

SATURDAY

JULY 11

TEN CENTS

ALL-STORY CAVALIER WEEKLY



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Quitter*

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of
Devotion

*Begins in
This Issue*

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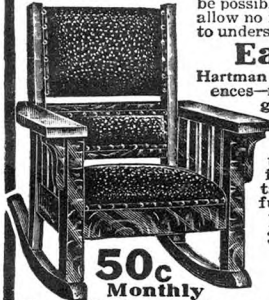
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ALL-STORY CAVALIER WEEKLY

Vol. XXXIV

CONTENTS FOR JULY 11, 1914

No. 1

FOUR SERIAL STORIES

- The Quitter Jacob Fisher 1
A Serial in Four Parts—Part One
- “Dad” Albert Payson Terhune 25
A Serial in Four Parts—Part Two
- A Silent Witness R. Austin Freeman 53
A Serial in Five Parts—Part Four
- The Lost Hearthstone Perley Poore Sheehan 86
A Serial in Three Parts—Part Three

ONE COMPLETE NOVEL

- Wild Norene Johnston McCulley 116

SIX SHORT STORIES

- Nutting Dances Frank Leon Smith 161
- Beside His Wife Elizabeth Irons Folsom 172
- A Personal Problem H. Bedford-Jones 177
- A Hard Man to Hit J. A. Fitzgerald 182
- Gold Fever Andrew Soutar 193
- Four String Power Ralph Roeder 205

POETRY

- | | | | |
|---|----|---|-----|
| A Woman Mary Carolyn Davies | 24 | Social Sinew Alice Lindsey Webb | 85 |
| Comparisons Mazie V Caruthers | 52 | Divorced H. M. Sterling | 167 |
| A Militant Hen Pearl A. Brown | | 208 | |

- Heart to Heart Talks The Editor 168

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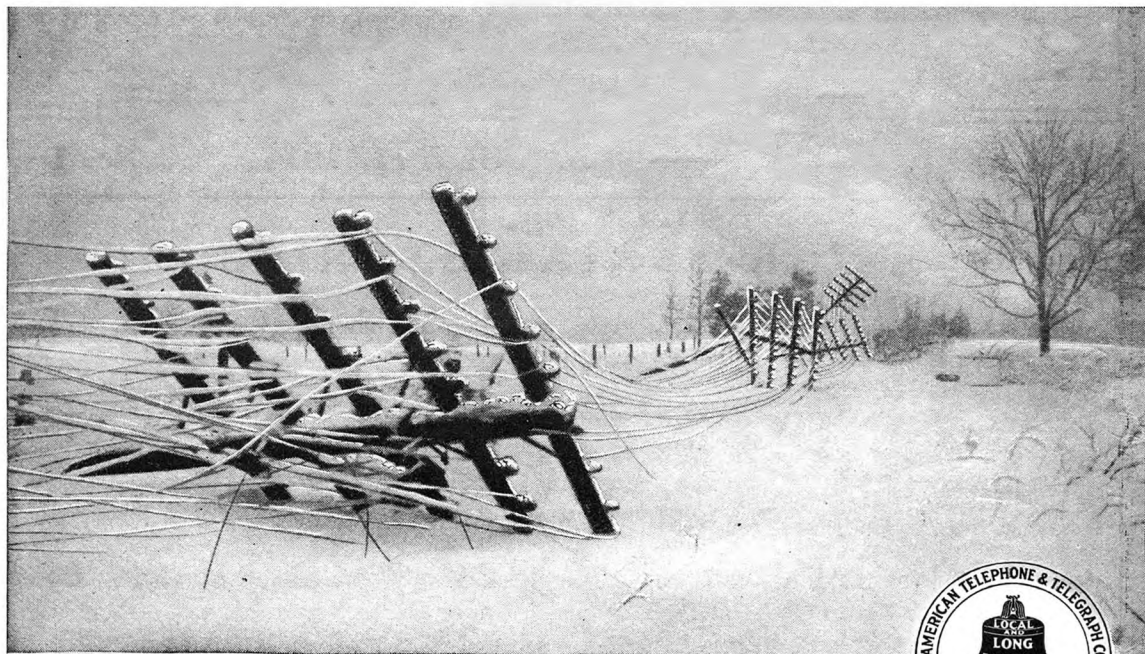
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The Telephone Emergency

THE stoutest telephone line cannot stand against such a storm as that which swept the Middle Atlantic coast early in the year. Poles were broken off like wooden toothpicks, and wires were left useless in a tangled skein.

It cost the telephone company over a million dollars to repair that damage, an item to be remembered when we talk about how cheaply telephone service may be given.

More than half of the wire mileage of the Bell System is underground out of the way of storms. The expense of underground conduits and cables is warranted for the important trunk lines with numerous wires and for the lines in the congested districts which serve a large number of people.

But for the suburban and rural lines reaching a scattered population and doing a small business in a large area, it is impracticable to dig trenches, build conduits and lay cables in order that each individual wire may be underground.

More important is the problem of service. Overhead wires are necessary for talking a very long distance. It is impossible to talk more than a limited distance underground, although Bell engineers are making a world's record for underground communication.

Parallel to the underground there must also be overhead wires for the long haul, in order that the Bell System may give service universally between distant parts of the country.

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Universal Service

ALL-STORY CAVALIER WEEKLY

Vol. XXXIV

JULY 11, 1914

No. 1

The Quitter

By
Jacob Fisher

Author of "The Cradle of the Deep," etc.

CHAPTER I.

The Challenge.

HALLAM brushed the clinging snow from his knickerbockers as they reached the top of the toboggan slide.

"Will you go down again, Sophia, or shall we go back and have tea?"

His tone was so politely bored that Miss Burton looked at him and laughed.

"You are so very enthusiastic, Ransford, that I am almost tempted to make you slide until you drop. I should like to see you really physically tired for once."

Hallam kicked off his heavy leather toeguard, and together they climbed to the broad terrace, beneath which the snow-covered roofs of the city glistened in the sun of a March afternoon.

"Well?" he inquired, straightening his big shoulders and uncovering to the breeze a head of rough, damp, tawny hair, "why shouldn't I be bored? I'll be honest, and confess it, but you are just as bored as I. You hate tobog-

ganing. You only do it because you couldn't come to Quebec and not do what is considered the smart thing."

"How well you know me, Ransford. To hear you one would almost think we were—"

"Sophia!" exclaimed Hallam sharply, "Don't joke. How many times have I asked you to marry me? I ask you again. I—"

"That makes the fourth time in two days," smiled Miss Burton. "The novelty is wearing off. I quite liked it—yesterday."

"That's just it," Hallam complained. "You don't even respect me. You've gotten too used to it. Why won't you marry me? Can't you see I'm sick, just for the want of you? That's it! I am sick. That's the way it affects people sometimes, and it must be the trouble with me—why, I'm bored to death with everything."

"And in time you would include me," said Miss Burton. "No, Ransford, I won't joke for a moment. I'll give it to you straight. I like you. I like you better than any other man I know, but you've just hit it. I don't

respect you. If I needed you on account of your money, I might marry you, just as you are, but I do not need you for your money. I have plenty of money of my own, and to be honest, Ranse, I don't need you for anything.

"If you were a different sort of man, one who possessed the qualities that I am without, a man with ideals and ambitions and the will to carry them to success, you would have no trouble, I am sure, in convincing me that I need you. If you were the sort of man I mean, I could not help myself. I should have to marry you because it would be your will."

Hallam stopped short, staring at her in amazement.

Miss Burton looked at him quietly under the veil of her dark lashes.

"You don't quite know what to make of it, do you, Ransford?"

"No," said Hallam briefly, "I don't."

"Then perhaps I'd better explain," went on Miss Burton calmly. "You see, Ranse, you and I are altogether too much alike. We move from place to place, or are moved, without much thought of why we do it, and we carry on the little, petty businesses of life in much the same way that scores of other people we know carry them on. Our days and nights are planned for us in the general scheme of the set in which we exist. We have no particular individuality of our own, nor does it seem very desirable that we should have. I have no more ambition than you."

"If I should marry you, we would become like so many of our friends, contented for a short time, then restless, then unhappy, then—well, I won't finish the picture, Ranse, you can draw it as well as I."

"Do you mean to say that I would tire of you?"

"No, my dear Ransford," she smiled, "I left it to you to say. You have finished the picture."

"And what particular line of ideals and ambitions would you choose for

me?" he asked, a bitter note coming into his voice. "Shall it be finance, science, or, perhaps philanthropy?"

At the hint of mockery she suddenly wheeled on him, her eyes brilliant, her cheeks flushed.

"Oh, you don't understand," she cried, "you can't understand. I want a *man*, Ransford Hallam, a *man*—one who has done something to prove it! One who, no matter where or how he finds himself, has the courage and the will to take the world by the throat, and make it do his bidding until he gets what he wants from it. I want a man who compels, who masters men, conditions, me—everything! It doesn't make any difference *what* a man does, it is *how* he does it—whether he gets what he goes after.

"What have you ever gone after? What have you ever done to prove yourself? You went to college and tutored your way through because you were lazy and had money. You played a little football on your class team. You rowed on your class crew. Why didn't you make the 'varsity? Why didn't you stand at the top of something? You didn't because it was easier to drift—easier to let the other fellow do the work, while you looked on with a foolish cynicism on your tongue for his success.

"And after college what did you do? You potted with business—just enough to learn how to clip your coupons and collect your rents. You tried polo and yachting, and you even flew twice around an aerodrome. But you didn't go far enough with any one of these things to make a mark, even in sport.

"You quit, Ransford. There's no other word for it, you quit."

Hallam, moving slowly by her side, said nothing, but, if she had looked at him, she would have noticed that his chin was jutting a little farther forward than was its wont, and that his eyes were burning under the brows that had beetled down over them until they were narrowed to mere slits.

And if she had laid a friendly hand on his shoulder, underneath the white blanket coat he wore, she would have felt the muscles, stiff as steel.

But she did not look at him, nor lay a hand on his shoulder. Instead she kept her eyes straight ahead, and as they walked slowly toward the hotel she continued to speak, seemingly as much to herself as to him:

"Perhaps I am not very clear. Have you ever been in a situation where your money could not help you, and your friends and your influence could not help you—where it became necessary for you to rely solely upon yourself, your own strength of body, and mind, and character to pull you through? I have often wondered what you would do in such a case—whether you would be equal to the lone fight, or whether you would allow circumstances and the men behind them to put you under."

Miss Burton paused and stole a little glance at the man by her side, and she caught at last the stiffening of the jaw-muscles and the frowning of the brows.

As they walked on she had an unpleasant feeling that perhaps she had said too much. She cast about for something to lighten the too-evident tension, and looking up she found it.

"See!" she cried, turning to Hallam suddenly, "there's that woman again—the one who wears the beautiful coat. Look at her! She's coming across the terrace!"

The woman was tall and of splendid figure. She wore a coat of fur, which the day before had aroused Miss Burton's admiration and her envy.

It was a short fur of a peculiar silvery-brown color, incredibly fine and soft, and the nap seemed to lie passively, whichever way it was stroked, so that the entire coat was a blending of light and shade, beautifully rich in its self-toned coloring.

"Isn't it the most exquisite thing you ever saw?" she exclaimed as the woman passed. "I would give almost

anything just to stroke it once and *anything* to have one like it. I never saw such fur. I must find out what it is."

"I have found out," Hallam said, shortly.

"When? How? What is it?"

"It is the fur of the baby musk-ox—the unborn calf. I inquired of a furrier in the town this morning."

"Then I can get it here? Oh, Ransford!" she cried, "I could almost love you for that."

"No," he went on, "you cannot get it here. You can't get it anywhere. It is not for sale. Sometimes—not every year—a very few skins filter through from the North. The killing of the musk-oxen for their young is forbidden, and the authorities see to it that, if the skins are obtained, as they sometimes are by the Indian hunters, they do not find their way into the market. The furrier told me that this woman we saw just now is a rather notorious person, and that the trading-post factor who sent her the skins lost his place on account of it."

"Where, pray, do they keep these musk-oxen, that they cannot be hunted and killed?"

"The musk-oxen," explained Hallam, "live in the country beyond the timber line, just under the arctic circle and inside it, as far as the coast of the Arctic Ocean. There is a tremendous waste of barren ground up there, where nothing grows but short grasses and moss, on which the animals feed, but they have been hunted so hard that, like the buffalo, there are only a few of them left, and the Indians have to go farther and farther each year for their quarry. The skins that do come out are disposed of, generally in secret, through the factors who have confiscated them from the hunters. They are the priceless furs of the world."

As they reached the hotel Miss Burton started to lead the way toward the tea-room, but when she saw that Hallam was not following she stopped and turned inquiringly.

He was standing very still, looking at her. She noticed there was something different about him—something that caused her almost to pause and collect herself. It was as if the man had suddenly grown in stature.

He stood there without moving, and slowly, as if something were drawing her, she moved toward him.

He looked at her without speaking. "What is it, Ransford?" she asked, her voice low and a little uncertain. "Can't you forgive me for the things I said?"

"There's nothing to forgive," he said slowly. "They were all true."

"But you're angry, or—or something, aren't you, or you wouldn't stand there looking so grim, and not coming to tea."

"I'm going to say good-by," said Hallam, quietly.

"Good-by?" she questioned, puzzled.

"Yes. You want a baby musk-ox coat. I'm going to get it for you."

CHAPTER II.

The Man on the Bed.

THREE days later Ransford Hallam stepped off the train at the end of the track.

The town marked the spot where civilization had made her latest pin-prick in the uncharted Canadian wilderness.

From this place led the trail. Beyond the ultimate point to which the south wind could faintly carry the toot of a locomotive whistle were the silences of the hyperborean wastes. And there lay Hallam's road.

It was a land of snow, bright sunlight and blue sky that greeted him as he stepped across the little platform. He asked the conductor who could put him up, and the man pointed to a building a hundred yards across the square that looked as if it might have been nailed together in a day.

As he started for it a sled, drawn by

a team of dogs, rounded the corner of the station building. The driver was a half-breed by the look of him.

As the team came to a stop the two leading dogs fought violently and the half-breed's whip curled in between them with savage strokes.

"Got any baggage? This man'll take it over for you," said the conductor. "Hey, Joe, here's a passenger."

The half-breed grinned. Hallam passed him his checks and waited to see his trunk and two heavy boxes safely loaded. The whip cracked, the dog-team straightened out and with Joe running at one side shot off across the snow.

As Hallam followed he wondered at the stillness of the place. From the low, rough shacks grouped about the square the smoke of fires rose lazily, but of life there was nothing to be seen. It was like a deserted village.

Even the dog-team had disappeared around the back of the structure that passed for a hotel.

Hallam stamped the snow from his overshoes and pulled open the door. After the blinding glare of the sun the interior was hard to discern.

He blinked for a moment and then dimly made out three or four men sitting about a stove in the center of the room. The air was thick and rank with the smoke of plug tobacco.

The low-toned conversation that had been going on as he entered, suddenly ceased. Hallam took a step forward, throwing back the lapels of his great, fur-lined coat.

"Is the landlord about?" he asked.

No one answered. After a moment there was a sound of a scraping moccasin on the rough floor. As a welcome it was discouraging. Hallam tried again.

"Where is the proprietor?" he demanded, a trifle sharply.

One of the men seemed to repress a snicker. Then a reedy voice came from behind the stove.

"He's in that room, there, I guess."

"Can I see him?" inquired Hallam, turning to the door indicated.

"Sure yuh can see him if yuh go in," said the reedy voice.

Hallam did not like the way the words were spoken, but stepping to the door he opened it.

At first he saw no one. There was a bed in one corner, a wash-stand and two chairs. There was some one on the bed.

"Asleep," thought Hallam. "I'll have to wake him."

He crossed the room and stopped with a start. The man on the bed was a dead man. On the forehead, between the eyes, was a blue mark where a bullet had entered.

Startled, shocked at finding himself suddenly face to face with violent death, Hallam stood gazing down on the sharply cut features of the corpse.

As his thoughts slowly collected themselves it occurred to him that he had been victimized by those men in the other room. Why they should have played such a trick upon him, an utter and unoffending stranger, he could not understand.

He stood very still by the bed, thinking. Then there crept into his mind the suspicion that this was a test, a challenge. These men wished to know what manner of man it was who had walked in among them.

The idea came to Hallam that he must meet it in kind—that here and now he must show the stuff of which he was made, or forever forfeit his right to the respect of the northland.

With an impulse that he hardly recognized as coming from within himself, he turned abruptly and walked back into the outer room. Without glancing at the group about the stove he slipped out of his fur-lined coat and dropped it on a chair. With still the feeling that it was not he himself, but another was directing his actions, he faced the silent men.

"Which one of you," he asked, in a quiet voice, "is the ill-mannered pup that directed me in there?"

As he spoke he advanced slowly toward the center of the room.

There was silence about the stove. Not a man moved.

"You, there!" called Hallam, suddenly pointing his finger at the man farthest back in the shadow. "I think you were the one. Suppose you step out and let me look at you."

The man pointed at shuffled his feet uneasily and rubbed the back of his hand across his mouth.

"Will you come out by yourself or shall I help you?"

One of the men dropped the fore-legs of his chair sharply to the floor.

"You're called, Whitey," he said, with a short laugh. "He's onto yuh. Go to it. We're needin' somethin' to cheer us up."

"Hold on there, mister," spoke up the man with the reedy voice, hastily shoving back his chair before the approaching Hallam. "There's no call for yuh to git mad. I didn't mean nuthin'. I see I made a mistake. I was takin' yuh for one o' them drummers that's due to come a pesterin' around here about this time."

"If it was a joke," returned Hallam, turning to the others, "my sense of humor doesn't take it in. Who is the dead man?"

"That's the landlord," said the man who had first spoken, "or it *was* the landlord till a Yaller Knife Injin got him last night across his own bar."

The speaker rose.

"Ef yuh want to git put up, I reckon I can fix it for yuh with the widder. I'll jest speak to her."

He went to a rear door and called, while the others, including Whitey, divorced themselves from their chairs and filed out. The first man returned.

"The widder says she can take care o' yuh all right," he said. "Yuh can have that room there," pointing to the one in which the dead man lay. "We're goin' to bury him this afternoon."

"And what," asked Hallam, "became of the murderer?"

"Oh, there warn't no trouble about him. Yuh see, they drawed together. We buried Mister Injin this mornin'."

Hallam glanced about the room. Its utter rawness and lack of comfort, the bare board floor, the walls and ceiling, black and greasy from wood smoke, the few wooden chairs in disorder about the stove, the unwashed glass of the windows, the odor of stale tobacco mixed with that of damp and dirty clothing hung to dry against the wall, and the smell of backwoods cookery from the kitchen all combined to give him a feeling that he was out of place, a rank outsider, a misfit.

A sense of loneliness and friendlessness suddenly rose up and possessed him. He saw in his impulsive starting upon this adventure the ill-advisement of youth.

He half acknowledged to himself a wish that he had not come.

Through the open door came the sound of a locomotive, chugging its way to its shed down the track, and it occurred to him that he was not yet altogether lost. The way out still remained open. If he chose, he could take it.

But as the thought came, shame came with it, shame for his faint heart, for his lack of courage, for the smallness of his manhood.

He noticed the man at his side looking at him curiously, and he imagined the contempt that would come into his eyes could they read the thoughts that were passing in his mind.

His memory leaped back to Sophia Burton and her half-amused, half-incredulous smile as he had said good-by. There could be no turning back for Ransford Hallam.

CHAPTER III.

The Start.

"FRIEND," said the man at Hallam's side, "it ain't polite in these parts to be askin' a stranger's business, an' I ain't goin' to over-step

the line none, but my name's Jackson, Thomas Jackson. I'm pretty well known, and if I can do anything—"

"My name's Hallam, Mr. Jackson—Ransford Hallam, of New York. You're right about my being a stranger—and a tenderfoot, too."

Jackson smiled.

"I'd be glad of a little advice and a little help; I'm ready to pay well for it."

Before the words were out, instinctively Hallam felt that he had struck the wrong note.

Jackson looked at him steadily for a moment, his gray eyes narrowing.

"I beg your pardon," said Hallam.

"All right, stranger," returned Jackson, "I just wasn't thinkin' of it that way."

"You're very kind, Mr. Jackson. I begin to suspect that New York ways and Athabasca ways are as far apart as the two places on the map."

Involuntarily Hallam glanced through the open door of the inner room, where the dead man lay in full view, the cold, sharp profile showing white against the dark background of the wall. Jackson followed the glance, and stepping to the door closed it.

"McAvey, there, won't be interested in our conversation," he said.

"McAvey?" Hallam questioned.

"Angus McAvey."

Hallam had a distinct feeling of having heard the name recently.

"McAvey," he repeated. "Angus McAvey."

"He was one of the fur company's factors till last summer," volunteered Jackson. "He had a small post, way to the north beyond the big lake."

A light broke on Hallam. Angus McAvey was the name of the factor who had lost his post for selling musk-ox furs against the company's rules.

It was on the end of his tongue to speak of it, but something warned him that the subject of musk-ox fur was a dangerous one to broach.

"How did he get shot?" he asked instead.

"Why, we don't none of us know exactly," said Jackson, pulling up a chair. "We was out here in this room, half a dozen of us, when along about dusk an Injin drove up to the door with a sledge and a team o' dogs. He come in an' looked around, an' asked for McAvey. Somebody pointed to the bar, an' he went in. We warn't payin' no attention, when there come two shots clost together. We run in, an' there they was, one on one side o' the bar and one on th' other, both drilled clean through the head. It's the first killin' we had this year."

"Where did the Indian come from?" asked Hallam, interested.

"He was a Yaller Knife—half-breed, I should say, from somewhere up north. No one ever seen him here before."

"Why did he kill McAvey?"

Jackson shrugged.

"Dunno. Maybe the old man wouldn't sell him a drink. It's ag'in' the law to sell Injins. Then agin, maybe he had an old grudge, but the old woman, McAvey's wife or widder, that is, won't let on she ever seen him before. So we buried him, an' here comes the boys to bury McAvey."

Looking out Hallam saw four men bearing a rough board coffin across the square. Jackson rose and opened the door and the box was brought in and placed on two chairs.

Other men arrived until the small room was nearly filled. The body was brought out and laid in its last hard bed, clothed as it had been when the man was killed.

There was a movement in the back of the room and the men made way for some one to pass. Hallam, curiously watching from a corner, saw that it was McAvey's widow, a huge woman of slightly more than middle age, with a hard, expressionless face.

She walked to the side of the coffin and stood looking down at her husband, as emotionless as a statue. Then she sat down in a chair that Jackson brought.

"Ready, Mr. Sanders," said Jackson, and Hallam saw a young man in the cloth of the Church step to the head of the coffin. It was dark in the room and some one held a lamp while he read the service.

As he finished, the men who had brought the box placed the cover upon it, and raising it on their shoulders carried it to a sled, drawn by a pair of horses that was waiting outside. The widow followed, and the little procession moved out of sight.

Hallam stayed where he was. The room lately occupied by the dead man was now his, but he did not go into it. The thought of sleeping there on the bed that had held the corpse made him shiver a little. The entire atmosphere of the place was depressing, and he felt a wild desire to see the last of it.

He decided to push his arrangements and to leave for the north at the earliest possible moment.

In less than half an hour Jackson and the others of the funeral party returned and filed solemnly into the bar. Jackson beckoned to Hallam.

"The widder," he announced, "asks me to thank everybody for their services on this here sad occasion, and invites those present to have a drink."

He stepped behind the bar and set out glasses and a bottle.

"Well, here's hopin' McAvey's in a better place than what he left," said Jackson.

The toast was drunk in neat whisky and the men filed out. Hallam seized his opportunity.

Without informing Jackson in much detail of his plans, or giving him a hint of the object of his journey, he told him that he wished to make his way to Great Slave Lake, and to continue on to the northward while the country was still frozen.

Jackson asked no questions, and readily undertook to procure two dog teams and drivers.

"Joe, the half-breed that brought yer boxes from the station, is a first-

class driver, and his team is a good one," said Jackson. "The only other good team here now is the one left by the Injin that killed McAvey. I'm takin' charge o' that, an' I'll let yuh have it if we can get a driver."

Jackson kept a general supply store, where Hallam found he could get the provisions he needed, and so it came about that most of the arrangements were left to his new friend. By night the lists were made out and the packing was well under way.

As Hallam returned to the hotel he found himself in much lighter spirits. Things were going better than he had hoped, and with luck in securing a second driver there would be nothing to prevent his making a start at once.

But the thought of the dead man's bed acted as a damper upon his enthusiasm.

With a lamp he inspected the room. It seemed fairly clean, but a splotch of blood on the pillow where the head of McAvey had rested sent a qualm through him. He thought of asking the widow for another room, but from the talk of the men who came filing in he learned that the house was full, and that two of them were even doubling up to give him a place by himself.

For an hour he sat in the one straight-backed chair and read for a second time the magazine he had brought on the train.

But the oil in the lamp was low. The wick began to sputter, and he saw that in a few minutes he would be left in darkness.

Fighting back the squeamishness that seemed bound to possess him, he turned the pillow to hide the blood-spot and, wrapping himself in his fur-lined coat, lay down in the murdered man's place to wait for the morning.

For hours, it seemed to him, he lay there, broad awake, his mind intensely active, leaping from one thought to another, until at last he fell into a

restless, broken sleep, which toward morning, however, became quite profound.

But the new day banished the discomforts of the night. Jackson came to tell him that he had found a Dog-Rib Indian named Wolf Bone who was willing to drive the dead Yellow Knife's dogs.

With Jackson's aid Hallam settled the advance to be paid and deposited with the storekeeper the balance, to be turned over only on a proper voucher.

"Don't never pay an Injin what he asks," advised Jackson. "If yuh do yuh'll likely wake up some mornin' and find yuh're shell-roaded, with Injins, dogs, camp-kit, and all among the missin'."

Half the population turned out to see them off, and escorted the two sledges to the edge of the clearing. Joe, the half-breed, and Wolf-Bone, the Dog Rib, ran beside their teams, while Hallam rode on the second sledge.

The air was crisp, the sun bright, the sky blue, and the dogs in the best of condition. It seemed a propitious beginning.

But as they left the clearing and the last house dropped out of sight, and the last man waved his hand in farewell, Hallam realized for the first time that there, ahead on the long white trail, lay the unknown.

Up to the present the business of preparation had occupied him so fully that he had little time to turn his thoughts onto actualities of the journey. To Jackson and the other men it was commonplace—one of the incidents that went to make up their rough lives. Any one of them would have undertaken it without a second thought.

But to Hallam, now that he was at last headed out, the problem of carrying his venture to success bulked large.

City-bred, used to the most luxurious living that civilization could devise, with almost unlimited money to

smooth the path, he had chosen to loose himself from the world he knew, from the friends whose aid and support he could command, from the influence that his wealth could bring, and to make his way alone to near the top of the continent—and for what?

To bring back a rare and priceless fur with which to drape the form of a girl who had called him a quitter!

CHAPTER IV.

In the North.

TEN minutes after leaving the town Hallam was in the wilderness. Had it not been for the blazes on the scattering cottonwood-trunks that marked the windings of the trail he might have believed himself in a land that the foot of man had never trod.

It was a late, cold spring. The March sun scarcely warmed the air above the freezing point, and the snow was in prime condition for travel. The loads were not extreme and the pace was good.

They had not been on the trail above half an hour when a low exclamation from Wolf-Bone in the lead brought them to a halt. Joe and Hallam ran forward to find the Dog Rib staring at the remains of a recent camp-fire.

The two drivers examined the spot, speaking together in low tones; but it was Hallam who found the clue to the late camper.

In kicking over the dead embers he saw a bit of rawhide and picked it up. He called Wolf-Bone, who drove the dead Indian's dogs, and to his surprise the man at once fitted the scrap to the torn end of a trace in his team's harness.

It was the slayer of McAvey who had rested here, within two miles of the settlement. Why?

As they left the spot Hallam pondered. A man who has driven many miles to reach civilization, whether he be red or white, does not sit down

within hailing distance of the goal and wait without a purpose. He began to see something in the killing of McAvey besides a sudden quarrel over a drink of whisky.

At night Hallam had his first experience of a sleeping-bag, with the frozen snow for a mattress. He slept warm, and wondered at the comfort of it, for his thermometer at daylight showed a drop to fifteen degrees below zero.

They went on, sleeping the next night at a little settlement on the bank of the river they were thence to follow.

This was the last connection with the world outside. To the north there was nothing of white men's work but the far-scattered trading-posts of the great fur companies.

Now that they were following the river the traveling became easier. For mile after mile the dogs pulled unwearyedly.

Hallam by degrees ceased to ride, and at the end of a few days was able to keep the pace, running by the sledges.

Sometimes at night they stopped early to cut a water-hole through three feet of blue ice, for wood began to grow scarce, and often Hallam's primus stove, burning alcohol, was called into service.

At length they came to a long stretch of frozen rapids, where the ice was treacherous. Once the leading team broke through, and there were moments of wildest anxiety until the dogs were hauled, dripping, to the firm ice. On certain days they hunted, and Hallam shot his first caribou.

That night they had fried liver and the dogs bolted a feast of fresh meat.

Hallam gloried in it all. After the first acute tortures of muscle lameness had disappeared he began to feel himself growing strong. It became a delight to run beside the dogs, to help push the sledges over the rough places, to turn in at night by the light

of the cold stars to dream of the girl to whom he was to prove himself.

At two fur-trading posts, called by courtesy "forts," they were welcome guests, and rested one day at each, Hallam giving the news of the outside world in exchange for bed and board.

At these places he was careful not to disclose the real object of his journey, but let it be understood that he was a mining man on his way to the north in search of copper. He did not fear that the Indians would tell, for the balance due them on their return, together with a liberal bonus promised in event of success, would effectually close their mouths.

The days were growing longer and the sun warmer, for April was in sight, and the soft condition of the snow in the middle of the day warned Hallam that he had no time to lose.

Thanks to their rifles and the caribou, which were now on their spring migration to the north, there had been no lack of fresh meat for both dogs and men, and the inroads on the regular stock of provisions had been smaller than Hallam had expected.

To save delay, he determined not to stop at the trading-post on the great lake, but to continue on to the east and cross the lake there, where the width was not more than twenty miles.

When he announced this plan to Joe and Wolf Bone, both men strongly demurred. The sledges were getting weak, they said. They needed repairing, and the dogs needed a rest to prevent spring sickness.

It was the last day on the river. By night they would reach the point where the trail left the stream and cut across country to the fort.

The men showed signs of discontent and held frequent consultations. Hallam had examined the sledges and could find no serious trouble—nothing that could not be repaired perfectly well en route. The dogs, too, seemed in the pink of condition, and he decided that the men's excuses were

trumped up to earn for themselves a few days' lay-off.

Nothing was said that night, and the tent was pitched as usual. They were awake at daylight. The tent was struck, the sledges packed, and the dogs linked in the traces. Joe, in the lead, pointed down the blazed road to the fort.

"We go this way," he said.

Wolf Bone nodded a vigorous assent.

But Hallam was beginning to understand Indian nature. He stood in his tracks and pointed to the white sheet of frozen river.

"That is our road," he said.

The Indians immediately took out their pipes and, seating themselves on their snowshoes, prepared to argue the matter.

"Joe, Wolf Bone," said Hallam, "it is necessary that I go on to the north while the snow is yet good. You are pledged to go with me. You have been paid for half the journey. If you insist on going to the fort we will go, but if we do I shall consider that you have fulfilled only half your contract and that your services to me are at an end. You have been paid half. You will get no more."

The Indians showed surprise and disappointment and held a rapid conversation in their own tongue. Hallam sat a little apart, quietly smoking, seemingly indifferent to their decision.

At last Joe came over to him and rather shamefacedly announced that they were ready to go on, and that there would be no more grumbling.

"Good," said Hallam. "Mush on, then."

The dogs broke into their steady, long-distance lope, and the remaining miles slipped under the sledge runners swiftly. At noon the lake itself was in sight.

They halted on the shore of the great, white, wind-swept waste—three hundred miles from end to end, fifty miles across in the western reaches. The northern shore, twenty

miles away, looked like a pencil-mark on the horizon.

While the men were gathering wood to boil the kettle, Hallam sat looking out over the vast expanse. Hitherto the journey had been one of no great difficulty. Any man might have made it—almost without discomfort.

Here was the dividing line. Across that plain of snow and ice lay the great barren ground of the north, stretching away beyond the arctic circle. No man lived there.

Here, at the lake, as it were, the world of human things was left behind. The trading-post to the west was the last frail link between Hallam and his world—between him and the woman he loved; the woman to whom he was about to attempt to show that he was a man.

Here, indeed, was he to depend upon his own courage and his own resources, not only in the winning of the prize he had come already so far to seek, but for the preservation of his very life.

Henceforward it was his manhood alone that was to count.

As Hallam had brought no canoe on his sledges it was necessary that he should cross the lake on his return journey before the ice left it. It was his intention, then, to procure a canoe from the factor at the post and make his way back to civilization in the quickest possible time.

So far, according to the Indians and the people at the two forts at which they had stopped, it had been an exceptionally late season, so that there was little cause for doubt that mid-May would not find the lake still closed.

For his choice of hunting-ground Hallam had trusted to the best advice of Jackson, in whom he had finally confided, and who had made several journeys to the barrens in various seasons of the year. The Indians, too, had backed this advice with experiences of their own, and while it

was agreed that year by year the musk-oxen were retreating farther and farther back toward the north, he felt reasonably sure of success in the region he had chosen.

The crossing of the lake was made in quick time, and as they neared the northern shore Hallam saw that in contrast to the low country they had left, the lake was bordered by a high, rocky ridge, crowned in many places with sizable clumps of stunted spruce. A succession of rocky islands stretched to the northeast through the long axis of the lake, and the course lay behind these, where the party would be sheltered from the sweep of the wind.

Monotonously they traveled on the ice for three days. But the snow was hard, the pace rapid, and the head of the lake was reached sooner than was expected.

As they left it and turned full north again the sparse timber was left behind, and Hallam at last found himself in the promised land, the great barren ground of the sub-arctic.

CHAPTER V.

The Lady of the Lake.

THEY traveled more slowly now, keeping a sharp lookout for musk-ox signs. The caribou seemed to have deserted the country. For a week none had been seen.

The food for the dogs was going at an alarming rate, and it was plain that unless fresh meat was soon procured the ration would soon have to be cut in half.

On the third day after leaving the lake the weather, which had been mild, turned suddenly cold, and a blizzard out of the northeast swept down with a blast that bit to the bone.

Huddled in the tent, the men waited for the storm to pass. No wood was procurable, and they were forced to fall back on the primus stove.

After two shivering, wretched days

the weather at length cleared and the sun came out, warmer than before. The new snow, under its influence, crumbled into sandy crystals, making traveling at anything but a snail's pace impossible.

The Indians commenced to show signs of discouragement and new discontent. They began to say that the musk-oxen had gone north, and that this was a sign of warm weather. They voiced the fear that the ice would leave the lake sooner than they had thought, and at last they openly expressed the wish to turn back.

Hallam, with discouragement gnawing at his heart, laughed at their doubts and ordered them to "mush on." But each day the dogs traveled slower, and each day the Indian and the half-breed became more sullen.

When they camped at night Hallam was almost afraid to close his eyes in the fear that the drivers would steal away and leave him.

He longed for the sight of a herd of caribou to give them the fresh meat both men and beasts so greatly needed. But from daylight to dark there were no caribou. The country seemed deserted by all forms of life.

For miles in every direction it was a blank, sunlit waste of glaring white, not a tree nor a bush above the snow to break the monotony of its dreariness.

In spite of his smoked glass spectacles, Hallam was beginning to suffer from incipient snow-blindness. The pain at times was great, but he bore it with a fortitude that was born of a desperate effort to preserve the *morale* of the trio; for any exhibition of weakness on his part would have at once fomented the breeding rebellion in the drivers.

The weather grew decidedly warmer, so that thick clothing became a burden. The snow was scarcely fit for traveling in the middle of the day, and still signs of musk-oxen were naught.

More than once Hallam felt his courage failing; but the thought of

going back beaten, his prize unwon, to hear Sophia Burton's mocking laughter and her "I thought so," was a goad that caused his jaw to stiffen and his face to turn again resolutely north.

On the seventh morning since leaving the lake Joe announced that his best dog, the leader of his team, was sick.

Hallam, scoffing at first, examined the animal and found it true. It was the spring sickness, Joe declared, and was likely to spread to the other dogs.

Also, there was no cure. The dog might recover; he might die.

"Then shoot him," commanded Hallam.

Joe demurred. It was his best dog, he said. He might get better. They could wait a few days and see. The team would not work well without its leader.

But delay for Hallam would be fatal. The only chance of finding musk-oxen was to push on, to make a dash to the north, find a single herd, shoot as many as possible, and then head back for the lake, traveling light.

Three days might mean the difference between success and failure. It was clear that hesitation on his part would mean the end.

He rose slowly and walked to where the sick dog lay stretched out in the snow, its eyes half shut, its breath coming heavily from slavering jaws.

The animal was easily the finest in either team. He had worked nobly, never shirking, always the leader and the master of the rest. There was affection in him, too, and from the first he had seemed to recognize in Hallam a friend—one who spoke kindly, who rewarded effort and who did not abuse the lash.

As Hallam stood over him the dog lifted his head and feebly wagged his tail. Hallam swallowed something in his throat and, stooping, stroked the rough coat.

"Poor old fellow. Poor old boy," he said.

Then he straightened up and jerked his heavy automatic pistol from its

scabbard. There was a sharp crack. The leader of the team twitched once and lay still.

A low exclamation from the half-breed echoed the shot, and Hallam turned. Joe, his face dark with anger, caught at his rifle and sprang up.

"Drop it," warned Hallam sharply, the automatic swinging into line with the man's heart.

The rifle fell.

"Now we'll go on. Pack, you loafers, before the snow gets soft," he commanded.

The drivers obeyed, and the sledges were loaded in sullen silence. On they went, Hallam snow-shoeing behind, his pistol loose in its scabbard, ready to his hand. The weakened team worked slower, for the dogs were hungry and they lacked the valiant leader who had kept them to their pace. In two hours they had scarcely made four miles.

On climbing a steep ridge Hallam suddenly found himself looking down upon the white surface of a lake. On the easterly side was a fringe of good-sized spruce timber. The sight of those friendly trees, after the deadly dreariness of the barrens, was like a glimpse of home.

"Go on, boys!" he called. "We'll sit in front of a wood fire to-night!"

As they stood for a moment on the summit of the ridge, taking the bearings of the lake, Hallam noticed a strange uneasiness in the dogs of Wolf Bone's team. They were twisting and whining in the traces, and sniffing the air with little yelps of excitement.

Suddenly the leader dropped on his haunches and, lifting his nose, gave forth a prolonged howl. Immediately the others of the team joined in, and the weird chorus went up in a long, tremulous wail, unearthly in its melancholy.

Hallam, puzzled, turned to speak to Wolf Bone, but as he did so the dogs started. Gathering speed with every leap, they took the rough slope at a dead run, the loaded sledge, its helm

guideless, swaying and sluing in their wake.

"They're running away!" yelled Hallam. "After them, Wolf Bone!" and the two men sprang together down the hill.

As they reached the ice Wolf Bone stopped, sniffing the air. Hallam, too, stopped. There was a distinct smell of wood-smoke coming straight from the spruce growth up the shore, toward which the runaway team was making top speed.

"Come on!" called Hallam, and, dropping his snow-shoes on the ice, he sped after the dogs. As he reached the point of a small headland he uttered an exclamation and, signaling the two men to follow, struck in toward the shore.

What he had seen was a log-built house not a hundred yards distant among the trees. Smoke was rising from the chimney. An open water-hole lay at the end of a well-trodden path to the camp door.

The dogs, in making a short turn toward the shore, had slued the sledge, which, striking a rock that projected above the ice, had overturned, and, tangled in their traces, the animals were mixed in a hopeless snarl, all fighting tooth and nail.

But Hallam did not stop. He climbed the bank with a beating heart, for this meant food, shelter, and above all a human welcome.

As he approached he saw that the door stood half open. No sound came from within, and without knocking he stepped across the low threshold.

For a second time since he had come to the north country he entered a strange room and saw, lying upon a bunk, the form of a man. And for a second time it was a dead man.

But here, with shoulders bowed until her face touched the covers of the bed, knelt another form.

Hallam stood still, his eyes staring. The figure was motionless. Could it be that this also was a frozen corpse?

As the door swung back it creaked

and struck against the log wall. In a flash the kneeling figure sprang into motion and a woman faced him.

CHAPTER VI.

Norma Leonard.

THE instant she turned Hallam saw that she was young—a girl of not more than twenty. Never while he lived did he forget that first flashing impression of her as she stood there, a hundred questions looking from her startled eyes, with one hand pressed against her breast, the other extended toward the bunk as if to protect the dead.

From head to foot she was clothed in fur, and as the light streamed in upon her from the open door Hallam saw with amazement that it was the same priceless fur he had come to seek—the skin of the unborn musk-ox calf, silvery gray-brown and softer than any velvet.

The girl's upper garment was cut in a short blouse or jumper which ended just below her waist. Her legs were incased in closely fitting trousers, tied with thongs below the knees, and met by long boots of a different kind of fur.

The hood of her jumper was pushed back, and Hallam saw that her hair was dark and smooth, deeply waving, and also that it was gathered in two great braids whose shining lengths fell in front of her shoulders, down over her breast, and half-way to her knees.

Her eyes were dark, and he became aware that they were gazing at him steadily from under fine, straight brows, which now were drawn together in a slight scowl of surprise and perplexity.

She was the first to speak.

"Who are you?"

Her voice was low and rich and the tone was level, but there was a certain huskiness and that bare tremor that comes from grief.

After her simple question she stood silent, waiting for a reply. There was such quiet dignity in her bearing and in her sorrow that Hallam felt almost as if he had suddenly broken in upon a sanctuary.

"You are in great trouble," he said gently and gravely.

He looked past her to the form on the bed, and he saw it was that of an old man.

"Is it—your father?"

The girl bowed her head.

"And you are alone here?"

"Yes," she said.

Hallam swept the cap from his head and took a step toward her.

"My name is Hallam," he said.

"I am from the States and traveling to the north. I hope you will let me help you."

The girl stood without moving, her eyes searching his face with their steady gaze. Hallam returned their look, his face full of sympathy and friendliness.

"How did you happen to find this place?" she asked abruptly, her brows knitting closer.

"It was chance," he replied. "The first we knew was the smell of smoke and the queer actions of one of the dog-teams. Neither I nor my two drivers had any idea there was a human being within a hundred miles."

The girl's eyes slowly left Hallam's face, and for the first time since she had risen she moved, turning toward the quiet figure in the bunk.

Hallam, from where he stood, could see the stern, austere face of a man of seventy, cold, impassive in its marble whiteness. The brow was high and the features were well cut. The frame, though wasted, had belonged once to a man of noble physique, but the hands were not those of one who had labored in youth.

"When did he die?" Hallam asked.

"Just this morning as the light came," she said. "He had been ill for many weeks."

Something suddenly darkened the

doorway, and both turned to see the forms of Joe and Wolf Bone blocking the entrance, their eyes wide with curiosity and apprehension. As Hallam started forward to motion them outside his movement disclosed the dead man on the bunk.

Each Indian looked at the other with a startled exchange of glances, and in an instant the doorway was empty.

In surprise Hallam sprang forward to see both drivers running down the path to the ice. He called to them to stop, but they kept on, and he leaped in pursuit. The sledge that had been capsized by Wolf Bone's runaway team had been righted, and stood with the dogs still in the traces at the bottom of the bank. As the Indians reached it the animals began to bark wildly, and, dragging the load, they bounded straight up toward the house.

Past Hallam they plunged, lustily giving tongue. Looking back he saw that the object of their sudden dash was the girl. She stood in the doorway, and as the dogs reached her they sprang upon her, leaping at her face.

Hallam was by her side in an instant. Seizing a heavy stick he beat the leader off and was attacking the others when a cry from her stopped him.

With amazement he saw her stoop and caress the dog that had received the blow. The animal responded with whines of pleasure, while the rest of the team leaped about her with every evidence of delight.

Suddenly she stood up and bade the dogs be still. Instantly every animal dropped to its haunches and sat gazing at her with rapturous eyes, tongues lolling.

She turned swiftly on Hallam.

"Why did you lie to me?" she demanded.

"Lie to you?" questioned Hallam in amazement. "Lie about what?"

The girl's scowl deepened and her eyes grew darker and seemed to blaze at him from under her close-drawn brows.

"About coming here," she accused. "You knew! Where is Sandy?"

"Sandy?" echoed Hallam, still mystified.

The girl made a gesture of impatience.

"Where did you get these dogs?" she asked.

The light began to break.

"I got them in the town at the end of the railroad," he said. "The night before I reached there from the States an Indian, a Yellow Knife, they told me, had been shot to death in a quarrel with the hotel-keeper. A man named Jackson had the team in charge. He let me have it, and found a Dog-Rib Indian named Wolf Bone to drive."

The girl was hardly listening as he finished. She had fallen back against the logs of the house wall and leaned there, staring at him.

"Sandy—dead! Who was the man who shot him?"

"His name was McAvey—Angus McAvey, and he is dead, too. The Indian shot him. They drew together, it was said."

"McAvey!" cried the girl. "You say Angus McAvey is dead? Shot by Sandy? And Sandy dead!"

She seemed overwhelmed and stood motionless, her face pale, her eyes staring past him at nothing.

Astonishing as the whole thing was, Hallam found himself piecing together the steps that had gone before the double tragedy at railhead. The Indian, Sandy, had evidently been a servant or a retainer of some sort to this old man and his daughter. McAvey had been factor of a fur post somewhere in the vicinity.

The Indian had followed him out of the north and had killed him behind his own bar.

So much was clear, but Hallam could reason no further. The motive, if there had been a motive, was still in the dark.

The girl's dismay puzzled him. What could she know about it? Had

she or the old man sent the Yellow Knife eight hundred miles over the snow to kill, or had the Indian himself, brooding on some wrong done to him by the factor, set out upon an errand of revenge?

As Hallam watched, these things flashing through his mind, he could see that the girl was thinking hard. At last she looked slowly up.

"Did the Indian say anything after he was shot?" she asked.

"I think not," Hallam answered gravely. "Both men were lying dead when those in the outer room rushed in."

The girl nodded her head abstractedly.

"Father dead, Sandy dead, Mc-Avey dead." She straightened and looked keenly at Hallam.

"And you," she said. "Who are you, and what do you want? Are you one of the mounted police? I have heard of them. Are you trying to find out why the Yellow Knife killed Mc-Avey, and why Mc-Avey killed him? Is that why you came here?"

"I'm not one of the mounted," Hallam said. "My name is Ransford Hallam, of New York City. I have never heard of you or your father. I do not even know your name. I came into the north to hunt, to kill musk-oxen, and for nothing else. I hope you will believe this, because if so you will make it easier."

"Why easier?" she flashed.

Hallam was taken a little aback.

"What are you to do, alone, here?" he asked. "How were you planning to live, or to reach civilization? I should like to help you if you will let me."

The girl smiled in a slow, almost scornful way.

"I have lived here a long time," she said. "I am at home here."

"But now you are alone," insisted Hallam, "you cannot *stay* here alone, a girl like you. You will have to go back to your relatives, your people. You will have to go back with me."

She smiled again, the same scornful smile.

"But you are not going back," she said. "You are going to hunt musk-oxen. You have come a long way. Besides, where should I go? I have no people. My father and I were alone in the world. We have been in the north ever since I was a child. I have no place, even if I wished to go."

As she spoke, the tone of her voice, which had been hard at first, grew gentler, and from the doorway in which she stood she glanced inside at the form of the dead man.

Hallam suddenly held out his hand.

"Shall we be friends?" he said.

"Will you tell me your name?"

She gazed into his face steadily for a moment without moving. Then she slowly laid a hand in his. It was a large hand, well shaped and strong, and it filled Hallam's palm warmly.

As he held it her grip tightened a little and his own clasp grew firmer to meet it. Still looking at him she said:

"I think you are telling me the truth. I believe you. My father was Norman Leonard. He called me Norma."

Norma Leonard. It had a simple euphony about it that fitted her, he thought, this tall, strong girl with her low, rich voice and her calm, almost stately dignity.

"Miss Leonard," began Hallam, but on seeing the puzzled look in her eyes he stopped, divining its cause. She probably had never been called "Miss" in her life.

"Shall I call you Norma?" he asked.

"Why, yes, of course. What else?"

"I wanted to ask if you had thought about what you wish to do with your father's body. If there is a grave to be prepared would it not be well for you to choose a spot? It may take some time to thaw the ground."

"There is nothing to be done," she said evenly. "Before the sun sets we shall be ready. Will you come then? There are some things I have to do,

now, and I think he would not like strange people about."

Hallam bowed silently and stood watching as she entered the house and closed the door.

CHAPTER VII.

The Grave Among the Spruces.

NOTICING the dogs of the runaway team still lying in their traces, Hallam loosened them, and one by one as they were freed they disappeared around a corner of the house.

He followed and saw them clustered about the entrance to a small hut of logs, evidently built for a kennel. A shout from the lake turned his attention to the Indians, who, with the other team, were standing well out on the ice, waving to him.

He smiled at their panic fear of a dead man, but when he reached them he perceived that it was something more than that.

Joe and Wolf Bone greeted him with the most extreme gravity of demeanor, and, sitting down upon the ice, invited him to a conference.

Pipes were lighted before either spoke. Then Joe asked:

"When you move on, Hallam?"

"I don't know, Joe," Hallam replied. "The old man, this girl's father, died this morning. He is to be buried before sundown. The girl can't stay here alone. She will have to go on with us."

"No," said Joe.

Wolf Bone grunted vigorously, shaking his head.

"What is the matter?" Hallam demanded.

Both men were silent.

"What are you afraid of?" he went on. "An old man who is dead? You act like a pair of children. What made you run away?"

"This place bad. No good. We go to-night," said Joe firmly.

"But why?" insisted Hallam. "Are you afraid because of the way

the dogs behaved? I can tell you about that. The dogs came from here. The Yellow Knife that killed McAvey lived here with the old man and his daughter. They were glad to get home; that was all."

The Indian and the half-breed exchanged glances.

"There's nothing to be afraid of," Hallam went on. "I myself will bury the dead man, and when that is done we will take counsel, and in the morning we will make a plan."

Joe addressed Wolf Bone rapidly in his own language, and the Dog-Rib nodded assent several times, replying shortly in his own deep gutturals. Joe turned to Hallam.

"We stay to-night," he said; "but we not go near house, and dogs must not go near. We camp in trees on that point, and at sunup we go. We do not like this place."

Hallam, disturbed and angry, could make nothing of it. To reason was useless, and to make threats was equally of no avail. The men would not move an inch from the stand they had taken. Neither would they explain the cause of their aversion to this lonely dwelling by the ice-bound lake.

Finally, leaving them to make their camp among the spruces on the point, Hallam took his way back to the house.

As he approached, the door swung open and Norma appeared. She did not notice him at first, but stood in the long shaft of sunlight that fell through a break in the trees. The strange grace of her figure, clothed in shining velvet fur, straight-limbed, lithe, strong, yet lightly poised; the calm beauty of her face, framed in the dark hair that fell on either cheek, made Hallam pause an instant to gaze.

But it was only for an instant. She saw him and spoke.

"Where are the dogs?" she asked.

"I loosed them, and they made at once for their kennel."

She stepped to the corner of the log house and gave a low whistle. In-

stantly the five dogs came bounding to her.

"Will you unload the sledge?" she asked. "We shall need it."

Hallam set about undoing the lashings, and placed the packs in a pile against the house while she harnessed the dogs. He wondered at their docility under her hands, for while ruled by the long lash of Wolf Bone the team had been a snarling pack of rebels from the start.

When the sledge was ready Norma turned toward the house. Hallam was about to follow, but she stopped him with a gesture.

In a moment she reappeared, bearing in her arms a long, dark shape wrapped and corded with thongs of rawhide in the shaggy robe of a muskox. She stooped with her burden and laid it gently on the sledge, while he marveled at her strength and lack of effort.

Rising, she faced him.

"Now I am ready," she said. "Will you go with me?"

She carried no whip, but guided the dogs by voice alone; and as they filed behind the sledge, winding in and out between the spruces along a trail that some one had recently traversed, Hallam saw for the first time a tear make its way down her cheek and lie for a second upon her breast, sparkling in the sun like a single diamond.

They had followed the high land along the edge of the lake for perhaps half a mile when there rose before them a sharp ascent, up which the dogs trotted at a smarter gait. Norma ran behind and guided the sledge by its "gee pole."

Hallam, following, found himself on a flat-topped hillock, ringed about with trees and overlooking the length of the lake. In the center of the ring Hallam saw an open grave.

Norma brought the dogs to a halt and turned.

"You will wonder at this," she said. "My father was prepared, you see. He chose this place long ago and made

it ready. This morning I came here and dug away the ice and snow. Over there are stones to lay in until it is filled."

Looking down into the pit, Hallam saw at the bottom a rude structure of hewn logs made like a box to receive the body. There was also a cover to be lowered over it.

The girl stooped over the bundle on the sledge and untied the strips of rawhide that lashed it in place.

"Now," she said; and together they carried the dead man in his wrappings of fur to the edge of the grave. Silently, by the long thongs, they lowered the body to the bottom.

"Norma," Hallam said, using her name unconsciously for the first time, "would you like to be alone here for a little while?"

She shook her head.

"Would you like me to repeat what I can of the service for the dead?"

"No," she said.

So, together, they brought the stones, small and large, from a pile where a fire had been burning to melt the snow, and together they filled the grave.

At last, when it was done, they turned away and, following the dogs as before, drove the empty sledge back through the spruces in the twilight. So silent, so stoical, did the girl seem that Hallam forebore to speak.

When they reached the house, and the dogs had been freed of their harness, she asked him to enter.

"It will be lonely," she said. "I do not wish to be alone."

"I will go and see to my camp, and then come back."

"For the night," she said. "I do not wish to be alone to-night."

In the gathering darkness Hallam could not see her face, but the words were so simply spoken that the utter unconventionality of the request did not even occur to him. His only feeling was one of sympathy for her loneliness. It seemed quite natural that she should want some one with her.

Crossing the cove, he found the Indians with a tent pitched and a fire burning. When he told them that he had decided to sleep in the house they glanced quickly at each other, but they did not try to dissuade him.

"In the morning," Hallam told them, "we will arrange what is to be done," and swinging a light pack of personal belongings over his shoulder he started back across the ice.

As he neared the house he saw that a light streamed from the window.

Norma called "Come in," in answer to his knock.

CHAPTER VIII.

A Singular Hostess.

AS Hallam pushed open the door of the cabin he was struck with the warmth and cheeriness of the interior.

In the center of the single long room there was a stone chimney with a fireplace, in which there was burning, not logs of wood, but lumps of what he recognized to be cannel-coal, the bright flames from which flooded the space in front with flickering light. On a chain, suspended from the roof, hung a large oil-lamp, and at the other end of the room, back of the chimney, he could see two others.

For furniture there were chairs, heavily constructed of hewn timber, but luxuriously upholstered with caribou hides.

A heavy, square table stood under the lamp, its rough top covered with a beautifully tanned skin. Caribou horns decorated the chimneypiece, and across them rested a shotgun and two repeating rifles. At either side of the room was a bunk, furnished with robes of fur.

Norma was not to be seen, and Hallam had time to note the few details the interior offered. After a moment he heard a light step and the girl appeared from behind the chimney.

She was no longer clothed in the suit of musk-ox fur in which he had

first seen her, but wore a long robe, evidently made of a gray wool blanket, which fell nearly to her feet. She had tried to give the garment a feminine touch, for it was furred about the throat and sleeves as well as girdled with the softest of sable.

As before, her two great braids of dark hair fell before her shoulders and well down below her waist, the ends unbound and tasseling out in thick, shining masses.

