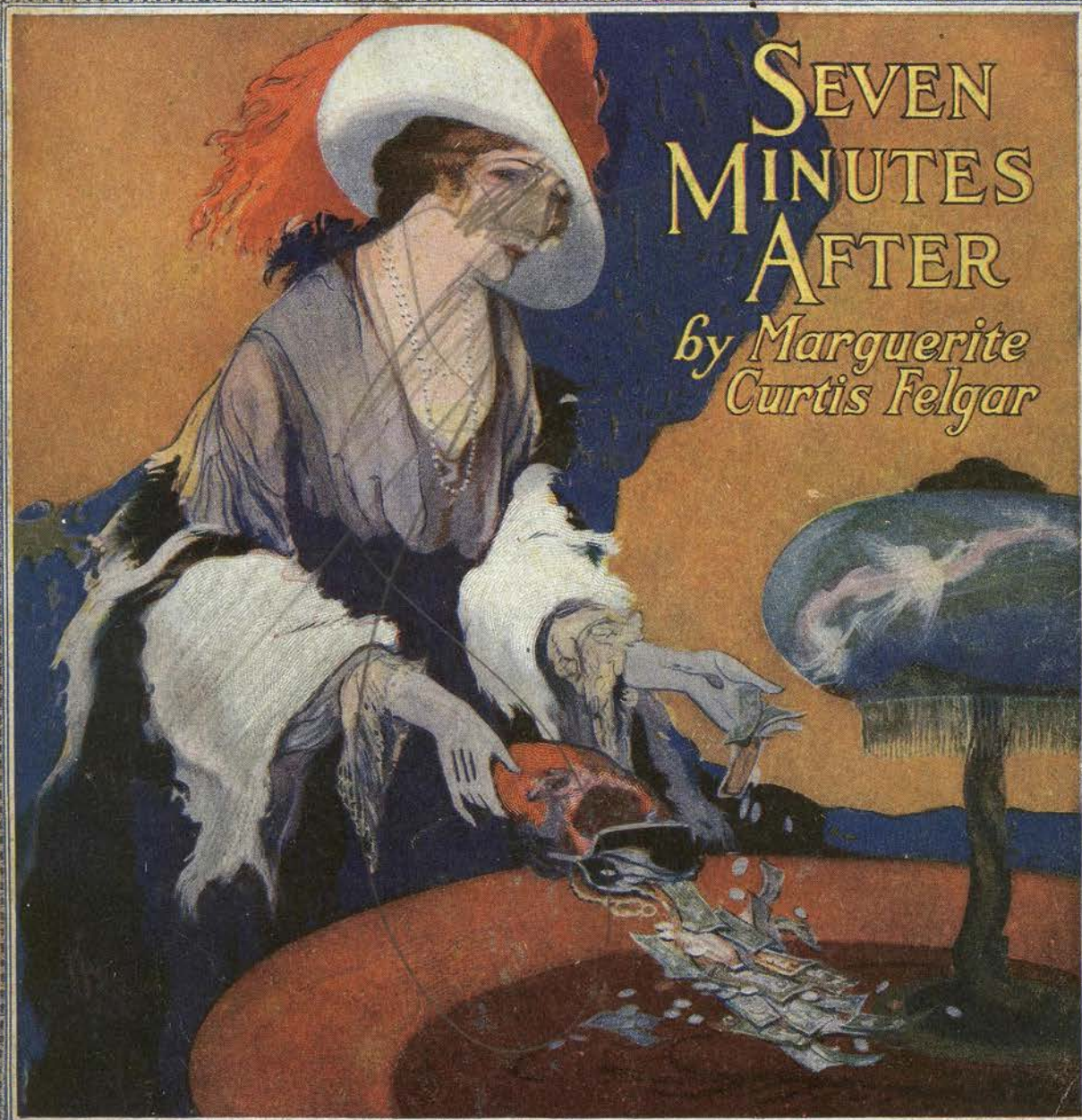


ARGOSY

Issued Weekly



SEVEN
MINUTES
AFTER

*by Marguerite
Curtis Felgar*

10¢
A COPY

MARCH 27

\$4.00
A YEAR



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Address.....
City..... State.....
Reference.....

Don't Send a Penny

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We can't foretell future prices of material and labor. Times are too uncertain. Therefore all we can tell you NOW is that we can guarantee you a pair of these elegant latest style shoes at this remarkably low price provided you send us your order at once. And at this price of only **\$4.69** we can send only one pair to a customer.

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Made of genuine leather in gun metal, popular Manhattan toe last. Blucher style. Comfortable, substantial, long wearing, genuine oak leather soles—reinforced shank and cap. Military heel. Best expert workmanship. Black only. Sizes 6 to 11.

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Leonard-Morton & Co.
Dept. 4214 Chicago, Illinois



Pay Only **\$4.69**

for shoes on arrival. If on examination you do not find them the greatest shoe bargain return them and back goes your money. No obligation, no risk to you. But send at once to be sure of getting them. A sale like this soon sells the stock.

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Size..... Width.....
Name.....
Address.....
Town..... State.....

THE ARGOSY

Vol. CXIX

ISSUED WEEKLY

NUMBER 2

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You'll go a long way and spend at least twice as much money to get anything in fiction that will be half as good as

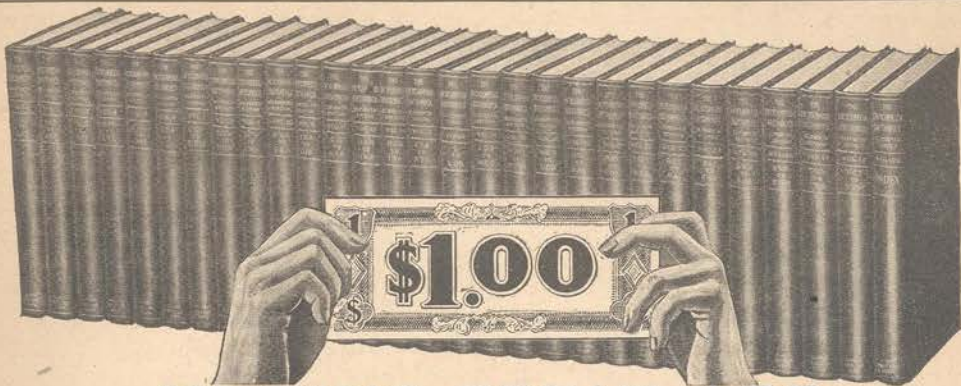
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NEXT WEEK

THE FRANK A. MUNSEY COMPANY, 280 Broadway, New York, and Temple House, Temple Avenue, E. C., London
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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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Entered as second-class matter September 28, 1917, at the Post-Office at New York, under the Act of March 3, 1879.



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Col. S. W. Wilke did it in one day, and in 4 years jumped to almost \$100,000 a year. S. E. Gibson jumped his earnings from \$150 to \$800 a month. O. B. Sheppard says it was worth more than \$15,000 to him. Let me send you my secret of earning more money, to try 5 days Free. All you risk is a 2-cent stamp.

By A. L. PELTON

MY name is Pelton—Albert L. Pelton. Four years ago I was as poor as a church mouse. I was out of a job, \$300 in debt, and my wife and two children were living on starvation rations. Yes, I've know the bitterest kind of want.

Today I have money and all that money will buy. I have my own home. I have no worries about high prices of food or clothing or rent.

Even if I never make another nickel, I don't think I will ever have to worry about money matters.

During the past three years I have been making on an average of over a thousand dollars a week.

That's quite a change from the time I was "on my uppers," isn't it?

Now let me tell you how I did it.

You will probably think I'm funny when I tell you that for twelve years I held in my hand the secret that at last won me riches.

But it's true.

For twelve years I struggled—with gold right in my hand.

It was this way.

I used to sell books—from door to door—eking out a poor man's living.

One of the books I sold was written by Dr. Frank Channing Haddock.

I never thought much about the book—although I sold a few from week to week.

For twelve years I never even took the trouble to read it.

It was called "Power of Will."

I didn't know anything about will-power.

What's more, I didn't care.

I thought it might be a good book for fellows who had to read it.

But I was too busy earning a living to bother about will-power.

Probably I thought then, as tens of thousands think

to-day, who've heard and read about this great book—that "will-power" was some myth, or impractical thing for dreamers.

You see—I hadn't analyzed the lives of the world's greatest men then, and discovered that will-power is the mightiest force men have ever known.

I was fooling myself—cheating myself fearfully, as I found out later.

One day I ran across a man who had purchased the book from me a few months back.

He stopped me on the street and said, "Hello, Pelton! Say, I'd like to have another copy of that Haddock book. Can you send it up right away?"

I told him I would. Then I asked him casually if he liked it.

What he told me made me go home and read the book myself—for the first time since I began to sell it twelve years before.

That same evening I borrowed \$300.

The next day I was in New York.

I secured the exclusive selling rights to the book.

Then I spent \$150 for a page "ad" in the *Review of Reviews* magazine.

It brought me about \$2,000 in cash.

As fast as the money came in I shot it back into advertising.

When I got \$2,500 in cash I bought a half-page "ad" in the *Saturday Evening Post*.

The first year I spent \$50,000 in advertising.

The next year I spent nearly a hundred thousand.

I guess I've spent over half a million dollars since my first \$150 "ad," and already 450,000 men and women—including great executives, international diplomats, famous authors, etc., also have taken up this study.

At first some people said I was crazy to advertise that book.

When they found that the book was selling—and

that I was spending as high as \$20,000 a month telling people about it, they said I had more nerve than sense.

But, my friend, all this time I was simply taking my own medicine.

I was telling people that the will was the motive power of the brain—that a strong will could batter down every obstacle to success—that weak will-power could be made strong, as easily as the muscles of the arm could be made strong—and that most people had weak wills simply because they didn't use their will-power.

I had strengthened my own will and was using it when people were calling me "crazy." And it was my will-power that people called "nerve."

Anyway, it was the secret of my success. Without it I might still be plodding—still canvassing.

Or even if I had gotten up enough courage to advertise I might have made only a piker's success.

It was my will-power that got me the \$300 loan.

It was my will-power that got me exclusive sale of Dr. Haddock's book.

It was my will-power that made me plunge into advertising instead of going slowly.

And finally it was my will-power that made me say to the public—"Send No Money—read 'Power of Will' five days free. Pay me if you decide to keep it. Send it back if you don't want it."

That was a new sort of proposition to most people. They had nothing to lose—and a lot to gain, if the book was worth while.

So the orders came in by the hundreds and then by the thousands.

At times I was 15,000 orders behind—just couldn't print books fast enough.

And letters from readers came pouring in so fast I simply couldn't read them all. Col. S. W. Wilke, of Roscoe, S. D., wrote that one day's study of "Power of Will" netted him \$300 cash, and that four years later, by using the methods Haddock formulated, his earnings had risen to nearly \$100,000 a year. V. P. Coffin, of Rochester, N. Y., wrote, about one month after getting the book, "'Power of Will' already has produced an increase of \$5,000 a year in my income." J. E. Gibson, of San Diego, Cal., said that since reading "Power of Will" his salary jumped from \$150 to \$800 a month.

Men like Judge Ben Lindsey, Supreme Court Justice Parker, Assistant Postmaster-General Britt, Governor McKelvie of Nebraska, Senator Capper of Kansas, Secretary of Agriculture Meredith, Governor Ferris of Michigan—and a host of other big men show



the class of leaders who have studied Haddock's methods.

Surely there must be something in "Power of Will" for you, my reader.

It helped me. It has helped half a million others. I could send you a circular filled with hundreds of letters from readers. But better still, see the book, and read it five days free.

All you lose, if you don't think "Power of Will" will increase your earnings, is a two-cent stamp.

It may make \$300 for you next week—it might carry you upwards to \$50,000 or \$100,000 in a few years—I don't know. I do know it has made a lot of money for its readers.

I do know, too, that if you pass this offer by—if you are a scoffer and a doubter—I will lose only the small profit on the sale of a book; but you—you may lose the difference between peanut money and real money.

It costs only a two-cent stamp to mail the coupon.

Don't wait twelve years—as I did. You may have gold within your reach and not know it. Send for "Power of Will" now. You've seen my ads before—now answer this one and see if this masterful volume doesn't contain the one little push you may need to make your life rosy-red. Begin training your will by sending in the coupon *this very second*.

A. L. PELTON.

PELTON PUBLISHING COMPANY
54-F Wilcox Block, Meriden, Conn.

You may send me "Power of Will" at your risk. I agree to remit \$3.50 or remail the book to you in five days.

Name.....

Address.....

City.....

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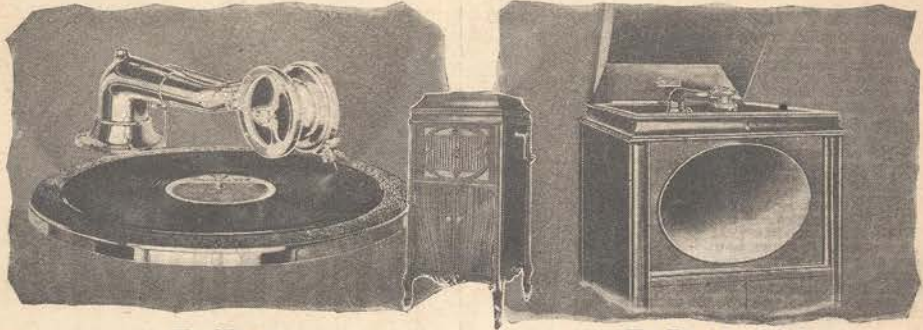
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THE ARGOSY

Vol. CXIX

SATURDAY, MARCH 27, 1920

No. 2



Seven Minutes After

by Marguerite Curtis Felgar

CHAPTER I.

THE JAILBIRD.

LEANING forward against the steering-wheel of his wicked-looking roadster, Tony Fane heard the mysterious letter from the Scarlet Rider crackle in his pocket, an unneeded reminder of his presence on Fifth Avenue at this time in the morning. By straining his eyes he could just see that the hands of the big clock outside the Golden Trust Company pointed to six minutes after eleven.

But it did not need any straining at all to see that there was a man standing beneath the clock, straight as a sentinel, silent as the sphinx. If only his patience would hold out for a minute longer, Tony thought, to give him time to get there!

He glanced with unconcealed irritation at the traffic-cop so needlessly keeping him on the curb, and suddenly, seeing a path made in the line of vehicles by a machine that turned at the corner, he decided to dash for it.

There was a shout, yells from the bystanders, and Tony knew that the chase

had begun. But he didn't care. He could see the man beneath the clock moving away, and there were still four blocks to go. If the Scarlet Rider was lost in the crowd there might never be another chance to find him, and not for all the fines in the world would Tony miss him. With a sudden spurt he passed the clock which had been the place of rendezvous, and drew up with a flourish just behind the slim figure of the man who had sauntered off at seven minutes after the hour.

"Say," he called in a friendly voice, "wait a minute, won't you? I'm late, but just as soon as I've finished with the cop—" He turned with a grin toward the irate officer of the law.

Few could look into Tony Fane's eyes when he was laughing, and not laugh, too. But the policeman had his dignity to maintain in the face of the curious crowd, and he stiffened rigidly. Tony's hand went toward his pocket; he brought out a visiting-card. Reading it, the policeman unbent a trifle. He waved the crowd away. It was in a comparatively clear region that Tony made his explanation.

"I'm really awfully sorry, officer," he said, "but the matter was urgent, you know; practically life or death; might be, anyway. I had an appointment to meet a man outside the Golden Trust Company at eleven. Got held up by the traffic every place, never had such a time in my life, 'pon my honor; then just as I came in sight of the place and found he was still there, though it was six minutes after the time—well, I got desperate, and made a dash for it. Of course, anything I can do"—he made a disarming gesture toward his pocket.

"Well your explanation is certainly all right, sir. No, I couldn't think of it"—waving away the hand that now swooped toward him from the pocket with a free and generous gesture—"it was my duty, and, of course, order must be maintained. But if you ever want anything from Clegg—that's my name—you call on me, Mr. Fane. I hope you didn't lose your friend."

"I may take you at your word, you know." Tony laughed, taking out his pocketbook and making a note in it with a small ivory pencil. "Awfully dangerous thing to promise me help, I'm so often in hot water. Where are you stationed, Clegg; what about my coming to see you when you aren't fenced in by duty?"

The rubicund countenance of the officer took on a deeper hue. He chuckled: "Well now, Mr. Fane, if you feel that way, sir, here's my address, and I'm sure I'm much obliged. I think your friend's waiting, too."

Not staying for more, he hurried back to his post, but if he had waited he might have been curious. For Tony, turning to confront a total stranger, cried out in amazement, grasping with a mighty grip the hand outstretched to him.

"Hello, *David*, where on earth did you spring from?"

For the moment he forgot everything except his pleasure in the unexpected sight of his old friend. Then, as David answered his question, he looked beyond him, anxiously. "Say, you didn't frighten that fellow off, did you? Awfully shy bird, I guess; he was waiting for me, under the Golden Trust clock. I chased him on up here—"

No one appeared in the surrounding group of passers-by in the least like the slender figure Tony remembered following up the avenue for four blocks. He turned back to David with a little frown between his brows. Then, suddenly, as he looked, an expression of amazement spread over his features. His eyes, deep-blue eyes that were changeful as the sea, gazed into David's gray ones. He took his hand again and wrung it, silently.

"Old man," he said quietly, all the usual exuberance gone from voice and manner, "I didn't recognize you at first."

"I knew *your* voice, Tony, the minute you called out. It's mighty fine to hear it again, after—"

Whatever he had been going to say, Tony interrupted. "Five years," he said. He turned to the car and opened the door. "Guess you won't mind riding with me," he said, "though I did nearly get arrested just now. Fine thing for me Clegg happened to be a good sort. Last time I was in the Speeder's Court the judge said next time he wouldn't fine me, he'd send me to jail. They call this car 'the blue devil,' one of the policemen told me. She's a pretty good goer, at that."

David settled back in the seat next the driver, laughing. It seemed to be sufficient answer, and Tony flashed a swift glance at him. They had come now to a busy section of the avenue, and speech was superfluous. Also, the minds of both men were busy. What, exactly, was the situation?

Red glowed in Tony's face for an instant. He cursed himself silently for a blundering fool. Why, overcome suddenly by the realization that David Cortland, his old college chum, was an ex-convict, brought to desperate straights, too, since leaving prison, could he have hit on no pleasanter subject for conversation than his own promised term in jail?

His mind was in a whirl. He had gone to meet a stranger, a man who had appealed to him and to others, according to his letter, and thus to meet—*David*, it was enough to make any one bewildered. Besides—then he left off wondering. An old

axiom of his father's occurred to him: "When in doubt"—old Abraham Fane had often thundered—"don't."

It was a pretty good hint to work on. Tony was in doubt what to say, how to ask anything. He'd let David do the talking, and if David didn't know how to talk or wished to be silent, that was enough for Tony Fane. He wasn't supposed to be brainy, or anything like that, but, by jingo, he *could* be loyal to his friends, and a friend down and out—his jaw set grimly. He'd show them! By "them" he meant the world that had treated David badly.

Taking a sudden turn to the right after they left Washington Square, Tony drove rapidly through a side street. To David it looked unutterably dreary and drab. Bits of paper were lying about, unwashed children ran shrieking across the street, playing tag, apparently, with the low blue car driven with such reckless ease. And as if he read his thought, Tony turned to him with a grin.

"It's fashionable to have a studio or something in this region," he said; "two years ago I was bitten by the Greenwich Village bug, and came down here. Then I got used to it, and never moved out. Foo Chah lives here all the time; I only come now and again. But it has its merits as a place to chum in. At the club you are everlastingly interrupted. Since dear old dad died I haven't opened the house much. The old place doesn't seem like home without him."

"I wrote to you—when I heard," said David, "but it was months after, in an old paper, before the news came to me. We didn't get much at first."

"I guess not," said Tony. "Well, here we are."

He drew the car up before a high brick house with square windows picked out in vivid green, and whistled. The door opened almost at once, and Foo Chah, his emaciated Chinese body clad in the decorous black silk garment of the Oriental houseman, ambled swiftly down the irregular pathway to the sidewalk.

"Foo Chah, you remember Mr. David?" said Fane. "He's back again, you see. Now, hurry to the garage with the car and

then get us breakfast; I'm ravenous; I could eat *you* almost!"

Foo Chah grinned. "Breakfast all ready," he said; and, climbing into the blue devil, he headed away down the street. Looking after him, the two friends laughed. There was something anomalous in the sight of the Oriental seated at the wheel of that up-to-the-minute racing car, tooling her with the surety of a professional chauffeur.

"See my tree?" said Tony, as they stood on the door-step while he searched for his latch-key. "They charge me fifty dollars a month extra for that, unofficially, of course."

He nodded at the struggling, smoking maple that grew in the pocket-handkerchief of green before the house, and threw open the door. David stepped into a high, narrow hallway, from which, shut off by solid oak doors, the living rooms opened. They walked into the studio.

David stopped on the threshold, and laughed.

"Whew!" said he, drawing a long breath. "You certainly got 'em bad."

"Everything," said Tony delightedly, "futuristic stuff, cabalistic, erotic, all the fads. Sure, I got 'em; what else makes them think me an artist, I'd like to know? You've got to bluff the commercial public."

He drew forward an easy chair upholstered in vivid orange velvet, and patted the back invitingly. "Horrible to look at, I know, but deuced comfortable to sit in. Try it."

David sank back with a sigh of relief. For an instant he closed his eyes. Then he opened them again—those wide, gray eyes that somehow reminded Tony of Robinetta, David's little sister—and sat up. "There's one thing I want to ask you, Tony, old man—"

"You can't—until after breakfast," Tony said positively. "I'm a bear until I've eaten. Foo Chah will tell you. If it hadn't been for my friendship for you—old-time stuff, and all that kind of thing, don't you know—I never should have got out so early this morning."

David interpolated ironically. "But I thought you were surprised to see me."

"I was, but that's another of the things we'll talk about after breakfast, Dave; I heard Foo Chah come back, I think. Excuse me for a minute."

Left alone, David considered the situation. His appearance of extreme youth was not borne out when one looked closer. There were fine lines beneath the eyes, marks of pain at the corners of the nostrils and the temples. It was still the face of a young man, because David Cortland had something of the old, indomitable fighting spirit that never ages, but it was not essentially a young man's face. Still, the lines of humor were strongly marked, and as David considered the situation he relaxed, until even his eyes were smiling.

"Must have been something of a knock-out for Tony," he said to himself, "but he certainly is a sportsman. *What* a time Robin 'll have over it when I tell her. Whew! If I had left that stand under the clock just one minute sooner, none of this would have happened, and I should have felt sore and as if nobody cared, for long enough. Poor old Tony, expecting to find a stranger, a down-and-out, desperate villain! I never shall forget how he looked when he understood I was the man. If there is any way on earth for me to make it up to him—"

His soliloquy was interrupted by the breezy entrance of his host.

"Lord, David!" he said. "Foo Chah must have known you were coming; he has mushrooms and lamb cutlets for breakfast. If you can't eat a whale of a meal when Foo Chah cooks cutlets and mushrooms, there's something wrong with you, believe me."

David laughed. "I can, but I'll call it lunch. I ate my breakfast at seven—Robinetta is very severe with me, now that she has me back again"—an expression that Tony could not decipher flitted across his face—"she makes me keep early hours at each end of the day."

"Makes?" said Tony. "That baby *makes* you do anything?"

"Baby? Well, don't let Robin hear you, that's all; she was twenty last birthday. I bet you a box of cigars, Tony Fane, that Robin could make you, or any other rea-

sonable man, do anything she made up her mind to; and what's more, you'd enjoy doing it."

CHAPTER II.

AN AMAZING DISCLOSURE.

BREAKFAST had been over for an hour when at last Tony turned in his chair and looked at David with a direct, alert gaze.

"Well, out with it, old man; I've made you swallow your story long enough."

David Cortland took a long pull at his cigar, watched the cloud of smoke disappear, and looked at his friend. His expression was keen and searching, but his eyes smiled. "Have you found 'em yet?" he countered.

"Found what?"

"The marks of the jail-bird?"

"Rot!" Tony stood up impulsively. "I don't care what you were imprisoned for, David, because I know you never did a thing in your life to be ashamed of, but I want you to know that I am going to earth out the dirty scoundrels who made you suffer, and beat 'em up. I'll do that if it's the last thing I do on earth, so help me God!" He changed to a lighter tone. "And don't tell me anything you don't want to; I merely mention it because in your letter—"

"What letter? Have you it with you?"

"Certainly." Tony laughed uncomfortably. "It gave me a bit of a jolt, you know, finding it came from you. Was there any need to tell me in such a round-about way? If you'd sent me word where you were these last five years, do you think it would have taken me long to get to you? Has every one turned you down so that you distrusted the whole world, even me?"

Tony Fane, forgetting the dictum of old Abraham, stood with his back to the fire, and said what was in his mind. His color was high, his blue eyes flamed. He reminded David of the boy who had won the college Marathon, seven years before, who, cheered and lauded by the crowd, had stood so, and yelled for the university, turning the cheers away from himself.

He had never been very much famed for his intellect, jogging along through his classes with a fair average only, but he had been a sportsman and an athlete, and now, with the keenness engendered by years of life in the old world, battling against evils unseen and monstrous, David realized that Tony's brain was a fine weapon, too. Since he had discovered who had been under the clock that morning, he'd been doing some thinking, with a vengeance.

He held out his hand for the letter.

"Let me read it first, Tony."

"Wait a minute." Fane turned the envelope so that his friend could see it. "I know this isn't your handwriting; you disguised it on purpose, I suppose, or got some one else to address it, and then you typed the rest. That isn't what I'm complaining about, Dave, it's the way you sent it. Why did you let it go to Willard? I tell you I felt like a skunk when he gave me the thing."

"Did Willard Fane bring you that?"

"Yes, gave it to me last night, came over to the club on purpose, found me on the point of going home. 'Say,' he said—you know that nasty, sneering way he has?—'I imagine I have inadvertently opened a letter intended for you, cousin; but it was brought to my chambers'—the bally idiot always speaks of his place as 'chambers,' some ridiculous word he brought back from London—and naturally—he cocked up his eyebrows in that affected way he has that always makes me want to punch his head, and handed me your letter. I opened it while he was there, too, and let him watch me read it. He gave me some free advice when I'd done, said I'd better turn the thing over to the police."

"Instead—"

Tony fidgeted uncomfortably. "Oh, I'm not a charitable institution; I thought of it, of course. Anonymous letters never made a big hit with dad; they don't with me, either. But that letter had something about it that touched me; when I had read it I said to myself that whoever the person was who wrote it, he was in trouble, and on the verge of something desperate—if I could help him—" Fane broke off in embarrassment. "So I drove down here

and made Foo Chah get me up early. I'd have been at the clock in time, but for the jam in the traffic."

David nodded. "When I caught sight of you racing past every one and defying all rules I didn't know who it was, of course, but I had the feeling that the driver of that blue car was headed for me. I watched you for a minute; then I thought I'd better get out of the way; I'm not very fond of the police."

He bent over the letter. It was badly typed on cheap paper, but it had the ring of sincerity.

TO MR. ANTONY FANE.

My dear Sir:

I just come out of prison, I done four and a half years and that was six months off for good conduct. I come out with a new suit of clothes and a little money what I earned but they won't let me go away from New York 'til I am off parole. I got to report to the judge every month for three months more. I swear before God that what I was in for was a plant and I never done it. Some of the police high up knows this and won't leave me go. If I start to get a job they are after me; I can't get no work, and I ain't a city man, I don't know the ways. The gang of a man I was in prison with is the only friends I got.

I learnt a lot while I was in prison, and five of the best criminals there—I mean the cleverest crooks—told me their dream jobs. That's what they call them. It means the big crime they want to do more than anything, the big, sure-fire scheme they have brooded over and thought out and thought out until there isn't any place it *can* go wrong. When they come out they are going to pull them off.

The gang got a scheme to have me tell them about each job, then they'll pull 'em off and make me master of the gang. The men what thought 'em up will have half the money. They won't have no need to tramp the city looking for work with all the bulls against them when they get out of jail.

That influences me some, because it's a hard thing to do.

I came from out West right near where you mines are, out at Shepherd, Mr. Fane, and I know'd you when you was a kid. I sure would like to get back to that country. It is out open and a fellow can breathe some without automobiles swallowing up the air. Also there ain't no police only the sheriff. His name is Bill Ponce and he knows me real well. If I'd been jailed there I could of come out and gone to work for him right away if I'd a mind to.

Folks is built different away from the cities. Mr. Fane, I will not take up with the gang and be master which is a compliment after all

and I like that part of it fine—if I can go back to the Shepherd country. If you spoke a word to the judge he would let me go maybe and I could report to him by letter which is a better plan for the bulls would not know it.

To-morrow I shall stand under the clock outside the Golden Trust Company on Fifth Avenue. I shall be there at eleven o'clock exactly and I shall stand straight and silent under the figure twelve. I'll be there until five minutes after the hour; I'm afraid of standing long because of the police spotting me. Then if you are going to help me you will meet me there, and if you speak to the judge for me I can leave the city. I don't want any money from you, but it seems like you might be able to use your influence. And I will hand over to you a paper I wrote out the dream jobs on; I carry it next me all the time.

I believe you will come to help me, Mr. Fane, you or some of the others. I'm writing to six other influential gentlemen what must know the right thing, but I'd like it best to be some one what knows Shepherd. God! but I love that country—seems as if only your father what is dead and gone knowed what I feel about it. He was a powerful fine man.

Your respectful friend,

THE SCARLET RIDER.

David read the letter through slowly, and laid it aside with a sigh. Tony had been standing with his back to him while he perused it, looking out of the window, but now he turned impatiently.

"One thing," he said, "I simply have to ask. Why did you disguise yourself that way: bad English, all the rest of it? Were you afraid of the gang? If you had said: 'Tony, I'm just out of jail, I'm David Cortland, from Shepherd Mines, who played with you when you were a kid, and went to college with you'; that would have been all that was necessary. I'd have gone to the ends of the earth to meet you, and you'd never need to have told me another thing."

If it had not been for his earnestness, David would have laughed. But instead, something caught him by the throat, and he had to swallow hard before he could speak. He rose impulsively from his chair and put a hand on his friend's shoulder.

"Tony, you dear old simpleton," he said, "I'll tell you why. *I never wrote that letter; I was never in prison in my life!*"

"Then—"

"I know; it all fitted in so nicely. You saw me five and a half years ago, and I

vowed vengeance, then, on my father's memory. You knew how he had been served, how, as chief of police, he had been disgraced and dishonored, so that he died of a broken heart as truly as any one ever did. You know that when the funeral was over I found papers which seemed to point to Malone—who succeeded him—as the culprit.

"And then I disappeared. I had been your great chum, and not a word out of me for five years, except that letter—so long delayed—I sent you when your father died. And, suddenly, you see me in the place of the man who wrote you that letter, and it leaps to your mind that I'd been wrongfully accused of a crime and that the 'police high up' know this and are onto me.

"Of course, you thought of Malone. And with your usual generous method of procedure you identified me with the man who needed your help. Tony, you're a brick and the most loyal friend in the world, but you certainly do butt your head against a stone wall or two, at times. You used to, you remember, when you played football. It's a useful trick."

Tony was desperately embarrassed. His fair skin was dyed crimson, his collar suddenly seemed to choke him. He squirmed under David's half-ironical, wholly amused gaze. Then, unable to resist the impulse, he sank down in a chair and laughed.

"Great Jehoshaphat!" he yelled. "Then it was *not* you I saw under the clock at all? I just jumped at the whole darned thing?"

"No, you saw me there all right; I stepped in and stood there at six minutes after eleven, to see if anything would happen. You see, I was one of the six men besides yourself who had one of those letters. I got there by ten forty-five. I swear no one made even the slightest attempt to stand there under the clock. And as far as I could see, we were the only two who made any attempt to answer them. I should think it was all a hoax, or something worse, but for one thing."

He took a bundle of letters from his pocket and, sorting out one, laid it on the table.

"Here, you see, is the facsimile of the

letter you received. But there is one thing different. Tony, the thing that makes me feel it is real. On the back page there are seven names penciled, and yours and mine are among them. I think that's the list the poor fellow used. You see, he wrote to Van Haven, Winter Smith, Bellamy, Tom Pedley, and to us.

"I thought at first the thing was a plant, to get us to the clock, and— Oh, what's the use of talking about it?" he broke off abruptly, "it isn't any real help. But with these others in on it—you and I chosen because we know the Shepherd country—though if *you* didn't you'd belong in that list simply because you're a multimillionaire; and the others because they are international names of importance—why, that doesn't seem possible. Besides, the letter rings true. No one could be quite as ingenious as that merely by trying! Tony, I wonder if you know how sick at heart I should have been if you hadn't come to keep that appointment!"

Tony laughed. "The only reason I mightn't would have been because I was out of town and hadn't received the letter," he said. "Even as a kid I was a soft-hearted sort of sucker, I guess; dear old dad always felt it was against me, I know."

"I knew you were in town, though, because Robin saw you. We were driving up from the station yesterday when you slid by in that blue devil of yours. Robin called to you, but you had gone like a puff of smoke. We tried to get you on the phone later, but they didn't know when you would be in, at the club. I left a message for you to call the Primalto, but didn't give my name; I wanted to surprise you."

"You did that, all right."

Laughter broke out afresh; they tramped the long room together for a moment in a paroxysm of mirth, just as they had so often done in the past. But then it had been David who steadied first, now it was Tony.

"I wonder," he said quietly, "what has become of that poor chap? Why didn't he get to the rendezvous? Do you think the gang he speaks of stopped him, or the police? And why didn't somebody else make an attempt to help him out? Take

Pedley, now, he's just the sort to take up a matter like that; why wasn't he in on it? He's in town."

"He probably wouldn't get the letter until to-day, at the earliest. It would go through his secretary's hands; you know how long it is before requests for money reach the eyes of a great financier. The slush has all to be weeded out first; that is what a secretary's for, isn't it?"

With a mutual comprehension of the overburdened life of the very rich, they smiled at each other. Then Tony stopped suddenly and caught up the telephone.

"Say," he said, "I have an idea; let's phone the other six and get them after this thing. We shall at least have their ideas on the mystery."

With his hand on the receiver, he stopped. Voices were heard in the hall. With a gesture of resignation he whispered a name.

"Lord, it's Araminta!" he said.

David gave one despairing glance around, but the way of escape was closed. The last thing he wanted to do at this moment was to meet an unknown woman. Foo Chah was heard explaining that Mr. Fane was engaged; and in return a woman's voice, a rather high, metallic, but withal languidly sweet voice—made the assertion that Mr. Fane was never too much engaged to see her; he had said so. Foo Chah's expostulations were useless.

As the door opened David made one swoop for the letters on the table, turned his back on the incoming visitors, and placed them safely in his pocket. Why he did so, he had no idea. For in another moment he turned to face the most radiantly beautiful woman he had ever seen, while Foo Chah announced decorously in his high, sing-song voice:

"Misse Alaminta Lellerby."

CHAPTER III.

THE "STUPID" MISS LETHERBY.

"WHICH means," said the radiant vision to whom Tony had just presented him: "Araminta Letherby. You don't remember me, Mr. Cortland, I can see; have

I changed in every other way, as well as changing my name?"

"If I'd ever met you before, Miss Letherby, I shouldn't have forgotten it," said David simply.

"Delightful! Doesn't he say nice things, Tony; and just as if he was swearing on the Bible or something. Quite European, isn't it? Most American men, Mr. Cortland, are so crude."

"Crudity is necessary sometimes, Araminta, sweet one," said Tony, "and Cortland is all American, you'll find, and proud of it. I've known him cruder than you would ever countenance. Do you remember when he boxed your ears, out at Shepherd, for tormenting that goat?"

Araminta's eyes smiled languidly. The dark fringes drooped over them for an instant, lifting again as she met David's amazed stare. "What a little fiend I was; now you remember, don't you, David?"

"Minta?" he cried amazedly. "Little Minta Crane, the child who used to stay down at the cabin and came up to play with us? Why, it's impossible."

"But delightful, isn't it?" Araminta drawled. "Just think, if I'd been compelled to *stay* Minta Crane, with that fiendish temper, and no clothes or anything! I had a rich uncle, David, who left me his money on condition I became a Letherby. It's a much nicer name than Crane, anyhow, don't you agree with me? And clothes do make a difference."

She looked down complacently at the suit of wistaria-colored velvet she wore, and allowed the deep cape of chinchilla to fall from her shoulders. As David recovered it she let it remain in his hands for a second longer than necessary, impalpably fragrant, elusive, delicate, and lovely as its owner. And once again her eyes met his, and David smiled with the vivid boyishness that wiped away all appearance of care from his face. He drew a long breath.

"I should say that everything around you added to your loveliness, Miss Letherby," he said; "but as for needing clothes in the way you mean"—he hesitated, finishing with a crudity that he felt no one could have equaled—"if you wore rags you would be beautiful."

"Piffle," Tony laughed; "that's a fallacy no artist believes. It makes all the difference how a lovely woman dresses. Araminta is known as the most beautiful woman in New York, and the stupidest."

"Tony!"

Araminta laughed delightedly.

"It's true, David; you needn't look so shocked. I'm used to it. I found I couldn't contend with the brainy women, so I decided to be just as stupid as I felt, and told a few of my best friends so.

"It went round New York in a jiffy. They speak of me as stupid Araminta Letherby. It saves me lots of fuss, and I can work at being a beauty, I really enjoy that."

She shifted her gaze to Tony as if challenging his opinion. It was a glance of unconcealed coquetry. Tony met it gallantly.

"And as David has declared, you make quite a success at it, sweetness. Araminta, I'm not in a painting mood to-day; I'm not going on with your portrait. Besides, you hadn't a sitting, you know."

She nodded. "I should say not, with David just back." Her kindling look showed appreciation of the fact that David was Tony's greatest friend. "I didn't come for that. Willard Fane told me you'd had an extraordinary letter from a crook, or something, and what he said made me so curious I simply had to look you up. He thinks its some new scheme for extorting money from the gentle philanthropist. He's an odd person, that cousin of yours, Tony."

"I wish he'd let me alone," said Tony. "He must be just dippy about you, Araminta, the way he tells you things."

"He is," said the girl calmly, "and he amuses me. He's coming to dinner, to-night—and that's why I wanted to hear about this letter. What did you do, Tony, go to the meeting place, and all that? I bet you did; any crook would have a soft time who tried to take you in."

The little laugh with which she ended, and the affectionate pat she gave to Tony's sleeve, took all malice away from the words.

But something stirred uncomfortably in David's mind. Was there any intent in the words; was the implication quite as innocuous as it pretended? Over Tony's

shoulder his eyes met Araminta's, and the luminous clearness of her gaze, the gentle, almost simple expression around her perfect mouth, reassured and made him ashamed of his doubt.

Araminta was just a charmingly beautiful, brainless doll. She uttered her words thoughtlessly, but at heart she was sound. He smiled at her, as one smiles at a charming child.

"Guess I'll have to let you see that letter"—Tony felt in the pockets of his coat—"doesn't seem to be here; what *did* I do with it? David, did you—"

"Put it in my pocket by mistake? Have you looked on the floor?" Stooping, David dexterously dropped the letter to the ground, ascertained that it was the copy that had been sent to Tony, and gave it to him with a smile.

For a second he saw an expression of amazement cross Tony's face, for he had been standing where his friend's little maneuver was perfectly plain to him; but it was instantly replaced by a good-humored smile as he gave the letter to Araminta.

The girl handled it daintily, her face wrinkled into a little *moue* of disdain at the torn, cheap paper; but as she read on that expression of disdain vanished, and when she laid the letter upon the table, at last, David saw with a thrill that her eyes were full of tears. She had a heart, then, to match her lovely face. What did brains matter in a woman as beautiful and tender?

Araminta stood up. "Oh, Tony; I hope you did something for the poor fellow," she said eagerly, and with an impulsive gesture she turned the contents of her purse out on the table.

"Give him this," she said; "it is little enough, but it may help him to get a start. I've been so terribly extravagant lately I can't let you have any more. I'm ashamed, now that I come across need like his." Once more she indicated the letter lying between them.

"Bless your generous heart," said Tony, making a handful of the bills and money and sweeping it back into her purse, raising his eyebrows at some of the denominations as he did so; "there's enough there to start him in a farm, almost; but run

along, Araminta, and forget it. The Scarlet Rider didn't turn up this morning. Perhaps he had help through some one else."

"Perhaps he has been found by the police, or something." She stood in perplexity, drawing her cloak around her slowly, then her face brightened. "I know," she cried. "Willard can help after all. Isn't he assistant to the commissioner of police? Oh, I know you've always said he didn't do anything, Tony; that he was more of a loafer than any of the rest of that crowd; but don't you see, here is a chance for him to prove himself, to show that he really can be of use, after all. He'd do *anything*, for me."

"That doesn't make him unusual," Tony responded; "any of us would, and you know it. Look at David, now; he's your abject slave. We all were, even back in the days when you had a fiendish temper and teased my goat. But don't try Willard too far, he isn't like the rest of us, exactly; and as for helping out on this poor devil's case, he's already counseled me to put it into the hands of the police. That doesn't sound exactly sympathetic."

"Brute! He wasn't a bit like that when he spoke to me this morning, though, Tony; he couldn't remember bits of the letter—that was what made me curious—but he thought there might be something true in it. Of course he wouldn't have the interest in it we all have, because *he* wasn't a child out at Shepherd."

"It's incredible you were!" David broke in.

"It is to myself, sometimes—" the eyes Araminta turned on him were very wistful; "other girls could put into words what it makes them feel, the change, the difference it has all made; but I'm so stupid, I can't. But David, I feel that you'd always understand."

She dropped her voice; though Tony stood close beside them, David felt for an instant as if he were alone with Araminta. Tony turned aside to hide a smile, though he was slightly, unaccountably irritated. Araminta could try her wiles with success on all the rest of mankind, but somehow, he wanted David to be free from them. David took things so hard. Another fel-

low wouldn't think much of being taken up by Araminta and dropped; as she always dropped every one in the end; but David wouldn't understand it. He stepped briskly forward.

"As for Willard—" he said again.

Araminta appeared to bring herself back to the remembrance of his presence with an effort. David was holding her hand as she said good-by. "And you will come and see me?" she was saying. "Tony will tell you where I live; in my uncle's old house on Sixty-Fifth Street."

Then she replied to Tony's remark.

"Willard?" she laughed. "He'd slipped from my mind. I'll be absolutely conscienceless and forget that he was to dine with me. I'll make Anita call him when I get home and tell him I have a headache or something, and can't see him. Then you boys come to dinner instead, won't you, *please?*"

She stood back, holding her big muff before her face, her two beseeching, lovely eyes brimful of mischief. If she had been beautiful before, she was radiant now. All the artist in Antony Fane recognized it. Mentally he groaned. What man could resist such allure? *He* knew Araminta through and through, for instance, but he could not.

He glanced at David expectantly, his ready grin already in evidence. A mere formal acknowledgment from himself would be all that was necessary; David, if he knew the symptoms, would jump at the chance of seeing Araminta again that day, and in the intimacy of a family dinner in her own home.

But David hesitated. "Thank you," he said; "you are more than kind; but I'm afraid I can't. You see, my little sister, she has been separated from me so long; I can't leave her, very well; we only returned to New York yesterday."

"How stupid of me," said Araminta; "of course I remember Robinetta. She was a toddling baby when I was about—well, let's leave the matter of age out of it. Wouldn't she come without a formal call from me first, if I wrote her a note? Or—I might call on her this afternoon."

David laughed. "Robin's the most un-

ceremonious creature in the world," he said. "If I may bring her with me I know she'll be charmed. She's the most astonishing memory, too; she'll probably know exactly what you looked like as Minta Crane, and unless I warn her she will be sure to blurt out that little matter of age."

"Gracious!" said Araminta, stepping away in pretended alarm.

"Even if she does, sweetness, you should worry!" Tony said slangily, and as he walked with her down the narrow pathway to the waiting car, his laugh came back to David merrily.

"Holy smoke, Araminta, I'd give something to see Willard's face when Anita phones him. He knows you never have a headache. Aren't you afraid of losing an adorer?"

She shook her head, laughing. "Even for stupid Araminta Letherby there are plenty more," she said, and her eyes turned, as if against her will, back to the window where David Cortland stood.

CHAPTER IV.

"LOT 245."

"**D**RIVE to the Primalto Hotel," Araminta told the chauffeur as the car turned out of Washington Square. For a moment she watched the man manipulating his way through the traffic, then, with a half-smile, that somehow altered the expression of her face, adding a subtlety to its beauty that had not been there when she talked with Tony and Cortland, she took the paper from her loose-sleeved cape, and opening it, proceeded to read again, calmly, the letter that had been the cause of her visit to Tony's studio—the letter from the Scarlet Rider.

Long before the Primalto was reached she had folded it again and placed it in her hand-bag, and when she swept across the curb and into the palm-shaded lobby of the hotel, famous for its exclusive patronage and the suavity of its service, all hint of frowning thought had gone from her expression, and she was again only the beautiful Araminta Letherby New York had labeled stupid.

She walked swiftly through the lobby to the alcove, where the telephone operator sat at the switchboard. "Chelsea 227A, if you please," she said quietly, taking no notice of the tall, unobtrusively dressed man who had followed her in and now leaned over the board, talking to the curly haired operator. When she received a signal to enter one of the booths, she was apparently careless as to who heard her conversation, for she left the door open and said only a few words.

"Foo Chah, this is Miss Letherby; put your master on the wire, please." And again, after a pause: "Hello, Tony, this is Araminta. I'm speaking from the Prim-alto; had to come here for a stupid luncheon engagement. What? Oh, that's mean, from you; it needn't necessarily be stupid because I'm there, you know. I called up to tell you that I took away the letter you had—you know, from the man who signed himself the Scarlet Rider—I must have swept it off into my bag with my sleeve, or something. I hope you hadn't missed it. Tony, can't you send Foo Chah for it? I'm phoning Anita to meet me here; she can sit in the lounge and wait for him. No, I can't. Tony, I don't like having the thing about; it depresses me. All right, good boy, thank you very much. Anita will be here right away. I'll tell her to look out for you. Yes, in about half an hour; good-by."

Thoughtfully, she hung up the receiver, paid the fee, and left the alcove with a glance at the jeweled watch on her wrist. One o'clock; lunch was at one thirty. There would be time for what she had planned. She walked up to the mezzanine floor, sought out the homeliest looking of the stenographers, and sat down to dictate.

"You take letters straight on the machine?" she asked.

The girl nodded; she thought she had never seen any one more beautiful than the woman before her, and her clothes were perfect enough to make any one gasp, even in that hotel of beautifully gowned women. She fitted a sheet of paper into the machine without looking at it. "You wish a carbon copy?"

"It won't be necessary; these are merely

a few extracts from a letter; I wanted them typed so that I shouldn't have to copy them by hand. Do you want me to talk slowly?"

"I think I can take it just as you speak."

Araminta dictated from the letter in her hand. Then she glanced over the sheet of typed matter the girl handed to her, laid a five-dollar bill on the machine, and rose.

"Change will not be necessary; buy yourself some candy with it."

"But, *madame*, your fee is only thirty-five cents," the stenographer stammered. Her brain was not working as rapidly as usual; she was dazzled by Araminta's beauty and gentleness, yet she thought back, rapidly. What was it she had taken down; nothing of real value, was it? No, it had evidently been a personal matter, only; something that had been written to this beauteous person by a dependent of some sort, probably, for the grammar had been poor. Nothing it was necessary to report to the house detective. She drew a long breath, pushing the five-dollar bill away from her.

"But I want you to take it—please." Araminta looked like a child about to cry; the other girl was sure her lower lip trembled ever so slightly. She looked up, hesitantly. "I have more money than I can ever spend, and once I was a poor girl, too; I knew then what a few extra pennies meant. Won't you let me—" the gentle, deprecating voice trailed off into a wistful silence.

Araminta turned away, leaving the girl at the machine lost in a haze of golden fancies. Once—she had it from her own lips—this wonderful person had also been a poor girl, perhaps a stenographer, even, and she seemed to know exactly how a working girl felt, anyway.

How wonderful to be rich, and to wear beautiful clothes, and be able to be kind, always. Perhaps her chance, too, would come. The unfortunates who dictated to her for the rest of the day wondered what could have gotten into the usually capable head.

Araminta had miscalculated, she had made a deeper impression than she knew. Aiming to bewilder, she had stimulated

memory. Not one word of what she had taken down on the machine escaped the girl's mind. And as she fell asleep that night one name was on her lips. She wondered drowsily who could be the Scarlet Rider? It was as attractive, romantic name.

Anita Ferndale was Araminta's companion. She did all the things Araminta didn't want to do, and stood as a buffer between that young woman and a kind and indulgent world too urgent in pressing its claims. She had one pride; her capability. Say, for an instant, that she was not the perfect social secretary, and Anita was up in arms. She knew that she could not be bettered in this capacity. And she adored Araminta Letherby, because she admitted it. It didn't matter whether Araminta was in a good temper or bad, she never made the mistake of depreciating Anita's qualities.

In return, Miss Ferndale gave unstinted good measure for her generous salary, and reserved the right to be as sulky—or saucy—to the beautiful Miss Letherby as she pleased. She made one mistake only: she took Araminta at the valuation she had set upon herself. She thought her stupid.

"I had a message from Peters, Minta," she said, coming across the crowded lounge a few minutes later, her trim figure clad in a nondescript suit of gray, the furs about her shoulders giving the impression of being unbecoming, somehow, although Araminta herself had chosen them. "He said you needed me here at one twenty-five. It is now exactly that," she added.

"Punctual as usual; how do you do it, child?" There was lazy admiration in Araminta's voice, and Anita flushed. She sat down on the seat next to her employer, and looked over the crowd.

"What are we doing?" she asked. "Something new?"

"I am," Araminta drawled. "Take my hand-bag, like a good girl, and find a folded letter—crumpled paper, dirty, horrid thing to touch—yes, that's it. Now, I want you to wait here for Mr. Fane, he's coming in with a friend on their way somewhere, and he wants that letter. He's expecting to see you. Here comes my escort; I'm lunching in the Gold Room; I'll be home by four o'clock."

She rose from her seat, nodded smilingly across her shoulder at her, and left Anita sitting contemplatively with Araminta's hand-bag on her lap, and a folded, crumpled bit of paper clasped in with it. But Anita did not mind. She had, for a wonder, no idea as to who Araminta's escort might be. He was tall and thin and aristocratic looking, but Miss Ferndale made a mental comment as she looked after him.

"Bet he's the devil of a temper!" she told herself inelegantly. Philosophically, she searched in the hand-bag left in her care—one of Araminta's stupidities, she knew—for bonbons. It was late, she had not had luncheon, and she knew Araminta's propensity for candy.

She was rewarded by finding some cakes of chocolate, but they were warm and sticky to the touch. She was annoyed to be found sucking off the remnants that had adhered to her fingers, when Antony Fane stopped beside her; for if Anita had a fancy for any man, it was for the young giant before her. He was so good-tempered, so wholesome, so virile. She smiled comically now, making a little face of dismay.

"What a mess to find me in," she said; "and you look as if you'd come out of a bandbox, as usual. Miss Letherby wanted me to give you this, Mr. Fane."

She handed him the folded paper.

Tony thanked her, and presented David Cortland. Both men were exceedingly spick and span, and Anita rose, eyeing them with sparkling eyes in which mischief gleamed.

"You're evidently going somewhere to conquer," she remarked, "and I must go home. Don't let me detain you, there are all kinds of beautiful girls waiting."

Tony laughed. "We're going to call on one—Mr. Cortland's little sister. At least, she seems little to me; I haven't seen her since she grew up. We're all dining with Miss Letherby to-night, you know, so we'll meet again."

"I didn't know; glad you told me," Anita retorted grimly. "Araminta expects me to have second sight about her guests. What sort of a dinner is it to be, Mr. Fane; any idea?"

"Strictly a family affair, no need to worry; let the chef have hysterics if he wants to."

"He may; he's temperamental," Anita laughed. With a gay little nod she watched them walk away, two exceedingly smart-looking men. Briskly, she was turning toward the ladies' entrance, when she was aware that the man who had taken Araminta to lunch stood at her side.

"Miss Ferndale?" he interrogated. "Yes? Then, if you please, Miss Letherby wants her hand-bag. She says she left it with you."

Anita gripped it more firmly. "I think I'll go with you to give it to her, if you don't mind," she said coolly. "I've no doubt whatever that Miss Letherby sent for it, but you see, if she had not, by any chance, and there always is a chance—then I'm responsible. And there's more money in that bag than I could afford to lose, I'm sure. Miss Letherby is awfully careless about money."

The man frowned in perplexity. "I see your point," he admitted; "but er—the fact is—Miss Letherby is transacting a matter of private business, and she doesn't want any one in on it. If you will let me bring her to you—"

Anita looked him over coolly. He was evidently a gentleman, well-groomed and distinguished-looking; but there was something about him she did not like. Moreover, he was new to her, and she had not heard his name. His tone, too, when he first spoke had been distinctly supercilious, and that was something he was to suffer for. Miss Ferndale lifted her chin.

"Certainly not," she said icily; "Miss Letherby cannot be dragged about to search for her own hand-bags." Her tone implied that she was speaking of a queen. "Besides, she is used to me in her private business; you see that man over there, the tall one leaning over the desk, talking to the information clerk? Well, he telephoned me to come here and meet Miss Letherby this morning. His name is Peters; he is never far away when Miss Letherby is in a public place. She gives him messages and sends him on errands without ever speaking to him, by code, of course; he knows

me. Would you prefer me to give this bag to him?"

Her companion laughed. "You are an ideal secretary, Miss Ferndale," he said pleasantly; "suppose you tell me that you are willing to accept the responsibility of accompanying me, and then come along. It won't do to keep Miss Letherby waiting. She can't do business very well without that bag."

Stanchly, Anita followed him. But as she turned the bend in the lounge and headed for the elevators, she turned her head and made a hurried signal to the tall, lanky man she had indicated as Peters. But she had no opportunity of knowing whether he followed her or not, for her escort hurried her into a descending elevator.

"Down," he said sharply.

They found themselves in a concrete passageway, and passed on into a large room almost blocked with people. But they were not the people who filled the corridors up-stairs. This was a crowd of commercial men of one sort and another, hawk-eyed Jews, down-at-heel women, one or two quiet matrons who kept together in a select group, and a few who seemed to be onlookers merely, better dressed than the others, less noisy, surveying the rest of the crowd with appraising eyes.

Through all a constant stream of porters passed and repassed with baggage, and a voice was heard uplifted in exhortation.

"What is it?" asked Miss Ferndale. She was surprised, but not in the least bewildered. Her companion looked down at her with twinkling eyes not without their gleam of malice, and the dislike Anita had felt at first suddenly developed into large proportions. She had difficulty in hearing his reply above the shouting, but as she followed him through the worst of the wedging, pushing mass of humanity, the sound of his words—as sounds will—made sense to her consciousness. "Sale of held baggage," he said.

"What on earth could Araminta want with other persons' luggage," she asked herself. For now she saw Miss Letherby, sitting on a tall, black-leather trunk, and eying the scene with bored amusement. She looked more beautiful than usual, and

more out of place than Anita had ever seen her. For she had the faculty that so few really lovely women have, of seeming to become a part of whatever portion of the landscape was her temporary setting. As Anita approached she looked up with an expression of astonishment.

"Willard," she said fretfully, "I asked you to bring the thing."

She took the purse from Anita's hand without glancing at her, and the girl smiled grimly. It was evident she had not pleased Araminta by coming, but at least she had satisfied herself that the demand for the purse was genuine. She didn't wait for the man to answer, but spoke firmly, as one speaks to a fractious child:

"You had over a thousand dollars in the bag when you started off this morning, and I didn't know this gentleman. I insisted on bringing it myself. If you need anything of the kind another time, write it down. I know your signature."

"But you know," said Araminta plaintively, for the first time letting her lovely eyes rest on Anita's face, "how long it takes for me to do that; I can never express myself properly."

"Asking for a simple hand-bag," Anita almost snorted; "you can't make me think you as stupid as that; any common school-child could write enough for that."

"If they chose," added Araminta spitefully, and made the words a dismissal, turning her back on her secretary and smiling up at her companion. She had not presented him to Miss Ferndale, but Anita knew who he was, now.

Willard Fane had figured in the papers enough for her to chide herself for not having recognized him instantly. But the fact was, he was a bigger man physically than his portraits had led her to believe.

As she wended her way alone through the crowd she thought out the reason, seizing upon it with the rapidity with which she did everything. It was because his features were small and refined, not as large as is usually the case with a tall man. It gave him a curiously indefinite look, she reflected, and yet from all accounts Willard Fane was anything but that. His record in the police department alone

proved him to be aggressive and politic, both. Now Anita felt him to be unscrupulous.

"Why hadn't he told her his name," she asked angrily, "and prevented her from making such a play for annoyance on Anita's part?" She turned to glare at him balefully.

But he had disappeared. It was only a moment since she had seen him standing by Araminta, laughing down at her while she coquetted with him. There was no place they could reasonably have gone, for the room ended in a concrete wall against which the black trunk on which Araminta had been sitting now stood out with clearness. And they had certainly not followed her back through the crowd.

In her amazement Miss Ferndale allowed herself to stop and scan the place anxiously. Araminta could not be lost; she was too beautiful and too conspicuous; but it would be just as well if Peters had seen her signal and followed her down, considering Willard Fane's reputation.

"Here," she heard his voice say softly.

The tall, thin man was leaning over the edge of a trunk, staring up the room at the auctioneer. Apparently he had not moved his lips, and he certainly had not glanced in her direction. He was the same picture of awkward ease that he had been in the lobby up-stairs, earlier in the day in the telephone alcove, and as he had been on the score of times only that Anita had seen him.

He had always amused her, rather, and to Araminta she spoke of him as "the Yank," always. He was not unlike the usual picturized ideas of Uncle Sam, but without the goatee. Yet in one gesture he had always seemed to Anita to be pulling at that imaginary beard.

He did not seem to be looking at her, and yet Anita knew that he had spoken to her. She edged her way through the crowd, and stood beside him, following the direction of his glance without speaking.

The auctioneer was disposing of his wares rapidly. It was evident that he had another appointment, and did not mean to waste more time than necessary on this one. It was unusual to hold an auction on

the hotel premises, and he did not approve of it. He had told the management that if a hall was hired, as usual, the baggage would fetch more money. He meant to act so that his words would prove true, and on the next occasion he could work in a hall, from the rent of which he could graft a nice little sum. But he had to be guarded about it, or the hotel officials would get on to his game.

He glanced perfunctorily at the small trunk and old grip labeled "Lot 245," that now was placed before him, and began his offer for bids, his hammer already poised to knock it down for a few dollars. Then, to his surprise, a cultured, drawling voice said: "Twenty dollars."

Miss Ferndale recognized the voice, but she could not understand it. What could Willard Fane want with an old, battered trunk that looked as if it came off the prairies? It was evidently home-made; on the end nearest her the initials S. T. R. had been painted by some one who knew little about the art of lettering. Also, the trunk was small, and the grip that accompanied it was of the old collapsible pattern that had followed the still more ancient carpet-bag. It was wrinkled and dusty, and altogether undesirable. At the most it might be worth ten dollars; yet he had bidden twenty. She turned to Peters, whispering a question.

