once more. Stevenson had turned as if about to pace back and forth again, but after a moment he wheeled to face her and she saw that he held in his hands a coil of slender but strong rope streaked with dust and soot. A slip noose had been made in it and the end which dangled was not frayed, but had been cut clean.

"Did you ever see any rope like this before?" he asked.

Mrs. Horton's brow knit.

"It looks like a length of ordinary clothes line to me," she replied. "I've got some

just like it strung up on the roof; there wasn't room in the yard for all I needed."

"How do you get up there?"

"To the roof?" Mrs. Horton glanced up at him. "Why, through the trapdoor in the hall closet on the top floor; there's a ladder leading up to it. It's right by Fannie's door—oh, good Heavens! You don't mean— That—that isn't the rope she—"

Horror choked the words back in her throat and Stevenson nodded gravely.

"The body was hanging from this by an ordinary loop, Mrs. Horton, when the assistant medical examiner and I took it down. It has only recently been cut from a longer piece, and with some very sharp instrument; you can see how fresh the end is and how it has been clipped short off, not sawed through by a dull blade—"

"I don't want to see!" Mrs. Horton covered her face with her hands and her fat body shook. "Take it away! I—I can't look!"

"Never mind!" he returned with comforting reassurance. "You needn't look at it now, but I may ask you to later, to compare it with other pieces. Now, you say the girl was always happy and light-hearted. Are you sure you didn't see any change in her lately? I want you to think carefully, please. Taking into consideration what has happened can you recall a word, even a look, that would show something was on her mind? Something that not only grieved her, but frightened her?"

"Why should she be frightened?" Mrs. Horton half rose from her chair. "Folks don't kill themselves because they're afraid, unless maybe they've done something terrible that's against the law, and of course Fannie couldn't have done that! What in the world would she be afraid of?"

"You haven't answered my question!" A note of stern authority had manifested itself in his tone. "I want to know if at any time lately the girl appeared to be in dread of anything! It doesn't matter what, that's our lookout. Haven't you noticed the least change in her?"

"Why, no!" There was a shade less certainty in Mrs. Horton's voice, however. "She's been real nervous lately, but I

thought that was because she'd been on the go so much and maybe tired out with the spring rush of trade. It did seem as if she was just living on excitement—"

"How did she show this nervousness?" the detective interrupted.

"Well, she jumped if anybody spoke to her sudden, and she kept looking around over her shoulder if she happened to sit with her back to a door or window—not that she was still a minute if she could help it! I never saw anybody so restless as she's been lately. I said 'good-by' to her at the door out there two-three mornings when she was starting for work and she'd peek out of the vestibule as if to see if somebody was there and then scoot for the cars, and when she come home she'd hurry no matter how tired she was.

"She always slept with the gas burner going full tilt in her room, and one night last week at dinner something went wrong with the main out in the street, and I thought she'd have hysterics before Agnes brought lamps—goodness! It never come to me until just now, but it does sound as if Fannie had been actually afraid, doesn't it?"

Stevenson did not reply directly, but he nodded as if what she had told him was in accord with some idea of his own.

"How long ago can you remember the first indications of this in the girl?"

"Let me see!" Mrs. Horton passed her hand over her forehead. "Two-three weeks, anyway; maybe a month. It's been getting worse, now that I think of it. Mr. Stevenson, what does it mean? You as much as told me to mind my own business a minute ago, but it *is* my business! I must know what come to Fannie Gillespie right here under my own roof, and what she was so afraid of that she killed herself!"

"Perhaps she was afraid of the very thing that did come to her here under this roof, Mrs. Horton," Mr. Stevenson remarked quietly. "Her door was locked from the inside, and there isn't any fire escape nor ladder nor even vine outside her window, but for all that we have no proof that the hand which slipped that noose over her head was her own!"



# A Fortune Hunting Fool

By **COLLINS D. BRADLEY**

Author of "Harness Shy."

## A NOVELETTE—COMPLETE IN THIS ISSUE

IT was a spring morning in Bordeaux. The bright rays of the sun, promising heat, were moderated by cooling, wanton breezes from the Bay of Biscay. On the second story of the Hotel des Girondins a set of shutters had been thrown back and a window was open, indicating to thoughtful souls among the passengers in the Rue Ste. Catherine that the room behind the window was inhabited by some sort of savage—probably American.

Inside the room the barometer was falling. Storm clouds hovered in the west, and the mercury was bulging the top of the thermometer. A lady with sharp patrician features, blue eyes, the magnolia-petal complexion and black hair of Andalusia or Erin, sat gracefully slender and straight, staring through her lorgnette at a letter.

Facing her from the other side of a table, on which the breakfast was growing stale,

sat her husband. He was short, burly, red of cheek. His head had once borne a fine coppery mane, it seemed, but now his forelock was brassy and his temples silvery. He, too, held a letter in his hands and glowered at it through his horn rimmed glasses.

At first the silence in the room was so dense that the noises from outdoors, butting against it in vain, fell back into the street. But soon within the chamber might be heard a genteel hissing as the lady exhaled through her arched nose at irregular but frequent intervals; a certain crescendo gurgling from the man, and the rustling of the sheets of paper in their trembling fingers.

This is what the lady read:

San Francisco, Cal.

MY OWN DEAR MAMMA:

I hope you are well and that you are enjoying your trip.

Oh, I hardly know how to tell you! I have fallen in love with a man since you left, and though I should like to have you and father at the wedding we cannot wait until you return.

He is that handsome clerk in the book store. The one whom we agreed looked like a poet. I think he is one. He hasn't written any yet, but you should hear him talk! He is ever so much more wonderful than I thought when you first called my attention to him, and I shall always be grateful to you for doing it.

By the way, he is a scion of one of the biggest families, and one of the oldest, in English history. Don't think of hurrying back for the wedding—that isn't at all necessary. We have decided not to have a bothersome formal affair.

If it isn't too much trouble please send a lot of cablegrams telling the police to prevent the marriage, and give out good, spirited interviews to the press representatives about it. Pa will know how to get the most advertising out of it for Roy's work.

Your loving daughter,  
VIOLA.

June 15.

Each time the handsome lady reached the end of the letter she turned loose the breath she had been holding and went back to the beginning. Meanwhile her husband was getting up steam with the following:

San Francisco, Cal.

MY OWNEST DADDY:

I hope you are well and that mamma does not have too much trouble in getting you to go to museums and art galleries. You should go to them, you know.

I am sure you will be greatly surprised to hear that I have resigned my position in your offices; but I have the very best of reasons for not remaining there. When I love a person his word is my law, as you know, and as my fiancé does not want me to work after our marriage, which is to occur immediately, I really had to quit.

It is all so wonderful! When you and mother left I would have gone with you but for my determination to become a business woman and be as much of a son to you as possible. Now I have fallen in love with a young business man, and that simplifies matters because *he* will be your son, you see.

He is a salesman at present; but he has larger operations under way which, when concluded, will enable us to live in comfort without depending upon his salary. It would be handy, though, if you could increase my allowance considerably just now.

His name is Roy Jones and he was born in Kansas. Please do not curtail your trip, be-

cause we will probably be married before you could get here, anyway.

If Roy would only consent to a big wedding and a lot of nice publicity I think it might help the sale of his product—don't you? If you could pretend to be very, very angry and get it all into the dispatches maybe that would do just as well.

Your loving daughter,  
VIOLA.

June 15.

When the lady and gentleman had got their respective letters by heart, they crumpled them savagely into balls and looked fiercely at each other.

"I suppose," said the lady, speaking rapidly, "that letter informs you that your poor, romantic daughter has been ensnared by a rogue?"

The gentleman still eyed her sharply; but now there was a difference in his expression.

"I don't know that I would use your term. She probably engineered this herself. Certainly she is not romantic. She seems practical to me—cold blooded, even."

His wife lifted her brows as she replied:

"You admit it? And what of this craving for notoriety? Now, perhaps, you realize the effect upon her of having a father who has contrived to make his name a synonym for dried prunes the world over."

He seemed about to utter a hasty retort, but the swift, even flow of his wife's voice prevented.

"In her heart Viola is essentially romantic, idealistic, like me. It may be just as well for her to marry if in that way she can escape the atmosphere of crass commercialism with which she has been surrounded so long. There is at least nothing sordid about this. She counts her social position as naught when weighed against her love. She condescends to wed a poor man without a word of regret. I dare to say that I do not blame her.

"I expect to be censured for this, and I am resigned. I know that she inherits her generous nature from me. Did I not marry a Stiggs? Her lover seems to have *family*, at least."

Mr. Stiggs, who had with difficulty kept still so far, suddenly found his opening.

"Ha! Family? Yes, he's got plenty of

family, I'll admit that. Family to burn. Jones, his name is—get that, my dear. Roy Jones. A good, plain name, I call it.

"Romantic nothing! There isn't a bit of wishy-washy, namby-pamby romance in the whole thing. I am glad to see that Viola has some of my common sense and practicality. I said she was cold blooded, and I meant it; but I admire her for it. Don't mistake me.

"I realize, however, that she has possibly imbibed some pernicious ideas of a sentimental nature from you. Therefore the wedding must be postponed until I can investigate this Jones. I shall not increase her allowance. I shall not let the slightest hint of this leak out. Thwarted thus, they will have to wait until I relent."

Mrs. Stiggs looked at him glassily.

"I agree with you perfectly," she said in a tone of amazement. "And we must start back at once."

"Of course we must."

They glanced at each other curiously. It was years since they had agreed so readily upon any subject of importance. Each felt that the other was behaving unnaturally. Finally Mr. Stiggs gulped a cup of cold coffee, and with a last worried look at his wife rushed from the room in search of a timetable.

## II.

ON the evening of the same day, but sixteen hours later, such is the difference in time, Viola, having just eaten an early supper at the Cliff House in San Francisco, spoke softly across the table to her husband.

"Roy," she said, "I have deceived you. Instead of being the remote relative and trusted stenographer of the great Stiggs, of Stiggs's Prunes, I am his only child."

Roy Jones's dark eyes, habitually gentle in expression, widened slowly, reminding Viola of a wounded fawn. His lean cheeks paled, and his tall, wiry figure was tense as he exclaimed reproachfully:

"Oh, Viola!"

She nodded her ruddy blond head emphatically, unabashed.

"I would have told you before, you know, but it might have worried you. I

didn't want to trouble you during the honeymoon. If I had done it right at first, you are so honorable and upright and silly and everything that you wouldn't have married me—would you?"

"Hardly."

"I knew it. Don't look at me that way, Roy. I feel like a stranger, and we've been married two weeks. It isn't such a dreadful thing to marry an heiress—is it?"

"Was that why you made me quit my job?" Roy was watching her curiously. "Did you suppose I would live on your money?"

Viola had an entrancing smile. Sometimes you might think her chin was carried just a trifle arrogantly, that her blue eyes sparkled with a metallic gleam, or that her lips were a little too firmly shut, but that was only when you had known her long enough to become inured to her charm, and when you were feeling especially disagreeably critical. Even then, just let her smile!

Her chin became gently round; her eyes, half shut, and shadowed by dark lashes, lost their former likeness to polished jewels, bringing to him on whom they gazed the thought of violets. And then, as this gracious mutation reached its climax, her serene lips parted, softly curving, to grant a fleeting glimpse of little, even teeth. Benevolent despot that Viola was, she never wept or stormed to gain her will. To vanquish the rare hardshell who opposed her whim she simply smiled.

She did it now, reaching across to pat her husband's hand.

"I made you leave that bookstore because they wouldn't give you two weeks' vacation for our honey-half-moon. You shan't go back there, either. That's no place for a man like you who's fond of dogs and horses, and who'd love to learn to box if he could steal a few evenings from reading new novels and reviews. If you were not so nice and persevering and pig-headed, you'd have quit it long ago.

"Besides, you haven't the slightest talent for pretending to be a highbrow. You're too sensible, even, to *want* to be one. So of course you'd never make a real bookman anyhow."

"But I can't do anything else, Viola.

You know that. And if you love me you'll have to agree to it because—"

Viola interrupted him. She had been fumbling in her hand bag, and now she thrust toward him copies of two letters.

"Don't worry, dear," she said confidently. "I have a plan by which you can make a fortune and support me in style. But before I tell you, I want you to read these. I wrote them, just a week before our wedding."

Even in his present distress and doubt, Roy was meekly obedient. He read one letter without comment. He laid it down carefully when he had finished, glanced furtively at Viola, and began the other. As he neared the end of the second letter he looked startled. At last he passed his hand across his forehead worriedly. Holding a sheet of paper in each hand, he compared the two. He dropped them at last and with something like despair in his expression peered at Viola, who looked strangely complacent, even smug.

"Viola," he began, "I don't seem to understand. I suppose I should—you have expressed yourself clearly, but—well—in fact, I must be dull—"

"No, you're not," she assured him. "It's the letters. Tell me just what you think of them."

Roy hesitated, stammered, but at last spoke out doggedly.

"It looks as if you'd lied in one letter, and then, when you wrote the other, forgot what you'd made up before and got out a new set of prevarications. Contradicted yourself, too. I don't say anything about the apparent brutality with which you have treated your parents; but it strikes me you could hardly have done better if you had deliberately tried to prejudice them against me. You might at least have told that I didn't know of their relation to you. They will think I'm a crook."

Viola flushed delicately with a modest lowering of her eyelids.

"That's what I thought," she said.

"What? Viola!"

"Oh, I meant them to think that. I couldn't think of any other way to make them come home. It's my duty to keep them happy and contented, you know. The

letters will fetch them. And what with their secret liking for you, they'll love you as soon as they make your acquaintance."

"I am sure you meant well," said Roy kindly, but sadly. "Though why you think they should have any regard for me, I cannot—"

"But they will," she interrupted—"that is plain enough. My mother is romantic. She is of ancient and exalted lineage, too, so I described you according to her specifications for eligibility. I used the same system on papa," Viola continued. "He admires plain, practical, self-made men like himself. I told him you were one.

"Whether these are lies or not depends upon you, not me. All you have to do is to be dashing, gallant, practical and businesslike—a perfect lover and a financial genius. You'd be that now, if you had any money, and I'll show you how to get it.

"You wonder why I surprised them so cruelly? Well, you see, my father doesn't like to travel, but he went to Europe with my mother as a favor. She went to look up the family records and ancestral estates of her father. They've been there two months, and she has found no family, no lands, no records. Father was getting dyspeptic and sarcastic. Mother was becoming a nervous wreck, but would not give up.

"This news will fix everything. Papa will get back to pie and buckwheat cakes in time to save his health and disposition, and mamma'll be able to say that she could have located her ancestors if she'd had time.

"I didn't want to take any more of my father's money, now, and I wanted to keep our marriage from the general public until you had time to get started; so I asked for money and advertising. They'll cut me off and keep mum."

Roy shook his head wearily. "I doubt whether I shall ever understand you, Viola?" he wondered aloud.

"Roy," she said softly, "happiness is never bought except upon the installment plan. You get the first part on approval—then struggle the rest of your life to pay for that and the remainder of the set.

"We met and loved. That was our trial shipment. But to keep our happiness, and

complete it, a payment was due. I made it. You have admitted that if I had acted differently you would not have married me now. I know that you would never have done so. You would have drudged along and worried over it a while, convincing yourself that you were foolish to love me, and that brown eyed bookkeeper would have got you, the hussy!

"As for not telling my parents what an ignorant, honest, good, foolish thing you are—as for not telling them that you didn't know who I was—nobody could believe it who didn't know you. So I didn't mention it."

"You are more clever than I," said Roy.

"I am," she admitted—"clever and tricky. And a very useful liar. I can guarantee to offset your open and honorable silliness."

She again gave him her hand, and he pressed it hard.

"There, now," she said after blinking rapidly several times. "Let's hurry. You must take me home and begin to make your fortune before dark."

"Home? You mean the hotel?"

"Oh, yes," she agreed. "We must go there first, to get our luggage. Then we keep our tryst with Opportunity. Don't get excited, dear. I'm not taking you to the family mansion."

### III.

AND, as it proved, she certainly was not. Roy was surprised and unnerved as, carrying two heavy traveling bags, he stood on the sidewalk looking up at the place she called "home." The more so as Viola had so far refused to tell him what it was that she wanted him to do.

But it was not its distance above the roadway which astonished him. No. A San Franciscan thinks little of having his front door fifty feet above the sidewalk. It was the tall wooden house itself, and the neighborhood, which made Viola's choice seem eccentric.

It was a two-story building, eight sided, with a door and two windows in each side of the ground floor, three windows in each side of the second story, and a pyramidal roof surmounted by an octagonal cupola.

It was painted a grass green with white trimmings.

The knoll on which the house stood was half a block wide at the base and sloped so steeply that it was still forty feet wide on its flat top. It stood squarely between two streets, facing on a third. Yet, for all its height a steeper hill rose higher just behind it. The foundations of the towering tenements next door were as high as the second story windows of the house on the knoll. On the side where Roy stood, the ground was level for three hundred yards or more, all the way to the docks on the bay.

Though Roy had never been there before, as many San Franciscans have not, he knew that this North Beach district was a strange place for Viola to live. A district of tenements inhabited by hucksters, fishermen, laborers and bootleggers. A district full of hand laundries, macaroni factories; strange odors of frying oil and crushed grapes, and fish and garlic. This, from the crest of the hills to the street at the foot of the knoll. From there to the water's edge—warehouses and factories; docks and ships.

Roy followed Viola through a tottery gate in a wooden fence and up a flight of stairs, half concealed in the luxuriant wild grass which clothed the knoll, to the wide wooden platform which encircled the odd house. Here he dropped his burden and sat down, panting, on the top step.

Viola settled herself beside him, and, with the house at their backs, they rested a moment, looking out at Telegraph Hill upon the right, the heights toward Fort Baker on the left, and straight ahead, the roofs, the wharves, the ships, the narrowed neck of the bay and beyond that, the purple hills of Marin County marching down into the Golden Gate.

When she had got her breath Viola explained a little.

"This is my house, Roy," she said, "my only dowry. It was left me by my grandmother. I furnished it and have been living here with a servant ever since I have known you. That's why I never let you take me home—afraid you would be offended by the neighborhood and quit me.

"I sent the girl back to father's house

in Burlingame, by messenger, this morning. She and her husband stayed here while we were on our wedding tour. It is our only property at present, and apropos of my remarks on happiness earlier this evening, I think you may be interested to know that even this geometrical love nest may not be ours to enjoy without a struggle."

"But isn't it yours now?"

"Yes. But some one is trying to steal the greater part of it."

"Steal it?"

"Yes. The important part. The house is worth nothing, practically. And the lot is valueless in spite of the crowded locality, because nothing worth while can be built here until this knoll is leveled at tremendous expense. The value here is all in the hidden treasure, and a man is trying to steal that."

"Treasure!" Roy exclaimed. "Now, Viola, don't keep startling me this way. Everything you've said to-day has been a little more astonishing than the previous statement. If it isn't asking too much, would you mind telling me about this house and the treasure and the person who is trying to steal it?"

"It is strange, isn't it?" remarked Viola cheerfully. "First I'll tell you about my grandfather and this house which he built. My mother's father, I mean, the French nobleman. He came here and built it during the gold rush, gathered a fortune and hid it without telling anybody, and then died.

"The old nobleman's end was tragic. He passed away from concussion of the brain sustained by falling off this roof while attempting to raise a flag on the cupola in memory of the second election of General Grant. His last words were concerned with the treasure, but he didn't have time to tell it all. He said: 'If you ever need money look behind the old mop.'

"My grandmother followed this advice at once. The only mop she knew of was one in a broom closet beside the fireplace. She looked behind that, even tore out the closet and part of the chimney, but never found the treasure. My mother has searched, too, and I have, but *we* never found it. We would have decided, perhaps, that there

had never been a treasure, if it were not that this mysterious chap comes every so often and tries to steal it.

"He came once, just before my grandmother died, and frightened her nearly out of her wits before she drove him away with a muzzle loading revolver. He came once more when there was only a caretaker in the house, and tried to break in at intervals for nearly two weeks. However, after being captured by the police and escaping again on the way to the jail, he disappeared. Now, however, he is back again, and to make it more certain than ever that it is the treasure he is after, he accidentally left a cryptogram, undoubtedly written by my mother's father, telling where the treasure is hidden."

"He did?" Roy exclaimed. "Where is it hidden, then?"

"I don't know," Viola admitted. "I haven't been able to read the cryptogram. That's what I want you to help me with."

"And you persuaded me to quit my job so that I could help you search for it?"

"Yes."

"I think, Viola, dear," said Roy, "that this is the most senseless proceeding I have ever heard of, but I assure you I shall enjoy it immensely. We can live on the remnant of my savings as long as possible, and hunt this hidden hoard. When we are entirely exhausted financially, and sure that we are not to find any money I can go to work again. By that time you will probably be ready to return to your parents."

He broke suddenly into loud laughter.

Viola was astounded at the bitter, hard undercurrent of feeling in his voice. She was hurt and dismayed that he failed to believe in the treasure.

"I think we may as well go in," she said.

#### IV.

DESPITE the bizarre look of the exterior, the inside of the house proved a cheery place enough. Two sides of the big single room which was the lower floor, were occupied by the great fireplace, and the stairway to the upper floor. Only one of the six doors seemed to be in use. The other five were blocked by pieces of furniture—

two heavy bookcases, a writing desk, a cabinet phonograph, a grand piano. Divans and window seats stood across the angles under the windows and between the doors, reducing somewhat the apparent size of the enormous room.

Now, with polished floor reflecting the light of the half dozen quaint ship's lanterns which, at Viola's direction, Roy lighted and hung from hooks on the heavy ceiling beams and the wooden pillar in the center of the floor, its air was much more homely and comfortable than he had expected. He would have liked to examine the apartment in detail, but Viola beckoned him to a place beside her on one of the window seats while she struggled to unlock the antique and massive oaken escritoire with a tiny brass key which Roy had noticed she wore like a bangle on a strand of gold chain about her wrist.

"There," she said as finally it yielded to her struggles, "please tell me what that means."

He stared at a slip of paper bearing the words and design here reproduced:

LANCY ~~III~~ - ~~III~~ // WON  
 LUCK IT HOLE  
 MOP ILL 2HON  
 ROW WZELL  
 OH ~~2~~ ZAY  
 OGAW ~~III~~ - ~~III~~ // WON  
 JOB IF MUK2  
 TK IT PINT IF  
 APPRA WOOL TILL  
 WERE TWOFINE  
 HAY THIN RILLICKS  
 BILL TILL BAR NUM

"But this is new paper!" he protested instantly. "And that writing is not more

than a few weeks old. The ink has barely turned from blue to black."

"Of course it isn't the original," she assured him. "You can hardly read that, it's so faded. This is a tracing I made. It is absolutely accurate."

Roy still regarded the jumble of letters with a frown of reluctant and perplexed interest.

"What," he again inquired, "is the meaning, if any, of this jagged line on the left and the straight border on the other side and the ends?"

"I drew it," she said, "and very carefully, too. It represents exactly the size and shape of the piece of paper on which the original was written. The left hand edge of that was rough, uneven and shredded. I think the note must have been written on a page torn from a notebook."

Roy nodded, then laid the thing aside and turned to Viola with the kindly yet patronizing air with which one explains to a child that there cannot be a bear in the upper hall.

"Now, Viola," he said, "just why do you attach such importance to this scribble?"

Viola sighed, as women must in dealing with the slower if more logical sex, and gave her reasons.

"It came to me from the hands of the mysterious prowler. He missed it, came back after it, and took it away with him again. So it must be something valuable. The value doesn't show on the surface, so it must be a cryptogram. I should think you could see that. I know that it relates to the treasure some way, and even if I didn't, there's the word mop to prove it."

"You got it from the prowler?"

"I did; but I don't think he knows it. The day I came to see about fitting this house up to live in, I surprised an intruder, a man. He saw me coming, that is, and as I reached the top of the knoll he burst out of the house through a door on the opposite side and ran away. He left the original of this note behind him. He couldn't have been in the house long, for the old man who was taking care of the place for me was pottering about upstairs and had seen no one.

"I suspected the value of what I had

found; so I copied it and left the original outside on the platform, making sure that it couldn't blow away. That night the watchman heard somebody trying to break in, and in the morning the slip of paper was gone."

"That is different," Roy admitted eagerly. "I begin to think that you have something which, if not valuable, is at least the key to a mystery."

"But I am afraid that this is only a portion of the cryptogram. In fact, if the torn-off part were restored, there might be little difficulty in reading it. My theory is that the other half of this sheet of paper is concealed somewhere in the house. Your nocturnal prowler knows that and is looking for it. Now if he, with greater information than we possess, cannot read the cipher nor find what he is seeking it would be useless for us to attempt it. I think the proper thing for us to do is first capture your burglar, then force him to divulge whatever information on the subject he may have."

Viola clapped her hands softly; but dropped them into her lap as an objection occurred to her.

"But we mustn't call in the police, Roy. I want to surprise everybody when we get the money. And you mustn't be reckless."

"I shall be in no danger," said Roy. "A person as timorous as he seems to be, cannot be a man of great physical strength or hardihood. Has he been trying to break in lately?"

"Indeed he has. The people who have been staying here say that he has not missed a night in the last two weeks. They had a system of strings connected to all the doors and windows in this room in such a manner that if any one of the cords was disturbed it overbalanced a keg containing several cowbells and caused it to roll down the staircase from the second floor. They were never able to catch the disturber, although he was so persistent, forcing them to get up several times every night to reset their mechanism, that they were quite worn out and ready to give notice when I relieved them of their duties here."

"Ah!" said Roy, thoughtfully. "Of course they could not catch him. The chap was warned as soon as they were. Now

I intend to let him think that you are here alone. He will approach as boldly as ever. I shall be in waiting and surprise him. He cannot elude me; for I shall be outside the house."

"But suppose he has some coign of vantage near by from which he watches?" Viola asked. "He probably makes certain that the coast is clear before he approaches."

"That is most likely," Roy agreed, "but hark!"

They listened, and in a moment a distant, prolonged, hoarse bellow came faintly to them from the west. He beckoned her to the door and opened it. More loudly now, carried by a cold, damp smelling wind, the melancholy siren roared again.

"One of the outer stations sounding its fog signal," Roy told her. "I think that with this wind to carry it, the night will be thick enough for our purpose within half an hour. If you are not afraid I can pretend to go now, while it is clear. As soon as the mist is thick enough I shall creep back."

Viola demurred somewhat at this plan, chiefly, it seemed, because she was to have little part in the excitement. But she did agree, finally, stipulating that Roy was to whistle a few bars of the Barcarolle from "Hoffman" as a signal the instant the fun started. Viola held the door wide for a minute or two while Roy made an elaborate farewell for the benefit of any spectator. Then he clattered loudly down the wooden steps while she went slowly inside.

## V.

RETURNING through the fog after a swiftly circuitous walk through the back alleys of the neighborhood, Roy was by no means certain that he knew his way until at last his outthrust hands encountered the damp and spongy top rail of a fence. He recalled then that there had been such a barrier around the knoll, and climbed it. He went forward even more cautiously now, through damp, tangible dark, through grass that soaked him to the knees.

He could see nothing. At the fence the street behind him where an arc light was barely visible, but plainly audible, had

seemed slightly less dark than the space ahead. But before he had gone a dozen paces, strain his eyes as he might, there seemed nowhere the slightest graying of the absolute murk. At the hundredth step, twice the distance from the fence to the bottom of the knoll, he knew that he was confused; and halted.

At once, now that his own movement had ceased, there came to his ears the sound of heavy breathing; the slither of damp soles on smooth, hard footing; and a hollow, intermittent bumping. All this was directly in front of him, and so close that he automatically recoiled a step from sheer surprise. The next instant he rushed forward, tripped, and sprawled on wet planks.

The shuffling and bumping could still be heard plainly, but now it was going from him. Not in a normal manner, however. The noise, exactly similar to that of a man in tennis shoes kicking an empty keg along a boardwalk, was mounting up into the air in eerie style.

Shuffle, shuffle, tunk!

At first the boards on which Roy lay had been vibrating in unison with it; but now the sound was high above him.

Roy started again, but more cautiously, and again was stopped sharply, bruising his shins against the stairway which led up the knoll. He hastened upward, following the noise. He stopped at the top to listen; but heard nothing. He ascertained by feeling that the nearest door and the dark windows at each side of it were still securely fastened, and moved on to the next facet of the house.

Here also everything was secure. He moved stealthily on. He was examining the ninth door when he remembered that the building held eight only. He stopped to consider the matter and was badly startled when a sweet voice whispered, somewhere in the night: "Was that you, Roy?"

Pawing nervously about him in the dark Roy answered

"Viola, Viola!"

"Oh, there you are," came the reply calmly. "Where have you been?"

"Oh, all around. Where are you?"

"At my window, of course."

"Oh."

"What are you doing now?" Viola asked, after a short pause.

"Why, I was thinking," said Roy. "I was wondering where the fellow had gone. Perhaps I've frightened him away."

Viola's silvery response held just a hint of impatience.

"Hardly. He went up on the roof."

"On the roof? What is he doing there?"

"I don't know. You're supposed to be watching him. Why are you whispering? Have you caught cold?"

Roy spoke louder, but humbly still. "Won't he hear us talking?"

"He can't. I think I can hear him moving about inside now. In the cupola. He climbed up a ladder. I can't understand why you don't know that. He made so much noise carrying it that he woke me. You must be right beside it."

"Ouch!" exclaimed Roy. "Yes, here it is."

He had backed up in a futile effort to see the roof and in doing so had struck his head against the underside of the ladder, whose foot was planted near the outer edge of the walk.

The feeling of futility which always oppressed him in Viola's presence, the melancholy certitude that whatever he did would probably be wrong, had been especially strong during their last conversation. He had sensed that she was again disappointed in him. Here now was the opportunity to do something on his own initiative. Without pausing for speech he trotted up, crouched in the gutter of the roof long enough to give the ladder a mighty kick, and facing about, started to climb the slope of the roof on all fours.

Luckily the roof was not steep, for it was very slippery. Roy reached the cupola quickly, and clinging to the two corners, for it was not more than five feet on a side, rose on his knees to peer over a window sill waist high above the roof.

The window, hinged at top, was unfastened and swayed at the touch of his nose. But Roy did not enter at once; for there was a light in the tower, and the scene he beheld convinced him there was more to gain by waiting a bit.

The floor of the eight-sided room was two

feet below the roof. From Roy's point of view the interior was like a pit, but the purpose of the tower was made evident by a three foot brass telescope, mottled with verdigris, which hung from the ceiling by an iron bar and adjustable gimbals, its big end facing out to sea. However, Roy's more immediate interest centered in the dark, indistinct human figure who, stooping low, was scrutinizing the rectangle of wall on one side of the room below the window frame.

With his back to Roy and his face pressed close to the figured wall paper, the fellow was going over it inch by inch—peering, feeling, prodding with his fingers, rapping with his knuckles. Suddenly the trespasser seized a thick piece of lighted candle stuck on a bench against the wall, and, moving it closer, fixed it firmly again. Then drawing a daggerlike knife from his waistband, he began to peel away the wall paper from the center of the space he had been investigating.

Roy tilted the window inward with one hand and lowered his leg over the sill. The burglar, engrossed in his mysterious operation, did not notice the slight sound. Roy was breathing fast with excitement. He moved with the utmost stealth. From the window sill he slid down until his feet touched the floor. Crouching so slowly that his knees creaked with effort, he swung the window shut and bolted it.

Certain that the stranger was about to uncover the treasure, Roy planned to let him do so, then force him to disgorge. Though he did not waver in this determination, he began to wonder, as the moments passed, by what means he could accomplish his end. He saw, all but too late, that the fellow was taller than he; also inches broader in the back; and that the huge, scarred hands plied the wickedly sharp knife with ominous skill.

Roy reflected that the sort of husband Viola deserved could knock a burglar senseless with a blow of his fist. But Roy feared that such a feat was beyond him. It sounded difficult and he had never tried it. He wished now that he had made a practice of assaulting brawny strangers from time to time, to get his hand in.

He decided, with regret, to abandon the heroic style. He reached upward to lift the heavy telescope from its gimbals. A rusty creaking attracted his attention toward the floor. A trapdoor, the only means of entering the cupola from inside the house, rose, groaning, three inches. Then it dropped with a bang.

The robber whirled at the sound, facing Roy for the first time.

He was wearing a pea-jacket with the collar turned up to his ears, and his old, flapped cap was pulled low. Yet Roy saw, to his intense surprise, peering out from under the cap, above the big, burly body, the face of a man no longer young. The eyes, though bright and quick, seemed sunken under wrinkled lids. The cheeks were flattened, bowed inward. The jaw was as sharp as the corner of a board, and the point of the projecting chin was frosted with a silvery stubble.

Roy had been ready to act, but the unexpected quality of his foe caused him to hesitate. The thought of striking a middle-aged man under the ear with a twenty pound telescope was one which offended his sense of propriety. Instead he stood up and started forward with the intention of being gentle but firm.

The prowler did not wait. With a snarl of rage he flew into action of appalling violence. Carried away, apparently, by uncontrollable passion, he dashed his fist against the wall, actually sinking his hand into it above the wrist. Roy halted involuntarily at this feat of strength, a sudden weakness afflicting the pit of his stomach. The burglar withdrew his fist and doused the candle with a sweep of his free hand.

The trap had been rising again before the light went out, but it thudded shut just as Roy was knocked off his feet and flung aside by the intruder, who was rushing toward the window.

Roy's only injury was that to his sensibility. His feelings were hurt. He lost his temper and his former scruples at the same instant he lost his breath. He had no sooner struck the floor than he tried to rise, but something held him by the ankle with a grip like the jaws of a bear trap.

One tug assured Roy that he could never

pull loose, yet such was his rage that he ignored his suffering and, stretching out at full length, groped fiercely. As the burglar had just got the window open and was passing out Roy's fingers found and seized the tail of the pea-jacket.

Roy dug in his nails and gritted his teeth. The burglar, cursing horribly, pulled like a mule. Roy wondered, panting, who would weaken first. Meanwhile the strain on his fingers and arms was becoming greater and greater as the miscreant gradually developed his full drawbar horse power. Also his cursing, in a hoarse yet high pitched voice, was becoming truly frightful.

At this juncture Roy experienced a new and peculiarly excruciating twinge in his ankle. It felt exactly as though some one were sticking pins into him. He groaned and spasmodically contracted his muscles with the strength of frenzy.

There was a ripping sound. A piece of cloth came away in Roy's hands, and he fell slackly against the floor listening to a swift, rushing sound, as the robber, so suddenly released, tobogganed down the slippery roof. The sliding noise ceased. Roy pictured the body hurtling from the eaves off into space. A single wild cry, faint with distance, reached his ears.

## VI.

Roy was shocked by the sudden fate which had overtaken the hoary desperado, but he was granted no leisure in which to philosophize about it. Another stabbing pain in his ankle caused him to writhe and cry out with an intuition born of necessity:

"Viola! Stop hurting me! You've caught my foot in the trapdoor."

As he had suspected, Viola was close at hand. She answered at once, icily:

"My name is Mrs. Jones, to you. The sooner you tell me where the treasure is, and the more respectful you are about it, the sooner I shall release you."

"But I'm Roy. The robber's gone."

Viola retorted skeptically: "Then whistle the signal we agreed upon."

"I can't. He kicked me in the mouth and my lips are swollen," Roy informed her

after an ineffectual effort. "Don't you recognize my shoe and sock?"

There was silence for a moment, while Viola examined the evidence, then the pressure on Roy's ankle was suddenly released. The trapdoor flew open and Viola climbed through it, carrying a lamp. Roy's first glance at her was one of reproach, but his sweet disposition immediately prevailed and he smiled forgivingly.

He related briefly his adventure, while renewing the circulation in his foot, and as soon as he could stand they hurried downstairs to look for the robber's remains.

It was a ghastly business—searching the side of the knoll in the fog with only the lamp to guide them, dreading to find the thing they sought. They clung to each other and spoke little, thinking soberly, wondering whether they were entirely free of responsibility for the fate of this their fellow creature. It was not until they had scanned one whole side of the knoll from top to bottom that they began to hope; but when finally they reached the fence itself and made a complete circuit of the knoll without stumbling over a corpse, they turned to each other silently, entering each other's arms, damp cheek against damp cheek in wordless gratitude.

A few minutes later found them again in the watchtower. The candle still lay unlighted and the window through which the robber had made his hurried exit was closed. Viola went straight to the hole in the wall, but after a moment's investigation she withdrew her hand, blackened with dust, looking both surprised and disappointed. Roy, too, felt around in the hole, finding, oddly enough, a perfectly smooth, empty recess behind it about six inches square. He had withdrawn his fist, slightly tearing the paper at the edge of the opening when Viola bent again to look at it.

"Why, no wonder he could put his fist through it if he knew the right place," she cried—"it's nothing but paper!"

"But how did he know it?"

"I think," said Viola, "that the treasure was there, and he knew it. He broke in and snatched the jewels when you surprised him, but until then he probably intended to pull the paper away neatly and

paste it back again so that the patching might pass unnoticed until he was beyond pursuit."

"But, jewelry?" exclaimed Roy. "And you think he got it?"

"If not in the form of jewelry, how else could a treasure of great value be compact enough to carry away in one hand? Whether he got them or not I don't know."

"He must have," declared Roy despondently. "It isn't there now. Or perhaps somebody beat him to it. For I don't think he could have got anything without my seeing it."

"But perhaps you did. Think hard. Try to remember," Viola persisted.

"Hum!" Roy ejaculated. He bowed his head and placed his hands over his eyes for a minute. Then he slowly looked up again.

"Viola," he said sadly, "I guess the hunt is over. After he made the hole in the wall he put his hand into his pocket."

"Which pocket?"

"His right hand coat pocket. Oh, why didn't the old villain break his neck! You were right, Viola—it must have been a jewel. And he's got it—he's—"

"I think not," Viola interrupted. "I've been asking questions simply because I did not want to be disappointed. Roy, tell me, what is that?"

Astonished, Roy leaned forward and followed the direction of her stare. Then he pounced upon something lying in the shadow against the wall.

"The piece of jacket I tore off. And from the right side at that, with the pocket in it!"

He started to fumble at the flap, but stopped quickly and handed the rag to Viola. She accepted it and drew out at once an extremely short stemmed corn-cob pipe, blackened and stained and odorous, which she placed on the bench beside her as far away as she could reach. Next she produced a small piece of plug tobacco, which she placed beside the pipe. Then a pocket notebook bound in brown calfskin. But though she turned the pocket inside out, it held no more.

"I was wrong," said Viola, holding up the notebook. "It was this he came for,

not the treasure. This must be the key to the cipher."

Roy dropped down beside her on the bench while she opened the book and flipped over the pages. All were blank. She closed it and turned her bewildered eyes to Roy.

"But look here, Viola—see here?"

He took the book from her and, opening it again, pointed to the slightly protruding ragged edge of what had been the first leaf.

"See? He has torn out a page."

Speechless, they stared at one another for a moment.

"Oh!" cried Viola.

They jumped up and side by side ran down the stairs to the old writing desk. The left edge of Viola's copy of the cryptogram corresponded exactly with the ragged ruffle where the page had been torn from the notebook.

"It means something—but what?" Viola remarked.

"I think," Roy answered deferentially, "that it means he, like ourselves, was unable to read the cipher, but knew where the notebook was, and came after it hoping or knowing that it contained additional information. If I am right we are more than even with him, for we are in possession of the property."

"But what shall we do?"

Here at last Roy was not at a loss. His extensive reading had made the proper procedure in such cases perfectly familiar.

"We must learn the secret of the cryptogram at once," he declared. "We must try every method of reading it. Also, it is more than likely that the seemingly blank pages of that notebook have been written upon with sympathetic ink. We must test them. We had better try heating one portion of each sheet, dipping another in dilute acid, and washing the third with an alkaline solution."

"I could do that, I think," Viola offered eagerly. "You try to decipher the cipher, while I do the chemical experiments."

A coal fire had been laid in the grate, and now Viola lighted it and busied herself with toasting fork and trays of vinegar and soda water. Roy sat at the writing desk. He held a pencil in his hand poised over a

sheaf of clean white paper. With furrowed brow he gazed alternately at the cryptogram and at an open copy of "The Gold Bug."

## VII.

THE fog had gone and the light of a new day was beginning to dim the lamps when Viola finished toasting the last page, and Roy, gathering up an armful of scribbled sheets, came to add them to the fire.

"I have found nothing," Viola told him wearily.

"Nor have I. It's odd, too. I have tried every method of reading ciphers that I ever heard of, and some I invented, but none of them worked."

"How he expected grandmother to read it, I don't know."

"The key to it all was behind the old mop," declared Roy. "Wherever that may have been."

Viola nodded as he helped her to her feet.

"Look," she said, going to the eastern windows—"it is just growing light. We have been up all night. I don't think I ever did such a thing before—except at a party. I shall make some coffee and waffles before we worry about this treasure any more."

Roy did not answer. Convinced by the events of the past evening that there really was a treasure, his constitutional dread of the future, his lack of confidence in his own abilities had left him for a time. Buoyed up by the thought that a great stroke of good fortune was to befall him, he had dreamed grand dreams. He had always felt, secretly, that with a little capital to start him he could do great things in business.

Now, tired mentally and physically, at the end of his resources, he thought blackly of poverty, misery and dishonor. And yet, this being the nature of mundane affairs, within a few seconds he was to strike a new scent.

As Viola started upstairs to the kitchen there was a single loud knock at the front door. They were both nervous. They both twitched at the startling sound, and Viola only half smothered a scream. With irri-

table reaction Roy ran to the door, flung it open and, seeing no one there, rushed outside. A moment later he returned with the morning paper in his hand.

"Oh," said Viola, greatly relieved—"that awful newsboy. He always throws it like that. Some mornings he wakes me up. I thought that horrid man had come back—or the police to arrest us for murdering him. But of course I knew he wasn't murdered at all; I mean I just felt that way because I was startled—"

But Roy was not listening.

"Look at that," he interrupted, pointing to the top of the right hand column on the front page of the paper. "Just read that, Viola."

It was, properly, an obscure hospital item, and did not deserve its place. But the editor had seen in it a chance to knock the police department and rail at careless motorists, two things he was keen on doing just then; so he had rewritten the bald report and given it a prominent position. However, Viola's interest was in the story itself, which, with headlines omitted, ran as follows:

The victim of police laxity and inefficiency in curbing reckless driving, an elderly man was run down last night on the North Beach and spent several hours wandering in search of help before finding a patrolman.

At the Emergency Hospital where he was brought in at eleven o'clock the victim, who gave the name of Sydney Cove, declared that he was struck down without warning while crossing Lombard Street near the Presidio and, painfully injured, made his way along the water front halfway to the Ferry Building without meeting a policeman.

He cornered one at last near the foot of Telegraph Hill, Roundsman Daniel Grogan, who sent in the call for the ambulance.

The victim's injuries were diagnosed as sprains and bruises of the right arm and shoulder, bruises and abrasions of the head and entire right side, and possible internal injuries. He was unable to give the license number or furnish a description of the machine that struck him, owing to the heavy fog; but the police, as usual, claim to have a clew.

Cove gave his occupation as seaman and Australia as his home. His injuries are not considered likely to prove fatal.

"But," said Viola, guessing at Roy's thought, "this can't be our man. He

wandered for hours, it says, and he got hurt out by the Presidio."

"That's what he told them," Roy agreed, "but you noticed, of course, that he was found within a few blocks of this house, barely half an hour after our man fell from the roof. I shall call on him at the hospital to see, anyway."

Roy attempted to telephone for a taxi after breakfast, but found the telephone wires broken, which accounted for the burglar's miraculous escape from death, for he must have fallen across them about half-way to the ground, checking in a great measure the force of his descent. Viola contended that they would not be allowed to visit the hospital at such an hour, and that the street car was a conveyance better suited to their financial status. Roy proved unusually stubborn, though, and finally went out to look for a public phone. Some half hour later, as they rode luxuriously toward the hospital, he explained his plans.

"While I was about it I called the steward at the Emergency, and asked whether any one had come forward to befriend the unfortunate Mr. Cove and remove him, perhaps, to more homelike surroundings. I was told that some one had done so, and that the patient was to be removed where he could be taken care of at this good fellow's expense, at nine o'clock."

"Some philanthropist? Do you know who? Where is he going to?"

"Not a philanthropist, I am afraid. One of Cove's pals. They are taking this method of removing him from the observation of the police. Once he leaves his present quarters I doubt whether we should ever find him again."

"But what can we do?" Viola asked.

"It has been arranged," declared Roy darkly.

Viola was greatly astonished at this evidence of secretiveness and low cunning on Roy's part; but she would undoubtedly have wormed his scheme from him if the taxi had not come to a stop just then at their destination.

Roy got out, beckoned the driver, and crisply telling Viola to wait, went into the jail-like, highly odorous building.

Ten minutes elapsed before they came

out again, and Viola was becoming greatly worried, not only by the constant motion of the taximeter, but also by visions of Roy under arrest. At last, however, they reappeared, the chauffeur and a white jacketed hospital attendant staggering as they carried the much bandaged and carelessly dressed figure of a large and bulky man.

Viola could only see one of this fellow's eyes and a part of each cheek, the rest of his head and face being swathed in white gauze; but from the startled, slightly blood-shot stare with which he regarded her, and the struggles he immediately began, she saw that he recognized her. The fellow was not crippled, but cleverly bound and gagged with bandages. She suspected that Roy had corrupted a public servant.

Roy opened the door, the (im)patient was placed tenderly upon a folding seat, and Roy got in, grinning at Viola.

The prisoner attempted immediately to thrust his head out of the open window to howl at some one on the sidewalk, but Roy easily held him in place until the cab had sped around a corner. Then, as though realizing there was no hope of escape, Cove settled back into his corner and demanded, in the weird jargon of the transplanted cockney, "What's yer gime, hi? 'Oo are yer? Wot the bladder o' lard, any'ow?"

"I want to know why you have been breaking into our house," Viola told him firmly. She held up the copy of the cipher and the notebook before his bulging eyes. Unless you tell us all you know about the treasure, we shall turn you over to the authorities and charge you with housebreaking and assault."

"Yus, missus, ye're at 'ome 'ere, an' I am in a stryngge land. Yer could land me in the work'us if yer was minded. But 'ow if I told yer? Wot would yer do wif me then, hi?"

"I should return you to the hospital, of course."

"Ow I never 'eard of the bloomin' treasure before," declared Cove sullenly.

"You know you did."

"I never."

"You're lying."

"Ow 'old yer blasted row!"

"Here, no more of that," said Roy sharply. "Viola, he doesn't want to go back to the hospital, of course. Now, old-timer, keep your own counsel and go to jail, or tell us what you know about this treasure and go wherever you please. Speak up."

"Missus," whined Cove, "I can't go 'umpin' me bluey abaht in this rig. Will you an' yer man hike out o' this if I tells yer? Will yer leave me to go in the cab an' not set the bobbies on ter me?"

She nodded, after exchanging a glance with Roy.

Cove spoke eagerly. His manner was as convincing as the circumstantial nature of his tale. They did not wish to believe him, but all the same they did.

"I've never read the note," he began, "an' weary the years I be'n tryin' it on. I was a lad just, but great pals with Dinivin. 'Syd,' 'e says, 'I've found a great treasure hid. Share an' share alike is the lay, Syd, if you'll help me when the time comes.'

"It was up in the lookout where yer found me last night that we was talkin'. 'E said somethin' abaht wantin' me to 'elp 'im dig it out an' to be sure to keep it a secret. Then he took the logbook yer 'ave there out of 'is pocket an' started to write into it. I remember plain as 'ow 'e says 'e was leavin' a record abaht the treasure ter pervide fer me an' 'is fam'ly if 'e was to be took off suddent.

"Every wunst in a w'ile 'e'd arsk fer the spellin's o' a word, knowin' that I'd be'n eddicated. All in a blink, though, as yer might call it, a murderin' row started in the taproom below.

"'E took an' shoved the book into that cubby'ole I got it from larst night, an' tumbled below to 'eave out the drunks. I was afride 'e might ferget 'is promise, so I 'ooked the writin' from the book afore I follered 'im.

"Strynge to s'y, I was shanghaied aboard a ship that very night an' took back to Austrilyer. Nigh fifty years gone that was, an' swelp me if I've read 'is bloomin' fist yet. A sylor's life if 'ard, missus, an' 'e carn't be w'ere 'e likes. 'Tis seldom I've made this port, but every time, seein' as Dinivin was dead an' 'is fam'ly no friends

to me, I'd 'ave a try at gettin' to the book to see if there was summat in it I'd missed. Larst night I mide it."

The old fellow stopped, sighed, and gazed fixedly at the brown leather volume.

"Ain't there nothen in there abaht it?"

"No," said Viola, "there is not. If there had been, we would not have bothered you. Roy, let us get out and leave this man."

There was something like nausea in the tightened expression of Viola's pale lips, something like pain in her clear eyes, and so, though there were questions that Roy wanted to ask, he stopped the cab and helped her out.

### VIII.

"TAKE me home, please," Viola said, slipping her hand under Roy's arm when the cab had gone, carrying away Sydney Cove. "And let's walk. It isn't far, and I can think more clearly walking."

Roy was uncomfortably conscious that Viola was troubled. Also that she did not wish to confide in him.

"Shall I talk, or no?" he inquired after they had walked a block without speaking.

"No. You must think," she answered. "I want to talk. Roy, I—I am selfish. I wish we had never heard of the treasure. I hope we never find it. I wish that old pirate had it—all of it. I know that I am mean and wicked and selfish, but I can't help it."

Roy caught his breath. "But, Viola—why?"

She looked up at him with troubled eyes.

"Roy, I can't stand disgrace. But it isn't all for myself, truly. That Sydney Cove is bound to demand his share; it will leak out; we can't keep it secret, and it will simply kill my mother."

"But what?" cried Roy. "What disgrace?"

Viola bowed her head.

"I hate to tell even you," she said; "but I will."

She began her explanation with a question: "Roy, doesn't 'Sydney Cove' sound familiar to you? Doesn't it suggest the same awful thing to you that it does to me?"

"Why, no, I guess not."

"Well, then," she continued, "think of your San Francisco history. Don't you recall the Sydney Cove in the days of the Vigilance Committee?"

"Yes," he assented excitedly. "A lot of Australian ruffians and bullies, were they not, who robbed and murdered the citizens until a few of them were killed and the rest driven away?"

Viola nodded, and went on explaining.

"You see, then? This man is not, of course, old enough to have been a member of the original gang, but he is probably the son of one of them. He must have been given that name as a joke, and is either too ignorant or too brazen to want to change it.

"Now this ruffian, this descendant of ruffians, was in my grandfather's confidence. I know from what he has told me that this much was true. He knows my grandfather's name, De Novanne. He knows that our home on the knoll was originally a tavern. My mother has been very careful to keep that a secret, too.

"The evidence is very clear to me that the treasure is the bloodstained spoils of the Sydney Coves, which they were unable to take away when the Vigilantes came down on them. What else could it be? Why, otherwise, should my grandfather give part of it to this rascally friend of his? And, remembering this, can my grandfather's name be longer venerated? Can his memory be held sacred? Can my mother pride herself now on her illustrious descent? Oh, it is terrible."

"It certainly looks bad," said Roy; "but—"

"If you can suggest any good reason why an honest man should make a confidant of that horrible old Cove I may begin to hope," she retorted quickly.

Roy pondered a moment, then spoke brightly.

"There is a reason. I knew I had one if I could only think of it. Why, old Cove himself explained that. He said your grandfather called him in to spell—"

"That is ridiculous."

"How is it ridiculous?"

Viola held her chin very high and looked at him from the corners of her eyes.

"Do you think it likely," she returned, "that a man who could invent such an ingenious cryptogram would require the assistance of a Sydney Cove in writing it down?"

"It isn't likely, I admit that," Roy argued; "but it's possible. He might be as brilliant as anything, and still a little hazy on spelling. Lots of people are. I am. Besides, look at the words. I never heard of most of them before. I bet Shakespeare himself—"

Viola's response was a trifle tart.

"The best way to dispose of this senseless argument, and explain to you why my grandfather was never suspected of anything like this before, is to tell you his story. You are a member of the family now, and should know it, of course."

"He was touring the world and happened to be on his way here when the gold rush started. He stopped off here and let his ship go on, while he visited the gold diggings. Then he met my grandmother, the Señorita Ynez, the belle of her father's rancho near San Jose. They fell in love; they eloped; they were married with the dust cloud raised by her relatives' horses approaching like the wind.

"Just as the American *alcalde* and justice of the peace concluded the ceremony the enraged relatives burst in upon them, led by a man who had once been my grandfather's friend and later his rival for the hand of the fair Ynez.

"My grandfather drew a derringer and wounded his rival. He was prepared to fight to the death, but Ynez shielded him with her body, and the bystanders interceded for the lovers. Her father's angry protests and exclamations made something clear to my grandfather which he had not understood before. The family's objections had all been due to the lies of the wretched rival.

"Seeing that his own suit was hopeless, he had tried to discredit my grandfather. He had told Don Alfonso, Ynez's father, that my grandfather was an ignorant Irish sailor named Donovan, who had deserted his ship in San Francisco, because he was too lazy to work.

"My grandfather was furious when this

preposterous charge was made to him. His hot Latin blood boiled. If not restrained, he would have slain his rival with a bowie knife. The wounded man was allowed, however, to creep away and hide until his wounds might heal, but, cowardlike, he fled the country and was seen no more.

"Don Alfonso was soon shown his error. My grandfather's polished manners and gallantry alone proved him no common man. He told of the ancient glories of his name, De Novanne. He described his ancestral estates in the sunny Midi, mentioned his education in Paris, and then, when the old don begged his pardon, spurned such a belated approval and announced that he was taking his bride to France.

"Ynez, her mother, and the old don wept, entreated, and implored him. De Novanne relented. He gave up his honors and estates abroad and settled here in California, never to return."

Roy murmured something appreciative, but avoided Viola's eye.

"I don't blame her now," he said to himself. "I can understand how she came to write those letters now, and the way she deceived me. It's inherited, and she can't help it. Whenever a crisis comes up the spirit of that old grandfather of hers enters into possession of her mind and she just tells a gorgeous lie. I wish I knew how to commune with the dear departed—there's a thing or two I'd like to ask her ancestor's rival."

He turned again to Viola.

"Was your grandfather's command of the English language as perfect as that of his native tongue?"

"Indeed it was. My grandmother, who spoke English imperfectly, told me that his Parisian accent was so slight that no stranger ever took him for a Frenchman. He did not like English, though, and never used it in writing.

"He wrote ordinary letters in French, my grandmother said, even to her, when he was away for a day or two, although she could not read them, and had to wait until he came back and translated. In making notes for his own use he preferred Sanskrit or Hebrew."

"How interesting," said Roy. "I would

like to see some of his manuscript if you have any lying about at home."

"We have none."

"But his letters?"

"It was a custom of his to tear his letters up as soon as he had translated them."

"I see," said Roy.

He had got the information he wanted, and suddenly became very quiet and thoughtful. Although Viola did not want to find the treasure, he felt more desirous of doing so than ever. He saw that the only real evidence of her grandfather's innocence, or his guilt, was the treasure itself. Though Sydney Cove's lack of information had been very disappointing, he had given Roy the germ of an idea. Viola had helped it grow. Roy's success in finally capturing Cove had gone to his head. He wanted to get the treasure and read the cryptogram for the sake of the financial gain, to retrieve, if possible, Viola's family honor, and last and very far from least, he wanted to do it just to show that he could. The strange part of it was that suddenly the thought came to him that he knew just how to go about it.