For a moment she stood looking at him.

"You will stay?"

Hallam nodded.

"That is good," she said, nodding her head; "you can have my bunk. I will take this one," pointing to that on which her father's body had lain, "Have you eaten?"

"Not since morning."

"Sit here," she said, pointing to a chair at the table, "I know what a hungry man is, and how to treat one."

She swiftly disappeared behind the great chimney and returned bearing a large pot, which she hung on a crane in the fireplace.

As she lifted the lid the appetizing odor of garlic faintly arose from the steaming contents, which she ladled out upon two tin plates. She swept the tanned skin from the table and laid one of these before Hallam on the bare boards. The other she placed opposite and disappeared at the rear of the room.

When she came again she bore forks, knives, and spoons, and two tin cups of tea.

"Eat," she said, seating herself in her place. "There's plenty."

To Hallam it seemed as if no food he had ever tasted was the equal of that savory stew; that no tea he had ever drunk before was of half the fragrance of that steaming infusion in the tin cup. Between mouthfuls and cups he watched the girl, surprised to see that she ate with all the delicacy that he was accustomed to find in women.

She said little until the plates were empty and the meal ended.

"There should be bread," she remarked as she finished the last of her mug of tea; "but I have had no time these last few days."

She rose and cleared the table, and Hallam, left alone, heard her rattling the plates in a dish-pan.

Full to repletion, comfortable, warm and dry for the first time in weeks, he turned his chair to face the fire, wondering whether he should offer to help her. But before he made up his mind the work was done.

"Do you mind my smoking?" he asked as she came to the fire, drying her hands on a coarse cloth.

She looked down at him in surprise.

"No," she said, "all men smoke."

Hallam smiled and filled his pipe. He was frankly puzzled.

With women, as a rule, he got on well. Women liked him. He was never at a loss with them.

But here was a woman who was different. He could not make her out. She was neither friendly nor unfriendly, neither interested nor indifferent. She had apparently accepted his coming and the slight aid she had permitted him to render her as a matter of course.

That she seemed to trust him after her early doubts had been disposed of, even to the point of admitting him to the house, was distinctly strange.

At first he had thought nothing of the invitation. Now that he had seen the single room with its two unscreened bunks, Hallam wondered. She must be either very innocent, he thought, or else entirely confident of her ability to protect herself.

As he lighted his pipe he cast about for some opening, for while he wished mightily to learn her history, her reticence so far had made him cautious of her displeasure. The sight of the coal in the fireplace quickened a thought in the back of his mind.

"You burn coal," he commented; "where do you find it?"

"On the shore of the lake," the girl answered. "There are tons of it lying about on the ground. I will show you our storehouses."

She took a lamp from a side-bracket and led the way to a door at the rear. In passing the chimney Hallam saw that there was a cooking-range of small size that glowed warmly in the dimness of the space.

Swinging back the heavy-timbered door the girl held her lamp high, disclosing a low, shedlike place, heaped to the roof with glistening black masses. Tons of fuel were stored there. In one corner stood three casks.

"Oil," she said briefly. "Father found a way to distill it from the coal. It is such a comfort—the oil. The winter nights are very long here."

While Hallam still marveled she closed the door and threw open another. A rush of cold air nearly blew out the lamp and she quickly shielded it with her hand to prevent its being utterly extinguished.

In this freezing space hung the carcasses of nearly a dozen fat caribou, and on one side there were great bags made of hides, filled to bursting. One stood open, and Hallam reached over and plunged in his hand. It was wheat.

He turned to Norma inquiringly.

"Wheat," she answered to his unworded question, "and barley. We raise them both in the valley of the inlet. There were some small vegetables, too; but they did not do well this year, and the last have been eaten. I am sorry."

As they turned back into the warm room Hallam thought of the man whose body he had helped to bury that afternoon.

What sort had he been? Where had he come from? Why had he chosen to live in this subarctic wilderness, wresting from the earth and from the wild animal life a living for himself and his daughter? What was his purpose? What secret had he

hidden with him in his grave within the ring of spruces?

A man who could raise wheat and barley in the heart of the barren ground, who could distil oil from cannell-coal, who could live in comfort and die in peace in this great, untenanted land, who could rear a daughter to womanhood in the midst of such desolation, could have been no common trapper or prospector.

"How long have you lived here?" Hallam suddenly asked as they reached the fire.

"Not long," she replied, looking at him steadily. "Four winters ago we came here."

"And before that?"

"We lived in many places, hardly ever for more than one winter and summer. They were not as good as this, and we had no coal, or good oil, or grain."

Hallam pulled on his pipe and looked at the fire. The girl dropped easily into a chair and stretched her moccasined feet toward the hearth.

"Norma," he said, "won't you tell me about yourself?"

The girl looked up at him, frowning slightly as she had when they first faced each other hours before.

"Why do you wish to know?"

"Would I be human if I didn't?"

"I don't know," she said. "I have never known but two human beings since I was so small that I can hardly remember."

"Only two human beings?" gasped Hallam. "Your father and—who else? Your mother?"

"No. My father and Sandy—the half-breed that Angus McAvey shot to death," she replied, her voice growing hard and her frown deeper.

Hallam's thoughts went back with a rush to the little frontier town and the story of the duel across the hotel bar. It seemed months ago. He recalled Norma's half-stunned surprise at the news he brought, and the hopeless look that had come into her eyes.

"Why won't you tell me?" plead-

ed Hallam. "You have shown your trust by asking me to stay here. Surely, it is not strange that I should wish to know."

The girl looked at him, as was her habit, straight between the eyes.

"Not to-night," she said shortly. "Perhaps to-morrow I shall tell you something. It is getting time to go to bed."

She rose and, going to the door, dropped a heavy bar into place across it. The two small windows she shuttered and barred also.

Hallam wondered at her calmness and poise. His presence apparently did not concern her in the least.

She went about the room, putting things to rights with the sure touch of the practised housekeeper. The lights in the rear of the room had already been extinguished, and only the lamp in the center now remained.

"The light from the fire will be enough," she said, and, mounting to the seat of a chair, she fanned the lamp out with a wave of her sleeve.

At once she walked to her bunk and, throwing back the coverings of fur, lay down.

"Good night!" she said.

Hallam, still sitting by the fire, had watched her curiously. Her bed-going was as simple as was everything about her. There was no embarrassment, no false modesty.

He was suddenly left to his own devices, and, knocking the ashes from his pipe, he unlaced his moccasins, stripped off his coat, and without further ado rolled himself in the great robe of mink skins he found on his bunk.

"Good night, Norma!" he said.

There was no answer.

CHAPTER IX.

The Wailing in the Night.

IT was a long time before Hallam slept; but soon, as he lay watching the flickering shadows of the fire on

the front wall, the regular, placid breathing of the girl in the bunk across the room told him that his presence had not interfered with her habit of slumber.

Now that he was left alone with his thoughts, the strangeness and unconventiality of his presence in the cabin impressed itself upon him.

He went over the events of the day one by one, the strange behavior of the dog-team, the finding of the cabin in the spruces, the dead man, Norma, the apparent fear of his half-wild guides, the burial on the knoll by the lake, the return to the house, and at last the girl herself, reticent, singularly unafraid, a trifle brusque, utterly unconcerned.

What manner of girl was this, he asked himself—brought up in the wilderness by the man he had seen lying dead? A stern old man by the look of him. Once a gentleman perhaps, an adventurer with the impulses and the love of a free life, passed on to him by some pioneer ancestor; perhaps a man with a great sorrow. A recluse, hiding himself from mankind and selfishly requiring the same sacrifice of his child? A criminal, secluded from the world?

Norma's beauty, her intelligence, her courage, her physical strength, the evident natural refinement of speech and manner that must have come from her father, all stamped her as unusual, unique, a young woman certainly to be studied and drawn out with patient tact.

Hallam decided that to press her for her story would be useless. If he would know it he must first gain her respect and confidence. She was at home here, independent and undismayed. Doubtless her resources were vastly greater than his, a mere tyro in the craft of the northland. He felt that she was quite able to take care of herself, whether she chose to live here alone or to make her way to civilization.

Civilization! He wondered how

much she had been told about the world—his world! She had not seen it since she had been a child. He wondered if she had read of or had been taught to picture the places that teem with humanity, and whether she had dreamed of some day leaving the great open spaces and herself becoming a part of the life he knew.

It suddenly occurred to Hallam that he had not seen a book or any printed thing about the cabin. Was it possible that she had never been taught to read?

He remembered her conditional promise to tell him of herself to-morrow. What would that telling reveal?

Gradually from Norma and the mystery of the lonely house of logs his mind drifted back—back, through what now seemed to him ages of toil and many happenings, to that other girl, whose challenge, half curious, half contemptuous, had sent him forth upon this adventure.

He fancied her incredulity when he should tell her of this part of it—his meeting with this young goddess of the barren ground, and how he had become, on her invitation, the sharer of her sleeping chamber, where she even now lay, screened from him only by the white, impenetrable curtain of her own unconscious chastity.

Finally he grew drowsy. He was warm, comfortable.

The hazy thought of how comfortable he was was slowly drifting through his fading consciousness when he became unpleasantly aware of a sound.

It was a low, unceasing murmur, now increasing, now diminishing with uncertain timbre, now rising, now falling in pitch, like the grief-wail of a woman.

Hallam became broad awake and listened intently. The wind was coming up. He could hear it whistling in the low-hung eaves and sighing through the tops of the spruces outside.

But the noise that had aroused him was not the wind.

He gave his attention sharply toward the bunk in which the girl lay. The sound did not come from her. It seemed to come from nowhere, yet from everywhere. The wind began to blow harder, and with it rose the sound.

Now it seemed like a chord, a harmony of tones; now it fell again to a voiceless murmur.

Once, puzzled, disturbed, strung to a tension of which he was ashamed, Hallam almost spoke to wake the girl and ask the meaning. He raised himself on his elbow, his ears straining at the mystery, but he fell back with the call unvoiced, a feeling of chagrin conquering.

All at once he heard her stir. She raised herself and laid back the robe that covered her. She was getting up.

Hallam lay still and watched covertly. Slipping out of her bunk, she found her moccasins and approached the fire. She glanced at Hallam's bunk, and satisfied that he was asleep, she noiselessly lifted a great piece of cannel-coal and laid it on the dying embers.

The flame shot up, yellow and strong, throwing her stooping figure into high relief against the shadows of the room. Silently she crouched before the blaze, spreading out her hands to its warmth.

The wind blew fitfully, and the sound that Hallam could not explain wavered with the gusts. The girl paid no attention, but knelt by the fire, staring into the heart of it, her eyes fixed in the emptiness of reverie.

Lying far back in the shadow, Hallam could see, beneath the soft fur that edged her gray robe, the rise and fall of her young breast. He saw her clasp her hands and carry them to her heart, then to her face, covering her eyes.

Her figure collapsed a little within itself, and above the whine of the wind and that other sound he heard a sob.

Suddenly his heart went out to her in a great wave of warmth. As he watched, his own eyes grew moist and his throat tightened. He forgot the sound; he forgot everything except that

she was a young girl, alone, grieving for the father who was gone from her forever.

His impulse was to go to her and lay his hand upon her, and offer her what comfort the presence of another human being might bring. He stirred.

She heard, and the spell was broken. Instantly he saw her face change and her figure straighten.

She rose, and without looking at his bunk, went swiftly back to her own.

It had been but a glimpse, but Hallam was glad he had seen. He was not conscious of having intruded upon her.

It had been given to him, rather, to know that, for all her calmness, her poise, and her repression, this young girl was like other girls, a very human soul, grievously hurt by the hand of Death—and sorrowing.

As he lay thinking, he felt that the sympathy which had silently leaped from him to her might have somehow reached her, and that henceforth there might be a better understanding between them.

The wind still rose and fell, but more faintly. The sound still murmured, but more softly. The tension was gone; and Hallam, watching the dancing shadows on the wall, fell asleep.

When he again awoke the day had come and the light from the clear east was flooding a yellow path across the room.

His first glance was toward Norma's bunk. She was not there. The fire was burning briskly on the hearth, and, listening, he heard the barking of the dogs in their kennel outside.

A light step sounded at the rear of the room behind the chimney, and he caught the sound of water splashing in a basin.

He wondered whether rising would cause him to intrude. He lay back to wait for her to appear, or to give some sign.

The splashing ceased, and in another moment the girl stepped within his

range of vision. She was clothed again in the full suit of musk-ox fur.

She walked quickly to the door at the front of the cabin, threw it open, standing in its path of white light and gazing out across the frozen lake, a straight, slim, boyish figure. The breath of cold air that came past her was sweet and fresh.

Hallam raised himself and threw back his furs. At the movement she turned and closed the door.

"Good morning," Hallam said.

"Yes, a fine day," she answered.

"We will have something to eat directly. You will find a basin back here."

Hallam swung out of his bunk and accepted the invitation, splashing his face and neck with ice-cold water, while she stood waiting with a piece of coarse linen for him to use as a towel.

He thanked her and used it gratefully, a luxury he had not known for weeks. A mirror showed him the unbecomingness of a stubby growth upon his cheeks and chin, kept from undue length by a pair of clippers, and he vowed he would use his razor at the first opportunity.

His comb being deep in his pack, he smoothed his rough hair with his hands as best he could, and, turning away, found Norma still looking at him. She had loosened her two great braids, and her hair fell about her like a dark cloak of smooth silk.

She smiled slightly at Hallam's attempts to subdue his tawny locks and held out to him the comb she herself was using.

Half embarrassed by the offer, he took it, used it, and handed it back, whereupon she went on straightening the tangles of her own tresses most unconcernedly.

"Your hair is wonderful, Norma," Hallam said, watching her.

"Is it?" she returned. "I like it, too. It's so soft, and it keeps me warm when the long nights come. Ah, I'm glad they're gone! They are the worst part of this country."

She braided her hair quickly into its thick plaits and became busy about the stove.

"I think perhaps I'd better see to my men," Hallam said. "Can I help you now? I will be back shortly."

Hallam found his fur cap and outer coat and started down the path to the lake. When he reached the shore he looked toward the point. A thin column of smoke rose from among the trees, and he struck across the cove.

In five minutes he reached the other side and called to Joe. There was no answer.

He bounded up the bank. The smoldering remains of a camp-fire greeted him, but that was all.

Indian, half-breed, dog-team, sledge—everything was gone!

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK. Don't forget this magazine is issued weekly, and that you will get the continuation of this story without waiting a month.

A W O M A N

By Mary Carolyn Davies

MY heart is a lute awaiting its master,
 Only one hand can wake its strings.
 Strike it, and humble it. Harder! Faster!
 Hark! It sings!

My heart is a lute, kept strung too tightly,
 Waiting one hand, one touch, always.
 The strings will break if 'tis not played lightly—
 But— Louder! Play!

“DAD”

By

Albert Payson Terhune



Author of "A Complete Tweed Suit," "Articles of War," "The Sword of Ali Diab," etc.

SYNOPSIS OF PRECEDING CHAPTERS

NEAR the end of the Mexican War, when Zachary Taylor was superseded by "Fuss and Feathers" Scott, Lieutenant-Colonel James Brinton, of Taylor's army, was overcome with *pulque* and insulted General Scott. The latter cashiered him. Brinton went home to Ideala, Ohio, where he tried to dull his disgrace with drink. Fourteen years later it is the opening of the Civil War. Brinton, known as "Dad" by the whole town, sees his son enlist for commercial reasons, and urged by his grandson Jimmie, enlists himself as "James Dadd."

CHAPTER IX.

A Lesson in Manners.

TEN days later an interminably long transport-train puffed out of the Cincinnati station. Its three engines were gay in polished brass and red smoke-stacks. All three were decked with sooty American flags.

At the station a brass band was braying and a brazen-lunged crowd was still cheering, for this was the first of the several troop-trains, bearing drafts of recruits from Cincinnati to the training-camps outside of Washington.

The day was stiflingly hot. The wooden cars were packed to overflowing. When the windows were closed the air promptly became unbreathable. When they were open a whirlwind of soft-coal embers and soot from the gaudy locomotive gushed in.

The recruits, however, were as jubilant as though they were starting on a picnic.

Singly there were choking memories of dear ones left behind, and there was perhaps dread of what might lie before. But collectively all was noisy, even boisterous, gaiety.

One car, whose occupants were largely recruited from Cincinnati water-front and similar purlieus, was deafeningly rackety. Songs, cheers, catcalls, horseplay, and the more or less surreptitious circulation of flat, brown flasks were the chief components of the fun.

The officers in charge, acting on a hint from headquarters not to press too heavily the lever of discipline until the recruits should reach the training-camps, did little to suppress the jolly riot in this particular car.

Yet as the racket swelled they exchanged many uneasy looks.

They themselves were for the most part civilians, still new to martial ways and to the handling of men. Wherefore, they had gathered in the officers' compartment at the forward end of the troop-car, where there was

This story began in the All-Story Cavalier Weekly for July 4.

at least breathing room, and left the men pretty much to themselves.

A new-made militia major went through the car, glaring sternly from side to side, at a loss for the exact words wherewith to restore quiet. As he passed there was but slight lessening of the din, and as he entered the officers' compartment the horseplay broke out afresh.

A drillmaster, ranking as first lieutenant and veteran of the Mexican War, looked up as the major entered.

"A few of those fellows need a taste of the cells or the log and chain," hazarded the lieutenant. "And they'll get plenty of both if they keep up this sort of thing after we reach the camps. It seems a pity we were ordered to go easy with them on the trips."

"It's mostly that big bargemaster who enlisted last week," said the major. "You remember? The fellow you told me about—the one who smuggled a flask of whisky onto the parade-grounds and tried to drink during drill? He's cast himself for the rôle of village cut-up. He starts the noise every time. His latest feat is to pelt one of the older men with peanut-shells. He picked out the meekest-looking, oldest man in sight, I suppose, to make the sport safer. Every shot brings a laugh and every hit a chorus of yells."

The lieutenant glanced out of the compartment and down the length of the thronged car.

"It's a dirty shame," he reported as he drew back from investigating. "He's chosen as his butt one of the finest old fellows in all the draft of recruits. A man I've had my eye on since the day he joined. A man with a mystery behind him, I should say."

"Who?" asked the major, waking to mild interest at the magic word "mystery." "The old codger the bargee is pelting? Seems a harmless, unromantic sort of fellow."

"He joined a little over a week ago," replied the lieutenant. "I was

cranky that day, and I hated to see a gray-haired man among the rookies I was drilling, for the old ones are awkward and take twice as long to learn the simplest tactics as the young chaps. But he'd passed the physical exam. and had been sworn in, so I tried to make the best of it. But, as it turned out, I didn't have to."

"Why not?"

"I put him in an 'awkward squad' and started in to teach the squad how to stand and how to step out. Well, the instant this old man 'fell in' I saw he was a soldier. I yanked him out of that awkward squad in five seconds and put him in a company. I kept on watching him. He had the tactics down to his finger-ends. I've used him two or three times at a pinch to help me drill awkward squads."

"Nothing very mysterious about that, is there?" yawned the major. "I've read several more thrilling mystery stories by Poe and Gaboriau."

"The mystery is this," said the lieutenant, ignoring the elephantine sarcasm. "I can't get him to admit he's ever served before. He just shut up like a clam when I asked him. His name is Dadd—James Dadd. I took the bother to look up the name on the old army rolls. There's never been such a name in the United States army. He isn't a foreigner, either."

"May be serving under another name," suggested the major, whom the story did not at all interest.

"Is it probable? Nowadays men are only too anxious to be known as enlisting for the flag. And there are big chances for promotion for men who have served before. He wouldn't be likely to miss those chances by changing his name and refusing to admit he was a veteran. No, it's a bit mysterious. And—"

A redoubled chorus of yells from the car brought the several officers in the compartment instinctively to their feet. Crowding to the door, they peered out over each other's shoulders into the traveling bedlam.

The humorist had just put a capstone on his achievement of wit by creeping slyly up behind the old man whom he had been bombarding with peanut-shells, and emptying the entire residue of the paper-bag's contents down the back of his patient victim's neck.

The exploit brought forth tumultuous applause from the uncouth crowd of onlookers near by.

Dad, who had smiled amusedly as each peanut of the earlier volleys had chanced to hit him, now laughed aloud in tolerant mirth. He had seen newcomers far more mercilessly hazed in his earlier army days. To him the rude fun was the mere animal spirit of a gathering of children, bent on larking it while out for a holiday.

And while he did not greatly enjoy the task of scraping harsh peanut-shells from between his collar and his neck, it struck him as decidedly amusing that a full-grown man like this partly drunk bargee should find joy in such foolishness and that others should deem it funny enough to send them into recurrent and boisterous guffaws.

He was glad, though, that they could laugh. It would shift their thoughts from the grief of leave-taking. He was quite willing to be the butt of their laughter so long as it served so good a purpose.

The bargee, however, was far from pleased at his victim's tolerant attitude. He would have preferred to see the old man stamp and swear in impotent rage or mumble piteously futile threats at his tormentor.

To achieve some such end he came around in front of Dad and, hands on hips, leered down at the pleasantly smiling target of his clownish activities.

"Well, gran'pa," said he, "ain't you goin' to thank me for them generous gifts I been lavishin' so free-handed and kind on you?"

"Certainly," agreed Dad. "Much obliged, my friend. Only you mistook the location of my mouth. It's

in front here, not at the back of my neck, as you seem to have made the mistake of thinking."

Some one tittered at this very mild pleasantry.

The titter nettled the bargee. He desired a monopoly of laughs, and through vexation his merrymaking at once assumed a more caustic tone.

"Kind of a smart Abe, ain't ye?" he queried. "Guess that kind o' talk passes for funny back in the Old Men's Home, don't it? Or did they dig you up out of somebody's fam'ly vault?"

"Aw, drop it, Cy!" expostulated a softer-hearted recruit across the aisle.

"That's right," assented the bargee. "He may be somebody's great-great-granddaddy. Gran'ma starved him and larruped him with a broom-handle back home, so he run away to get a square feed at Uncle Sammy's expense. Ain't that the way of it, gran'pa?"

"Sonny," replied Dad, still smiling and in perfect good nature, "I ran away because somebody stole my comic almanac, and I couldn't get on without it. I missed it a lot—till I met you."

The titter rose again, this time swelled by several voices. The bargee reddened as he sought to digest the dubious repartee.

Nevertheless, he essayed to answer the none too subtle gibe in like vein.

"It's bad enough," he grumbled, "to stand up and get shot at for thirteen dollars a month. But when we've got to stomach an old goat like you, along with the job, by gollies, it adds new horrors to war! You talk like you're the same breed as old monkey-faced Abe, down there in Washington."

The smile was wiped clean off Dad's face now. His eyes were cold, and his mouth was set in a very straight, thin line.

"My friend," he said with slow gravity, "you don't realize what you are saying. So I will explain to you, if you will let me. President Abraham

Lincoln is commander-in-chief of the army to which you have sworn allegiance. In speaking of your commander-in-chief as you have just done, you do not insult *him*—he is too high for insults to reach him—but you insult your army, and likewise your own self-respect. You didn't stop to think of that when you spoke, did you? I'm sure you didn't. But you will another time."

The bargee's head shot forward from between his suddenly hunched shoulders. There was a menacing scowl on his low, receding brow, below which his eyes had narrowed to pin-points that gleamed redly.

"I don't want no lectures," he snarled, "from any fat-headed old blowhard." Angry, the bargee, nevertheless, rejoiced in secret that at last he had roused his foe from his former kindly calm. "And I've got a right to speak my opinions as I choose to. This is a free country. Or it was till they stuck up a lantern-jawed, back-woods booby in the President's chair. That's some more of my opinions; how d'ye like that?"

Somebody hissed. The hiss was taken up from various parts of the car.

But at the next moment every man was on his feet; and on the instant hush that had fallen a hundred necks were craned.

With almost incalculable swiftness Dad had sprung up and faced the bargee. The latter, reading the white-fire message in the lately kind blue eyes, hesitated not the fraction of a second, but struck out instinctively.

The hamlike fist swished portentously through the air.

But the air was all it encountered. Dad, ducking the blow, ran in. Before the bargee could grapple, he was lifted bodily on high.

Down he came. Not to the floor, but to a bended knee that caught him lengthwise athwart the middle of the body. The bargee doubled, face downward, across Dad's knee—like a jack-knife.

One iron hand on the back of his fat neck pinioned his head to the floor. With the other hand Dad smote—smote again, and yet again and again.

Wide-handed he struck and with open palm on the portion of the bargee's anatomy which, in that position, presented the largest and, in all respects, the most convenient striking surface.

The blows of the spanking resounded like prolonged theater applause. The bargee struggled and writhed and kicked. But all in vain. The hand and arm that held him fast were as strong as they were deft.

With no shadow of annoyance on his handsome face. Dad continued to spank, while the car shook with howls of delight from a hundred throats—howls that quite drowned the bargee's lurid vocabulary.

At length Dad paused. Palm significantly upraised, he asked gently:

"President Lincoln is a great man, isn't he?"

"Y-yes," groaned the bargee, after a moment of hesitation.

"You'll never forget that again?"

"No."

"I'm glad. Get up now, and let's be friends. Won't you share my seat? Or—perhaps, under the circumstances, you'll feel more comfortable to stand up for a while."

CHAPTER X.

Sergeant Dadd.

A SEA of pale-green sward, bathed in a drift of pink-white apple-blossoms. Above, the softest of blue spring skies.

In the middle distance the hazy mountains brave in their spring panoply. And, between mountains and apple-orchard, a line of trampled grain-fields, sown now with hundreds of sprawling dead men in dark blue and in light gray.

Back of the glowing white orchard a dingy white city that had sprung to

life overnight. A city of many long streets, each lined with battered canvas tents.

Over one of these tents—a tent large and less dingy than its humbler fellows—floated an American flag topped by a gilded eagle. The veriest three-month recruit would have known the tent by its insignia as the temporary abode of the general commanding.

Through the opening made by the pinned-back flap the interior was visible. At the back was a cot; beside it a shabby campaign trunk.

In the tent's center was a collapsible table, at which, on a campaign stool, sat a bearded man in a gold-laced blue coat which bore the rank mark of a general officer of the Union army.

At attention in front of the general stood a tall, wiry man, bronzed of face, his grizzled hair close clipped, his eye the eye of a boy. Sergeant's stripes adorned the arm of his fatigue jacket.

Few of the old Eagle Hotel coterie back in Ideala would have recognized at a glance, in the trim, alert figure, their old crony, the portly and shambling Dad.

The loose flesh that had accumulated during fourteen years of bibulous indulgence had vanished; to be replaced by hard muscle. The alcohol had been utterly banished from his system by nine months of hard working and clean, outdoor living.

At Ideala he would have passed for sixty; here for little more than forty.

"Sergeant Dadd," said the general, looking up from some papers and maps on the table as the non-commissioned officer's shadow fell athwart his vision, "I have sent for you to act as courier in getting copies of some important plans through to General Hooker. Your success in carrying a message across thirty miles of country infested by the enemy's skirmishing parties last month has been reported to me. That is why I have sent for you now."

Dad's face did not relax its look of military blankness. But a faint flush of pleasure tinged the tan of his cheeks.

The general as he spoke was sorting from the heap before him several papers whereon were written pages, columns of figures and rough-drawn plans. These he thrust into an envelope, which he triple-sealed with wax heated in a tallow dip that sputtered for that purpose on one corner of the table.

Then, addressing the envelope, he sanded it and passed it across the table into the outstretched hand of Dad.

"To General Hooker himself, and no other," he said succinctly.

Dad saluted, thrusting the envelope into the bosom of his flannel shirt. Vaguely he wondered why he, an infantry sergeant, should be chosen for this task in a camp that bristled with aids and couriers.

His former feat of the sort had been performed in a moment of dire emergency, for which volunteers had been requested. He had volunteered, had accomplished the ticklish task, and had thereby won promotion from a second to a first sergeancy in his company.

But as the general spread out a pocket map on the table and pointed to the present position of General Hooker's headquarters, Dad began to understand why a specially equipped man, instead of an ordinary courier, had been selected for this particular purpose.

Dad was familiar with the surrounding region. His corps of the Army of the Potomac had marched and fought and countermarched and bivouacked and advanced and retreated across nearly every square foot of it for the past two months.

He saw from a glance at the map the location General Hooker had chosen for his new headquarters. It was nearly forty miles away, and between it and the camp behind the apple orchard lay a section of country that the Confederate victory of the preceding day would set aswarm with graycoats.

This battle—whose grim harvest still lay ungathered along the mountain foot, ten miles distant—had

driven back a portion of the Union line that was seeking to wriggle its way along the Virginia peninsula toward Richmond.

The several corps were widely scattered.

And in the interstices—notably between this spot and General Hooker's headquarters—were masses of Confederate guerrilla-bands, Confederate skirmish companies, Confederate scout-parties, and even swift-marching Confederate regiments and brigades.

To cross the intervening space unmolested was an exploit easier for a high-flying crow to accomplish than for a human being—particularly when that human being chanced to be a blue-uniformed Yankee soldier.

The general, raising his eyes from the map on which with a pencil-butt he was tracing the route from start to destination, read in Dad's eyes the knowledge of what the journey must mean.

"It is an expedition for a full brigade," said the general, "or—for one resourceful man. I do not underestimate the peril of capture, nor do I formally command you to go. I merely give you a chance to volunteer for the mission if you wish to assume its responsibilities."

Dad saluted again.

"I beg to volunteer, sir," said he with decisive military brevity.

"I was certain you would," nodded the general. "I made the request as a technicality. I warn you, sergeant, that the chances of capture are at least ten to one against you. That is why I wish you to go in uniform. It may lessen your prospects of success, but in the event of capture you will be a prisoner of war and not hanged."

Dad looked more keenly at the speaker. This general of his had not the reputation of nursing carefully his men's lives, nor of placing those lives ahead of successful achievement.

Dad wondered a little at the man's unusual consideration. But quickly

he dismissed the problem as not only too deep for him, but as immaterial.

He was eager to be off upon this hazardous venture. He knew the country. He knew his route, and he was anxious to pit his brains and his luck against whatever foes might infer the intervening districts.

"You ride?" asked the general.

"Yes, sir."

"You will gain time that way. The risk is greater, but so is the speed. Go to your quarters and get ready. I will order a fast horse sent there to you in five minutes. Start at once when it arrives. Well," he went on impatiently as Dad hesitated, "what is it?"

"Pardon me, sir," ventured Dad.

"A man who is captured may sometimes get away, but the papers he has are seized as soon as he is caught. If I am taken and if I get away again without my papers, is there any verbal message that I may take to General Hooker? Any outline of the nature of those plans I am to carry?"

"No!"

The general spoke sharply and in a tone of stark finality, turning his back on the volunteer courier and resuming his work at the table. His manner toward him had all at once changed from the unwontedly familiar to the customarily dictatorial.

Again wondering a little, Dad left the tent and made his way hurriedly down the camp street to his own company's quarters.

There it was the work of two minutes to make his soldierly preparations for the trip.

Then, with nothing to do but to await the arrival of the expected horse, he filled and lighted a pipe, sat down on a roll of blankets in the tent doorway, and with a stick fell to tracing in the dirt a line of his proposed route, that each step of the way might thereafter be fresh in his mind as he started on his errand.

This act of concentration was by no means easy, for a half score of

lounging infantrymen were lying on the grass near by, smoking and talking over the events of the preceding day's battle.

Realizing that a soldier in the ranks knows far less about the actual actions and effects of a battle in which he has just been engaged than does the non-combatant stay-at-home who reads a telegraphed account of it next day in his morning newspaper, Dad gave no particular heed to their frankly voiced conjectures and boasts.

Presently, as they were discussing a certain disastrous attempt to rally a retreating regiment, he heard a newly joined member of his company—who formerly had fought in the army of the West—break loudly in upon the group's debating:

"Talk of rallying! We ought to have had Battle Jimmie along. He'd have drummed that whole skedaddling regiment to a halt in less than no time; and then he'd have led 'em back to the firing-line, blackguarding them for a rabble of cowards every step of the way."

"What's Battle Jimmie?" drawled a lank New Englander. "That's a new name to me. What is it—a dog or a bird or a patent medicine?"

"Don't know who Battle Jimmie is?" cried the Westerner in scornful incredulity. "Next you'll be askin' who's Little Mac or Father Abraham or Fightin' Joe."

"Maybe I will at that," answered the New Englander. "But who the dickens is—"

"Battle Jimmie? There ain't a man in the army of the West who'd ask that question. And yet—I dunno who he is. Nobody does. First time we ever saw him was back in the late fall. We were chargin' a line of batteries on a hill, and as fast as we'd get half-way up the hill we'd break and scuttle back to cover, which sure wasn't none too healthy on that hill-side.

"The fourth time we tackled the hill we hadn't any too much love for

the job, and we begin to waver and get unenthusiastic before we've gone a quarter of the distance. Then all of a sudden, skallyhootin' out of nowhere, comes Battle Jimmie.

"He's in a cast-off uniform miles too big for him, and he's got hold of a drum somehow or other. And, say, boys, the noise he could tease out of that old drum was sure a caution to snakes.

"Right in front of our first rank he runs, hammerin' away at that blessed drum; chargin' up the hill ahead of us in a whole beehive of bullets and grape, yellin': 'Come along, you lazy coots! Shake a leg there! Don't keep me waitin' when I get to the top. I don't want the bother of havin' to clean out them Johnnie Reb batteries all by myself!'

"There was one great big laugh went up that was more like a cheer. It came roarin' out from the whole line. We forget to be discouraged any more, and up the hill we kited after that fool boy and his drum.

"We didn't stop till we was over the breastworks and right in among the guns, and the Confeds was scramblin' out the opposite side to get away. After that Battle Jimmie could have his pick of anythin' the army of the West had in their whole camp—"

The arrival of a roan cavalry charger, led by an orderly, ended the narrative of Battle Jimmie, so far as Dad was concerned. His mind full of his mission, he had given little attention to it.

Now, swinging into the saddle, he set off at an easy canter.

Ahead of him lay an errand whose chances of success the general himself had estimated as one in ten. The prospect of such fearful odds sent a glad thrill of combat tingling warmly through the veteran.

"Jockeys have won races against bigger odds than that," he mused joyously, "with only a purse as reward. It'll go hard if I can't do as well with the country's fortunes maybe as my

stake. I'll win out, or—I won't be alive to know I'm a failure."

For twenty miles Dad rode in safety.

That did not mean he covered twenty straight-away miles of his journey. On the contrary, he lessened the distance between himself and Hooker's headquarters by less than twelve miles.

Avoiding main roads as far as possible; reconnoitering and then making détours when danger seemed to threaten or when fresh hoof-marks denoted the recent passing of cavalymen; going out of his way to take advantage of hillock-and-forest shelter—he had almost doubled the distance that would have been needful had he followed the direct route.

Thus far he had met with no mishap. Once he had plunged into a thicket, halted abruptly there, and dismounted as a troop of gray-coated patrols jingled past on the road barely twenty yards distant. Cautiously reaching downward, he had snatched a handful of sweet fern, and with it had rubbed his horse's nostrils; lest the beast, catching the scent of the patrols' horses, should whinny.

Again he had turned quickly into a high-banked and twisting lane at sight of a dust-cloud far ahead and thus avoided a battalion of Jackson's cavalry.

A third time he had spurred his horse into a gully of red clay on sound of hoof-beats, just before a band of guerrillas, or bushwhackers, had cantered by.

His senses super-tense, calling on himself for every scouting trick that old-time experience could devise, Dad wound his tortuous way safely through a score of pitfalls that would have entrapped a lesser man.

The farther he rode the more fully he realized the truth of his general's forecast that the chances against his winning through to Hooker were ten to one.

In fact, the prospect of any one's making the whole trip in safety was negligible.

The whole countryside was alive with Confederates. Dad could see traces of their passage everywhere. More than once he was tempted to dismount and trust to the greater safety, if lesser speed, of a foot journey.

Halting, as usual, before rounding the bend of a by-road, he strained his ears to catch any sound of riders ahead. There was only the drowsy spring silence.

He trotted around the wooded curve—and passed four men who sprawled, half asleep, on the wayside grass, their grazing horses hobbled behind them.

A glance told Dad the occupation and character of the resting quartet.

They were guerrillas; such as infected both Northern and Southern armies. Irregular troops in demi-uniform, who pursued a system of free-lance fighting, and often of free-lance plundering as well.

He had ridden too far into their line of vision to retreat. His uniform was an instant introduction. The fine horse that he rode was, alone, worth a chase from these horse-loving Confederate marauders.

At sight of the rider one of the somnolent guerrillas opened an eye. The spectacle of a blue uniform set both eyes wide open.

He called loudly to his fellows. All four sat up with the grotesque suddenness of jumping-jacks.

Then they scrambled to their feet and flung themselves at the horseman.

Dad had already dug spurs into his mount. Now he flashed out the pistol he had brought along. But, finger on trigger, he hesitated and forbore to fire, lest the report bring to the scene every possible Confederate within a half-mile.

The foremost guerrilla reached his bridle and jumped for it as the horse darted nervously forward under the sudden double impact of the spurs.

Dad threw his own body far for-

ward and with his pistol-butt caught the guerrilla's outflung wrist a numbing blow that deflected the grasp from the bridle leather.

A second guerrilla clutched at the leg of the rider himself, missed it by a scant inch, and rolled in the dirt from a glancing contact with the roan's flank.

Dad was clear of the men and was still riding at top speed. A glance over his shoulder gave him a momentary picture of the four turning back and running for their hobbled horses. Apparently it was to be a chase.

Dad settled himself low in the saddle, returned his pistol to its holster, and nursed his eager horse along at every atom of speed the mettled brute possessed.

The horse was not fresh, but was strong and swift. Dad, despite his five feet eleven inches of muscular height, was slender and no galling weight in the saddle.

Also, there was every probability that his pursuers' mounts were little fresher than his own.

Yet he was riding straight into the enemy's country, with no further chance of subterfuge or skulking. At any point he might be headed off, or speedier horses might be added to the chase.

He must trust to blind luck, and to no other mortal agency, that he might possibly be able to gain sufficient lead to give the four guerrillas the slip before they could drive him into some body of Confederates coming from an opposite direction or rouse the whole region against him.

And so he rode as never before he had ridden.

Once and again he looked back. The guerrillas were mounted now and in full pursuit, strung out in a long line of three vari-sized gaps. As he looked the second time the foremost gave voice to the Virginian fox-hunters' "View-halloo!"

It was an insult that stung the fugitive to hot rage.

Snake-fences, copses, and fields

swept past on either hand. The roan was well in his mile-eating stride, and thus far showed no sign of distress at the fearful strain put upon him. Yard by yard, he was pulling away from the four laboring steeds that thundered along in his dusty wake.

The by-road, at an acute angle, met and merged with the highway.

Here was added danger of meeting foes. But there was no other course to take.

And into the yellow highway Dad guided the fleeing roan. As he did so he rose in his stirrups and peered forward, the sharp, old eyes scanning the broad ribbon of road for a full three miles ahead.

The next moment he had brought his horse to a mercilessly quick and sliding standstill that well-nigh threw the gallant beast off balance. Directly in front hung a dust-cloud no longer than a man's hand.

CHAPTER XI.

Devil and Deep Sea.

THE campaigner instinct told Dad what raised so odd a cloud on the dry dust of the road. From its position and formation, he knew it hung above a cavalry column of considerable size.

A glance at the road at his feet showed him that no such large body of horsemen had passed during the past two hours. The column, then, was coming toward him.

And between him and it lay no cross-road.

There was but one possible move for him; for already the hoof-thuds of the four guerrillas' horses were growing louder.

Dad wheeled his horse and rode back at a dead gallop along the main road he had just entered.

Past the byway's mouth he sped and straight on. The guerrillas, still on the byway, noted the maneuver and, with a quadruple yell, struck out across the intervening field to cut him off.

And for a brief space their action favored the refugee.

For the field they entered was newly and deeply plowed. Moreover, through its center, in a depression, was a bit of boggy ground almost worthy the name of quagmire.

The horses lumbered heavily over the plowed ground and sank almost to their knees when they came to the strip of mire. The roan, meantime, tore along the hard, yellow highway with undiminished speed.

One of the guerrillas whipped out a pistol and fired thrice in quick succession.

A bullet whined querulously past Dad's head. A second caught him fairly in the bridle arm.

The shot was fired at longest pistol-range, and its force was almost spent before it reached its mark. Yet it bit its way through the uniform coat and the shirt-sleeve, and inflicted a light flesh-wound in the forearm.

The shock of the blow knocked the rein from Dad's left hand numbed his left arm to the shoulder. At the jerk on the bit the great roan swerved sharply in surprise.

Dad caught the loose-flung rein in his right hand and guided the terrified horse back into the road's center.

As he did so a chinkapin and live-oak forest shut him off from the view of the floundering guerrillas.

"They never knew I was hit," he growled. "That's one comfort."

He glanced down at his left arm. Already an inordinately large patch of blood was discoloring the blue uniform on either side of the bullet hole.

"Must have tapped a big vein or maybe an artery," he conjectured, as he saw the blood trickle fast from the edge of his cuff. "At this rate, I'll be too weak in a few minutes to sit in the saddle. I'll have to stop somewhere to stanch it."

He looked back. No sign yet of the guerrillas. He had been too far away from the larger cavalry column, he knew, for any of its riders to dis-

tinguish himself or his uniform. The thick woods still closed in the road on either side.

Dad looked for a likely spot to penetrate the forest.

But on both sides of the road a high snake-fence arose, a fence too high for any horse to jump.

There would be no time to dismount, tear down a panel of the fence, lead his horse through, and repair the gap so that the guerrillas' sharp eyes would not detect the recent break.

So on he galloped, hoping for a gate or a lane farther ahead.

With a deal of wriggling Dad got his right arm out of his jacket and managed to wind the jacket itself roughly around his left arm, that a trail of blood-spots on the road's dust might not mark his path to his pursuers.

Around another bend swept the galloping roan. And now both forest and snake-fence stopped abruptly, to continue a furlong farther on. The intervening space was filled by a soft, green lawn dotted with trees, and cut off from the road by a four-foot stone wall.

Far back on the lawn and bowered by oaks stood a rambling house of colonial style.

On its pillared front porch sat the littlest and daintiest woman imaginable. She was in black and wore a little, frilled, white apron. Her grayish hair formed a mass of soft curls around her forehead. On her lap was a basket of knitting.

All these details Dad's eyes saw without fairly grasping them as he galloped into view. And his heart sank.

He had heard of Southern women's splendid loyalty to "the cause." This woman would assuredly tell his pursuers that she had seen a man in Yankee uniform ride past. She would add that he was very palpably wounded.

Thus would die his last hope that they might give him extra time by pausing to beat up the woods for him.

Dad was turning away from his fleeting glance to scan the road ahead for a lane or other opening, when suddenly he shifted his gaze in astonishment back toward the white-columned portico.

The little woman had sprung to her feet with the agility of a child and was waving her knitting to him in frantic summons.

He had traversed fully half the length of the cleared lawn's space as he saw the signal. Acting on lightning instinct, he reined in his mount, wheeled him to one side, and put him at the wall.

The roan, with a mighty effort, cleared the obstacle, came down heavily on all fours on the springy turf of the lawn, and bounded toward the house.

The little lady had run down the steps and was jumping up and down in wild excitement in the driveway.

"Tumble off, quick!" she ordered. "Get into the hall there and shut the door behind you. I'll tie your horse in that magnolia copse over yonder. It's so thick-grown I guess they'd hunt a week before suspicing a critter was hid there."

Dad rolled out of the saddle in dazed obedience, staggered weakly up the steps and into a broad hall that bisected the house from front to rear. The dim coolness struck him like a blow. He groped for a horsehair sofa that he could just distinguish in the half-light, sank down on it, and slid helplessly from its slippery seat to the polished floor—in a dead faint.

Within a minute he opened his eyes and broke into a fit of strangled coughing. A most horrible odor had gripped his sense of smell.

Above him knelt the little woman. In one hand she held a bunch of feathers torn from a duster; in the other a still lighted match. A fume of smoke from the feathers spoke eloquently of the odor's origin.

"Nothing like burning a bunch of feathers under a body's nose to bring

them out of a fainting fit," she was saying cheerily. "Don't look so wild, man. You're safe enough. Or you will be presently. Can you stand up? Try."

Dad called on all his failing strength and, helped by the little lady and a hand on the sofa-arm, reeled to his feet.

"So!" she approved. "Now, you just lean on me and on the banisters. We've got some climbing to do. Your horse is safe hid. And the men that were chasing you have ridden past. But they'll be back."

CHAPTER XII.

The Little Lady.

GRITTING his teeth to keep his will-power up to the task, Dad began mounting the spiral stairs that led from the big hallway to the upper regions of the house. He leaned heavily on the mahogany banisters on one side, and as lightly as possible on the little lady's black bombazine shoulder upon the other.

Once or twice dizziness again overcame him. But he forced it back.

They reached the upper hall. Dad would have stopped, but his inexorable guide urged him on.

Down the hall they went, and at the farther end came to a door that she unlocked and opened. Before them rose a shorter, narrower, steeper flight of steps.

A Herculean struggle brought Dad to the summit of these. Around him were dim spaces, vaguely redolent of old lavender. Somewhere near bees were sleepily booming and crooning.

His eyes growing used to the dim light, he saw that he was in a huge garret—a garret wherein were strewn quaint bits of bygone furniture, horsehide trunks, ghostly garments in white muslin wrappings, and broken-down household goods of every description.

"Sit there!" ordered the little lady, thrusting him gently into the depths of

a soft, old armchair whose upholstery was shamelessly moth-eaten.

"Now," as he gratefully followed her command, "just stay there till I come back."

She vanished.

Dad stared after her in dull wonder. His mind was still hazy. He knew he had fainted momentarily through loss of blood. But he wondered that he had since then felt no weaker as the minutes had gone on. Gingerly he unwound the coat from his injured arm and rolled up the sleeve of his shirt.

Then he understood.

The vein that had been tapped—it was assuredly no artery nor even one of the very largest veins—had bled in crass profusion for a space. Then the caking of the blood had checked further flow.

Dad was surgeon enough to realize that that meant there could be little if any more flow of blood from so petty a wound.

He was looking from side to side in search of something better than a uniform jacket wherewith to bind the hurt, when again the little lady stood before him.

Tucked under one arm was a black case, under the other were rolls of white bandages. In both hands she bore a basin of hot water in which a soft sponge bobbed like a floating island.

"There!" she said soothingly. "Just you lean back and rest. I'll tend to the wound."

With deft fingers she bathed the arm, then sponged the bullet-graze clean of blood. From the black case she drew a bottle filled with some pungent liquid. With this liquid she washed out the wound, then proceeded to bind it skilfully with a roll of the bandages.

So slight was the hurt that, but for the accident of its touching the wrong vein, it might well have caused so healthy a man no more annoyance than would the process of vaccination.

Yet for once in his life Dad felt no inclination to belittle a physical mishap.

He discovered — and wondered vaguely at the discovery—that it was marvelously pleasant to lie back like this and let his strange little hostess minister to his hurt. Her touch, too, held for him a strange and soothing magnetism all its own. Not for twenty years had a gentlewoman laid her hand upon him.

The novelty of it was delightful. Yet in his heart Dad felt the novelty was by no means all.

As she worked, the little lady's tongue went as nimbly as her fingers.

"Isn't this what Ehud used to call 'rank good luck?'" she was saying. "This afternoon of all afternoons, too. Why, three days out of four I'm as busy as tunket all afternoon. And here, just to-day, I said to myself: 'I guess I'll sit on the stoop a spell and play lady, and do some knitting.' And I hadn't been there three minutes, hardly, when past you came prancing.

"There's another piece of luck, too. Only this noon I let all three of the house servants run over to the Winstons' plantation to a wedding in the servants' quarters over there. And I sent Tom—he's my gardener, the only man slave I've got left here—over to see they didn't stay too late. Any other day they'd be screeching like a pack of wildcats at sight of a Yankee."

"But, madam," expostulated Dad, finding his voice at last, "surely you run a risk, harboring a fugitive Union soldier. It was selfish in me not to—"

"Risks?" She caught him up gaily. "Sakes! I run risks every day of my blessed life these times. When the Confederates aren't stealing my chickens the Yankees are stealing my pigs. Or both of them in turns are stealing my cows. It's a mercy my teeth are my own, or those would have gone, too, long ago."

"Still, there must surely be a risk in hiding me here. You said those

men would come back. And if they do—"

"If they do," she finished, "I'll have to ask the recording angel to blot out some of the fibs I'll tell them. Risk? There's no risk. They aren't likely to search the house. Not upstairs, anyhow. The servants won't know anything, and I don't believe any one will search the magnolia thicket to see if there's a horse tethered there.

"Just you rest easy. There's no risk. Either for you or for me."

"I can't thank you," he faltered. "I haven't words to. But I think you know how grateful I am."

"Grateful for what? For not letting you ride on until you ran into some picket-party down the road? Nonsense! There's nothing to be grateful about.

"When I saw you streaking past my house, wounded, on that fine big horse of yours, I knew well enough no Yankee soldier would be choosing these parts to take a pleasure ride in. I knew by the way you rode there must be some one after you. So what was there to do but ask you in?"

"I—I thought you Southern ladies hated all Yankees like poison. I hardly expected—"

"Southern ladies? *Me?* Dear man, southern Massachusetts is the farthest south I was born. Born and bred there. In South Wilbr'am, ten miles out of Springfield. Do I talk Southern?"

"No. I—that is why I wondered—"

"We came South here, to Virginia, ten years ago. My husband—he was Captain Ehud Sessions—captain in the Mexican War, you know—his health failed him, and Dr. Ballard said he'd best go South to live. So we sold out in Wilbr'am and came down here. We and our daughter. She's married now and living out in New York City.

"A couple of years later Ehud died. It didn't seem to do him any good down here, and all the time he kept peaking for the Wilbr'am mountains.

After he died I kept on running the place here. Because it was less lonely here than it would have been back home without Ehud.

"I've been doing it now for eight years. All alone. Except the servants. But a body that's busy hasn't much time for pining. So— Have I fastened that bandage too tight?"

"No. It is perfect. You are a wonderful nurse."

"Ehud always said so," she answered, highly gratified at the praise. "He knew a lot about doctoring and nursing. Picked it up in the Mexican War. And he taught it to me. I've thought sometimes, if this war keeps up, maybe I'll close the place here and run up to Washington and volunteer as a nurse. They say they're needed badly sometimes after battle; and there aren't any too many of them."

"You would put a premium on recklessness. Every man would be trying to get sick or step in the way of a bullet."

"Now isn't that a real pretty speech!" she cried, flushing delicately. "And a woman fifty years old her last birthday, too."

"Madam," said Dad, right gallantly, "I beg you won't tax my credulity by saying you are a day over thirty."

"Listen to the man!" she laughed happily. "Yes, sir. I'm fifty years old last May. According to the record in my family Bible."

"Never before in my life," returned Dad, "have I been tempted to doubt the truth of one word that is written in the Book of Books. But—"

"Wait!" she said, as though reminded of some neglected duty; and again she vanished.

This time she was gone for fully ten minutes; leaving the fugitive to dream strange, sweet, vague dreams in the shadows of the quaint garret.

At last she came back, bearing this time a tray whereon rested a most delectable little supper.

Dad had eaten nothing since dawn. 'At her behest he fell to with a will.

And as he ate his strength came slowly back to him. Rest and food were steadily repairing whatever damage the temporary loss of blood might have wrought upon his seasoned constitution.

"I took a good look for those guerrillas of yours," she said, as he finished eating. "But there's no sign of them yet. This road, in the direction you were going, winds and twists like a sick adder. They might ride on for ten miles before they could be sure you weren't riding just ahead of them. And they'd have to search all along the way back before they get here."

"I must go," he said, starting up. "I've lost too much time already."

"If you're aiming to lose time," said she, "go by all means. But if you want to get safely to wherever you were riding, you'll stand a better chance after nightfall, and especially after those fellows pass here on their way back. Otherwise you might run into them at the gate. There's much less traveling at night on these roads. Only the patrols. And they generally sing to keep from falling asleep in their saddles. So you'll probably hear them in time to get out of their way. Oh, and I sneaked out and fed and watered your horse."

Inclination for once sided with common-sense, and Dad sank back again in the big chair. The thought that this utterly charming little woman might be annoyed by a search of her house on his account sent his hand involuntarily to his pistol holster.

It was empty.

With a thrill of dismay the man realized that he must make the rest of his perilous journey weaponless.

He remembered thrusting back the revolver into its holster after his brush with the guerrillas on the by-road. He had thrust it back carelessly. And hard riding had evidently caused it to slip out of its resting place and tumble, unnoted by him, to the ground.

His start of surprise drew the little lady's attention.

"What ails you?" she asked solicitously. "Does the wound hurt?"

"I wish it did," he replied in the ponderous gallantry which suddenly had seemed to come so easy to him, "so that I might get you to bind it for me again. But it is something more important than a petty scratch on the forearm that bothers me just now. I've somehow lost my pistol. I have no weapon to protect you in case those ruffians should try to come in; and no weapon to protect myself for the balance of my ride."

"Oh, that's too bad!" she sympathized. "It beats all how careless a man is about losing weapons. Ehud was just like that with his razors.

"Don't you worry about protecting *me*. I won't need any protecting. But if you want something to fight with in case you should be held up on the road—why, I've got just the very thing for you. Take good care of it, though, won't you?"

She darted across the attic floor and in among the shadows; returning presently with a straight-bladed infantry sword of a somewhat antique make.

Handling it almost with reverence, she offered it hilt foremost to Dad.

"It was Ehud's," she said gently. "He set a lot of store by it. He carried it all through the Mexican War. I think I told you he was a captain there. It cost thirty-two dollars and seventy-five cents, including the lettering. Is the light too dim for you to see the lettering? It's on the blade.

"It says: '*Draw me not without cause. Sheathe me not without honor.*'"

"I—I kind of think you're the kind of man who can keep that commandment. Take the sword."

CHAPTER XIII.

The Alarm.

DAD received the weapon from her hands as reverently as she had tendered it. His fingers closed about the fretted ivory hilt, and he read in

the fading light the inscription on its blue-steel blade.

Then he handed it back.

"A beautiful sword," he said, a catch in his voice, "and one that any soldier might rejoice to wear at his side. The sword of a brave man, I am sure. Such a man as would to-day be striking gallantly for our dear country if he were still living. I am honored past words at your gift. But—I cannot accept it."

"What?" she asked, her eyes big with wondering disappointment. "Why not? I don't grudge it to you, a mite. Nor Ehud wouldn't either."

"You don't understand," he explained, feeling as though he had brutally rejected the love-offering of a child. "I cannot wear this splendid sword because I am not entitled to. Such a weapon is worn by none but commissioned officers. I am only a sergeant. And a sergeant is not permitted to carry a sword of this kind. Any more than he is allowed to wear epaulets."

"But—"

"I should treasure this gift above any other I have ever had," he went on, "if the laws of warfare would let me take it. I shall never forget that you offered it to me—an utter stranger—out of the generous bounty of your heart. Please don't think I don't appreciate it."

Reluctantly she restored the sword to its hook on the raftered ceiling.

"I'm sorry," she said. "If Ehud's sword could go on fighting, I'd feel happier."

"If I could carry it to victory, madam, I'd feel prouder than I can tell you."

"Well, maybe you'll be able to wear a sword at your side some of these days. If you're a sergeant now and if you had the pluck to ride alone into this nest of hornets— By the way, *did* you come alone or were you separated from your regiment?"

"I came alone. I am carrying despatches. To General Hooker."

"Fighting Joe, eh? That's a man after my own heart. Where is he?"

Dad told her.

"Sakes alive!" she ejaculated. "That's the best part of twenty miles from here. And all the district just abuzzing with Confeds. You must be brave!"

"No one in our war is brave," he corrected. "Some are cowardly. Some are foolhardy. But the bulk of us on both sides of the quarrel just plod along and do our duty, as I've tried to do mine to-day. It isn't bravery it's duty."