"Is Miss Letherby there, too?"

Peters nodded. He was smiling as one smiles at a spoiled child. Miss Ferndale smiled back, understanding the cause of his mirth. She had felt that way about Araminta often, when some whim seized her to possess something bizarre and unsatisfactory—a whim that she would move heaven and earth to satisfy. Her quick brain reasoned it out something like this, which was surprisingly near the truth, too, as Peters informed her later:

In some way Araminta had heard of this auction of baggage held by the hotel in lieu of unpaid accounts, and insisted on attending it. Then, whimsical as ever, she had set her heart on this absurd, small trunk with the hall-marks of Western origin, and Willard Fane had undertaken to get it for her.

It was a perverse desire to hide her childish wish from her secretary that had made her sulky just now.

With her lips curving in a smile, Anita stayed until the wily auctioneer, getting somewhere near the truth, had run the price up to fifty dollars, doing it so swiftly, too, that the rest of the crowd had very little interest in it.

The bag and trunk became the property of Miss Letherby with a suddenness that surprised the watchers unsuspected in the background. Peters once more made that gesture of pulling at his beard, and Miss Ferndale moved away quietly. It did not surprise her that the man followed, and stood with her, waiting for the elevator; even though in the six months since he had become an unacknowledged member of Araminta's staff, he had never talked with Miss Ferndale face to face.

But there had been something in the small incident to draw them together. Araminta had done something so senseless, so supremely foolish. These employees of hers could scarcely refrain from comment.

However, Miss Ferndale, always a trifle curious about this secret body-guard of Araminta's, found Peters a silent companion. He accompanied her to the stage, walking over to Fifth Avenue from the Primalto, and scarcely speaking as they crossed the park, except to tell the secretary about the conversation which had led to the desire Araminta had just gratified, to attend the auction. But as they waited for the bus he asked a question, looking down into her face with eyes that Anita found could be very searching.

"What do you think of Willard Fane?"

"I only saw him to-day for the first time; I don't think—I like him."

"He's a damned crook!" said Peters between his teeth.

CHAPTER V.

DIANA—AND HER WEAPON.

"MR. CORTLAND is wanted on the telephone, madam."

"That must be my sister," said David, excusing himself. A sigh of relief went

round the little group in Araminta's drawing-room. Even the most informal of dinner parties is not improved by unpunctuality on the part of one of the guests, and for fifteen minutes now every one had been waiting for Robinetta Cortland to appear.

Even the arrival of the cocktails had not saved the situation, for Tony had still remained gloomy, and David had been distressed at his sister's absence, begging his hostess not to wait dinner.

"I can't think what has come to Robin," he had said. "She promised to meet me here; she is the most punctual person, too; uncomfortably so, almost."

"Aren't you afraid something has happened to her?" Tony had roused himself from gloom to ask. He had fallen a ready prey to Robin's charm during his call upon her that afternoon, and had come into Araminta's house absurdly early, with an eager expression in his eyes that Miss Letherby had at once noticed. She laughed at him openly now.

"Tony, as if a modern girl couldn't take care of herself."

"Robinetta can," said David with a laugh. "Out West she had to, you know; she was all alone."

"Of course you were in—" The slight pause was evidently an invitation for information. David took advantage of the opportunity it gave him to address his hostess directly by answering as he crossed the room to a seat at her side.

"In Europe."

"And your sister was alone out West?" The accent was almost anxiously concerned. David thought it another mark of tenderness in this adorable woman that she should be concerned about the lonesome life of a scarcely remembered girl. "Of course she was at school most of the time," he smiled.

"Still," said Tony, interrupting pessimistically on the main issue, "New York is New York, you know; it's a bit different from the West. I wouldn't let a sister of mine go around alone in this city."

"Don't say that to Robinetta."

"Is your sister so militant?" asked Araminta. Her eyes were soft as velvet tonight, David thought, as he answered. Her evening gown was simple; in his masculine

innocence he thought that an ingenue might have worn it, not recognizing the art of the swirling golden draperies and the big sash of dull gray velvet caught with an opal pin.

The opal earrings she wore gleamed rosy and blue and gray as they caught the color of cheeks and eyes and girdle, David thought. But not even the gleam of deepest blue in any jewel could match the depth of Araminta's eyes.

His voice breathed his admiration, and Araminta half smiled. She had seen that expression too often in men's eyes not to know its meaning.

In a corner Anita watched the little scene without criticism. She had sometimes wondered why it was that men preferred beauty to brains; but it seemed to be an irrefutable fact.

The announcement of the phone-call came as a relief. Tony grinned, catching Araminta's eye. As David returned all looked at him eagerly. Tony, because he could scarcely wait to hear news of his new divinity; Anita because, having missed her luncheon, she was desperately hungry; Araminta, out of real curiosity to see this young girl whom her brother adored, and Tony—an artist, after all—considered lovely enough to admire. She might be stupid, but Araminta had a very certain belief in Tony's artistic sense.

"It was Robin; she telephoned to say that she had a breakdown with the car and could not possibly get here for twenty minutes if she stayed to dress. I took the liberty of telling her to come as she is. I hope you don't mind, Miss Letherby?"

"I'm delighted," said Araminta, with a sincerity that brought a little cynical smile to her secretary's lips.

Almost as she spoke the butler opened the door and announced: "Miss Cortland."

A slender girl entered swiftly, her eyes searching for her hostess. She seemed to be dazzled a little by the brilliant lights of the room—Araminta insisted upon brightness always; she had no need of a subdued light—and paused on the threshold.

David took her hand, presenting her to Miss Letherby. "Why Robin," said he, "you came on the wings of the wind; I had only just come back from the phone."

Robinetta, her hand still in Araminta's soft, cordial clasp, laughed softly. "I telephoned from next door," she explained; "I made a mistake in the house. They were having a dinner-party, and I caught sight of the women trailing out to the dining-room. It made me remember that I was not dressed, so I asked the man if I might telephone. I must ask your pardon for coming like this," she added directly to her hostess.

Even Araminta laughed, there was something so naïve in getting as far as "next door," and then remembering her lack of suitable clothing. Tony grinned his wide, infectious grin.

"You're giving your brother away like everything, Miss Cortland," he announced. "He made a pretty apology for himself, permitting you to come this way."

It was a merry party by the time dinner was announced. "We haven't enough men to go round," said Miss Letherby. "I'm afraid you're left, Anita." She smilingly took David's arm. Tony, so happy that he was now grinning foolishly, took Robinetta on his right and Anita at the left. Somehow, with the coming of this slender, bright-eyed girl in street garb, an air of gaiety had invaded the party.

"I'm hungry enough to—" Robin paused suddenly as they crossed the hall, catching sight of herself in the mirror that ran from floor to ceiling in one corner. "Why, I haven't taken off my coat," she said, the color rising in her cheeks; "and—oh, I am afraid Miss Letherby will think me too informal altogether," she confided to Anita across Tony's broad chest. "I only have riding clothes underneath this."

She touched the coat of covert cloth that buttoned smartly to her throat.

"No, indeed," said Miss Ferndale kindly. "Miss Letherby is too happy to have you here. Let us drop the coat here in the hall. Simmons!"

A young footman came forward and took the coat. Robin stood revealed in a fawn-colored habit that spoke eloquently of the West. The coat came down to her knees, and the smartly cut breeches fastened below it around the slender, rounded knees. Riding boots that were ridiculously small cov-

ered the dainty feet and ankles, and little golden spurs clinked as she moved.

It was not an Eastern riding outfit, but it was an Eastern tailor's dream of what a Western habit should be, Anita's trained eyes saw. And it was perfect; no need for Robin to apologize for her apparel. She seemed, in her slim, feminine boyishness, to have been poured into the clothes she wore, and as she moved toward the dining-room her grace struck Miss Ferndale dumb.

How many New York girls could have appeared in such attire without being conscious of it, she wondered. She was a young Diana, without Diana's sternness.

At the door to the dining-room, however, she paused again. "Oh, please, when I have done everything else stupid, I've one more to add to my list. I've left something—something really important, in the pocket of my coat. If the footman feels it he will be scared; may I—"

"Let me get it for you," said Tony eagerly.

"Thanks; in the right-hand pocket; you won't miss it." She waved Anita on into the dining-room with an airy gesture, and waited for Tony with thinly veiled amusement. Then her sight was caught and held by something that was happening in the back hall. She could see it all in the mirror.

A grip—old and wrinkled and worn—was being taken up the back stairs on the top of a trunk, a little hand-made trunk with something familiar about it. The man holding the back end stopped a moment to adjust his hold and, turning slightly, displayed the initials painted in primitive fashion on the end:

S. T. R.

Robin read. Impulsively she ran forward and spoke to the servants in an authoritative tone.

"Whose trunk is that?" she said imperiously.

One of the men laughed. "It don't belong to no one, miss; it's a new buy of Miss Letherby's, that's all; she've a fancy for old junk sometimes."

He hoisted the trunk again, displaying the three letters to her closer, sight as he did so. Robinetta nodded and turned away,

all the gaiety gone from her eyes, though she forced her lips into a smile as she saw Tony Fane standing, waiting. In his hand was a small automatic pistol. With a murmured word of thanks Robinetta took it from him and slipped it into her pocket.

"It's loaded!" said Tony, as if he could not help the comment.

Robinetta's clear eyes met his. Was it fancy, or did he see a troubled mist back of their seriousness? He could not be sure. But all through dinner her reply echoed in his consciousness, giving a thrill of added adventure to the adventure of falling in love with another beautiful girl.

"It has to be!" she said.

CHAPTER VI.

ROBIN THE RECKLESS.

DAVID CORTLAND had an appointment that took him away from Araminta's side shortly after nine o'clock. Tony had promised him to see Robinetta home, but the girl turned to him, laughing.

"I can drop *you* anywhere you wish, Mr. Fane; I have the car, and shall be glad to, but I'm quite capable of going home alone."

"My dear!" said Miss Letherby, her fine brows raised in amazement, "you couldn't drive yourself, *alone at night in New York*."

"But of course—" said Robinetta composedly.

Araminta shuddered. "You might be sandbagged; murdered; anything," she exclaimed. "I should be scared to death." She gave an unmistakable shudder.

Tony was looking at Robinetta—he had done little else the whole evening—and he saw an expression of amazed inquiry come into Robin's face. "But I thought—David told me you were a Western girl," she exclaimed. "After the prairies, what is there to be afraid of in the city? An old man I used to know told me there was nothing in the world big enough to be afraid of, and he guessed there was nothing outside of it, either. He was a very wise old man; he'd seen a lot of life; he'd been a convict."

"Good gracious, how did you ever meet him?" Miss Ferndale said.

Robinetta considered. "I think it was

at a chicken supper at the church," she said, and smiled at the laughter following the announcement. "He was a very good old man, too, and quite religious. Those things don't always go together, of course, but they did with old Scart."

Her eyes were upon Araminta as she said the name, and the most beautiful woman in New York raised a white hand and carefully covered a yawn. "My dear," she said, "you really mustn't talk about persons of that kind in the city. People won't understand."

"Oh, as to that," Robinetta chuckled, "I think they would. You see, Scart was very rich. He could have come into New York any day and broken up a few millionaires. He made all his money after he left Sing Sing. People here would have said that he was quaint, *after* they knew how much money he had."

She faced Araminta roguishly, laughing at her own cynicism.

"I was at school in the East, Miss Letherby; I understand more than you think."

"I've forgotten where you were educated," said Araminta. There was a gleam of malice in her eyes. Like most beauties, she did not care to see a younger and less lovely woman win admiration that she had enjoyed. Robinetta was interesting to her because she was David's sister; but now that David had gone, she did not relish seeing Tony Fane worshiping at her feet.

It had been a nice game to flirt with him; it was always worth while, because it made the other women so wild. Tony was the wealthiest and most attractive bachelor in town.

She was not without forethought when she asked this question. Tony was democratic, but he could make distinctions. He must know that this girl was quite impossible, in his heart of hearts. To hear that she had been educated in a little two-by-four school would cure him of his infatuation for her absurd naturalness.

"Did David tell you?" asked Robinetta, surprised. "I was at Miss Selden's, of course."

Anita Ferndale made a sudden coughing sound and buried her face in her handker-

chief. Araminta had been unable to conceal her surprise, and the situation was amusing. Miss Selden's Seminary was the most exclusive school in New York. Araminta herself had never graced its doors. Probably Miss Selden would not have considered her application, despite her beauty and wealth. So many things had to be taken into consideration before one was admitted to that educational holy of holies.

She sat up, eying Robinetta with a new respect. However simple and outspoken this girl seemed, she must be all right, since she had been a pupil at Miss Selden's.

"And you were all alone there for years," she said, "while your brother was in Europe?"

Conflicting emotions showed in Miss Cortland's vivid little face. She dropped the sprightliness that she had shown since David's departure and allowed her real mood to emerge.

"Yes," she said, "if you can ever be alone in a girl's school. You see, I had lost my father, and David had gone off to seek vengeance. It was terrible at first."

Miss Ferndale drew her chair a little nearer. Tony wished she wouldn't; somehow this seemed to him a time that they three—Robin, Araminta, in her unexpectedly sympathetic mood, and himself—might have had without the addition of the secretary. He saw tears in Robinetta's eyes, held back steadily by force of will.

"You remember, Tony"—she called him by the name David always used without appearing to notice that she was doing it—"how hard David took father's death. He—Miss Letherby, he was commissioner here, head of the best and most efficient police force New York ever had, they say; he was ousted from office and killed—killed by what they said about him.

"Some one was responsible for his disgrace in the eyes of the world, and David went away, vowing to find out and punish him, whoever it was. It couldn't have been more than one or two men at the most; David suspected one. He left me in boarding-school; he thought I was too young to know much about it, but—at night I used to think and think. You see, David didn't send me many letters."

She lifted her eyes, still tear-filled, with a pathetic appeal the more pathetic in that it was unconscious—for understanding.

"Of course I was very little," she said, "but I vowed vengeance, too. I used to spend all my holidays out at Shepherd, in Idaho, roaming over the hills and learning things from all kinds of people. A Mexican greaser taught me how to use a stiletto; a few of our own cowboys taught me how to rope and throw a lariat. I can shoot like a man, through my pocket. If ever I meet the hypocrite and thief who broke papa's heart, I know what to do to him."

"I think you're wonderful," said Tony.

"Isn't she." Araminta's white hand caught and held the little cold one that had clenched with the vigor of its owner's speech. "But now, little girl, you mustn't spend your time thinking thoughts like these. You're due for a happy time, laughter and gaiety; love, perhaps; all the things we women crave. I am stupid; I can't express my thoughts very well, but I know that you can gain more by being womanly and sweet and gentle than by using—a gun. Can't she, Anita?"

"I don't, exactly, know," Miss Ferndale said. "I'd rather shoot my enemy than scheme and cajole to catch him."

"But I was forgetting about the enemy; Miss Cortland must do the same if she can." Araminta's eyes sought Tony's. "So young and lovely, and all this bottled up inside the pretty head."

"By Jove! you know, I think Miss Letherby's right," said Tony Fane. He looked deep into the gray eyes that had recently been full of tears. They were hopeless with grief for a flash, then blazing with fire into his. And suddenly this girl of many moods, Western, Eastern, whatever she called herself, but different—different a thousand times from any girl he had ever met, smiled at him softly.

"You advise me to forget—this?" she said.

There on her palm lay that little automatic. Araminta drew a long breath. Anita Ferndale uttered a sharp exclamation, and bent over, looking at it. "Loaded?" she asked.

"Loaded? Always!" Robinetta affirmed.

Her slender, brown hand closed over it, and, rising with a little swaggering effect of throwing off a weight, she dropped the revolver in her pocket again and laughed gaily.

"It's getting awfully late," she said, "for a girl who was up at six o'clock, and I've talked more than I ever do. Thank you so much, Miss Letherby, for letting me, and for—everything. Now, if Mr. Fane is going to see me home—" she flashed a smile at him.

But out in the street she seemed a different person; she was grave, absorbed. It was dark, and across in the park the shadows were deeply purple, except where the lamps threw long arms of light into the depths. Behind them the big house that Miss Letherby's uncle had left her was darkened suddenly.

Tony had the feeling of being all alone in the world with Robin Cortland. The roar of New York came to them muffled, subdued.

"I wish," said Tony quietly, "that you were going to ride with me in the blue devil."

The girl looked at him steadily. "Perhaps I am," she said, in a voice that trembled a little. "Tony, I have to trust you; there is no one else; I left too little time to change my plans. While we were in there some one tampered with this car. I can't get her to start. Is there any way that I can get to the Golden Trust Company, quietly and without a fuss by eleven? Be careful; speak quietly; we may be watched from the house; the lights are out; see."

Tony's nerves steadied themselves. He was as cool as this girl from the West as he answered:

"Yes, of course; but are you sure about your car; isn't there something I can do? I'm a pretty fair mechanic."

"No; I'm sure. I half suspected it, at the last. But we've got to see that they know we don't use it. Will you go back to Miss Letherby's and have one of the men come and watch the car until we can send for it? Miss Letherby hasn't a garage on the place. And will you say, please that you are taking me right back to the hotel through the park. It's a glorious night

for a walk; that ought to be sufficient reason."

"I think you'd better come with me; I can lie if I have to, but I'm afraid of slipping up on this. I'm with you heart and soul, but I haven't much of a brain-piece, don't you know; I'm better at action. It is all a bit bewildering, Miss Robin, but you can trust me—to the death."

"All right," said the girl. She walked beside him to the great front door, her slender figure erect and graceful, and laughed and chatted with him for the moment before the door swung back at their ring. A surprised-looking man-servant opened the door.

"It's Mr. Fane, Roberts," Tony said. "I want one of you men to go out there and keep an eye on Miss Cortland's car. Something is wrong with it again; she had trouble earlier in the day. It isn't necessary to disturb Miss Letherby. We are going to walk back to the hotel through the park, and I will send some one to tow it into the garage." He turned to Robinetta. "How long will it take you to walk?" he asked.

She laughed. "It's right across from the park, isn't it? About ten minutes, then; really, it isn't necessary for any one to watch the car, it has been out in the street all evening."

"But it's late now," said Tony; "ten thirty, anyhow. You never know what crooks may come by. Perhaps some mechanical genius could make that car run, after all; far enough to steal it, anyhow."

Laughing, they nodded at the man who followed them down to the car, and made off at a rapid pace along the street. As they turned the corner Robin said quietly: "Splendid; now, is there any chance of a taxi?"

"We might have to wait," said Tony, "they don't run much here so far up the avenue. I thought I could get a friend of mine to lend me his runabout; it won't take a minute; he lives right here."

"I'll wait," said Robin briefly. It seemed the only thing to do. Time was of moment; Robin could not accompany him to young Pedley's home at this hour of the night while he asked for the loan of a motor-car.

It was not until Tony had rung the bell

that he remembered that the man he was going to see must have received one of the letters from the Scarlet Rider. This is, if David's surmise had been true. He dismissed the remembrance hurriedly, wondering what had brought it to his mind. Ah! Robin had spoken of the Golden Trust Building. Suddenly a light flashed on his consciousness. Eleven o'clock—Golden Trust—this must have something to do with the letter.

"Tom, old man," he said breathlessly, announcing himself to his astonished friend the moment after the door opened, "had a breakdown; important appointment, and all that. Can I borrow your runabout?"

"Surest thing you know," said Tom Pedley; "I'll send James out to the garage now. Have a cigar, won't you?"

"Nothing, thanks," Tony called over his shoulder, following the amazed man-servant along the hall to the back entrance, and nearly falling over him in his haste. "See you in the morning, old top; so long."

Robin climbed into her seat beside him without a word. For a moment Tony allowed himself the bliss of tooling the car along the broad, perfectly kept stretch of avenue with this wonderful girl at his side. Then he bent toward her, speaking quietly.

"Robin, you said something about trusting me. Do you want to talk?"

"I must," the girl said in a low, distressed voice. "But first, I want to ask you a question. I was all strung up, I may have imagined it, but back there, when I was talking, did you or did you not see Araminta look frightened?"

"Yes," he said quietly, "when you showed her that automatic. And once before, I think, when you were talking about that old convict. I thought it was because she—well—was annoyed at hearing a man of that kind mentioned in her home. Araminta always was a bit of a snob, you know; but thinking it over I'm pretty sure it was fright, not disgust."

Robin drew a long breath of relief. "That makes it certain; thanks."

"I know I'm butting in." Tony waited a minute, trying to focus his ideas. "But the fact is, there's a chance of your making a mistake. I see, of course, that for some

reason you are suspecting Araminta Letherby of something—something that you think is serious, anyhow. Still, you only met her to-night, didn't you, and I've known her a long time. Araminta is all kinds of a fraud in her affectation of refinement and delicacy, but she's really only a beautiful doll, you know; she couldn't plot and scheme if she tried. Honest, I think you've gone off on the wrong track, there."

"It's like you to tell me; just what you would have done when we were playing together out at Shepherd, all of us, but, Tony, I'm making no mistake. I met Miss Letherby for the first time to-night, actually, yes, but I've known about her for a long time. Araminta Letherby isn't one bit stupid; she's a very clever and dangerous person. Think, how could she grow stupid all at once? Wasn't she awfully shrewd and clever when she was Minta Crane, that little ragged girl out West?"

"You can't remember her, though; you were just a baby."

"You all thought so; it used to make me wild. But I was seven; I hated and feared Minta. I had reason; oh, won't you believe at least that I have reason now for what I am saying?" Her voice broke in a little, pathetic appeal.

"I'd believe you if you told me the moon was made of cheese," the young man answered, without intending to be ridiculous.

But quickly Robinetta's clear laugh rang out. "Thank you," she chuckled, "excuse me, but really, you're awfully funny."

"I'm glad you find me so," said Tony stiffly.

He looked straight ahead, unable to hide his annoyance. He had put his heart into his words, and told himself grimly that it was his own fault for using the first that came to hand. But in the midst of a serious conversation with a young lady to whom you had vowed fealty in your heart—to have her laugh at your expression of it—Tony was not used to being laughed at by women.

He set his eyes steadily on the hotel lights, now drawing very near. When Robin glanced up at his face she saw that his profile was cold and set. Timidly, she touched his arm.

"Mr. Fane, you're going to help me?"

"Certainly," said Tony, melting inwardly, although his voice was crisply business-like.

"Then, please listen. It is twenty minutes to eleven now. I must go into the hotel and up to my rooms. Araminta will telephone, I am sure, to make certain that I am there. You go to the garage and send a man back for my car, then meet me at the side entrance in ten minutes. Whatever happens, I must be at the Golden Trust at eleven. That will leave time, won't it?"

"Plenty; we ought to make it in five."

"Then good-by, Mr. Fane, and thank you." The girl held out her hand as she stepped from the car almost before it drew up at the hotel entrance, and ran lightly up the steps and into the lobby. It did not take her an instant to reach the elevators, and her smile at the starter made him send her up rapidly in an empty car. She burst into her bedroom just as the telephone rang.

"Answer it, Ellen," she said to her maid. "I'll talk to any one."

In another moment she took the receiver the woman laid down.

"Yes, Miss Letherby," she said, "just got in. I'm certainly sorry we have disturbed you; Mr. Fane told the man not to tell you anything about it. No, I couldn't say; he went to the hotel garage to send a man back for the car. No, I don't care, it's only a hired one, anyway. I had to have something to drive; guess I'll buy myself one to-morrow. Thank you so much for calling; good night."

Robin replaced the receiver gently and then faced her maid like a whirlwind. "Ellen, Miss Letherby will call again, I fancy, in a few minutes. I'm going out. But she mustn't know that. Pretend I'm in the bathtub, and after a minute I'll come to the telephone—in your person, of course—and explain that. Giggle and laugh into the phone just as I do sometimes. Say you're going to take a beauty sleep and have a massage; be sure and make it plain that you are undressed and going to stay right here. I think you can put that over, can't you?"

The woman eyed her soberly. "I think so, Miss Robin, but I hope you aren't running into any danger, miss?"

"No, I don't think so, Ellen, you dear old thing. It is to help—some one in desperate trouble; anyway, against that, danger doesn't count. But if—if I don't come back in an hour or two at the most, tell Mr. David that the key to all is a trunk with 'S. T. R.' on it. He can trace that up all right, and they won't really harm me, I'm sure of that."

Like a laughing shadow she was gone. Ellen heard the descending elevator carrying her away, and sighed. Then she hurried to the window, and, raising the shade, looked out. Only the darkness of the park was visible, with here and there a gleaming light of an automobile flew through the gloom.

Raising the window, she listened to the roar of the city, frowningly. Who knew what dangers adventurous, dare-devil Robinetta Cortland was about to face in this strange place?

It was darker in the street near the ladies' entrance. Tony did not see Robin until she stood close beside him. She settled down in her seat, nodding at him to proceed. Out of the dinginess of Sixth Avenue they sped into the splendor of Fifth. The traffic was small, for the theaters had not yet disgorged their crowds. Robin nestled back in her seat with a sigh of content.

"If it must be a city," she said, "then let me see Fifth Avenue." And, replying to Tony's laugh: "Mr. Fane, will you wait for me round the corner from the Golden Trust? I must walk alone past the clock, there, at exactly eleven. I'm afraid—if we were together—we might frighten off that poor Scarlet Rider."

"So it was—that?" Tony said.

She nodded. "Yes; why you and David should have jumped to the conclusion that it was eleven in the morning, I cannot think. For a man harried by the police, and just out of prison, think what a relief it must be to do anything at night, in the dark. But he never thought, naturally, how he was courting disaster by sending out all those letters at once, with a whole day intervening. Oh"—a sharp edge of anxiety

was on her voice—"how I hope we put them off, back there, that Araminta thinks I am in the hotel."

"You don't mean—" said Tony incredulously.

Robin shivered. "But I do; that and a great deal more. David doesn't dream, he hasn't an idea except her beauty. I saw that to-night. And when I got to the house I knew no more than you do, except that I had made up my mind to be at the Golden Trust at eleven. But before dinner, something happened—I knew then that there was a plot to prevent the poor fellow from getting away. I don't pretend to know what it is—but anything that Araminta Letherby has her hand in is always—interesting." She gave a faint smile.

"David ought to be here," said Tony uncomfortably, "he will blame me, if you get into danger."

"He's off on a still hunt, himself, something to do with that letter, I'm sure. We may find him there before us. You see, he's half in love with Miss Letherby, and he wouldn't have left her house early, otherwise. But as for blaming you—that was what you meant, wasn't it?—I am perfectly responsible for myself, and he certainly knows it.

"Tony, let's draw up over there, close to that hotel. Then if I find that any one is watching us, and I'm pretty sure they will be watching the clock at the Golden Trust, I can help that poor fellow escape into the hotel, perhaps."

Silently, Tony did as she asked. He gave one look at the slender, beautiful little figure standing on the sidewalk, and inwardly he was consumed by fear.

"Miss Cortland," he begged, "let me go instead of you? I have the right; that poor chap wrote to me, I—"

Robin smiled into his eyes with her steady gray ones.

"But you see," she explained, "he knows me; that makes a difference."

And swiftly, she turned the corner in the direction of the Golden Trust.

Her destination was only a few doors away, but on the other side of the street. An automobile going at top speed dashed

over the crossing, delaying her for a second. Robin, with her heart beating loudly, saw a tall figure with a queer, loping gait pass toward the Golden Trust on the other side of the street, and take up his stand beneath the clock. In the distance she heard chimes; somewhere a church clock was striking the hour.

She walked quietly up to the man who waited, and spoke softly:

"Scarlett, I am Robinetta Cortland, from Shepherd. We had your letter, my brother and I; please come home with me."

Something much like a sob answered her. The man whom she addressed caught her hand and wrung it until she could have screamed with the pain. She looked up into the long, lean, handsome face she remembered, laughing.

"Scarlett, aren't you ashamed of yourself," she said, "hiding away from your old friends like this? Why, we were all so anxious to help you, and you had to sign a name like that! What did you mean by using the name of Scarlet Rider, instead of Scarlett T. Rider, I should like to know?"

They were walking, as she talked, toward the corner where Tony waited out of sight. No one seemed to be watching, but she was taking no chances. Scarlett replied to her eagerly:

"Why, Miss Cortland, I knewed it 'ud take in nobody that knowed me; not you folkses, nor Mr. Fane; while if the police got a hand on it, see"—he looked at her, secure of understanding.

"But you were wrong, Scarlett; I was the only one who got 'onto' it. Mr. Fane and my brother knew nothing of whom it could be. Perhaps that's because they haven't been back home for a long time, either of them. I've kept in touch more. Both the boys looked for you this morning, you know."

"Gee! Is that the truth now?" Scarlett stood still and looked back at the clock. "I never gave a thought to that. Didn't I say eleven o'clock *at night* in my letter, Miss Cortland? I would no more 'a' dared to come out in the daytime, not on a thing like that, than nothin'. And, believe me, I was some frustrated when I sawed that I

were late to-night. Gosh! thinks I, none of the folkses will 'a' waited. I don't know how it happened, neither, fur my watch said one minute of eleven when I crossed the street."

"What do you mean?" said Robin sharply. "You were on time all right, Scarlett." She lifted her arm, and beneath the light of a street lamp bent to see the dial of her wrist-watch. "It is only two minutes past the hour now, and you promised to

wait until five minutes past, you remember that?"

"Sure; but that clock back there said seven minutes after."

There are impressions that are more vivid than any words. They crowd on the consciousness faster than explanations. Robin needed no further words. She tugged at Scarlett's arm. "Just a minute," she said, "let's go back and make sure. It may be important."

(To be continued NEXT WEEK.)

Stronger Than Iron

by William Merriam Rouse



"JEANNE! My Jeanne! They are trying to kill you!" Etienne Dubois held out trembling hands to the girl—hands that trembled as his whole body trembled beneath its earth-stained shirt and woolen trousers of a quarry workman. "Better to marry any man rather than Jacques Bolduc, who is as hard as a steel drill and as pitiless!"

The lips of Jeanne Patry moved, but he could not hear the ghosts of words that came. Looking into her widened eyes he knew that a fear as great as his own possessed her; he read it there in the gray depths out of which had welled so many smiles for him, so many smiles that had spoken love even before the words had been said by her lips.

They stood together in the shelter of some trees on the plateau that overlooks the little village of Visitation. Below them the blue and silver St. Lawrence went out to sea and above, in the distance, the misty Lau-

rentians were banked against the sky. A few stolen, dangerous moments at the end of his day's work was all that Dubois had of Jeanne, now that her family looked coldly upon him; and this meeting had brought the news that a marriage was planned between her and the quarry boss, Jacques Bolduc.

She took the shaking hands held out to her, swayed toward him a moment, and then held herself erect. Something of determination struggled with the fear that had nearly mastered her.

"I will do all that I have strength to do," she said, "but they bear me down—they are all against me. He has money, he will own a quarry, they say, and—"

"*Mon Dieu!*" interrupted Etienne. "They count love nothing! Because I am a workman they commit this sacrilege!"

Jeanne broke away from the grasp of his tight fingers and covered her face. He tried to take her in his arms but she held him off gently, with a palm against his breast.

"I must not, my Etienne! If I am forced to this marriage I must go to it as I would go to you! But pray, and I will pray!"

"You will not be!" he cried, with a sudden stiffness in his slender but well muscled body. "I'll take you away—we'll elope!"

A swift brightness swept into her face as she lifted it; to be half obliterated immediately by doubt. After all she was hardly yet a woman, thought Dubois. Could he raise her to his fierce rebellion? To his defiance of the customs of their people and the opinion of the parish?

"Would it be right, Etienne?"

"More right than for you to marry without love!"

"*Eh bien!*" Her eyes searched the delicate clouds of the horizon as though for wisdom. "I will ask *le bon Dieu* about that and we will talk about it to-morrow."

She touched his hand with a movement light as air and walked swiftly away, toward the road that went twisting down to the village. He watched until her black head disappeared over the edge of the cliff.

But there was no to-morrow for Etienne Dubois—no to-morrow for his hope or his happiness. The next evening at sunset Jeanne was not there, nor any evening after that for a week. She was not seen in the streets of the village and none of the frantic, although discreet, efforts that he made to learn something of her availed. Only an indefinable gleam in the eyes of Jacques Bolduc gave any message to Dubois—and that he could not read.

Mlle Jeanne Patry was seen again by the people of Visitation at the end of the week when she rode to the church to be married to Bolduc. The hard, unalterable fact that she came out of that sacred place bound to Jacques Bolduc until death, struck Etienne as simply and as horribly as though one of the rocks that he handled every day had risen up of its own volition and crushed him. He noted the absence of the boss at the quarry, heard rumors, and was in time to see her bent head as she stepped into a carriage—Mme. Bolduc.

Without coat or hat or so much as a piece of cold pork in his pocket Dubois set out for the shelter of the mountains, driven by an

instinct that made him hide the utter misery of his grief even from his own family. He went on that night until he fell—to get up again and go on, when a sudden madness of rage against fate gave him the strength. Through the night and the day following he walked and fell, prayed and cursed, and shook his fists at the world.

It was late the third day when he entered his own house. But when he did go back his head was held erect, his gaze met the questioning glances of his people without faltering, and the only weakness that was in him was that of the body. He had put the thought of Jeanne far away; he kept it within his mental vision still, but it was like a gleaming white shrine, seen across interminable fields.

So he moved through life for weeks; grave and self-possessed and immeasurably older than the boy who had gone into the mountains. Each day he met a flash of triumph in the face of Jacques Bolduc; and each day he looked calmly on that broad, square-jawed countenance with indifference.

He had gone into the mountains hating Bolduc—now he pitied him. The foreman was now good natured enough, but he drove—drove the men to a greater production of the quarried stone of Visitation and thus drove on toward the success which he now boasted would be his. He meant to become an owner within a year.

Not until well toward the end of that summer did Etienne again meet Jeanne face to face. It happened without warning, when he turned a corner on his way home from work. He was very tired; and this was the great test of his power over himself, the test that he had been dreading and trying to prepare for.

Her eyes flashed up from the boards of the narrow sidewalk and met his squarely. For a second they looked at each other, within an arm's length, and read what had been written in eye and face. Then they went on, without speaking, and Dubois found himself walking very straight. Now, indeed, was he sure that he was master of himself.

He was certain of this notwithstanding what he had seen in the eyes of Jeanne Bolduc. Deeper than any pain or surprise that

she might have felt at the sight of him was the impress of horror—such a look as one might wear after having touched something unclean.

Etienne Dubois knew what that look of horror meant; he had read the too-full lips and the narrow eyes of Buldoc when first they met. He knew. And as his imagination took hold of his knowledge and turned it over and showed him the infinite misery of the thing he knew, his soul again went down into the deep places.

This time he was obsessed with the desire to kill. He pictured his fingers sinking into the throat of the foreman—pictured his boots beating against the hated face.

But even as those days and nights in the mountains had brought him back to his normal life—brought him back and given him strength to meet Jeanne face to face once more—so now the thing that had been done to him asserted itself. When dawn came, haggard and gray as the look with which he met it, he was able to put the tragedy outside of himself. He could be calm. He could swing the hammer and hold a drill and gaze into the eyes of Bolduc without breaking.

It was something almost like peace that filled him with self-confidence as he went to work that day; something akin to peace and victory that had given him a new semblance to the eye of the beholder—as though a kindly hand had wiped away from his face the ravages of his passions and remolded it with a gentle touch. It was like this that he met Bolduc, just after the whistle blew.

Triumph had filtered away from the foreman. Etienne did not know whether this had happened overnight or whether he himself had just that day been given eyes to see. However that might be, he was as sure of the lack of triumph as he was of the hatred that seemed to come like a hot, sickening wave from Bolduc.

Before that day was ended the intuition of Dubois was proven sound. He had come out from behind an angle of rock after a blast when hobnails grated beside him and he turned to find Jacques Bolduc so close to him that their arms almost touched.

“I’m going to give her a grave to think about instead of a man!”

The words were spoken in a tone so low that they barely carried to the ear of Dubois, but in them was all the ferocity of which the tremendous will of the boss was capable. Etienne halted and looked into his enemy’s eyes almost with indifference, and yet with readiness to protect himself. He looked steadily until Bolduc decided to go on.

Now, Dubois knew definitely that he had to guard his life every hour of every day, for it was inevitable that sooner or later some accident of the work they did would give the boss a chance to bring about his death with the appearance of innocence. He had speculated as to whether Bolduc might develop such a hatred for him and he was glad of the warning.

But the cause? How did Jacques know she was thinking of him? Or was it imagination? He had no way of telling.

Nor were they to be answered for a long time, to Dubois. After the threat weeks and months passed uneventfully for him and spring came again to Visitation. The village, with the intimacy of a French-Canadian hamlet, had settled to the conviction that Jeanne Bolduc was unhappy, that her husband was getting richer every day, and that Etienne Dubois was a fine fellow.

Dubois went to work again in the quarry as soon as the melting of the snow permitted it to open, but he had begun to wonder whether it would not be well to change his occupation. The malignity of the now all-powerful Bolduc cut him off from hope of rising above the grade of workmen and the constant strain of guarding himself had begun to tell. But before the slow moving life of the country would permit him to put this thought into action the consummation of Bolduc’s hatred came.

Seven charges had been fired almost together. The whole great pit of the quarry, which was shaped as though a giant’s porridge spoon had scraped a hole in the earth’s surface, was filled with smoke and the clatter of still bounding fragments as the men came out from their hiding places. As usual the foreman was in the lead of the scattered groups and this time it happened that Etienne was within a few feet of him.

The force of the explosion had ripped off

a layer from half the face of the cliff into which they were boring and it had heaped up the débris in a wilderness of strange shapes. One mass of broken rock rose up like a slovenly built wall; tiny slivers and pieces as big as a man's trunk had gone into the making and it towered unsteadily fully twenty feet high. Even as the smoke began to clear it wavered and settled a little, with a hint of complete collapse. Instinctively the men halted, waiting for the crash.

The crash did not come. Jacques Bolduc turned his head slowly and his eyes fell upon Etienne—they went to the pile of jagged rocks again and back to the man he hated. Suddenly he leaped to where a couple of crowbars leaned against a neighboring block of stone and seized one in each hand.

"Here, Dubois!" he cried, holding out a bar. "Help me tip that pile over! You others stand clear!"

Mechanically Etienne took the bar and went forward with the boss, but even as he did so he realized that he had read purpose in the glance of Bolduc. Should he turn back? Not that—the others would call him a coward. His fingers took a tighter hold upon the iron. He would see it through—Jacques could not harm him now that he was forewarned.

"Loosen that big chunk in the middle—at the bottom!" ordered Bolduc. "That's the keystone. I'll work at the ends so that it'll all go together!"

Dubois scrambled to the big stone to which the foreman had pointed and labored to get the point of his bar under one corner of it. He heard shouts of warning from the other men and he knew that they realized his apparent danger; but he knew also that the rock upon which he was spending his strength uselessly would have little or nothing to do with the fall of the mass above it. He had not worked with stone all his life without profiting in knowledge of its ways and he knew, as well as Bolduc knew, that this particular fantastic pile would collapse under leverage from the rear. The weight leaned forward, and the place in which Etienne Dubois stood would be a place of death.

Nevertheless Dubois remained where he

was for the moment, grunting and making a great pretense of labor. He heard the clink of Bolduc's bar at one end of the pile. Then the sound ceased and at length from the opposite side, and above his head, came a shout. "Are you ready, Dubois? What's the matter with you?"

"Another minute!" he replied to the invisible voice. "One minute more and I'll be ready to get out of the way."

With the words he dropped his bar and leaped for his life, going cat-footed from rock to rock in spite of thick shoes and a strong desire to laugh. He reasoned thus: Bolduc was ready to spring his trap and had wanted to make sure that he was still in front of the pile. An ominous grating and the sound of falling fragments confirmed his belief—he knew as certainly as though he had looked behind that the rocks were teething forward.

Only at the corner where Bolduc had first pretended to work did Etienne stop. There he swung around, breathless, just as a cry that was half shout, half groan, came from the watchers. He saw tons of rock in a slow movement that gained velocity each fraction of a second—saw that Jacques Bolduc had fallen and was being carried forward with one leg twisted down into the grinding wave of stone which would break in a moment with a shower of dust and splinters.

Etienne gathered himself, hesitated, and sprang straight up the side of the tottering prison of Bolduc. He had no hope either for himself or the foreman until he had actually laid hold upon the shirt of the latter—and then, just as he began to think that the long delayed crash would delay a little longer, it came. He flung himself backward as they fell, partially freeing Jacques, and saw the world become a blackness shot with streaming fire.

Etienne Dubois awoke in his own bed with the face of an amateur nurse whom he knew very well bending over him. She called him "*un brave*," and told him to go to sleep; which he promptly refused to do without some idea of what had happened. Thus he learned that he himself was sound, except for some injuries about the face as to which the nurse would not be explicit.

The foreman? He lay at home very

badly injured and no one could say what might happen. But that in any event M. Dubois was the hero of the village. At which information Etienne felt so much surprise that he forgot to ask any more questions.

But while Dubois was lying in comparative comfort and with a feeling of rest that he had not known for long Jacques Bolduc dwelt in a deep, dark region of agony where his first thought was bitterness and his first hope that he had at least drawn Dubois to a fate equaling his own. For he himself, as he knew with his return to consciousness, was a stricken man. It did not do any good for his wife and the others to lie about it.

So they told him at last, after days during which he suffered countless bandagings and proddings at the hands of doctor and nurses. One of his legs was too twisted and broken by the rocks ever to be of any use again. He could walk on crutches, of course, after his other injuries had healed; and he ought to thank God and Etienne Dubois that he was alive. If it had not been for that backward pull at the hands of Dubois he would have been buried, literally, under at least a ton's weight.

This was the bitterest of the medicine that fate had placed upon his tongue—that he should owe his life to his enemy. For some latent, almost stifled element of magnanimity stirred in him and told him that his hand was forever restrained—never again could it be lifted against Dubois. He hated this restraint, this intangible something that balked his will; hated it all the more because he knew that it was something that the strength of his will could not overcome.

The root of the matter lay in the fact that his god had failed him: to the driving force of will power he had given all homage, all worship, and in return for the soul he had placed upon that god's altar he had been given only half favors. He had driven his way to affluence and he had won the body and control of Jeanne—enough, he had thought, at one time, to make him forever satisfied. But greater things than these had dripped, like water, through his thick-fingered clutch.

That long-past threat against Dubois had been made after Jeanne had cried "Eti-

enne!" in her sleep—to awaken trembling with uncontrolled sobs. Then Bolduc knew that this woman in his possession was no more his than the wind that drove against his face. What the eye could see was his to have and to hold, to beat and caress; but the woman herself belonged to Etienne Dubois and no pounding of Bolduc's will to own her love could break that other bond.

After that, for the first time, he caught the look of horror which her eyes, unguarded, held for him. More—one day he saw her gazing after the form of Etienne and read what was written in her face. In that moment was born an insane desire to kill Dubois and to bind the woman. He had tried to kill and the effort had struck him down in such a manner that what good still struggled for life within him forbade another trial. As to binding what of Jeanne was visible forever to him he was determined in purpose but uncertain as to means.

Even good French-Canadian women had been known to err—to run away from their husbands. He thought of this constantly; permitting himself to degrade her in his thoughts and in the very act of giving himself a thousandfold more mental agony. He could not kill Etienne—he could not watch his wife all the time. Oftentimes between sleeping and waking strange ideas came to him, at first to be put away and then gradually to be entertained. Thus he lay and brooded and held back his recovery so that it was the end of summer before he was able to walk down to the quarry, awkwardly enough on his new crutches, but driven by determination to look upon Dubois.

He found Etienne and stood face to face with him, grating out a few hard words of thanks; hard by reason of the smile that was on the lips of Dubois and harder still because of the long, red, hideous scar that ran, blotched and tinged with purple, from brow to neck of the man who had saved him. It spread over nearly all of the cheek. Yet Dubois could smile, without malice or contempt or any other emotion.

Bolduc hated him more than ever, but he knew that the man who held his wife's heart was safe—the last doubt of this passed from his mind. Even if his hand lifted to strike the sight of that scar would stay it. More-

over, there was a quality in this steel-hard, slender workman that awed him—made him feel that Etienne was watching over Jeanne and protecting her.

That feeling of the watchfulness of Dubois followed Jacques Bolduc and annoyed him like a thousand devils; yet he managed to attend to his affairs, and they prospered as always. As the days went on, however, less and less of his mind was given to the quarry and to business, and more went to turning over and over the problem of Jeanne. It was, in essence, this: how to conquer her? He thought of it constantly and his face grew black and set.

In her unguarded moments Jeanne's eyes now showed fear mingled with horror, and this began to give Bolduc a curious kind of satisfaction. Once or twice he found himself chuckling over it. He'd teach her where the heart of a wife belonged! He did not know just how at the time, but he'd be able to beat this woman's game sooner or later.

One day, when he was in the tool-house at the quarry, the idea came to him. In looking, half indifferently, to the condition of the drills his hand came in contact with a light bar of iron such as is used about a forge. His fingers closed around it. Two or three feet long and reasonably stout—it would bend a little under sufficient pressure, but it would not break. Not to the touch of unaided human strength. Into the twisted channels of his mind came an analogy between the metal and his will. He was iron! They could not break him!

He set a hand to each end of the bar and bent it half double. Behold! It was not broken! And the picture of what he would do to hold his wife forever came to him as clearly in all its details as any conception he had ever formed. He laughed so that the sound filled the little building—and went out with the bar swinging in his grasp.

After that Bolduc was neither at his house nor at the quarry through the afternoons of an unbroken week. He had been so erratic in his movements that no one except his wife noticed that he disappeared from the village. She saw that he went off along the main highway, making good progress now that the autumn frosts had hardened the ground, and believed that he was

walking for exercise, to clear his mind of the miasmas which she had seen gathering there. As the week passed his looks were still dark and he still kept his habit of laughing silently to himself, but she thought that the relaxation had done him good and some of her fear went away.

She began to believe that he was going to recover. Also she had more than once seen Etienne Duboise following after Jacques, keeping himself well out of sight: and she had the belief that Etienne was watching to see that no harm came to her.

In this double feeling of security she slept with the depth of exhaustion on the night that ended the week of her husband's apparent improvement—so soundly that when she began to awake with a vague fear in her heart and a sense of physical distress it took what seemed an age to come back to consciousness. At last her eyes opened and her vision groped in the dimly-lighted bedroom.

She saw Jacques standing, fully dressed, beside the bed; he leaned upon his crutches, balancing himself with his thick arms hanging loose and his fingers drawing in and out. He laughed. She had heard such a laugh once when she visited the great asylum for the insane at Mastai. She tried to spring up, and found that bonds held her wrists and ankles. She tried to scream, but there was something bound into her mouth that held her tongue down and choked her utterance.

Bolduc bent and flung her over his shoulder, as he would have carried a sack of flour, and passed a long leather strap under his arm and over her body so that she would not fall while his hands were attending to the crutches. Then he stumped out of the room and the house, and started purposefully through the village. It was near dawn—she knew that by the feeling and the hint in the sky—but Visitation had not yet awakened and no help would come forth to her from those dark and silent houses. Where was Etienne, whose watchfulness she had believed in? Surely he would come—it must be that God would send him! She closed her eyes and prayed; and mercifully she went from prayer into temporary oblivion.

This time she returned to physical suffering—and to the terror of what seemed at first an impossible nightmare. But she knew that it was real because of the chill that struck through her and because of a terrible strain that racked her body with a pain greater than any she had felt before.

The twisted, grinning face of Jacques Bolduc was the central point of the nightmare. He stood swaying on his crutches as a caged animal sometimes stands and sways—with the same loose-muscled power to strike. Light from half a dozen candles revealed also oozing rock walls to which clung wet grass and clots of slime. Walls all around, except for the hint of a gray opening behind Jacques, and a roof of rock. Dark pools, treacherous looking as to depth, dotted the floor.

She realized that she was neither standing nor sitting nor lying down, and that the almost unendurable pull came from her right arm. She twisted her body and looked up. Her wrist was clasped by a tight iron ring that ran through the bolt set into the uneven, sloping wall against which she lay. She saw where a dark stream had run down her naked arm from the ring, and dried. With a whimper of cold and pain she set her naked feet more firmly on the slippery floor and nearly, but not quite, succeeded in standing. The ring and bolt had been cunningly placed.

"I've got you now!" The laughter of the maniac rang back and forth in the cavern. He came nearer, chuckling; with his mad eyes gloating close to hers. "I've got you now where you can't look at Etienne Dubois. You're down in a cave at the edge of the river—and nobody in the world but me knows where it is! I've got you now where you can't run off! You'll stay here forever and ever, with the tide coming in up to your feet and out again! I've got you where you can't get away!"

His laughter rose to a screech. He rocked with it, as a tree bends to strong wind. His crutches slipped away unnoticed and he stood perilously balanced on his sound leg, with his glaring eyes upon her and his mouth emitting those sounds of hideous mirth.

"I've got you now!" he shrieked. And

as the words left his lips he swayed toward her—swayed until his body lost its equilibrium and his foot slipped from its place on the firm rock down into one of those still, dark pools that were scattered over the bottom of the cavern.

He pitched forward, with arms outflung, and his head struck on the edge of the pool as he disappeared from the sight of Jeanne. The black water heaved and settled again. The ripples gradually died away. The pool became as still as it had been and there was no sound in the cave but the occasional tiny splash of a drop from the seeping walls. Jacques Bolduc had left the world his will had not been able to shape.

The tide came in, creeping, and stopped its welcome menace at her feet. The candles that Jacques had set to light her sufferings had burned to stumps. Toward him now she had no feeling but forgiveness—she had little feeling of any kind save that and her thirst for Etienne.

Through the stillness a cry reverberated. Jeanne heard her name in a voice she knew as the one that spoke to her soul—the voice of Etienne. She saw the yellow brightness of a lantern flinging back her shadows, and summoned her life forces in a great effort to speak.

"The pools, Etienne!" she whispered, as he bent over her. "Jacques died in one of them—take care—"

She glimpsed an iron bar above her head and saw his face half hidden by straining arms. Iron grated on stone, a fearful pain seared her wrist, and then she sank down upon the dank floor, free. Etienne lifted her, with the clinking ring and bolt still on her wrist, and drew a blanket close over her shoulders.

"God forgive me!" he panted. "I went to sleep as I watched your house last night—for a week I've known what he was doing down here and every night I've stood guard to stop him! And he did it in the very hour when my strength failed me!"

"Your strength fail?" she murmured, as he bore her out into the sunlit morning. "Do you call it failure after a week without sleep? My Etienne, the strength of your soul is stronger than iron!"

Ali's Revenge — and Allah's



by
Peter Ward

COMPLETE IN THIS ISSUE.

CHAPTER I.

A PEARL OF PRICE.

A HALF-NAKED black ran into the bazaar of Nejed, that oasis town in Central Arabia, which all Orientals call Nejed the Blessed. The slave carried a long white staff in his hand, and cried: "Way for Ali Hassan! Make way for the worshipful Ali, who ruleth for the Sultan in this city!"

At the sound of his chant the vendor of melons cursed and put his best fruit out of sight; the seller of sweetmeats groaned and said: "Farewell to the profits of this day." The goldsmith, hunched over his tiny anvil, dropped the chain upon which he worked into his girdle, and the old woman who sold the long Nejed dates, said to the girl who stood near her: "Get thee out of sight, my child. I will not have him look upon thee."

A white donkey with a crimson blanket under his saddle and yellow reins on his bridle trotted out of a narrow street into the bazaar, bearing a bulky man upon his back who wore the long cloak of an Arab, but the red fez of the Turk. The crowd parted quietly and many men bowed low to the bulky figure. Ali Hassan bowed to no one; he rode with his small black eyes now upon the ground, now upon the heaps of merchandise, and now upon the carved

upper windows about the square. His glance fell upon a small man sitting near a bale of rugs. He reined in his donkey.

"And who art thou?" he said abruptly.

"Najob Azoura," said the merchant, "if it please you."

"It pleaseth me indifferently well," said Ali, "and your face pleaseth me even less. Thou art a coast dweller?"

"Yes."

"And thou wouldst do business here without a license from the viceroy of the Sultan?"

"I knew not that that was the custom here, Ali Hassan."

"Custom!" said the big man. "It is the law." He turned to the crowd who had gathered about the rug merchant and himself. "Has he sold aught?"

"Aye," said the goldsmith, "one rug scarce a half-hour ago."

"The dog!" whispered the old woman over her dates. "There is no law in this place but Ali Hassan's evil heart. Now will the coast dweller catch it."

"What wares hast thou here?" said Ali Hassan.

"Rugs, excellency."

"Spread them out."

Ali Hassan eased himself in his saddle and watched while the merchant straightened his bale of rugs. The merchant was a

small man with watery blue eyes and a ragged beard. He looked about him for help, but the crowd, although they all suffered from the exactions of the viceroy, were not unwilling to see some one else suffer. Najob Azoura put his rugs in a neat pile and turned them one at a time as a man might turn the leaves of a book.

"Rubbish!" exclaimed Ali Hassan as the rugs fell one by one. "Made of filth and colored with mud! Show me thy best!"

"They are my best," pleaded Najob Azoura. "My wares are for poor men."

The mounted man reached out and touched the merchant with his staff.

"Not so fast," he said, "there was one thou didst not show me."

The merchant spread out his hands and said: "That one I have not showed thee because it is sold."

"Show it to me," said the implacable Ali.

Najob Azoura shrugged his stooped shoulders; took a bit of sacking from his rugs; turned them up, and showed the one on the very bottom.

"Spread it out to the full," said his tormentor.

"Ah, but the sun," whined his victim, "the sun will fade it. Such are for indoors, and thou knowest, wise one, that one hairs-breadth change in the color will ruin all."

The staff cut the air, and fell upon the dusty shoulders of the merchant.

"Do as I say, or there will be no more sunlight for thee!"

Najob Azoura wept a few tears, spread the rug out to the full, and squatted on his heels beside it.

"Where didst thou get this rug?" said Ali Hassan. "And why has no one robbed thee of it?"

Najob Azoura lifted his head to say: "It is the true Bokhara; the blue is the right Afghanistan blue; there are full four hundred knots to the inch."

Ali Hassan looked long upon the shimmering fabric before him.

"And it is sold?"

"Aye," said Najob.

"Then shalt thou unsell it. Find the buyer and give him back his price."

The merchant looked piteously about among the crowd.

"He is not here, excellency," he said.

The crowd raised a hoot of laughter at the way in which the merchant had been caught.

"Nor is he anywhere, old fool!" said Ali. "Five minutes will I give thee to find him, for none can say that I am not just. Then if I find that thou hast lied to me, will I have thy feet whipped."

Najob Azoura raised his voice in a long wail.

"Allah!" he cried. "Thou hast forgotten me!"

A tall figure stepped from the crowd and bowed low to Ali Hassan.

"I am the buyer," he said, "I did but now chaffer with this man for his rug, and I paid him a part of the purchase price."

"Only a tenth!" cried the rug merchant, springing to his feet. "It was but a tenth! And I shall give him but what he gave me."

"Beware, young man," said Ali, "how thou dealest with me. I am not a coast dweller who lives by laws and courts and decrees. No man hath lied to me with impunity."

"Nor do I lie now," said the young man, looking fearlessly at Ali. "What I have said is truth."

"It maketh little difference to me," said the viceroy, shrugging his shoulders, "thou hast saved him from a beating. Pay him, Najob Azoura."

The rug merchant opened his pouch and counted out two gold pieces.

"Two pounds in English gold," he said.

"One-twentieth of the purchase price." "One-tenth, dog!" cried Ali Hassan. "Why wilt thou lie? Therefore thy rug is worth but twenty pounds in English gold. I will give thee five for it, and it is only the favor of Allah that giveth thee that."

Najob Azoura wailed again.

"Forty pounds in good English gold it cost me at Constantinople," he wept. "Thou wilt ruin me!"

"Ruin thee, thou gold-stuffed coast dweller!" scoffed his opponent. "It is a favor to take some of thy wealth before the Bedouin do. Come to the coffee-house of Mustufa, and thou shalt have thy gold there. Batuta, take the rug."

One of Ali Hassan's retinue rolled the rug up and put it on his shoulder. Najob Azoura made no sound; Fate was against him; he wrapped his cloak about his head, and sat down on his heels. The other merchants chaffed him; he lighted his pipe and hid himself in a cloud of smoke.

Ali Hassan touched his donkey with his stick, and the beast trotted gingerly among the piles of merchandise and into a narrow street. The black ran ahead of him and chanted: "Way for Ali Hassan!" The cobbler, at the sound, picked up his leather and moved closer to the wall; the letter writer hid his fair parchment under his robes. Even the dogs at the door-steps lowered their heads and stood quiet as the little procession trotted past.

The street opened suddenly into a square bounded on the one side by a minaretted mosque; on the others by shops and the colonnaded front of a caravansary. The donkey tapped smoothly across the square and stopped before the blue front of a coffee-house. Ali Hassan slid out of his saddle and walked in.

"Welcome, Ali Hassan!" cried the proprietor, preceding him to the corner near the fountain. "Welcome to my poor shop! There is a youth here to see thee."

He wiped a table dry; arranged the cushions in the corner, and clapped his hands.

"Coffee!" he shouted. "Coffee, and a pipe for Ali Hassan!"

A servant brought the coffee mill, the charcoal-lamp, the dish of green berries. He roasted the berries until they crackled, ground them in the stone mill, and boiled the grains in the long-snouted pot. He poured the thick liquid into a cup thin as egg shell, and stood waiting until the great man should have approved his work.

Ali sipped, grunted, and the servant glided back to his corner. Mustufa, the proprietor, filled the pipe with fine Persian tobacco, and held a coal to it until it was well alight. Ali sighed a deep breath, and lay back among the cushions.

"You spoke of a youth, my Mustufa," he said, "who wished to see me."

"Aye, my Ali," replied Mustufa, "he is just come on a long journey from across

the desert, for he sat here watching the jet of water as though it flowed from Heaven. Shall I bring him to thee?"

Ali waved his hand, and Mustufa said: "Ali Hassan will speak with thee, O stranger."

The young man arose, the same who had saved Najob Azoura in the bazaar, and stood before the Sultan's viceroy. He was a tall young man, lithe almost to thinness, and his face showed the clean outline of thorough blood. He wore a burnoose, or desert cloak, and the white turban ended in a flowing tail to keep the sun from his neck. He put his hands to his forehead and bent his head in greeting.

"What wouldst thou with me?" said Ali, looking at him from under heavy lids. "I thought I had seen the last of thee this morning."

"Rumor hath made thee known over all Arabia," said the young man. "Fame runneth before a man like a trumpet note. It is said of thee that thou hast a pearl of price in thy possession called Ayesha's Mirror, and that by looking into this pearl, one can find lost treasure. It is said that this pearl hath never failed, and on it thou hast reared thy great fortune. On that," he added, seeing the shade of displeasure in the great man's face, "and thy great talents."

"And thou hast come to me to find a lost treasure?"