## IX.

It was nearly noon when they got home. Roy kept his thoughts to himself until after luncheon.

"Viola," he said, when they had finished wiping the dishes, "you look tired, dear. I would suggest that you take a nap. I will take the cryptogram up into the tower and try a little Greek or perhaps Czech on it. I have made up my mind that your fears on the score of your grandfather's character are groundless. To prove that, however, I must read the riddle and find the treasure.

"I think I could have done it before, but I was not aware of the extent of your ancestor's erudition. The language in which a cipher is written is, naturally, of the greatest importance in its translation. I see now that your grandfather knew one language which I did not try out last night."

"Oh," cried Viola, her face lighting up at once with rekindled hope and pride. "Oh, Roy—if you can prove my grandfather innocent, I shall love you."

"Very well," Roy told her, rather calmly, considering the circumstances, "I'll go up, then. Good-by for an hour or two."

"Good-by, dear," she cried, and, as he ascended, she stood watching him, her face aglow with smiles. As his shoulders disappeared through the trapdoor, Viola called to him again:

"Roy, what language is it that you didn't use last night?"

He couldn't have heard her, for he sprang suddenly into the tower and slammed the door down without answering.

Now, Viola possessed a certain trait often observed in capable people, and this trait is difficult to classify, for accordingly as it controls or is controlled by the possessor it may be either a weakness or a source of strength. Without vanity or egotism, she instinctively assumed supervision of and responsibility for everything which occurred or was done in her circle. She had taken her parents in charge before she was able to talk, and one of her principal reasons for marrying Roy was that she saw he needed a manager. Add to this a usual amount of feminine curiosity and you can understand Viola's feelings on this occasion.

She climbed slowly to the second floor, frowning a little. She hesitated a moment at the door of her room, and finally very softly went to the cupola stairs and started upward.

Meanwhile Roy was exercising powers of analysis which he had not known that he possessed.

"If," he thought, "Viola had seen fit to tell me sooner that her grandfather was an Irish bartender, I might have solved this puzzle long ago."

He ran his fingers through his hair, staring hard at the cryptogram.

"Irish dialect," he muttered, "spelled phonetically without knowledge of the sense of it all by an Australian cockney, and then written down by an illiterate. I must reverse the process, and, allowing for illiteracy and cockneyisms, convert this scrawl into the spoken brogue. Hum-m-m."

He made several false starts, but at last, with a flash of inspiration, crossed out the two fragments of names and the tally marks following them.

"I'll bet," he soliloquized, that those are the names of two of his customers and the score of the drinks they owed him for. He probably wrote this note on the same page, innocent of the desire to puzzle any one.

"Now—'won luck it hole mop.' In Hibernian—wan luke ut hole mop? Wan luke ut hole mahp? I suspect Cove's influence in that 'h.' Wan luke ut ole mahp? Hot dog! One look at old map. The old 'mop' was the old map all the time. But what is next?"

"I'll shoe sow hell on say— Let's try a running jump at it. Wan luke ut ole mahp ill shoe sow hell on say—one look at old map will show sow hill on sea! Fair enough, I'm getting the swing of it now."

He bent over the sheet, muttering rapidly and writing his translation as he went. At the ninth line he stuck, and to help get the sense of it he shut his eyes and chanted aloud: "One look at old map will show sow hill on sea. One jab at muckstick at point of arrow wool till were two fine—aha! will tell where to find."

He fell silent again and started to scribble, but sprang to his feet as the trapdoor flew open and Viola confronted him.

She snatched the two slips of paper, the cryptogram and its translation.

"Ah!" she said with a little sigh when she had had time to understand just what they meant. "So he was an Irishman—not a Frenchman. He could not even read and write. And—and he was a thief."

"Why, no," Roy protested, "I don't think he was a thief at all. Look at the last two lines of the cryptogram. Don't they give you any hope?"

"But I can't read it."

"Well, let's see—I think it should be pronounced like this, haythin relics—sell till Barnum."

"Heathen relics? Sell to Barnum? But what has that to do with the treasure?"

"I think," Roy replied, "that the heathen relics are the treasure. Phineas T. Barnum, you must remember, was a contemporary of your grandfather. Doubtless, these relics are objects suitable for Barnum's famous museum. I think that now we can look for the treasure with our minds at rest, for heathen relics are scarcely the

sort of booty hoarded by the Sydney Coves."

"That sounds reasonable," Viola agreed. "You have certainly relieved my mind of a great weight. It is a blow, of course, to learn that my grandfather was not a French nobleman; but on second thought I think I am prouder of him than ever. Ordinary noblemen are born that way and can't help it. He raised himself to the nobility and fooled the world. If I am to be the descendant of a liar I am glad it is a first class, stupendous, epic liar. I hate a miserable, crawling, half hearted person. Now tell me where the treasure is."

"Oh," protested Roy, modestly, "I thought that you understood the cryptogram! I was afraid you might think me presumptuous if I tried to explain it."

"H-m! Well, we won't quarrel about that. I have read it, and made my own deductions. You go on and tell me what *you* think. That 'll sort of clear my mind and may possibly give me an idea."

"It's like this," said Roy. "Mr. Donovan advised his wife to look behind the old map, but she thought he said 'old mop' and was consequently thrown off the trail. Then the cryptogram mentions the map as the key to the hiding place. 'One look at old map' and so on. Again, 'one jab of muckstick'—a shovel—'at point of arrow.' Meaning, I suppose, an arrow drawn upon the map. Find that map and you've got the treasure."

"Yes," said Viola, heatedly, "find the map. This is the most maddening thing I've ever heard of. We're no nearer success than when we started. If there ever was an old map around here it has been lost years and years ago. Oh, I wish I'd never—"

Viola stopped short and calmed herself.

"Roy," she said, "just because you have more brains than I you tease me into a temper. If you don't stop it I'll never forgive you."

"My dear—" Roy began.

She jumped up and seized his hair with both hands. "Tell me where that map is," she demanded.

"I don't know," he protested.

She released him reluctantly. "But you know something," she declared.

"I don't *know* where the map is," he assured her, "but I'll tell you where I think it is. Your grandfather said: 'Look *behind* the old map.' For what? I think it was for the notebook which contained the note explaining the map. You remember Sydney Cove was peeling the wall paper off with his knife before I—"

But Viola was already kneeling on the floor, looking at the hole in the wall.

"It's there. It's there," she cried. "Lend me your knife! Hurry up! My goodness, grandfather never disturbed the book, I guess, after he hid it here, and died thinking the note was still in it. Then, nobody knows how long after, they papered this room, and finding the old map apparently stuck on the wall, simply covered it up. Oh, give *me* that knife!"

It was stained with paste, and torn, but not difficult to read, for it was a crude and simple chart drawn to a large scale with heavy lines. In the upper right hand corner was a cross, marked on its arms with the points of the compass. In the center of the design was a circle outlined with short, radial pen strokes so that it looked like a moldy biscuit. A heavy, wavy line like an angleworm crawled diagonally across the paper passing near the biscuit, accompanied, on the side farther from the fuzzy circle, by parallel hair lines. A conventionalized arrow transfixed the angleworm and rested its point against the biscuit. The latter was labeled: "Sow Hell," and among the hairs appeared the word "Say."

"This knoll is Sow Hill," Viola explained. "My grandfather used to keep pigs. The map is very old and, as it shows, when it was drawn the knoll was at the edge of the beach. The tidal flats have been filled in long ago and covered with buildings. The arrow touches the hill on the north side, doesn't it?"

"Yes. But look at this thing like a ladder, drawn in pencil. And here he has written 'tint stip.' We are to dig under the stairway up the knoll, at the tenth step from the bottom."

## X.

PASSERS-BY in their street that afternoon observed the activities of Roy and Viola

with indifference, or with kindly tolerance for their feverish industry, but with little interest. Almost any amount of excavation in a front yard passes unnoticed in San Francisco, for it is as much of a patriotic duty there to raise a flaunting garden and astonish tourists as it is for a native to wear short pants and yodel at intervals in Switzerland. Front yards in that city are usually of the upright variety, anyhow, so if the hole is too deep for a flower bed you naturally suppose the fellow is digging a garage.

Viola crouched upon the eleventh step watching eagerly and giving advice. Roy, collarless, coatless, hatless, toiled stubbornly with a shovel. Down through a thin layer of soil he dug, then with increasing difficulty through a hard packed layer of oyster shells. Perhaps a foot of these, and then, with a shout, he uncovered the end of a plank.

An indecorous dance by Viola. Mighty deeds with the shovel. He had revealed the upper portion of a door and its frame set into the slope like the entrance to a tunnel.

Out with the lower nine steps. Twenty minutes more hard labor. A slight delay to pry off the staple of a rusty padlock. Then they dragged the door open.

The sunlight did not enter more than a foot, showing a bit of rough gray wall, a strip of sandy floor and nothing else. Black darkness faced them.

Roy struck a match impatiently, and cuddling the flame in his cupped hands, went slowly in. Viola clutched his elbow and followed. Ten steps, twenty steps.

"Some tunnel, Viola."

Then Viola started and turned back.

There was a confused movement behind her at the mouth of the tunnel. The harsh grating of the rusty door hinges was followed by a crash as the light of day was completely shut out. Roy swept his arm around Viola's shoulders as she screamed. They blinked at the incandescent disk of a flash lamp.

A harsh, familiar voice warned: "Turn yer back, me lad, an' 'ist yer 'hands."

"Sydney Cove," Viola whispered.

"How do you get like that?" demanded Roy hardily. "Open that door. Clear out."

"'Ist yer 'ooks!"

The command, this time, was peremptory and savage.

Viola turned to Roy anxiously. He did not look like the man she had married now. His brows were knotted. His head and hands were thrust forward. His shoulders slouched loosely. The line of his bowed back was as tense as that of a crouching cat. She found herself unable to utter the command that had been ready on her lips. Roy sprang at the light.

For a second it was blotted out. Then it flew upward in an eccentric orbit and whirled down to the floor. Now its reduced beam pointing away from Viola displayed a thicket of moving legs and feet. Feet and legs that whirled lightly, strained heavily and slowly, stamped hard.

The tunnel boomed and seemed to rock with a tumult of shouts, with blows, with grunts and hard drawn breaths.

Viola cowered against the wall, her knees pressed together, her elbows tight to her shaking sides, her hands unconsciously clasped across her mouth.

Sometimes she saw hands, or faces, or trodden bodies down upon the floor. Once she saw Roy's face, dreadfully distorted as he fell or was flung down. But while the sobs tore her throat in sympathy and her muscles strained with his, he fought up again. Yet it was not more than a minute or two until, crouching on the ground, her knees having failed her, her face hidden in her hands, she heard her own gasping breath, suddenly loud, in silence. She sprang up, startled, and in the light of the recovered flash lamp she saw Roy's face again.

He was bruised and battered. His shirt was torn from his shoulders. A dark trickle barred his upper lip from nostril to mouth. His thin bare chest rose and fell jerkily, pumping hissing breaths between his bared teeth. But his eyes still shone fiercely and the straining muscles knotted and quivered on his lean arms and neck.

Two men were holding him. In the fainter edge of the nimbus surrounding her husband's countenance she could see their dark, rough hands clasping his wrists, and the coarse sleeves of their coats. Just a

suggestion she caught of swarthy or tanned faces. The burly silhouette of the man who directed the light was unmistakable. It was Sydney Cove, and if other means of identification had been lacking, his croaking voice was raised again.

"G'blimey, ye've 'ad yer needin's now, I 'ope? Another start like that 'ere an' I'll do yer in, I will. I can't be 'avin' me tripes trompled at my age! 'E's a tARRIER, mates, 'old to 'im."

He turned slowly and swept Viola with light.

"Ah, *yeou!*" he said, petulantly. "More trouble no a bit, ye've been."

"You nasty old thing!" rejoined Viola with returning spirit. "Go away."

"Not likely. Back up. Let's see wot we 'ave 'ere."

"You shan't come in."

Cove merely grunted at this and advanced upon her with one hand outstretched. She recoiled with a swift shudder, and step by step retreated before him.

It was not far she had to go. She had been standing practically at the end of the tunnel on the threshold of a small room hollowed from the hill. It was no more than six feet high by ten square. As Viola brought up against the rear wall and stood pressed against it, Cove's searchlight swept the rough gray sides and ceiling swiftly.

Bare it was, and save for the minute and intricate tracery of silvered lines on every side where generations of snails had left their spoor, it might have been newly dug. A cellar waiting to be stored.

There was a disappointed mutter from Cove's companions and even he whispered a surprised oath. But he had regained his self-possession immediately.

"'Old 'ard," he cried. "Watch yer man. I knows wot's wot, don't I?"

With occasional quick flirts of the light to assure himself that Viola held her place he went peering and prying around the walls. To and fro with the light upon the ceiling. To and fro across the floor. Four pairs of eyes watched his progress with equal intensity.

At last he stopped and stood still in the middle of the floor, staring down; the bright cone of light including his feet in its base

and rising to meet his lowered hand. Sucking a sharp breath he dropped to his knees. He supported his weight with his hands and stooped his face within an inch of the ground. He puffed gruntingly, blowing little clouds of dust.

"Mates," he called, "see wot's 'ere, will yer?"

Dragging their prisoner they scuffled to him. Even Viola stepped a pace forward and bent to look. Carved rudely in the earth floor, but unmistakable now that the dust no longer filled its slight hollow, they saw an arrow, its point at the foot of the rear wall.

"'Ere," said Cove, drawing his knife and playing the light along the blade, "see it, young fightin' cock? No tricks, mind yer. Loose 'im, mates. Ye've work to do."

So it was that Roy and Viola saw the end of their treasure hunt standing side by side, as prisoners. A candle stuck hastily in a shovel scar on the wall gave the only light, while Cove, with Roy's own shovel and the other pair with knives, attacked the wall.

Long, long it seemed they stood and watched the growing heap of rubbish and listened to the thud and rasp of the shovel, to the heavy breathing of the workers.

At first every other moment brought an exclamation from one of them as they held up small objects for inspection in the candle light. But after a time silence fell upon them and at last they began to grumble. Then at a word from one of his helpers Cove cursed and struck him.

The grumbler's knife flashed up wickedly, but the other caught his arm, and while they struggled Cove darted forward and struck the weapon from the fellow's hand. Then, as Roy crouched, seeing his chance to spring, as Viola flung her weight upon his arm to stop him, came faintly from the outer air the inflected whistle of a bosun's pipe. It sounded three times, and Cove and his companions answered it instantly.

Before Roy and Viola realized what was happening the trio had fled down the tunnel, shot one by one through the bright rectangle of the suddenly opened door, and slammed it shut behind them.

Roy snatched a shovel and sprang after them. The door held against his first thrust.

He hurled himself upon it headlong. With a crash the hinge bolts tore from the rotted door post, and Roy staggered out into the sunlight.

In the street a black touring car with side curtains in place was gaining speed in low gear. Cove, clinging to a door, ran frantically and scrambled in. With a roar and a slide the machine took a corner and headed for the water front.

A policeman on the other side of the street seemed to be the cause of their sudden departure. He had halted his leisurely stroll and now shouted an inquiry as to the reason for the commotion.

Roy wiped the blood from his face with his sleeveless biceps, glanced quizzically at Viola, who stood pale and still frightened in the mouth of the tunnel, and replied gayly, "Oh, nothing much, officer. Just a little fun between friends."

The patrolman drew down a long upper lip, twinkled a blue eye and strolled on.

"But, Roy, you'd better tell him," said Viola, as he came to her, "they might come back."

"No."

"Why not?"

"Because there is no treasure here to steal, and now they know it. Come, I'll show you."

Back in the underground room again Roy held the candle above a heap of rubbish. Some shards of coarse pottery were there, some arrow heads of black obsidian, a stone mace with a crumbling wooden handle attached by a thong.

"The 'heathen relics.' This is what your grandfather found. Barnum might have made a good thing out of them—we can't."

## XI.

VIOLA watched Roy as he gathered up the scattered planks and replaced the steps. She thought him strangely silent, oddly grim.

"Figured out how those relics got there?" he asked her suddenly.

"Why—why, no."

"Shell mound," he told her. "There's another one bigger than this on the Oakland side of the bay. More than that, may-

be, I don't know. Indians made 'em. Dug clams and oysters out of the beach, you see, and ate 'em on shore. The whole tribe ate all their meals at the same place every day. Let shells lie where they fell. A messy outfit! Three or four hundred years and they had a mound like this one. Careless beggars with their tools and weapons, I guess. Anyhow, the mounds are loaded with 'em. No money in the stuff. Ever try selling this property?"

"It can't be sold," she told him mournfully. "The location would make it valuable if it were not for the prohibitive cost of leveling this knoll. That would be necessary before building anything worth while. The house of course is worthless from a buyer's point of view."

"That's what I thought."

Setting his lips in a thin line he spiked the last step down savagely. He picked up his coat and his tools and motioned toward the house.

"Let's go in."

Viola was frankly exhausted with excitement and lack of sleep. She went to bed immediately. Roy, still taciturn and unlike himself, disdained to follow suit. She left him, still in his ragged shirt, smoking a horrid pipe and staring dreamily through a window out at the bay.

He called her for supper, but she refused to get up. At ten o'clock that night, though, she awoke again to hear him marching like a sentry in the big room downstairs.

It worried her, and after a bit she came down to him, through a blue haze of tobacco smoke, and tried to express some of her contrition for leading him on to such a bitter disappointment.

He stopped her brusquely, with his palm across her lips.

"Huh! I wouldn't have missed it for a million bucks," he declared.

He stepped away from her, his eyes shining, a grin on his lips.

"I'm a fighter, d'you know that? I didn't until I got into this. Maybe I never would have but for you and that Sydney Cove. I love that old crook like a brother!"

He stepped forward suddenly with his left foot; shot out a straight, stabbing left

fist; and ducking made the air sing with a right hook to the jaw of an imaginary opponent.

"Viola," he cried, gloating, "didn't you see me knock that big guy flat? Kid, I surely smacked that boy. They got me down, but they couldn't keep me there. I got a punch, girl. I pack a wallop."

Viola stared at him, dazed. He slapped her shoulder exuberantly, with a hearty force that staggered her, beaming at her with vulgar delight.

"Go on to bed, kid," he ordered; "don't stand there, you bother me. I've got to think."

Viola went silently to the staircase. Starting to ascend, she looked back at him. He was pacing up and down the room with long, forceful, graceless strides. One hand was thrust into his trouser pocket; with the other he was deliberately standing his hair on end, pulling it over his eyes. His gaze was fixed upon the floor. His cheeks were flushed. Already he seemed to have forgotten her.

Slowly Viola mounted the stairs and entered her room. Slowly she sank upon the bed and buried her face in the pillow.

"What have I done? Oh, what have I done?" she murmured.

Roy did not sleep at all that night, apparently, yet he was not haggard, she thought, the next morning, looking at him cautiously over her breakfast orange. His bruises had turned a shade or two darker, on his cheekbones, and there was a lump on his left jaw, but he bore them without self-consciousness or regret. His conversation, when he finally roused from his abstraction, was even more remarkable than his actions.

"How long will it take your parents to get here?" he began.

"About three weeks, I think. Perhaps a little less. I suppose they have my letters now."

Roy nodded.

"Call it two weeks. We can be settled by then if we don't waste time."

"Settled?" Viola ventured.

"We can't stay here," he argued; "no place for you to entertain. No conveni-

ences. Bum neighborhood. We can afford a decent house, not too large. Out at Ingle-side, say—something like that. We may move down the peninsula afterward, but for the present, while this treasure hunt is occupying my time, we had better stay nearby."

"Treasure hunt?"

"Perhaps it would be more correct to call it a gathering or harvest of treasure. Of course the hunting is over. Now we simply haul it away and sell it."

Viola pushed away her plate. Her lips quivered, yet she heroically restrained her emotion so as not to excite him. "It's all my fault," she said to herself. "Before I married him he was kind, gentle, sympathetic, and sane. Now look at him. I'll be good to him and maybe he'll recover; but I'll never feel the same about living with him again."

She tried to meet his eyes, but could not.

"What's the trouble? Aren't you hungry?" he asked.

"Yes, yes."

"Then, why don't you eat?"

"I—I—I will! Ha, ha! Of course."

"I don't mean to criticize," said Roy after a short pause, "but your manner seems odd this morning. Don't you feel well? Is there anything troubling you? Perhaps you think I don't know how to handle the treasure as well as you do?"

"Oh, no, no. I mean yes, indeed," Viola answered. "You know what is best. Isn't it nice it's so simple. You just haul it away and—and sell it?"

"Yep. Imagine your family living all this time right on top of a gold mine. A regular hill of treasure.

"Of course the excavating will interfere with this house in a day or two, so we must find a new home. Perhaps you'd rather rent than buy, though?"

"I—I think so, just at present."

"Well, then, you go house hunting after breakfast. I shall be busy seeing the trucking companies and arranging with the authorities for men to do the digging."

"What?"

"You don't think I'm going to dig and haul away this whole knoll myself in two weeks, do you?"

"No, no, I didn't mean that. But mightn't it be more fun to sell the treasure by the—well—by the *piece*?"

Roy laughed long and heartily.

"It would take centuries."

Viola considered this a moment. She must be cautious. He talked connectedly enough, but there was the treasure. What treasure? And buying a new house!

"I don't feel like house hunting to-day," she said finally. "I can do it to-morrow—if you haven't changed your mind."

"Very well," Roy agreed. "Now do you wish to sell me this property or trade it to me for a good house, or do you wish to retain control yourself? If the latter, I must ask you for a salary to be taken from the profits. I would not ask it, but I have no income at present, so if you do not pay me I must go to work at something else. In that case you would have to dispose of the treasure yourself."

"I don't want to pay you, Roy," said Viola plaintively. "It sounds too business-like. I'd much rather trade for a nice house. Then you can work with the treasure as much as you like."

To herself she added: "It may bring him to reason. He hasn't got a nice house nor any kind of a house. The poor thing is so set on this treasure business that I'll have to humor him and let him come to his senses by himself. If I were to pay him a salary he might moon around here for years, thinking he was earning it and getting crazier every day."

"I think that is wisest," Roy agreed. He got up, kissed her, and said: "I'm going now. May not be home until late this afternoon. Good-by."

"Good-by," said Viola.

## XII.

It was a trying day. First of all, a gang of men arrived in a motor truck. They tore down a portion of the fence, laid boards across the curb and sidewalk, and drove in onto the flat beside the base of the knoll.

Viola went down to inquire and was informed that her husband had ordered the work. She retired to the house and watched them.

They built a stout scaffolding and platform some eight feet high, set up a gas engine and other machinery upon it and then departed.

When she was sure that they had gone Viola went down to the foot of the knoll and investigated. She mounted to the platform by means of a long wooden ramp and poked about trying to fathom the purpose of the thing. There was a machine with a hopper like a giant coffee mill which was driven by the gas engine. This much she learned at the cost of a hand embroidered house dress ruined with black grease. And she went back into her room again, even less comfortable in her mind than before.

An hour or two later, as she sat on one of the window seats trying to think, she saw a small, cheap automobile stop in front of the house.

A slender little man, slightly stooped, neatly and quietly dressed, got out of the machine. He hurried eagerly through the gate to the newly replaced steps. Here he sank to his hands and knees peering at the débris left by Roy's excavation. He arose, after a moment, and forgetting to dust off his trousers, rubbed his hands together, smiling happily. He walked all around the mound, stopping occasionally to kick at the grass with his heel, his expression becoming momentarily more benign. At last he climbed slowly up to the house.

He bent his gray head courteously when Viola opened the door; and mentioned his name, which Viola did not catch, asking her to inform her husband that the excavation would start at nine o'clock next morning.

"I did not think I should start until the next day," he said further, "but your husband's samples interested me so much that I came to see for myself. I have now resolved to begin work at once. You have a great treasure here, madam, and your generosity in giving it away as you are doing is as great as it is unusual."

Viola thought, after he had gone, that he must have thought her rather difficult. She had been unable to wring a single word of commonplace speech from the turmoil of her thoughts. Treasure, he had said.

Roy was sane or else had found a fellow lunatic. That seemed the likelier explana-

tion. This fellow was simply a craftier type. He had an automobile while Roy possessed nothing but the clothes he stood in. As usual, she reflected, the crafty one had persuaded the simple one to give up the mythical treasure. But why and whence the machinery?

She got Roy's supper and with a most exemplary patience kept it warm for him until he came trudging home at eight o'clock. He was tired, worn, and the resilience and febrile excitement that had buoyed him up so long was lacking. Strong as her curiosity was her compassion was mightier. She did not question him. And with hardly a word to her he went to bed and fell asleep.

She slept little herself, fearing he might be ill, rousing frequently to look at him.

Consequently when she awoke the next day it was late in the morning, Roy was up before her, and there was a dreadful chaotic noise outside.

By leaning from her window she could see around an angle of the house a swarm of men digging on the side of the knoll. A boy stood on the platform beside the mysterious machinery which roared and rattled and backfired. A big motor dump cart stood beneath the platform. Roy, pipe in mouth, hands in pockets, stood halfway down the knoll watching with irritating complacency the busy scene before him.

It was too much. Viola stopped only long enough to tuck her hair under a cap before going to the window nearest her husband and screaming his name until he heard her and came in.

"Roy," she pleaded, "please, what does this mean? Why—why are you doing this? How are we to pay the hire of all those men?"

Roy grinned cheerfully and picking her up settled himself on a chair where their view of the work might be undisturbed.

"Kid," he said, "look me over, I'm a fortune hunting fool. The treasure of M. de Novanne is the thing that saves us after all. I happened to recall that a party of professors from the State university once obtained permission to dig in the shell mound over on the Oakland side of the bay and would have demolished it if the owners

hadn't stopped them. That mound is valuable, for it is one of the attractions in an amusement park.

"I took some arrow heads and things to the university yesterday and offered to let them dig if they would haul away the debris. They keep the Indian stuff, of course.

"They jumped at the chance, so we are now getting the ground cleared for nothing, and when it is once graded down to the street level we will have an extremely valuable lot. There will be no difficulty about borrowing enough on it to erect some flat houses which will insure us a moderate income for the rest of our lives."

Viola burst into tears.

"Oh!" she moaned, clinging to him. "I thought you were a helpless dreamer just because you let me lead you into failure and disappointment. Then, while I slept and pitied myself, you walked the floor all night and by sheer determination and brains thought out this wonderful scheme to save us."

"Hush!" said Roy sternly. "That's what husbands are for."

The terrific noise of the machinery on the platform had stopped when the loaded truck drove away, and had been silent while they were speaking, but now a second truck had backed into place beneath it, and the uproar began again.

"Now," cried Viola, "what is that thing for?"

Roy chuckled. "That is the best part of it all. That machine makes it possible for us to lay up a few nickels against a rainy day, to buy us a decent home, and to keep us clothed and fed until we can begin to collect our rents. That is a shell crusher, my dear," he said.

"Go on, man, explain," Viola urged.

"You see, I had to make everything count and it occurred to me that the shell of which this great mound is entirely composed ought to be worth something. It is not good enough to sell to a button factory; it would be too long and troublesome a process to burn it for lime, with a small profit.

"At last I remembered that such shell, broken up, is used for chicken feed, and

that on account of the thousands of chicken ranches in this State there must be an unlimited market for shell which can be got as cheaply as I can furnish it. I went to several wholesale dealers with samples, and although there are thousands of tons of it in this knoll I have made contracts for the whole thing at fifty cents the hundred pounds. This gives them a big profit, for the shell sells for a dollar a hundredweight retail.

"The university men agreed to haul it away, so I let them take it to the warehouses for me, thus saving the cost of transportation. True, I am renting the crushing machinery and hiring that boy who runs it, but as each truckload is worth several dollars to me, I can afford that.

"The only difficulty is that due to their care in sifting out the curios, the students who are doing the work do not dig fast enough to get rid of the mound in the two weeks which is the time I am allowing. I decided this morning to get around that by

inducing a spirit of rivalry in them. Tomorrow a force of men from Stanford will be added to those now on the job and they will be augmented with husky gangs from the universities of Oregon and Washington and possibly Nevada before the week is out."

"I'm going to write to my parents again," said Viola. "I don't think I put it strong enough before."

"Let's have breakfast," he suggested after a moment. "We can look at houses to-day and by day after to-morrow we will have saved enough to buy one."

No great lapse of time is required for the reconciliation of indulgent parents to even the greatest escapades of a daughter like Viola. Mr. and Mrs. Ephraim Stiggs, now that a month or two have passed, are upon the most cordial terms with Mr. and Mrs. Roy Jones. There is but one difficulty to be met in their intercourse: Roy and Viola must take pains to conceal the fact that Mrs. Stiggs's maiden name was really Donovan.

#### THE END



## THERE'S NOTHING WORTH WHILE IN THE WORLD BUT YOU

THERE'S nothing worth while in the world but you,  
 Nothing but you!  
 I only knew to-day it was true  
 That nothing but you  
 Could mend an hour, or a day, or scar it;  
 Careless, could make my life or mar it;  
 That, though my possessions be many or few,  
 There's nothing worth while in the world,  
 But you!

Oh, I'll forget, as people do!  
 I'll often be angry and cross with you!  
 I'll hurt you with word and glance and thought.  
 At the forts of our hearts, there are wars to be fought;  
 There'll be battles royal between us two!  
 Misunderstandings, tears and pouts,  
 Jealousy, hatred, sulking, doubts.  
 But I'll always remember again, anew,  
 There's nothing worth while in the world but you—  
 Nothing but you!

Mary Carolyn Davies.



# The Black Jarl

By JOHNSTON McCULLEY

Author of "The Mark of Zorro," "Hooked," etc.

## WHAT HAS OCCURRED IN PART I.

TO the hall of Svend the Bloody, a Norse jarl or noble, a galley from Gaul brings Edvard, son of Haakon, Svend's gentle brother, who wooed a maid of the Southland and died there. His coming is not relished by Svend, who has had control of his brother's lands, but Svend fears the wrath of Olaf Trygvesson, the king, too much to do him open harm. Edvard, seeming small and dark to the huge Norsemen, is called "the black jarl," but he speedily proves his skill and courage in an encounter with Magnus, Svend's right hand man. Edvard incurs the enmity of Magnus because Brynhild, a shield maiden Magnus loves, prefers Edvard. The black jarl himself enrages Brynhild because he does not love her.

Svend leads his followers to a fair at Trondhjem, by command of King Olaf, who hopes to bring about peace between Svend and other followers of the old gods, and the Christian jarls. The pagan jarl contrives to leave Edvard at his camp, where the king will not see him. Magnus commissions two warriors to slay Edvard. The black jarl fights manfully.

### CHAPTER IV (continued).

#### AT TRONDHJEM.

THEY rushed to the attack, and Edvard gave ground in turn. Back against the bole of a tree they pressed him and made ready to cut him down.

But Eric the Dumb had seen, and for a moment forgot that he was a thrall. He

knew only that the black jarl pleased him, and was being attacked unjustly. He hurled his great body forward and seized one of the men. He held the warrior's arms close to his sides in a hug like that of a bear, so that the man could not use his sword, could only mouth oaths and struggle in vain to get free.

Edvard Haakonsson shouted in triumph and renewed his attack on the other. He

*This story began in the Argosy-Allstory Weekly for December 1.*

got through the guard, and his blade descended. But not the edge of it. The flat struck a terrific blow against a winged helmet, and the man went down.

"And now!" Edvard cried.

Eric the Dumb released his man, and with a loud bellow of rage the warrior sprang forward. Now he, in turn, learned something of fencing. Back Edvard pressed him, tiring him, playing with him. And in time the flat of his blade struck again. The second man lay stretched.

For a moment the son of Haakon the Lover stood panting. And then he turned to the thrall.

"You did well, Eric!" he said. "Get some others, and fetch thongs! Bind these men well, and carry them into the tent of Magnus!"

He returned his blade to its scabbard and leaned against a tree to watch. Eric called to the other thralls, and they brought thongs.

"Bind them hand and foot!" Edvard commanded. "Now carry them to the tent. No man of you is to release them, even if they demand it. Do you understand? They are to remain so until Svend returns. It will be death for the man who disobeys!"

He turned and beckoned to Eric.

"Your back to me!" he ordered. "I cannot ride or walk to the fair, on my honored word—but nothing was said about me being carried!"

And then the black jarl sprang up and caught the giant thrall about the neck and wrapped his legs around the man's middle. And so, carrying Edvard Haakonsson pickaback, Eric the Dumb stood and waited.

The son of Haakon the Lover pointed down the dusty road.

"To the fair!" he ordered.

## CHAPTER V.

### THE LITTLE MAID.

**A**LONG the dust-deep highway Eric the Dumb trotted slowly, kicking up great clouds of dust behind him, making nothing of the burden upon his back. Edvard Haakonsson laughed aloud.

They passed none, save here and there some thrall sleeping at the edge of the woods.

"On, good steed!" the black jarl cried. "Remember that you are carrying me, and I am not riding."

His words were those of merriment, but his thoughts were not. He sensed a mystery that was fraught with peril for himself. There were some things that cried aloud for an explanation.

Around a bend in the road trotted Eric the Dumb with his unusual burden. Now they could see the buildings of Trondhjem in the distance, and the gay booths on the level space where the fair was being held. People seethed back and forth, common folk straining their eyes to catch sight of famous jarls, and jarls and their men fighting to win through the press and reach the king.

Now Edvard Haakonsson passed countless persons who looked at him in surprise. They knew him for a jarl, and so restrained their laughter. He waved grandly at some of them, laughed, and pretended to be spurring Eric on.

They were not more than two hundred yards from the edge of the fair now. Edvard could see the long lane with pavilions on either side. Shield maidens and ladies of jarls' households were in the midst of the throng. Men-at-arms scowled at one another or greeted one another warmly, according to their creeds.

"Behind the booths!" Edvard commanded; and the thrall turned to one side. On he trotted, but now the perspiration was streaming from him and his breath was coming quicker. Edvard Haakonsson for the moment was quiet, and his merriment had fallen from him. He knew that he must face Svend, and he preferred to do it before the king.

And then a burst of gay laughter reached his ears, and he turned his head quickly. To one side of the road there was a small company, consisting of half a dozen men-at-arms, some thralls, a few shield maidens. But it was none of these who had laughed, though all but the thralls were smiling.

Edvard Haakonsson looked again, and saw a maid. He pressed his arms about

Eric's throat, and Eric stopped thankfully. Edvard's teeth flashed in a smile.

The maid stood before the others. She wore a flowing gown caught with a girdle about her waist. Her hair fell in a golden shower down her back, bound with bands of metal. Her bare arms bore a weight of rich ornaments. Never in his life before had Edvard Haakonsson seen a maid like this.

The others held back, but she took a step forward. And he knew by their manner that she was a jarl's daughter. A shield maiden whispered to her, but she waved the shield maiden aside and took another step toward him, and laughed again.

"You like my horse?" he asked.

"He is a well trained steed to walk on his hind legs," she replied, and her voice was like the trickling of water over cool rocks.

Edvard Haakonsson dismounted, for which act Eric the Dumb gave him thanks again. Half a dozen steps forward he took, nor noted the black looks that the men-at-arms gave him. The maiden looked as though she might retreat, yet she held her ground.

"I am new come to this land," Edvard said, "yet it is now in my mind that I was a fool not to come before."

"And how is this?"

"For, had I come before, perchance I would have seen you sooner," he said. "I have lived in a land where there are beautiful women, yet they seem old and ugly when I look at you."

Her face flushed with pleasure. The men she knew did not speak so. Rough Norse they were, who knew not fine speech, men of war and work who did not consider it necessary to speak soft to a woman.

"You come from another land?" she asked.

"But four sleeps ago I landed."

"Yet you are a jarl!"

"It is my station," he replied. "I am my father's son."

"And your father—"

"Haakon the Lover."

Her face turned pale swiftly, and she caught her breath.

"You—you are the son of Haakon the

Lover?" she asked. "You are the nephew of Svend the Bloody?"

"I am his nephew," Edvard replied. "But a man cannot pick his uncles."

"You are to live with him?"

"Our interests are related."

"Oh!" she cried. "And it was in my mind to like you."

"And can you not?" he begged. "But you have not told me your name. Is it as sweet as you?"

"I am called Thyra."

"It is a sweet name."

"But perhaps that of my father will not sound so sweet to your ears," she said. "He is called Harald the Just."

"Harald the Proud, to have such a daughter."

"Do you not understand? Between Harald the Just and Svend the Bloody there always has been war. Your people and my people cannot be friends. We are Christians!"

"Cannot a Christian be a friend?"

"But those who worship Odin and Thor will not," she said. "And what a shame it is—at times."

Edvard stepped closer to her.

"Though our houses fight, need we?" he asked. "Can we not be friends? Never before have I seen a maid like you! If I wished one to sit at my right hand—"

"There are maidens in your uncle's house."

"But not for me—now!" he said.

"And in the other houses where Odin is a god."

"I do not speak of gods, lady," he said. "I do not speak of houses and clans. I speak only of you—and of me. Can we not be friends?"

"Are you mocking me?" she asked. "Can I trust one who is not a Christian?"

"I have not said that I am not a Christian."

"You need not—you, a jarl of the house of Svend the Bloody! How could you be, in a house where treachery is bred?"

"But I have not been in that house long!" he protested. "If you are a Christian, you have charity. You have faith. You, also, should have love! Am I mocking you? Can you trust me?"

She raised her head and looked at him bravely, and his eyes did not falter.

"I seem to read that you are an honorable man," she said in a breath.

"Then we may be friends?"

"If you wish it."

"Friendship is but the basis, often, for stronger ties," he said.

Her face flamed again.

"It were well for you if you kept our friendship a secret," she said. "If Svend the Bloody hears of it, he will break it fast enough."

"Svend the Bloody is my uncle, but I am a jarl in my own right, and my father before me," Edvard Haakonsson declared. "I make what friendships please me, and break them only when I will. I hope soon to greet your father. And to see you again soon, Thyra."

He bowed before her, lifted her hand, and pressed it against his lips. She thrilled.

"It is a quaint custom," she confessed, "but it is a pleasant one!"

"Now I must get me to the fair and see the king," he said. "I must swear my allegiance."

"But why do you ride on the back of a thrall? Is Svend the Bloody so poor that he cannot furnish a horse for his kinsman?" she asked.

"I have sworn not to ride or walk to the fair," he answered, laughing. "So I am being carried. I'll explain it better when again we meet. Until then!"

He sprang upon the back of Eric again, turned to wave at her, and was gone. Thyra of the house of Harald stood silently looking after him for so long that the men and shield maidens behind her wondered whether they had been forgotten. But presently she turned and beckoned them, and led them on toward the fair.

## CHAPTER VI.

### BEFORE THE KING.

**G**RIM and austere, Svend the Bloody led his men through the throngs at the fair, Magnus riding at his left hand. The company was an imposing one, as Svend had intended it to be. Behind

the mounted men-at-arms came the footmen, the archers and spearmen. Then the mounted maidens, of whom Svend had taken half a score along. And then the thralls, each in a fresh white kirtle, bearing Svend's presents to the king.

The common folk surged back from beneath the hoofs of the horses and gazed in awe at Svend's magnificence. Yet many looked at his stern and inscrutable countenance, too, and wondered what thoughts were in being behind that mask of flesh. The common folk knew of the clash of religions and played a part in it.

Svend the Bloody was known as one of the richest jarls in Olaf's kingdom, though not many knew that his jarldom belonged in half to his brother's son. Magnus, riding at Svend's side, curled his lips in scorn at the common folk, and now and then shouted rough orders to the men behind him, merely as a show of authority, at which some men glared and others smiled. There were plenty of other lieutenants of other jarls who hated Magnus.

And so Svend the Bloody and his train came before King Olaf where he sat in his big chair on a raised platform at one end of an open space, the booths and pavilions of the fair and the mass of people forming a background.

Svend dismounted, and the others with him. The thralls hurried forward, some to hold the horses and others to spread Svend's presents before the king. Olaf Trygvesson waved a hand to show that he was grateful, and the king's own men carried the presents away.

Then Svend approached the king. He strode like the jarl that he was, pride in his bearing, his head held high, his shoulders braced. Magnus stalked behind him, while the others held back.

Svend the Bloody knew well that he was making an impression in that moment. He was showing his wealth and power, and King Olaf was a shrewd man. Svend bowed before Olaf, and stood back. But as he glanced aside he saw something that angered him.

Another jarl was approaching from the opposite side. He, too, sent forward thralls with rich presents. He, too, had dignity in

his bearing, and behind him came men-at-arms richly weaponed, and glorious maidens. Svend the Bloody was facing his ancient enemy, Harald the Just.

For an instant Svend's face was not a mask. But the hatred that flamed in it was extinguished almost instantly. Then he turned and looked at the king.

"I make you welcome, jarls!" Olaf said.

Thus he greeted them both at once, nor showed his preference. He looked from the one to the other, and when he spoke again it was to both.

"There is too much dissension in the land," Olaf said. "It is our wish that our people live in peace. Some of us there are who follow the cross and the teachings of the Christ. Yet there are others who cling to the old gods. If a man is sincere, I have respect for him, regardless of what faith he professes."

Svend the Bloody opened his eyes wide at that. He had expected an attempt at conversion. He had anticipated an argument, for which he was prepared, and wherein he would stand by Odin and Thor and hurl his defiance. But Olaf, he saw now, was too wise to risk splitting his kingdom so. Olaf Trygvesson knew that civil war would follow an attempt to cram Christianity down the throats of those who followed the gods of their fathers. Later, he was to Christianize his country with the ax, but the time was not yet at hand.

Svend merely bowed without speaking, and Harald the Just did likewise. And so the two jarls faced each other before their king, their faces reflecting none of their thoughts, while their retainers waited behind them motionless but ready for instant combat.

"Svend the Bloody, you are a great man!" King Olaf said, after a time. "You often have proved your loyalty. That you have courage and dignity and wealth goes without being said. And you, Harald, also are a great man, and Svend's neighbor. Word has been carried to me that your households are not at peace."

"That word did not come from me," Svend said quickly. "I do not allow my men to carry tales. I fight my own battles. Never have I asked help of the king."

"Nor did it come from me," Harald said firmly. "I, too, can fight my own battles!"

"Yet I have the word," Olaf told them, with something of sternness in his manner. "A man of my own reported on the situation. It is my wish that this strife cease. We gain nothing by fighting among ourselves. It is my prayer that this land be a Christian land, but I know the thing cannot be done in a moment. A man has the right to his individual belief. However, there is no need of this continual strife."

The king ceased speaking, and the jarls waited for his further words, knowing that he had some. And finally Olaf looked down at them again, and his voice was more gentle when he spoke.

"It is our wish that you seal a pact of friendship, here and now," he said. "Svend the Bloody, and you, Harald the Just, clasp hands before me. Differences in religion you may have, but let us have no other differences. Your thralls must not fight. Your men-at-arms must not attack one another."

Svend drew back a pace and a look of astonishment came into his face. Magnus drew in his breath with a sharp hiss. Harald stood waiting proudly, willing to do as the king commanded, but not wishing to be the first to make the advance.

The mind of Svend the Bloody worked like lightning then. He might smite hands with Harald, but there would be no meaning to it. He could repudiate this friendship when it so pleased him, and in the meantime Olaf and Harald would be lulled to a sense of peace and security.

"Harald?" Olaf called.

"I am agreed," Harald the Just said.

"Svend?"

It was a critical moment. Harald had agreed, and for Svend to spurn the offer of friendship now would mean an instant battle royal, for even in the presence of the king and the king's guardsmen Harald could not overlook such an affront to his pride.

Behind Svend, his men reached for their swords, and Magnus glanced quickly around and prepared to shout his commands. But Svend had been thinking to

some purpose, and already he had a plan. And so he took one quick step forward and looked up at Olaf.

"I am agreed," he said.

There were cheers from those near the king, but Magnus and Svend's men gasped their astonishment. However, it was not for them to question their jarl's sagacity. Undoubtedly, Svend the Bloody knew to what purpose he was working.

The jarls approached each other before the king. There was a moment of silence as their hands met and touched lightly. And then they stepped apart again.

But there was a tension in the air. The friendship scarcely had been cemented. There seemed to be something lacking, and Harald the Just supplied it.

"Svend, great jarl, this is the thing for which I long have waited," Harald said. "The new religion of the cross teaches that neighbors should dwell in love and respect and friendship. Let us have it so."

"Let it be so," Svend agreed.

"My house is open to you," Harald said. "Do you journey to it as soon as this fair is at an end, with your men-at-arms and your women and thralls. The gates will be standing wide. It will be my pride and pleasure to feast you and yours, to cement this bargain that we have made."

"The invitation is a fair one, and as such cannot be refused," Svend replied. "I will do myself the honor of accepting your hospitality as soon as may be, and in turn will offer mine."

"Well spoken!" King Olaf cried. "Let us then have peace. Let your men-at-arms and thralls mingle without passing hot words and black looks, that they themselves may form friendships after the pattern of their masters!"

Svend and Harald bowed before him, and each stepped back once more. Their followers scarce could believe their ears, yet they knew that they had heard aright. Magnus was scowling, searching in his mind for the truth of the matter, for he knew Svend well, and realized that this was not the end.

And suddenly those in the great throng at the side of the open space began ribald laughter. Hounds scurried to cover and

snapped and barked. Children screeched their merriment. The king looked across the clearing, and Harald and Svend turned to look also. Svend turned black with rage.

The reason for the sudden merriment was easy to find. Into the clearing before the king came a giant thrall, perspiration streaming from his face. And, carried pick-aback, was a man of black hair and dark skin, who wore the ornaments of a jarl.

Edvard Haakonsson had come before his king!

## CHAPTER VII.

### THE AX THROWER.

WAVES of loud laughter rolled back from the throngs. Men-at-arms joined in, save those who followed Svend the Bloody, for these latter recognized the black jarl and wondered how their master would take this affair.

Svend seemed on the verge of choking, yet he stood straight and proud. His eyes flashed, and the anger clouds gathered on his brow. Edvard Haakonsson urged Eric onward, straight toward the king, laughing back at those who laughed at him, waving his hand to the maidens, pretending now and then to prod his unusual steed. On he came, until Eric was a few paces before Svend, and then Edvard stopped him and stood to the ground and bowed before his kinsman.

Svend's eyes blazed into those of his brother's son. He felt that his dignity was outraged. And he remembered his wish that Edvard remain at the camp, his fear that he would become a friend of Olaf.

"How is this?" Svend cried.

But Olaf stopped him with a gesture. "Who is this man, who wears the ornaments of one of my jarls?" the king demanded.

Svend was compelled to turn and face his ruler. Once he bowed low, yet when he spoke there was anger in his voice.

"Great Olaf, this man is Edvard, the son of Haakon the Lover, and my nephew," Svend said. "He is but new come from the lands to the south, where his father long resided, and where this jarl was born and bred."

"Son of Haakon the Lover? Then is he welcome according to his just rank. But why does he come before us riding the back of a thrall? Is it a new method of approaching a throne?"

Though the king's voice was firm, his eyes were twinkling.

"Those are questions for which I await the answers also," Svend said. "I thought it better that my nephew remain in command of my camp. Word of honor he gave me to do so, unless two trusted men of rank were there to take his place. Yet he is here!"

"Can a jarl forget word of honor?" Olaf demanded, his brow suddenly black.

"Great Olaf, word of honor has been kept," Edvard replied. "I did give it not to ride or walk to the fair. Yet I am here, but I call upon all of you to witness that I did not ride or walk—I was carried."

Olaf laughed at that, and his favorites with him, but Svend did not. The Bloody one stepped forward again, and his voice rang with venom when he spoke.

"But how about the remainder of your oath?" he cried. "You have left my camp, and you promised there to remain unless two men of rank were there in your stead."

"And so they are," Edvard answered. For a moment his eyes met those of Magnus, and the lieutenant betrayed his nervousness.

"Two of your company dropped out of the march and returned to the camp, my kinsman," Edvard continued. "They thought it best to pick a quarrel with me, for some unknown reason. Two giants they were, too. But they remain at the camp."

"Dead?" Magnus cried before Svend could speak. "You have slain them—you?"

"I had no wish to rob my kinsman of two noble warriors," the black jarl replied. "So I merely stunned them and had them bound with thongs and placed in a tent. Perchance, if they see fit to attack me again, they will bring a larger company."

Once more Olaf roared his laughter. Svend turned purple, and the face of Magnus was white. Magnus knew well that the black jarl understood, yet had not betrayed him. And he promised himself re-

venge on the two warriors who had failed in their undertaking.

"This small black jarl pleases me much!" Olaf cried. "Edvard, son of Haakon the Lover, I must have speech with you before the end of the fair. You have come from lands I visited when I was young. There the religion of the cross is strong, and I would speak with you later concerning its developments."

That which Svend the Bloody had feared was coming to pass. Edvard was making a friend of the king. Svend's rage was withheld in a measure, yet it was almost consuming him. He felt compelled to expend it. And he did not dare expend it upon Edvard Haakonsson after what the king had said.

His eyes turned to Eric the Dumb. The thrall was but a thrall, and upon him Svend could work his will. Slowly, the Bloody one drew a dagger from his belt.

"Accursed thrall!" he cried. "You have done this thing! Would you make a mock of me before Great Olaf by turning yourself into a horse? Your blood shall pay!"

He raised the dagger to strike, but Edvard Haakonsson sprang before the thrall and held up a hand in warning.

"If there be blame, it is mine, kinsman," he said. "I commanded the thrall to do as he did."

"One side, jarl! I punish my slaves when I please!"

"But it is not just!" Edvard cried. "The thrall did only as I ordered. Can he be blamed? I appeal to the king!"

Olaf's brow darkened. He had no wish to affront Svend now, after the new pact of friendship. And there were laws regarding a thrall's relations to his master.

"It is Svend's right to punish the man if he so wills," the king said. "I can only hope that he will be merciful. But, if he thinks it better not to be, I can do nothing to stay his hand. A jarl may discipline his slaves."

Svend took another step forward, gloating, and once more the black jarl raised his hand.

"Then let me be champion for this thrall, since the fault is mine!" he said. "It will furnish sport for the throng."

"Champion for a thrall?" Svend gasped.

"You have men of skill among your followers, kinsman. Put one forth against me. Let us throw the javelin, or the ax. If I win, the thrall is mine to do with as I please. If I do not win, you compel him to punishment."

"You would throw ax or javelin?" Svend gasped.

"Against any of your men!"

Magnus surged forward and touched Svend on the shoulder. He thought that he saw his chance to humble Edvard Haakonsson before the king, and when he spoke, Svend had the same opinion. Olaf loved rough sports, and he did not love losers.

"What would you?" Svend asked. "The king has not given the order for the sports to begin."

"I have no hand in this," Olaf said.

Edvard bowed before him again. "Then we will throw the ax," he said. "Let my kinsman choose his man."

"You would pit yourself against Magnus, for instance?" Svend asked.

"Even against Magnus."

"He throws the best ax in my jarldom."

"But never has he met me," Edvard said.

"So be it!"

The throng surged backward again, eager for the test. Here was sport they loved. Far in front of the royal pavilion there was a huge tree, with a blazed space upon its trunk.

"There is the target!" Olaf said.

Now there was a clear space between the king's seat and the tree. On either side pressed forward the throng, noble men and women in the front rows. Howling dogs were kicked backward out of the way. Magnus stood forth, a smile upon his bearded face, and took up his ax.

He turned and looked once at Edvard, gloating in his manner. But the black jarl showed no sign of nervousness. He stood to one side, his hands resting lightly against his hips, his body bent forward.

"It scarcely will be a test, jarl" Magnus said. "Your pet thrall soon will know the taste of Svend's steel."

"You have not yet thrown, nor have I," Edvard replied.

The brow of Magnus grew dark again. One step forward he took. He balanced the ax, and his great arm drew back. The crowd suddenly was still.

An instant of silence, and then the flashing ax whizzed through the air. There was a thud as it struck and quivered. Its blade had bitten deeply into the bole of the tree, and less than the width of a hand below the blazed space.

Shouts came from the men at arms and the common folk.

"It is a good throw," Edvard admitted. "Many men could not beat it. If I do not, 'twill be no reflection on my skill."

"Then you think that you will not?" Magnus sneered.

"In a moment we shall see," said the black jarl.

He sprang forward and toed the mark and took up his ax. Eric the Dumb crouched behind him, his lips moving. None knew to what god he prayed, yet all knew that he was praying. None knew better than Eric the Dumb what depended upon the black jarl's throw, and it is not surprising if he had small faith in the outcome. For Magnus was known the breadth of the land as an ax thrower.

The son of Haakon the Lover flashed a smile at those on either side of him, and then set his face grimly. A moment he stood poised. Then his blade flashed through the air.

Again there came a thud, then a cry of surprise and wonder. The ax he had hurled was buried to the hilt in the trunk of the tree. It quivered in the center of the blazed space above that of Magnus.

Edvard Haakonsson stepped backward and bowed to the king. A chorus of cheers assailed his ears. But Magnus strode forward, his face black with wrath.

"Accidents happen!" he cried. "Can the black jarl throw so well again?"

"I have won, have I not?" Edvard demanded.

"You have won," Olaf decided. "The thrall's life is spared, and he belongs to you. But I would like to see yet another throw, if you are willing."

"I am willing," Edvard replied.

Magnus snarled and stepped to the line

again. A thrall came running with the axes. Magnus took his and balanced it. For a moment he hesitated, and then he threw. A cheer answered his effort.

It was a better throw than the other, for the ax cut the edge of the blazed space, yet it was not so good as the first throw Edvard had made.

"Let us see you equal that!" Magnus said.

The black jarl laughed and once more stepped up to the line. He waited a moment, for there was a commotion in the throng. Two hounds were fighting, and men and women and children were pushing back out of the way, while thralls ran forward to separate the big dogs.

Their fangs flashed, their howls rent the air. Other dogs fought to get in the battle. The crowd surged backward.

And then a gasp of horror came from the throng. One of the great dogs had broken away. Foaming at the mouth, his eyes blazing, he was darting across the clearing. Women and children ran from his path. Warriors could not get through the press to use their weapons.

And in the path of the crazed hound stood a maiden, dressed in flowing robes, her costume denoting her the daughter of a jarl.

A bedlam of shrieks and cries frightened the hound more. The maiden turned to flee, but tripped and fell. The great dog sprang at her.

Then it was that Edvard Haakonsson gave a cry and hurled his ax quickly through the air. Over and over it turned, yet it struck true. The sickening thud came when the hound was but a spring from his prey. The great dog paused in his leap, and dropped, gasping out his life.

A moment of horrified silence, and then a shout from those who were the first to realize what had happened! Half a dozen aided the maiden to her feet. A score rushed toward where Edvard Haakonsson was standing.

But he thrust them aside and ran across the clearing. He fought his way through thralls and warriors and men and women. He reached the side of the maiden, who was standing wild-eyed and panting, and

she whirled toward him and clung to his arm for support.

"You are not injured?" he asked.

She fought to regain her composure, for she had remembered that she was the daughter of a jarl. And then:

"Not injured, thanks to you, Edvard Haakonsson," said Thyra, daughter of Harald the Just.

The crowd fell back, and a big jarl thrust his way forward. His face was stern, yet a suspicion of tears glistened in his eyes. His hand fell upon Edvard's shoulder.