"I've an idea," she suggested, "that bravery and duty add up to pretty much the same thing; whether it's in storming a fort or selling a yard of calico. Anyhow, mister—mister—"

"Dadd," he answered glibly. "James Dadd."

"Anyhow, Sergeant Dadd," she continued, smiling ever so faintly at the odd name, "I know men pretty well. And I believe you'd do your duty, squarely and honestly, whether it was in war or in a shop."

"Madam," said Dad, miserably, "I didn't do my duty in either. And, as for honesty, I have been even more remiss. Why, I have just told a lie that shames me to the soul. I have told it to the ministering angel who saved me from death or capture and who has since played Good Samaritan to me. The only woman in years who has shown me her sex's divine pity.

"I have lied to you about my name. It is not James Dadd. It is James Brinton."

He dared not look at her, but spoke rapidly, his eyes downcast, his fingers foolishly busy with the torn fringe of the chair in which he sat.

"I—I call myself James Dadd," he blundered on. "And I suppose I have a right to. For it doesn't harm any one, and it gives me a chance to be in the army. They wouldn't take me under my own name. But, oh, I love the old name, and it makes me ashamed every time I have to use the other one."

Still, I've always figured—till now—that it's nobody's business. But—somehow I can't lie to a woman that's got eyes like yours."

"Unless I'm very wrong," she said, after a little breathless silence, "you aren't given to telling lies to any one at all, man or woman, Mr.—Brinton. As for going to the war under another name, I can't see anything very terrible in that. I take it you didn't enlist with the idea of cheating folks out of anything?"

"No!" he declared, almost fiercely. "No!"

And again silence fell, there in the dusty, lavender-scented garret.

Dusk was pushing the shadows forward from the mysterious corners and shoving them farther and farther into the little window-lit space where sat the man and woman.

At last Mrs. Sessions said:

"I s'pose all women are inquisitive."

"They must have one drawback to keep them mortal," he countered with a brave attempt at his earlier tone of gallantry.

"But," she went on impersonally, "why a fine, upstanding man like you should go to war under a silly name like Dadd, when he's got such a fine name as Brinton, certainly does make me curious. Not," she added, in polite haste, "not that it's any of my business—as maybe you were going to say."

"I was going to say," he contradicted, "that any of my affairs are also your affairs. As far as you honor me, ma'am, by making them so."

"You say pretty things," she laughed in pleased embarrassment. "I wonder if a woman ever gets too old to love to hear them. Pretty speeches wasn't Ehud's way. But he always liked to hear other men-folk make them to me. It flattered his judgment, he used to say."

"I fancy his judgment used to get flattered tolerably often," ventured Dad.

But she did not hear. Her brows

were puckered, and she was murmuring his name in perplexity.

"Brinton," she mused. "Brinton. It's queer how natural that name seems to me. Because it isn't such a common name either. Wait a second and I can tell you where I heard it. My brain's all full of little scraps of things I've heard and tucked away there. I'm rummaging there now, like fury. Presently I'll find it. Oh, I know!"

Then she stopped ashamed.

"You remember?" he asked miserably.

"No," she denied. "That is, I can't remember but one man of that name. Ehud told me about him. Long ago. And it made an impression on me at the time."

"Tell me about him," urged Dad.

"Oh, 'tisin't a nice story. Besides there's just a bare chance that maybe he was some kin of yours—the name being so uncommon—and I'd hate to hurt your feelings."

"Go ahead!" he begged, in the same perverse spirit that had prompted him, since this turn of the conversation, to pursue it toward the bitter end. "There are many Brintons. I—I believe a man named Brinton was down in Mexico during the war there. Perhaps that's where Captain Sessions heard the name?"

"That was the place and that was the man," she said. "Ehud was in General Scott's army, you know. A captain of infantry. His regiment was on duty one day at a celebration—for some victory or other—and up rides this Brinton man disgustingly drunk and spoils the whole celebration.

"He insulted General Scott something terrible, Ehud said. Then he fell off his horse asleep, and they lugged him to the guard-house; and that's the last Ehud was ever able to find out about him. They never court-martialed the man or anything. Ehud said he guessed Brinton escaped in the night; the wicked old sot! What's the matter, sir? Is the wound hurting you so bad?"

"Yes!" panted Dad. "But not the silly scratch on my arm. It is a thousand times deeper."

"And you never told me!" she cried in genuine alarm. "Here I've been chatting so selfishly with you and never doing a thing to help you! Wait till I fetch you some brandy."

"I—I don't need it, thank you," he replied, "and I never touch it any more. I've sworn I never will. The wound I spoke of is on my soul; not my body. I—"

"I thought all army men drank once in a while. Shall I get—"

"No, thank you. I'm all right again. I don't know that the majority of army men drink. Though a drink is a consoler after a long day's march, and it helps drown the memory of the comrade who was shot to pieces at one's side. But it is a consolation that's not for me. It consoled me too often—till nothing else worth while would trouble to console me.

"Mrs. Sessions, you have been very good to me. I haven't the words to tell you how good; and—"

"And because of that, as well as because no man could lie to eyes like yours, I wanted to tell you something. Something that may make you sorry you've done so much for a worthless old derelict. Something that will surely make you ashamed that you honored him with the offer of your husband's sword. I—I am the James Brinton whose story Captain Sessions told you."

"Land's sake! You never are!"

"And the reason he heard no more of me was because I was dismissed from the service I had degraded, and was secretly kicked out of the army. And because I was forever kicked out of it, I had to sneak back into the service under a false name."

"Is that all?" she asked, quietly.

"That is all—except to say good-by and get out of the house where I've let myself be entertained under false pretenses."

He rose as he spoke; sick at heart,

and all at once feeling very, very old and wretched.

He realized with a queer pang that the last hour had somehow been the happiest he had ever known. And by contrast the future seemed to stretch away before him dreary and barren as a rainy sea.

Dad took an uncertain step toward the head of the attic stairs. A small and determined figure barred his way.

"Go back!" came the imperious command. "Go right back where you were, and sit down there. You may have said all *you've* got to say. But I haven't, by a long shot."

Dully he obeyed her. His flesh shrank from the thought of listening to the merited tongue-lashing that he felt was his due. Yet, like a scared schoolboy, he recognized and meekly obeyed the note of authority in his hostess's voice.

"Now, then!" she said, planting herself squarely in front of him. "Aren't you ashamed, Sergeant James Brinton? Aren't you *ashamed*? Telling me on like that to say scand'rous things about a poor man whose story I only half-knew. Oh, I'm cruel, shrewish old woman to go on like I did about Brinton—about you.

"Who am I to sit in judgment on a poor, weak man whose love for drink overcomes him sometimes? Why, I'm just every mite as bad myself. Without my morning cup of tea, I'm no good at all. I lean on it as men lean on whisky."

"But, madam—" he stammered.

"I want to tell you how sorry I am for talking like that," she rushed on unheeding. "And to tell you that no man who looks and talks the way you do was ever a sot or a scoundrel. Weak, maybe. Yes, we all are. But never bad."

"Would—would you let me tell you?" he faltered, gripped by a sudden, overwhelming impulse to make this wonderful little woman his mother confessor—to tell her what he had never clearly told himself.

She nodded eager, kindly assent.

In a voice at first incoherent, almost broken, but that soon steadied into narrative force, Dad told the whole pitiful tale.

He did not strive for effect. He spared no needful detail. He spoke as though of a third person; calmly, impartially.

When the story of his Mexican disgrace was done, he went on to tell her of his homecoming, his futile life for the past fourteen years, his continued degradation, the sordid surroundings, the unworthy hopelessness of it all.

Only when he spoke of Jimmie did an unconscious softness and a thrill of pride come into the deep voice.

He told of his son's departure for the front, the bedside talk with Jimmie in the moonlight, the escape from Ideala, the kneeling vigil on the hill-top where he had forever shaken off his dead self. Of his later army achievements he said little.

It was twilight now, all over the battle world. The long twilight of early summer. And in the attic darkness left the faces of the man and woman visible only as dim white rifts in the gloom.

Presently Dad's deep voice ceased. There was a hush; through which the far-off throb of a complaining whip-poorwill, from far down in the bottomlands, by the river, came to their ears.

Mrs. Sessions had drawn insensibly closer to the speaker as the story progressed. But she had not once interrupted. Nor, now that the tale was done, did she speak.

"Now you know it all," he said, breaking the long silence. "And I suppose you're as disgusted with me as I am with myself. As General Scott was when I—"

He caught his breath with a gasp. Something in falling had touched the back of his outflung hand. Something tiny, and stinging hot—a tear!

"Mrs. Sessions!" he exclaimed in wonder.

"I—I'm not given to blubbing," she answered, choking back her sobs. "I didn't know I was doing it. Oh, you poor, *poor* dear!"

"You don't despise me, after all I've told you about—"

"Despise you?" she echoed, almost shrilly. "*Despise* you? Listen to me, sergeant! Any man can strut around, pompous like, on the top of the mountain if he was born up there or boosted up there. But the man who can *climb* there—as you've done—who can climb there out of the mire and muck that he's been shoved down into; that man's a—a *man*! And the mud on his garments comes pretty close to looking like royal ermine.

"I'm talking like a schoolgirl that reads novels. But it's all true. Sergeant Brinton, I'd like to shake you by the hand, please. I wish Ehud was here to do it, too!"

Dad, even as he groped for and found the warm and slender little hand in the darkness, could not bring himself to give mental indorsement to the last half of her wish. He was quite satisfied that the late Captain Ehud should remain in Paradise, instead of invading his earthly home's attic just then.

The two hands met in a clasp that each sought to make frank and hearty. But hands are less docile than faces in masking their hearts' mandates. And the fingers that met so formally forgot somehow to unclasp. Dad found the little woman's hand nestling quite comfortably and contentedly in the big grip of his own. And if she struggled to withdraw it, the struggle was so very faint as to escape the notice of either of them.

Dad had risen to his feet. Through the gloom he was looking down at the half-seen figure whose hand he held. And something long, long dead was stirring strangely in his heart and his soul.

Very reverently he lifted the little hand and laid it against his lips; holding it there a moment while the tender

sweetness of the contact mounted like music to his brain. Reluctantly he unclasped his fingers from about their precious burden. And for a space he and his hostess stood staring wide-eyed into each other's half-invisible faces.

Then—

"If my daughter could see me now," said Mrs. Sessions, a little break in the laugh she forced to her lips, "she'd say I was an old fool."

"If my son could see me now," answered Dad, "he'd say I was not only an old fool but an old scoundrel as well. But Jimmie wouldn't. Jimmie would understand. Jimmie always understands. Oh, you must meet Jimmie!"

"I'd love to. I'd love to be just like a mother to the boy who's done so much for—"

"If you don't mind," ventured Dad bashfully, "I'd a lot rather you'd be just like a—a grandmother to him."

Then in the dark there—very simply, like two little children, they kissed.

And on the instant, the quaint old-world stillness of the attic was split by the noise of many pounding hoof-beats.

CHAPTER XIV.

Dad the Paladin.

THE ground-shell of the driveway below resounded thickly to the thudding of hard-ridden horses. Then, with a multifold shuffle, the hoofs came to a standstill.

There were heavy steps on the porch. A hammering broke out, as of gun-butt or sword hilt against the front door panels. And a voice shouted "Let us in!"

"Sakes!" whispered Mrs. Sessions. "I'd clean forgot! There must be a hundred of 'em from the sound."

"No," corrected Dad, his practised ear having enumerated the hoof-beats. "Not more than four or five, I should say. Probably the men who chased

me this morning. They've come back, as you said, and—"

She was gone, slipping down the stairs in swift noiselessness, closing the attic stairway door behind her.

Pausing only long enough to light a sconce of candles on the table in the wide hallway, Mrs. Sessions sped to the front door, whence the clamor had risen to a deafening pitch.

Unbarring the door she flung it open, and stood on the threshold, a tiny spirit of wrath.

"What do you folks mean?" she demanded hotly. "What do you folks mean by banging all the varnish off my door panels like that? Couldn't you use the brass knocker? What do you want, anyway; disturbing an old woman, like this?"

Four guerrillas gave back for an instant—if only for a bare instant—before her indignant outburst. Then one of them laughed.

The spell was broken. Pushing past her, the quartet trooped into the hall.

At a glance, Mrs. Sessions could see they were tired, cross, and—apparently—more or less drunk. They had evidently moistened more than once the dry tedium of their afternoon's search.

"You're old Yankee Sessions's widder, I reckon," said one of the four.

"Yes," she snapped, "I am. But I've lived hereabouts for ten years without ever before hearing rude language from any Southern man. No regular Confederate soldier would speak to a woman that way, either, or burst into her house without a 'by-your-leave.' It's you guerrillas that are the pest of both armies. But you aren't going to be the pest of my house. Out you go, all of you!"

"You spitfire!" hiccoughed the camp follower. "I wish there was still a ducking-stool for scolds. Keep a civil tongue in your head or we'll find a way to revive the ducking."

"What do you want here?"

"We're looking for a runaway Yank. Seen him go past?"

"Why didn't you say so first, instead of cluttering up my clean hall with mud and kicking the polish off my door. Yes," she added with perfect truth, "I saw a Yankee. He was riding lickety-split along the road there."

"How long ago?"

"I don't know. Quite a while back. He seemed to be wounded."

The four moved excitedly toward the door.

"I said so!" cried one of the men.

"Just what I told you. He sneaked into the woods somewhere, and we rode past him. Then he doubled back."

"Wounded, hey?" said another.

"My shots don't miss. I knew I winged him. If we can get another mile or two of speed out of those nags, we may overhaul him yet."

Three of the men were at the door. The fourth, following, paused to light a cheroot by one of the candles on the table.

As he was starting on after the others, he came to a sudden stop. His exclamation brought the three bushwhackers back into the hall. The man pointed melodramatically at a little pool of drying blood on the polished hardwood floor in the full glare of the candlelight. Beside the pool lay a Federal infantry cap.

There was no need for words. The story told itself. The four men with one accord turned on Mrs. Sessions.

She had, as though by sheer chance, taken up a position at the stair foot. And there she stood; magnificently futile and as futilely magnificent as a sparrow that bars a prowling tomcat's way to her nest.

"Well," she demanded shrilly, "what are you going to do about it?"

"Do?" laughed the drunkest of the four. "Root him out, of course. And you're li'ble to keep your hair tidier if you'll take us straight off to where you've hid him."

"I've told you twice to get out of here," she replied, not a faintest trace

of fear in her authoritative voice.

"And now I tell—"

"Yes," growled the man, suddenly turning savage at her words, "and your husband, old Yankee Sessions, told me to get out of his house once, a few years back. I was just out of pen, and I was hungry. I stopped here and told his black butler to rustle me some grub and a little spending-money, or I'd cave his woolly head in. That's the way to speak to niggers. And he—"

"That's the way nobody but 'poor white trash' ever speaks to them, down here," contradicted Mrs. Sessions. "I remember the time. Ehud was sick abed with quinzey and—"

"And just as I'd got that nigger so scared that he'd do anything I told him," snarled the bushwhacker, drink and a sour memory combining to enrage him, "down them stairs rushes old Yankee Sessions, half dressed, and wavin' a sword in his hand. And he kicked me—yes, kicked *me*—out of his house, the dirty Yank. I reckon here's where I square accounts with his long-tongued widder."

He lurched to the stair-foot and caught Mrs. Sessions roughly by the shoulder.

"Show us where you've hid the blue-backed cur!" he ordered. "Or we'll—"

He got no further.

At his brutal touch Mrs. Sessions had involuntarily cried out. A cry of stark indignation, not of terror.

And in the midst of the guerrilla's surly threat she saw the unshaven mouth grow speechless and slack; the drink-bleared eyes widen in crass horror.

The unwashed paw fell inert from her shoulder. The man reeled back a step as though struck across the face. He was staring stupidly at the stairway. And his fellows had followed the direction of his gaze.

All this in the fraction of a second; even as Mrs. Sessions turned to note the cause of the strange panic.

Out of the darkness of the upper landing had sprung a terrible figure. For an instant, as it gathered itself to bound down the broad and shallow flight of stairs, it was vaguely and weirdly outlined by the uncertain candlelight below.

A man, towering, fierce; coatless and without waistcoat. His face was white and distorted with wrath. His eyes blazed in the half-light like living coals. His gray hair was abristle.

Above his head flashed a sword-blade.

“Yankee Sessions!” croaked the drunken guerrilla, in babbling fear. “Yankee Sessions’s ghost! Just as he came at me that day when—”

The man at the stair-head cleared the intervening steps in three bounds. With a berserk yell he was among the guerrillas, his swirling sword giving forth a million sparks of reflection from the candle-glow.

There was a moment of wild turmoil; of clashing, of yells, of madly stamping feet.

Mrs. Sessions, leaning weakly against the newel-post of the banisters, saw an indistinguishable mass of figures, whirling, jostling, screaming; while once and again above the ruck flashed the sword-blade like a tongue of silver flame.

A cleverly aimed sweep of the blade as the knot of men swayed bodily toward the table, and both candle sconces were knocked violently to the floor.

The sudden darkness was too much for the guerrillas’ drink-shaken nerves. Still in strong doubt as to whether the hero who had attacked them were ghost or human, they had made shift momentarily to hold their ground.

But to cope in the dark with a possible wraith—a homicidal wraith at that—was more than they had bargained for.

Panic—mad and unreasoning—possessed them. Behind, an oblong of lesser gloom through the blackness showed the location of the door.

And through the door they surged pell-mell.

Down the steps they rushed and flung themselves upon their waiting horses. Out of the grounds they galloped and down the road.

A hundred yards farther on they drew rein as by common consent. But before they could bring their mounts to a halt the clatter of hoofs behind them sent their scared gaze backward.

By the pale starlight they could just distinguish their half-clad foe—enormous and ghostly in the dim light—astride a monster horse, bearing down on them at the speed of an express-train. The sword still gleamed above his head.

There was no pause; there was no consultation; there was no impulse to investigate.

Swayed by a single purpose, the four guerrillas urged their tired horses to a run. Down the road they streamed, their ghostly foe in close pursuit.

Presently—or, as it seemed to them, after a thousand years of terror-flight—the foremost of them reached the by-road. And, with the instinct of a burrow-seeking rabbit, he wheeled his horse into it. His three comrades followed his example.

They had ridden for perhaps a mile when the rearmost of them paused to make certain of what he had begun to hope, that their terrible ghost-foe had ceased his pursuit.

One by one the guerrillas drew in their exhausted horses. No hoof-beats or any other sound came to them on the summer night’s still air.

Shamefacedly the men looked at one another. Then, without a word, they set off at a walk for their camp, five miles away.

Dawn was breaking as Dad rode into a tent-street and up its long, straight course. At his side was a Union cavalry captain whom he had encountered when the first sentry and

corporal of the guard at Hooker's outposts had halted him.

On a little rise of ground, from which the streets of tents fell away on every side, was a farmhouse, commandeered by Major-General Hooker as temporary headquarters. And into a front room, five minutes after his arrival, Dad was conducted.

General Hooker was picturesquely clad in a mere fraction of his uniform and was gulping down large mouthfuls of very black and very hot coffee from a tin dipper. In his other hand was a slice of unbuttered bread.

"Sergeant James Dadd, of the Blankth Ohio Infantry," announced Dad, saluting, "with despatches from Brigadier-General ——"

He paused in consternation midway in his formal announcement.

To his amaze, General Hooker set down his portable breakfast on a window-sill, gaped in wonder for an instant at the courier, then burst into a fit of unextinguishable laughter.

"The despatches, sir," volunteered Dad, "are of the utmost importance, so I was told by General ——"

"Importance!" gasped Hooker, weak with laughter. "Oh, man! *Importance?* Do you mean to say he didn't tell you? Didn't you even *guess?*"

CHAPTER XV.

Fighting Joe.

"**G**UESS?" echoed Dad, returning the general's amused gaze with an expression upon his own face of gross perplexity. "I—I don't understand, sir."

General Hooker seemed to realize that his habitual, easy informality toward his subordinates — for which they adored him and whereon none had been known to presume — had gone well-nigh beyond bounds.

For he checked his laughter and, with a touch of authority in his big voice, said:

"Make your report."

Briefly Dad outlined the orders given him by his brigade commander, the adventures he had undergone on the previous day, and the clever scout work and hard riding which had marked the night stage of his journey.

Hooker listened with real interest; his eyes, under half-closed lids, narrowly reading the speaker's features. Yet when the short recital was finished the mirth sprang back unbidden into the general's tanned face.

"Sergeant Dadd," he asked whimsically, "do you ever think?"

The odd question, tenfold more strange coming from a general officer to an enlisted man, deepened Dad's bewilderment.

"Think?" he repeated.

"Yes. Or do you prefer to be the supposedly model soldier who works like a machine and who leaves to his superior officers the task of thinking?"

"When thinking can help," answered Dad, "I suppose I do my share of it. But I don't let it interfere with the orders given me."

"Did you happen to think when you were told to ride across nearly forty miles of hostile country with these despatches for me?" insisted the general, the same quizzical look in his half-shut eyes.

"Frankly, sir," returned Dad, "I did. I remember that I thought——"

"Well?" urged Hooker impatiently. "Out with it, man! If it wasn't complimentary to any one in particular don't be afraid to say so."

"I thought, sir," answered Dad, "that if those documents weren't all-important it was strange that a man's life or freedom should be risked in delivering them. And I thought if they *were* all-important there must be some safer and surer way of getting them to you than by sending that same man through a region where there was barely one chance in a dozen — in a score — of his being successful in reaching you."

Hooker nodded approval.

"Good!" he vouchsafed. "And, wondering that, you still did all in your power to win through safely?"

"I had orders, sir."

"And you set out to obey them? Well, sergeant, you did not obey them."

"The envelope—" began Dad.

"Is here. With its contents undisturbed. But it doesn't belong here. By this time it ought to be in Jackson's hands. Perhaps even in Lee's. You still do not understand?"

Dad essayed to speak; then hesitated.

"You set down your general for a fool," insisted Hooker. "Don't deny it, man. Well, he isn't one. He hit on a wise scheme. The scheme he proposed to me last week and which had my endorsement. These papers were carefully made out—lists, maps, directions, and all. For the exclusive benefit of—Jackson and Lee.

"Do some more thinking for a moment and then see if you can't guess the riddle."

Dad had forestalled the command. Already his brain was hot on a trail of conjecture. He recalled what his general had said of the chances against the mission's success, and of the unaccustomed care that same general had taken in warning him to lose liberty rather than life should danger threaten.

He fell to rehearsing what General Hooker had first said. And, bit by bit, the truth came to him.

"You begin to understand?" asked General Hooker, reading his every expression.

"I hope, sir," returned Dad stiffly, his color rising, "that I am mistaken in supposing that my commanding officer sent me into the enemy's country, expecting me to be captured. He said the chances against my reaching you were ten to one, and even worse. But—"

"Ten to one?" mocked Hooker. "A hundred to one—that's how much

worse—a thousand to one. Humanly speaking, there was *no* chance that a Federal courier—least of all a mounted courier—could get through. For forty miles the whole country is alive with Confederates. A trained spy might have hoped to do it; yes. In disguise and on foot and with three days to make the trip. But a mounted man in uniform, with instructions to hurry—there was no chance. Such a man could not possibly have avoided capture. Yet you did."

"The despatches, then, that I have just now handed you—"

"The despatches you just handed me are no longer worth the paper they're scrawled on. Yet, in the Confederates' hands, they would have been worth their weight in gold—no, diamonds—to *us*."

"Then—"

"They were very carefully prepared—for the enemy. They are crammed with vital and categorical misinformation of the most interesting kind as to our movements, our numbers, our disposition. It is an old trick. But the papers were so carefully prepared that, carried by a palpably honest man—"

"I see, sir," broke in Dad, a wave of honest hot wrath driving all thought of discipline momentarily from his brain. "And I was the dupe. The honest fool who would make a blundering effort to get through to you and would honestly and vehemently resist capture; so that on my dead or captured body the false information would be found. I catch the idea."

"A soldier's duty," began Hooker, "is to—"

"Is to obey orders. And in a war like this most soldiers enlisted prepared to throw away their lives blithely for their endangered country.

"I am no exception. If my commanding officer had told me what I was expected to do those documents would be in General Jackson's camp now, and I would be on my way to the

hell of a Southern war-prison. I am not indignant at being used in this way for the good of my country, nor even at being used as a catspaw. But I *am* indignant at failing to serve the cause through my very effort to succeed in doing it.

"If I have spoken too freely I ask your pardon, sir. But, if I may suggest it, it would be better another time to tell me frankly what I am supposed to do, or else to choose some less zealous man as dupe."

Hooker, no whit offended by his subordinate's unusual language, listened patiently to the close of the angered outburst.

"What is that for?" he asked as Dad paused for breath.

And as he asked he pointed toward the courier's left hip. Dad glanced down, following the directions of the inquiring gesture.

Thrust through his belt was the naked sword Mrs. Sessions had given him. Vaguely he remembered placing it there for safe keeping and to have it out of his way, as he had ridden on after the four fleeing guerrillas who had galloped up the byway. In the night's perils and need for eternal watchfulness he had forgotten it.

Now, blushing like a schoolboy—his keen soldier-sense horrified by so glaring an error in his equipment—more chagrined at the unpardonable lapse than had he been caught going barefoot to a Presidential review—shame swallowed his former resentment.

"I—I apologize, sir," he said contritely, "for appearing in your presence wearing a commissioned officer's sword."

"Where did you happen on it?"

"I lost my revolver. The sword was—was given me for self-defense at a house where I hid when guerrillas were after me. I used it in getting away again; then stuck it in my belt in case I should be attacked in close quarters at some time during the night."

"You need not apologize to me or to any one," said Hooker slowly, "from this time on, for wearing a commissioned officer's sword. Your commission as first lieutenant of infantry will be signed by President Lincoln as soon as my next courier goes to him. In the mean time you are an acting-lieutenant."

"Keep the sword. I wish all newly commissioned officers had as good a right to one as you have just shown yourself to possess."

Dad's head swam. He tried to stammer out halting phrases of gratitude. Hooker cut him short with another brusque laugh.

"If we played a trick and you were chosen as the catspaw," said he, "you'll at least bear witness that I know how to reward a catspaw whose claws are as alert as yours. Go across to the staff mess and get some breakfast. Then take a few hours of sleep. You look as if you could make use of it."

Dad saluted with the sword he had drawn and turned to go. Hooker recalled him as he reached the threshold of the tent door.

"Lieutenant Dadd," he said inquisitively, "do you chance to have been at the Point?"

"No, sir. I am not a West Point man."

"Were you ever an officer in the army?"

"You will not find the name, 'James Dadd,' on any army list, I am afraid, sir," answered the new-made lieutenant, shaking inwardly with fear of exposure.

"H'm!" mused Hooker. "Probably not. Probably not. It's no affair of mine or of any one's. But don't deny it too strenuously to other people who may ask you—or, rather, if you don't want them to ask you, don't draw a sword and salute with it as if you had handled such weapons for years."

"Infantry privates do not carry swords. And when they are first pro-

moted, they don't handle them as you do. That is all. Good-by, Lieutenant—Dadd."

CHAPTER XVI.

The Chickahominy.

A BOGGY, tree-strewn stretch of lowlands where whitish mists hung thick at dawn and whence miasma vapors rose under the broiling sun of midday.

A delightful place for duck and quail shooting in midwinter. In summer a rank plague spot—and incidentally, on this particular summer of 1862, the camping ground of the army of the Potomac. The malarial region whose name, even to-day, sends a shudder along the bent spine of many an oldster.

Chickahominy Swamp.

For months Major-General McClellan, commander of the army of the Potomac, had pursued his fated peninsula campaign. Along the peninsula in early spring he had marched his mighty army to the speedy capture of Richmond.

Battles were lost; battles were won. Chances were lost; chances were blindly thrown away.

More than once the spires of Richmond were in plain view to the grim, tired men of the ranks. On one occasion, had they been allowed to press their advantage, they could have charged into the Confederate capital's streets at the heels of a lesser body of foes who were in headlong flight.

But that one golden chance had been lost through official hesitation; and it could never come again.

For Lee and Jackson, by massing their scattered forces, rendered the city impregnable. Whenever fresh danger seemed to threaten Richmond, Lee made a demonstration toward Washington, which caused a rushing of Federal regiments to repel the supposed danger and rendered a mass attack on Richmond out of the question.

So, through a terrible summer of non-achievement, the once redoubtable army of the Potomac lay for the most part in Chickahominy Swamp. Lay there and rotted.

Pestilence did not "stalk" through the camps. It swept through them like the lightning breath of the death-angel.

To one man who died in battle four died of disease. A locality that even the heat-hardened Virginians were wont to shun in summer, Chickahominy Swamp exacted horrible toll of lives from the Northern invaders.

Thus rested, wearily inactive, the army that was the hope and pride of the Union. And at every turn Lee and Jackson outgeneraled its leaders; the Confederate force opposing to the ill-led Northerners' greater bulk a speed and deftness that paralyzed its bulkier foe.

So that at last the North, which had so excitedly shouted "On to Richmond!" beheld in growing amaze the reverses of its bravest sons, and clamored vainly for a change. From Washington, too, came first protests, then rebukes, then an imperative command that the peninsula campaign be brought to an end and the army of the Potomac remove from the Chickahominy pest-hole.

Back from the swamp and to less fatal ground, farther away from the lost goal of its ambition, the huge army was withdrawn, the Confederates working havoc upon their retreating foes.

It was in one of these flank attacks—a mere flea-bite for the main body of the army, but as vital as Gettysburg itself to the army corps directly concerned in it—that Lieutenant James Dadd won his captaincy for gallant conduct in the face of the enemy.

A week later the demi-corps to which his regiment was attached chanced to be far to the left of the massed army on special detail, and was returning to headquarters.

The regiments, marching in close formation, were ascending the long,

gradual slope of an almost interminable hill when their videttes appeared over the summit, riding back like mad, while at almost the same moment from a wood to their left, and slightly to their rear, broke out an irregular line of white smoke.

A masked battery in the forest, supported by several regiments of Confederate riflemen, had opened fire on them.

Before the nearest Federal ranks could wheel to repel the attack the flying videttes from in front reported a large body of Confederates who had somehow gotten between the detachment and the main army, and were approaching at the "double" from the far side of the hill up which the line of march led.

Even the Federal corps commander—a political appointee with three months' actual military experience—saw the gravity of the position. Cut off from in front and attacked on the left flank, they might well be captured as had been more than one equally large body of Federals during the calamitous year.

And on realizing that fact the newly appointed corps commander, who was still weak in nerve and body from a touch of swamp-fever, proceeded to lose his head.

Regardless of the presumably greater danger that was approaching from behind the far-off hilltop to the front, he noted only the more palpable peril in that booming cannonade and rifle-fire from the woods to the left. Being only a temporary fool and not a coward, he stuttered to his aids a series of orders that sent fully half his attenuated corps swinging leftward in close-formation attack on the forest.

Fully twelve hundred yards of open country lay between the wood-edge and the Federal line.

To charge a seen foe is one thing; to attack an invisible enemy who is ensconced in unknown numbers behind a screen of leaves is quite another. And this the advancing line promptly realized.

The order to charge was given. Across the field of fresh-cut rye-stubble started the Federals.

(A charge, in a picture-book, is an inspiring sight. In real life it consists of various blocks and lines and other formations of uniformed pawns moving awkwardly and with exasperating slowness, all in one direction, athwart the vast checker-board. A retreat is far more picturesque and less geometrical.)

Advancing by order, in close alignment, the blue-clad men offered a mark not to be missed. A near-sighted child in the thick wood-fringe could scarce have failed to wreak vengeance in their ranks.

The whole edge of the forest was white now with belching smoke from which spat jets of yellow and red fire. Solid shot, grape and rifle-fire tore grotesque gaps in the oncoming ranks.

With no opportunity to avenge their losses or even to see their slayers, the Federals plunged onward.

First at the double they moved, their officers trotting, sword in hand, at the side of the companies, barking sharp commands and closing as well as might be each new and ugly rent in the lines. Then the orderly, rhythmic run grew shambling.

One man in a regiment's front rank wheeled and tried to bolt back—anywhere out of reach of the whizzing, crashing, viewless death that was striking down his companions at every step.

A lieutenant struck the coward across the face with the flat of his sword and howled curses at him, striving to beat him back to his duty.

But by this time another man, and yet other men, had followed the panic example. Here and there, from the chokingly tight front rank, men had begun to drop out, or to plunge back into the line just behind them, throwing out of gear the exactness of company formations, infecting hundreds with their terror.

It was no longer possible for officers

to check individual cases of fear. Their whole attention was taken up in keeping the bulk of their men in line and in keeping them advancing.

The dead strewed the stubble ground in windrows. The fire-streaked smoke rolled out in a blinding, acrid wave from the nearing fringe of trees.

And at every yard of distance gained the Confederate volleys waxed more and more accurate, the piles of dead higher and thicker.

Unscathed, the woods' defenders were killing by wholesale. And a corps commander's folly was paid for in the lives of hundreds of better, wiser, braver men than himself.

A riderless horse, his back broken by a grapeshot, crawled along the space between the Federals and the woods, dragging his hind legs behind him and screaming hideously above the near-by din.

A major, sword in hand, running ten yards in advance of his regiment and hallooing to them to come on, stopped abruptly, his brown face turning suddenly to a mask of blood, and fell where he stood.

He was major in Dad's regiment.

And Dad himself, as the men wavered on seeing their loved officer fall, leaped forward, sword aloft, to take the dead man's place ahead of the line.

His lean body tense, his mild eyes aflame, the sword of old Ehud Sessions whirling in wild encouragement above his bared head, Captain James Dadd charged onward, yelling to his men to follow. And not only his own company, but the whole regiment, obeyed that call.

For another fifty yards the Federal line—now irregular as a snake-fence—plunged forward; Dad's regiment, the Blankth Ohio Infantry, forming its foremost point.

But flesh and blood could not stand the increasingly galling fire from the forest. Mortal nerves were not proof against the horrible strain of advancing to be struck down by the invisible, with no chance to strike a single return blow.

To have halted, if only once, and to have fired a chance volley, even ineffective, or its effect unseen, into the trees and underbrush whence poured that hail of death, would have been infinite relief.

But the officers had had their orders from the chattering corps commander. And those orders were to advance at the double and to continue to advance until the Federal line should come to grips with the foe.

Despite the frenzied exertions of their officers, the men began to lag. The trot slacked to a walk. The walk to an almost general and very wavering halt.

Dad, hoarse and exhausted, knew that the next move would be a cave-in of the demoralized line, then a retreat that would change to panic flight and a universal hurling away of rifles and knapsacks. Moreover, that soldiers who once allowed themselves to flee in that fashion would never again be the same men.

Their usefulness in war would be impaired by full fifty per cent, even as a horse that once has run away is no longer to be trusted.

The old man redoubled his furious efforts to rally his regiment and to force it onward to the charge. The whole crooked line had halted.

It was wavering like the tail of a kite. Presently it must snap.

Then—from nowhere in particular—from the skies, some vowed afterward—came a diversion.

Down the field, in a line parallel to the woods, and a dozen rods in front of the wavering Federal line, galloped a gun-carriage horse, its harness flapping and flying about its flashing hoofs.

Astride the barebacked horse was a small and marvelous figure. The figure of a short and stocky boy, fiery red of hair, his powder-blackened face freckled, his little eyes glaring. He was clad in the obviously chopped-down uniform of an artilleryman.

On his back, suspended by a strap

that was fastened around his neck, bounced and rattled an enormous drum. In the boy's trouser waistband were stuck two drumsticks.

The lad was kicking vehemently with his heels at his horse's stomach. But as he came midway adown the Federal line he jerked his mount to a halt, slid to earth and, in the same gesture, unslung his drum.

He had halted not twenty feet from Dad.

"Now, then," shrilled the boy, his

harsh young voice ringing out like a trumpet-call, "what're you long-legged loafers waiting for? Hey? Charge, you chumps! Charge!"

He faced the woods. His drum rolled out a deafening tattoo.

"Battle Jimmie!" shouted some one in the ranks.

"Jimmie!" echoed Dad. "Jimmie! Oh, it's my boy!"

"Charge!" shrilled Jimmie, his drum seconding the fiery command.

And they charged.

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK. Don't forget this magazine is issued weekly, and that you will get the continuation of this story without waiting a month.

C O M P A R I S O N S

By Mazie V. Caruthers

WHEN Mother Eve went traveling
 She never had to pack
 Her finery a day-ahead,
 And then—be on the rack

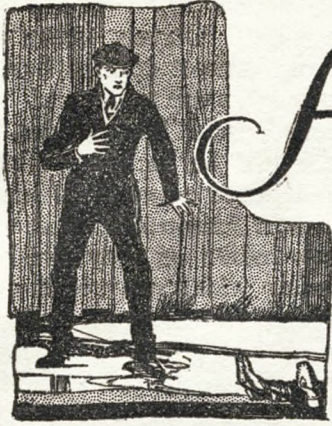
For fear that wrinkles numerous
 Might spoil her bestest gown,
 Or that the trunk-lid on her hats
 Too heavily pressed down.

She never had to fold and find
 A place for Adam's clothes.
 (There's no more thankless task than this,
 As every good wife knows!)

And Adam (bless his heart!) sought not
 To volunteer advice.
 (Oh, would some modern benedicks
 Had habits half as nice!)

Nor, having locked the trunk and strapped
 It tight with extra care,
 Did he discover, had been packed
 The suit he wished to wear.

Oh, easy life when trunks were not,
 And clothes on bushes grew!
 Fortunate Eve, who never did
 The things I have to do!



A Silent Witness*

by
R. Austin Freeman

SYNOPSIS OF PRECEDING CHAPTERS

DR. HUMPHREY JARDINE, who tells the story, has just graduated. On his way home one night across Hampstead Heath, he finds the body of an elderly man. It is gone when he gets the police. He finds a gold locket containing a compass. Later he finds a queer palette knife and meets Sylvia Vyne, then helps certify the death of Septimus Maddock, a boarder with Mrs. Samway. He is decoyed into a disused cellar and nearly asphyxiated with carbonic acid gas. Dr. John Thorndyke, a doctor-detective, helps investigate. While they are in the building they find it afire.

They escape with help of the carbonic acid gas. Dr. Thorndyke is interested in discarded work of a mysterious painter who owns the palette knife. Dr. Jardine is flung into the Thames, escapes to a barge, lands at Folkestone, and there saves Mrs. Samway from a runaway horse. She is much upset at seeing him. A nautical man on the train is very curious about the gold compass. Getting home he calls on Sylvia, but finds himself facing a terrible old woman.

The woman proves to be Sylvia's aunt. A mysterious stranger shadows Jardine and Sylvia. Mrs. Samway waylays him on the Heath to ask about his half-drowned condition at Folkestone. He is guarded, but kisses her as they part. Some one has followed them, he finds. By Dr. Thorndyke's advice Jardine is disguised and hidden in the former's home. Marchmont, a lawyer, brings a client to Dr. Thorndyke, calling him "Mr. Wallis." He is the nautical man of the train.

CHAPTER XVI.

We Meet Mr. Wallis.

THE solicitor ushered in his client with an air of but half-concealed triumph and proceeded with exaggerated geniality to do the honors of introduction.

"Let me make you known to one another, gentlemen," said he. "This is Mr. Thomas Wallis. These gentlemen are Dr. Thorndyke, Dr. Jervis, and Mr. Howard, who will act, on this occasion, as the recording angel to

take down in writing the particulars of your very remarkable story."

Mr. Wallis bowed stiffly. He was evidently a little disconcerted at finding so large an assembly and glanced at me, in particular, with undisguised disfavor while I, my oiled hair, deformed eyebrows, and false beard notwithstanding, perspired with anxiety lest he should recognize me.

But, however unfavorably the nautical man may have viewed our little conclave, Mr. Marchmont, who had been watching him anxiously, gave

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him no chance of raising objections, but proceeded to open the matter forthwith.

"I have not brought any digest or precis of the case," said he, "because I know you prefer to hear the facts from the actual parties. But I had better give you a brief outline of the matter of our inquiry. The case is concerned with a Mr. John Anson, who has been closely associated with Mr. Wallis for very many years past, and who has now, without notice or explanation, disappeared from his ordinary places of resort, ceased from communication with his friends, and adopted a mode of life quite alien from and inconsistent with his previous habits. Those are the main facts, stated in general terms."

"And the inquiry to which you referred?" said Thorndyke.

"Concerns itself with three questions," replied Marchmont, and he proceeded to check them off on his fingers. "First, is John Anson alive or dead? Second, if he is alive, where is he? Third, having regard to the singular change in his habits, is his conduct such as might render it possible to place him under restraint or to prove him unfit to control his own affairs?"

"To certify him as insane, if I may put it bluntly," said Thorndyke. "That question could be decided only on a full knowledge of the nature of the changes in this person's habits, with which, no doubt, you are prepared to furnish us.

"But what instantly strikes me in your epitome of the proposed inquiry is this: you raise the question whether Mr. Anson is alive or dead, and then you refer to certain changes in his habits; but, since a man must be alive to have any habits at all, the two questions seem to be mutually irreconcilable in relation to the same group of facts."

Mr. Wallis nodded approvingly.

"That," said he, "is just our difficulty. Certain things seem to me to

point to a probability that my friend Anson is dead. Certain other things make me feel almost certain that he is alive. It is a complete puzzle."

"Perhaps," said Thorndyke, "the best plan would be for Mr. Wallis to give us a detailed account of his relations with Mr. Anson and of the latter gentleman's habits as they are known to him; after which we could discuss any questions that suggest themselves and clear up any points that seem to be obscure. What do you say, Marchmont?"

"It will be a long story," Marchmont replied doubtfully.

"So much the better," rejoined Thorndyke. "It will give us the more matter for consideration. I would suggest that Mr. Wallis tell us the story in his own way, and that Mr. Howard take down the statement. Then we shall have the principal data and can pursue any issue that seems to invite further investigation."

To this proposal Marchmont agreed a little reluctantly, fortifying himself for the ordeal by lighting a cigar; and Mr. Wallis having cast a somewhat disparaging glance at me, began his account of his missing friend, which I took down verbatim, and which I now reproduce.

"My acquaintance with John Anson began more than forty years ago, when we were both rated as midshipmen apprentices on board the Black Ball liner Carthage. When Anson joined the ship with a cousin of his named Robert Vyne, I had already served one year of my time. I need not trouble you, however, with the details of our life at sea, but I must mention one or two apparently trivial circumstances, because, though trivial, they developed important consequences.

"I will begin with one that seems very trivial indeed. While I was at home from my first voyage I had given to me a little gold locket. I won't say who gave it to me—that is of no consequence, it is more than

forty years ago; but I may mention that it, contained in one-half a tiny charm compass, and in the other the portrait of a young woman.

"When I went to sea again I naturally took the locket with me, and partly to keep it out of sight of my shipmates, and partly for sentimental reasons, I wore it suspended from my neck under my clothing. But the conditions of life in the midshipmen's berth frustrated my efforts to keep the little trinket hidden, and then, to escape the incessant chaff of my fellow-apprentices, I set up the pretense that the locket was some sort of charm, and that I carried it about with me to insure good luck.

"It sounds now a sufficiently foolish statement, but in those days the rank superstitions of the f'c'le found their way pretty freely into the officers' quarters. My ridiculous explanation was accepted quite simply, and the little locket, which got to be known as 'Wallis's Luck,' acquired quite a reputation.

"It is curious, gentlemen, to see how easily people deceive themselves. I am not more fortunate than other people, but, through the medium of this supposed amulet I gained a reputation for extraordinary luck. Whenever I came off winner in any game of chance, the fact was eagerly noted, while the occasions on which I failed to win were passed over and forgotten. And always, of course, any good fortune was attributed to the precious locket.

"I have said that these superstitious beliefs were not confined to the common seamen, but made their way into the midshipmen's berth and even into the cabin; and among the midshipmen there was none so completely saturated with the superstitions of the sea as my friend, John Anson.

So intense was his absurd devotion to Wallis's Luck that, but for obvious sentimental reasons, I would have given way to his oft-repeated entreaties to be allowed to buy it of me. I

could give you a hundred instances of Anson's extraordinary superstition, but I will mention only two, and those because they are relevant to our present inquiry.

"It was in the year 1867, when we were homeward bound and had just sighted the Lizard. The ship was bound in the first place for Havre, but we had a passenger for Penzance who was anxious to be put ashore without delay. As the Lizard was actually in sight, and the weather was fair, the captain put over a quarter boat of which I, being then third mate, was directed to take charge and convey the passenger to Penzance, for which purpose I was provided with a crew of two seamen and one midshipman, John Anson, besides the passenger.

"We put off and hoisted the sail, and for an hour made fair progress, while the ship set a course to the southeast and soon disappeared.

"The land was still some miles distant and only just visible from the boat when it suddenly fell dead calm, and then a dense bank of fog came creeping down from the north and soon hid not only the land but the sea and even the sky.

"Our position was one of great danger. On the strong current we might easily drift right out to sea, and since we had neglected to bring a boat compass, and consequently had no means of judging direction, it would be worse than useless to ply the oars. We were all very much alarmed. A few more hours of fog might see us right out in the Atlantic and as good as lost.

"But here Anson's superstition came to our assistance. In the midst of our despair he suddenly brightened up, exclaiming cheerfully: 'It'll be all right, mates; we can't come to any harm; we've got Tom Wallis's "Luck" aboard.'

"It was an opportune reminder; for though I scouted the idea of luck, I remembered the little compass in the locket. It was only the merest toy,

but still it would show us which was north within a point or two, and that was all we wanted to know. I got the compass out and, to make a long story short, it enabled us to steer the boat toward the land and to bring her at last safely into Penzance.

"The second instance occurred three years later. When the war broke out between France and Germany Anson and I joined the German Transport Service as volunteers. But we weren't long with the army, for less than a month after Saarbrück our little force met a French division and had to retreat, leaving a number of men and guns in the hands of the enemy. Both of us were among the prisoners, and John was one of the wounded; for, just as the retreat began, a French bullet struck him in the right hip. We were both taken to Paris with the rest of the prisoners, and there, in the hospital, I was allowed to visit him.

"His wound was a severe one. The bullet had entered deeply and lodged behind the bone of the hip, so that the repeated efforts of the surgeons to extract it not only failed but caused great pain and made the wound worse. From day to day poor Anson grew thinner and more yellow, and we could see plainly that if no change occurred the end must come quite soon. So the doctors said, and so Anson himself felt.

"Then it was that his superstitious mind turned once more to Wallis's Luck, and at his earnest request, and with the permission of the surgeons, I attached the little locket to the outside of the dressing. This foolish proceeding seemed to give poor Anson great comfort, and he went to sleep that night full of confidence that Wallis's Luck would draw out the offending bullet."

"And did it?" asked Marchmont as Mr. Wallis paused for a somewhat necessary rest.

"Well, no," replied the latter, with an indulgent smile; "but, all the same, Anson was convinced that the locket

saved his life; for oddly enough, on the very next morning, when the dressings were changed, a small shred of cloth came out of the wound. It seems that that, and not the bullet, was the cause of the trouble; for from that moment the fever abated and the wound began to heal. In quite a short time it was completely closed, and has never given him a moment's trouble since.

"Now, I need hardly say that if Anson believed in the virtues of the locket before, he was now absolutely rabid on the subject; and as the sentimental reasons at which I have hinted no longer existed, I made him a present of the little bauble. He accepted it joyfully, and by way of commemorating the services it had rendered him he caused an engraver to inscribe on one face of it the representation of a lizard with his initials and the date '1867,' and on the other 'Paris. 1870.' He also cut the head out of a portrait of his mother and inserted it in the locket; but so fearful was he of disturbing the luck that he left the other portrait in its place underneath, where it no doubt remains to this day.

"After this I lost sight of Anson for some years. I learned that, wearying of the deep water traffic, he had qualified as a Trinity House pilot; but apparently he did not practise his profession very long, for by the death of an uncle he came into a very considerable fortune and, naturally, retired.

"It was at this time that I met him again. I had then also retired from the sea and held a post as secretary to a children's hospital; and it was in connection to this that our new relations began. Anson, who was still a bachelor, and from his solitary habits likely to remain one, had conceived a desire to found a home for the orphan daughters of fishermen of all nationalities.

"He proposed to start this institution on a small scale near Boulogne, and proposed to me that I should help him and undertake the management.

I need not trouble you with details. We started the home, and for a time it was maintained entirely at Anson's expense.

"But later it occurred to me to place the home partially under the control of a community of nursing sisters, and as soon as we did this we began to get pecuniary help from other quarters."

"This is all extremely interesting," said Marchmont; "but—excuse my asking—has it any bearing on your friend's disappearance?"

"Yes, it has," replied Mr. Wallis—"a very important bearing, as you will see." And as Mr. Marchmont bowed and closed his eyes with a resigned air, he continued:

"When the home was fairly started Anson took up his residence in the building where he had a small set of apartments, taking his meals at the refectory table with the orphans and generally maintaining a position as the father of our little community.

"But not always. From time to time he has taken little holidays to travel about and mix with the outer world. Sometimes he would come to England to visit his relatives, and sometimes he would spend a few weeks in one of the great cities of the Continent, looking over the museums and picture galleries. He was greatly interested in art and liked to frequent the society of painters and sculptors, of whom he knew several; and one in particular—an English painter named Burton, whose acquaintance he made quite recently—he seemed very much attached to, for he stayed with him at Bruges for more than a month.

"When he came back from Bruges he told me that he purposed going to England to see his relatives and to make certain arrangements with his lawyers for securing a part of his property to our institution. I had often urged him to do this, but hitherto he had retained complete control of his property and only paid the the expenses of the home as they occurred.

"He was most generous, but of course this was a bad arrangement, because in the event of his death we should have been left without the support that he had promised. It seemed that while he was at Bruges he had discussed this matter with Mr. Burton, and that the Englishman also advised him to make a permanent provision for the home. It seemed that he had decided to divide his property between our community and a cousin of his who lives in England, a project of which I strongly approved. After staying with us for a month or two he left for England with the purpose of making this arrangement. That was in the middle of last September, and I have not seen him since."

"Did he complete the arrangements that he had mentioned?" Thorndyke asked.

"No, he did not. He made certain arrangements as to his property; but they were very different ones from those he had proposed. But we shall come to that presently. Let me finish my story.

"A few days after Anson left us one of our orphans was taken very seriously ill. I wrote to Anson, who was deeply attached to this child—a French girl named Julie Chanot—telling him of this; and, as I did not know where he was staying, I sent the letter to his cousin's house at Hampstead.

"He replied on the 18th of September that he should return immediately. He said that he was then booking his luggage and paying his hotel bill; that he had to see his cousin again, but that he would try to come by the night train, or if he missed that he would sleep at the station hotel and start as early as possible on the following day, the 19th.

"That was the last I ever heard from him. He never came and has never communicated with me since."

"You have made inquiries, of course?" said Thorndyke.

"Yes. When he did not come I

wrote to his lawyer, Mr. Wyndhurst, whom I knew slightly. But Mr. Wyndhurst was dead, and my letter was answered by Mr. Marchmont. From him I learned that Anson had called on him on the morning of the 19th and made certain arrangements, of which he, perhaps, will tell you. Mr. Marchmont ascertained that, on the same day, Anson's luggage was taken from the cloak-room in time to catch the boat-train. I have made inquiries, and find that he arrived at Calais, and have succeeded in tracing him to Paris; but there I have lost him. Where he is now I am unable to discover.

"And now, before I finish my story, you had better hear what Mr. Marchmont has to tell. He has been very close with me; but you are a lawyer, and perhaps know better how to deal with lawyers."

Thorndyke glanced inquiringly at the solicitor, who in his turn looked dubiously at the end of his waning cigar.

"The fact is," said he, "I am in a rather difficult position. Mr. Anson has employed me as his solicitor, and I don't quite see my way to discussing his private affairs without his authority."

"That is a perfectly correct attitude," said Thorndyke, "and yet I am going to urge you to tell us what passed at your interview with your client. I can't go into particulars at present, but I will ask you to take it from me that there are sound reasons why you should, and I will undertake to hold you immune from any blame for having done so."

Marchmont looked sharply and with evidently awakened interest at Thorndyke.

"I think I know what that means," he said, "and I will take you at your word, having learned by experience what your word is worth. But before describing the interview I had better let you know how Anson had previously disposed of his property.

"About twelve years ago he got

Wyndhurst to draft a will for him by which a life interest in the entire property was vested in his cousin, a Miss Augusta Vyne, with reversion to her niece, Sylvia Vyne, the only child of his cousin, Robert. This will was duly executed in our office.

"After that our firm had until quite recently no special business to transact for Mr. Anson beyond the management of his investments. The whole of his property—which was all personal—was in our hands to invest, and our relations with him were confined to the transfer of sums of money to his bank when we received instructions from him to effect such transfer. He never called at the office, and latterly there has been no one there who knew him excepting Wyndhurst himself and the clerk, Bell.

"The next development occurred last September. On the 17th I received a letter from him, written at Miss Vyne's house at Hampstead, saying that he had been discussing his affairs with her and that he should like to call on me and make some slight alterations in the disposal of the property. I replied on the 18th, addressing my letter to him at Miss Vyne's house, making an appointment for eleven o'clock on the morning of the 19th. He kept the appointment punctually and we had a short interview, at which he explained the new arrangements which he wished to make.

"He began by saying that he had found it somewhat inconvenient, living as he did on the Continent, to have his account at an English bank. He proposed, therefore, to transfer it to a private bank at Paris, conducted by a certain M. Desiré, or rather to open an account there, for he did not suggest closing his account at his English bank."

"Do you know anything about this M. Desiré?" asked Thorndyke.

"I did not, but I have since ascertained that he is a person of credit—quite a substantial man, in fact—and

that his business is chiefly that of private banker and agent to the officers of the army.

"Well, Mr. Anson went on to say that he had become rather tired of the monotonous life which he had been leading and wished for a little freedom and change. Accordingly, he intended to travel for a time—which was his reason for employing M. Desiré—and did not propose necessarily to keep any one informed of his whereabouts. He was a rich man, and he had decided to get some advantage from his wealth, which really did not seem to me at all an unreasonable decision.

"He added that he had no intention of withdrawing his support from the orphanage; he merely intended to dissociate himself personally from it, and he suggested that any occasions that might arise for pecuniary assistance should be addressed to him under cover of M. Desiré.

"Finally he desired me to transfer one thousand pounds in stock to his new agent seven days from the date of our interview, and gave me an authority in writing to that effect, in which he instructed me to accept M. Desiré's receipt as a valid discharge."

"And you did so?" asked Thornydyke.

"Certainly I did. And I hold M. Desiré's receipt for the amount."

"Did you think it necessary to raise the question of your client's identity, seeing that no one in the office knew him personally?"

"No, I did not. The question did not arise. There could not possibly be any doubt on the subject. He was an old client of the firm and our correspondence had been carried on under cover of his cousin, Miss Vyne, who had known him all his life. You remember that I wrote to him at Miss Vyne's address, making the appointment for the interview."

"And what happened next?"

"The next development was a letter from Mr. Wallis, asking if I could

give him Mr. Anson's address. Of course I could not; but I wrote to M. Desiré, asking him if he could give it to me. Desiré replied that he did not at the moment know where Mr. Anson was, but would if desired take charge of any communications and forward them at the first opportunity. This statement may or may not have been true, but I don't think we shall get any more information out of Desiré. He is Anson's agent and will act on his instructions. If Anson has told him not to give any one his address, naturally he won't give it. So there the matter ends, so far as I am concerned."

"Did John Anson make no suggestion as to altering his will?" Wallis inquired.

"None whatever. Nothing was said about the will. But," Mr. Marchment added after a cogitative pause, "we must remember that he has another man of business now. There is no saying what he may have done through M. Desiré."

Mr. Wallis nodded gloomily, and Thornydyke, addressing the solicitor, asked:

"And that is all you have to tell us?"