"Aye, Ali Hassan."

"What is thy name?"

"Kahleel, son of Kahleel."

"Thou art a coast dweller," said Ali Hassan. "Thou canst not fool me, young man."

"I have no wish to fool thee, great one," said Kahleel. "It is of the pearl that I wish to speak."

"One born and bred in the oasis of Nejed as I have been," said Ali Hassan, "can tell the speech of the men of the coast. And thou hast not been long from the desert. I can tell by the way in which thine eyes follow the water trickling there."

"Thou art right. Heaven hath given thee wit with fortune."

"Be plain with me, youth," said Ali, putting a fresh coal to his pipe, "and I will

be kind to thee. What is it that thou hast lost? Be sure the pearl will find it."

"Is that true?" said the youth eagerly.

"As true as that Allah ruleth in heaven and His Prophet on earth. The pearl which I have Mohammed gave to Ayesha when he took her to wife. At his death her holy tears fell upon it. Since then it hath had the marvelous power of which thou speakest, and so it is called Ayesha's Mirror. No less than a week ago the chief of the Beni Lam came to me to find a herd of camels which had strayed.

"He looked in my pearl, and saw the pillar of basalt by which they were then grazing. He went and found them. He would not have paid me, saying that that pillar was in his mind when he looked, but no man hath ever kept from me my just reward. So I took a half of his herd."

"The treasure that I seek is not of the animal kind," said Kahleel.

"Money, then?"

"Not money."

"Jewels?"

"Nor jewels."

"Mayhap a rug?" said Ali, smiling.

Kahleel shook his head and Ali said:

"What in the devil's name can it be, then? There be no other treasures than those."

"Must I tell thee?"

"Yes. Else the charm will not work."

"What is the best treasure that a man may have?" said Kahleel.

"I know not," said Ali good-humoredly, "leaving out camels, money, and jewels."

"And what of a woman's heart?"

"Ho!" said Ali, rasing his heavy eyebrows almost to his cap. "The caravan marcheth in that quarter! Young man, let me advise thee. Thou art a fool to set a woman's heart above real treasure. What woman is there who is not bought and sold even as a camel? Wouldst thou have the creature for a slave, well enough; but thy face sayeth you would wed her, and a wife is worse than a tooth-ache."

"I would have her to wife," said Kahleel, "and know, Ali Hassan, great as thou art, I will not stand here talking with thee. If I may see the gem, I will look and depart; if not, farewell, and may Allah prosper thee."

"Nay," said Ali, still in good humor, "every merchant doth business in his own way. I am twice thine age, O Kahleel; I could have had any woman to wife, yet I remain a bachelor. Do thou likewise, and be happy."

"But what of the wife," said Kahleel earnestly, "who reigneth gently in her house? What of her that hath the voice of the nightingale, the grace of a deer, and the eyes of a dove? She bringeth a man strong sons. Ali Hassan, thou dost ill to speak so of love, for had not Ayesha loved the Prophet and she him, thy pearl had been but a pearl and naught else."

"Knowest thou one who would be all this?" said Ali, shooting a quick glance at his visitor.

"That, O Ali, is the treasure I seek."

"Thy wife left thee, then?"

"I said not the woman was my wife," said the youth patiently. "I would have her so."

"Nor is she the wife of another?"

"No."

"A maid, then," mused the Sultan's friend, sitting up among his cushions, "and she is here in Nejed?"

"Else I had not come to see thee, Ali Hassan. Are there wits within that head?"

"Every man worketh in his own way," said Ali. "Thou shalt look in my pearl. But eloquence, my youth, hath cost thee dear. Forty pounds in English gold shalt thou pay for thy look."

Kahleel put his hands to his forehead, bent his head, and said: "Then we part, Ali Hassan."

"Nay," said the owner of the pearl, "then this is not such a treasure, after all. Thou couldst buy a blond Georgian for twenty pounds English."

"There are treasures which are above price," said Kahleel. "I will pay what a poor student in the mosque at Medina can pay—ten pounds in gold. But let me look in the pearl quickly."

"Twenty," said the older man, "and thou shalt look."

"The devil fly away with thee!" ejaculated Kahleel. "Thou wilt drive me mad! Many a man hath died for being as ugly as thou art!"

"And many a man," said Ali Hassan, "hath died for being as quick with his tongue as thou art. Hark ye! Ali Hassan ruleth in the fair oasis of Nejed, and thou hadst best keep a cool tongue between thy teeth. A poet could not have spoken more eloquence of love than thou, and there was something in thy talk of Medina, the Holy. Therefore shalt thou see at thy price. But not now, for here cometh the old man with his rugs."

CHAPTER II.

HIS HEART'S DESIRE.

NAJOB AZOURA limped across the dusty square, bearing on his own shoulders his bale of rugs. He came to the door of the coffee-house, peered in, then salaamed almost to the ground. The viceroy of the Sultan shook with silent laughter.

"Old man," he said, "as I see thee standing there, I can think of nothing but an old jerboa rat—the kind that lurk in the holes at the desert edge. Come in, and my Mustufa will give thee coffee and a pipe."

"I have no heart for a pipe," groaned the merchant, "but coffee might lift these drooping spirits of mine. I will thank thee for that."

He shuffled in, threw down his rugs, and sat upon them.

"Coffee of the best," cried Ali Hassan, "with a touch of cinnamon in it."

The old man drank silently while Ali looked at him with delight. Najob Azoura set down his cup, spread out his hands, and said: "Even the strongest must bow to Fate, and I am but a poor man."

"Thou wilt know better next time," said his tormentor. "No merchant doth business here without the protection of Ali Hassan."

"Thou wilt pay me," said the old man, "the five pounds in gold?"

"Aye," said Ali. "Thou shalt have it, old miser." He opened his pouch and counted out five gold pieces. Najob Azoura watched them fall upon the table one by one, weighed each one upon his finger tips, and put them in his own greasy pouch. He arose and salaamed deeply to the great man.

"And now," he said, "I have thy leave to depart?"

"Aye," said Ali, "with a bit of advice from me. Take thy mind from thy money bags, Najob Azoura, and the next time thou art here, remember the Sultan's viceroy."

The merchant wagged his head sorrowfully, without a word, took his rugs upon his back, and shuffled out and across the square.

"Now then, my Kahleel," he continued, "it is thy turn. But pay me first half the money, and if thou seest thy wish, pay me the other half."

Kahleel counted out five gold pieces into the palm of Ali. The latter clapped his hands and a slave glided in.

"Watch at the door," said the viceroy, "and send some of thy fellows to watch at the back."

When the slave had gone, he opened his pouch and took out a small leather case.

"There was never the woman," he said, "who could match this pearl in beauty."

He opened the case and showed a large, somewhat irregular pearl lying in a bed of black velvet. It was pear-shaped, slightly flattened, and Kahleel caught his breath at the rush of color that played over its mirrorlike surface at the slightest movement of Ali Hassan's hand. Most pearls are a bit dull, as though a gem, originally violet in color, were overlaid with a powdering of some fine white substance, but Ali's pearl had all the smoothness, polish, and fiery play of color that goes with the opal.

"It is a marvel," said Kahleel, after he had looked at the pearl for a moment, "and a holy thing, since it hath been washed by the tears of Ayesha. Yet I know a greater treasure."

"Take it, thou poet," said Ali, "in the palm of thy hand, and hold it to the morning light. Think of thy treasure, and thou shalt see where it lieth."

Kahleel took the pearl in his hand and held it so that a beam of light struck full upon it. He saw a tiny, but faithful, picture of the square—the mosque across the way, the open front of the caravansary, a towered house upon a small hill. Wave after wave of color rolled across the mirrorlike surface of the gem, and so faithful was

the reproduction that he saw even the tiny picture of the dog who dozed in the sunny square.

"O Ayesha!" said the young man. "As thou livest in bliss, show me where my treasure lieth."

He looked long at the pearl and said: "O Mohammed, if ever thou hadst compassion on young lovers, show me the way to my treasure."

For a long moment he looked; then took a deep breath, and gave the gem back to its owner.

"Thou hast had thy wish?" said Ali. "Thou hast seen where thy treasure is?"

"Aye," said Kahleel, "I have seen." He counted out the other five gold pieces.

"And was it as thou didst say? Eyes of the gazelle, grace of the nightingale, and the rest of it?"

"Yes."

"And is the treasure near to thee now?"

"There was nothing in the contract to make me tell thee that," said Kahleel.

"As thou wilt," said Ali, pocketing the pearl and the gold pieces, "but be sure that I can see in the pearl as well as thou."

"So be it," said Kahleel.

"I would not have thee go so soon," said Ali, "I could listen to thy talk of love for all the morning. Thou hast fired my heart with all this poetry. I, too, would have a wife such as thou hast described."

"Allah will bring thee that as he hath brought all other things," said Kahleel. He put his hands to his forehead, bowed, and departed.

Ali Hassan shifted in his seat to watch the young man cross the square. The youth went straight to the caravansary.

"Where any fool would have gone to find a traveller," said the owner of the pearl. "Ali Hassan, it is the foolishness of men as much as thine own with that maketh thee what thou art."

But the young man went straight through the caravansary without stopping. The keeper of it ran out to him and cried: "A camel, sir? I have here a young camel of the true Oman breed, as fleet as any horse." He pointed to a flea-bitten beast so old that her hump had almost disappeared.

Kahleel shook his head, and passed

through the ankle-deep dust of the square and out into the lane. Over the tops of the mud walls that lined it leaned date fronds, and he could hear the splash and gurgle of water within the walled gardens. Ahead of him lay a slight rise of ground—on top of it stood the towered house which he had seen in the pearl. A heavy gate, iron-clad and barred, stood in a deep recess in the wall, and over it jutted the carved work of the second story. A beggar sat in the shade by the gate, and held out a skinny hand to Kahleel.

"Alms, young man, alms for the love of Allah!"

Kahleel paused before him.

"How long hast thou been here, O favored of God?" he asked.

"Longer than thou hast lived, youth," said the beggar, "and naught but pain for me all that time."

"Knowest thou," said Kahleel, balancing a coin on the tip of his finger, "knowest thou if any woman hath entered this house within the last week?"

"One came two days ago," said the beggar, "in a train of four camels. A man rode one—two carried baggage—there was a litter on the fourth, and I heard a woman weeping. It was a gray Oman camel, and I have not seen the like of it for grace. There were four bales of rugs in the baggage, and such pots and pans as a man might take on a long journey."

"What manner of a man was it?"

"An old man, small, with eyes like a kitten's."

"Knowest thou his name?"

"Najob Azoura!"

Kahleel struck his palms together.

"How came she to be with him!"

"I am not Allah," said the beggar, "to see into all things."

"I am content," said Kahleel. "Here is thy fee." He dropped the coin into the beggar's lap, and let a second follow it.

"Remember," he said, "thou hast never seen me, nor dost thou see what I do now."

He looked up and down the lane; save for himself and the beggar it was empty. A young date palm grew by a rill of water that trickled through the lane; he climbed it and rocked it until the sap oozed from

the trunk. As it leaned toward the wall opposite to the house, he jumped quickly and landed light as a cat on the wall. He ran softly along it until he was opposite the carved window of the chamber over the gate, and there dropped flat under the protection of a branch of foliage.

Across from him spread the dark carving of the window—a screen covered the lower half of it. Above it he could see the dim interior—rugs, a tabouret, and near it a girl sitting with her head bowed and her hands lying unclasped in her lap.

Kahleel looked long upon her and said: "Ali Hassan, thou shalt go to Paradise yet, for this boon thy pearl hath brought me."

He heard a camel grunting down the lane; ran lightly back to his date palm, slid down it quickly, and took his place beside the beggar with his cloak wrapped about his head. A caravan trailed past, bound for the sea, and in the trail of it limped Najob Azoura. The tracks of tears still showed on the old man's cheeks, and when Kahleel arose before him, he said: "Thou, too! Misfortune on misfortune! It was not enough that the fat Turk took my best rug, but thou must step in and claim two pounds!"

"Not so," said Kahleel, smiling. "I saved thee from a whipping, and perhaps worse. I saw that thou wert an old man and a coast dweller, and I stepped in to save thee. Now I have come to give thee back the two pounds in English gold."

"Young man," said Najob Azoura, turning his watery eyes upon the youth, "it is impiety to jest with thy elders. No man parteth with what treasure he hath."

"I have not come to jest with thee," said Kahleel. "Here are thy two pieces of gold."

He held them out to the old man, who took them, weighed them on his finger-tip, and pocketed them. He picked up his rugs without a word, struck three times upon the gate, and it swung open to him. Kahleel made as if to follow him, but the old man said quickly: "Nay, I allow no strangers within my gates."

"The house is thine," said Kahleel, shrugging his shoulders, "but there is other business that I would talk with thee."

"Then shall it be done here," said the

merchant, dropping his bundle. "What wouldst thou with me?"

Kahleel was silent for a time, and then he said: "Najob Azoura, hast thou ever been a lover?"

The old man arose.

"This is not business," he said.

Kahleel seized his wrist and pulled him down to his seat.

"But that is what I would talk to thee of."

"I put such foolishness out of my head years ago," said Najob.

"Then why," answered the young man, "do you keep a girl mew'd up within your house?"

The old man made as if to rise again, but Kahleel clung to his wrist.

"Thou shalt hear me," he said, "or I will tell Ali Hassan that thou art a kidnaper. How came that girl to be with thee?"

"I found her in the desert," said Najob Azoura. "She was in a caravan that was raided. She alone escaped and fell into the hands of a chief of the Beni Lam. She told me her tale, and I bought her for three camels. Her father will pay me well to bring her back to him."

Kahleel listened intently.

"That is where I lost track of her," he said. "I followed her caravan, which was bound from Howeit to Maskat, but I lost it and came hither."

"And what is the maid to thee?" said the old merchant.

"She is my beloved," said Kahleel simply, "and thou shalt give her to me."

"Her father shall give her to thee," said the rug merchant. "My task is to take her to him."

"That is the point of the whole matter," said Kahleel, looking upon the ground, "her father will not give her to me, because I am poor. He sent her away, thinking that she would have fled with me."

"She hath said that her father will give me a hundred pounds in English gold and pay me for the camels I gave for her. Is that true?"

"Aye," said Kahleel. "The maid speaks truth."

"But what canst thou give, O lover?"

"I did thee a good turn in the market place this morning, not knowing that we should meet again," said Kahleel. "I have naught else to offer."

"Then shalt thou chaffer with her father," said Najob Azoura.

"It is hard," said the young man, "for a lover to speak to one who hath not been a lover. But as thou wishest for joy in Paradise, give her to me!"

"Nay," said the old man, rising, "I have had loss enough. Be patient, my Kahleel. There are other maids in the world, and fathers not so hard of heart. How didst thou know she was here?"

"I saw a vision from Heaven which marked this house."

"Where sawest thou that vision?"

"Where but in Ali Hassan's pearl?"

"Body of Allah," groaned the merchant, "shall I never be done with him!"

He shuffled through the gate and slammed it shut, leaving Kahleel and the beggar alone in the lane. The youth arose, walked a few irresolute steps, but dropped into place again, for Ali Hassan's slave ran down the road shouting: "Make way for Ali!"

CHAPTER III.

DICE—AND A DRUG.

THE quick patter of the donkey's hoofs sounded against the walls, and Ali Hassan, followed by his retinue, rode up to the gate. The slave struck at the gate with his stick, and it opened slowly to him. Ali Hassan rode through; Kahleel slipped in with the last of his train and dropped out of sight behind a huge water-jar. The Sultan's viceroy urged his beast across the courtyard, and stopped before Najob's door.

"Najob Azoura!" he bellowed. "Here is Ali Hassan come to do business with thee!"

The old man put his bare head out of an upper window and said: "Thou hast done but too much business with me already, Ali Hassan."

"Come down, merchant," said his guest, laughing broadly. "Mayhap I did do you some wrong this morning, and mayhap I have come to set it right."

Najob Azoura stared down at him for a moment; then set the dusty turban on his head and came into the courtyard.

"Here I am," he said spreading out his hands. "Allah's plaything, and thine."

"I did thee some wrong this morning," said Ali Hassan, generously, "but my conscience hath reproached me, and I have come to right it. But first thou shalt show me all thy treasures, great and small."

Najob pointed to the rugs that still lay in the courtyard—opened them painfully, and turned them one by one, while Ali stood with his hands in his girdle and watched him.

"And is that all?" he said, when his host had finished.

"Yes. I swear it by the beard of the Prophet."

"Nonsense!" scoffed Ali. "An old rat like thee hath more than this in his burrow. Come, if thou wilt not show me thy treasure, I must find it for myself."

He walked into the house, and Najob cried: "Have I not sworn there is nothing there?"

"Why should an old man like thee take a house instead of going to the caravan-sary?" said Ali. "There must be something of price about thee somewhere."

He strode into the house, laughing silently, and the merchant followed with his fingers in his beard. Ali padded through the corridor, looked into the long coffee-room, and set his foot upon the stair.

"Allah save us!" screeched the old man. "Art thou a Christian, to walk so into women's quarters?"

"Hear ye, old Najob," said Ali, turning to him. "Knowest thou of a woman in this city who is the most beautiful of her kind?"

"I keep not with houris," said the merchant.

Ali shot a keen glance at his host.

"Is it thy wife, old rat?"

"No," said the merchant, looking into the courtyard, "there is no woman here."

"Then," said Ali, "there can be no harm in my walking above."

Najob Azoura spread out his hands and said: "Art thou God, to see two men's hearts so?"

"Not God!" cried his guest. "But Ali Hassan, who hath the pearl which telleth all. I will be plain with thee, Najob. A young poet came to me this morning—the same youth who saved thee in the bazaar. He spoke so eloquently of his love that he moved me to seek the most beautiful of her sex in this city. I looked into my pearl, but I saw naught but an old rat, and I read that to mean that she was with thee. Thy face telleth me that I am right."

Najob Azoura shrugged his shoulders and said: "I bought her at a great price from the Bedouin. She hath been an expense to me from beginning to end."

Ali Hassan struck him a blow across his shoulders that almost threw him off his feet.

"There is sense in thy talk now!" he said. "But to get anything out of Najob Azoura is like getting moisture out of a desert rock. Why do we stand here talking like two dry camels grunting for water? Thou shalt have coffee such as hath never passed thy lips before."

He led the way into the long room, clapped his hands, and said: "Coffee—the best thou hast ever made!"

The slave ran to the donkey and brought the coffee mill, the pot, and the charcoal-lamp. He blew up the spark of fire in the lamp, and brewed a pot of thick brown coffee flavored with cinnamon and citron.

"Now, then," said the great man, after his pipe was alight and he was settled among the cushions, "now we may talk business. Mind you, I would not take the young man's maid unless necessary, but my pearl hath not told me that this was his maid. Wilt thou give her to me?"

"All treasure hath price," said the merchant, "even a woman's beauty."

"*Even a woman's beauty!*" exclaimed Ali. "*Especially a woman's beauty, old bag of bones! Let me see her.*"

"No," said his host, a bit fearfully. "Thou wilt run away with her. All thy men are armed."

"I give thee my word," said Ali, "that I will not take her without just recompense."

"Just recompense!" whined the merchant. "Thine ideas of just payment jump not with mine."

"Body of Allah!" ejaculated Ali suddenly. "Thinkest thou I have no pleasure in life but to sit here and gabble with thee!"

Najob arose, went to the foot of the stairs, and called, "Mirza!"

A voice answered, "I come," and Ali said, touching one of his fingers, "Voice of the nightingale."

"Thy face must be covered," said the merchant. A faint footfall sounded on the stairs, and the girl stood in the door. She hesitated, and Najob Azoura said, "Sit thou here beside me." The girl crossed to him quickly and dropped to the floor at his side.

"My child," said the merchant, "here is a man—the great Ali Hassan, of the oasis of Nejed. He ruleth here for the Sultan. He hath heard of thy beauty, and hath come to see thee."

The girl was silent, and Ali said:

"Dressed in green, as a daughter of the faithful should be; small, but ripely formed; fingers long and taper. Thou hast naught to fear from me. Let me see thy face."

She was silent and motionless until Ali stirred among his cushions, and then Najob Azoura said: "There is no help, child. The horse goeth where the curb moveth him. So must we."

The girl put up her veil, and when Ali had looked long upon the small oval face he touched another finger and said:

"Eyes of the gazelle. What is thy price, Najob Azoura?"

"Thou canst not sell me!" said the girl quickly. "I am not thine to sell! My father will pay thee richly for me."

"But thy father," said the merchant, "is far away, and Ali is here. There is no help that I can see. And since I was at some expense about thee, thou wilt not grudge that I make it good? And remember that Ali Hassan is rich and can make thee happy. I can face thy father with a clear conscience, for I shall have done what I can."

"Thy father will thank him," said Ali Hassan. "I came to buy thee for a slave, but I will make thee my wife!"

He paused and threw out his arm to

emphasize the honor of his offer; but the girl said:

"How can a wife be a true wife when her heart is elsewhere?"

"And is thy heart elsewhere?"

"Yes, O Ali, it is—" The merchant touched her arm, and she finished: "It is in my Howeit by the sea."

"But then," said Ali, rubbing his fat palms together, "once thou hast forgotten the sea thou wilt be happy. Men call the Nejed the Paradise of Arabia, and I will make it doubly a paradise for thee." The girl was silent, and Ali said: "What is thy price, Najob?"

"First," said the old man, "there is the matter of the rug in which thou owest me thirty-five pounds. Then there is the price of the camels which I gave for her, and those come to some forty more. She hath told me that her father would give me a hundred more for her; and there has been the expense of food and transport. Counting the reward that I miss, the total is one hundred and ninety pounds, Ali Hassan."

"I will give thee a hundred and fifty," said Ali, "for it is likely that her father would have thee jailed instead of rewarding thee. Thou shalt have an order on the goldsmith with whom my money is lodged."

Najob Azoura drew up his shoulders and said: "Allah send that I profit by this bargain, but I fear not. Thou seest, girl, I am not to blame."

"Stop!" said the girl, throwing back her veil. "Art thou a gambler, Ali Hassan?"

"Aye," said Ali, "as all Arabs are. I am one, too, that is used to winning."

"Then," said the girl, "I will gamble with thee, Ali Hassan, for myself. We will cast the dice, and the one that turneth up the fifth ace is winner. If I win, thou wilt set me free; if thou art winner, then will I go with thee without more ado."

"Beard of the Prophet!" exclaimed Ali in delight. "What a spirit is in that small body! But thou wilt keep thy bargain, my dove?"

"Yes, Ali, I will leave the house and go with thee."

"Allah save us!" cried Ali. "To gamble for thee! Never was there such a stake! Maid, I would follow thee across

the desert, even, hating it as I do. Come, I have dice here in my girdle."

"No," said the girl, "we will not gamble with dice of thine."

"As wise," chuckled Ali, "as thou art clever. But dost thou think that I would stake all on dice of *thine*?"

"Nay," cut in Najob Azoura; "since you will gamble, I have dice within my pack which I will sell at two drachmas a pair."

"Old rat!" laughed Ali. "Thy poor life is bound up in money-bags."

Najob Azoura brought a handful of dice, and the girl said: "Pick thou one, and I will pick one. Then there can be no question."

She arose, brought her cushion to Ali's feet, and sat herself there.

Ali touched his third finger. "The grace of the dove," he said.

"First," she said, "we must throw to see who hath first cast."

She took the dice in her small palm and threw. A five and a four rolled up.

"Nine!" shouted Ali, picking up the cubes. "Mohammed and the angels be with me now!" He cast, and turned up four.

"It is thy chance first!" he said. "The Heavens are with thee."

She rubbed the cubes together in her palm, spun them, and turned up an ace.

"One!" shouted Ali.

She cast again, but no ones came up, and Ali swooped upon the dice. He rolled two aces in succession—then a blank. The next cast was a blank, and the next.

Then the girl threw two aces, but after that a blank.

"Now," said Ali, with his eyes gleaming, "watch!"

Even Najob Azoura craned his thin neck as the dice fell, but no aces came up. The girl took the ivory cubes in her hand and smiled at Ali.

"Ali Hassan!" she taunted. "After all, there is a woman's heart in that great body of thine. See how thy hand trembled, and mine is as steady as a rock, for all that I am gambling for my freedom. Thou wilt keep the bargain?"

"Aye," said Ali.

"I will haunt thee if thou dost not," said the girl. "Be sure that I will die before I will be thy wife, if thou keepest not to the promise. And mayhap thou wilt die with me."

"And what if I do?" laughed Ali. "How better could I go to paradise than with thee?"

The girl put her hand down without throwing the dice.

"No," said Ali, "I trust thee not. They must roll."

She took them up, and, with her eyes fixed on him, dropped them on the floor. They rolled—a four came up, and an ace.

"There," said the girl, as the tears came into her eyes, "I have cast the fifth ace. Thou wilt let me go now."

"Women may talk large," said Najob Azoura, "but they come to tears in the end. Come, child."

"No!" roared Ali, springing to his feet. "By Allah, she shall not go!"

"Thou wilt not break thy bargain," said the girl faintly. "Thou wilt rue it. There is a hell for perjurers!"

"I love thee!" said Ali. "I will not give thee up! Dice or no dice, thou art mine. I will make thee happy, for thou shalt rule my house and me, and all that I have."

"Rule thy house and thee!" echoed the girl. "I would see thee dead first!"

A slow flush crept over Hassan's face.

"Thou shalt rue that, my bird," he said slowly, "when I have caged thee."

"Nay, child," expostulated Najob, "calmness bringeth more than haste."

The girl turned and sped from the room, but the white figure of Kahleel met her in the dark corridor. He touched her arm and whispered: "I am here, beloved, and have heard. Go back."

She wrapped her veil about her head and returned to the room.

"I thought so," said Ali. "There are those outside to turn thee back, and not too gently." He clapped his hands, and when the slave glided in said: "A donkey litter from the caravansary."

The girl took her place by the side of the old merchant.

"Najob," said Ali, "bring me the parch-

ment and ink, and I will make an order upon the goldsmith!" When this was done, the three sat in silence until the litter came to the door.

"Come, my bird," said Ali, "we will go home together, like the loving pair that we will become."

She went quietly into the courtyard, and mounted into the litter without touching the hand that Ali put out to her.

"Farewell, little one," said the old merchant; "have patience. I looked into Ali's pearl this morning, and I saw that which maketh me believe that Heaven will save the innocent."

As the procession crossed the square Ali Hassan cast a longing glance at the coffee-house. He said to his slave: "Batuta, take this maid home, and if she escape God help thee! I will leave the others with thee to help guard her."

Alone he trotted across to the coffee-house, left his donkey, and walked in. He did not go to his usual corner; instead, he walked on through to a smaller and more private room.

"Mustufa," he said to the proprietor, "coffee, of course, and—Mustufa, hast thou anything else that a good Moham-medan like myself might drink?"

Mustufa looked knowingly at him, and said: "I have no wine, O Ali, but an excellent bottle of *arrak*."

"There can be no harm in my taking a drop," said Ali Hassan, "since this is one of the great days of my life. Of course, my Mustufa, it should not be known that so stanch a follower of the Prophet as myself should drink liquors, but thou knowest that some exception may be made in the case of rulers and the like."

Mustufa brought a wicker-bound bottle and a cup, and the great man drained one cup and then another of the liquor. He lighted his long pipe, and sat in the little room with a smile upon his heavy features, and his hands clasped across his girdle. A flush came upon his face as the liquor stirred his sluggish blood.

Across the square he saw the tall figure of the youth, Kahleel. He arose, put his head out of the small window, and roared: "Kahleel! Youth! Poet! Come hither!"

The young man stopped, looked for a moment, and then walked quickly across the square. Ali Hassan leaped up and put both hands on the youth's shoulders as he entered the room.

"Ho, young poet!" he roared; "fortune is with me to-day! I have to thank thee for two things—first, it was thou who put into my head the idea of getting a wife; second, thou art here to let me thank thee. Mustufa, another cup!"

"Nay," said the young man, looking at the wicker-bound flask. "The Koran forbiddeth that."

"As thou wilt," said Ali Hassan, "and perhaps thou art right. I doubt if thy young head could stand it."

Mustufa came in with the second cup and said: "Ali Hassan, art thou not afraid to be here without thy retinue? No man hath more friends than thou, and no man hath more enemies."

"No," scoffed Ali. "What man dare touch me? And this youth is here who is my friend."

"Aye," said Kahleel, "I will take good care that no harm cometh to him."

Mustufa shrugged his shoulders and went out, and Kahleel filled Ali's cup and said:

"Thou wilt let me say a verse over the drink?"

"Yes, young poet, and let it be something about love. Eyes of the nightingale, voice of the gazelle, and the rest of the bird talk."

"I will put a charm on this cup, O Ali," said the young man, "so that thou shalt have such dreams of love and poetry as never thou hadst before."

"Nay, no dreams," said the big man good-naturedly, "but give it a blessing."

"I will give thee a blessing of flowers," said Kahleel, raising the cup. "What of her that is straight as a young palm-shoot, hath a breath like that of the rose, and eyes like the black poppy that bringeth sleep?"

"Good!" cried Ali. "Would that thou and I might match beauties, youth! Hast thou found thy treasure yet?"

"No," said Kahleel, "but the night is not done."

"Thou wilt find her," said Ali when he had finished the drink. "The pearl never faileth. Another blessing!"

Kahleel filled the cup again, and said: "What of the good man? The good man walketh in the straight path to paradise, but the man of evil heart walketh in the maze which leadeth only to death."

Ali was silent for a long time, and then hiccuped: "I liked the other blessing better, Kahleel. What was in that bottle?"

"*Arrak*; naught else."

"Body of Allah," said the great man, with a long sigh; "it worketh as no *arrak* ever worked before. I am sleepy, youth."

"Then sleep, O Ali Hassan!"

"Nay," said Ali, shaking his shoulders, "I will arouse me, for I have other business in hand. Yet I will have one more draft of this. Fill the cup, for it escapeth my hand somehow. The blessing of the flowers. What of her that is straight as young palm-shoot—hath a breath like the rose—and what was the rest?"

"Is as soothing as the black poppy that bringeth sleep," said the young man.

"Aye, the black poppy that bringeth sleep," murmured Ali. He staggered to his feet and said: "I must rouse me. Mustufa!"

The proprietor glided in, and Ali said: "Knowest thou what I have brought to my house this day?"

"I have heard," said Mustufa, "that a mule litter hath gone thither."

"Aye, old fox, but this time I take a wife."

"A wife," said Mustufa. "I have heard thee say that that was worse than tooth-ache."

"And so I thought until I saw this maid. What a mother she will make for my sons!"

"One can never be sure," said Mustufa. "She may have another man in her head, and be sure she will make thee pay for it!"

"Another man in her head!" exclaimed Ali hazily. "But I have a way to find out! O Mustufa, thou knowest not the advantage of being in the confidence of Heaven. If she have another man in her head, I

shall know it, and she shall pay for it, not I!"

He dragged at his pouch with fumbling fingers, and took out the pearl. A ray of the western sun struck in through the window, and he held the pearl up to it.

"Tell me, O lovely jewel, what other man there is in this maid's head!"

He stood swaying, with the heavy eyelids scarce open, watching the shifting play of color in the gem. Suddenly the eyes opened wide, and his hands fell to his sides.

"Mustufa," he said, "that *arrak* of thine is queer stuff!" He looked again, and said clearly: "Youth, I see thy face in the jewel!"

Kahleel rose and stood close to the door.

"I cannot help what thy jewel shows thee," he said evenly. "If thou wilt be a fool, Ali Hassan, no man can stop thee."

"She was *thy* treasure!"

He lunged unsteadily at Kahleel; tried vainly to bring his wits together; then the drug which Kahleel had put in his drink overcame him, and he fell among the tables. Mustufa spread out his hands and smiled.

"The *arrak* hath been too much for him."

"Keep him here, out of sight," said Kahleel; "it will not do to let any one see the Sultan's viceroy thus. I will send his slaves to him."

CHAPTER IV.

PURSUIT.

AT dawn Ali Hassan awoke. Batuta crouched at his feet, looking at him with mingled devotion and fear. The great man rolled over, sat up, and put his hands to his head.

"I have had such dreams," he said. "Mustufa, what do I here?"

Mustufa rose from the ground, where he was brewing coffee, and said: "The youth and Ali Hassan sat here last night."

"I remember," he said. "I had some of thy villainous *arrak*."

He arose, walked to the jet of water, and

drank deep. Mustufa placed the coffee before him, and when he had tasted that his head began to clear.

"It was like no *arrak* that ever I tasted," he said. "There was a girl?"

"Aye," said Mustufa. "I saw the donkey litter cross the square."

"So," said Ali, "I must be gone. I have kept her waiting too long."

He arose, but the slave threw himself at his feet and clasped him about the knees. "Mercy, master!" he cried. "Do not whip me for bringing evil news!"

Ali looked down upon him and said: "Thou evil son of an evil mother, what tidings hast thou?"

"Thou wilt not have me whipped?"

"No," said Ali Hassan; "but tell thy news quickly."

He walked to the fountain, plunged his arms into it, and bathed his face. Then he sat down in the corner and said: "I will listen."

"Yesterday at sundown," said the slave, "we took a maid to the house, Ali Hassan. No sooner had we arrived there than a youth came, the same that was with thee in the morning, and said that thou wert in danger here.

"We came to thee, but the youth had said that thou wert not to be disturbed, and we let thee lie. One only stayed behind.

"At midnight he dragged himself hither, wounded, and told his tale. The young man, after we were gone, forced his way into the house—wounded the lone guard with a knife, bound him, and took the maid in the litter. After some hours he got himself free from his bonds and came hither and told us. Allah knoweth, Ali Hassan, that I am blameless, and thou hast promised not to have me whipped."

The flush spread over the master's face, and the veins in his forehead swelled.

"Thou shalt not be whipped," he said, "but where are the others!"

"At that evil news, master, they fled from fear of thee!"

Ali Hassan sprang to his feet and his fingers curled.

"I could kill thee!" he choked. "Thou raven! But there is other work to be done."

His donkey stood outside the coffee-house with his patient nose almost to the ground. Ali leaped upon him and galloped across to the caravansary. The caravan provider squatted over a tiny fire.

Ali galloped up to him and said: "Hast thou seen anything of a rat-eaten merchant called Najob Azoura?"

"Aye," said the keeper of camels. "He left in the night for Mecca."

"Alone?"

"Aye."

"Knowest thou of a young man, tall and dark, Kahleel?"

"Yes; he came but yesterday."

"And hath gone away?"

"I saw him not, but one hath told me that he went away toward the sea last night."

"Alone?"

"No; there were two riding upon one camel—a gray Oman."

Ali Hassan leaped from his donkey.

"Thou shalt give me a horse," he said. "I must overtake them."

"A horse?" said the provider of caravans. "I have but one, and what knowest thou of horses?"

"Enough, thick wit," choked his customer, "to ride it."

"But thou wilt not go into the desert, Ali Hassan," expostulated the other. "The desert is worse than the sea, and thou art a townsman born and bred."

"Fear not for me," said Ali, taking a pistol from the donkey's saddle and putting it in his girdle; "but give me a horse."

"Thou knowest I have but one," said the man stubbornly, "and she is of pure desert breed. If she be lost I cannot replace her."

"Allah knoweth," said Ali Hassan in a low voice, "I try to be patient with thee. I will give thee an order on the goldsmith, and thou shalt fill in what figures thou wilt. If she come not back to thee, thou wilt have enough to buy a dozen."

The caravan keeper shrugged his shoulders and led the way to a stable which formed a part of his own dwelling. A neigh greeted him, and he said: "It is I, beloved."

He dropped the bars, and a round-bellied, slim-legged mare stepped out into the square.

"Is she swifter," asked Ali Hassan, "than the gray Oman?"

"Can the falcon outfly the buzzard?" said the caravan keeper scornfully.

"Saddle her quickly!" cried Ali. "Here is thy order on the goldsmith."

"What seekest thou?" asked the keeper of camels. "Another pearl?"

"Speak not to me of what I seek," said Ali Hassan. The mare now bore her saddle, and he leaped into it.

"Thou wilt ride her without a bridle and water-skins and forage and food?" said the owner of the horse scornfully. "Ali Hassan, I think—" He did not finish, but touched his forehead, bound a bundle of forage and a water-skin on the saddle, and touched the mare on the flank.

"Ride her gently," he said. "Thou art a heavy man. She can do forty hours' marching without water, but that is in the coolest weather and at her own pace."

The rider touched her with his staff, and she trotted smoothly from the square and into that lane called the Sea Road. There Ali put her to the gallop and came quickly to the edge of the oasis; there the verdure ended and the desert rolled up to it like a great sea. Behind him lay the oasis with its low walls and cloudy palm tops; ahead a shimmering stretch of sand and bare, sun-burnt rock.

A broad camel track stretched ahead of him; he turned into it. The sound of the horse's feet ceased; the sand came above her fetlocks at every step. She fell into the desert pace—a gentle canter—but Ali Hassan struck her with his staff, and she threw up her head and broke into a swift gallop.

The sun was up and strong; Ali put his hand to his head, for he wore only the fez still. He wrapped his cloak about his head and let his hands rest on the pommel of the saddle.

Until well past noon the horse did not falter in her swift pace; then she stumbled. Ali struck her with his staff; she picked up speed again, but at the end of a quarter of an hour she fell again to a

walk. Ali struck her again and again about the head.

"Thou art a dog," he screamed, "and no horse!"

She threw up her head and galloped wildly while he kept the staff drumming on her flanks. The broad camel track had dwindled by now; it split in two, and the rider pulled up. The mare dropped her head to her knees, and stood with her fore feet wide apart. The sun had passed the meridian; it was that hour in the desert when man and beast take rest in whatever shade there is at hand.

Ali looked at the two paths, took the pearl from his pouch, and said: "Thou hast never failed me yet." He held it so that the blinding sun fell on it, and saw for a time nothing but the opalescent rush of color.

"Show me where," he whimpered—"show me where they are!"

A tiny picture formed itself under his eyes—a black dot first, and then from it came a faithful picture, very small and very dim, of a camel and two figures upon it.

"Aye," groaned Ali, "but where?"

Still holding the pearl to the sun, he turned into that path which led to the right; the picture shifted into the pearl until it was almost lost; he turned back into the path which led to the left, and the tiny camel stood full in the middle of the gem.

"Allah hath spoken!" cried the man, and struck the horse again. She struggled to keep the swift gallop, but faltered more and more frequently while her rider beat her until his arm was numb. The fine nostrils showed a touch of red; her eyes rolled from side to side; and the chestnut sides grew black with sweat. Ali cursed.

At sundown she stumbled to her knees and did not rise. Ali rolled from the saddle to the ground, lay for a time inert, then staggered dizzily to his feet. The mare turned her head to him and groaned. Ali tried to mount again; his hand touched the water-skin. He tore it from the saddle and drank deeply. At the touch of water, hot as it was, his brain cleared.

"Softly," he said; "no horse, no revenge."

He filled his cap with water and held it for the horse to drink. She sucked up the water, and he filled his cap again. The faithful beast struggled to her feet and plodded through the sand. Ali tried to walk by her side, but the sand burned through his shoes and the rocks cut his feet.

The stars came out and a small moon. A shadow followed alongside the two—the slim-legged horse and the bulky man on her back. Close to midnight the mare put up her head, whinnied, and broke into a trot. Ahead of them a star burned upon the surface of the desert—a dim star shining in a pool of water scarcely larger than the saddle, a patch so foul that it stank. Man and horse drank; Ali dropped the bundle of forage before the horse. She nibbled at it; stretched herself out on the sand, and drew long breaths.

Ali could not rest long; always the red vision of his revenge danced before his eyes. Walking about the mare, he was suddenly aware of a single camel track that stretched ahead of him. He did not doubt that it was the track of his prey; he kicked the mare in the side, and she struggled to her feet. He mounted, and the two pushed on through the sand.

An hour past dawn he came upon them. He topped a small rise, and almost at his feet saw the two sitting with their baggage made ready for the day. At sight of the horse the gray Oman camel threw up its head and ambled a few steps, but Kahleel and Mirza, sitting with their backs to him, did not see Ali Hassan as he slid from his horse and crept up to them.

CHAPTER V.

THE RAT DINES.

"AND what shalt thou call me," said the girl, "when I am thy wife?"

"I shall call thee Ali's pearl," laughed Kahleel; "for it was by means of that that I came to thee."

The girl shuddered.

"What a pig! Sawest thou ever such a fat one?"

"I never saw such a fat-witted one,"

said Kahleel, and the rocks echoed the girl's laughter.

Ali Hassan had crept so close that he could have touched them. He took the pistol from his belt; it was a muzzle-loader, with one charge; he could fire, but that would leave him without protection on his return journey. He clubbed the pistol and struck once.

Kahleel pitched forward with a groan; the girl screamed and whirled about.

"Ali Hassan!"

"Aye," said their pursuer, "the fat pig with the thick wits."

He put out his hand toward her, but she fled away from him among the rocks.

"One at a time," said Ali. "Catch one of a pair, and the mate will come."

He touched the man with his foot. Kahleel stirred and groaned. Ali raised his pistol, but lowered it again. Instead of firing, he cut the cord which bound their luggage, and tied Kahleel hand and foot.

Kahleel opened his eyes and gazed up at the face above him,—a face in which the eyes were shot with blood and the lips black and swollen almost to the size of ripe figs. He turned his head and saw Mirza crouching among the rocks.

"Why dost thou not kill me?" he said. "Thou canst not frighten me by looking at me. I am no child, to be frightened at goblins."

"I am studying how to kill thee," said Ali Hassan.

"Take me," said Mirza, "and let him go."

"And why," exulted the pursuer, "should I not kill him and take thee, too?"

The girl said nothing, but moved closer to her lover, and put out her hand as if to touch him, but Ali seized her by the wrist.

"I have a heart," said Kahleel, "as others have. Put the point of thy knife under my fifth rib and thy revenge will be done."

"That were too much kindness," said Ali musingly. "If we were but in the city now I would know how to deal with thee. I could give thee such a drug as would make thee an idiot the rest of thy days, or have thee garroted, or killed in a hundred ways. But I am no desert dweller, and

know not how men may best revenge themselves in this waste."

The sun was fully up now, and a beam struck across the rock.

"Move him out of the sun," said the girl, "if there is any pity in thee."

Ali looked at her a moment, and laughed wildly.

"Maid," he cried, "I have to thank thee. His blood will not be upon my head, but upon thine!"

Still holding the girl by the wrist, he fumbled among the baggage and found the tent pegs. He drove four of them deep into the sand with a bit of rock. He let the girl's hand go and said: "If thou art quiet, I may have mercy on him."

She sank to the ground and wept bitterly, while Ali rolled his helpless victim between the tent pegs and bound him hand and foot to them. Kahleel lay stretched upon the burning sand like a man on a cross.

"Ali Hassan," said the young man, "thou shalt be kind to the girl, or I will haunt thee."

Ali laughed again.

"Thy spirit will see things that will please thee," he said, "if it comes to my harem."

He sat down, threw out his arms, and said:

"Body of Allah! I am hungry for the first time. What hast thou here for a famished man? Nejed dates, *samh*, and clotted cheese!"

When he had devoured as much of their food as he could, he said: "Now this is the mercy I will show him, maid. I will leave the rest of the food in his sight, so that if he should escape from his bonds he shall not starve. Thou and I will ride the camel."

He walked toward the camel, but the Oman threw up its head and trotted away a few steps. He tried again, but it evaded him, and he went back to his horse, mounted it, and tried to catch the camel. The horse was too weary to go beyond a shuffling trot, no matter how much he beat it.

"The devil rot thy bones!" he cried in a fury, pulled his pistol from his girdle, and shot at the beast. It broke into a long

gallop and disappeared in the shimmering heat waves.

Ali rode back to his victims and dismounted.

"The gray Oman hath settled thy fate, maid," he said. "I would have saved thee, but the horse can carry but one. Thou shalt lie here by him."

Kahleel groaned and said: "It will break my heart, Ali Hassan, to see her wither—"

"Hadst thou shown any care for my broken heart," said Ali Hassan, "things would not have been as they are."

Mirza laid herself down willingly beside her lover, while the Sultan's viceroy drove two more tent pegs into the sand. He bound her side by side with her lover. There was not enough of the rope to tie her; he took a leather thong from his saddle and tied one wrist with it.

"Kahleel," said Mirza suddenly.

Kahleel did not answer, and the girl continued: "The Koran sayeth that the true wife can have no greater pleasure than to die with her husband. Thou shalt not mourn for me, for I shall be happy in dying with thee. We shall cross the long bridge that leadeth into paradise hand and hand. Death cannot be painful to us, for I shall sing to thee and tell thee the long tales which the queen told to Haroun-al-Raschid. Art thou listening?"

"Tell him the tale of the pearl," cut in Ali, "the pearl which the Prophet gave to Ayesha and which hath come to Ali Hassan. Tell him that tale, for it was the pearl that brought me to you."

"I heard no one speak," said the girl, "nor shalt thou hear any voice but mine."

She looked up at the sky with wide-open eyes. "I will tell thee the tale of the cobbler—how he made shoes for the queen."

"I am sorry," cut in Ali Hassan, "that I cannot stay to hear thee. But thy tale might charm me from my purpose. Here is audience enough for thee—a rat—a long-whiskered desert rat, that looketh like nothing so much as Najob Azoura."

A jerboa rat had hopped from his burrow in the rocks, and stood up on his strong hind legs and watched these invaders of his

peace. Ali Hassan walked up to his horse and mounted. He looked about again for the gray Oman camel, but it was nowhere in sight.

"Fare thee well, Ali Hassan," said Mirza, as he put his heels to the horse, "and in thy death remember me."

"Fare thee well, witch," answered Ali, "and when *thy* end cometh, think of my garden with the three jets of water and the cucumber vines."

He pushed his horse up the little slope and back along his track. The red flecks that had danced before his eyes were gone; his head was clear, and he looked carefully at the mount under him. There was no question of galloping now; she shuffled along with her head down and her loins drawn up. He felt the water-skin; it scarcely bulged under his hand. The bundle of forage was thin; he had left most of it at the pool where they had halted at midnight.

At the end of the second hour he wetted his own lips and gave the mare the rest of what water there was in the skin; gave her also the rest of the forage.

All morning she kept up her shuffling pace; a little past midday he came suddenly upon the place where the pool had been. A broad track cut across his own trail there; the water was gone, drunk up by some thirsty Bedouin band who had crossed there. Already the bottom of the pool had baked and curled into dry chips under the fierce sun.

The mare turned her head and looked at her rider. Ali climbed painfully down.

"Softly, Ali Hassan," he said; "no horse, no life."

Ahead of him lay eighteen hours of stiff marching; how much his horse could do he did not know, being a city dweller born and bred. Neither did he know enough to give the horse her head and let her go to some haven to which her instinct led her; instead, he stood by her with the reins over his arm. About him lay the confused track of the caravan. He turned and looked at his horse; decided that she could not make the long march into Nejed. Neither could he without water.

Half fearfully he laid his hand upon his

pouch. Hitherto the pearl had helped him in matters not of life and death; if it should fail him now it was a question only of hours before he would be curling under that sun.

He took the pearl from his pouch and held it up to the sun. The play of light in it was so fierce that it almost blinded him; he muttered his wish and looked long in the pearl before the wavering color settled into the tiny picture. Then he saw—not some oasis to which he might go—not some friendly camp of desert dwellers—but the face of Mirza as he had last seen the girl, looking straight to heaven with wide-open eyes. For a moment the heavy pounding of his heart ceased; horse and desert melted into a whirling maelstrom.

"Curse thee!" he screamed. "Traitor!"

But look as he might, all that he could see was that small, upturned face. Then his reason, shaken by his physical sufferings in the desert and what he had done, tottered. Ali Hassan rubbed his hands and babbled like a child:

"At least, I shall see *them* die!"

He climbed into the saddle and turned the unwilling horse upon the long return journey—back to where he had left Kahleel and Mirza exposed to the sun. He rolled in the saddle, singing, cursing, repeating stray bits of conversations long past. They went on through the terrific heat of the rest hour—just past noon—went on as the sun went down and a moon came up.

When Ali saw the little rise ahead of him behind which he had left his victims, his head cleared somewhat. He tumbled out of the saddle and stood listening for a groan—weeping—even screaming. Stooping so as not to be seen, and laughing silently to himself, he stole up to the brow of the ridge and looked over.

The place below was empty. Kahleel and Mirza were gone; the tent pegs were there, and the ropes, and the prints of their bodies showed clear in the strong moonlight. In the little hollow there was but one living thing—an old jerboa rat who sat on his strong hind legs and nibbled at a piece of leather thong.

True to its carrion instinct, the jerboa rat

had gnawed the leather thong which had bound one of the girl's wrists, and so had set them free. If Ali Hassan had been a desert dweller, he would have known that the nature of the jerboa rat is to gnaw dead flesh or anything like dead flesh; even now it was some time before Ali saw what had liberated his victims.

When the truth did penetrate through the whirling maze of his mind, he ran upon the rat and screamed: "So it was thou that set them free!"

But the rat dodged between his hands into the inky shadows of the rock. He could see its eyes shining like two points of green fire, and tore at the rock until his fingers bled; but the rodent drew deeper within to safety.

Ali raged up and down, threw sand upon his head, and beat his breast. His passion cleared a bit after a time; he went to the top of the ridge. His horse was gone; she had shuffled away in the night to some refuge to which her keen nostrils guided her.

Once more the pearl came out of his pouch; the silver and violet of the night played along its smooth sides, but there was nothing in the pearl but the face of Mirza as Ali had last seen her—wide-open eyes, upturned face.

He dashed the pearl to the ground and put his heel upon it, chattering with rage. Then he saw the old rat nibbling again at the bit of leather. He threw himself upon it, but it slid between his feet and back into its burrow. Ali Hassan sat down outside the little hole in the rock to wait.

Close to dawn he awoke—something tugged at his foot. He raised his head and looked down to see the rat nibbling at the soft leather shoes. A touch of foam came to his lips, and his voice broke into a falsetto wail as he threw himself upon his enemy.

Again it escaped him, and again he sat down and smiled craftily as he settled himself down to wait.

But in such a duel of patience there could be but one victor. The next dawn saw the rat making his meal off the soft leather shoes in peace.

(The End.)

The Great Discovery

by Charles V. Barney

Author of "Texas Fever," etc.

WHAT HAS ALREADY HAPPENED

A SIMPLE British sailor, or so he thought himself, Arthur Lake, son to Tobit Lake, cobbler, was in reality of noble blood—the son of Prince Charles of Viana and Eleanor of Durham. Tobit knew the secret, but it died with him when, in a fit of rage, he was strangled by Don Juan de Seseca, Count of Sansito, private secretary to Ferdinand of Aragon. Tobit had stubbornly refused to part with the parchment attesting the youth's identity.

Finding Tobit dead, young Lake, as we must call him, discovered the parchment, and a store of gold; then, visiting his sweetheart, Judith Merton, daughter of the diplomat, Sir Thomas, who, finding the two together, waxed wroth; Arthur returned to his lodgings to find a yokel whom he had left in charge vanished—and the money and parchment stolen. All that he now possessed were a few gold pieces, and a miniature of his mother, whose name he did not know.

Hearing a movement within the room, Arthur pursued an unseen intruder through the window, cutting off one of his fingers ere he could escape—and later was accepted as a common sailor on the ship *Hopeful*, in which Seseca and Sir Thomas and his daughter were sailing.

But little did the young man suspect the sea of intrigue upon which he was embarking. Merton's interview with Seseca—who wore his hand bandaged—might have told him much could he have overheard it; he would have learned that he was indeed noble—royal, even. But aboard the ship, when he had sought audience with Seseca, or Sansito, the latter, talking to Sir Thomas, said: "I will excuse you."

"I would rather be present," the old man objected.

"You will go!" Sansito made no effort to soften his insolent command.

CHAPTER X.

SESECA LOST.

AT that moment Arthur Lake came into the cabin.

Sir Thomas Merton did not stir.

"I thank you for this privilege." The sailor bowed to Sansito.

The Spaniard acknowledged the speech with a slight nod, while he looked first at Sir Thomas and then at the door. But the old courtier refused to take the hint. He feared for Arthur's safety if left alone in the power of this man.

"I thought you were on watch," Sansito nervously began, for the youth had surprised his look at Sir Thomas. "How comes it that you are allowed to pay visits, ha?"

"I asked leave."

The Spaniard eagerly demanded: "Of whom?"

"The captain."

"He then knows you are with me?"

"He saw me come," Arthur replied.

Sansito looked baffled.

"I would talk with you alone," Arthur announced, glancing meaningly at the old nobleman.

Sansito pretended to misunderstand. "Leave us, Luis." The Jew departed.

"Am I to speak before him?" Arthur asked, pointing to Sir Thomas.

"Why not?" the crafty Spaniard demanded. His interest in getting Sir Thomas away had vanished since discovering that Arthur's whereabouts were known to the ship's captain. Now, he had another scheme.

At the young man's direct insistence, Sir

This story began in *The Argosy* for March 20.

Thomas had risen and with dignity proceeded toward the door.

"Stay!" Sansito's cry was an imperative order.

"What I want," Arthur announced simply, "concerns *myself intimately*, so may I be permitted to make my request to you in private?"

"I have no secrets from my old friend, Sir Thomas Merton," Sansito said ingeniously.

Arthur wasted no more words, but asked abruptly: "You are a Spaniard?"

"Yes. And may one ask how you, an Englishman, come to speak, so easily, my mother tongue?"

"I learned at sea. I sailed for years on Spanish and Portuguese ships."

"But you are an Englishman?"

"Yes."

"How comes it that you, after so many years at sea, are still but a seaman?"

"I came upon this trip at the last moment; glad of any chance to work my way across to Spain."

Arthur was unaware that the interview was turning into a close examination of himself.

"And what are you to do in Spain?" Sansito inquired.

"It is of that I wish to speak. I am—could you tell me anything concerning one—*Seseca*?" Arthur came close to his man and looked into his eyes.

The Spaniard did not flinch, but he attempted to bury his bandaged hand still more deeply beneath his cloak.

"*Seseca*," the count repeated. "*Seseca*.' Is that Spanish? It sounds—" He broke off, and, turning upon Sir Thomas, inquired: "Did you ever hear the name *Seseca*? Perhaps you know *Seseca*?"

The old diplomat was caught.

"No," he lied. "I do not."

The Spaniard indolently inquired of Arthur: "What do you want with this *Seseca*?"

"I must find him!" the young sailor cried vehemently.

"What for?"

"I—but, since you cannot aid me, you will pardon me for withholding my confidences."

Arthur bowed low, and, in the following silence, hastened to depart.

As the door closed, Sansito whispered admiringly: "Such a manner! His old grandfather could not have bettered it! He must be put out of the way—he might—"

Sir Thomas started forward.

"If you harm him—" he began.

Sansito smiled hypocritically. "You have *my* promise!"

And so Sir Thomas was obliged to let the matter rest. But he thought a great deal about it during the following days.

The weather was overcast and penetratingly cold, but the wind was favorable and the ship made good headway.

The old nobleman remained most of the time in the cabin close beside Mistress Judith, who was still too ill to rise. He feared that she was suffering more from the absence of Arthur than from the roughness of the sea.

He had not told her that her lover was aboard. Indeed, Tanner, acting under his instructions, had answered her questions with the information that Arthur was not on the ship!

Sir Thomas, who had feared this love-match when he believed Arthur too lowly, now feared it infinitely more because the youth was so far above them.

He wished there was something he could do for the young sailor; but, as yet he saw no safe course. He must get to the king with all speed on his own account and, as far as possible, keep Judith out of everything. This was as much as he could plan.

The tenth day out was decidedly squally, and the little ship was buffeted by wind and waves, but the next morning all was calm. Judith seemed better, and declared that on the following day she intended to go on deck. But that night a terrible storm came upon them.

Judith awoke suddenly, and called to her father. Sir Thomas lit a candle and almost at once was beside her. The boat was tossing blindly, and Judith, on her shifting pallet, trembled to hear the confusion of the storm and the constant running to and fro on the deck below.

Sir Thomas, clinging for support to the stationary table, strove to quiet his sick daughter, but he was himself much alarmed.

Suddenly the door was flung open, and with the gust that entered the candle was extinguished. In the darkness the door was slammed and outside a great wave was heard sweeping the ship.

"This is no safe place," the voice of Arthur Lake came from the ensuing momentary peace. "We must make for the cabin below. This may be blown off at any minute!"

Judith Merton made no sound after her single glad cry: "Arthur!" Weak from lack of food and dazed with fever, it seemed right to her that her beloved should come for her in the hour of peril.

"Take care, Sir Thomas," Arthur warned, "the sea breaks over the deck frequently. You must watch your chance, and attempt, between waves, to gain entrance to the Spaniard's cabin."

"But—" the old man began.

"There are no 'buts.' It's your only chance. Three sailors have been washed overboard already. The rudder is broken, and—"

The ominous noise of an overrushing wave almost drowned his voice.

"Cling all the time to the stair-rail. If you are caught by a wave, hold until it passes, then rush for the door."

As Arthur spoke he lovingly lifted Judith, pallet and all, in his arms. "I'll take care that this lady comes to no harm," he announced proudly.

Sir Thomas opened the cabin door and went out into the storm. Arthur followed.

Judith nestled closer as the blast beat upon her. From the fury of the storm without, it seemed to her that the boat must certainly go to the bottom beneath them; it groaned and creaked, staggering in the boiling blackness of spray and cloud and wind. But the girl did not care; for the first time in days, she was content and happy.

Sir Thomas gained the lower cabin in safety; but before Arthur, burdened by his precious freight, could follow, the little boat was almost swamped in a mighty onslaught of the sea.

"Cling to me, dearest," he said gently

as he let Judith slip to her feet, and, catching her tightly about the waist, he locked his other arm through one of the rungs of the stairs.

The water descended upon them. The ship shivered; the stairs trembled like reeds, but they held to their moorings—the man clung to them, and the girl to him.

There was a terrific wrench as the wave subsided and, in the glare of light that came almost simultaneously with a peal of thunder, Arthur saw the little turretlike cabin, formerly occupied by the Mertons, torn completely from its pinnings and carried away on the black, hissing waves.

During the next moments he had descended the few steps; gained the door; opened it, and deposited his charge in the arms of her father.

After the most approved romantic fashion, Sir Thomas was beginning: "I owe my daughter's life, and my own, to you! I can never repay—"

Arthur cut him short. "The only pay I want or will take is this—" He bent and kissed the girl's white lips, then turned away.

"Where are you going?" she cried.

"Out on deck. There is work for us, every one, up there!"

The door opened and closed; Arthur Lake was gone.

CHAPTER XI.

SESECA FOUND.

THE little ship *Hopeful* weathered the storm, but when the fury was passed, the unhappy vessel was in a sad plight. If a clear sky and gentle, favorable wind had not come with the morning, it would never have been possible in that heavy sea to patch things together sufficiently to drag into the little port where Captain Knee felt it needful for them to hasten for adequate repairs.

The nearest harbor being *La Coruña*, they put into this little town on the coast of Galicia.