"I thank you, jarl!" he said. "Our daughter is precious to us!"

And then another chorus of cries rent the air:

"Hail, Edvard Haakonsson! Hail, Edvard the Ax Thrower!"

The black jarl had won a name.

## CHAPTER VIII.

### THE DAY—AND THE NIGHT.

**T**HERE comes to many men a flood of good fortune, events tumbling one upon the heels of the other and each adding to a man's position and fame, and so it happened now to the black jarl.

The excitement of the moment died down, and Thyra went with her maidens to a pavilion her father had erected. For, after all, though the daughter of a jarl she was but a woman, and her danger of a moment not enough to stop the fair.

King Olaf gave the signal for the sports to begin, and Edvard Haakonsson, avoiding his uncle and Magnus and many of the others, walked about the grounds, peering into booths and pavilions and enjoying the sights, Eric the Dumb always at his heels.

Then there came a moment when Edvard turned and regarded Eric gravely.

"It is in my mind that you are of good blood," Edvard said. "I can tell it in your manner and bearing. Tragedy has touched your life, mayhap, but it is not necessary that it endure forever. It is necessary that we have thralls, yet would I rather have a man cling to me and serve me through love. What will be your actions if I set you free?"

Eric's dull face lighted and he struggled to speak. The words came slowly, but finally they came.

"Still would I serve you, master," he said. "To be free, and yet to serve you—that is enough. I do not wish to return to my own country—too many years have passed."

"Then shall you be free, and serve me as a free man."

"And ever will I stand at your back, master, to guard you against foes. For there be foes in this land who strike a man in the back."

Edvard's face darkened. "Did you have more wit, I should take it that there is a double meaning to your words," he said. "Follow!"

They went back to where the sports were being held, and men acclaimed the ax thrower and urged him to show more of his skill. And so Edvard Haakonsson, wishing merely to enter into the spirit of the games and seek his own diversion, so managed it that he made more enemies, and many in the following of his kinsman.

He wrestled, and he won, and it was noticed that the big Magnus took no part in the wrestling. He threw the javelin, and here he won easily, for it was a weapon with which he was familiar. Nor could the swimmers defeat him, which was looked upon as a strange thing, since Norsemen are clever in the water.

Sport after sport he attempted, and almost all he won. Now the throng of common folk acclaimed him, and some of the noble born, yet there were men at arms who thought that he attained altogether too many honors.

The sports came to an end, and Edvard the Ax Thrower was acclaimed the victor. And then he sat at the left hand of Olaf for a space, and talked of lands far away, while Svend the Bloody watched from a distance, his face a thunder cloud.

There was feasting in the open space as the night approached. But when it was ended the jarls went back to their own camps with their followings. Edvard Haakonsson was given a horse, and rode in style, with Eric the Dumb trotting beside his mount.

When the camp was reached, Magnus hurried to his tent, where he found his two men bound. He released them, and what words he said are not known, but they burned. And afterward Magnus went to Svend's pavilion, and held secret conversation there, telling him what had happened.

"This black jarl has belittled me," Magnus said. "Nothing but combat and blood can satisfy me now."

But Svend held up a warning hand. "He must not be touched," he said. "He is the favorite of Olaf after this one day. His sudden death at this time would mean trouble for us."

"Has the day come, then, when my jarl fears the Christian king?" Magnus asked, boldly and hotly. "Are you not almost as great as Olaf? Did you lead the men of Thor, you might yet be king in Olaf's stead."

Svend looked at him searchingly. "Perhaps I am growing cunning, Magnus," he replied. "There was a time when boldness and strength always won, but the day has arrived when a man must possess cunning also."

"But I do not understand," Magnus said. "You bend before Olaf. You strike hands in friendship with Harald the Just!"

"But with a reservation of mind," Svend said, smiling a bit.

"How is this?"

"I have a plan," Svend said. "We will make this visit of friendship to Harald's jarldom. We shall take a goodly company. And men at arms shall follow and hide themselves in the forest."

"You intend—" Magnus did not dare voice his thought.

"Think you that my friendship for Harald could be real?" Svend asked. "The fool grows soft. Look you how there were tears in his eyes to-day when he feared for his daughter! He will welcome us with open arms and suspect nothing. It will be the time to strike."

"The laws of hospitality—" Magnus began.

"Laws have been broken before, Magnus. It is our great chance. I shall pretend an illness and refuse to take salt with him. I can be busy speaking, and forget to eat

meat. And when they feel secure, when his gates and doors are open—”

“The men come in from the woods!” Magnus completed.

“But this thing must not be spoken of now,” Svend warned. “I do not trust this kinsman of mine too much, and he must never know. And there is another reason for keeping him unknowing.”

“I wait to hear it, jarl.”

“Were this Edvard to be slain now the king would suspect us, and we want his trust for our plans. We go to Harald’s, and before we leave we slay his men and women and thralls, and lay waste his estate. We can tell a tale afterward, of thralls starting the fighting, of warriors joining in. ’Twill not be too strong a tale, hence it will be believed. Harald, the greatest of the Christian jarls, will be gone and his men with him. Even if the king suspect, then, he will dare not strike. For his forces will be weakened. And if he does strike, then we of Odin and Thor finish him.”

“And you will be king!” Magnus supplied in a whisper. “None has a better claim. The sons of Earl Haakon have not a better right!”

“Haakon! Must I always hear that cursed name?” Svend cried.

“And the black jarl—”

“Must be kept in ignorance as to our purpose,” Svend said. “And what more natural than that, in the heat of battle, he falls?”

Magnus smiled evilly. “I shall see to it that he falls,” he said.

“’Twill be a fair day when he does. He has made a fool of you. He has become the favorite of Olaf in a single day. He has the heart of a woman. He fights for a thrall, and now makes a free man of him. He saves a maid from a dog. And that maid the daughter of Harald the Just! Far better would he have served our plans to have held his hand and let the crazed hound do its work. It would not have grieved me to see sorrow eating at Harald’s heart.”

Svend walked to the door of the pavilion and looked out over his camp. Thralls were stretched around the great fires. Guards had been placed. Warriors laughed and

jested and shouted. The clear voices of shield maidens came from tents in the distance. And the bright moonlight bathed it all.

Svend turned back into the tent. “Pass the word, Magnus, that the black jarl is not to be harmed,” he commanded. “I want no man to pick a quarrel with him. If we accomplish what we wish, it must be when we raid the jarldom of Harald the Just.”

Magnus saluted and left to go to his own tent, and Svend the Bloody sought his couch, there to stretch himself and think more on his plans. In his own tent, Magnus stalked back and forth, his mind filled with Brynhild. He would have to explain to her why Edvard Haakonsson returned from the fair alive.

Edvard had departed from his own tent as soon as the camp had quieted down. Guards saluted as he passed, nor looked where he went. He walked along the edge of the highway, and presently plunged into the brush. When he was at some distance from the camp, he turned into the road again and strode forward, yet ready to dart out of sight if he met men.

He had ascertained where the camp of Harald was located, and now he made his way rapidly toward it. In time he was standing in a clump of trees and watching the tents. There was a great fire in Harald’s clearing, too, and his men were making merry.

Edvard the Ax Thrower circled the camp halfway and then crept closer. He made out the women’s quarters. Gusts of laughter came to his ears, silvery laughter that he thrilled to hear.

For a space he watched and waited, and after a time the flap of one of the tents was lifted, and a maiden stepped out into the moonlight. It was Thyra.

One of the guards whirled quickly toward her, recognized her, and turned away again to watch the men around the fire. Thyra stood for a moment looking up at the moon, then moved slowly toward the edge of the woods.

Nearer she came, until Edvard could see her features. Beautiful features they were, and now thoughtful ones. She stopped al-

most at the edge of the brush, and turned to glance back toward the tents, her hands clasped at her breast.

"Thyra!" He called the name softly, like a caress. "Thyra!" he repeated.

She turned swiftly at the sound of his voice, and sudden alarm was in her face and manner.

"Who calls?" she asked in a low tone.

"Him they call the Ax Thrower."

He heard the little gasp of surprise she gave. For a moment she stood still, looking toward the edge of the woods. And then she moved nearer.

"Edvard, son of Haakon the Lover?" she questioned.

"It is I."

Now he stepped out where she could recognize him, then went back a pace, so that the guards would not see. She followed swiftly.

"What do you here at my father's camp?" she questioned. "If you are found—"

"I do not come in anger," he said.

"Then—" She seemed to question why he should come at all.

"Is it strange that I should wish to look upon your fair face again?" he asked.

"You might see me to-morrow at the fair."

"And waste the long night?"

"But you are in danger," she said. "There is not much trust between your house and mine."

"Then you did not wish me to come?" he asked.

"I have not said that."

"Did you not hope that I would? Did you not know that I would?"

"How should I know?"

"Did not your heart tell you so?" he asked. "And why are you walking alone in the moonlight, instead of listening to the shield maidens gossip?"

"Perhaps I grow tired of their gossip."

"If you do not wish to see me, I can go away again."

She hesitated a moment. "Since you are here, it were unmannerly to rush you away," she replied.

Edvard Haakonsson stepped closer to her, looked down at her.

"Never before have I seen a maiden so fair," he said. "I give thanks that my ax went true to-day."

"And I give thanks to you because it did."

"Our houses have plighted their friendship this day, and it is a good omen."

"But there is not much trust," she said. "Edvard Haakonsson, you must beware! Do not stroll about my father's camp at night. There may come a thrust in the dark." She shuddered as she spoke.

"Yet must I see you."

"In secret only, for the present. Perhaps, when days and days have passed, and Svend the Bloody has shown himself sincere—"

"But I cannot wait for days and days, Thyra. I—I want you for my wife."

"You?" she gasped.

"My heart already is filled with love of you. Can there be no hope?"

This was a wooing of the sort she never had known before. It were more the Norse custom for a man to want a maid and make a bargain with her father. She had expected that one day she would be betrothed to a jarl or noble warrior. Yet this manner of wooing pleased her best.

"There—there may be hope," she whispered.

"Thyra!"

"But how can it be? Think you that my father would give me to you? Think you that Svend the Bloody would have you mate with one of the house of Harald?"

"I am my own man!" Edvard said. "I am a jarl, even as Svend is a jarl! In a matter like this, I seek none but my own counsel, Thyra!"

"Then must you win my father over," she said.

"And I do not have you to win?"

"You already have won, jarl!"

He took the last pace toward her and clasped her in his arms, and then his lips met hers. A moment he held her so, then she stepped back again.

"I cannot understand how this thing has come," she said. "And I have the feeling that there is danger to follow—for you. Edvard, you must beware! If anything were to happen to you now, I should die!"

"Well will I guard myself," he said, "when there is such a reason for it."

"Svend the Bloody is to make us a visit. And you will come with him?"

"You may depend upon that. In my eagerness to see you, I shall ride in the van."

"But my father must be won slowly, if we are to win his consent at all," she told him. "You must teach him to trust you, as you have taught me. Perhaps, when you come for the visit—"

"Then we may be able to tell him?"

"Perhaps," she repeated. "But we must keep it secret now. It has all come so swiftly. And we cannot blame my father if he is slow to believe that Svend and those of his house have really changed."

"Then it must be secret," Edvard Haakonsson agreed. "But let us hasten the day."

"And now you must go, Edvard, my Ax Thrower. There is peril for you in the woods. I will return to the tent, and there pray for your safety. And, if you can, Edvard, let your heart turn from Odin and Thor and toward the cross."

He would have replied, but one of the guards turned and walked toward them. And so he clasped her quickly in his arms again, and once more he kissed her. And then he stepped back into the darkness of the dense woods, and was gone.

Thyra, her heart singing, turned toward the approaching guard, acknowledged his salutation, and hurried toward her tent.

## CHAPTER IX.

### SAVED FROM SACRIFICE.

**S**VEND the Bloody and his company remained two days longer at the fair, during which time Edvard the Ax Thrower saw Thyra several times, but not once did he get the opportunity to speak to her alone.

Then there came a bright morning when the jarls took their leave of King Olaf, and Edvard among them. Tents were furled, and the gallant companies left the town of Trondhjem and started back to their jarldoms.

His heart and mind filled with love, Edvard Haakonsson did not notice that the men at arms treated him in a peculiar manner. They gave him respect and the attentions due his station, but none of them warmed toward him. And each was particular to do or say nothing that might form the basis for a quarrel. For Magnus had passed the warning and had promised heavy punishment at Svend's hands if the order was disobeyed.

No sooner had he reached the jarldom than Svend the Bloody commenced preparations for the visit to Harald, not all of them, however, being made public. He selected presents, and made up a roster of his company, choosing the more prominent nobles and men of good blood, as though wishing to do honor to Harald, but for a purpose entirely different.

"We must take some of the maidens with us," he told Magnus. "Harald the Just is no fool. If we seek to enter his house with only warriors and thralls, and no women, it may put him on guard."

And so it was decided that Brynhild and some of the shield maidens should go along, it being planned for Magnus to whisper the truth to Brynhild at the proper moment, so the maidens could be rushed to some place of safety.

And now Svend the Bloody took thought on the enterprise he had planned, and consulted with Magnus frequently. His religious fanaticism burned brightly. For this was to be a battle for Odin and Thor, a service to the gods.

"We go not half hearted into this thing, Magnus," Svend said. "We need strengthening for our sword arms."

"There is one way to strengthen them."

"I already have thought of it—sacrifice!" Svend replied. "Olaf Trygvesson has forbidden it. But we do not take orders from the king here. We serve our gods, and let Olaf serve his, and see which is the stronger."

"You will make it a big sacrifice?"

"The greatest!" Svend replied.

Magnus's eyes opened wide. "You—mean—a human?" he gasped.

"Even so!"

"And the black jarl—"

"Shall not know of it," Svend declared. "Did he know of the sacrifice, he would wish to know the reason for it. A human being is not sacrificed these days merely to ask good fortune on a journey. And it is my wish that Edvard Haakonsson have no inkling of our real purpose."

"Then—" Magnus questioned.

"We must hold the ceremony when he is not near. None but the trusted men at arms will be admitted."

"That is well," Magnus replied.

"Some thrall—any thrall—will serve our purpose."

An evil glint came into the eyes of Magnus as he bent nearer the jarl. "Does not our purpose demand the best?" he asked, quietly. "Shall we be backward when we ask good fortune of Odin and Thor?"

"How mean you?" Svend asked.

"What is a common thrall to the gods? A little better than sheep or swine, and not half so much as an ox," Magnus said. "Can we not do better than that in asking the blessings of the gods on our enterprise?"

"Speak!"

"A free man!" Magnus suggested.

"A free man? Are you out of your wits? How could such a thing be arranged?"

"Eric the Dumb is a free man—now!" Magnus whispered. "How I detest the creature! He follows at the black jarl's heels like a cur, struts among his betters—"

"It is an idea!" Svend admitted.

"We can take him at night and bear him to the sacrificial chamber. After his blood has bathed the sticks, his body can be thrown over a cliff. And none will know, save trusted men! Would not that be honoring the gods and flinging defiance at Olaf?"

The eyes of Svend the Bloody glistened. "It would be a noble sacrifice!" he said.

"A free man for the gods! Does every jarl offer such a sacrifice as that?"

"You can arrange it?"

"I can!" Magnus promised.

"So be it, then! To-morrow night, before the moon shines!"

During the day following, Svend and Magnus whispered to the men they had chosen. Edvard Haakonsson, dreaming of

seeing Thyra again, noticed nothing wrong. The great house was a scene of confusion because of the preparations for the visit. It had been planned to start soon after dawn, hence Edvard the Ax Thrower sought his couch early, wrapped himself in his furs, and dreamed.

Outside the door, Eric the Dumb stretched his great body on guard. He, too, was dreaming of his new position in the world of men. Two thoughts were paramount in his slow working mind. One was that when the proper time came Svend the Bloody should be made to pay for murdering the thrall the day the ship had come. And the other that Eric the Dumb should serve the Ax Thrower with his life, and guard him from harm.

Finally the great hall was still. The thralls had finished their work and were sleeping, and all but a few of the warriors had prepared for the journey of the coming day. One by one the great torches burned out, until finally only two remained to cast fitful streaks of light across the big room.

From one of the rooms slipped three men. They wore armor, but their faces were covered. From shadow to shadow they darted, until they came close to where Eric the Dumb was stretched. Then one of them uncovered his face and walked forward boldly, attracting the attention of Eric.

Eric looked closely at him, but saw nothing more than a warrior pacing back and forth for a time before he sought his couch. And as he watched the other two sprang upon him from behind, smothering his head in furs.

Eric fought, but only with half a heart. The years of thralldom had taught him submission, and the habit was not easily broken. Still, he fought. But they bore him down and stunned him, and so carried him away.

Swiftly across the great hall they took him, and to the door of the sacrificial chamber. They carried him inside, where Svend and Magnus were waiting.

"Work swiftly!" Magnus ordered. "Bind him well, and stuff his mouth with fur!"

Again Eric fought, for his moment of

semiconsciousness had passed. But again they bore him down and worked their will. Thongs lashed his ankles and legs and fastened his arms at his sides. His mouth was stuffed with a piece of fur, which was bound there, so that he could do no more than groan. And then he was picked up again and carried.

It was dark in the sacrificial chamber, save for the light from a single torch. At one end of the room stood the altar, and upon it the bowl filled with twigs, into which the blood of the sacrifice was to be poured. Human blood it would be this time with which the warriors would sprinkle themselves. And Svend himself would act as priest, since there was none other handy. Priests of Odin were scarce since King Olaf had forbidden sacrifices.

"It is time!" Svend said. "Summon the men, but let them come quietly."

Magnus and the three who had made Eric captive went to do his bidding. The chosen ones were waiting for the signal. One by one they slipped across the great hall, and through the door of the sacrificial chamber. Slowly they gathered, while Svend the Bloody stood back against a wall, his arms folded across his chest, a sharp knife in his belt.

Behind the altar was a stone table, and upon this Eric was stretched and lashed, and the kirtle was cut from his left breast. Eric knew what it meant, for he had been in the chamber before. He tugged at his bonds, and found that they would not give. They were proof even against his great strength. He tugged while the perspiration stood out upon his brow, while his breath came in painful little gasps, and after a time he groaned and ceased his struggling. He knew that it would avail him nothing. He could only wait for the end.

Edvard Haakonsson had heard the slight noise at the door of his chamber when Eric had been taken. For a moment he did not get from his couch, only remained there listening. But presently he got up and walked across to the door, and opened it.

He was surprised to find that Eric was not stretched before the door, as he was usually. And, as he watched, he saw men slipping furtively across the great hall and

disappearing into another chamber, and knew them for warriors.

Here was a thing that needed investigation, Edvard thought. He knew that the room into which they had slipped was the sacrificial chamber. And he knew that it had a small rear door through which, in days gone by, the priests had entered.

He did not even put on his mail or helmet. He had no weapon save the knife at his belt, but he was not thinking of combat. Across the great hall he slipped, opened one of the huge doors, and went outside.

It was black night, which suited him. He slipped around the corner of the great house, past the sleeping thralls about the dying fire. So he reached the rear, and fumbled in the darkness until he found the little door.

Cautiously, he opened it and slipped within. He found himself far behind the altar, in front of which a torch was burning. He saw the sacrificial table—and the body of a man stretched upon it.

Then he realized the horror, though he wondered why his kinsman had not invited him to witness the ceremony. Toward the altar he went like a shadow, stopping now and then to listen. He could hear the voices of Svend and Magnus, some distance from that terrible slab of stone on which a human being lay helpless.

"There are four more to come," Svend said. "When they are in, bar the door!"

Edvard Haakonsson, almost stretched upon the floor, crept closer to the stone table. He reached it, and raised himself slowly and carefully. His hands went up and felt of the man's bonds. His head came up, and his eyes looked into the wide staring eyes of Eric the Dumb!

Again he listened, and heard another man enter the chamber. The time was scant, he knew. His dagger came out, and he slashed at the things, at the same time warning Eric, by a pressure of his other hand, to keep quiet.

Again he slashed. Eric started to rise, but Edvard thrust him back. But finally the thongs were cut, and he pulled the man off the stone table and toward him. Eric tugged at the gag, but Edvard Haakonsson motioned him to silence, and led the way to

the little door. They slipped through it, and into the night.

"Go into the woods!" Edvard commanded. "Let no man see you! But when we go to the house of Harald the Just, do you follow us through the forest, keeping out of sight. You can find me at Harald's."

Eric had torn the gag away. Now he knelt quickly, and pressed his lips to Edvard's sandal.

"Master—master!" he breathed.

"Go!" Edvard said.

Eric the Dumb fled into the darkness. A band of sheep had settled for the night at the rear of the great house, and Edvard seized a lamb. Once more he crept through the little door. All the men had entered now, he guessed. Svend the Bloody was commencing the ritual. In a short time he would be at the altar.

With the thongs which had bound Eric the Dumb, Edvard lashed the lamb to the stone table. Once more, like a shadow, he crept back to the little door. He passed through it, and closed it softly behind him.

The words of Svend the Bloody rang through the sacrificial chamber as he advanced toward the altar, the others close behind him.

"Mighty Odin, grant us victory!" he mouthed. "Great Thor, give us the added strength of thy hammer! To thee we make the sacrifice of sacrifices!"

"The sacrifice of sacrifices!" the others chanted.

"Aid us, Mighty Odin, against those who would be thy foes! Give us the victory

complete! Send us back again to our homes, else take us to thy bosom and grant us the glories of Valhalla! With this blood of a living thing—"

He stopped; he gasped; a smothered curse left his lips. He had reached the stone table, and his knife was poised to strike. But no human sacrifice was there—only a lamb!

"A trick—" Magnus began.

"Can a man change to a lamb?" Svend demanded.

"But how could he escape? Are the gods frowning upon us?"

"Fool!" Svend cried. "Dare you let such words leave your tongue? Human or lamb, yet must we have our sacrifice. Stand back!"

He continued the ritual, and men sprinkled the blood over their heads. And then Svend, furious, threw open the door of the chamber, and stalked into the great hall, followed by the others. Straight to the door of Edvard's chamber he went, and hurled it open.

A single torch was burning within. It showed Edvard Haakonsson as he raised his head sleepily and then struggled out of the furs, pretending to reach for his weapons.

"What is this?" he cried.

"It is nothing, kinsman," Svend the Bloody replied. "We were crossing the hall, and thought we heard you cry out."

"Perhaps," said the Ax Thrower, "I was dreaming of battle. Yet why should I dream of battle when to-morrow we start on a mission of peace?"

**TO BE CONCLUDED NEXT WEEK**

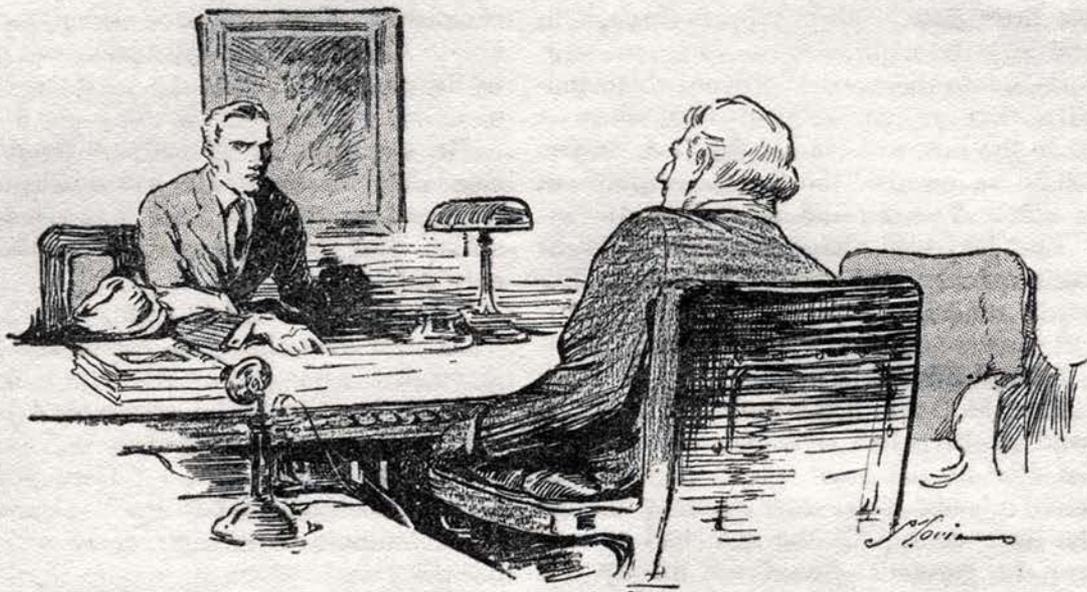


## SALVATION

ALL that he struggled for he loved,  
 All that he feared he braved  
 Until the coward in his heart  
 Went out—and he was saved.

Yet had he gone where others willed  
 Because they thought him weak,  
 He would not find in his own heart  
 The power he went to seek.

*Glenn Ward Dresbach.*



# Capital and Surplus

By **NEWTON FUESSLE**

**T**HE caged and watchful look in Wooten's eyes was evidently there to stay, for no mere passing mood or temporary diffidence could possibly have implanted it so deeply. His eyes were blue and mild and singularly agreeable. They matched the gentle structure of his short, straight nose, and harmonized with the clement curvature of his slender lips. Certainly Wooten was not a man to start an argument or indulge in verbal backfire. He had come honestly enough by his caged and watchful look. The one was the product of eight years of solitary confinement in a receiving teller's pen, and the other came from being continuously on the lookout for counterfeit bills and spurious signatures. Prolonged contact with the ready money of local depositors had ingrained in him an air of politeness that nothing had ever been known to ruffle.

If Wooten ever played soldier during his boyhood, there was nothing about his present appearance to denote that he had ever led the juvenile onslaught upon glistening

fortresses of snow. The cosmic ladle had obviously left the ingredients of gusto and generalship out of his meek personality. But there was a note of unquestionable resolution in his compact small chin and a gleam of fidelity in his watchful eyes that bore witness that he had the loyalty to follow if not the genius to lead.

He was not at all the romantic figure that Maisie had dreamed of marrying. But in due course she began to see him through a borrowed nimbus of glamour that dated back to a visit to New York during which she had gone on a sightseeing trip to Wall Street. The tense, energetic, and mysterious atmosphere of banking and finance had laid commanding hold of her, and from that day on the courteous little bank clerk at home had grown more and more interesting to her. He impressed her as a remote but definite part of the enchanting world of which Wall Street was the center. And so she set her cap for him, and finally became his wife.

So faithfully had Wooten served his

eight years' time in the receiving teller's cage that soon after his marriage he was released for good behavior and transferred to the bond department, where he was permitted to sit at a desk instead of being compelled to stand behind a counter. It seemed to Maisie that this carried him a step nearer to the inscrutable drama and unfathomable power of Wall Street.

Maisie's discovery of the extent to which Wooten was wrapped up in his job did not disturb her ambitious young soul. It augured well for his future and convinced her that he was headed straight for the presidency of the institution. The earnestness with which he labored, and the austere singleness of purpose with which the little man slaved for his employers, gave her the comfortable feeling that he would never come home to her with the dreary look on his face of one who has been discharged and must set out in search of new employment.

While she was moved, to be sure, by occasional twitches of regret that he cared but little for dancing or gadding, and while she began to realize by degrees that they would doubtless both have reached an elderly period of life before he attained the dignity and emoluments of an executive position, she took refuge in the thought that her husband would never be out of a job, and that surely, even though slowly, his status and salary would be advanced.

Maisie guarded Wooten's punctuality like a watchdog, and invariably had his breakfast on the table promptly at seven thirty each morning. He never reached his desk later than nine o'clock, and was usually the last to leave at night. For several years he had now been performing his duties in the bond department, and he had never made a mistake in figuring the yield of a bond issue. So closely had he applied himself to his work that he was hardly aware that Maisie had changed.

Her mercurial enthusiasm had diminished and she was no longer deceived by her early hopes that Wooten was headed for the top. She noticed that other men at the bank were moving up, but that Wooten was standing still. She would watch him with a pitying look as he meekly mowed

the lawn on Saturday afternoons, and would reflect that no one by the name of Wooten could possibly cut much figure in the energetic world of finance. She recognized that he was hopelessly negative and acquiescent. She felt panic-stricken and frustrated.

One bright October morning Wooten finished shaving and dressing according to his unflinching schedule, and descended to the minute dining room of their small suburban home. But for once he detected no smell of frying eggs, or bacon, or scrapple in the air.

"You eat your grapefruit a while," said Maisie, as she appeared for a moment in the kitchen doorway. The "a while" harked back to her Pennsylvania Dutch grandmother.

Wooten consumed his grapefruit, dividing his attention skillfully between it and the morning paper's report of yesterday's tendencies on the New York Stock Exchange. Each morning he consulted the financial page with scrupulous care, cherishing the secret fancy that some day New York might hear of his faithful services and insist that he pull up stakes and accept a position with one of the big Wall Street financial institutions.

Lost in his dreams, he was unaware that for some reason his breakfast was being unduly delayed, and only when Maisie brought in the rest of his meal did it dawn upon him that he was twenty minutes behind his habitual schedule. When he consulted his watch a look of pained resentment flitted to his face and he began bolting his food.

"What's the matter?" inquired Maisie, watching him with a look of cool amusement.

"I'll be late to work," he said critically.

"Well, what of it?"

Wooten gave her a look of grieved surprise.

"I've never been late to work before in my life," he answered pointedly.

"What did it get you?" demanded Maisie testily.

"What did it get me?" repeated Wooten in a kind of blank amazement. "What did it get me? That's a funny question for you to ask."

"That isn't any answer," said Maisie with a shrug.

There was something cool, unprecedented, and deliberate about her manner—something portentous and disturbing. It created an atmospheric pressure that had hitherto been foreign to the house of Wooten; and its meek little master was quite at a loss as to how to cope with the situation.

"That's no answer at all," continued Maisie, with an air of gentle belligerence. "I'd like to know why we should always have to jump through hoops at this hour of the day. I take notice that we're not getting anywhere in particular. It's just the same old thing over and over again, day in, day out, year after year, and what are we getting out of it?"

"What do you want me to do—lose my job? Is that it?"

"I don't know that it would be such a tragedy. I take notice that plenty of others are shooting right straight ahead of you, while you're standing still. It's very amusing to hear you talk about your job. One would think that it was the only job on earth. There are young men in this town making five times as much as you are."

"What at?" spluttered Wooten.

"Storekeeping; contracting; real estate," enumerated Mrs. Wooten pleasantly.

"Real estate!" sniffed Wooten.

"Yes, and there are a lot of day laborers who make more than we do," added Maisie.

"At least there's dignity to being connected with a bank," said Wooten defensively. "Money isn't everything."

"A bank *roll* means a good deal more than a bank *job*," contended the wife impatiently. "What fun do we get out of life? We can't afford to belong to the country club. We aren't able to travel. We haven't even got a car. Buying a hat or a dress is such an extravagant transaction that I feel guilty every time I think about it. I've never had a maid in my kitchen, and never will have. We're as poor as church mice—that's what we are. I should think you'd be getting sick and tired of it. I should think you'd have too much pride to make a drudge out of me."

Wooten looked sternly at his watch.

Never had he lingered so late at a week-day breakfast. He pushed back his chair with nervous haste.

"Oh, finish your breakfast," ordered Maisie. "If I can stand over a hot stove and cook it for you, the least you can do is to take time to eat it."

"But I tell you I'll be late," complained her husband. "I can't afford to be late."

"Is there *anything* we can afford?"

"You've knocked the appetite all out of me," declared the bank clerk fretfully. "I couldn't finish my breakfast on a bet. This is no time to start in on a tirade like this. I'm just as disappointed as you are that we haven't had better luck. But that's neither here nor there. I'm doing the best I can. I've stuck to my job just as faithfully as any man ever did. I haven't shirked for a minute. You know that as well as I do. I'm surprised to hear you let out such a roar. And if you expect to gain anything by it, you're mightily mistaken, I'll tell you that. I never knew you were so quarrelsome. Whom have you been talking to, anyway?"

"Talking to? I suppose I've been talking to myself. I don't get a chance to talk to anybody else. The friends you used to have at the bank have all become officers or department heads, and they don't look at us any more. Even the Shepherds haven't been here for three years. Why should they, now that he's a vice president?"

Into her final question Maisie poured all her pent-up anger and brooding and despair. "You're so wedded to that job of yours," she went on relentlessly, "that you don't even care whether you're making a drudge out of me. You don't care whether I've got any friends. Night after night you bury your nose in a book about your fool bonds. But as for getting busy and making enough money to buy a few bonds, I don't think it ever occurred to you. You hardly ever open your mouth unless it is to talk about the bank, and the bond department, and your two-by-four job. Your job! Why, you're wedded to it. You may think you're married to me, but you're wedded to your job. You're a bigamist—that's what you are!"

Wooten did not answer. He rose, seized

his hat, stalked savagely to the door, and slammed it violently behind him. It was the first time he had ever left the house without kissing Maisie good-by. His brain was in a turmoil, his nerves were in a state of peculiar tension.

He strode angrily to the interurban car line, missed the eight fifteen, and realized that he was stuck until the eight forty-five. He reflected sullenly that he could not possibly reach the bank until ten, and that for the first time he would be more than an hour late at his desk. His features hardened into a stern and gloomy expression; he could not think coherently, and the whole world suddenly seemed topsy-turvy.

The unexpected events of the morning had struck a blow to his pride that filled him with all the fury he was capable of experiencing. Maisie's outburst had given him a wrench that made him feel reckless. She had never talked to him in any such terms before, and if this was how she felt, he reflected grimly, their married life had descended to the level of burlesque.

A bigamist, was he? So that was what she thought of him. In his exasperation, strange notions began twisting through his brain. He imagined himself never going home again, never going to the bank again. He pictured himself taking a train for some outlandish place and starting life all over once more. How would it be, he wondered, to lose himself in some island in the tropics and live like a savage? He recalled Maisie's rebuke on the score of their lack of worldly possessions.

She had angered him, but after all he had to concede that she was not far wrong. It was a shame the way she had to work, while other women no better than she never had to go near a pan of dish-water. Some people were certainly born to good luck.

He got off the interurban and started across the street to the bank.

"Look where you're goin'!" yelled a chauffeur with an oath, jamming on his brakes.

Wooten jumped.

"Close shave, that," said a familiar voice, as a friendly hand seized Wooten's arm. It was Shepherd, one of the vice presidents of the bank. "What are you try-

ing to do? Get run over?" he asked good naturedly.

"Why not? I'd never be missed," growled Wooten in a tone the like of which he had never used before in addressing a superior.

"Indeed you would be missed," said Shepherd.

Wooten detested the amiable manner in which the other could utter such commonplace insincerities. He was resentfully aware of the healthy glow on Shepherd's face, his robust confidence, the springiness in his walk.

"How have you been, old man?" Shepherd was asking.

"Rotten!" snapped Wooten.

Shepherd looked at him with unconcealed surprise. He had never known Wooten to be anything but sweet tempered and mild and agreeable. He could scarcely believe his ears. His interest and curiosity were aroused. He tightened his friendly hold on Wooten's arm.

"Look here, old man, this won't do. What's troubling you?"

"What the devil do you care what's troubling me?" demanded Wooten ungraciously.

"I care a great deal."

Wooten did not answer, and as they entered the spacious bank together Shepherd added sympathetically: "Cheer up, Wooten. Don't feel so down on your luck. I'll see you later."

The clerk went sulkily to his desk, angered by Shepherd's patronizing air and by his pretense of interest. He could remember what a raw young fellow Shepherd had been when he first went to work for the bank. He had himself helped break Shepherd in, had helped steer him, and show him the ropes. He had watched him climb from nothing to a vice presidency. Wooten realized that he himself had at one time been the better man of the two, yet to-day he was the serf and Shepherd one of the masters.

He had worked like a dog, and yet, just as Maisie said, he had stood still while others no whit better than he had climbed right on up to the top. Even Street, the president, had been nothing but a paying

teller fifteen years ago. It made Wooten sick to think of it.

The manager over Wooten was a square jawed executive named Jarvis. He had only recently been appointed to the position, and was making a strenuous effort to key up the department into high speed performance, and to break a few records for efficiency.

"Good *afternoon*," said Jarvis, with a glance at the clock, as Wooten opened his desk and began work.

"Good evening," answered Wooten with a deliberate scowl.

"What's the matter to-day?" demanded Jarvis, twirling round in his swivel chair and eying Wooten inquisitively.

"There's nothing the matter with me. What's the matter with you?" asked Wooten bluntly.

"We used to be able to set the clocks by you."

"It's a lovely life being an hourglass," replied Wooten sarcastically.

He picked up a printer's proof of a new municipal bond circular, made a final checking of a table of rates, maturities, prices, and interests. He glanced at the footnotes and hedge clause, O. K.'d the proof, and threw it into a wire tray.

"What's that—the circular? The front office is in a big sweat for that circular," remarked Jarvis.

"It's ready for the printer," said Wooten, sharply.

"Many corrections?"

"A few."

"I was hoping we could get it on the press early this morning. That's the reason I didn't want you to drift in here so late on this of all days."

"You held up the circular yourself for nearly a week," retorted Wooten.

Jarvis's eyes narrowed. He was in no-wise accustomed to hear Wooten talk to him in this manner.

"I'll run my end of the business; you run yours," he ordered. "Get that stuff over to the printer, and get it there quick. If there's no messenger about, take it over yourself." There was a snap in Jarvis's voice, and an answering snap in Wooten's.

"I'm no errand boy," said Wooten with

quiet rage, pressing a buzzer for a messenger.

## II.

WHEN Wooten crossed the public square on his way to lunch he cast a hostile look at the Chamber of Commerce Building, where Street and Shepherd and Jarvis and other officers of the bank foregathered at noon. He recalled the airs these men put on, and he recalled with acute satisfaction that he had talked that morning to at least two of their number without mincing words. He had bowed and scraped to them, and had been their meek and lowly servant as long as he intended to.

Since Maisie's candor at the breakfast table, it no longer made a vast amount of difference to him whether he kept his position or lost it. Her attack had touched a buried spring of independence in him. It had worked changes in him that affected his whole being and bearing. She had given his pride a trouncing, had roused it from its coma, and stirred it to the core.

There was a subtle difference in his stride, and his mild blue eyes gleamed with a re-discovered sense of humor. It had certainly been amusing, he reflected, to talk back to Shepherd and Jarvis, and to see them blink.

Instead of grabbing the usual hasty lunch at the cafeteria, Wooten did an unprecedented thing. He went recklessly to the leading hotel and spent a dollar and a quarter for a meal. Instead of smoking one of his usual seven cent Manila cigars, he selected a twenty-five cent Havana, sank into the deep upholstery of an enormous chair in the lobby, finished his smoke without haste, and strolled back to his desk nearly thirty minutes late.

It was his first rebellious mood, and there was a novelty about it that rather fascinated him. Curious impulses had invaded him, and he had discovered that there was something in life besides tranquil and unresisting servitude.

Soon after he returned to his desk, Shepherd dropped around. He seemed unusually thoughtful and solicitous. He said: "I hope you're feeling better, old man. Your manner this morning worried me. Is there

anything wrong with you? How is your wife?"

"Fine. How's yours?"

"Never better. And that reminds me we haven't dropped in to see you people in an age. Going to be home to-night?"

"We're home every night."

"Well, how would it be if we ran over with the car and took you and the lady for a spin?"

"All right. We'll be glad to see you," said Wooten, and went to work.

Wooten went home that evening as if nothing unusual had happened that morning at breakfast. Toward the end of dinner he announced that the Shepherds were coming with their car.

"What's come over them?" demanded Maisie. "Did you ask them to?"

"Certainly not. What do you take me for?" asked Wooten.

There was a mellow bite in the autumnal air that evening as they motored over the winding slope of the country roads. Maisie, beside Shepherd, who was at the wheel, felt a touch of the old gayety that had almost deserted her since her marriage to the bank clerk. They wound up at a roadhouse eighteen miles from town. There was an orchestra and there was dancing, and Maisie danced for the first time in almost a year. Even Wooten, uneasy at first at being taken away from his lawn and his volumes on finance, soon found himself enjoying it.

Next morning Maisie had breakfast on the table again on the dot, Wooten was at his desk at nine, and that evening he returned to his garden hose and later to his books and pamphlets on public utility bonds.

"I wonder if the Shepherds will ever take us out again," remarked Maisie finally. "It was wonderful last night, wasn't it?"

"I don't know that it was so wonderful," answered Wooten. "What we ought to have is a car of our own. God knows we've worked hard enough to own a few things. We don't have to be patronized by the Shepherds."

His wife pricked up her ears, but went on with her sewing.

Now that fall had come, Jarvis, the square jawed executive of the bond depart-

ment, started a heavy mailing campaign to prospective bond buyers throughout the county. He himself prepared a form letter to accompany a circular of selected offerings, and prided himself upon having written a document with some real selling punch in it. There was, but in the extensive mailings that followed, the letter went to nearly all the names listed in the telephone directories of that and adjoining counties. Among those who received the letter was Street's father-in-law, a crusty old financier, and one of the chief owners of the bank.

When that old fellow was in the midst of reading the letter he grew red in the face, and when he had finished it he spent the next twenty minutes making sarcastic marginal comments, and dispatched it to his son-in-law, the president of the bank, in a great rage.

Two minutes after the communication reached Street he strode angrily to the bond department.

"Who wrote this letter?" he demanded, waving the form letter in Wooten's face.

"Mr. Jarvis, I believe," returned Wooten, calmly.

"Where is Jarvis?"

"I haven't the slightest idea."

"I want to see him. When he comes in tell him I said so."

"With pleasure sir," said Wooten.

The president had by no means had time to cool off when Jarvis reported to him a few minutes later.

"Who wrote this letter?" demanded Street, thumping it with his knuckles.

"I did. What's the matter with it?"

"Everything's the matter with it!" exclaimed Street. "The idea of sending a letter like that to the principal owner of this bank, and to God only knows how many more veteran bond buyers! How many of these letters went out?"

"About a hundred thousand."

The president groaned. "Why, you talk to these people as if they never heard of a bond before in their lives. You seem to assume that they've never even learned how to save their money. You insult them in practically every paragraph, and then expect them to come trooping in here and

become customers. It's a hell of a letter. Look at those comments on it."

Jarvis read them in silence; then he said: "He seems to resent the selling punch."

"Selling punch!" snarled Street. "The people of this county bought more Liberty bonds than any other county in the State. You don't have to send them any such ballyhoo circus stuff as this. If they want jazz, they can turn on the phonograph. Don't let me catch you sending out any more stuff like this."

Jarvis went back to his desk, beckoned to Wooten, and said:

"Don't mail any more of those form letters. We're going to send out a different kind of a letter. I want you to try your hand at it. Something very genteel. Write it as if you were addressing a bunch of old codgers who never did anything else but buy bonds. You might refer modestly to the bank as a fine, old established institution; but don't for Heaven's sake make it appear that we're really trying to do anything so crude as to sell any bonds. Oh, dear, no! Keep the letter so genteel that it leans backward. Refer only in a most casual way to our offerings. See?"

Wooten accepted the assignment without argument. He suspected what had happened, and from his knowledge of the abandoned sales letter he had a fairly correct notion of the kind of critical fire it had drawn. He knew that Jarvis had been on the carpet on account of it. But he welcomed the opportunity to try his hand at a new letter, and that night he composed a dozen different versions before he felt satisfied with the result.

After the final polishing and typing, Wooten delivered the letter next morning to Jarvis. He watched Jarvis knitting his brows, and at length heard him burst forth petulantly:

"You didn't listen to me. You didn't do what I told you. This letter is liable to sell some bonds, and that's exactly what I don't want."

"What's the letter for? To send out?" asked Wooten.

"Certainly it's to send out. What else do we write letters for? That's a bone-head question to ask."

"Is it?" asked Wooten, unruffled. "Since when does the bank send out letters that aren't supposed to bring results?"

A crafty expression gathered in Jarvis's eyes. He said: "I'm afraid the situation may be a trifle too-subtle for you to understand. This isn't a matter of brute force, but of strategy." Jarvis paused impressively. He looked at Wooten with the detached superiority of a human being contemplating a worm. "There are phases of the administration of such an institution as this that *you* could hardly be expected to comprehend," he added with slight but devastating emphasis.

But instead of being devastated, Wooten replied with a burst of spontaneous laughter such as had rarely been heard in the austere old institution during banking hours.

It is a painful ordeal to be publicly laughed out of countenance by a subordinate; and Jarvis's face grew red.

"Stop it," he snarled. "You make too much noise with your mouth. If there's a joke, it's on you. Do you hear? It's on you. Get your hat and get out of here. If you think I'll stand for any insubordination in this department, you're mistaken. Get your hat and get out. You're discharged; you're fired."

The grin on Wooten's face was so broad that when he put on his hat and walked out of the bank no one who saw him go had the slightest idea that he had been dismissed. Before boarding the interurban for home he stopped at the arcade for a bunch of roses and a box of candy. In the sunny sitting room he found Maisie industriously engaged in knitting a sweater. She looked at him with that quizzical, questioning look of misgiving that enters the eye of the wife of a wage slave who comes home from work too early in the day.

"I'm fired," he announced before she could make inquiries. In his voice was a note of unmistakable triumph. "I got into a racket with Jarvis and got fired for insubordination," he added with a conscious expansion of the chest. "It's the best day's work I ever did. I've been a worm so long that it had become second nature for me to crawl. But my crawling days are over, and from now on I'm on my toes."

There was a singular look of elation in Maisie's unsentimental eyes. "What are you going to do?" she asked.

"I may try storekeeping, or contracting, or real estate. In short, I'm going to make some money."

It was by far the most exciting thing that had ever happened in the house of Wooten, and as Maisie listened she felt a curiously satisfying chill running up and down her spine.

### III.

ONE week later, down at the bank, and in the office of the president, Street and Shepherd were in conference.

"That man Jarvis has proved a great disappointment to me," Street was saying. "His judgment is faulty and his methods aren't at all in line with our established policies. I've decided to let him go. I've asked for his resignation."

"It's not an easy post to fill," answered Shepherd thoughtfully.

"The manager of our bond department has got to be forceful and enterprising, but also tactful and diplomatic," continued Street. "He's got to know bonds, but he's also got to know human nature. Jarvis antagonizes too many people. I never felt comfortable with him about. Securities can't be shoved into a clientele like ours with a ramrod."

"At the same time, we've got to sell bonds," contended Shepherd.

"Without a doubt. In selecting a successor to Jarvis, we can't afford to make another mistake. How about O'Brien?"

"O'Brien's got a good head on him," rejoined Shepherd. "Good personality. Lots of drive. He's made a good assistant to Jarvis. There's only one thing I don't like about him. He worries too much. He's got one of those extravagant wives. She blows in his money as fast as he can make it. They're driving too big a car for people with their income. They entertain an awful lot. They've just traipsed their daughter off to a finishing school in New Hampshire. He's worried all the time. I've lent him money myself."

"All right. O'Brien's out," answered Street. "What about Smithers?"

"Too valuable a man where he is. We need more assistant cashiers instead of cutting down. I wouldn't know how to replace Smithers."

"Haven't we any tellers who are showing executive ability?"

"You can't tell much about a man's executive ability as long as you keep him in a teller's cage. Besides, we need some one who already knows something about the bond business. I'm afraid we'll have to fall back upon some out-of-town man."

Street pondered for a moment. "I don't like to go outside the institution if I can help it," he objected. "A bank ought to be able to train its own executives. I wish that man Wooten weren't so namby-pamby. He's a quiet, clean cut, serious minded fellow, an exceedingly hard worker, and apparently loyal. But he was never cut out for an executive. He hasn't enough drive or force. He's too damn nice."

"Well, Wooten is no longer with us, anyway," said Shepherd.

"What's that?" asked Street, pricking up his ears.

"He and Jarvis had a row of some sort, and it seems that Jarvis threw him out for insubordination," explained Shepherd. "There's been a good bit of a change in Wooten here lately. One day last week he snapped out answers to me in a way that nearly bowled me over. You know how painfully pleasant he has always been. Well, I got to wondering if they could be having trouble at home. So Mrs. Shepherd and I called, but found everything all right. Another time I overheard him talking back vigorously to Jarvis, and the next thing I knew Jarvis had fired him."

"Fired him?" repeated the president incredulously.

"Yes, but I never did find out just what the trouble was all about."

"How long was Wooten with us?" asked Street.

"I don't know. Probably ten or fifteen years."

"Any complaint about his work previous to this blow-up?"

"Never heard of any. I don't even know that there was any complaint about his work at the time he was discharged."

"Well, it's too bad. I'm sorry it happened."

"So am I," said Shepherd, turning to go.

"You might get in touch with Wooten and have him run in and see me some time," added the president. "I'd like to talk to him myself and find out what's troubling him."

#### IV.

WHEN word reached Wooten that they wanted to see him at the bank, he said to Maisie:

"I know what they want. They can't get any one to fill my place at what they were paying me, and most likely want me back."

"Maybe they'll be willing to pay you more," said Maisie hopefully.

Wooten's reply was brusque and menacing.

"Well, they'll have to talk real money if they want to do business with *me*," he declared.

After waiting for a few days Wooten dropped in at the bank, where he was presently informed by Shepherd that the president wished to see him. But when Wooten entered the large and somber office of the president, the latter paid no attention to him, remaining preoccupied with the papers on his desk.

Wooten cleared his throat, but did not speak. In the presence of the bank president, the old timidity was flooding him again, the old meekness and subservience and trepidation. The courage and belligerence he had lately achieved were ebbing away, and the old cringing weakness was relentlessly taking possession of him again. He despised himself for his cowardice, and felt a sudden animosity toward the self-confident official whose calmness and poise inspired it. But with a stalwart effort Wooten pulled himself together, and, with a show of courage that he far from felt, he said:

"I was told that you wanted to see me, Mr. Street. Is that correct?"

Street looked up. "Hello, Wooten. Just a moment." For half a minute he busied himself with his papers, then he leaned back in his chair and regarded Wooten with a quizzical air.

Then: "I hear you've been getting yourself into trouble, Wooten. What's the matter? What does it mean?" asked the president in a friendly tone.

"I'm afraid I can't answer that question," replied Wooten respectfully. "Perhaps Mr. Jarvis can."

"I've talked to Mr. Shepherd, but he doesn't seem to know what it's all about. No one seems to know. Just what was the trouble, Wooten?" questioned the president in a kindly tone.

"There was a difference of opinion," began Wooten. Then he checked himself. "But what's the use discussing it? It's a closed episode. I'm through. But perhaps I may venture to add just this, Mr. President. There must be something wrong with a system under which an officer of a bank has the power to fly into a rage and discharge a man who has put in fifteen years of faithful service. Don't misunderstand me, please. I'm not beefing. I'm out, and it's the best thing that ever happened to me. But I know this, that if one of your officers has the arbitrary power to assassinate the business career of one of his men for no reason that any one can discover, then, if you'll pardon me, there must be something radically wrong with the system under which it can happen."

"Just a minute, Wooten," interrupted the president. "That's a pretty serious charge you're making."

"If a man can be slaughtered right under your very roof during banking hours," continued Wooten tensely, "and no one knows why it happened, then there must be something wrong somewhere."

"Don't get excited, Wooten. Calm yourself," urged Mr. Street.

"Calm myself?" echoed Wooten with a shade of bitterness in his words. "I've been calm for fifteen years. Fifteen years I've stuck to my job with all the patience I had. Fifteen years I've been a clerk in this bank, hoping against hope that the time would come when my value to the bank would be recognized and there would be something better in store for me. But what happened? I remained a clerk—nothing but a clerk.

"My wife kept wondering why, but I

couldn't tell her why. If there's a streak of laziness in me, I don't know where it is. If there's any inferiority or inefficiency, I can't discover it. I've studied, and I've ground, and I've stuck. Others have galloped on ahead of me, but my chance never came. And yet I venture to say that I know as much about banking as any one in the place. I've worked while others talked. With the result that the bank hardly knew I was on earth. Why, this is the first time in years that I've been inside your office. I had to get fired in order to cross your threshold to-day."

"Look here, Wooten," put in the president, "we are not as indifferent about your case as you seem to think."

"And yet all you know about me is that for fifteen years I've been one of several hundred clerks who wear green eye shades. You don't know what I was fired for, and you don't know what I contributed in the way of work."

"Just what *have* you been doing since you left the paying teller's cage?" inquired the president with interest.

"You'll have to ask my superiors. Don't ask me. Ask Mr. Jarvis. If I tried to tell you, you might think I was boasting."

"I've made some inquiries, but no one seems to know just what you've been doing," pursued the president.

Wooten regarded the other steadfastly.

"For fifteen years," he answered dryly, "I've been on the job early and late. I never shirked. Yet you don't know what I've done. Nobody knows what I've done. You'll pardon me. I'm no longer in your employ. I'm out. So I can speak frankly. The books of this bank have to be balanced every day at the close of business. When the bank inspectors make their rounds, everything is in shipshape order. You know to a cent how much every one of your depositors has to his credit. You know all about the dollar equation, but you seem to know mighty little about the human equation. You want to know what value I have been to the bank, but you can't find out. You've got to call me in and ask *me*. Do you have to ask your customers how much money they've got on deposit? Not much. It's your business to know. And if you'll

pardon the suggestion, it seems to me to be just as much the business of a bank to know what an employee has deposited in the form of service."

The president had listened with attentive interest.

"That's an interesting point of view, Wooten," he replied. "You've touched upon an important point. It is possible that an injustice has been done you. What do you propose? What do you want done?"

Wooten shook his head. "It isn't for me to say what should be done. But it seems to me that if I were in your place I'd want to know what the department heads were doing with their power, and I'd want to know more about the fellows who are willing to stick patiently to their jobs year after year and who do most of the actual work that the executives get the credit for. The capital and surplus of a bank like this can't be measured merely in terms of money and securities. No—there's capital and there's surplus in the men at the desks and behind the counters. Good day, Mr. Street."

## V.

THE president of the bank gazed thoughtfully into space for several minutes after Wooten had gone. Then he sent for his first assistant and said to him:

"An old employee of the bank has recently been discharged. His name is Wooten. I want to know what kind of a record he made during his term of employment. I want a complete and detailed report of what he has done. I want some one to dig through the records and find out."

No time was lost in carrying out the president's instructions. Night after night the investigation continued. Officials and veteran clerks were interviewed. Innumerable ledgers, files, documents and carbons were dug into. And as the trail of the discharged clerk was followed up, it disclosed his services in connection with masses of important transactions. His painstaking handwriting, his initials, his O. K.'s, were found in thousands of forgotten places. It was found that a score of men who had subsequently shot ahead of him on the pay

roll had been turned over to him for instruction in their early duties, and six of them had eventually become officers of the bank.

He had blocked three different attempts at embezzlement. He had written hundreds of bond circulars, pamphlets and booklets. He had repeatedly persuaded managers of the bond department to inaugurate policies that had worked out successfully and become established practice. His patient and unobtrusive labors had time and again been capitalized by ambitious superiors to their own exclusive credit.

After a week of investigation the report was laid on the president's desk. He read it attentively and then he called his secretary and dictated the following letter:

MY DEAR WOOTEN:

Since talking to you, I have caused an investigation to be made of your services while you were in our employ, and am surprised at the volume of work and the quality of work for which you have been responsible.

I am indebted to you for some of the suggestions you made when you were in here the other day, and have given considerable thought to some of your views. You were in

the banking business for fifteen years. I have been in it for forty years. But you have given me some good advice.