"Yes. And I'm not sure that it is not a good deal more than I ought to have told you. It is Mr. Wallis's turn now."

Mr. Wallis acknowledged the invitation to resume his narrative by a stiff bow, and then proceeded:

"You can now see, sir, that what I said is perfectly correct. The conduct of my friend Anson shows a sudden and unaccountable change. It is quite inconsistent with his habits and his way of thinking. And the change is, as I say, so sudden. One day he is coming with the greatest haste to the bedside of his sick protégée, Julie Chantot; the next, he is making arrangements for a life of selfish pleasure, utterly indifferent as to whether that protégée is alive or dead. As a matter of fact, the poor child passed

away to her reward the day after Anson should have arrived without even a message from his old friend. But now let me return to my story.

"When Anson failed to appear, and I could get no news of him, I became very anxious; and, as it happened that the business of our institution called me to England, I determined to inquire into the matter. Circumstances compelled me to travel by way of Boulogne and cross to Folkestone.

"I say 'circumstances,' but I should rather say that I was guided that way by the hand of Providence, for in the train that brought me from Folkestone to London I had a most astonishing experience. In the carriage alone with me there traveled a young man—a tall, powerful fellow, not naturally ill-looking, but disfigured with the most unmistakable traces of vice and debauchery. And he was obviously suffering even then from the effects of quite recent excesses.

"His excellent clothing was disordered and crumpled and stained with mud, as if in his orgies he had actually rolled in the gutter, and I noticed that he was wearing a brand-new collar, evidently fresh from the shop."

"He seemed, in fact, to have been tinting the village pink," said Lewis, with a gratified smile and a leer in my direction.

"Pink!" exclaimed Wallis. "Vermilion, my dear sir, with green stripes. No ordinary debauch would have got his clothes in such a state. And if further evidence were needed, soon after we had started he began to turn out his pockets as if to see whether he had lost anything during his drunken bout. And then it was that I saw a most astonishing thing. Among the objects that this man took from his pockets and laid on the seat was the very locket or compass that I had given so many years ago to John Anson.

"I could not mistake it. Once it had been mine, and I had been accustomed to see it almost daily since,

Moreover, this fellow actually allowed me to examine it, so that I was able to identify it detail by detail.

"When I asked him where he had obtained it he told me that he had picked it up at Hampstead. But his answers were very evasive, and I did not believe him."

"Nevertheless," said Mr. Marchmont, "there was nothing improbable in his statement. Mr. Anson had been at Hampstead and might have dropped it."

"Possibly. But he would have taken measures to recover it. He would not have left England until he had found it. He was a rich man, and he would have offered a large reward for this, his most prized possession."

"You say," said Thorndyke, "that he habitually carried this locket on his person. Can you tell us how he carried or wore it?"

"He wore it," replied Mr. Wallis, "attached to a ring on his watch-guard, and attached in a very characteristic way: namely, by means of a silk eye-glass cord, which was made fast to the ring of the locket with a fisherman's bend, and to the ring of the watch-guard with two clove-hitches connected by a reef-knot.

"And while I am on this subject I may as well mention another ornament that he wore, though it was not exposed to view. This was a small, enameled gold beetle or scarab, given him, I think, by his aunt, which he wore suspended from his neck next to his skin.

"But now, to return to this young man, when I had heard his explanation and decided that he was telling me lies, I made a simple pretext to discover his name and place of abode. Quite readily he gave me his card, which I have here, and which, you will see, is stained with mud, owing, no doubt, to those wallowings in the mire of which I have spoken."

He drew the card from his pocket-book and handed it to Thorndyke, who

read it gravely, and, pushing it across the table to me, said, without moving a muscle of his face:

"You had better copy it into your notes, Mr. Howard, so that we may have the record complete."

I accordingly copied out my own name and address with due solemnity and a growing enjoyment of the situation, and then returned the card to Mr. Wallis, who pocketed it carefully and resumed:

"Having the name and address of this young man, I telegraphed immediately to a private-detective bureau in Paris, asking to have sent to me, if possible, a certain M. Foucault who makes a specialty of following and watching suspected persons. This Foucault is a man of extraordinary talent. His power of disguising himself is beyond belief and his patience is inexhaustible.

"Fortunately he was disengaged and came to me without delay, and when I had given him the name and address of this young man, Jardine, and described him from my recollection of him, he set a watch on the house and found that the man was really living there, as he had said, and that he made a daily journey to the hospital of St. Margaret's, where he seemed to have some business, as he usually stayed there until evening."

"St. Margaret's!" exclaimed Mr. Marchmont. "Why, that is your hospital, Thorndyke. Do you happen to know this man, Jardine?"

"There is, or was, a student of that name, who qualified some little time ago, and who is probably the man Mr. Wallis is referring to. A tall man—quite as tall, I should say, as my friend here, Mr. Howard."

"I should say," said Mr. Wallis, "that the man Jardine is taller—decidedly taller. I watched him as I walked behind him up the platform at Charing Cross, and M. Foucault has shown him to me since. But that does not matter. Have you seen the man Jardine lately at the hospital?"

"Not very lately," Thorndyke replied. "I saw him there nearly a fortnight ago, but that, I think, was the last time."

"Ah!" exclaimed Wallis. "Exactly. But I had better continue my story. For some time M. Foucault kept a close watch on his man, but discovered nothing fresh. He went to the hospital daily, he came home, and he stayed indoors the whole evening. But at last there came a new discovery.

"One morning M. Foucault saw the man Jardine come out of his house dressed more carefully than usual. From his house Foucault followed him to a picture-gallery in Leicester Square and went in after him, and there he saw him meet a female, evidently by a previous assignment. *And,*" Mr. Wallis continued, slapping the table to emphasize the climax of his story, "from—the—neck—of—that—female—was—hanging — *John Anson's—scarab!*"

Having made this thrilling communication, our client leaned back to watch its effect on his audience.

I am afraid he must have been a little disappointed, for Thorndyke was habitually impassive in his exterior, and, as for Jervis and me, we were fully occupied in maintaining a decent and befitting gravity.

But Marchmont—the only person present who was not already acquainted with the incident—saved the situation by exclaiming:

"Very remarkable! Very remarkable indeed!"

"It is more than remarkable," said Wallis. "It is very highly suspicious. The locket might, as you suggest, have dropped from its fastening and been picked up. But to suppose that the scarab could have broken away and dropped at the same moment and been picked up by the same person is beyond all reason. Yet here are these two objects in the possession of one individual. I don't know what you infer from this: to me one inference

only seems possible: that John Anson has been robbed, if not murdered, and by this man Jardine.

"But let me finish my story. There is not much more to tell.

"It seems that the man Jardine suspected Foucault of watching him, for presently he left the gallery in company with the female, and after being followed for some distance he managed to escape.

"As soon as Foucault found that he had lost him he went to Jardine's house and waited about the neighborhood, and an hour or two later he had the good fortune to see him coming from Hampstead toward Highgate in company with another female. He followed them until they entered a narrow passage or lane that leads up the hill, and when they had gone up this some distance he followed, but could not get near enough to hear what they were saying.

"And now he had a most strange and terrible experience. For some time past he had felt a suspicion that some person—some accomplice of Jardine's, perhaps—was following and watching him, and now he had proof of it. At the top of the lane Jardine stopped to talk to the female, and Foucault crept on tiptoe toward him, and while he was doing so he heard some one approaching stealthily up the lane, behind him.

"Suddenly Jardine began to return down the lane. As it was not convenient for Foucault to meet him there, he also turned and walked back, and then he heard a sound as if some one were climbing the high wooden fence that enclosed the lane.

"Then Jardine began to run, and Foucault was compelled also to run, but he would have been overtaken if it had not happened that Jardine fell down.

"Now, just as he heard Jardine fall he came to a broken place in the fence, and it occurred to him to creep through the hole and hide while Jardine passed. He accordingly began to

do so, but no sooner had he thrust his head through the hole than some unseen ruffian dealt him a violent blow which rendered him instantly insensible. When he recovered his senses he found himself lying in a churchyard which adjoins the lane, but Jardine and the other ruffian were, of course, nowhere to be seen.

"And now I come to the last incident that I have to relate. The assault took place on a Saturday; on the Sunday M. Foucault was somewhat indisposed and unable to go out; but early on Monday he resumed his watch on Jardine's house. It was nearly noon when Jardine came out, dressed as if for traveling and carrying a valise.

"He went first to a house near Piccadilly, and from thence to the hospital in a cab. Foucault followed in another cab and saw him go into the hospital, and waited for him to come out.

"But he never came. Foucault waited until midnight, but he did not come out. He had vanished."

"He had probably come out by a back exit and gone home," said Marchmont.

"Not so," replied Wallis. "The next day Foucault watched Jardine's house, but he did not come there. Then he made inquiries, but Jardine is not there, and the landlady does not know where he is. Also the porter at the hospital knows nothing and is not at all polite. The man Jardine has disappeared as if he had never been."

"That, really, is rather queer," said Marchmont. "It is a pity that you did not give me all these particulars at first. However, that can't be helped now. Is this all that you have to tell us?"

"It is all, unless there is anything that you wish to ask me."

"I think," said Thorndyke, "that it would be well for us to have a description of Mr. Anson, and, as we have to trace him, if possible, a photograph would be exceedingly useful."

"I have not a photograph with me," said Mr. Wallis, "but I will obtain one and send it to you. Meanwhile I will tell you what my friend Anson is like. He is sixty-two years of age, spare, upright, rather tall—his height is, roughly, five feet nine. His hair is nearly white, he is clean shaven, with the exception of a small fringe of whitish beard under his chin; he has gray eyes, a straight nose, not very prominent, and remarkably good teeth for his age, which he shows somewhat when he talks.

"I think he is a little vain about his teeth, and he well may be, for there are not many men of sixty-two who have not a single false tooth, nor even one that has been stopped by the dentist. As to his clothes, he continues to wear the dress which was customary among the Trinity House pilots before the present uniform was introduced; namely, a frock coat, tall hat, white waistcoat and a shawl over it when out of doors. He also wears gloves, habitually, even when indoors."

"Is there any reason for his wearing gloves?" Thorndyke asked.

"Not now. The habit began when he had some affection of the skin which made it necessary for him to keep his hands covered with gloves which contained some ointment or dressing, and afterward for a time to conceal the disagreeable appearance of the skin. The habit having been once formed, he continued it, saying that his hands were more comfortable covered up than when exposed to the air."

"Was he dressed in this fashion when he called at your office, Marchmont?" asked Thorndyke.

"Yes. Even to the shawl and the gloves. I noticed, with some surprise, that he did not take the latter off even when he wrote and signed the note of which I told you."

"Was he then wearing the locket, as Mr. Wallis has described, on the front of his waistcoat?"

"He may have been, but I didn't

notice it, as I fancy I should have done if it had been there."

"And you have nothing more to tell us, Mr. Wallis, as to your friend's personal appearance?"

"No. I will send you the photograph and write to you if I think of anything that I have forgotten. And now, perhaps you can tell me if you think that you will be able to answer those questions that Mr. Marchmont put to you."

"I cannot, of course, answer them now," replied Thorndyke. "The facts that you have given us will have to be considered and compared, and certain inquiries will have to be made. Are you staying long in England?"

"I shall be here for at least a month and I may as well leave you my address, although Mr. Marchmont has it."

"In the course of a month," Thorndyke said, as he took the proffered card, "I think I may promise you that we shall have settled definitely whether your friend is alive or dead; and if we find that he is alive we shall, no doubt, be able to ascertain his whereabouts."

"That is very satisfactory," said Mr. Wallis. "I hope you will be able to make good your promise."

With this he rose, and having shaken hands stiffly with Thorndyke, bestowed on Jervis and me a ceremonious bow and moved toward the door.

I thought that Marchmont looked a little wistful, as if he would have liked to stay and have a few words with us alone; indeed, he lingered for a moment or two after the door was open; but then, apparently altering his mind, he wished us "good night" and followed his client.

CHAPTER XVII.

The Palimpsest.

IT was getting late when our friends left us, but nevertheless, as soon as they were gone, we all drew our chairs

up to the fire with the obvious intention of discussing the situation, and began, with one accord, to fill our pipes.

Jervis was the first to get his tobacco alight, and having emitted a voluminous preliminary puff he proceeded to open the debate.

"That man Jardine seems to be a pretty desperate character. Just think of his actually wallowing in the mire—not merely rolling, mind you, but wallowing—and of his repulsive habit of consorting with females; one after the other, too, in rapid succession. It's a shocking instance of depravity."

"Our friend," said Thorndyke, "reaches his conclusions by a rather short route—in some cases, at least; in others, his methods seem a little indirect and roundabout."

"Yes," agreed Jervis, "he's a devil at guessing. But he didn't get much food for the imagination out of the man, Thorndyke. Why were you so extraordinarily secretive? With what he told you, and what you knew before, you could surely have suggested a line of inquiry. Why didn't you?"

"Principally because of the man's personality. I could not have answered his questions; I could only have suggested one or two highly probable solutions of the problem that he offered, and partial solutions at that. But I am not much addicted to giving partial solutions; to handing over the raw material of a promising inquiry. Certainly not to a man like this, who seems incapable of a straightforward action."

"The worthy and pious Wallis," said Jervis, "does certainly seem to be a rather unnecessarily downy bird. And he doesn't seem to have got much by his excessive artfulness after all."

"No," agreed Thorndyke; "nothing whatever. Quite the contrary, in fact. Look at his ridiculous conduct in respect of 'the man Jardine.' I don't complain of his having taken the precaution to obtain that malefactor's address, but when he had got it if he

had not been so tortuous, so eager to be cunning; if, in short, he had behaved like an ordinary sensible man, he would have got, at once, all the information that Jardine had to give.

"He could have called on Jardine, written to him, employed a lawyer or applied to the police. Either of these simple and obvious plans would have been successful; instead of which he must needs go to the trouble and expense of engaging this absurd spy."

"Who found a mare's nest and got his head thumped," remarked Jervis.

"Then," continued Thorndyke, "look at his behavior to Marchmont. Evidently he put the case into Marchmont's hands, but, equally evident he withheld material facts and secretly tinkered at the case himself. No, Jervis, I give no information to Mr. Wallis until I have this case complete to the last rivet.

"But, all the same, I am greatly obliged to him, and especially to Marchmont for bringing him here. He has given us a connected story to collate with our rather loose collection of facts and, what is perhaps more important, he has put our investigation on a business footing. That is a great advantage. If I should want to invoke the aid of the powers that be, I can do so now with a definite *locus standi* as the legal representative of interested parties."

"I can't imagine," said I, "in what direction you are going to push your inquiries. Mr. Wallis has given us, as you say, a connected story, but it is a very unexpected one, to me, at least, and does not fall into line at all with what we know; that is, if you are assuming, as I have been, that the man whom I saw lying in Millfield Lane was John Anson."

"It is difficult," replied Thorndyke, "to avoid that assumption, though we must be on our guard against coincidences; but the man whom you saw agreed with the description that has been given to us; we know that Anson was in the neighborhood on that day,

and you found the locket on the following morning in the immediate vicinity. We seem to be committed to the hypothesis that the man was Anson unless we can prove that he was some one else, or that Anson was in some other place at the time, which, at present, we cannot."

"Then," said I, "in that case the policeman must have been right, after all. The man couldn't have been dead, seeing that he called on Marchmont the following day and was afterward traced to Paris. But I must say that he looked as dead as Queen Anne. It just shows how careful one ought to be in giving opinions."

"Some authority has said," remarked Jervis, "that the only conclusive proof of death is decomposition. I believe it was old Taylor who said so, and I am inclined to think that he wasn't far wrong."

"But," said Thorndyke, "assuming that the man whom you saw was Anson and that he was not dead, how do you explain the other circumstances? Was he insensible from the effects of injury or drugs? Or was he deliberately shamming insensibility? Was it he who passed over the fence? And, if so, did he climb over unassisted, or was he helped over?"

"And what answers do you suggest to the questions that Marchmont propounded? You answer his first question, 'Is Anson alive?' in the affirmative. What about the others?"

"As to where he is," I replied, "I can only say, the Lord knows; probably skulking somewhere on the Continent. As to his state of mind, the facts seem to suggest that, in vulgar parlance, he has gone off his onion. He must be as mad as a hatter to have behaved in the way that he has. For, even assuming that he wanted to get clear of Wallis and the orphanage without explicitly saying so, he adopted a fool's plan. There is no sense in masquerading as a corpse one day and turning up smiling at your lawyer's office the next. If he meant to be dead,

he should have stuck to it and remained dead."

"The objection to that," said Jervis, "is that Marchmont would have proceeded to get permission to presume death and administer the will."

"I see. Then I can only suppose that he had got infected by Wallis and resolved to be artful at all costs and hang the consequences."

"Then," said Thorndyke, "I understand your view to be that Anson is at present hiding somewhere on the Continent, and that his mind is more or less affected?"

"Yes. Though as to his being unfit to control his own affairs, I am not so clear. I fancy there was more evidence in that direction when he was forking out the bulk of his income to maintain a sort of international repository for female orphans. But the truth is, I haven't any opinions on the case at all. I am in a complete fog about the whole affair."

"And no wonder," said Jervis. "One set of facts seems to suggest most strongly that Anson must certainly be dead. Another set of facts seems to prove beyond doubt that he was alive—at least after that affair in Millfield Lane. He may be perpetrating an elephantine practical joke on Wallis and the orphans; but that doesn't seem to be particularly probable. The whole case is a tangle of contradictions which one might regard as beyond unravelment, if it were not for a single clear and intelligible fact."

"What is that?" I asked.

"That my revered senior has undertaken to furnish a solution in the course of a month; from which I gather that my revered senior has something up his sleeve."

"There is nothing up my sleeve," said Thorndyke, "that might not equally well be up yours. I have made no separate investigations. The actual data which I possess were acquired in the presence of one or both of you, and are now the common property of us all. I am referring, of course, to

the original data, not to fresh matter obtained by inference from or further examination of those data."

Jervis smiled sardonically.

"It is the old story," said he. "The magician offers you his hat to inspect. 'You observe, ladies and gentlemen, that there is no deception. You may look inside it and examine the lining, and you can also inspect the top of my head. I now put on my hat. I now take it off again, and you notice that there is a guinea-pig sitting in it. There was no deception, ladies and gentlemen; you had all the data.'"

Thorndyke laughed and shook his head.

"That's all nonsense, Jervis," he said. "It is a false analogy. I have done nothing to divert your attention. The guinea-pig has been staring you in the face all the time."

"Very rude of him," murmured Jervis.

"I have even drawn your attention to him once or twice. But, seriously, I don't think that this case is so very obscure; though, mind you, it is a mere hypothesis, so far as I am concerned, and may break down completely when I come to apply the tests that I have in view. But what I mean is that the facts known to us suggested a very obvious hypothesis, and that the suggestion was offered equally to us all. The verification may fail, but that is another matter."

"Are you going to work at the case immediately?" I asked.

"No," Thorndyke replied. "Jervis and I have to attend at the Maidstone Assizes for the next few days. We are retained on a case which involves some very important issues in relation to life assurance, and that will take up most of our time. So this other affair will have to wait."

"And meanwhile," said Jervis, "you will stay at home like a good boy and mind the shop; and I suppose we shall have to find you something to do to keep you out of mischief. What do you say to making a long-hand

transcript of friend Wallis's statement?"

"Yes, you had better do that," said Thorndyke, "and attach it to the original short-hand copy. And now we must really turn in, or we shall never be ready for our start in the morning."

The transcription of Mr. Wallis's statement gave me abundant occupation for the whole of the following morning. But when that was finished I was without any definite employment; and though I was not in the least dull—for I was accustomed to a solitary life—I suppose I was in that state of susceptibility to mischief that is proverbially associated with unemployment.

And in these untoward circumstances I was suddenly exposed to a great temptation and, after some feeble efforts at resistance, succumbed ignominiously.

I shall offer no excuses for my conduct nor seek in any way to mitigate the judgment that all discreet persons will pass upon my folly. I make no claims to discretion or to the caution and foresight of a man like Thorndyke.

At this time I was an impulsive and rather heedless young man, and my actions were pretty much those which might have been expected from a person of such temperament.

The voice of the tempter issued, in the first place, from our letter-box and assumed the sound of the falling of letters thereinto. I hastened to extract the catch, and sorting out the envelopes, selected one the superscription of which was in Sylvia's now familiar handwriting.

It was actually addressed to Dr. Thorndyke, but a private mark, on which we had agreed, exposed that naively pious fraud and gave me the right to open it; which I did, and seated myself in the armchair to enjoy its perusal at my ease.

It was a delightful letter, bright, gossipy, and full of frank and intimate friendliness. As I read it the trim,

graceful figure and pretty face of the writer rose before me and made me wonder a little discontentedly how long it would be before I should look on her and hear her voice again.

It was now getting into the third week since I had last seen her, and as the time passed I was feeling more and more how great a blank in my life the separation from her had caused.

Our friendship had grown up in a quiet and unsensational fashion, and I suppose I had not realized all that it meant; but I was realizing it now. As I coned over her letter, with its little personal notes and familiar turns of expression, I began to be consumed with a desire to see her, to hear her speak, to tell her that she was not as other women to me, and to claim a like special place in her thoughts.

It was toward the end of the letter that the tempter spoke out in clear and unmistakable language, and these were the words that he used, through the medium of the innocent and unconscious Sylvia:

You remember those sketches that you stole for me—"pinched," I think was your own expression? Well, I have cleaned off the daubs of paint with which they had been disfigured and put them in rough frames in my studio.

All but one, and I began on that yesterday with a scraper and a rag dipped in chloroform. But I took off not only the defacing marks, but part of the surface as well; and then I got such a surprise! I shan't tell you what the surprise was, because you'll see when you come out of the house of bondage.

I am going to work on it again to-morrow, and perhaps I shall get the transformation finished. How I wish you could come and see it done! It takes away more than half the joy of exploration not to be able to share the discovery with you; in fact, I have a good mind to leave it unfinished so that we can complete the transformation together.

Now, I need not say that as to the precious sketches I cared not a fig what was under the top coat of paint. What I did care for was that this dear maid was missing me as I missed her; was wanting my sympathy with her little

interests and pleasures, and was telling me, half unconsciously, perhaps, that my absence had created a blank in her life as her absence had in mine.

And forthwith I began to ask myself whether there was really any good reason why I should not, just for this once, break out of my prison and snatch a few brief hours of sunshine.

The spy had been exploded. He was not likely to pick up my tracks after all this time, and now that my appearance was so altered; and I did not care much if he did, seeing that he had been shown to be perfectly harmless.

The only circumstances that tended to restrain me from this folly was the one that mitigated its rashness—the change in my appearance; and even that, now that I was used to it and knew that my aspect was neither grotesque nor ridiculous, had little weight, for Sylvia would be prepared for the change and we could enjoy the joke together.

I was aware, even at the time, that I was not being quite candid with myself, for if I had been I should obviously have consulted Thorndyke.

Instead of which I answered the letter by return, announcing my intention of coming to tea on the following day; and having sent Polton out to post it, spent the remainder of the afternoon in gleeful anticipation of my little holiday, tempered by some nervousness as to what Thorndyke would have to say on the matter, and as to what "my pretty friend," as Mrs. Samway had very appropriately called her, would think of my having begun my letter with the words, "My dear Sylvia."

Nothing happened to interfere with my nefarious plans.

On the following morning Thorndyke and Jervis went off after an early breakfast, leaving me in possession of the premises and master of my actions.

I elected to anticipate the usual luncheon time by half an hour, and, when this meal was disposed of, I crept to my room and thoroughly

cleansed my hair of the grease which Polton still persisted in applying to it, for, since my hat would conceal it while I was out of doors, the added disfigurement was unnecessary.

I was even tempted to tamper slightly with my eyebrows, but this impulse I nobly resisted, and, having dried my hair and combed it in its normal fashion, I descended on tiptoe to the sitting-room and wrote a short, explanatory note to Polton, which I left conspicuously on the table.

Then I switched the door-bell on to the laboratory, and letting myself out like a retreating burglar, closed the door silently and sneaked away down the dark staircase.

Once fairly outside I went off like a lamplighter and, shooting out through the Tudor Street gate, made my way eastward to Broad Street station, where I was fortunate enough to catch a train that was just on the point of starting.

At Hampstead Heath station I got out, and snuffing the air joyfully, set forth at my best pace up the slope that leads to the summit. In little over twenty minutes I found myself at the gate of "The Hawthorns."

There was no need to knock or ring. My approach had been observed from the window and, as I strode up the garden path the door opened and Sylvia ran out to meet me.

"It *was* nice of you to come!" she exclaimed as I took her hand and held it in mine. "I don't believe you ought to have ventured out, but I am most delighted all the same. Don't make a noise: Mopsy is having a little doze in the drawing-room. Come into the morning-room and let me have a good look at you."

I followed her meekly into the front room, where in the large bay window she inspected me critically, her cheeks dimpling with a mischievous smile.

"There's something radically wrong about your eyebrows," she said, "but, really, you are not in the least the fright that you made out. As to

the beard and mustache, I am not sure that I don't rather like them."

"I hope you don't," I replied, "because, off they come at the first opportunity—unless, of course, you forbid it."

"Does my opinion of your appearance matter so much, then?"

"It matters entirely. I don't care what I look like to any one else."

"Oh! What a fib!" exclaimed Sylvia. "Don't I remember how very neatly turned out you always were when you used to pass me in the lane before we knew one another?"

"Exactly," I retorted. "We didn't know one another then. That makes all the difference in the world—to me, at any rate."

"Does it?" she said, coloring a little and looking at me thoughtfully. "It's very—very flattering of you to say so, Dr. Jardine."

"I hope you don't mean that as a snub," I said, rather uneasy at the form of her reply and thinking of my letter.

"A snub!" she exclaimed. "No, I certainly don't. What did I say?"

"You called me Dr. Jardine. I addressed you in my letter as 'Sylvia'—'My dear Sylvia'."

"And what ought I to have said?" she asked, blushing warmly and casting down her eyes.

"Well, Sylvia, if you liked me as well as I like you, I don't see why you shouldn't call me Humphrey. We are quite old friends now."

"So we are," she agreed; "and perhaps it *would* be less formal. So Humphrey it shall be in future, since that is your royal command. But tell me, how did you prevail on Dr. Thorndyke to let you come here? Is there any change in the situation?"

"There's a change in my situation, and a mighty agreeable change, too. I'm here."

"Now don't be silly. How did you persuade Dr. Thorndyke to let you come?"

"Ha — that, my dear Sylvia, is a

rather embarrassing question. Shall we change the subject?"

"No, we won't."

She looked at me suspiciously for a moment and then exclaimed in low, tragical tones:

"Humphrey! You don't mean to tell me that you came away without his knowledge?"

"I'm afraid that is what it amounts to. I saw a loophole and I popped through it; and here I am, as I remarked before."

"But how dreadful of you! Perfectly shocking! And whatever will he say to you when you go back?"

"That is a question that I am not proposing to present vividly to my consciousness until I arrive on the doorstep. I've broken out of chokee and I'm going to have a good time—to go on having a good time, I should say."

"Then you consider that you are having a good time now?"

"I don't consider. I am sure of it. Am I not at this very moment looking at you? And what more could a man desire?"

She tried to look severe, though the attempt was not strikingly successful, and retorted in an admonishing tone:

"You needn't try to wheedle me with compliments. You are a very wicked person and most indiscreet. But it seems to me that some sort of change has come over you since you retired from the world. Am I not right?"

"You're perfectly right. I've improved. That's what it is. Matured and mellowed, you know, like a bottle of claret that has been left in a cellar and forgotten. Say you think I've improved, Sylvia."

"I won't," she replied; and then, changing her mind, she added: "Yes, I will. I'll say that you are more insinuating than ever, if that will do. And now, as you are clearly quite incorrigible, I won't scold you any more, especially as you 'broke out of chokee' to come and see me. You shall tell me all about your adventures."

"I didn't come here to talk about myself, Sylvia. I came to tell you something—well, about myself, perhaps, but—er—not my adventures you know or—or that sort of thing—but, I have been thinking a good deal since I have been alone so much—about you, I mean, Sylvia—and—er— Oh! the deuce!"

The latter exclamation was evoked by the warning voice of the gong, evidently announcing tea, and the subsequent appearance of the housemaid. She was certainly not such a goose as she was supposed to be, for she tapped discreetly at the door and waited three full seconds before entering; and even then she appeared demurely unconscious of my existence.

"If you please, Miss Sylvia, Miss Vyne has woke up and I've taken in the tea."

Such was the paltry interruption that arrested the flow of my eloquence and scattered my flowers of rhetoric to the winds.

I murmured inwardly, "Blow the tea!" for the opportunity was gone; but I comforted myself with the reflection that it didn't matter very much since Sylvia and I seemed to have arrived at a pretty clear understanding, which understanding was further clarified by a momentary contact of our hands as we followed the maid to the drawing-room.

Miss Vyne on this occasion, as on the last, was seated in the exact center of the room, and with the same monumental effect; so that my thoughts were borne irresistibly to the ethnographical section of the British Museum, and especially to that part of it wherein the deities of Polynesia look out from their cases in perennial surprise at the degenerate European visitors.

If she had been asleep previously she was wide enough awake now; but the glittering eyes were not directed at me. From the moment of our entering the room they focused themselves on Sylvia's face and there re-

mained riveted, whereby the heightening of that young lady's complexion which our interview had produced became markedly accentuated.

It was to no purpose that I placed myself before the rigid figure and offered my hand. A paw was lifted automatically to mine, but the eyes remained fixed on Sylvia.

"What did you say this gentleman's name was?" the waxwork asked frigidly.

"This is Dr. Jardine," was the reply.

"Oh, indeed. And who was the gentleman who called some three weeks ago?"

"Why, that was Dr. Jardine; you know it was."

"So I thought, but my memory is not very reliable. And this is a Dr. Jardine, too? Very interesting. A medical family, apparently. But not much alike."

I was beginning to explain my identity and the cause of my altered appearance, when Sylvia approached with a cup of tea and a carefully dissected muffin, which latter she thrust under the nose of the elder lady, who regarded it attentively and with a slight squint, owing to its nearness.

"It's of no use, you know," said Sylvia, "for you to pretend that you don't know him, because I've told you all about the transformation—that is, all I know myself. Don't you think it's rather a clever make-up?"

"If," said Miss Vyne, "by 'make-up' you mean a disguise, I think it is highly successful. The beard is a most admirable imitation."

"Oh, the beard is his own—at least, I think it is."

I confirmed this statement, ignoring Polton's slight additions.

"Indeed," said Miss Vyne. "Then the wig—it is a wig, I suppose?"

"No, of course it isn't," Sylvia replied.

"Then," said Miss Vyne majestically, "perhaps you will explain to me what the disguise consists of."

"Well," said Sylvia, "there are the eyebrows. You can see that they have been completely altered in shape."

"If I had committed the former shape of the eyebrows to memory, as you appear to have done," said Miss Vyne, "I should, no doubt, observe the change. But I did not. It seems to me that the disguise which you told me about with such a flourish of trumpets just amounts to this: that Dr. Jardine has allowed his beard to grow. I find the reality quite disappointing."

"Do you?" said Sylvia. "But, at any rate, you didn't recognize him; so your disappointment doesn't count for much."

The old lady, being thus hoist with her own petard, relapsed into majestic silence, and Sylvia then renewed her demand for an account of my adventures.

"We want to hear all about that objectionable person who has been shadowing you, and how you finally got rid of him. Your letters were rather sketchy and wanting in detail, so you have got to make up the deficiency now."

Thus commanded, I plunged into an exhaustive account of those events which I have already chronicled at length and which I need not refer to again, nor need I record the cross-examination to which I was subjected, since it elicited nothing that is not set forth in the preceding pages.

When I had finished my recital, however, Miss Vyne, who had listened to it in silence hitherto, put a question which I had some doubts about answering.

"Have you or Dr. Thorndyke been able to discover who this inquisitive person is and what is his object in following you about?"

I hesitated. As to my own experiences, I had no secrets from these friends of mine, excepting those that related to the subjects of Thorndyke's investigations. But I must not come here and babble about what took place

in the sacred precincts of my principal's chambers.

"I think I may tell you," said I, "that Dr. Thorndyke has discovered the identity of this man and that he is not the person whom we suspected him to be. But I mustn't say any more, as the information came through professional channels and consequently is not mine to give."

"Of course you mustn't," said Sylvia; "though I don't mind admitting that you have put me on tenterhooks of curiosity. But I dare say you will be able to tell us everything later."

I agreed that I probably should; and the talk then turned into fresh channels.

The short winter day was running out apace. The daylight had long since gone, and I began with infinite reluctance to think of returning to my cage. Indeed when I looked at my watch I was horrified to see how the time had fled.

"My word!" I exclaimed. "I must be off, or Thorndyke will be putting the sleuth-hounds of the law on my track. And I don't know what you will think of me for having stayed such an unconscionable time."

"It isn't a ceremonial visit," said Sylvia, as I rose and made my adieus to her aunt. "We should have liked you to stay much longer."

Here she paused suddenly and, clasping her hands, gazed at me with an expression of dismay.

"Good Heavens! Humphrey!" she exclaimed.

"Eh?" said Miss Vyne.

"I was addressing Dr. Jardine," Sylvia explained in some confusion.

"I didn't suppose you were addressing me," was the withering reply.

"Do you know," said Sylvia, "that I haven't shown you those sketches, after all? You must see them. They were the special object of your visit!"

This was perfectly untrue, and she knew it; but I did not think it worth

while to contest the statement in Miss Vyne's presence.

Accordingly I expressed the utmost eagerness to see the trumpery sketches, and the more so since I had understood that they were on view in the studio, which turned out to be the case.

"It won't take a minute for you to see them," said Sylvia. "I'll just run up and light the gas; and you are not to come in until I tell you."

She preceded me up the stairs to the little room on the first floor in which she worked, and when I had waited a few moments on the landing she summoned me to enter.

"These are the sketches," said she, "that I have finished. You see, they are quite presentable now. I cleaned off the rough daubs of paint with a scraper and finished up with a soft rag dipped in chloroform."

I ran my eye over the framed sketches, which, now that the canvases were strained on stretchers and the disfiguring brush-strokes removed, were, as she had said, quite presentable, though too rough and unfinished to be attractive.

"I dare say they are very interesting," said I, "but they are only bare beginnings. I shouldn't have thought them worth framing."

"Not as pictures," she agreed, "but as examples of a very curious technique I find them most instructive. However, you haven't seen the real gem of the collection. This is it, on the easel. Sit down on the chair and say when you are ready. I'm going to give you a surprise."

I seated myself on the chair opposite the easel, on which was a canvas with its back toward me.

"Now," said Sylvia. "Are you ready? One, two, three!"

She picked up the canvas and, turning it round quickly, presented its face to me.

I don't know what I had expected; but certainly I was not in the least prepared for what I saw.

The sketch had originally represented, very roughly, a dark mass of trees which occupied nearly the whole of the canvas; but of this the middle had been cleaned away, exposing an under painting.

And this it was that filled me with such amazement that, after a first startled exclamation, I could do nothing but stare open-mouthed at the canvas.

For, from the opening in the dark mass of foliage there looked out at me, distinct and unmistakable, the face of Mrs. Samway.

It was no illusion or chance resemblance. Rough as the painting was, the likeness was excellent.

All the well-known features which made her so different from other women were there, though expressed by a mere dexterous turn of the knife; the jet-black, formally parted hair, the clear, bright complexion, the pale, inscrutable eyes; all were there, even to the steady, penetrating expression that looked out at me from the canvas as if in silent recognition.

As I sat staring at the picture with a surprise that almost amounted to awe, Sylvia looked at me a little blankly.

"Well!" she exclaimed at length. "I meant to give you a surprise, but—what is it, Humphrey? Do you know her?"

"Yes," I replied; "and so do you. Don't you remember a woman who looked in at you through the glass door of Robinson's shop?"

"Do you mean that black and scarlet creature? I didn't recognize her. I had no idea she was so handsome, for this is really a very beautiful face, though there is something about it that I don't understand. Something—well, eery—rather uncanny and almost sinister. Don't you think so?"

"I have always thought her a rather weird woman, but this is the weirdest appearance she had made. How on earth came her face on that canvas?"

"It is an odd coincidence. And yet I don't know that it is. She may have been some relative of that rather eccentric artist, or even his wife. I don't know why it shouldn't be so."

Neither did I. But the coincidence remained a very striking one to me at least, much more so than Sylvia realized, though what its significance might be—if it had any—I could not guess.

Nor was there any opportunity to discuss it at the moment, for it was high time for me to be gone.

"You will send me a telegram when you get back to say that you have arrived home safely, won't you?" said Sylvia as we descended the stairs with our arms linked together. "Of course nothing is going to happen to you, but I can't help feeling a little nervous. And you'll go down to the station by the High Street and keep to the main roads? You will give that as a promise, won't you?"

I made the promise readily, having decided previously to take every possible precaution. When I had wished Sylvia "good-by" at some length, I proceeded to execute it, making my way down the well-populated High Street and keeping a bright lookout both there and at the station.

Once more I was fortunate in the matter of trains, and, having taken a hansom from Broad Street to the Temple, was set down in King's Bench Walk soon after half past six. As I approached our building I looked up with some anxiety at the sitting-room windows; and when I saw them brightly lighted a suspicion that Thorn-dyke had returned earlier than usual filled me with foreboding.

I had had my dance and now I was going to pay the piper, and I did not much enjoy the prospect; in fact, as I ascended the stairs and took my latch-key from my pocket I was as nervous as a schoolboy who has been playing truant.

However, there was no escape unless I sneaked up to my bedroom, so, in-

serting the key into the lock, I turned it as boldly as I could and entered.

CHAPTER XVIII.

A Visitor from the States.

AS I pushed open the inner door and entered the room I conceived the momentary hope of a reprieve from the wrath to come.

I found my two friends in what was evidently a business consultation with a stranger, and was on the point of backing out when Thorndyke stopped me.

"Don't run away, Howard," said he. "There are no secrets being disclosed—at least, I think not. We have finished with your affairs, Mr. O'Donnell, haven't we?"

"Yes, doctor," was the answer; "you've run me dry, with the exception of your own little business."

"Then come in and sit down, Howard, and let me present you to Mr. O'Donnell, who is a famous American detective and has been telling us all sorts of wonderful things."

Mr. O'Donnell paused in the act of returning a quantity of papers to a large attaché-case and offered his hand.

"The doctor," he remarked, "is blowing his trumpet at the wrong end. I haven't come here to give information, but to get advice. But I guess I needn't tell you that."

"I hope that isn't quite true," said Thorndyke. "You spoke just now of my little business; haven't you anything to tell me?"

"I have; but I fancy it isn't what you wanted to hear. However, we'll just have a look at your letter to Curtis and take your questions one by one. By the way, what made you write to Curtis?"

"I saw when I inspected Maddock's will at Somerset House that he had left a small legacy to Curtis. Naturally I inferred that Curtis knew him and could tell me something of him."

"It struck you as a bit queer, I guess, that he should be leaving a legacy to the head of an American detective agency."

"The circumstance suggested possibilities," Thorndyke admitted.

O'Donnell laughed.

"I can guess what possibilities suggested themselves to you, if you knew Maddock. Your letter and the lawyer's, announcing the legacy, came within a mail or two of one another. Curtis showed them both to me and we grinned. We took it for granted that the worthy testator was foxing. But we were wrong. And so are you, if that is what you thought."

"You assumed that the will was not a genuine one?"

"Yes; we thought it was a fake, put up with the aid of some shyster to bluff us into giving up Mr. Maddock as deceased. So, as I had to come across about these other affairs, Curtis suggested that I should look into the matter. And a considerable surprise I got when I did; for the will is perfectly regular and so is everything else. That legacy was a sort of posthumous joke, I guess."

"Then do I understand that Mr. Curtis was not really a friend of Maddock's?"

O'Donnell chuckled.

"Not exactly a friend, doctor," said he. "He felt the warmest interest in Maddock's welfare, but they weren't what you might call bosom friends. The position was this: Curtis was the chief of our detective agency; Maddock was a gentleman whom he had been looking for and not finding for a matter of ten years. At last he found him, and then he lost him again; and this legacy, I take it, was a sort of playful hint to show which hole he'd gone down."

"Was Maddock in hiding all that time?" asked Thorndyke.

"In hiding!" repeated O'Donnell. "Bless your innocent heart, doctor, he had a nice, convenient studio in one of the best blocks in New York, a couple

of doors from our agency, and he used to send us cards for his private views. No, sir, our dear, departed friend was not the kind that lurks out of sight in cellars or garrets. It was Maddock, sure enough, that Curtis wanted, only he didn't know it. But I guess I'm fogging you. I'd best answer the questions that you put to Curtis.

"First, do we know anything about Maddock? Yes, we do. But we didn't know that his name was Maddock until a few months ago. Isaac Van Damme was the name we knew him by, and it seems that he had one or two other names that he used on occasion.

"We now know that the gay Isaac was a particularly versatile kind of crook; and a mighty uncommon kind, too, the Lord be praised! for if there were many more like him we should have to raise our prices some. He wasn't the kind of fool that makes a million-dollar coup and then goes on the razzle and drops it all. That sort of man is easy enough to deal with. When he's loaded up with dollars everybody knows it, and he's sure to be back in a week or two with empty pockets, ready for another scoop.

"Isaac wasn't that sort. When he made a little pile he invested his winnings like a sensible man, and didn't live beyond his means; and the only mystery to me is that when he died he didn't leave more pickings. I see from his will—which I've had a look at—that the whole estate couldn't have been above five thousand dollars. He had a lot more than that at one time."

"He may have disposed of the bulk of his property by gift just before his death," Jervis suggested.

"That's possible," agreed O'Donnell. "He'd escape the death dues that way. However, to return to his engaging little ways. His leading line was penmanship—forgery—and he did it to an absolute finish. He was the most expert penman that I have ever known.

"But where he had us all was that

he didn't only know *how* to write another man's name; he knew *when* to write it. I reckon that the great bulk of his forgeries were never spotted at all, and of the remainder very few got beyond the bare suspicion that they *were* forgeries. In the case of the few that were actually spotted as forgeries, his tracks were covered up so cleverly that no one could guess who the forger was."

"And how did you come to suspect him eventually?" Thorndyke asked.

"Ah!" said O'Donnell. "There you are. Every crook, even the cleverest, has a strain of the fool in him. Isaac's folly took the form of suspicion. He suspected us of suspecting him. We didn't; but he thought we did, and then he started to dodge and make some false clues for us.

"That drew our attention to him. We looked into his record, traced his little wanderings, and then we began to find things out. A nice collection there was, too, by the time we had worked a month or two at his biography—forgeries, false notes, and at least two murders that had been a complete mystery to us all. We made ready to drop on Isaac, but at that psychological moment he disappeared.

"It looked as if he had left the States, and, as we have no great affection for extradition cases, we let the matter rest, more or less, expecting that he would turn up again, sooner or later. And then came this lawyer's letter and yours, announcing his decease. Of course, Curtis and I thought he was at the old game; that it was a bit of that sort of extra caution that won't let well enough alone.

"So as I was coming over I thought I'd just look into the affair as I told you, and to my astonishment I found everything perfectly regular: the will properly proved, the death certificate made out correctly, and a second certificate signed by two doctors."

"Did you go into the question of identity?" asked Thorndyke.

"Oh, yes! I called on one of the doctors, a man named Batson, and ascertained that it was all correct. Batson's eyesight seemed to be none of the best, but he made it quite clear to me that his late patient was certainly our friend Isaac, or Maddock.

"So that's the end of the case. And if you want to go into it any further you've got to deal with a little pile of bone-ash, for our friend is not only dead—he's cremated. That's enough for us. We don't follow our clients to the next world. We are not so thorough as you seem to be."

"You are flattering me unduly," said Thorndyke. "I'm not so thorough as that, but our clients when they betake themselves to the happy hunting-ground usually leave a few of their friends behind to continue their activities. Do you happen to know what Maddock's original occupation was? Had he any profession?"

"He was originally an engraver, and a very skilful engraver, too, I understand. That was what made him so handy in working the flash-note racket. Then he went on the stage for a time, and didn't do badly at that; but I fancy he was more clever at making-up and mimicry than at acting in the dramatic sense.

"For the last ten years or so he was practising as a painter—chiefly of landscape, though he could do a figure subject or a portrait at a pinch. I don't fancy he sold much, or made any great efforts to sell his work. He liked painting and the art covered his real industries, for he used to tour about in search of subjects and so open up fresh ground for the little operations that actually produced his income."

"Was his work of any considerable merit?" Thorndyke asked.

"Well, in a way, yes. It was rather in the American taste, though Maddock was really an Englishman. Our taste, as you know, runs to technical smartness and novelty of handling; and Maddock's work was very pecu-

iar and remarkably smart and slick in handling. He used the knife more than the brush, and he used it uncommonly cleverly. In fact, he was unusually skilful in many ways; and that's the really surprising thing about him when one considers his extraordinary-looking paws."

"What was there peculiar about his hands?" asked Thorndyke. "Were they noticeably clumsy in appearance?"

"Clumsy!" exclaimed O'Donnell. "They were more than that. They were positively deformed. A monkey's hands would be delicate compared with Maddock's. They were short and thick like the paws of an animal. There's some jaw-twisting name for the deformity that he suffered from—brachodactylous, or something like that."

"Brachydactylous," suggested Dr. Thorndyke.

"That's the word, and I dare say you know the sort of paw I mean. It didn't look a very likely hand for a first-class penman and engraver of flash notes, but you can't always judge by appearances.

"And now as to your other questions: You ask what Maddock was like in appearance. I can only give you the description which I gave to Batson and which he recognized at once."

"Had he noticed the peculiarity of the hands?" inquired Thorndyke.

"Yes. I asked him about it, and he remembered having observed it when he was attending Maddock. Well, then, our friend was about five feet nine in height, fairly broad and decidedly strong, about fifty-five years of age, of a medium complexion, with gray eyes and nearly white hair. That's all I can tell you about him."

"You haven't got his finger-prints, I suppose?"

"No. He was never in prison, so we had no chance of getting them."

"Was he married?"

"He had been; but some years ago

his wife divorced him, or he divorced her. Latterly he has lived as a bachelor."

"There is nothing else that you can think of as throwing light on his personality or explaining his actions?"

"Nothing at all, doctor. I've told you all I know about him, and I only hope the information may be more useful than it looks to me."

"Thank you," said Thorndyke. "Your information is not only useful; I expect to find it quite valuable. Reasoning, you know, Mr. O'Donnell," he continued, "is somewhat like building an arch. On a supporting mold the builder lays a number of shaped stones, or *voussoirs*; but until all the *voussoirs* are there it is a mere collection of stone, incapable of bearing its own weight. Then you drop the last *voussoir*—the keystone—into its place and the arch is complete; and now you may take away the supports, for it will not only bear its own weight, but carry a heavy superstructure."

"That's so, doctor," said O'Donnell. "But, if I may ask, is this all gratuitous wisdom or has it any particular bearing?"

"It has this bearing," replied Thorndyke; "I have myself been for some time past engaged, metaphorically, in the building of an arch. When you came here to-night it was but a collection of shaped and adjusted stones, supported from without. With your kind aid I have just dropped the keystone into its place. That is what I mean."

The American thoughtfully arranged the papers in his case, casting an occasional speculative glance at Thorndyke.

"I'd like to know," he said presently, "what it was that I told you. It doesn't seem to me that I have produced any startling novelties. However, I know it's no use trying to squeeze you, so I'll get back to my hotel and have a chew at what you've told me."

He shook hands with us all round, and when Thorndyke had let him out we heard him bustling down-stairs and away up King's Bench Walk toward Mitre Court.

For a minute or more after his departure none of us spoke. Thorndyke was apparently ruminating on his newly acquired information, and Jervis and I on the statement that had so naturally aroused the detective's curiosity.

At length Jervis opened the inevitable debate.

"I begin to see a glimmer of daylight through the case of Septimus Maddock, deceased," said he, "but it is only a glimmer. Whereas, from what you said to O'Donnell I gather that you have the case quite complete."

"Hardly that, Jervis," was the reply. "I spoke metaphorically, and metaphors are sometimes misleading. Perhaps I overstated the case, so we will drop metaphor and state the position literally in terms of good, plain, school-book logic.

"It is this: We had certain facts presented to us in connection with Maddock's death. For instance, we observed that the cause of death was obscure; that the body was utterly destroyed by cremation, and that Jardine, who was an unofficial witness to some of the formalities, was subsequently pursued by some unknown person with the unmistakable purpose of murdering him.

"Those were some of the observed facts, and the explanation of those facts was the problem submitted to us—that is to say, we had to connect those facts and supply others by deduction and research, so that they should form a coherent and intelligible sequence, of which the motive for murdering Jardine should form a part.

"Having observed and examined our facts, we next propose a hypothesis which shall explain them. In this case it would naturally take the form of a hypothetical reconstruction of the circumstances of Maddock's death.

That hypothesis must, of course, be in complete agreement with all the facts known to us, including the attempts to murder Jardine.

"Then, having invented a hypothesis which fits our facts completely, the next stage is to verify it. If the circumstances of Maddock's death were such as we have assumed, certain antecedent events must have occurred and certain conditions must have existed.

"We make the necessary inquiries and investigations, and we find that those events had actually occurred and those conditions had actually existed. Then it is probable that our hypothesis is correct, particularly if our researches have brought to light nothing that disagrees with it.

"With our new facts we can probably amplify our hypothesis—reconstruct it in greater detail—and then we have to test and verify it afresh in its amplified and detailed form. And if such new tests still yield an affirmative result, the confirmation of the hypothesis becomes overwhelmingly strong. It is, however, still only hypothesis. But perhaps we light on some final test which is capable of yielding a definite answer, yes or no.

"If we apply that test—the 'crucial experiment' of the logicians—and obtain an affirmative result, our inquiry is at an end. It has passed out of the region of hypothesis into that of demonstrative proof."

"And are we to understand," asked Jervis, "that you have brought Maddock's case to the stage of complete demonstration?"

"No," answered Thorndyke. "I am still in the stage of hypothesis, and when O'Donnell came here to-night there were two points which I had been unable to verify. But with his aid I have been able to verify them both, and I now have a complete hypothesis of the case, which has been tested exhaustively and answered every test. All that remains is to apply the touchstone of the final experiment."

"I suppose," said Jervis, "you have obtained a good many new facts in the course of your investigations?"

"Not a great many," replied Thorn-dyke; "and what new data I have obtained I have, for the most part, communicated to you and Jardine. I assure you, Jervis, that if you would only concentrate your attention on the case you have ample material for a most convincing and complete elucidation of it."

Jervis looked at me with a wry smile.

"Now, Jardine-Howard," said he, "why don't you brush up your wits and tell us exactly what happened to the late Mr. Maddock, and why some person unknown is so keen on your vile body? You have all the facts, you know."

"So you tell me," I retorted; "but this case of yours reminds me of those elaborate picture puzzles that used to weary my juvenile brain. You had a hatful of irregular-shaped pieces which, if you fitted them together, made a picture. Only the beggars wouldn't fit together."

"A very apt comparison," said Thorndyke. "You put the pieces together, and if they made no intelligible part of a picture you knew you were wrong, no matter how well they seemed to fit. On the other hand, if they seemed to make parts of a picture you had to verify the result by finding pieces of the exact shape and size of the empty spaces.

"That is what I have been doing in this case, trying the data together and watching to see if they made the expected picture. As I have told you, O'Donnell's visit found me with the picture entire save for two empty spaces of a particular shape and size, and from him I obtained two pieces that dropped neatly into those spaces and made the picture complete. All I have to do now is to see if the picture is a true representation or only a consistent work of imagination."

"I take it that you have worked the

case out in pretty full detail," said Jervis.

"Yes. If the final verification is successful I shall be able to tell you exactly what happened in Maddock's house, what was the cause of death—and I may say that it was not that given in the certificates—who the person is who has been pursuing Jardine and what is his motive, together with a number of other very curious items.

"And the mention of that person reminds me that our friend has been disporting himself in public, contrary to advice and to what I thought was a definite understanding."

"But surely," I said, "it doesn't matter now. We have given that spy chappie the slip, and, even if he hasn't given up the chase as hopeless, we know that he is quite harmless."

"Harmless!" exclaimed Thornydyke. "Why, my dear fellow, he was your guardian angel. Didn't you realize that from Mr. Wallis's statement? He shadowed you so closely that no attack on you was possible; in fact, he actually caught a rap on the head that was apparently meant for you. You were infinitely safer with him at your heels than alone."

"But we've given the other fellow the slip, too," I urged.

"We mustn't take that for granted," said Thornydyke. "The French detective, you remember, came on the scene quite recently, whereas the other man has been with us from the beginning. He probably saw Jervis and me enter the mineral-water works on the night of the fire, for he was certainly there; and he may even have followed us home to ascertain who we were.

"There are several ways in which he could have connected you with us and traced you here, so I must urge you most strongly not to venture out of the precincts of the temple for the next few days; in fact, it would be much wiser to keep indoors altogether. It will be only a matter of days unless I get a quite unexpected setback, for I hope to have the case finally com-

pleted in less than a week; and when I do I shall take such action as will give your friend some occupation other than shadowing you."

"Very well," I said. "I will promise not to attempt again to escape from custody. But, all the same, my little jaunt to-day has not been entirely without result. I have picked up a new fact, and a rather curious one, I think. What should you say if I suggested that Mrs. Samway was the wife of that eccentric artist who used to paint on the Heath? The man, I mean, who always worked in gloves?"

"I have assumed that she was in some such relation to him," replied Thornydyke, "but I should like to hear the evidence.

"Mrs. Samway," Jervis said in a reflective tone, "isn't that the handsome, uncanny-looking lady with the mongoose eyes, who reminded me of Lucrezia Borgia?"

"That is the lady. Well, I met with a portrait of her to-day which was evidently the work of the man with the gloves," and here I gave them a description of the portrait and an account of the odd way in which it had been disinterred from the landscape that had been painted over it, to which they listened with attention.

"It's a queer incident," said Thornydyke, "and quite dramatic. If one were inclined to be superstitious one might imagine some invisible agency uncovering the tracks that have been so carefully hidden and working unseen in the interests of justice.

"But haven't you rather jumped to your conclusion? The existence of the portrait establishes a connection, but not necessarily that of husband and wife."

"I only suggested the relationship; but it seemed a likely one, as the portrait had been painted over and thrown into the rubbish-box."

Jervis laughed sardonically, and even Thornydyke's impassive face relaxed into a smile.

"Our young friend," said the for-

mer, "doesn't take as favorable a view of the married state as one might expect from a gay Lothario who breaks out of his cage to go philandering. But we'll overlook that in consideration of the very interesting information that he has brought back with him. Not that it conveys very much to me. It is obviously a new piece to fit into our puzzle, but I'm hanged if I see at the moment any suitable space to drop it into."

"I think," said Thorndyke, "that if you consider the picture as a whole, you will soon find a vacant space. And while you are considering it I will just send off a letter, and then we had better adjourn this discussion. We have to catch the early train to Maidstone to-morrow, and that, I hope, will be the last time. Our case ought to be disposed of by the afternoon."

He seated himself at the writing-table and wrote his letter while Jervis stared into the fire with a cogitative frown. When the letter was sealed and addressed, Thorndyke laid it on the table while he went to the lobby to put on his hat and coat, and glancing at it almost unconsciously I noted that the envelope was of foolscap size and was addressed to the Home Office, Whitehall.

The name of the addressee escaped me, for suddenly realizing the impropriety of thus inspecting another man's letter I looked away hastily.

But even then, when Thorndyke had taken it away to the post, I found myself speculating vaguely on the nature of the communication and wondering if it had any relation to the mysterious and intricate case of Septimus Maddock.

CHAPTER XIX.

Into the Darkness.

THE resigned composure with which I accepted Thorndyke's sentence of confinement within doors was not

entirely attributable to discretion or native virtue; for, having enjoyed my little dissipation, I could now contemplate with fortitude a brief period of retirement.