The second day of their stay there, Arthur discovered that the Spaniard and his man, in company with Sir Thomas, his daughter,

and Tanner had abandoned the ship! Their departure had taken place while he was away on an errand for Captain Knee at the shipwrights.

The captain could tell him nothing of the plans of his former passengers. They had told him they were going, and they had gone! He surmised that they had got enough of the sea, and would make the remainder of their journey on land.

Arthur begged to be permitted to follow them.

"What, give up another man after all that have been drowned and—"

Arthur interrupted: "You can surely get more men here—"

"What sort, pray, what sort? Foreigners! Look what *they've* brought upon us—just having them as passengers—they are ill luck, these heathen!"

"Spaniards are not heathen," Arthur objected.

"They are so mixed up with Moslems, I can't tell 'em apart. There isn't much difference that I can see, anyway. I have one left aboard—"

"Who?"

"The cook—Banny—"

"Is he Spanish, with that name?"

"Yes. His name is Estéban, but what could I do with such a name? It's no God-fearing name—now, is it?"

"Suppose I jump the ship?" Arthur threatened.

"You do, and I'll kill you!" Captain Knee exclaimed.

At this they both laughed.

The young man finally asked: "May I have leave to go ashore this afternoon and see what I can—"

"You may not," the captain thundered. "We sail on this tide, without fail. And you sail with us!"

And it turned out as the captain said. Perhaps it would not have, had not the wise old man of the sea put Arthur below, ostensibly to help Banny in the galley, but really where he would be safely watched.

Shortly after the vessel was under way, the young man was ordered on deck and assigned his usual duties.

It seemed as though there might have been some truth in the captain's assertion

that the Spaniards were trouble-bringers; for, from now on, the voyage was as easy as it had before been arduous. Arthur had more free time, and this he spent with Will Harris, to whom he spoke of Judith Merton and his plans to find her. He was careful to avoid any mention of the locket that still reposed safely beside the ring and nine gold pieces next his skin.

He did not tell Will the story of the picture and treasure. It was too improbable! Will would find it hard to believe, and Arthur was too fond of this simple, loyal friend to put such a strain upon his credence. So he kept his own counsel, but he pondered his affairs a great deal and one day he asked Estéban if he had ever heard of "Seseca."

"Of course!" the cook cried. "Every Spaniard knows that name."

Arthur was almost dumfounded.

"Who is it?" he demanded.

"That is the name of the great Count de Sansito—Secretary to His Majesty King Ferdinand of Aragon. He's the greatest man in Spain. Some say he can do anything, even with the king himself!"

"Are you sure that's who Seseca is?"

"Of course, I'm sure. I never saw him, but I know. He has other titles—lots of them, but first he was just plain Don Juan de Seseca—a nobody, employed by the old King of Aragon—the father of the present king and the Prince of Viana, him as died so young—some say poisoned by his own father—"

"How did you hear all this?"

"It's no more than everybody knows that was born and raised in Spain."

"Funny that grandee who was our passenger did not know who Seseca was, nor Sir Thomas Merton, either—he was often at the Spanish Court."

Arthur was thinking aloud. Estéban interposed by demanding: "Did you ask them?"

"Yes, and they both said 'No.'"

"Then," Estéban announced with solemnity, "they *both* lied!"

Arthur was silent. He knew that this fellow spoke the truth. But why had Sir Thomas deceived him? Why had the grandee lied? Where had they gone—and

why? Had Judith willingly left with no word for him? Was she angry? No, he knew this could not be true. She loved him.

She had been so gentle, so frail and helpless the night of the storm. That was the last time he had seen her. Was all well with her now? Where had they taken her? He must find her!

But first, he must go where the court was; for there would be the secretary—Seseca—and from him he would learn all that now was so mysterious.

When they arrived in the blue bay of Cadiz, Arthur escaped from the ship, the first night, by slipping quietly down the boat's side and swimming ashore. His preparations had consisted of penning a scrawl to Will telling that he had gone to find her.

He landed, dripping, in the little low-lying, white-housed town, where he got food, and dried out before the stingy fire in a cheap *posada*. Here he made inquiries about the location of the court, and learned that it was now at Granada, a city some distance inland and to the northeast.

Arthur Lake slept that night at this same inn where he had eaten and, the next morning, beneath a brilliant blue sky, departed on foot. Soon he had left the little town, with its whitewashed houses streaked with vermillion, glistening and gleaming beside the sunlit sea, and entered upon the flat, sandy, shadowless country of arid dunes, flies, and mosquitoes, and pitiless sun.

He spent eight days on his way, unexciting, but happy days, often traversing a hilly, dusty country where he frequently had to ask his way, but where the customs seemed strangely familiar and satisfying. Sometimes he had company, but more often he went forward alone. His evident prowess protected him from much, his shabby clothes from more; and his beauty and charmingly simple friendliness brought to him still more that was very delightful.

The land abounded in surprising contrasts. Hours of heat and dust and barrenness would be succeeded by vineyards and grain-fields—now nearing harvest in this tropic clime. Or silvery-green olive-orchards and orange-groves, where the yel-

low balls were still green and the glossy, aromatic foliage sent up a sweet smell in the golden air, would be followed by rocky, sunburnt plains and desolate, dry rivers.

As he proceeded the ground became more and more rolling, and the snowy peaks of the Sierra Nevada came into view.

On the eighth day, his eyes were gladdened by the sight of Granada, backed by the snow-capped mountains, resplendent upon its hills; while above, among the dark cypresses, towered the beautiful, ruddy fortress of the Alhambra.

At noon he arrived within this old city of the Moors, which they had but recently surrendered. And with little difficulty he learned the whereabouts of the dwelling-place of the king's secretary. For the Count of Sansito had a palace of his own!

Arthur went to it, but, after making certain that it was the right place, he dared not knock and demand entrance.

Instead he walked around it several times and then went to a *posada*, where he bathed, put on fresh linen which he had bought in the town with part of the last but four of his gold pieces, and, as a final touch of elegance, placed the magnificent, jeweled ring on his forefinger! And how it glittered! Strangely at odds with the strong, well-worn hands of the usual sailor-boy.

Thus arrayed, he wended his way to the prisonlike palace of the king's secretary.

He marched up to the door and bravely grasped the magnificent, wrought-iron knocker. He raised it and let it fall with a loud thud.

He waited in sore anxiety. What was he about to discover? Or was he about to discover anything? He might be turned away! No matter—he would come again, again and again, until he learned the secret. Then, to find Judith, and then—

The door opened! A marvelously liveried servant looked insolently at the big fair-haired sailor.

"The Count de Sansito?" Arthur raised his deep voice to interrogate.

The servant did not budge from where he blocked the entrance.

"I would see Don Juan de Seseca," Arthur cried imperiously, for all that he felt most insecure.

As he spoke he moved his hand in a brave attempt to wave this lackey aside.

Suddenly the servant's whole manner changed. He almost groveled as he bowingly besought the shabby youth to come within.

"The Count de Sansito will see you *instantly*."

In the greatest bewilderment, Arthur Lake entered the tapestry-hung hall. The strange Moorish lamps suspended from the richly ornamented ceiling made little light when, suddenly, the glare of the sunny street was shut out—the iron-studded door behind him had closed noiselessly!

CHAPTER XII.

THE INTERVIEW.

THE magnificent corridor brought him to a more magnificent loggia that ran around all four sides of a large courtyard. Over this enclosure billowed a gorgeous tawny-pink canopy in wide stripes of alternate thick and thin silk.

Into the mysterious rosy gloom of this flower-planted court, the lackey hastened, and Arthur followed. The center of the courtyard, toward which they advanced, was occupied by a small marble pool from which rose a single thin jet of crystalline water, flashing like a keen rapier toward the silken roof, and then returning upon itself with a sleepy tinkle.

Beside the fountain was a richly sculptured bench of green, semitransparent stone, upon which lolled a man elegantly dressed in black velvet with touches of gold. He looked up from watching the water circles of the fountain.

He was the Spanish grandee, former passenger of the *Hopeful*!

Before Arthur could recover from his surprise, the servant spoke:

"Your Grace of Sansito, a messenger from His Majesty the King!"

The grandee started to his feet and then, his astonishment overcoming him at sight of the young Englishman, he fell back upon the bench.

As Arthur, stepping past the lackey, came rapidly forward, Sansito's hand flew to his

belt. A look of dismay came into his eyes as he realized that he was unarmed.

Arthur saw both the movement and the look. In amazement, he asked himself: Why does this man fear me?

Aloud he inquired: "Are you Don Juan de Seseca, Count of Sansito?"

The Spaniard jerked his head in affirmation, while with his hand he motioned to the servant. The lackey moved promptly backward until he was beyond range of their voices, but still within view.

"You come from the king?" Sansito almost whispered.

"I do not!" Arthur rapped out.

"But my servant said—"

Arthur interrupted: "I was as much surprised by that as you. I—"

He got no further, for Sansito had spied the ring. He sprang upon it, and, catching the hand, attempted to tear the jewel from it.

But the brawny sailor was too quick. With little apparent effort he forced the count back upon the bench and held him there.

"Now what's all this? What's the matter?" he asked.

Sansito calmed suddenly. "Will you be seated?" he inquired graciously.

Arthur hesitated for a moment, and then sat down.

"The ring you wear," the count pointed, "is the property of His Majesty the King of Aragon."

"Holy saints above!" Arthur cried. "I found it on the floor of the cobbler's room."

"That sounds probable!" Sansito sarcastically remarked, and then he laughed.

As the young man eyed his mysterious trinket with growing awe, he remarked simply: "It's true."

"The ring is the property of my master, the king. Give it to me. I will see that it reaches him. I—"

Arthur interrupted: "I will *not* give it to you. Why should I?"

"I could take it from you," Sansito quietly addressed a dark-red carnation that he was caressing.

"It is not so easy to take things from me, as your grace has just discovered."

The Spaniard smiled cruelly. "My ser-

vants are within call," and he trailed the heavy-scented flower across his thin lips.

"*They* would find it no easy matter to despoil me. I am no weakling."

Sansito interposed: "My boastful young man, don't you realize that I can do with you as I choose? You are alone, in my palace!"

Then suddenly he discarded his insolently threatening manner. "I ask you in all courtesy to give me that ring." His words were like the fountain's music.

"And in all courtesy," Arthur's deep voice declared, "I refuse. Your gentle requests move me no more than your threats."

Sansito made a sharp movement. His eyes glinted ominously. "Young man, you may go too far. Don't you know I could—*kill*—you, for that matter."

At last the realization of his danger yawned before Arthur. He thought quickly and to good purpose. A lie might save him. "If you harmed me, what do you suppose my friends would do?"

"Your friends?" Sansito echoed in alarm. "They know you are here?"

Arthur smiled and nodded, wondering just who his friends were and why Sansito feared them. "I have taken other precautions than this simple one of bringing my dagger." He tapped his side.

"What do you want? Why are you here?" the count demanded flatly.

"To—" The young man interrupted himself. "Why did you deceive me on the Hopeful? You said you did not know Seseca! You yourself are he!"

A crooked smile twitched the diplomatist's face. "I have that honor."

"Then why did you lie?"

The Spaniard flushed. "Your words are blunt, Sir Sailor."

"I am an Englishman," Arthur responded, "my tongue knows no Latin tricks."

A slight silence came, and then Sansito recited calmly: "In that brief interview on the boat, which *you* cut short, you will remember, you only said you must *find* Seseca. I was in England on a secret and most perilous mission for His Majesty King Ferdinand. I feared discovery."

"Was that why?" Arthur cried in a dazed way.

Sansito quickly took advantage of his position. "I dared make no admission. Besides, Sir Thomas Merton knew who I was. Why did he not tell you—"

"Sir Thomas knew that you were the Seseca for whom I was looking? He—"

Sansito interrupted: "I do not know *what* Seseca you are seeking, but he certainly knew that I was Juan de Seseca, Count of Sansito."

"Then you can tell me everything," the youth cried radiantly.

"I don't know what you mean by *everything*." The count feigned mystification. "What can I tell you?" he coldly inquired.

"About myself—who I am, and what my secret is—" Arthur paused.

"Go on," the other prompted.

Then, impetuously, the handsome sailor told of finding the locket and treasure, and of his loss of everything except the picture and a remembrance of the parchment directions—to find and question Seseca.

"And this locket?" the Spaniard inquired quietly. "Where is it?"

As the significant question floated on the warm air, Arthur recalled old Tobit's warning to be "ticklish" of this man.

"It is safe," the youth responded enigmatically.

The count was watching him narrowly. "Upon your person?" he inquired.

Arthur did not answer.

"I would like to see it."

"What for?" the youth showed suspicion.

"If you can tell me everything, what good would it do you to look at this miniature? There is nothing written upon it, except the words—Your Mother—and, on the outside, For—"

"For whom?" Seseca cried.

"That is entirely worn away," Arthur responded. "Now, I have answered many questions—you talk!"

The handsome face had flushed with happy anticipation; it now paled as Sansito declared: "There is nothing I can tell."

"Why?" Arthur's voice was harsh.

"Because," the count confided, "I know nothing."

Incredulously the big sailor burst forth: "Know nothing?"

"Exactly."

"What do you mean?"

Slowly the Spaniard remarked: "Seseca is a common name in Spain. There are many of us. I know nothing about you, my dear young giant, except what you yourself have just confided to me." His tone was too perfect in its sincerity.

But Arthur Lake believed him.

These words settled upon him like mighty stones. He had counted upon this interview, never suspecting that it might all end in nothing. He seemed to sink dejectedly in upon himself.

The Spaniard watched in silence. When he thought the youth's despondency had reached the proper stage for his evil purpose, he asked: "What's the matter?"

Arthur looked up. "Everything. I—" he paused.

Sansito came to the rescue.

"There are other Sesecas. You must hunt them out. Sooner or later you will succeed in finding your man. I am sure you will! You are the kind who does not fail," he flattered.

Then the Spaniard smiled as he said: "It will take time and money, but you are young."

"Yes," Arthur admitted, "I'm young, but money—" He shrugged.

Many thoughts—questioning, miserable thoughts—whirled about in his confused brain.

In the silence Seseca watched him. The fountain trickled dreamily; the flowers gave out their blessed perfume, and the sunlight forsook the ruddy awning.

Finally Arthur arose. "I'm intruding," he began, "I must beg you to forgive me, and—"

The Count of Sansito put his hand gently upon the unhappy man.

"Stay," he solicited. "I would talk further with you."

CHAPTER XIII.

THE RING AND THE LETTER.

HE drew Arthur down beside him. "I would like to help you," Sansito said kindly.

The hand which he had placed upon the

sailor's arm still remained there, and he gazed graciously upon his victim.

Touched by Seseca's evident interest, but remembering the warning, Arthur forced himself to demand: "Why do you wish to aid me?"

"Why? Why?" Sansito hesitated. "Perhaps it's your youth—perhaps—well—sometimes there is a heart left somewhere in the depths of even so hardened a courtier as I. The secretary of His Majesty the King of Spain is, after all, just a man!" He paused and waited vainly for Arthur to respond.

The fragrant languor of the voluptuous garden seemed to encompass them more closely; the blue and orange tiles decorating the façades of the house seemed to glisten more tenderly, and the rosy twilight of that old Moorish courtyard, to sanctify with its security and peace.

Sansito was the first to speak.

"I can instruct you in the whereabouts of all the Sesecas I know, and so send you forth upon your quest, but I wish to do more. I—"

"You can," Arthur cried. "Tell me of Sir Thomas Merton and his daughter."

"What of them?" the count parried.

"Where are they?"

Sansito lied promptly: "They have returned to England."

"Already?"

The count confirmed his lie and continued gloomily: "As soon as we left the ship, we hastened to Seville, where the court was. Sir Thomas quickly despatched his business and, with his daughter, started at once for home."

When the silence following this was broken, it was by the Spaniard, speaking as if half asleep: "Your interest sets in the direction of the daughter—yes?"

The sailor did not reply, and Sansito resumed: "She is very desirable—that young lady; very beautiful and very good—"

"Indeed—yes!" Arthur agreed happily.

"It is because of her that you wish to learn the secret of your birth and regain your precious gold and—"

Arthur sighed deeply, and made a sign of affirmation.

"I would I could help you," Sansito thought aloud.

Another silence followed.

"Would you take money?" The secretary barely breathed the words.

Arthur asked sharply: "From you?"

"Why not—from me?" The question was as musical as a song.

"I see no reason why I *should*?" Arthur spoke stiffly, then more gently added: "I thank you, noble count, for the offer."

Unabashed, Sansito inquired: "You believe in this secret that your parchment hinted?"

His companion nodded.

"I think I understand." Juan de Seseca did not look at the youth; his eyes wandered over the beautiful garden, and his voice came slowly and softly:

"You feel within yourself that you have the right to claim your loved lady's hand," the Spaniard's voice quickened, "that in your veins pulses good, true, noble blood. Something fine stirs within you—you feel yourself—almost—a king! You—"

"Yes. Yes," Arthur cried. "That is just it. How did you know—how—"

Sansito interrupted: "It is a way of youth." He smiled benignantly. "I, too, was young. You—you might almost be my son." He added sadly: "I have no son."

Arthur was impressed. The schemer saw his advantage, and hastened to his goal by slowly suggesting: "Let me give you money, boy. It will make your search easier. You need better attire—and—"

The Englishman shook his head positively. "Thank you, my lord. Thank you—but, no!"

"Then, my son, let me *buy* that ring of you. It really belongs to the King of Spain. It was stolen from me on my last mission to England. How, I know not; nor can I guess how it came to be found by you in Dover. It was while I was in London that I was robbed. King Ferdinand does not yet know of the loss. Give me the ring. It will save me chagrin; and you will receive its full value! You need gold—"

Arthur asked greedily: "How much?"

The Count of Sansito clapped his hand sharply upon the bench. The lackey sprang to attention.

"Bring me the Toledo coffer," the master called.

This coffer, a box of marvelous Moorish inlay—gold on steel—was brought. Sansito opened it by a hidden spring and took out three bags.

It was now that Arthur noticed that the count did not use his left hand, and that both were encased in fine black gloves that opened down the back, after the Italian style.

"One bag is for you," Seseca announced, "one is for you to remember me by, and the third is a memento of Mistress Judith." He smiled charmingly.

"Each contains one hundred pieces of gold—is it a bargain—"

He got no further, for Arthur jerked the ring from his hand.

"It is yours," he cried eagerly.

Sansito dropped the jeweled ring into the casket. He closed this strong box with a sharp snap; then indicated that the lackey, who was kneeling with it on his outstretched arms, should take it away.

Arthur was profuse in his thanks.

"That money is nothing," the Spaniard cried, "it will get you nowhere with your beloved, and *that's* what counts—eh?"

The youth blushed.

"Sir Thomas is an ambitious man," Sansito announced regretfully. "There is talk here in Spain of an almost royal match which he could effect if his daughter so chose. You must get a fortune, my friend, and quickly, too, or, better still, get fame! Now I think of it, there may be another way to help you."

Arthur was attentive.

Sansito spoke with growing enthusiasm: "There is an Italian, Christopher Columbus, who is about to sail from Palos on an expedition of discovery. The Spanish sovereigns have fitted him out with three caravels. He promises to find lands in the west."

The count did not add that his had always been one of the strongest voices raised in doubts concerning Columbus's undertaking; instead he assured Arthur he will find that for which he seeks, and great fame and riches, too!

"You, my son, know and love the sea!"

Sansito spoke appreciatively. "Who could be better fitted to serve under this new 'Admiral of the Ocean Seas,' as he has been christened by Queen Isabella—who, I ask? You should share in his triumphs!"

The nobleman, seeing that Arthur's interest was kindled, hastened to add this offer to the blaze: "I can give you a letter that will insure your place in this glorious undertaking."

Arthur demanded: "When does he sail?"

"Shortly."

"But his crews are already complete."

"No doubt they are," Sansito agreed, "but with my letters you will be given place."

He did not explain that Columbus had encountered such extreme difficulty in securing mariners that an extra seaman would be most welcome. An order from King Ferdinand forcing men to embark had not been sufficient; so condemned criminals had to be freed to swell the list of those hopeless venturers upon the Sea of Darkness!

"And you will do this for me?" Arthur cried.

"Indeed, yes!"

The youth turned and looked searchingly at the overly enthusiastic nobleman.

Sansito pretended not to notice, but hastened on: "When you return as one of a richly successful voyage of discovery, you will find Sir Thomas Merton more ready to listen to your prayers, and Mistress Judith—"

Arthur interposed: "I will go!"

"It is well," the count remarked, and added subtly: "And I pray it will *be* well!" He did not mention to whom the benefit should come.

"Now, Sir Voyager, I will hasten to prepare the letter, and—" Sansito hesitated. "Shall I send Don Luis to you? With his assistance you can be properly habited before you depart—"

"You mean you wish to give me better clothes?"

"Why not? Those are far from—new, and—"

"I thank your grace. These will answer until I buy some for myself. In accepting your letter, I'm obligating myself far more than is my custom."

The count shrugged. "So be it," he replied calmly, but in his heart was disappointment, for he had not discovered the hiding-place of the miniature. He suspected it to be upon the youth's person, but he had observed that no chain encircled the sailor's throat.

Arthur was left in the beautiful garden, now ash-color in the fading light.

Within a short time Sansito returned with a document which Don Luis had written, but which he himself had signed and sealed with his arms.

Arthur took the missive which bore the inscription:

DON CRISTOBAL COLON

**Admiral of the Ocean Seas
In the Port of Palos**

By the hand of Tallarte de Lajes

He smiled at this grotesque Spanish rendition of his own name—"Tallarte de Lajes" (Arthur Lake). Little did he suspect that this garbling was deliberate and a precaution which Sansito had taken to protect himself.

After expressing his heartfelt thanks for what had been done for him, Arthur left.

The secretary stood and smiled after him. He had given his word not to harm this youth; and in a way he had kept that word. All the same he had arranged to do away with him as surely as if he had followed any one of numerous impulses to have him murdered. For, from this western voyage, Sansito was firmly convinced, no one would ever return!

But, before the sailor left Granada, that telltale miniature must be taken from him!

CHAPTER XIV.

PRISON.

WHEN the young Englishman was clear of the Sansito Palace, he was trailed through the gathering dusk by Don Luis and three of the count's stalwart servants.

Before sending the Jewish doctor upon this errand, Sansito had admonished him: "You are not to take this young man's life except as a last resort; under no circumstances are you to permit yourself to be recognized; and guard carefully against these 'friends' of his. Do you understand?"

Don Luis assured his master that he did, and departed.

In a narrow street, behind the cathedral, the lackeys set upon Arthur.

They were armed with stout sticks, and had the advantages of number and surprise. However, the first assault failed, and in some trepidation Don Luis, watching from the shadow of a deep doorway, saw that Arthur, with his back to a blank wall, looked ready for anything, and was calling lustily for help.

The ruffians, disconcerted by the amazing strength of their prey, hesitated. No one would venture to attack alone; but finally they decided to rush forward in a body.

Arthur's continued cries awakened nothing but echoes in the deserted street; the iron-latticed, bird-cage windows projecting from near-by houses might as well have been openings into houses of the dead.

As the men came upon him, the sailor sprang forward and caught the nearest fellow a stunning blow under the chin. The stricken man gave a gurgling cry, staggered back, and falling up against the wall, closed his eyes. But Arthur narrowly escaped the descending club of his next companion. The club crashed to the surprised lackey's side; he had been certain of hitting his man.

Arthur sprang upon this momentarily useless club and by sheer weight tore it from the wielder's hand; at the same time, before the third knave realized what was taking place, the sailor had drawn his poignard and was upon him. He struck two deep blows over the fellow's heart. The unfortunate creature shrieked, and fell headlong into his own blood.

By this time the second man, whose blow the youth had so narrowly escaped, was rearmed. He succeeded in striking the poignard from Arthur's hand, and attempted to clinch with him. But the sailor's feet were not idle. He cleverly

tripped this adversary, and during the brief moments that he was down, possessed himself of the dying lackey's club and gave two resounding whacks on the struggling brute's defenseless pate. Then this second man rolled senseless into the gutter.

Arthur's frequent cries for help seemed about to be answered. Noise of people running was heard.

The remaining lackey, just recovered from the blow under his chin, seeing the fate of his companions and hearing people approaching, decided to trust to his heels. As he fled another man joined in his flight.

Arthur noticed him, and wondered who this could be; and then the watch was upon him.

He attempted to explain his predicament, but these officers of the law, recognizing one of the fallen men as a lackey of the great secretary, would listen to nothing. Protesting, Arthur was taken before an ignorant petty official and charged with breaking the peace, killing the king's loyal, law-abiding subjects—in broad daylight—in the open street. These last clauses seemed in the eyes of the official to be his most heinous offenses.

Arthur was allowed to say nothing in defense, but was roughly led away to prison. His letter to Columbus and the bags of gold for which he had sold the ring were taken from him, and he was thrust into a little dark cell. Here the hot air stank with a nauseatingly fetid odor, while rats and worse vermin disputed his possession of water in a handleless pitcher and a small hunk of hard bread.

Without, in the rough guard-room, Arthur's two jailers gossiped. He could hear their mumbblings, but not the words. They were cooking their meager supper over a sickly fire burning upon the hearth—a big, flat stone in the center of the room.

"The yellow-head, for all his gentle manners, killed one of the Count de Sansito's own men," the big, tall, bristly, hollow-jawed fellow named Tomasso announced. He spoke with gloomy awe as he pointed to Arthur's cell. He moved out of the blinding smoke, licking his fingers and munching, then sat down.

"I heard it was two," his little com-

panion, Sebastian, a copper-colored, bald man, complained disappointedly.

"No—one!" Tomasso corrected noisily. His manner was haughty, despite his rags. "The fellow with the broken head will recover," he continued. "I know. Juan told me. He it was that helped carry him and the dead one to the Sansito palace!"

"The yellow-head had papers upon him, too. Did you know that?" Sebastian blinked.

The smoky torch-light flared in the hot breeze, fitfully revealing and obscuring the dirt and squalor of this prison lounging-room.

"Papers?" Tomasso snorted. "Worse than that—a letter to the fiend incarnate, the Italian magician, Cristobal Colon, who—"

"Is he a magician as well?" Sebastian cried in horror. "I thought he was but a madman who sailed other folks' ships, and—"

Tomasso loudly interrupted: "If he were not a magician how else could he bewitch our men into sailing with him to their *deaths*?"

"Is it to their deaths? Holy Mother! I thought it was to find new land." Sebastian was in a sad muddle.

"You are a heretic and fit for hell's fire, or worse, the fires of the holy inquisition!" Tomasso thundered.

"Shuz! Be quiet," Sebastian pleaded in terror. "Say not that. God defend me from the holy office. I'm a true son of the church."

"I have my suspicions," Tomasso muttered, as he luxuriated in his little companion's alarm, "especially when you say this pilot can find new lands beyond the great ocean.

"That's what he claims. I—"

Poor Sebastian got no further. "You infidel!" Tomasso cried. "Do you know that this Colon preaches that the earth is round; that folks walk on t'other side with their heads down like flies on a ceiling; that—"

"Holy saints in God!" Sebastian moaned. He repeatedly crossed himself and began mumbling a protecting prayer.

"Do you suppose the yellow-head is like

that?" he finally ventured to inquire, suspiciously eying the door of Arthur's cell.

"Like what?" the fierce-looking Tomasso demanded.

"Wanting to make us all walk on our heads like flies."

Tomasso spat in disgust. "You are a fool!"

Sebastian cowered; but at last his loquacity overcame his fears, and he timidly remarked: "And he looks so gold-pure, and mannered like a prince; he might be born royal as a Trastamara! You don't think he might be the poisoned prince? He had yellow hair, and—"

"Now," interrupted Tomasso, "you are fit for the inquisition, and I'll declare against you!" He got to his feet.

"Oh! St. Lawrence defend me," the little man prayed. "What have I said? There's surely nothing against God in that—"

"Worse," Tomasso pronounced awfully. "You spoke against the Holy Trinity."

"How's that?" Sebastian besought his austere judge. "I did but say—"

"Know you of what the blessed Trinity is composed?"

Sebastian looked doubtful.

Tomasso informed him: "'Tis God—He's first, and then the blessed King Ferdinand, and then the thrice blessed Queen Isabella. Now," the instructor in dogma lowered ominously above his companion. "When you suggest this fellow is of the royal line, you blaspheme against the blessed Trinity, and hence are fit subject for the holy office."

Sebastian was in a sad state. "I'll recant. I'll swear to anything. I meant no harm. I'll—"

His companion emitted a filthy word and showed him aside. "Fool!" he cried, "pray God to lead you no more into temptation."

Little Sebastian fell upon his knees and began his prayers; beating his breast and calling aloud upon the divine mercy of all the saints in the calendar.

The tall Tomasso looked on approvingly until a brilliant idea came to him, then he interrupted his fellow jailer's devotions.

"Since yellow-head was rich enough to

carry bags of gold upon him, maybe he might be worth helping to escape," he announced.

The little bald man looked up stupidly.

"You go in and talk to him," Tomasso proposed; "see what he will give us to look aside while he gets out."

"You come, too," Sebastian suggested; "he might knife me—alone—in the dark."

"How can he knife you without any knife?" Tomasso was indignant at his companion's stupidity. "Besides, if we both go, and are caught conniving in this escape, *two* heads would pay the penalty. *One* is enough for us to risk! What say you—yes—yes—yes?" He advanced upon his thicker-witted companion at each question, insisting upon a response.

"Yes," Sebastian hastened to confirm.

Tomasso turned away to unlock the door of Arthur's cell.

Sebastian advanced, scratching his bald head. "If I had not you to think for me, Tomasso, where would I be?" he demanded.

The tall jailer did not answer, but turned away from the unlocked door and, stepping quickly across the room, pretended to be interested in something outside the barred window.

Sebastian understood this trick, and noiselessly opening the cell door, he slipped into the dark little hole where Arthur, not daring to sit down, stood shoe-deep in the filth.

"Would you be free?" Sebastian idiotically queried after he had closed the door and heard his accomplice lock it on the other side.

These words suggesting a happy promise seemed like light breaking through the black clouds of Arthur's thoughts.

"Yes—why? Who are you?" he inquired.

"Whisper!" Sebastian warned. "What would you give?"

"All I have," Arthur responded promptly.

The jailer demanded: "How much is that?"

"Four doubloons and some silver."

"Have you no more?" Sebastian was greedy, although this amount was beyond the poor, underpaid creature's wildest dreams of wealth.

"No," was the prisoner's gloomy response.

"Outside you have more, eh?" Sebastian suggested.

"I am a stranger in Granada. I have nothing more."

"Will you give it to me—all—if I let you slip through the guard-room?"

"And beyond that?" Arthur demanded.

"Is one sentry. You can wait your chance and slip by him. Maybe I'll tell him not to look."

Smiling at the discipline of this prison, the young Englishman cried: "It's a bargain." Already he was extracting his gold from its hiding-place.

"Wait till I ask Tomasso if it's enough," Sebastian whispered. "How much did you say?"

"Four doubloons."

Sebastian prompted: "And some silver—yes?"

"Yes," the young man admitted ruefully, "but I had thought you would let me keep that."

"What for?" The jailer was suddenly suspicious.

"For traveling money," Arthur announced, with a wry smile.

"You go on a journey?" Sebastian showed a gossip's quick interest.

"Yes," the youth responded, "to the south of Spain, perhaps farther."

"Oh! then you must keep the silver," Sebastian graciously conceded. Then, apprehensively, he added:

"But I'll ask Tomasso."

CHAPTER XV.

THE THREAT.

DON LUIS returned to the Sansito palace humiliated and fearful. He had failed in a most important mission. The fact that he usually succeeded would weigh little with the count against this present failure.

The Jew knew that for years he had been allowed to live on in Spain and enjoy safety only through the good offices of his master. The inquisitor-general, Torquemada, had just obtained a royal edict forbidding a Jew even to hold intercourse with

a Christian. All the race were now obliged to accept baptism or exile. Don Luis had long since officially placed himself within the law, but he understood only too well that his considerable wealth made him envied, and his surgical ability rendered him a suspicious person, for necromancy and medical science were almost synonymous to many. Sansito alone stood between him and the torture. And how would he accept the return of his emissary empty-handed?

The Jew was relieved to learn that his master was away, having been summoned to the presence of his still greater master, King Ferdinand. Indeed, the count did not return until late that night.

But immediately upon seeing Don Luis, early the next morning, Sansito cried: "Give it to me, quick!"

The Jew stammered: "But I have not got it."

"Not got it?" Sansito was astonished. "Then he did not have it upon him?"

Suddenly the frightened doctor saw a chance of escape, and hastened to lie: "I searched, but it was not on him. He killed our Martin, and broke Diego's head, and—"

His recital was interrupted by the entrance of a bold lackey, who announced: "The prisoner has escaped. The—"

"What prisoner?" the count cried in angry bewilderment.

Don Luis went pale, but did not speak.

The master demanded: "What prisoner?"

The lackey spoke up: "The one as killed Martin and almost murdered Diego."

"That Englishman in the clutches of the law!" Sansito was thinking of all that Arthur might reveal. Turning upon the trembling doctor, he demanded sternly: "Why did you not tell me this?"

"I did not know," the Jew began.

Sansito interrupted angrily: "You knew that he had been taken into custody?"

"Yes."

"Why did you not inform me last night?"

Don Luis cringed.

"Answer!"

"He has escaped now." The Jew attempted to mitigate his master's wrath.

"Escaped?" Sansito derided. "Yes, but how? With whose help? What may he have told? What—this must be—"

He paused to glare at an intruding servant.

"What do you want, sirrah?" he snarled.

The servant stood rigid and announced solemnly: "His Most Catholic Majesty King Ferdinand of Aragon commands the immediate presence of His Grace of Sansito."

The count looked perturbed. His own position at court was just now most precarious. He must respond at once to this royal command, but this other matter was also most serious.

Hurriedly he dismissed the two servants; then, catching Don Luis fiercely by the arm, he cried: "Go and find this young Englishman. It makes no matter where he is. Find him, I say! Find him and bring him here to me. Go! It makes no difference; nothing makes any difference. I must have him here—safe with me."

Don Luis was about to ask some necessary question, but his master, thinking that he was going to make objection concerning his orders, cried fiercely: "Do you know what happened at court yesterday?"

The Jew made no response. A sickening fear came upon him.

Sansito hastened to recount: "Two of the richest members of your race, attempting to avert their doom, had presented enormous sums to his majesty. Yesterday, while King Ferdinand was considering this offer, Torquemada himself appeared suddenly in the royal presence. Holding up a crucifix, he cried: 'Lo! Here is the Crucified, whom Judas sold for thirty pieces of silver. Will you sell Him again for thirty thousand?'"

"King Ferdinand feebly expostulated.

"But the raging inquisitor interposed passionately: 'I, at any rate, will have no part in the transaction!'"

"He threw down the crucifix and left the room.

"This," Sansito smiled cruelly, "to his majesty! Now you see where you stand."

White with fear and trembling, Don Luis looked beseechingly at his master.

"Go to the prison," Sansito commanded,

"find out everything you can. Then find *him*. If you do not bring him here—well." The Spaniard extended his open hands with a graphic gesture. "Do you understand?" "Yes."

For a few moments Sansito gloated over the abject misery of his doctor. Cruelty shone in the count's eyes, and the fire of fanatical religious zeal seared his heart. No one better than he appreciated that this cringing creature was a rich and talented man, forced by necessity to call him master.

When the Count of Sansito's hideous passion was satiated, he turned on his heel, hastening to obey the summons of the king.

CHAPTER XVI.

SANSITO ENTRAPPED.

"WHAT can King Ferdinand want at this ungodly hour?" the secretary muttered as he dismounted at the gate of the Alhambra. He dismissed all but two of his attendants and walked haughtily past the saluting guard.

Although it was late July, the morning air was chill here on the hilltop, and the count drew his light cloak more closely about him. The beautiful palace was before him, and he was thinking regretfully how it might have been his if the queen had not overcome her fear that witchcraft lurked in its painted stones.

For at first the pious Isabella had been repelled by the regal abode of the vanquished Moors. Now she had become reconciled to the heathenish beauty of its colorful bejeweled halls; and, in this Oriental dream-palace of many courts, sculptured fountains, vistaed pools and lovely gardens, the most magnificent sovereigns of Christendom held sway.

The Count of Sansito traversed various beautiful apartments, encountering few except the sentinels, until he arrived at the royal antecourt. Here was the usual crowd. He spoke gravely to some, flippantly to others, and ignored the deep bows of still more.

Hastening to the door of the inner room, where their majesties held state, he opened it and entered unannounced, exercising a

privilege the ceremonious sovereigns allowed to few.

At the far end of this beautifully carved and painted apartment, which was further embellished by rich tapestry hangings, sat the sole occupant of the room—King Ferdinand of Aragon.

His great chair was upon a slightly raised platform, a long table before him and, immediately by his side, an empty chair, intended for his wife, the Queen of Castile. Over all was draped a magnificent ruby-velvet canopy, which bore the golden arms of the united kingdoms.

The king was superbly dressed in maroon and red-brown with slashings of pale blue. He was rather a handsome man, and decidedly kingly in appearance. His abundant fair hair was bobbed square, except for a curved line that ran from the straight bangs on the temple to below the ear, and his strong-featured face was beardless.

The cold, calculating eyes looked up sharply at the intrusion, but his majesty spoke very deliberately: "You are late. I have waited long."

He pushed the shining, straight hair back from his shrewd, somewhat sensual face, and then placing his beautiful hands on the table gazed proudly upon them.

"How can I serve your majesty?" Sansito placated.

"By telling me why, and for what, that old fossil from the barbarian king keeps annoying me?"

The courtier smiled. "By which you mean Sir Thomas Merton, envoy from the King of England?"

Ferdinand sniffed luxuriously as with sarcasm he remarked: "Brilliantly guessed. Now, what does he want; tell me *that*?"

"As your majesty knows, it is about this marriage of your daughter, Doña Catherine, and the Prince—"

Ferdinand interrupted: "It's more! I've been pestered for an interview about that for days. But this is something new. He clamored *at dawn* to-day for immediate audience."

The secretary, filled with vague alarm, cried: "Have you seen him?"

"No," the king replied, and shifted his velvet-shod feet to another place on the

warm, wide rim of the great copper and brass brazier beneath the table at which he was sitting.

"I wanted to speak first with you," Ferdinand drawled. "You have always advised on these English matters more or less to my satisfaction."

Sansito, feeling apprehensive of this smooth beginning, smiled and bowed.

The king looked a trifle surprised by this nervousness of his secretary. "What is it all about?" he inquired.

"I do not know," Sansito soothed, "but I will soon learn. He is without. I saw—"

While speaking, the count had started toward the outer door, but the king cried: "That will not do. I must see the old fool. England must be treated with respect. I have held off, perhaps, too long, but other things were more pressing—Catherine is a baby still, and—" he paused and looked searchingly at Sansito.

"There is nothing you can tell me to illumine my way in this interview?" his majesty astutely demanded.

The secretary grew uncomfortable beneath the scrutiny of those clear eyes. Much was going on in his brain. First, he was wondering what the king suspected. And next, what ailed the English envoy. He knew that Sir Thomas had a right to be impatient. He had promised to support him in this marriage business, and had done what he could, but King Ferdinand was slow and cautious. After the official reception of the envoy no progress had been made.

Could it be possible that Sir Thomas had learned of the attack upon Arthur, and construing this in the light of the king's indifference, decided that the secretary had played false? Was the old man about to reveal everything to King Ferdinand? No—no, that was impossible. Sansito vehemently told himself.

But, all the same, this was very close to the truth. For the trusty Tanner, discovering about the fight, had reported to his master. The account of this cowardly onslaught had roused the ire of the old Englishman to a great heat. His sense of justice was so outraged that he forgot all diplomacy; the necessity for immediately

employing every possible means to preserve Arthur, had urged him to apply at the king's door at dawn.

A change in regard to the young sailor had been growing upon Sir Thomas these last weeks; after closely observing Judith, and talking repeatedly and earnestly with her, he had been forced to understand that his daughter's future happiness was irrevocably intertwined with the life of Arthur Lake.

As the Count of Sansito remained pensively unresponsive, the icy voice of King Ferdinand broke through the troubled silence: "Call in the English envoy!" he commanded.

"I will talk with him first," the count announced with dignified assurance. "I might save your majesty—"

He got no further. "Do as you are bid," the royal master snapped. Within a few minutes Sir Thomas Merton entered the chamber.

Without acknowledging the bow of Sansito, whose presence at this interview both surprised and annoyed him, the old Englishman almost ran to King Ferdinand and threw himself on his knees before the sovereign.

When commanded to arise, Sir Thomas cried: "I come to your majesty as a suppliant, in the name of justice and humanity. I—"

"What have you to say, old man? Rise and speak." Ferdinand was, as usual, courteous, cold, observant and superlatively regal.

"Last night," Sir Thomas began as he arose, "a young man was set upon by servants of *his!*" He pointed angrily at the secretary.

The king did not even look interested, although he had noted that Sansito changed color.

"Their intent was murderous!" Sir Thomas announced witheringly. "The youth routed them—God be thanked! But he is now in prison. I pray your majesty to protect him."

The king did not reply, but looked inquiringly at Sansito, who also remained silent, although a cruel smile threatened to appear upon his face.

The count was overjoyed to learn that Sir Thomas did not know of Arthur's escape, hence had probably had no hand in it.

He was thinking. There is no one then to deal with but the sailor himself, and Don Luis will soon overtake him, and, once again in my power, the trouble-maker shall cease to cause anxiety.

The old Englishman ran on: "And all this in spite of the fact that *he*"—again he pointed his shaking finger at the count—"he had promised me faithfully not to harm him."

"And who is this sorely pressed youth?" Ferdinand sneered.

"One whom I thought to be English, but who now, I have reason to suspect, is uncomfortably close to the Spanish royal house," Sir Thomas responded with angry dignity.

"Meaning by that, just what?" the king's tone was unbelievably insolent.

Sir Thomas was angry and lost his head.

"It is just possible," he cried, "that he is the son of that Prince of Viana who was the older half-brother of your majesty."

Ferdinand announced wearily: "My brother of Viana was never married."

"That, your majesty, I must deny," Sir Thomas spoke more gently. He was still angry, but also he was beginning to appreciate that he had gone too far, and was looking for an opportunity to retreat. "I was present at the wedding," he added half apologetically.

"When was this?" the king demanded.

"Just before King John II of Aragon—his and your majesty's father—imprisoned the prince for the last time."

At first Ferdinand did not speak; when he did it was to query: "And the wife?"

"Was Eleanor of Durham, a young English girl who had previously forsaken home and family for love of him."

"And this Eleanor of Durham, I suppose, was a close relation of yours?" the king inquired meaningly.

"No." Sir Thomas drew himself up haughtily. "She was the only child of the English ambassador to the Court of Naples. After the father's death she and her old mother lived on in the same city. It was

there she saw and loved Don Charles of Viana, for that unhappy prince found it expedient to live in Italy—"

Ferdinand interrupted to ask: "What do you mean by *expedient*?"

Sir Thomas attempted diplomacy. "King John, his father," he began, "felt the Kingdom of Navarre more easy to govern, with his son, to whom it was said to belong, living in distant Naples."

The king narrowed his eyes as he cried angrily: "And I suppose, next, you will tell me that my father, abetted by my dear mother, had the Prince of Viana, my half-brother, poisoned while in prison so that the crown should come to me, the younger, but more favored—eh?"

Sir Thomas Merton understood that he was treading on the edge of his own grave, but he did not show the least fear; he knew that to quail before Ferdinand now would mean immediate disaster. He spoke brazenly:

"I had no intention of repeating that old and terrible tale, although I have heard it more than once, and there are those, greater than I, who do believe it."

Before this attack, the king quickly regained his usual calm. He spoke slowly, weighing each word: "And you say there is a son of this Prince of Viana?"

"No, your majesty," Sir Thomas interposed, "I did not say there *was* a son—although this youth is so like Eleanor of Durham that it is surprising I did not suspect it before—"

"You have known him long?" the king pursued.

"He grew up in Dover," Sir Thomas explained. "But I knew nothing of his pretensions until just before I sailed, this time, for Spain. I at once told the Count of Sansito what I suspected, and he swore me to secrecy—"

"Where was this?" The suspicious monarch was now hot on a scent.

"In Dover, last month." Sir Thomas announced, as he did so Sansito, who had been tortured by this interview which he dared not interrupt, darted toward the Englishman a look of undying hatred.

"In Dover?" King Ferdinand yawned. "I don't seem to remember this English trip

of yours to Dover. I was told my secretary was in Portugal. Explain!" he snapped at the count.

CHAPTER XVII.

REVENGE.

SANSITO came forward in silence, and stood before the king. He seemed to be attempting to usurp the very spot occupied by the old Englishman.

"Your majesty," he began, "I am being forced into an ugly corner."

Sir Thomas would like to have interrupted to say: "You are about to force me off my feet," but he dared not.

"You recall the beautiful jewelled ring that was mysteriously stolen from you some weeks ago?" the count asked.

King Ferdinand narrowed his thick lips and slightly inclined his head.

"That ring," Sansito resumed, "I determined to regain for your majesty. Because when you took it from your finger that last time, I was the only person you could remember as being present. Had I been—well—other than myself—I should certainly have been accused of theft!"

The king tapped the table with the polished nails of his forefingers. This recital evidently bored him, and he made no effort to disguise the fact.

Undismayed, the secretary continued: "I asked for leave, urging Portugal and my estates there as an excuse. I did go to Portugal; then, a clue led me to Dover, where I encountered Sir Thomas, about to sail on the same vessel with me. He spoke of this supposed son of the Prince of Viana. I immediately discovered that there were no adequate proofs upon which to base the fellow's pretensions; however, I besought Sir Thomas Merton to forget the whole matter and never to speak of it again to any one. I even agreed to repay his discretion by aiding his suit to your majesty. That suit is the urging of the Spanish-English marriage."

Sansito darted a swift, venomous look at the old diplomat.

A scowl of displeasure was settling upon the king's face, but he refrained from interrupting.

"I also promised Sir Thomas to make no attempt to put this youth out of the world. A silly promise, I will admit."

Sansito paused, awaiting some response from the king, but only a calm, bored look met his inquiring gaze, and he was obliged to continue:

"The boy is a common sailor. He accompanied us on our return voyage. The daughter of Sir Thomas's—your majesty was pleased to comment upon her beauty yesterday, when you passed her in the company with Doña de Torres—was on the same vessel! The sailor has his eyes upon her!" Sansito's look was insinuating.

Sir Thomas made an angry movement but dared not interrupt.

The count drew himself up proudly as he began his final revelation.

"Yesterday," he began slowly, "this sailor called upon me. He offered to sell me the ring—"

Ferdinand interrupted: "What, my ring?"

"The same, and—"

"Where had he gotten it?" the king demanded.

"I am coming to that, your majesty," Sansito propitiated. "I *bought* the ring!"

"Why? Why did you bargain with—" King Ferdinand did not finish.

To cover the awkward pause, the count quickly cried: "I will reveal all that in time. I beseech your majesty's patience."

"Proceed at your own pace," Ferdinand decreed.

"I was not ready to accuse this youth of treason," the secretary explained; "I was not ready to reveal the deep plot upon which I chanced to stumble. I am not now!" He looked reproachfully at the king. "I would feign have had more proofs. But my hand was forced by this gentleman." He glared at Sir Thomas Merton.

"Proceed!"

"For a large sum I bought the ring. I have it here." Sansito opened his embroidered pouch, but did not immediately display the jewel.

"My lackeys saw the considerable amount of gold pass to the sailor. It proved too much for their cupidity. They followed and set upon the youth, intending to rob

him. He killed one and wounded the other; but was himself taken in charge by the watch, and imprisoned!"

Sansito drew forth the jewelled ring, and was about to pass it to the king.

"Your majesty is unaware," the secretary began, "that this ring was originally the property of the last Prince of Viana—"

"No," Ferdinand corrected, "the jewel was my father's. He gave it to me."

"Pardon, your majesty," Sansito interposed, "your father first received the ring as a gift from his son—the Prince of Viana, at the time when he liberated and conferred upon the prince the title of Lieutenant of the Realm."

Sir Thomas peered at the jewel which Sansito had placed upon the table.

"That ring *was* the property of Charles of Viana," he corroborated.

King Ferdinand crossed himself, and gazed with aversion at the one-time treasured trinket.

"I will never touch it again," he declared.

"I think your majesty can see everything now!" However, the count hastened to explain: "That ring was stolen for one who gave it to the pretended son of its original owner—such possession strengthened the youth's claims—you see? And the one for whom it was stolen is he who aspired to have his daughter called 'Princess of Viana—Queen of Navarre—Queen of Aragon.'"

"Good God!" Sir Thomas gasped, and raised his old hands to his turbid brain.

"But why did the pretender sell the ring to you, Sansito?" King Ferdinand's cold, suspicious voice broke the passionate silence.

The count was ready for the question.

"Because," he responded, "the youth is not the ambitious one of the conspiracy. He was temporarily separated from the director of the enterprise. He wanted money, and I offered a goodly sum! The fellow did not understand the full significance of the ring. Everything is not always explained to one's tools." Again that poisonous look was darted at the old Englishman.

"Sir Thomas Merton," King Ferdinand drawled, "until this most serious matter is properly investigated, I must ask that you take the utmost care of yourself. The air outside the Alhambra I am sure would not

agree with either your health or that of your fair daughter."

Suddenly the old diplomat was aroused to action. "Surely, you do not believe this pack of lies! You cannot! I do not see my way—all is a haze of deceptions and diabolic tamperings with the truth. I must think—"

"Exactly," the king interrupted, "that is just what I wish you to do. I suspect nothing, Sir Thomas. The envoy of England is above conspiring against the crown of Spain! I only ask that you be cautious until the matter is thoroughly sifted. I am certain that, with your valuable assistance, all can be unraveled.

"Now, will you leave us? I have much to discuss with my secretary. And, remember, the walls of the Alhambra are a sure defense for you against everything. Avail yourself of their security—remain within!"

There was nothing for the old man to do but withdraw. He did so in angry bewilderment, knowing full well that all King Ferdinand's courtesy meant nothing; he and Judith were as much prisoners as if they were in the deepest dungeons of the kingdom!

The moment they were alone, the king demanded of Sansito: "How long have you known that there was a possible heir to Charles of Viana?"

"Not until I discovered it from the lips of Sir Thomas Merton, at Dover, last month," Sansito lied convincingly.

"What does this boy know—what proofs has he—do you believe his tale?"

"Your majesty overwhelms me," the count cried. "The last question needs no answer. I believe *nothing* that would in any way harm you! But there is no test put upon my loyalty in this case; the boy knows nothing, has no tale to tell! He possesses a miniature of Eleanor of Durham upon which is scratched 'your mother.' He found this locket upon the neck of his dead father, a cobbler of Dover. Sir Thomas Merton has done the rest—"

Ferdinand interrupted him. "You are strangely revengeful upon that old man. Take care, or you will make me suspect that there is something yet to be revealed."

Sansito bowed low to hide his chagrin.

The king remarked: "You say this youth is imprisoned. I would see him—have him brought—"

"Your majesty," the count began timidly, "he has escaped."

"Escaped?"

"Yes," the secretary nodded desperately. "Sir Thomas does not know this. I did not, until just as I was summoned to appear before you."

"He is at large?" The king's voice showed genuine feeling.

"Yes, your majesty, but I have already taken precautions. He will be found. I have sent one to search—"

"Sent one—send ten—send twenty," the king cried. "No—send no more. Arouse no alarm. Go yourself. Immediately. Report to me to-night."

The secretary started toward the door.

"Here—take this. Keep it. It is yours." The king pointed to the beautiful ring of the some time Prince of Viana.

Sansito hastened back to accept the gift.

"I thank your majesty," the count cried.

Ferdinand responded: "And I trust you."

The Count of Sansito smiled delightedly. He felt himself secure in his lord's good graces, and departed in high spirits, little dreaming that the wily king was having him followed by a spy.

CHAPTER XVIII.

ILLNESS.

THE king's secretary returned to his own palace. It was near noon, and the weather, by one of those violent changes characteristic of Spain, had become almost tropic. Worn by the anxieties of the morning, he felt ill, and dared not venture again into the hot sun.

Dejectedly he thought of the king's discovery of the existence of Arthur Lake. His majesty's determination to interview the youth was very alarming. Arthur would surely speak of the lost parchment, and then would ensue the fatal revelation of the name "Seseca." And Spain contained no other of that name beside himself!

Arthur's recital of his discovery of the

hidden gold, its robbery, and the mysterious stranger would be of little consequence. "But the severed finger!" Sansito moaned with apprehension.

His majesty had long since discovered the mutilated condition of his secretary's hand. Seseca had explained that it was the result of blood-poison, and that his doctor had decreed the amputation.

But King Ferdinand was astute. He would put all the evidence together, and arrive somewhere near the truth.

"No, the king must not see Arthur Lake!" the secretary murmured. "But also, I must conduct myself with the utmost circumspection. All will be saved if Don Luis discovers the sailor and apprehends him."

But the day wore on, and still the Jew did not return, and the unhappy count worried more and more.

In the cool of the afternoon, although feeling very ill, Sansito sallied forth in search of news and was trailed by the king's spy, but he did not suspect it.

The count discovered nothing of consequence, but several times he heard of Don Luis's activities in the same quarters.

"I have trained him well," the master commented to himself. "He is proceeding in this investigation as I myself would do, but I want results! I hope he has already finished his man, or at least brought him a prisoner to the palace."

Hopefully, the secretary returned home. But Don Luis was not there. Anger, fear, and disappointment struggled for mastery, but outwardly there was no evidence of the mental conflict until, suddenly, a fit of dizziness overcame Sansito, and he staggered blindly into the beautiful, rosy courtyard. There he was seized by violent attacks of vomiting, and was led away to bed. After a time, in the cool of his monastically bare bedchamber, he felt better, and set himself to think over his situation.

After all, would he be so pleased if Arthur Lake were destroyed? He had the proofs that this youth was the royal heir, and, in case anything went wrong with the present régime, and Arthur still lived, here was the new king!

It is due Sansito to say that never did the

prospect of that personal advantage accruing to the one who places a monarch on his throne influence his actions. He loved Spain and her interests far more than he did himself!

It was to insure a ruler for his dear country that he had aided old Tobit (then a young retainer, faithful unto death to Eleanor of Durham) to escape with the baby prince. This he had done immediately upon discovering that the inhuman grandfather was planning to destroy both parents.

As long as the old grandfather lived, Sansito had preserved the helpless little heir. And when Ferdinand came to the throne, still he had preserved the young hope, while he watched and waited to see how fair and just to Spain this new monarch would be. And the King of Aragon had ruled better and more wisely than any prince that the peninsula had even had.

Sansito, then, seeing useless danger in the existence of the little prince, whose dead father had been the people's hero, decided upon the secret trip to Dover, where he expected to buy Tobit's silence and all the proofs of the youth's identity.

To establish himself in the old servant's eyes, he had taken the dead Prince of Viana's ring. It was a token agreed upon when the baby was spirited away. For little could any one have foreseen that this jewel would become a valued possession of the old king who had poisoned its owner. But King John had always refused to part with the ring, and had ultimately left it to Ferdinand. After deciding to go to Dover, Sansito had to wait; for months vainly seeking an opportunity to steal this ring. King Ferdinand was as tenacious of it as his father had been, and the jewel always adorned his hand. Finally, the count had secured it, and then hastily departed, supposedly for Portugal, really for Dover.

Never had he calculated upon the stubborn refusal of Tobit to be a party to the obliterating of the prince's identity.

"If he hadn't angered me," Sansito muttered, "I should never have murdered the old fellow. And then, all these other events would not have come crowding upon me—so fast—so fast that I cannot think. What am I to do? What will happen next?"

The sick man tossed helplessly. A cold sweat broke out upon him.

"If Ferdinand discovered that for years I fostered this son of Charles of Viana!" Sansito shuddered. "But can he ever discover this?"

The power to reason was slipping from his fevered brain. His head seemed to expand and contract with painful persistence. The count moaned aloud, and the blackness that had seemed to be creeping upon him now engulfed him and Juan de Seseca sank into a stupor.

The night passed, and, from daybreak on, the sick man grew steadily worse. His doctor did not return, and the servants became panic-stricken. In vain they tried to get another doctor, but physicians were very scarce, for the two races, Moors and Jews, representing almost the entire medical skill of the day, were being expelled in droves from the kingdom.

News of the secretary's illness was taken to the palace, and King Ferdinand seemed as deeply concerned as he ever was by another's affairs, and, learning that Sansito was without medical care, he sent his own doctor.

This man of science returned to his master with the report that, in his estimation, the Count of Sansito would never recover!

Six days passed, and the patient's condition continued desperate, but on the seventh day he showed signs of mending.

All this time nothing had been heard of Don Luis Levy, and the reason was, that the Jew had made no effort to return! Indeed, he had made every endeavor to disguise his whereabouts from the Sansito household.

On the morning that his master had been summoned to the interview with the king and Sir Thomas Merton, Don Luis had gone to visit the prison, as instructed by the count. He had discovered nothing from the jailors except that Arthur, in what seemed to be a miraculous fashion, had escaped through locked doors!

Don Luis was presented with the confiscated letter addressed to Columbus, but no mention was made of the three bags of gold.

The little doctor had departed in despair, and spent the remainder of the day in fren-

zied efforts to find some trace of the fugitive. His search was vain!

In the late afternoon the Jew's terror somewhat subsided, or rather, he was calmed by the prospect of immediately putting into action a plan which he had conceived.

It was a desperate chance he was about to take, but the case was worse than desperate.

He procured a mule and quitted Granada, taking the road to the west.

On this road Arthur Lake, afoot, had preceded him by some twelve hours.

Don Luis passed him on the second night, at Loja, where the almost penniless sailor was sleeping in the open field; but neither suspected the presence of the other, and Don Luis continued his journey.

CHAPTER XIX.

TALLARTE DE LAJES.

FOR several days following this, Arthur's way led along the same road he had traversed on his journey to Granada. But now he was obliged to go more slowly, stopping from time to time to labor for necessary food.

The enthusiastic expositions of Sansito concerning the glory to be won by adventuring with Columbus had deeply impressed the young sailor. There was nothing now to hold him in Spain; Judith had left; so he had determined to attempt (even without an introduction) to join the admiral.

He arrived at Palos late in the afternoon of the second day of August, and hastened through the little town to the Bar of Saltes, where the three vessels comprising the fleet of Columbus were anchored.

With some difficulty the penniless Englishman got some one to row him out to the flag-ship. And with not oversanguine hopes, the young sailor presented himself to an officer aboard the Santa Maria, and blusteringly demanded speech with the admiral.

The supercilious individual to whom he addressed this request said that such a thing was impossible; Columbus was far too busy. "He sails for the unknown to-morrow, an hour before dawn."

Arthur was overjoyed to have arrived in

time. "I did not allow myself much margin, did I?" he remarked, laughing.

The officer made no comment, and Arthur, feeling that he must propitiate this person, continued affably: "But I'm lucky to be here at all. And I *must* speak with the admiral."

"You can not."

"But I must," Arthur persisted.

The officer sniffed and walked away.