I agree with you as to what you said regarding capital and surplus. The mistakes in management you pointed out will not occur again if we can help it. We are at work now revising our system of accounting to include the human equation.

Drop in and see me again at your convenience. I want you to come back into the organization. We need your help in making some of these changes.

Faithfully yours,

JOHN STREET.

Wooten read the letter and then handed it to his wife without any comments.

"Well!" she exclaimed happily. "You have certainly brought them to their senses. They want you to come back. You will go, won't you?" she asked anxiously.

"I don't know. It depends on what they've got to offer."

"Maybe they'll be willing to pay you more," she said hopefully.

"I'm not worrying about that part of it," answered Wooten confidently. "But if I do go back, I know I'll get a square deal. And that's something."



## YOU ARE:

YOU are the day  
In whose white radiance  
My sense can find the time  
For naught but play.

You are the night  
In whose soft splendor  
My thoughts like twinkling stars  
Do dream of might.

You are all time  
In which fantastic dreams  
I weave, that have as yet  
No reason and no rime.

You are all space  
In which there's room  
For naught, besides the presence  
Of your tender grace.

You are the tide  
On whose surging roll  
My joys and sorrows, too,  
Forever ride.

*Eve Warren.*



# Another Woman's Life

## CHAPTER XV.

"THE PRINCE KNOWS NOTHING."

JENNY walked up and down the archduchess's sitting room. She had switched on all the lights.

On the mantelpiece a golden flying cupid held a little crystal clock. It struck nine with a chime like a musical box. All the clocks in the castle were kept half an hour fast; so it was half past eight. She had been up there nearly half an hour.

Down in her sitting room the ex-empress was telling Prince Nicholas the truth.

He knew it by now. He knew that she was a fraud. She would never see him again. He wouldn't want to see her. He was hating her, despising her. She had helped to make a fool of him. No man could forgive that.

She stood before a mirror. She wore silver lace over pale rose, and the long chain of rubies that matched in fire the magnificent ring on her left hand.

There was no gayety in her mouth. To

herself she looked ugly and old. The color in her cheeks and lips stared at her and made her angry. She took her handkerchief and rubbed vigorously, leaving cheeks and lips ghastly white after the glow of friction had subsided. At least, she need not do that any more.

She wondered what they would do with her. Probably get her out of the castle at once. Their plan had failed. They would want to get rid of all traces of their deception. Of course the prince would back them up, however disgusted he might be. They would all hang together. She could see herself being let out of the distant postern gate and bundled into a swift but inconspicuous motor car. Once more being carried Londonward through the night.

In memory she heard Nicholas commanding her to think of him every second until he came back. She had obeyed. She had one of his letters inside her dress at that moment—a little note that had made her grow pale as she read it, and bury her face in her hands and picture his return, quite

*This story began in the Argosy-Allstory Weekly for November 24.*

forgetting that hand in hand with his return for the wedding must go her disappearance from the scene.

It seemed to her that hours passed. Why did nobody come? Had they forgotten her? Had the prince gone away at once? It could not take all this time to tell him.

How angry he must be! How splendid he must look when he was angry! Oh, what a fool she had been to do it! What had she done but broken her own heart?

She would never see his dear face again. He would never hold her in his arms again and call her "little girl" and kiss her, and look at her with that half wonder in his eyes as if the fact that they loved each other were too good to be true.

Symbolically, she took the ring from her finger. She held it for a moment, kissed it passionately, sobbing to herself like a lost soul, and was about to take it into the dressing room and lay it in its case, when the door opened and the Baroness Dora Luini came in.

The pale, precise lady looked like an apparition. She seemed to glide over the carpet without a word.

The little crystal clock chimed out the hour of ten.

"Have you heard anything?" the baroness asked. "Has any one been up here?"

"No," said Jenny dully. "Do you want me to get ready to go at once?"

"My dear," said the elder woman, "the empress has been taken ill. She is lying unconscious. The doctors say it was a stroke. She was weak, you know. The shock—"

"The shock of telling the prince," said Jenny solemnly.

"I don't know. She hasn't spoken."

"But the prince?"

"I only saw him for a moment. He was alone with her majesty when it happened."

"Didn't he say anything to you?"

"No. Only how grieved he was."

"But he must know the truth."

"I suppose so. But it was no time to discuss it."

"What am I to do? I had better go."

"I don't know." The baroness's agitation was painful to behold. "He asked to see you—"

"Oh, no! I couldn't!" cried Jenny in horror.

"I said you were indisposed. It is only natural."

"I had much better go at once."

"I don't know. Supposing—supposing she did not tell him?"

"But she must have told him!" cried Jenny.

"Yes, I suppose so. The shock of telling him must have brought on the attack. I am at my wit's end. I must consult the archduke when he is visible. He is with the empress now. Countess Grioch and General Mortis insist on leaving everything to me. It is hardly fair. But they say that I was more entirely in her majesty's confidence. In this matter, I suppose they are right. Don't move from here until I come back."

She left the room, and Jenny gave herself up to her miserable thoughts.

The baroness came back about half an hour later, more distressed than ever.

"The archduke—oh, my dear, what a terrible business this is! He—you know how simple and silent and vague he always is! Well, now he is like a child! He worships her majesty. I can get no sense out of him."

"I had much better go," said Jenny again.

"The prince has returned to Broadmeads, thinking he might be in the way. He has seen the doctors. He left word with General Mortis that he hoped to be able to see you to-morrow. General Mortis is strongly of the opinion that you should stay here. Of course, the marriage will be postponed. General Mortis is seeing to all that. Fortunately, it was to have been so quiet that it won't make much difference. So it cannot hurt, if you stay for a day or two."

The baroness presented such a pitiable spectacle that Jenny could not be angry with her. But it was just the same as ever; her feelings were not considered in the least. They expected her to remain in this odious position; perhaps even to bear the brunt of the prince's anger and scorn. But that she was determined no power on earth should persuade her to do.

Jenny was firm. She would not see the prince when he came the next morning. They must explain to him. They said it was quite natural for her to be upset.

The ex-empress still lay unconscious.

"Can't you tell whether he knows or not?" the girl asked desperately.

"No," the baroness answered. "He says nothing. His manner has not changed in the least. He seems very much concerned about you. It is most mysterious. I can't help hoping—"

"Hoping?" asked Jenny, driven to distraction. "What can you hope? You must see that for me it is unbearable!"

"You have been so good," was all the baroness could murmur, gazing appealingly into the girl's white face.

Toward evening the ex-empress recovered consciousness. There was a hopeful rally. Prince Nicholas sent constant inquiries and said he would remain until he received definite news and until her imperial highness was well enough to see him.

At ten o'clock Jenny was alone in her rooms, having played with the food served to her, and half inclined to slip into bed without summoning the maids, and find a brief respite from her miserable thoughts in sleep.

But the baroness came to summon her to the ex-empress's bedside.

"Her majesty wishes to see you. She is extremely weak. The doctors fear the worst. But her mind is perfectly clear. Come, please! Her majesty wants to see you alone."

Jenny looked at her dressing gown. The baroness nodded.

"You must change," she said. "Her majesty wishes everything to go on as usual."

So it was in full evening dress that Jenny was taken to see the wonderful little old lady in her sumptuous room.

At eleven o'clock Jenny and the baroness were alone again in the archduchess's sitting room.

The girl was sobbing with a mixture of awe and grief.

"Oh, it was terrible!" she said. "How could I do it? And what else could I do?"

"My dear, try to collect yourself," the baroness urged. "It is so important. Everything depends on you now. So her majesty had not told the prince the truth!"

Jenny wiped her eyes and struggled for calm.

"No. She said she was thinking out the best way to tell him. He had not even begun to speak of me—I mean, of the archduchess. She was trying to break it gently to him—and then she remembered nothing more."

"Her majesty is quite herself, is she not?"

"Oh, yes—so wonderful! But she frightened me, too, lying there, with that loaded revolver by her side, and her eyes—they seemed to be seeing things in another world! I felt as if she had already gone away."

"So the prince knows nothing!"

"No. And she asked me to stay on until the archduchess came back. She implored me to. She said she was sure to come back. I could hardly hear her voice—it was like a silver thread. She made me give her my promise. I did. Oh, but I oughtn't to have done it! It makes it worse than ever."

"My dear, you were generous and right. And what difference can it make? There can be no wedding yet. And her majesty is right. The archduchess must come back when she hears of her grandmother's illness. She cannot be lost to all sense of decency."

"But I cannot see the prince!" Jenny insisted. "You must understand that. It would be too hateful. He would condole with me on her majesty's illness. I should have to accept his sympathy and it seems too utterly low. It is playing the fool with kindness of heart. I can't do it, and I won't!"

"We must manage somehow," agreed the baroness.

Some one came to the door. It was an officer of the household to summon the baroness to the ex-empress's room.

There were assembled the Archduke Gabriel, the ex-empress's chaplain, and the principal members of the imperial household.

On the stroke of midnight Melita Ariadne Marguerite Louise Alexandrine, ex-empress of Rosemark, breathed her last.

## CHAPTER XVI.

### JENNY'S RESOLUTION.

THE funeral ceremonies were over.

There was no news of the Archduchess Stephanie.

Jenny had resolutely refused to appear as a mourner. The idea shocked her too deeply.

The baroness arranged everything. The archduchess was seriously indisposed owing to the shock of her grandmother's death on the very eve of her wedding. Such a condition of affairs was generally understood. The press was most sympathetic toward the young couple.

It was announced that the wedding would be postponed for six months.

One brilliant April morning, Jenny, clad in deep mourning, which revolted her sense of decency and fitness, faced the baroness with the look of a hunted animal in her velvet brown eyes.

"I know I promised," she said. "But I can't keep my promise—I simply can't."

"A promise to the dead," reminded the baroness.

"But the archduchess has not come back! She must have heard of the empress's death."

"There must be some reason. She may be ill. She will come back."

The baroness was transformed. Her precise voice was full of passion—the great passion of loyalty to the family she had served all her life. "It is only a few days longer. The prince is leaving to-day. I only ask you to see him once more when he comes to say good-by. It would be so cruel to let him know of her majesty's deception now—so soon after she has been laid to rest. He admires her so. And she thought so much of you. Only a day or two before she died, she said to me 'She is a sweet girl, a good girl. I only wish Stephanie had her disposition.' I think, I believe, she loved you, Jenny. And you gave her your word—on her death bed."

The solemn words seemed to fill the room with the strange spiritual strength of the old lady's presence. Right or wrong, Jenny was hypnotized. She gave in.

And just then the chamberlain came to announce that His Royal Highness Prince Nicholas of Galmatia was in the library.

Jenny looked at the baroness in mute despair when the official had withdrawn. The baroness pointed to her left hand.

"The ring," she said.

Jenny went into the dressing room and took the glowing ruby from its case, slipping it onto her finger. It was another symbolical act. She was putting on her mask again; she was deliberately helping to break her own heart.

In somber black, unrelieved save by the blood red stones on her finger, she accompanied the baroness out of the room.

In her perturbation the baroness did not even notice that the girl's face was not made up.

"Oh, Stephanie, you poor little ghost! I am so sorry—so awfully sorry!"

Prince Nicholas stood before Jenny in the great library, with its somber richness of books and woodwork, and the famous collection of Roman and Greek bronzes, and the mysterious Persian rugs, like carpets of flowers, and the real flowers, the blaze of spring tulips in the copper and bronze vases.

"I feel a perfect beast," the young man went on, "for worrying you to see me. I didn't understand somehow that you would feel it like this. You thought all the world of your grandmother, I suppose?"

"She was very wonderful!" Jenny said.

He made no advance toward her for a few moments. He stood looking at her. At last he said in a low voice:

"How lovely you are! How much more lovely than I ever thought!"

And then even the shadow of death could not restrain his youthful fire, and he took her into his arms and kissed her passionately, hungrily.

"Stephanie! You are my little girl still. I shan't mind going away now I've seen you again. I won't say anything to hurt you, sweetheart! Only think of me! That's

all I ask. My mother will write to you. Perhaps you'll be able to come and stay with her for a little while—later on. They say we can't get married for six months now, don't they?"

"Yes," Jenny breathed. Half of her was in heaven, and the other half loathed this wicked assumption of grief. She did indeed feel some grief. The ex-empress had never met any one on whom she had not set a seal of her magical personality. But this grief that she was supposed to feel was a mockery.

"Stephanie, tell me you love me!" whispered the caressing voice.

And out of the depths of her heart she confessed it.

"I love you, Nicholas!"

The scene was more than she could bear. She could see that her sorrow to him was sacred. He would not speak of himself, of their plans, not even of their love. He had asked her for the one simple statement, and she had satisfied him. But although it was true, it was also false; and the falseness seared her soul.

His arms released her.

He was gone.

She had played her part. But this was the end. She took a solemn oath. She had played these people's game. She had pretended to be what she was not.

To play the fool with his position, with his rank, with the political aspirations of his country and of the imperial family of Rosemark—that was one thing.

But to play the fool with his love for her and her love for him—that was another matter. And that no power on earth should persuade her to do.

This was the end.

## CHAPTER XVII.

### AN UNLUCKY MEETING.

**T**HAT was a strange day.

Jenny saw the Archduke Gabriel for the first time since his mother's death. He was now, of course, the head of the household. The ex-empress had left him the whole of her enormous fortune and her estates for his life; and afterward the

Archduchess Stephanie would inherit everything. The ex-empress had already made a princely marriage settlement on her granddaughter, so that the absent girl was probably the richest heiress in the world.

The archduke made an even stranger impression on Jenny than before.

"Do you know," she said to the baroness afterward, "it almost seems as if he thinks I am really the archduchess. He was so nice to me this morning; so kind. He said now we two were all alone, and what a great loss we had sustained, and how he hardly felt strong enough to manage everything and I must try to be a help to him. And he gave me a lot of money, and said he hoped I would order the meals. It made me feel so creepy."

"I am afraid his mind is going," the baroness answered. "He has never been quite like other people. He was in the terrible battle of Fresinelle as quite a small boy, and they think it affected him. But he was a splendid soldier. You can see how he is wrapped up in his war maps now. It is a great comfort that he takes you for the archduchess. Oh, that wicked girl! How can she have the heart to stay away?"

It was then that Jenny announced in a solemn tone of voice:

"I cannot meet the prince again. Indeed, I cannot. If she does not come back, you must make some arrangement so that it can be avoided. You must see it yourself. To accept his sympathy, to pretend—no, it's impossible! It's indecent," she added violently.

"We must see what we can do," said the baroness, looking alarmed. "My dear, your sentiments do you the greatest credit. You see, there are six months. And you will be expected to lead the quietest of lives. And the prince would hardly propose himself to stay here for some time to come."

"He suggested my going to stay with his mother."

"We must get over that somehow. But, of course, of course, the archduchess must come back."

"I must go away for a few days," said Jenny to the baroness a few days later.

"My brother has gone to the seaside. I have not seen him since he has been moved there. He will think something has happened to me. It is so mysterious the way I have been sending the money every week. Besides, I must see him. He is the only person I have in the world."

The baroness hated the risk; but Jenny was adamant. So it was given out that the archduchess was confined to her rooms, and the girl slipped out of the distant postern gate into the inconspicuous car, and was driven to a junction on the railway. There she waited for a train direct to Margate, where Bertie was.

"One of the maids from Argar Castle," she heard a porter whisper to a country woman, who looked at her with interest.

She found Bertie much as usual. The air was doing wonders for him physically, but it did not improve his temper. He grumbled because she did not come more often. He did not like the home. He hated so many open windows. He was always cold.

Jenny had meant to go to London, but she decided not to. She would stay in Margate for the three days of her absence. In London she might have run across somebody she knew. There was the possibility of a meeting with Marcus Phare. She had heard nothing more of him, and almost persuaded herself that she had been mistaken in thinking he had recognized her. The excitement and bewilderment of the ex-empress's death had put him out of her mind. But London was no safe place for her.

It was fate.

On the second afternoon of her stay she was taking a stiff walk along the cliffs. It was such a relief after the confined life of the castle. She was a girl naturally fond of exercise, and poverty had made her into a great pedestrian.

She wanted to breathe fresh air—physically and mentally. Her life of lies was telling on her. She saw what a high price human beings paid for earthly greatness. She had a hundred pounds in her hand bag, and, if she chose to take it, a good income for life was guaranteed to her. But she was utterly miserable, and she wished

herself with all her heart and soul back at Mme. Lacour's, the humble manikin, with her heart in her own keeping, and able to look every man in the face.

The past was spoiled for her. She did not suppose she could ever go back to it. And the future she dared not think of. It held the unspeakable moment, the moment in which Nicholas discovered the truth.

On her return she passed the large hotel at the eastern end of the town. A man was just coming down the steps of the glass-covered porch. He was protected against the keen north wind by a thick ulster and a white woollen scarf.

As Jenny passed, he stared hard, made a little sound of astonished recognition, and started in pursuit. Jenny, all unaware, was going over her parting with Nicholas in her sorrowful mind.

A quiet voice sounded behind her.

"Is it your imperial highness, or is your visit here incognito, and should I say Miss Devon?"

She turned to meet Marcus Phare's smiling gaze.

It was sheer cruelty. She had not gone to London for fear of meeting him. And here he was. And he had recognized her.

Blindly she set her feet on another path of lies. There seemed nothing else to do.

"I don't understand you, Mr. Phare," she said coldly.

"Don't you? Perhaps I didn't make myself clear. I went to Argar Castle near Lordstone not long ago with a deputation to wait on Her Imperial Highness the Archduchess Stephanie of Rosemark with a wedding present. She received us in company with her fiancé, Prince Nicholas of Galmatia. And the royal lady was none other than yourself."

"I cannot understand you," Jenny said again.

"You are going to deny it, then? Of course you would. I have been investigating portraits of the lady. You are amazingly like her. But I knew you at once. There is only one Jenny Devon in the world."

"I think you are mad, Mr. Phare," said Jenny scornfully.

"Oh, no! But deeply interested. I am

going into this. Of course, the main idea is clear enough. For some reason the young lady is absent, and you are taking her place. But does the prince know? He is a good-looking boy, isn't he? How do you like being engaged to him?"

"I don't know what you are talking about."

"It must have been pretty awkward when the empress died," went on the suave, mocking voice. "I noticed that the archduchess was overcome with grief and kept to her own apartments. I suppose you wouldn't like to tell me the truth?"

Jenny flashed him a withering glance. She was half paralyzed with fright, but there was too much at stake.

"I shall try to find out," said Phare blandly. "You see, I am very much interested in you. I would hate you to come to harm. It seems to me that you are playing a slightly dangerous game. I think I can get into touch with some one who would help me. I know one of the archduchess's most intimate friends. I never had the honor of being presented to her—until the other day. You were quite delightful, I must say."

"Really, Mr. Phare, I wish you would not talk such nonsense," said Jenny. "I haven't the slightest idea what you mean. I am here visiting my crippled brother."

She walked very fast. He kept step with her.

They were about to cross a side street when two ladies came round the corner. Both were elderly, distinguished-looking, and dressed in black. One of them gave Jenny a startled glance, then stopped and made the slight regulation curtsy that the occasion demanded.

The girl hurried on, the man by her side. Her cheeks were flaming.

Phare looked back.

"The ladies are glued to the pavement," he chuckled, "wondering why you did not acknowledge the salutation."

Jenny's heart was pounding. She was ready to cry with distress. There were quite a number of people in the castle who did not know that she was not the archduchess. That lady must be one of them, and must have recognized her.

"It is a great game," said Phare. "I admire you intensely. You're as clever as you're beautiful, and as plucky. I want you to be my wife, and I hope you're going to say yes. Indeed, I am sure you are."

"Is that a threat, Mr. Phare?" she asked.

"No. But I warn you I'm going into this business. It is far too interesting to drop. Unless, of course, you'll tell me all about it."

"There's nothing to tell," Jenny said. "You are making a ridiculous mistake. Good-by, Mr. Phare. I'm going to see my brother."

She left Margate the next day, full of terror. She saw nothing more of Phare, but the thought of him was always with her, sinister, menacing.

And yet, frightened though she was, she could not bring herself to tell the baroness about him.

## CHAPTER XVIII.

### THREE MEET.

**T**WO days later, Jenny was alone in the archduchess's sitting room in Argar Castle.

It was about half past seven o'clock. She had a book open on her lap, but she was not reading. Time hung heavily on her hands. Of necessity she had no companionship. The baroness was busy with General Mortis, sorting out their late mistress's papers. Other members of the household she hardly ever saw. She took her meals in her own rooms, except when the Archduke Gabriel invited her to share his table. But that was more painful than anything else. He was convinced that she was his niece, and to play her part with him was the greatest of all her difficulties.

Everything was at a standstill. She had no ordinary relaxations, no housekeeping, no shopping. Her mourning clothes had been sent down by Mme. Lacour without fittings. The trousseau, of course, was hung up until the first period of mourning should be over.

Life was just a dull waiting for the archduchess to come back.

Jenny rose and walked over to the window, and looked out at the quiet waters of the moat, reflecting the pale primrose of the evening light.

The door opening made her turn, and she saw a stranger come into the room. It was a woman wrapped in a dark fur coat with an enormous collar. She wore a fur cap and a thick veil, and as she raised it, Jenny had the curious experience of looking into a face the very living image of her own.

She could see the likeness herself, and had to own that it was extraordinary. Of expression she could hardly judge; but the vivid make-up struck her, and she realized that hers had never been quite so obvious. Also she noticed the much more careless carriage, an assurance born of a position that could never be called in question.

So this was Stephanie of Rosemark. She had come back.

"Well, my little substitute!" said the archduchess, and Jenny heard the difference in the voice and wondered how Prince Nicholas could ever have been taken in. "I've stolen a march on you! I wanted badly to see you. I slipped into the castle and found one of the old servants one can trust and put him on his honor not to tell anybody I am here."

She surveyed Jenny with mocking but not unfriendly eyes.

"You're prettier than I am," she said. "But we really are as like as two peas. I've been ill. That's why I didn't come before. Poor old grandma! I have been a nuisance to the whole lot of you. No wonder Nicholas fell in love with you, my dear! I suppose you've had some grand times together. And now he's gone back to his country! Well, what do you think of me?"

"Your imperial highness," began Jenny slowly.

"Oh, stop the imperial highness, my child!" cried the careless voice. "You know what it is to be one yourself."

"I'm glad you've come," said Jenny from the bottom of her heart.

"What? Tired of poor Nicholas already? But I don't know that I'm going to stay altogether. I'm pretty fed up with the life I've been living. Being hunted is

no fun, I can tell you. I feel quite sorry for the fox."

She glanced mischievously at the ring on Jenny's finger. "I say, our young man has good taste, hasn't he?" she asked. Then she stopped, holding up her hand to enjoin silence.

There were sounds in the adjoining room. She ran to the communicating door and locked it. Then she came back to Jenny's side.

"I want to talk to you before anybody sees me," she whispered. "I suppose the maids have come to dress you. Come with me. We'll slip down to the library by one of the back stairs. It's a room that's never used. Nobody will disturb us there. Probably old Luini will be looking you up here before long. I've got a lot to say to you."

Jenny could do nothing but comply. Also she was deeply stirred by the fascinating, careless figure with lines of a secret history already written on her young face.

She followed the archduchess, and they slipped down a side staircase at the end of the corridor.

They met nobody on the way to the library. The archduchess opened the door, and they went in, Jenny shutting the door behind her.

The room was lighted up. As they entered, a tall young man rose from a chair by the fireplace. He wore an ulster, thrown open, and a tweed traveling suit under it. It was Prince Nicholas.

Jenny stood rooted to the spot. Stephanie gave a little laugh.

All three gazed at each other in profound silence.

Jenny's first sensation, curiously, was one of immense relief. The truth was out. The deception was over. She could breathe again. It was as if a great load were suddenly lifted from her.

Her second sensation was one of anger at the archduchess's frivolity. How could she laugh at such a time?

How Prince Nicholas came there was a mystery. He was supposed to be back in Galmatia. There had been no expectation of his return.

But there he was, and for a few moments

—each seeming an endless age—he looked from one girl's face to the other. His eyes, dark and cold as a thundercloud in winter, rested finally on Stephanie, who stood careless, and to Jenny's eyes insolent, just as she had sat her horse in the film that the girl had seen on that dreary Sunday now more than six weeks ago.

"The girl of the hunting field!" said Nicholas at last.

Then he looked at Jenny, and his eyes grew more threatening still.

"The girl of the little china room!" His voice was low and he spoke as if to himself. The next moment it rang out harshly: "Ladies, I make you my compliments. You have both fooled me beautifully. Would it be presumptuous to ask for an explanation?"

Jenny had once thought how splendid he would look when he was angry. She saw him now. It was a cold, imperious wrath; his eyes were like stones; his face was white under the tan; on his temple she saw a blue vein throbbing; his lips were curved in a scornful smile.

She was dumb. She stood, head bowed, the picture of misery, of fear, of repentance. A convicted sinner, deeply conscious of her sin.

"The explanation is simple," began Stephanie lightly. She moved over to Jenny and put a careless hand on her shoulder. "You are not to blame this pretty little girl, my dear Nicholas."

At that moment the door opened, and the Baroness Dora Luini came in.

She gave one look at the trio, then a wild shriek, which she tried hard to smother with her hands. Her knees gave way and she sank into a chair.

Nicholas bowed to her.

"I am only asking for an explanation, *madame*. Do not alarm yourself."

Long training came to the distracted lady's aid. The passion of her loyalty to the great house of Rosemark surged up in her and gave her strength.

She rose and mechanically curtsied to the prince. She was trembling still and her whole being was given over to devastating despair. But she did not show it. She had acquired composure and dignity; it was as

if the collective spirit of the imperial family of Rosemark had entered into her, in order that she might defend their cause.

"I beg leave of your royal highness to make the explanation," she said. "Neither her imperial highness nor this young lady is to blame. Have I your royal highness's permission?"

"Certainly. Please go on, *madame*."

"I will ask her imperial highness to allow me to conduct your royal highness to another room," said the baroness. "I will ask this young lady to wait here and her imperial highness to go to her own apartments."

"My good old Luini," interrupted Stephanie, "not a living soul knows I'm here. I came in by a back door, and only old Victor saw me, and he won't tell. I went up to my rooms and found my little substitute there. I brought her down here because I wanted to talk to her undisturbed. I had no idea that Prince Nicholas was going to complicate matters like this. It can't be helped now. I've given the whole show away. It's all my fault, of course, and you can blackguard me all you like."

"I have not been back to Galmatia," Nicholas put in. "I had a message from my father, telling me to go to Paris on some private matter. I stayed at our embassy incognito. I came back before going home because I wanted to see—" He stopped short. His eyes were fixed on Jenny, who dared not look up. "Because I wanted to see the archduchess," he continued in a frozen voice.

Then Jenny did look up. She met his accusing eyes, and gave him one wild look of adoration and despair.

The baroness and the prince left the room after Stephanie had gone. She protested that she wanted to talk to Jenny, but the lady in waiting pointed out that the archduchess must be in her rooms to be dressed for dinner.

Stephanie gave way. The baroness was all authority. She dominated both the headstrong girl and the furious prince.

Jenny was left alone in the library.

Half an hour later the baroness came back. She sat down and put her hands to

her head. Jenny, who was walking up and down the room, paused.

"The prince has gone," said the lady in waiting in a thin, tired voice. "He did not wish to stay. I would not urge him. His car was waiting outside. He wouldn't even stay to dine. Oh, what an awful thing that he should have come back!"

"What did he say?" Jenny asked.

"Very little; hardly anything. I told him the truth. Of course, I made light of the archduchess's escapade. Oh, why did she come back like this? Hasn't she caused us enough misery already?"

"I suppose he was very angry."

"Yes, very. It's quiet, cold anger that frightens you. I suppose he was more angry because he was taken in. He's going home at once."

"I suppose he will not—break off the engagement?" asked Jenny. The words sounded banal and silly.

"Oh, no, he would not do that! He did not speak of it. You see, it is all arranged. It would be impossible. Think of the scandal. And besides, the marriage is still as desirable. Circumstances have not changed."

"No," thought Jenny bitterly—"only the girl."

"There are six months before the wedding. The unpleasant impression will pass. Now that the archduchess has come back, it will be all right. I am sure we can never, never thank you. You have behaved admirably throughout."

"I had better go now."

"Yes. It will be safer. One cannot take risks. I will take you up to my rooms and fetch your clothes for you. You must have some food up there, and I will order the car to fetch you about ten o'clock. I am so sorry it's so late. But we must take no risks."

Jenny took the ruby ring from her finger and laid it in the baroness's hand.

"I shall be glad to take off this mourning," she murmured. "It—it stifles me."

"You have behaved admirably throughout," the baroness repeated. "We can never make it up to you."

No, they could never make it up to her. They could not bring back the love light

into Prince Nicholas's eyes. Now she would certainly never see him again. That was her last look at the beloved face, with the furious harshness in the eyes and the cold, reckless smile on the lips.

She had helped to fool him, and he hated her.

The archduchess demanded to see Miss Devon. She insisted. She threatened.

So it was arranged. Jenny consented unwillingly enough, although she could not help a certain curiosity. But she was too wretched to have any strong feelings except about her own sorrowing heart and her empty future.

Dressed in her plain coat and skirt, with her hat on, she went up to the orange and gold sitting room, while some trusted servant kept the coast clear.

Before, she had had a clear understanding with the baroness. She would take no money except what was absolutely needful for Bertie's and her expenses until she could find work again. The baroness pressed a thousand pounds on her. She took a hundred. She wanted to give back the pearl necklace and the diamond and topaz bracelet. The baroness implored her to keep them. The pearls her late majesty had especially chosen for her from her own jewel case. She had worn them herself as a young girl. She wanted Miss Devon to have them. She had such a real feeling of gratitude and kindness toward her. She had so thoroughly understood that Miss Devon wanted no money for what she had done.

Jenny gave in, and kept the pearls, but the bracelet she gave back. It could only embarrass her. The baroness almost tearfully begged the girl to let her know if she were ever in need of help. She must not be too proud. She must realize that she had done more for them than they could ever repay.

Jenny got the impression that the baroness did not fear for the future. The archduchess had come back. The prince might be angry, but he was bound by the rules of his caste, as all men and women were. After all, when he agreed to take Stephanie for his bride he had never seen her. It could not make much difference to him.

Jenny found Stephanie in a deep chair, smoking a cigarette. The remains of a meal were on a table. Jenny herself had pecked at some food up in the baroness's room, in order to please that much perturbed lady.

The archduchess wore a filmy black garment with flowing sleeves and a knotted girdle of dull black beads. She had no make-up on her face, and her skin looked sallow, and there were hollows under her eyes. She said she had been ill, and she looked it.

Her face fascinated Jenny more than ever—that face so like her own and yet tonight so different. The secrets were showing through; something sad, something rebellious, something desperate. She was not wearing the ruby ring.

"I want to talk to you," she said, and through the carelessness of her voice sounded a quality that played on Jenny's feelings like nervous fingers on a harp. "Do you know, I have absolutely nobody to talk to. I never have had. My head is bursting with things to say. It's so queer looking at you—so like me, and yet not a bit. Prince Nicholas was taken in—actually thoroughly taken in. He didn't understand me when I turned up before. He thought I was capricious and being horrid to him. He fell in love with you at first sight."

"Please, your imperial highness," said Jenny faintly.

"Don't call me that. For Heaven's sake be natural! Nobody is natural with me. My grandmother never was. She believed in discipline. My Uncle Gabriel is dotty. I've always been on my own—inside of me, if you understand what I mean. At least, listen to me. I trust you. I know you won't go back on me. You're as good as you're pretty. I'm not good. I loathe the life here—everything about it. I loathed the idea of this marriage—from the first. Imagine being engaged to a man you've never seen! But you understand that now—that is why I can talk to you—that's why I *must* talk to you. Do you know where I've been? Tell me straight."

"I was told," said Jenny, hesitating.

"That I'd run away with a man? With Count Saxt?"

"Yes."

"Well, it's true. The first time I put them off the scent. We hadn't time to get married, and there were other difficulties. So I pretended to come back like a good girl when I was found. And I told them the count had nothing to do with it. But he had. The second time we had laid all our plans. We got married—"

"Married!" exclaimed Jenny in amazement.

"Well, we went through a form of marriage. My people wouldn't allow it was a marriage, of course. I was crazy about him, you see. I can't help telling you all this. I must tell some one. You know, I suppose, that they followed us—Monsignor Stellaria, my confessor, and other people he employed. We were hunted and harried from place to place. But we gave everybody the slip and got to Constantinople, where for the moment we were safe. Am I boring you?"

"Oh, no," said Jenny, her eyes fixed on that vivid, haggard, mysterious face now quite unlike her own—the face not of a girl, but of a woman at grips with life.

"Count Saxt has deserted me," said the vibrant voice, careless even in its naked misery.

"Oh!" gasped Jenny.

"That was why I was ill—in Constantinople. It nearly killed me. I tell you, I was crazy about him. I worshiped him."

"But—how could he do such a thing? You were married."

"I felt I was married. I would never have looked at another man."

"Didn't he—love you?"

"Who knows when a man loves or when he doesn't? They got at him—my people. I found out afterward. They bought him. That's what men are. I gave up my position—everything—to go and be his wife. I would have lived in a garret with him, in a slum—anywhere. My people said it was no marriage. They bribed him. He took money from them—money to desert me."

Jenny was shocked to the depths of her being.

"How awful!" she said. She forgot the insolence, the harshness, the unsympathetic

frivolity that the girl displayed; she saw only a woman shamed and humbled. She looked into a naked soul.

The archduchess took a flat locket from under her dress. It was of gold, and had some letters in diamonds on it. She opened it and handed it to Jenny.

"I was crazy about him," she said again. "You don't wonder at it, do you?"

Jenny looked at the man's face. It was not a very young face. It was handsome in a barber's block way—wide liquid eyes, curved lips, a silky-looking mustache, rather curly hair. A weak, insipid-looking face. And the girl loved him passionately, and Prince Nicholas, with his masterful, manly beauty was merely a cypher to her!

"What are you going to do," Jenny asked.

The archduchess shrugged her shoulders.

"He has deserted me. He slipped away without a word, leaving a note, explaining things. *Explaining* things! That's what men are! I would have stood with him against the world. He listens to my people! The marriage will be annulled. My marriage will be no marriage."

"And you will marry Prince Nicholas?"

"I suppose so. If he will have me!" She laughed with an indescribable bitter levity, and repeated:

"If he will have me!"

## CHAPTER XIX.

### A THREAT.

A MONTH later, on a sultry May evening, Marcus Phare was passing Charing Cross station when he encountered Jenny Devon coming out of the gates. Her skin looked whiter than ever; her eyes were full of even sadder questions; she was dressed in deep black.

He took off his hat, and held out his hand, saying in his quiet, dangerous voice.

"I was wondering what had become of you. So you've given up your rôle as royal understudy for the moment? But I see etiquette has a hold over you. You are in mourning for the late empress, I take it?"

"I am in mourning for my crippled brother," Jenny said coldly.

The man's voice changed to a note of concern.

"Oh, I am sorry! Forgive me! It was unpardonable. Did the poor little chap die suddenly?"

"Yes—the end was quite sudden. He was at Margate. Everybody thought it was doing him good. Then he caught a cold—and pneumonia. He hated the place," she added, almost childishly. "He didn't like the open windows. He said he was always cold. And now he's dead. He was buried to-day."

"Look here," said Phare, reading signs of exhaustion in her voice and manner, and, no doubt, a certain weakness that might further his own ends. "You're coming to have some dinner with me. I insist. You're tired to death. I'll take you to a quiet place. Why, you poor child, you're ready to drop!"

He hailed a taxicab and put her into it. It was just about seven o'clock. He had been going home to dress and dine at his club.

Jenny did not resist. Her nerves were on edge; there was thunder in the air; she had eaten nothing since the morning. She felt utterly desolate. She had not known herself how she clung to poor, disagreeable Bertie as the one person belonging to her. Now she was all alone in the world.

The taxi drove a very short distance and stopped in front of an old-fashioned restaurant that had taken a new lease of life.

They were shot up in a lift to the very top, and entered a large room decorated like an Italian garden on a hilltop, with cleverly painted walls showing beautiful landscapes, and the tideless blue sea below. About the tables were arbors of vine, orange, and lemon, cunningly lit up.

"This place never fills up until supper time," Phare said to Jenny. "You needn't be afraid if you don't want to be seen."

He ordered a choice little meal. A hidden orchestra played Italian airs. Some of the glamour of the south seemed to creep into the girl's weary veins, and a good deal of it was certainly to be heard in Marcus Phare's voice.

"I am lucky to have met you. I have been thinking about you all these weeks.

I suppose you are an independent young lady now."

"What do you mean?" she asked.

"That your working days are over."

"You are wrong. I am working very hard."

"As a manikin?"

"Part of the time."

"But not at Mme. Lacour's?"

"No."

"That would hardly do—now."

He smiled at her disarmingly. His manners were really perfect. There was something oddly attractive, too, about the mixture of the libertine and the intellectual in him. Jenny hated and feared him; but she could not help feeling that charm. No woman could. There were not a few women of the great world who would have been glad to be in the girl's place that night.

He encouraged her to eat and drink. Life and animation soon came back to her. She was so young, so superbly healthy. Neither nervous strain nor sorrow could long injure her beauty.

When he had lit his cigar, he leaned across the table and said:

"I may as well tell you—I know all about it."

"About what?"

"About the Archduchess Stephanie."

He turned round and called a waiter, asking him to bring some illustrated papers. He did not speak until they were brought. Neither did Jenny.

He opened one, and gave it to her.

It was a picture of the archduchess and the Archduke Gabriel attending a requiem mass for the late empress in the chapel at Argar Castle, celebrated by a special emissary of the Pope. Jenny had seen a much worse printed replica in one of the daily papers. There was also a picture of a magnificent wreath sent by Prince Nicholas of Galmatia, and a snapshot of the prince taken at some public function while in England. He was fiddling with his tie in a way he had. Jenny remembered his doing it when he was with her at the laying of the foundation stone of the Children's Hospital, and when they received the deputation of which her present host was a member.

"The young lady has returned," said Phare in a low voice. "And so you are just an ordinary person again, Miss Devon?"

"Please, Mr. Phare!" she protested.

"You may as well listen to me. I told you in Margate I should find out all about it. The archduchess ran away with Count Saxt with whom she was infatuated, and you, being her double, were induced to take her place. She has been abandoned by Saxt and has returned home, and no doubt there has been the devil to pay. You and I are the only outsiders who know this in the whole world—or so I imagine. I assume that the prince was taken in at first."

Jenny caught her breath. Was there any use in denying the story?

"I presume the marriage will take place in due course," Phare went on. "The secret has been well kept. You were on the spot. And I don't suppose Nicholas wants the world to know how he was fooled. But the world would enjoy the story, wouldn't it?"

"Oh!" gasped Jenny.

"There's nothing to stop my telling it."

"You couldn't do such a cruel thing!"

"I don't know." He played idly with his coffee spoon. His steely blue eyes were fixed on her flushed face.

"Mr. Phare, what good could it possibly do you? To make such a scandal! What have they done to you? The poor empress is dead. You would drag her name into it, too? You would ruin the archduchess's life, and the prince's?"

"It would not do me the least bit of good in the world," he answered frankly, "unless it helped me to win you for my wife."

"It could never do that!" Her breath came in gusts of indignation.

"Are you sure? Why won't you be sensible? I don't know whether you've fallen in love with the prince, but you can't possibly marry him. Do you want to go on slaving all your youth for a few shillings a week, wearing yourself out? I can give you nearly everything in the world. You would be one of its richest women. You are wonderful; much more than beautiful. You have power over men. You weren't

out of place in Argar Castle. You certainly wouldn't be in my houses. I'm quite frank. At first I wasn't sure, but now I know that I want to marry you."

"But I don't want to marry you, Mr. Phare," said Jenny, stiff and distant, although her heart was thumping with fright.

"Well, perhaps this knowledge of mine will help you to change your mind."

"But you couldn't be so cruel as to do it! Besides, who would believe you?"

"I think I could prove it. And, anyhow, royalties can't afford even rumors. They have all to be like Cæsar's wife."

"Oh, but you couldn't do such a thing!"

"Why not?"

He looked at her with his disturbing, covetous gaze. Then he smiled.

"I'm not going to be in a great hurry. I'll give you time. I'll say nothing more for a week or two. You can think it over. Only—don't try to escape from me, to hide, because it won't be any good. And now tell me all about yourself."

Jenny kept a brave front. She talked in an ordinary way. The man took stock of her, following his own train of thought, making his own deductions.

When he saw her into a cab, his eyes pierced her with their blue fire. His quiet voice seemed to take possession of her.

"You are a wonder! There's nobody like you in the whole world. You're a woman who can't be bought with money. You've done all you've done for these people at Argar Castle, and you've never got anything out of it."

He shut the door of the cab, and gave the driver her address.

Then he leaned through the window again, and said more quietly still.

"Little Jenny, all women have a price. I must find out yours."

## CHAPTER XX.

"A GENTLEMAN TO SEE YOU."

JENNY earned less money than at Mme. Lacour's, but she was, of course, better off because of poor Bertie's death.

She had found a post in a big Knights-bridge shop. She felt easier among a crowd

of other young women. It was a temporary post, for the season.

She did not attract much attention. Perhaps her looks had fallen off a little. Perhaps her eyes were too sad and her mouth never showed its gay enchantment. But she still walked like a spring day, and as a manikin there could be no fault to find with her.

Her heart was not in her work. She could not concentrate on this life. The life of Argar Castle, strangely enough, seemed much more real. It was not that she cared for the luxury and splendor of it. It was the prince, of course. Reality had gone out of her life with him. Daily, hourly, she pined for him, wherever he was, hating and despising her for a heartless fraud. What Phare said was true. She had something more than beauty. He called it power over men. But it was really one man's power over her.

That she had changed in this short time was clearly proved to her one day when she met Linette Gurney in the street. Of course, she had changed the way of doing her hair again, and there was no make-up on her face; but it was something more than that.

Linette was very pleased to see her dear Miss Devon, and told her about her visit to Argar Castle and raved about the arch-duchess, never dreaming that the girl she was talking to was the very unapproachable princess she had so humbly admired.

"I think you really are a bit like her, Miss Devon," she said dubiously. But that was all."

And, thinking of Stephanie, Jenny realized that she, too, had changed in the short time. She was not the girl of the meet, nor the girl whose photograph Prince Nicholas had seen before he came to England. Womanhood looked out of her eyes, the excited, hollow, dark-ringed eyes of the girl who said she had been "crazy" about a man.

The next day was Sunday. Jenny went for a long walk in Regent's Park in the morning. She had promised to dine with Marcus Phare. She didn't want to, but she could hardly help herself. She was so afraid of what he might do. He had said

it was no good her hiding. And she knew it. Twice she had dreamed that he had published the truth from the housetops, and that Prince Nicholas was the laughing stock of Europe. In one of the dreams the Archduchess Stephanie committed suicide. Jenny had hardly touched her food that day.

Phare had written and asked her to dine. A very kind letter, without a hint of a threat. It frightened her all the more.

She came back from her walk unconsciously rested and soothed by the beauty of the trees and flowers in the park. She looked radiant. Black suited her. The empress's pearls glistened on her white neck. She wore them, finding everybody thought them artificial.

Her landlady met her at the door.

"A gentleman to see you, Miss Devon. Luckily Mme. Gloria's away for the weekend, so I showed him into the drawing-room."

Jenny's heart sank. It could only be Phare. Why had he come at such a time, when they were to meet in the evening? He must have something disagreeable to say.

"What name?" she asked.

"He didn't give none, but he said he was sure you'd see him. Such a handsome young gentleman! Oh, there, my joint's burning!" She shuffled off toward the basement stairs. "Let me know if you're asking the gentleman to stay to dinner, Miss Devon," she called back.

Jenny's heart pounded as she went up to the first floor. A handsome young gentleman!

She opened the door. She was half prepared, but her breath failed her and she thought she was going to faint.

Prince Nicholas stood with his back to the marble mantelpiece. He looked—he looked a prince. To Jenny's eyes he filled that commonplace Bloomsbury room with light and glory.

She could not speak. She stood there, swaying a little.

He came over and shut the door behind her.

They looked at each other. He was not smiling; but his eyes were alight.

Jenny felt like somebody drowning in happiness—the happiness just of seeing him there. She had never expected to see him again in all her life.

Nicholas walked back to the fireplace. He did not offer his hand. Still he did not smile.

"How do you do?" he said conventionally.

"You—you are here!" murmured Jenny.

"I have come to see you."

"How did you find me?"

"I made the Baroness Luini give me your address."

"I wonder she did."

"She had to." His mouth was grim.

He came nearer to her.

"She told me your name is Devon."

"Yes. Jenny Devon."

"What a pretty name!" His eyes were accusing. "Why did you do it? The baroness told me you would not take money. Why did you deceive me like that?"

"I don't know," she answered. "The baroness implored me to. They were in a terrible state. I don't think I quite understood. She talked of a terrible scandal. She said I was the only person who could save them."

"And the second time?" he asked.

"Why did you do it the second time?"

"Oh—I don't know! I can't tell you—really. I refused. I refused point blank. I felt I couldn't do it again."

"But, after all, you did."

"After all, I did."

There was just a hint of melting about his face.

"And the third time. Why did you do it, then?"

This she could answer.

"Because the empress made me promise. She was on her death bed. She made me promise to stay until the archduchess came back. I couldn't resist her. She died. I didn't know what to do."

He came quite close to her. His eyes looked as if a fire had suddenly been lit in them.

"Did you never think of me? Didn't you know it was wrong?"

"Of course, I did," she whispered.

"But you didn't care?"

"Of course—I cared. I knew you would hate me—when you found out."

"You did think of me—then?" His voice was low; it was warm and caressing again. "When you came back—did you think of me?"

His hands were on her shoulders. He pulled her toward him. She was helpless under the fire in his eyes. He drew her very soul out of her body.

"I—I only thought of you!" she breathed.

His lips were on hers, on her neck, on her hair, on her eyes. She found herself sobbing wildly.

"My love, my little love, you have told me everything!" Nicholas said. He was transformed; ardent, passionate, triumphant. "You love me, you are just what I knew you were—the most wonderful girl in the world!"

He held her so close that she could hardly breathe. Such happiness she had never dreamed of. It was so strangely, deliciously made up of both peace and violence. It was like coming from a dark, rugged valley in one blinding moment onto a hilltop swimming in golden sunshine.

She remained in a breathless ecstasy until at last he released her. Then she shivered with the icy chill of memory, of reality.

"Tell me you love me, Jenny!" the warm voice pleaded.

"I mustn't," she said, struggling to collect herself. "How can I? It was all—all untrue. You are a prince and I am a little manikin. How can we love each other? You are going to marry the Archduchess Stephanie."

He gave a short, angry laugh.

"Nothing in this world," he cried, "will induce me to marry the Archduchess Stephanie!"

## CHAPTER XXI.

### A PARTING.

"AREN'T you playing rather a dangerous game?"

Marcus Phare spoke to Jenny Devon over the dinner table that same night.

It was a large, fashionable restaurant. Phare had proposed it, and Jenny had agreed, thinking she was more lost in a crowd.

The soft night air came in through open windows from the river. On the table creamy yellow roses lay around a bowl of lilies of the valley. The lights were golden shaded. Jenny wore a thin black frock. The top was transparent, and showed black velvet ribbons over her white shoulders. A wired black lace headdress, half toque, half cap, covered her corn colored hair, with a quaint bunch of ribbons hanging down one side. The empress's pearls completed the toilet.

Her eyes were dreamy; her face was brushed over with the magic of love. To the man's jealous eyes, she was quite obviously in another world.

His question brought her back to this one quickly enough.

"What do you mean?" she asked.

"I saw you this afternoon at the Old Road House near St. Alban's, having tea with Prince Nicholas of Galmatia."

"You saw me!" she said in a distressed voice. "I did not see you."

"Quite obviously," he retorted, "you saw nothing and no one but his royal highness. I think it is a dangerous game. I don't think any one else happened to recognize him. But they might have done."

The waiter was changing plates and dishes. Jenny was silent, while Phare made a few trivial remarks.

Her thoughts were back in the afternoon. He had seen them. It had been wrong of her to go with Nicholas. She knew it. But she could not help herself. He had carried her off, saying he could not talk to her in that stuffy room on such a lovely day. It was immediately after he declared that nothing would induce him to marry the archduchess. He said they would not talk about her any more, or about Argar Castle or about anything that was past; but only about themselves. And his manner had changed. He became his old merry, frivolous, irresistible self, the masterful, light hearted, beautiful young man who had taken possession of her on their very first meeting.

She protested that they might be seen when he suggested taking a taxicab out into the country and having tea somewhere. He said nobody knew him. He was incognito, staying at the embassy. The ambassador was old and nearly blind. The secretaries were excellent fellows. There was no woman in the establishment, his excellency being a widower. He came and went as he pleased. He had come over especially to see her, to find her out. Ostensibly, of course, it was a private visit in order to see his fiancée.

Jenny went with him. The afternoon was a blur of delirious happiness. All unpleasantness was forgotten. He had forgiven her. He was assured that she loved him. He assured her that he would never love any other woman. They might have been any boy and girl together on a perfect early summer day.

The hours sped and they drove back, Jenny in a dream. When she reached her room she had barely time to change to go to dinner. She had to go, now more than ever, although she hated it more than ever, too. But the idea of the fraud practiced on Prince Nicholas being revealed to the world was intolerable. She simply had to keep in touch with Marcus Phare.

And Marcus Phare had seen them.

The appetizing odor of the 'Chicken Maryland' on her plate rose unheeded to her nostrils.

Phare, plying his knife and fork, smiled at her.

"I had to tell you," he said in a conciliatory voice. "Candidly, isn't it dangerous? A nice titbit for any scurrilous newspaper—Prince Nicholas of Galmatia having tea with the double of the archduchess whom he leaves pining in her castle!"

Jenny looked at him in a helpless rage. She had no answer.

His manner grew almost paternal.

"You're very young, Jenny. Won't you believe that I am your friend? What good can come of such meetings? Granted that you and the prince fell in love—what can come of it? What can he offer you? Nothing—honorable."

She kept her eyes on her plate, making a pretense to eat.

"I am naturally concerned," he went on. "I want you to be my wife. I want to keep you from anything that can harm you."

"What do you mean? Why are you saying this?" She was so disturbed that she nearly choked over the words.

He poured some mineral water into her glass.

"Drink that! By gad, you look pretty even when you choke! My dear, I want nothing but to warn you of danger. The prince is a very good looking young man. He has had his head turned ever since he was a lad, and he isn't at all likely to be particular in his conduct toward a girl like you. Forgive the apparent harshness. But one must look facts in the face. What *could* you be to him?"

Jenny could not speak. She was afraid of bursting into tears.

"Do face the truth," urged the quiet voice. "Prince Nicholas will marry the archduchess and amuse himself with other women. I don't want you to be one of the—other women."

Jenny could have killed him for speaking in this ugly way of her beloved. She was so angry that she became childish.

"I think you are impertinent and horrible!" she said fiercely. "I hate you!"

"I hope that mood won't last," he answered. "It's a very unfair one. Any true friend of yours would tell you the same thing."

That was the hideous part of it. He was right.

"But I'm not going to worry you any more now," he went on. "Do let's be pally and have a nice time. You're eating nothing. Let me peel you this peach."

Later, he saw her into a cab. She would not let him drive her home. She was so firm about it that he did not insist.

"You've never looked more lovely than you do to-night," he whispered as they crossed the pavement together. "I am giving you time. I am very patient. You must admit that."

The next day Nicholas wrote to Jenny, saying that he was coming to call for her to dine with him at an out-of-the-way café

in Soho—a place, he assured her, that hardly anybody knew but the small Italian shopkeepers of that region.

Mme. Gloria was back. Jenny could not have the use of her room. She could not see the prince in her own. All the others were occupied.

She must see him. It was to be for the last time. What was she to do? She went.

Again it was like a dream, being there in that funny little half underground place with the sanded floor, and all the rows of colored bottles behind the desk of the smiling, swarthy 'padrona.' They ate smoking dishes of macaroni, she and this gay boy so handsome that he delighted all the habitués, foreigners, every one, talking to them in their own language, smiling, laughing heartily, snatching the guitar from the hands of a musician to show him how a passage was to be played, humming in a rich, warm tenor voice a tune that he wanted them to learn.

To Jenny it was Paradise, like nothing she had ever known or dreamed of. As he played the instrument, Nicholas tossed his head and his brown hair became untidy and fell in a thick lock over his forehead. Like that he was more irresistible than ever. He insisted on her drinking some red wine, and he toasted everybody and everybody toasted them: "*it bello signorino e sua bellissima ragazza!*" He translated it to Jenny. "The beautiful young man and his most beautiful girl!"

All things have an end.

Out in the street, Nicholas proposed they should walk back to her lodgings. He fell into silence, as they walked, pulling her arm into his and holding it tight.

Under the great shadow of the British Museum, soft and majestic in the moon-

light as some mighty Greek temple, Jenny made the little set speech that she had been preparing all day.

"Prince Nicholas, I am very sorry but I cannot see you again."

"Jenny, why?" he asked almost roughly.

"I must not. Please, you must understand. You are a prince."

"Worse luck! Jenny, for that reason, am I to have no happiness?"

"You must understand," she persisted.

"I—I can't bear it."

"You mean that you love me."

"Yes."

"I think I do understand," he said after a pause in a low, discouraged voice. "I love you too much, Jenny. We love each other too much."

"That's it. I knew you would understand. It's too good to be with you, to see you, to go about like this. It's too beautiful; and it's no good."

He did not speak. She could hear his quick, rebellious breath.

In her ears rang Phare's quiet, warning voice: "I don't want you to be one of the—other women."

In desperation, feeling that she must convince him, she said brokenly:

"What is the good of our loving each other? What can I be in your life?"

He caught her close to him with one arm, still walking. They came to her doorway.

"I know," he said, and his voice sounded like a miserable boy's. "You can be nothing in my life—that I want you to be."

They made their sad little pact. Tears were streaming down her cheeks. He kissed her—only once. It was farewell. His last words, as she put her key in the lock, were a pretty foreign sounding little sentence: "I leave my heart with you."

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK



## NEXT WEEK

in addition to the start of the new Hopalong Cassidy series, there will be the opening chapters of Homer Eon Flint's "Out of the Moon," a striking five-part serial, and "Crab Reef," a Complete Novelette of extraordinary adventures, by Theodore Goodridge Roberts.



# The Seventh Son-in-Law

By **LESLIE GORDON BARNARD**

**I**N the dying light of day the broad acres of Armand Gauthier lay smugly content under the mellowness of the hour. Father Brisson, diverting himself and pleasing his host, Claude DeBoissy—with whom he was making an overnight visit—by inspecting a new pair of field glasses of DeBoissy's purchase, focused them upon these acres on the farther slope of the valley. His mood induced a new appraisal. He had always rather liked the place. Now he became confirmed in a recent vague suspicion of smugness.

A house, roomy, built of stone, straddled a slight rise, and was approached by a trim, graveled walk, bordered with whitewashed stones and flaming red geraniums. Lawn and flower beds in front, primly laid out; a market garden to one side; a flower garden with fruit trees behind, fenced off; spreading on four sides away from the rise, fields of wheat, of barley, of corn, of hay,

of everything that repaid cultivation under the hands of the hired men and the sons-in-law of M. Gauthier. And, in the lush pasture lands sloping toward the river, sleek, mild eyed cattle—Jerseys in the smaller field to the left, just a few; black and white Holsteins dominating the larger area to the right. Armand himself discernible, when the focus was properly established, smoking a long pipe in the ruddy light, and looking upon his work with the satisfied air of a man who found it good.