Moreover, the weather was in my favor, being—as Polton reported when he returned, blue-nosed and powdered with snow, with a fresh supply of tobacco for me—bitterly cold, with a threatening of smoky fog from the east.

Under these circumstances it was no great hardship to sit in a roomy armchair with my slippers on the fender and read and meditate as I basked in the warmth of a glowing fire.

To be sure, my reading was perfunctory enough, for the treatise of "The Surface Markings of the Human Body," admirable as it was, competed on very unfavorable terms with other claimants to my attention.

In truth, I had plenty to think about even if I went no farther for matter than to the events of the previous day. There was my visit to Sylvia, for instance. I had not said much to her, but what I had said had pledged me to a lifelong companionship, which was a solemn thing to reflect upon even though I looked forward to the fulfilment of that pledge with nothing but hopeful pleasure.

The dice were thrown. Of course they would turn up sixes, every one; but still—the dice were thrown.

From my own strictly personal affairs my thoughts rambled by an easy transition to the singular episode of the buried portrait, and thence to the subject of that strange palimpsest.

Viewed by the light of Mr. O'Donnell's revelations, Mrs. Samway's position was not all that could have been desired. She and her husband had unquestionably been closely associated with Maddock; but Maddock was, it seemed, a habitual criminal.

Could this fact have been known to the Samways? Or was it that the cunning forger and swindler had shel-

tered himself behind their respectability?

It was impossible for me to say.

Then there was the strange and perplexing case of the man, Maddock himself. I could make nothing of that; had not, indeed, been aware that there had been a "case" until Thornydyke's investigations had put me in possession of the fact.

And even now I could see nothing on which to base any suspicion, apart from the attempts on my life, which we were assuming to be in some way connected with events that had occurred in Maddock's house.

The cause of death was apparently not "morbus cordis," which might easily enough be, seeing that the diagnosis of heart disease was a mere guess on Batson's part. But if not morbus cordis, what was it?

Thornydyke apparently knew, and seemed to hint that it was something other than ordinary disease.

Could there have been foul play? And, if so, were the Samways involved in it in any way?

It seemed incredible, for had not Maddock himself suspected that he was in a dangerous state of health?

There was certainly one possibility which I considered with a good deal of distaste; namely, that Maddock had been in a hypochondriacal state, and that the Samways had taken advantage of his gloomy views as to his health to administer poison. The thing was actually possible, but I did not entertain it; for, even if one assumed that poison had been administered, at any rate the cremation of the body was not designed to hide the traces of the crime.

The Samways had nothing to do with that; the cremation had been adopted in preference to burial by Maddock's own wish.

So my thoughts flitted from topic to topic, with occasional interludes of "Surface Markings," through the lazy forenoon until Polton came to lay my solitary luncheon. And after this

little break in the comfortable monotony another spell of meditative idleness set in.

Polton was busy up-stairs in the laboratory with some photographic copying operations, and I was disposed to wander up and look on; but my small friend politely but very firmly vetoed any such proceeding.

On some other occasion he would be delighted to show me the working of the great copying camera, but just now he had a big job in hand, and as he was working against time, he would prefer to be alone.

He even suggested that I might attend to any stray callers and make my own tea on the gas-ring so as to avoid interrupting his work; and when I had agreed to relieve him to this extent he thanked me profusely and retired, and I saw no more of him.

For some time after his departure I stood at the window looking out across the wide space at Paper Buildings and the end of Crown Office Row.

It was a wretched afternoon. The yellow, turbid sky brooded close down upon the house-roofs and grew darker and more brown moment by moment, as if the invisible sun had given up in despair and gone home early.

A comfortless powdering of snow filtered down at intervals and melted on the pavements, along which depressed wayfarers hurried with their coat-collars turned up and their hands thrust deep into their pockets.

I watched them commiseratingly, reflecting on the superior advantages of being within doors and forbidden to go out; and then, having flung another scoopful of coal on the fire, I betook myself once more to the arm-chair, the "Surface Markings," and idle meditation.

It was some time past four when my reflective browsings had begun to proceed in the direction of the teakettle, that I heard a light footstep on the landing as of some one wearing galoshes.

Then a letter dropped softly into

the box, and, as I instantly pushed back my chair to rise, the footsteps retreated. I crossed the room quickly and opened the door, but the messenger had already disappeared down the dark staircase, and had gone so silently on his rubber soles that, though I listened attentively, I could hear no sound from below.

Having closed the door, I extracted the letter from the box and took it over to the window to examine it. I was not a little surprised to find that it was addressed to W. M. Howard, Esq.

This was the first communication that I had received in my borrowed name, and my surprise at its arrival was not unreasonable, for of the few persons who knew me by that name, none—with the exception, perhaps, of Mr. Marchmont—was in the least likely to write to me.

But if the address on the envelope had surprised me, the letter itself surprised me a good deal more; for, though the writer was quite unknown to me, even by name, he seemed to be in possession of certain information concerning me which I had supposed to be the exclusive property of Thorndyke, Jervis, Polton, and myself.

It bore the address 29 Figtree Court, Inner Temple, and ran thus:

DEAR SIR:

I am taking the liberty of writing to you to ask for your assistance as I happened to know that my friends, Drs. Thorndyke and Jervis, are away at Maidstone and not available at the moment, and I understand that you have some acquaintance with medical technicalities.

The circumstances are these: At half past five to-day I shall be meeting a solicitor to advise as to action in respect of a case in which I am retained, and the decision as to our action will be vitally affected by a certain issue on which I am not competent to form an opinion for lack of medical knowledge. If Dr. Thorndyke had been within reach I should have taken his opinion; as he is not, it occurred to me to ask if you would fill his place on this occasion, it being, of course, understood that the usual fee of five guineas will be paid by the solicitor.

If you should be unable to come to the consultation, do not trouble to reply, as I am now going out and shall not be returning until five-thirty, the time of the appointment.

I am,

Yours faithfully,
ARTHUR COURTLAND.

The contents of this letter, as I have said, surprised me more than a little. How in the name of all that was wonderful had this stranger, whose very name was unknown to me, come to be aware that I had any knowledge of medicine?

Not from Thorndyke, I felt perfectly sure; nor from Jervis, who, notwithstanding a certain flippant facetiousness of manner, was really an extremely cautious and judicious man.

Could it be that my principal was overseen in his trusted laboratory assistant? Was it conceivable that the suave and discreet Polton had moments of leakiness, when, in unofficial talk outside, he let drop the secrets of which his employer's unbounded confidence had made him the repository?

I could not believe it. Not only did Polton appear to be the very soul of discretion, there was Thorndyke himself; he was not the man to give his confidence to any one until after the most exhaustive proof of the safety of so giving it.

Nor was he a man who was likely to be deceived, for nothing escaped his observation, and nothing that he observed was passed over without careful consideration.

My lethargy having been shaken off, I addressed myself to the task of preparing tea; and, as I listened to the homely crescendo of the kettle's song, I turned the matter over in all its bearings.

By some means this Mr. Courtland had become aware that I was either a doctor or a medical student.

But by what means? Was it possible that he had merely inferred from the circumstance of my being associ-

ated with Thorndyke that I was of the same profession?

That was just barely conceivable; but, if he had, then, as Jervis had said of Mr. Wallis, he must be "a devil at guessing."

As I made the tea and subsequently consumed it, I continued to ruminate on the contents of that singular letter.

No answer to it was required. Then what was Mr. Courtland going to do if I did not turn up? He admitted that the issue, which seemed to be an important one, was beyond him, and yet he had to give an answer to the solicitor.

And he was prepared to pay five guineas for the advice of a man of whom he—presumably—knew nothing. That was odd.

In fact, the whole tone of the letter, with its inconsistent mixture of urgency and casual trusting to chance, seemed irreconcilable with the care and method that one expects from a professional man.

And there was another point. The time of the consultation was half past five.

Now, within an hour of that time Thorndyke would be back—or even sooner if he came by the earlier train as he had done on the previous day, as Mr. Courtland must have known, since he knew whither my principal had gone, and he must have often attended assizes himself.

Could he not have waited an hour? And again: had this business been sprung upon him so suddenly that he had had no time to get Thorndyke's opinion?

And, yet again, why had he written at all, instead of dropping in at our chambers with the solicitor, as was so commonly done by Thorndyke's clients?

All of which were curious and puzzling questions which I put to myself, one by one, and had to dismiss unanswered.

And then I came to the practical question, to which I had to find an

answer, and which was: Could I, under the existing circumstances, accede to Mr. Courtland's request? To go outside the precincts of the Inn was, I recognized, absolutely forbidden; but I had given no actual promise to remain in our chambers, nor had I been positively forbidden to leave them.

Thorndyke had advised me to remain indoors, and his advice had been given so pointedly, and with so evident a desire that it should be followed, that I had not hitherto even thought of leaving our premises.

But this was an unforeseen contingency; and the question was, did it alter my position in regard to Thorndyke's advice?

I think I have never been so undecided in my life. On the one hand, I was strongly tempted to keep the appointment. The prospect of triumphantly handing to Thorndyke a five-guinea fee which I had earned as his deputy appealed to me with almost irresistible force.

On the other hand, my knowledge of Thorndyke did not support this appeal. I knew him to be a man to whom a principle was much more important than any chance benefit gained by its abandonment, and my inner consciousness told me that he would be better pleased by a strict adherence to our understanding than by the increment of five guineas.

So my thoughts oscillated to and fro, now impelling me to risk it and earn the fee, and now urging me to keep to the letter of my instructions; and meanwhile the time ran on and the hour of the consultation approached.

What decision I should have reached in the end, it is impossible to say. As matters turned out, I never reached any decision at all; for just as the Treasury clock struck a quarter past five I heard a light, quick step on our landing, and, immediately after, a soft but hurried knock at the door.

I strode quickly across the room and threw the door open.

And then I started back with an ex-

clamation of astonishment. For the visitor—who stood full in the light of the landing lamp—was a woman; and the woman was Mrs. Samway.

As I stood gazing at her in amazement she slipped past me into the room and softly shut the door.

And then I saw very plainly that there was something amiss; for she was as pale as death, and had a dreadful, frightened, hunted look which haunts me even now as I write. She was somewhat disheveled, too; and, though it was a bitter evening, her plump, shapely hands were ungloved and cold as ice, as I noted when I took them in mine.

“Are you alone?” she asked, peering uneasily at the door of the little office.

“Yes; quite alone,” I replied.

She gazed at me with those strange, penetrating eyes of hers and said in a half whisper:

“How strange you look with that beard. I should hardly have known you if I had not expected—”

She stopped short and, casting a strange, scared glance over her shoulder at the dark windows, whispered:

“Can they see in? Can any one see us from outside?”

“I shouldn’t think so,” I replied; but, nevertheless, I stepped over to the windows and drew the curtains.

“That looks more comfortable, at any rate,” said I. “And now tell me how in the name of wonder you knew I was here.”

She grasped both my wrists and looked earnestly, almost fiercely, into my eyes.

“Ask me no questions!” she exclaimed. “Ask me nothing! But listen! I have come here for a purpose. Has a letter been left here for you?”

“Yes,” I replied.

“Asking you to go to a place in Fig-tree Court?”

“Good God!” I exclaimed. “How on earth—”

She shook my wrists impatiently in her strong grasp.

“Answer me!” she exclaimed. “Answer me!”

“Yes,” I replied. “I was to go there at half past five.”

Again her strong grasp tightened on my wrists.

“Humphrey,” she said in a low, earnest voice, “you are not to go. Do you hear me? You are not to go.”

And then, as I seemed to hesitate, she continued more urgently:

“I ask you—I beg you to promise me that you won’t!”

I gazed at her in sheer amazement; but some instinct, some faint glimmer of understanding, restrained me from asking for any explanation.

“Very well,” I said. “I won’t go, if you say I’m not to.”

“That is a promise?”

“Yes; it’s a promise. Besides, it’s nearly half past already; so if I don’t go now the appointment falls through.”

“And you won’t go outside these rooms to-night. Promise me that, too!”

“If I don’t go to this lawyer I sha’n’t go out at all.”

“And to-morrow, too. Give me your word that you won’t let any sort of pretext draw you out of these rooms to-morrow, or the next day, or, in fact, until Dr. Thorndyke says you may.”

For a few moments I was literally struck dumb with astonishment at her last words, and could do nothing but gaze at her in astounded silence.

At length, recovering myself a little, I exclaimed:

“My dear Mrs. Samway—” But she interrupted me.

“Don’t call me by that horrible name! Give me my own name—Lettitia—or” she added, a little shyly and in a soft, coaxing tone, “call me Lettie. Won’t you, Humphrey, just for this once?”

“You needn’t mind. You wouldn’t if you knew. I should like, when I think of my friend—the only friend that I care for—to remember that he called me by my own name when we said good-by. You’ll think me silly

and sentimental, but you needn't mind indulging me just for once. It's the last time."

"The last time!" I repeated. "What do you mean by that, Lettie, and by speaking of our saying good-by? Are you going away?"

"Yes, I am going away. I don't suppose you will ever see me again. I am going out of your life."

"Not out of my life, Lettie. We are always friends, even if we never see one another."

"Are we?" she said, looking up at me earnestly. "Perhaps it is so; but, still, this is good-by. I ought to say it and go; but, oh, God!" she exclaimed with sudden passion, "I don't want to go—away from you, Humphrey, out into the cold and the dark!"

She buried her face against my shoulder, and I could feel that she was sobbing, though she uttered no sound.

It was a dreadful situation. Instinctively certain though I was that her grief had a real and tragic basis, I could offer no word of comfort.

For what was there to say? She was going, clearly, to a life of wretchedness without hope of any relief or change, and without a single friend to cheer her loneliness. That much I could guess, vaguely and dimly.

But it was enough. And it wrung my heart to witness her passion of grief and to be able to offer no more than a pressure of the hand.

After a few seconds she raised her head and looked in my face with tears still clinging to her lashes.

"Humphrey," she said, laying her hands on my shoulders, "I have a few last words to say to you and then I must go. Listen to me, dearest friend, and remember what I say.

"When I am gone people will tell you things, and you will come to know others. People will say that I am a wicked woman, which is true enough, God knows. But if they say that I have done or connived at wickedness against you, try to believe that it was not as it seemed, and to forgive me.

"And say to yourself, 'This wicked woman would have willingly given her heart's blood for me.' Say that, Humphrey. It is true. I would gladly give my life to make you safe and happy. And try to think kindly of me in the evil report that will reach you sooner or later. Will you try, Humphrey?"

"My dear Lettie," I said, "we are friends now and always. Nothing that I hear shall alter that."

"I believe you," she said, "and I thank you from my heart. And now I must go—I *must* go; and it's good-by—good-by, Humphrey, for the very last time."

She passed her arms around my neck and pressed her wet cheek to mine; then she kissed me, and, turning away abruptly, walked across to the door and opened it.

On the landing, in the light of the lamp, she turned once more; and I saw that the hot blush that had risen to her cheek as she kissed me had faded already into a deathly pallor, and that the dreadful, frightened, hunted look had come back into her face.

She stood for a moment with her finger raised warningly and whispered:

"Good-by, dear; good-by! Shut the door now, and shut it quietly," and then she passed into the opening of the dark staircase.

I closed the door softly and turned away toward the window; and as I did so I heard her stumble slightly on the stair, a short way down, and utter a little, startled cry.

I was nearly going out to her, and did, in fact, stand a moment or two, listening; but as I heard nothing more I moved over to the window and, drawing back the curtain, looked down on our door-step to see her go out.

My mind was in a whirl of confused emotions. Profound pity for this lonely, unhappy, warm-hearted woman contended with amazement at the revelation of her manifest connection with the mystery that surrounded me; and I stood bewildered by the tumult of incoherent thought, grasping the cur-

tain and looking down on the great square stone that I might at least catch a farewell glance at this poor soul who was passing so unwillingly out of my life.

The seconds passed. A man came out of our entry and, turning to the left, walked at a rapid pace toward the Tudor Street gate.

Still she did not appear. Perhaps she had heard him on the stairs and was waiting to pass out unnoticed.

But yet it was strange. Nearly a minute had elapsed since she started to descend the stairs. Could I have missed her? It seemed impossible, since I had come to the window almost immediately.

A vague uneasiness began to take possession of me. I recalled her white face and frightened eyes, and as I stared down at the door-step with growing anxiety I found myself listen-

ing—listening nervously for I knew not what.

Suddenly I caught a sound—faint and vague, but certainly a sound. And it seemed to come from the staircase.

In a moment I had the door open and was stealing out on the landing.

The house was profoundly silent. No murmur, even, penetrated from the distant streets. I crept across the landing, breathing softly and listening.

And then, from the stillness below, but near at hand, came a faint, whispering sigh or moan.

Instantly I sprang forward, all of a tremble, and darted down the stairs.

At the first turn I saw, projecting round the angle, a hand—a woman's hand—plump and shapely and white as marble.

With a gasp of terror I flew round the turn of the staircase and—

God in heaven! She was there!

TO BE CONCLUDED NEXT WEEK. Don't forget this magazine is issued weekly, and that you will get the conclusion of this story without waiting a month.

S O C I A L S I N E W

By Alice Lindsey Webb

WHAT sort of a citizen, friend, are you?
Can you lift as much as you weigh?
Are you doing your share of the work to do,
Or just "catching a ride on the sleigh"?
Are you standing up on your own two feet,
Or hunting around for a nice, soft seat?

Is your citizenship of a rose-scent sort,
Bound up with a silken string;
Or are you of solid iron and blood,
With a zest for the *hardest* thing?
Are you corseted tight by an outworn creed,
Or fighting for freedom, wherever there's need?

Come, out with it, friend; give the devil his due—
Have you filled your place at the front?
Are you skulking to rear with the cowardly few,
A bearing the battle's brunt?
Oh, a man who is *honest* and *unafraid*
Is as fine a thing as God has made!

The Lost Hearthstone

By
Perley Poore Sheehan

Author of "The Copper Princess," "The Woman of the Pyramid," "Kidnapers of Dark Entry," etc.

SYNOPSIS OF PRECEDING CHAPTERS

AFTER a chat with Major Woods, who knew him as a boy in Milldale, Ohio, Henry R. Birkland, president of the Susquehanna Railroad, resigns in favor of Bruce Howland, with the intention of returning to Milldale, buying the Birkland homestead, and finding Mary Harmon, his old sweetheart. His plan to leave New York City on a midnight train is frustrated when a taxi is wrecked in which he is being driven to a police station with the wife of a friend who has begged him to bail her husband out of jail; and they are arrested for speeding. Birkland manages to catch an early morning train for Poughkeepsie, after giving the police the slip. On the way there a fight breaks out between a deputy and several gunmen who attempt to take a prisoner from him. Birkland intercedes for the deputy and soon finds himself covered with a revolver in the hands of one of the crooks.

Birkland narrowly escapes being shot. The gunmen are routed and one of their number killed. Birkland is asked to stay for the inquest. Again he eludes the police, and, after several adventures, reaches Poughkeepsie, penniless. He despatches night letters to Howland and the major for money. A telegram comes at length from Mary Harmon, forwarding fifty dollars, and explaining that Major Woods is away from home. Birkland resolves to catch the Cincinnati express; but he is pursued by a sleuth who recognizes him as the man who ran away after the shooting affray on the train, and by a telephone-operator he cheated out of some money. Birkland accepts the invitation of a stranger to jump into his ice yacht and overtake the express he has just missed. In its course up the Hudson River the yacht is wrecked, and Birkland, unconscious, is carried into the Merriman home. There he is nursed back to health by Julia Merriman, who falls in love with him. Birkland resists her charms, however, and returns to Hambleton, near Milldale, where he puts up at the Grand Hotel. The major is still out of town. As Birkland is sitting in the hotel one evening, the Hambleton *Clarion* announces the failure of the bank, which contains about all of his available cash. At this moment Major Woods arrives. He takes Birkland home into the bosom of his family and calls to Mary in the next room.

CHAPTER XXXI.

Face to Face!

FIRST of all it seemed to Birkland that he was looking at a stranger.

A moment and it seemed as though their paths had never led apart. He had expected to find her older—a little

old-fashioned, old-maidish. It was the surprise that had given him that impression that here was a stranger.

It was the revived memory of her youth that blotted out this impression with the other.

"Mary, for the love of Heaven!" he exclaimed, foolishly, as they looked at each other.

This story began in the All-Story Cavalier Weekly for June 27.

"How do you do, Henry?"

She was smiling, perfectly self-possessed.

"I think I'll kiss you, too," he said.

"You may," she answered.

He had taken one of her hands. He put a hand lightly on her shoulder. His lips touched her cheek.

She radiated strength, warmth, mystery; but, above all, perfect calm, perfect self-reliance. Good God, he thought, and he had secretly been feeling a little sorry for her, had been allowing his meditations concerning her to be touched with a tinge of charity, had conceived her to be countrified, *passée*—his little, faded wild-flower!

Without being capable of noting details, he was struck, none the less, that she was charmingly dressed; that her complexion was perfect; that her hair was becomingly arranged—ah, there was a tuft of gray, just over her forehead, after all!

He was grateful for that touch of gray. He had begun to feel a little frightened. His eyes came back to hers, having scarcely left them. They were almost on a level with his own.

"I'd like to do it again," he said, as they all laughed.

"Go ahead! Go ahead!" roared the major happily.

And all through the supper that followed—or dinner, with its barley soup, fried chicken, vegetables containing the distilled essence of the country, jellies of haunting perfume—Birkland couldn't get over the wonder of it. This was Mary Harmon, still young, still beautiful, with no other legacy from the passing years than that of a greater charm.

Not even when the conversation touched on the wrecked bank and the suicide of Custis Campbell was Birkland's attention wholly diverted. Not very much was said, anyway; only, it appeared, the Campbells had been neighbors of theirs—lived just across the street; and Mrs. Woods had been over to see "poor little Mrs. Campbell."

"Does she try to explain it?" asked the major gently.

"Yes, she does," answered Mrs. Woods with hesitation. She was one of those women who could never say anything that might be derogatory to some one without hesitating first. "She seems to blame it on Mr. Miller."

"Cyrus F. Miller—of Milldale?" asked Birkland.

The major snorted. There was neither gentleness nor sympathy in the way he did it.

"Yes, Cyrus F. Miller, of Milldale. He's a deep one—deep, and crooked, and dark, like a skunk-hole."

"*Eliphalet!*"

"Henry, have some more coffee," said the major, rebuked but not dismayed.

Music, slightly agitated but meritorious, withal, by the inspirational Luella; more music of a maturer sort—with some slight hint of agitation here, too, perhaps—by Mary; some kindly, homely conversation on general topics; and the major cleared his throat.

"Mother," he said, "let's say good night. That needn't concern you young folks," he hastened to add.

"I guess I'll remain up a while, too," Luella ventured.

But Grandmother Woods whispered something in Luella's ear, topping it off with a kiss and a hug.

"Good night, Aunt Mary," said Luella, lifting her face. "And then, 'Good night, Uncle Henry.'"

Birkland touched one of Luella's fine-gold eyebrows with his lips. Chords that had slumbered within the innermost depths of his being for ages—it seemed—were aquiver with angel-music. Lord! and he had believed himself alone in the world.

If there were no tears in his eyes when he finally looked across at Mary through the yellow lamp-light, there might have been, so far as his feelings were concerned.

There was no noise in that part of

Hambleton. A great silence, a great peace—as fathomless as the night itself—seemed to have fallen on everything.

Mary had been standing at the side of the center-table idly turning the pages of a magazine. As she looked up the light from the lamp shone strong on the white smoothness of her throat, deepened the shadows about her eyes.

As Birkland looked at her he felt a sort of suffocating wave of gratitude that he hadn't wavered along the road—that this wasn't Julia or any one else in the world that confronted him other than she who stood there.

"Mary," he whispered.

Her only answer was to smile, to turn from the lamp and start slowly across the room. Before she had taken three steps he was at her side, had taken her hand.

"Mary," he repeated tensely; "listen—you're a dream come true—part of a great, magical dream come true!"

She was facing him—not bashfully; just gently and proudly, mistress of herself.

"You still dream?" she asked softly.

It came like an echo from years all but forgotten. He remembered now how much they had talked about dreams in the old days; dreams and ideals, and things like that.

He was standing very close to her, holding both of her hands now.

"Shut your eyes," he whispered.

She knew what he contemplated. Her seraphic smile showed that. But she did as she was ordered, unhesitatingly. Birkland closed his own eyes.

It all became a miracle, of a sort.

They were standing again in the shadow of the Methodist church at Milldale, stars and swaying branches overhead, the night-air stirring, soft-footed, around them; organ-music dissolving earth and heaven into one.

"And do you also dream?" he asked at last.

"Yes."

"Of—the thing I've dreamed of?"

She smiled. "I've dreamed of you."

He pressed her to him. "Mary—you're going to—you have to—you're going to be my wife?"

But, even as he said this, he felt a stab of remorse. It is often like that—some tragic note in the triumphal march, some mummy appearing at the feast.

Ruined! He was ruined, and he was willing to thrust his poverty on her!

She had reached up and touched his face. Her clear eyes were looking into his as she answered, "Yes!"

"But I must—must—" he began.

The hand on his face made a gentle little stroking movement. It was such a caress as a mother might use in soothing a hurt child.

"You must fight for your dreams, my dear boy," she said softly; "you must demand their fulfilment. Don't you suppose I know that you'll do this—that we'll do this—together?"

"Then you knew—you did send me that fifty dollars."

"In a place like this every one knows everything—provided it isn't vital. It's only the great truths that they miss, the Truth with a capital."

"And you're not worried—not frightened?"

Miss Harmon's only answer was to draw Birkland's face down, ever so gently, toward her own.

CHAPTER XXXII.

Deep and Crooked and Dark.

BUT that night, when Birkland was alone in his room, there again recurred to him, despite the tremendous stimulus that had been given him to more cheerful thinking, a twinge or two of dread. From his window he had looked across the street.

It was late, an hour when most of Hambleton had already gone to bed. But there was another house over there with lighted windows.

It was the house of his boyhood friend—poor Custis Campbell, lying dead; a white night there for “poor little Mrs. Campbell;” and his mental image of the widow threw up on the screen of his imagination the baleful shadow of the man he had never seen, Mr. Cyrus F. Miller, of Milldale.

He saw Mr. Miller next day, and his premonitions were confirmed.

He was one of those men who look as though they have tasted alum—a tight little mouth slued down to one side, open and showing the lower teeth, but hard. He had alert, prehensile eyes that looked out unsteadily from under bushy, red-brown eyebrows. Otherwise his face was normal, clean-shaven, but far from handsome.

“Fifty,” Birkland reflected; “and deep and crooked and dark.”

He turned to the major, who had accompanied him up-town. “I agree with you on your characterization,” he said.

“Are you sure you want to negotiate that land-deal yourself, Henry?” asked the major. “He’ll want to rob you. That’s in his line.”

Birkland took thought.

After all, it would be a mere opening of negotiations. Before the purchase could be consummated he would have to get money—money at any price. And if he was to have this man as a neighbor there might as well be frankness on his own part, whatever might be forthcoming from the other.

“I’ll try it myself, major.”

“Remember, if he asks more than three thousand for that particular tract he’s trying to skin you.”

“I’ll remember.”

Mr. Miller had evidently been brought into town early through his anxiety for the wrecked bank. It was on the steps of the bank building that he now stood talking to a growing group of citizens.

“Of course, I can’t tell what’ll be done,” he kept saying. “You must remember I am only a director.”

“But the most important,” some one

said. It was evidently put forward not as a compliment, but as a means of forcing some definite statement. Mr. Miller emitted a sour little laugh from his small, wry mouth.

“Us directors may all chip in, so far as we’re able—every little ’ll count.”

“That’s a most extraordinary offer for a mean man to make,” Birkland communed with himself.

“Have they located any of the money?” asked a fat man with a white and flabby face.

“Ask the police! Ask the police!” said Mr. Miller in falsetto tones. He had been asked the same question before, and manifestly it made him peevish. The crowd was growing momentarily larger. Mr. Miller looked out over it, seeking, possibly, for a friend. His search must have been vain.

A small man with a derby hat on a head that was too big for him elbowed his way brutally to the front.

“Are you sure,” he demanded, “that the directors didn’t cop out that cash?”

Mr. Miller sought to freeze him with a look of his shifty eyes, but failed.

“Are you sure that some clost friend of his’n didn’t cop it out?” persisted the little man.

Mr. Miller didn’t answer that, but the crowd did. Somehow, it sent a little crisping chill down Birkland’s backbone when he heard the crowd’s answer—a ragged, spasmodic attempt at a cheer.

Mr. Miller’s face went black with rage. He saw one of the town’s four policemen standing near the curbstone.

“Officer,” he piped, “you’ll have to keep order here.”

There were a good many boys in the crowd now. They led the cheering at that, but a good many men joined in naggingly.

“I bet you know where that cash is yourself,” shouted the small man, sure of his backing.

Mr. Miller spat out the beginning of an oath, checked himself, smiled crookedly.

"And, by God, we ought to choke it out of him," cried the little man, facing the crowd.

Mr. Miller had decided to go elsewhere, was worming his way down one side of the stone stoop. At the same time the policeman was creating a diversion, forcing his way through the crowd. Evidently he was known to the majority of the citizens there. Several of them were frankly obstructing his way, calling him by name and urging him not to persist.

"Leave him alone, Charley!" "He didn't hurt any one." "He's all right."

"Hey, you," said the policeman, when he was as close to the little man as possible; "don't you make no disturbance here, or I'll run you in."

"You can club my nut off," said the little man; "they've robbed me of all I had."

He turned and smiled pitifully out over the crowd. He was standing on the topmost step. Every one could see him, despite his small stature—big brow, mustache over a weak chin and mouth, his derby hat pushed far back like that of an agitated business man.

Again they cheered.

Finding himself in such a prominent position with so many eyes focused upon him seemed to excite him even more. He had probably passed a sleepless night, poor fellow, anyway. He begun to make a speech.

"I'm as peaceable as the next one," he began, and the boys in the crowd urged him on with shrill cries; "but, by golly, fellows, when a feller's got you by the windpipe, you want to punch him."

"You got to stop that," cried the policeman, making another attempt to get nearer.

"Ah, leave him alone, Charley," a dozen voices protested. Friendly hands were holding the policeman back.

More cheering. The little man was

becoming more and more excited by his situation and attendant circumstances. He pushed his hat further back, tugged savagely at his mustache.

"I agree with Shakespeare that you shouldn't speak evil about dead people," he went on; "and I don't do it now. The crook or the crooks that has got your money and mine in their jeans to-day ain't dead, you can bet your sweet life on it they ain't. They're alive. But, by golly, if I had my say"—the voice rose to almost a scream—"they wouldn't be!"

The crowd roared at that.

There was some laughter in it, no doubt; for all of those present were not losers. A good deal of the noise certainly came from the small boys. But again Birkland felt a thrill running up and down his backbone.

He suddenly realized that he had almost cheered himself.

It made him feel foolish. He had started out, such a little while before, so calm and fortified. Whatever had happened to him, the future was brilliant.

Nothing could go wrong, if he kept his mind in the proper attitude—that was what Mary had impressed upon him.

He was to go ahead and negotiate the purchase of his old homestead just as though nothing at all had happened to him, just as though Mr. Cyrus F. Miller of Milldale was one of the finest gentlemen in the land.

Had he allowed Mr. Miller to escape?

The crowd was still cheering as he cast a glance around him. He saw the man he wanted not more than half a block away untying his horse preparatory to driving off.

Mr. Miller still had his back turned when Birkland came up to him, for he was engaged in arranging the yellow blanket he had just taken from his horse as an extra cushion for the buggy. Birkland hesitated a moment, then touched him on the shoulder. He was shocked by what followed.

Mr. Miller had given a violent start, whirled upon him with a face that was shot with dread.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

Known and Unknown.

IT only lasted for a moment or two—that look on Mr. Miller's face—but Birkland was never to forget it, especially as he was to see it again—see it under circumstances more striking and tragical still. The dread changed to suspicion; over the suspicion there was spread a thin veneer of politeness.

"What can I do for you?" Mr. Miller asked.

Birkland also recovered himself. The shock of what he had seen had sent his own mind momentarily racing back to the scene he had just left—to the small man on the steps of the bank, his pitiful, perilous harangue, the crowd, half mocking, half sympathetic. Mobs sometimes grew from crowds like that.

"I beg your pardon," he said; "I merely wanted to see you about the purchase of a certain piece of land."

A light of further relief came into Miller's shifty eyes.

"What land's that?"

"That old Birkland property, out at Milldale."

"Umph—the richest land in Butler County," said Mr. Miller, more from force of habit, perhaps, than any immediate desire to bargain. His eyes were down the street, in the direction of the bank. "Get into the buggy, and we'll drive over to the court-house. We can talk better over there, Mr.—Mr.—"

"Birkland—my name is Birkland."

Very little was said after that—just then; but during the short drive to the court-house Birkland had further opportunity to study the face of the man at his side. It was a face of shifting expressions, despite its hard lines.

Greed and cunning, bitterness and

satisfaction, fear and desperate resolution—a very remarkable face indeed, so Birkland thought.

There was a dismal room in the basement of the court-house with a tin sign on the door bearing the inscription "County Assessors." Mr. Miller unlocked this door with a key he carried, went in, invited Birkland to follow, then closed and locked the door behind them.

"This is my office when I come to town," he said shortly. "Sit down."

They looked at each other through the dim and dusty light of the place. Oddly enough, Birkland thought of Mary. Perhaps it was because it required such an effort on his part to choke back the instinctive hatred he felt for the man in front of him. Could even she, he wondered, be charitable to such a man as this.

"Well, Mr. Miller, how much do you want for it?"

"I never thought of selling it. You see, it's just as I said—about the richest tract in Butler County. You can raise everything on land like that."

"I wasn't expecting to farm."

"And land like that is doubling in value right along—Milldale growing fast; Hambleton spreading out in that direction. Speculators been after me all along. Just day before yesterday I had an offer of five thousand. I was expecting the gentleman back from Cincinnati to close the deal."

Birkland knew that the man was lying. In all his experience with men of one kind or another a lie had never been more manifest.

"Mr. Miller," he said, "I'm not a speculator any more than I'm a farmer. Moreover, I'm not a millionaire. I've come out here to buy that place merely as a matter of sentiment—because my folks lived there, because it was my old home. I want to live there again. That's why I want to buy it. That's why I'm willing to pay you a fair price for it."

Birkland was rather proud of that speech.

For honesty and ingenuousness, he told himself, Mary herself couldn't have improved on it. But if Birkland was satisfied it was evident that Mr. Miller was even more so. His face simply radiated crooked delight.

"Oh," he crooned, "that's a hoss of another color! Sentiment, is it? Now, I understand sentiment, and I'll tell you what I'll do. I'll let you take that passel of land and not another word said to any one for six thousand dollars—cash."

"Mr. Miller, that's just twice too much, and you know it."

"Six thousand—cash!"

"We're going to be neighbors—good neighbors, I hope—and you know very well that if you hold out for an unfair price it's going to cause regret."

"Are you talking cash or time-payments?" asked Mr. Miller suddenly.

In the silence that followed there seemed to come from the corridor beyond the locked door a shuffling footfall, very light, like that which might be made by a heavy person who seeks to walk cautiously. Mr. Miller raised a finger and listened.

Again a slight movement outside, something like suppressed breathing.

Birkland had an inspiration. He disregarded Mr. Miller's signal; raised his voice instead.

"I'm talking cash!"

It was odd that this simple declaration, even if it was delivered in a voice that was a little louder than necessary, should have sent through Mr. Miller such an obvious pang of nervousness.

Suddenly he got to his feet, tiptoed over to the door, stood there, listening.

Birkland was watching him, a new light dawning on the horizon of his mental vision. There was a muffled movement outside the door—there was no doubt about that.

Mr. Miller, quite as suddenly as he had left his chair, wrenched open the door and looked out. It was evident that he saw no one, for he looked long in one direction, then in another.

When he had closed the door again and locked it he came back visibly shaken.

"I don't mind telling you," he said, with a crooked, mirthless effort at a laugh, "that I'm getting rid of a lot of my farming property. And I haven't so much faith in those Cincinnati gents. They'll probably want to hem and haw. Their offer stands for you. Now, if you could come around with five thousand cash—"

"Three thousand," said Birkland steadily, his eyes never shifting from the other's face.

But even as he was saying it his mind was working madly in other directions. He could raise three thousand dollars cash somehow at short notice. There was the offer that Major Woods had made, and which he shouldn't refuse under the circumstances.

He would sell out every share of stock remaining to him in the Susquehanna, if necessary, however great the sacrifice might be, and that would bring him five or six thousand dollars at least.

"Cling fast to your vision—demand its realization!"

Both his own philosophy and that of Mary—God bless her!—were in accord as to that.

But there was something else—something that gave him a little, tingling sensation of an even more imminent power—was taking form in his mind. It was still shifting, nebulous, like the vapors of dawn, seen in that new light that had begun to come up a little while before on his mental horizon.

Custis Campbell's widow blamed what had happened at the bank on Cyrus F. Miller.

There were others who thought likewise—the small man with the large head, he who had made the speech, and some of those who had cheered him on. Birkland recalled the look of dread on Miller's face in response to the touch on his shoulder,

his manifest uneasiness just now, his declaration that he was getting rid of his land.

He looked steadily at Mr. Miller, nor even deigned to smile.

"Three thousand cash," he repeated.

"Not so loud!"

There was no mistaking the fact this time that something or some one was again astir just outside.

"If I did do such a darn-fool thing," Mr. Miller went on, "it would be as a matter of sentiment." He began to whine a little, and raised his own voice to a louder pitch. "I'd do a whole lot for sentiment. I always did."

"Sure!" said Birkland; "there's the case of poor Custis Campbell."

Mr. Miller's shrunken mouth twitched and his shifty eyes went to the door.

It sounded as though there might have been two persons out there who whispered.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

The Voices at the Door.

MORE than once in his career had Birkland put his trust in the simple fact that his position was unassailable—that his principles were right; that his motives were fair; that he had nothing to hide or to be afraid of.

Honesty with him wasn't an abstraction. It was something real—as solidly practical as the rock foundation of a lighthouse or a sky-scraper.

And more than once he had seen men squirm—bigger men than Cyrus F. Miller—through lacking this thing. Somewhere in the construction of their lives there was a hidden fault—a shifting foundation, a missing girder, cheap material.

Such spectacles, apart from his instinctive charity, had always consoled him, strengthened him in his own course. But he was experiencing a different sentiment now.

This time, there was no charity. He didn't want to gloat, but he did—just a little.

Mr. Miller was obviously afraid. Whatever the cause of it, Birkland was fully conscious now of the advantage that it gave him. There was another whispering advocate pleading his cause apart from the one or the several at the door.

It was Mr. Miller's own conscience, and it didn't matter much whether its theme was the wreck of the Hambleton National Bank and the suicide of its president, or something else.

"I always have to be a little careful in discussing my affairs here," said Mr. Miller, as he wiped his dry lips with the back of his hand. He laughed unevenly. "There's always such a lot of rubbernecks hanging around—"

He stopped short and listened, then once more went over to the door, with affected carelessness this time, and threw it open. No one was there.

Birkland watched Mr. Miller as he once more stared long in one direction, then the other.

He made a curious picture of doubt and wondering suspicion, for his neck was long, his jaws bulged roundly just under the ears, and the ears themselves stood well out from the head.

And Birkland himself was interested. He had heard the sounds. There could be no doubt about them. He ventured a suggestion.

"Maybe it was a rat."

"Rats don't whisper," the other objected.

"Then, it's to be three thousand dollars," said Birkland, resuming negotiations.

"Cash—this afternoon."

"Or to-morrow."

"To-morrow at the latest, subject to one condition, Mr. Birkland. I'm a fool to make such a bargain, but the fact needn't be advertised. I want you to keep quiet about it. I can keep the transfer quiet. What did I say—three thousand dollars? Oh, I can't let it go for that!"

"And I also have a condition or two, Mr. Miller," said Birkland, disregarding the last declaration. "I want the old house you moved off for a cider-mill."

"All for four thousand dollars?"

"For three—and then, something else."

Mr. Miller's eyes shifted to one of the windows, almost opaque with grime, then back to the door.

"That's curious," said Birkland evenly; "I also heard it again—just outside the door." He waited for a moment or two. "For three thousand dollars, and then something else."

"What?"

"Mr. Miller, when I lived in that house, there was a big stone in front of the fireplace—the old hearthstone. Do you remember it?"

"What—an old hearthstone?"

It was evident that Mr. Miller was either sparring for time or that his mind was too taken up with other thoughts.

"Yes. Where is it?"

"Why, I don't remember anything about an old hearthstone."

"Think!"

Mr. Miller, nervous, suddenly lost his temper.

"What are you talking about now?" he demanded, with snarling insolence. "You come around here with a picayune offer for your dad-blasted land, and I give in to you like a dad-blasted fool; and you want me to throw in a dod-rotted shack; and now you begin bellerin' for a hunk of dirty claystone—"

"So you do remember it!" said Birkland. "Where is it?"

"It's none of your business where it is."

"Where is it?"

Birkland hadn't turned a hair nor shifted his eyes. His voice was low.

"Well, by— Well, by—"

Miller stopped, suffocated.

"Where is it?" demanded Birkland, more softly still. He even smiled a little.

Two sounds reached them as they sat there in the grimy little room. One was a confused murmur in the distance—a crowd cheering, perhaps. The other was a recurrence of that ghostly sibilance at the door.

"You can go to hell!" said Mr. Miller whiningly. "I'm going to get out of here. I've got other things to attend to."

"Sit down," Birkland whispered, "and listen to what I have to say. It won't take long."

Fear and anger were both on the other's face as he again sat down. There followed another period of listening. Birkland's voice was still dispassionate as he resumed:

"You and I will go over together to Major Woods's office and seal this bargain for the land and the house, as we agreed, and you'll have that much off your mind. You've got enough on your mind, haven't you? Cheers up the street, whispers at the door, rumors going around town—some pretty shrewd investigators busy at the bank."

"What do you mean?"

"Where's that old hearthstone?"

Miller let out a raucous little cry, not very loud, but hideous—a laugh and a sob and a curse.

"All right," said Birkland; "that's enough for one day. Come on; we'll go and see Major Woods."

It was Miller who opened the door. But before he went out into the corridor he once more extended his long neck for a look to left and to right. No one there, and he laughed.

Birkland also paused just outside the door. He was puzzled. Those voices couldn't have been all imagination. A soiled newspaper on the dirty, unswept floor at his feet attracted his attention. It was a copy of the special edition that had heralded the failure of the bank and Campbell's death.

He read again the head-line:

BANK RIFLED—PRESIDENT A SUICIDE!

As he read, a passing breeze gave the page an air of animation. It lifted and

scraped against the door with a rustling whisper.

CHAPTER XXXV.

Signs of Storm.

IT isn't often that there is a concordance between weather and human events on this planet.

Many of the worst tragedies befall under a smiling sky. The sun shines bright and the boy drowns, the girl goes wrong, the invalid opens the door on eternity.

But as Birkland followed Miller out into the street it seemed, somehow, as though the whole world partook of those qualities that distinguished the room they had just left—dust and gloom, a gray atmosphere of huddling fear. He cast an eye aloft.

A storm was coming up.

The sky was overcast with coldly sodden clouds driven furiously out of the north. There had been a marked drop in the temperature since morning. Now and then a gust of wind lashed out with an invisible knout, cutting and freezing the shrinking mortal wherever it struck.

Birkland shivered; shivered twice—once physically, once mentally.

It wasn't like this that he would have had things come about, he told himself. It wasn't on this sort of a day that he would have negotiated the purchase of his birthplace. It seemed to him, almost, as though he were participating in a crime.

Perhaps he was. Just how much had there been of blackmail in these negotiations, so far as they had gone?

Miller slumped along, furtively, absorbed, planning something that only he might know. Then he and Birkland were brought together by a peculiar incident—peculiar because it seemed so out of place in the frigid gloom—a recurrence of the cheering they had heard.

Yet, the steps of the bank were deserted.

They looked at each other. Before they had time to speculate as to the nature of the celebration—or whatever it might be—the cause of it appeared. Charley, the policeman, had at last made his arrest.

The prisoner was the small man with the big head. There had evidently been a chase. Both were panting and disheveled.

"I tell you," shouted the little man, "they don't arrest no robbers! They arrest the feller that's robbed!"

Again the crowd cheered, enjoying the diversion mightily.

Cyrus F. Miller stepped into a doorway, and Birkland instinctively placed himself in front of him. The crowd was coming in their direction. But the little man had seen him.

"There's one of them, now," he howled.

Charley, the policeman, jerked him by the arm, bade him to come along; but the crowd was pressing close, and the prisoner felt that it was with him.

"If I had my way," he bawled savagely, "I'd hang him up now to a telephone-pole."

There were hoots and jeers. The crowd surged past, the little man making a desperate effort to delay the march.

"You'll get yours, you old skin-flint!"

What else he had to say was lost in the noisy tumult of the crowd. Birkland looked back at the man behind him with a smile. Mr. Miller also smiled, crookedly, but he was trembling.

Major Woods's office was in the Templar Block, on High Street. It was there that the Good Templars had their hall, and on this particular day many of the younger generation, unawares of the greater excitement in the street, were in the hall getting ready for some festival or other.

There was a piano in the hall, and every now and then there floated down to the large but somewhat bare office where the major sat a sound of dance-

music, the ripple and pulse of laughter and conversation.

The big, round stove sizzled and clinked cheerfully with its charge of coal—summer-weather, so far as the major was concerned. Life was certainly good.

He dozed awake—in that pleasant state of somnolence wherein dreams are subject to the will; and the major had sent his dreams back a good many years to the time when he and Jo Birkland were still rivals for the hand of Sarah Deane.

His white beard was on his bosom. But now and then he slowly shook his head up and down, and again from side to side.

Once he murmured half aloud: "Ah, me! Ah, me!" And again: "Good Lord! Good Lord!"

Like many men, who have kept old sorrows and romances alive and have never given the world at large any sign of it, the major had developed into a good deal of a mystic. Such dreams were the consolation of his old age—they had always consoled him.

How like it was to Sarah's boy that he should return like that from the East in the sudden quest of an ideal.

Sarah had been like that. Sarah had married Jo Birkland because—because she was sorry for him; sorrier for him than she had been for Eliphalet Woods, because he, Eliphalet, had been proud in those days and the richer of the two.

To the old major, sitting there with his white beard on his spotless white shirt and his equally white and spotless waistcoat, it was very sweet to hear the merrymaking of the young Templars—almost as though they were his and Sar—

There was a knock at the door, and the major roared: "Come in!"

Early night was drawing on—mysterious, wild, and threatening; but as Birkland looked out of the window of the major's office, with the major at his side, he felt such a warmth in

his heart as he had hardly ever known before.

In the breast-pocket of his coat was the deed to the land at Milldale.

Yellow lamplight glimmered from the windows of all the private houses he could see, and in each one of them he could picture some happy family-group around a fireplace such as he would make his own—a bivouac of comfort, sympathy and love.

For the first time in his life he was appreciating what it had meant to be alone in the world. What were riches and success to a heart gnawed by loneliness!

Fireside and family!

These were the very beginning of things. Men were already fighting for them back in the stone-age.

Then the wind howled. A white moon, with a wobegone face, peered, ghastly, from between runaway clouds. At the same time a lean horse, hitched to a buggy, sprang to the touch of a whip in the street just below.

It was Cyrus F. Miller starting out on his long drive to Milldale.

"Is he married?" asked Birkland, trying to pursue, even in this connection, his former line of thought.

"Him— No," said the major, with contempt. "Lives alone—hires paupers from the poor-house, imbeciles and such, to do his work."

"Why did you insist on paying him the entire sum this afternoon? I could get the money from New York by tomorrow, or a couple of days at most."

"Who knows what'll happen in a day or so? He may go the way of Custis Campbell, although I don't think he will. He's too mean. He may jump the country."

"But why should he lie so about that hearthstone?"

"Lord, Henry, let's not ask why human happiness is never perfect—never right away at first, that is."

His hand descended gently on Birkland's far shoulder, but something of the outer cold and the wind-driven clouds and the gaunt horse with the

fear-haunted man behind had struck into Birkland's heart.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

Sun and Shadow.

THIS feeling was to remain with him for days.

He didn't know it then. He was only conscious that it was there—that the garden of his dreams had a ghost in it. And, methodically, he set out to lay it.

He had ample time to think—something that he had lacked for a good many years—for, with the abundant tact of native kindness, the members of the Woods household recognized his needs and left him much to himself, even Mary.

He was willing that this should be so. He had enough to think about.

First of all he knew now that he stood committed, that he had put his New York life behind him forever. He had never been perfectly at home there—not as Bruce Howland, for example, was at home there.

This was where he was at home, out in the open, where neither people nor hours were crowded.

Not that he objected to work. He expected to work. He had liquidated his Susquehanna holdings, had paid back to Major Woods the money advanced for the payment to Miller, had even stripped himself to the extent of three thousand dollars more which he had sent to Bruce Howland as a return of the friendly deception in the matter of the undeclared dividends.

He was a poor man, with scarcely four thousand dollars to his credit. He would have to work.

But he expected to both work and grow. It was in such towns and counties and States as this that the country had found her Presidents.

He nourished no delusions about ever becoming President, nor of entering politics, even; but there were other big jobs abroad—great constructive

enterprises, such as aiding, for example, the panting hordes of the slums to do what he himself was doing, to get back to the universal mother of all men.

Thus he became certain that back of the impulse which had caused him to put New York behind him was something more than mere sentiment, powerful as sentiment is in the life of every man.

He had, in some way, obeyed the call of destiny as well. All men are "men of destiny," said Birkland to himself. It was destiny which had brought him back to the Miami Valley, and it was here that destiny would give him his work to do.

Therefore, it was fated that he go on with his project to put his old homestead in order—whatever difficulties were in his way—and to build up a family around him—whatever difficulties might be in the way of that either.

And wasn't it destiny, also, which had kept Mary Harmon free, youthful, beautiful?

Mary sustained him in all things. He couldn't keep even his worries to himself, however much he might have wanted to. She was one of those rare creatures—not so rare to-day as they were a while ago—who have a working philosophy of life and abide by it and impart it to others.

"Keep demanding, keep asking," she would thrill to him when she knew that he was depressed, "and you'll receive."

He couldn't quite see why this should be, but it consoled him. He even came to believe it.

"Don't worry about the future," she would urge again. "Do the right and beautiful thing now—the thing that's in line with the plan, and you'll see how splendidly everything will work out."

Birkland would look at her with baffled wonder.

Up to then he had been optimistic to the extent that two plus two equal

four, and that a brick would stay up if it were laid level on two other bricks and fastened into place with mortar.

"Well, I've done the right and beautiful thing to-day," he confessed one evening at the supper table.

The major laughed. Mary looked across at him with shining eyes. Mrs. Woods paused in serving the mashed potatoes.

"Oh, where is it? May I see?" cried Luella.

"You may," said Birkland, laughing on his own account, "the very first time you go to the livery-stable. I've bought Dan."

"Heigh-ho!" cried the major.

"Our first horse," said Mary, clapping her hands.

"Yes," Birkland went on; "but I tempered your philosophy with mine—made them take fifty dollars off the price they asked—reminded them that Dan was a sooner when it came to eating and wearing out his shoes."

"Glorious!" said Mary. "Now I'm sure, sure as I always have been, that our demands are being heard."

It was Dan—solid, not too much in a hurry, but kind and obedient withal—who conducted Birkland and Mary Harmon on their first joint trip to Milldale.

Birkland, taking the advice of the major and obedient to his own impulse in the matter, had lost no time in having the old homestead restored to its original position. John Brown, the Milldale blacksmith, had undertaken the job and done it well—careful not to break anything, sparing the hedge, sparing the rose-bush that had run wild.

And it was John Brown who was the first in Milldale—apart from Mary's Aunt Miriam—to be informed of their engagement.

He came out from his forge with his wrought-iron face pliant with affectionate enthusiasm.

"I had an eye to that," he confided. "I hoped it'd be so; I couldn't believe it'd be otherwise."

"Why so?" asked Birkland.

He gave them a mystic smile, went back presently to his work, pondering no doubt on this welding of human lives—blacksmith work, also, yet so delicate, so tremendous.

They drove on past the creamery—very busy, with its smoke-stack and panting steam-vent. There was a possible investment there, said Birkland.

A man with limited capital, but not too limited as to brains and energy, could take over a plant like that and make it grow—grow like a pumpkin-vine, in these rich bottoms where cows had everything to make them happy.

"Then, later on," Birkland continued, "there will be a fortune in the building of an electric road through this section—'The Miami & Milldale Electric Railway Company'—see, I've figured it out, given it a name. I've even seen the farmers carrying out their stuff for the early morning freight-car service—a basket of eggs for Oxford, a crate of chickens for Hambleton, a barrel of onions for the Grand Hotel—hamburger steak."

"Oh, that's the way of success," cried Mary; "visualize what you want, then fill it in with facts!"

"Is that the way you've kept beautiful?"

"Am I beautiful?"

Birkland guided Dan into the shore road, where he knew that no one could see, before he answered.

He needed—both of them needed, perhaps—a stimulus to new courage just then. So small, so empty—it stood there in front of them, their future home!

Mary instantly had tears in her eyes. Birkland, starting to make some jocular remark, suddenly stopped with a lump in his throat.

Then she smiled.

"See it with flowers blooming all around it," she said. "See it with the roses clambering right up to the roof. See it, even as merely a part of the big and beautiful home that is to be."

Said Birkland: "I have. But,

Mary, as long as that one thing is missing—Miller has done something with that hearthstone, and I can't find out. It's the heart of everything. I carved your initial on it, as I did on my own heart. It's the symbol, it's the Holy Grail, it's sacred."

"Dear heart," whispered Mary, "go ahead with the vision."

"It haunts me—the ghost in my garden!"

"All ghosts are laid, sooner or later, if we can keep the darkness away from our thoughts."

"I could take Miller by the neck, and—"

"Sh-h! Listen; we'll go ahead just as though we had it, and then, when the time comes— You'll see!"

Was Mary a prophet? Perhaps. For even then Fate was preparing one of those master plays with which she occasionally amuses herself.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

The Voice of the Mob.

FROM that stormy evening when Birkland watched Cyrus F. Miller start off behind his gaunt horse for the drive to Milldale, Miller had kept out of Birkland's sight.

At first Birkland had made several attempts to see the man, determined to end some way or other the foolishness concerning the hearthstone. But Miller wouldn't be seen.

His house, kept prim and clean by pauper labor, was an inhospitable place at the best.

It stood on a hill about a mile back from Birkland's place. It had about it a certain air of hard prosperity—painted, perfectly conserved. But the shutters were always closed.

No guests ever came or went. A large, belligerent dog barked at all those who passed in the road.

It was here that Miller lived alone. He was unmarried. He had no relatives, so far as any one knew. He took no interest in his neighbors.

He did no farming. He was the country financier, feared by some, disliked by all.

The first time that Birkland went up to the house on the hill, he got no further than the paling fence that surrounded the door-yard. It was the big dog, a sort of mongrel mastiff, that stopped him. He saw no one.

He got no answer to his hail.

The second time he penetrated the door-yard; the dog this time being held in check by an imbecile man. But the man's only answer to his inquiries was open-mouthed silence and a vacant stare.

The third time his discomfiture was even greater, for not even the dog was in evidence—nor a living soul.

And Birkland's wrath was cooled by a certain chilling of the blood. He wondered whether it could be true—or whether the feeling was due to mere nervousness—that he had been watched by invisible eyes all the time that he was there.

But this was true—events in Hambleton were so shaping themselves that he was not alone in concentrating more or less interest on Mr. Miller and his inhospitable house.

The deeper the investigation proceeded into the affairs of the Hambleton National Bank and the circumstances leading up to the death of Custis Campbell, deeper became public conviction that Miller was in some way involved. Nothing much was said, as yet—save by the scatter-brained and the gossips.