Arthur followed him, and boldly ventured: "Tell Don Cristobal that I come from the Count of Sansito, secretary to His Majesty, King Ferdinand."

The haughty officer looked surprised, but went to deliver this message. And Arthur Lake waited, wondering if he had been a fool to send such an announcement—he, a fugitive from justice—a beggar, ragged and stained from a long tramp across Spain.

It was a daring thing to demand an audience with a great navigator on the busy eve of his departure upon the greatest voyage man had ever conceived! A daring thing to do even if one's credentials were all right, and Arthur had no credentials!

The officer returned and bade this ragged sailor follow him.

Radiantly Arthur entered the captain's cabin, and was ushered into the presence of Christopher Columbus.

The great man sat silent before his table, on which were many charts, nautical instruments, and piles of papers closely written. He was not a large man; his white, bushy hair, that had long since receded from his noble brow, and his heavily seamed, weather-beaten face declared him to be past mid-life. But Arthur felt that he had never approached any one so alive. It was as though a tremendous fire of energy burned within the man, vivifying the air about him.

His great eyes, of Italian softness, turned inspiringly upon the visitor; but Arthur could not speak. This man, eloquent in his silence, disconcerted him.

Columbus's eyes, keen for all their softness, noted how ill this youth's costume befitted the emissary of a great noble, but such discrepancy did not arouse any doubts. He had himself served princes, and worn rags of necessity at the same time. The world was a strange place.

He rather liked this youth because of his garments—they reminded him of himself. If only he had not come from the expedition's arch enemy—Sansito!

The admiral suddenly appreciated that he must be on his guard, no matter how much his instinct declared in favor of this young man.

"What is your business?" the Genoese finally asked.

"I must go with you on this great voyage," Arthur cried. He spoke eagerly, and words flowed eloquently from him, almost without his knowing what he said. He realized that by his prayerful rhapsody he must work a miracle. Columbus *must* see how determined he was to be a part of this glorious adventure, and *must*, even at this last minute, add another to his crew!

First his listener regarded him with surprise; then, for a moment with quick suspicion, for the admiral had the true Italian fear of being laughed at. But the youth's enthusiasm was too sincere to be doubted, and upon the stern face of Columbus settled an expression of amused interest.

He was recalling how he had despairingly sought to gain his fellow-voyagers—how it had been a triumph, after hours of persuasion, to win a reluctant "Yes" from some hard-pressed sailor—and here was a splendid seaman begging to be taken!

The admiral smiled with admiration, and pleasure; and then across his happy thoughts came a memory of the narrow, conceited, self-satisfied Sansito, who had opposed him at every turn with the crafty conservatism of fanatical bigotry and iron-clad ignorance.

Columbus interrupted the youth: "Why is your master so desirous of having you go along? There are surely spies enough with me—the cautious groom of the king's chamber, jealously and coldly overlooking my every move, and always striving to curb me. Sansito already has sent one—last week. I took him! He's a good surgeon. And, I'll take you if you are willing to do a seaman's work—"

"Willing, and able, too," Arthur cried. "I have sailed the sea before."

"I have many that have not," Columbus

rejoined bitterly. "But are you not afraid?" the admiral seemed incredulous.

"I am not!" Arthur declared stoutly.

There ensued a short silence, broken by the older man. "Are you a good Catholic?" Columbus's concern was genuine.

"I try to be," Arthur responded.

"Then get you into town and confess and receive the Blessed Sacrament. I take none with me," declared the pious admiral, "but those lately shrived by Holy Church.

"I will enter you on the lists," Columbus decreed, "and keep you on this ship. And," he added, acidly, "you can then watch me better—"

"I am no spy!" the young sailor cried. "I but used the name of the Count of Sansito to gain your presence; it was refused me at first."

"I ask no questions," the admiral spoke haughtily. "I take you, no matter whose man you are. Return before midnight. And your name?" The Italian opened his record book.

"Arthur Lake," the youth replied.

"An Englishman?"

"Yes."

Columbus was surprised, and his suspicions were being quieted. But he paused, quill in hand, and remarked conversationally: "Sansito's man was styled 'Tallarte de Lajes'—do you know him? He brought letters of recommendation."

"That letter was mine!" Arthur cried, indignantly. "It was taken from me, and—"

Columbus looked narrowly at his new sailor. "A letter from the Count of Sansito?" he asked quietly.

"Yes."

"So!" the admiral exclaimed, sadly. "You do come from his grace. I feared as much."

"Where is this man? He is an impostor. I must find him." Arthur Lake was excited.

"Calm yourself, my youth," the admiral spoke sternly. "I will have no quarrels or fights on the eve of my departure—I take you both! So what matter? Go, now, and be shriven." He motioned toward the door, and returned to his study of the strange-looking chart.

(To be continued NEXT WEEK.)

He Who Hesitates Is Bossed



by

Samuel G. Camp

IT'S a sure-enough fact. We won it—the Big Series—and now they're all calling me names like the "Miracle Man," and the "Napoleon of Baseball," and the like. And I guess if I didn't have a pretty level head, in a way, and if it wasn't for "Spike" McGinnis, I'd begin to think I was somebody. As it is—you know there's a saying that no man is a hero to his valet. Well, I don't know about that. I never had one. But I'll say this: I've got Spike McGinnis, and no doubt in this instance it amounts to about the same thing. I mean that if I'm a hero you've surely got to show Spike.

As for me, of course I'm not going round doing a lot of ballyhooing for myself; but just the same, when forced to it, I'm willing to admit that when a fellow cops the championship of everywhere, his first season as a big-league manager, it's quite a little stunt—it's stepping some. And so no doubt it's a good thing for me that I've got Spike McGinnis handy instead of one of these valet things, because otherwise I might start swelling up and there's no telling where it would end.

You understand, a valet would probably keep his opinions to himself, if he valued his job; but Spike doesn't make any bones about telling me right to my face what he thinks of me.

And then, too, that ain't the worst of it: if I didn't handle him with gloves he'd tell the world. And if Spike McGinnis ever starts in advertising what he knows—

to say the least, I'll have to do a lot of explaining.

Anyway, according to Spike McGinnis, if I'm the Napoleon of baseball—oh, boy!—he can sing better than Caruso, trim Hoppe at billiards, and show this chap Rickenbacker how to fly. And as for the Miracle Man stuff—"A healthy looking Miracle Man you are! Don't make me laugh!" says Spike. But Spike doesn't stop there; he doesn't ring off when he gets through telling me what I'm not. Oh, no! He goes right ahead and audibly tells me what I am:

"You!" says he. "A lucky stiff, that's what you are! A lucky stiff—and that's all!"

So that's the way it is. The papers are all calling me a Miracle Man, and so forth; and Spike McGinnis says—but you know what Spike says; and Ina—the wife, you know—Ina admits that I've certainly gone and done something—and takes most of the credit to herself; and as for me—well, of course it wouldn't look right for a fellow in my position to do a whole lot of talking, and so I guess you'll have to write your own ticket.

Now, as a matter of fact, this is not the story of how I—we—won the World's Championship. I—we—won it, and the facts speak for themselves. It's the story of how I got my start as a big-league manager. The whole thing hinges on that—how I got my start. And the things that led up to it go back to some little time ago.

The blow fell shortly after Ina and I were married. It was a lucky thing for Ina that I didn't know it was going to happen. If I'd known it I wouldn't 'a' dared take the chance, you see. But I thought my future was assured for quite a few years anyway, and so I went ahead and married her. And then—of course you might know—the crash came. The old salary-wing went dead on me. About fifteen specialists all said the same thing—and nicked me for a young fortune for saying it: I'd never be any good any more. I'd pitched my last game of baseball.

And me just married!

But I've got to hand it to Dave McBurney. McBurney was manager of the Pink Sox then, and he certainly treated me white. At that, when you've given a team the best that's in you for seven years, no doubt you've got something coming. Anyway, I stayed with the club.

It was Ina that put the bee in my bonnet—the managership bee. Of course we'd been doing a lot of worrying about where we were going from here—and somehow I couldn't make up my mind what to do. All I knew was that it was certainly a tough old world, and that the future surely looked black—blacker than Jack Johnson.

Then we heard that McBurney was going to quit the club at the end of the season—and Ina was off to a good start. She said that I knew as much baseball as the best of 'em, and that I had all the necessary qualifications for a first-class manager, and it was up to me to take my foot in my hand and whirl in and land that manager job. Well, I agreed with her—partly. When it came to knowledge of the old pastime I wouldn't concede an inch to anybody; but—well, to tell the truth, I didn't know. There's a lot of things that a fellow's got to have to make a good baseball manager, and I wasn't sure that I had 'em. And even if I did have 'em, I wasn't sure that I wanted the job of managing the Pink Sox—provided I could get it. Looking at it some ways I thought maybe I'd like the job; and then again, looking at it other ways, I thought maybe I wouldn't. I wasn't sure. And I couldn't seem to make up my mind.

But I might just as well 'a' saved myself a lot of wear and tear on the old brain about whether to try for that manager job or not, because Ina was strong for it in the first place, and she kept getting stronger for it right along; and so in the end, of course, that settled it. A little while after the close of that season I went to the magnate—Alonzo J. Brown, owner of the club, you understand—and spoke my little piece.

I told him I'd heard that McBurney was quitting, and so of course he'd be looking for another manager, and if it was all the same to him I'd like the job; and believe me, I'd positively guarantee satisfaction—you understand; Ina had told me to make it strong. And I told him how he knew I'd been giving the team the very best I had for seven years, and—and, well, how about it?

Well, Alonzo seemed to have some kind of throat trouble that morning, because, anyway, he had to clear it several times before he was able to speak—and then he asked me to have a cigar. While I was lighting it something in the street seemed to attract his attention, and he spent a minute or two on the inside looking out—saying nothing. Then he went to his desk and sat down, and,

"Listen, Jim," says he. "It's like this: the club owes you something—I admit that—and I'm not the sort of man to side-step a debt of that kind. But about giving you the managership—well, frankly, I can't say, not at this time, anyway. But get this: don't you worry. You've got it coming, and I'll see that you're taken care of. And that's the best I can say now."

And that's all the satisfaction I got. Alonzo J. Brown threw the whole thing up in the air and left it there—except, of course, that I knew now that I was going to be taken care of, as the magnate said, and that helped some.

When I told Ina what Alonzo had said, she was dead sure that I was going to land the job. I told her not to go and get her hopes set too high, because if she did she was liable to be disappointed. But of course what I said didn't make any difference. She went right ahead seeing me as manager of the Pink Sox, and all covered

with bells and everything; and so when we got the news, I'll say the wife was a mighty sore woman—and, for that matter, I didn't go rushing round the streets giving any three long cheers for everybody and everything, myself. But compared to the wife, I was a happy man. She surely took it hard.

The first we knew about it was when we read it in the papers: the well-known baseball magnate, Alonzo J. Brown, announced that George A. Simmons, who had been managing a team in the International, would pilot the Pink Sox the coming season. And Mr. Brown also announced that Jim VanNess, the veteran Pink Sox southpaw, would be the club's official coach, working with the young pitchers, and so on.

Official coach! And he hadn't even asked me if I'd accept the position! Well, no doubt he wanted to save himself the trouble of handing me a lot of alibis for making this fellow George A. Simmons manager and throwing me down; and he knew I'd accept the position, anyway. What else could I do? And so that was what Alonzo meant when he said I'd be taken care of. He'd had that official coach thing up his sleeve all the time. He hadn't considered me for the manager job for one little minute! Well, at that, I guessed I didn't have any kick coming. Suppose I'd been let out entirely?

That's the way I looked at it. But Ina—but I've told you how it struck her.

"Simmons!" she hissed. "Who is he, anyway? Did you ever hear of him, Jim?"

"I never did," I says. "He's one on me."

"Then will you tell me why," she demanded; "will you tell me *why* Mr. Brown throws down a man like you and goes to work and gives the job to somebody nobody ever heard of—a bush-leaguer like this man Simmons?"

Ina can talk quite a little baseball talk herself.

"You can search me," I says. "But there must be something or—"

"Yes," snapped Ina. "There must be something—and I'm going to find out what it is!"

This was shortly after the first of the year; and it wasn't until the last of July that Ina found out what it was—the reason why I had been turned down. And, though I didn't know what the reason was myself, it's a kind of curious thing, but it's the truth: she got the answer from me.

You know, the wife and I own our own bungalow. Well, one morning Ina says to me:

"Well, Jim, have you made up your mind about the new heating system?"

The old heater was pretty well burned out, and we were going to put in a new one of some kind.

"No," I says, "I haven't. Some ways steam looks best to me, and then again there's a lot of pretty good arguments for hot air. Then there's this one-pipe system, too. And—well, I can't seem to quite make up my mind."

"Well," says Ina, "I wish you'd hurry up and decide one way or another. Pretty soon the fall rush 'll come on, and the plumbers will all be busy, and we may have to go through the winter with the old one—and you know it uses twice too much coal."

"Yes," I says. "I know. I'll see if I can't make a decision one way or another pretty soon."

"I wish you would," says the wife. "And how about the car? Are you going to sell it and buy a new one, like you were talking of the other day, or—what?"

"I haven't made up my mind," I says. "The old boat's in pretty good shape yet, and what with prices the way they are nowadays—well, I don't know. Sometimes I think I will, and then I think I won't. I'll see."

"Well," says Ina, "you'd better not take too much time about it. If you wait too long it 'll be coming along winter and you won't be able to get anywhere near what the car is worth. And listen, Jim. Did you order that new suit of clothes, like I asked you to?"

"No," says I, "I didn't. You see, I can't make up my mind whether to get a blue serge or one of these Palm Beach outfits. The Palm Beach things are fine for hot weather, but I'd probably get more ser-

vice out of a blue serge suit, and so—well, I don't know. I can't seem to quite make up my—"

"Help!" says Ina, and left the room as if she was out of patience, or something, about something or other.

She came back in about ten minutes.

"Oh," says she. "You still here, Jim? I thought you'd gone."

"It looks kind of like rain," I says. "I was trying to make up my mind whether to take an umbrella or not."

When I got back from the ball game that afternoon, Ina necked me the minute I stuck my head inside the door, and told me to sit down and listen to her—we were going to have a little talk.

"What's the idea?" I asked.

"This," says she. "Listen, Jim. I've got it!"

"You don't mean the flu?" says I.

"The reason why Mr. Brown turned you down for manager of the Pink Sox," says she.

"You don't tell me!" I says. "What was the reason?"

"Yourself," she says.

"Me?" says I. "How do you mean, me?"

"I mean this," she says. "Listen, Jim. You take too long about making up your mind about things. You're always too—uncertain. You never can quite make up your mind about anything. Big things or little things, it never makes any difference—you've always got to think it over. You'll 'see.' You'll have to have time to consider it; and you keep right on 'considering it' until, honestly, Jim, sometimes it would drive a person crazy!"

"And so that's the reason Mr. Brown turned you down," says she. "He's known you for a long time, Jim, and what I say is true—and he can't help knowing it. That's your trouble, Jim. You can't make up your mind. And that's the reason George Simmons is manager of the Pink Sox instead of you. You always hesitate, Jim—and he who hesitates is bossed!"

I asked her where she got that line about he who hesitates; it didn't sound quite like Ina.

"Read that!" says she. I'd been won-

dering if there was something in that magazine that she was going to spring on me, because she was holding it in her hand when I came in, and had kept hanging right onto it as if she was waiting for the proper time to pull the sensation—or whatever it was.

It turned out to be a full-page ad about a book. It was a book written by a fellow by the name of Professor Aloysius X. Bee-croft; and the name of it was "I Will." I thought it was a pretty good title; it sounded so sort of determined like, and everything. The ad started off in big type like this: "He Who Hesitates Is Bossed!"—and so that was where Ina got it from. Then it went on to tell you to "Increase Your Will-Power! Stop Putting Things Off! Learn How To Do It Now! Stop Hesitating! Learn How To Be Firm, Decisive, Determined! Stop Arguing With Yourself! Learn The Power Of Quick Decision! Learn How To Decide About Things Instantly!"

And so forth and so on. Ina made me read the advertisement all through, and I seemed to get the idea that if you read the book once you surely couldn't help turning out to be at least a United States Senator unless you broke a leg or something. If you read it through twice you'd have the President worrying about his job; and if you read it through three times you'd be able to hold down an Information hut in the Grand Central Station and never turn a hair. And it only cost four dollars and fifty-six cents, postpaid.

"Well," asked Ina. "What do you think about it, Jim?"

"Why," I says, "I don't know. I can't seem to quite make up my mind whether—"

"There you go!" says she. "But it doesn't make any difference, anyways. You're going to get that book, and you're going right through it from the first page to the last, and you're going to learn how to do everything it says! I'm going to *make* you do it!"

So you see I never had a chance. The same day we got the book the team started on a Western tour—and Ina tagged along. And nights, when I'd a lot rather been with

the gang, or take in a show or something, Ina would drag me off to our room and sic me onto Professor Aloysius X. Beecroft. We tackled it together—though goodness knows the wife didn't need the course. I'll say she didn't! And before we got back home I'd done just what Ina had said I was going to do—I'd been through Professor Aloysius X. Beecroft's book from the first page to the last! And it was a big book, too.

Before we reached the end—honestly, I could fairly hear the old brain creak! But I stuck to it—with Ina right there at my elbow, why wouldn't I?—and I won out. And I know opinions vary, but I want to say that as far as I'm concerned the finest two words in the English language are "The" and "End."

I asked Ina if she noted any improvement in my condition, and she said that she didn't seem to make up her mind whether I had improved any or not. But if it turned out that I hadn't, I'd have to read the book again! So about then I made up my mind that it was up to me to be decisive—instantly. I had a hunch that what I'd read was going to do me a lot of good—when Ina was around, anyway.

Then it came—the chance. On the morning of the second day after we got back from the Western trip I got a hurry call on the phone from the club secretary telling me to report at headquarters on the jump. Well, here was one time when I didn't need Professor Aloysius X. Beecroft to help me make up my mind. I went. And when I came away from there I was manager of the Pink Sox—temporarily. George Simmons had taken the count from the flu, and the magnate had turned over the management of the team to me—until Simmons was able to get around again.

The old man didn't say much—I mean Alonzo, of course. But somehow I managed to get the idea that it was up to me. If I had anything, now was my time to show it.

And when I told Ina what had happened—

"Jim," says she, "it's your chance! Go in and win! And whatever else you do—don't hesitate!"

"Me?" says I. "Hesitate when I've got to read that book again if I do? I should say not!"

As for its being my chance, I knew that Simmons had only signed on for a year, and that he and Alonzo didn't hitch very well, and so—well, maybe it did look like something of the sort.

Now the situation was like this: that year the Whales had made a runaway race of it, and we were having it out hammer and tongs with the White Caps for the second position. I had the White Caps to beat, and if I came through, the fans would be satisfied, and so would Alonzo J. Brown—which was the main point. Until McBurney took hold the year before the team had always been a second division outfit. The season had only a little over a month to go, and Alonzo had said that there wasn't a chance of Simmons's getting back into harness.

So you see that after all there wasn't much to it: all I had to do was beat the White Caps and—not hesitate!

Well, I had it put right up to me the first day I took hold. We were playing the Comets, a heavy-hitting crew; but Al Leavitt was on the mound for us, and Al was going great guns; the game rocked along until the last half of the seventh without either side scoring. We went to bat. With one out we got a man on third.

Then I saw it coming. The Comet pitcher had the batter in a hole: two strikes and one ball. He was a weak hitter, and it was a cinch he'd fan. Al Leavitt was next up, and if Al ever hit a ball he'd be so astonished that he couldn't run to first, anyway. Al thinks that baseball bats are made for the same purpose as Indian clubs—to swing with. And that would make the third out.

So: would I stick in a pinch-hitter for Al Leavitt and take a chance on finishing out the game with another pitcher, or wouldn't I? Would I or wouldn't I? Yes or no? If I put in a pinch-hitter for Al he might land that run; and the run might win the game; and it might not. And what would happen to the new pitcher? And then, too—but never mind all that now. Would I or wouldn't I? Yes or no?

Well, sir, I'm going to tell the dead straight truth: in spite of the wife, in spite of Aloysius X. Beecroft—in spite of blazes—I couldn't quite seem to make up my mind! And in a minute—

I dodged into a door that led under the grand stand.

I was out again in just a jiffy. As I came out I heard the umps sing out, "Batter out!" That fellow had whiffed just like I'd known he would.

Then Spike McGinnis tackled me. Leavitt was walking toward the plate. And I hadn't said a word.

"See here, Jim," Spike fired at me. "Ain't you going to put in Platt to pinch a hit for Leavitt? Believe me, we need that run!"

"Nix," I says. "Leavitt stays in the game."

"Some manager!" snarled Spike. "Some manager! *Zip!* There goes the ball game!"

Leavitt took a strike, two balls, and—poked one out of the lot! And yet you'll hear 'em say that the day of miracles is past.

"Well, what do you know about that!" says Spike. He was certainly disgusted. "Here you go to work and pull a prize bone, and darned if you don't get away with it! You lucky stiff—how d'you do it?"

"Judgment, Spike," says I. "Judgment!"

"Judgment nothing," he says, and took his grouch somewhere else.

Just a word about Spike McGinnis. You understand, Spike was an old-timer and a privileged character, or else I wouldn't have allowed him to talk to me that way—not right out in public, anyhow. And besides, as it happened, Spike was out of luck—or thought he was—and so he was pretty well down on the world in general.

You see, Spike was superstitious, and—well, it was like this: After the game the day before, when we were walking out of the ball lot, Spike had offered to spin me for a couple of nut sundaes or something. I said all right, and Spike tossed the coin. When it came down he muffed it and it hit the ground and rolled; we must have

looked for it for at least half an hour, but we couldn't find it. And so that was Spike's trouble. The coin was what Spike called his "lucky piece," and now he'd lost it, and believe him he was in for trouble—he'd bet a cooky he was going to get the rheumatism in his throwing arm again, and he had a hunch—right then that his wife's mother was planning another visit, and so forth and so on.

And so you see there was some excuse for Spike's feeling the way he did, seeing he was superstitious like that.

I'll cover the next few weeks by simply saying that I didn't hesitate. Maybe I'd better add a little something to that: at any rate, I didn't get caught at it. Ina was certainly one pleased woman—and every little while she'd mention how much good that book had done me. And of course I agreed with her. Anyway, when any little question came up at the house, I decided about it right off the bat. I had a picture of myself wading through Professor Aloysius X. Beecroft again!

As for the rest, we stayed right up there with the White Caps, holding second place turn and turn about, only a few percentage points separating the two teams at any time. Of course, in order to do that, I had to get the breaks at least some of the time. As to whether I got them or not—all you had to do was ask Spike McGinnis. He'd say I did! And in the big pinches, when it was up to me to come through with a decision—I came. And if I hesitated—well, anyway, nobody noticed it. At least I thought—but never mind that just now.

And as regards the magnate—well, Alonzo had picked up a few measly millions by never tipping off his hand; and so he had come to the conclusion that it was a pretty good policy. And he kept it right up in my case. He didn't throw any brickbats at me—or any bouquets. All he did was to keep me guessing. Was I making good with him? You could search me.

Then, according to the schedule, the White Caps came to town for a five-game series that would close the season. As it happened, we were in second place then; and to hold the position it was up to us to win at least three out of the five set-tos.

The fans were wild; even Alonzo J. Brown appeared to be worried about something or other; and for me—I can remember a lot of times when I've felt a whole lot easier in my mind than I did then.

And Ina was the worst of the lot. You see, Ina had got an idea into her head that this series was a make-or-break thing with Jim VanNess—and maybe it was.

It would be hard to find two teams more evenly matched than the Pink Sox and the White Caps. For instance, we split the first four games of that series fifty-fifty—two and two.

We locked horns for the fifth battle. Cutting it short, when the White Caps went to bat in the first half of the seventh—the lucky, or unlucky seventh—the score was two to nothing—in our favor. So far so good. Al Leavitt, the king pin of the Pink Sox twirling squad, was dealing 'em for us; and he was never in trouble—until that same seventh inning.

Then, before you could say Jack Robinson the bases were filled! The first three men up had hit safely. Three on and none down! The White Caps were rattling bats, yelling their heads off, and all that. And the grand stand and bleachers were full of maniacs yelling "Take him out!"

Well, would I or wouldn't I? Would I pull Leavitt or not? Yes or no?

To save my life I couldn't quite seem to make up my mind! I tried to remember what Professor Aloysius X. Beecroft advised you to do when a feather-headed filbert went up in the air and started blowing a ball game—and so far as I could recollect he hadn't covered the situation at all. And there I was!

I happened to be standing by that little door that led under the grand stand—and I dodged into it.

It wasn't ten seconds when I turned to go out again—and ran plump into Spike McGinnis! He had followed me under the grand stand and had been standing right behind me all the time!

"Give it here!" said Spike.

I gave it to him.

Then Spike shot out one word—putting as much scorn and sarcasm into it as if he'd made a half-hour speech:

"*Judgment!*"

Now of course there wasn't any time to settle it then—and so we'll let the explanation go till the proper moment.

Just the instant Spike and I stepped out from underneath the stand, the fourth man up for the White Caps met Leavitt's first delivery squarely on the nose—and a run came in. Two to one, none down, and the bases still choked! Hod Wheeler, the Pink Sox backstop, straightened up, took off his mask, and strolled down to the mound to pass the time of day with Leavitt. And the whole Pink Sox ball club, including the kid that looked after the bats—and Spike McGinnis—the whole pack were after me like wolves to pull Leavitt and save the game.

Would I or wouldn't I?

Leavitt turned and looked toward the bench.

I signaled to him to stick. And then I made a little speech to the bunch of escaped lunatics that were dancing around me and trying to tell me how to run a ball club.

"Nothing stirring!" I says. "Leavitt stays in."

"Holy hope!" sobbed Spike McGinnis. "And that's what you call judgment! Good-by ball game; farewell to you!"

Leavitt knelt down and fussed with a shoe-string. Then he straightened up—and fanned two men hand-running! The next hitter zipped one straight down the first-base line; and the first-sacker made the play without taking his foot off the bag. And, as it turned out, the game was won. And of course I don't know, but it surely looked to me as if everybody was happy, except, perhaps, the White Caps—and Spike McGinnis.

At any rate, I knew that Spike wasn't *satisfied*.

Right after the game I went looking for Spike; and no doubt Spike was looking for me. But Alonzo J. Brown, the magnate, saw me first. He shook me by the hand and congratulated me. I thanked him. Then he said:

"And just a word, Jim. When I make a mistake I'm willing to acknowledge it; and I want to say that I've had you wrong.

I've always thought you were one of these—these waverers. You know what I mean. One of these fellows that take a couple of weeks to make up their minds about something—and then they aren't quite sure."

So Ina was right. Yes, on the whole, she's a pretty bright young woman.

"But I take it all back," went on Alonzo. "Take this afternoon, for instance. You came through with a decision, and you came through with it quick and—right. I'll say it was mighty good judgment leaving Leavitt in! And so now, Jim, about this manager thing. Simmons is through; and if you want the job, it's yours."

"You've hired a manager!" says I.

And I never hesitated!

Spike McGinnis and I got together right away afterward in a quiet corner of the clubhouse.

"Well, Spike," says I, trying to be very careless about it, "looks like maybe you've got a little something on me."

"I'll say I have," says Spike.

"What do you know?" I asked, trying to draw him out.

"What do I know?" says he. "I'll tell you what I know. I've had my eye on you for some time, and this afternoon I got the goods on you, and I know that every time it's been up to you to make some kind of a decision, and make it in a hurry—like whether to pull a pitcher, or stick in a pinch-hitter, or something—you've been sneaking around a corner, or under the grand stand, or somewhere, and *tossing a coin* to see what you'd do!"

"Righto," says I, putting all the brass into it I could.

"And what's more, you've been doing it with my lucky-piece, you robber!" says Spike.

"Right again," says I. "But listen, Spike. Here's how it was. You remember I was with you when you lost it; and just before the game next day, the day I took hold of the team, I stumbled onto it right where it got away from you. It was right in plain sight all the time; the way things generally are when you can't find 'em. And I stuck it in the pocket of my shirt—I had on my uniform—meaning to hand it to you, of course.

"Well, I got into a pinch that day—couldn't make up my mind what to do about something—and I happened to remember that I had that coin in my shirt pocket. And so I dodged under the stand and tossed the coin, heads or tails, to see what I'd do."

"Can you beat it?" says Spike. "Judgment!"

"Things came my way," I went on, "and so I got to thinking that maybe this was a sort of 'lucky-piece' after all—though of course you know I'm not superstitious or anything like that—and so, well, I hung onto it, meaning to give it back to you some time, of course. And afterwards, whenever I got into a jam, and couldn't quite seem to make up my mind—"

"Don't I know it?" says Spike. "Oh, yeh! Meaning to give it back to me some time! Yeh, *some time!* And of course you ain't superstitious or nothing—oh, no! But how about me? How about me? Listen! Didn't the wife's mother come to visit us just like I said she would? And ain't I been on the bench for two weeks with old John J. Rheumatism in the money arm just like I said I would? And—but let it go. I want to ask you something. Heads or tails, eh? For instance, how did you frame up that proposition about leaving Leavitt in this afternoon?"

"Why," says I, not getting what he's driving at, "a proposition like that would naturally frame up this way: heads, yes; tails, no. Heads I pull him; tails I leave him in. Why?"

"I guess you never took a good look at this little piece of change, did you?" asked Spike. "Here; look it over—good."

As it happened, I never had looked at it very carefully. I'd simply used it when I had to; and then—tried to forget it. But I took a good long look at it then. It was a fifty-cent piece, as I knew already, of course; and that's as far as I'd got.

And so help me John Roger, it was a trick coin! *Both sides were tails!*

"Must be you thought tails was having an awful run!" jeered Spike.

"I never noticed," I says. "You see, I only used the coin eight or ten or maybe

a dozen times all told; and generally there was two or three days in between times; and so—I never noticed.”

“Well,” says Spike, “in case you never noticed something else, the next time you shave yourself take a look in the glass and you’ll notice the luckiest stiff in the world!”

And I’ll admit frankly that I almost believed him.

Well, taking it by and large, it’s a kind of complicated thing, when you consider the possibilities; and I’ll let you figure it out yourself, if you can. But, anyway, I’ll say this: the contrary-minded certainly had everything their own way! And we’ll let the rest of that little heart-to-heart talk between Spike and me go, too. I’ll merely say that, to me, it shapes up a good deal like this: as long as I’m manager of the

Pink Sox, Spike McGinnis will never have to go looking for a job. Not that there’s any regular understanding between us; but—well, maybe a *sort of* understanding, you know.

And so that’s the story of how I got my start. This year—how I won the World’s Championship—that’s another story. So I’ll pass it up except to say that Spike McGinnis says—but you know what Spike says. Ina splits the credit about eighty-twenty between herself and Professor Aloysius X. Beecroft, and me. Of course I’m on the little end. As for me, I’m not saying a word—more than this: I’ve learned—and I’ll leave it to you to guess where—that the big idea is to *decide*—and don’t hesitate! And if you go wrong—It’s a poor boss that has no alibi.

DREAMLAND

BLEAK the winter night without,
Cold the hearth within,
Loud the gale with roar and rout,
Doleful clash and din.

Swirling clouds are scurrying by—
Restless spirits they;
Melting, merging, still they fly;
Doom comes with the day.

Though the tempest’s towering arm
Rock the flaming skies,
There be places, hidden, calm,
Where his fury dies.

So my spirit, void of will,
Restless, ever flies
Round a center that is still,
Wherein dreamland lies.

Raging storms of passion cease
On this hallowed shore;
Tempest wrath is stilled, and peace
Bideth evermore.

Wraiths of many another scene—
Scenes I hold full dear,
And the dearer might-have-been—
These in dreams appear.

So I, counting storm and strife
As but things that seem,
Find a richer, sweeter life
In the land of dreams.

The Trail Horde

by Charles Alden Seltzer

Author of "Riddle Gawne," "Beau Rand," "Square Deal Sanderson," etc.

WHAT HAS ALREADY HAPPENED

THE first inkling of a conspiracy to ruin him came to Kane Lawler, of the Circle L, when Gary Warden, buyer for a cattle company at Willets, repudiated Lawler's oral contract with Warden's predecessor, Lefingwell. Lawler's meeting with Simmons, freight agent, further strengthened this belief. Warden had stated that he could have all the cars he wanted—Simmons had said there were none. Prior to his trip to town, Lawler, who had inherited his father's prowess with a gun, thrashed the son of Dave Singleton for attacking Ruth Hamlin, whom Lawler loved, and whose father had been encouraged to rustle Lawler's stock by Singleton. But at Simmons's suggestion that Lawler would make it hot for them—in the matter of the refusal of cars for the shipment of his stock—Warden sneered.

Lawler went immediately to the Willets Hotel, where, in a conversation with several ranch owners, they appointed him spokesman to visit the capital—for they were all in the same boat. Meantime, following Warden's talk with Singleton, in which the latter had spoken of a certain Blondy Antrim and Kinney's Cañon, and his encouragement of the latter's hatred for Lawler, Warden, yielding to his passion for Ruth, attacked her at her cabin in her father's absence. Lawler, however, coming on the scene, spared Warden at Ruth's plea, later dispatching Hamlin—whom he had given a job at the Circle L—on a mysterious mission prior to his futile visit to the capital and his interviews with Hatfield, railroad commissioner, and Governor Haughton.

Lawler was now convinced that the invisible power was widespread. Hatfield was a part of it—as well as Haughton. After giving the story of the Governor's refusal to help him to Metcalf, of the *News*, Lawler, returning to Willets, met with an added proof, if such were necessary, of the far-reaching conspiracy against him; a new ordinance had been passed abrogating the old "vent" law by which owners, registering their cattle, had been protected against rustlers. Then, after leaving three thousand head at home, at Blackburn, the foreman's suggestion, Lawler, with his men, took the Tom Long trail to Red Rock, five hundred miles away.

But of the hazards which confronted them Warden knew, and Singleton knew. The latter snarled bestially. "Showed yellow at the last minute," he whispered to Warden; "only drivin' about half of them. Well, we'll take care of them he's leavin', before the winter's over."

CHAPTER XII.

OBLIGATION.

AFTER the departure of Lawler on the night of Gary Warden's visit to the Hamlin cabin, silence, vast and deep, reigned inside. The last golden shadows from the sinking sun yielded to the somber shades of twilight as Ruth came to the door and peered outward, to see Lawler riding away.

For a long time the girl watched Lawler, her face burning with shame over what had happened, her senses revolting from the realization of the things Lawler knew concerning her father. Then she seated herself on the threshold of the doorway, watching the long shadows steal over the plains.

She loved Lawler; she had never attempted to deny it, not even to herself. And she had found it hard to restrain herself when he had stood outside the door of her room gravely pleading with her. Pride only had kept her from yielding—the humiliating conviction that she was not good enough for him—or rather that her father's crimes had made it impossible for her to accept Lawler upon a basis of equality.

She felt that Lawler would take her upon any terms—indeed, his manner while in the cabin shortly before convinced her of that; but she did not want to go to him under those conditions. She would have felt, always, as though pity for her had influenced him. She felt that she would always be searching his eyes, probing them

This story began in *The Argosy* for March 13.

for signs which would indicate that he was thinking of her father.

And he was certain to think of him—those thoughts would come in spite of his efforts to forget; they would be back of every glance he threw at her; they would be lurking always near, to humiliate her. The conviction sent a shudder over her.

The girl's mental processes were not involved; they went directly, unwaveringly, to the truth—the truth as her heart revealed it, as she knew it must be. If there was any subconscious emotion in her heart or mind from which might spring chaotic impulses that would cloud her mental vision, she was not aware of it. Her thoughts ran straight and true to the one outstanding, vivid and overwhelming fact that she could not marry Kane Lawler because to marry him would mean added humiliation.

Greatness, Ruth knew, was hedged about by simplicity. Lawler was as direct in his attitude toward life—and to herself—as she. There was about him no wavering, no indecision, no mulling over in his mind the tangled threads of thought that would bring confusion. The steel fiber of his being was unelastic. He met the big questions of life with an eagerness to solve them instantly.

He wanted her—she knew. But she assured herself that she could not bring upon him the shame and ignominy of a relationship with a cattle thief, no matter how intensely he wanted her. That would be doing him an injustice, and she would never agree to it.

But it hurt, this knowledge that she could not marry Lawler; that she must put away from her the happiness that might be hers for the taking; that she must crush the eager impulses that flashed through her; that she must repulse the one man who could make her heart beat faster; the man for whom she longed with an intensity that sometimes appalled her.

She got up after a while and lighted an oil lamp, placing it upon the table in the big room. She closed the door, and then dropped listlessly into a chair beside the table, her eyes glistening, her lips quivering.

The future was somber in aspect, almost hopeless, it seemed. And yet into her mind

as she sat there crept a determination—a resolution to tell her father what she knew; to tell him that she could no longer endure the disgrace of his crimes.

That meant, of course, that she would have to leave him, for she knew he was weak, and that he had been drawn into crime and had not the moral strength to redeem himself.

When about midnight she heard the beating of hoofs near the cabin she sat very quiet, rigid; still determined, her eyes flashing.

She was standing near the door of her room when her father entered, and as he stood for an instant blinking at the light, trying to accustom himself to it after riding for some time through the darkness, she watched him, noting—at she had noted many times before—the weakness of his mouth and the furtive gleam of his eyes.

He had not always been like that. Before the death of her mother she had always admired him, aware of the sturdiness of his character, of his rugged manliness, and of his devotion to her mother.

Adversity had changed him, had weakened him. And now, watching him, noting the glow in his eyes when he saw her—the pathetic worship in them—her heart protested the decision that her cold judgment had made, and she ran to him with a little, quavering, pitying cry, and buried her face on his shoulder, shuddering, murmuring sobbingly:

“Oh, daddy; oh, daddy, what have you done?”

He stood rigid, his eyes wide with astonishment, looking down at her as she clung to him, as though wondering over a sudden miracle. For he knew she was not an emotional girl, and this evidence almost stunned him.

“Why, honey!” He patted her hair and her cheeks and hugged her tightly to him. And presently he gently disengaged himself and held her at arm's length, peering into her face.

And then, when her clear eyes met his—her gaze direct and searching even through her tears—he paled, his gaze drooped, and his arms fell to his sides.

“I've done enough, Ruth,” he said.

"Why, daddy—why did you do it? Oh, you have made it so hard for me!"

"There, there, honey," he consoled, reaching out and patting her shoulders again. "I've been a heap ornery, but it ain't goin' to happen again." His eyes shone through a mist that had come into them.

"I've been talkin' with Kane Lawler, an' he opened my eyes. I've been blind, Ruth—blind to what it all meant to you. An' from now on I'm goin' straight—straight as a die!"

"Ruth," he went on, when he saw incredulity in her gaze; "I wasn't to tell you. I reckon Lawler would half kill me if he knowed I was tellin' you. But there ain't no use, I've got—"

"Did you give your word to Lawler, daddy?"

"I sure did. But I've got to tell you, Ruth. Mebbe you knowin' will sort of help me to go through with it.

"Kane Lawler was here this mornin'—he come here to see me about a Circle L cow that I was runnin' my brand on the night before. He talked mighty plain to me—an' earnest. He offered me a job over to the Circle L, an' I took it.

"I rode over there this afternoon, an' Lawler's straw-boss put me to work. Then to-night Lawler rode in an' took me out by the corral. He gave it to me straight there. He's goin' to restock my place an' give me a chance to get on my feet. He's goin' to put his shoulder behind me, he says, an' make me run a straight trail—takin' a mortgage on the place to secure him.

"He give me a letter to his mother, sayin' I was to have what stock I wanted. An' I'm to repay him when I get around to it. Honey, I've got a chance, an' I'm never goin' to slip again!"

Ruth walked to the door and threw it open, standing on the threshold and gazing out into the dull moonlight, across the vast sweep of plain from which came the low moaning of the night wind, laden with mystery.

For a long time, as she stood there, pride fought a savage battle with duty. Her face was pallid, her lips tight-clenched, and

shame unutterable gripped her. To be sure, Lawler had enjoined her father to silence, and it was evident that she was not to know. Still, she did know; and Lawler had added an obligation, a debt, to the already high barrier that was between them.

Yet she dared not evade the obligation, for that would be robbing her father of a chance over which he seemed to exult, a chance which promised his redemption—for which she had prayed.

Her heart was like lead within her—a dull weight that threatened to drag her down. And yet it throbbed with gratitude, with hope and with thankfulness. For if her father really meant to try—if he should succeed in redeeming himself in Lawler's eyes and in her own, she might one day be able to go to Lawler with no shame in her heart, with the comforting assurance that her father had earned the right to hold his head up among men. To be sure, there would always be the shadow of the past mistake lurking behind; but it would be the shadow of a mistake corrected, of a black gulf bridged.

Her father was waiting when she finally turned to him—waiting, his chin on his chest, his face crimson with shame.

"Ruth, girl—you ain't goin' to judge me too harsh, are you?" he begged.

Again she could not resist the pathetic appeal in his eyes. She ran to him again, holding him tightly to her. A cool gust swept in through the open doorway—the night wind, laden with mystery. But the girl laughed, and snuggled closer to the man; and the man laughed hoarsely, vibrantly, in a voice that threatened to break.

CHAPTER XIII.

KINNEY'S CAÑON.

AT the close of the second day the big trail herd halted at the edge of the vast level over which it had come. The herd had been driven forty miles. Cattle, men, and horses had passed through a country which was familiar to them; a country featured by long grama-grass, greasewood, and cactus plants.

There was no timber on the level. The

gray of the grama-grass and the bare stretches of alkali were brightened by the silvery glare of a sun that swam in a cloudless sky of deepest azure. Except for the men, the cattle, the horses, and the two slow-moving, awkward-looking, canvas-covered wagons, there had been no evidence of life on the great plain. In a silence unbroken save by the clashing of horns, the bleating and bawling of the cattle, the ceaseless creaking of the wagons, and the low voices of the men, the cavalcade moved eastward.

The wind that swept over the plains was chill. It carried a tang that penetrated; that caused the men, especially in the early morning, to turn up the collars of their woolen shirts as they rode; a chill that brought a profane protest from the tawny-haired giant who had disclosed to Lawler the whereabouts of Joe Hamlin that night in the Circle L bunk-house.

The first camp had been made on the Wolf—at a shallow about five miles north of the Two Bar, Hamlin's ranch. And with the clear, sparkling, icy water of the river on his face, and glistening beads of it on his colorless eyelashes, the giant had growled to several of his brother cowboys, who were likewise performing their ablutions at the river:

"This damn wind is worse 'n a Kansas regular. You lean ag'in' it an' it freezes you; you turn your back to it an' you've got to go clawin' icicles out of your back. Why in hell can't they have a wind that's got some sense to it?"

"It ain't c-cold, Shorty," jibed a slender puncher with a saturnine eye and a large, mobile mouth.

"Kells," grinned the giant; "your voice is froze, right now!"

And yet the men enjoyed the cold air. It had a tonic effect upon them; they were energetic, eager, and always ravenously hungry. The cook offered testimony on that subject, unsolicited.

"I never seen a bunch of mavericks that gobbled more grub than this here outfit!" he stated on the second morning. "Or that swilled more coffee," he added. "Seems like all they come on this drive for is to eat!"

Toward the close of the second day corrugations began to appear in the level. Little ridges and valleys broke the monotony of travel; rocks began to dot the earth; the gray grass disappeared, the barren stretches grew larger and more frequent, and the yucca and the lancelike ocotilla began to appear here and there.

The trend of the trail had been upward all afternoon—gradual at first, hardly noticeable. But as the day drew to a close the cattle mounted a slope, progressing more slowly, and the horses hitched to the wagons began to strain the harness.

The rise seemed to be endless—to have no visible terminus. For it went up and up until it melted into the horizon; like the brow of a hill against the sky. But when, after hours of difficult travel, herd and men gained the summit, a broad, green-brown mesa lay before them.

The mesa was miles wide, and ran an interminable distance eastward. Looking back over the way they had come, the men could see that the level over which they had ridden for the past two days was in reality the floor of a mighty valley. Far away into the west they could see a break in the mesa—where it sloped down to merge into the plains near Willets. The men knew that beyond that break ran the steel rails that connected the town with Red Rock, their destination.

But it was plain to them that the rails must make a gigantic curve somewhere in the invisible distance, or that they ran straight into a range of low mountains that fringed the northern edge of the mesa.

Lawler enlightened the men at the campfire that night.

"The railroad runs almost straight from Willets," he said. "There's a tunnel through one of the mountains, and other tunnels east of it. And there's a mountain gorge with plenty of water in it, where the railroad runs on a shelving level blasted out of the wall. The mountains form a barrier that keeps Willets and the Wolf River section blocked in that direction. It's the same south of here, the only difference being that in the south there is no railroad until you strike the Southern Pacific. And that's a long distance to drive cattle."

When the herd began to move the following morning, Blackburn sent them over the mesa for several miles, and then began to head them down a gradual slope, leaving the mesa behind. There was a faint trail, narrow, over which in other days cattle had been driven. For the grass had been trampled and cut to pieces; and in some places there were still prints of hoofs in the baked soil.

The slope grew sharper, narrowing as it descended, and the cattle moved down it in a sinuous, living line, until the leaders were out of sight far around a bend at least a mile distant.

Blackburn was at the head of the herd with three men, riding some little distance in front of the cattle, inspecting the trail. Lawler and the others were holding the stragglers at the top of the mesa, endeavoring to prevent the crowding and confusion which always results when massed cattle are being held at an outlet.

It was like a crowd of eager humans attempting to move through an open doorway at the same instant. The cattle were plunging, jostling. The concerted impulse brought the inevitable confusion—a jam that threatened frenzy.

At Lawler's orders the men drew off, and the cattle, relieved of the menace which always drives them to panic in such a situation, began to filter through and to follow their leaders down the narrow trail.

Down, always down, the trail led, growing narrower gradually, until at last cattle and men were moving slowly on a rocky floor with the sheer wall of the mesa on one side and a craggy, towering butte on the other.

The clatter of hoofs, the clashing of horns, the bellowing, the rumble of the wagons over the rocks and the ring of iron-shod hoofs, created a bedlam of sound, which echoed and reechoed from the towering walls until the uproar was deafening.

Shorty, the tawny-haired giant, was riding close to Lawler.

He had never ridden the trail, though he had heard of it. He leaned over and shouted to Lawler:

"Kinney's Cañon, ain't it?"

Lawler nodded.

"Well," shouted Shorty; "it's a lulu, ain't it?"

For a short time the trail led downward. Then there came a level stretch, smooth, damp. The day was hours old, and the sun was directly overhead. But down in the depths of the cañon it was cool; and a steady wind blew into the faces of the men.

The herd was perhaps an hour passing through the cañon; and when Lawler and Shorty, riding side by side, emerged from the cool gloom, they saw the cattle descending a shallow gorge, going toward a wide slope which dipped into a basin of mammoth size.

Lawler knew the place; he had ridden this trail many times in the years before the coming of the railroad; and when he reached the crest of the slope and looked out into the hazy, slumbering distance, he was not surprised, though his eyes quickened with appreciation for its beauty.

Thirty miles of virgin land lay before him, basking in the white sunlight—a green-brown bowl through which flowed a river that shimmered like silver. The dark bases of mountains loomed above the basin at the eastern ridge—a serrated range with lofty peaks that glowed white in the blue of the sky. South and north were other mountains—somber, purple giants with pine-clad slopes and gleaming peaks—majestic, immutable.

Looking down from where he sat on Red King, Lawler could see the head of the herd far down the ever-broadening trail. The leaders were so far away that they seemed to be mere dots—black dots moving in an emerald lake.

The cattle, too, had glimpsed the alluring green that spread before them; and at a little distance from Lawler and several of the other men they were running, eager for the descent.

"She's a whopper, ain't she?" said Shorty's voice at Lawler's side. "I've seen a heap of this man's country, but never nothin' like that. I reckon if the Lord had spread her out a little mite further she'd have took in mighty near the whole earth. It's mighty plain He wasn't skimpin' things none, anyway, when He made this here little hollow."

He grinned as he rode, and then waved a sarcastic hand toward the cattle.

"Look at 'em runnin'! You'd think, havin' projected around this here country for a year or so, they'd be better judges. They're thinkin' they'll be buryin' their mugs in that right pretty grass in about fifteen seconds, judgin' from the way they're hittin' the breeze toward it. An' it'll take them half a day to get down there."

Shorty was a better judge of distance than the cattle. For it was after noon when the last of the herd reached the level floor of the basin. They spread out, to graze industriously, the men not caring, knowing they would not stray far from such grass.

By the time the chuck wagon had come to a halt and the cook had clambered stiffly from his seat to prepare the noonday meal, Lawler and the others saw the horse wrangler and his assistant descending the long slope with the *remuda*. The horses had fallen far behind, and Lawler rode to meet them, curious to know what had happened.

When he rode up, the horse wrangler, a man named Garvin—a stocky individual with keen, inquiring eyes—advanced to meet him.

"Boss," he said shortly, "there's somethin' mighty wrong goin' on behind us. Me an' Ed—my helper—has been kind of hangin' back, bein' sort of curious. They's a bunch of ornery-lookin' guys trailin' us. I first saw 'em after we'd struck the bottom of that cañon. They was just comin' around that big bend, an' I saw 'em. They lit out, turnin' tail—mebbe figurin' I hadn't seen 'em; but pretty soon I seen 'em again, sort of sneakin' behind us. I reckon if they was square guys they wouldn't be sneakin' like that—eh?"

CHAPTER XIV.

BLONDY ANTRIM.

WHEN Lawler spoke to Blackburn regarding the news that had been communicated to him by the horse wrangler, Blackburn suggested that himself and several of the Circle L men ride back to ascertain the object of the trailers.

"We'll ride back an' make 'em talk!" he declared heatedly.

Lawler, however, would not agree, telling Blackburn that the trail was free, and that, until the men made some hostile move, there was no reason why they should be approached.

So the men ate, selected new mounts from their "strings" in the *remuda*, and again started the big herd forward.

Lawler rode for a time with Garvin, keeping an alert eye on the back trail. But though he could see far up the cañon, where the trail—white with dust from the passing of the herd—wound its sinuous way upward into the dark recesses between the towering mesa walls, he could see no sign of life or movement.

The non-appearance of the mysterious riders was suspicious, for if their intentions were friendly they would have come boldly on. In fact, if they were abroad upon an honest errand, they must have found the slowness of the herd ahead of them irksome; and they would have passed it as soon as possible, merely to escape the dust cloud raised by the cattle.

When the afternoon began to wane the herd was far out in the basin, traveling steadily toward a point where the little river doubled, where Blackburn intended to camp for the night. And though both Blackburn and Lawler scanned the back trail intently at intervals, there was still no sign of the riders Garvin had mentioned.

Nor did the riders pass the herd in the night. Blackburn threw an extra guard around the cattle, making the shifts shorter and more frequent; and when daylight came a short conference among the Circle L men disclosed the news that no riders had passed. If any riders had passed the cowboys must have seen them, for there had been a moon, and the basin in the vicinity of the herd was clear and unobstructed.

Enraged at the suspicious nature of the incident, Blackburn took half a dozen cowboys and rode back, while the remainder of the trail crew sent the herd eastward. It was late in the afternoon when Blackburn returned, disappointed, grim, and wrathful.

"There's a bunch trailin' us, all right,"

he told Lawler; "about a dozen. We seen where they'd stopped back in the cañon a ways—where Garvin said he'd seen 'em sneakin' back. We lost their tracks there, for they merged with ours an' we couldn't make nothin' of 'em.

"But at the foot of the slope we picked 'em up agagin. Looks like they separated. Some of them went north an' some went south. I reckon that during the night they sneaked around the edge of the basin. It's likely they're hidin' in the timber somewhere, watchin' us. If you say the word I'll take some of the boys an' rout 'em out. We'll find what they're up to, damn 'em!"

"As long as they don't bother us we won't bother them," said Lawler. "It's likely they won't bother us."

Again that night the men worked in extra shifts; and the following morning the herd climbed out of the basin and straggled up a narrow trail through some foothills. At noon they passed through a defile between two mighty mountains; and when twilight came they had descended some low hills on the other side, and went to camp for the night on a big grass level near the river they had followed for three days.

The level upon which they camped was much lower than the floor of the big basin, for the water from the river came tumbling out of a narrow gorge between the hills through which the herd had passed.

They were in a wild section, picturesque, rugged. There was plenty of water, and Blackburn and Lawler both knew that there would be water enough for the herd all the way to Red Rock. There was a section of desert before them, which they would strike before many days; but they would cross the desert in one day, barring delay; *and there seemed to be no reason why the long drive should not prove successful despite the mountain trails—most of them hazardous—through which they still must pass.*

And yet the men were restless. The continued presence of an invisible menace near by disturbed them. They had not seen the mysterious riders again, but there was not a man in the outfit who did not feel them—not a man but was convinced that the riders were still trailing them.

Long ago the younger men had ceased to laugh and joke. During the day they kept gazing steadily into the gulf of space that surrounded them, carefully scrutinizing the timber and the virgin brush which might form a covert; and at night they were sullen, expectant, every man wearing his gun when he rolled himself in his blanket.

It was not fear that had seized them. They were rugged, hardy, courageous men who had looked death in the face many times, defying it, mocking it; and no visible danger could have disturbed them.

But this danger was not visible; it was stealthy, secret, lurking near, always threatening, always expected. It might stalk behind them; it might be flanking them as they rode; or it might creep upon them in the night.

Blackburn had fallen into a vicious mood. His eyes glowed with the terrible, futile rage that surged in his veins; it was a reflection of a wrath that grew more and more intolerant as the days passed and the danger that portended did not materialize.

"Boss," he said to Lawler on the tenth day following that on which Garvin had reported the presence of the riders behind them, "the boys is gettin' jumpy. They're givin' one another short answers, an' they're growlin' about little things that they never noticed before.

"I'm gettin' fed up on this thing, too. It's a cinch them riders is following us. I seen 'em dustin' north of us this mornin'. I ain't said anything to the boys, but it's likely they've seen 'em too—for they've got their eyes peeled. It's gettin' under my skin, an' if they don't come out into the open pretty soon and give us an idea of what game they're playin', me an' some of the boys is goin' to drag 'em out!"

Yet Blackburn did not carry out his threat. He knew pursuit of the riders would be futile, for there were no further signs of them for several days, and Blackburn knew the pursuers would have no trouble in eluding them in the vast wilderness through which the herd had been passing for a week.

They had been on the trail twenty days when at dusk one night they moved slowly down a wide, gradual slope toward a desert.

At the foot of the slope was a water hole filled with a dark, brackish fluid, with a green scum fringing its edges.

The slope merged gently into the floor of the desert, like an ocean beach stretching out into the water, and for a distance out into the floor of the desert there was bunch-grass, mesquite, and greasewood, where the cattle might find grazing for the night. Beyond the stretch of grass spread the dead, gray dust, somber and desolate in the filmy, mystic haze that was slowly descending.

The cattle came down eagerly, for they had grazed little during the day in the mountainous region through which they had passed. They were showing the effects of the drive. They had been sleek and fat when they started from the Circle L; they were growing lean, wild, and they were always ravenously hungry.

But where they could feed they required little attention; and the cowboys, after halting them, helped Garvin establish the lines of a rope corral into which they drove the *remuda*. Then they built a fire and squatted wearily around it—at a respectful distance—to watch the cook—and to listen to him as he complainingly prepared supper.

The men had finished, and the long shadows of the dusk were stealing out over the desert, when Lawler—sitting on the chuck box—heard Blackburn exclaim sharply:

“*Hell's fire! Here they come!*”

Blackburn had sprung to his feet, his eyes blazing with the pent-up wrath that had been in them for many days. He was tense, his muscles straining; and his fingers were moving restlessly near the butt of the huge pistol that swung at his hip. The fingers were closing and unclosing, betraying the man's passion.

Lawler got to his feet. Following the direction of Blackburn's flaming eyes, he saw, perhaps a mile away, a large body of horse-men. They were descending the long slope over which the herd had been driven.

Lawler counted them—thirty-nine. But the menace was no longer invisible; it was now a material thing which could be met on such terms as might be, with the whims of chance to govern the outcome.

Lawler did not doubt that the oncoming riders were hostile. He had felt that when he had first been made aware of their presence behind the herd. He saw, too, that the men of his outfit felt as he did; for they were all on their feet, their faces grim, their eyes glowing with the rage that had gripped them over the presence of the unseen menace; their muscles were tensed, and their lips were in the sullen pout which presages the imminence of action.

Shorty, the tawny giant, was a terrible figure. He seemed to be outwardly cool, and there was not a sign of passion in his manner. His hands swung limply at his sides, not a muscle in his body seeming to move. Unlike the other men, he was calm, seemingly unperturbed.

So striking was the contrast between him and the other men that Lawler looked twice at him. And the second time he saw Shorty's eyes—they were gleaming pools of passion, cold, repressed.

“Easy, boys!” Lawler called to the men. “Don't let them suspect you know they've been trailing us. They've got us two to one, almost—if they mean trouble we'll have to work easy!”

He saw the men relax, and several of them resumed their former positions at the fire.

The strange riders were coming steadily onward; they were not more than a hundred yards distant when Blackburn exclaimed, hoarsely:

“Lawler, it's Blondy Antrim an' his gang! Damn his hide! We're in for it!”

For the first time since Garvin had told him about the presence of the men on the trail behind the herd, Lawler's face betrayed passion—the glow in his eyes rivaled that in the giant's.

During the past year or so word had reached him—rumor unfounded, but insistent—that more than once Singleton and Blondy Antrim, the outlaw, had been seen together. He had placed no credence in the rumors, ascribing them to the imaginations of mischievous brains, prejudiced against Singleton because of his bluff, dominant manner.

He had first suspected there might be truth in them when Joe Hamlin had told

him that he had rustled cattle for Singleton. He now believed that Singleton had disposed of the stolen cattle through Antrim; and the conviction that Singleton was behind the action of the outlaw in trailing the herd through the country seized him.

In an instant—following Blackburn's exclamation—he was aroused to the danger that confronted himself and his men. As though by previous arrangement, the men looked at him, noted the tenseness that had come over him, listened attentively when he spoke:

"Boys, don't offer to throw a gun. I know Antrim. He's a killer, and his men are like him. Take it easy—keep cool. The man who loses his temper will be guilty of the wholesale murder that will follow. When Antrim rides up, send him after *me!*"

He had not unsaddled Red King. He strode to the horse, swung into the saddle, and rode eastward, away from the advancing riders.

Blank astonishment, puzzled bewilderment, shone in the eyes of the Circle L men as they watched him, and into the hearts of some of them crept the conviction that Lawler had deserted them; that he was afraid of the outlaw chief.

Blackburn saw what they thought, and his burning eyes bored into them with sarcasm unutterable. He laughed hoarsely, with a grim mirth that startled them.

"Don't you worry about Lawler's nerve, boys; he's got more of it than the bunch of us put together! He's got some scheme in mind. You guys just set tight until you find out what it is. Do as he told you. Don't let that scurvy gang know that you're flabbergasted!"