The priest, watching, saw the man turn to the north, to the south, to the west, gazing long in each direction. He was not at a loss for interpretation. Bordering the actual acres upon which the useful tithes of Armand Gauthier were assessed were the strips of land that had once belonged to the holding. Upon these strips white houses, stanch houses, nestled cozily, satisfied, self-sufficient places, even to the wisps

of smoke rising virtuously to heaven at this very minute. Three wisps across the northern fields, three across the southern. Men might say—and did—that M. Gauthier did well in supplanting the sons of his desire with the sons-in-law that his daughters brought him, but they must admit that the sons-in-law did fairly by the deal. To each was there not a girl as sleek and plump and pleasing as any in the country; a house with its strip of ground, a horse and rig; and a share, coöperatively, in the agricultural efforts and results of M. Gauthier himself? What more could son-in-law ask? Yes, or daughter? Six of them already so established matrimonially, and well content with it, and every one by now channels of early grandparentage for Armand Gauthier!

There remained the seventh. Gabrielle! The youngest and so the last, for Armand believed in an almost mechanical orderliness. It was doubtless at thought of her that her father looked to the west and approved—M. le Curé was certain—the seventh white house, its new starkness, unrelieved by vines, ready and furnished complete for immediate occupancy. Father Brisson detected, too, a white figure, separated from the man by greenery, but gazing also into the west.

“She is looking at the house he has built for her and René,” said the priest, with a catch at his heart.

In this he was mistaken.

A train whistled, its blaring tone softened by distance into music. With glasses one could see even the flashing streak of the windows, flame colored. It wound its way along the valley, following the course of the stream, losing itself in the dark greenery of the pine woods through which it must pass to the station, leaving behind its trail of smoke, shot through with sunset gold, drifting lazily, attaining an ethereal loveliness as it faded into a turquoise sky.

M. Gauthier cupped his hands to his mouth and called.

The priest could imagine its exact sound, commanding, yet mingling paternal right with tenderness. On the second call the girl started, as from a dream, and, turning, came toward him. How different was her slenderness when one thought of the sturdy sisters

six, already safely married; the one most like in every way her dead mother; the one least able, as Armand declared boomingly when first the curé timidly raised the point, to endure the hardships life—elsewhere—might offer.

M. Gauthier drew his seventh daughter to him and kissed her. Then he motioned toward the house, rather imperiously, and preceded himself, rubbing his hands. To-night would be a great one at the Gauthier farmhouse. Never had he failed, on the eve of a daughter's wedding, to give a grand *soirée*. He loved these occasions. It pleased his emotional palate that many should come to the feast of his bounty, envy his prosperity, and mark well his success in life.

Gabrielle remained for a moment outside. The train whistled again for the station. The last faint touch of smoke vanished. A married sister appeared at the door impatiently. Gabrielle hastened in obediently.

It meant nothing to the priest that the window of Gabrielle's room, which faced toward the station, held in its narrow inclosure a lamp whose rays for the moment offered but feeble competition to the sunset glow that burnished the glass and metal with a ruddy light. Perhaps the priest's line of vision did not permit it, or again the ordinariness of a light in a window aroused no suspicion. It may be, also, that he was too deeply engaged in the matter of prayer to notice.

## II.

M. GAUTHIER himself admitted frankly that his *soirée* was a huge success. He made this clear to M. le Curé, and to his friend, DeBoissy—whose opinions he respected and who were courteous in their confirmation at no expense to the truth. Was not M. Lafond, from St. Paradis, there, to lend quality, and talk of politics, of crops, of financial affairs so vast that the *habitants* sat pop-eyed, as one might say? Was not old Sansfaçon there, to crack musty jokes about the matrimonial estate, and enable M. Gauthier to show his democratic good humor in booming laughter that outdid the timid cackles of the lesser folk?

Add to this the six married daughters,

displaying themselves in new dresses that showed off their generous forms, and their cooking in dishes of the most striking pattern and expensive ware ever seen in Ste. Marie-en-bas! And the six sons in law—stanch, solid fellows in vivid black suits, white ties, and watch chains of heavy gold in their vests, golden chains binding them to the donor, their father-in-law; every one of the six hallmarked with the smug contentment of the Gauthier acres, and Gauthier cattle, and Gauthier houses, and Gauthier customs.

Ah, yes—and Gabrielle was there! Gabrielle, amazingly attractive in a gown she had chosen, at her father's insistence, specially for this prenuptial event; Gabrielle, never more beautiful—for her recent pallor, that had rendered him uneasy, gave place to-night to rich colorings when any spoke to her, or looked at her steadily; most of all Armand himself, who could not look enough.

René Constant was there, of course, a secondary but brilliant star. René, so debonair, with such a carriage as only a son of that old aristocrat, Beudet Constant, could have—the best, declared M. Gauthier, by his faith and every saint, of all the seven matches his diplomacy and shrewdness had effected!

M. le Curé stood in a little alcove, watching, chin cupped in hand. There was no more striking figure present than he, and none less conscious of it. The slight stoop of age did not detract, nor did his comparatively small stature. He stood there in his black robes, his face limned with the voluntary servitude of years, that found him faithful by day and night alike, his mouth rebelling, as the years had fled, from its first firm-set line, until the wrinkled corners were distilleries of tempered sunlight, and his eyes deep pools of blue, their surfaces ruffled by breezes more wistful than gay.

Just now, though, there was a set, stern look. His steady gaze was on René Constant, whose eyes, whenever they met the priest's, as they seemed to at every turn, held, in order, evasion, fear, bravado, boldness, the latter triumphing so that in the end René's voice was heard above all in laughter and light badinage.

Father Brisson felt a heavy hand on his shoulder. A voice boomed in his ear.

"Well, father, admit you are wrong for once, and that my choice of a son-in-law is good. I ask you, is there a more gallant young fellow or a keener wit in the place to-night—hey?"

The priest did not smile. He simply said: "I am fond of your daughter Gabrielle—very fond."

"Which reminds me," said M. Gauthier, glancing hastily about, "I have missed the little minx this last while. I wonder now—She is such an odd girl, and not like my others. It was of indifference to her if we had this event or not. I wonder—Did you see her go out, father? I have known the minx to escape, as she would say it, that way before."

He glanced toward the door that led to the garden.

"Is it not more likely," said Father Brisson, "that a young girl should be showing her wedding finery to her intimates at such a time? I saw Mlle. Adrien and others going above."

"Ah, true! Of course!" cried Armand Gauthier, satisfied, rubbing his hands again, his lips as expressive as a cat's that has tasted cream. "Such a trousseau as that girl has, though! And such an odd girl. One would think such things were bought every day."

He lifted his hands appealingly, as if calling on Heaven to bear witness it was beyond him, and moved off to indulge in his democratic booming with the lesser folk.

The priest stood statuesque. His eyes were pools of light. His fingers clenched and unclenched. His mouth was at once very stern and very tender. The pools of light darkened as he stood there. After a time he slipped quietly out into the starlit night, by the same door through which his observant eyes had not long since seen Gabrielle make her escape.

### III.

THE night was very dark, but, by contrast, the stars seemed very near at hand. The season being well advanced, the August night was quite chilly, and Father Brisson,

concerned with the chill, discovered himself in the gateway of the garden before he knew it; a gate that, with its attendant fence, protected green growing things for personal and special uses of the farmhouse against the depredations of domestic animals and rabbits from the field and woods. A suspicion, which seemed more than that to him, was his that something was amiss, and that his duty led him to the protection of the girl Gabrielle—in this at least, where elsewhere he must fail.

As if in answer to unspoken prayer, the form of Gabrielle grew in the darkness before him, and he took a pace backward as one might before a vision. Then reality was restored—to be quickly lost again. Above, the stars dimmed a little that a new glory might appear. From a pillar of light in the north cloudy battalions came, flashing their spears through the sky, advancing, retreating in incredible maneuvers. And now the spears no longer flashed, but disintegrated into cascades of light—fairylke waterfalls of Boreas, dropping, into elusive pools above which drifted silver clouds of mist.

The girl stood, for a moment, hands clasped in ecstasy, then moved farther into the garden with silent step. A man's form showed quite clearly just ahead. He stood, hands clasped behind him, legs a little apart, firmly balanced on the turf, head uptilted, motionless, watching the sky. Into its ethereal beauty came again a piercing of blue, flashing spears—a yet colder blue, darting earthward, then withdrawing.

"*Par Dieu!*" he said quite reverently.

A twig crackled under her foot. He turned swiftly to greet her, taking her small hands in his great ones.

"Gabrielle!"

"Philippe!"

Father Brisson caught his breath sharply in his eavesdropping course, and a little pulse within him sang.

"Gabrielle," Philippe Frigon said at last, "all wonders such as that have brought you to me—all things of beauty tore my heart, I think, because of you." He hesitated. "Have you no greater welcome for me, Gabrielle?" He rushed on impetuously then: "Was it a dream, then—just one of many such—that when I sent word by

Jean Lafontaine, who was hitting the trail for home, that I was coming soon if all went well, he came back after two months' trip to our far post, to say if I came, to come by the twentieth at the latest as I—loved you—"

She broke in faintly: "It was an impulse, Philippe. The good God forgive me, but I wanted to see you—"

"And I am here," he said, a little grimly. "I will not complain, Gabrielle, that the trail was hard or the way long, or that the brief harvest must be left to other hands to gather. These would not matter. They mattered not because of what lay ahead—your welcome—you! Ah, Gabrielle, what does it all mean? Montpetit at the station grabs my arm as soon as I arrive just now by traveling day and night the last forty-eight hours to railroad. 'It is well,' he said, to go easy, Philippe. She bade me tell you if you saw a light in her window to come then to the garden.' More than that he would not say, leaving it, he said, for your lips. Is it your father, Gabrielle? I know he never cared for me, and insulted me grievously at last, but I am not afraid of that, if it is for your happiness."

Father Brisson, though his was no ear for gossip, was not unmindful of such history of Gabrielle's affair with Frigon as had leaked out. It was common knowledge that, at mention of his desire to pay court to his daughter—a rather belated mention, perhaps—Armand Gauthier had ordered Philippe out, with a tongue that, having brought blood to the lad's face, drove it from him again and left him with a white, high pride, which he took with him out into the night. Gabrielle had run to him, it was said, and he had stood there, arms folded at sight of her, to say:

"He is unfair. I am no ne'er-do-well, and he knows it. Your kind are not mine. Yours follow and live fat on the lands we make for them. My father was here with the first, and after the trees were felled, and the stumps out, and the roads easy for travel, your father came in and settled down in comfort to reap. But the spirit of my father drove him farther on to the hard things again. Is it anything against my character that his blood flows in my

veins, and that something at least of his spirit is mine?"

Then, so the tale was told, she had forgotten maidenly reserve, and pleaded with him not to be angered, above all not to go. And suddenly he had drawn her to him and told her: "I will go, and when I have made a home for you, I will come for you!" And she had watched his tall form striding down the gravel path where the moonlight lay bright upon the whitened stones.

A message came from him that he had reached the goal whither his pioneering spirit led him. Days became months, and months—twenty-four of them—marked the passage of two years, and yet he did not come, and, though her sisters and others began to scoff, memory remained true.

Life was like the soil and the growth of things she knew so well. One sowed and one reaped in kind. She had sowed in that moment when his arms received her, and his promise was in her ears comfortingly, and always, because of this, there would be a harvest of memory. Twice, since that first direct message, word of Philippe had come from outside sources, filtering from his northern outpost, but none direct from him.

Her father began to bring pressure—her father, her sisters, and others, and, not least of all, René Constant, who had a way with him where women were concerned. There came a time when—she having heard from a man who had himself seen Philippe, and reported him doing well, and yet no word had come—she had no spirit left to defy them; and most of all her father so greatly wishing this thing of her, he had his way, and René began to be much with her, and folk nodded their heads, approving her wisdom at last.

Father Brisson, having remembrance of this history, found himself in a most assiduous eavesdropping just now, lest he miss her answer.

"Ah, Philippe," she said sadly, "it is too late!"

"Too late? No, no—the twentieth, you said; and I have traveled almost day and night!"

She held out her hand warningly as he would have drawn nearer.

"To-morrow," she said simply, "to-mor-

row morning I marry René Constant. It is wrong that I even see you this way to-night. I should not have sent that message by Jean Lafontaine, for it was too late then, but my heart cried out to do it, and when I came to myself Jean had already gone. Yet, I said you would not come, for how could you care for me still when you sent no word in all these many months?"

"No word?" He started. "Each time young Bruneau went to the railhead, which was quite often, for he had attraction there, he took my letters and brought me mine. I wondered at the little I had in reply."

Gabrielle whitened.

"In months I have not heard till this last message," she said despairingly.

Philippe swore softly.

"Fool that I am," he declared. "Bruneau is a bosom friend of this man René Constant, who always liked you, and I doubt not he fancied to do him friendly service. I think that mail was never posted." Despair changed to exultation. "It is not too late, my Gabrielle—for have I not come in time? To-morrow morning is not due for hours. Ah, look, look!"

From a pale lake of light in the north, there was reared in the sky what was not unlike an arch through which, if one had imagination, the wraithlike wisps passing by might have been fairies, dancing in unearthly beauty, quickly to pass away.

"It is an omen," said Philippe gravely. "The spirits of the Northland, I like to call them. I have seen them so before. They always bring me good fortune. Up there, on frosty nights, I have seen them, like the stars, so close one could think to pluck them out by a reaching of the hand, and their very voices can be heard. Ah—perhaps I am too fanciful! But it is very wonderful in the great spaces, Gabrielle, when the world is so silent, and one feels—alone. With two there, it would be wonder—without loneliness, if the other—understood."

She was silent. He put his hand out and touched her.

"You are shivering, child," he said, and as the silence came again he placed his own interpretation upon it. "You are thinking, of the hardships, perhaps—the long,

cold winters, the short summers, the great distances, the solitude, the scarcities? I would not make light of them Gabrielle. You have heard of these things—and it is true." He waited; she did not speak; he turned away. "I could only have prayed that you might have loved the very bigness of it all. Perhaps I expect of others that which is in my inheritance of blood alone. I ask too much."

Then she, who had set signal within her narrow window place, night after night of late, with little faith that he would come to open the door for her escape from the fate that awaited her in the seventh white house, seeing the door now open, closed it tight again, taking advantage of his certain misinterpretation.

"Alas, Philippe," she said sadly, "if you only knew how much you ask."

Her voice broke on the last word, and he turned swiftly to her. It seemed to the old man still watching almost grimly—for his ethical side was sensitive—that for the moment a magnetism greater than all barriers held them, drew them—drew them—His lips moved in prayer. A voice boomed impatiently through the night: "Gabrielle!"

"I must go in," said the girl quickly. "I have been out too long now; and they have missed me!"

A door banged. A twig crackled under-foot near them. Philippe sprang back.

"Come!" whispered the curé, taking Gabrielle's arm. "Come—your father is seeking you, and will be angry if he finds you thus!"

She suffered herself to be led away. The voice they had heard boomed again: "Gabrielle!—Gabrielle!"

"We will go around by the front," said the priest hastily. In the last of the covering darkness she took his arm.

"Father, you will keep this that you have seen secret? You will do nothing to hurt him! Much of my happiness is in your hands now, father."

He started, then said slowly, almost mechanically: "I must do my duty, child!"

She shivered and moved from him as from an enemy. When she looked back after they parted in the lighted doorway,

he was still gazing after her, but it was in his face and features that the greatest agony lay.

#### IV.

THE priest, in fact, watched her long after she ceased to be conscious of his regard. Then gayety flooding past him, drew him into a laughing group of young folk, and he must needs laugh with them.

Father Brisson was an unusual man. Reared in the Spartan simplicity of a home that dedicated him to the priesthood and that gave him—at a time when his labor would have helped eke out a scant existence on a rocky farm—to an education that involved direct financial sacrifice; a studious lad, who won by conscientious plodding what he could not have had by any brilliance that was his, he brought to his life ministry in this country parish a rigorous personal code, and a simplicity of outlook in which the quiet of rural life confirmed him. Birth he knew, and blessed; death he knew, and hallowed; but of life itself more the gentler side than otherwise, for his confessional yielded up few secrets other than the ordinary shortcomings of average lives.

Almost upon the fingers of one hand he could count the other times, the revelations that had sent him home, sick at heart, horrified at the depths of human depravity, to fall upon his knees and pray his God that the absolution he had granted for spoken penitence might have more content of reality than it had of his own priestly faith. This worried him not a little, for he was a sincere believer in the priestly office. And he had perforce to hug the thing to his own bosom.

He would have cut off his right hand rather than by word or hint or inflection broken the sacred seal of the confessional, the little portion of the mercy seat over which, according to his belief, he presided.

The music and the merrymaking grew in volume. Where ordinarily his simple soul would have rejoiced to see happiness so expressed, to-night the very scrape of the violins tortured him. He went out again into the darkness, passed silently through the garden gate, his black robe—that would

soon be quite green did his conscience not permit the extravagance of a new one—brushed the bushes with a sighing sibilance.

He called softly: "Frigon! Philippe Frigon!"

Save for small insect noises there was silence for a moment; then a figure appeared beside him.

"Ah, I fancied you would still be here, son," said the priest, going right to the heart of his subject. "Forgive me—but you love Gabrielle?"

"Would a man come through better than a hundred miles of bush otherwise, father?"

"Then," protested the curé, eagerly, "you will not lack persistence and daring to see it through." He added with embarrassment at his impulsiveness: "You have come to take her away—even now? You will marry her, and take her away, and be good to her?"

Philippe's gaze was toward the north where a pale aftermath of light still lingered.

"Why do you ask?"

"Because I care for her, my son."

"And you would send her to hardships few women willingly endure?"

"Far better, my son, far better," cried Father Brisson, more eagerly than he knew. "You will not fail her?"

Philippe stared.

"Your reasons, father?"

The priest's eagerness died. He said hastily:

"N-nothing, my son. No reasons I can give you in as many words. You must trust me."

Philippe swung sharply upon him.

"Listen," he said. "There was a woman up in the place from which I come, who threw herself in the river because the solitude, and the bigness of things preyed on her nerves. There was another: she died in childbirth because there was no medical aid to be had in time for complications. With my own hands, father, I have made a place for Gabrielle, cleared as fine a lot as any, built for her a house not far from neighbors. Since, I have learned of these cases—these unfortunate women. You see my difficulty. Apart from this I have not a sou to offer, even if I were to force myself

to settle down, and try to appear happy here. With her own lips she confirms my fears: I ask too much. I would never forgive myself if I forced my love upon her. Better I should never trouble her. This René Constant is of her kind; with him her way will be smooth and easy, under the eye of old Gauthier himself. With me—" He shrugged his big shoulders. "In the morning I shall return north, father. It is better so."

"My son!" called the priest urgently.

Philippe turned unwillingly.

"Well?"

"You do not understand the case fully."

"Nor you, father, the thing you would have her face in spite of her fears."

"Ah, but not worse than—"

"Than what? Why do you stop?"

"Than—unhappiness with him."

"She does not fear this unhappiness evidently as much as that the life I offer promises." He spoke bitterly now, ending with a quick question: "Have you anything special against him—his character, father? That might be different. If so, speak—if not—what right have I to interfere further?"

The priest was silent. His head was bowed.

"I have nothing to say, Philippe."

Frigon shrugged his shoulders wearily, and the darkness swallowed him up. Father Brisson did not call after him this time; his hands reached out in trembling impotence, then dropped helplessly to his side.

"God," he said, in agony, "must I keep silence? Must her sweet flesh and spirit be joined till death with a murderer?"

## V.

FATHER BRISSON, wandering within again, did not, could not remain long. Where the riot of sound within brought added confusion of thought, and the sight of René claiming a dance that put his bride of the morrow into his arms, stirred a madness in his pulse, the out-of-doors, breathing a great calmness, made a background against which one might range a more orderly foreground of reflection.

The priest checked back his actions, his results, his prospects. His actions: remonstrance with René Constant, blocked by his own sensitiveness in the matter of the confessional, and by the combined refusal of René to accept such delicate hints as the old man's ethics would permit him to give, and a sneering bravado illy covered; long talks with Armand Gauthier, in which the curé came more than once to the very verge of breaking the seal, irritated at the obduracy of the man; attempts in less direct ways; now his failure with Philippe Frigon. His results? Nil! His prospects? In Gabrielle herself?

Ah, from that he had so far kept, telling himself if he could not—as DeBoissy would phrase it—put all his cards on the table, to hint at things might the rather drive her to the man Constant, who, admittedly, had magnetism of a kind, and a telling tongue. Young girls were like that. He had tried it once before with Anne Péréchon, whose protective instinct and interest for a man he had aroused to her own hurt; who came seldom to mass, never to confession, and lived an unhappy life with a man unworthy of the loyalty she gave, bearing her lot proudly in a defiance that flashed through the hurt soul of her whenever she chanced to meet the priest.

No—that was not the way. Her relations with Philippe Frigon, then? Ah, that was his chance. He would here await her coming. Intuitively, he knew she would slip out again at the first opportunity.

He had not long to wait.

He heard her soft footfall; he rustled the bushes.

"Philippe," she called gently.

"It is I—Father Brisson," he told her, approaching. "My child, I was speaking to Philippe, but he has gone."

She gave a little cry, half anger; then steadied herself.

"You sent him away! You are too hasty, father, reading people's actions! I came but to say good-by. You know we have been good friends, Philippe and I."

"Only friends?" When she did not answer, he took the plunge. "Gabrielle, child, I feel for you. Philippe Frigon is a good man. His face is a true index, as all

faces are not. In the morning he goes north again. Must he go alone?"

She gave a little gasp of surprise.

He added: "If I find him for you, if I stand by you both—"

She broke in with a quick remonstrance: "Father, father, you think to be kind, but you are cruel!" She paused. "It is not that I do not like René—do not misunderstand me, I do!" Her voice broke. "And yet my heart—my heart cries out for Philippe, whose love I may not have."

"May not, Gabrielle?"

"Unless I chose to break my father's heart. René is of his kind, and choice. And—I have caused him enough of sorrow already."

"Sorrow? Dear child, how could you have brought aught but gladness to him?"

She did not speak for a moment. When she did, she said in a low voice: "He loved my mother dearly. When—when I came, I took her from him, you know. One day my eldest sister, Emmaline, told me, being angered over some childish fault. She did not know how deep she struck. My childish heart nearly broke, I think, with sorrow for his sorrow. He wondered why I stroked those gray hairs of his so tenderly that night. When I went to my room I knelt and vowed by St. Joseph I would bring him sorrow no more. You are wise, father, and know life and duty, and must understand. Tell me what I should do, for my heart pulls so strangely two ways."

An oblong of radiance joined that of the windows on the garden side of the house. A voice called booming again.

"Go, my child," said the priest, sadly. "Your father calls for you."

After she had obeyed, the curé dropped upon his knees, regardless of the heavy dew and his rheumatic joints. As he prayed, the northern sky grew brighter once again, and across it drifting masses and shafts of light were flung slowly. The priest's eyes, from a devoutly humble posture, facing the earth, were lifted to the firmament. The northern lights penetrated the dark heart of the sky: so, it seemed, a light, soft, mellow, illuminating, stole into the being of this humble old man, stilling the tumult, calming his fears, bringing a

peace that, having no foundation of human reason, did indeed pass the understanding of men.

"Now the good God be praised," cried Father Brisson, "for, as to thy servant of old thou gavest the Damascus vision, so to all who sincerely follow duty thy light shall come."

He rose from his knees. He went in. The party was breaking up, with much merrymaking over the coming of the midnight hour, and felicitations for the two who now stood together to receive them, as was the Gauthier custom.

The priest found himself caught by the tradition.

"May such happiness as you deserve be yours," he told them.

"I will call for you at five thirty in the morning, father," René reminded him, meeting the curé's eyes boldly, "and drive you to the church."

Father Brisson nodded and went out to join DeBoissy in the waiting rig. As he took his departure the old Gauthier clock chimed twelve.

The calm of the material universe, ushered into a new day in the purpose of its maker, was not deeper than the unexplainable quiet in the heart of Father Brisson, as they drove to DeBoissy's under the stars.

## VI.

It was the curé's first impression when he woke, that Gabrielle's wedding morn was to be cloudless. Yet, rising at the first streakings of dawn, after a singularly refreshing sleep, in which a few hours seemed to do the merciful work of many, he found that the upland on which the DeBoissy home stood, enjoyed a clarity of atmosphere that was lacking below. One of the heavy mists, not infrequent in this district in certain seasons, hung over the valley, blotting out the town, that would otherwise be clearly seen from here, dominated by the spire whose graceful upreaching was a constant pride to the curé, and under the shadow of which, one might say, he had had his abiding place for half a century or more.

Father Brisson prepared himself with deliberation for the ceremony in which he

was to play so vital a part. With similar deliberation he took from his little black bag, and from the folds of an intimate garment, a less innocent object. This metallic article he regarded with the subdued concern of a determined man unused to firearms. For a moment hesitation overcame him. Should he not leave all to a Higher Power? Well—there was that phrase about "keeping your powder dry." He must neglect nothing. He conquered his hesitation and slipped the little weapon into a pocket of his robe. His hand, when it was withdrawn, still trembled.

He welcomed the respite afforded presently by the frugal meal which was all he permitted his friend to set before him. DeBoissy's choice of subjects dear to both their hearts aided greatly. He almost forgot. A clock struck the hour.

"Hullo," cried M. DeBoissy, "your man is late, isn't he?"

"Perhaps," replied Father Brisson, curbing any show of eagerness; "perhaps he will not come. Something may have happened—already." He left the table, and went to the window overlooking the road up which René must arrive to fetch him.

DeBoissy whispered in his ear: "I will have Alphonse drive you."

"But, no!" cried Father Brisson. "If it is the will of God he will come. If not—"

"The mist is exceptionally heavy," said DeBoissy.

"Praise God!" returned Father Brisson in his heart.

"Ah—look, he comes at last!"

"René's mare is a roan. This is jet black," cried the priest, his heart sinking none the less.

"True, but I have not retained my sight into age for nothing. The beast is black as Satan, but the driver is none other than René Constant." He consulted his watch. "With haste, you will still be in time."

Father Brisson bowed his head, as if in acceptance of a decree. Was not Isaac bound, and the knife already upraised?

"You are late," he greeted René, as he climbed into the rig. "The fog is bad, eh?"

"It was not that—but why that mare of

mine must cast her shoe to-day of all days beats me! It was just past M. Fournie's establishment, and to save time I hurried in there. Faith, but *m'sieu'* was sleepy and cross until he knew the urgency. Then says the old fellow, grinning with all his yellow teeth: 'Yes, but have the horse back sure by noon, for he must draw Pierre Alard at two thirty to such rest as may be found in the Protestant burial ground! A wedding in the morning and a funeral in the afternoon: what a life!' he says, and grins again."

René laughed, himself, and spat at the bushes on the roadside.

Father Brisson fingered the golden cross that lay against the dark background of his robe.

"God rest his soul," he said, and sighed. "Pierre Alard followed his gleam sincerely, and not without purpose—though we dub him, after our fashion, a heretic."

René snickered: "You are too easy-going, father. Your heart is far too kindly towards such."

"Toward those who err in frailty of flesh, in human weakness—not to the deliberate evil doer, René!"

His eyes were full upon the youth. René Constant turned away and lashed the horse sharply. Father Brisson rebuked him.

"We are late, aren't we?" said René roughly. "And this damned mist is thick enough to cut!"

They drove on in silence. The shrouding fog became so closely wrought that even the black head of M. Fournie's horse was visible only through drifting swirls.

René said, after a time: "I hope the horse knows the road better than I do." Father Brisson's heart gave a little leap. He had noted this uneasiness, and that they had ascended a rise where the muscles in the horse's flanks stood out. "Well," laughed René, with his characteristic shrug, "they cannot go ahead without us, eh, father? What matters an hour or two delay when there remains a whole blissful lifetime of union?"

There was a sneer on his lip that matched the words. Father Brisson felt the keenness of the thrust. He discovered himself in the act of gripping the metal hidden in

his robe, and recoiled, trembling as one awakening from a bad dream.

"*Par Dieu,*" swore René, presently, "if this is the right road I am a numskull! What now? There is no sharp turn such as this." For the animal had veered sharply to the left, and the wheels crunched over gravel. "Whoa, there, whoa! What the devil! Now a curse on old Fournie and all his. Father, the black beast has brought us to the burying ground!"

A little breeze, springing up, sent the fog in swirls past them, curling curiously about the horse's ears, as he looked back at his driver after the mildly questioning manner of his kind. The impenetrability gave place to misty wreathings that, as the fog began to lift, disclosed the nearer rows of tombstones and monuments, about whose upper parts the fog clung in a likeness to winding sheets.

The curé's heart almost stopped beating this time; his simple direct mind accepted the thing that had come to pass. He knew now where they had stopped—this small, open square at the entrance to the graveyard. On it three or four prominent families had their lots: the Bergerons, Morissettes, the Lafonds. The Lafonds' where the great monument was.

"Come up there!" René clucked urgently to the horse. The animal would not budge.

"To turn," said Father Brisson, steadying his voice with effort, for he knew now to an inch where the rig stood—"one must back out, and with care. The chapel is directly ahead. The beast knows better than you!"

"Then take the reins, since you are accustomed here; and make haste, father!" Cold sweat stood on the youth's face.

The priest accepted the reins, but for the moment they lay idle in his lap. His face was eager; his lips moved in a soundless, "The sun, dear God, the sun!" and an instant later he rebuked himself for being overanxious.

The sun suddenly pierced through the remaining mist. Father Brisson was not mistaken in his estimate of location. Trembling with ill-controlled emotion, he put his hand on the young man's shoulder. Yet,

even now, his ethical restraint forbade him, and he withdrew it; nor did he point to the thing that was now revealed to their gaze.

Immediately opposite them stood the great monument which family pride and anger had caused to be so placed that all who came and went might see. Upon a granite pillar an avenging angel was poised; beneath was an inscription boldly cut:

**Sacred to the Memory of  
EMILE LAFOND**

who was foully murdered by an unknown hand on the night of July 7, 1920, and who is here laid to rest in the assurance that justice shall triumph in such a day as God wills.

"Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord!"

The priest glanced quickly from the inscription to the man beside him. René's face was a study; his brow was still beaded with sweat. A glow of triumph filled the old man's being.

"Shall we go?" he said calmly. "We are late now for the wedding!"

René did not speak. Then color began to flood his face in anger.

"You think to frighten me with superstitious nonsense!" he almost shouted. "It was his life or mine. We quarreled, and as it happened he got the worst of it. I told you that before!"

A touch of steel flashed in the mild blue eyes.

"In supposed penitence then, as to a priest," said Father Brisson; "but now, in evil bravado to—*an ordinary citizen!* Easy, now, René! I am an old man and inoffensive, but"—the weapon trembling in his unaccustomed hands as it came from

his robe caught the sunlight and reflected it—"quick—your hands behind you—so!" Father Brisson clambered into the back seat of the rig. "Now you may take the reins," he said.

René obeyed.

"You will drive," said Father Brisson, "under my orders, to the town. The mayor will doubtless not mind an interruption, as serious as this, to his breakfast." He glanced at his watch. "It would be well," he said, with a queer little twist of his mouth, "if you could urge M. Fournie's beast to a little greater haste. The up-train leaves for the north at nine fifty-seven, and there is the little matter of M. Gauthier's seventh son-in-law yet to be arranged."

VII.

It is recorded in town annals that, on the Sabbath, Father Brisson, preaching with great eloquence upon "The Damascus Vision, and its Lessons," was guilty of an amazingly long digression, in which, with fervor and humility, he warned his hearers against the sin of malice.

Had it been any one but Father Brisson the length would have been unpardonable, eager as the congregation were for the church steps, and the gossip that would pounce with avidity upon the subject of the arrest of René Constant, and that would propound, and with great gravity discuss, the question of what would become of the seventh white house of M. Gauthier's building, now that his youngest daughter had gone so suddenly north as the wife of that estimable young man, Philippe Frigon.



**G'WAN!**

**A** LOT of rime has long been wrote  
About the man who rocks the boat;  
But he is wise beside the gink  
Who trustingly will buy a drink  
From some guy that he doesn't know—  
Thinks what the label says is so!

George A. Wright.



# Annihilation

By ISABEL OSTRANDER

Author of "McCarty, Incog," "Dust to Dust," etc.

## WHAT HAS OCCURRED IN PARTS I, II and III.

**E**X-ROUNDSMAN McCARTY, investigating the death by poison of a man who falls in the street, discovers that the victim is Alfred Hughes, valet to Henry Orbit, one of the wealthy residents of a block with gates at either end, adjoining the park, known as New Queen's Mall. Inspector Druet, of the police, also investigates.

Neither Orbit nor his neighbors, including the Sloanes, Goddards, Parsons, Bellamys, and Burminsters, shed light on the poisoning. McCarty and his friend, Denny Riordan, learn from little Fu Moy, nephew of Ching Lee, Orbit's Chinese butler, that Lee and Hughes were enemies, and that there had been a slight fire in Orbit's bedroom. It develops that the dead man's character was such he had a number of enemies. Several days after the murder young Horace Goddard disappears under circumstances indicating kidnaping. While McCarty is investigating an ex-crook, Roberts, butler at the Parsons' house, who confesses to having harbored an escaped criminal in an empty house in the Mall, he is interrupted by the wildly excited Ching Lee, who brings word that Lucette, maid in charge of the Bellamy baby, is dead in Orbit's house.

### CHAPTER XIII.

"THE HORROR DEEPENS!"

"**T**HE breath of death!" Dennis repeated, awestruck. "God save us, what's that? Are you trying to say that the French girl is in Orbit's house, dead?"

"We'll soon see!" McCarty shook off the Chinese butler's grip and dashed up the steps and in at the door, with Dennis just behind and Ching Lee bringing up the

rear chanting a weird refrain of lamentation.

The door of the huge conservatory also stood wide and its hot, humid breath, heavy with fragrance, stole out to meet them, the silent organ with slender pipes gleaming softly like silver birches in moonlight looming up in the semigloom. A group at the marble bench facing it stood out against the background of leafy palms and thorny cacti, holding their eyes irresistibly, in dread fascination.

*This story began in the Argosy-Allstory Weekly for November 17.*

Orbit's tall figure, with the Bellamy baby clasped tightly in his arms, stood before it, and beside him Jean the houseman was bending forward while little Fu Moy knelt at its foot. On the bench itself a slender form lay relaxed as though in sleep, the head, with its bright hair rippling from beneath the trim little bonnet, resting against the high white stone back, the small gloved hands limply extended at either side.

McCarty halted for an instant and Dennis crossed himself, but Ching Lee darted forward, and seizing Fu Moy, dragged him away as though from the mouth of some unnamable peril. Then Orbit turned, his face white and set, and McCarty advanced to meet him.

"Thank Heaven, it is you!" The normally resonant, well modulated voice was hoarse and shaken. "Ching Lee thought he caught a glimpse of you passing, and I told him to rush after you! McCarty, look—look at this girl! What is this horror that has come to my house!"

"Is it—dead, she is?" McCarty's own tones were reverently low. "How did it happen? What was she doing here?"

"Listening to the organ! She was to all appearances as bright and well as this little child, but when I finished playing and turned, she was as you see her now! I feel as though I were going mad, as though I couldn't credit the evidence of my own eyes! What can this fearful thing mean?"

"We'd better be finding out, Mr. Orbit!" McCarty was rapidly recovering from the first shock and his quick mind leaped to meet the exigencies of the tragic situation. "Denny, run next door to Goddard's and get the inspector, but not a word to anybody else! Jean, take the little one home to the other house and tell Mrs. Bellamy that her nursemaid's took sick here, but will be over it in a little while and she's not to bother; understand? Think you can put it so's she won't come tearing in here to make a scene?"

Jean straightened and nodded, not trusting himself to speak. His sensitive Gallic face was working, but he controlled his emotions by a valiant effort and took the baby which his employer held mechanically out to him. Little Maude broke into a low

wail of dismay at the abrupt transition and stretched out wavering, dimpled arms to the familiar but strangely inattentive figure on the bench. Her sobs echoed back to them as she was borne quickly from the room.

"Now, Mr. Orbit, what did you do when you turned from the organ and saw Lucette stretched out like this on the bench?" McCarty began. "Where was the baby? How did Ching Lee and Jean know that something was wrong, did you call them? Have you sent for anybody else?"

Orbit passed his hand across his forehead as if dazed and the other noticed that it came away glistening with moisture.

"For the doctor, of course!" he replied to the last question first. "Allonby, around on the next block. I haven't had a physician for years myself, but some of my neighbors swear by him. I told Ching Lee to telephone to him as soon as I could make myself realize that—that she was gone!"

A slight shudder ran through him and he averted his gaze from the rounded, childish face, relaxed as though in sleep, save that the bright blue eyes were dull and staring widely at the lofty ceiling.

"She wasn't dead, then, the first glimpse you had of her after you stopped playing?" McCarty himself did not find it easy to continue with that silent, dominant presence before them.

"I don't know—but she must have been, of course! She didn't move and there was no sign of her breath! I can't understand it! What frightful thing can have stricken her?"

"Suppose you tell me from the beginning." McCarty restrained his impatience. "How did she and the child come here?"

"I was seated here alone at the organ, improvising as I do when I am disturbed in mind, for this misfortune to little Horace affected me deeply."

He paused as though to collect himself, glanced again with a shudder at the body of the young French girl and turned away. "The room seemed overpoweringly warm, and I went to the window there and opened it wider to see Lucette and the baby just outside, listening. The child is entranced with music and once or twice before Lucette

has brought her in at my invitation; Mrs. Bellamy is much amused at little Maude's devotion to me.

"When I saw them standing there I suggested that they come in and myself opened the door for them. Lucette seated herself there where you see her now and took the baby up on her lap, and I returned to the organ, really forgetting their presence the moment I was seated again before it. Handel's "Largo" came into my thoughts, although it is scarcely the sort of thing to appeal to a child, and I played it through to the end. In the silence as the last notes died away the patter of small feet running across the marble floor recalled my guests to my mind and I turned.

"Little Maude was playing about that palm over there, trying to reach the lowest of its broad leaves, but Lucette was—as you see her. I don't know—I can't recall what I thought for the moment—possibly that she had fallen asleep or was still relaxed under the spell of the music, but almost instantly it came to me that something was wrong. I called her name sharply, I remember, and hurried to her side, but before I touched her I seemed to know the truth—that she was dead!"

"You didn't move her, Mr. Orbit? The position of the body is just the same?"

"I raised one of her hands to feel her pulse, but there was no slightest beat beneath my fingers and I lowered it to the bench and drew her head forward. One look was enough, and I let it roll back once more, calling for Ching Lee. The baby had trotted over to me and I took her up in my arms to keep her from approaching Lucette. I think it was Jean who appeared first, but Ching Lee came immediately after, and I told him to send for the doctor. When he came back from the telephone he said you were passing and I had him stop you."

Orbit passed a shaking hand once more across his forehead. "What could have brought death to that girl, McCarty? I'm not ignorantly superstitious, but it seems as if some horrible, malign thing were settling down over us here in the Mall and the horror deepens! First Hughes, then Horace's disappearance and now this inex-

plicable tragedy right under my roof, in my very presence! It is enough to shake a man's reason!"

"You're sure you were alone in the house, with just the servants, I mean?" McCarty had advanced to the body again and was scrutinizing it carefully without touching it. "Those front windows are flush with the sidewalk, but nobody could have climbed in very well in broad daylight with the watchman patrolling the block. How about that glass wall where it bulges out? The lower panes open as well as the upper ones, don't they?"

He pointed to the farther side of the room built out like a huge bay window, and Orbit nodded.

"Of course, but they are never touched except for an hour on the hottest of summer days; the tropical orchids banked there would die instantly if a cool breeze blew over them and the sections of glass can only be reached with a long pole. No one could force a way through the plants without leaving some trace or making their presence known. There is a French window in the card room which is probably open and a person might enter unseen from the court between this house and Goddard's, and the kitchen or tradesmen's door may have been left ajar."

He spoke slowly as if to himself. "The cook is out and Jean, Ching Lee, and Fu Moy are the only others in the house besides myself. Great Heavens, Sir Philip arrives this evening! I had a wire from him!"

"That's the English gentleman who's on his way from the West? Sir Philip Dever—something?" McCarty recalled their conversation of the previous day.

"Sir Philip Devereux. He comes at a most inopportune moment!" Orbit groaned. "This poor girl—McCarty, there must be some rational explanation!"

"What did Ching Lee mean?" McCarty asked suddenly. "When he grabbed me outside in the street there he said Lucette had 'breathed the breath of death.' It didn't seem only a Chinese way of expressing himself. Have you an idea what he could have been getting at?"

"Is that what he said?" Orbit walked

quickly over to the nearest orchid and indicated the great distended purple bloom shot with angry streaks of livid orange-yellow.

"There is what he meant, one of the rarest of my specimens and a hybrid, a cross between two of the least known varieties of orchid in Central America. The natives down there regard it as poison and believe that to inhale its odor, which is rank and nauseous, means death. There is an old superstition among them that it is part vegetable and part animal life, and that the curious vibration of its petals—so like pulsation, do you see it?—is the act of breathing; to smell it is to take its breath, to die. Ching Lee heard me telling this to some guests one evening, and nothing could ever induce him to approach it since. There is nothing in the idea, of course; the plant isn't poisonous in any way, but I suppose that was the first thought that occurred to his mind when he saw Lucette lying dead."

McCarty edged cautiously over toward it, but footsteps sounded in the hall, and Jean presented himself at the door.

"Mme. Bellamy is not at home, but Snape took the little Maude to place in the care of one of the maids," he reported. "He says that he will explain to *madame*. The docteur is not come?"

Before Orbit or McCarty could reply, the doorbell rang violently, and he hurried away to admit Dennis and the inspector. The latter had evidently been prepared by his companion, for he glanced hastily at the body and then turned to Orbit.

"How long has she been dead?"

"I don't know; about twenty minutes, I should say, inspector. It occurred while I was playing rather a lengthy movement on the organ, and I wasn't aware of it until I had finished." Orbit started as the bell pealed again, and added in relief: "That must be Dr. Allonby now."

Jean ushered in a slender, dapper individual with a small, pointed blond beard and the unmistakable air of a professional man, who greeted Orbit suavely by name, nodded with suddenly alert interest when the inspector and his deputies were introduced, and then advanced to the body.

While he examined it the four grouped themselves about him, but Jean crept to the door and joined Ching Lee, who was hovering just outside. They whispered together, but the others waited in tense silence.

Finally the doctor straightened.

"This woman has been killed by the inhalation of some gas, some poisonous fumes, but of what nature I am unable to determine," he announced, gazing from Orbit to the inspector with keen incisiveness. "I have never encountered a similar case, but the symptoms admit of no other diagnosis. They are like, and yet unlike, some of those I noted on the battlefields of France a few years ago, but undoubtedly death was induced by asphyxiation. The autopsy will reveal its nature."

The inhalation of poisonous fumes! McCarty heard a faint but high pitched ejaculation in the hall, in Ching Lee's chattering tones, and involuntarily his eyes strayed to the distorted, bulbous, luridly glowing orchid which seemed in the shadows to be moving, reaching out toward them! Could it have been the "breath of death" indeed? He felt the nerves crawl beneath his skin and his scalp tingled, but the matter-of-fact voice of the inspector recalled him to stern facts.

"How long would you say she'd been dead, doctor?"

"Not much more than half an hour; the body is still warm. You have taken charge here?"

The inspector nodded.

"Then I may suggest that you notify your medical examiner without delay. I understand that this death is—er—a mystery, Mr. Orbit?"

"An unaccountable one, Dr. Allonby! I was here in the room at the time it occurred, playing the organ over there, and Lucette and the baby—this young girl was the nurse for Mrs. Bellamy's child next door—were seated on this bench."

The doctor started, and asked quickly: "The child! What has become of it?"

"The houseman took it home after you were summoned," Orbit replied.

"But it was unharmed? The child was seated here beside the nurse?"

"Oh, no!" Orbit interrupted. "While I played it had climbed down and was amusing itself over by that palm."

"A miraculous escape!" the doctor exclaimed. "Had it remained here it would undoubtedly have met with the same death which overcame the nurse! Was that window open just as it is now, the one directly behind those plants back of the bench?"

The doctor had never taken his eyes from Orbit's face, and it seemed to McCarty that his tones had quickened.

"Just as you see it now," affirmed Orbit. "Nothing has been disturbed or changed in any way. But, doctor, are you positive of your diagnosis? I am not questioning your knowledge, but this terrible affair is utterly inexplicable to me. I heard nothing, saw no one. When I seated myself before the organ Lucette was, to all casual appearances, a perfectly normal young woman glowing with health; when I turned from it a few minutes later she was stretched there dead! The child was absolutely unconcerned, and I am sure she had noticed nothing. She is a shy little creature, uneasy in the presence of strangers, and if any one had stolen in and approached the nurse it seems incredible that she would not have cried out or run to me! Thank Heaven, she is old enough to talk. We may be able to learn something from her later."

"That is an important point," conceded the doctor. "When you approached the body, did you notice any peculiar odor in the air? It would have been pungent, irritating, almost choking. Think, Mr. Orbit! You must have been conscious of some foreign, highly chemicalized odor even if it were almost instantly dissipated."

There was a pause, and then Orbit slowly shook his head.

"I was conscious of no such odor," he replied. "It is odd, for I am peculiarly sensitive to things of that sort, but then I was overwhelmed with the shock of what had taken place. As soon as I realized the girl was dead I called the servants— They might have detected this odor you speak of. Jean! Ching Lee!"

The two advanced reluctantly from the hall, but in answer to the physician's queries, supplemented by more brusque

ones from the inspector, they could only reply in the negative. Jean had been polishing some brasses in a near-by room, and heard Mr. Orbit call Ching Lee; he had thought it strange that he did not ring as usual, and when he called again there was something in his voice that made Jean think he needed help. He rushed in and saw the *bonne* stretched upon the bench and Mr. Orbit standing there with the little Maude in his arms.

Ching Lee had entered just behind him, and their stammered stories corroborated that of their employer in every detail. They had noticed no odor but that of the plants all about, and they were quite certain they had seen no stranger lurking in the immediate vicinity, to say nothing of getting into the house itself. They had both been on the lower floor all the afternoon.

"I live on the next street, and I shall be glad to render any assistance possible to your medical examiner." Dr. Allonby then turned to the inspector. "I will look up this case among my notes, and try to ascertain the nature of the chemicals used to generate the gas or vapor which caused this young woman's death, meanwhile holding myself entirely at your disposal. Mr. Orbit, I regret that I arrived too late to be of real service, but in any event the end must have come almost instantaneously."

He bowed, still with that guarded air of repression, and left the room, Ching Lee accompanying him to the door, and Orbit shrugged, throwing out his hands in a hopeless gesture.

"You saw? I believe the man actually thinks I am withholding some facts from him! But who wouldn't? I can't bring myself to believe it either, even with that poor girl's body here before us! It is awful—awful!"

He sank down upon a low stone seat, resting his head upon his hands, and the inspector observed:

"Poison gas! That's a new one on me, except for the carbon monoxide generated from motor cars standing in inclosed spaces. I never was connected with the bomb squad, but I thought most of that stuff had to be

exploded. You didn't hear anything, did you, while you were playing?"

"Not a sound. The 'Largo' is not necessarily thunderous in volume, but it has swelling chords which would have effectually smothered any slight noise. What are we to do now, inspector? I am in your hands."

"Where's your telephone? I've got to notify headquarters and get the medical examiner. That's the first step, as the doctor said. Of course, I want no one to leave this house."

"Assuredly not!" Orbit lifted his head. "Ching Lee, show Inspector Druet to the telephone and then see that Fu Moy remains quietly upstairs until he is sent for."

Ching Lee bowed and followed the official from the room. Dennis, who had been fearfully regarding the body of the dead girl, moved toward McCarty.

"By all that's unholy, what's doing around here?" he whispered audibly. "Are the powers of darkness let loose entirely? Poison gas, my eye! Mac, how would anybody reach her except with a squirt gun or a grenade through that window?"

"Who gave Hughes that poison, that not one in a thousand has ever heard of, and how was the Goddard kid snatched from off the face of the earth?" McCarty retorted, but in a cautiously lowered tone.

He had approached the bench once more and was gazing down at the still figure. "You remember what Ching Lee said? Lucette was the 'next.' He don't think this devilment is goin' to stop even here, and no more do I, unless our luck turns and we can stamp it out. This girl, now—"

He paused, staring down seemingly at the small feet incased in their neat shoes which peeped out from beneath a fold of her skirt. Dennis drew back with a shiver.

"It turns me fair sick to look at her! To think we was only talking to her this morning! It seems to me there is a kind of a funny smell in the air. Don't you get it, Mac? Maybe it's something that creeps over you gradual, and before we know it we could be corpses ourselves! I'd like well to be out of this room."

"'Tis your imagination and not that

nose you brag of that's working now!" McCarty thrust his foot forward in a pushing motion until his knee struck smartly against the edge of the stone seat on which Lucette's body lay. "There's no smell whatever, barring the scent of the flowers! Himself has been here through it all, remember."

He indicated with a jerk of his head the seat where the bowed figure rested. At that moment the inspector reentered the conservatory.

"Mr. Orbit, is there any other entrance to this room besides that door?"

Orbit looked up and then rose slowly, shaking his head.

"None; but the windows are open, as you see—"

"We'll close and fasten them and then lock this door behind us. I want everything in here left undisturbed until the medical examiner comes. Take us somewhere private where we can talk."

"My study, upstairs?" Orbit suggested.

"All right. Riordan, close the windows, will you, and fix the catches?" The inspector turned and fumbled with the key in the lock as Dennis started for the windows, and Orbit, after a last horror-stricken glance at the dead girl, preceded the others from the room.

McCarty eyed his superior's back for a moment, then stooped quickly and drew out from under the bench the object he had carefully kicked there a minute or two before. It was a slender stick with a wad of shriveled, limp blue rubber dependent from one end. Snapping the stick, he thrust it back beneath the bench again and placed the fragment with the clinging, clammily resilient pouch in his pocket. Then he, too, glanced once more at Lucette's dead face as though ratifying some agreement between them, and turned to follow his superior.

## CHAPTER XIV.

### THE BLUE BALLOON.

ORBIT told of the afternoon's tragic experience again in detail for the inspector's benefit. McCarty and Dennis listened carefully, but the account

differed in no way from his first description, and just at its conclusion the medical examiner's assistant was announced. The inspector descended with Orbit, but McCarty and his colleague discreetly effaced themselves.

"We're leaving just when it's getting good!" Dennis sighed with morbid relish, as they went down the steps and out into the lengthening shadows of late afternoon. "I'd like to have had a good look by ourselves around that conservatory. That doctor may be all right for the fashionable, expensive ailments of the crowd around this neighborhood, but I've been fighting fires too long not to know what asphyxiation means, and 'twas not that killed the poor young thing in that great vault of a room, with the windows open wide behind her. How the devil do you suppose she did come to die, Mac?"

"I'm past guessing!" McCarty confessed. "'Tis the worst case since ever I went on the cops, and we're up against the cleverest murdering wretch that's been loosed on the world! You'll mind I told you once that brains and not brawn was back of it all? Brains it is, with the genius of them twisted and gone wrong, and a knowledge of poisons and such that means the learning of a lifetime. We'll slip around to the back of the house and wait till the medical lad from headquarters has gone. I'm thinking there's more besides us would like a minute or two in that conservatory."

"Why?" Dennis looked startled. "Is something hid there, do you mean? How could it be, with the servants all the time and Orbit right there in the room? 'Tis the first murder ever I heard of that could be pulled off with a man playing the organ not twenty feet away and a little child running about in the midst of it, and neither of them the wiser. There's the baby now!"

They had reached the rear court, and in the tradesmen's entrance of the Bellamy house next door a buxom housemaid appeared with little Maude in her arms. She stood eying them in undisguised curiosity and interest, and McCarty lifted his hat, approaching her with a bland smile.

"Maudie's after having a new nurse, I see!" he began ingratiatingly. "'Tis a pity

Lucette took sick back there in Mr. Orbit's—"

"How is she?" the woman interrupted. "What happened to her? I know who you are; you're from the police, trying to find out who killed that valet from in there."

McCarty acknowledged the recognition with a bow as graceful as his girth permitted.

"You've got us right. We just happened to be on hand to-day when Lucette got sick. She'd brought the baby in to hear Mr. Orbit play, and he told Jean to bring her back home while the doctor was coming. I guess that French girl's pretty bad, but they didn't tell us what was the matter with her."

"Lucette!" The child had caught a familiar name. "Maudie wants Lucette! Wants to hear mans play adain!"

She struggled to free herself, and the woman stooped and set her on her feet, but kept a careful grip on the fluffy skirts.

"She's a handful!" Her tone was exasperated. "It was all I could do to get her quiet, and now she's started hollering again. Lucette's got a wonderful knack with her, and patience too, and Maudie's took a great fancy to her, considering the little while she's been here. She's a nice girl, and I can't think what's ailing her, for she was all right when she started out with the baby for a walk this afternoon."

"Want to walk *now*!" Maudie announced, making an abortive dive forward.

"Want to go to Lucette!"

"Hello, there!" McCarty held out a stubby forefinger, and Maudie looked up at him for a moment, then shyly clasped her chubby hand about it. "What happened to your pretty balloon?"

"Balloon?" Her other hand went to her mouth and she sucked her thumb reflectively.

"Sure," McCarty urged encouragingly, while Dennis stared at him in surprise. "The grand blue balloon you had. What's become of it? Did you break it?"

"She had no balloon—" the woman began; but Maudie was of another mind.

"*Did* have!" she contradicted flatly. "Lucette buyed it."

"Off a wop—I mean, a man—with a big

basket full of them down by the gate?" McCarty asked. "A big basket with a lot of balloons, red and blue and purple ones?"

Maudie nodded.

"Big bastik!" she affirmed. "Lucette buyed balloon, an' I tooked it into the man's house where he made the music."

She was evidently trying hard to remember, and McCarty waited, but the effort proving vain he prompted:

"You broke the balloon while the man was making the music, didn't you? When you got down off Lucette's lap to play around, didn't you break the pretty balloon?"

"Didn't bwoke it!" Maudie shook her curls decidedly. "Dave it to Lucette."

"Whilst the man was making the music?" McCarty persisted.

"No. Lucette tooked it when we went into the man's house, where the garden is an' the fing that makes the music. Want my balloon!"

The corners of the rosebud mouth drooped pitifully and a premonitory moisture dimmed her eyes.

"What did Lucette do with it, do you know?"

The question was beyond Maudie, however, and she could only reiterate: "Want Lucette! Want my balloon!"

"Did Lucette have many friends here in this country, do you think?" McCarty gave it up at last, and addressed the housemaid, who fortunately did not note that he voiced his query in the past tense.

"No, she hasn't. She's got plenty of followers, if that's what you mean, but she's real sensible for such a young thing, and don't bother with them. She would not have gone in Mr. Orbit's house if that Hughes had been alive, though. She hated the sight of him, and small blame to her!"