Such subterranean murmurs often come and go—especially in small towns, where they are more easily heard. Sometimes they are the forerunners of a cataclysm.

As for Birkland, he had decided to take Mary's advice and let matters take their course—so far as they lay beyond his control. This was the policy he adopted with regard to the wrecked bank.

All in good time, the affair would be straightened out, so far as they

could ever be straightened out, and he would get his share with the others. Already it was being computed that the depositors would receive about fifty per cent.

That would mean ten thousand dollars for him; and with ten thousand dollars—

Mild weather had again set in after the recent storm, and, although there was some snow on the ground, he had taken Dan and moved out to Milldale, there to make his temporary home with Mary's Aunt Miriam.

He had work to do out there, and, for the time being it was the only work that appealed to him.

There he could stand with his feet on the ground—ground that his father and mother had trod—ground that was his own. He loved it.

He trimmed the trees and hedges. He and Dan worked for days hauling boulders for the new chimney he was to have built, and more boulders still for the stone wall with which his whole domain was to be surrounded.

Much of the time Mary was there with him; and it must have been a sight to entertain the angels, to see these two mated creatures planning and building their nest against the coming of the spring. Paths laid out, plantations of trees both useful and ornamental decided upon, a rock-garden there with a fountain in it.

A real fountain? Why not! With a small gasoline engine to do the work, and the abundant water that was theirs!

But, through it all—and Birkland was sounding depths of happiness he had never before imagined—there ran that minor strain of the missing hearthstone.

It had become a sort of obsession with him. He couldn't think of it without feeling the skin along his spinal column creep—where our ancestors, perhaps, had bristles—making him feel a good deal as that dog of Miller's looked whenever there were strangers about.

The hearthstone was necessary.

It was to be the talisman of this new life of his. It was to throw all of the good luck that might be coming to him into this new life of his. He worked, but he knew that he was doing this chiefly through the blind faith that Mary and his own dreams inspired.

But he was waiting—waiting—

Then, one night, Fate raised the curtain on that master-play of hers—a master-play so far as he, and certain others, were concerned.

He had retired for the night at Aunt Miriam's. The old lady lived in a pleasant house that topped a rise on the other side of Milldale. The weather was mild, but not unseasonably so.

And Birkland, with his window wide open, had tucked the quilt about his ears. It seemed to him that scarcely had he closed his eyes than the waters of the Branch had risen in a spring freshet, were roaring as they used to roar in the old days under the covered bridge.

Then, suddenly, he was wide awake, but the roaring continued.

There was something grisly about it—continuous, remote, yet suggestive of human passion. It wasn't the river that had a voice like that. Nor was it Aunt Miriam, nor Sally, the hired girl. It was outside—far away.

There came a shot, faint yet distinct, then another and another, while the roar went two full tones higher. It wasn't one voice. There were many of them—the complex, thrilling note of a mob.

In an instant, he was out of bed and hurrying into his clothes. With no very definite idea as to what was happening as yet, still his mind kept reverting to the scene outside the Hambleton National Bank the first day that he had seen Cyrus F. Miller.

The crowd then had made a sound something like the one he was hearing—only smaller, more fragmentary.

He was outside, in the black village street, before the rest of the household

was disturbed. But there were lights in several windows. Several men whom he did not recognize, but who called him by name, passed him with incoherent explanations.

A red glow appeared to the north, beyond the branch, in the direction of his home—"his home!"

It couldn't be that; but, with a sudden gripping at his heart, he started to run. Nor did he stop until he had crossed the bridge, plunged down the shore-road and stood gasping inside the wall that he himself had built.

Even here in the blackness, the place was hallowed.

He loved it. The spirits of his mother and father, of his brothers and sister, of Mary, and of his own accumulated dreams pressed about him. He stood there, getting his breath back.

The red glow was brighter. On the horizon, strangely near, there was a whirling gust of flame and fantastically luminous smoke. Now he knew. Comprehension staggered him.

That was Miller's house—the inhospitable, the mysterious. The roar of the flames that consumed it were almost as loud as the roar of the mob that watched it burn.

Just then a black form emerged from behind Birkland's own shadowy house and kept on at an awkward run toward the road. Instinctively Birkland had leaped in pursuit.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

Men and Masks.

IT was Miller himself.

Birkland knew it—knew it as certainly as a sleuth-hound knows its quarry. Perhaps it was the sleuth-hound instinct that was uppermost within him just then—that here was the man he had been looking for and who never again should escape.

A moment, and he had seized him roughly by arm and collar, had almost thrown him to the ground:

"Stop! Where are you going?"

Miller was gasping for breath, but there was another reason why no words came. The face that he turned on his captor was stamped with the same expression that Birkland had seen there once before.

The darkness made it all the more ghastly, accentuated the lines of dread and evil.

"For God's sake!" he panted. "For God's sake!"

"What's the matter?"

"The mob!—they're burning my house. They want to kill me. Let me go!" He repeated the request in what would have been a shriek, if tones so small and strangled could be called a shriek. "Let me go!"

"Where?"

"To get away."

"You're guilty—you made Custis Campbell kill himself."

"So help me God!"

Miller made a sudden effort to free himself, but Birkland was gripping him with all the new strength that had come to him with his work out-of-doors.

An inner rage, controlled but burning fiercely, added to this strength. Now was the time to choke from this creature the one thing he cared to know—that secret so trivial and yet so vital.

Miller read his thoughts, even while he squirmed and moaned.

"I sold it—that's why I wouldn't tell you about it."

"Sold the hearthstone?"

"A professor—"

"Where?"

Miller was struggling again. He struck and kicked with the desperation of panic. He began to curse, weepingly.

"They're coming. They'll kill me. You want to murder me. Oh—"

While he stormed blasphemously, taxing Birkland's strength to keep his mastery, there was a resurgence of cries, nearer, more chaotic. What Miller had said was true.

It was the imbecile of the open

mouth and vacant stare who had seen his master flee, then, with some eleventh-hour awakening of the intellect—under stress of the unusual excitement, the slowly accumulated stimulus of dumb vengeance for real or fancied wrongs—had given the word.

There was no time to be lost. Birkland sought to listen, to form a plan.

He shook Miller savagely.

"Keep quiet," he hissed, "or I'll smash you myself."

"Save me!" Miller sobbed. "Let me go!"

The request, hysterical as it was, gave Birkland, hard pressed, the idea he sought.

"I'll save you, but I won't let you go," he said. "Come with me."

Still gripping his prisoner, he made for the shore-road and started toward the village. Now and then he looked back. The mob was coming on.

Some of its members carried lanterns. Some carried improvised torches, which they sought to keep flaming by whirling them overhead. But progress was slow. They were scattered. They were making some pretense at trailing over the half-melted snow. Where to?

Birkland had a half-formed plan of hurrying Miller on through the village to Aunt Miriam's house, greatly as he disliked to do so. But even that would be preferable to turning Miller over to the mob. He knew what a mob might do.

He remembered having seen once, when he was a little boy, a souvenir of mob-rule hanging to a tree one frosty morning in a village not ten miles away. He shuddered.

He was equally determined, however, to prevent Miller's flight.

In his own mind, he believed that Miller was guilty, if only in part, of the ruin of Campbell and the wrecking of the bank, had believed so ever since that morning he had seen the man shiver and turn white at the touch of a strange hand on his shoulder.

They were passing through the all but opaque shadows of the cotton-wood-trees near the bridge when Miller made his last desperate attempt to free himself from Birkland's grasp. It came without warning—a backward kick, a blow, a floundering lurch.

Then, before Birkland could have retaliated, even had he wanted to, they had all but collided with some one else. In the dim light, Birkland recognized the silhouette of the newcomer, and his heart gave a surge of relief.

It was John Brown, the blacksmith. He had come just in time.

While Birkland was still gasping out an explanation there was an outburst of hoarse cries not far back of them. The vanguard of the mob had come upon the fresh footprints, doubtless, at the side of the deserted house.

The blacksmith had taken one of Miller's arms in his own mighty grip. He listened to Birkland, disregarding altogether the blasphemous demands and whimperings that again poured from the prisoner's crooked mouth.

"We'll run him up to the forge," said Brown, "and keep him there until the crowd goes away."

But they hadn't taken a dozen steps before the crowd was on their trail with wild hurrahs. Birkland cast one glance over his shoulder, saw a confused and grotesque constellation of flickering, bobbing lights.

"We'll have to run," he gasped.

"Run," ordered Brown, jerking at Miller's arm.

But it was almost more than Miller could do. He sagged and lurched like a drunken man. There came a clicking sound from his throat, as though his body refused to breathe even without a protest.

"Run, dog-gone you!" commanded the blacksmith again.

By this time he and Birkland were dragging Miller along in a shuffling effort at speed. It was heartbreaking labor. The crowd was gaining, though still unconscious that the man they sought was just ahead.

They had mounted the rise by the bridge, were in the main street of the village, with the blacksmith-shop not a hundred yards away when the thing happened. It fell upon them, like so many big events, with unnoticed preliminaries, for all of a sudden without gradation the mob was upon them and around them.

There was an orgie of disordered light and movement and clamorous sound.

Birkland was fighting and shouting to protect the man to whom he clung. He knew that the blacksmith was doing the same.

It was phantasmal, nightmarish; for he wasn't fighting men—there were men in the background whom he dimly saw—but he was fighting with creatures who were masked and who made no human sound.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

Missing, One Prisoner.

THEY were at the door of the forge before Birkland had his first conscious communication with the blacksmith since the fighting began.

He knew that he had been struck, and that he had struck, but his body was too hot and his nerves too excited for details. The communication of the blacksmith reached him rather by some sixth sense than by the ordinary sense of hearing.

"Hold them off a minute while I get him inside."

And Birkland did so.

Suddenly he laughed. He was breathless, wildly excited, had burning spots about him that he dimly recognized as hurts. But he laughed, for in the sweaty, dusty, brutal phantasmagoria of which he was the center he had recognized a familiar figure.

It was that of the small man with the big head.

He still wore his derby hat pushed far back from his bulging forehead. Like most of those who were pressing

close he was masked—an ordinary handkerchief tied across his face and holes cut in it.

As if there could be any disguise for that miniature stature and oversized head!

A Napoleon of a man! A little corporal!

To make the analogy still more complete, this hideous, funny little figure wore the counterpart of a military sash—a sinister and lugubrious thing, for it was a coil of manila rope, swinging from one shoulder down to the opposite hip.

Time—that was the thing that was most needed now. Concentrating all the physical strength that remained to him, Birkland, almost in a single movement, had grasped the coil of rope, bringing the little man with it, and was leaning back against the door through which the blacksmith had just disappeared.

Intuition, always quicker and more direct than thought, had told him that here was his one best hope for diversion. Even in a mob a man's vanity may be reached.

"Tell your men to hold off a minute," he shouted.

The wearer of the rope was waving his arms. Leader, he was, perhaps.

"Hold off a minute," he bellowed. And again: "Hold off a minute, you—"

He backed up the adjuration with a string of frightful oaths. He was creating a diversion at any rate. There was a sufficient subsidence of other sound for him to be heard.

There were others who began to laugh—from sheer hysteria, most likely.

"No mob-law here," shouted Birkland; "this is our county, this is our State!"

The little man turned, wrath at having been tricked, even for a moment, burning manifest through his flimsy disguise, making his body quiver.

"The hell you say!" he shrieked.

"We come out here for Miller. Boys, he's trying to save him as robbed us!"

Birkland didn't let time enough elapse for this verbal firebrand to do much damage. He was thrilled by the image of his own words—"our county, our State!" He could never have used such words, nor conceived such a thought even a little while ago.

"I tell you mob-law is a disgrace," he shouted at the top of his lungs. "There'll be none of it in Butler County—there'll be none of it in this part of Ohio, *so help me God!*"

There were those who were listening—he could feel it—especially on the outer fringe of the crowd, boys and men who had had no part in the mob's original activities and purpose. "You're not attacking one man. You're attacking all of us. You're disgracing other homes!"

"Come on, boys; we'll duck him in the crick!" bellowed the little man. "He's Miller's friend!"

He raised his arm and struck twice at Birkland, hitting him on breast and chin.

Sporadic fights were starting elsewhere, between members of the original mob and some of the villagers, no doubt. On one side of him, some one had lit a newspaper and was trying to set fire to the old plank walls of the smithy.

There was a crushing attack in that direction, and the attempt became a scrimmage.

On Birkland's other side, another member of the mob had discovered a plank that was loose and started to pull it off. A moment later he had fallen back with a cry, all but impaled by a steel rod thrust from the interior.

Then there was the blacksmith at Birkland's side again. It wasn't a moment for fine ethical questions as to the propriety of choosing an antagonist of one's own size.

John Brown signaled his return to activity by bringing his mighty palm down with crushing weight on top of the derby hat. The little corporal

went down as though he had been a peg on soft ground and hit by a mallet.

"We want Miller," came a raucous voice on an alcoholic gale.

Birkland saw a revolver with a general background of handkerchief and mustache. He and John Brown had grabbed at the weapon, both at the same time. There was a report.

It felt to Birkland as though one of his fingers had been blown away—as a matter of fact, he was merely burned and slightly nicked—but he caught the revolver as it fell. The blacksmith had seized the fellow's arm.

It was that shot, then a shriek.

"You've broken my arm!"

"That's what I wanted to do," said the blacksmith.

Birkland held up the revolver in his wounded hand. There was little light. Torches had been abandoned. Several of the lanterns had gone out altogether or were flickering dimly, kicked about.

How long would it last? The whole thing had lasted but a few seconds, that he knew.

Simultaneously with his movement and his thought came the diversion that he was unconsciously praying for.

There was an eddy of movement, a new vortex of sound off to the left, and he saw that out of the night some one had arrived in a buggy. He caught a glance of a thin-necked horse with its head held high, then of a bearded man striking to left and to right and getting no blows in return.

From the rim of the crowd a dozen voices clamored the news.

"It's the sheriff!"

Then the man himself declared the fact:

"I'm sheriff of this county."

Then he raised his voice still louder.

"Grab one or two of them, Bill, before they get away!"

There was a stampede.

Only the man with the broken arm was left behind—and him only because he was too sick to run. The little man with the derby hat might

have been caught, only, in that momentous fraction of a second, the blacksmith was engaged in giving him a kick in the region where a kick is most likely to induce speed.

It induced speed this time—the little corporal was off like a scared rabbit, rope and all.

“Boys,” said the sheriff, addressing Birkland and the blacksmith indifferently, “it ’pears I got here a little late.”

There was a minute or so of confusion, and then they were crowding into the smithy. It was cavernous and dark.

“Hey, Miller,” cried Mr. Brown; “here’s the sheriff.”

No voice answered him.

Cyrus F. Miller was gone.

CHAPTER XL.

The One Great Thing.

“YOU’RE a hero,” said Mary as she corked the arnica-bottle, on the following afternoon, and brought Birkland’s bandaged hand lightly to her cheek. “Ah, I almost wish that you were still more badly hurt—no, I don’t mean that—so that I could take still greater care of you.”

“What if I’d been crippled for life?” asked Birkland with a quizzical smile, merely wondering what she would say.

“Oh, I should have loved it—you know what I mean—to be your nurse, your mother, your—your—”

“I know,” Birkland answered softly; “my—my—everything.”

He used his hurt hand, this time, to draw her closer to him, knowing that it would furnish her sufficient excuse, if one were needed, for not resisting overmuch.

She had given him the news from Hambleton.

It appeared that little Mrs. Campbell, in searching through her husband’s effects, had at last discovered a paper that had made it abundantly

clear that Cyrus F. Miller was implicated in the dead banker’s speculations, if not actually the instigator of them.

It had begun by illegal loans—to Miller—and then Miller had used these very loans as a club to force the banker on down the crooked path. The word had gone abroad, and late that evening the mob had formed.

“You’re a hero,” she repeated. “The sheriff says that if it hadn’t been for you there would have been one of those horrible lynchings.”

“John Brown did more than I did.”

“You and Mr. Brown; but you’ve shed your blood in defense of a principle. Such actions never fail to do good in the world—to bring their own reward.”

Birkland laughed.

“I lost an opportunity, rather. I had the measly rascal where I wanted him—luck threw him into my hands. I could have settled the matter of the hearthstone, at least, once and for all, but I let him get away.”

“That doesn’t matter,” she consoled him, with conviction. “The great thing is to act always as though you had the thing you wanted—that’s the real test of strength and faith. That’s what you’ve done. You’ll see—ah, can’t you see that all the happiness and wealth and power in the world is ours, already? That the great plan is working out?”

“Yes,” Birkland whispered, as she, forgetful of herself in her seriousness, lifted her face to his.

As a matter of fact, it did seem that events were shaping themselves for the good—that the plan, as Mary called it, was beneficent in its general drift, whatever the incidental features of it might appear.

Miller was gone—good riddance of a bad neighbor.

So much of a blight removed from future peace and happiness, so Birkland figured it. He could never have been perfectly content with a neighbor like that soiling the landscape and atmosphere.

Then, one day, he got a letter from Amos T. Merriman, Julia's father. Birkland's heart missed a beat as there fell from the envelope a check for thirty-one hundred dollars. The old gentleman explained succinctly that he had made a "killing" in ice, and that he was merely returning Birkland's principal and his share of the profits.

Great Heavens! And he had permitted himself to harbor doubts about the future!

As he stood there with the check in his hand, some trick of the imagination transformed Mary's philosophy into something that he could visualize.

Milldale, Butler County, Ohio, the United States, the world at large, Infinity—these were the heritage of the optimists. The deed to their possession was faith—the ability, as Mary had said, "to act always as though you had the thing you wanted." Faith had started him out from New York, it had given him this check, it had given him Mary.

It was the one great thing, and on this he would build his home and his future.

He acted on this clear vision without delay. He hitched up Dan and drove into Hambleton, and there hired a carpenter and a mason. Winter was breaking.

There were evidences of an early spring. Work on the old house could begin at once.

Then he drove down to the Grand Hotel and called out the porter. The negro came with a shuffle and a grin. He and Birkland had become better acquainted.

"Ambrose," said Birkland, "I've been thinking over what you said about wanting to work in the country. When can you begin?"

"Does you mean when I can begin, boss?"

Ambrose was still trying to smile, but his emotions were getting the better of him. He had long been harboring thoughts of marriage.

"Yes, I'll want a good strong man for a lot of hard work—looking after the horse, raising some vegetables and corn."

"Co'n!" cried Ambrose softly. And he repeated the word with a rising quaver, quite as though the word conveyed some promise that was too good to be true: "Co'n! Oh, Lawdy, Mistah Birkland, jest see this nigger in de vineyard!"

Birkland drove on around to the Woods home. He had been saving this part of his day's activities to the last.

Luella opened the door for him. He gave her a hasty hug and a kiss, saw Mary appear in the hall. Without an instant's hesitation he advanced and threw both arms about her, kissing her also, as Luella watched, first with amazement, then with skipping joy.

"When are you going to marry me?" he demanded, without other preliminary. "Don't run away, Luella; this is a family affair. When?" he persisted. "To-day, to-morrow, next week, or when the first spring flowers are in bloom?"

"Oh, Henry!"

"You've found your hearthstone!" she thrilled.

"No," he answered; "I'm taking your advice—acting as though I had."

"Then, you'll be sure to have it."

"When?"

"Some day, soon, I know; it will turn up—"

"No; I mean—when—will—you—marry me?"

With his arms about both Luella and Mary he led them into the parlor. Mother Woods was away at a meeting of the ladies of her church. Major Woods had not yet returned from the law-office, where he still made a pretense at business. There was ample time for discussion.

"And now, dear little Luella," said Birkland; "you go over to the piano and play all the prettiest pieces that you know."

"I make a good many mistakes,"

declared that young lady, with becoming modesty.

"Oh, that's all right, honey," said Birkland; "your Aunt Mary and I sha'n't mind."

CHAPTER XLI.

Found, Found at Last!

SPRING coming on, and the Miami Valley, with the rest of the northern hemisphere, was getting ready to perform the annual miracle-play.

It might have been merely due to his changed outlook on life, or it might have been due to the actual betterment in his prospects, but as Birkland went about his daily work he felt, for the first time in his life, that he was in partnership with everything about him.

During his early struggles in New York he had often envied those men who possessed "influence"—men in touch with the "big interests," the great banks and the great corporations.

He was becoming master now of another sort of influence—an influence compared with which the sort he once envied was a most trivial thing. He was in touch with something greater than any millionaire or any institution. He was in touch with something that was superhuman. It was the Primal Cause.

He knew it—the thing that was informing nature was informing his own life, and he acted accordingly.

He and Mary were to be married the first week in April. He was proceeding with his arrangements for this event as calmly and confidently as the cottonwoods and willows were preparing for their own part in the spring pageant.

The rock-chimney was rising in its place.

There was a wide porch around the house. The paths that he and Mary had laid out were being smoothed and graveled. Trees and bushes were arriving by the dozen from the nursery

and were being set out, each in its proper place.

There was a rock-garden with a fountain in it. A magic day would come—before very long, now—when the flowers would bloom and the sparkling water leap into the air.

Dan went about his work with perfect patience, a perfect understanding—apparently—what it was all about; how solemn it was, and important.

And it was with the same patience, the same sense of importance, but with a degree of more manifest enthusiasm, that Mr. Ambrose White went about his part of the labor; for there was a small house—white folks would have called it a bungalow—newly built, back by the wood-lot, and already there were morning-glory seeds in the clean and fecund earth at the side of it.

Ambrose had secretly decided upon the same day in April for his own nuptials. Some day, he told himself, there would be picaninnies running about these fields and fishing for toothsome catfish in the Branch.

There were two things that might have caused Birkland worry—that might, at any rate, have put a couple of drops of gall into the ambrosia of this new life of his.

One of these was his financial condition. By careful management he would be able to live on what he had without the necessity of looking for a job.

He was a poor man, judged by the standards he had built up for himself and to which he still adhered, only a few months back.

It surprised him at times to find himself so calmly looking the future in the face, thinking big thoughts, planning big things despite this handicap. But, even when he tried to, he couldn't get rid of the sense of abundance, that he would have all that he needed; and that, when he needed it, the necessary money would appear.

There was a material basis for this feeling.

He was getting more encouraging letters from Bruce Howland of late. Bruce had been making a long, uphill fight and was winning out.

He had taken the three thousand dollars that Birkland had sent back to him and bought with it, for Birkland's account—so he said—as much of the stock as he could that Birkland himself was offering.

"You showed faith in me, old man," he wrote, "when the world was pronouncing me a rotten risk. Now, I've got faith in myself, faith in the Susquehanna—"

Birkland sent back a telegram—"Stick to your faith, and God bless you."

But even without the Susquehanna there was wealth enough for every one, right there in the Miami Valley—the countless billions of cells, each one a wealth-factory, that went to make up organic and inorganic nature. It made Birkland's head swim to think of the opportunities that lay waiting for him at his door.

The other thing that might have caused him worry, but did not, was the matter of the missing hearthstone.

That was the one detail of the rejuvenated old home that remained unfinished. He had lacked the heart—or the indifference—to put in another stone, as yet.

He fought the matter over in his mind, especially at night. Often he would get up in the morning determined to settle the matter once and for all by putting the new hearthstone into place. If the old one appeared later on, no harm done—that would be time enough for a change.

But he could never quite bring himself to carry this plan into execution.

A thousand subtle advocates would appear to bid him stay—some forgotten sight or smell or association that would bring the whole world of spirit and imagination into pulsing life; the very feel of the air around him waking, in the back of his brain, the loves and aspirations of boyhood.

And then, once more, Birkland would recognize that this particular piece of stone was not only a symbol that he sought, but a talisman.

He discussed the matter at length with John Brown, the blacksmith, who was a kindred spirit and could understand—told him what Miller had said about it the night he fled.

"Said he sold it, did he? He could hardly have made that up—not with that mob at his heels."

"Yet, who would have bought it?"

"It might have made a tombstone No—it couldn't have been that—not Harris, at any rate. Harris has a quarry of his own, except for fancy granite and marble."

"It might have been bought as a geological specimen."

"That's right—there was a professor around here some years ago picking at the rocks."

He followed these clues with no great hope. Twice he hitched up Dan and, Mary at his side, visited the cemeteries for miles around.

Once he drove to Oxford, ten miles away, where there was a university, and talked to the professor of geology there. Even his disappointment on these occasions was tinged with a sort of melancholy pleasure. He was neglecting nothing—was doing what he ought to do.

Then, one evening, in the middle of March, he had a sudden, pulse-quickenning premonition that all was well.

He was walking from the post-office to Aunt Miriam's at the time. He stopped in his tracks and wondered what it was. He knew that this feeling that had swept in upon him was not due to ordinary causes. Mary had been waiting for him on other evenings than this. On other evenings the air had been exhilarating, cool, spiced with the perfumes of stirring life.

He hurried back to the shore-road. How beautiful his home looked there in the glamouring dusk!

A moment later he was hailed by the voice of Ambrose White:

"Hey, Mistah Birkland, we've found yo' hearthstone!"

CHAPTER XLII.

Out of the Shadows.

AMBROSE wasn't alone. He was accompanied by a thin wraith of a figure whom Birkland immediately recognized.

It was the imbecile pauper who had formerly worked for Cyrus F. Miller. Sight of him brought with it a measure of revelation. Birkland's thought flew to the hill where Miller's house had formerly stood.

Ever since the night the mob had visited the place and Miller had fled, it had remained deserted—lonely, haunted, hideous; ashes, charred wood, crumbling brick, and twisted metal where the prim house and stables had been; poultry scattered no one knew where; the body of that belligerent dog somewhere in the ruins; the three horses and a cow that had been Miller's "boarded out" until the day that the sheriff should sell them to pay the cost of their "keep."

That was where the hearthstone must be. In his supreme moment, with sudden death clamoring at his heels, Miller had been true to the habits of a lifetime and had lied.

That was the truth.

Ambrose explained that late that afternoon he had seen the pauper poking round in the ruins and had watched him, wondering what he was about. Then he had seen the man trying to lift a weight from among the debris that half filled the cellar of the house. It was the hearthstone.

Ambrose recognized it from having heard Birkland speak about it.

"He started fer to run away," said Ambrose, with a touch of legitimate pride; "but I says: 'No sir; you come along wif me. Mistah Birkland'll want to talk wif you,' I says."

"Did he kick?" asked Birkland.

"No sir; he didn't 'ject any."

Birkland looked at the pauper. He stood there, mouth open, indifferent, as one who bears his honors lightly. It was getting dark.

"What did you want there?" Birkland asked gently.

The man squirmed like a bashful child, murmured something, looked over his shoulder.

"He says as how he wants to go back there," Ambrose interpreted.

"Get your lantern, Ambrose, and come in," Birkland ordered.

He wouldn't allow himself to get excited—wouldn't admit the emotion that was knocking at the doors of his heart; not yet; there might be a mistake; yet all the time he was hearing the rising voices of that invisible choir of his—the one that had rustled its wings on a certain other evening, that time when he had first kissed Mary Harmon.

They traversed the old orchard, made their way up over the darkening hillside; still silent, they entered the haunted precinct and clambered with precaution into the odorous, littered cellar—the pauper, the negro, the man who had risked his all to find this thing.

A great hush fell, momentary, secular.

Then Ambrose, with a gurgling expression of satisfaction, had dropped on one knee, was holding the lantern close.

Birkland's knees were trembling. His heart was like a castle besieged, by this time battered, almost at the point of giving away. There was no mistake.

Even had his senses failed him there would still have been no chance for mistake. His very soul was proclaiming the thing.

Here was the hearthstone!

Ambrose was busy with one of his padded, efficient palms, brushing the ashes away. Birkland knelt beside him.

Detail after detail came into view—each one signaling an incident or an epoch in his life. Here was the string of “lozengers” he had traced, time and again, into the mysterious depths of the rock, like a little chain of events that would end—who could see where and how?

“Praise God!” crooned Ambrose.

Little “curlicues” appeared, tiny fossils of a life long since extinct; vibrant still with that other life which, living, they had never known.

“Oh, praise His name!” breathed the negro, his emotion breaking into incipient song.

The imbecile behind them stirred from his trance and mumbled softly, incoherently; but neither Birkland nor Ambrose paid attention.

As the ashes were brushed away there appeared an area more polished than the rest—polished, Birkland recollected with a fresh catching at his heart, by a blessed human contact that this stone brought back to him, made his again to have as long as he lived.

His father’s knees had rested here as he knelt in the holy, domestic service of lighting the fire; his mother had swept it and scoured it, kept it sweet and clean; his brothers and sisters had played there with him; the soles of his bare feet knew the warm, smooth comfort of it.

And there came back to Birkland the slap of warm water and the smell of Castile soap, an evocation of his mother giving him, on such a night as this, a warm bath before sending him off to his dreams.

“Mr. Birkland,” said Ambrose, “I jes’ feel like singin’ a hymn. Now, you got two hearthstones.”

“You can have the other one,” said Birkland, stifled. “You and Priscilla will want a new one—for you and your children and your children’s children.”

Ambrose was cleaning out a little hollow. It surrounded a “trolobite” that Birkland recognized. He and Lem had worked long, with their dull

old Barlows, to dig it out of the embedding rock.

Then Birkland remembered another detail. He had not forgotten it completely. Even now, through the stress of all those other crowding memories, it had hovered near, elusive yet ready to assert its claim.

“This corner, Ambrose,” he whispered. “Brush it off here.”

Then he saw it—like a smile of one of the spirit presences around him suddenly materialized it came to him—the mark that he himself had carved there with such secret love and yearning, the dim beginning of a letter “M.”

There came to him now a passion of energy, a sort of leaping eagerness to hasten this long, long dream of his to final realization.

“Come on, Ambrose,” he cried; “we’ll lift it up, get it out of here.”

Every wasted moment had become a moment of desecration.

The stone was lying flat, only a slight hollow under one corner of it—made by the pauper that afternoon, no doubt. But, as Birkland started to lift, the imbecile once more showed signs of excitement, mumbled incoherently.

“There’s something under it,” said Ambrose.

Like many of his race, he had an uncanny faculty for reading the thoughts of all dumb creatures.

“We’ll see,” said Birkland.

They bent their strength to it, even the pauper assisting, more excited still. The stone came up.

As it did so Birkland and the negro each let out a cry of surprise.

CHAPTER XLIII.

Hidden Treasure.

THE stone had been made the cover of a home-made safe, a primitive safety-deposit vault. In a rudely bricked receptacle under it were stacks and stacks of paper currency.

Even in that first glance Birkland saw that many of the sheafs of bills were still bound with paper bands stamped with the name of the Hambleton National Bank.

"Go tell the village," said Birkland. "Tell Mr. Brown, tell the justice of the peace, tell—" for the first time his voice quavered slightly—"tell Miss Harmon. Then, ask Mr. Bowers to telephone for the sheriff, quick."

Ambrose gone at a loping run.

Birkland and the pauper eased the old hearthstone back on its edge against the cellar wall. Stone and pauper, each so mute and mysterious, his only witnesses, Birkland raised his eyes to where a blue star, joyful and majestic, flamed in the cloudless sky.

The village came out—John Brown, hatless, still in his leather apron, for he had been working late; the thin man with the large Adam's-apple; Mr. Bowers, the inn-keeper; the boy Willie, and all the other boys, large and small; the justice of the peace, the foreman of the creamery; the Baptist, Methodist, and Presbyterian ministers; then, horses and buggies with girls and women; an occasional automobile.

Mary's eyes were brilliant.

She had little to say—little that could be said in front of a crowd. But Birkland noticed how much more beautiful she was than any other woman there, young or old.

It became a celebration.

They lighted bonfires. Boys and girls began to pair off, or to form little groups apart, and naively to talk of other things. For the spirit of spring was already in the air, and, apart from that flaming star and its lesser sisters, there was a white moon in the east.

Then some one suggested supper, and, because no one was quite certain what should be done, it was decided that the men should remain, and that the ladies would bring out coffee and food.

It was after nine o'clock when the

sheriff arrived, for he had elected to come not alone. There were other county officers and lawyers in the band.

Milldale stood around while the money was counted—one hundred and sixty-five thousand dollars.

"And every cent of it," said the lawyer representing the wrecked bank, "the property of the depositors."

"Minus your fees, Jo," laughed the sheriff; "minus your fees!"

And so it turned out, after not very much litigation. For, a few weeks later, at the time of the first spring freshet, two little boys who had gone far down the branch on an expedition after muskrats found that which sent them scurrying back home for their elders.

It was the body of Cyrus F. Miller, and he had been drowned or frozen, or had died of exhaustion, perhaps, that night he had fled from the mob.

Birkland and Mary had slipped away at last from the rest of the crowd; were walking home by way of the path that would take them through "their place."

As they crossed the wall and stood on the more familiar ground, it was as though some special essence came up from it to bid them welcome. Both of them noticed it, no doubt. A tender silence fell upon them.

"There is no loyalty like that of the earth," mused Birkland. "However many owners have ever walked upon it, each feels the same mighty, ungrudging devotion. No wonder that the love of the earth becomes a passionate thing; the most deep-seated, the most lasting, the most sacred—"

One of his hands had been lifted to contact with a cool, smooth cheek and with warmer lips.

It startled him. What a fool he was! What would this land be, the house, the hearthstone, without this crowning glory of them all!

They stopped where they were for a little while.

The great star flamed with perfect

acceptance of the rising moon. The waters of the branch rippled a whispered chorus to the minor song of the night. The old apple-trees, who had seen things like this before, no doubt, looked on approvingly.

Suddenly there was a burst of cheering back in the direction from which they had just come—jubilant, almost musical.

"Oh, see," whispered Mary, "they're coming this way, too."

They watched and listened with bated breath.

Scattered lights had drawn together again. They heard laughter and singing—the opening phrases of "Way Down Upon the Suwannee River" all tangled up with "My Country, 'Tis of Thee," then more laughter and cheers. Yet, in spite of this vocal levity there was a certain dignity in the slow advance.

Then they understood.

"They're bringing the hearthstone," thrilled Mary.

"They're bringing the hearthstone," Birkland echoed.

John Brown and Ambrose White were the principal bearers, but they were aided—whether they needed it or not—by a hundred willing hands.

Birkland, with Mary pulsing at his arm, felt his knees get weak, the old lump come back in his throat.

The crowd saw them standing there and cheered and sang.

"We're bringing her home, Mr. Birkland," John Brown shouted. "We're going to put her where she belongs."

More cheers.

Every one was there, the justice of the peace and the ministers included, for the affair had their enthusiastic sanction. Birkland and Mary found themselves escorted at the head of the procession by men and women, boys and girls, who sang and laughed.

At the side of them marched John Brown and Ambrose White bearing the precious burden, and the old stone stirred and sent back a reflected sheen

as though it were conscious of the celebration.

"Careful now, folks; don't break anything," John Brown shouted as they entered the little park.

"Be careful—don't break anything," a dozen voices echoed.

They came to the door of the house and entered. The blacksmith and the negro gently put the old hearthstone down in front of the fireplace, then straightened up and looked around.

The place was filled, lit up by many lanterns; the men and boys had taken off their hats. An odd, embarrassed silence fell upon them. For an instant or two no one spoke.

Then the Rev. Mr. Hargitt and the Rev. Mr. Hall looked at their senior, the Rev. Mr. Cross.

"Brother Cross," they said, "will you lead us in prayer?"

CHAPTER XLIV.

"On This Rock."

THERE appeared a bucket of cement and a trowel, and the stone was fitted into place, Birkland and Mary each having a hand in the work—a good deal as a king and a queen might assist at the laying of a cornerstone.

Then Mr. Brown appeared with his brawny fists filled with shavings and pine sticks, and Birkland, with a trembling hand, put them into place and touched a match to them.

The flame caught—brightly, almost gratefully it seemed—and up from this new-old altar of domestic concord and happiness there went a crackling petition to the guardian-angels of such things.

A new home was born, and Birkland saw this light reflected in the eyes of the woman he was going to marry.

Willie and the other boys brought in more wood. The new chimney was doing nobly. How could it have done otherwise?

The justice of the peace stepped forward.

"Feller citizens," he began.

"And ladies," some one supplemented.

"They're feller citizens, too," said the squire amiably. "But what I wanted to get at was this. We got in our midst to-night," (cheers) "some one who—some one who—"

The squire's voice rose.

He was contemplating a flight of eloquence. He turned his head a little to one side, looked at the ceiling; momentarily words failed him. The ministers and some of the ladies encouraged him by clapping their hands.

The squire bowed in acknowledgment.

"Now, as I was about to say," he went on, "I remember—remember-r-r" (fresh cheers and sounds of "sh-h!") "when this—this party who we have in our midst—was the first to raise his hand—in support of law and order. That's right, isn't it, Mr. Brown?"

"That's right," said the blacksmith stoutly.

"In other words, feller citizens," the squire said, hastening on to his conclusion, "we've got—we've got" (oratorical pause) "a new feller citizen in our midst. I want—"

The squire's closing words were lost in the outburst of applause as he smiled at Birkland and, with rough geniality, poked him in the ribs.

Birkland had never made a speech in his life—except privately, or, at the most, before a group of his own directors. He was a little embarrassed.

But as he confronted the kindly, good-natured crowd in front of him, this embarrassment was engulfed in other feelings.

There flashed through his brain an epitome of all that he had undergone, all that he had hoped for—his passions, his plans, and his dreams.

He was standing at last on the hearthstone—smooth and warm—of his own home. The woman he loved was there at his side. These people were his neighbors, his friends.

"I wish I could make a speech," he said softly, as sudden silence once more swept over the room. "You folks are mighty good. You've added the supreme touch to a great event. This is my home. The minister has called down a blessing on it. The blessing's here. You've all helped it to come about."

He was going to stop at that, but every one applauded, and the squire and the ministers were among those who urged him to go on.

"Friends," he said, "we're here to-night with such perfect understanding because we have so much in common. Some of us still have our fathers and mothers with us. Some of us are orphans. But each one of us, 'way down deep in the bottom of his or her heart, had the same thing planted there at the beginning of life by some sainted woman.

"You know what it is.

"Even a man doesn't have to be told what.

"A woman with a little baby in her arms—the future squire, the future blacksmith, the future minister—but helpless, toothless, a little mass of pure flesh and spirit; and oh, how she pours into it her yearning for peace, for plenty, for right living, for high ideals!

"That's the way the home-spirit is born; for these things are the elements of home.

"Shall I stop?" asked Birkland quite suddenly, with a smile.

The older ladies especially shook their heads. Most of the younger people were listening absorbed, surprised, open-mouthed.

"Then, just this in conclusion. We can wander far. We can go after other things—after power, after money, after fame. But greater than our desire for these things is that holy, primal passion implanted there not by one mother only, but by the Lord knows how many generations of mothers ahead of her. The wanderer turns back. The spirit-voice of his

heart bids him put up a temple to this religion of the world's good women."

Many of the ladies present pinked up pleasurably at that in acknowledgment of the compliment. There was brief applause.

"A temple it is," said Birkland.

"Indeed it is, brother," said the Rev. Mr. Hargitt.

"And God defend it!" said the Rev. Mr. Hall.

Brother Cross, the elder of the three, nodded his head in solemn affirmation.

"And out from it, to sweeten and enrich the earth," Birkland resumed, "there drifts the spirit of that woman with the baby in her arms, her yearnings become a power—for peace, for plenty, for right living, and for high ideals!"

John Brown and the squire shook each other by the hand.

"So," Birkland concluded, "here with my feet on this rock, on this old hearthstone, I—I sort of feel that it's an altar dedicated to such things—for the good of Milldale, for the good of Miami Valley, for all mankind!"

CHAPTER XLV.

Conclusion.

THERE have been years of happiness and accomplishment since then. Piccaninnies dodging about—five or six—no one ever knows exactly how many, except Mr. and Mrs. Ambrose White; the new electric railway paying dividends; the creamery become a large and prosperous cooperative plant; the youngest fruit-trees beginning to bear; the fountain and the rock-garden graced and beautified by a first growth of lichens and moss.

Even Birkland's house has grown.

The old part—the most important part—is still unchanged; but now it is the wing of a rather stately but old-fashioned dwelling, the very simplicity of which bespeaks the work of a high-priced architect.

In this new part of the house there are music-rooms and drawing-rooms, guest-chambers, boudoirs and dens—all very nice when there's entertaining to be done, which is pretty often; for, when Luella or Mary are not giving something or other, the house is being loaned to the ladies of the church, or the Foresters, or the Maccabees.

But it is in the old part of the house that Birkland and Mary love to pass their hours together when they are alone.

There Mary takes her place at the center-table, with the yellow lamplight flooding her shimmering hair, accentuating the softened beauty of her face—that beauty which comes to women who are happy, and which grows with years.

And Birkland, even when the nights are warm and there is no excuse for a fire, still takes his place on the old hearthstone.

With his feet on that and his eyes on Mary—and always that same, vague hunger in his heart—his thoughts soar off into the clouds. There, and like that, he has always dreamed his greatest dreams and worked out their execution.

There was the matter of children, for example.

They adopted Luella. But soon, in a general way, they were adopting all the children of the countryside, orphaned or otherwise.

Then Birkland built another and larger home on the hill where Cyrus F. Miller used to live, made it something of a monument to consecrate the ground where the hearthstone had lain in exile, and there started an enterprise that he and Mary have ever since delighted in—changing the bad luck of still other children into good.

Every year, when he and Mary go to New York—where Birkland attends the annual directors' meeting of the Susquehanna—they pick out an additional quartet, two girls and two boys, two of them ugly and two of them handsome.

And it pleases them mightily when, after a year or so, the ones that they thought were ugly surprisingly outgrow that claim.

Growing old?

There is no age in surroundings like that.

Witness old Major Woods—white, growing deaf, more patriarchal still with his snowy beard and flowing mane—but he still comes out to Milldale to visit Sarah's boy, plants the heels of his boots on the old hearthstone, and, leaning back in his favorite chair, dreams himself into the mystic past until the past is the present and he is a youth again.

Julia Merriman—married happily, bringing with her a small and chubby edition of herself—has been their guest.

"Did he tell you that—I loved you before I ever saw you?" asked Julia.

"Yes," thrilled Mary, with an impulsive kiss.

Bruce Howland has been there several times.

"By gad, Hen," he exclaimed the last time that he was out, "you know, this would be great if—if it weren't so far from New York."

"New York would be all right if it weren't so far from—from this," Birkland answered quickly with a grave smile.

Bruce looked out over the superb garden, the soaring trees. The new head gardener of the Birkland place was an importation from the bonnie river Wye; some sort of a forty-second cousin to Hawkins—who, by the way, was still writing regularly, was still doing finely, and God bless you, sir.

"It's so beautiful, and yet—and yet—" said Bruce, with a troubled face.

"And it's home!" cried Birkland. "Do you know what that means—h-o-m-e! No, I suppose not. You'll discover your Valley of Peace, like most New Yorkers, only when you—Hold on! Valley of Peace, Peace Valley—by gad, Bruce, a name I've been trying to remember!"

And Birkland wrote a letter to Will Lovetts, Peace Valley, Missouri, recalling that night on the banks of the Hudson when they were both homeward-bound; when Will had taken in a certain stranger, fed him, cheered him up, and had sung to him a wonderful song.

In less than a week an answer came.

Will wrote:

DEAR FRIEND:

O I was glad to hear from you. O how happy I was to no who slipped me that fifty plunks. It sure did save my life. I sure was plum busted when I arrove. I wunder did you have it as hard as me. Sue was redy fer me but the cow dide on the way. Now you should see our home, thirty acres, expect to turn over 2 thousand dollars this year hogs and dairy alone. Yes, I still sing that old song. You and your Mrs. must come and see us and I sure will sing it to you. Sue sends your Mrs. her love, also a present. You see by foto our latest, he sure is a prize-winner, and we have just picked out a name for him. It's Henry. And as long as we live and he lives you sure will have a place redy for you in Peace Valley.

There was a photograph in the letter, a fairly good snap-shot of a happy family group in a buggy—a brand-new buggy to which was hitched a clean-limbed roadster with beautiful lines.

Birkland recognized Will immediately.

He was a little stouter, but otherwise he hadn't greatly changed. His shrewd and kindly face was still the face of a man who would play the guitar in his family circle and compose his own songs.

Mrs. Lovetts, of generous proportions, was at his side, her eyes manifestly on two dressed-up, healthy youngsters squatting at the dashboard, her ample arms enfolding "the latest."

Little Henry had moved, unfortunately. His features were not very distinct. Still, he gave out an impression of baby fatness and good cheer.

In due time the present came—Will's way of returning that fifty dollars, no doubt, with interest—a glorious two-year-old of Kentucky strain,

a young counterpart of the horse in the photograph, gentle, graceful, and strong.

They've named him Peace Valley. He's become a member of the family, too.

And often, when Birkland and Mary

(The end.)

are driving him through the fragrant mystery of some familiar, moonlit road, Peace Valley will slow up and listen to what they say; and then, as if satisfied, will resume his splendid stride again, knowing that all roads, sooner or later, lead toward home.

Wild Vorene

By
Johnston McCulley

Author of "Pennington's Choice," "Siskiyou," etc.

CHAPTER I.

The Girl in the Doorway.

SEÑOR GUERRERO led the way down the dark and narrow alley and softly opened the door. The man behind him waited close to the wall.

A shaft of light pierced the darkness. With it came the sound of strong voices raised in ribald song and the tinkling of a piano scarcely heard above the din.

Feet shuffled, liquor gurgled, glasses rang as they were placed on the tables.

Foul air rushed out, bearing odors of stale tobacco-smoke and cheap liquor. In an instant the clean smell of water-soaked pine was gone, and the breeze that swept up the street from the river and the distant sea seemed instantly polluted.

"The coast, I think, is clear," Señor Guerrero whispered.

He slipped inside, and Captain Bill Adams followed and stood against the wall for a moment while Guerrero closed the door behind them.

Captain Adams had a soft hat pulled down to his eyes and his coat collar turned up in an attempt to pass without being recognized. There was no disguising his broad shoulders, great hands, and massive form, yet the risk was small, for those men in the room who knew him were scattered in the crowd or sitting at tables near the street door.

Adams's lips curled in scorn as he followed Guerrero along the wall to a table in a far corner, at which there were two chairs, both unoccupied.

As he sat down he glanced over the room.

There was a bar along one wall, with a crowd of men before it. There were scores of tables to which silent-footed Chinese carried liquor. On a platform in one corner was an old piano, a woman playing it. Another woman stood beside her and sang in a cracked voice.

In another corner were poker-tables, where the players silently eyed one another, speaking in low voices only when it was necessary. There were

faro-tables and roulette-tables. And there were women who mingled in the throng, painted women dressed in gaudy gowns.

"It is a place," said Captain Adams slowly and with conviction, "where a man would expect to find a traitor."

Strong men of the sea called Adams king. He was a relic of the days of bucko mates. He had slain a man with a single blow of his fist. He had quelled mutiny single-handed.

His name was a synonym for fear from Valdez to Cape Horn, in Honolulu, in the ports of China and Japan, Australia, and the South Seas.

That name also was coupled with justice, for Captain Adams never gave a demonstration of brute force without good and sufficient provocation.

He always showed his strength at sea, never on land. The usual haunts of sailormen did not know him. He left his ship only to transact business. He was an abstainer, and morally clean.

Because he never appeared in a gathering to refute them, seamen told great tales of his strength and brutality when provoked, thus making his reputation in that regard thrice what he deserved.

Now he bent forward at the table, his keen eyes taking in the scene before him. Guerrero had ordered liquor, and as soon as the Chinese waiter had gone Captain Adams had thrown his in a cuspidor.

"If our suspicions prove true—" Guerrero began.

"We'll say nothing until we are certain," the captain interrupted. "It's a bad thing to accuse a man of unless there is an abundance of proof."

"And if we get the proof?"

Captain Adams straightened his shoulders and waited a moment before replying.

"If we get the proof I'll attend to the matter personally," he said. "You are not concerned in it, *señor*, except that you are a sort of guide for me ashore."

"Not concerned in it!" exclaimed the other hoarsely. "Not concerned in it? When there may depend on it success or failure?"

"Screech, *señor*, and tell our business to the world," the captain advised. "There are some in this place, I believe, who would be glad to hear."

"I beg your pardon," Guerrero said, and fell silent.

Captain Adams looked over the room again. The woman at the piano had ceased playing and was standing at the end of the platform, talking with some men. She was tall, graceful, and fair, despite her painted face; but there were lines about her eyes and a wistful look was about her lips.

"What a place!" Adams gasped.

"Sailors must have relaxation after a long voyage," suggested Guerrero.

"This isn't relaxation! They spend two months' wages here in a night, drinking vile liquor, trying to beat gambling games that cannot be beaten. I've been a sailor for thirty years, and I don't need this sort of relaxation. And the women—"

"That tall one who was playing the piano is Sally Wood," said Guerrero. "Every one in Astoria knows her. She has a history."

"I don't doubt it."

"Not the sort you think, *señor*. She lived in Seattle as a girl. A man won and married her. Then he took her aged father's savings and deserted her, left her penniless with a baby—the old story."

"And she turned to this sort of thing?"

"Again, *señor*, not as you think. She turned to this sort of thing because she can play a piano, and because she gets more money here in a night than she could any place else in a month. The sailors worship her, *señor*. Sometimes when she plays they throw silver and gold on the platform, showers of it, and she thanks them prettily."

"Pity she wouldn't take her silver and gold and get out of here, then."

"She stays because she needs much silver and gold. Every one seems to know the story. She is laying it by. When she has an adequate amount she intends trailing the man who deserted her, and when she finds him—ah, *señor*, when she finds him! Such a woman will know how to take her revenge.

"Her child is a girl—she keeps the little one in a school. I admire Sally Wood, *señor*; she mingles here with the scum of the earth, yet is not defiled. She is a good girl; countless men will tell you so. Countless men would fight for her in an instant to avenge an insult. They know her story, tell it to every newcomer, help her in every way."

Captain Adams showed sudden interest.

"If that story is true, if she is a good girl and can mingle with this sort and keep her goodness for such an object, I pray Heaven she finds the man," he said earnestly.

"There is also another story," continued Guerrero. "There is a man hereabouts by name Jack Connor, a pleasant giant, a happy-go-lucky devil of a sailorman of the usual sort. He is at present out of a place, and is here in Astoria visiting his aged father. He is a favorite of men and women. He drinks with the men—but he has no use for the women."

"Half sensible, at any rate," said the captain.

"Sally Wood, so the story goes, rebuked him on a certain night because he was drinking heavily. The proprietor of this place even lets her do such a thing as that, for it delights his customers to see one of their number the subject of a sermon. Jack Connor treated the girl courteously, but continued drinking. If he had done as she requested she would have forgotten him; since he refused to obey her wish, she loved him."

"Womanly," said Captain Adams. "So she loves him?"

"In her own sweet way, *señor*. All

have noticed it. Her eyes follow him continually when he is here. And he continues to treat her courteously, but that is all.

"Jack Connor, say his friends, has little use for women. He respects them—the good ones—too much to ask one of them to share his lot, he says; and the other sort he does not respect enough to consider at all."

"He has the making of a man in him then," the captain decided. "Sailorman out of a job, eh? I need a couple more men."

"A very devil of a fellow, *señor*; I have seen him. I do not know, of course, whether he would be the man for our business. He has an independent way about him. Speak of the angels—"

Voices near the door had been raised in eager greeting. The throng parted, and through it strode a man the appearance of whom made Captain Adams's eyes sparkle.

More than six feet he stood, with shoulders almost the equal of the captain's. His hair was yellow, his eyes blue, his face boyish. He walked with an easy swagger that betrayed his agility.

Such was Jack Connor.

Friends crowded close to him; voices called to ask him what his drink would be. A bartender, smiling in welcome, brought forward a private bottle and sat it on the bar before him and polished a glass and sat beside it.

He and his friends drank.

"Jack, the woman-hater, caught at last!" one of the men shrieked in laughter.

Guerrero tapped the captain on the shoulder.

"The man who is talking, the one with his arm on Connor's shoulder, is his best friend, a sailorman by name Morgan," he whispered.

"Listen!" the captain commanded.

There had come a flush into Jack Connor's face not caused by liquor. He turned toward Morgan menacingly, but still smiling.

"Hold him while I tell the story!" Morgan cried. "It is too good to keep."

"If you open your mouth—" Connor began.

But, laughing, three of them held him. The others in the room had grown quiet to listen.

Morgan ran away a few paces and faced them.

"We were walking down Commercial Street," he said. "A girl passed. Her eyes met Connor's. My friend Jack was done then and there!"

"Love at first sight, eh?" cried another.

"Wait!" Morgan cried. "He insisted on following her. Think of that—Jack Connor, who never looks at a woman! Oh, he did it in a proper fashion! He never took his eyes from her. She dropped a handkerchief—"

"They always do something like that," interrupted another.

With a roar of rage Jack Connor hurled away the men who held him and looked into the crowd.

"Understand me?" he cried. "The young lady—*lady*, I said—dropped her handkerchief. I ran forward and picked it up. I'm not ashamed of it. I never saw her before—I don't know her name!

"But she's a lady—and not to be talked about in a crowd like this. Understand me?"

"I walked down the street with her, talked with her while Morgan waited. She's the sweetest girl I ever saw. I'm not worthy to speak of her, and if I am not, neither are any of you. So we'll drop the subject. Understand?"

There was no answer; no man's eyes met his. He smiled at them again and motioned toward the bar. The men crowded forward.

"He strikes me as pretty much of a man," said Captain Adams to Guerrero in their corner.

Sally Wood, sitting at her piano, had heard. Now she began playing furiously, and some of the men near

the platform began to sing, and the noise broke out anew.

Jack Connor and half a dozen of his friends made their way across the room to a table within fifteen feet of where Captain Adams and Guerrero were sitting.

The captain turned toward the wall, his back to the room, and there he remained, talking with Guerrero in whispers, until he heard his own name mentioned. It was Jack Connor speaking.

"The Amingo is the cutest little steam schooner that ever carried a cargo of lumber," he was saying. "I never saw her until she dropped down the river from Portland this morning, but I've heard a few things about her and her skipper."

"Who hasn't?" Morgan asked.

"If all I hear of Cap'n Adams is true—"

"You can bet it is," Morgan interrupted, and the others nodded their heads.

"Then I've got to set eyes on the old sea-dog some time. He's turned some good tricks in his day, but he's getting careless. Must be feeling his age."

Captain Adams's shoulders straightened, but Guerrero warned him and he slouched forward in his chair again.

"Meaning just what?" Morgan asked.

"What's his old scow doing?" asked Connor.

"Lumber, Portland to Mazatlan," said Morgan.

"Oh, she carries a deck-load of lumber, all right," said Connor, laughing. "But what she carries in her hold is the joke."

"Contraband?" one of the men asked.

"Not so loud, friend. We don't want to queer Cap'n Adams's deal. Only he's getting careless. I know what he's up to; and if I know it, what must persons know whose business it is to find out. He isn't carrying opium or chinks, if that is what you mean.

But he's got an interesting cargo, all the same."

"Meaning?" asked Morgan.

"Meaning it is none of our business," said Connor. "Only I'd hate to see an old sea-dog like Cap'n Adams spend his last years in a Federal prison."

The face of Captain Adams flushed, then grew ashen as the meaning of the man's words came to him.

This man knew—he *knew*.

And, across the table, Señor Guerrero muttered a good Spanish oath that has no just equivalent in English and started to rise from his chair.

But Captain Adams gripped his arm so that the bone almost snapped, and the *señor* resumed his seat.

"Queer old fish, the cap'n," Jack Connor went on. "And that niece of his—What about her? I never heard much of it."

Morgan enlightened him.

"They call her Wild Norene; she is Captain Adams's brother's girl, and she's lived with the cap'n for ten years, since her daddy died. Sails with him all the time. Cap'n taught her to read and write aboard the schooner. Pretty as a picture, strong as a man yet soft as a woman, and wild and untamed."

Connor laughed.

"She needs a man to tame her, maybe."

"Maybe you'd like the job," chuckled Morgan.