When Lawler rode away there was a noticeable commotion in the group of advancing horsemen. One of them left the group, spurring his horse in the direction taken by Lawler. He must have been called back, for he wheeled his mount after he had ridden a dozen paces or so, and rejoined his companions, who came on as before.

When the horsemen came to a halt near the fire, they were spread in a semicircle about the Circle L men and in their bronzed, immobile faces was no answer to the question that agitated Blackburn and the others.

They had halted at a little distance from the fire, and one of them, a tall, slender, keen-eyed, thin-lipped man, urged his horse out of the circle and insolently inspected Blackburn and his cowboys.

There was a sinister light in his eyes, a lurking threat in his manner.

"What outfit is this?" he demanded.

"Circle L, from Wolf River," answered Blackburn.

"Where you headin'?"

"To Red Rock."

"Railroad out of business?" jeered the outlaw.

"Far as the Circle L is concerned, it is, Antrim," smiled Blackburn. "We had a fuss, an' quit 'em."

The outlaw peered intently at the other. Then he grinned.

"It's Andy Blackburn!" he said. Glad to meet you, Blackburn. This seems like old times—before the railroad went through; when old Luke Lawler used to jam 'em to Red Rock—sometimes—when he didn't pick up too many strays on the way." He laughed as though pleased over the recollection. "Got this stock vented, Blackburn?"

"Nary a vent, Antrim; the inspector wasn't feelin' in the humor."

"Ha!" exclaimed Antrim; "so you didn't get no vent. Well, we're aimin' to look through your herd. We've been missin' cattle all summer—from my ranch, the Circle Bar. About three thousand head. We've traced 'em as far as Kinney's Cañon, an' lost 'em. But we've been thinkin', Blackburn, that it ain't no hard job to make a passable Circle L out of a Circle Bar. That's why we aim to look your cattle over."

He grinned slightly at Blackburn's scowl, aware of the impotent rage the latter felt over the greatest insult that could be offered an honest cattleman. For an instant he watched Blackburn keenly, his lips sneering; and then he said sharply:

"Who was that guy that rode away as we come up?"

"Lawler," said Blackburn. "He's figgerin' on seein' you alone, looks like. He left word that when you come I was to tell you he wanted to see you."

The outlaw's eyes glowed with swift suspicion.

"He knowed me, eh?" he said. He glanced keenly over the level floor of the desert. Dimly, in the dusk, he could see Lawler riding near the herd. For an instant Antrim hesitated, plainly debating the wisdom of leaving his men; then he smiled with whimsical recklessness, and his movements became rapid, jerky.

"Slade," he said, addressing a rider near him, "you're running things till I get back."

He wheeled his horse and sent him into the dusk toward the herd, riding cautiously, evidently not entirely convinced of the peaceableness of Lawler's intentions.

He rode a quarter of a mile before he came upon Lawler; and though the light was fading he could plainly see Lawler's face; set, expressionless.

The outlaw brought his horse to a halt within three or four paces of Red King. Antrim's manner exuded the insolent tolerance of the master, who has the confidence that comes from thoughts of overwhelming advantage.

He knew Lawler; knew him as perhaps no other man in the section knew him. For he had seen Lawler using his gun. It had been some years before, when Lawler had been proving himself—proving that he had a right to the respect and consideration of his fellowmen; proving that no man could trifle with him.

Antrim had been a witness to the shooting. He had marked Lawler's coolness, the evenness of his temper; and had noted the deadly swiftness and precision of his movements when he had drawn his pistol. Lawler had not been the aggressor—a dozen other men had testified to that.

Antrim had not seen Lawler since, until now. And as he looked at him he saw that the years had brought a change in the man. He had been a tall, bold, reckless-looking youth then, with a certain wild waywardness in his manner that might have destroyed him, had he yielded to it. Now he was cold, calm, deliberate, imperturbable. The recklessness had disappeared from his eyes; they were now aglow with quiet determination. The waywardness had gone—ironlike resolution marked his manner.

And yet behind it all, Antrim could see the threat of those youthful passions; the lurking eagerness for violent action; the hint of preparedness, of readiness.

Antrim was startled, uneasy. He saw now that he should not have left his men; that he had made a mistake in coming alone to meet Lawler.

He was certain of it when he heard Lawler's voice, saw the cold, smiling light in his eyes.

"You're wanting my cattle, Antrim. Your men have been trailing me for two weeks. You don't get them. You've got thirty-nine men, and there are only twenty-three Circle L men over there. I'm not getting any of them killed. This thing is between you and myself. Get your hand away from your gun or I'll bore you!"

He moved his hand where it had been—seemingly—lying on Red King's neck, under the mane, and Antrim saw the dark muzzle of a pistol showing in the hand.

"I'm not taking any chances, Antrim—you can see that. I'm not going to take any. If you do anything to attract the attention of your men, I'll kill you. Drop your guns, using your thumbs and forefingers."

He waited, watching keenly until the outlaw had complied with the demand, the two big pistols thudding dully into the sand beside his horse.

Then Lawler resumed, his voice low and even, as before:

"Now we're riding back to the fire, Antrim. Listen hard, for this means life or death to you:

"We're going back to the fire. You're going to act as though nothing had happened; and you are to tell your men that you have changed your mind about the cattle—you are to tell them that you are going with me to Red Rock; and you are sending them back to where you came from, to wait for you."

Antrim stiffened, and his face bloated poisonously. But he did not answer, for there was that in Lawler's eyes that convinced him of the futility of attempting resistance.

"You're going to Red Rock with me," went on Lawler. "I'm going to be per-

sonally responsible for you. I'm going to watch you; you're going to ride ahead of me. If you talk, or make any motion that brings any of your men back, you'll die so quick you won't know it happened! Do you understand?"

"Damn you, Lawler; you'll pay for this!" muttered the outlaw. "I'll go on your trail and I'll never let up till I get you!"

Lawler laughed lowly. "Just be careful not to get any of that poison in your voice when you tell your men what I told you, Antrim, or you'll never go on anybody's trail. Get going, now; and be careful."

Antrim wheeled his horse, and Lawler spurred Red King beside him.

"I'll be watching you, Antrim," he warned. "If your men show they suspect anything wrong you go down, mighty rapid. You don't get off your horse until your men go. And there is to be no playing for time. You talk fast and earnest, and carefully. Go ahead."

Riding slightly in Antrim's rear, Lawler followed the outlaw to the fire. There had come no change in the positions of the outlaws or of the Circle L men. And when Antrim and Lawler rode up there was a silence during which the men of both factions looked interrogatively at their leaders.

Antrim's face was pale, and his voice was vibrant with emotion. But he did not hesitate.

"Slade," he said to the man he had left in charge, "I've changed my mind about these cattle. Lawler has given me proof—that none of our stock is with them. I'm hittin' the trail to Red Rock with Lawler. You take the boys back to the ranch an' wait for me."

Slade's eyes widened; he flushed and peered keenly at Antrim. "You—why, hell's fire, Antrim; we—"

"Slade, do as I tell you!" said Antrim coldly. "Are you runnin' my affairs? You hit the breeze, right now—you hear me!"

Slade grinned venomously, and waved a violent hand around the circle. "You hear your boss, boys!" he said. "Slope!"

The men hesitated an instant, sending sharp, incredulous glances at their leader. But Antrim, pale, knowing that if he be-

trayed the slightest sign of insincerity his men would suspect, met their looks steadily. The men wheeled their horses, muttering profanely, and rode slowly westward into the growing darkness.

When they had disappeared, Lawler smiled faintly at the outlaw chief.

"You can get down, now, Antrim." He drew the pistol from Red King's mane, where it had been concealed during Antrim's talk with his men, and sheathed it. And then Blackburn, who had been a silent, amazed witness to what had occurred, whistled softly, covertly poking Shorty in the ribs.

"There's one thing that's as good as a vent, ain't there, Shorty?" he said. "That's a gun in the hand of a man who's got plenty of nerve!"

CHAPTER XV.

"MEDIUM MOURNFUL."

EARLY in the afternoon of the first day of December the sky darkened, and a cold, raw wind began to shriek through Willets. The company corral was empty; and again, as on the day before Kane Lawler had visited him, Gary Warden stood at one of the windows of his office, smiling. Warden was almost satisfied.

Only one disturbing thought persistently recurred: Lawler had got his cattle through to Red Rock.

A crimson stain appeared in Warden's cheeks as his thoughts reverted to Lawler's return to Willets, after disposing of his cattle to the Red Rock buyer. And Warden's shoulders sagged a little, the smile faded, and he glared malignantly at the bleak, gray clouds that sailed over town on the chill, bitter wind.

Oddly, at the instant Warden's memory was dwelling upon the incident of Lawler's return to Willets, Lafe Corwin, the storekeeper, was mentally reviewing the incident.

Willets was a cow-town, and for that season its period of activity was over. All the beef cattle in the section, with the exception of three thousand head still held by Lawler, at the Circle L, had been shipped eastward, and Willets would now descend

to supine indifference to considerations of gain.

Life Corwin was tilted back in a big wooden chair near the big, roaring-hot stove in the lounging-room of the Willets Hotel. His clerk could attend the store. Until spring came, Corwin would spend much of his leisure near the big stove in the hotel, talking politics and cattle—two subjects of paramount importance.

But just at this instant Corwin was thinking of Lawler's return to Willets. Little wrinkles gathered around his eyes—which were twinkling; and he chuckled lowly as his gaze roved from one to the other of the men who, like himself, were enjoying the warmth of the stove, and listening, between words, to the howling and moaning of the wind.

Three or four times, during silences, Corwin chuckled. And when at last he saw Dave Rankin, the blacksmith, watching him curiously, he guffawed aloud.

"I don't reckon I ever seen no mournfuller sight than that!" he declared.

"Meanin' which?" asked the blacksmith, his eyes alight with truculent inquiry. The others sat erect, attentively.

"Meanin' that mornin' when Kane Lawler hopped off the train with his bunch of cow-hands—an' Blondy Antrim," snickered Corwin. "Dave Singleton an' Gary Warden an' Jordan an' Simmons an' that pony-built girl which is stayin' over to the Two Diamond with that ossified woman she calls 'Aunt Hannah,' was on the platform waitin' for the six o'clock train from the East. It appears that pony-built—Della Wharton, her name is—was expectin' some gimcracks, an' Warden an' her was waitin' for them. Anyways, they was there. It sure was medium mournful!" declared Corwin.

He appeared to hesitate; and Rankin grinned.

"We've heard it before; but I reckon we can stand listenin' agin. Tell it, Corwin."

"As I was sayin' when you interrupted me—it was medium mournful," resumed Corwin. "Shorty—who was with Lawler on the drive—has told me since; but at that time I didn't know—that Jordan had refused to vent Lawler's cattle.

"Well, I'd come down to see the train

come in, too. We was all standin' there when she come a steamin' up, an' stopped. An' who clumb off but Lawler an' his trail crew—twenty-three of 'em. An' Blondy Antrim in the midst of 'em, lookin' like a sheep-killin' dog.

"Well, gentlemen, they was a scene. Warden got his face all screwed up an' couldn't get it unscrewed agin. He looked like he'd swallered a hot brandin' iron an' it didn't lay easy on his stummick. Singleton was a standin' there with his mouth open an' his eyes a poppin' out; an' Jordan was plumb flabbergasted. Simmons was leanin' ag'in' the side of the station buildin', lookin' like he was expectin' to be shot the next minute.

"That Della Wharton girl was the only one that seemed to have any wits at all. I seen her grin eloquent at Lawler, an' look him straight in the eye like she was tellin' him somethin' intimate.

"Well, as I was sayin', Lawler an' his boys got off—an' Blondy Antrim. Antrim looks wild an' flighty—like you've seen a locoed steer on the prod. His eyes was a glarin' an' he was mutterin' cusses by the mouthful. All of which didn't seem to feaze Lawler none.

"Lawler was as cool as an iceberg which had just arrove from the north pole. An' then some. An' he got a mean, mild grin on his face when he saw the reception committee that had come to meet him. They was a twinkle in his eyes when he looked at Della Wharton; but when Warden blows into his line of vision he looked mighty wicked.

"Lawler an' his gang had brought their hosses from Red Rock in two cars—they'd sold some of the *remuda* in Red Rock, not carin' to ship 'em home. Anyways, the gang didn't appear in no hurry to unload the hosses; an' a trainman yells to them, sayin' they'd have to hurry.

"But the boys was too interested just then. 'Unload 'em yourself, you sufferin' yap!' yells Shorty. 'If you pull out of here with them hosses I'll blow your damned railroad over into the next county!' Shorty sure does love the railroad!

"As I was sayin' when you interrupted me: Lawler looked mighty wicked. But

he's cold an' polite—an' ca'am. An' he escorts Antrim over to where Warden was standin', an' says, quiet an' low:

"Warden, I have brung back my vent. He sure was a heap of trouble, an' he got himself attached to us right close. But as we haven't got no further use for him we're turnin' him over to you. I reckon he's lookin' to you an' Singleton to pay him for the trouble of trailin' us for two weeks, an' for keepin' me company as far as Red Rock, to see that my herd got there right an' proper. Antrim,' he says; 'go to your boss!' And he gives him a little shove toward Warden.

"Warden didn't say nothin'—he'd lost his voice, I reckon. But Antrim goes off the handle complete.

"The damned sneak lifted my guns!' he yells.

"You wantin' a gun?' says Lawler, cold an' ca'am. He backs up an' lifts one of Shorty's. Then he walks close to Antrim an' shoves it into his right hand.

"There's a gun, you polecat,' he says. 'Fan it. I'd admire to blow the gizzard outen you!'

"But Antrim didn't seem to be none tickled, now that he'd got the gun. He stood, lookin' at it, like it was somethin' strange an' unusual, an' he was wonderin' whether he ought to hang onto it or drop it. Finally he grins sorta sheepishlike, an' hands it back to Lawler, butt first.

"I ain't aimin' to fight you to-day, Lawler,' he says, his face bloomin' like a cactus.

"Lawler laughs, an' gives Shorty his gun back. Shorty grins like a tiger. 'Mebbe Singleton wouldn't mind acceptin' your kind offer, boss?' he says.

"But Singleton don't break his neck reachin' for *his* gun, neither. He stands there, lookin' like a calf that's lost its mother. An' then Lawler laughs again, an' says:

"Well, boys, seein' that the reception committee has received us, an' the honors has all been done, I reckon we'd better get the hosses off the cars an' hit the breeze for home!'

"An' they done so. But before they went they smoked up the town considerable—

as you all seen. Them boys had divided twenty-five thousand dollars between them, which Lawler give 'em for makin' the drive. An' they sure did celebrate.

"Except Lawler. He went right home, an' I ain't seen him since. But I reckon Warden an' the rest of them ain't had no regrets. I ain't never seen no mournfuller sight than them folks sneakin' away from the station. All but Della Wharton. She was a grinnin' sorta slylike, as though somethin' pleased her."

CHAPTER XVI.

THE WIRE-CUTTERS.

WHEN Lawler returned to the Circle L ranch-house he found that his sister Mary had gone East, to school. She had left for Willets on the second day following Lawler's departure; and Mrs. Lawler had already received two letters from her.

Mrs. Lawler watched her son keenly when she told him that Joe Hamlin had brought a letter, stating that Hamlin was to be permitted to take a number of mixed cattle from the Circle L—and that he had driven away one hundred. She smiled gently when she told Lawler that on the day before her departure Mary had visited Ruth Hamlin—had spent the whole day with her, and had come home, mysteriously delighted. Ruth had given up the school.

"Mary loves her, Kane," said Mrs. Lawler. And she smiled again when she saw a flush reach Lawler's face.

Lawler intended to ride to the Hamlin cabin this morning. It was the third day following his return to the ranch; and until now he had had no time for anything except to attend to the many details of work that had been neglected during his absence.

There were still three thousand head of cattle on the Circle L range—the men had held them in the valley for a time during his absence on the trail, but the grass had grown sparse, and the herd was now grazing on the big plain beyond the northern slope of the valley.

During the two days that he had been home the outfit had been busy. The Circle L had a dozen line camps—little adobe

cabins scattered over the range, occupied during the winter by Circle L cowboys whose duty it was to guard the cattle against the aggressions of timber wolves; and from rustlers, cold, and starvation.

For two days the chuck-wagon had been sent rattling to the various line camps, stocking them with supplies against the winter. As the weather was threatening the hoodlum wagon had been pressed into service this morning; and all the men, with the exception of the blacksmith—who was working diligently in his shop near the corral; and two punchers—Davies and Harris, who had been assigned to Number One camp—were away with the two wagons.

Davies and Harris had not been able to resist the lure of "town." The prosperity that had descended upon them had made them restless, and the night before they had importuned Lawler to permit them to spend "one more night in town before holin' up for the winter."

Lawler had consented; and now he was wishing that he hadn't. For when he emerged from the ranch-house this morning he saw a dark cloud bank far in the north, moving southward on the chill wind.

The herd, he knew, was somewhere on the big level beyond the crest of the valley, in the vicinity of Number One line camp. It was an isolated section off the trail that led to town—a section of featureless level near a big break in the valley.

The break opened upon another big level that stretched southward for a hundred miles. In other days Luke Lawler had lost many cattle there; they had drifted through the break by hundreds, with a blizzard behind them; and had been swallowed by the great waste.

Two years before—aware of the previous losses—Lawler had erected a wire fence across the big break, extending from a craggy mountain wall on the western end, to a sheer butte that marked the end of the break, eastward.

Lawler had sent Red King to the crest of the valley on his way to the Hamlin cabin, when he noted that the cloud bank in the north had grown denser, nearer. The wind had increased in velocity, and he had to lean against it as he rode; and it was so

cold and raw that he drew his heavy cap down over his eyes to shield them, and drew over his mouth the heavy woolen scarf he wore around his neck.

He rode on a short distance, casting troubled glances into the north. He found himself wondering if Davies and Harris had gone to the line camp. If they hadn't, and a storm broke, the herd on the big level was in danger.

He brought Red King to a halt. The big horse pranced, whistling eagerly. He champed on the bit, tossed his head, raising it finally and staring straight into the north. "You see it too, eh, King?" said Lawler. "Well, we can't take that chance; we'll have to go to the camp."

He headed Red King down into the valley again, where the bitter wind did not strike them, riding westward rapidly.

It was noon before Lawler and Red King had traveled half the distance to the line camp. A dull, gray haze was sweeping southward. It mingled with the southern light and threw a ghostly glare into the valley, making distance deceptive, giving a strange appearance to the landmarks with which Lawler and the horse were familiar.

Lawler increased Red King's pace. He saw that the storm was nearer than he had thought, and that he would have to work fast to get the cattle headed into the valley before it broke.

The distance from the Circle L ranch-house to the big plain near the line cabin was about fifteen miles, and the trail led upward in a long, tiresome rise. Yet Red King struck the level with a reserve strength that was betrayed by the way he fought for his head as he saw the level stretch before him. He was warmed up—he wanted to run.

But Lawler drew him down in an effort to locate the herd before he started toward it.

Man and horse made a mere blot on the yawning expanse of land that stretched away from them in all directions. A lone eagle in the sky or a mariner adrift on a deserted sea could not have seemed more isolated than Lawler and Red King. In this limitless expanse of waste land, horse and rider were dwarfed to the proportions

of atoms. The yawning, aching, stretching miles of level seemed to have no end.

Several miles into the north, Lawler saw the herd. Directly westward, at a distance of about a mile, he saw the line cabin. No smoke was issuing from the chimney; and so far as he could discern, there were no men with the cattle.

Harris and Davies had overstayed. That knowledge might have been responsible for the grim humor in Lawler's eyes; but the rigidity of his body and the aggressive thrust to his chin were caused by knowledge of a different character. The storm was about to break.

The sun was casting a dull red glow through the gray haze. It was blotted out as he looked. Southward from the horizon ends extended a broad sea of shimmering, glittering sky that contrasted brilliantly with the black, wind-whipped clouds that had gathered in the north. Fleecy gray wisps, detached from the heavy, spreading mass northward, were scurrying southward, streaking the shimmering brilliance, and telling of the force of the wind that drove them.

A wailing note came from the north, a sighing vague with a portent of force; a whisper of unrest, a promise of fury. Far in the north, its blackness deepening with distance, stretched the menace, arousing awe with its magnitude.

Nature seemed to know what impended, for on the vast level where the storm would have a clear sweep the dried grass, bronzed by the searing autumn sun, was rustling as it bent far southward; the hardy sage bowed reluctantly to the fitful blasts, and the scraggly, ugly yucca resentfully yielded to the unseen force.

A wide, shallow gully ran northwestward from a point near Red King, almost in a straight line toward the herd. Lawler urged the big horse into the gully, and rode hard. The distance was several miles, but when Red King came to the gully end he flashed out of it like a streak of red flame. He was drawn down, instantly, however, snorting and pawing impatiently, while Lawler shielded his eyes with his hands and again scanned the country.

He saw the herd; and as he watched it

began to move. There were no men near the cattle.

They started slowly, seeming reluctant to leave the level. They moved sullenly, closely massed, their heads lowered, their tails drooping. The wind, now beginning to carry a vicious note with its whine, drove a heavy dust cloud against them, warning them.

The wind was icy, giving the cattle a foretaste of what was to come. And mingling with the dust were fine, flinty snow particles that came almost horizontally against their rumps, stinging them, worrying them. They increased their pace, and soon were running with a swinging, awkward stride, straight toward the wire fence, several miles distant.

If they saw Lawler they gave no sign, for they went lumbering on, snorting and bawling their apprehension.

Lawler was about to start Red King toward them, when he noted movement on the level a little northwestward from the cattle. Peering intently, he saw two horsemen racing southward, a little distance ahead of the cattle, paralleling them.

At first Lawler was certain the men were Davies and Harris, and he smiled, appreciating their devotion to duty. But when he saw them race past the cattle, not even halting to head them in the right direction—which would have been slightly eastward, so that they would enter the valley before reaching the fence—he frowned, wheeled Red King sharply, and sent him back into the gully from which he had emerged.

"They're strangers, King," he said, shortly to the horse, as the latter fled headlong down the gully toward the point from which he had started; "Davies and Harris wouldn't leave the herd with that norther coming on."

The big horse made fast time down the gully. He brought Lawler to a point near the fence where it crossed the gully at about the instant the two riders were dismounting some distance away.

Lawler rode out of the gully and brought Red King to a halt. There was no danger that the two men would discover him, for all objects in the vicinity were rapidly being blotted out by the dancing smother of dust

that was riding the north wind. Lawler was to the north of the men, slightly eastward, and they could not have faced the smother of dust to look toward him.

Lawler could dimly see the herd moving toward the fence; he could see the men plainly; and as he watched them his eyes narrowed. The big horse leaped with the word he caught from his rider's lips, racing lightly with the wind toward the fence where the men were working.

Lawler's approach was noiseless, for all sound was engulfed in the steady, roaring whine of the storm. Neither of the two men, working at the fence, heard Lawler as he brought the big horse to a halt within half a dozen paces of them.

The taller of the two, plying a pair of wire-nippers, completed his work at a fence post and turned to leap toward another. The movement brought him against the muzzle of Lawler's horse. He halted jerkily, retreated a step, and looked up, to see Lawler looking at him from behind the muzzle of the big pistol that had leaped into his hand.

There was no word spoken—none could be heard at the moment. What followed was grim pantomime, with tragedy lurking near.

The tall man held his position. He had tentatively extended his right hand, the fingers spread, clawlike. Now the hand was going upward, accompanied by the other.

When the man had stepped backward to escape a collision with Lawler's horse, the wind had whipped his hat from his head. He now stood there, his hair waving to the vicious whims of the gale, veiling his eyes, and he not daring to lower his hands to brush it away.

The shorter man, too, had assumed a statuesque pose. He had turned when he had noted his companion's startled movement, and he, too, had seen an apparition that had sent his hands swiftly upward.

The big horse stood motionless, his back to the wind. He did not move as Lawler leaped from his back—smoothly, quickly, his eyes alert, his muscles tensed for violent action.

The men stood rigid while Lawler jerked their pistols from their holsters and tossed

them into the dust waves that danced and swirled around them. The short man was catapulted against the tall one with a viciousness that staggered both; and then they heard Lawler's voice, sharp and penetrating, above the shrieking of the wind:

"Those cattle will be here in five minutes! If you don't have that fence repaired before then, you drift with them, hoofing it!"

In the allotted time they repaired the fence, working with breathless energy, while Lawler stood near, the menacing gun in hand, a saturnine smile wreathing his face.

When the herd reached the fence there was no break in it. More—where the break had been were three men on horses who took instant charge, easing the cattle down along the fence, heading them eastward toward the shelter they were sure to find if they kept going.

The three men followed the cattle for a mile—until they were going straight and fast toward the home ranch. Then Lawler, **smiling** with bitter humor, motioned the men toward the back trail.

They seemed to know what was demanded of them. They wheeled their horses, sending them into the billowy white smother that was now coming in a gigantic wave toward them.

The southern light had gone. A dense blackness, out of which roared a gale that robbed them of their breath, descended. The snow was hurled against them like a sand blast, biting deep, stinging their faces and blinding them.

It took them more than an hour to travel the distance that lay between the point at which they had cut the fence, and the line cabin. And when they reached a wind-break near the structure the two men rode behind it, silent, thankful.

Lawler had ridden forth, prepared for bad weather. His face was now muffled in a huge scarf that encircled his neck, and his eyes were shielded by the peak of the fur cap he wore. He dismounted, waved the men toward a dugout, and watched them as they dismounted and led their horses through a narrow door. When the men emerged Lawler led the big red horse in,

leaving the men to stand in the white gale that enveloped them.

The wind was now roaring steadily, and with such force that no man could have turned toward it with uncovered face. It came over the vast emptiness of the northern spaces with a fury that sent into one the consciousness that here was an element with which man could not cope.

Lawler emerged from the dugout and closed the door behind him. He barred it, turned, and motioned the two men toward the cabin. He followed them as they opened the door and entered. Then, after closing the door and barring it, he lifted the peak of his cap, removed the scarf from his neck, glanced around the interior of the cabin, and looked coldly at the men.

"Well," he said; "there's a heap of explaining to be done. You can begin now—one at a time!"

CHAPTER XVII.

THE INQUISITION.

THE two men had walked to a point near the big fireplace that occupied the greater part of one end of the cabin. The hatless one, big, assertive, belligerent, grinned defiantly, saying nothing in answer to Lawler's words.

The other man, slighter, and plainly apprehensive, glanced swiftly at his companion; then lowered his eyes and gazed at the floor.

"You skunks bunked here last night!" charged Lawler sharply. "When I was here, yesterday, these bunks were made up. Look at them now! Talk fast. Were you here last night?"

The smaller man nodded.

"Why didn't you cut the fence last night?"

The smaller man grinned. "We wasn't aimin' to get caught."

"Expected there'd be line riders here, eh?"

The other did not answer.

"Then, when you saw no one was here, and that it was likely the norther would keep any one from coming, you cut the fence. That's it, eh?"

7 ARGOSY

The two men did not answer, regarding him sullenly.

Lawler smiled. This time there was a cold mirth in his smile that caused the two men to look quickly at each other. They paled and scowled at what they saw in Lawler's eyes.

Half a dozen bunks ranged the side walls of the cabin, four on one side, two on the other, arranged in tiers, upper and lower. A rough, square table sat near the center of the room, with a low bench on one side of it and several low chairs on the other. A big chuck-box stood in a corner near the fireplace, its top half open, revealing the supplies with which the receptacle was filled; some shelves on the other side of the fireplace were piled high with canned goods and bulging packages. The bunks were filled with bed clothing; and an oil-lamp stood on a triangular shelf in a corner near the door. The walls were bare with the exception of some highly-colored lithographs that, evidently, had been placed there by some one in whom the love of art still flourished.

It was cold in the cabin. A window in the north wall, with four small panes of glass in it, was slowly whitening with the frost that was stealing over it. In the corners of the mullions were fine snow drifts; and through a small crevice in the roof a white spray filtered, ballooning around the room.

During the silence which followed Lawler's words, and while the two fence-cutters watched each other and Lawler, all caught the voice of the storm, raging, furious, incessant.

With his free hand Lawler unbuttoned his coat, tossed his cap into a bunk, and ran a hand through his hair, shoving it back from his forehead. His movements were deliberate. It was as though catching fence cutters was an occupation of every-day occurrence.

Yet, something in his eyes—the thing the two men had seen—gave the lie to the atmosphere of deliberate ease that radiated from him. In his eyes was something that warned, that hinted of passion.

As the men watched him, noting his muscular neck and shoulders; the slim waist of

him, the set of his head—which had that hint of conscious strength, both mental and physical, which clearly marks the intelligent fighter—they shrank a little, glowering sullenly.

Lawler stood close to the door, the pistol dangling from his right hand. He had hooked the thumb of the left hand into his cartridge belt, and his eyes were gleaming with feline humor.

"There's a heap to be told," he said. "I'm listening."

A silence followed his words. Both men moistened their lips; neither spoke.

"Get going!" commanded Lawler.

"We was headin' south," said the small man. "We cut the fence to git through."

Lawler's eyelids flickered slightly. The heavy pistol swung upward until the dark tube gaped somberly into the small man's eyes.

"I've got loads of time, but I don't feel like wasting it," said Lawler. "You've got one minute to come clean. Keep your traps shut for that time, and I bore you—both—and chuck you outside!"

His smile might have misled some men, but the small man had correctly valued Lawler.

"Gary Warden hired us to cut the fence."

The man's voice was a placative whine. His furtive eyes swept Lawler's face for signs of emotion.

There were no signs. Lawler's face might have been an expressionless mask. Not a muscle of his body moved. The offense was a monstrous one in the ethics of the cow-country; and the fence-cutter had a right to expect Lawler to exhibit passion of some kind.

"Gary Warden, eh?" Lawler laughed quietly. "If you're lying—"

The man protested that he was telling the truth.

At this point the tall man sneered.

"Hell," he said; "quit your damn blabbin'!"

"Yes," grinned Lawler, speaking to the small man. "You're quitting your talk. From now on your friend is going to do it. I'm asking questions a heap rapid, and the answers are going to jump right onto the

tails of the questions. If they don't, I'm going to see how near I can come to boring a hole in the place where you've got your brains cached."

The man glared malignantly at Lawler; but when the first question came it was answered instantly:

"How much did Warden pay you?"

"A hundred dollars."

"When were you to cut the fence?"

"When the norther struck."

"You saw us cache grub in the cabin?"

The man nodded.

"What if you had found a couple of line riders here? What were you told to do if you found line riders here? I'm wanting the truth—all of it!"

The man hesitated. Lawler's pistol roared, the concussion rocking the air of the cabin. The man staggered back, clapping a hand to his head, where, it seemed to him, the bullet from the pistol had been aimed.

The man brought up against the rear wall of the cabin, beside the fireplace; and he leaned against it, his face ghastly with fright, his lips working soundlessly. The little man cowered, plainly expecting Lawler would shoot him, too. And Lawler's gun did swing up again menacingly, but the voice of the tall man came, blurting out the reply:

"Warden told us to knife any men we found here."

Lawler's lips straightened, and his eyes glowed with a passion so intense that the men shrank, gibbering, in the grip of a mighty paralysis.

Lawler walked to the table and sat beside it, placing the gun near his right hand. The men watched him, fascinated; noting his swift movements as he plunged a hand into a pocket and drew out a small pad of paper and a pencil. He wrote rapidly upon a leaf of the pad; then got up, stepped back and ordered the tall man to approach the table.

"Write your name below what I have written—and date it."

When both men had signed the paper, Lawler folded it, stuck it between some leaves of the pad, and replaced pad and pencil in the pocket.

"That's all," he said. "You'll hang out here until the norther blows itself out; then you'll hit the trail to town and tell your story to the sheriff. I'll be doing the honors."

He sheathed his gun and flung open the door, stepping back as a white avalanche rushed in; grinning broadly as he saw the men shrink from it. He divined that the men though he was going to force them out into the storm immediately, and he grinned coldly.

"You can be tickled that I'm not sending you out into it, to drift with the cattle you tried to kill," he said. "You'd deserve that, plenty. You'll find wood beside the dug-out. Get some of it in here and start a fire. Move; and don't try any monkey business!"

He closed the door as the men went out. He had no fear that they would try to escape—even a threat of instant death could not have forced them to leave the cabin now.

When they came in they kindled a fire in the big fireplace, hovering close to it after the blaze sprang up, enjoying its warmth, for the interior of the cabin had become frigid.

Lawler, however, did not permit the men to enjoy the fire. He sent them out for more wood, and when they had piled a goodly supply in a corner, and had filled a tin water-pail from a water hole situated about a hundred feet straight out from the door of the cabin, he sent them again on a message to the dugout to get their ropes.

With the ropes, despite the sullen objections of the men, he bound their hands and feet tightly, afterward picking the men up and tossing them ungently into upper bunks on opposite sides of the room.

He stood, after watching them for a time, grinning coldly.

"That's just so you won't get to thinking you are company," he said. "We're holed up for a long time, maybe, and I don't want you to bother me, a heap. If you get to bothering me—disturbing my sleep trying to untangle yourselves from those ropes, why—"

He significantly tapped his pistol. Then he pulled a chair close to the fire, dropped

into it, rolled a cigarette, and calmly smoked, watching the white fleece trail up the chimney.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE KNOCKING AT THE DOOR.

FOR an hour there was no sound in the cabin. Lawler smoked several cigarettes. Once he got up and threw more wood upon the fire, standing in front of the blaze for several minutes, stretching his long legs, watching the licking tongues as they were sucked up the chimney by the shrieking wind.

Then, for a time, he lounged in the chair, gazing meditatively at the north window, noting how the fine, frozen snow meal clung to the glass; watching the light fade, listening to the howling white terror that had seized the world in its icy grip.

At the end of an hour it grew dark in the cabin. Lawler got up, lighted the kerosene-lamp, placed it on the table, seated himself on a bench, and again resumed meditatively watching the leaping flames in the fireplace.

Satisfaction glowed in his eyes as he thought of what would have happened had he not decided to substitute for Davies and Harris. Undoubtedly by this time the two men were on their way to the camp. They would certainly have noticed the warning, black northern sky and other indications of the coming storm. And undoubtedly, if they had started toward the camp, they were by this time being punished for their dereliction.

They would make the camp, though, he was sure, for they had the wind at their backs, and they knew the trail. He expected, any minute, to hear them at the door.

He grinned, his face a trifle grim as he anticipated their astonishment at finding him there, with the two fence-cutters occupying the bunks.

He had not followed the herd to the Circle L shelters because he had had small hope of keeping close to the fence-cutters in the storm. And he had brought them back to the cabin to make sure of them. As he sat

at the table he drew out the paper the men had signed, and read their names:

Lay Givens.
Ben Link.

Their confession would convict Gary Warden of a crime that—if it did not open the doors of the penitentiary to him—would bring upon him the condemnation of every honest man in the State. In his anxiety to inflict damage upon Lawler, Warden had overstepped himself.

Lawler had betrayed no passion that day when he had got off the train at Willets with his men, and Blondy Antrim. He had not permitted any of them to suspect that the incident of the attempted theft of a portion of the trail herd had affected him.

But it had affected him. It had aroused him as he had never been aroused before; it had filled him with a passionate hatred of Gary Warden so intense that when his thoughts dwelt upon the man he felt a lust to destroy him. Not even Lafe Corwin, watching him that day at Willets, knew how he had fought to overcome the driving desire to kill Warden, Singleton, and Antrim, as they had stood there on the platform.

His eyes chilled now, as he thought of Warden and the others. He got up, his blood pulsing heavily, and started toward the fire. He had reached it, and was standing before it, when he heard a sound at the door—a faint knocking, and a voice.

Davies and Harris were coming now. They were cold, he supposed, had seen the light in the window—perhaps had tried the door; the wind drowning the noise so that he had not heard it before. They were in a hurry to get in, to the warmth the cabin afforded.

He was in no hurry to let them in, and he walked deliberately to the table and stood beside it, his back to the fire, smiling.

He heard no further sound, and he supposed the men had gone to the dugout to turn their horses into its shelter before again trying the door.

He was in a grimly humorous mood, now, and he stooped, blew out the light, and stepped toward the door, standing back of it, where it would swing against him when the men opened it.

He loosened the fastenings, stealthily. He wanted them to come in and find the two fence-cutters there.

He stood for a long time at the door, listening, waiting. No sound reached his ears, and he scowled, puzzled. Then, above the wailing voice of the storm, came the shrill, piercing neigh of a horse.

Several times in his life had Lawler heard that sound—once when a cow-pony which had been bogged down in quicksand had neighed when she had been drawn under; and again when a horse which he had been riding had stepped into a gopher hole and had broken a leg. He had been forced to shoot the animal, for which he had formed a sincere attachment; and it had seemed to him that when he drew the pistol the horse knew what impended—for its shrill neigh had been almost human in its terrible appeal.

It was such a sound that now reached his ears above the roar of the storm.

Davies and Harris were in trouble.

With a bound Lawler tore the door open and stood, leaning against the terrific wind, trying to peer out into the white smother that shrieked around him. When he made out the outlines of a horse not more than half a dozen feet from the open doorway—the animal so encrusted with snow that he looked like a pallid ghost—and a shapeless bundle on his back that was seemingly ready to pitch into a huge drift that had formed in front of the cabin—he leaped outward, a groan of sympathy breaking from him.

In an instant he was inside again, carrying the shapeless bundle, his lips stiff and white as he peered close at it as he tenderly laid it on the floor of the cabin.

With swift movements he lighted the lamp again, and then returning to the bundle, leaned over it, pulling away a scarf that covered its head and disclosing a white, drawn face—the face of the woman he had met, in Willets, at the foot of the stairs leading to Gary Warden's office!

Lawler wheeled swiftly, leaping to first one and then to the other of the bunks where the fence-cutters lay, tearing the ropes from them.

The tall man tumbled out first, urged by

what he had seen and by the low, tense voice of his captor. He seized a tin-pan and dove out of the open doorway, returning instantly, the pan heaped high with snow. The other man, following the first quickly, dove through the snow-drifts to the dugout, where he fumbled in the slicker on Lawler's saddle until he found a flask.

By the time the little man returned the woman was in one of the lower bunks. A pair of bare feet, small and shapely, were sticking out over the edge of the bunk, and the tall fence-cutter was vigorously rubbing snow over them. A pair of small, high-top riding boots of soft, pliable leather, was lying beside the bunk near some pitifully thin stockings.

At the other end of the bunk Lawler was bathing, with ineffable tenderness and care, a face that had been swathed in the scarf he had previously removed. The long, glistening black hair had been brushed back from its owner's forehead by Lawler; and a corner of a blanket had been modestly folded over a patch of white breast, exposed when Lawler had ruthlessly torn away the flimsy, fluffy waist.

"It was the scarf that saved her face," said Lawler, after he had worked over the unconscious form for a quarter of an hour. The face was flushed, now—which was a good sign; and the feet and ankles were beginning to show signs of restored circulation also—though more reluctantly.

"How she ever got through it I'm not pretending to say," declared Lawler grimly. "But she did it, and the frost didn't get her, much. She'll be fresh as a daisy in a couple of hours."

The tall man—Link—had ceased his labors with the woman, and was standing near Lawler. He grinned at Lawler's words.

His face was flushed, his eyes were glowing with passion as he watched the inert form on the bunk.

"She's a peach," he said thickly. Lawler was not looking at him; he was giving all his attention to the woman.

"Della Wharton," continued Link. "I've seen her at the Two Diamond—runnin' around with Warden. Warden's took a shine to her. Don't blame him."

He muttered something else that Lawler

did not hear, for Lawler was paying no attention to him.

Lawler held the flask to the woman's half-open mouth, and smiled when several drops of the strong spirits trickled over her tongue. Then he walked to the wood-pile and replenished the fire. Returning, he saw Link standing close to the bunk, smiling bestially at the upturned face. When Lawler caught sight of him he was fingering the disordered hair, lifting it and letting it filter through his fingers.

Without a word, Lawler leaped and struck with bitter malignance. Not a sound escaped Link as he fell. Lawler lifted him bodily, threw him upon the pile of wood in the corner, where he lay huddled up, unconscious.

Wheeling swiftly, his eyes ablaze with the terrible passion that had seized him, Lawler faced the bunk. The woman's head was moving slowly from side to side, as though she were making an effort to lift it; her eyelids were fluttering, and her hands were straying over the bed clothing, the fingers closing and unclosing.

Lawler made a horrible grimace at Givens.

"Get out of here, damn you!" he said. "Go out and take care of her horse—anything! If you are in here when she wakes up, I'll kill you! And take that other skunk out of here, too—take him to the dugout, and don't come back here for an hour!"

He watched impatiently while Givens seized his companion and dragged him outside. Then Lawler fastened the door, and standing near it, watched the woman.

Her eyes were open. He could see them, even though he stood slightly behind her. She moved her head, lifted it, and gazed around the room, seemingly bewildered at what she saw. Then she twisted her body around; saw her bare feet, and quickly drew an end of the bunk blanket over them.

And then she saw Lawler. Her eyes opened wide, filling with satisfaction, and she sat up, holding one hand to her throat, tight against the flesh, covering it with the other.

"Oh!" she said thinly. "I—I got here, didn't I? But I didn't expect to find you here!"



The High Flier.

by Gordon Mac Creagh

COMPLETE IN THIS ISSUE.

I.

THE sharp trill of the telephone startled Howard Selfridge out of his vacuous lethargy. For long minutes he had gazed emptily, rather blearily, into nothingness. At intervals his face was screwed up with pain and he pressed his two hands against his head to still the hammering in his temples. Soft white hands they were, and they trembled dissipatedly. The bell broke in on one of these periods of groaning torpor, and Selfridge's eyes opened again and he looked round at each of the luxurious furnishings of his room in turn with an expression of peevish bitterness on his face.

It might have been a fine face under other circumstances. The eyes were wide apart and intelligent—in spite of their present bleariness. The nose was finely chiseled. The lips were full and firm; and the whole showed the possibility of an imagination which might have accomplished things. But it was a soft face and bloodless, and the lines which seamed it were lines of dissipation and disillusionment and of weary cynicism.

Again the bell reminded him. He grumbled discontent, and without rising from his deep chair he reached out a shaky hand to a decanter on the table beside him to pour himself a bracer for the necessary

energy to answer it. He turned the decanter upside down over a tumbler, and for long seconds he watched the last amber drops trickle from the thin neck with a twisted smile of satirical introspection.

Then suddenly he gripped the bottle in a spasm of passion as a convulsion of rage flushed his pale face. He leaped to his feet and crashed the costly glass into the empty fireplace.

"Damn Dickie anyhow!" he swore viciously. "I knew he was a fool! Sure tip, hell! Any stock that he boosted was bound to slump! Curse it, I'd never have invested, only Margie giggled and said I was no sport; and I was pickled to the gills."

Once again the bell jarred imperiously on his jangled nerves. This time he staggered painfully to the instrument and listened at the receiver. An appreciable time elapsed before he seemed to understand the message. The operator had to repeat. Then he groaned.

"Oh, thunder! Tell her I'm not in."

There followed an awkward pause. Then he distinguished the cautious buzzing of the wire—or was it his head:

"Standin' right heah, suh; she done heard me talkin' to you, suh."

Selfridge hung over the instrument helplessly. All he could think of was:

"Oh, Lord! Tell her that—oh, hell!"

Then the voice again:

"She comin' right up, suh."

Selfridge was standing by the mantle-shelf when the girl burst into the room with eager impulsiveness. Then she stopped rigid in her gesture of greeting, his half-formed name frozen on her lips.

She had never seen him this way before. She had heard of his prodigal gaities, and she had seen him "sick," but not like this. Her eyes opened slowly wide and the level brows above them corrugated in an expression of incredulous surprise and sorrow rather than reproach. Fine eyes they were, wide-set and thoughtful, with a wistfulness in them which came of much grieving and wondering—and waiting; silent, suppressed emotions which inevitably mold softness; yet the lips, when they closed with a tremulous intake of the breath, were firmly curved and the rounded chin was full of decision.

She wore "something in a russet-brown," which matched her hair. Selfridge never knew what these things were made of, or how; he was conscious only that it looked well and quiet and wonderfully appropriate.

It was abundantly clear that this girl was not, never could be by the most distorted fancy mixed up with the Margie who had giggled when he was pickled to the gills. Selfridge stood leaning weakly against the mantle, looking at her in dull silence in which humiliation was evenly balanced with irritation. The girl was the first to find her voice. Instead of bursting into reproachful reference to his appearance she faltered, stammered, and managed to articulate:

"Howard, I—I heard that you had—had been unfortunate again; so I—well, I came."

Selfridge's reply was irrelevant.

"You shouldn't have come, Grace—not here."

Instantly the rounded chin was ready for battle.

"Why not?" she demanded defensively, knowing full well the answer in advance.

Selfridge subsided wearily into a chair and told her the conventional law in a dispassionate voice.

"If anybody were to see you it might be unpleasant—for you."

The girl was wilfully defiant.

"I don't care. I—I heard that you had—that you were cleaned out; and I knew that you needed m—" She was about to say, me, but she bit her lip on her impulsiveness and altered the sentence lamely to, "you needed somebody to help."

Selfridge winced, but said nothing. He sat hunched in the chair staring dully ahead. The girl came swiftly into the room and stood by his side, her feeling of awkwardness in the situation evinced by the helpless little movement of her fingers playing with her dress. It was difficult to know just what to say. So, "poor Howard!" she murmured.

There was the sheer woman of it. All his present plight, all his past criminal foolishness, all his neglect, were glossed over. The only emotion she was aware of was sympathy.

"Poor Howard! What do you propose to do now?"

Howard proposed nothing. He had been in no condition to think of anything. He just shrugged at the outlook therefore. The girl offered a hopeless suggestion.

"Couldn't you go back to your Uncle Stanley—just for a while, till you could get something to do?"

At last Selfridge spoke; he laughed, rather; a laugh of the ultimate ridicule.

"Pshaw! Uncle Stanley! You know what my uncle thinks of me, Grace; and you can just imagine what he'd say if I went to him looking for room and board"—his face turned stubborn—"not in a million years, I wouldn't! Darn him, he'd read the Bible at me."

The girl nodded. She had listened to that stout Methodist's views on his scape-grace nephew on more than one occasion when she had dropped in, while Howard was still at home, and found the old man alone—always alone.

"Well then, what about your friends?" she suggested.

Howard's sudden cackle was satanic.

"Ha-aa-a! That bunch? You know those boys—you don't, though, and that's your good luck. I could borrow just about ten dollars from one of them; and then they'd stake me to dinners—as long as my clothes lasted."

"Well, what are you going to do then, Howard?" She was insistent, and he felt that she was driving him into some definite blind alley; but he was too utterly soul-weary and heavy-headed to conjecture about it.

"Oh, good Lord, Grace, how should I knew what I'm going to do? I'll get some one to sell all this stuff for me, I suppose—my private cellarette ought to fetch something these days; and then—well, I suppose I'll get a job of some sort."

"What kind of a job, Howard? What can you do?" She fenced him yet closer.

Selfridge had a very clear-cut picture of just what he could do. It was an easy picture to visualize. The keen imagination betokened in his forehead and eyes showed him a long vista of grim grayness stretching ahead of him; drab days during which the crease in his coats and pants gradually dissolved into dissolute bagginess, and progressed thence to hard-worn shininess, and finally disintegrated to the ultimate frayed thread; hideous days to contemplate; and colorless nights of unbroken monotony in which the only laughter would be that of people who *passed* in automobiles, and the only lights would be the white arcs gleaming coldly on park benches. His laugh was the fulfilment of the twisted, bitter-tasting smile.

"What can I do? Might have got a sweet job mixing drinks—a little while ago. But now—oh! I've never thought about it, but I suppose I can do something."

The girl pressed her concerted plan yet further.

"What is something, Howard? You know you have no training."

Howard was silent. He knew his limitations better than she did. He shuddered suddenly and put his hands over his face. That was to shut out the grim prospect which his malicious imagination conjured up. He was afraid of it. The competing with other men for work, the battle for existence, appalled him. He had never had to develop self-reliance. The only assertion he had ever known had been his readiness to order—and pay the bill.

That keen imagination of his showed him in hideous pictures how he would shrink in

the competition with men in an open field. The only competition he had met hitherto had been a riotous rivalry with vacuous young men to be known as the wildest, highest flier of them all. In that sort of competition he had succeeded gloriously. He had flown high—and he had crashed. And now he was afraid, deadly afraid. He sat therefore with his hands before his eyes, and there was no smile on his face.

The girl swayed over him, yearning to do something, she did not know what; but just hungering to comfort and help. It was the instinctive mother yearning over the weakness which is the weakness of a child, a phenomenon which leaves strong men in amaze and indignant fury. Her fingers touched his hair ever so lightly.

"Poor Howard!" she murmured again; and then—she had driven him now against the final wall—diffidently, yet with set determination, she made her final point. "Howard, you know that I have a little—some negotiable securities; so I"—the rest came with a rush—"won't you take them to carry yourself with till you can make some connections?"

The startling suddenness of this offer from this direction struck Howard with galvanic effect. He lurched, almost reeled, from under the girl's protective influence.

"Good Heavens, Grace, don't talk that way!" he muttered almost fearfully. "Of course I couldn't. It's—it's awfully decent of you, of course; but—good Lord, I haven't got *there* yet!"

He strode several times up and down the room plucking nervously at his fingers locked behind his back. Then:

"Grace, you ought to be going now. If some one were to come, you know—really, you mustn't stay."

The girl made another effort to reason with him; or rather to urge the age-old argument of, why not? But he almost ran from her with a hunted expression in his eyes. She saw that she would have to relinquish her plan, for the present, at any rate. She sighed, then; but she was only postponing matters till a more auspicious occasion, when his need might be more imminent and his nerves less shaken. He must communicate with her, of course, as

soon as he had made any other arrangements for a less exorbitant scale of living. With feminine practical economy she urged that he lose no time.

"Of course," he said; and, "sure he would." And he piloted her to the door. Once more she gave him implicit directions of just how he should proceed; once more her eyes softened with yearning; and then she went, looking back and waving bravely as the elevator shot down.

Selfridge sat down weakly and dabbed with a handkerchief at his brow.

"Phe-ew!" he murmured. "Gee whizz, that was a bad one! Nearly a knockout, by golly! When they begin to assume that air of proprietorship it's time to slide from under."

He remained supine for a long time, his hands in his pockets and his long legs trailing out in front. His expression was thoughtfully serious, half frightened still; an expression of long and sober review of the past and of shuddering forecast of the future. Finally he gathered his legs stiffly under him, rose painfully to his feet and dabbed a shaky key at the lock of a mahogany sideboard.

"Gosh!" he murmured. And "Gee, whizz!" again, as he poured a stiff bracer for himself. "Grace is a bully fellow and an awfully good girl and all that; but—thunder—who wants to be tied to a good girl for life!"

One of the inexplicable enigmas of existence is why a good girl should so often want to be tied to a worthless man for life.

II.

EXACTLY twenty-eight days had passed, and Selfridge's keen imagination had proved itself to be a prophet of horrid accuracy. Gray days they had been from the first; for Selfridge had moved out of his luxurious home at once; not so much from a sense of economy as from a sense of pride. He was afraid that some of his friends might look in while the memory of joyous nights was yet new, and he shrank from the attendant humiliation. He was quite sure, too, that the girl would come again, and he was afraid of her—and of himself.

If his prophetic imagination had erred

at all it was in defining just how black a gray day might be when it had been preceded by seven others, or by fourteen, or by twenty-one. Selfridge had never before thought of days in periods of sevens; but three times already a drab woman, as gray and monotonous as the days she counted with such dull avarice, had appeared before him and demanded money for his privilege of occupying a thin coffin of a room at the head of a dingy flight of stairs which were as dark by day as they were by night. To-day Selfridge knew that she would appear again and demand more money for a further lease of the malignant number seven—and he had been afraid to meet even her this morning. He had got up early, therefore, earlier even than the woman, whose practise it was to emulate the early bird; and he stood now in a line with other men who wore overalls and carried tin pails, or, some of them, packages, under their arms, greasy packages suggestive of food.

It conveyed the impression that these men hoped to go to work the same day. It was a comforting impression that did much to counterbalance the repugnance with which he had forced himself to consider this new type of advertisement. Hitherto he had haunted offices which advertised: "See Mr. Smith after 9 A.M." This other which said tersely: "Bring your tools," was a grievous come-down. But Selfridge had acquired a new and very definite conception of the potency of the mystic number seven.

In due time Selfridge, having filled out—or rather, made empty dashes in—an application form in an outer office, found himself standing before a wiry little man who sat at a desk and scribbled his name on slips of paper which bore printed captions such as Sub-Assembly, Dope, Wiring. He looked Selfridge over with quick ferret eyes. Twenty-eight days ago he would have said: "Nothing doing, brother; you're in the wrong shop." But to-day Selfridge looked quite a lot different from the wreck of three weeks ago. His face, for one thing, was a lot browner—even the sparse sunlight of city streets will have some effect if one ventures into them by day; and his hand was

steadier; and to-day, oddly enough, under the spell of the impending seven, his attitude was not quite so diffidently apologetic.

The man grunted, there, and snapped: "Ever done anything in aircraft before?" It was quite evident that he had never looked at the application-blank; what he looked at was men.

"No," said Selfridge without following up with his usual, "but, *et cetera, et cetera*." Two days ago he would have produced his well-worn diploma—and would have immediately killed his chance. Employers have a nasty habit of insisting that "there's a reason" for broken-down college men. The alert little man surprised him.

"Good! Most of 'em claim that they're expert mechanics at least, with an army training—and I fire 'em. In this shop we *work*. What can you do?"

"Anyth—" Selfridge began; and then he caught the look that was starting into the other's eyes, and altered his reply to: "I have no experience in manufacture."

The man looked at him sharply and grunted: "Huh, I don't like that high-brow accent of yours for two cents; but the National will give anybody a chance. Could you"—he looked at Selfridge and grinned shrewdly—"do you know how to use dope?"

"No," said Selfridge quite innocently.

The man grinned again. "H-m, I guess you're telling the truth. If dope had been your trouble you'd have fallen for that. All right." He scribbled on a slip: "Report to Scudder, dope section. He'll show you how to use it. Twenty a week."

That was all. There was no inquiry as to whether the figure would suit. The quick-eyed psychologist at the desk sized up his applicants as he spoke to them, and he always knew to an exact nicety just how badly they needed employment.

Selfridge took his slip to Scudder feeling an elation which he had not known since his misfortune. As a matter of fact, he had never felt such a real satisfaction in his life before; he had never known the need of success.

Scudder looked him over with scant approval. He took the slip which consigned Selfridge to his care and growled:

"H-m, another of Mitchell's experiments, I suppose." And he set Selfridge to painting wings. This was not a compliment; for it meant that Selfridge, in his opinion, did not have sense enough to apply dope to fabric.

Selfridge, then, at last had what he had never hoped to have in his life—a job.

For torturing ages thereafter it seemed to him that he toiled with a breaking back and raw hands directing a fine spray of liquid color through an air pressure "paint gun" against acres and miles of wing surfaces. Yet he dared not stop or slack down; for he saw men, older than himself mostly, and even more anaemic, shirking now and then; and presently they did not come any more. The thought of not coming any more to this loathed occupation filled Selfridge with cold horror; for the insistent woman and the alternative fear of the outer dark were very present menaces.

He toiled with feverish steadiness, then, and his life was a hazy mist of gray paint and acres of gray wings and ages of gray days; though as a matter of fact he saw the grim woman who reckoned days by sevens but twice during that time. And presently his back ached less and he began to feel the airbrush nozzle as something other than a piece of red-hot metal; and he found himself doing almost as well as some of the girls who worked by his side in overalls. And just about then he was suddenly transferred to the dope-room!

Selfridge did not recognize the compliment. He worked in the forced draft of the dope-room for nearly half a day; and then he went out and deathly sick—and then he quit. Two weeks ago he would have toiled on in terror and would have died; but two weeks of "experience" at a definite profession gave him a wonderful confidence. He went to Scudder and told him flatly that the fumes of that acetate were too much for him, and that was straight goods.

Scudder looked at him searchingly for a minute. Then he said: "All right. Knock off and call it a day. I'll see Mitchell about shifting you."

This in itself was amazing. As a shrill-voiced girl remarked pithily to another be-

tween rapid mastications of gum, "Holy jiminy! 'F I'd have fallen down on me job thataway I'd 'a' bin fired that quick." But to Mitchell, Scudder said: "I don't quite make that guy. He ain't got a hell of a lot of steam to him; but then he don't waste no extra time fooling around with the Janes."

Which was true. For one thing, Selfridge had not dared to steal time for surreptitious horse-play with the by no means frail sharers of his labor; and for another—well, he had acquired during his years of affluence a certain very definitely developed taste; and these girls were neither in speech nor in manner nor in looks anything like Margie. Nor were they by any means anything at all like Grace. He thought, in passing comparison, of Grace, and he thought of his promise to write and communicate his whereabouts; but that thought, too, was no more than passing, and hastily dismissed as quite obviously not to be considered.

Mitchell smiled thinly at Scudder and agreed: "I don't quite make him myself; but he looked like a man who wanted a job bad enough to stick. You say he's not as thick as some? Well, I'll put him in sub-assembly on fabric."

Selfridge, then, instead of being fired, was promoted. He went to a department where the thin skeletons of wings came in all their nakedness and he learned to stretch fine linen over them. Acres of linen he stretched and tacked down with infinite care; and he shuddered as he regarded the frail structures which he covered. His imagination freed—or perhaps rather jaded—from visualizing for him scenes of his own unpleasant prospects, turned with a mysterious fascination to picturing gruesome collapses of these spidery compositions of wood and cloth and paint in every conceivable sort of circumstance. In their nakedness he could see—his mechanical training helped him—just where the weaknesses lay, and he pictured them suddenly doubling up thousands of feet in the air and whirling down to spectacular destruction. His imagination dwelt with morbid fascination on the emotions of the occupants during the appreciable interval of hopeless certitude.

But it was a cheerfully impersonal sort of picture show this time. It was no affair of his. He would never have to trust his life to his own skill and care and to the care of his fellows. The very thought occasioned a derisive and at the same time a fearsome smile.

Yet he worked, carefully and fast. Not that he liked the thought of work any more—or rather, hated it less; but because his imagination still found time every now and then to remind him of a cold park bench; and, though his promotion meant more pay, he never saved anything; it meant only that he ate that much the more suitably to his taste. But he did not drink. For one thing, drink was difficult and not very satisfying; and for another, he did not dare. If he were to revert to his old condition of uselessness he would be fired; and the consequent picture was unthinkable.

This is no story of a man who has seen the error of his ways and has resolutely set himself to conquer the demon rum and thereafter to raise himself by sheer grit and determination—spurred by the inspiration of the pure working-girl who believes in him—to affluence and respectability. Selfridge frankly did not see the error of his ways. He worked solely because work meant better food and a room less soul-destroying.

As for the demon rum, it had never been for him more than a pleasant accessory to pleasant company. He felt no urge to drink in company with his fellow workers, any more than to talk to them. The honest—and sometimes pure—working-girl who held down her end of the fabric with a lump of chewing-gum while she skilfully tacked down the edge, afforded him no inspiration whatever. Not one of the nobler emotions fired him. He worked because he had common sense and he could visualize the inevitable result of two and two—or of two minus two; and—since man is a creature of habit—because work came not nearly so difficult now.