McCarty chuckled.

"He was a gay lad, from all accounts! But I guess there are others that Lucette hates, too, eh? She's kind of afraid of somebody, isn't she?"

"Not that I know of." The woman tossed her head as she caught up the protesting Maudie once more. "I've no call to be talking about her to a stranger, anyway. Get along with your nonsense!"

McCarty laughed again good naturedly. "A bit of gossip does no harm! But we've work to do, Denny and me. Good-by, Maudie!"

"By-by," that young person responded graciously, and the two departed for the Orbit house.

"What for were you asking the kid about the balloon?" Dennis asked when they were out of earshot of the woman, who still stood in the door watching them. "I saw none anywhere near the girl's body. How did you know she'd bought one for the child?"

"What would that wop have been hanging around the gate for, if he'd not sold one already in here and hoped to get rid of more?" McCarty countered. "Who else would be wanting balloons when there's no other kid on the block, since the Burminster girl's not back from the country and Horace Goddard's gone?"

"Gone, it is!" Dennis's voice lowered fearfully. "I feel it in my bones, Mac, that the boy will never turn up alive! There goes the car with the medical examiner's assistant. They'll be sending now for the body, and then 'twill be all over the neighborhood. Who in the devil is back of it all?"

"Who'll be the next one marked for death or disappearance?" retorted McCarty. "'Tis that has me worried now, for the hell hound is working faster and faster, as if the killing fever was getting the best of him, and by that same token that's my one hope: that 'twill get the best of his shrewdness and cunning, and he'll give himself away! That's the question now, Denny: who'll be the next?"

They reëntered the Orbit house by way of the tradesmen's entrance to find that Andre, the cook, had returned and was visibly wrought up over the fate of his countrywoman. His hands trembled as he shelled chestnuts for a glacé, and dire threats issued in a choked monotone from beneath the fiercely bristling mustache.

"That Hughes should have been taken, perhaps it was the hand of fate or *le bon Dieu*, for he was of use to no one in the world except *m'sieu'*, and a perfect valet is easily found, especially among the French, but that the little Horace should be made

to disappear and now Lucette the beautiful one is kill—it shall be for the revenge!”

“You’re right, it shall!” McCarty returned grimly. “Andre, do you know the Parsons’ cook across the street?”

“It is a she!” Andre looked up with a shrug of unutterable contempt. “A woman big like a brigadier with three moles upon her cheek! How should she know the art of the cuisine? But what would you? They are of the old bourgeoisie, these Parsons! I am not acquaint’ with the Amazon of the three moles!”

“Did ever you notice the eyes of her?” McCarty asked suddenly. “Do they be looking two ways at once?”

“But, yes!” Andre stared. “It is as though she would see behind of her. Has she, then, tell to you something of value to your search?”

“She’d have to see more than just behind her to do that, Andre!”

They left him still muttering and passed through the pantries and down the hall toward the front, but McCarty drew Dennis hastily back as the doorbell sounded vociferously.

“That’ll be the ambulance to take the body to the morgue for the autopsy,” he whispered. “The medical examiner’s assistant must have phoned for it before he left, that it’s here so quick. We’ll just be laying low till it’s gone.”

“And we’ve no chance for another look at the corpse!” Dennis mourned.

“What for? ’Twould help us none and ’tis not from what’s already happened we’ll find out the truth, but from what’s maybe coming! It’s as well to have the poor thing’s body out of the way.”

In silence then they listened to the heavy tramp of feet, but when the front door had closed once more McCarty beckoned to his companion and started for the conservatory. Its door stood wide, the windows had been flung open again and a slight breeze which had sprung up stirred and rustled the leaves of the palms, but nowhere did there remain any sign of the tragedy so recently enacted.

Walking over to the organ McCarty scrutinized it critically and then seating himself on the stool before it with his back

to the instrument and hands outspread on his knees he regarded the marble bench on which Lucette had met her death while Dennis shifted from foot to foot watching him. All at once with a grunt he doubled forward and appeared to be peering at the space beneath the bench.

“Nothing’s under there.” Dennis’s eyes had followed the direction of his gaze. “The floor’s as bare and clean as the palm of your hand. What more is there here for us to see?”

“Not a thing, now,” McCarty replied. Nevertheless, he crossed to the windows and examined the sills before leading the way from the room.

In the hall they met Orbit. There were deep lines graven on his face by the shock and strain of the afternoon’s horror and he was holding himself in such deep repression that only his eyes betrayed his emotion, glowing darkly like live coals in an ashen pallor.

“It is—all over?” he asked in a hushed tone. “Jean tells me the body has been removed and the conservatory thrown open again. I would gladly close it forever. I feel that I can never touch the organ, but I suppose that is morbid. Whatever mysterious, horrible thing came to destroy that girl we can be thankful that the baby escaped! Your inspector is quite beyond his depth, I am afraid, but have you and Riordan no clew?”

“Did the medical examiner’s assistant say it was poison gas did it, the same as the doctor?” McCarty evaded the question.

“He didn’t express an opinion while I was there, but your inspector went away with him, perhaps for some data that may reveal the actual cause of poor Lucette’s death. With all respect to Dr. Allonby I cannot convince myself that the girl was gassed. The sheer impossibility of it under the circumstances can’t be overcome in my mind! But don’t let me keep you, unless, of course, there are some questions you wish to ask me?”

“Not now.” McCarty shook his head. “We’ll be back later, likely. You’ve my own phone number in case anything turns up?”

Orbit nodded and himself showed them out the front door. Bill Jennings met them as they approached the east gate and immediately launched into excited queries concerning the murder, but McCarty cut him short.

"You know as much about it as we do ourselves," he asserted. "The girl died sudden, sitting in the conservatory with the child playing around her feet and not even the doctor's sure what took her. Bill, do you mind that balloon peddler you chased away from the gate when we were coming in? Did you ever see him hanging about before?"

"Many a time," returned the watchman promptly. "Balloons are a new line with him; it used to be peanuts, and before that little plaster images. Tony, his name is—he knows this boy coming now, that delivers the evening papers for the whole Mall. Is there anything wrong about him? He ain't ever been inside the gates while I was on!"

"Lord, no!" McCarty replied hastily. "I thought he looked kind of like a dago I used to know myself. Don't let any reporters in, Bill, until we get back."

He hurried through the gate dragging Dennis after him and around the corner, where he came to a halt.

"I want a word with that paper boy," he explained. "Happen he'll give us a line on this Tony; we'll collar him as he goes back."

"Balloons again!" Dennis exclaimed in disgust. "Well, I know you'll not talk till your own good time, but 'tis in your mind that a balloon had something to do with that girl's death! I'd better be getting back to the engine house, laying up some good sleep against to-morrow, for it's small use I'll be while you keep me in the dark!"

"I'm in the dark myself, Denny," McCarty confessed in contrition. "'Tis only a wild guess on my part, but I've a busted toy balloon in my pocket that I picked up from the floor of that conservatory right foreinst Lucette's feet after the doctor had gone. I don't know has it anything to do with the case, but 'twas the gas that balloons are sometimes filled with that put me

in mind of it. I broke the stick off it and threw it under the bench and when we went back just now it was gone."

Dennis's jaw dropped.

"But how in the world could gas, poisoned or no, be put into it?" he began. "I never heard tell of the like—"

"Whisht! The lad's coming now!" McCarty cautioned, then stepped forward. "Hey, just a minute, sonny! Where 'll I find your friend Tony, him that sells toy balloons? I saw him around here this afternoon and I want to get a dozen or so off him for an entertainment. Bill Jennings, the watchman there at the Mall, said you could tell me."

The boy, an olive skinned lad, with soft, dark eyes and a shy, ingratiating smile, pushed his cap farther back on his curly black hair.

"Tony Primavera?" he nodded. "Tony's got de best balloons fer a dime in de city, mister. He ought ter be t'roo bus'ness fer de day now, but youse can find him over where he lives wid Joe de ice man, in a basement on Thoid Avenyer near Eightieth Street. He'll have his stuff dere wid him, too!"

Thanking their informant they started east to the avenue indicated and up along that teeming thoroughfare to Eightieth Street, where they readily found the steep basement stairs with the sign outside that orders for coal and ice would be taken below.

With Dennis close behind McCarty descended to the dark half cellar lighted dimly by a single flaring gas jet. Besides the table and broken backed chairs, two cots covered with soiled blankets and a stove on which a pot bubbled and gave forth a strong aroma of garlic denoted that the apartment served for living as well as business purposes. But their eyes were caught primarily by the huge basket in the corner bristling with toy balloons so that it seemed a miracle it was not lifted from the floor by its aerial freight.

"Are they the same he had with him this afternoon?" asked Dennis.

"If they are he's not sold many," responded McCarty. "Where's he gone, I wonder? 'Tis a grand sight we'll be, trail-

ing them through the streets across town, but I'm going to find out what's inside of every last one of them this night."

Dennis betrayed acute symptoms of alarm.

"What if we find what we're looking for and the two of us keel over?" he demanded. "If you'll listen to me for once, Mac, we'll take them up to the park in the fine fresh air and bust them with rocks—thrown! I'm not saying we've done such a hell of a lot so far in this investigation, but we'd do less laid out cold and stiff!"

"Well do the spellbinders—of the losing party—tell us the town is going to the devil when we depend on the likes of you, that's afraid of a child's toy, to protect us if we drop a cigarette or coax the stove along with a bit of kerosene!" retorted McCarty, adding with naïve inconsistency: "That wop ain't carting poison gas around with him in ten cent balloons, but I'm going to be sure, anyhow."

A clatter on the steps interrupted the debate and the swarthy vendor of the afternoon appeared with a round, porous loaf and a pale, bulbous cheese unwrapped beneath his arm.

"Joe's out." He jerked his thumb toward the table. "Write do ord' on da slate an' bime-by he bring it."

"'Tis not coal nor ice we want, Tony, but some of your balloons, a lot of them," McCarty replied. "You know the kid that delivers the papers over at the New Queen's Mall? He told us where to find you, for they're giving a child's party where we work and we've got to have the balloons right away."

"How many?" Tony deposited the bread and cheese on the table with a thump and proceeded eagerly to business. "Fine-a balloon, only fifteen-a cent—"

"A dime was what you were asking this afternoon and a dime you'll get now!" McCarty announced with decision. "How many have you there?"

The Italian shrugged philosophically and counted on his grimy fingers.

"Twenta-two." He looked up with a grimace. "Bad-a biz to-day!"

"We'll take the lot," declared his customer. "Tie the stems of them together in

two bunches if you can. Here's your money."

The bargain was soon concluded and they sallied forth with their burden, but it excited so much comment, chiefly of a humorous nature, that McCarty himself was glad to subside in the depths of a taxi encountered on a side street.

"Don't sit all over me!" he warned his companion irritably as they started anew. "You'll be busting the damn things before we get home! Is it grinning the chauffeur is, the blockhead?"

"'Tis two lunatics he thinks he's driving!" Dennis averred gloomily. "He'd grin with the other side of his mouth if he knew he was carrying a load of sudden death, maybe! I'll thank you to move over yourself, Timothy McCarty, and not be poking them gas bags in my face!"

Thereafter conversation languished until they drew up before the door of McCarty's rooms. M. Girard, the dealer in antiques, came to the door of his shop and raised his withered hands heavenward at this latest demonstration of his neighbor's eccentricity, but McCarty vouchsafed him only a curt nod and then followed Dennis, who was gingerly ascending the stairs guarding his cargo with almost maternal solicitude.

In the living room he deposited it in the middle of the floor and opened the windows wide before turning on the light. The balloons rose slowly ceilingward in a variegated cluster and he made a wild dive to secure them.

"Tie your bunch to the arm of the chair," McCarty directed. "We'll start with mine. Hold them till I get out my penknife and jab it into one."

Dennis shut his eyes tightly, and holding his breath, extended his long arm until the joints cracked, but a sharp pop like the shot of a miniature revolver made him gasp, forgetting his caution. He opened his eyes to behold one of the balloons hanging, a mere deflated wisp, at the end of its stick.

"Nothing but plain air," McCarty commented. "'Tis not gassed you are, is it, Denny?"

"Not yet," replied Dennis with a palpable reservation. "You've twenty-one left, though!"

"We'll make short work of them!" McCarty jabbed a second balloon with his knife and the ensuing report was productive of a like harmless result.

Thereafter the air was for a space filled with a rapid succession of small detonations, and when it was over and not a balloon was left intact Dennis's apprehension gave place to disgust.

"'Tis in our second childhood we are!" he declared. "Whatever put it into your head that the toy balloon had anything to do with the girl's death—"

But McCarty was not listening. He had drawn from his pocket the shriveled shred of rubber on its fragment of stick and was smoothing it out thoughtfully between his fingers. All at once he straightened.

"Denny, that first balloon we stuck the knife into was red, wasn't it?"

"Sure it was!" Denny looked his surprise.

"And the second was blue and the third green?"

"I disremember—but what of it?"

"Look at them! Stretch them out and see if they've changed color since!" McCarty's tones shook with excitement and Dennis caught the infection. He drew the limp rubber out and scrutinized each torn balloon in turn, then shook his head.

"There's nothing different about them that I can see! What are you getting at?"

"Just this! When I picked this up it was blue, as blue as that second one we broke, and look at it now!" The rubber wisp he held out was a greenish gray mottled with brown spots which were already disintegrating. "Denny, the others didn't change color because 'twas just air they were filled with, but this is different; it's rotting before our eyes! 'Twas this child's toy held the poison gas that killed Lucette!"

## CHAPTER XV.

### MIDNIGHT MARAUDERS.

THE litter of wrecked balloons was cleared away and the one which had changed color with such sinister significance was carefully deposited in an empty tin cracker box. With pipe and

cigar alight Dennis and McCarty were discussing the latest development, the fatigue from the previous night's sleepless activity forgotten in their renewed zeal.

"There's an old guy I know living far uptown that's a wizard about chemistry," McCarty observed, neglecting to mention that the "wizard" had an interesting police record. "I'll take the box with what's left of that blue balloon in it up to him some morning, but we'll not breathe a word of it to another living soul! 'Tis somebody on the Mall or with easy access to it that's walking around with two murders and a disappearance on the conscience of them, maybe giving us fair words every day and the grand laugh behind our backs. We don't know who it is and till we do, we'll be telling nothing to any of them."

"True for you!" Dennis nodded. "I'm thinking, though, 'tis on the north side of the street you'll find your man, Mac, for everything that's happened hit the three households on the south side; Orbit's valet and Goddard's son and now Mrs. Bellamy's nurse girl. The only two houses opposite that are occupied since the Burminsters are still away are Five and Seven—the Sloanes and the Parsons. We'll not be forgetting that Swede, Otto, who beat it away from the Sloanes at the first alarm, and we've not so much as crossed the door sill there yet, but then there's the Parsons, too. They hold themselves better than their neighbors and have them that are next to royalty, no less, for company, and still and all they have an ex-convict and suspected poisoner at that to buttle for them! If I was that ambassador I'd have thought twice before I stayed to lunch!"

"They've a houseful of crooks, 'ex' or no," McCarty asserted, regarding his cigar thoughtfully. "I got Porter right, but 'twas the inspector first gave me the wire without knowing it when he said the housemaid and page boy looked familiar and as if he'd seen them somewhere before, but he couldn't place them. Where would he have seen them if 'twas not at headquarters or on trial? Andre put the last touch to it this afternoon, though."

"Orbit's cook?"

"He did that. Do you mind when I

asked him if he knew the cook over at Parsons he said it was a 'she,' a great big woman with three moles on her cheek? Jennie Malone shoved about twenty thousand dollars' worth of the queer-in the best stores of the city for the Carpenter counterfeiting gang before she was pinched and she'd never have been caught after she got the office to make her get-away if it hadn't been for those three moles that gave her away. Ever since Andre tipped me off unbeknownst I've been asking myself what was the rest of that household like, and did they have more reasons than one for keeping the neighbors at arm's length?"

Dennis sat forward suddenly and took his pipe from his mouth.

"Do you mean the Parsons themselves are not on the level?" he demanded. "The old gentleman with his grand charities and his pious talk, the old maid sister and the young niece? Three generations of them have lived in that same house, Goddard said, and the women of the family must be out of it, but do you think the old gentleman is cracked, maybe, and turned murderer wholesale? Is it him that's planted a hotbed of crime right there in the Mall?"

"Somebody has." McCarty shrugged. "Of course the two murders happened in Orbit's house, if 'twas there Hughes got his dose of Calabar bean, and the Goddard kid disappeared from next door—"

Dennis snorted.

"Would Orbit be killing the valet that give him perfect service all these years till he can't so much as put on his own shirt for himself, no less murdering a nurse girl, and running off with a boy? None in the Bellamy household could have had a hand in Lucette's death and it stands to reason Goddard didn't kidnap his own son! Orbit's likely to be under fire now and come in for a lot of notoriety and maybe—well, there's others under that roof besides himself!"

"I've been turning that over in my mind, too." McCarty took a last pull at his cigar and laid the stub in the tray. "We've put in this evening so far breaking balloons and that's about all we've been doing since first this case started; opening up one gas

bag after another and getting nothing but empty air! I'd like a chance to go through the Parsons' house and Orbit's, too, with no one the wiser, and if you were not such a clumsy, heavy-footed galoot, Denny, we'd be paying them a little visit to -night without leaving our cards."

"Clumsy, is it?" Dennis repeated indignantly. "Me that's been scaling walls and ladders since you tramped your first beat! We've broke in an empty house there in broad day and we can get in the others at night just as easy in spite of what new-fangled burglar alarms they may have, for I'm on to most of them through fighting fires, thanks be!"

"I've felt in the soul of me since the first night we went through those gates that sooner or later we'd be marauding in there like a couple of second story workers and now it's come! If instead of Parsons and his convicts it should be one of those Frenchmen or the Chink in Orbit's house we'll spot him!"

"The first thing we spot will be the restaurant around the corner, for 'tis near ten o'clock, and we've had no dinner," McCarty rejoined. "We won't be showing up near the Mall till midnight or after, and we've a lot to plan first."

Their meal finished, they returned again to the rooms, but McCarty paused in the doorway of the living room for a moment, a peculiar expression crossing his face.

"Sit you down and light your pipe, Denny." He threw open the closet door as he spoke. "I'll be with you in a minute. Now where—"

He left the closet and went into the bedroom, and Dennis paused in the act of tamping his pipe to listen open mouthed, for an unaccustomed sound came to his ears. McCarty was whistling, wheezily and off key, but there was something oddly reminiscent in the simple, insistently reiterated measure; moreover, McCarty never indulged in that or any other form of melodious expression unless in a blatant attempt at dissimulation.

What was he doing, anyway, that he didn't want his own pal to get on to? He'd opened and shut the door of his clothes closet, and now he was in the bathroom,

still trying to whistle that funny little tune, almost like the ones Molly's kid learned at the kindergarten!

Dennis shrugged and went on lighting his pipe as McCarty reentered the room, and going to the mantel, selected a cigar from the box reposing there.

"Did you find what you were looking for?"

McCarty reddened.

"I did not, but no matter," he replied shortly. "I unearthed an old kit of burglar's tools that I took once off of Black Matt, that 'll maybe come in handy, and here's a revolver for you."

"I've no use for it!" remarked Dennis hastily, regarding the weapon with small favor. "Something short and hefty is more in my line, with no trigger to go off unexpected and send me to the chair!"

"Do you think I'd trust you with it if it was loaded?" his host retorted. "'Tis only to throw a bluff if we're cornered, and we'll be wearing handkerchiefs over our faces like movie burglars, for whatever comes we don't want to be recognized! It don't matter what tracks we leave behind us as long as we get clear ourselves, so we'll take these nippers to cut every wire we see."

"And to-morrow there'll be a new job for us, tracking our own selves!" Dennis grinned, and then his face sobered. "We've the hardest job on our hands as it is that ever we tackled, Mac, with this inhuman devil to lay low!"

"I've a creepy feeling that there's more than him at work." McCarty dropped the tools he had been sorting and stared reflectively into space. "I don't know how to put it, but it seems as if there was something powerful and as evil as a spirit from hell itself that's helping the wretch in his destruction! He's getting bolder, Denny; he'll over-reach himself yet, and if we could figure who's to be the next, we could close in on him!"

"'Tis too deep for me." Dennis shook his head. "Is there a glass-cutter and a lump of putty in that layout?"

For more than an hour they discussed the forthcoming adventure, and at midnight left the apartment and took a round-

about way across town to the New Queen's Mall. Waiting until Dave Hollis, the night watchman, had strolled to the other end of the block, they let themselves in at the west gate and slipped into the court between the Burminster mansion and the Sloanes's smaller residence next door. The original plan had been to visit Orbit's house first, but a light still glowed from the lower floor, indicating that the host and his guest, Sir Philip Devereux, had not yet retired. But the Parsons establishment was decorously dark, and they proceeded to its rear along the open back court like two moving shadows. There they paused to adjust handkerchiefs over the lower part of their faces, and Dennis took stock of the situation. There was no moon, and even the stars were partly obscured by scudding clouds, while the rising wind that swirled through the alleylike spaces between the houses betokened a coming storm.

"'Tis the equinox, no less, that's on the way!" Dennis shivered more from nervousness than chill, and his voice came in a muffled whisper from beneath the handkerchief. The flash light in his hand wavered as he directed its infinitesimal ray against the house wall.

"Look at that, now! If the old gentleman keeps any valuables here he must think that the crooks under his roof are enough protection from them outside, for he's still depending on the old Kip electric system that a babe in arms could disconnect! Get you to the mouth of the alley, Mac, and keep an eye out for the watchman."

McCarty obeyed, and when, after an interval during which Hollis had passed twice, he heard a cautious hiss behind him and returned, it was to observe loose wires dangling innocuously from the wall and a yawning aperture in one of the windows where Dennis had removed a whole pane of glass.

"I made a good job of it," the latter whispered complacently. "The telephone is cut, too, and the inside burglar attachment. The old gentleman's not such a fool after all, for he's got an installation that once set would warn him if a window or outside door was touched; but I put it out of business. Take off your shoes like I

did and then come on; I've fixed the catch already."

He raised the window inch by inch, while McCarty removed his shoes, tied the laces together, and hung them about his neck. Then he crawled over the sill, drew his bulkier companion in after him, and flashed his light quickly about.

"There's the door. You said not to bother with any rooms downstairs except the old gentleman's private study or sitting room, if he's got one, didn't you?"

"Yes. I can see the foot of the back stairs at the end of this hall, so shut off that light!" McCarty whispered in response. "You're breathing loud enough to wake the dead!"

Dennis grunted indignantly, but made no rejoinder, and they fumbled their way to the stairs and up. The silence was oppressive, and to the amateur housebreakers it seemed to hold an ever-increasing menace. They padded along in their stockinged feet through the wide hall, pausing at each doorway as McCarty directed his own electric torch within, but only stately drawing-rooms and a dining hall huge enough for a banquet met their gaze.

"Wouldn't you think he'd buy more furniture?" McCarty forgot their equivocal situation for the moment as he gazed disparagingly down a long portrait gallery where Cavalier and Puritan forbears of the Parsons looked down only upon a few chairs placed at wide intervals against the wall. "There are not seats enough in all the parlors to hold a decent funeral, and what there is, is old and dull like the junk in Girard's antique shop!"

"Maybe 'tis worth as much and more," Dennis suggested sagely. "I'm not facing jail this minute, though, for a chance to look at it! There's a smaller room beyond that might be the old gentleman's study."

He had guessed truly, though the apartment in which they found themselves more closely resembled a business office. A roll-top desk and swivel chair, filing cases and a solidly compact safe met their gaze, and the rugs, upholstered furniture, and tall bookcases which completed the appointments, formed merely an incongruous background.

"Unless you're up in safe-blowing, which I doubt, I don't see as this room is going to tell us anything!" Dennis whispered. "Them keys that you stuffed your pockets with will do no good."

"Won't they?" McCarty chuckled grimly, and strode toward the nearest filing case. "Hold your light steady, Denny; fireproof this thing may be, but all the sections of it open with the one lock, and I could pick it with a buttonhook!"

The lock confirmed his opinion by yielding to the third key tried, and the various sections, filled with an orderly arrangement of ledgers and documents, were at their disposal.

"Look at the fine, neat writing of him." Dennis was rummaging in the topmost one. "What's this? 'Tis a lot of typed stuff with his own notes on the margin, and headed: 'Report. Chris Porter, 1913-1920.' He's wrote under it: 'Reasonable doubt. Pardon essential'; then, 'Pardon granted, help needed.'"

"Give it to me!" McCarty demanded. "Are there any more like it? These ledgers have nothing in them but notes on charity cases."

"Here's another; something about a reformatory, and in his own writing: 'Weak not vicious. Useful if right influence.' It's headed: 'Danny Sayre, 17.' This one is about that Jennie Malone—"

"Let me have them all!" McCarty interrupted. "Don't you see what they are? The criminal records of all the hired help! Take the next section, after."

A pause broken only by the rustling of papers ensued, and then Dennis exclaimed in an awestruck whisper:

"Mac! Here's a lot of notes about ways of killing, all mixed up with religion, and— and among 'em's poison gas! Fluorine, hydrogen and H. 2. F. 2—"

"Grab it!" McCarty hastily thrust the documents he had been examining into his pockets and closed the filing case. "Grab all the notes and come along; we'll need look no further in this house!"

Yet, on the way to the door, he paused, and ran the pinpoint of light along the rows of books in their towering cases. They appeared to be volumes of references on

widely diversified subjects from hygiene and sanitation to law and religion, and all arranged in meticulous order save on a lower shelf where the huge tomes of an encyclopedia had been stacked helter-skelter. One volume, that labeled: "Bronze—Cephalaspis," protruded from the row as though too hastily replaced, and McCarty stooped on a sudden impulse and drew it out. The morocco covers fell apart, and the book opened midway, where a thin, silvery, leaf-shaped object had been inserted as a mark.

At a muttered injunction, Dennis held his light trained upon it, and McCarty's eyes traveled down the page, then stopped, and for a long minute there was no sound except their mingled breaths. Then the latter whispered:

"Listen, Denny; here's a queer one! 'It is used in the form of an emulsion by the natives of Africa, as an ordeal when persons are suspected of witchcraft. It is believed that if the suspect vomits it he is innocent; if it is retained and death occurs, he is guilty.'"

"A mighty sensible arrangement, considering!" Dennis commented. "If he's guilty, and I'd not put witchcraft past them heathens, they're saved the bother and expense of an execution! But what in the name of common sense has it got to do with what's been going on here in the Mall?"

"Nothing." McCarty tore out the page, wrapped it about the leaflike bookmark, and pocketed it. "Nothing whatever, except that the stuff they make the suspects take is Calabar bean!"

He replaced the mutilated volume and they stole from the room, making their way down the stairs and back to the open window through which they had entered. The silence still reigned unbroken, and when they had crawled through the aperture and out into the wind-swept court, McCarty leaned against the wall, balancing himself precariously on one foot as he drew on a shoe, while Dennis softly closed the window.

"We'll not be breaking into Orbit's?" the latter asked, as he followed his companion's example. "Them notes about

poison gas, the marked page telling of Calabar bean, and the life history of the crooks he surrounds himself with—if Benjamin Parsons isn't the man we're looking for I'll eat my hat!"

"Then maybe you'd better be working up an appetite against the future!" suggested McCarty dryly. "There's no more proof against him than there was against that Otto Lindholm, and if the lights are out over at Orbit's, I'm going to take a chance!"

The miniature palace across the way was in total darkness, but its marble front gleamed whitely in the faint glimmer of starlight before a wind-driven cloud obscured the sky. Once more escaping the vigilance of the night watchman, they crossed the street and passed down the opening next to the Goddard house, where the glow from all the upper windows bore mute testimony once more to the sustained anxiety and heartbreaking suspense within.

McCarty halted his companion before the little side door.

"I'll wait here while you go around back and cut any wires you find," he directed. "The bulge of the conservatory hides me from the street, and 'tis not likely any of the Goddard household will be looking out their windows. What with the murder, and then company and all, Ching Lee may have forgot to fasten this door proper on the inside, and we can force it easier than the iron grille outside the rear windows. Don't be all night, Denny!"

Dennis glanced rather dubiously up at the next house and then out to the sidewalk, but he hurried away without a word. McCarty took out his keys and waited.

The strangely coincidental facts he had unearthed with such fortuitous ease in Benjamin Parsons's study gave him much food for reflection, but long experience made him more wary of jumping to conclusions than his optimistic colleague. Parsons was known as an eminent and practical philanthropist; what if he'd taken those ex-convicts into his home to reform them at first hand? It would be natural enough for him to keep reports on their past records. Calabar bean had been prominently mentioned in the papers in connection with the mur-

der of his neighbor's valet; mightn't he have been interested sufficiently to look it up as a rarity? The notes on poison gas "mixed up with religion" were more difficult to explain, but then only Dennis had seen them yet; and—where the devil was Denny, anyway?

McCarty craned his neck to stare into the darkness toward the rear, but no deeper shadow moved, and no sound came to him but the moaning swish of the wind. Denny had maybe found a burglar alarm that wasn't so easy to put out of business!

Hollis pounded heavily past on the sidewalk, then returned and went on again, and still there was no sign of his erstwhile companion. But all at once the bolts of the door against which he leaned were drawn back, and McCarty had barely time to spring aside and flatten himself in the corner of the out-curving glass conservatory wall when the door itself swung inward.

He held his breath, but no one appeared, and then at last a low hiss assailed his ears.

"'Tis you!" Mingled relief and exasperation lent emphasis to his whispered ejaculation. "For what did you play such a damn fool trick? I near landed on the flat of my back—"

"Forget it!" Denny interrupted with unaccustomed assertion. "Come on in before the watchman passes again! You'd never have got past these bolts only I found a way in through the little pantry ventilator; you couldn't have squeezed through it in a year! Now, which way? Is it up to the floor where the Frenchmen and them two heathen sleep that we'll be going? Nobody's stirring.

He had closed the door and noiselessly shot the bolts, and McCarty responded:

"I want to make sure. Orbit said he wasn't a good sleeper, you'll remember, and if he could rest easy in his bed this night, with that poor girl murdered under his roof not so many hours past, he's not

the man I took him for! We'll go up the back stairs and then sneak along the hall to his door. Thanks be, we know the lay of this house!"

They crept silently through the card room and past the pantries to the back stairs, where they stopped and removed their shoes again before venturing upward. No faintest ray of light shone from under any door on the floor above to compete with their darting flash light, but from behind, one on the left, deep and regular breathing denoted that one at least of the household, doubtless the distinguished arrival of the previous evening, slumbered unhaunted by morbid visions.

Before the door of Orbit's own bedroom they halted, but no sound came from within, and at length McCarty motioned to his companion and tiptoed into the sitting room adjoining.

"You've been in that bedroom before." His lips barely formed the words close to Dennis's ear. "You'll know how the furniture's placed, so as not to fall over it. Go in and see is he asleep; I've our story all fixed if he should jump you."

"I've not!" Dennis retorted in palpable reluctance. "Moreover, there's a queer, sweetish smell in the air; don't you get it? If he or anything else in there jumps me I hope you'll get busy first and explain afterwards!"

He left McCarty's side, and the latter heard his feet pad softly off toward the connecting door between the rooms. A pause ensued, then came the footsteps again, but fainter, now, and after a moment a low light flashed. It wavered, steadied, went out suddenly, and a dull thud came to McCarty's ears as the electric torch itself struck the thick pile of the rug. He started forward as Dennis's low, shaking voice was borne upon the silence.

"For the love of the saints, come here, Mac! Somebody's been before us!"

**TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK**



COMING  
SOON

**OFFICER!**  
BY HULBERT FOOTNER

AN INTERESTING TALE  
UNDER AN ARRESTING TITLE



# Socket Dooley: Demon

By CHARLES FRANCIS COE

**T**HE most trying of all times for the fighter is that endless period which crowds itself into the two days before "fight time." Then it is that tensivity of perfect physical condition rebels against the enforced restraint of the rest period. The inactivity palls upon taut nerves, straining muscles, concentrated thought. Maudlin expressions of supreme confidence are upon every lip; assurance, the more ostentatious because of its lack of depth, is belloyed across unthinking lips, unreasoning minds. And the hours drag with the weight of centuries.

Socket Dooley had been through all this many times of yore. It was "old stuff" to him. So he trod the confines of the training camp with the brooding silence that most befitted the condition. No, Socket was not

going to figure as one of the principals in the coming fray. The impending matter was one which interested him only from the standpoint of how well he had trained the boy who was going to do the fighting. Socket, to all intents and purposes, had long since passed the fighting days. His present unfortunate state was that of capitalizing those things which he knew, rather than those he could do. That is one of the weaknesses of the fight game. Just about the time a man learns enough about it to be good he is too old to do his stuff.

It is during the last two days before the fight that everything annoys. No matter what it is that happens, it is irritating to the fighter. Knowing the value of entering a ring in a contented frame of mind, Socket intended to see to it that the kid was not

bothered by interviewers. The newspaper fellows weren't so bad. They knew the trick, and never asked a lot of fool questions. But there were others.

For instance, that reformer who came in behalf of the League for the Suppression of Brutality. That bird had left the kid so mad that it took the entire camp to get him smiling after the talk. There would be no more of that—not if Socker had his way.

So he kept a watchful eye peeled for intruders. Two days before the battle his efforts were rewarded by the appearance of a dignified old lady who came in behalf of a woman's club. Try as he would, Socker could not forestall an interview. The papers had aroused a vast interest in the fight, and the public was interested in anything that appeared in print. To refuse to talk would have brought a storm of protest—or so said the promoters of the fight—so Socker agreed that he would talk with the lady. Frankly, he wholesomely admitted total ignorance of the why and wherefore; but there was nothing else to be done. The kid couldn't possibly see that woman. It meant too much; nobody seemed to understand that.

"It's dis way, ma'am," said Socker when the kindly soul had been introduced to him and leaned back to gaze upon his battered physiognomy through her lorgnette. "De kid is 'on edge' an' needs ter git sleep. I just got 'im tucked erway an' can't shake 'im loose. Whatever yer wants ter know, why, just ask me—I'm Socker Dooley."

The manner in which he announced his identity seemed to impress her far more than the announcement itself.

"I wanted to interview the principal. We are interested in his psychologies; his mental processes; his general background."

"He ain't got none uh them!" Socker assured her. "I spent de last t'ree weeks tryin' ter teach 'im the whole works. We gotta wait till de mill ter see whether dere's anyt'ing above de shoulders except jaw. Are yuh goin' tuh de fight?"

The lorgnette trembled perceptibly and the pampered face behind the glasses crimsoned slightly.

"I have no intention of seeing the degrading affair, sir."

"Den wot's de use uh gabbin' about it?" asked Socker rather practically. "An' yuh needn't 'sir' me. I ain't stuck up on account uh bein' good in me day, lady!"

"I fear that this interview will not answer my purpose," snapped his caller.

"Wot's yer purpose? I'll answer anyt'ing yuh ask me."

Apparently this logic was a little too strong for her. She shifted her position and cast a withering glance upon Dooley. It was plain to be seen that her continuance of the interview was actuated solely by a sense of duty.

"I wanted to secure information first hand, that I could report to my associates. We are opposed to prize fighting, and expect to find any justification for it which may exist, by keeping an open mind and lowering ourselves to personal investigation rather than decide a matter without all the facts before us."

"Oh!"

"If there is anything chivalrous, anything uplifting, anything that makes better men and women of us, in this fighting, the place to learn of it is among you who make a business of it. Am I not right?"

"I'll say you are, old kid!" Socker was beginning to understand. The lady wanted to learn the game. "An' you just take it from one as knows—they's a hell of a lot ter learn about it!"

The kindly interviewer was beginning to sense conditions which had not been foreseen. She actually felt qualms as to her personal safety. Then Socker grinned congenially and it was evident that under the veneer which proclaimed lack of culture far more than lack of manhood there was a dormant sense of chivalry which would have offered its full measure of protection to a lady in distress rather than see a hair of her head harmed.

She took what she considered a tactful course.

"This promises to be a most interesting chat, Mr. Dooley."

"Socker's good enuf," he assured her magnanimously.

"Very well, Socker. I take it you have engaged in fistic combat yourself?"

"Well, I wasn't born wit dese ears, lady,

an' I ain't never been in no railroad wrecks!"

"To be sure! Did you—like the business of fighting?"

"Kin a duck swim?"

"To be sure! You fought for the love of fighting?" And the lady made a few notes in a black book she carried.

"Fer de *love* of ut!" gasped Socker. "Sweet patootie! Yuh never stopped a belt on de lug, did yuh? Did yer old man ever take a swipe at yer mug when he had a few shots aboard? *Love* of ut! Good night! Dere ain't no fun in wipin' no gloves outa yer lamp, lady. Dat's de way wit' women. Dey ain't got no understandin' of a man's business."

With the fortitude of a martyr the good lady overlooked these remarks. Every pioneer in any field must expect hardships; these were the penalties of being a protector of public welfare. She must countenance them with patience and courage. While regaining her composure she made a few more notes.

"To be sure," she giggled finally. "You are a fighter who commercialized the art—that is—the ability."

"I never done nuttin' wit' it but grab de coin."

"Indeed—yes! And let me ask you: was there considerable animosity on your part against the man you fought with?"

Socker thought that over a bit. The puzzled expression upon his face enlightened her as to the lack of response.

"I mean—did you hate the man who opposed you?"

"Hate a guy dat brought me a nice purse?" Socker was amazed at the thought. "Why should I hate him?"

"How could you fight with a man whom you had no reason to dislike?"

Socker was hopelessly involved. There seemed no head or tail to the thing; no manner in which the thoughts of this bewildering lady could be answered. Well—there just wasn't any sense to it, if you get me. Finally in desperation he said:

"I don't git yuh, ma'am. If it's about de fight game yuh wanna know, dere ain't nuttin' to ut but who is de first guy ter knock de udder's eye loose. Dat's all dere

is to ut. In me day I used ter climb troo de ropes figgerin' ter drop de udder bird's hat rest in de last aisle tuh de right as soon as I got a crack at ut—dat's all dere is to ut!"

"You mean his *head*?"

"Well—mebbe only his chin; dat's enuf," grinned Socker.

The lady rose in horror. The interview was at an end. She had learned enough. She trembled once more for her own safety. Here was irrefutable evidence of the murderous intent of pugilists.

"You said your name was Socker Dooley, I believe?"

"I sed ut right, sister. Dat's de case!" Socker rejoined.

Once more the pencil flew across the notebook. Then, with a chill smile, the interviewer swept toward the open door and the waiting car. Her sigh of relief was no more audible or expressive than that of Socker.

But the next morning a wild promoter appeared at the camp. The baleful glare in his eye warned Socker of impending disaster. The man did his best to release from his straining system the thoughts that brewed there. It was no use. They would not lend themselves to expression. In a frenzy he finally stuffed the morning paper into Socker's hand and pounded a trembling finger upon an article which he profanely commended to Socker's immediate attention.

Well, there it was:

### **FISTIC BATTLE SHOULD BE STOPPED BY POLICE**

**Prominent Society Folk to Appeal to  
Governor to Take Immediate Steps to  
Prevent Coming Ring Encounter**

Laboriously Socker struggled through the two column article. Not alone was his every statement included, but many that he could not have thought of, much less made. The good lady interviewer was none other than the famous Mrs. Fink, member of the Four Hundred. What she hadn't said about the brutality of boxing and the fixed intention of boxers upon entering the ring was what Socker had failed to mention, and what she

and the reporter who had written the article couldn't think of. It wasn't a whole lot.

And then there was what the promoter had to say. Most of those bimbos can talk against time, and when any one casts a shadow over their income there just isn't anything more to be said. The first chance Socker got he sneaked out into the barn and hid. One of the perquisites of fighting is judgment, and Socker showed his.

The pull of the promoter plus feverish effort and many agreements on the matter of reciprocity finally squared things as well as could be expected. The fight wasn't to be stopped.

Then came one of those incomprehensible twists of the public mind which has marked American history since its beginning and made luminous its pages with deeds of might and valor, performed under stress of sudden impulse.

One writer commended Socker for the spirit of combat that was his. He pointed out that this was the spirit of conquest; that it was the factor of competition which assured genuine skill, determined effort. The idea took hold. Socker's name appeared in the rôle of a great fighter who knew little of expressing his thoughts. The very crudity of his exaggeration which had so frightened the lady marked him as one of the few men who had made fighting the clean game it should be.

Just let a fan rest assured that the man he pays to see means to fight to the limit of his powers, and he asks no more. For the first time in many months the name of Socker Dooley crept into the headlines.

And then came into the life of Socker one whose influence was to mean much. He appeared at the camp the morning following the turn in newspaper sentiment. Over his arm he swung a jaunty cane. His frail body was swathed in a perfectly fitting suit. His genial smile illumined his features with as dapper a light as is within human propensity.

He got to Socker on the strength of that smile.

"Socker, old kid, you're there! Fortune has seized you in her whimsical grasp and is about to waft you to the crest of fickle

adoration. All that you need is the finished touch of a genuine leader—and I've both the touch and the leader! If you have one-half the judgment that I can see lurking in the lustrous depths of your shantied lamps, you will seize my hand with the warmth of gratitude. See—I hold forth said hand unqualifiedly. Fate has seen to it that we are to share opportunity."

Mechanically, Socker took the extended hand. Things were breaking a trifle fast for him; a little beyond his powers to grasp; but there was something about this chap which fascinated. One found it difficult to argue with him because one had no opportunity to talk. He did all that.

"Ah, yes! We are brothers of fortune. You of small intelligence, and I of great. You of great brawn, I of none. Wonderful, don't you think? They say it is always darkest just before the dawn. I'll wager that you have been blue for the last few days. Am I right? I am!"

And he was. Socker recalled the day he had spent in the barn after that promoter had called. Indeed he had been blue!

"And so it goes! At the very darkest hour—I appear! Even now you cannot see in that the great good fortune which it really is. In a very few words—we are the ideal combination. You, a body in search of the mental spark which lights the way to fame and fortune. I, the spark in search of a body to follow the path I illuminate. Shake again, Socker. God is good!"

Socker shook.

Then he followed the other into the quiet of the gymnasium and there listened, spell-bound, to the words of wisdom which poured from the glib lips of his new friend. Terminating the conversation, the newcomer drew forth an envelope from his inside coat pocket. Hanging the flourishing cane over his forearm, he leaned over a wall pulley and wrote upon the envelope:

This is an agreement that Lewis Latts is the manager of Socker Dooley until written notice to the contrary is mutually signed. As such, said Lewis Latts is to arrange bouts for Socker Dooley on a profitable basis and is to receive from Socker Dooley one-third of the proceeds of these bouts. Lewis Latts agrees to pay all expenses of training.

Both men signed the document. Immediately Latts set forth in search of the promoter. He had a very definite idea in mind. In his pocket he carried the strongest article that had appeared anent the desire of Socker to annihilate all opponents. It was the insurance for the fan who paid to see a fight and was too often stung by too careful fighters, that he would get the worth of his money.

"I have always admired the wisdom of your matchmaking," Latts assured the promoter. "There are certain features about fighting which reflect credit or discredit upon the matchmaker more than upon the fighters themselves. Those qualities you possess. It is for that reason that I am here."

In his own inimitable manner he pointed out to the promoter how distinct a drawing card Socker Dooley had suddenly become. He was in the public eye. He had publicly gone on record as one who thought only of the demolition of an adversary. A fighter worthy the name! One who fought with the primitive fury of his antediluvian ancestors. A caveman—a *demon!*

And so it was that an extra bout was added. What Socker might lack in physique was made up in heart. What he might have lost by reason of his long record was more than compensated for by the fact of his sudden appearance in the public eye. It was truly one of those incomprehensible twists; and one which bade well for the Socker Dooley coffers, to say nothing of those into which went the worldly wealth of Lewis Latts, Manager Extraordinary.

## II.

PROVIDE three thousand men with questionable tobacco; crowd them into a poorly ventilated building, give them plenty of matches and then feed them excitement! The experiment will reproduce the average "club" on fight night.

Add to this the catcalls of a hundred pseudo wits; the scraping of six thousand feet and the perspiring presence of half a hundred ushers who act as though they never before have been inside the place; and you have the background.

There are other nondescript attributes which classify the affair in a category all its own. For instance, Levy Litsky is engaging in his first bout. In the fifty cent gallery are Levy's vociferous admirers. Every time Levy disturbs the resin with any portion of his anatomy other than his feet, there is loud recriminations from said admirers. Across the balcony are the admirers of Pat Gilhooley, possibly of Irish extraction. The fight takes place as much outside as inside the ring. The pandemonium is the only thing of certitude about the affair. Be the victor Levy or Pat, certain amount of hell is assured from the gallery gods.

Into that atmosphere strode the rejuvenated Socker Dooley. Many there were about the ring who looked not so far back to the days when the appearance of that grinning face was significant of action. These shook knowing heads a little sadly. There is something disheartening in the prostitution of faded glory.

Across the ring reposed the somewhat frightened form of Abie Epps. Abie was the possessor of the head which Socker was to attempt to deposit in the extreme right aisle, if one can believe the papers. To all intents and purposes Abie's affection for that same head was increasing momentarily.

He was surrounded by a corps of chattering, water slopping "seconds" who warbled diversified advice of a technical nature into a head that knew not the cause of the simplest of things. The head bobbed occasionally, but whether from understanding or the frenzied rubbing that tortured the back of the neck which supported it, will never be known.

Socker was happy. There was that in the very air which carried him on the wings of memory into the faded past. The roseate recollections of supremacy obtruded beyond the misgivings of judgment. Many a man has been sustained by finding himself the cynosure of admiring eyes. Back of the battered eyes of Socker Dooley was the best fighting brain in some thirty odd States. The body that caged it might be lacking in all ways, but the brain would always function in that atmosphere.

"Demon Dooley," some one yelled, and the cry was taken up from all quarters. The fans want action. Dooley had been portrayed as the inventor thereof. One look at the bilious color on the face of Abie Epps, and Socker mustered his most violent expression. There is a lot in an expression when one is facing a newcomer. If Abie, or any of his friends, could read, Socker knew that the demon idea was well seated in that young man's mind.

The clang of the bell galvanized the aged body of Socker Dooley. If you've never been there you cannot appreciate what the combined odor of resin and perspiration mean to the scrapper. As the Nimrod breathes deep of the pine aroma of his chosen playground, so did Socker Dooley chortle his knowledge of a return to the field of endeavor which was his by right of consecration thereto.

He was across the ring like a bolt from the heavens. That expression was at the height of its terror bestowing powers. Somehow things looked different than ever before to Abie Epps. He whipped his hands into fighting position; quivered in anticipation of some unknown thing commensurate with the awfulness of those gleaming eyes—then grinned sheepishly and did a ridiculous little dance; purportedly one of confidence.

Then Socker mailed the famous old "sock," Special Delivery! The elbow of his right arm crooked, the wrist arched inwardly and the shoulder and hip on the right side of his body swung into procession behind the flying fist. Doubtless Abie saw it coming. In any event it was a thing that was bound to assert itself sooner or later! With a thud that caused a prolonged "O-o-o-h!" from the assembled fans, the big glove slammed against the most prominent portion of Abie's pale face.

The body of Epps swung dizzily as though on a pivot, then sank floorward. The whites of the eyes showed a combination of terror and disinterest. Abie's knees landed in the resin and the agonized cries of the gallery gods who swore particular allegiance to the neighborhood whence he came, wafted him back into the land of material things.

Some one had told Abie to "take a count." The words rang in his ears at the moment. Some one was saying "five—six"; that would be the referee. Again there popped into the dizzy mind of Abie further good advice that rang from the hazy past. "Clinch." That was what he would do. So he leaped to his feet and grabbed the first thing he saw. It happened to be the referee, but this was of no significance to Abie. He hung on. Were those cheers which rang thunderously in his ears?

The third man in the ring cursed, raved and struggled to free himself. Seconds shrieked words that meant nothing. Socker galloped around the struggling men intent upon one more opening for that right. Finally it came. Again came the coördination back of the lightning swing. And then it happened. Through a mind that failed to function clearly, Abie got an idea. It had to do with taking another count. So he swung sharply away from the man he had been holding and dropped to one knee.

Like a good many other ideas, it was all right except that it didn't work out exactly as planned. The flying glove of Socker shot over the wavering head of Abie and chugged neatly under the chin of the referee. A blissful smile of content overspread the judicial features of that gentleman. With the grace of a dying swan he piled himself inanimately beside the kneeling Abie. The gallery gods set up an incessant chant which was a fitting melody to the tragedies being enacted.

But the mind of Abie was beginning to clear. At his feet lay a vanquished foe. Just how it all occurred Abie didn't know. Things happen with amazing rapidity in the ring and the true fighter is he who takes opportunity as she presents her glowing self.

The thought of victory still further cleared his mind. Then he saw Socker Dooley standing, nonplused and frightened, in the center of the ring. If he read aright the Socker's mind he saw that the old-timer was facing something new in his variegated career. At a moment like this unusual judgment was required and Socker didn't have it. But there was one here who boasted it.

Lewis Latts! Accordingly Socker Dooley turned toward his corner to get the proper advice.

All that he saw was a wild look of agony upon the managerial countenance. Too late he realized its import.

Whirling toward the center of the ring he placed his genial mug directly in the path of the trusty right of Abie Epps. And that was that!

Abie regarded the fallen Socker momentarily. Then the roaring advice from the maddened crowd percolated his dull wit. The time had come when some one must count and the only man to do it was still roaming the Elysian fields of "poppy grove."

Abie rushed to the prone referee and grasped him under the arms.

"Vake up! Fer Gawd's sake, vake up! Cow-int—cow-int!" he bellowed excitedly. "He iss k-nocked out. Pleease cow-int!"

The difference between the pugilist and the layman was never more clearly demonstrated than then. Despite the entreaties of Abie Epps, the referee slept peacefully on, whereas the good Socker Dooley gathered his shattered faculties in a matter of eight seconds. He rose tottering to his feet and paused long enough to survey the situation. Then with the stately tread of one on a mission he veered forth to do battle in convincing manner.

Abie chanced to see the form of Socker approaching. Again came that horror of combat with Demon Dooley. He refused to rise. Again Socker circled his prey. All in the ring were deaf to the pandemonium outside it.

Then the referee came to. It wasn't a sudden process. He did nothing more than open his eyes slowly, but Abie saw it. What if the referee blamed him? He was safer on his feet before Dooley than on his knees beside this abused personage!

So he rose. Socker leaped for him. What trick of fate caused the second stage of returning consciousness to actuate the referee in his first attempt to rise at that identical moment? Ah, well—who will ever know?

Suffice it to say that he made the attempt and became entangled in the flying feet of

Socker Dooley. The result was to shoot Socker like a catapult through the air. The head of Abie Epps and that of Socker met. Immediately their bodies enfolded in a loving embrace as together they slid into the folds of oblivion.

The referee shook himself as though to get free of the tangle. He rose gingerly to his feet. In his eyes beamed a far-away look that bespoke lack of mental clarity. He poised himself a moment, tipped forward from the hips to view the tangle at his feet, then jerked upright in all his official dignity. Like a drunken sailor he teetered to the ropes and raised his hand for attention. Into the teeth of the roar that he heard not, nor understood, he pronounced his decision:

"'S a draw!" he babbled. "The damn fight's a draw!"

Then he swayed increasingly to right and left, felt his clutch on the sustaining rope slipping and, finally, in returned abandon, slipped dizzily to the floor.

We left an hour later and they were still cheering.

### III.

OUTSIDE the arena Socker sought to push his way through the crowd. In his pocket he carried some six hundred American dollars. Prosperity had returned! On his arm hung the talking Lewis Latts.

The discourse was interrupted by the sudden appearance of a white haired lady who peeked through a lorgnette.

"Ah, Mr. Dooley! And did you accomplish your nefarious purpose?" she inquired.

"Are you back again?" growled Socker Dooley.

"But wait!" insisted Lewis Latts, he of the money thoughts. "You may say for Socker Dooley that his one regret is the unfortunate premature ending to the bout. He had scarcely begun to fight. Given more time he would have dismembered this Epps person with one annihilating crusher. As it was he landed but one blow and that almost killed three men! We are saving his glove with the idea of selling the gold from the teeth that are still imbedded in the leather!"



# The Stranger at the Gate

By **MAX BRAND**

Author of "Dan Barry's Daughter," "The Night Horseman," etc.

## CHAPTER XXVIII.

### ON THE STAIRS.

THE shrill of that voice rang on. But Olivetta heard no more what she screamed. Instead, she was listening to a turbulent outbursting of noises from the lower part of the house. Doors were crashing open, deep, hard voices were calling to one another, and over all she could make out the bull-like roar of huge Tom Lanier directing his men to the attack. Then began the swift thunder of many heavy feet rushing up the stairs below them.

When that tumult began, John Hodge had stretched out an arm of iron and barred her advance. Now he caught her arm, and in his excitement his grip sank deeply into her flesh. Yet she felt the pain almost as

a thing detached from her, an experience not of her body.

"Keep your courage, now," he said. "It means fighting. Have you the gun?"

"No—I—oh, I left it below—"

"Good God! Well—then there's only my hands. But there's still a ghost of a hope—in the darkness to help me—"

The roar of feet, and the crashing sound of voices pouring up at them, drowned his words.

He turned, leaned, wrenched at a baluster. It was torn from its place. And he shook it before him in a silent joy to show that he was armed, no matter how feebly.

In the darkness the old demoniac look was in his face, the look which had so fascinated her and so repelled her.

And then the mass of men swerved up the stairs at them.

*This story began in the Argosy-Allstory Weekly for November 3.*

One came first. As a sprinter darts out before a field in the last leap for the tape, so this man suddenly shot out before the others. He whirled around the turn and came at them far in front. And then Olivetta knew that if she had had the gun with her she would have been able to shoot and kill without a tremor save of thankfulness.

"No shooting!" panted a huge voice in the rear, the voice of great Tom Lanier. "Knives, boys! Slide a knife into the damned long-legged rat—but no guns. They make too much noise! We don't want the whole town to hear us working!"

That great voice beat into her ears. And she saw the flash of steel like a disembodied pale flame in the shadows as the leader leaped at John Hodge.

The baluster, wielded like a short club, rose and fell. The knife fell with a clatter. The assailant flattened against the stairs. But behind him came three more, swinging about the turn. So fierce was their gasping eagerness as they came to the kill that they jammed in a sudden tangle between the wall and the creaking, sagging balustrade.

John Hodge stooped and lifted the body of his stricken man shoulder high. With a shout he cast the body into the faces of the three. He cast the body, and he hurled his own weight behind it. And all the mass went down into a groaning heap, smashed against the outer wall at the turning place. One form disentangled itself from the shapeless masses, lifted itself into the clear.

It was the gaunt, wide-shouldered form of John Hodge. He faced another man laboring up the stairs in the rear of the rest, and in that last form she recognized the squat and solid bulk of Tom Lanier. Yet not an instant did John Hodge hesitate. He sprang at the head of the giant, and the two crashed down the stairs.

Olivetta sped in after them. She scooped from the stairs, where it had fallen from the hand of John Hodge, the baluster with which he had stricken down the first man. And that small club might lend sufficient weight to a blow from her arm to aid Hodge in a crisis.