"And I could do it if I was in the woman-taming business," Connor answered. "Honestly, I mean. I'll bet I could make her love me—make her promise to marry me. I could tame her so she'd eat out of my hand."

Again Guerrero restrained the captain, whispering to him that he could wait for vengeance—that to betray himself now meant to spoil their enterprise.

Morgan and the others were laughing.

"Why, she won't even look at a man," said Morgan. "She's waiting to find one that measures up to her

uncle, Cap'n Bill Adams; and she'll have a long wait, I'm thinkin'."

"If what I hear is true, she'll have a long wait," assented Connor. "Won't look at a man, eh? If I was in the woman-taming business, I'd make her look at *me*. Pretty, eh?"

"Like a picture," said one of the men. "I really saw her once."

"I'm getting interested," remarked Connor, laughing again.

"And you're gettin' blamed inconsistent—I guess that's the right word. A few minutes ago you raised blue blazes because we mentioned a certain young lady in this place, and now you're not only mentioning one, but you're mentioning *names*."

Jack Connor's face grew sober.

"There's a difference," he said.

"There are but two classes of women. One class should never be mentioned by such men as us—they're too good. And the other class—what's the difference? This niece of Cap'n Bill's—this Wild Norene, as you call her—scarcely comes under the first class."

Captain Adams's face grew ashen again and he gripped the sides of the table, but made no attempt to get out of his chair.

Guerrero felt sudden fear; he knew Captain Adams was waiting for this Jack Connor to go so far—then the blow would fall.

"For God's sake, *señor*," he whispered, "don't wreck our plans! Wait until the other business is disposed of; then we can find this Jack Connor and you can kill him. Hold on to your temper! We can find him easily; he'll be about all night."

Captain Adams's lips were set tightly; he looked across the table at Guerrero and nodded assent.

"This Wild Norene," Connor was saying, "must be the other sort. I don't know what her father was, but we all know her uncle. Bucko mate once, he was! Blackbirder, too. Traded in human flesh! His name's a terror in the South Seas. He's been a smuggler; he is yet. He's pulling off a

crooked deal right now! And this Wild Norene has been on his schooner, knows his life and how he makes his money, helps him no doubt; so what sort of a girl do you suspect her to be? Too good to be mentioned in a place like this? I'm sorry for the girl, but—bah!"

They nodded their heads as they picked up the drinks a Chinese had placed on the table.

Captain Adams was looking straight at Guerrero and not seeing him, and a tear was rolling down the captain's cheek.

No man ever knew the pain he suffered in that instant. Like a flash, his life was before him—his life and Norene's. Captain Bill loved his niece, worshiped her. And he realized now how men regarded her. They measured her by *his* standard.

But Connor had been wrong.

Adams never had been a blackbirder—never had dealt in human beings. He had been honest, in a way, in his dealings. He had broken revenue laws, smuggled Chinese, carried arms and ammunition to revolutionary armies, and landed them by dodging gunboats; but he had been honest in business dealings.

And Norene, he thanked Heaven, was innocent of it. She did not know the truth.

He had kept her with him rather than placing her in a school, because he thought he could guard her better so. And now it appeared from this man's talk that he had made a great mistake.

But he felt rage at the thought that this man could talk so. He could tame Norene, could he? She was of the sort to be spoken of lightly?

Captain Adams said nothing aloud, but he cursed bitterly in his heart and stored up rage against Jack Connor, the man he had liked at a first glance.

Guerrero was looking across the table at him appealingly.

"I'll not spoil our plans," the captain whispered to him. "I'll wait!"

"Heaven be thanked, *señor!* I—I was afraid! After we have attended to this other business you'll—you'll kill this man?"

"There are things worse than death, Guerrero. And this is my own affair; keep your nose out of it!"

The men at the other table had risen and were scattering, some of them returning to the bar, some going to the gambling tables, others crowding about the platform where Sally Wood was playing.

Captain Adams heard Guerrero gasp—realized that one of the men had stopped beside him.

"Can I trouble you for a match?" a voice asked.

Adams looked up; Jack Connor was smiling down upon him.

The captain got to his feet, while Guerrero trembled and waited for the outcome. But Captain Adams had lived a life full of experience and could control himself even at such a time as this. He ran his hand in a pocket and handed Connor the match for which he had asked.

"Thanks," Connor said. He lit his pipe and puffed slowly. "Lots of the boys around to-night," he added.

"Seems to be," replied Adams, resuming his seat. Guerrero's fear was unnecessary; the captain was studying the man before him, was not ready to take vengeance yet.

"Sailorman?" asked Connor.

"Yes. Came down from Seattle to meet a friend of mine who's skipper of a German bark. Going to sign on with him," the captain replied.

"Astoria isn't the port she used to be, but she's still some port," said Connor. "Lots of queer fish float in here. There's a funny old tub in the river now. Notice her?"

"Which one?" Adams asked. Guerrero felt the fear again.

"The letters on her stern spell 'Hester,'" replied Connor. "But that's a joke. I know her. Once away from the river she'll be the Benito, and there'll be guns on her, and her sailor-

men will put on uniforms; then she'll be a Mexican gunboat. Her skipper is Garza, cap'n in the Mexican navy—or what they call their navy—and he's a secret service agent, too."

"Why the disguise?" asked the captain.

"That's another joke. Ever hear of Cap'n Bill Adams? Of course you have, since you're a sailorman. Cap'n Bill's old scow is in the river now, and the gunboat is watching *her*. Old Bill must be losing his cleverness."

"Why is the gunboat on his trail?" the captain asked.

"Nobody knows exactly, but there are suspicions. It wouldn't be the first time Bill Adams had carried arms and ammunition marked sewing machines. But nobody dares tackle Adams without getting the goods on him first. Believe me, they'd better not! Have a drink? No? Much obliged for the match."

Connor hurried away toward the bar, and the captain's eyes met Guerrero's across the table.

The *señor* was vastly troubled.

"We must get away to-night," he whispered. "Great Heaven, every one seems to know!"

"Remember what the fellow said—nobody tackles Adams without getting the goods on him first. And they haven't got the goods on me—yet!"

"But the man for whom we wait—"

"That man thinks we sail to-morrow evening. If he does what you think he'll do, we can attend to him and get away before daylight. I can get outside the three-mile limit before that old scow of a gunboat catches me."

"Sit as you are," said Guerrero. "I am watching for your man. When he comes in— Ah! He has arrived."

The captain did not turn.

"And the other?" he asked.

"I do not see Garza yet. We have been watching him closely, and one of my men will trail him here. Your mate is to meet Garza here to-night and tell him the cargo is aboard and when you are to sail."

Captain Adams's hands gripped the sides of the table again.

"I hate a traitor and know how to deal with one," he said. "What is Riney doing?"

"Is that his name? He's looking through the crowd. Now he has seated himself at a table. There's no doubt of the man's guilt."

"Riney had been my mate for two years, and there is doubt of his guilt until I hear from his own lips words that prove him to be dishonest," said the captain. "You don't suppose he can recognize me if he looks over here?"

"Sit as you are. You are in the shadow. I am watching."

Riney, Captain Adams's mate, appeared nervous. He arose and went to the bar again, then resumed his seat at the table.

In the corner of the room men were wildly applauding Sally Wood's music. She ceased playing when she saw Jack Connor standing near the platform, and walked over to him.

"You've been drinking too much again," she accused. "Why do you?"

"Now, Sally, I'm not in a mood for a lecture to-night. You've been playing too much; you look tired."

"I get sick of it at times."

There was agony in the woman's voice. Connor looked down at her with sympathy in his face. It was not sympathy she wanted to see there.

"It is pretty hard on you," he said. "Why don't you give it up? Let the scoundrel go!"

"Not until I find him and punish him. He took my father's savings, remember. My father didn't—didn't have quite enough to eat for a year before he died."

She looked away, biting her lip to keep back the tears. Soon she turned toward him again, trying to smile.

But Jack Connor was looking away toward the opposite side of the room. An expression of unbelief was on his face.

In that opposite wall was an open

doorway, twice as wide as an ordinary door, that led to a cheap café and restaurant where sailormen ate and painted women sometimes took their meals.

Framed in it for an instant, beckoning him, he had seen the girl he had met in the street while with Morgan, the girl whose handkerchief he had picked up, mention of whom he had prohibited in this sorry resort.

CHAPTER II.

Defiance.

SALLY WOOD had not seen the girl who had stood for an instant in the doorway, and thought little of it when Jack Connor excused himself and hurried across the room, thinking some friend had called him.

Connor made his way rapidly around the room, shaking off his acquaintances who would have detained him, and reached the open doorway. He waited there for a moment, until he was sure nobody was watching him, then slipped into the other room.

She stood a dozen feet from the doorway, awaiting him. In an instant he was at her side.

"You wanted me?" he asked.

He looked down into her face. He regretted the liquor he had taken, and the very thought of such a girl in such a place half sobered him. But her eyes met his without drooping, and he read in them that she was good.

"Perhaps we'd better walk out on the street," he said. "This is scarcely a place—"

"Wait," she interrupted. "I want you to do something for me. You said this afternoon—"

"That any time I could do you a service you had but to let me know. I still say the same."

"Look through the doorway then. You see the third man from the end of the bar—the one with the red handkerchief about his neck?"

"The one with the scar on his right cheek?"

"Yes. My father gave him that scar one day because he was impudent. He has hated my father and me since. This evening I learned of something he said—about me."

"Yes?"

"It wasn't complimentary. It was an insult."

Connor's eyes met hers again, and he did not need to ask more questions. His fists clenched.

"I saw him come in here a short time ago," the girl went on, "and as I passed the place the door was open and I saw you. I remembered what you had said, and took the liberty of entering and asking you to do me a service."

"I shall do so gladly."

"I want you to thrash that man."

He looked at her quickly. This girl, with goodness in her face, thought nothing apparently of asking that a man be given a beating.

He looked through the doorway at the man again.

"His name is Riney," the girl was saying. "You'll thrash him for me because of the insult he has offered?"

"Consider it done," Connor said.

"But first you may walk as far as the corner with me, if you will."

He ushered her from the place, put himself at her side, and they hurried to the corner. She clung to his arm, and Connor's heart throbbed.

"I suppose you think I am a peculiar girl for asking you to do such a thing," she said.

"I have no right to think so. No doubt you have a good reason for it. But I would suggest, if you'll allow me, that this part of town—"

"Is no place for me? I can take care of myself, sir."

She was smiling as she spoke.

He met her eyes again, half afraid of what he might see there.

And she read his thought.

"I don't want you to think that I am a—a bad girl," she whispered. "Don't think, please, that I am used to associating with—with—"

"Such persons as are to be found here? Myself, for instance?" he asked.

"I did not mean that. I feel sure you are a good man."

"A woman like you would make a saint out of a sinner," he said.

"Here we are at the corner. You'd better return now. I shall know if you do as I have asked."

"When I beat him I shall remember that he insulted you."

"Yes. And thank you!"

"Shall I see you again?" he asked.

"I don't even know your name."

"Does the name make much difference?" she asked.

"None at all."

"And you want to see me again?"

"Yes."

"Perhaps to-morrow afternoon I'll be walking along Commercial Street, where you saw me to-day. I am not certain—"

"I'll watch for you then."

She held out her hand, and he clasped it.

She smiled at him again, then hurried away.

Connor looked after her until she had disappeared in the darkness down the street, then turned back toward the resort.

He did not question. She had asked him to thrash a man who had insulted her, and he promised himself to do the task well.

He did not care to know the circumstances. He did not care to remember she had entered the resort to call him. He gave her credit for courage in doing so, feeling that it had taken courage for her to stand there in the midst of painted women and men who thought nothing of approaching any woman to be found there.

When he reentered the resort he did not see the man Riney at first. Riney had left the bar and crossed the room again, to sit at the table within a few paces of Guerrero and Captain Bill Adams.

The captain was bent over the table in the shadow, listening, waiting.

"Garza has arrived," Guerrero was whispering to him.

"Has he located Riney yet?"

"Yes; he is coming this way. He has nodded to Riney. Now he sits down beside him."

Garza was wise, however. He and Riney regarded each other as if they had been strangers.

Garza ordered a drink and when it arrived tossed it off. Then he looked across at Riney and winked.

"Fishing good?" Garza asked.

"Great!" said Riney. "I know a craft whose hold is full."

"Shipping 'em south, eh?"

"I should guess," said Riney slowly, "that she would float out to-morrow evening with the tide."

Guerrero's eyes met Captain Adams's across the table, and the captain nodded slowly.

He had heard. Riney, his mate, had sold him out. There was nothing enigmatical about his conversation with Garza, the secret-service agent. The hold was full of fish—the ship would sail to-morrow evening with the tide. The hold was full of arms and ammunition; the Amingo would start on her voyage to the aid of revolutionists in less than twenty-four hours—that was the meaning.

Captain Adams stood up, and so did Guerrero.

The captain's rage was not of the sort that makes a man "fly off the handle" and "have it out." Guerrero shuddered as he looked at the face of the old sea-dog. Captain Adams was the sort of man who would proceed with deliberation and refined cruelty in such a case.

Not for any amount of money would Guerrero have stood in the shoes of Mate Riney.

But as Adams turned to confront the traitorous mate another man lurched across the room and half fell against the table at which Riney and Garza were sitting.

It was Jack Connor, feigning intoxication.

"Look where you're going," Riney growled.

"Keep out of the way!" shouted Connor.

He kicked at the table, and it went over. He reached for Riney, who sprang to his feet and aimed a terrific blow at Jack Connor's head. And then Riney realized his mistake; Jack Connor was not intoxicated. He stepped swiftly to one side, and his fist crashed into the mate's face.

In an instant they were at it, and every one in the room had crowded forward, making a great ring of human bodies, to watch the combat.

Members of the Amingo's crew were there, cheering on their mate, who had a reputation as a fighter. Jack Connor's friends were there, too, and stood in the ring, grinning with delight.

They had seen Connor fight before. He had punishment in his blows, and he had fistic science in addition.

The mate's terrific blows struck empty air; Connor's fists played on the other man's face, head, and breast.

Slowly and surely Connor was beating his antagonist down. He was delaying the final blow purposely, making Riney take all the punishment he could stand. He remembered only that the man he was beating had insulted the girl he had met that afternoon.

Riney's shipmates saw how the battle was going, and edged forward. It was an axiom of the sea that Captain Adams's men stood together in brawls.

A foot was thrown out, Connor was tripped, and as he saved himself from sprawling on the floor a blow from Riney's fist caught him on the side of the head and staggered him.

A roar of rage at the foul trick came from a score of throats. In an instant the fight had become general. Connor's friends sprang to meet the men from the Amingo.

But in that last instant Connor's fist stretched Riney to the floor.

Garza had made his escape. Guerrero hung close to the wall.

Captain Adams, towering above the other men, watched the combat as it raged, his arms folded.

Riney, getting up from the floor with the intention of continuing the combat, saw his captain's eyes fixed on him. He recognized the coat the captain was wearing, and knew that the captain had been sitting a few feet away while he had been talking to Garza.

Riney knew well nothing but suspicion would bring Captain Adams to such a place. And he realized what form the vengeance of the captain would take.

He stooped and started toward the combatants again. But as several men came between the captain and himself, he turned and darted toward the door, escaped into the night, and fled toward the water-front.

Sally Wood, standing on the platform against the end of the piano, caught sight of the mate's face as he flashed past her and to the door.

Her own face turned white, and she staggered to a chair and sat down.

Morgan had been beaten to the floor, and others of Jack Connor's friends had met with disaster. The crew of the Amingo could fight. Connor found himself almost alone, in a circle of flying fists.

His rage redoubled. The odds were not fair. He threw himself into the fray with renewed zeal.

A weight of human bodies assailed him. His foot slipped and he crashed to the floor. Men were on top of him, striking him, trying to choke him.

Some one near him was screeching: "Let him up! Tie his hands behind him!" "Take him to the cap'n!"

Others of the Amingo's crew took up the cry:

"Take him to th' cap'n! Cap'n Bill will know what to do with the man that smashed the mate!"

Connor began fighting again as they let him up. He had heard of Captain

Bill Adams; he didn't intend to let these men carry him aboard the Amingo.

But his struggles were in vain. They fastened his hands behind him and started him toward the alley door, half carrying him, some of them guarding the rear to prevent Connor's friends from effecting a rescue.

"Take 'im to th' cap'n!" they cried.

A giant of a man stepped between them and the door and held up a hand. "Stop!" he cried. "Turn that man loose!"

The sailors of the Amingo gazed at him in amazement. One of them laughed aloud. Another looked away, afraid to meet the skipper's eyes.

"Why, it's th' cap'n!" another cried. "It's Cap'n Bill!"

Jack Connor, knowing the captain had heard his conversation earlier in the evening regarding himself and his niece, felt something like fear clutch at his heart for a moment as he looked at the giant in front of him whose eyes met his and held them.

"Turn him loose!" the captain repeated.

"But he beat up Mate Riney, cap'n!"

"I saw it! Turn him loose!"

"He beat up th' mate!"

"That's why I'm telling you to turn him loose!" cried the captain, walking toward them. "He saved me a job. I was going to beat Riney up myself."

Wondering at the skipper's manner, his men obeyed him, and Jack Connor soon stood in their midst with his arms and hands free.

Señor Guerrero, who had been standing beside the door, hurried forward and stood on tiptoe to whisper something in the captain's ear. The captain nodded his head.

"Go aboard, men—all of you!" he commanded. "Round up the others! I want every one aboard in half an hour—every one except Riney!"

It was the old sea-dog giving a command. The men disappeared as if by magic influence.

"As for you," said the captain, stepping up to Jack Connor, "I want to talk to you. Come over in the corner."

Connor followed him slowly, ready for the combat he felt sure was coming.

He remembered how he had made sport of Captain Bill in the captain's hearing; remembered what he had said concerning the captain's niece, Wild Norene.

Morgan, on his feet again, holding one hand to a bruised and bloody face, sensed the situation, and attracted the attention of certain of Connor's friends. At a short distance away they waited, ready to plunge to the rescue if Captain Bill Adams opened hostilities.

They had heard of Captain Bill. Even Jack Connor would have difficulty standing up to Captain Bill.

Captain Bill sat down at the table and motioned Connor to the other chair. Guerrero remained standing against the wall a short distance away, wishing the captain would hurry, fearful for the success of their enterprise.

The mate had been unmasked; Garza, the secret-service agent, knew facts and details. They might not wait many hours before making a move.

Even now, when the captain was away, they might be descending upon the ship, and the few men left aboard might be making an inspection of the cargo in the Amingo's hold.

"You're a sailor?" the captain asked Connor.

"Yes. I've got a mate's ticket."

"It is none of my business why you thrashed Riney," the captain went on. "I'm glad you did it, however. I had just discovered that he was a man I couldn't trust. I'm minus a mate. Do you want his job?"

Connor looked up quickly and met the captain's eyes.

"You're offering me the berth?" he demanded.

"I am."

"And to-night you sat here and

heard me grill you and say things about your—your niece.”

Captain Adams's eyes flashed for an instant, then he regained his composure.

“I'm not speaking of that. Do you want the job?”

Connor laughed lightly.

“No, thanks!” he replied. “You'd get me aboard and beat me to death as soon as we got to sea. I'm taking no chances with you after you heard what I said this evening. Do you think I am a fool? And, besides, I don't like the voyage you're to take. I don't like your cargo.”

The captain restrained his anger and bent forward across the table.

“As to my cargo,” he said, “that is none of your business. You are not supposed to know anything about it when you ship. As to the other thing you mention—you've heard whether my word is good.”

“I've heard it is as good as gold,” said Connor.

“Very well. I give you my word of honor that I'll not lay a hand on you during the voyage. Understand? Does that satisfy you? And you can bring your friend Morgan along. I need another man or two.”

“I don't doubt your word, captain. But I'll decline the job with thanks.”

Their eyes clashed again.

“I want you,” said Captain Adams. “You're the sort of man I need on the *Amingo*. I'm going to sail within twenty-four hours, and when I sail, you'll be aboard.”

“I guess not!”

“I'm a man of my word, you've admitted. And I give you my word right now that you'll sail with me. You'll sail with me, as my mate, *whether you want to or not!*”

“I don't care to sail with any one just now,” said Connor, remembering the girl he had met, and her half promise that he was to see her again. “And, if I did, I'd not sail with you! I've got money and friends, and Astoria is my home port.

“And even Captain Bill Adams can't make me sign on when I don't want to do it! *You can understand that!*”

CHAPTER III.

Wild Norene.

THE throbbing of engines, the washing of waves came to the ears of Jack Connor. He opened his eyes, sitting up quickly at the same time, and in an instant was lying down again, for his head had struck sharply against the top of the bunk.

He realized then that he was in the fore-castle of some craft.

He slipped from the bunk and tried to stand up. The vessel was rolling and pitching. Connor guessed instantly that she was passing out over the bar at the mouth of the Columbia River.

He cursed softly to himself as he put his hands to his aching head and tried to remember what had occurred. He had risen from the chair after hurling his defiance into the face of Captain Bill Adams, and gone to the bar, to be joined there by Morgan and some of his friends.

As they drank they had watched Captain Adams and Guerrero walk through the room and out the front door.

Connor had talked with Sally Wood again for a short time, but Sally had acted in a peculiar fashion. Sally's face had been white, and she appeared nervous, and Connor had left her, afraid she was going to lecture him again for drinking so heavily.

Together with Morgan and the others, he had gone to another resort. There Morgan and he had seated themselves in a corner and ordered a Chinese to bring drinks.

He had tossed his off—and that was all he could remember.

Shanghaied! Jack Connor Shanghaied!

Connor laughed mirthlessly as he

held his aching head. He did not doubt that he was aboard the Amingo, that Captain Bill Adams had won.

He found a bucket of water in a corner and drank deeply, then bathed his head. A groan caused him to whirl around. A cry escaped him. Crawling out of another bunk was Morgan, his friend.

"You!" Morgan gasped. "You?"

"The same!" said Connor.

"Where are we?"

"Aboard some old hooker, just crossing the bar, I should imagine. We're shanghaied, that's what!"

Morgan cursed as he made his way toward the water-bucket.

"But—" he began.

"It isn't a hard puzzle to solve," said Connor, laughing again. "I'll bet we're aboard the Amingo."

"She wasn't to have sailed for twenty-four hours."

"Maybe it's been twenty-four hours," replied Connor, "and maybe Cap'n Bill made up his mind to sail earlier. Cap'n Bill has a habit, I've understood, of changing his mind at times. Take another swig of that water, and we'll go on deck and face the music."

"Shanghaied!" gasped Morgan, only half able to get the idea through his befogged brain. "Now, by Davy Jones—"

"Going to whip the skipper and crew and put back into port?" sneered Connor. "If we're shanghaied aboard the Amingo we might as well take our medicine, that's what! We're due to obey cap'n's orders until we make a port, then there'll be a chance to desert. We might as well make the best of it."

Morgan sat down on the edge of a bunk and held his head in his hands. Connor stood before him smiling.

"We might get a chance to get square with Cap'n Bill, you know," he said. "That is, if we are aboard the Amingo, and I'll make a big bet we are. And, if we are, we're helping pack arms and ammunition to the

Mexican revolutionists, and there'll be a Mexican gunboat at our heels. Oh, we'll have experience and excitement, all right, and maybe get shot up and maybe go to jail!

"We'll be lucky if we have only the Mexican to deal with. One of Uncle Sam's revenue cutters might take a notion to overhaul us before we get on the high seas."

"What are we going to do?" Morgan asked.

"Go on deck. Come on."

Connor led the way. They reached the deck to discover that day was breaking. To starboard the light at North Head flashed. Behind was the river and Astoria.

And they were aboard the Amingo, as Connor had guessed.

Her lights were not burning, and Connor guessed they had not been burning when the craft slipped from the river. Her nose was pointed toward the open sea, and the throbbing of her engines told that they were being driven to the utmost. Captain Adams was barking orders, and members of the crew were hurrying about.

Morgan followed at Connor's heels as he led the way across the deck toward the skipper. There was a grin on the face of Captain Adams as he met them. He stood before them with arms folded, waiting for one of them to speak.

"Would you mind telling us, cap'n, what we're doing here?" Connor asked.

"Sleep must have robbed you of your wits, Mr. Connor," came the reply. "You are aboard the steam schooner Amingo, Portland to Mazatlan, with lumber, of which craft you are first mate and your friend a member of the crew."

"Oh! That's it! I'm first mate, eh?"

"You must have taken too much liquor, Mr. Connor, that you fail to remember. I shall be obliged to deny you shore leave when we make port. You'll ruin your health."

"Would you mind telling me just how it came about?"

"Delighted. I offered you the berth and you refused, you'll remember. When you left that resort you went to a saloon where the proprietor is under obligations to me. He put the old reliable knock-out drops in the poison you ordered. A couple of my men took pity on you and your friend and carried you aboard. We didn't want to leave you behind."

Morgan took a step forward. His chin made an inviting target as he bent toward the skipper.

"And let me tell you, you'll suffer for this!" he cried. "No man can shanghai me and get away with it!"

Captain Bill's arm flashed through the air, there was a crack, and Morgan stretched his length on the deck.

Connor did not make a move. Morgan should have known better, he thought. Shanghaied or not, no man can rebuke a ship's master and expect to go unpunished.

"I am glad to see, Mr. Connor, that you take a sensible view of the matter," said the captain. "I'll ask you to take the deck presently. Just now I am interested in putting three miles of the Pacific between the schooner and the coast.

"Of course, you must understand. There's a little vessel in the river that might follow us. You mentioned her last night during our interesting conversation."

He called a couple of the men and ordered them to take Morgan to the forecabin for the time being and place him in irons, then faced Connor again.

"I said I'd have you for mate, and I have you," he announced. "I am a man of my word. I suppose you wonder why?"

"Because I smashed your old mate, Riney, I reckon."

"Wrong, Mr. Connor. Riney deserved the smashing, but I didn't want you for mate because I admired your fistic ability. I can supply all of that necessary on this craft. I wanted you

under me where I could give you the punishment you deserved."

Connor's face flushed as he looked the other man squarely in the eyes.

"You gave me your word of honor that, if I made the voyage with you, you'd not lay hand on me," he said. "Now that you have me aboard, I suppose you'll take it out on me. Start in, Captain Bill Adams. You'll win, maybe, and anyway I'm helpless on your ship and out at sea. But I'll leave my mark on you—"

The look in the captain's face caused him to hesitate.

"I am a man of my word," replied the captain, "and when I said I'd not lay hands on you I meant it. I'm not going to beat you up on this voyage.

"But I am going to make your life a hell!

"I overheard you last night, as you know. I don't care what you think of me or what you have said about me. But you spoke of my niece. You divided women into classes, and put her in the worthless class.

"You called her wild and untamed, and said you could tame her. You could make her love you, promise to marry you, you said. And you intimated she was a woman of loose character, my niece, one of the sweetest girls God ever let breathe the breath of life! You can tame her, can you! Very well, Mr. Jack Connor, that's exactly what you'll have to do!"

His eyes blazed into Connor's, and Connor took a step backward, not because of sudden fear, but because of the spectacle of wrath and pain mingled that those eyes held.

"I'll be watching you," the captain continued, "and Heaven help you if you show an instant of disrespect. I'll tell the girl what I heard you say. She's a good girl, a sweet and honest girl. I've kept her with me because I was afraid to leave her alone in some port. I worship her. Whatever I have been, Norene is honest and good.

"Tame her, then, if you can; make her love you and promise to marry

you, and do it honestly and honorably. You have until we make port. I've put you in the mate's place so you'll have every chance. I'm playing fair!"

"Suppose I do not fancy making a young woman fall in love with me," said Connor. "Suppose I do not make the attempt; suppose I grant you that I made a mistake, that she is a good, sweet girl?"

"There still remains the fact that you said you could tame her, boasted of it before your worthless companions. You have until we reach port."

"And if I do not try, or do try and fail?"

"Then you stand proved a liar, Jack Connor, and I'll remember the insults and deal with you."

"But you've passed your word you'll not lay a hand on me."

"And I'll not. But I can do something else. I can make it appear you are guilty of certain things, violating international law, for instance. I can swear, and my men will back me up, that what this vessel carries is known to you alone, was shipped by you, that I thought it honest cargo—for so it looks. I can have you stood up against a wall, a file of Mexican Federal soldiers before you, and shot."

"Do you understand now? Make good your boast. Tame Wild Norene after she knows what you have said about her—or die! Take the deck!"

Captain Adams went aft. Connor stood near the rail, looking after him. What the skipper had said was damnably true—Adams could, perhaps, do as he promised.

Ordinarily, Connor would have had no scruples. He would have laid siege to the heart of Wild Norene and won it to save his own life, if he could.

But now the scheme seemed distasteful to him. Even if such a thing were possible after the girl's mind had been poisoned against him, he did not want to play with a girl's affections only to cast her aside if he won.

He remembered the girl in Astoria, the one he could not meet now on

Commercial Street, as he had hoped. He saw a vision of her before him—her large, trusting eyes and frank face. She was the first woman he ever had met for whom he thought he could care.

What would she think of a man who would make love to a woman when he did not mean it, merely to save his own half-worthless life?

"I'll not do it!" he muttered. "There'll be some other way. I can wait until the last—put up a fight. Morgan will help me!"

He took charge of the deck and for a time worked frantically. Captain Adams watched him and recognized that Connor knew his business, that the new mate was familiarizing himself with the men and the ship.

Half an hour passed; then Connor turned aft—to meet the vision of which he had dreamed.

She was coming across the deck toward him, her face flushed, her eyes wide in wonder. She was dressed in a loose blouse and short skirt, and her hair was whipped about her face by the wind. Connor stared at her as she advanced.

What could she be doing here? he wondered. If she was surprised to see him, he was more surprised to see her. But his heart beat wildly as he realized she was aboard, that he would see her every day, talk with her, walk the deck with her.

Tame Wild Norene to save his own life? Not with this girl aboard! He could not act falsely before her, could not let her despise him, as he felt sure she would if he did such a thing.

"You?" he heard her say. "You are the new mate?"

"I whipped Riney, then got his job," he replied, laughing. "But how do you happen to be here? I was to have met you this afternoon in Astoria."

"I intended to sail on the Amingo, but she wasn't to have sailed until tonight," she answered. "There was a change in plans. I really expected to

see you in Astoria this afternoon. And now—to find you here—”

“But why are you here?” he asked. “I didn’t know the Amingo carried passengers.”

Captain Adams, smiling evilly, stepped between them.

“Mr. Connor,” he said, “let me make you acquainted with my niece, Miss Norene Adams!”

The captain’s eyes were upon him, but Connor could not prevent the look of amazement and pain that came into his face.

Norene Adams! This woman he had met on the street in Astoria, the only woman he ever had taken the trouble to look at more than once, the woman for whom he had thrashed a man, the woman it had pained him to see in the resort, mention of whose name he had prohibited there—was Wild Norene, of whom he had spoken lightly to his friends!

The girl was dimpling, her eyes sparkling, ready to laugh at her uncle and tell him they had met before. But Connor, watching the evil smile on the captain’s face, was thinking of the predicament in which he found himself.

That this girl could be the Wild Norene of whom he had heard so much was not to be believed. How she would despise him when her uncle told her!

There was a pleading in Connor’s face as he looked at the skipper, but Captain Bill did not show mercy.

“Norene,” he said, “I’ve something to tell you in Mr. Connor’s presence.”

“Well, uncle?”

“You know I went to a certain resort in Astoria last night to learn the truth about Riney being a man I could not trust?”

“I heard you say you were going with Señor Guerrero.”

“Mr. Connor was sitting at a table near me with some of his companions. They began talking of the Amingo, of me and my business, finally of you.”

“Of me!” she exclaimed.

“Very complimentary, wasn’t it, to speak of you in such a place? Mr. Connor spoke, too, in a tone half the persons in the resort could hear. One of his companions remonstrated with him about mentioning your name there.

“Do you know what he replied? That there were but two classes of women, one too good to be mentioned by men of his stamp, and the others of such standing that it made no difference what a man said about them.

“He put you in the latter class.”

“Oh!” the girl cried; her face flushed scarlet.

She looked at Connor, but he was not watching her; his eyes were blazing into those of the captain, and he said nothing.

“Is this—true?” she asked him.

“Your uncle has said that it is,” he replied, without taking his eyes from the captain’s face.

“Wait, Norene; that is not all,” the skipper resumed. “One of the men said you were called Wild Norene, and Mr. Connor said you needed a man to tame you.

“‘I would tame her,’ he boasted. ‘I could make her love me, promise to be my wife. I could tame her so she’d eat out of my hand.’

“That was his boast, Norene, to his drunken companions, in a dive, where other men could hear.

“So I had him knocked out and carried aboard, and I’ve made him mate. We’ll see if he makes good his boast. I’ve given him until we reach port to win your love and your promise to be his wife. If he fails, there will be punishment provided.”

Captain Adams laughed raucously. Anger flamed in the girl’s face as she turned toward Connor and stepped close to him.

“Is all this true?” she demanded.

“Cap’n Adams says it is.”

“I want to hear you say so. Did you make that boast before your drunken companions in that resort?”

“Listen to me!” Connor cried. “I

met you accidentally yesterday afternoon on the street. You're the first woman I ever took the trouble to look at twice. My friend taunted me about it when we went to that resort, and I warned all men they were not to mention you, even without mentioning your name. Your uncle, if he was there at the time, will say this is the truth.

"I didn't know you were Wild Norene; I'd never have guessed it. I knew only that you were a woman, and a good woman.

"I saw you later at the door of that resort, and you asked me to thrash a man who had insulted you, acted as if your presence in such a place was nothing unusual, and still I knew that you were good.

"When I spoke, as I did to my friends I was not speaking of *you*. I was talking of the Norene I knew by reputation only, thinking only of what I had heard men say—"

"Then you *did* say it?"

"I said it—yes. But I didn't know—"

Her eyes held his. Her face went white for an instant, and with all the strength at her command she struck him across the face with the flat of her hand. Her fingers left white marks in the red and tan, but Connor did not move.

She started to turn away, half ashamed of what she had done.

"I didn't know!" he said. "Great heavens, girl, do you suppose I'd insult you purposely, whether I knew you personally or not? I tell you you're the last woman in the world whose name I'd speak lightly—the only woman in the world I'd look at a second time—"

"You already are beginning to tame me, I see. You are trying, perhaps, to make me believe you love me, trying to make me love you," she said in scorn.

"Miss Adams, can't you understand? I didn't know you were Wild Norene."

"And how may I be sure?" she

asked. "You boasted you could tame me. When I asked you to thrash Riney for his insult to me, you did it instantly. Perhaps that was to gain my gratitude. Maybe that was part of the taming process."

"Miss Adams, I—"

"I do not care to discuss the matter with you," she interrupted. "You are beneath notice! You may prepare to take what punishment my uncle has promised, for small chance you have of taming me and winning my love!"

"And if that punishment is—death?"

"It does not matter to me; I am not interested," she said.

Without another word she turned her back upon him and walked slowly away to the rail, to stand there looking out over the sea, making a picture to attract the eyes of any man.

Connor looked after her. He was cursing himself for the words he had spoken in the resort.

Captain Adams was chuckling.

"I guess she told you something!" the skipper said.

Connor whirled upon him.

"And I'll tell *you* something!" he exclaimed. "This is the third time I've met her. But I love her! Do you understand? I think she's the best and sweetest woman in the world. And I'll do what I boasted I could do, in spite of the way you have poisoned her against me.

"I'll win her and I'll marry her! And I'll not do it to escape any punishment you may hand out, but because she's the woman I want—the woman I'm ready to fight for! Can you understand that?"

CHAPTER IV.

The Stowaway.

THE noon hour found the steam-schooner Amingo on the broad sea far off the coast, her nose pointed to the south, the Oregon shore half obscured by a fog.

Connor had gone to the fore-castle, at Captain's Bill's orders, to remove the irons from Morgan and, after delivering a lecture, send him on deck. He made the most of the opportunity and told Morgan all that had transpired; an attempt to outwit Captain Adams was decided upon, and both were to apply their minds to inventing ways and means.

There would be safety for several days, for the captain would keep his word, they knew, and make no move to harm Connor until the end of the voyage.

It was at this time that two members of the crew, climbing over the lumber lashed to the deck, discovered the stow-away.

The stowaway was a woman.

Captain Adams's eyes bulged with surprise as the two men led her across the deck toward him. She was tall and shapely, dressed in serviceable clothing, and had no hat. Her hair was disheveled and flying in the breeze.

She made no attempt at resistance, but walked forward proudly, not even trying to shake off the men who grasped her arms and urged her on.

The brow of Captain Bill was wrinkled in thought; he told himself he had seen the woman before. The men led her up to him, and her eyes met his unflinchingly.

"Stowaway, cap'n," one of the men said, grinning. "She was hidden between two piles of lumber."

"Go forward!"

The men obeyed, turning frequently to look back at the woman, who remained standing in front of the skipper, waiting for him to speak.

A woman stowaway was unusual, and any sort of a stowaway was a rarity aboard the *Amingo*.

"Well?" the skipper demanded.

The woman put her hands behind her back and regarded him without apparent emotion.

"How did you come aboard?" Captain Adams asked.

"I took a small boat and rowed out

to the schooner this morning about three o'clock. I understood you would sail before daylight, so I had no time to lose. I caught a line under the bowsprit, and made my way to the deck and hid in the lumber. I let the boat drift out to sea."

"It is rather unusual for a woman to do such a thing. Why did you do it?"

"I had good reasons."

"You live in Astoria?"

"I've been living there for some time."

"Running away from the police?"

The girl's face flushed as she replied:

"I have done nothing to put the police on me, sir."

"I guess you'll have to explain. When a woman does what you have done—sneaks aboard a vessel—there must be some compelling reason. There isn't much charity for stowaways. Do you know where this vessel is going?"

"No, sir."

"What? I supposed, naturally, you wanted to get to a certain port and had no money. Why, in Heaven's name, did you stow away on a craft whose destination is unknown to you?"

"I'm not anxious to get to any certain port," she said, "and I have plenty of money. I can pay my passage."

She reached in the front of her waist and drew out a roll of bills, and a small bag filled with silver and gold coins.

"This isn't a passenger vessel," said the captain. "And if you wanted to sail with us and had money, why didn't you see me about it, instead of playing stowaway?"

"You'd not have given me passage, would you?"

"I scarcely think so."

"That's why I sneaked aboard in the way I did. I was determined to sail on this vessel and none other."

"Seems like I've seen you some place before."

"You no doubt have, sir. I've been playing the piano in a certain resort in Astoria. My name is Sally Wood."

"Ah! I remember now. Your story was told to me last night. I think I am more than justified in asking you for an explanation now. You don't know where we are bound, but were determined to sail with us. Why?"

"You say you've heard my story?"

"Yes."

"Then you know that I've been working—where I have—in order to get money quickly. And you know for what reason?"

"To trail the man who married you and deserted you, I was told."

"The man who stole my father's savings and left us penniless," she added. "Last night I saw that man. That's why I'm aboard this vessel. He is a member of your crew."

"A member of my crew!" the captain cried. "Prove that, girl, and convince me your story is true, and I'll manhandle him myself."

"I will take care of him," she said. "I always thought I'd kill him when I found him. Now I'm not so sure but what I'll make him suffer first. I don't know how it's to be done, but I'll find a way. Just let me pay passage, so I can be near him and watch. I'll not create a disturbance aboard your ship."

"You'll pay no passage!" the captain exclaimed. "If I've got a man like that aboard this ship I want to know it, and I'll help you punish him. Who is he?"

"Your mate, sir."

"What?"

"He was fighting last night, and I recognized him just as the fight was over. I learned he was your mate and discovered that you had ordered your men aboard. I knew you meant to sail immediately. I got my money, changed clothes, left the place where I was employed, and boarded the schooner. Now I want to meet him face to face."

The captain looked away across the sea for a moment, then back at her. She was watching his face, waiting for his answer.

"I'm afraid you've made a mistake, girl," he said.

"Do you think I don't know the man who wrecked my life, helped send my father to his grave?"

"I didn't mean a mistake in that way. You say he fought in the resort?"

"You saw the fight, for I saw you watching. He was fighting with Jack Connor. He sneaked away like the coward he is."

"You mean Riney, then?"

"His name was Wood when I married him. The man I mean has a scar on his face."

"He didn't sneak away because he was afraid to continue the fight, for my men won," said the captain. "He sneaked away because he saw me there—because he knew I had discovered he was a man not to be trusted. He sneaked away so I couldn't get my hands on his worthless throat—"

"And now you've—you've punished him?" she asked. In her eyes was the fear that she would not have a chance for vengeance; that the captain had taken that chance away from her.

"I've had no chance to punish him," Captain Adams said. "He's deserted the ship, girl. I've got a new mate, though I had a deuce of a time getting him. My new mate is the man who thrashed Riney—Jack Connor."

"Oh!" There was surprise in her voice at this last statement of the captain's.

Then realization of her position came to her.

"So he has escaped me, too!" she cried. "I've stowed away to get him, and he's behind in Astoria laughing, and I'm aboard this ship bound for—Heaven knows where!"

Captain Adams patted her shoulder.

"Don't worry, girl," he said. "It isn't as bad as you think. I've a good notion that the man you want will meet up with you soon. I'm pretty sure he's on a craft that's going to follow us down the coast. You just

make yourself comfortable aboard. It'd do me good to see you meet him, and I'll arrange it if I can. My niece is aboard, and she'll be company for you. And there is Jack Connor, too."

The captain chuckled as another thought came to him. "It is fortunate Connor is my new mate," he said. "I think he likes you, girl."

Her face flashed crimson as the captain looked at her. He had remembered what Guerrero had said—that this woman loved Jack Connor. If she thought Connor returned her affection she'd pay considerable attention to him. It would prove another barrier between Connor and Norene.

Captain Adams didn't think another barrier was needed, but it was better to be on the safe side.

It happened that at that moment Connor and Morgan came from the forecastle. Connor and Sally Wood faced each other across six feet of deck.

"You?" Connor gasped. "For the love of Heaven, Sally, what are you doing here?"

"She came to find her husband, the man who deserted her," the captain said. "Riney was the man."

"Then I'm doubly glad I smashed him! But you missed him—you are here, and he has remained behind."

"She played stowaway to get at him," the captain said. "Two of the men found her among the lumber piles forward. There's nerve for you. We'll take care of her, Connor, and if Riney follows on that fool gunboat we'll see that she meets him face to face and makes him uncomfortable. Take her below and see that she has something hot to eat."

"Thank you, sir," Connor replied.

Sally Wood staggered as she started forward, and Connor threw an arm about her and helped her across the deck.

Wild Norene came from below just in time to see them. She stood to one side as they passed. Connor gave her no attention; he was bending over

Sally Wood and talking to her in a low tone.

Wild Norene's face flushed and she hurried across to her uncle.

"Who is that woman?" she asked. "What is she doing here?"

The captain laughed.

"She's a stowaway, niece. The men found her behind a lumber pile. She crept aboard at Astoria just before we sailed."

"But—"

"She was afraid I'd not take her as a passenger, and she was determined to sail on the Amingo. That's why she stowed away. Interested in the mate."

"Interested in the mate," Norene repeated, looking in the direction Connor and Sally Wood had taken. "What sort of a woman—"

"She's a musician. She played the piano in the place where Riney and Connor had the fight last night.

"Oh!" There was deep scorn in Norene's voice.

"Both interested in this girl, I imagine. Perhaps that's why they fought; the fight seemed to start over nothing at all."

"Oh!" she gasped again.

It flashed over her mind that here was the reason Jack Connor had agreed so promptly to thrash Riney, and without asking questions as to why he should be thrashed. She had thought he was fighting for her—and he had been fighting for this woman!

Wild Norene said nothing more to her uncle, but turned and went forward to stand near the rail and look ahead at the tossing sea.

Captain Bill Adams chuckled. Let Jack Connor win Norene now, if he could!

CHAPTER V.

The Mate's Order.

THE North Pacific kicks up its heels at times like a wilful youngster overriding parental authority. For

the remainder of that day and that night and the day following there was work for Jack Connor to do.

Captain Bill Adams, on deck with his mate, watching the crew as they carried out Connor's orders, listening to the mate's hoarse voice as he bel- lowed his commands, found himself regretting that he had planned to pun- ish the man; he began wishing he could have Connor for his mate per- manently.

There is danger in a blow when the seas run high for a vessel that car- ries a cargo of lumber lashed to her decks.

Time and time again giant seas boarded the Amingo and threatened to tear away lashings and make every stick of the cargo a peril to the crew and a matter of loss to underwriters.

An afternoon, a night, and a day without sleep, Connor held himself to his work, refusing politely to turn in when the skipper told him he could do so.

Connor relished the work because, for the time being, it took his mind away from other matters.

Señor Guerrero, brave enough, perhaps, on the field of battle when engaged in leading ragged revolution- ists against their organized govern- ment, was an abject coward now. Seasickness had made of the hero a craven.

He remained below, moaning, long- ing for the death that did not come.

Sally Wood, too, remained in the small cabin Captain Adams had as- signed her, for Sally was not used to the sea. The Chinese cook offered her food and drink, which she refused, and played steward in an attempt to relieve her suffering.

In those two days Connor knew why Wild Norene was so named.

She was on deck when the blow be- gan, her eyes sparkling, her cheeks flushed. She clung to the rail and watched the tumbling sea, glorying in the rushing wind, the dashing spray, running away now and then to escape

a wetting. She stood on the deck and watched the man put extra lashings on the lumber, laughed and shrieked like a wild sister of the wind that was raging.

Jack Connor, watching her from afar, felt his admiration grow. She had not spoken to him since the scene that first morning: she had not spoken to Sally Wood at all.

The second night came and the storm fell. Jack Connor turned in, stiff and sore, to sleep the clock around.

He emerged from the cabin in the middle of the next morning, to find the sea dancing in the sunshine. The coast could be seen in the distance.

Behind, smoke pouring from her stacks, followed the Mexican gunboat like a hound on the trail.

Captain Adams laughed as he saw Connor regarding the pursuing vessel.

"Needn't fear her, lad," he said. "You have graver things to fear. You haven't won Wild Norene's love yet, I take it?"

"I haven't spoken to your niece since you blackened me to her."

"You lost time because of the storm, lad, but that's the fortune of war. The days are slipping. We're getting down the coast a bit. The voyage will not last for always."

"It is my affair," Connor said. "You gave me until we made port. Let it rest at that."

Captain Bill was watching the gun- boat through his glass.

"She's kicking up a real lot of water," he said, "but that's all she dare do. I scarcely think she'll put a shot across our bows when Old Glory is flying from our stern."

"She can make as good time as the Amingo, sir. You'll not dare go in Mexican waters."

The skipper laughed loudly.

"You don't think I'm going to stay on the high seas forever, do you? I've a bit of cargo to deliver, and it'll be delivered. A measly little gunboat with a Mexican in command can be

dodged by the Amingo with a Yankee sailing her, and don't you forget it. I'll turn in now, I guess."

The Amingo was making good time and was on the right course; there was little for Connor to do. Morgan was with others of the crew in the fore-castle getting sorely needed sleep after the battle with the gale.

Señor Guerrero came on deck for a time, pale and weak, spoke a few words, and retired again. Connor imagined he did it to see for himself whether the Amingo still was afloat.

And then Norene appeared.

She walked forward, playing with the ship's dog mascot. Presently she turned and made for the bridge.

Connor watched her from the corners of his eyes. She did not go aft; she stopped, started up.

Connor swung his glass up and looked hard to starboard at nothing. When he lowered the glass she was within six feet of him and with a glass of her own was looking back at the Mexican gunboat. She did not appear to recognize his presence.

Connor smiled as he turned his back upon her and again regarded a spot he imagined to be on the horizon. When he looked back she had dropped the glass to her side and was watching the antics of the dog playing with one of the men over the piles of lumber.

Connor wondered whether she had come there to explain by her actions that she did not consider he existed on earth. If she would not recognize his presence, he would recognize hers, he told himself.

He was puzzled how to begin.

A plea for justice would not avail with such a girl as Norene; he had made that before and it had failed. To start an ordinary conversation would mean to be snubbed. He must find some way to startle her, some way to make her answer, to get her to talk.

An idea came to him, an idea so bold that for a moment it held him aghast, then forced him to smile in

spite of himself. He would startle Wild Norene as she never had been startled before, he decided.

He took a step nearer her.

"I beg your pardon," he said.

She turned her back on him and made no reply. Raising the glass again, she contemplated the distant shore.

"Pardon me, but passengers are not allowed on the bridge!"

"Passengers!"

She whirled toward him as she spoke, then, realizing she had been betrayed into speaking, flushed and bit her lip.

But Connor was not smiling at her nor sneering at her, was not sarcastic, not angry, not attempting a pleasantry. He was only the courteous, firm officer in temporary charge of a vessel on the high seas.

"Pardon me for mentioning it," he continued. "Perhaps you did not understand about it."

"Not understand—"

She bit her lip and flushed again. Not understand? Wild Norene Adams, who had spent ten years aboard a vessel with Captain Bill, not to understand the simple rules of the sea?

Hot anger flamed within her; her eyes flashed danger signals.

"It is permissible, with the captain's permission, to visit the bridge with himself or another officer, but it is not permitted you to be alone on the bridge with the officer in charge."

"Are you trying to be impertinent?"

"Also, it is forbidden to speak to the bridge officer, madam."

He turned away from her and again contemplated the horizon, trying hard to keep from smiling.

"It happens," she said in scorn, "that I have the run of the ship. I own one-fifth interest in her, if you desire to know it. I think I may stand on the bridge a moment."

He turned toward her again, his face grave.

"It would be the same, madam, if

you owned all of her," he said. "An officer in charge of a vessel has responsibilities and certain rights. He can order an owner in irons if that owner makes an attempt to interfere with navigation of the ship."

Her eyes flamed again.

"You'd put me in irons, I suppose?" she asked.

He did smile now.

"I scarcely think it will be necessary," he said. "Now that I have explained, I am sure you'll descend to the deck and observe my orders."

"Your orders!" she exclaimed. "You— You dare to speak to me like this? You—you—dare order me from the bridge of the Amingo as you would a meddlesome tourist on a Japanese liner? You—"

"Ordinary rules of seafaring, my dear madam, that I cannot see fit to disobey," he reminded her. "Pardon me for not accompanying you to the deck; I cannot leave the bridge."

She gasped at him again, then sat on the rail, crooking her feet around a post, folded her hands in her lap, and regarded him, her head held high, the danger signals still in her eyes.

She knew he was laughing at her—that he was attempting to make her talk to him. She had come up on the bridge to punish him by acting as if unaware of his presence, and now she could not retreat and leave to him the victory.

She would remain, and she would ignore him.

He regarded the pursuing gunboat again, looked long at the shore, then turned toward her and pretended surprise.

"I believe I suggested that you descend to the deck, madam," he said.

She looked away from him; made no answer.

"You refuse to obey my order?" he asked.

No answer. She was biting at the corner of her lip to keep from laughing. What could he do now, she wondered.

He turned away from her again.

"Forward!" he cried. "Pass the word to Morgan; tell him to come to the bridge immediately with one of the other men!"

"Aye, aye, sir!"

The Amingo continued on her way through the wallowing sea. Connor did not look at her again, could not trust himself to do so.

She remained sitting on the rail, trying to keep from laughing. He would speak to her again soon, she supposed, and again she would ignore him and make no answer.

Morgan, rubbing his sleepy eyes, came from the fore-castle and made his way aft, another man at his heels. They mounted to the bridge and stood before the mate.

"You wanted us, Mr. Connor?"

"Yes. This young lady refuses to leave the bridge after being ordered to do so. Conduct her to her cabin and lock her in. If she resists, put her in irons!"

Norene's eyes bulged in amazement and she got down from the rail, staring at him, not believing what she had heard, not dreaming he would dare think of going so far.

"I—I beg pardon, sir?" asked Morgan, looking from one to the other.

"You heard my orders? Do as I told you!"

"But—"

"As I told you!" Connor advanced toward him threateningly.

"Aye, aye, sir!"

Morgan turned toward her, the other seaman stepping beside him.

"Mate's orders, you go below, miss," Morgan said.

"I'm very comfortable here, thank you."

Morgan was bewildered. Conducting the captain's niece below was something out of the ordinary. He wasn't sure what he should do. But the discipline of the sea is strong—and he had received his orders.

But—

"Lady refuses to go below, sir," he reported to the mate.

"You have your orders!"

Connor's lips were twitching; he did not dare turn and look at them. Through his glass he regarded another spot on the horizon. Morgan scratched his head a moment, then faced Norene again.

"Mate's orders must be obeyed, miss," he said. "Officer says you must go below."

Norene realized the man's predicament and did not care to cause him trouble. It was Connor she wanted to outwit.

"Tell your officer," she replied, "that I was just going. There is much better company in the fore-castle."

She started to descend, and Morgan and the other sailor followed her at a respectful distance. On the deck they stopped, while Norene walked across to the rail, leaning against it and kicking out her heels like a girl of ten.

"What th' dev—" Morgan was muttering to himself.

"Morgan!" came the hail from the bridge.

"Aye, sir!"

"I told you to conduct the young lady to her cabin and lock her in. Do so instantly, and fetch me the key."

"Aye, aye, sir!"

Morgan and his messmate started slowly across the deck toward her. Orders were orders; if they had been told to throw the Chinese cook overboard they might have done it, and stopped to think of it afterward.

Norene whirled upon them as they advanced, and held out her hands.

"Do as your officer ordered!" she said. "Lock me in my cabin, then take him the key."

Her face was fiery red; she looked once at the bridge, her eyes flashing angry—but Connor was calmly gazing through his glass at the imaginary spot on the horizon.

Morgan and his comrade followed her below, ushered her into her cabin,

locked the door, and carried the key up to the mate. In the ears of Wild Norene rang the chuckle she had heard Morgan give as he locked the door:

"Great Salt Lake! Cap'n's niece! And it'll be in th' log!"

Her head held high, her hands clenched, and her arms held rigid at her sides, she stood for a moment and regarded the door they had locked. Then the storm broke.

She was Wild Norene Adams in earnest now. She pounded against the door in her fury, shrieked and screeched, hurled to the floor or against the walls everything movable.

In another woman it would have been old-fashioned hysterics, but in Wild Norene it was anger, pure and simple, rage at herself for having been conquered, not at the man who had conquered her.

The slumbering skipper in the adjoining cabin was awakened when a lamp-bracket crashed against the wall. He sprang to his feet and began pulling on his clothes, his ears assailed by shrieks and cries.

He knew it was Norene's voice. What had happened? What in the name of Neptune, he asked himself, *could* have happened?

He ran out and pounded on Norene's door. He saw that Señor Guerrero was standing near, aghast at such an outburst. Farther away, Sally Wood had opened a door and was peering out, fright in her face.

"Norene! Girl!" the skipper cried. "What is it? Open the door!"

Another shriek of anger answered him.

"What's the matter? Open the door, girl!"

Another chorus of hysterical screams. Captain Bill stepped back. Another instant and his gigantic bulk crashed against the door's panels and burst them in. He half fell into the tiny cabin.

Norene was standing near a port-hole, her back toward him, stamping

her feet, pounding against the thick glass with her tiny fists.

"Norene! What is it, girl?"

She turned as he approached, and he tried to take her in his arms, sudden alarm in his face, for never had he seen Norene in quite such a state before.

But she pushed him away and confronted him, wild anger in her eyes.

"Girl—girl! What is it?" he asked.

"Ask—your mate!" she gasped.

"My mate!" Captain Bill turned and dashed from the cabin and to the deck. He had been aroused from a deep sleep, he had heard Norene screeching as if in fear and anger, he had demanded the reason, and had been told to ask his mate. Had Connor overstepped the bounds of courtesy? Had he dared insult Norene?

Captain Bill's fists were clenched and his breath was coming in angry gasps as he hurried across the deck and mounted to the bridge.