Since he had sense, however, which so many of his fellow slaves had not, he forged ahead. That was the plain result of two and two. In the fabric department he happened to detect an internal brace wire which

was too loose. That meant that he had observation as well as sense. He was graduated to the wire section.

Wire work meant more pay—and as a natural sequence, more of the luxuries of life. Selfridge smiled to himself, that thin cynical smile. He was able to see humor in the thing. That a man entirely unworthy, as he confessed himself to be, who had no interest in his work, and who worked solely that he might not starve, should be pushed ahead through sheer force of circumstance, was a most pleasing satire on life.

And then, as he chuckled over the thing, the beginnings of a great truth began to take shape in his mind. This tremendous fact was that a man of educated intelligence, having once acquired the necessary technique of any manual craft, is bound to rise by reason of his quicker thinking apparatus.

Let some of our forlorn college graduates, whose finest prospect is a "position in business," apply this axiom to, let us say, the plumbing trade, and watch themselves become leaders of men.

Selfridge realized another and more patent truth; and that was that since the direct result of work was more pay and therefore food more suited to his taste and even cigars—not so well suited, real application might lead once more to the flesh-pots of Egypt. That was the beginning of ambition.

One of the first things that Selfridge did was to move away from the nightmare of the seventh day advent. So imminently respectable was his new domicile that he thought for a moment of redeeming his promise to communicate his whereabouts to Grace. Grace used to be awfully good companionship; and human companionship was what he could not find among his fellow workers. But he thought immediately of his last meeting with Grace and he put the impulse from him with a shiver.

Less than a month in the wire department found Selfridge an expert in making loops in hard wires and soldering eyes into non-flexible cables and splicing flexible controls and taking gages and even in applying the Tinius-Olsen test. He was put into "field."

Not long after, on the field, he was re-

newing a flying wire on a plane and listening to two mechanics swear because the engine would not start. They had tried all the orthodox tests. They had tested spark-plugs for "juice," sweatingly turning the propeller the while. They had poked screw-drivers into the distributor terminals; they had opened up the breaker-box and examined minutely the platinum connection points; and they had found no fault. Yet there was no current. Therefore they stood and blasphemed to high heaven in their wrath.

Selfridge finished his job and gathered up his tools. He was always diffident about thrusting himself forward among those rough-spoken men; but he made a suggestion over his shoulder.

"How's the betting for a cracked bushing in your magneto, causing internal ground?"

"Huh!" snorted one of the mechanics. "Whadda *you* know, lineman? S'pose you show us."

Selfridge shrank from their antagonism.

"Not I," he said. "I wouldn't know the inside of one of those things if I saw it; but theoretically that would be the next step."

The mechanics looked after him and swore some more, including him in their objurgations this time.

Yet it *was* a cracked bushing. Selfridge was transferred to "motor." He had to smile quizzically to himself again. But he was beginning to realize that there was, after all, some value to his college training. And in motors his inherited aptitude at last found an interest. Here was something in which his father's spirit was evident in him. He took a real joy in toying with oily things that revolved and noting how exactly they fitted and understanding just why they worked, and even theorizing in a half-formed way how they might be improved.

In motors at last he had found something in which he did not have to force himself reluctantly to work. He did not by any means plunge into an orgy of interested activity; he did not even particularly apply himself, no more than he had done at college; but since he knew the theory already

the application of it came easy. Intelligent application of the two put him once more into the field force.

Only the best motor mechanics get to field work. But Selfridge was not entirely elated over his promotion. Field men are sometimes called upon to go up. The idea was unthinkable. Selfridge had never at any time been called upon to develop personal courage; his life had been too sheltered. And now, like many factory men who have seen the apparent frailty of internal construction and who have a knowledge of aerodynamics to show them just with what force and where the strains incidental to flying are applied, the thought of trusting his life to one of those things was a chill of horror.

That diabolical imagination of his treated him all over again to a vivid picture show of collapses from vast heights, and added this time the grim "close-up" of himself as one of the occupants. Selfridge determined to apply some real energy and work out of the field force to motor-tester in the shop. Yet in that very application his fate overtook him.

A military model Spad had been converted to the more useful pursuit of mail-carrying. The Liberty motor had been replaced with a powerful, and appallingly noisy, Hispano-Suiza. The observer's seat in front had been ripped out and replaced with an aluminum grille for holding mail-bags. Flying wires and landing wires had been sounded like banjo-strings to test their tautness. Innumerable crown nuts and cotter-pins and safety wires had been examined; and now the great machine stood ready for its test.

The flight-tester, Stevens, a youth of sublime recklessness, as is befitting in one who takes machines into the air to determine whether they are fit to fly, sat in the pilot's seat and jerked his controls sharply to try out their tension. Selfridge hopped down from the foot-board of the lower plane and reported:

"All O. K. with the engine."

Stevens looked toward the field superintendent, who nodded.

"All right!" the boy called. "Spin the stick over! She's on!"

An assistant of Selfridge's took the great propeller in both hands and jerked it downward and to the left. It was a compliment to the engine force that the ignition caught on at once and the propeller roared its readiness. The pilot immediately shut down on the gas-control and let the motor "idle" while he settled himself and tested his "joystick" again. Once or twice for a few seconds at a time he "gave her the gun" and let the engine race while he watched his instruments. Suddenly he threw up his hand.

"Hey, the tachometer don't register!"

The tachometer is an instrument which is connected with the cam-shaft of the engine and registers the revolutions per minute of the propeller. Selfridge jumped up, abashed, to the dash-board and examined the instrument. In a moment he found that it had been rattled loose by the vibration of the motor. Adjustment was easy.

"All right, I can fix this while she idles," he called; and his nimble fingers set to work with quick skill. In a few moments he muttered: "That's all right, I guess," and he climbed into the forward well; it seemed to him that perhaps the leader-hose might be stretched a little too taut. The pilot tested out the new connection by gradually opening out the throttle to its limit. Then he choked down again and hung over the edge of his seat.

"Seems all right now," he shouted to the field boss.

"Well, give her a jump," that individual shouted back. "You've got just about a decent balance with that man forward."

Selfridge, doubled up in the well, half over and half under the grating, with the motor drumming in his ears, heard nothing of all this. Stevens opened up wide again; but Selfridge was blissfully content. Suddenly Stevens waved his hand. The men who leaned against the wings in front let go and dived under. The great machine slowly gathered way and raced off across the field.

It was then that Selfridge knew! In a frenzy of terror he extricated himself from his position and sprang to his feet—and was instantly hurled against the rear of the well by the blast that roared past him.

His cap disappeared from his head like a conjuring trick and he gagged for breath. The machine was skimming the grass tops now and must have been making about sixty miles an hour. In another moment the pilot drew gently back on the control-stick and climbed into the sky at a steep angle.

Sheer choking for breath forced Selfridge to duck his head under the well-coaming; and then the wilting of his knees let him down in a huddled heap. For several minutes he was too paralyzed to think.

Blessed minutes of respite! For when his reasoning faculties returned to him he was beset with the most hideous picture display of his life. Each separate one of his previously imagined accidents flashed before him in vivid detail; and with the climax of each his breath ceased and his heart rose to his choking throat with the immediate expectancy of feeling the machine suddenly lurch and wobble and then—his heart ceased—plunged to the long, shrieking dive.

But, no lurch came yet, no sickening plunge. His long reel of preimagined pictures came to an end at last, and his paralyzed mind was quite incapable of making up any new ones. In the ensuing blankness he found himself vaguely conscious of all the conglomerate voices of his engine. There was a despairing sort of pride in the droning hum which the trained ear picks up as an undertone below the pervading racket; almost a sense of security in the strong, steady rear of the exhaust.

The motor was running beautifully, and on the ground Selfridge would have thrilled to its music. But here he cowered and clutched with despairing strength at the grating as though to hold the machine off from the expected crash by the sheer pull of his arms.

There is a definite limit to every human emotion. Having arrived at the extremity of terror, the mental reflexes presently tire and are unable to hold their high pitch. They subside with slow palpitations and leave a dull numbness behind through which other emotions are able to register again. Selfridge began to be aware of another such emotion. It was a queer tingling of the nerves, a racing, shouting circu-

lation of the blood. It was the exhilaration of extreme speed. He found for himself what this unusual sensation might be—and then the dive came!

The machine nosed over. Selfridge gasped and clutched at the rear rods of the grille. Over it went till it was almost perpendicular, and then, with engine going full blast, it roared down to earth. Selfridge shrieked, shut his eyes, and choked on his pent-up breath. Every nerve cringed before the expectant crash. Then suddenly the engine stopped dead, and a few moments later the landing-gear bumped gently. Another few seconds and it came to a stop within a few feet of its take-off.

"Good landing, boy!" a voice congratulated.

"Yep, she's a bird," responded Stevens easily, pushing his goggles from his face.

Selfridge climbed down from the forward well and vomited his soul out before the group. Somebody supported him with an arm around his shoulders. Somebody else patted his back. The voice came again with matter-of-fact confidence.

"I've seen them that way before the first time. He'll be all right in a minute."

III.

Of course he was all right; but it was many minutes before he could control the trembling of his limbs. It was anger at the rough chaffing of the others that gave him the impetus to climb up to the engine and fumble among its cylinders as though feeling for possible overheating. The action called for all the will power he had. It surprised him, as a matter of fact, that he was able to do it at all; for he had conceived an almost physical fear of the brute machine, as though it might suddenly turn and snap at him.

During the rest of that week Selfridge was undergoing a peculiar sort of transition. Machines, of course, were tested every day; and as field expert his was the responsibility for the condition of the engine. It was with an almost ludicrous alacrity that he stepped clear of every possible entanglement before he gave the word announcing his O. K. Then he would stand and watch the powerful mechanisms scud away and roar up into

the air with a strange feeling of mingled nausea and interest.

They seemed amazingly steady up there. They dipped and turned with such perfect grace that they carried an impression of being calmly sure of themselves. As he watched he imagined himself seated again behind a humming engine whose giant power he knew to the last revolution; and his imagination played tricks with him. It projected pictures of himself sitting calmly confident, toying with gas and ignition levers—he always contended that Stevens was too rough with those little polished knobs which needed a delicate touch—and he felt a faint echo of that tingling and racing of the blood. Then when Stevens would nose the machine down for its long dive to earth he would feel the same old sinking in the stomach and would clutch spasmodically at whatever tools he happened to have in his hand. And yet, it never looked anything like the fearsome fall he had experienced.

He felt impelled to talk about the planes and their habits to Stevens; and since his was the last word on the engines on which Stevens had to rely, the superman would unbend a little of his aloofness. Selfridge was amazed to find that he couldn't tell him much. The boy had a certain technical jargon of *pancakes* and *whip-stalls* and *flip-flops* and *wing slips*; but as for explaining just what stress was set up by a pancake, and where, why, he was scarcely able to decide.

He tried to bluff through on his flying patter; but Selfridge, as a wire man and a rigger, knew much more than he did. About engines Stevens was discreetly silent. Till one afternoon in a burst of ingenuous frankness, cornered by the insatiable questions of Selfridge, he quoted the jealous taunt of the ground force.

"Any fool can be a flier."

Selfridge had been supplementing his questions with a little private exploration in a book entitled, "Theory of Flight and Aerodynamics." He grinned understandingly at Stevens. Then he made an extraordinary statement.

"I'd like to go up again—only I'm scared."

Stevens laughed like a delighted school-

boy. He had found the one touch of nature.

"So was I," he admitted cheerfully. "Scared green. But I just had to. Something"—he shifted his gaze diffidently—"something called me."

"Yes," said Selfridge. "I know. Something up there."

And right on the heels of his tremulous decision the fruit of his previous efforts became apparent. He was promoted to motor tester! Immediately he saw a splendid pageant of the bright lights of his own Broadway stretching before him. For a motor tester is a man who makes money. He is a man who must know all the idiosyncracies and moods of an airplane motor, which is the most temperamental piece of mechanism in the world. A cloudy day crabs its disposition as surely as a sunny day brightens it. A few thousand feet of altitude above what it likes gives it a cough. A humid day in summer will as likely as not cause it to sulk and refuse to work.

A motor tester, then, is a man who is worthy of the money he makes; and he makes quite enough to take a whirl now and then among the bright lights.

Selfridge patted himself and smiled widely. The flesh-pots of Egypt which had been his goal were at last at hand. Yet he refused the offer of promotion and said that he preferred to remain chief field mechanic for a while yet. He explained it to himself:

"I guess I can hang that up for a little while. I've waited so long, a little longer won't hurt. I'll get this flying thing through first, and then—oh, boy!"

Yet in making that decision Selfridge, though he did not know it, was admitting that something had come into his life which was more important than the flesh-pots. Nor did he know that his method of expressing his decision was decidedly different to what it would have been some months ago. Yet less did he know that his own Broadway would have looked at him with a hazy sort of recollection as though trying to recall a vaguely familiar face.

For the face was a healthy brown—with a smear of grease across one cheek just now—and the lines that seamed it were lines of

thought and of worried guessing at the next mood of an engine, and wrinkles of long staring at a circling dot against the sun. And the hands, those white, blue-veined hands of old, were brown paws, criss-crossed with small cuts and scars, and steady enough to time the tappet clearance of a valve to the prescribed decimal .020 of an inch.

So Selfridge remained on the field force, and Stevens took him joy-riding. It was a fearful sort of joy at first; yet in spite of his tremors and the leaping of his bowels into his throat with each dip of the machine, the novice experienced again that racing of the blood which caused him to whoop aloud as they swung round in a spiral on a bank which brought Selfridge looking in astonishment over his shoulder at the ground beneath.

Sitting strapped into a regular seat crouched behind the celluloid wind-shield and feeling the air whizzing in solid particles past one's ear was a very different sensation from being banged about on the bottom of an aluminum mail grille.

Stevens was merciful. He brought the machine down to earth again on a long easy glide. Selfridge was spared the sinking sensation of a steep dive.

"Well, how come?" grinned Stevens as he pushed home the gas control and cut off the spark, and the engine came to an abrupt stop with a queer *blip blip*.

Selfridge was removing his helmet. He was breathing hard. He didn't know just how to reply. Then he said irrelevantly:

"How high were we?"

"Oh, about three thousand feet," said Stevens.

Selfridge was suddenly disappointed.

"Was that all? Gosh, I thought we were miles up." Then, grinning: "We didn't reach it. It's still up there, way up."

Stevens looked at him quizzically for a moment; then he understood and grinned too. "Oh, the thing that calls? Yes, I've never reached it either; I used to feel that way too." Suddenly an idea struck him. "Say," he exclaimed. "If it gets you that way, maybe—well, you hold the stick next time in your front seat and see how it feels."

Stevens's inspiration was correct. In six months Selfridge was for the second time in his life something which he would never have believed—a flier; and what was more, knowing how to nurse his engine as he did, he was a good flier. Extraordinary development for Selfridge of the gay boulevard!

The company made him a flight tester; and gave him more money even than a motor tester; enough to make quite frequent whirls through the region of the bright lights. Selfridge determined to make his long postponed *début*—some time. The thought gave him keen satisfaction; yet he said to himself that there was just something else which he wanted to attain to first. He didn't know exactly what, but he was not satisfied. That urge to go up and up was not stilled as it had been in the case of Stevens. Selfridge's ambition always had been to be a high flier. As in the old days, so now it seemed to be his sole ambition.

His imagination was working overtime these days. Fed by the need of analyzing the tantrums of motors, nurtured by his vivid emotions in learning the mastery of the air, it spread its wings and soared. It reeled long rosy pictures—they were all *prisma* process now—of himself circling high above fleecy clouds in an ultramarine sky and chasing eagles. It showed him leaving the eagles behind and swinging up to a limitless blue. It dressed upon old memories of fairy tales and thrilled him with—well, he could shut his eyes and be almost sure that he saw the pearly gates. And on one especially inspired occasion—that was after he had attended a banquet in honor of certain foreign aviators and had worn evening dress—he flew right through them and was lost in billowing waves of aurora colors.

He felt that he must go up and see for himself. That Something up there impelled him irresistibly. He adjusted an engine for altitude and went. There were no eagles; but he soared through the stillnesses of upper space, drunk with the exhilaration of height and speed. Only when his gasoline gage showed a scant inch in the tank did he shut down on his engine and swing down in long spirals.

He stepped out of the machine in silence,

He was exalted, thrilled. Vague theorizings about human souls and sublime heights flitted through his mind. Then, as the exhilaration wore off he slowly woke up. He shook himself angrily, and muttered something about copy-book platitudes.

But there remained a disappointment. The Something that called was still there. He felt that if only he might rise high enough he might attain it and be satisfied. He found himself wishing that Grace might be conveniently getatable. She was always so ready to understand and explain things which he did not understand. However, Grace was—wherever she was. Selfridge analyzed his emotions for himself in an inexperienced manner and decided that the urge was ambition calling him to make a record. Whatever it was it was quite necessary to go and find out.

Selfridge sought out Mitchell and sounded him about the possibility of getting the company to develop an altitude engine. Mitchell smiled shrewdly through half-closed eyes. He was thinking of the wreck of a year ago.

"We-ell," he said judicially. "A record is always top hole advertising. If you think you can do the stunt—and I wouldn't be surprised if your trick with engines wouldn't make it—why hop to it. But you've got to go some to beat thirty-two thousand feet."

"I know," admitted Selfridge. "But give me the right engine and I'll make it or bust."

"Hm-mm," said Mitchell dryly. "Machines cost around the ten thousand mark; aviators cost—seventy-five a week. But I'll tell you what we'll do with you. Go up and show us that you've got the stuff, and we'll build you a special machine. And if you make thirty-five the advertising is ours and you can keep the ten thousand dollar prize."

Selfridge spent a month studying the effect of altitude on gas engines and experimenting with oxygen supply systems. Then he chose a favorable day and went out to show the company that he had the makings of an altitude champion. That was easy. The company put the promised special machine in hand; but Selfridge insisted that success would lie in the engine.

He was not satisfied with any of the oxygen supply systems. For that matter he was not satisfied with anything these days. He was obsessed with a vague unrest. He wanted something; but he didn't know what it was he wanted. He felt that the call to climb to the greater heights was the basis of his unrest; and then the thought of heights set him angrily to thinking what sort of a craziness this was that overtook him at high altitudes. His researches into the reactions of gas engines had not included anything about the psychological reactions of extreme exhilaration, or about the purely pathological reactions on some temperaments of oxygen from a breather mask.

So he fretted and worried and felt the longing for whatever it was that haunted him; and in the interim he developed an idea of his own for supplying the necessary oxygen for normal ignition at high altitudes by a pressure pump. If it worked, it would involve a patent and comparative affluence. And affluence meant lights, laughter, *life!*

But Selfridge had almost decided by this time that he was not nearly so anxious for *life* as he used to think he was. There was that something else.

Meanwhile the new machine was nearly completed; a masterpiece of clever design and perfect material. The designer told him that the company relied on his skill and that he had therefore cut down the factor of safety from the standard five to three, sacrificing the rest to lightness. Selfridge didn't worry. All he wanted was to make the big climb.

At last the day of the great attempt arrived. Weather conditions were perfect. But Selfridge climbed into his seat without much enthusiasm. He felt an intuition of disappointment. However he showed a cheerful face as he circled once over the heads of the group on the field and waved his arm at them. Then he set his controls and roared away on a steady climb.

Up he soared, and up. The engine—tuned up with his own hand—hummed in perfect rhythm and the beautiful machine leaped to every turn of the control surfaces.

Ten thousand feet! Everything ran with the smoothness of a jeweled watch. Twenty

thousand! Selfridge knew that far below, in another world, tiny specks were straining their eyes to follow him with telescopes. His old sense of exhilaration began to come over him. His imagination took possession again and projected rosy pictures of success. Another five thousand!

Selfridge sat with tense muscles, his face thrust forward, a beatific smile on his open lips beneath the hideous oxygen mask. He was wrapped in wool and leather, swathed to a shapeless bulk, yet he felt as free and unhampered as the thin air that hurtled past him. He was drunk with the exhilaration of it, as surely intoxicated, so far as his control over his reasoning faculties went, as he had ever been with sparkling champagne.

His eyes ceased to watch his instruments and gazed wide open into blue space. He flew by feel alone, with the unconscious effort of the born bird-man. He forgot that he ever had a recording barograph. He knew only subconsciously that his controls were set to climb at a certain angle, and he sat tense in just that position.

Yet another five thousand feet! But Selfridge did not know it. Engine and atmospheric condition and machine coordinated perfectly. There was no need of conscious effort. Selfridge was permeated with a supreme confidence, a pure emotion which exalted him out of himself. He knew. That was all. He never questioned. He just knew that he would find the elusive something which his soul hungered for.

And then, quite naturally and beautifully, he did! He saw it, floating diaphanously before him. A face!

First the eyes were apparent; fine eyes, wide-set under level brows, with a wistful yearning in them. Then the lips, curved and tremulous, and the firm rounded chin. And lastly the hair, a halo of russet brown.

Selfridge started into sudden consciousness. His eyes stared behind his goggles. He leaned forward with an eager exclamation. The movement depressed his elevator control. The machine dipped downwards. And the vision was gone.

Selfridge drew a sharp hissing breath. He was trembling. He tried to think; but he found thought impossible. He was too

unnerved to continue his flight. He let the machine hold its downward slant while he pinched himself to ascertain whether he was awake.

Fifteen minutes later he landed almost as lightly as a feather on his own field. Immediately an excited group rushed to the machine. Selfridge sat motionless in his seat, looking straight in front of him. Mechanics and managers almost fought with one another to get a look at the recording barograph, sealed over the dial with the official seal of the representatives of the Aero Club.

"Whe-ee!" yelled a voice that cracked in its excitement. "Thirty-four thousand and some! Whai-ee-ee! Our man! The highest flier on earth!"

Enthusiastic hands dragged Selfridge from his seat and hoisted him shoulder high. But his face remained set and grave. He knew now, of course. He had seen the thing that called, the thing that he wanted. His record meant nothing to him. He knew now that it was never the record that had lured him. There was no room for mistake about his unrest of the last few months. He knew definitely what his soul's desire was.

And he began to understand in a vague sort of way that it had been necessary for him to rise to a plane far above where he used to be before he could appreciate what his desire really was. He begged to be let down. "I'm dead tired, fellers," he said. "I'd be obliged if you'd let me go home, and celebrate without me."

He was tired too. The strain of his emotions had worn him out. But not too tired to sit down and write a letter, a long-promised letter that ought to have been written more than a year ago. He mailed it at once; and then he went home and sat and wondered whether he had seen what he had seen.

He had plenty of time for speculation. Days came and went, and brought no reply to the letter. Selfridge waited in gnawing suspense. He tried to reconstruct the scene of his vision, but his imagination raced away into the wildest suppositions. Every time he tried to think—and that was all the time—the most grotesque explanations

visualized themselves in vivid series. Selfridge was forced to realize that he had been in no condition, under the spell of his exhilaration up there to be sure of anything or to remember anything.

It was a nerve-racking period for him. As the days went on, and no reply came, the grotesque pictures took on a suggestion of morbid gruesomeness. Selfridge began to wonder, cold fear in his heart, whether his realization had not come too late; whether the girl—the only possible girl ever, he knew now—was perhaps—he dared not think it—perhaps beyond call, and whether he might possibly have seen a spirit.

He had heard of such things. Many scientific men were now beginning to believe that certain people, when in a condition of a peculiar exhilaration which they called *trance*, were able to see, or at least had obtained vivid and recognizable impressions of loved ones who had passed over.

The thing obsessed him. It was absolutely necessary, of course, for him to know. He speculated gloomily, then, whether, if he could reproduce the same condition of exhilaration in the same circumstances, he might be able once more to see—what he thought he had seen.

Speculation did not hold him for long. Certainty was what he needed. He stalked to the hangars and ordered out the machine.

There was no eager little crowd this time, no cheery wave of farewell and good luck. Selfridge sat in his seat with a fixed expression and with a fixed purpose. He took off with as little delay as possible and climbed as steeply as he dared; he wanted to get there and find out as quickly as possible.

Once again he reached the thirty thousand level without any difficulty, thanks to his patent; and he cruised the attenuated blueness with a set determination to find out whether these thin, chilly levels were the abode of some unusual kind of spirit, and whether the urge that had drawn him was still there.

His face set more bitterly than ever as he pushed the control lever from him. Careless of the reduced factor of safety—sacri-

ficed to lightness—he swooped down at an angle which caused strangely ominous strains and creaks to mingle with the shriek of the wind rushing through the wires.

Only the grace of Providence and the best material in the world averted a tragedy. As he landed Selfridge felt that his leaden heart alone would be sufficient to wreck the machine. It was a bad landing. It would have been bad even for a beginner. It was bumpy and it was far from his usual precision which brought the machine right up to the hangar doors.

He sat in dull misery for a while and then he climbed wearily out and removed his mask to call to the figure which darted out of the hangar and came running across the field to him. He felt dully annoyed. Why did not the other mechanics hurry up to take the machine over? Star fliers were not people who should be kept waiting. He pushed his staring goggles up to his forehead and pressed his fingers to his tired eyes and blinked to readjust them to normal vision.

Then he started suddenly, and trembled as he had done when he had seen the face up above. Was he seeing it again? The figure that ran across the field so eagerly, was it a deft handed mechanic, or was it just one of the fool girls who so ineffectually washed off the machines after flight? And if so, why in thunder wasn't his regular crew coming out?

It was a girl! An ardent impatient girl, strong and graceful, with wistful wet eyes!

She threw herself against the wool and leather monstrosity of a man with an inarticulate little squeal of anxious contentment and pressed close.

"I—I just got your letter," she sobbed for no reason whatever. "I've been away, and—and I've been looking for you for so long, Howard."

"I've just been looking for you too, Gracie girl—up there. And I guess I've been looking for a long time before that too, only I didn't know what I was looking for. Why didn't you tell me?"

The girl lifted a shy, wet face.

"I was going to," said the girl simply. "But you ran away."

(The End.)



The Right Thing

By Ray Cummings

THE girl stood quiet in the cabin doorway looking out at the brilliant, frosty night. Over Sugar Loaf the cold, glittering moon shone full; the big fir on its summit stood stark and black against the vivid blue of the star-studded sky behind, like a giant sentinel watching over the silent valley.

Below her, at the bottom of the little pass, the winding trail with its single strand of telephone wire beside it, showed plainly in the moonlight. Up the mountain a wolf began howling. The girl turned back into the cabin abruptly and closed the door behind her.

The supper she had been preparing was almost ready. The little board table near the fireplace was set for one; over in a corner from a large, wood-burning stove came the odor of steaming coffee.

The girl put a lighted kerosene lamp upon the table and served herself with a single plateful of food from the frying-pan. Once she stood still, listening, but only the muffled noise of the brook and the lone wolf baying broke the silence. For a brief instant her glance rested on the telephone instrument fastened to the wall beside the fireplace; then, as though reassured, she sat down and began her solitary meal.

A knock upon the door made her leap to her feet and stand for an instant trembling. She put her hand into the pocket of her gingham apron, her fingers gripping a little revolver that lay there. The knock was repeated. The girl withdrew her hand—

empty—and with a trembling smile that seemed to belittle her fear, she crossed the room swiftly and flung open the door.

A man stood on the threshold—a slim young man in a short heavy coat, blue flannel shirt, corduroy trousers, and neat, incongruous leather puttees. He was bare-headed. He stood wavering with a hand against the doorway to steady himself, all his weight on one foot and the toe of the other just touching the ground.

“You!” cried the girl. Her tone held amazement, but it was tender, too, with love. Then as she saw the pallor of his face in the lamplight, and his lips pressed together in a thin straight line of pain, she cried again:

“Tom, you’re hurt!”

Her arms went around him, and leaning heavily on her, he hobbled across the room. The pain made him moan, and he sank back in the chair and closed his eyes. The girl knelt on the floor beside him, and began gently to unstrap one of his puttees. After a moment he seemed to recover a little. He sat up and wiped the sweat of weakness from his forehead with his coat sleeve.

“I know I shouldn’t have stopped, Beth, but I—I knew you were alone to-night.” For an instant the drawn lines of pain left his face; his eyes looked into the girl’s tenderly.

Beth looked up into his face, brushing back a wisp of hair that had fallen forward over her eyes. That he had come here frightened her. But she was glad that

he had come, and the sight of his pale face with the look of pain on it made her eyes fill with tears of love and sympathy.

"What happened, Tom?" she asked.

The boy shook himself together. "I wouldn't have stopped, honest, Beth—only my horse threw me—a mile back toward Rocky Gulch." He winced as the girl withdrew the puttee and began unlacing his shoe.

"Only sprained, I guess," he added. "But it hurts like the devil—and I'm bruised all over from the fall." He laughed a little in boyish apology for showing his pain to a girl.

"It was about an hour ago. I wasn't going to stop—I wanted to get to Vailstown to-night. The horse shied at something, and bolted, and left me lying there. I don't know—I guess I'm a rotten rider." He grinned sheepishly.

He had come to her! Of course, it was all he could do then, without a horse and with a sprained ankle at night on the Vailstown road. At the thought of having him here with her when he was hurt and needed her help, the girl's heart grew very loving and tender.

"I've been an hour coming," he went on quietly—he brushed her hair lightly with his fingers and smiled—"and now I'm here, Beth, I'm—I'm sort of glad the accident happened."

She made no answer, but went on taking off his shoe and the heavy woolen sock; his ankle was red and swollen. She raised his foot to a low wooden bench, and he watched her silently while she filled a pail with hot water. Then he noticed the food on the table.

"Finish eating, Beth," he said. "This can wait—it doesn't hurt much when I hold it still."

Again she did not reply, but held his foot and ankle in the water a moment, and then, wrapping it in an improvised bandage, replaced the sock. She was very tender and gentle. Once the boy made as if to kiss her, but she pulled away, effectually but without resentment. Wonderment was in his eyes as he followed her swift, deft movements.

"Why don't you say something, Beth?"

he asked after a moment. "What's the matter with you?"

"Now you can eat with me," she said. She had made him as comfortable as possible, and returned to the stove.

He took the plate of food she handed him. "I know I shouldn't have stopped, Beth—but I couldn't do anything else, could I?"

"How did you know I was alone?" She knew what he was going to answer, and it frightened her.

"I saw your stepfather in Rocky Gulch this afternoon—no, wait, listen Beth—I'd tell you, wouldn't I, if anything had happened?"

He went on impetuously, as though to dispel her rising fear.

"He was drunk, Beth, and he's too old a man. Look at that"—he clenched his fist, and the muscles of his bared forearm rose up in knots—"I could have twisted his neck with that for what he said about me and you. But I promised I wouldn't lift a hand to him, and I didn't, no matter what he said. I didn't mean to meet him—and then—when he said what he did I—well, I just listened and beat it, that's all."

The boy shoved his food away from him untouched, and looked across the table to meet Beth's frightened eyes.

"Don't you worry, kid," he added reassuringly, "I won't hurt him, and he can't hurt me—except with his gun." The girl shuddered, and he hastened to add:

"He wouldn't do that, Beth. Don't you think it for a minute! Even when he's drunk he wouldn't do that—he's too much of a coward—he knows he'd swing for it."

"He said he would, Tom."

"He said he would if I come up here again. I didn't come, did I?"

It was a month now since her stepfather in drunken rage had ordered Tom from the house and threatened to shoot him if he ever came there again. But after all, he had to come to-night, as things happened. And her stepfather was away—the first time he had been away in months—and he need never know that Tom had been here.

"He won't be back until to-morrow—you'll be gone then," said Beth, voicing her thoughts.

Her words seemed to rouse the boy to sudden anger. "Why should he forbid my seeing you, anyway?" he went on, resentfully. "I love you, Beth, and you love me. And I want to marry you!" His tone changed abruptly. "You *do* love me, Beth?"

He held out his arms appealingly, and in answer the girl rose silently and kissed him. "You know that, Tom," she said simply.

"Then why do I have to sneak away like a thief? Just because we love each other, what's that he's got against me?"

"You know why he said it was, Tom." She crossed the room again to attend to the stove.

"Because I haven't got any money. I know—that's what he said. But I've got enough to keep you as well as he does—and better." He glanced around the cabin contemptuously. "You know that isn't the reason. It'd be the same, anyway—unless maybe I had a fortune and would give him some of it."

Beth winced. It hurt, somehow, to have him say things like that. But she knew it was true. And she knew, too, just how he felt—how he resented the way he had been treated.

"Besides, why shouldn't I marry you?" the boy went on. "I'm from the East, same as you. I've been to college—my family's as good as yours—for all his drunken talk—better than *his*, if you ask me. What he wants is to get you a rich husband back East if he can't stake a big-paying claim out here. And I don't fit into that scheme. That's what's the matter, and you know it."

Beth laid the coffee cups on the table and sat down again, facing him.

"You mustn't talk that way, Tom," she remonstrated. "You just mustn't. I won't listen. I've told you that before. I can't listen to such things. Why were you going to Vailstown to-night?"

He ignored her question. "Well, I'm right, and you know it. I love you, and I'd make you happy. He's the only thing in the way. So far as your happiness is concerned, he'd be better off dead, and I wish he was. Oh, I know it's a rotten thing to say, but I do. Look at that."

He leaned forward suddenly, and gripped her by the shoulder, pulling her toward him. "Your neck's bruised black and blue. You think I don't notice things like that, don't you? I know how he treats you when he's crazy drunk—and I'm the only one who does. And I can't do anything about it because you won't let me."

"Tom—I—"

"And because he's your stepfather, you won't let anybody say a word against him. But you know he's no good to himself, or anybody else. He'd be better off dead, and you know it. Somebody'll get him one of these days, too—the way he acts down there at the Gulch when he's drunk—you wait and see. Some day they'll find him lying in a gully or something, where somebody's pushed him. He hasn't got a decent friend in the world—only the bums are good enough for him. And that damn One-Eyed Charlie he pals around with."

Beth sighed hopelessly.

"Some day they'll find him dead down there," the boy went on. "Charlie 'll do it, maybe—he's a rattlesnake anyway. And when he talks to me like he did today, and I see your neck horribly bruised the way it is now, I feel as if I could do it myself, sometimes—if I had a good chance."

His words shocked her, perhaps even more because some little whispering devil inside said it would be better that way—better for all three of them. She rose abruptly, and bending down, put her hands on the boy's shoulders, looking him squarely in the face.

"Tom, you didn't mean that," she said evenly.

His eyes shifted and avoided her own, and she felt her heart leap with sudden fear.

"Well, I feel as if I could, anyway," he answered, sullenly. "And you wouldn't be sorry—deep down in your heart."

"Tom, you can't talk this way. I won't listen. Don't you understand—I won't listen."

She pulled her chair close beside him. He put his arm about her shoulders and drew her to him hungrily.

"Tom, why were you going to Vailstown

to-night?" she asked again, when he had released her.

"I—I—" He seemed to make a sudden decision. "I wasn't going to tell you, Beth, till I was sure." He met her searching gaze squarely. "I think I've struck it, Beth—over there on Cedar Creek. It looks good—pans richer than anything around the Gulch. I wanted to get it recorded in Vailstown to-night. Then, if everything was all right, I was going to phone you."

His face was flushed and eager now, and very boyish. She leaned forward and kissed him.

"I'm so glad, Tom. At last—you deserve it. You've worked hard."

"I think I've got it, Beth—got it for you, just like I said I would."

Beth rose, and went to the window. "It's clouding over," she said. "We'll have snow by morning."

She came back to the fireside, and glancing at his bandaged ankle, smiled. "You'll have to stay here to-night. In the morning I'll walk over to Simpson's—it's only three miles back around Sugar Loaf—and get you a horse. You can make it to Vailstown then."

A faint, distant sound outside made them look at each other in sudden alarm. They listened. It grew louder—a horse coming along the trail from Rocky Gulch at a gallop. Beth thought of her step-father, perhaps returning unexpectedly—to find Tom here with her. In the silence she could hear again the lonely howl of the wolf on Sugar Loaf—a sound immeasurably mournful, very much like the desolate, silent mountains themselves.

She rose to her feet, trembling. The sound of the horseman approaching grew steadily louder. Then her glance fell upon the little tin clock over the fireplace. She smiled with the relief of sudden comprehension.

"Nine o'clock, Tom. I'd forgotten. It's only the mail rider for Vailstown."

She went to the window. "It's snowing, Tom," she added.

Tom was sitting up in his chair, tense. She wondered vaguely why he did not seem relieved at her words.

"It is the mail," she cried, after a mo-

ment. She opened the door a little and stood looking out.

The boy started from his chair, standing upon his injured ankle without thought of it. "He may stop, Beth. He mustn't see me here. It wouldn't look right, don't you see—it—"

She wheeled on him sharply. "He isn't going to stop," she said. Then she flung the door wide open and stepping outside, waved her hand to the passing rider on the trail below.

"Sit down, Tom." She came back into the room and closed the door. "You mustn't stand on that ankle."

He sank back into the chair, his face white. "God!" he exclaimed, "I shouldn't be up here with you alone to-night after—after what—"

Beth sat down again beside him. The thoughts that came to her mind frightened her. She tried to dispel them, but couldn't. She put her hand upon his arm.

"I'm glad you've struck it, Tom," she said. "I knew you would. And some time—"

"I'm going to have you for my wife," he finished. "And take you back East, maybe, where you belong."

Suddenly he flung his arms about her again and kissed her upon the lips roughly. "It's the right thing—the right thing, Beth." He repeated the words a little bitterly.

She disengaged herself gently.

"You say 'the right thing,' Tom," she returned quietly, "and you mean to be cynical. Because I've said that to you sometimes—and—you never quite understood, did you?"

"But why shouldn't you marry me if we love each other?" he protested again.

He had never understood, of course. And hadn't he the right to understand?

"I'll tell you what I meant, Tom—what you have never understood—never realized." Her face was very earnest, very serious. "You say my step-father is—is no good. Well, you're right. He is no good as the world judges those things—and maybe as God judges them, too. But he's the man my mother loved—there's no getting away from that, Tom—she loved him; and

she died loving him, and with the whisper on her lips telling me to help him and care for him as long as he lived." She laughed—a curious little laugh that seemed to catch in her throat.

"I never told you that, did I, Tom? I was only fourteen then—but that day, talking there with mother, I thought out my creed—my religion. To do the right thing always, Tom—that's it—that's all there is to it. Not the thing that may look best for me at the time or even right for me—but the just thing—the right thing in the eyes of God."

Her delicate little face grew wistful with the memories the words evoked. She had never spoken to Tom—or to any one—like this before. She had hardly realized until now as she put it into words, how much this simple creed of hers had come to mean to her—how unconsciously she had used it as her guiding star, through all these dreary, mournful years that followed her mother's death.

She had been unhappy, she knew; and yet not unhappy, either, since happiness came with the knowledge that she was doing the right thing.

And then Tom had come—Tom with his love that had awakened hers, with the promised fulfilment of all her girlish dreams. It was hard for Tom—hard for her, too, when now the right thing made them deny love. But still, she had gone on trusting—hoping, blindly hoping—just waiting for God to work it out in His own way—the way that would be right for them all. And she was sorry now—and a little frightened—that she had never let Tom understand.

Her eyes were dim and soft with tenderness as she leaned forward toward him.

"That you can understand, Tom. It's very simple, isn't it? And don't you see, that's just what father never has done. It has always been the right thing as he saw it, yes—but the right thing for himself—always the right thing for himself.

"And somehow, Tom, it doesn't seem to work out, when you only figure the right thing for yourself. I don't just mean that it hurts or sacrifices others—but somehow, some way, it don't work out for you—your-

self. It looks all right—you can't see why it isn't all right. But there's something working against it—some law of nature—or God maybe—or something—and it just don't work out. I believe that, Tom—I believe it absolutely—and—and no matter how hard it is, I'm trying to live up to it. I promised mother that."

Tom moistened his dry lips. "Then so long as he lives you—you—"

She put her hand over his mouth.

"Don't, Tom, don't. It isn't only that way—it's in everything. The right thing always—even if it looks wrong and bad for me. And I believe in the end it will work out best—something we don't understand will make it work out."

Suddenly she slipped from her chair onto his lap, with her arms about him, her head on his shoulder.

"But I do love you, Tom, so very, very much." All the yearning tenderness of love was in her voice. "I do want to be your wife—some day—when it's the right thing to do."

The telephone bell rang, startlingly loud in the silence of the little cabin. Beth pulled away from the boy and rose to her feet. That nameless apprehension—the vague presentiment she had felt before—came back to her now as she stood looking at the instrument, hesitating. The ring was repeated—a slightly different call this time, abruptly stilled.

"What is it, Beth? Is it for us?" The telephone was silent now.

She lifted the receiver. A voice in conversation sounded in her ear; instinctively she did not speak, but listened with an eager attention.

"Dead," said the voice, "lying there dead, with marks on his throat—murder, all right."

The little cabin room went suddenly black for Beth. The noise of the brook down by the trail seemed roaring in her ears; out beyond she heard the wolf still howling. She knew she must not faint—whispered it bravely, despairingly to herself.

"Beth! Beth, what is it?" the boy had started to his feet.

At the sound of his voice her head suddenly cleared. She let go of the telephone

box she had clutched for support, and raised her hand in warning for silence. The voice in her ear was still sounding. She recognized the voice now—the sheriff of Rocky Gulch.

“—hell of a scrap this afternoon,” the voice was saying. “It’s him all right—only circumstantial evidence, but damn strong. And he’s gone—you know him—Tom Hawley—that slim young feller from the East over at Ransome’s.”

The man in Vailstown made some answer.

“You send some men down the trail,” the sheriff went on. “He might come along any time. Probably won’t. And phone Centerville—or whatever else you think best. You’ll hear from me later—morning probably. I gotta ride way over now and tell his daughter—I dassent phone her, with her all alone out there. Hell of a job, too. Then in the morning we’ll get busy right.”

Again the man in Vailstown spoke—some question this time about One-Eyed Charlie—and the conversation then continued.

But Beth heard no more. The shock of this abrupt news of her step-father’s death, and then the suggestion of murder—murder done by Tom Hawley, the man she loved—the man whose wife some day she wanted to be—all whirled through her confused brain.

Tom Hawley, standing there now by the fireplace watching her wonderingly—Tom Hawley was a murderer?

The shock of it caused a sudden revulsion in the girl’s heart. Her fingers gripped the little revolver that lay in her apron pocket. The sheriff’s voice was still sounding in her ear; her lips were at the mouthpiece—she had only to speak to give Tom up—a murderer whom the law demanded.

And then something within her—some tiny voice of nature—whispered to the girl that she loved Tom Hawley. And that he had thought it was the right thing to do—only because he loved her—because he wanted her for his wife—wanted to make her happy. If she gave him up he might be sentenced and hung. The man she loved, to be killed by the law.

The right thing! The words of her creed came back to her. Which was the right thing now? Her tired brain groped at the question wearily. The right thing! The words she had said to Tom flashed through her mind: “Not the thing that may look best for me, but the right thing in the eyes of God. And something—some law we don’t understand—will make it work out all right.”

Beth dropped the telephone receiver to the end of its dangling cord and put her hand over the mouthpiece. Then she whirled to face the boy who still stood watching her expectantly.

“They’ve found it out, Tom.” Her voice came low, but vibrant and tense. In the hand she held outstretched a bit of polished steel glistened in the lamplight. “They know it’s you.”

At sight of the revolver she pointed at him the boy started forward. Amazement, incredulity were on his face.

“Beth! Why, Beth, what—”

“We’re going to do the right thing, Tom—the right thing in the eyes of God.”

He was hobbling forward, and her voice rose suddenly:

“Tom—Tom Hawley. Don’t you hear me? Don’t you understand?” She waved the revolver toward the wall nearer the telephone. “Stand over there—over there against the wall. No, I mean it”—as he continued coming forward. “Not a word now, Tom, or I’ll shoot. Don’t you understand? Can’t you see I mean it?” she ended almost with a sob.

The boy hesitated; stared into her gleaming eyes an instant, and then drew himself up against the wall, silent. Holding the revolver leveled, Beth took her hand from the mouthpiece and lifted the receiver again to her ear. The sheriff was still speaking in the phone.

“This is Beth—Beth Rollins,” she interrupted. Her voice sounded almost casual. She heard the sheriff’s gasp of astonishment, his profane exclamation, and went on evenly:

“I’ve been listening, Sheriff Williams. I—you’re looking for Tom Hawley—well, he’s here—here with me now. He’s—he’s going to stay here until you come.” She

waited through an instant of silence, and then the sheriff's voice said with seeming contrition:

"I'm mighty sorry, Miss Beth. I was coming over to see you to-night—I clean forgot you were on this line in the excitement. Your step-father—he—"

She interrupted his awkward, embarrassed explanation. Her brain was whirling; the room was dim to her sight, with only the boy's white face and his questioning eyes watching her, standing out clear and sharp.

"Tom Hawley's here with me," she heard her own voice repeating. "He—he'll wait for you here."

And then the sheriff's voice said:

"Hell, ma'm, your step-father—it didn't happen only a few minutes ago. If Tom Hawley's there with you now that's all the alibi I want—it's a cinch he wasn't here. I'm mighty glad you happened to tell me to-night, Miss Beth, or it would of gone hard for him. You let me speak with him, ma'm, if he's there—it must have been One-Eyed Charlie did it."

EGO

I SIT before my window and I gaze
 Before me at the multitudes of men
 That pass, each in himself so wrapt
 That naught but self can come within their ken.

Before me passes youth, in whose light heart
 Philosophy forsooth disdains to stay,
 But seeks the eye experience has wet
 With tears resigned to shoulder come what may,

Youth, Age, indeed together in my view
 And, how alike in one God-given thing
 The Hope, that dwells in every one alike
 To dull despair's cruel suffering.

The world to one and all of them is lost
 In blindness sterile they themselves deny—
 Turn from true joy indeed to seek it where?
 Within themselves their blinded ego, I.

Within oneself alas is narrow field
 To plant the richness of one's growing soul—
 Choked by the rampant weed of selfishness
 And dormant ever in complacent mold.

What depth within that universe of stars
 Each peopled with a billion like to you
 What then, behold in one and one alone
 The very face of him—oneself, to view.

Here through my window-glass do I behold
 The multitudes of men that pass and pass;
 And thus the individual, I lose—
 Beholding here—aloof, alone, the Mass.

The Big Boss in Bronze

By Holman Day

CHAPTER XIX.

A FAIR ENIGMA.

"MISS BINGHAM, you will step inside the house. I'll talk with you later," Cates hastily commanded.

"Am I under arrest?"

He hesitated.

"If you are arresting me, Warden Cates, you must tell me why," she insisted.

"I have been told that somebody leaped off that wall."

"Somebody did," she admitted.

"Do you know who it was?"

"I could not see the person's face."

"What were you doing—but I'll talk with you later, Miss Bingham. Step inside."

She stiffened herself and stood in her tracks. "Am I arrested, sir?"

It was plain to Warden Cates that this was not a matter to be handled rudely or in the hearing of his assistants. His wife had come to the door, anxiously seeking more information.

"Anna, here is Miss Bingham—you know—the friend of—of Squire Nile," explained the warden, covering the thing as best he was able at such short notice. "She will step inside with you?"

"As a prisoner?" demanded Nina, insistent on the point.

"No," promised Cates desperately. "As a guest! As a guest of Mrs. Cates and myself. There's trouble outside here. It's no place and no time of night for a young lady to be strolling about alone."

While he was speaking he urged her to his wife by a firm grip on the girl's arm. Nina entered the house.

When Warden Cates was finally back in bed after the intermission in his night's rest, his puzzle was ready for him, and no almanac-twister had ever set him such a stunt. What had this girl been up to?

There had been a knotted rope dangling down from one wall of the prison; an up-ended plank marked some sort of illicit activity on another wall. But in the prison there was neither a convict less nor a convict more than there had been when the count was made the afternoon before.

Why was the girl there?

She most assuredly knew that Barron Douglass was not in the prison; the newspapers had been explicit on that point and had even reported him as being here, there, and yonder, in most emphatic fashion.

In fact, after the excitement of the night had calmed down, the warden had solemnly assured his "guest" that Douglass was still at large, and then Cates was sorry because he had promulgated that information with so much positiveness; the girl displayed the only satisfaction that she had shown in the one-sided interview.

"But now that I have been honest with you, Miss Bingham, you must be equally honest with me."

Miss Bingham, before that interview began, had recovered her breath and a great deal of her poise, and she kept both because she did no talking and would not allow herself to be jumped by arguments or threats.

This story began in *The Argosy* for February 28.

The warden attempted a bit of clumsy craft, after he had enlisted his wife as his aid. He assured the girl that she ought to telephone to her anxious friends, whoever they might be, and he invited her to step into the private sitting-room and call up anybody with whom she might care to talk.

Miss Bingham was duly grateful for the kindness, blandly affecting not to notice that there was an extension instrument in the library where they were seated. But she would not think of disturbing friends at that time of night!

"If you're afraid you'll disturb any one by going home at this late hour, Mrs. Cates and I will be delighted to have you remain as our guest. And I suppose you live at some distance from here?" prodded the inquisitor.

The girl made no reply. She said nothing when he inquired where she was employed in the city. She did not display any emotion of any sort in her silence, neither resentment nor anxiety; Warden Cates, returning her serene gaze, was conscious that it was the same sort of a disconcerting stare that one finds in the steady regard of an unresponsive kitten.

Therefore, realizing the uncertainties in the pursuit of a cab, should he allow the girl to leave that night, he told Mrs. Cates to install their guest in the best spare-room.

And the next day he instructed Mrs. Cates to use every feminine art in pumping the young lady.

The sum total of that pumping was, so Mrs. Cates reported, an expression of Miss Bingham's opinion on the fine weather, as the windows of the spare-room permitted her to see it, and some chatty compliments on Mrs. Cates's taste in the furnishings of the guest-room. The hostess also reported with some astonishment that the young lady seemed to be perfectly contented to remain just where she was.

The warden, keeping his own counsel in the matter of Nina's continued presence in his house, had been cogitating upon possible results to be obtained by setting her loose and detailing a man to shadow her. He entertained no great hopes, to be sure, considering how the young woman was keeping a tight rein on herself in all other ways, but

it was the only recourse that occurred to his official mentality.

However, when she seemed satisfied to remain as his guest, his mentality was attacked from another angle: she had become more of a puzzle than ever, and Mr. Cates was a hound in the matter of puzzles.

"The only sensible thing is to keep her here a little longer. I'll get a line on her yet," he told his wife.

Before he resumed his personal attack on the problem in petticoats, he allowed the chaplain to have a try, approaching the maiden from the angle of friendly relations and anxiety for the safety of a misguided young man; then the warden employed the brusque aid of the prison physician, who had a way of his own in getting at mental reservations.

Both of them failed.

The chaplain deplored her obstinacy.

The doctor called it "spunk," and confided to Warden Cates a hearty admiration of a girl who could play the game through, as this girl was doing it.

"I was obliged to confine my study of her to her eyes," affirmed the doctor. "I can usually make a patient show the tongue—but that young lady never allowed me to see even the tip end of hers when it came to opening her mouth to talk. Not one word from her!

"But it's plain enough that she came back here with the young fellow to put something over in the way of helping a friend to escape. I dwelt on the matter with her, and her eyes hinted that I was near the truth. But I wasn't aware that Douglass made any especial chums here in prison!"

"He made two very hot and hearty enemies—and that's about as far as he got in the way of social intercourse," retorted the warden. "Perhaps he was trying to help somebody to escape. He may come back and try it again. But there are two men whom we won't have to watch—and they are Fogg and Foster."

And that was the evening of the night on which those two exceptions from Douglass's friendly interest sawed their way out with tools that had been secured somehow—somewhere!

Warden Cates had plenty to occupy his mind, after that, to the exclusion of almanac puzzles and the enigma presented by a reticent girl.

He knew only one man who had a fair claim to the confidence of Miss Nina Bingham of Canton.

The telegram that the warden rushed off to Squire Cassius Nile was filled with urgent appeal; the squire reported in person as soon as a train could bring him.

He listened attentively to Warden Cates's exposition of a struggle with a puzzle. Result to date: no solution! "And I have never had any occasion to do much worrying over women before in my life," confessed the fat warden with a wheezy sigh. "I give it up, and you're in a position to handle it."

Squire Nile did not jump at the opportunity that was offered.

On the contrary, he pursed his lips and tapped his finger-tips together and displayed an irritating amount of legal reserve.

"You've simply got to do it," insisted the warden.

"Eh! What say—what say?"

"Young Douglass is trying to get in touch with her. We're laying for him. It's for his own good, too, to come back here."

"Do you expect my client to walk in here because you're holding the girl here as a bait?"

"Your *client!*" scoffed Warden Cates.

"Exactly! Considering what your attitude was on a certain occasion when I asked for a private talk with my client, it occurs to me that I can get along better with my client while he's out of prison."

"You know more about the inside of this than you're telling me," complained Cates.

"Perhaps."

"I don't like the attitude you are taking, Nile!"

"I can afford to take a very superior attitude right now," purred the old lawyer. "I am not begging favors."

"I thought I could deal with you on the basis of our old friendship. That's why I have sent for you. I'm in trouble."

"Cates, now you're talking real sense! You can deal with me on that basis."

"But you—"

"Hold on! I do know more about this thing than I have any mind to tell right now. That boy is innocent. He's trying to prove his innocence. I haven't been doing half what I have wanted to do to help him. But, by gad, Cates, I'm not going to hurt him—when it's only a matter of keeping my mouth closed. I tell you, you can deal with me on the basis of friendship, the moment you come down off that official mule you're mounted on! You have located her boarding-house—her place of employment, you tell me, and you're keeping watch and have promised rewards—oh, that's only old stuff! Do you want me to help you, as a friend?"

"I do!"

"Then I'll take that poor girl right back to Canton with me—her own home town—where she belongs."

"By thunder! You're right. That's where he'll come out of the bush, if he shows up anywhere!"

The squire gave the prison official a malevolent look. "You don't think I'm rigging a derrick, along with you, to betray the boy, do you?"

"No, but—"

"But when I can send you the news that will make you and the rest of the one-ideaed blunderheads who have been gunning this case good and ashamed of yourselves, I'll report—and I'll expect you to grab in then and help just as twice as hard as you've tried to hurt."

"I have nothing against Douglass, personally," pleaded Cates.

"Why should you?" snapped back Squire Nile. "He's innocent." He rose. "Now bring Nina to me. She is going home, poor girl!"

CHAPTER XX.

THE BEACON OF TINGLEY HILL.

SERGEANT BARRON DOUGLASS came back to his home town of Canton, a skulking fugitive.

He was slinking far from the highway, along the beech ridges, waiting for the twilight to deepen into night. He welcomed

the darkness. He knew his way about in those woods and along those shadowed lanes where, as a boy, he had hunted partridges when he could escape, for a few hours, from the tyranny of Farmer Blaisdell.

Douglass had only half-formed plans, for he was obliged to depend on circumstances as he might find them. His future was as dark as the gloom of the night—his hopes as few as the stars that he could see through the cloud-rifts.

To get to Cassius Nile with his story and his troubles—he was making that his first, sole aim!

One of the beech ridges led a tongue of woods well down to the village, and he kept on till he could see the lights in the stores and houses.

He mounted a boulder, sat on it, and waited for the lights to wink out.

The old squire had his bachelor's room at the village tavern; that made it impossible to confer with him that night.

But Douglass had provided himself with pencil and paper. Before the twilight had faded he had written a bit of a note which he intended to slip under the squire's door that night; he asked the lawyer to remain in his office late the next evening, promising to come as soon as Main Street was deserted. That would be soon after ten, the young man knew. The stores were closed at nine o'clock and the folks of Canton were usually early to bed. Then a more desperate determination began to urge him.

He understood the habits of his townspeople so well that he resolved to be venturesome. To wait twenty-four hours, after leaving the note, was a hard trial of patience. The squire often went back to his office after supper. Douglass knew there was a chance of catching him there, if a sortie was made early enough this evening.

Before half past nine, flanking the block by means of an alley, he managed to slip into the corridor and mount to the floor where the lawyer's office was located.

A card was hung on the squire's door and the single light in the corridor shone on it.

Out of Town

The poor fellow clutched his empty hands till the nails stung the flesh.

Not a door in his home town open to him! Even the dogs would bark him out of woodsheds and barns! Disguised though he was by dirt and dishevelment, he could not afford to have an eye in all Canton rest on him. In this locality he was not dealing with careless throngs and indifferent policemen. And there was no "Governor's Grave," resort of a complacent clan with the motto: "Mind your own business."

What was the loneliest place in Canton?

Douglass, a native, did not need to debate that matter with himself.

It was the Tingley mansion on the hill, even during the old miser's lifetime.

Now, untenanted, abandoned by the heirless, it must be more utterly lonesome than ever—branded and shunned, no doubt, because of the new horror that attached to it.

Dire necessity forced him to seek some shelter. Hateful as the old house was, he must have the sort of protection that it would give him.

Another thought mellowed the protest his natural feelings were making: the house belonged to Nina. By going there, though she could know nothing of his tenancy, he was accepting the hospitality of the dearest champion he possessed; he would dwell under the roof, he could feel the comfort of knowing that she had been there.

He made stealthy exit from the village, and mounted the long hill.

The winds had risen, aftermath of the protracted rains, and the Norway pines murmured disconsolately when he stood under them and made survey of the house; the clouds had been swept from the sky, and the stars lighted the hilltop.

The windows of the lower story had been boarded up, and this sealing of the place against humankind added to the desolate melancholy of the mansion's aspect. He walked around the house in order to ascertain whether any unbarred window would afford him an entrance. He deciphered markings, roughly chalked, on some of the boardings. One warned: "Gosts here. Kepe away." It was up-and-down juvenile chirography. In another place he found: "Hornted House."

In a sagging building once used as a car-

riage shelter—now open to the weather—he lighted matches to aid his search, and came upon a rusty crowbar. With this tool he pried loose the bottoms of two boards of a kitchen window, broke the catch by an upward blow, entered, and pulled the boards into place behind him.

The barricaded windows permitted him liberties with a light. He found a lamp on a shelf and felt easier when it shed its glow upon the surroundings.

The furnishings of the house had not been disturbed, so he learned when he made a tour of the lower part. The hole in the wainscoting of the dining-room had not been closed; the make-shift door hung down, giving uncanny suggestion of a dead man's sagging jaw.

He did not venture to visit the upper floor of the mansion with his light, though the grim thought occurred to him that he thus might more effectually secure isolation for himself by carrying out the chalked suggestions, playing ghost after the fashion of the miser in "The Chimes of Normandy."

He was infinitely weary of body, after his miles of toiling along mud-smeared roads and through the sodden forest; there was no more clarity in his thoughts when he tried to figure on his future plans. He puffed out the light and stretched himself on the couch where he had found Nina lying unconscious on the night of the tragedy.

But he dozed rather than slept. The wind made eery sounds outside, and the old house responded with cracklings and creakings.