She whirled around the corner of the

stairs. One of the stunned, breathless men reared to a sitting posture and gripped at her with an oath. She struck the hand away with a blow of the baluster. She felt the wood bite through to the bone. She heard a howl of rage and pain as the arm was beaten down. Another hand caught her skirt. But she tore it away, and speeding on down the stairs, she saw the two tumble across the floor of the hall below.

They disentangled and rose to their feet. In this hall, as in all the others, there was only one light burning at the farther end, a closely hooded, dust-dimmed light, and in this hall it was further darkened by the fact that it was nearly burned out. And what Olivetta saw was merely two shadows among shadows.

Half stunned by their fall, they had staggered apart. But plainly the big man, Tom Lanier, was the more injured of the two. His own weight had helped to batter him in the struggle down the stairs. And now, as he reeled helplessly away, John Hodge turned toward Olivetta, and with a clear way before him, made for the head of the stairs.

She was beside him as she leaped down the last few steps. And then a shadow flew by her, struck John Hodge, and knocked him headlong to the floor. It was the guard he had struck down in the second hall above, and he had recovered in time to block their escape effectually. He had thrown himself bodily from the landing above, and the force of the fall, while it stunned John Hodge, tumbled the assailant half senseless beside his victim.

And yonder was huge Tom Lanier, cursing and mumbling to himself, still too stunned to know what was actually going on around him, just as a prize fighter will sometimes stagger through half a dozen rounds, striking, warding mechanically, but all his movements directed by a subconscious brain. So Tom reeled up and down the hall, groping, blinded. His forehead had been gashed in the fall. The blood he could not wipe away as fast as it trickled into his eyes; a terrible spectacle, in that half light, to Olivetta.

Past him she sped and dropped to her knees beside John Hodge. His head was

limp to her touch. She shook him. His body was inert. There was no mark on his face. But he was stunned completely. Was he, perhaps, killed?

She glanced to the side. There yawned the stairs. And one flight down them was the street level and safety for her. But she could not leave him helpless in this fashion. It would be certain death to John Hodge; and even though her staying could do no good, still her heart was sickened at the thought of leaving him.

Over him she crouched, sobbing his name, shaking him in a frenzy of eagerness. For on the stairs where he had knocked down the four men a second or two before, they were rousing. She heard their groans, their fierce curses. One of them came wavering down the stairs. He who had stunned Hodge was now picking himself off the floor. And John Hodge himself was only beginning to gasp for breath. Tom Lanier came toward them at a run. His brute brain was cleared of the fog of battle at last.

"Jack!" he cried. "What in hell are you doing here over him? What—by God, it ain't Jack!"

A stream of profanity was turned upon her, and she was bidden stand back. But Olivetta, gripping the little, heavy billet of wood hard, and hiding it in the fold of her skirt, stood with her shoulders pressed back against the wall.

"Oh, for God's name!" she pleaded to him, holding out her other hand, "don't touch him—let him go—he'll do no more harm—"

"No more? He's done enough."

He stepped closer.

"Stand off from him; get—what, you—"

The last was a snarl of rage as she resolutely stood her ground. He raised his arm for a back-handed stroke which would have knocked her senseless to the floor. And then Olivetta struck straight for his forehead.

At the last instant he saw the danger and tossed up his striking hand to guard against it, but the guard was raised too late. The weapon struck home. There was a shiver of the wood in her gripping fingers.

And Tom Lanier dropped heavily to his knee.

Help was coming to him now, however. Across the hall at the foot of the stairs he who had just descended had discovered them at last, and, with a hoarse shout, started to the rescue. And poor John Hodge was only now coming reeling, blinded to his feet.

She cried his name. He turned toward her a face contorted with the effort to understand. With all his might he was struggling to clear his brain, and to control his numbed limbs. But here was an enemy already upon them. And yonder down the stairs lurched others.

Even if she now wished, however, she could escape. They would stay to close on this one man who had battered them all so terribly. And while they were disposing of him, she could flee unhindered. But there was no thought of flight in the mind of Olivetta.

She sprang in before John Hodge and struck into the face of the oncoming man. The blow made him throw up his head and reel there with his arms cast out. She struck again with all her might, and a savage thrill of satisfaction ran through her as the stick tingled against her palm with the force of the blow. She had struck him squarely along the side of the head, and he lurched senseless to the floor.

Tom Lanier, his face a bleeding mass, rushed on them, and she whirled on him only to find that John Hodge had run before her. She saw the blows speed into the face of Lanier—saw him stagger away. Then she whirled toward the stairs again with John Hodge striding at her side.

There were three men coming from the stairs. But, as though the fighting had made him drunk with battle, John Hodge ran straight for them with a shout of exultation. She herself raced behind him, feeling that they were lost now, indeed, but though the odds were so greatly in their favor, the three who blocked the path had had enough of fighting. They winced from the encounter. One man went down under the driving fist of Hodge. The others stepped away. Between them they rushed to the top of the stairs and then down.

As they turned the landing place, she looked back. The red face of Tom Lanier was looming above them, and behind him came all of his legion. But now she was down in the lowest hall. She reached the front door. The knob gave under her hand, and they plunged into the blessed cool, the divine silence of the outer night.

## CHAPTER XXIX.

JOHN HODGE SPEAKS.

THERE was one great advantage. The door opened flush with the street, and there was no flight of steps to descend. They turned to the side, and there John Hodge dragged her back into a narrow passage between two houses.

They had barely turned the corner of the house when Tom Lanier and his men went by, running blindly ahead in their furious rage.

Then they heard Lanier calling to his men—calling in a half muffled voice to bid them scatter and search around all the houses. For every house was vacant, and in one of the passages they surely must be.

A cellar door was to their left. Against it John Hodge set his shoulder. And the door gave way with a faint scraping. They stepped into a dark and musty smelling interior.

"But they'll follow us here—" breathed Olivetta.

"They'll never think of looking for us here—they'll at least comb all the passages around the houses before they start to go through the houses themselves," said John Hodge.

They stood quietly for a while. A footfall went down the cement walk outside, and as it passed, she pressed closer to Hodge. He found her hand and patted it.

"We'll start up, now," he murmured. "They've gone farther down the line of houses. But step softly!"

He produced a small electric torch, and, with the aid of an occasional flash from it, they were able to find their way among the cellar rooms until they reached a stairs which brought them to the first floor of the house. There, in a corner of a great blank,

dusty room, they sat down on the floor to rest and wait.

Still through the wall of the house and the closed windows they could hear an occasional sound of the pursuit, a voice calling lightly, or footfalls in a clattering chorus. But these at length were quiet. And another set of noises began, small, intimate sounds which had not been noticeable before, but which now grew into series of small murmurs and squeaks like the treading of men up a hall, or a great, soft-breathing sound, as when a door opens and a draft rushes through.

To Olivetta it began to seem that Tom Lanier and all his corps of assistants were stealing up on them. She could hear the scraping of the cellar door as it opened. And after that she could hear every approaching sound as they stumbled across the concrete cellar floor and then climbed the noisy stairs to the first floor, and crossed the kitchen, and entered the hall, and then paused with a hand on the knob of the door of the room where she and John Hodge were then waiting.

But John Hodge was speaking, no longer in a whisper, but in a low voice, which was a proof that there was no foundation for her fears. She could have blessed him for the solid strength of his nerves and the support they gave her.

"We'll wait here till the dawn begins," he said. "Because that's the time that paralyzes Tom Lanier and his ilk. They hate to have the eye of the day looking at them, you see. It seems to read them through and through. And yet that's the time that the rest of the city will be most thoroughly asleep. We can wait until then, and then go out safely—safely for you, at least."

"And you?" she asked.

"I," said John Hodge, "have no right to be considered. I have to take my chances with the rest."

She shook her head.

"That," she said, "is not true."

"Why?" he asked curiously.

"Because I have discovered the truth about you, after all, John Hodge."

So mortally thick was the blackness in the room that she could only vaguely make

out the broadening of his outline as he turned toward her.

"Then—what's the truth, *madame*?"

It seemed to her that there was a change in his tone, a peculiar touch of anxiety in it.

"I have discovered," she said, "that you are an honest man."

"What?" he gasped. "At the end of a trail on which you've found me with stolen jewels? Do you mean it? Stolen jewels, thieves and knaves for companions—"

"Don't say all that!" she cried, and pressed her hands across her ears.

"But how do you explain?"

"I don't explain," said Olivetta. "I used to try to explain everything. Now—I can't even explain myself. I—I—I find myself sitting here and looking back on all the terrible things which have happened as though they were simply a part of a great—great game of some kind—don't you see?"

"God bless you," said John Hodge.

"And yet," she said, "if you *would* explain—just a little—"

"You couldn't believe."

"You don't know," said Olivetta. "I'm a great believer. I—I've even liked fairy stories quite lately."

"You want me to tell you?"

"Yes, yes! Everything about yourself. Because, you see, I've guessed the main thing—that you're an honest man."

"Where is your proof?"

"Because no dishonest man could have done all the things you've done. You've been brave, you've been generous, you've thought more for me than for yourself all the evening. And yet I came here to trap you. Oh, it sickens me to think of how I came after you, John Hodge."

He made a gesture of disclaim.

"Very well," he said at length, "I'll try to tell you so that you can believe."

"And begin with your real name."

"My real name?"

"Because John Hodge—doesn't fit you."

He laughed softly.

"My real name is a stopper for you. I am really Francis Fitzroy Blackwater Campbell."

"Scotch!" cried the girl happily.

"Dour Scotch," he admitted, "but chiefly American, at that."

"Francis Fitzroy Blackwater Campbell," she echoed. "Why on earth did you ever pick out such a name as John Hodge?"

"Because, take it by and large, it's about the best contrast one could think of for my real name."

"It is, of course." She added: "Unless it were shortened to Frank Campbell."

"They never would shorten it to that," sighed he. "They raised me in the midst of a flock of tutors and governors, and what not. You understand? When I stopped being Master Francis I became Mr. Campbell because my father died while I was young. A stout-hearted old aunt took charge of me and managed to mix up my affairs so terribly that when I came to the end of my college career I found that my total assets were an invitation to hunt big game in India—that and a large assortment of clothes and rifles and a scattering of books. Otherwise I didn't have a cent in the world. My total income-bringing property was lost.

"That's rather a facer for a youngster. But I managed to survive. I was too keen for the hunting trip to care much about any thing else. I was living in the midst of visions of charging elephants and dying tigers.

He laughed again in reminiscence.

"Then there was no truth in it when you said you couldn't use a revolver?"

"I'm afraid not. But in the pinch we were in then, it was better that you should have a gun with you—right up to the very end—"

"I understand," she said hurriedly.

"Well," he went on, "at any rate, I boarded the boat with the rest of our party. We hit Havre. Then we shot across continent and grabbed another boat on the far side of Suez and wound up in the jungle in due time." He sighed. "To cut that part short—"

"But I don't want it cut short," protested Olivetta. "I want to hear every single detail."

"That would make it too long, really. The fact is, we had a fine party. The rest of 'em liked it well enough. But I was fairly stung. I had my luck with me. I slaughtered beasts right and left as I never

have since. As a matter of fact, my luck was so very good that it attracted a little attention. And people began to pick me up.

"You know how it is with young fellows. They don't have to pay much of the way. They're supported by the people they help to have a good time. And that's the way it was with me. I had my togs and my guns which I'd laid in long before the financial crash was announced to me. And I was taken in hand by the very best.

"Wherever people were making up a party to hunt the big game, some one had a word to say in my behalf. It was said that I brought good luck. And in fact I seemed to, for not a single expedition that I went on turned out a frost. We always located the stuff and got it.

"You may feel that I'm playing a loud horn in my own behalf. But I've hunted for a good many years since that time and I've never again run into such luck.

"Of course the success of it all went to my head. I suppose I was an unbearable young beast for a time. Every one was turning to me, every one was paying me royal attention. Because when men go out to hunt, the best hunter is the king and dictates. All that matters is that a man can hold a gun straight when there is a living target in sight. A billionaire is only a tenderfoot in a hunting camp until he shows what he can do with a gun.

"But after a while I began to wake up to the fact that life is something more than a hunting party. I began to be dunned for the money I owed. And in the midst of this awakening I received my first visit from—what shall I call him, because even now I can't give him his true name or his true title? Suppose I call him Rajah Pundar, then. At any rate, I can string the story on that title as well as on another."

## CHAPTER XXX.

### A RAJAH'S DIFFICULTY.

**T**O Olivetta it seemed that the darkness made the story thrice vivid, for every word he uttered called up in her mind a picture contrasted on absolute blackness.

"Rajah Pundar," went on John Hodge,

for Olivetta still could not think of him by the other name he had given, "was a little slender man who went about with an eternal smile. He seemed to know something about life which enable him to laugh at every one who took it seriously. For his own part he never pretended to do anything worth while.

"He had his education given him at Oxford, and a good job they had made of it. He had his Greek pat. He was fond of Theocritus and never went far without a pocket volume of the stuff. In other things, too, he was a good deal of an exquisite and he knew much, in fact, that when he laughed at life, one felt there must be something in what he thought. A fellow like that can do a devilish lot of harm, in passing.

"The rajah looked every inch a European, even in his complexion. His father had married an English girl; and the rajah had his mother's skin; but in the whites of his eyes there was a smoky tint. It was very slight. It hardly existed outside of one's imagination, but once it had been seen one could not see anything else. Do you understand?"

"Yes," she said, and shivered a little. She could not tell why this picture of the rajah thrilled her so, but the smoky eyes and the wise smile were vivid to the life.

"The rajah," went on Francis Campbell, "was a jolly good fellow. He kept me well entertained for the better part of an hour, and then he drifted around to the serious purpose of his visit.

"By what approaches he managed it, I can't remember. It was delicately done, I assure you; and he was able to let me know that he understood I was penniless, owing a great deal of money, and apt at any time to be exposed to shame if some of my friends and creditors awoke to the fact that I had become simply a sponger without the means of paying back what I had borrowed from my hosts here and there.

"And that, in fact, was exactly what I had done. It sounds devilish bad. But at the time—well, I had simply drifted ahead and taken the easiest way—"

"Oh," said Olivetta, "I can understand that!"

And she found in the darkness his arm and dropped her hand lightly upon it.

"Thank you," said he. "It's fine of you to say that."

He paused a moment and then he went ahead more lightly: "I was man enough to shudder when the rajah's words made me reflect a bit. I saw exactly what I had done. Strange how it clears one's mind when one reflects what the world will say in judging one's actions. At least, I was brought up short. I was in a cold sweat. And then he made his first proposition to me.

"It was magnificent. It was worthy of a king instead of a half ruler over a miserable little square quarter of an inch on the map of the Himalayas. What he suggested was that I come up into his mountains with him and become his official hunter. He himself, he declared, liked to go hunting, but, since an ugly accident a year or two before, his nerve had been shaken. He made the confession with a shrug of the shoulders and a perfect good grace. I should have suspected him then. No real man would have been able to confess cowardice as easily as he. At any rate, he went on with his kingly suggestion that he be allowed to pay me enough salary in advance for me to clear off my debts. Then I should come up into his hill country with him and, if I liked the place and the work, stay until I reached a green old age. But if I did not like the country and the work, I could leave as soon as I pleased and simply owe him the salary which I had not earned.

"What could be more generous than that on the face of it?"

"Oh," said Olivetta, "it was *too* generous. You must have known that there was something wrong behind it."

"Sitting here a dozen years later," said Francis Campbell, alias John Hodge, "sitting here a dozen years later, in a dark room, with those twelve wasted years behind me—why, I can look back and see that I was then a young fool. But at the time, it seemed a not impossible offer. I was newly out of college; I was newly out of the habit of thinking in hundreds of thousands; and besides, I believed in the ro-

mance which must exist somewhere in the world.

"When a boy is under twenty-five, yes, or even under thirty, he keeps feeling that he is just around the corner from great happiness. He keeps expecting to find himself plunged in a fairy story of one kind or another at the next turning of the page. And that was the way with me.

"For the sake of dignity I told the rajah that I must have a day to think things over and arrange my ideas on the subject. But at the end of twenty-four hours, when I called on him, I was hot with eagerness to take him up. For that morning I had received a dun for money, a very stiff little note, such as an angry man can write.

"The offer of the rajah seemed, on reflection, so impossible that I hardly dared broach the subject to him when I saw him. But he opened the talk himself and reiterated all that he had said the day before. And I accepted at once.

"So there I was, in a fortnight, headed for the mountains in his train. He had insisted that there was no need for hurry. He had advanced me even more than his promise and urged me to do some entertaining on my own part before I started for the hills.

"Of course I was very glad to have the means of doing that. I repaid some of the debts of hospitality which I had been piling up. And then we went up into the mountains together.

"The rajah's country was, like the rest of India, under English rule. But here the English rule was a very mild yoke, for the simple reason that the rajah's country was hardly worth governing. His people were a horny handed lot of hunters, a wild, thriftless gang. And nothing in the world could have extracted taxes from them except a superstitious awe for their ancient ruling house, which was now represented by the rajah.

"I looked about the country for a time and then I dropped in on the rajah. I had been there for two weeks and he had said not a word about a hunting party. When I called on him I brought with me an offer to resign at once.

"He asked me what was wrong, and I

told him that it was a very good joke, but a joke which I could not exactly appreciate. If he wanted hunters, he only needed to pick at random from among his mature male subjects. Any random choice he made was almost sure to be an expert as good as I.

"The rajah listened politely until I was ended and then he shrugged his shoulders. No European can shrug shoulders with the expressiveness of a Hindoo. And then he admitted that when he brought me into the hills, he had no desire to make a hunter of wild beasts out of me. What he wanted was a hunter of men.

"He was just as blunt as that, but after he had given me the first shock he went on to explain more at length and with infinite smoothness.

"It seemed that his revenues were falling short of their old fullness. And the reason was that there was another pretender to the throne. That pretender was a half brother—suppose I call him Randar? Randar had set himself up in the hills and announced that he had been robbed of his birthright. And while he never had been able to seriously threaten the throne of Pundar, yet he caused such a disturbance in the minds of the mountaineers that they decided that they would pay no tribute to either of the claimants until the dispute were settled.

"Because, they said, if Pundar were the true lord over that section of the mountains, he should be able to prove it by wiping out Randar instantly with the aid of justice and the divine power which was vested in him. Neither would they pay their old measure of tribute to Pundar nor would they whole-heartedly assist him in chasing Randar and running him to the ground. For who could tell? The man they hunted down might, after all, be the rightful claimant to the throne!

"So that Pundar found himself with an income cut in two and the hard added burden of the necessity of supporting a little army of a hundred or so men to defend his capital in case Randar and his handful of miscreants should attempt to sweep down on him from the higher mountains where they took refuge.

"Rajah Pundar for once forgot to smile

as he told me this yarn. He even went out and had the army mustered for my inspection. And they were a ratty looking crew if ever I saw one! Most of them were imported, because, as he had just explained, he could not trust his own subjects to fight against a man who, for all they knew, might be their rightful ruler. They were too apt to step to one side and let the two brothers settle the matter subject to the arbitration of God alone.

"But Pundar was not inclined to submit to such a test. As I have said, he was a little, slender man, and his half brother, the false Randar, was a gangling fellow upward of six feet in height and with little short of two hundred pounds of brawn in his favor. So Pundar had brought in these half starved mercenaries who, being mortally despised by the inhabitants of the country, brought Pundar into still further disfavor with his subjects.

"Yet he could not dispense with his army, and his army dared not move outside the royal presence, so to speak, for fear it would be mobbed by non-combatants!

"And, in the meantime, cunning Randar hung in the upper mountains and swooped down like an eagle time and again to carry off plunder from the valleys and to carry off a few new adherents each time. For every descent he made, unscathed, helped to convince the natives that Randar must indeed be of the right blood royal and the true heir to the throne.

"Now, what Pundar wanted was a white man in command, a daring adventurer who would, in the first place improve the morale of his "army" and, in the second place, who would be willing to risk his life among the upper crags of the mountains in the chase of Randar.

"I listened until he was through and then I asked him why he didn't appeal the case to the English. But he explained that the English were easy to call in, but hard as the devil to send out. I asked him to go over the main points of dispute and he proved to me, clearly enough, that Randar was a rank impostor. After that I had no doubts. I decided that I would do my best for him. I knew that Pundar was a rascal, but even a rascal can be in the

right now and then, and besides, this rascal had treated me with the most princely generosity from the very first. So I determined to fight his fight for him."

## CHAPTER XXXI.

### THE FIGHT ON THE MOUNTAIN.

"FIRST of all, I looked over the army. Gathered together in a flock, they numbered about a hundred and fifty men, and they seemed a crew of wrecks and derelicts. But when I went over them one by one, I found some hardy fellows in the lot. I weeded out forty men as hard as nails, all handy with weapons, and reckless enough to suit the prince of evil. I added to the lot a dozen men about the palace who were so stanchly attached to Pundar that they would fight for him. That gave me only around fifty fighters for the army, while Randar was reported to have close to a hundred followers. But if his hundred were at all like Pundar's original hundred and fifty, I had no care for the numbers. Three cowards mixed with ten brave men will start the ten brave men running when it comes to a pinch. Panic is like fever; it's catching, and it spreads as fast as a bullet travels.

"Well, I had my army boiled down and ready for training. Then I managed to get them into a uniform, a cheap contraption in red and blue cotton cloth. The bright colors would make them perfect targets, but the bright colors were worth while on account of the effect they had on the spirits of the men. My men felt braver in red and blue than they would have felt in drab. In three days I had them rivaling one another in the care they took of their uniforms. And inside the same three days I had come to know them well enough to pick out their natural leaders. I had half a dozen of the hardiest raised in rank, which meant giving them better pay and brighter colors to wear. They were gaudier than rear admirals on dress parade, those corporals of mine. And after they had been 'made,' I had no troubles about discipline. I simply held each corporal accountable for his eight or ten men. And

if one of the men overstepped the bounds, he was beaten to a bloody pulp by his superior officer. And, after that, my next step was to double the pay.

"That sounds extravagant. But I could have quadrupled the pay and still it would have been less than a decent wage. However, the raise in pay brought a wail from the treasurer that made even the rajah sit up and prick his ears.

"He called me in to interview him, and pointed out very politely that to reduce the size of an army was commendable, if one thought it still large enough to do the work, but that to double the pay was obviously doing away with the good work I had already done.

"I heard the little rascal to the finish, and then I informed him that his former army had done their fighting entirely through talk, but that I intended to get my boys out and work them.

"And I lived up to my word. For two weeks I drilled them. I didn't make them fall into formations. That wasn't what I wanted. Formations weren't worth a continental on the sides of mountains where the best trained company of king's guards in the world couldn't have held a straight line. My training consisted of marching them straight across country and back again by the hardest routes I could find. And I hung up prizes for the men who made the trips in the best time and best condition, taking packs on their shoulders as they went.

"The result was that at the end of two weeks I had worked them into good condition. Their cheeks were thin and drawn. Their muscles were hard. The outer coating of fat was gone. They began to jar and wrangle with one another. In short, they were in good fighting condition, like a pack of half-starved dogs.

"I had been drilling into their heads a few commands, such as common words for a charge, an advance at slow pace, seeking for cover as they worked forward, and such things, including the knack of simulating a retreat—running like the very devil for a ways and then suddenly whirling about, dropping on their bellies, and blazing away at an imaginary line of foes.

"At the end of the two weeks, my boys were in splendid shape. I was almost afraid to trust myself among them. And when I had them in that condition, I started out to find Randar.

"In the meantime, Randar, as I learned through a spy I had sent out on big pay, had been worried by the reports he heard about activities in the camp of his dear brother. His way of meeting the danger was to recruit every man he could lay hands upon. Those who were not willing to fight for him he pressed into the service anyway. The means did not matter with Randar any more than they did with Pundar. The ends were what he had his eye fixed upon. The one great difference was that Randar himself was a good two-fisted fighter, and able to set a wholesome example for his army.

"He had gathered, for the emergency, close to two hundred men, all equipped with firearms of varying centuries. And, so prepared, the brave fellow retreated to his highest mountains and waited!

"I came after him in a leisurely way. I didn't want to wear out my boys without necessity for it. And I managed it so that they got within striking distance of Randar while still in the very pink of condition.

"We started the battle in the approved Indian fashion. At a distance of half a mile, Randar's men began shooting hundred weights of lead into the rocks in our general direction. I kept a half dozen expert riflemen skirting along onto the highest and most commanding points, from which, as we advanced, they potted a few rounds at Randar's army. The result was that we kept Randar's men ducking for close cover and hardly daring to show their heads, while we worked up that murdering hillside among the boulders. My sharpshooters were picking off Randar's men one by one, and Randar's volleying were carving the air to bits and splashing on the rocks. So that my total casualty list in the climb consisted of one slightly wounded in the head and in a red fighting rage because of his hurt.

"However, my boys had held their fire so long that they were ravenous for action.

That long, slow, careful approach under fire had taught them to heartily despise the marksmanship of their enemies. Every step, in reality, was convincing them of the righteousness of the cause of Pundar. Otherwise, God would have sent the bullets on a straighter line against them. Finally I had them bulwarked behind rocks a short hundred and fifty yards from Randar's boys.

"The blockhead had simply posted his men in a massed line without attempt to use intelligently the immense opportunities which those rocks offered. All I had to do was to place a dozen of my boys on high points in order to establish a plunging fire that dropped them by the half dozen.

"Randar's lines were sweating blood, and a loud yell and a charge would probably have carried his position. Already some of his boys were sneaking away in twos and threes. But I didn't want to charge that line of rocks, lose seven or eight of my own boys, and only scatter the evil of the enemy over the mountain country.

"I may sound bloodthirsty to you, but I wanted to wipe out that gang of thieves and robbers. You see, I was very young. And I was seeing a beautiful chance for a career among those cold peaks. I saw myself as a sort of grand vizier with the reins of government dropped into my hands by the trusting Pundar. I would send him away to Paris to enjoy his fat income. In the meantime, I would stay at home and start improving things.

"If I could introduce a trickle of American gold, with an investment of a few hundred thousand, a solid burst of income would be the result, and I knew whom to speak to to bring in the investors. But first of all, I must make the country safe to live in, and the best way to go about it was to wipe out the murderers who were living now under the head of Randar.

"So I waited until Randar's men had delivered another desperate, blind, shaky volley, and then I gave my signal to simulate a retreat.

"My boys did it wonderfully. It was just the sort of game they could appreciate. They leaped up from behind the rocks. Randar's men had just fired, and their old

muskets hadn't been reloaded. Therefore a bit of self-exposure was harmless. My boys, therefore, jumped up, waved their arms, yelled, and brandished their repeating rifles by way of showing their terror, and then sprinted away, shrieking, among the rocks, as though a panic had taken hold on them and they were pursued by a legion of devils.

"That was enough for Randar's cut-throats. They had already suffered pretty heavily at the hands of my sharpshooters. Now they went out for revenge. They didn't wait to reload their old-fashioned guns. They threw them away by the score and whipped out their knives, their natural weapons, and came with their eyes rolling and their teeth showing.

"They dashed across the clear space before their lines. They raced around the ledge of rocks behind which my boys had lain. And there they stopped.

"For they got the contents of fifty repeating rifles in their faces. My fine lads had run a little way according to their training, and then they dropped to their bellies, tucked the rifle butts into the hollows of their shoulders, saw that the magazines were full, and waited.

"When Randar's outfit tore through the rocks they were salted away in crowds. Randar himself went down with ten bullets through his head and breast. And that charging line of his men stopped, staggered, and turned to run.

"But they didn't run far. I had set apart ten of my best men to the right flank. When Randar's men charged, they had moved down and occupied Randar's old lines. Only a handful, mind you, but all expert shots, all with good, modern guns and oceans of ammunition. And the ten were ample to stop the return of Randar's rascals. They came swarming back, met that counter fire in their faces, staggered again, and then were caught by another blast of murder from the rear, where my main body had moved up again to a closer range.

"And then the remnant—the wretched remnant of Randar's boys—ran down the mountainside, throwing away even their knives, and shrieking for the help of kindly

deities. How many got away I can't say. Some of my boys, when they came wearily back from the chase that evening, declared that they had run down every mother's son of them—that the enemy was utterly annihilated. But I imagine that their enthusiasm had run away with them. At least, when I sat down on a rock and looked at the burned palm of my left hand—burned by the heat of the rifle barrel, you understand—I knew that I had done a good job for clever Pundar. I was very much satisfied with myself. I was very much satisfied with the intelligence he had shown in picking me out for this nasty job. And then I went to examine the camp of the enemy and collect the plunder."

## CHAPTER XXXII.

### A MYSTERY EXPLAINED.

HE paused for such a time that she stared curiously at him through the darkness and made out that he had dropped his chin upon a supporting fist while he stared into blank distance straight before him.

At length he continued in a changed voice, with the exultation gone out of it.

"That camp was simply a mess, of course. There was only one decent habitation along the whole line, and that was the cave which Randar himself had occupied before the battle with a pair of his wives. It was quite habitable. And among other things I found the treasury, a big iron bound chest which had held the cash of Randar. It was absolutely empty. With the cash had disappeared everything worth having in the rest of the cave. A few of my handy lads had preceded me.

"I had them caught and I threatened to hang them up by the thumbs unless they instantly confessed. They finally confessed—that they had taken the money to keep it for me until we should come down from the campaign and return to the palace of the rajah. I took every cent from them; but I simply redistributed the money, giving every man in the army an equal share. The treasure furnished them—there were forty-five left alive—with nearly a hun-

dred dollars apiece, and they considered themselves rich.

"I watched them start celebrating; and then I went back into Randar's cave and looked about among the wreckage. There was nothing worth examining except the old treasure chest; and as the night came on, with a stiff wind from the snow of the upper summits, I called in some of the lads and told them to smash up the box for fire-wood.

"They set to work on it, but it was a hard job. There was an interlacing of steel laths. They had to be battered apart, and finally they had stripped away the steel netting and thrown the wooden parts on the fire.

"It was such a cleverly reinforced chest that I looked over the skeleton, and not until then I noticed a little steel section which was more of a small box than a section of the lathing. And when I examined it more closely I found that it was in reality what had been a secret compartment, buried in the wood of the bottom part of the box. I chiseled it away from the rest, and then I started to work on the little lock. But I could not open it except by cutting through the steel.

"My men were scattered about the fire outside the little cave. And in the cave itself I was at work until midnight before I got the box open and found on the inside, bedded in a wad of green, soft silk, the pearl which Logan called the Sheik—this pearl which I now have in my hand."

She saw the shadow of his raised hand through the darkness. His voice quivered with triumph.

"I knew little about pearls," he went on, "but I knew enough to tell the Sheik is worth a fortune. And I stayed awake another hour dreaming about the uses I would make of the money after the sale. Then I went to sleep.

"I woke up in the early dawn, and the first thing I did was to reach for the pearl. I had put it in a sock and then drawn the sock on and wrapped up in my blankets. But I found that the sock was empty!

"Some clever thief had unfolded the blankets at my feet, cut the stocking with a razor or a razor sharp knife so that I

felt nothing, and removed the pearl. And he had been cool enough to wrap the blanket softly around my feet afterward so that the cold might not waken me.

"The first thing I did was to call the roll. And I found that my most trusted lieutenant, he who had led the flanking force which afterward occupied the abandoned lines of Randar's men and drove them down the hill to annihilation, was gone. He was a very intelligent half-breed. His name was Louis Kern!"

"The one armed man!" cried Olivetta.

"He had two good arms at that time, and he knew how to use both of them. I didn't wait to get back to the palace of Pundar. It was a good thing that I didn't. I learned afterward that he was so much disturbed by the loyalty of the army to me that when I returned he planned to give me a cup of wine, after drinking which I should fall into a sleep from which there would be no waking. But what I did was to take two of my most faithful soldiers and start with them on the trail of Louis Kern.

"It was a strange trail and a wild trail. It brought us down to the sea eventually, and there Louis Kern—I am telling you what I found out partly then and partly afterward—was in turn robbed of the Sheik. The men who robbed him took to the open sea in a small sloop. And the sloop was wrecked off the shore of Ceylon. You heard that from Samuel Logan, though of course the yarn which he told about the diver who brought up the pearl on his last dive, as he was about to retire—that was simply nonsense.

"I had met Logan while I was on the trail of Louis Kern. I met him under peculiar circumstances, so complicated that it would take a long story to explain it to you. But the fact was that Logan thought he had rescued me from punishment for a murder. I was entirely innocent—in fact, the Calcutta police last year discovered the real criminal. But Logan was convinced of my guilt. And yet he did what he could for me. And I, in turn, thought at first that he was an extremely good natured fellow. The result was that I told him exactly what had happened to me.

"I left Logan at the same point where I lost track of the thief and the sloop which now carried the Sheik.

"You can see the situation which held then. Logan and I and Louis Kern knew about the pearl. And there was also the crew on the sloop who knew about it. But when they went down it was Logan who first discovered the fact, and Logan again who took out the tug and the diving apparatus and went to search the bottom of the sea for the Sheik.

"I had wind of what he was about and wanted to go with him. But he now disclaimed me and tried to betray me to the Indian police on account of that murder of which I was at that time accused. I had to hide from the police and at the same time track Logan and see what he was able to recover from the sea.

"Another person was doing the same thing, and that was Louis Kern. There followed the adventure on Commodore Dascom's yacht. The incidents of that, I suppose, were very much as Logan told. But he was a monumental liar, and it is possible he may have falsified some of the details.

"After that there was nothing for me to do but wait and hope. Louis Kern and Logan were doing the same thing. You can imagine the situation. Logan was a discredited thief, sponger, and liar, known to a thousand men for what he was. Louis Kern was a villainous half-breed. And I could not appeal to the law, because the law was waiting to string me up by the neck for the murder of a poor old man in Calcutta.

"You observe that Commodore Dascom was in control. And so long as he lived he continued to be in control. In the meantime, Louis Kern had joined the household of the Commodore, had been thrown out of it again under the peculiar circumstances to which Logan alluded, and he and Logan had joined forces.

"I, in the meantime, lay in the offing. I had made one secret trip back to India in the hope of securing sufficient evidence to clear myself of that horrible murder charge. But I nearly put my neck in the noose and escaped by a scant inch.

"After that, there was nothing I could

do but wait. I had to pick up a living as I could. I did all sorts of things. I became a guide and hunter in Africa for several years. I toured here and there. And I had some years in the Russian army. But at last I found myself in Hawaii keeping an eye upon Logan and Louis Kern when the news of the death of Commodore Dascom arrived.

"The next day after that news appeared in the papers they were on the high seas. I followed them to San Francisco. There I learned that they had gone on to New York. And I followed again.

"In fact, it was an easy matter to put two and two together and know what the story must be. The moment they heard of the death of the commodore, the moment they saw, as I had seen, that no mention of the great pearl was made in the published will of Dascom, they had gone on to see what they could do. And that fitted in with what I had already suspected: Louis Kern had learned something about the permanent hiding place of the Sheik. But he had already suffered so terribly from the anger of the old commodore that he dared not tell his secret to a soul. He was waiting for the death of Dascom. And Samuel Logan, in the meantime, supported Kern in the hope of securing a share from him when the pearl was taken.

"Now that they were heading for New York, I knew that they would be making an attempt on the house of the commodore. And I determined to be there before them and rob them of the spoils. I considered myself the rightful owner of the pearl. Randar, in the first place, had owned the pearl and had kept it in reserve, to be sold as a last resource to win back the country which Pundar ruled. Pundar had expressly declared that any plunder taken from Randar's army was to be my personal property. And therefore the pearl was mine. I cannot imagine a better right. I had fought for it and won it squarely.

"You know how I appeared at Dascom house. And when Louis Kern and Logan saw me on the lawn, you were unable to read the rage in their faces; but I could.

"That night I saw Logan busy at the globe, and I knew that the globe must have

something to do with the pearl. So I came down myself to take a look at it later on. I could make nothing of it, and while I studied it I heard a noise at the window and knew that Logan was spying on me. I went wild at that. I ran out into the garden, but the clever devil had faded into the night air—"

"It was I, and not Logan!"

"You?"

"Yes."

"Good gad! But I understand. At any rate, I went back upstairs to my room. Naturally I could not sleep. I had to keep awake and on watch to see what Logan or Kern accomplished.

"I came down again, and after another walk I came in and saw the shadow move in the hall, as I told you before. That brought me to find you bound in the closet—"

"And you really hadn't put me there yourself?"

"I? Upon my honor—"

"Just your word is enough. But my head swims!"

"Let me tell you what had actually happened. I have guessed at it, I think. Louis Kern went down to the steel globe to steal a march on Logan—they must have agreed to open it in each other's presence. But he found that the globe was already opened. And you, Olivetta Dascom, were bending over the globe.

"He attacked you as you came out, held you down and searched you while I walked past you down the darkened hall, and then he gagged and tied you and put you in the hall closet while he went to find Logan and get an explanation from him.

"You went back to your room, after I'd let you out, and then Logan decided that what he had done was not enough. He played pig and tried to scoop in your emerald, because he had heard the talk about it that night."

"But the shooting of Logan!" cried Olivetta, unable to contain her impatient excitement. "Oh, how—"

"Don't you see," he said, "that there would have been no point in *my* doing it?"

"But—" she began.

"I don't blame you for doubting," said

he. "After that shooting the jewels were stolen."

"But he seemed to be sure that what he had to say about you—"

"Exactly," said Francis Campbell. "He did not know that the real murderer of old Henry Tanfaran in Calcutta had confessed last year. He thought that a word from him would throw me into the arms of the police. That was what he was about to tell to the crowd when the bullet struck him and stopped his speech."

"And you?"

"Of course I saw, by his preliminaries, what he was leading up to. And just before he reached the crisis, when he was to announce my name and my supposed crime, I slipped out of the room. I wanted to telephone to a New York paper and try to find out from a reporter I knew if they could verify the story of the confession concerning the Tanfaran affair. But before I could reach a telephone the shot came from the man who stood at the window and fired through. If any of the people in the room had noted the time I left it, they would have seen that I did not have the time to go around to the outside of the house and fire the shot."

"Then, who did?"

"I don't know. I can only guess. But I've been in hiding all this time, playing a game of hide and seek and trying to trap the man I think did the shooting."

"But, oh," sighed Olivetta, "I begin to believe—why, I want to sing, it makes me so happy!"

"God bless you!" he said quietly.

"Will you try to explain one thing more? You see, I'm at a point when I will believe almost anything. But what did it mean when I saw you run down the hall and knock down the detective with your gun?"

"Has one thing occurred to you?" said he. "If I had been a murderer, and if my own life was forfeit, would I have thrown my gun at that detective and tried to knock him down with it, as I luckily did? No, I should have shot him through the head and gone on with one danger removed from my rear!"

"I know," she said. "I've thought of

that. But my rather—when I reached his room—”

“You found him wild with rage,” said he, “and ready to tear the world in two to get at me. And there was a perfectly good reason for him to be angry. I don’t like to tell stories out of school, but here’s a case where it will do no harm, I’m sure. At least, I have to save my own hide.

“This is the truth about my attack on your father.

“When I knew that the murder was blamed on me, and by the shout that went up after the shooting, I knew it at once, I turned and bolted and got safely out of the grounds. Then I came back with the determination to get at the Sheik. I had heard about how you were robbed by the simple expedient of listening in on a telephone and taking off some of the messages which were passing to New York. And I guessed that it must have been some member of your family who had exchanged those agates for the jewels. It was too pat, else.

“I picked out a person with a sense of humor, plenty of coolness and ready wit and laid the blame upon him. In other words, I accused your father and went to search his room. The reason I accused him, also, was because I had gathered that he had perhaps some debts which were not known to his family. And, in fact, it turned out that way.

“When I reached his room I found the whole stock of the jewels. Of that stock I took only the Sheik. That was the only one to which I had any claim. The others were the rightful property of your father as heir of old Commodore Dascom. I left him the whole stock and went on my way. But the next day he did not say a word about having all the jewels saving the Sheik in his hands. He has sold those jewels at underground markets. And the result is that he begins to show evident signs of prosperity.”

Olivetta glanced back into her memory of the last few days. It was exactly as Francis Campbell had said. Hugh Dascom had shown a growing recklessness so far as the marriage of his daughter to some rich catch was concerned. And his gay spirits

had exceeded anything he had been known to show before.

“Then it’s all true,” breathed Olivetta. “And I *may* believe in you!”

“So help me, God, it is pure truth! And there was one other true thing I have told you, Olivetta.”

She knew what was coming, but she listened with her heart beating in her throat.

“Yes?” she whispered.

“When we stood in the garden—all that I did or said had my heart behind it, dear!”

She could not speak.

“Do you believe me still?”

“Yes,” murmured Olivetta.

His arms leaped around her, but suddenly she fought herself away.

“No, no!” she said. “Listen! They’ve found us—they have found us—”

He leaned back. Down the hall came a soft and regular ticking sound, as of some one walking stealthily and bringing these creaks from the floor.

## CHAPTER XXXIII.

### TENSE MOMENTS.

**T**HERE was no question about the reality of the noise, or what caused it.

The murmurs which the sweep of drafts had caused before might disturb a nervous mind, but there was a world of difference between them and this concrete fact. The footfalls crept on to a place which must have been near the door of the room in which they sat.

Frank Campbell, with a silent pressure of his hand, bade her stay where she was. He himself began to rise slowly to his feet, moving so very cautiously to prevent noise that it seemed to her a whole minute was occupied by the maneuver. But at length he stood erect and began to steal away from her in the direction of the door, keeping very close to the wall, where there was less danger of the floor squeaking under his tread.

His progress, in fact, was utterly soundless. Now another noise caught her ear. It was a light grit of metal against metal, no louder than the very faintest whisper, but it told Olivetta that the knob of the

door was being turned. Then a new draft of air passed across the floor. Dust was blown into her face. She knew that the door had been opened. Then the draft ceased. It was shut again.

Had he who opened it shut it and gone on? Or did he remain inside the room? Meantime, her companion was dissolved in the black wall of darkness. Olivetta found herself pressing back farther and farther against the wall behind her.

But when the silence broke it was in an explosion of noise. There was a shock, a curse in a harsh, strange voice. Then something crashed upon the floor, rolled on it. There was a prolonged scuffling, then all was still.

"Have you got enough" said the voice of Francis Campbell, panting.

"Yes," breathed another.

"Wait a minute—so! Now lie still. If you move, I'll shove the knife into you. I mean it, you dog! Olivetta!"

"Yes?" she murmured, hurrying to him.

"Stand back from me. Wait till I make sure of this thing before you come within striking distance of it. So!"

As he spoke, he snapped on an electric torch. He was revealed in shadowy outline sitting a-straddle of the body of a prostrate man. And the shaft of light from the torch glistened on the rolling eyes and marked in deeper furrows the seamed face of Louis Kern. The left hand of Campbell held the light. In his right hand was a heavy hilted, sharp-edged knife. He had poised it just over the breast of the man from the Orient.

"Ah!" said Campbell. "I knew that the trap would close on something one of these days. It couldn't fail. And here you are, Louis? After all these years, here we are again?"

The lips of the other writhed over words, but no sound came. He glared in a fascination of terror into the face of his captor.

Campbell arose from his victim and stepped back.

"Stand up," he said.

Louis Kern obeyed.

"Now notice," went on Francis Campbell, "that that door is closed. That your only escape is through that door. That if you try to bolt for it, before you can

get that door open I shall certainly be able to drive this knife into your back, and I shall assuredly do my best to do it! Do you understand?"

Louis Kern bowed. But when he bowed, he kept his eye fixed upon the knife in the hand of Campbell.

"But don't forget," said Campbell. "I'd hesitate more about killing a dog, Kern, than about ridding the world of you. And there'd be no penalty. You understand what I know of your life. There was only one good day in your life, and that was the time you fought for me in the Himalayas. But, good gad, Louis, why should the bravest soldier I ever saw be a rascal as well?"

His voice had lowered as he spoke the last sentence. There was a gentleness which was almost a caress in his manner and his accent. And Louis Kern was apparently moved. His sallow face flushed. His eyes widened and darkened with emotion.

Suddenly his head bowed in shame and remorse and he stared at the floor. And that mute contrition took quick effect upon Francis Campbell.

"Come, come!" he said. "I don't mean to turn you over to the police. I want you to say only enough to clear me. And then, before I turn your confession in to them, I'll give you time and money enough to get you clear of this country. Will you do that? Does that sound generous enough?"

Louis Kern jerked up his head.

"How can I run away?" he said.

He pointed to the missing arm. "They'll know me by that," he said gloomily.

"You can get a false arm and wear it in a sling—there are a dozen ways of covering up a missing arm," said the captor. "I'll see that you're provided. But the main thing is: Will you sign a confession before? Will you talk and tell the truth?"

Louis Kern looked at the white man with an indescribable expression.

"I can do nothing else," he said. Throughout, his English was flawless. He spoke in a low, unemphatic voice. "Is there paper?"

"Yes, and a pen. I have all that you need. Will you tell everything, Louis?"

Again there was a touch of hesitation.

"For the sake of the day in the mountains," said Louis. "Yes! I remember how you led us."

"For the sake of that day, then," echoed the white man, greatly moved. "And I remember how you fought—I shall never forget it! And yet, Louis, if you had acted the part of an honest man on the evening of that day, I should not have been a vagabond for ten years! Yes, you've cost me ten years of the best of my life. You've made me throw away that much."

"Were all the years thrown away?" said Louis in his soft voice, and he looked full at Olivetta, so that she shrank and blushed.

"Drop that!" exclaimed Campbell harshly. "You yourself, Louis, I should have looked after you!"

"Yes," said Louis bitterly, "I might have been your valet, and you would have told how I fought for you on the mountain—you would have told that after I had brought in the wine!"

His lip lifted in a sneer of contempt.

"Show me the paper and the pen!" he said suddenly. "And let's be done with it. I can write by that torch."

"Very well," said Francis Campbell, and reached into his pocket for the paper.

He had half turned as he did so. A ringing cry from Olivetta made him spring back. Louis Kern had whipped out another knife and was leaping straight at his throat.

## CHAPTER XXXIV.

### A SHRIEK IN THE NIGHT.

"It was here," said the chauffeur. "I followed her right down here and seen her take a turn around the block."

The sergeant of detectives listened without emotion. It was the fourth time that he himself had been called out to trace to the ground stories of people who declared that they had seen Olivetta Dascom that evening. He had been from the Battery to New Rochelle, and the sergeant was weary in soul and spirit.

"You could not be mistaken in her?" said Hugh Dascom, who made the third in the party.

It was the first excursion which he had made since he came in from Long Island—his first attempt to find the lost trail.

"Mistaken about her" grinned the chauffeur. "No, sir. I got twelve pictures of her on the wall of my room. I got pictures of her from every angle. I couldn't of been so sure of my own mother."

"And you think," said the sergeant with a trifle more interest, as he looked down the blank faced line of houses, "you think that she was following a man?"

"I'm kind of sure of that, too," said the chauffeur. "Of course I kept an eye on her all the time she was in the car. I seen that she kept leaning forward and looking away past me as though there was a street fight beginning about a block ahead. She kept that look all the time. And she got more nervous every time the traffic jammed in between and buried a big orange colored taxi ahead of us. Pretty soon I was wise to that and I laid in pretty smooth behind the big orange boy. Then Miss Dascom took it easy. She sat back in the seat and stopped worrying.

"Pretty soon we passed the orange fellow pulled up beside the street. And at the next corner she told me to stop, paid the bill and gave me an extra dollar besides the tip, and then went off down the street so fast that I couldn't stop her to give back the dollar.

"But I shoved my car up against the curb and climbed out and hiked after her with the dollar in my fist. But when I turned the corner I seen her walking along about a half block behind a big tall bird and keeping about that distance back. Seemed to me that she might be shadowing him, and I forgot about the dollar and began to watch.

"Well, I walked down here to this block of houses, as I was saying. I seen the tall gent go up a flight of steps and disappear inside the door. And Miss Dascom walked right on and went around the far corner. After that I turned around and went back. I didn't have no time to spare, and it wasn't up to me to give her advice. But when I seen the papers—about her not showing up where she was expected at her friend's house— Good God! What's that?"

A faint shriek had reached them, a hoarse scream such as comes from a man in a throe of terror or agony. Even the sergeant looked aghast. Then he pointed to a house ahead of them and to the right.

"It came out of that," he said. "Come along with me! Mr. Dascom, you got a gun. Get ready to limber it up."

He jerked the last words at them over his shoulder as he started to sprint ahead, but in a stride Hugh Dascom was beside, had even passed him. Up the steps they rushed shoulder to shoulder. The front door rebuffed their attack. The sergeant shattered the lock with a forty-five caliber slug and they tumbled into a deadly dark hall until the light from the sergeant's electric torch split the blackness in two.

Then an hysterical cry from a woman turned them sharply to the left. And the three smashed the door wide open and plunged into a room where Louis Kern lay on his back on the floor with his one arm thrown above his head.

Over him leaned that much sought after form of "John Hodge" himself.

"Hodge!" cried the sergeant. "Hands up!"

"I'm too busy," said Hodge. "Stand close. You're my witness!"

"Olivetta!" called her father.

But Olivetta held him off with a raised hand.

"Wait!" she whispered.

And then Hugh Dascom saw that the hand of John Hodge, which was pressed across the breast of the half-breed, was endeavoring in vain to check the welling blood which was draining the life of Kern. And John Hodge himself was slashed with a shallow cut across the side of the head.

He paid no heed to that.

"Kern!" he was crying. "For God's sake, before you go do me right. You're done. But it will save me from hell on earth if you speak one word! Kern, will you do it?"

The half-breed opened his eyes and smiled in quiet disdain up at the face of the white man.

"Oh!" cried Olivetta, and falling on her knees, she stretched out her hands to the dying man. "You can free him from danger; and if you free him you will free me. In the name of mercy, tell what you know!"

Louis Kern closed his eyes, opened them suddenly, and looked at the ceiling.

"Gentlemen," he said, "I killed Logan. I killed him before he could name my name."

### THE END



## THE SONG OF THE CITY

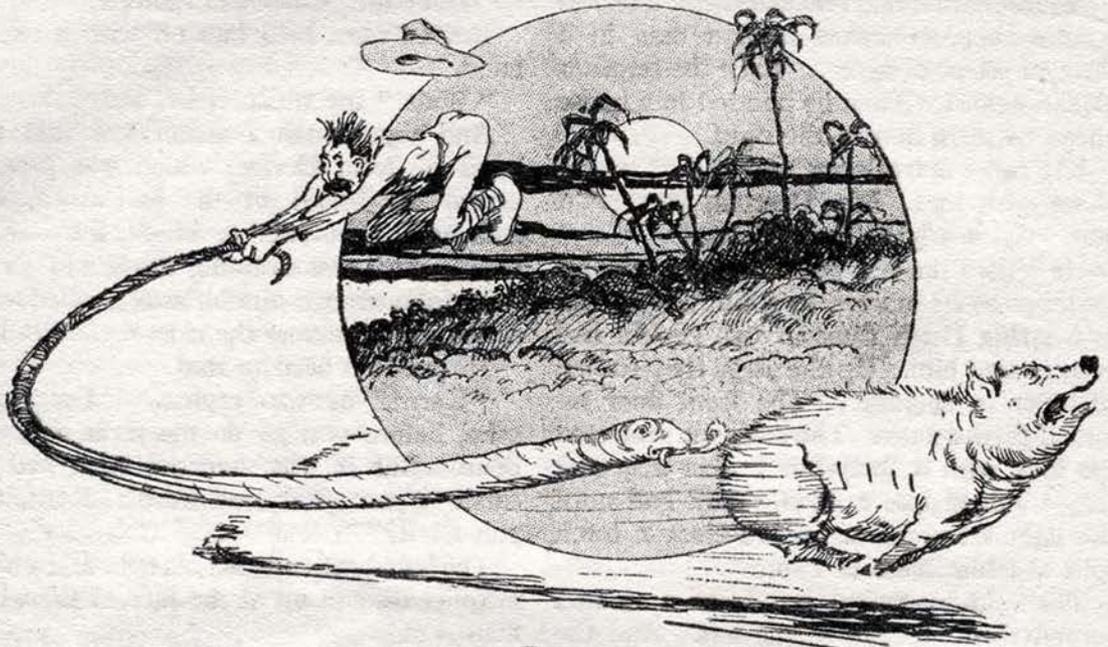
O H, he whom I once have held in my thrall,  
In my crowded street,  
I hold him for aye; I weave me a snare  
For his hastening feet.

He travels east and he travels west,  
But he finds the track—  
With joy or with grief he finds the way  
That leads him back.

He may think—the fool!—that he hates my noise,  
My clatter and din,  
And the pulse and throb of life in my veins,  
And the moods I am in.

But he reckons wrong; for wherever he goes,  
Like a magnet I draw,  
Till he finds himself back in my grasp again,  
And my will is his law!

*A. Eastman Elwin.*



# Josh Stebbins: Prospector

By A. D. TEMPLE

IT was late summer afternoon in Coonburg. In the shade trees the cicadas were humming their hot weather chant, a katydid now and then swelling the chorus as the evening shadows grew darker. An escaped vagrant pig grunted interrogatively as he paused in front of McGoogle's with eyes and keen nose scouting for banana peels, overripe tomatoes, or other porcine tidbits. Link Brown's two coon hounds, Range and Sport, outstretched lazily on the curb in their character of guardians of the street, half raised their heads as they growled a sleepy warning at the disturber of their slumbers. Some luscious cabbage leaves were close to Range's nose. The pig advanced toward them, only halting a moment as Range, with a menacing deep growl, bared his teeth savagely, the porker

replying with a supercilious whoof, then seizing the dainty morsel. A second later one hundred and fifty pounds of live pork and about an equal weight of coon hounds formed the center of a cloud of dust in mid street.

The jazzlike symphony that erupted from the cloud drowned the soothing songs of katydid and cicada, causing as well a hasty informal adjournment of a meeting of the Coonburg Sportsman's Club that was being held in the back of the store, the entire membership of the club rushing out *en masse* to view the fray from the front porch.

Josh Stebbins was the last to see the rumpus, as in his haste to be first he, in rising, had collided with the freshly opened keg of salt mackerel, stumbling over it as

it rolled and, in a badly calculated effort to keep his equilibrium, caromed on a full basket of fresh eggs, to their almost total destruction. Then falling over a sack of potatoes, he joined the interested crowd of spectators on the porch.

"Hey, there! Hey, there, Link!" he shouted, as with egg besmeared hands he pushed his way through the crowd and recognized one of the combatants. "Call off yer dogs; they're killin' my pet hog. I dunno how he got loose, but I wouldn't lose him fer a pretty."

Link sounded a sharp whistle twice repeated, at which the hounds slowly and regretfully released the pig, coming to their master's side with drooping ears and guilty, wagging tails. The pig, emitting a stream of indignant grunts and squeals, fled down the street.

"That your hog, Josh?" inquired Link, with a grin.

"Sure, he is. Thet ar hog cost me forty dollars."

"Don't look to me as if he was very well bred. I've got some Berkshires and Poland Chinas in my pen, a heap better lookin', that I'd 'a' been glad to sell for half the money he cost you," remarked Jeff Tate.

"Huh! O' course, he ain't thet kind o' hog. All them hogs o' yours is good for is fer whale bait, ham, bacon an' lard. I know all about 'em, fer I used 'em fer fish bait before you was outa long dresses; but my hog comes from Arkansaw an' is the gini-wine razorback, scissorbill breed, with jest a quarter strain o' the Californy tule-splitter thet they use ter raise down round Tulare Lake before it was dried up. Hogs is hogs, mostly, nothin' but four legged factories o' squeals, grunts, ham, bacon, lard an' sasses; but my hog ain't thet kind. He works fer his livin' an' don't hev ter die ter pay his board bill."