Then, at last, he heard a sound that did not partake of the supernatural; a door was slammed and locked with a vigor that suggested human agency. The doors were open between dining-room, sitting-room, and kitchen; when Douglass opened his eyes he saw in the kitchen the sharp ray of a flashlight.

"Where the blue blazes did you leave that lamp?" demanded a gruff voice.

"Same place. Shelf!"

Douglass was not astonished, recognizing these voices. On the contrary, he felt a queer sense of relief; he was commending his prescience in the matter of these recreant rascals. He had told himself that

they would go to Canton. Here they were, hiding in the most natural covert. That query about the lamp showed that they were not visiting the house for the first time; they were talking like regular tenants, and started out toward them, in a most matter-of-fact way.

"Here's your lamp," he called, signalling his approach as he turned the corner into the dining-room.

He saw Foster, in the kitchen, shift the flashlight to his left hand and begin to claw frenziedly with the right at his hip pocket.

"You don't need that revolver that I stole for you," said the young man, coldly contemptuous and in full command of his nerves. "You can see who I am."

"Well, I'll be—"

"Sure enough!" broke in Fogg.

Nobody spoke for some seconds.

Then Mr. Foster, inured by his experiences to tense situations, showed that he had calmness of his own. "Well, so you've got along! That's good! We've been expecting you."

Douglass marched into the kitchen and set the lamp on a table. "I've been doing a little expecting of my own—at a place called 'Governor's Grave.' I reckon words don't suit this case—I'd better take the two of you by the necks and rap your lying heads together."

"Licking us got you something once—but it won't work that way a second time, bo," said Mr. Foster, mustering a conciliatory grin when the grimed, savage features were thrust close to his face. "We all three decided on this place as second choice, providing there was any choice."

"You're a liar!"

"I have been called that before—because I've been misunderstood. If you didn't understand what I said—"

"You never said it."

"I meant to say it, then! But you know what a state prison is for carrying on conversations in! You're broken in on so much that you never get a chance to finish a subject! But now that you're here—showing that you can do helpful thinking for yourself—why make a friendly meeting unpleasant between gents who have so much in common?"

"What are you doing here?"

"Tending to business."

"Straight dope," supplemented Fogg, eagerly trying to assist in placating.

"The business you promised me to attend to was clearing from me the charge of murder."

"Sure thing! But we had to hurry up here to look after a little business of our own."

"Leaving me hiding and dodging and worrying my heart out! The two of you are—"

"Now, let's not go into a lot of details about why we slipped up on that meeting," pleaded Foster. "We're here, now. Right according to the arrangement that you forgot."

He did not quail under the infuriated victim's stare of disbelief, and profane words.

"Say, if you stub your toe on a brick in the sidewalk, what's the good of going back to stub it again? Let's go on! All friendly and helpful. D—n the newspapers! They reported us as being loose. There wasn't time to waste in getting up here. That was our business, and it's linked up with yours."

"I don't know what you're driving at, Foster."

"Doesn't it strike you as kind of important where old Tingley's money has gone?"

"I don't give a continental damn about the money! I want you to expose the man who murdered Swinton Tingley!" In his passion Douglass beat his fist on his breast. "I'm the one to be considered ahead of that dirty money."

"It may be more or less soiled—we haven't had a peek at it yet," returned Foster, dolefully. "But we propose to!" He twisted his features in an ugly grimace, and growled. Mr. Fogg drove an admonitory elbow against his associate.

"I mean to say that I ain't as much interested for myself—seeing that the money doesn't belong to me—as I am for that nice young lady who used to give us a pleasant smile every time we passed the library window in our days of trial and tribulation," Foster hastened to add, in way of qualification. "And, seeing what you must be to her, it seems to me that you'd be thinking about what belongs to her."

"Look here, I'll stand no more bull of that sort, Foster! All you are thinking about is grabbing that money—wherever it is, whoever has it! You'd cheerfully walk over me to get at that money. But I've kept my word with you and Fogg. I risked my safety and my life. I have lost something that's too sacred to be mentioned in the hearing of you pigs. I've done my part, man-fashion. Now you forget money and do your part for me or, by God Eternal, you'll find out that a man who has shot Huns can do a good job at it on this side of the water."

His harsh voice rang through the house. He clacked his fists under the man's nose. The three were silent after he had finished.

Foster seemed to find the young man's gaze troublesome, and walked up and down the kitchen, playing thoughtfully with the skeleton key that he had plucked from the ell door. "I guess you'd do it," he admitted at last. "A lot of these fellows who have come back from there have got all kinds of grit they didn't have when they went over."

"I guess we'll have to bunch hits so as to let all three of us run the bases at the same time. We hurried up here, Douglass, to get in a whack of our own before setting off the big blow-up. We have been hiding in this house. I'll be honest with you, and admit that we haven't been able to do anything sensible with our own affair, up to date. And that's because the newspapers tipped off the condemned—I mean to say, the news got out that *we* had got out!"

The smug way in which the fellow still insisted on putting some vague concerns of his own ahead of an innocent man's agony of soul, drove Douglass out of all bounds of self-control. "You demanded a price. You sold me something. I have bought it. Now pay!"

"But by going off half cocked—"

"Pay!" Douglass was snapping the fingers of both hands in front of Foster's face.

"That's a nice way to treat pals—thinking of nobody else but yourself!"

That was blowing the victim's wrath with a bellows, in sooth!

"I helped you to get out of state prison! I can put you back there. I'll go outside

and yell my head off, calling the neighbors and the constables. I'll hang to your wheel and turn you over to the law. Foster, you've got to give me action. Now! Do you hear? Now! No, not another yip of your lying tongue. Now, I say!"

"Condemn your pelt!" shouted Foster, "if that's all the sense you've got in handling a delicate matter, and helping friends, have it your own way!" He turned on Fogg. "You know what we have planned for a final splurge!"

"S-s-s-sure!"

"Well, it's got to be sprung now, or he'll have the jaspers jumping us. Get busy!"

It was plain that Foster was commander-in-chief of that regiment of two. Mr. Fogg started for the door.

"No, you don't! I propose to keep my eye on the both of you!" But while Douglass was in the midst of his protest Foster leaped back to a tactical distance and pulled his gun.

"Yes, he does, bo! You don't seem to be fooling with *me* just now. By gad, I'm not fooling with *you*, either. If you try to trig, I'm going to shoot!"

It was a desperate rascal's cold-blooded threat, and Foster's even tones carried conviction.

"This is no job on you," stated the stick-up gentleman when Fogg had rushed out. "It's on another critter, and we hope it's going to be for mutual benefit, even if we do pull it off on short notice. You'll kindly stand right in your tracks."

Fogg had left the ell door open.

In a few moments a dull glare lighted the night outside.

"Nothing like having all arrangements made ahead," said Foster. "We didn't expect you'd be in so much of a hurry—but, seeing that you are, we're glad we were all ready to accommodate. All the kerosene on the premises and plenty of dry kindling!"

"What does this mean?" gasped the young man, at bay.

"It means that the old barn has been torched up, son. And it's really a good night for the job, because the roof of this house is wet, and"—he backed to the door—"yes, and the wind is strong t'other way.

I'd hate to be a party to hurting your girl's house, even if you do insist on quick action."

Fogg came running in. "S-s-she's off in great shape!" he reported.

"Then off it is for all three of us! Douglass, you have said that you propose to hang to our wheels! You'd better! Come on!" He shoved the revolver back into his pocket. "Forget the gun-play, bo! There won't be any more of it if you're sensible. From now on it's mutual—and we hope it's going to be self-acting."

There was nothing else for Douglass except pursuit of them; they ran, and he followed.

The old barn, some rods away from the mansion, was now a torch, heaving great clouts of flame above the hilltop. It was a fiery signal that would bring the town-folk of Canton flocking there, and the locality was no longer a refuge for an escaped prison convict.

Foster had locked the ell door with the skeleton key, and the old house gave no sign that it had been recently tenanted.

The precipitate torching up of the old barn had sufficiently astonished Douglass; but when he went chasing after the two conspirators the course they took added to his amazement. He had expected that they would make for the woods across the fields, escaping from the highway along which the volunteer fire-fighters would come streaming. Already shouts of men were borne on the night wind from the village, and a bell had begun to clang.

Foster cut across in front of the house, under the Norway pines, and went directly to the highway. Then he ran down the road, the other two at his heels. Douglass, panting, tried to put questions, but neither man replied.

A quarter of a mile down the hill, in the direction of the village, the leader of the expedition hopped over a stone wall and crouched down, and his companions joined him.

"The thing that's under your vest—have it ready, Tudge," commanded Foster, breathing heavily between the words. The big stones of the wall were chinked with small ones. Foster pulled out several little

stones and made an aperture through which he could peer and observe passers; the highway was fairly well lighted by the glare of the leaping flames on the hilltop. "Save your questions and get your breath and keep your head down," he grunted in reply to Douglass.

Men, singly and in groups, according to their ability to make speed, were passing. They were confused by the conflagration, which smeared the night skies, and their excited comments revealed that they were not sure which one of the stand of Tingley buildings was on fire.

"That's good!" growled Foster. "There will be another critter doing a whole lot of guessing!"

"Sure! And if our guess is right, he'll be coming to tend to a matter of business that's as much ours as his."

The young man was obliged to keep on guessing for himself. Foster threatened to bang him on the head with a stone if he didn't keep his mouth shut. And when he tried to peep through the crevice in the wall where Foster was lurking, the boss of the party rudely pushed him aside.

He knew by the sounds in the highway that the principal rush of fire-fighters was past. Once in a while somebody went puffing along. Suddenly, Foster yanked something away from Fogg and leaped over the wall. A moment or so later he was back, tussling with a man over whose head and body a sack had been drawn. "Take his feet, Tudge! I've got a good grip on his gullet. Come along!"

Douglass, marveling, followed behind into the woods.

In a deep coppice the bearers dropped their burden, and Foster stifled the moans of the unknown with gripping hand.

"No talking! No whispering!" said the boss. "There's no telling how much snooping they'll do."

By this time there was no longer any glare on the sky; the barn had been merely a wooden shell, and that shell had been quickly consumed.

They who waited in the coppice heard the shouts of those who were returning from the fire. They were coming away, it seemed, with much celerity. In the night

their words carried far, and men frankly stated that they did not hanker to hang around the Tingley house in the night, after the crowd had left.

When the silence encouraged Foster he picked up the head and shoulders of the man in the sack and again Fogg lifted the other end of the burden; Foster had been enjoining silence on the captive by occasionally administering slaps or thumps.

The little procession made its way through the woods and around to the rear of the Tingley domain. Every once in a while Foster stopped and listened. Assured, he went on.

Dull-red coals marked where the barn had stood. No human forms were silhouetted against the bedded fire; there were no sounds from the direction of the mansion.

"They didn't lose any time in getting away. Afraid of ghosts, probably," commented Mr. Foster. "Well, in about five minutes there's going to be somebody in that house who'll be damnation afraid of something that ain't ghosts. Lug him along, Tudge."

He stood the sacked captive beside the ell door and used the skeleton key. He dragged him in, produced his flash-light, and yanked off the sack.

In the circle of the electric dazzle was revealed the convulsed countenance of Dr. Abner Sawtell; it was no longer cherubic; it was ridged with hideous fear; the sack had tousled the white hair, and spires of it stood like exclamation-points of terror.

"Welcome to our city—I greet you in behalf of the visiting firemen," was Mr. Foster's grim greeting.

CHAPTER XXI.

TREASURE UNLOCKED.

"LET'S see! You mentioned something about action, didn't you?" drawled Foster, turning to Douglass. "Well, how about this?"

The young man was too astounded to make any sane rejoinder.

Dr. Sawtell had not spoken; he stood there with mouth agape, tottering in an effort to stand erect.

"We're much obliged to you for hurrying us up like you did," pursued Foster. "We were sort of ducking the proposition. It was ticklish to tackle. But it has worked."

"I can't see anything in this except a devilish outrage," declared the young man.

"Barron, I am in dreadful danger! My boy, protect me," quavered the doctor.

The poignant memory of Dr. Sawtell's attitude on the witness-stand was still keen in Douglass; and there were Squire Nile's hints! The old lawyer was not a man who babbled idly.

"I call on you as a friend in my need," insisted the captive.

"God help a man when you call him a friend and ask him to help you," rasped Foster. "You—" He dealt in furious oaths. "Look at me and Fogg, when you say that!"

Dr. Sawtell stumbled to a chair and sat down in it.

"You're talking to a pal of ours—not to a friend of yours," put in Fogg.

"Hold on! I'm able to speak for myself in this thing," stated Douglass. "And I'm going to be almighty open. When you were on the witness-stand you didn't do me one good turn, Dr. Sawtell."

"I had to tell the truth."

"I know a little something about law, sir. You did volunteer certain facts. But the manner in which you gave them made them the most damnable kind of false circumstantial evidenee—and you must have known that you were putting the wrong construction on innocence. I say, you did know it!"

"Hand it to him—he deserves it," advised Foster.

"I'm not taking your side against this man," cried Douglass hotly.

"You ought to. You asked for action. Here it is!"

"I'll have no more of your balderdash. You have promised to tell me who killed Swinton Tingley. You don't dare to intimate that Dr. Sawtell had anything to do with it."

"Oh, *he* didn't do it! Certainly not!"

"I have done nothing," bleated the doctor.

"That's right, to a certain extent, you old hellion! But you're going to do something almighty soon," declared Mr. Foster.

"They're wicked men, and you must save me, Barron!"

"You can depend on me to see that you get fair play, Dr. Sawtell—whatever this is all about."

"Fair play!" repeated Foster, twisting the words with nasty sarcasm. "See here, Douglass," he went on savagely, "it's about time for you to wake up and lay off this story-book hero stuff you're trying to pull."

"I'm trying to be decent, and if that kind of stuff belongs in a story, so much the better for the story," retorted the stickler.

"I've read about 'em like you are, but I've never bumped into one before. Now shut up for a minute! This is no Sunday-school session. There's no time for sermons or long stories." He turned on the doctor, who was attempting to plead with Douglass. "The shut-up orders go for you, too! There's going to be a showdown."

"Do your showing, then," snapped Douglass.

"You know that a job was put up on you before you went away to war—that is to say, unless your high and mighty ideas have argued you back into believing that all men are angels. Do you need any more showing about that job?"

"Not much!"

"Believe none of his lies, Barron!" insisted Dr. Sawtell.

"The big burg has shaped up some able crooks," averred the sarcastic Mr. Foster, "but, believe me, they can't shade these up-State Heskiahs whose minds are not taken off their night-time thinking by any roof-garden show. Douglass, I can tell the truth when I have to and when it's for my own good. I'm handing you stuff that's on the dead level.

"This grand old doc came down to the big town and got a line on Fogg and myself as handy tongs for a job he had doped. No matter about how he met us—this story is going to be short, for there's business ahead. So as to make us feel confidence in him he wised us about himself. Do you

see the plot thicken, son? Making himself a bird of a feather and all sociable!"

The knave menaced the sputtering doctor with his fist and went on.

"Told us about one Douglass and how he had put that poor guy out of the running in a certain matter where a girl and a lot of money were concerned, at the same time getting in a grab at some coin for himself. Does the old doc love money? Oh, boy!"

"Go on!" Sergeant Douglass, standing very straight, kept emotion out of his tones.

"Doc's son was going to get the girl, agreeing with one Tingley to be very nice about asking foolish questions on money matters. Girl couldn't see doc's son! So doc, having felt his own pulse and realizing that the case would prove fatal if he didn't get his whack at the cush, proposed to go at it another way.

"That's where Fogg and I fitted in! In the mean time, the proposition had jibed around so that the aforesaid other way was almighty handy. Estate all in cash, in a hole in the wall! Ding, ding! Go ahead! Nothing to it for men like us! Said he was doctoring the old skinks, promised to poke him dope good and proper, so that the job would be an easy one; agreed to wait down the road near by with his horse and wagon so that he could flick the stuff away and hide us till we could make the divvy and duck.

"And we gets the swag—though there were extra trimmings to the job, like you know—and we runs and slings it into his wagon"—the narrator's voice was steadily rising until Foster was squalling with ugly rage—"and then he larrups his horse and beats it away and leaves us in the road."

"You didn't throw it into my wagon! You're crazy. It was somebody else's wagon."

"You're a liar! Douglass, I'm giving it to you straight. He double-crossed us. Then we cracked that store safe, hoping to grab off money enough to stay by till we could get him right. When the papers printed it about us getting out of State prison he got his tip and has stayed in his house till to-night, playing sick, with a couple of strong-armers he called nurses.

"Fogg and I have done a lot of discussing together, you bet your life. And we says to each other that he would hide that swag in the place where there'd be the least hunting for it. We've got brains for such plays, Fogg and I."

"S-s-sure have!"

"Right here on the same premises where it was taken from—that's the place! Why did we come here to hide—why did you come here, Douglass? It's the last place where anybody would expect to find you or us!

"And is it here? How about that fire to tole him? It was a play we had planned. I tell you, the swag is here, and he came hustling to see about it. Condemn you, you old hyena, it is here!"

He doubled his fists and advanced on the cowering doctor. "You acted like a hick slapping his hand on his wallet when he hears somebody holler 'Pickpocket!' It's the old game. We tried it. It worked. Now uncover, or down comes your mansard front!"

Dr. Sawtell struggled to his feet. His fears had produced a reaction of desperate determination. "All lies! All lies! My good name protects me."

"Not here—not now!" stated Foster with vicious emphasis. "I reckon you haven't dared to spend much of that money—probably you ain't any readier in letting go of it than Tingley was. Where is it?"

"I have none of the money—I don't know where it is!"

"Then you're due for a little memory-refreshing. If you can forget that it was dumped into your wagon, you can find it easy to forget where it is. Fogg, according to plans—get busy!"

In spite of his suspicions of the past, the brutal revelation had so shocked Douglass that speech failed him and his wits were clearing but slowly.

He was assured of the selfishness of the two convicts. They were bringing out all this stuff for their ends. Who had killed Swinton Tingley? They were not hurrying to give him the information that he was seeking with an eagerness that made the affair of the money of small account in his mind. Again he demanded:

"If you expect me to believe that you're a friend of mine, Foster, tell me who those men in the house—"

"All in good time, bo! I'm running this!"

"I'm going to have a hand in it, too," insisted Douglass. What their spirit of revenge had planned in the case of Dr. Sawtell might jeopardize the young man's interests; he could not afford to be wholly dependent on such natures as Foster's and Fogg's. When he looked into the beseeching countenance of the doctor he restrained his own spirit of vengeance, in order to employ tactics more shrewd than threats.

"I tell you, I'm going to see fair play here! Dr. Sawtell, it doesn't seem possible—it can't be true what they say! Tell me the whole truth, and I'll stand by you!"

The captive grasped at the opportunity to gain a protector. "I'll expose them. I must save myself. Breck Blaisdell and his brother robbed Tingley and killed him. Those two men standing there know it, Barron, and they told me so on that same dreadful night. Go to Breck Blaisdell and his brother for that money. Let me out of here—I had nothing to do with the thing!"

In that frantic clutching for help—in his despairing attempt to escape from the menace that threatened at that moment, Dr. Sawtell had allowed his tongue too much liberty in admitting his knowledge of the perpetrators' identity.

Douglass, in the riot of his emotions, did not bother with what the doctor's guilt in the actual robbery might be. "You say you know that about the Blaisdells—you were told that—and you went onto the witness-stand and said what you did about me? You didn't start an investigation of the Blaisdells?"

"I had to be careful—they were not accused," was Dr. Sawtell's amazing reply.

Douglass's breath was knocked out of him for a moment.

"This seems to be a night for springing things ahead of scheduled time," observed Mr. Foster urbanely. "What he has just handed over to you was the prize package we were saving up to pay you with, Douglass, after the little business of our own had

been attended to. Well, seeing that it has slipped out, we may as well inform you that the good old doc, here, isn't a liar on all points. Fogg and I found that we were running against opposition on this project. We bumped against other parties one night, took a good look after we had yanked off their masks, and found some local talent on the job. And they were sure persistent cusses, in spite of the scare they got. They were the guys in the house when the fireworks were touched off. They were the ones who handed over to us the 'tag-you're-it' hair trunk that Fogg and I later tossed into the old doc's wagon, a waiting in the lane!

"But this is simply wasting time on minor matters that have nothing to do with the money," he went on callously. He rolled up his lip and showed his teeth. "Doc, you have had the keeping of a nice little pet. Now trot it out and let your friends pat it!"

"Barron, I have been honest with you! I have told you!" pleaded the man who was threatened. "I have tried to use you—"

"Like you'd use any floating thing you could get hold of if you were drowning! Damn you, Dr. Sawtell!" he shouted. "I would have died in State prison, for all the help you were to me!"

"Here are your real friends," purred Foster, patting his breast.

"Friends!" raved the victim. "You renegades simply trod me under to be able to reach what you are after! If I hadn't followed you here to this house, would I have stood any show? I have had to fight this thing through for myself—understand? There are five men going into the hands of the law—and the law will know what to do!"

"Don't need any more help, hey?" inquired Foster.

"Not your kind—judging from the sample I've had of it!"

"Let me get you right! Going to throw the gaff into us?"

"I'm going to have a square deal, even if I have to lug you crooks into a courtroom by the scruff of the neck!"

"Say, bo, aren't you making pretty big

talk for a narrow place?" There was threat in the query.

But the scapegoat of that infernal affair was not in a mood to temporize. He was not dealing in mere bravado, big as his talk sounded. His troubles had kindled a hot fire under his determination, to be sure, but his natural contempt for the men whom he had beaten up was his better reason for taking that attitude; under other circumstances it might have seemed rash. "It's talk I can back up!"

Foster pulled his gun and patted it. "Here's a little guy that you haven't counted into the odds."

"I'm getting well acquainted with that joker, and I'm not afraid of it," said Douglass scornfully. However, he kept steady gaze on Foster; he was planning a quick leap, feeling that if he could secure the weapon he would have control of the situation. His close concentration of all his faculties on Foster was his undoing.

He did manage to whirl on his heel when a squawk of warning from the doctor enlightened him regarding danger in the rear, but he was not able to dodge the kitchen chair that Fogg had raised; Douglass saw it coming—that was all.

He was in stifling darkness when his senses returned. In a moment he realized that the handy sack had been pulled over his head and that ropes bound his arms.

He heard something which distracted his thoughts from his own sorry plight—a bodeful, harrowing sound. It was the hideous squealing of a human being in torture.

Whatever was going on was not near at hand; in spite of the muffling sack he realized that much. The dreadful clamor was under him—in the cellar of the old house, he decided. He kicked out his feet and moved a chair and figured that he was still in the kitchen where he had been felled.

Then the bloodcurdling shrieks in the inquisition chamber below died into gasping moans.

Later he heard feet come trampling upstairs and there was a mumbled conference between men; he could not distinguish the words.

In a few moments he was lifted and

pushed upon a chair and the sack was pulled off.

The lighted lamp, without its chimney, flared on the table, and he saw the hair trunk close by it, opened and revealing the Tingley treasure. Foster and Fogg were in the room.

The former was standing by the table, propped on his outspread palms. "The memory-refresher worked," he reported, malice in his grin. "The old-fashioned way—it's always best to stick to the old methods—saves brain-wear!"

He pointed to the lamp flame. "Hard on the soles of the feet—but saves brain-wear!" Then he patted the hair trunk. "So, you see, bo, we had the good old doc doped right! He was obliging before he passed away. He told us which foundation stone to move in the cellar."

"Has another man been killed on account of that cursed money?" choked Douglass.

"Certainly not! We simply gave him a little extra scorch and he fainted. That was kindness. It saved him from the wrench of seeing the money lugged off. Same idea as when he gives ether to his patients. We're naturally kind-hearted when anybody gives us half a chance."

He came around the table and stood in front of Douglass. "It's on account of our kind hearts that you're sitting up right now with that sack off. The question is, are you going ahead and give us half a chance?"

The captive made no reply.

"Of course, after the way you put it up to us a little while ago," proceeded Foster with victor's equanimity, "the perfectly natural thing for Fogg and me to do would be to walk off and leave you in your sack and the good old doc in his sog. But Fogg and I have talked it over. Circumstances happened so that we couldn't deliver goods to you, just the way we had promised. You have had a raw deal all the way through, no doubt about that! So, in the interests of a fair play proposition—that same being a bug with you, it seems—what say to splitting this swag three ways?"

"You whelp!" raged Douglass. "This

is just as much robbery as the first job was! Are you asking me to join in that kind of a crime?"

"The thing has become complicated," declared Foster, preserving his calmness. "You really haven't any business to be here, complicating things. But, seeing that you're here, and the circumstances being what they are, we're offering you a third. Why, that doesn't make you a robber! You're simply taking it as an agent to hand it over to the girl. We pity the girl—she always gave us a kind smile, you know. If you refuse to act for the girl in this thing, and grab off something for her, you ought to be ashamed of yourself. Take your pickings. Then off we go and mind our business."

In his extremity Douglass forced himself to hold back what he really wanted to say. "Yes, off you go! But where does that leave me in the eyes of the law, men?"

"Oh, you have the doc for a witness, and the tip about the Blaisdells. They can be stampeded. Law can do most anything on a straight tip. Look what it has done to you!"

"You renegades wouldn't be bothering to offer to give me one dollar of that money if you weren't making it a play to keep me off your trail!"

"Well, if we treat your square, it's only natural to expect that you'll show some man-feeling for two other poor critters. Fogg and I may as well fade out of this case, Douglass. What's evidence of State-prison birds worth in court? Your tip is enough—with the doc on exhibition."

This layman's crude idea of what constituted evidence offended the embryo lawyer's intelligence as acutely as the callous selfishness provoked his choler.

But Mr. Foster understood, so he believed, some of the hidden traits of human nature, even if he did not grasp the finer points of law. He caressed the packet of bills and began to pile them on the table. "There's nothing like money," he crooned, with moist lips. "Money all stacked up! Like this! It'll do anything you ask it to do! Baled fun! With a wad of it in your pocket you can walk anywhere, and

they bow down and do what you ask, give you what you want when you want it, every time you wet your thumb and peel off a layer.

"Douglass, you want to get over the fool idea that Fogg and I are afraid of you. You have been tied up long enough to come to your senses and know that you ain't the boss of the outfit any longer. Look at this sweet stuff!"

Both he and Fogg were bending over the bills, all pressed smooth with a miser's loving care. Their attention was wholly absorbed.

"I guess old doc didn't have the heart to spend it! Probably sneaked up here where no one would bother him and had a gay time counting it over. It's the hick idea of how to use money. Look at it, Douglass! Doesn't it make your mouth water?"

But Douglass was looking at something which the intently occupied rogues did not behold. Back in the dimness of the cellar-way was a face—a contorted, ferocious visage. It was visible just above the sill of the door. Then a hand appeared; in it was a revolver, and the hand took aim. But the weapon was jerked to and fro and up and down as crazily as though shaking palsy were disabling the hand.

Douglass felt an itching of apprehension along his spine; he was in line, almost, with the foes whom Dr. Sawtell was threatening. There was no telling where a bullet would land when the trigger was pressed by the finger of the victim whose nerves had been so wickedly unstrung by terror and torture.

"We propose to show you, Douglass, that we're not a bit afraid of you. We'll cut loose the ropes and you can come to this table and sit down and help us count this noble swag. Probably your fingers are aching by this time, on account of those ropes. Too bad! The touch of this money will stop aches better than liniment."

The knave had his own sage opinions on the placatory influence of money in the fist!

"Fogg, take your knife and cut off those ropes! This is going to be friendly and sociable from now on!"

Then, repeating the words "friendly and sociable," Mr. Foster reached for his hip pocket. He looked surprised, and began to pat himself with both hands in the region of his other pockets.

"Lay off on that rope cutting, Tudge," he called.

But on this occasion, as on all others, Mr. Fogg had obeyed with instant alacrity the commands of his boss.

The ropes were off.

"Condemn it!" exploded Foster unguardedly; "I laid that gun down when we were tying up old doc in the cellar!"

He turned and faced the cellar door.

The doctor leaped to his feet from his hands and knees, and the exquisite agony of his tortured soles when he stood on them brought a yell of agony out of him. Then he shouted "Barron!" and flung the revolver over the wildly clutching Foster's head. The aim was not good, but the young man knocked Fogg down and caught the hurtling weapon by a side reach that would have won applause for a baseball player.

Foster was after the gun with a rush. It was not a time for words. And Douglass was no longer depending on fists. He leaped to one side. When his attacker lunged past, unable to stop, the sergeant deliberately put a bullet into Foster's leg.

By the time that Fogg was on his feet Douglass was posted in a corner of the kitchen, where more flank attacks would not endanger him.

Foster, fallen, was staring wildly, and Fogg stood in his tracks.

"Just a moment, before this goes any further," warned the young man. "I don't want to kill off valuable witnesses at this stage of the game."

He "broke down" the weapon and took a quick glance and noted that one cartridge of the six in the chamber had been exploded.

"I am pretty handy with a gun, men! I won a regimental prize in France. For instance!"

He looked about the room. "I don't think the skeleton key will be needed here any more."

He took aim and fired at the key in the

ell door. The bit of metal was snapped short off.

"I merely want to show that I can plant four more bullets into your systems where they will do the most good in making you behave."

"I'm bleeding to death," averred Foster, displaying a blood-spotted hand.

"We have a good doctor right on the premises. I took that into account when I plugged you! Dr. Sawtell, attend to your friend. At once!"

He had seen signs of rebellion on the doctor's face. The physician was on his knees, groaning with the pain in his feet. He did not venture to disobey; Sergeant Douglass, with that gun in his grip, was plainly not a person to be provoked further with safety.

Dr. Sawtell crawled toward his patient.

"Fogg, look in that bureau and see if you can find cloths," snapped the new boss. "And do what you can to bandage that wound."

There were towels. When the makeshift job had been finished, the doctor and Fogg crouched down on the floor beside Foster.

Sergeant Douglass sat astride a chair-back, the revolver dangling significantly from his fingers. "I reckon that no talk is needed. We've got to wait till daylight. This better be a session of—well, silent prayer," he advised.

So far as keeping silent went, they obeyed his suggestion. They found no spirit of conciliation in the sergeant's expression.

At last the crevices of the boarded windows were revealed by streaks of light; dawn was without.

The spectacle of daylight—significant of imminent exposure—stirred Dr. Sawtell to speak.

"Barron, I have had plenty of time to do thinking. But I'm not going to argue this thing. I have a question to ask. Are you determined to turn me over to the law, along with those two men?"

"I am absolutely determined, Dr. Sawtell. Your decision not to argue is a wise one."

The silence was not broken for a long time.

"You may remember that I had something to say once about the dangers of temptation," the doctor ventured. "The curse of money—getting money—keeping money—the curse—it ruined me. And when money was in my hands I could not spend it! Look! On the table! Every cent of Swinton Tingley's money is there!"

Douglass was silent.

"I have prostituted my profession for money," whimpered the doctor. "Cassius Niles knows. He has been groping in my affairs. He has been hounding me."

"You had better use a different word than 'hounding' when you're speaking of an honest man and a square lawyer, sir!"

"But he has been threatening me."

"Then he must have had good reason."

"You know what his reason was," cried the doctor, displaying sudden anger. "You are too close to him not to know. Don't try to make a fool of me. You know, and that's why you are stubborn now when I have asked for mercy. An old man ought to find mercy. But I was obliged to fight back when Niles threatened me. It was all on your account that he threatened. But how was I to say anything about the Tingley case without them getting their law clutch on me? I had to protect myself!"

"Yourself first! That's always been your play!" growled Foster.

"I'm sorry for you, sir—I can say that much," put in Douglass. After all, he was finding it hard to steel himself in the case of this old man, herded thus with wretches whose profession was crime.

"If that's the way you feel—" the old man began to plead.

"It's no use, sir! You're only making it worse for both of us. Matters must take their course."

"Why don't you show a man's grit in taking your medicine?" demanded Foster.

"I'm trying my best to put the personal side of this thing out of my thoughts, Dr. Sawtell," stated Douglass. "I'm proving it by keeping still now about what you did to me. But I believe that Cassius Nile is right, and that there are bigger matters than my poor affair to be uncovered in this town. I propose to be able to tell Cassius Nile that I did my duty."

"Well, do it, and don't preach so much about it," rasped Mr. Foster, having callous notions regarding the pros and cons of chivalrous intent.

Sergeant Douglass withheld retort.

Dr. Sawtell held his peace, also, for some time. Then that bitter spirit of semi-hysteria that he had shown before flamed.

"I don't know as it makes any difference what you do, young man, in my case. It was coming in another way, anyhow, through that devil of a Cassius Nile, with his poking and his prying into *cumulative* poisons and *cumulative* evidence.

"But I'll never stand up in court and have him wag his finger and bark at me. No, no! I've been ready for him! I'm ready for you, young man! A man must go," he babbled on. "I have seen so many of them go—and it's nothing! It's only this!"

He had been fumbling in his waistcoat-pocket. He held up a small object. He popped it into his mouth and gulped it down. He pointed to his bare feet, blackened, swollen, seared with the flames from the lamp. "I can't stand the pain any longer. I can't stand a lot of other things!"

Douglass jumped to his feet. Even while, horror-stricken, he realized what the old physician's recourse had been when finally brought to bay, Dr. Sawtell crumpled down, rolled over, and lay motionless.

"Well, I must say he's a crack shot when it comes to shooting the pill," observed Foster.

His friend, Fogg, exhibited no especial discomposure. He went even further in callous indifference; it was evident that the grudge still had its wire edge.

One little witness took a dose of goo;
Made a flop and did his duck, and then there
were two.

"If either one of you whelps lets out another yip till I say the word, I'll plug you with lead," shouted Douglass. "Lay a towel over that face!"

When Fogg had obeyed, the sergeant sat down again on guard.

Day was broadening in mellow tints

outside; there were flickers of sunshine through the crevices of the boards at the windows, and dust motes danced in the radiance of the shafts of light.

There would be daylight visitors to the scene of the fire!

Douglass, considering that one of his prisoners was wounded in the leg, resolved to wait.

Between the guard and those he guarded the heaped fortune of old Swinton Tingley, on the kitchen table, provoked in vain the temptation to grab.

CHAPTER XXII.

A DAYLIGHT GHOST.

ONCE, Sergeant Douglass had stood guard over a party of captured Huns. But they were hypocritically servile, and their meekness hid sour rebelliousness.

There was nothing of the sort in the demeanor of Messrs. Foster and Fogg. Their imposed silence was without sullenness. Though they were rogues, they were practising the philosophy they had preached to Dr. Sawtell, and were "taking their medicine" heroically.

Douglass knew better than to patronize them as a victor or to condole with them as a sympathizer. He became conscious that he entertained no more resentment in their case. They were returning his gaze with complacent resignation. With backs against the kitchen wall, they were waiting without complaint or expostulation.

Late in the morning the sergeant had something to say to them.

"I have tried to play this thing fair, men. Now I'm going to take into account what you were up against, after you escaped. Your grudge and that money made you pretty careless about my business. I'm going to forget it!"

"Considering that you've said that word you mentioned a while ago, and that a yip is probably allowable, I'll yip 'Thanks!'" replied Foster.

"I'm going to turn everything over to Lawyer Nile. I can't compel you to post him up on what you know."

"No compelling needed! You win on

the showdown. We shall shove all our chips over to you."

"I shall tell the whole truth to the prison officials. Under the circumstances, there's no knowing what Squire Nile may be able to do for you, in your own affairs."

"All small favors gratefully received!"

"Sure!" affirmed Mr. Fogg.

"And now, having done a little something with unfinished business, I'd like to make a remark for the good of the order—*without* rising," proffered Foster, moving his wounded leg with a grunt.

Douglass nodded permission.

"There are beef sandwiches in that cupboard over your head."

The young man was weak with hunger. He scaled a sandwich to each of his prisoners and took one for himself. While he was munching he heard the voices of children outside. He had anticipated that children, seizing on an opportunity before school-time, would make early visit to the scene of the affair that had interested their elders so much the night before. Douglass was in need of a messenger.

But when he had pushed aside the boards that he had loosened in order to force his entrance into the mansion, the children shrieked and fled from this daylight ghost, and his wild appeals only urged them to more frenzied flight.

He was obliged to content himself with the thought that the story they would spread would bring grown-ups to the place in hot haste.

So, with the crowbar with which he had gained entrance, he knocked all the boards off the window, stood in plain sight, and waited.

After a time a few of the nearer neighbors appeared in the highway and prudently lingered there. The group had become a considerable crowd when Constable Nute came whipping his horse up the long hill from the village.

After he had hitched the animal in front of the gate, the constable was so exasperatingly slow in advancing that Douglass urged him to hurry, repeatedly announcing his identity.

"You may be 'Bad' Douglass, but, by swanny, you don't look like him," declared

Mr. Nute skeptically. "No wonder you scared the little tykes!"

"I'm not trying to frame any beauty tableau in this window, Nute! I have two prisoners to turn over to you—I shall turn myself over, too. And Dr. Sawtell has committed suicide here. Send for the medical examiner. For the love of the Lord, man, get a move on! I ask only one favor for myself. I have an idea that Squire Nile is at the county seat. Wire him to rush here at once."

Constable Nute's slow mind had not begun to digest the heavier chunks of the information that Douglass had fed out. But the matter of Squire Nile was one that he could handle easily.

"No need of spending money for telegraphs when he's right here at home. I just left him in Judge Bragg's office where he is representing Nina Bingham in talking over the insurance on the barn. She is back home here, and—"

"Nina Bingham!" Douglass yelped the words, and leaned far out of the window.

"Squire Nile brought her with him on the late train last night, and I don't see anything to be excited about because she's back here in her own home town. And now to get down to something that's really important and—"

"Nina Bingham!" The sergeant banged the butt of the revolver on the window-sill, like a crazy moderator calling for the main question. "How—how—how—"

"Well, ask her how, seeing that you're bound and determined to fool away time on things that don't amount to a hoot when here lies Doc Sawtell, and—"

He came closer to the window when Douglass continued to rail.

"I tell you to ask her how, whatever your howlaferoopus is all about! There she comes with the squire and the judge—to adjust her insurance, probably."

To adjust insurance!

Rather, so the frenzied lover thought, to adjust the universe which had been so infernally out of joint since she had dropped from the State-prison wall!

With dim eyes he beheld her running toward the old mansion, as if his wild calling of her name had summoned her. Behind

was Squire Nile, and the trial justice followed with dignity's slower pace.

She was showing none of Constable Nute's doubts about the identity of the haggard face in the window.

She ran toward Douglass with arms outstretched, and he leaned low and clasped her when she was in his reach.

Under calmer circumstances, when tumult of soul was not sweeping all considerations other than her own dear self out of his mind, he would have paused to reflect on the distressing spectacle her eyes might find in the old kitchen. Now he did not stop to think. He swept her up and swung her through the window to himself.

"Tudge, be a gent, and keep your eyes on the ceiling," counseled Mr. Foster in an undertone.

"Look, Nina! On the table!" he choked, trying to turn her head with the hand that he pressed against her cheek. "It's your fortune! I have been guarding it for you. Look!"

But she would not turn her head. She set her arms more tightly around his neck. "Do you think I can look at anything except you now, Barron? I have found you again. I have found you!"

"Showing that true love," whispered Mr. Fogg to his friend, "can't be depended on to help the barber business. She—she hasn't noticed how much he needs a shave!"

The fact that a girl had entered the grim place, though involuntarily, emboldened Constable Nute, and he came clambering over the sill; Squire Nile followed.

"For God's sake, squire," pleaded Sergeant Douglass, sobbing when he saw this sturdy stand-by at his side and felt the pat of the lawyer's consoling palm, "take them all in your hands—these troubles—my innocence—take them in your hands!"

"Of course, bub, don't worry! I'll take everything into my hands. Your own seem to be pretty well occupied right now. What say!"

The squire set himself in command of that situation with the same decisiveness that characterized him as the autocrat of Canton's town-meetings.

By his orders the gathering throngs outside the mansion were kept back from the window.

Men and women and children, hurrying up from the village by the highway and along the lanes from the farms that surrounded the Tingley estate—the flocking populace arrived and massed in the yard. They stared at the open window—an empty orifice at which no face appeared—and wondered what was going on within.

After a time Squire Nile showed himself and propped his hands on the sill and quieted all their murmurings with the commanding air he customarily assumed on the town hall rostrum.

“Nute,” he commanded the constable outside the window, after a searching inspection of the crowd, “pick out two helpers and stand ready for your orders.”

The red beard of Breck Blaisdell signaled that person’s presence in the onlookers; his brother was beside him.

“They’re here for news—and they’ll get some hot intelligence,” muttered the lawyer.

He raised his voice and addressed the citizens of Canton:

“Listen, sharply, men and women! You are going to hear something that’s bad for the pride and self-respect of the decent ones among you, but good for the souls of all of you! And let gossip in this town get a thing right for once.”

Bitter sarcasm marked his tone: “Listen and be ashamed, if shame is in you! Barron Douglass is home again—here in this house. Abner Sawtell is in this house—dead by his own hand—and his crimes will be made known in due course. When they are known you will understand how much Barron Douglass has been abused in his old home.

“In this house are two men who know who robbed and killed Swinton Tingley. Step forward here!” he called over his shoulder.

Foster and Fogg showed impassive faces at the window.

“If two men in the town of Canton didn’t get a good look at these faces down under those pines yonder, the night Swinton Tingley was killed, I ask those men

to take that look now. I’ll give ’em a chance for closer study. Nute, bring Breck Blaisdell and his brother up to this window!”

As if it were a grim afterthought, he added: “And whilst you’re about it, arrest the Blaisdells for the murder and robbery of Swinton Tingley. I accuse them, and I’ll be able to back up the charge.”

Squire Nile had staged his little drama well; the surprise was effective.

Constable Nute and his helpers went about their business warily, but the brothers did not offer protest or resistance. They stood close to each other when their townspeople edged away from them; this public, sudden, amazing denunciation—this exposure of their conscious guilt had stunned them, as a hammer blow stuns an ox that stands in stupid torpor for a moment before falling.

In the silence the squire flung this final advice at the crowd:

“Better go home, you folks, and say to yourselves the things I haven’t got time to say.”

Until late that evening Squire Nile entertained two select guests in his office.

Sergeant Douglass held Nina’s hands clutched in his broad fist, as if he feared that he might lose her again.

The door of the office was locked, but the windows were open to let the Indian summer blandness in and to permit the clouds from the squire’s pipe to escape. The lawyer was at his desk, his back considerably turned on the couple. He was docketing various telegrams and the replies thereto. Demands sufficiently insistent and preliminary reports properly authentic had availed importantly in temporarily restoring rights to a citizen who had been unjustly convicted of a crime.

“Paroled in charge of counsel!”

That allowance by the law—a bit irregular, considering the precipitateness of the demand—ameliorated Douglass’s condition till further steps for his complete justification could be taken.

At the first opportunity the girl had told him her story.

She put her fingers across his lips when

he tried to express his complex feelings in regard to that sacrifice she had rashly offered in his behalf.

She explained that she had fled from the foot of the wall, thinking that she had encountered a guard, and hoping that all attention by pursuers would be centered on her trail.

"And why should I not have done so, Barron? I went with you to help, not to hinder!"

"That's the talk, my girl!" commented the squire over his shoulder. "And if you could start in that way with a mere convict, it ought to be pretty easy to keep on in the same way with a good husband! Eh? What say!"

She abandoned her convict promptly; she hurried across the room and kissed the squire's wrinkled cheek on the spot where Douglass's lips had sealed the giving of that "honor badge of unselfish friendship."

Two days afterward the Blaisdells confessed in the county jail; the squire expected that they would do so—he predicted it.

"It comes from the psychology of a guilty conscience that has gnawed and gnawed until there's nothing left except an empty shell that still presents a surface to the sight of men," he philosophized. "Then one good, unexpected wallop caves it all in! Abner Sawtell caved, too, after his own method!"

That confession of the Blaisdells had lifted one especial cloud from Nina's mind, long troubled by the confused memories of that tragic night. Breck Blaisdell, explaining how the two were trying to save them-

selves from the attack by the crazed miser, said that he had wrested the revolver away from Nina Bingham and had used it in "self-defense."

"Oh, well," declared Mr. Foster in his farewell interview with the squire and Douglass, "Fogg and I can't expect much of anything, anyway. If there's any chance for us in that new parole law you're speaking of, well and good. If we manage to get out I guess we can be depended on to stay good. When we'll blow a safe for a set of old maid's frizzes and let ourselves be hinkydinked into tossing good money into the tail-end of a buggy, it looks like we had lost our grip and had got to stay honest."

On their wedding journey Barron Douglass and his bride stopped over at the State capital.

Under the benison of a cloudless sky they sat in the little grove and gazed up at the bronze face that blessed them with its serenity.

Sergeant Douglass stood very straight and snapped a salute when he and Nina were ready to leave.

"It's great stuff—the kind that a commander-in-chief like the Big Boss puts into a chap, Nina!

"Why, after I had talked with him here in the night and the rain, I just couldn't quit!"

Then he tucked her hand into the crook of his elbow.

"Do you mind my asking you to take a stroll before we go back to the hotel, sweetheart? I want to pay a bill that I owe down at a tool shop."

(The End.)

*Keep it in mind till you've read
it, and then you'll never forget!*

"NAKED MEN OF NAGA"

BY GORDON MACCREAGH

BEGINS APRIL 17



The Log-Book

By the Editor

"OLD TIMER," writing from Stuyvesant, New York, while snow-bound, suggests that I "start an argument" as to who is the oldest reader of THE ARGOSY. He frankly informs me that he doesn't know where he stands in that respect himself, and asks me to inform him how old a reader of our magazine he must be from the data that he will be forty-nine next month, and remembers reading THE ARGOSY as a small boy. With no more definite information than this to build upon, I think he must see the blue ribbon borne off by some other member of—shall I say, our long-distance clientele.

I also have a letter from E. L. Walb, Oneonta, New York, who says that he was a reader of *Peterson's*, one of the two oldest magazines in America before it was merged with THE ARGOSY in 1898, and has been an ARGOSY reader continuously from that date. I take this opportunity to reply to the query of a correspondent in Atlantic City who wishes to know if THE ARGOSY has always been a weekly. Possibly my answer that it was started as such December 2, 1882, became a monthly with the April number, 1894, and resumed weekly issue October 6, 1917, may quicken my Stuyvesant friend's recollection regarding his own ARGOSY past.

A grim and a tragic jest it was which made of *Dan Corwin* a pariah even to his own soul, spanning the bridge of his dreams, in very truth, with a ladder of broken rungs.

"THE BUTT OF NEPTUNE'S JEST"

BY GEORGE MARIANO

is, as its title implies, a story of ships and the sea, of storm and smooth water, yet fanged with hidden shoals, strewn broadcast with the flotsam of scattered hopes. This is drama, tense and powerful, the sort of a story that grips by reason of its sheer spell of absorbing human interest. The first of six satisfying instalments of this impressive serial appears in THE ARGOSY for April 3.

In these days of high living costs I imagine that not a few of us would think twice before refusing a sinecure which paid five "iron men" *per diem* merely for the exertion of sleeping in the daytime and the consumption of three well-rounded "squares" a day. This is your introduction to

"THE GRAVEYARD WATCH"

BY JOHN D. SWAIN

Author of "Alone in Boston," etc.

our complete novelette for April 3, and I fancy that it appealed to *Tim Cannon*, ex-bouncer of the Golden Calf, who, however, counted without his host, or, rather,

hostess, in a manner of speaking. And as for a visitor or two to his perfectly appointed residence, which, in the words of *Asa White*, needed only a wife to make it a home. Well, *Tim*, as the saying is, found himself speedily a reception committee of one for as variegated an assortment of battle, murder, and sudden death as one could well imagine. This is told as only this writer can tell it.

Not within my recollection have I been able to offer you so sterling a collection of short stories of all varieties as in next week's issue of *THE ARGOSY*. In the way of crime you will find it hard to beat in cleverness the scheme put through by Maxwell Smith, who wrote "JUST A LITTLE THING," a scheme I defy you to divine until you reach the author's own account of it. Then in romance there are few things more delicate in touch than Katharine Haviland Taylor's "AND SOME FELL UPON GOOD GROUND," a tale which is likewise permeated with a keen sense of comedy not often combined with the pathos that rings so true in this striking narrative of two generations. Humor and the movies both crop up in "THE WHISKERING CHIN," quite different, yet equally entertaining account of *Joe Conner's* experiences with the Giles Confidential Detective Agency, for which Raymond J. Brown is responsible.

COMPLAINS OF A SEA STORY SHORTAGE

Boston, Massachusetts.

Just a word to say what I think of *THE ARGOSY*. I have been reading it for the past year, but have never as yet subscribed to it. But I hope to do so soon. During the strike I was very much disappointed in not being able to get my magazine every week, but when they do come I surely do enjoy many a pleasant evening. If I come across a story or serial I don't like, I don't read it, but I know that other people will enjoy it if I don't.

There is only one thing I don't like, and that is there are not enough sea stories. I sure would like to have a good sea serial-story or novelette rather than short stories. Detective stories are usually too dry and uninteresting for me, but cheer up, I am not the only one reading your great magazine in the world.

Yours for more luck and sea stories. H. E. B.

"SUCH KNOCKING I NEVER SAW"

Plainfield, New Jersey.

It's a long time since I wrote to the *Log-Book*. But things in it now are getting my goat. Such knocking I never saw. I like all the stories in *THE ARGOSY*. Sometimes I strike one that I don't care for; but the book wasn't printed for me alone. There are others that like stories that I don't, so I let it go at that. I read the book from cover to cover, and have taken it since it first came out. Some people would kick if they were playing football.

Have just read a letter signed Flora Watson Morgan, and want to say I agree with her, and think she was fine in writing to the boys. What difference if she knew them or not? When they went to fight they didn't go for any special one, but went to fight for all of us.

I had a dear friend in the army over there who said their letters were the best things they got. Just below her letter was one from a soldier who agrees with this girl from the West. Some

soldier! There may be worthless characters in the army, as he insinuates, but I know lots of cases where they come back more of men than when they went. It's best to be sure we are all right ourselves before we criticize others.

I guess this letter will never go in the *Log-Book*, but I hope it does, for I hate knocking. Why spoil a good book with such punk stuff.

LILLIAN M. WILLIS.

PAPER TOO SCARCE FOR MORE POEMS NOW

Marion, Ohio.

I buy a copy of each issue of *THE ARGOSY* and find the stories very enjoyable, but I think this magazine like so many others of the country makes a mistake by not publishing more poetry. A couple of pages of good human interest verse, not odes to the moon, *et cetera*, but out-of-door poetry, I believe would pay. The editor who thinks that people do not like poetry is fooling himself. I once owned a bookstore, and sold more books of poems than any other line. Educators say that poetry is on the increase, and the world certainly needs more true poets.

I think the stories in *THE ARGOSY* are fine, and I am just mentioning the publication of more verse as a suggestion.

The *Columbus Evening Dispatch* publishes a poem on its editorial page every day, and I know my children look for the poem, and it is usually read out loud before the news is touched.

Wishing *THE ARGOSY* great success,

GEORGE CHAPMAN.

THE ARGOSY'S BEST AND WORST STORY

St. Paul, Minnesota.

This is my first attempt as a contributor to the *Log-Book*. I have read your magazine for about five years, and *THE ARGOSY* is the best magazine on the market, bar none.

Now, Mr. Editor, I have a suggestion to make. Would it not be a good idea for readers to express

their opinion in the Log-Book as to what was the best story they ever read in THE ARGOSY, and also the poorest? The best story that I ever read was "The Golden Cat," by George F. Worts, which in my estimation even surpassed Zane Grey's "Last of the Duanes." "Luck," by John Frederick, was also some tale, and I am glad to hear that there is to be a sequel. Do not care much for Seltzer's stories, as he seems to write in the same rut.

There was one story that was not up to THE ARGOSY requirements, and that was Edgar Franklin's "Everything but the Truth." It was the most foolish and senseless story I have ever read, but I guarantee it would make a great hit on the stage. Here's hoping that we have more from Peter Moore.

PAUL CRAIG.

"Everything but the Truth" has received more praise than any other of Franklin's stories we have printed. But Mr. Craig is, of course, entitled to his opinion, and I shall be glad to have other candidates join this "best" and "worst" contest.

RECTIFYING "ROCKY" MOUNTAINS

Albee, Oregon.

Well, I guess the joke is on me, all right, but I certainly know and have always known, as long as I can remember, that I live in the Blue Mountains. I didn't notice, until I saw my letter in print, that I had written Rocky instead of Blue, and I laughed about it then. Does that satisfy you, E. P. B.? I have lived at least in sight of these same Blue Mountains almost my entire life.

And as for book learning, I can't see that it takes a great deal of that to know where you live. I am not one of the fortunate people who never make mistakes, but I have never yet been ill-bred enough to write such a letter that I was ashamed to sign my name to it.

I have read THE ARGOSY for about fourteen years, and never realized what it would be to do without it until it missed coming on account of the strike. We sure did appreciate it when it started in again.

I am afraid there isn't any fault I can find in THE ARGOSY, although there are some stories that I don't care for. But that is to be expected. Just finished "Drag Harlan," and "The Golden Cat" a short time ago. They were specially good, and I hope that our friend, Peter Moore will decide again, in the near future, to visit China, and we will read of his adventures.

With Mrs. P. I. W. and others I must say I was very much disappointed in the finish of "Luck," although otherwise I liked the story very much. I'm very glad there is to be a sequel, and I think Jack deserved better treatment than she received in "Luck."

I guess I have taken up enough of your time, so will close with the very best wishes for our friend, THE ARGOSY. (MRS.) CHRIS. STURN.

STILL BACKING ITS NAME

Battle Creek, Michigan.

Regarding the fact that I am an old customer of the good old ARGOSY, and also that I have never had my say-so in the Log-Book, I think it my

duty to contribute to you the plain facts regarding the same. To begin with, I am not saying enough when I say that THE ARGOSY is the best magazine to be had anywhere in our U. S. A. This refers to your authors also.

THE ARGOSY was my pal when it was *The Golden Argosy*. I still remember the stories that were issued at that time. "The Year 2000" was one of the many that I distinctly remember. If I would start telling them all, I would keep you reading all night. I will say that THE ARGOSY still backs its good faithful name by giving its readers some of the best reading to be found in this country.

My friends all read THE ARGOSY because they know a good magazine when they see it. Will you please tell me what has become of Albert Payson Terhune? I am anxious to read another story of his.

I have read the Log-Book over lots of times, and I find that some people like to kick about this story and that. My opinion is that if I see a story I do not like I do not say anything, because the same story may more than please some one else. I know positively that THE ARGOSY would not print rotten stories. Its reputation is too great to try such a venture. THE ARGOSY is still the greatest of its kind; the cleanest, wholesome and most true American stories that are being printed to-day. So tell me where a kicker has any argument.

R. B. SHILTS.

Mr. Terhune is a very busy man in many lines, but has promised to write us another story as soon as he can get around to it.

LOG-BOOK JOTTINGS

First Cl. Pvt. David Perlow, Honolulu, Hawaii, writes that although there are magazines of all kinds at the military post, THE ARGOSY is the favorite, and that when the mail arrives from the States the soldiers all make a dash for it. Mrs. Annie S. Nixon, Granite Pass, Oregon, resides in the beautiful Rogue River Valley, with the Pacific Ocean only about forty miles away, and although she has lived in the far-famed California and Hawaiian Islands, she is still busy with the southern Oregon slogan, "It's the climate; come and enjoy it." Incidentally she revels in the Log-Book. Walter A. Fultz, Royal Center, Indiana, having been a soldier in the great war, particularly appreciated "Soldier Boy's Sister's" letter in the Log of January 10, having known what a good, cheery letter meant in circumstances like those. Arthur Royce, the Bronx, New York, another soldier, away from home with the Canadian army, writes to tell me that he "missed your wonderful book for thirty-three months, and was glad to get back to it again." A booster (who does not wish her name published), from Kent, Ohio, avers that THE ARGOSY is not only entertaining, but educational as well, the wide scope of the stories enabling readers to become acquainted with the people and their customs of many different lands. Carl Strasser, Lafayette, Indiana, thinks it right and proper for girls to powder, and admired the way in which two girls in the January 17 Log stood up for this feminine habit. Frank L. Vaughn, Oklahoma City, is informed that THE ARGOSY has printed several stories of the oil-fields in the past, and will offer its readers others about the same great industry in the future.



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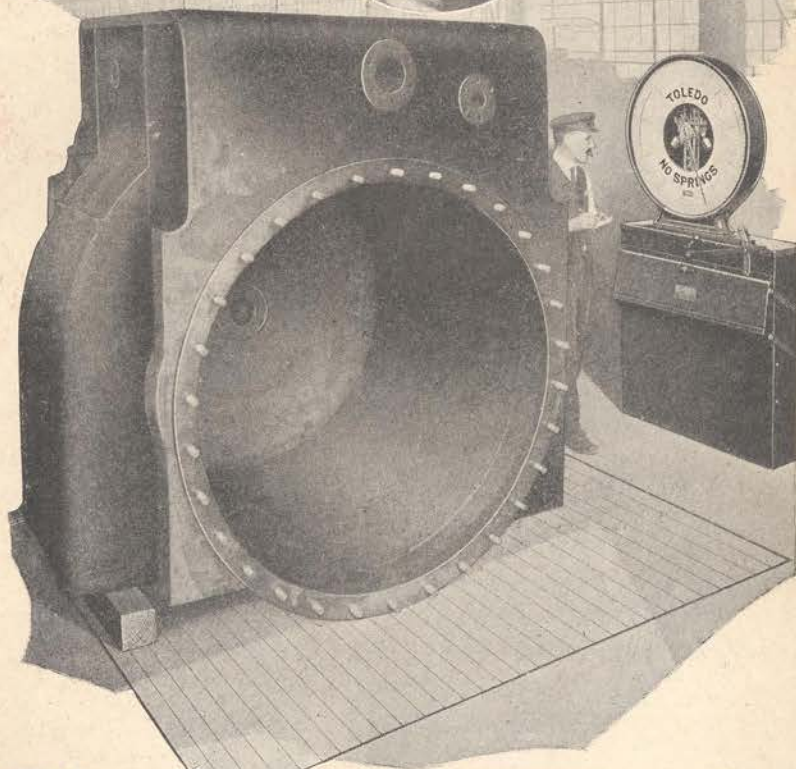
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along with \$1.00 to us now. Have this 110-Piece dinner set shipped on 30 days' trial. We will also send our big Bargain Catalog listing thousands of amazing bargains. Only a small first payment and balance in monthly payments for anything you want. Send the coupon now.

Straus & Schram Dept. 8073 W. 35th Street, Chicago, Ill.

Straus & Schram Dept. 8073 W. 35th Street, Chicago, Ill.

Enclosed find \$1.00. Slip special advertised 110-Piece Bluebird Dinner Set. I can have 30 days' trial. If I keep the set I am to pay \$2.70 monthly (total price \$28.90). If not satisfied I am to return the set within 30 days and you are to refund my money and any freight charges I paid.

110 piece Bluebird Dinner Set No. G5385NA—\$28.90.

Name

Street R.F.D.

or Box No.

Shipping Point.

State

If you Only Want the Catalog, Put X Below:
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