"How come, Josh? What's he good fer?"

"What's he good fer? Hell's bells, Jeff! I've been a-givin' thet hog lessons fer the last six months, an' now he's the wise one. He knows more about money than the cashier o' the First National Bank, or any

other bank. He kin tell a German mark from a Mexican "*veeyam veekie*."\* He'll squeal ef I show him a greenback an' grunt at a silver certificate or a Federal Reserve note, but he jest whoofs at thet furrin paper money an' wiggles his tail, ez much ez ter say they ain't no good. But ef I take a four bit piece an' hide it in a hole in the ground a foot deep, he'll find it an' dig it up in less time than he'd scorch a feather.

"Las' week I dug a six foot hole down behind the barn an' put a couple o' twenty dollar gold pieces in the bottom of it, an' then filled the hole up an' poured water over it ter make it solid before I let the hog loose, tellin' him, 'Hunt it up, Spoopendyke.' He jest walked round, sniffin' an' gruntin' till he got right over where they was planted, then he stopped like a bird dog makin' a p'int on a bunch o' quail. I left him thar an' went in to supper. When I come back nothin' but his tail was in sight; he'd dug himself in like the boys did in France. I seen the hole was cavin' in on him, so I grabbed him by the legs an' hauled him out. An', Jeff, durned ef thet hog didn't hev the two twenties in his jaws!"

"He's some hog, all right, Josh, but all the same, what good is he? They ain't enough lard on his whole body to grease a skillet, an' put 'up in ham an' bacon he'd be so tough nobody could chew it. Unless you travel with him as a circus side-show, there ain't no cash in him. Burying money just to see him find it don't leave any profit."

"Jess so! Jess so! But how about usin' him ter find buried gold an' silver? Don't ye know thar's millions an' millions o' treasure hid away in the ground by pirates an' bandits? Ter say nothin' o' gold placers thet prospectors miss findin'? Why, up in Grass Valley in Californy I knowed a man whose hog, thet wasn't eddicated like my Spoopendyke, jest a plain razorback with no eddication whatever, rooted out a solid gold nugget wuth ten thousand dollars. I calkulate this 'ere hog o' mine with his eddication an' hog sense is goin' ter help me make a heap more'n ten thousand dollars."

\* Bills issued during the Mexican Revolution, worth one or two per cent of face value.

"How come, Josh? I never heard of gold diggin's nor hidden treasure round here. Spuds an' carrots are all he can root out in Coonburg."

"Thet's so, Link; here in Coonburg the only way to get it is to dig spuds, haul 'em over to the railroad an' ship 'em to St. Lewy or Chicago; an' at thet it's hard grubbin' ter root out enough ter pay yer grocery bill an' buy a new pair o' brogans—then you hain't got enough left to get a plug o' tobaccy, except on tick—but this 'ere town o' Coonburg ain't the hull world, not by a long shot!"

"Wal, with wheat at two dollars an' spuds at one fifty a bushel, farmin' is payin' purty well these times," drawled Jeff Tate. "Ez fer ez I'm concerned, I'd do a heap o' thinkin' before goin' off on a wild goose chase hunting gold thet I hain't lost, in outlandish parts o' the world, ez long ez the price o' wheat an' spuds keeps up."

"Yeah, thet's jest like all you fellers thet never traveled a hunderd miles from whar you was born. You-all ain't got no what the highbrows call 'inishyative.' Ye jest sit round, watchin' the hogs fatten an' the pertaties sproutin'; an' fer a year's work ye don't get ez much gold, mebbe, ez I, with good luck, hev picked up in a day."

"How come, Josh, that you're runnin' a hen ranch now, after makin' money so fast an' easy?" asked Jeff Fisher.

"It's 'Easy come, easy go,' Jeff—thet's all. Ye see, I allus was of a sportin' disposition, likin' to take a chance; an' I never found thet money did me any good till I'd blowed it in. The fun was gittin' it an' arterwards puttin' it in circulation."

"Josh, if you know where I can pick up enough gold in a week to keep me going for a year, lead me to it! I'll pack my grip right now and we'll start in the mornin'." This from Jed Styles, ex-aviator on the western front.

"Wal, Jed, I ain't ridin' herd on no fortune hunters lookin' fer easy money, but I was in a country once whar the sand was mostly gold dust an' nuggets, an' we got more'n a ton of it together, but it was hard, resky trav'lin' gittin' in there, an' a heap wuss gittin' out agen. Mebbe with a flying

machine ye could find it an' experienced prospectors, hogs or men, to show ye whar the pay streak was. But it's a mighty hard country ter live in, I'm tellin' you!"

"Just say where it is; I'm rarin' to go, Josh."

"I ain't advisin' you ter go thar, Jed; but I'll tell ye what a bunch of us found down in no'thern So'th Ameriky.

"Ye see, me an' my partner, Barney Murchensen, shipped on a two masted schooner outa NyOrleans, fer a tradin' v'y'ge to the Orinoky River. Thet was what the skipper told us when we signed on, but we found out different before we'd made the round trip. Forrud o' the galley was a hog pen with four hogs in it. They was giniwine scissorbills from Arkansaw. They wasn't ez well bred ez my hog Spoopendyke, but all the same they was good ones, built fer speed an' not fer bacon. The skipper stored on 'em a heap, an' had 'em named High, Low, Jack, Game; an' they answered to their names all right when he called 'em to their chow. I axed the skipper ef he was goin' inter the circus business in So'th Ameriky, an' he sez: 'You jest wait till we git there, an' you'll see what you'll see.' Aft in the cabin messin' with the skipper an' the mate was a feller wearin' blue specs with turtle shell frames. He claimed to be the supercargo o' the schooner, but fer a fack, later, we found out he was one o' them rock sharps lookin' fer gold mines.

"Right now in my own mind I ain't sure whether them hogs or the rock sharp was the big noise aboard the hooker. They both got a heap more attention from the skipper an' mate than we thought they had comin' to 'em.

"We made a quick run an when we got to the mouth of the river we landed an' squared ourselves with the custom house, an' then sailed on up the river thet was ten miles wide at the mouth. They told us to look out fer the cannibal Injuns thet was on the warpath up above, but didn't say a word about the wild varmints we'd be likely to run across. They left us that to find out for ourselves; and we did.

"It was a free menagerie an' circus ez we sailed along. They was long tailed an'

short tailed monkeys skippin through the tree tops, grinnin' an' chatterin' at us when we made a tack close inshore, with 'jagers,' what they call them spotted tigers o' So'th Ameriky, sneakin' through the brush below 'em lookin' fer a chance to jump a wild turkey or a deer or a man, fer thet matter, ef they could find one asleep, 'specially them black tigers thet 'll jump a man quicker'n a deer, an' eat him too. They're savage brutes; I seen one in the New York zoo, the last time I was up there. Then alongshore alligators an' crockodiles, reg'lar man eaters, ez long ez saw logs, was layin' on the beach by dozens; overhead parrots of all sizes was flyin' round an' squawkin' till it sounded like a woman's political meetin' electin' delegates. Some o' them parrots wasn't bigger'n a sparrow an' pure green, while others hed a tail three foot long an' was green, red an' yaller, with a voice thet sounded like a saw-filin' shop in full blast.

"In every cove an' backwater they was pelicans, cranes an' plume birds by the hunderds, an' heaps o' wild ducks. In one cove was the biggest water lilies I ever laid my eyes on—the leaves was more'n twelve foot across an' the flowers was six foot wide or more.

"We didn't navigate at night, but always run into some bay or backwater an' anchored. One evenin' we headed in fer a cove about a hunderd an' fifty yards wide at its mouth, calcalatin' to lay up fer the night; but ez we got closer we seen they was a log boom stretched right across it. It was made outa mighty queer lookin' logs with scaly, shinin' bark; we'd never seen nothin' exactly like it, so the skipper sent me an' Barney in the dory to take a look at it an' find a passage. When we got a close up an' seen what we seen, we rowed back a-whoopin'."

"What was it you saw, Josh?" asked McGoogle.

"Why, Pat, ye see it was gittin' dark, so we run the bow o' the dory right onto the boom before we see what we was up agens. The durned thing moved an' squirmed when we struck it, an' we seen it was a snake thet hed six fathoms of its tail round a coconut tree on one side o' the

cove, with as much more of its neck an' head belayed around a tree trunk on the other side. He give a hiss louder'n a harbor tug blowin' off her bi'lars the minit we teched him, an' we backed water an' lit out fer the schooner, but not till we'd seen thet the durned varmint hed about a hunderd alligators corraled in the bay an' was holdin' 'em thar, while a couple of other snakes, purty near ez big ez he was, chased them fifteen an' twenty foot alligators round an' round an' swallered 'em jest like them little water snakes in Brown's millpond ketch minnies an' eat 'em. We didn't wait ter see whether they changed shifts after one hed got a bellyful, but I reckon they did."

"Say, Josh, what kind of hooch did they give you aboard that schooner?" inquired Link Brown.

"Link, ef you are insinooatin' anything, come right out an' say so. My well known voracity in statements o' scientific interest is too well established ter be questioned by anybody, unless he's an agent o' the Associated Press. You kain't shake my repytation with insinooations."

"Mr. Stebbins," interrupted the schoolmaster, who was an absorbed listener, "I wish that my class in natural history could hear your account of the marvels of nature, as yet unrecorded in the annals of scientific research that you encountered in the unexplored wilderness on the shores of the Orinoco River."

"Purfessor, it's a giniwine pleasure ter hev a liberal minded, well read man say thet; one thet knows thet half the wonders o' the world ain't been put in print, an' ken apreciate a man thet has risked his life an' repytation for voracity in spreadin' reliable scientific knowledge fer the good o' the stay-at-homes, like Link sittin' over thar an' grinnin' at me."

"Josh, 'twasn't you I was grinning at. It was that hooch hound from New York that come out here and camped at Mike Finnigan's applejack factory at the crossroads till he got the d. t.'s, and come runnin' up the road yelling that a red, green, blue an' yellow snake was after him that was forty rods long and had a mouth wide enough to swallow a cow without choking. I thought mebbe he'd been down in South

America too, and had seen one of those snakes you've just told us about."

"All right, Link, I'll take yer apology fer what it's worth. I did think it jest the pure cussedness of human nacher stickin' out on ye because ye've been plantin' spuds an' drivin' mules all yer life, an' was jealous of me thet hez sailed the seven seas an' seen the world a hull lot."

The ensuing deep silence was broken by the schoolmaster's inquiry: "Was the discovery of the existence of those huge serpents the only important addition to our knowledge of natural history that you made while in South America, Mr. Stebbins?"

"You're jest a-shoutin' it warn't—not in comparison with what we found farther up the river, thet I was goin' to tell ye about when Link butted in an' interrupted me."

"Never mind me, Josh," said Link. "Go on with your rat killing; we're all listening."

"What I can't see is what good was they in exportin' scissorbill hogs to South Ameriky. Ain't they got no decent breed of hogs down there?" asked Jeff Tate.

"Wal, we found that the skipper was countin' on the hogs an' Cap'n Bunkum, the rock sharp, to make the v'y'ge a payin' proposition, an' they did—part o' the hogs did, anyhow. Ye see them big snakes made us fight shy o' thet part o' the country, so we kept goin' up stream till it got so shaller that we grounded on a sandbar an' found there was a forty foot fall a mile farther up the river. We pulled her off the bar an' anchored close to the bank, makin' a camp under some coconut trees. We could see the tops of snow covered mountains off to the west thet I reckon must 'a' been the Andes, while all around us was heavy jungle with some cricks runnin' through it under the brush.

"We hedn't fairly got settled before them cannibal Injuns we'd been told about come out of the woods ter make us a visit. The chief was all dressed up in a plug hat an' a stand-up collar, with a gee string round his waist an' a pair o' spurs on his heels thet was always ketchin' in the brush an' trippin' him up. I guess he only wore 'em on state occasions. Outside of what I've mentioned, he was clothed in his na-

tive innercence an' dignity. The rest of his bunch jest wore a gee string an' a coat of red, green an' blue paint in stripes like a barber pole."

"Were these untutored children of nature actual cannibals who reveled in feasting on human flesh?" asked the schoolmaster.

"Wal, no, not ez a reglar everyday dish; it was a kinda extra, jest like we hev roast turkey on Thanksgivin' an' Christmas, or on a birthday or christenin'. After I'd give the chief a lookin' glass, a Waterbury watch, an' a plug o' terbaccy, we got quite chummy, an' held a long powwow. He sed they lived on monkeys, fish, an' wild turkeys, mostly, ez they was easiest to ketch an' more digestible than some o' the humans thet he'd tasted. Once, he told me, they killed a hull gang of prospectors, an' hed a big barbacue, an' invited all their neighbors to the spread, an' after it was over he lost five outa seven of his mothers-in-law, an' the two survivors had had chronic dyspepsy ever since. He said they was done to a turn, but was so soaked up with rum an' tobaccer thet they was very indigestible' an' his medicine man got plumb worn out curin' the sick the week arter the barbacue. Since then they'd only got three or four missionaries thet was fat an' tender an' made good eatin'. I seen him sizin' up the rock sharp an' got leery thet he took him for a missionary on account of his horn specs, an' thought he might go good stuffed with green bananas an' roasted in a hole in the ground with hot stones, like in these new-fangled fireless cookers. I knowed thet Barney an' me was in no danger; our bad habits bein' ez good ez a paid-up life insurance policy, but I wouldn't cared to hev stood in Cap'n Bunkum's shoes—not in thet neck o' the woods.

"Arter the skipper hed made a treaty with the Injuns, an' clinched it by givin' 'em a lot of lookin' glasses, beads, butcher knives an' sech, he started us out prospectin' fer gold. He give us a prospectin' pan an' a hog apiece to me an' Barney, an' two hogs to Cap'n Bunkum, he bein' supposed to know more about gold huntin' than we did, bein' a college bred man with a dy-

plomy ez mining engineer. In the deal I drew the hog named 'High,' an' Barney drew 'Low,' while Cap'n Bunkum hed 'Jack' an' 'Game.'

"The skipper told us them hogs was broke to hunt an' root fer gold in the brush, jest ez hard ez any Wall Street curb operator, an' they sure was ez well broke ez bird dogs. We told 'em to go an' hunt fer it along a crik back in the timber; they hedn't worked very long before Low give a squeal, trottin' up to Barney with a fifty-dollar nugget in his jaws, an' dropped it at his feet. Business picked up right away, for in a little High rooted out a two-ounce nugget an' brought it to me. Then we started panning the crik, an' by sundown hed more dust an' nuggets than we could pack. We cached most of it, takin' jest enough back with us to show we'd found pay diggin's.

"Cap'n Bunkum went with his two hogs across the river to the west, an' come in arter sunset feelin' fine. Both of his hogs hed bloody noses, an' he sed they'd bloodied 'em rootin' at a ledge of white hard quartz thet hed a vein of solid gold in it two inches wide. He was ez proud ez a hound pup with his tail painted sky blue, an' hed the skipper all worked up, tellin' him how with a twenty stamp mill an' some Burleigh air drills he could turn out a millyun dollars a week, an' wanted to start right off fer New York fer to organize a stock company with seven millyuns capital.

"Barney an' me said nothin' much, but jest laid low. Fellers, our placer claim was payin' big! A full pan o' the gravel was too heavy to lift, it was so full o' gold in dust an' nuggets. We tied up our hogs so's they wouldn't wander off an' find another pay streak before this one was cleaned up. One day they did git loose while we was so busy washin' gravel we didn't know it, till we heard 'em squealin' ez ef they was bein' killed, way up the crik on ground we hadn't prospected. We dropped our pans an' went on the run to see what hed happened. We met 'em, comin' through the brush hellity split, with a big yaller eel eight or ten feet long hangin' on their tails. What got my goat was thet the hogs was pure black when we tied 'em

up, an' now they was a golden yaller. I grabbed one o' the eels by the tail ez they come by, an' before my hand slipped off I got a shock thet knocked me end over end ag'in' a stump; when I picked myself up an' rubbed the dirt outa my eyes, there was Barney doin' the same.

"'What hit us, Barney?' I sez.

"'It was them travelin' storage batteries thet had a hold o' the hogs' tails. Ain't you never heard of the electric eels they is in So'th Ameriky?' he sez.

"'No, I hain't,' I sez.

"'That's them,' he sez, rubbin' a lump on the back of his head, where he'd hit a rock ez he fell. 'This crik is full of 'em, I reckon.'

"By the time we'd finished comparin' notes on our bumps an' scratches, them eels hed let go their holt on the hogs an' slipped inter the crik agen, while them educated pigs, after havin' hed the first big scare o' their young an' joyous life, was restin' up in the shade. We went to take a look at 'em, an', boys, jest ez sure ez thet the Lord made little green, sour apples, them hogs was gold plated, the yaller we'd noticed on 'em bein' pure gold plate.

"We quit work right there, an' went up the crik to find out what kind of a gold-platin' plant them hogs hed fallen into. Up the crik, a half mile or so, we come to its head waters where it bust out of a ledge of rotten white quartz, an' we seen thet was the bonanza thet was makin' us millyunares. Ye see, the freshets hed washed out the gold dust an' nuggets, carryin' 'em down to where we was pannin' 'em out, but a lot of chloride of gold, thet will dissolve in water, was still in the rock, an' every time it rained good an' hard the crik was full of chloride thet hed soaked out of the ledge. So, nacherly, the big hole at the foot o' the ledge was nothin' but a tank of chloride of gold in solution, an' besides was full o' the durned electric eels. When the hogs found the place it was purty hot, an' they laid down in the tank to cool off; the eels seein' their tails wigglin', took 'em for fish-worms an' bit. Ez the hogs felt 'em an' give a jump an' squeal, the eels let loose a charge of electricity outa their storage batteries thet pre-

cipitated the chloride in the shape of pure gold on the hogs, electroplatin' em ez good ez ef it hed been done in a reg'lar shop.

"It looks like you an' your partners had got High, Low, Jack, Game, an' had the world by the tail with a down hill pull," remarked Jeff Fisher.

"Thet's what we thought, Jeff, but the good book sez 'Man purposes, but the Lord disposes,' so ye never ken tell. We set down an' lit our pipes in the shade of a big tree by the side o' the tank. I sez to Barney, 'Partner, arter all this dust an' nuggets is changed inter double eagles an' gold notes, an' we get our share packed away, what say ef we take a personally conducted pasear to Yurrupe, like the schoolma'ms an' millyunares do every summer? We've been on the city front o' most o' the ports o' the world, from New York, NyOrleans, an' Boston to Sydney, Singapore, an' Shanghai, an' know most o' the mainers happy harbors an' boardin' houses o' the seven seas, hevin' been shanghaied outa several of 'em. Now, ez we're rich, we oughter travel in style, like our feller millyunares.'

"We ain't millyunares yet, Josh," he sez. "What we got here ain't worth ten cents a ton, where it is, an' we've got to git it out to where we ken turn it inter hard cash, an' that's no fool of a job. An' besides, you an' me ain' built right to live like millyunares. I tried it once when I'd been jest paid off, an' made a killin' at poker. I went inter Sherry's, on Broadway, an' when the waiter come, to show thet I was no piker, I ordered ten dollars' worth o' ham an' eggs, five dollars worth o' stewed tripe, with biled spuds an' a dozen bottles o' champagne. He looked at me wild eyed, an' called up the police over the phone, tellin' 'em they was a crazy man in the house thet oughta be in Bellevue!"

"Ez he was talkin' I looked over to the so'th where a big black cloud showed up. The lower pint of it was touchin' the tree tops, and up above it spread out wide till it looked like a black toadstool, an' was whirlin' round an' round like one o' them whirlin' dervishes thet travel with the circuses, dancin' on his head. I could hear a roarin' sound in the air, an' the monkeys

in the trees was screamin' with the bull alligators in the river bellerin', an' spotted tigers roarin', frightened like. A couple of black tigers passed close to us on the run, payin' no attention to us. 'Looka there, Barney,' I sez, interruptin' him. 'Fer the luvva Mike! What's thet black cloud goin' ter do to us?' He looked up an' sez: 'It's one o' them hurrycanes they have in these latitudes, an' it's comin' straight for us. If it ketches us our names will be Dennis J. Mud—grab the tree trunk an' hold tight!'

"It hit us with a roar louder'n a thousand cannon, yankin' the tree up by the roots thet we was holdin' onto. I was scared stiff, an' knowed nothin' after we went sailin' up in the air till I come to the next mornin'. We was adrift in the tree top, outa sight o' land, with three o' them howler monkeys an' a spotted tiger for shipmates; they was so scared thet they was ez harmless ez guinea pigs, never even showing their teeth at us.

"The tree we was adrift on happened ter be a wild fig tree, with plenty of fruit, an' the water, though we was outa sight o' land, was only a leetle brackish, ez we was off the mouth o' the Orinoky, whose sweet water freshens up the salt water fifty miles out at sea, jest like the Amazon River does.

"After driftin' for three days, a coaster, bound fer Pernambuco, sighted us an' took us aboard, also the monkeys; they shot the tiger an' took his hide to pay our passage, seein' we didn't have a cent. We never heerd what luck the schooner Falling Star an' her crew hed, but ef the hurrycane didn't git 'em, I'll bet the cannibal chief got Cap'n Bunkum anyhow. Barney an' me ain't never gone back to salvage the gold we hed cached, but I trained my hog Spoopendyke ez good ez them four we hed on the schooner—High, Low, Jack, Game—an' ef you want to go, Jed, I'll lend him to ye, an' a map o' the country, on a fifty-fifty layout. What d'ye say?"

Jed laughed.

"Josh, if I can get hold of a bomber with a big tank for gasoline, and some depth bombs, I may take you up, but those snakes you saw down there make me mighty leery of the Orinoco country."



# On Broadway

By MAXWELL SMITH

WOODRUFF'S thoughts were far from Hurley and that long distant day when Hurley had killed. Not that he could ever completely forget Hurley and the score which remained unsettled; no. But it was all so long ago, the likelihood of ever again encountering Hurley was so remote that the killer had become only a dim figure on a page which might as well be counted closed. Like Woodruff's rude boyhood in the Carolina mountains when the future had held for him no more than a scraping, toiling, grubby, fruitless existence, the memory of Hurley, belonging to that same period, had become misted and almost to the same extent outgrown.

The years had brought a different sort of life to Woodruff. Coming out of the mountains to run down and kill Hurley for having killed, he had failed in that purpose; but he had found emancipation from the narrow sordidness into which he had been born and in which, but for that vain quest for Hurley, he would have passed all

his years, sunken into that state of dumb resignation which the back country inevitably bred in its sons. The cities to which he had wandered in his aimless man hunt had shown him his benightedness and roused some latent ambition within him.

When the red blaze of his vengeance cry had spent its first fury, realization of the vastness of the land in which he had presumed to search for Hurley had brought also realization of the hopelessness of his mission. Contact with the people of this outer world, whom he had been taught to distrust as all strangers to the mountains were to be distrusted, had then opened up an amazing and unsuspected horizon and widened his eyes to the poverty of the life to which, but for the ruthless murder of his kin, he had been foredoomed. Still youthful enough to retain a thread of stifled vision he had applied himself to learn the ways of the city and grasp its opportunities rather than return to the murky barrenness of the hills in whose confines he had been

circumscribed by his own ignorance. So the old life had faded, slowly at first and then more quickly as the strangeness of the new wore off and he won success in it. And with the old life had faded the memory of Hurley and the hope that some time, somewhere, he would at length come up with his lost quarry; the world was too big, its people too many.

Thus Hurley was far from his thoughts when with an unexpectedness that was violent, an abruptness that was disconcerting, the killer stood before him! The span of seventeen years was rolled back, swept passionately away as though it never had been! Hurley was within his reach—a step away! He had but to put out his hand and Hurley was his! Within an instant of time he could exact payment for the two lives which Hurley had taken! A shot, and the utmost that Hurley had to give would be extorted—the life he had saved by flight seventeen years ago.

The veneer of the city, of civilization, dropped from Woodruff like a cloak. The hatred and purpose which had lain dormant throughout the softening years flamed high again. The picture of his dead rose stark and commanding—the bodies of his only near kin, his brother and his brother's bride of a week, lying by the roadside, shot from ambush with never a chance for their lives. Hurley had done that in mad fury over having been bested in love and beaten, too, with the fists of his rival for having in his rancorous jealousy offered insult to the girl. Hurley, skulking behind a clump of rocks, had waited for them to pass that way, their vigilance relaxed in the happiness they had found in each other—Hurley who now at last was delivered to him!

Blood surging, he reverted to the primitive, became again the mountaineer who believed it his right and his duty to avenge the killing and uphold the honor of his house. It was for him alone to demand and receive the penalty. The law had had its chance, but had failed; the law of the courts which the hill folk tolerated when its intrusion could not be avoided, but which they would not recognize as the last word. A quarrel of any kind was a man's own business; it should rest with him to balance

his own ledger. When blood was spilled and life taken it was his right to spill blood and take life in return. Seventeen years ago Woodruff would have shot on sight. Time had not altered his claim to vengeance. To-day was as seventeen years ago! His hand slipped to the pistol on his hip!

But as his fingers closed on the weapon some one jostled him and so recalled him to consciousness of his surroundings. Beneath his feet was the ceaseless murmur of the subway from which he had just emerged. An endless stream of automobiles was rolling by, honking, hurrying. More people, it seemed, were about him, rubbing elbows with him, than populated the whole of his native mountains. This wasn't the hills where feudal law was the rule and found sympathy! This was Broadway and One Hundred and Forty-Fifth Street, New York City!

Woodruff's hand left his pistol as his thoughts jarred back to where they had been when Hurley crossed his vision. He had been thinking of those who awaited his coming in the cozy apartment four blocks farther up Broadway; of the wife and two children who made for him a home such as he never dreamed of when the thirst for vengeance drew him out of the monotonous drudgery and soul-killing darkness that had been his lot, into this fairer environment to which he had raised himself and found all to his liking. He had been thinking of home and, in happy conjunction, of the stroke of business he had completed tonight; of how the generous commission just earned would bring him and his nearer to their goal—a real home of their own in the suburbs with a bit of land big enough for a real garden and a handful of fruit trees. He had been dwelling so buoyantly on how good life was to him when—Hurley!

Hurley had not yet seen him. Standing at the curb the killer was giving all his attention to the passing automobiles, apparently on the lookout for some one. There was an air of impatience about him, a reflection almost of nervousness in the quick puffing of his cigarette and the darting motions of the hand with which he repeatedly raised it to his lips. When two policemen

paused on the corner he turned and sauntered away from them toward One Hundred and Forty-Sixth Street.

A couple of paces behind, Woodruff fell into step while he struggled with his problem. Under the mountain code he was in duty bound to kill Hurley. He was not afraid to do that, not afraid of such consequences as might affect himself. But another duty confronted him; others would be affected. He was in New York now where only the law of the courts prevailed. If he were to kill Hurley as Hurley should be killed, like a dog, he would go to the death chair. No one here would understand or admit that his deed was dictated by right and justice. It would make no difference that Hurley had but paid the penalty for his own act. In the eyes of the law he—Woodruff—would be no better than the hired gunman who from some dark lurking place shoots his victim in the back. They would brand him murderer though in truth he had but served as executioner. They would electrocute him and—

What then of his wife and children? Should they be outweighed by the dead? Where lay his foremost duty? To keep faith with the dead or with the living? To carry out the vow made over the bodies of his murdered kin or that other vow to cherish and protect above all else the woman whose life was joined with his?

Woodruff hung back irresolutely, shrinking into a doorway when Hurley halted and resumed watching the passing cars. The temptation was strong to go his way, forgetting this glimpse of Hurley, convincing himself that he had been for the moment misled by a fancied resemblance. The killing had been done so long ago—long. And Hurley had been acquitted—that had to be considered, too. The law had pronounced him not guilty. Perhaps he hadn't—

Woodruff moistened his dry lips and swore softly. That line of thought was cowardly; it was simply trying to find a way out, making excuses for evading a duty which could not honorably be evaded. He was not mistaken in his identification. That was Hurley over there, just across the sidewalk; harder of face, and bearing himself now as a creature of the city, but unmis-

takably Hurley, the killer whom fate had given seventeen years of life to which he had not been entitled. For Hurley was undeniably guilty. He had been acquitted—yes, but on a lying alibi and by a jury of his friends, without any real effort to convict being made by a prosecutor who owed favor to the Hurley clan. His flight alone had been a confession of guilt. He had been afraid to stay and face the righteous vengeance of the last of the Woodruffs; afraid to stay and shoot it out man to man.

Between the living and the dead! Woodruff knew that he must choose; and quickly. He must know his mind before Hurley moved on again, lest he yield momentarily to the temptation to let him go and later regret.

But it was hard. Keeping faith with the dead would mean breaking faith with the living. If by killing Hurley he condemned himself to the electric chair he would be abandoning the woman he had sworn to guard and shelter as surely as though he had walked out of her life without a word. He would be abandoning her and their children, bringing them heartache and shame and robbing them of a future which was now alight with happiness.

And what if he should break faith with the dead? Who then would suffer? Nobody! None but himself in his secret heart when roweled by the memory of how he had failed in a sacred duty; how he had foresworn the vengeance that was due to his dead. He couldn't cheat his dead like that, for always he would know that in doing so he had been actuated by selfish motive; he would know that coupled with his concern for his wife and children had been his own desire to live on. He did not want to die, to throw his life away. Yet he could see no way out. There stood the man who had murdered a Woodruff and that Woodruff's bride. That man's death was seventeen years overdue. He must die—now!

Still within the doorway, his movements unnoticed by the people constantly passing by, Woodruff drew his gun. Folding his arms, he concealed it in the crook of an elbow and waited for the sidewalk to show clear between him and Hurley. He had no

fear of missing. His hand was steady, his eye sure.

Minutes dragged, but always there was somebody within his line of fire. Then when a fair and unobstructed target presented itself his finger refused to come down on the trigger. While he tried to force himself to shoot treacherously, unseen, as Hurley had shot and killed, the opportunity was lost as the passers-by again intervened. He didn't wait for another opening. Even a cur was entitled to a show. He'd give Hurley his chance. Besides, he wanted Hurley to know where death was coming from, to know what vengeance had overtaken him.

Putting his pistol in his coat pocket, Woodruff stepped over and touched the killer on the shoulder.

Hurley jumped, whirled, the cigarette flying from his hand as his arm snapped downward with tensing muscles.

"I'm giving you an even break, Hurley," said Woodruff quietly. "Grab for your gun! I'm going after mine! Quick!"

Hurley sucked in his breath audibly and his eyes dilated. He was startled—but he kept his head. His recognition of Woodruff was instant. And, knowing his man, he played the surest way of prolonging his life. Instead of obeying the command to go after a gun he brought his hands up before him, letting them hang limp at the level of his waist.

"I've got no gun," he returned, also quietly, gambling to the limit that Woodruff wouldn't shoot unless certain that he was armed. The Woodruffs always had been foolish thataway; which was the main reason that their line had all but died out while others less worthy and less scrupulous survived.

"I'll give you ten seconds!" said Woodruff stonily.

"You're wasting 'em!" Hurley's surprise was over and, while shaken and fearful, he had a hold on his nerve. He had to keep that to bluff this out.

His narrowed eyes were on Woodruff's hands, alert for the slightest move toward a gun. In anticipation of that he poised ready to leap sidewise and interpose some hapless pedestrian as a barrier—while he

went after his own gun! But fervently he hoped that wouldn't be necessary; that he could back out of the jam without a violent clash. He couldn't afford to get tangled up right now. He had—a date!

"I've got no gun," he repeated, his hands still dangling. "Go ahead and shoot if you're going to before folks get to noticing that you're sticking me up! You gone crazy, Jim—or what?" He smiled thinly as the other made no move. "This ain't back home. Folks don't go running around Broadway making gunplay!"

Woodruff studied him coldly, noting the crafty malevolence in the slitted, wary eyes. He didn't believe that his enemy was unarmed. In the old days, even as a boy, Hurley had been hard, shiftless, bad; a gun toter ever ready to draw—when the advantage was with him. He was harder now, with a shifty tightness about his face, flat, colorless complexion, and a fidgety bravo twitch to his shoulders. His voice added to the furtive effect, coming toneless from thin, close moving lips. He was well enough dressed, but in a drab way which somehow did not bespeak prosperity in places where shone the full light of day. What had he been doing all these years, Woodruff wondered? The State of Pennsylvania could have explained his occupation during four years that he had been its guest on account of a matter of highway robbery!

"You'll be gathering a crowd in a minute, sticking me up like this," giped Hurley, emboldened by Woodruff's inactivity and silence. "If you're going to start something, go to it and get it over with."

"I'm not sticking you up. I'm giving you a chance to draw—and I'm getting tired waiting."

"I've got nothing to draw—"

"I'm waiting," repeated Woodruff dispassionately. "Better think again. You've got a gun, Hurley. Go after it!"

A spasm of fear drove Hurley close to panic. His fingers contracted, itching to pull his gun in a desperate effort to gain the advantage. But he controlled himself. That would be suicidal, whether he got Woodruff or Woodruff got him. Even if he were to dart into the traffic and escape being shot he was scheduled to come to grief.

Some one would be sure to grab him as a principal in the commotion; there were always half a dozen cops scattered around this corner. With a gun on him and a prison record, he'd go up the river for all the time that could possibly be hung on him. He couldn't let himself get snarled up that way; not if he could help it. He had to find a middle course, carry on his bluff and break away without a blow-off. And he must get away soon; he had that date to keep.

"We'll go round the corner," said Woodruff, "where we'll be less likely to hit anybody else. While we walk you can make up your mind whether you're going to get your gun or have me shoot you"—his voice lashed for the moment as he sought to goad Hurley to action—"like a skunk—you dirty, murdering skunk!"

Hurley was watching his step too carefully to be led into any disastrous motion. He decided that his only play was to bank heavily on the belief that so long as he did not draw a gun Woodruff would not shoot.

"Sure!" he jeered. "Sure, I'm going to walk along nice and tame till we get to a nice quiet place where you can plug me and be on your way! Sure, I will—like hell! Say, let me tell you something. There's two cops coming up right behind you. All I've got to do is yell and—"

"Don't!"

"—they'll take you before you can turn around," finished Hurley, grinning with inspiration as the taxi he had been waiting for slid to a stop six feet away. With a glance at the driver he went on rapidly to Woodruff: "Maybe you don't know it, but there's a law up here against toting guns. Just for having one on you they can shove you away for about five years. That's you! With them cops stepping on your heels I can take a chance and yell and whether you plug me or not they'll get you. And you go up," he emphasized, "just for having the gun on you. Me—there's nothing on me. But they'll tack on some more years for you when they hear how you stuck me up and threatened to kill me."

With that and before Woodruff could reply, Hurley made his big flourish. Raising

himself to his full height he cocked his head and spoke over Woodruff's shoulder—to the policeman:

"Oh, officer! Have you got the right time?"

Glancing sidewise, Woodruff found the two officers hesitating at his side while one of them looked at his watch.

"Ten forty," said the cop.

"Thanks," said Hurley—and the direction of his voice made Woodruff swing back to face him.

Hurley was no longer where he had been! He was stepping into the taxi! The driver, with motor already running, was slipping in his clutch. Hurley muttered an order and the car crawled.

"Officer!" he called again.

The policeman, a bare step beyond Woodruff, halted inquiringly.

Hurley leaned out of the cab, a hand outstretched.

"A cigar," he smiled.

"Thanks," nodded the cop, taking the folded dollar bill as the car slid past.

His right hand darting to his gun Woodruff took a quick step, reaching out his left hand to haul himself aboard the taxi.

"So-long, Jim!" said Hurley with an apparently friendly wave as he perched on the edge of the seat ready to drop to the floor at first sight of the avenging gun. "See you later, Jim! Take good care of yourself."

Out of the tail of his eye Woodruff observed the policeman still standing by, practically at his elbow—watching him, he thought. The hand on his gun stiffened as he realized that they probably would fell him before he could draw. It would be madness to try for Hurley now. The best he could attempt would be a shot from his pocket—and the chances against registering with that were a hundred to one. There was no chance at all that it would find a fatal spot.

Checking his stride, he stood watching Hurley's taunting grin showing cautiously through the rear window as the taxi rushed into speed and crowded into the tide of northbound traffic.

A blinding rage misted Woodruff's eyes, the fury of self-condemnation, rage over his

failure and the selfish weakness which he told himself had been responsible for it. He had broken faith with his murdered dead because he had been afraid to sacrifice his own softened existence. He had thrown away his honor, besmirched the honor of his clan, not one of whom had ever before failed to fight his fight or exact whatever justice demanded. The blood of his kin had called to him and he had been found wanting.

What mattered it that this was Broadway, New York, and not the mountains where a man was expected to uphold his own? Hurley had been armed; that was sure. Why, then, hadn't he drawn on Hurley and forced him to defend himself or die like the dog he was? Seventeen years ago he would have done that. Why hadn't he done it to-night? Because now he was but a putty man with the guts taken out of him by the ease and comforts of the city! Because a woman and two children were waiting for him a couple of hundred yards up street! Because he wanted to be with them and not in a cell that was the beginning of the road to the death house at Sing Sing!

He flayed himself. Back in the mountains would he have stopped to consider a wife and children when blood cried for vengeance? He would not have found it necessary to consider them. They—a mountain wife and mountain children—would have been first to urge him to his duty; and first to despise him for such a failure as he had written down to-night.

A putty man with a putty wife and putty children!

No—that was unfair! He snapped up his thoughts, cleared the mist from his eyes. His wife and children had nothing to do with his—cowardice! Cowardice—he called it that. They were not of the mountains. They couldn't understand—couldn't be expected to understand.

And yet—what would his wife say if he were to tell her that he had let the murderer of his brother and sister-in-law get away from him unscathed, mocking? If he were to tell her that when at last it had come within his power to keep the pledge to his dead brother he had vacillated and dodged so that it remained unfulfilled?

What would she say? Would she preach that it was not for him to take the law into his own hands? That he must respect the verdict of the lying jury which on lying testimony had declared Hurley not guilty? Or would she despise him as would a wife from among his own people—the hill people from whom he had grown so very far apart? She might—might—

In mental turmoil he walked on up Broadway past the apartment for which he had been so eagerly bound when he emerged from the subway and ran into Hurley. He didn't want to talk with any one just now. He wanted to be alone with his self-loathing. He had let Hurley escape for the second time after it had taken seventeen years to come up with him. Hurley would put such distance between them that they would not meet again in seven and seventy years.

## II.

"THAT," said Hurley, recapturing his breath as he let down the front window of the cab and addressed the driver, "was what I call one hell of a tight hole. The goat I was talking with there, Mike, was all steamed up to plug me for good and keeps."

"Yeah?" commented Mike listlessly, bucking his car into a space which seemed inadequate between two others.

"Yeh!" went on Hurley. "And I guess he'd 've done it and busted our party all to nothing if them cops hadn't happened along. He hadn't another thought in his head but. Turn a couple of somersets, Mike, and dazzle him. Maybe he's chugging along in another bus. Shove over to Amsterdam."

As Mike proceeded to turn a couple of "somersets" by cutting over One Hundred and Forty-Seventh Street to Amsterdam Avenue, he spoke out of his wisdom:

"On'y a cuckoo 'd go slingin' a cannon in the middle of Broadway. He was kiddin' you, Steve. What's his peeve, anyhow?"

Looking backward as they spurted through the long block to the avenue, and seeing that there was no pursuit, Hurley chuckled.

"The middle of Broadway don't mean a thing to him, Mike. He's had his mind made up for so long he'd just as soon do

his stuff on me in the middle of Times Square at noontime. Shove down Amsterdam, Mike, and turn around a couple of times and then hit up Broadway again. Don't step too hard—there's nobody trailing."

"What's his peeve, anyhow?" inquired Mike again.

"He lost a brother one time," laughed Hurley, "and thinks maybe it was me mislaid him. I'd 've mislaid this damn fool the same way," he snarled, "only I couldn't seem to get a shot at him. Let me out a couple of blocks from the job, Mike, then you shove on and get set. Right?"

"Yeah," said Mike. "You'll make it snappy, huh? I'm gettin' leary of this bus. I thought surely we'd be all through by now."

"Pretty soon," promised Hurley. "Where'd you lift it? Down town?"

"Uh-huh."

"We got all night," Hurley disposed of the danger of being caught with the stolen car. "Ain't there five—ten thousand like it in town?"

### III.

WALKING aimlessly, head bent with his scalding thoughts, Woodruff went on down the gloomy stretch where Broadway dips through Trinity Cemetery. He wasn't looking where he was going—didn't care. All he craved was another chance at Hurley. Given it, he wouldn't fumble. He wouldn't indulge in any maudlin chivalry another time—wouldn't place the killer on equal footing by warning him to draw. He'd shoot on sight—and if he didn't shoot straight Hurley then would have his chance.

Another time! He grimaced scornfully over his valiant decision. What good was that now? He should have reached it half an hour ago when he had Hurley at his mercy. What hope was there of ever again seeing Hurley?

Passing One Hundred and Fifty-Sixth Street, just beyond the cemetery, his steps turned toward the quiet, unpopulated upper reaches of Riverside Drive which there loops almost into Broadway. Without regard to traffic he stepped off the curb.

"Say, you dumb-bell, where'n 'ell d'you think y're headin'?"

The harsh query, mingling with a grinding of brakes and followed by a string of oaths, made him look at the taxi which had so precipitously halted a foot behind him.

Heedless of the driver's abuse, he was going on when something which he had not consciously registered flashed in his brain. The license number on this car was the number of the one that had borne Hurley, jeering, away from him! He didn't know how he knew this—had no recollection of having noted the simple three-figure number—but he knew! This was the car! Here was the man who could give him trace of Hurley!

He was staring, grasping the fact, convincing himself of its verity, when the driver broke out cursing him afresh.

"You gonna get t'ell outa the way, or have I gotta ride over you? Get on the walk, you bum, outa me way. I'm in a rush—see?"

Woodruff returned to the sidewalk, but though the taxi came to rest finally only twenty feet farther on, he did not inquire about Hurley. The feeling was on him that Hurley was near by! Hurley had not picked up this taxi at random when he made his escape. It had been there to meet him at One Hundred and Forty-Sixth Street. And here it was, waiting again—for Hurley!

Thirty feet past the cab, at the corner of One Hundred and Fifty-Seventh Street, was a subway kiosk. Cold and deadly, one-minded now, Woodruff sought its shelter, watching with his hand on his gun. He was irrevocably committed to his task. The mountain code ruled him, to the exclusion of thought for his wife and children. They wouldn't be penniless; there was seven thousand dollars; the money had been laid away to buy the house in the suburbs. He steeled himself to the loss of them, to forget them. He must keep that faith which he had once broken with his dead.

As the seconds ticked by, each age-long, he gauged the possibilities of getting away. He'd do that, of course, if he could without using his gun on any one else. Morally, the law had no claim on him; he had the

right to kill Hurley. The law itself would have taken Hurley's life if he had been properly prosecuted and the jury had not been virtually of his own selection. His death would be merely the accomplishment of what the law had failed to do. It would be simple justice.

After killing Hurley he would try to get away, yes—but since he would not use his gun on those who might stop him, the odds were all against him. There were few people on the streets at that hour, past eleven o'clock, but enough to herd him in. Most probably the policeman idling across the street would stop him with a bullet! That—yes—would be better than going to the chair. He would strike a course that would carry him up against the policeman's gun!

His attention was taken by the taxi driver leaning far out of his seat to look backward toward One Hundred and Fifty-Sixth Street. Settling back into his place, the driver draped his hands over the steering wheel with a casualness which to Woodruff's interested gaze seemed studied and not quite natural. Although at that distance the man's eyes could not be seen, the watcher sensed that they were flickeringly alive to both the occasional pedestrians on one side of him and the machines passing on the other. And—his engine was running!

Then Hurley appeared, walking briskly from One Hundred and Fifty-Sixth Street! Halfway down the short block, close to the buildings as he was, he stood out as a good target against the lighted windows of a lunch room.

Woodruff started to ease the gun from his pocket. A few more steps and Hurley would cut across the sidewalk to the waiting cab. It was just as well to let him come these few steps nearer. This was to be just such a killing as Hurley had done—merciless. The shorter the range, the surer would be the result.

Adjoining the lunch room was a cigar store, more brightly illuminated. The taxi was just abreast of it. Hurley should turn to the left now, across the broad sidewalk, heading for the cab.

In the shadow of the kiosk Woodruff pulled his gun, hiding it again in the crook

of his elbow. He noted thankfully that, except for Hurley, the sidewalk was deserted. In a moment he'd have Hurley. At thirty feet he couldn't miss.

Raising the gun he steadied it in the hollow of his left arm. Another instant and Hurley—

But Hurley did not turn toward the cab. He entered the cigar store—which his driver and partner had signaled him was empty of customers.

The clerk, making up his cash register preparatory to closing, turned to look into two guns leveled at him across the counter!

"Back!" commanded Hurley, jerking his guns menacingly. "Into the cubby-hole there"—indicating the stockroom, the door of which stood open at the rear of the store. "Keep your hands still—and step!"

Silent, white-faced, his eyes on the guns, the clerk retreated. On the outside of the counter Hurley kept pace.

"Inside!" ordered Hurley unnecessarily; the clerk already was in!

Pocketing one of the guns and taking off his hat he rounded the end of the counter.

"Keep still and stay put," he warned, "for you haven't the damndest idea how long I might stay. Be good and be careful and you'll come out O. K. Make a break and—"

Terminating the speech with a motion of his gun he shut the door and went to the cash register. He chuckled over a stack of bills which the clerk already had counted and encircled with a paper wrapper—chuckled largely because the wrapper bore the penciled inscription "three hundred and twenty-seven dollars." Stuffing the roll into an inside pocket he started to scoop out the loose bills and silver still in the drawer.

Came an interruption as a man entered. With an eye on the stockroom door which was held only by a flimsy latch, he served the customer with cigarettes and gossiped with him a minute.

Left to himself again he hastily collected the balance of the money and tiptoed to the stockroom. Opening the door a crack he inserted the muzzle of a gun without showing himself.

"I'm still around, buddy," he remarked, "still around and likely to be fer quite a

while. I'm in no hurry. Get that under your hat. Sit pretty and smile and maybe I'll let you out when I lock up the store. I'll let you know."

Clicking the door shut, he was putting on his hat and going outside the counter when another customer came in. Hurley no more than succeeded in concealing the gun inside his hat as he stepped back to 'tend store. To look more regular he laid the hat—and perforce the gun—on a packing case inside the counter. He didn't figure that he was taking any chance; he had another gun.

That was where he made his second mistake. The packing case was within a foot of the stockroom door.

The first mistake was made in issuing that last injunction to the clerk. For that young man took it as an indication that the hold-up was over. He regarded it as the usual threat by which the bandit seeks to delay pursuit.

Wherefore it was not exceptional bravery which led him to open the door and peer out. He had no great hankering to be killed in defense of three hundred odd dollars belonging to a half billion dollar corporation. Not for a minute!

But, peering, he saw the muzzle of a gun nosing from under the bandit's hat within easy reach of his hand. And he saw also that the bandit was engaged in supplying the wants of a customer at the front end of the counter. And being ordinarily though not exceptionally courageous, he wondered if he couldn't advance himself in the esteem and service of the corporation by taking a shot at the hold-up man! He had learned to handle a pistol in the army and while he never had got close enough to the enemy to make practice on a human being he knew that he never had any difficulty running up a fair score on a white-washed target.

Snatching the gun he made the effort.

The roar of the shot was echoed by the clattering of plate glass. Unaccountably he had found shooting at another man somewhat different from blazing away at a target. Perhaps that was because he was very careful not to hit the customer. All he had done was shatter the display case on the

counter—and bring Hurley wheeling on him with gun smoking!

The clerk let go one more shot before he doubled up with a bullet in his insides, but that also was wild. Gagging and squirming, he dropped the gun and clutched at his middle. Through a haze he saw Hurley smash his gun into the face of the dumfounded and frightened customer and vault the counter.

With shooting under way Hurley was wasting neither time nor lead. He gathered himself to sprint for the get-away car.

From the street came shouts voiced by half a dozen people who were stampeding back into the subway from which they had only a minute ago issued. Shouts and running footsteps—the shrilling of a police whistle and the rapping of a nightstick on the pavement. A shot which crashed the window on the left side of the store entrance.

Cursing, but nevertheless with a certain degree of satisfaction, Hurley marked the direction of that shot which evidently had been fired to delay his exit from the store. It served the purpose for an instant, but also it informed him which way to look for attack as he made his dash.

The shooter, a policeman, taking scant cover behind a pole between the store and One Hundred and Fifty-Sixth Street, sent another shot with the hope of either driving the bandit deeper into the store or drawing him out in desperate sally.

Hurley crouched to run for it, intending to sweep the waiting marksman with a burst of fire as he went.

Before he could get under way another report sounded and cracks rattled through the window on the other side of the entrance. Caught between two fires, the angle of this shot showing that it had come from the One Hundred and Fifty-Seventh Street side, he hung back when he should have kept moving.

That was Woodruff joining in with his gun—and a prayer that Hurley would be saved for him! Only extraneously did he comprehend that a hold-up was taking place. His mind was all on the possibility of Hurley being killed by other than his hand. That must not happen. Hurley be-

longed to him. To square himself for having let Hurley escape earlier in the night and seventeen years ago he alone must kill him.

Woodruff advanced to get his man.

This while Hurley hesitated during precious seconds, weighing his chances. He cursed himself for not having observed whether there was a rear way out of the store through the stockroom. He didn't believe there was—but he wasn't sure. He considered running back to see, but was afraid of being penned up in the back of the place.

While he debated, his glance traveled from the wounded clerk, lying moaning, to the customer he had felled. The latter was sitting in a corner where he had fallen, nursing his lacerated face and blubbering.

Realizing that he had no choice but to make a rush for the cab, daring the guns to right and left of him, Hurley dragged the blubbering customer to his feet. Before running the gauntlet he could at least create a diversion.

"Stand up!" he commanded viciously. "I'm going to let you go. Get that! Get out of here!"

He shoved the man reeling through the front door.

The policeman behind the pole fired immediately, but Woodruff, then within ten feet of the door, saw that it wasn't Hurley and held his fire.

The man collapsed on the sidewalk, untouched by the bullet, but in weakness from sheer terror. The policeman came running.

Hurley plunged out—and found himself facing double disaster. The get-away cab still was at the curb with engine running, but the driver was gone. And as he halted, cornered, not knowing whither to run, he saw Woodruff raising his gun at point-blank range!

Hurley's gun flashed up, its report blending with that of Woodruff's. That was all. Hurley was done, having been shot through the head.

Gun drooping at his side Woodruff stood looking at the fruit of his vengeance. His task was complete. Now—

"And that 'll be about all," said the po-

liceman, rising from brief examination of Hurley.

"All," nodded Woodruff. He held out his gun.

The policeman looked at him questioningly.

"What's that for?"

"You want it, don't you? And me?"

"For what? Say, ain't you a copper?"

Woodruff shook his head.

"Well, it don't matter, anyhow," the officer approved, "you made one swell job of this bird. Hey, you," he shooed the people who were gathering close now that the danger was over, "get back a bit. Chase 'em back a bit. Chase 'em back," he handed his nightstick to Woodruff, "while I talk with the station house and get an ambulance."

The arrival of another policeman relieved Woodruff of the duty of handling the growing crowd.

"Happened along in time, didn't you?" remarked this officer, assuming from the stick in Woodruff's hand that he also was a policeman. "Where are you working out of?"

"I'm not," said Woodruff. "I'm just—a citizen."

"Oh!" The cop lost interest in him until his partner came back from telephoning and told that it was Woodruff who had got the bandit. Then he whistled thoughtfully.

"I don't suppose they'll tax you for it," he said, "but somebody's going to ask how come you're carrying a gun. Maybe it 'd be a good scheme for you to fade out and let Ed here stand for the killing. Huh, Ed?"

"But," said Woodruff with dawning understanding, "I have a permit. I always carry a gun in my business—selling jewelry. Why—"

"Oh, that fixes everything. Say, Ed, let's mop up. Just stick around, mister, will you?"

Woodruff smiled and stuck around. He had found a middle course after all. Hurley, the killer, had made it possible for him to keep his faith with the living and still not break faith with the dead.

"I'm going inside," he said, "to phone my wife."

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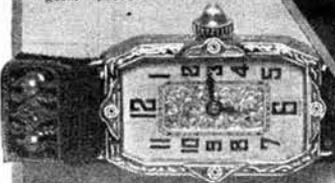
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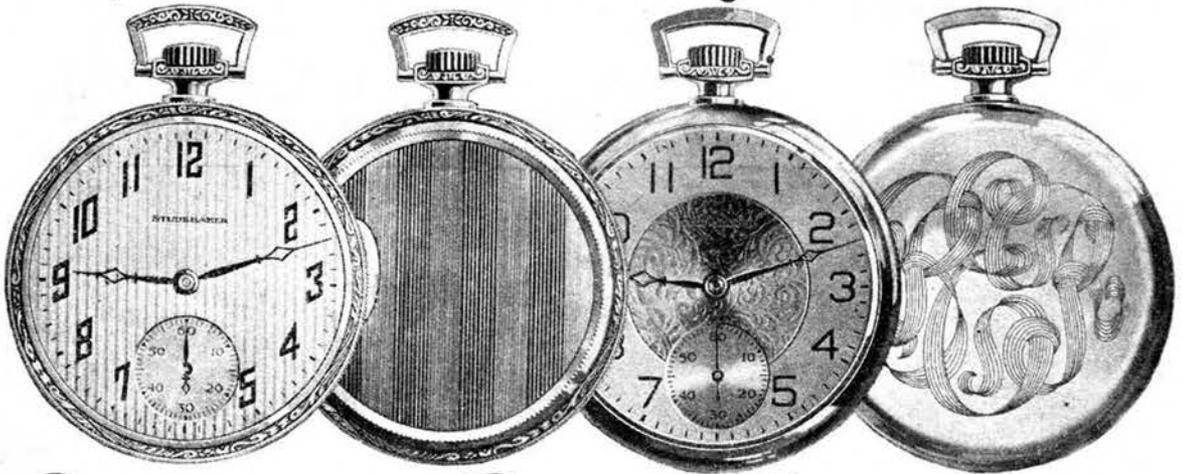
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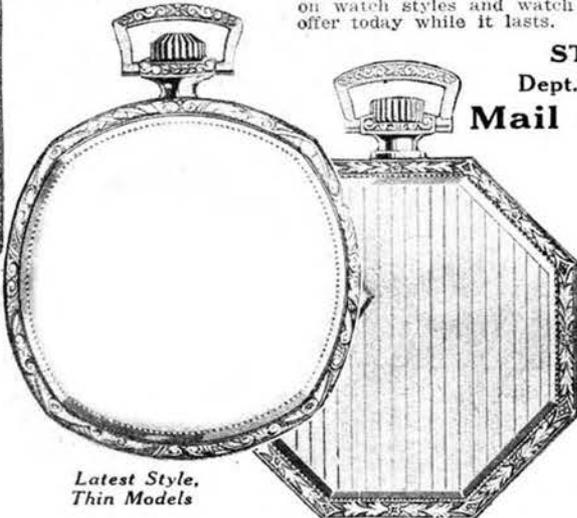
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