He stopped in astonishment as he reached it. Jack Connor was looking through his glass at the imaginary spot on the horizon. He did not present the appearance of a man who had just quarreled with a woman or insulted her. He was the typical, cool, calm and collected officer on the bridge.

Captain Bill began to feel ridiculous as Connor turned and faced him.

"Up so soon, cap'n?" he asked.

"What's been goin' on here?"

"I beg your pardon, sir?"

"My niece is down in her cabin shrieking to wake the dead. She woke me, all right! I asked her what was the matter and she said to ask the mate. If you've gone too far—"

"Oh!" Sudden recollection seemed to come to Connor. "She came up here on the bridge, sir. I informed her, courteously, that passengers were not allowed on the bridge."

"Passengers—"

"And asked her politely to leave. She answered me, and I informed her it was against the rules to talk to the bridge officer."

Connor's eyes were twinkling and a smile lurked on his lips as he faced his superior.

"Well?" the captain demanded.

"She refused to go, sir. Mutiny of passenger against rules! I called two of the men and had them lock her in her cabin and fetch me the key."

"You— You what?"

"Yes, sir."

"You did that—to Norene?"

"Yes, sir—fully within my rights, of course, and in a polite and courteous manner. Here is the key, sir."

Captain Bill Adams took the key, but did not take his eyes from the mate's face. Slowly the expression of his own face relaxed, his mouth twitched, then he threw back his head and roared.

"For the love of Neptune!" he cried, and laughed again. "Sent her to her cabin—locked her in—Wild Norene! Great Heaven, how she'll hate you now! Fully within your rights and in a polite and courteous manner, eh? That's good! By Heaven, it's good! Wild Norene! So that's the way you start in to tame her, eh?"

Captain Bill laughed again; Connor searched the horizon once more. A voice behind them—Norene's voice—made them both turn.

"Funny, is it?" she demanded. She had followed her uncle and made her way to the bridge. "Well, are you going to thrash this fine mate of yours? The men could not help it—they had to carry out his orders!"

The captain laughed again, while she stood before him angrily, tapping the floor of the bridge with the toe of one shoe. The captain's laugh died down, and as Norene looked away an instant he winked at Connor.

"Mr. Connor tells me he ordered you to leave the bridge and you refused to go."

"He did—and I did."

"And he called a couple of men and had you locked in your cabin?"

"He did! And it'll be in the log. I went because of the men—they were

forced to obey orders. Now thrash this man for me because of his impudence!"

Captain Bill pulled at his mustache.

"My dear Norene," he said, "my officer acted fully within his rights. He wasn't insolent, was he?"

"He was polite enough," she admitted.

"You should have left the bridge when he ordered it," said the captain, trying hard not to laugh. "I cannot punish my mate for abiding by the rules of the sea. And now you've gotten yourself in worse than ever—you've broken your arrest and come up here on deck."

"Uncle!"

"Must have discipline!" said Captain Bill. "You'll have to go back in your cabin until I have time to consider your case. Mr. Connor, I'll take the bridge until you return. Conduct Miss Adams to her cabin. I smashed the door, but you can put a man on guard if you think it necessary."

"Uncle Bill!" she shrieked.

But the captain had turned his back upon her, for no longer could he keep back the chuckles that bubbled to his lips.

"At least," she said, recovering some of her dignity, "take me back yourself, or let me go alone. I do not care to walk across the deck with a man of Mr. Connor's stamp."

Connor's face grew red, and there was an expression of pain in it.

"Miss Adams," he said, "I do not care to accompany you if you think I am unworthy. I see you are bound not to be friends with me. I explained honestly to you once. I spoke lightly of Wild Norene in a low resort, because I did not know you personally then, I thought. But I did know you, only not by name, and a few minutes before I had prohibited mention of you in the same place—because I had met you and admired you, because I loved you from the first—and I'm not ashamed to tell you now, in your uncle's presence."

"This is a part of the taming process, I suppose," she sneered. "Do you think I believe in your love merely because you say you love me? Are you not saying it to escape the punishment my uncle has promised you? Do you think I am that weak-minded?"

"I have told you the truth," he replied, "believe it or not. I'll never mention the subject again—and I'll take whatever punishment your uncle sees fit to give me. But do not say I am unworthy to walk across the deck with you, for I have not lied. I'm a rough sailor, but I've kept myself measurably clean, and what bad habits I have can be corrected easily."

"However, you do not see fit to give me a square deal. I'll not bother you further, Miss Adams. Regarding the present matter, with the captain's permission we'll consider your arrest at an end."

He bowed to her and turned away.

The look in his eyes haunted her. She fought against feeling that his words were true. She wanted to feel that she could condemn this man to his face. Ah—

"A worthy man—you!" she exclaimed. "And just how worthy? Do you know one reason I won't believe you? Do you want to know one reason why I think you are unworthy? What about the girl who became a stowaway? What about the girl who played the piano in that low resort you made your headquarters? Why did she become a stowaway? 'Interested in the mate,' my uncle says. A woman like that—a vile creature like that unsexes herself to follow you when you sail, yet you say you are a worthy man. And you fought with Riney for her—not because I asked you to avenge his insult to me!"

"Stop!" Connor almost yelled the word. "You do not know what you are saying! Sally Wood is a woman in a thousand—a good woman—"

"A good woman—playing the piano *there?*" she cried, laughing.

"Yes—a good woman!" Connor's

eyes blazed at the captain, then he faced Norene again. "Evidently your uncle hasn't been fair. Evidently he didn't tell you this woman's story! It's one to make an honest woman's heart bleed with sympathy for her. 'Interested in the mate,' eh? Cap'n Bill didn't happen to mention *which* mate, did he?"

"What do you mean?" she asked.

There was an expression of guilt in the captain's face, and she had been quick to notice it.

"I wasn't the mate meant," said Connor. "It was Riney, the old mate, she followed aboard, or thought she was following him. She is *interested* in Riney—and she has the right to be."

"But a woman of that sort—" she began again.

"A woman that is good and honest, and whom any other woman ought to help," he said. "Why not ask your uncle to set you right—to tell you the story? I don't blame you for blaming me if Cap'n Bill led you to believe some things that are not true."

She demanded the story, and Captain Adams told it in a manner that showed he was somewhat ashamed.

Norene said nothing as he concluded, but there was a bit of contempt in her face as she watched her uncle descend to the deck and start toward the cabin to continue his interrupted sleep.

But Captain Adams turned, grinning, and called back at her, sending a parting shot in revenge.

"Better get off that bridge, Norene, or the mate will have you in irons!" he cried.

Her face grew red, and she started to descend without looking at Connor.

"Miss Adams," he called softly as she started, "I meant what I said. I'll bother you no more. I love you—I meant that, too. I've corrected one false idea you had of me, but I shall go no farther. I just wanted you to know I'm perhaps not as bad as you thought, and that Sally Wood was a

decent woman, deserving of kindness and sympathy. You're the one woman I've ever looked at a second time—"

She hesitated, then ran swiftly down to the deck, as if afraid to hear more. She did not ask his pardon; did not by word or look express penitence.

But that evening in the moonlight Jack Connor saw her walking the deck with Sally Wood, and Wild Norene had her arm around the other woman's waist.

He did not know how Wild Norene's pride had suffered that day.

CHAPTER VI.

The Truth Comes Out.

SEVEN days passed, with the steam schooner Amingo wallowing on toward the south, and the Mexican gunboat following, dropping behind by day, creeping up by night, always watching, ready for any emergency, ready to match wit against Captain Bill Adams's strategy.

The pursuing craft had thrown out her true colors, and now and then by looking through a glass one could see the sun reflected from her guns.

The Amingo now was off the Mexican coast, and Connor knew that the end of the voyage was near. Times without number he had passed or met Norene Adams, but always he had merely saluted her courteously and passed on.

She had grown to be great friends with Sally Wood, and with Sally Wood Connor talked a great deal now and then.

These conversations were but half sweet to Sally. She was a woman who could read the heart of such a man as Jack Connor. And she read that she had his respect, but not his affection; that all that was reserved for Wild Norene.

Guerrero, now that they were approaching the end of the voyage, became nervous and looked continually over the stern at the pursuing gunboat.

He held long conferences with Captain Adams, at which the skipper repeatedly requested him to attend to his own business; that he had promised to land the arms and ammunition, and that they would be landed.

On a certain afternoon the captain mounted to the bridge during Connor's watch and looked long at the vessel behind.

"She hangs on pretty well, doesn't she?" Connor said.

"I'll shake her off when I am ready."

"Do we put into Mazatlan first, then out again and land the arms, or do we land the contraband first?"

The captain whirled upon him.

"Who said anything about contraband?" he demanded.

"Why pretend with me?" asked Connor. "I was just wondering if we were near the end of the trip."

"You are near the end of *your* trip!" the captain snarled. "Ready for the firing party?"

"I was beginning to believe you'd changed your plans."

"Well, I haven't. You insulted my niece—you'll pay for it!"

"Why not leave it to her?" asked Connor.

"I gave you your chance. You haven't tamed her, have you? And you'll never get back to a United States port to say Cap'n Bill Adams weakened. You'll never tell about this voyage! Maybe I've been a bit friendly with you now and then, and maybe it was because you amused me. But don't think I've altered my original program."

"Oh, very well!"

"You take it calmly enough."

"Why not?" demanded Connor. "You're a man of your word, aren't you?"

"I am."

"Very well. You've promised to keep your hands off me during the voyage. And I'm going to take advantage of that and tell you just what I think of you."

The captain sneered in his face.

"Go ahead!"

"I'm not going to tell you that you're a cruel, masterful terror, because you'd like that—you're vain! I'm going to tell you that you're an ordinary, plain fool!"

Captain Bill's fists doubled instantly.

"Remember your given word!" warned Connor. "You're ready to send me to prison or death on some trumped-up charge because I didn't accomplish a task you made impossible. And I didn't try. I tell you again I love Norene. I told you I'd win her. I still think I'll do it. But I'll not even attempt it now when she will think I am making the effort merely to escape punishment from you. I've done nothing to make you seek vengeance on me—"

"Nothing, eh? Calling my girl an unmentionable woman, saying she was a fit subject for barroom gossip, declaring to the world you could tame her—nothing?"

"I've explained that. I'm sorry I did it. I know her now, you see. I'd marry her if she'd have me and go back and tell every one in Astoria I'd done it, and beat half to death the man that dared make a remark about it, either in a barroom or in a church. That's where I stand.

"You shanghaied me and made me mate of your law-breaking craft against my will. You placed me in a position where I was subjected to insult. You let Norene believe things that were not true. You haven't been fair. You're not only a fool, but you're a coward!"

"Strike me now, break your word, and make yourself out a liar as well!"

"That's about all I have to say to you. I'm your mate until the climax, Cap'n Bill Adams. But from now on I fight—you understand?—I fight for myself and for Norene! And you'll find that a Connor can fight, curse you!"

"Bah! Fight—and be cursed yourself!"

"I'm not trying to tame Wild Norene, Cap'n Bill! But I'm starting in, right now, to tame *you!*"

For a moment they glared at each other. For a moment Connor thought the captain would break his word and strike.

But Captain Bill Adams only laughed evilly, and started to turn away.

"One moment!" Connor stopped him. "I have guessed that you're going to try to land that cargo under the nose of the gunboat that's been hanging on like a dog. Have you stopped to think of the consequences?"

"I'll take care of the consequences!"

"There are women aboard—your niece and another. There may be a fight. These women will be in danger. They'll be in danger of wounds or death, and of a Mexican prison and Mexican jailers. I guess you know what that means."

"Well?"

"Land the women first. Run ahead to Mazatlan and land 'em, then run out again and land your contraband. You can dodge the gunboat tonight. But don't put the women in danger."

The captain walked up close to him again, but Connor did not retreat.

"I'll land that cargo when and where I please," he said. "And you needn't fear for the women. You'd best fear for yourself!"

"Then you'd risk Norene's life and happiness for the sake of aiding a handful of ragged, ignorant fools fight against their own government—for the little money the *junta* pays you?"

Connor had raised his voice and his words carried far. From below came a snarl of rage, a cry of fright.

Captain Adams and his mate looked down—to see Señor Guerrero standing there talking to Norene.

Sudden hatred had flamed in the señor's eyes.

"Ragged, ignorant fools!" he

cried. "You call them that? They walk through jungles with naked, bleeding feet, they die because of exposure and poisonous snakes, they are shot down like dogs when found, they starve, they die of thirst, they let themselves be strung up and riddled by bullets—and you call them ragged, ignorant fools! They fight for what your country boasts every man has there—the right to live and be free.

"You Americans! Three months ago I was coming into New York on a steamer from France. I saw a poor Italian weep for joy when the saw your Statue of Liberty. God pity him—and the thousands like him!"

The señor's words choked in his throat. It seemed to be genuine emotion depicted in his face.

"Ragged, ignorant fools!" he cried again. "And how could we make the fight without breaking laws? My government is strong enough to keep from us that with which to fight. We can't fight with the ballot, for that is denied us. And if we use guns, we must smuggle them.

"Your country—your liberty-loving country—denies us the right to buy guns there for shipment. But we buy them. And if it wasn't for a few fearless men like Cap'n Bill Adams, who isn't afraid to carry them and land them, we'd have no chance to fight at all!"

"Run your guns, curse you!" cried Connor, thoroughly angry. "I'm not talking of that! I'm talking of making women run the risk—"

Too late he remembered that Norene was standing there below beside Señor Guerrero.

"What does it mean?" she asked wonderingly. "Uncle, you told me you were going to stop along the coast before we got to Mazatlan, to land some machinery that was to go back in the mines."

"I—I know I did, Norene."

"And now—guns!"

"Run on to your cabin, Norene, and let us talk this thing out."

"No!" she cried, looking up at him. "You—you *lied* to me?"

"Now, Norene—"

"You *lied* to me?"

"Don't you understand, girl? It wasn't necessary for you to know."

"But you're breaking the law!"

"It isn't a fair law, girl. Why should it be against the law to carry guns and cartridges to people who want to fight?"

"Because," she said, "unscrupulous men always would be starting trouble, getting poor downtrodden men to fight for liberty when really they would be fighting to help rich men seize property. The law would not have stood this long, uncle, unless it had been a good law. And all nations would not have adopted it unless it was good. You don't know what you do."

"You're making it possible for men to shoot one another, you're helping create widows and orphans—and you're breaking the law!"

"Liberty cannot be gained except blood be shed," said Señor Guerrero.

Norene looked at him in scorn.

"I begin to understand," she said.

"You have mentioned to me that you and your friends own oil-fields and mines, and that you could make more money if the government favored you more. You are trying to establish a government more to your liking, I suppose."

The banner of guilt showed in Guerrero's face. Norene's lips curled as she looked at him.

"But I am speaking to my uncle," she went on, looking up at the bridge again. "Why have you deceived me, uncle?"

"It wasn't any of your business, girl," he said brutally. "Women shouldn't bother their heads about business."

"You should have told me. You'd no right to do such things when I was on the schooner, to make me a party to them—"

Captain Adams's anger had been

growing steadily, and now it flamed forth. That it was directed against his niece happened because the last words addressed to him had been spoken by her.

"No right!" he exclaimed. "I've been a good uncle, haven't I? I've tried to raise you right. You've had everything money could buy. It cost more to have you with me instead of putting you ashore, but I did it because I wanted to be sure you'd be protected. I've run guns before with you aboard. You've spent a lot of the money I got for doing it. It's legitimate, whether the government thinks so or not. And I'll continue to do it, and no Mexican gunboat or headstrong girl or fresh mate can stop me!"

"Protected me!" she cried, half-shrinking from him because of his words and manner. "In return I've given you such love as a daughter should give a father. And how have you protected me? This man, Jack Connor, spoke lightly of Wild Norene in a barroom—spoke so because of what he thought I must be, having been with you. Because you are a breaker of laws, he assumed I must be a dishonest woman. Can you blame him? By Heaven, I cannot!"

"Norene!" There was agony in the captain's voice.

"I cannot, I say. Not knowing me as he does now, what else could he think? You were a lawbreaker, I was your constant companion, nearer to you than any other human being; I sailed with you on all your voyages! What could men think except that I was a lawbreaker, too, that I knew what you were doing and agreed with you in it; that I was lawless—not a good woman, but a thing to be spoken of in scorn?"

"Don't, girl—you don't understand—"

"I *do* understand! And I don't blame Jack Connor for what he said, nor for where he said it! You left me open to the insult—you, my uncle! I blame *you!*"

"Girl—girl! Maybe I made a mistake—"

"I've loved you and trusted you," she went on. "I knew you were a hard man, and gloried in your reputation as such, because I thought you were honest and fair. I knew you were clean compared to other men of the sea, and I thought—I thought my Uncle Bill was the soul of honor.

"And now you're breaking the laws of two nations. A gunboat follows, watching you as a thief. And behind you've left a nation—*your* country—fooled, swindled, because you've gotten away with a contraband cargo. You fly the stars and stripes from the stern—you're a disgrace to the flag and the country for which it stands!"

"Norene!" he begged.

"This is my last trip with you," she said. "I cannot prevent you breaking the law this time, but I'll never be with you when you do it again. I'll go ashore—I'll work! I'll wait for my uncle to turn honest before he can claim my friendship again!"

Sobbing, her head bent, she turned and walked quickly away, to go below to her cabin, to throw herself in the berth and burst into a storm of tears.

They stared after her for a moment—Guerrero, Captain Bill, Connor.

Guerrero's face broke into a grin that was half a sneer. Anger flamed in the captain's, anger more at himself than at Norene; anger because she had vindicated, in a way, the thing for which he was blaming Jack Connor.

And Jack Connor, meeting the captain's eyes, knew that he could expect no mercy now!

CHAPTER VII.

Prisoners—and Freed!

WONDERING how it all would terminate, Jack Connor left the bridge and went to the cabin to throw himself in a bunk and try to sleep, for he felt he would get no sleep that night.

He realized within a few minutes that Captain Adams was forcing the Amingo to her greatest speed. The attempt to dodge the gunboat had begun.

Had he been on deck, watching, he would have seen a peculiar thing, for Captain Bill called the members of the crew to him on the bridge, one by one, and to them imparted certain information. These men, for the greater part, had sailed with Adams for some time, had played parts in his evasions of the law, and were ready to do his bidding.

Others, newer on the Amingo, could be trusted by the skipper, since they had been vouched for by tried and trusted men. Only one man failed to get the summons to the bridge and a message from the captain; he was Morgan, Jack Connor's friend.

Morgan's guarded inquiries as to what was up were met by sneers from the others, and one man told him to his face to attend to his own business. Morgan asked no more questions, but decided to mention the matter to Connor when next he saw the mate.

Guerrero was on the bridge during these conversations and heard them all. One by one, the men were informed that that night cargo was to be landed. Grinning, they nodded that they understood.

But the remainder of the captain's message puzzled them. He would not be on deck, possibly, during the unloading, and they were to take orders only from Señor Guerrero in case their captain was absent.

If Connor attempted to take command, they were to ignore him. If he made himself obnoxious, they were to tie him to the mast and proceed with their work.

It was peculiar instructions, but the men did not question. They knew Captain Bill had peculiar ways.

As far as the mate was concerned, they knew there was bad blood between him and the captain. They had missed nothing during the voyage; they had witnessed clashes between Norene and

the mate, and between Captain Bill and Connor.

One other instruction they received, too: if the gunboat overhauled the Amingo and her officers asked questions, the men were to swear that whatever Captain Bill said was the truth. They understood that—many of them had sworn to lies before for Captain Bill.

The Amingo began to gain on the gunboat. The latter did not realize it until night began falling and she attempted to creep nearer, as she had done on previous nights.

She found she could not; the Amingo held her distance.

Then the gunboat put forth her greatest speed, Garza, her commander, realizing that the clash was near at hand. At any time after dark he knew, the Amingo might turn toward the shore and soon get within Mexican waters.

Night came. Captain Bill still paced the bridge. Hatches were opened and huge packing cases were put on deck—cases supposed to contain mining machinery; and they might have, as far as their weight was concerned.

The men worked swiftly, silently, like men used to such labor. Señor Guerrero was among them, more nervous than ever, continually rubbing his hands together, his eyes sparkling with excitement. It was pitch-dark, and the lights of the pursuing gunboat could not be seen.

An hour or two passed, and the nose of the Amingo was turned toward the distant Mexican shore.

In the cabin below Jack Connor slept. In an adjoining cabin Wild Norene lay in a berth, her tempest of tears at an end, and Sally Wood sat beside her, bathing the girl's swollen face and telling her of Jack Connor.

"I heard it all—that night," she was saying. "I've known Jack Connor for some time. He never looks at a woman. And I knew by the way he acted that night that he *never* would look at a woman unless that woman

was you. I could read him like a book. You should have seen him hurl the men away and prohibit them mentioning the girl he had met on Commercial Street, even though they did not say your name.

"He didn't know your name then. If he had he'd never have spoken of Wild Norene as he did a short time later."

"I know—I know," Norene said. "He wasn't speaking of *me*; he was speaking of the girl he *thought* I must be."

"And he—he loves you, I am sure," said Sally Wood.

She looked away as she said it, and there was an expression of pain in her face.

"I know he is clean and honest," she went on.

"You must be in love with him yourself," Norene muttered.

Sally hesitated before she answered.

"But he's never looked at *me* twice—with any interest," she said. "He—he feels sorry for me, I suppose. I have a share in his sympathy and perhaps his pity, but not in his love."

Norene thought it best to change the subject.

"Do you suppose you'll ever meet the other—Riney?" she asked. "What are you going to do if you meet him?"

"I don't know," Sally answered. "I've had thoughts of revenge for years, but I never decided how I'd take it. I've thought I'd find a way when I found him. We never know what we'll do, do we, when we meet the person we've hated for years?"

"He may be on Garza's boat," suggested Norene.

"In that case I hope I'll not meet him just now, for that would mean danger for you and your uncle."

Norene got up from the berth and walked across to the port-hole, to stare out at the blackness of the night.

Her uncle! There'd be another scene with him, she knew. And she

was firm in her decision to leave the Amingo as soon as the vessel was in a United States port again. She had meant it when she said she would not sail with her uncle again until he turned honest.

The Amingo was steaming toward the coast without lights. On the bridge Captain Bill Adams searched the horizon with his night-glass, trying to locate the gunboat, wondering whether she had gone on south, past the place where the Amingo had turned her nose toward the shore.

And then from a masthead Captain Bill caused two red lights to be displayed for an instant, then extinguished, then displayed again. Guerrero stood beside him, and they watched in the direction of the coast.

Another hour passed, the lights winking their signal now and then, and finally the answer came—two green lights that blinked ahead in the darkness.

Captain Bill rang for half speed, and for a few minutes there was an exchange of signals between the vessel and the shore.

"I want the gunboat to come up just after the cargo is landed and you are safe ashore," Captain Bill told Guerrero.

"It is a risky business, *señor*."

"We'll carry it off, all right. You remember your instructions."

"Everything shall be done as you wish, *señor*."

"We'll go below in a moment, then."

The red lights had disappeared from the masthead; on the distant shore one green light blinked as a signal and a guide.

The Amingo crept nearer and nearer, then stopped, and the anchor was let go.

Captain Adams and Guerrero descended to the deck. A few whispered orders to the men and a boat went over the side, and the crew began letting down the first heavy packing-case.

The stopping of the vessel had awa-

kened Connor, and he left his cabin, to meet Captain Adams and Guerrero at the head of the companionway.

"You'd better stay in the cabin," the captain told him with a grin. "But you can go on deck if you wish."

"I beg your pardon, sir. Is the deck to be left without an officer?"

"Go on deck, by all means, if you think an officer necessary," the captain retorted, grinning again, then walked to his cabin, with Guerrero following close behind him.

Connor sprang to the deck and looked about him. He saw that a boat had been lowered, and that a heavy packing-case was being let down.

He searched the sea, but did not see the lights of any craft; nothing to indicate the presence of the gunboat.

"What are you doing here?" he demanded of the men near the boat.

"Cap'n's orders, sir."

"Just *what* are the cap'n's orders?" he demanded.

The man did not answer, but turned to grasp a line. Connor gripped him by the shoulder and whirled him around.

"Answer me, you scum, and be civil about it!" he roared.

By way of reply the man struck; the blow grazed Connor's shoulder.

"You would, would you? You'd strike an officer, would you?"

As he spoke one fist shot out and the sailor struck the deck like a dead man. But Connor found others upon him. They grasped his arms, tried to trip him, rained blows upon his head and face and breast.

Morgan sprang across the deck to the mate's assistance. In an instant he, too, had been conquered.

Both were carried to a mast, and lashings appeared as if by magic. Kicking, trying to strike, struggling to be free did not avail. The crew left their work at the boat to help.

A moment—and Connor and Morgan were lashed securely to the mast, so that they could move neither hand nor foot.

"Cap'n's orders," grinned one of the men as they started back across the deck.

"You'll suffer for this, you dogs!" Connor cried.

They gave him no reply; they hurried back to the boat and began lowering away another packing-case. They worked by only one dim light that was shielded so there would be no reflection in the distance of the open sea. They talked in whispers.

Connor and Morgan struggled at their bonds, but the sailors had done their work well and escape was impossible.

"They're landin' th' contraband," Morgan whispered.

"Yes."

"Do you suppose it was cap'n's orders?"

"Yes."

"But he hasn't come back on deck; there ain't anybody to boss the men."

"They don't need a boss," snorted Connor. "They've got their orders, and they've done this work before."

Then he saw Guerrero, who had come slowly across the deck and was standing before them.

"We are sending the playthings to the ragged, ignorant fools," Guerrero said. "And you, my friend, will soon be one of those men who tell no tales."

He turned and walked toward the men working at the packing-cases.

"Lively, men!" he called. "You'll be remembered with something extra apiece if we come out all right."

"Aye, aye, sir!" replied the men in chorus.

"Easy with that case, there! Those lines need more grease; they are making a devil of a noise!"

"Cap'n's orders," muttered Connor to Morgan. "You notice, don't you, who's commanding the ship?"

"But where's th' cap'n?" Morgan demanded. "Why isn't he on deck? I'd think he'd want to boss this job himself, with a gunboat liable to poke her nose at us out of th' dark any minute. You don't suppose Guerrero has

done for th' cap'n, do you? You don't suppose th' men have mutinied and turned to Guerrero?"

"I do not," replied Connor. "I have an idea we'll see the captain presently, and I've an idea that he's playing some sort of a game."

Then there was silence for a time, save for the creaking of the lines and the scraping of the cases as they were lowered against the side, and low oaths of men who smashed fingers or cut hands, and the soft-spoken orders of Señor Guerrero.

From the dark behind them after a time came a whisper:

"Don't speak! Don't attract their attention!"

Connor felt his bonds give and knew a knife had slashed them. Another slash of a knife, and he was free. Morgan, too, was being favored, and without making noise they turned slowly and peered around the mast at their deliverer.

It was Wild Norene!

CHAPTER VIII.

Caught!

THERE had been a peculiar scene enacted in the captain's cabin. Entering it with Señor Guerrero, Captain Bill Adams had closed the door behind them, locked it, and draped a towel over a crack in it, through which the light filtered.

"Well?" the captain asked then, smiling.

They sat down at the table opposite each other.

"You think there's no danger?" Guerrero asked.

"None for you, *señor*; the cargo will be put ashore and you will go with it. Everything seems to be in proper order. As for the cargo itself — you shipped it from Portland to the lumber-camp in boxes labeled machinery, and we picked it up as we dropped down the Columbia to Astoria.

"As far as I know, I am carrying for you certain machinery. If you desire to have it landed at this spot on the coast, well and good—you know your own business."

The captain grinned and puffed at his cigar. Señor Guerrero, grinning also, arose and turned his back, lifted up his vest, parted his shirt, and so reached the opening of a money-belt he wore next his skin. From this he took folded bills.

He turned to the captain again and counted out a certain sum. The captain counted the bills in his turn.

"Correct," he said. "One moment, please."

Behind a panel in the wall of the cabin the captain had a strong safe. He opened this now, put the money in it, and twirled the combination knob again. Guerrero was half-way to the door when he turned.

"A moment, *señor*," said the captain. "I wish you to do me a favor."

"Certainly."

Captain Adams took a coil of rope from a corner and advanced to the middle of the cabin.

"The men already are moving your cargo, and have been told to obey your orders in the matter. I'll not go on deck again at present. Señor Guerrero, you will kindly take this rope, bind me securely, and place me in my bunk; then tie me in so that I cannot move."

"I beg your pardon?"

"I have a reason for this unusual request, believe me. You'll get your cargo ashore before the gunboat comes—if it comes afterward and finds me I do not care. I have a little game of my own to play."

"It is a great risk, captain."

"Which I alone am taking. You'll do as I ask?"

Guerrero complied. He bound the captain securely, except that one hand was left free, and in it Captain Bill held a revolver, so that when he was placed in the bunk he could cover any one who entered the cabin. The cap-

tain was chuckling at the look of amazement on Guerrero's face as the *señor* finished the task.

"Now go on deck, *señor*," he directed, "and see that all your cargo is landed properly. After the last load send the men back to the schooner, and we'll consider that we've said farewell. If you need me again you know how to find me."

"*Si, señor! Adios!*"

"*Adios!*"

Guerrero unlocked the door and went out, to close it after him as the captain had directed, and hurry back to the deck.

Norene, with Sally Wood in the adjoining cabin, knew that the vessel had stopped and that the cargo was being unloaded. She knew Captain Bill had entered his cabin with Guerrero, and when she saw Guerrero go back to the deck and leave the captain alone she determined on an interview with her uncle. She opened the door of his cabin and entered, to stand aghast at what she saw.

"Uncle Bill!" she exclaimed, starting forward. "Who has done this?"

"Stay where you are!" he commanded.

"I was going to unbind you."

"I don't want it!"

"What can you mean?" she asked.

She stepped toward him, wonderment in her face.

Captain Adams laughed at her appearance.

"Go back to your cabin," he ordered. "Remain there, too! This is not your affair."

"You—you are unloading the cargo—the contraband?" she asked.

"We are—if you want to know."

"But you—the captain—tied here at such a time! And the gunboat—"

"This is a little scheme," said Captain Adams, "to get square with the man who called you an unmentionable woman and said he could tame you."

He thought his words would touch her, and they did, but not in the way he imagined.

For Norene had been thinking the past hour.

"I have told you," she said, "that I blame you for that more than I blame him."

"Girl!"

"I do! And now you are breaking the law again at this minute, and in addition placing me in a position where I may be insulted by the officer of a Mexican gunboat."

"So you're taking the part of the man who insulted you against your own uncle, are you?" the captain demanded.

"I am taking nobody's part—but I am not blaming a man who should not be blamed."

Anger flared in the captain's face.

"Let me tell you this!" he exclaimed. "If you want to overlook what this man said, you may. I'll not. He insulted me, too. He called me blackbirder, smuggler—"

"And haven't you been?"

The girl's retort increased the captain's anger. Had he been free at the moment he might have struck her.

For an instant he half choked with rage, then he looked up at her and snarled.

"If I've got to tame you, girl, I'll do it after this business is over," he said. "But I'll fix Mr. Jack Connor first. Want to know why I had Guerrero tie me up like this, eh? Because about the time the cargo is landed and safe over the first hill the gunboat will put in an appearance. The schooner 'll be seized. And I'll have a story to tell."

"What do you mean?" she asked with quick suspicion.

"I'll be found bound and helpless. I'll explain how Jack Connor shipped machinery with me to be landed here—mining machinery. I'll say that just before we sailed I lost my other mate and signed on this Jack Connor, who told me he'd go on as far as Mazatlan in that capacity, then return to his mines; that he engaged to do this because he was in a hurry to get the

machinery through and I couldn't find another good mate in a hurry."

"Well?"

"And I'll say that just before we got to this cove he admitted to me that the cargo wasn't mining machinery, but arms and ammunition for the revolutionists; that I rebuked him and said I'd go on to Mazatlan, hand him over to the authorities and give them the contraband cargo.

"He bound me here, left me helpless, took the bridge, brought the ship to anchor, and ordered the men to discharge cargo. They did it because I wasn't on deck, and he was the mate, and of course they'd obey his orders. Understand, girl?"

"I'll be released and we'll sail on with the Amingo—and the man who slandered you and insulted me will be shot by a firing squad. The cargo will be landed, and I'll have kept my word with Guerrero. I win—and Connor loses. I said I'd do it, and I'll keep my word."

"Oh!" she gasped. "You'd do that? You'd send him to his death—and for nothing? You'd blame him for the crime you are committing?"

"I said I'd do it, and I keep my word. No man can call me a blackbirder and get away with it! If you want to overlook his insult to you, the more shame to you; but I'll not overlook his insult to me!"

"You'd not dare!"

The captain laughed unpleasantly.

"I promised I'd let him off, of course, if he tamed you before we got the cargo landed. If he'd made you love him, agree to marry him. But it's too late for that now. It'll not do any good to say you love him just to save him. If you're willing to admit before all the crew that this man has tamed you—if you'll admit he insulted you and you loved him for it—"

The captain laughed raucously again.

Sudden fire flashed in the eyes of Wild Norene. A swift movement forward and she had wrenched the revolver from his grasp—and Captain

Bill Adams, outwitted for the first time in his life, found himself bound and helpless in his bunk, scarcely able to move, his subterfuge turned against him.

"What are you going to do?" he cried, a feeling of dread in him.

"I'm going to play fair!" she answered. "I'm going to save the man you'd send to death. And I'm going to stop this unlawful act. I'll see that the men stop unloading that cargo; that the Amingo runs out to sea again—"

"Girl!"

"If I must fight you, uncle, I'll fight well! I'm Wild Norene, you know. You've often boasted no man could outwit me, that in an emergency aboard ship I was worth any six of the crew and any two officers. Well, I'll try to live up to your boasting!"

"You dare—"

"It is my wits against yours," she reminded him. "You are helpless, but it is your own doing. I didn't bind you and tie you in your bunk. Your little trick has proved a boom-rang.

"Swear—nobody will pay attention. Call—the men will not answer, for they're busy. I'm fighting you with your own sort of weapons, but I'm fighting for the right and you're fighting for the wrong!"

His curses ringing in her ears, she sped from the cabin and hurried to her own. A moment, and she had explained to Sally Wood, and Sally followed her to the deck.

The men were loading the first boat—Guerrero was commanding them. Connor and Morgan were lashed to the mast and helpless.

Sally remained in the shadow, and Norene sped across the deck, and with her knife slashed the ropes that bound the mate and his friend. There was not time to explain, and Norene spoke but few words.

"We must stop them, and get the ship away from the coast! There is danger—"

Already she was speeding across the deck, with Connor and Morgan at her heels. Sally Wood remained where she had been standing, watching the scene in the dim light of the one lantern that burned.

Norene stepped within the circle of light just as the last case for the first boatload was being lowered. A pretty picture she made, her eyes flashing, her hair blowing in the wind, a look of grim determination on her face, the revolver gripped in her hand.

"Stop!" she commanded, and as one man the members of the crew turned to look at her. "Bring that case on deck again—all of them! Hurry! Get up the anchor and put straight out to sea!"

Connor stood beside her.

"Lively, men!" he cried.

He had not forgotten how they had handled him a short time before. His fists were clenched and the look in his eyes promised ill for the one who hesitated.

"Up with that case!"

"We're not takin' orders from you!" one of the men growled.

Connor sprang forward, and that man struck the deck felled by a single blow. Guerrero, who had stood to one side astonished, seemed to come to life.

"Throttle him!" he shrieked. "Lash him to that mast again!"

The men sprang to obey. The captain had told them to obey Guerrero and disregard the mate.

But Norene stepped before Connor, and the weapon in her hand covered them.

"Do as I commanded!" she ordered.

"My dear young lady!" It was Guerrero speaking. "There must be some mistake. This work must not be delayed—for there is danger. It must be done as swiftly as possible."

"There is no mistake!" she said. "You men—do as I ordered!"

One of them stepped forward and touched his forehead.

"Cap'n's orders, miss, under favor, that we unload cargo and take orders from Señor Guerrero."

"The captain's orders have been changed!" she said.

"If th' cap'n—"

"The captain is ill, cannot come on deck."

Guerrero cursed and stepped toward her.

"Enough of this nonsense!" he cried. "To your work, men! You know the skipper's orders."

"They've been changed!" Norene said again.

"I'll see!"

Guerrero turned to start to the cabin. The revolver in the hands of Wild Norene covered him.

"You'll stay here!" she said.

Guerrero, his face purple with rage, turned toward her threateningly. But he did not speak to her—he faced the men.

"Do as I ordered!" he commanded. "Hurry with that cargo! Do you want that gunboat down on you—want to go to a Mexican prison, want to be stood against a wall and shot?"

The men began to murmur. They could not understand the situation.

Connor sensed the clash in authority, and he didn't trust the men. He stepped into the circle of light again.

"Back with that case!" he ordered.

"We ain't takin' orders from you—cap'n told us not to obey you!"

Again Norene stepped before him and with her weapon threatened the crew.

"You men know *me!*" she said.

"If you'll not obey the mate because of the cap'n's orders, you'll obey me!"

The weapon spit fire; a bullet crashed into the deck at the feet of the foremost man.

Guerrero had been watching for his chance; now he sprang upon her in an attempt to wrest the revolver from her hand.

But Guerrero did not know Wild Norene. A quick step she gave to one

side, and the butt of the heavy weapon struck the *señor* behind the ear and felled him.

"Bring back those cases now!" she commanded again, and the men turned to obey.

And out of the blackness that hung over the sea came a tiny finger of light that flashed toward the shore, broadened, and finally bathed the deck of the Amingo in its glory, making it as light as if the sunshine had played there.

Like statues they stood, those on the Amingo's deck—statues whose faces expressed fear and horror and anger and hopelessness—while the search-light revealed to all their guilt.

A crash out there in the night, a flash of vivid flame, and a shell shrieked over the Amingo's bow and rushed on toward the shore!

The gunboat had arrived!

CHAPTER IX.

What Riney Did.

A MOMENT they stood, while the gunboat crept nearer, and in the silence they could hear the slow beating of her screws, the creaking of davits as boats were prepared to be lowered away.

That pitiless light revealed everything on the Amingo's deck. A dash below, an attempt to get arms, a movement even might call forth a shell that would crash into the vessel or the rigging or scatter death among those on deck.

Señor Guerrero's face was white as chalk, and his teeth chattered. None knew better than he what capture meant—that there would be no red tape about the matter.

A trip to the shore—a squad—flashes of fire—then the hereafter.

The search-light and the whining shell had struck fear to the hearts of the men. Instinctively one of them put up his hands, as if he had been

covered with a revolver. Others trembled, some showed acute nervousness, some growled angrily.

Sally Wood was behind a mast, where the light did not strike her. Wild Norene, still clutching the revolver, turned and faced the glare of the light. Her face expressed no fear, only patient resignation.

Two men had been below in the small boat, and now they came scrambling to the deck to join their fellows.

"We'll be shot—shot!" one of them was mumbling.

"Shot by greasers!"

The search-light had startled Jack Connor, too. For a moment he had stood silent, a tumult of thoughts in his mind. He, too, knew what it meant.

Then he thought of Norene and of Sally Wood. He knew how the men regarded Norene. They would hold her equally to blame with her uncle.

For Norene it probably meant prison or death or worse. No courtesy would be shown her, no respect.

Connor looked at her where she stood gazing into the face of the light. Love for her swelled his heart.

This was the time to make the fight, he decided; even if she detested him, that did not prohibit him making a fight for her sake. True love, even when hopeless, calls forth sacrifice.

Now they could hear oars creaking. The boats from the gunboat were coming. In a moment men from her would be swarming over the deck of the Amingo, taking prisoners.

And that search-light held them in thrall, and behind it, Connor knew, were big guns ready for firing when an officer gave the word.

Yet it would do no good to stand and wait for capture and what capture meant. A fight seemed hopeless, but a fight would relieve the tension.

And always, even in the most hopeless fight, there is the slim chance that the god of battle may prove capricious.

"Arms! Where are they?" Con-

nor asked in a hoarse whisper, without making a move.

One of the men answered him in a similar manner.

"We all have 'em—in th' fore-castle, sir! And th' cap'n has some! If th' cap'n was here—"

"Pay attention!" Connor said. "When I give the word, rush for the fore-castle and arm yourselves. Miss Adams, you go to the companionway; you'd best go below and take Sally Wood with you. You, Guerrero, may do as you blamed please!"

They waited; the boats from the gunboat came nearer.

"Now!" Connor shouted.

His shout seemed to rouse them. With cries and curses the men dashed across the deck, some of them shielding their faces from the strong light, many of them expecting to hear the crash of a shell.

Norene darted to the companion-way, dragging Sally Wood with her. Connor and Morgan ran with the men. They gained the fore-castle, and revolvers and knives were torn from bunks and from the wall.

It flashed over Connor again that this was to be a hopeless combat. Even if they overcame the boarding party, there was the gunboat ready to sink them. And the Amingo was anchored.

But the men were frenzied now. Prison or execution stared them in the face, and they were the sort who'd rather die fighting.

Out on the deck again they grouped near the bowsprit, holding their weapons ready, trying to keep in the shadows as much as possible.

"Wait until they're on deck, then mix!" Connor was shouting. "The gunboat won't dare fire then, for fear of hitting her own men!"

The small boats reached the Amingo's side. On the gunboat a bugle was blowing a signal, and some officer was trying to megaphone a warning to the boarding party.

Then they came over the side, in two

places, a swarm of some thirty men, two officers in command. Garza himself was there, intent on taking the filibuster and Guerrero.

And Connor saw that Riney was with him.

Riney had a score to settle with Captain Bill Adams—he had a score to settle with Connor for that beating in the Astoria resort.

A chorus of yells and shrieks, a volley of shot, a fusillade from the gunboat's men, and then they were at it hand-to-hand on the deck, in the glaring illumination of the search-light.

The men of the Amingo were fighting for liberty and life; the men from the gunboat were urged on by their officers.

Connor found himself in the thick of it, with faithful Morgan at his side fighting like a wild man with his knife. Revolvers cracked in their ears, exploding powder burned their faces.

Señor Guerrero already was a prisoner, for Garza had attended to him first.

Amidships they fought, but the men from the gunboat, by the weight of their superior numbers, were driving the Amingo's men aft.

Connor saw Morgan slip and fall, but he was up in an instant. But some of the Mexicans were between them now, and the friends were denied the advantage of fighting back to back.

A bellow of rage assailed Connor's ears—and he faced Riney.

"Now, my fine buck!" Riney shouted, and followed it with a volley of curses.

It was a hand-to-hand conflict. Connor's revolver was empty; he had but a knife. Riney had a revolver at his hip, but he fought with a knife, too, for he was handy with the weapon, and he was a man who liked to see his foe's blood.

They clashed, parted, clashed again, now slipping on the slippery deck, now fighting toward one rail and now toward the other, but always going aft.

Connor found he had no mean an-

tagonist—he knew he was fighting for his life.

Riney's knife found his side, but the wound was not deep. In turn he ripped the man's forearm. Save for them, the battle was at an end, and the men of the Amingo had been vanquished.

Some of the Mexicans rushed toward them.

"Back! This is my fight!" Riney roared at them.

Garza ordered them back. Riney had stipulated that he was to have a chance at Connor alone. He knew Connor had been shanghaied by Captain Adams, and that was why he had sailed with the gunboat.

Riney was the sort that doesn't forgive a beating.

Again they clashed, fought around and around, both tiring. Connor called forth his last ounce of strength and forced his foe. Again he felt the knife bite into his side. Again he drew blood on his adversary.

Then a lucky stroke came for him, and Riney's knife flew from his hand and over the side.

Connor, too weak to follow up his advantage, too generous to take the advantage of an unarmed antagonist, perhaps, staggered backward, gasping for breath.

But Riney, with a cry of rage, sprang backward, too. His hand dived at his hip; came up holding the revolver.

"Now, curse you!"

Two screams rang in Connor's ears—for behind him, at the mouth of the companionway, Norene and Sally Wood had been watching the combat.

A rush across the deck, a body before his own—The crack of Riney's weapon, and a scream of pain as its hot messenger struck home. Cries of horror from more than one throat.

On the deck at Connor's feet a stricken human being who had saved him.

It was not Wild Norene Adams, for, though she had rushed forward,

another had been before her. It was Sally Wood.

The men were still. Riney, still cursing, walked forward to look at his work.

"Some fool woman!" he muttered.

Connor had knelt beside her and was trying to lift her. Norene stood beside him, and the wild girl of the sea had tears in her eyes. Sally Wood's eyes had opened; she looked up at Connor and smiled.

Then she looked at Riney, standing less than six feet away, the smoking revolver still in his hand.

"I've—found—you!" she gasped. "And this—is my—revenge! Perhaps you'll think—of me—the next time you plan to desert a woman and child—or rob—an old man."

The man was staring at her. His revolver dropped to the deck. A look of horror came into his face.

"You left me—to starve," she whispered. "Left me—your wife—and your baby, too. And you took every cent my father had—my old father—who suffered from hunger before he died—because of what you did. I've always said I'd find you—and have my revenge. And this—is my revenge! *Wife-murderer!*"

She screamed the last words at him, and the man staggered backward, holding his hands before his face.

The Mexicans, realizing the drama they were seeing enacted, stood like statues, and regarded Riney with scorn and sudden hatred.

Sally Wood looked up at Jack Connor again, and tried to smile.

"Jack," she said, so low that he could scarcely hear. "I think—I loved you—a little. But there is—Norene—"

And with that she died.

Norene was sobbing as Connor got slowly to his feet and looked at Riney. The expression in the mate's face was not pretty to see.

"Give the cur a knife!" Connor cried to Garza. "Let the wife-murderer stand before me again!"

But Garza knew a better way.

"The man had committed a murder, and we are in Mexican waters," he said. He stepped up and clapped a hand on Riney's shoulder.

"Irons, here!" he commanded, and two of his men stepped forward and obeyed.

CHAPTER X.

When Death Is Faced.

THE gunboat was sending a shower of shells toward the shore, where the revolutionists had been awaiting the landing of the cargo.

On the Amingo's deck another scene was being enacted. The cases that had been lowered to the small boat were on deck again, guarded by the Mexicans—Captain Bill Adams had been "caught with the goods."

They had searched the cabins and had found Captain Bill bound and helpless in his bunk, cursing at the top of his voice in an effort to attract attention.

This had puzzled Garza, and now all of them were on deck, and he was trying to work out a solution to the puzzle. Guerrero and Riney had been sent to the gunboat as prisoners. Sally Woods's body had been carried to one side and covered.

Captain Adams, Connor, Wild Norene and the men of the crew stood under guard, awaiting the pleasure of the Mexican officer.

"I'll make him suffer for it!" Captain Bill was shouting. "Mutiny on the high seas! Make me a lawbreaker, will he?"

"Calm yourself, Captain Adams, and let us get at the straight of it," Garza ordered.

The captain sputtered a bit, as if in rage, and then complied, darting glances of venom at Connor, meanwhile.

"I can see now it's all a put-up job!" he said. "In the first place, I'll admit I've run guns before, but

never into Mexico. Only into little two-by-four countries of Central America. I stopped that sort of business some years ago; I'm an honest skipper handling lumber principally.

"I was loading lumber in Portland when I was approached by a member of the *junta*. He said his name was Gonzales—that's Spanish for Smith, I guess. He made his little proposition, without saying exactly where the stuff was to be landed, and I turned him down flat—told him I was done with that sort of thing."

Garza grinned.

"I'm telling the truth, as you'll soon have reason to believe. I went on loading lumber at Portland. This man, Jack Connor by name, came to me one day and said he understood I was going to carry lumber to Mazatlan. He said he was a sailorman, but had come into a bit of money and was buying an interest in a Mexican mine.

"He had some machinery he wanted to ship. Part of it was in a lumber camp on the Columbia, he said. Would I carry it for him, and land it here—at this place?"

"I told him yes. Everything seemed all right, and we stopped on our way down the river to Astoria and took his stuff aboard. My papers are all right, and the packing-cases look like machinery to me.

"I went on to Astoria and tied up, to sail a couple of days later after I'd taken on some supplies. There I met Guerrero. He wanted passage to Mazatlan, and I told him I didn't carry passengers. He offered me big money, because he said he was in a hurry and didn't want to go to Frisco and wait for a regular steamer. I agreed to take him.

"I can see now how they worked it, and how they made it look. Guerrero hung around me, and I suppose you spotted him and thought I was carrying contraband. My old mate, that fellow Riney, had a grudge against me, but I kept him because he was a good man.

"One day in Astoria, Guerrero told me my mate wasn't honest. I asked what he meant. He said you were in Astoria trying to lease a small ship for your government; that you were the whole thing in Mazatlan and were a dirty grafter. He said Riney was to meet you, and the two of you were to work up some scheme to libel the Amingo at Mazatlan, and Riney was to have a share of the graft.

"I think he said the idea was to confiscate the schooner and divide the money you would have paid out if you'd bought a ship.

"Wait a moment now before you smile like that. I went to the resort with Guerrero where Riney was to meet you. You began talking, and before you'd got down to bedrock this man Jack Connor pitched into Riney for some reason and beat him up. Riney saw me watching him, and I think he guessed I was on to him, for he sneaked away.

"Then this man Connor told me he would act as my mate until we got to Mazatlan, then run back to this cove on some little boat. I was to deduct regular mate's wages from what I charged him for handling his machinery. I was anxious to sail, and I took him up."

"Well?"

"Let me get this straight now," said the captain. "Riney's wife was a stowaway, came aboard expecting to find him and make things hot for him—so that explains her presence.

"We turned in toward the cove last night, and I went down to the cabin with Connor for him to pay me for hauling his stuff. That was the arrangement. He was to go on to Mazatlan, though, then come back. I wanted my freight money before that cargo was put ashore, of course.

"When we got to the cabin and I was looking for my papers, he knocked me down, bound me, and tied me in my bunk. Then he came on deck and brought the schooner here to anchor, and began getting the cargo overside.

He boasted to me when he tied me, that the cargo was arms and ammunition; that he was getting a pretty penny for running it in, and that I had been fooled and was getting just ordinary freight rates.

"The men obeyed him, of course, for he was the mate, and they didn't ask questions because I didn't come on deck. Then the gunboat came, and you had the row. Connor led the fighting, didn't he? Because he knew what he was up against! And you found me bound in my berth, didn't you?"

"Connor is the man you want. He's your filibuster. Punish him for it, and welcome, for he made my ship a dishonest vessel in spite of me. You can take the rest of us to Mazatlan for trial, if you want. I can prove my innocence. Question the crew, if you like!"

Garza grinned again.

"That story doesn't sound good."

"Why did you find me bound then? Why wouldn't I be on deck putting up a fight? You know my history. Do you think you'd have taken this ship so easily if I'd been running guns?"

"There's something in that," the Mexican officer said.

He turned and looked at Connor.

"What have you to say?" he demanded.

Connor had been thinking swiftly. Captain Bill had plotted well. He could send Connor before an execution squad.

"I've nothing to say," Connor growled.

"You admit it is true?"

"I'm not talking!"

Garza faced Captain Bill again.

"If this is true, I am glad for your sake," he said. "But I'm not certain."

Connor was still thinking. Either he would pay the penalty, else Captain Bill and Norene would pay it. He didn't care for Captain Bill, but Norene was innocent; had been horrified when she discovered what her uncle was doing.

Perhaps there'd be some chance of escape after Captain Bill got Norene and the Amingo away.

"It's up to me!" he told Garza suddenly. "What the captain says is true. But you haven't executed me yet by a long shot—"

"So!" Garza cried. "Iron him, men! He's tried to run guns for the last time!"

Two of the men started toward Connor.

Norene, her face white, stepped before him. Connor never forgot how she looked just then.

"Wait!" she cried. "It isn't true! My uncle has lied to you! He alone is guilty!"

"Wait—listen to me! He shanghaied this man in Astoria—shanghaied him, and one of his friends, too. This man had spoken lightly of me. My uncle swore he'd punish him for it. Guerrero tied my uncle, at his orders. My uncle admitted to me what he was going to do—that he was going to send this man to his death, and go free himself."

"Girl!" the captain screeched.

"It's true—true! You sha'n't have an innocent man executed! You must face your crime yourself! I'm telling the truth, *señor*," she added, facing Garza again. "Ask Guerrero—he has no reason to hate this man, but he has reason to hate my uncle now, because he failed to land the cargo. Go back to the States and find who bought the arms and cartridges!"

She was sobbing as she spoke, for she began to realize the consequences of what she was saying.

Connor realized, too, with horror. The girl was freeing him, but condemning her uncle—and perhaps herself.

"Girl—girl! You've just killed me!" said Captain Bill, surprise and horror in his voice.

Garza was looking at him searchingly.

"This matter can be investigated and the guilt fixed," he said. "I

think, Captain Adams, that your little plot has been in vain."

Captain Adams cursed, cursed his niece, cursed Connor, cursed the Mexican officer and his men, and Señor Guerrero most of all.

"Silence!" Garza commanded, and called a subordinate to him. "Take charge of this schooner and follow the gunboat to Mazatlan. A squad here! Bind these prisoners well and have them taken aboard the gunboat. Watch the captain carefully, and have his guard a double one. Señor Connor, too. And the girl—

"Take the girl aboard the gunboat, but keep her in irons. She's as bad as her uncle. She's known in every port. She's slippery as an eel."

Two of the men caught Connor just as he launched himself at the Mexican officer.

"Watch the girl closely!" Garza went on, ignoring the American. "I don't know why she's turned against the captain, but that makes no difference. You all heard her testimony here. We'll make her repeat it—and it'll send her uncle before a firing squad. Lively, now!"

"You dare lay hands on me?"

Norene had ceased her weeping. Her tiny hands were clenched at her sides, her eyes blazed.

"You curs!" she cried. "I accused my uncle to save an honest man, not because I hated my father's brother. And he's a better man than any five of you! He's an American and I'm an American, and you can punish us for such an offense if we are guilty—but you'll treat us decently until we're proved so!"

"You're going too fast, my fine Mexican officer—entirely too fast aboard an American ship. We have a right to stop here and land cargo, haven't we?"

"Scarcely, when that cargo is contraband of such a nature, my dear young lady," Garza smilingly reminded her.

"We're lost, I suppose. But we'll

bother you as much as we can!" she went on. "You'll take every step in a legal manner! Perhaps, before you remove us to the gunboat, you'd better be sure the cargo *is* contraband. Not all of us will be executed—and the man who is not you may be sure will see that you suffer if every step is not legal."

Garza, smiling, bowed before her with fine sarcasm.

"Very well, *señorita*," he said. "A squad! Smash in those cases and we'll have a look. If you'll pardon me, *señorita*, I was about to do so, to make the evidence sure."

She turned toward her uncle, weeping, but he repulsed her.

Connor clasped her in his arms. It was all foolery, he knew. They'd be taken aboard the gunboat, there would be a farce of a trial in Mazatlan. With the country in such a state, the trial would be over and they'd be executed before a United States consul could even make a protest.

But he held Wild Norene in his arms for the moment, and that was because she sought a refuge in her grief, not because of love. Even as he thought these things she drew away from him and stood in the circle of Mexicans, watching Garza's squad smash in the tops of the cases.

She tried to explain to herself why she had not let Connor be taken to his death while her uncle escaped. What was Connor to her?

She answered herself that she had done it because of the dread of seeing an honest man suffer for the crime of another—and because she had real love for her uncle after all, that he was her ideal, and she didn't want that ideal shattered, didn't want her uncle to lower himself by putting the blame on another.

It was over now, she thought. Prison, perhaps death—at least for her uncle and his crew, and perhaps for herself. Or, if she escaped, there would be endless years to remember that she had condemned her father's

brother with her words—the man who had been like a second father to her.

A cry from Garza caused all to turn toward him. The lid of the first case was off. Here were no rifles, no cartridges—here were chunks of scrap iron, stones, packed with heavy paper!

A smothered oath came from the Mexican.

“Smash them in—all of them!” he commanded in his own language.

They waited in consternation—Captain Bill, Norene, Connor, Morgan and the crew.

Case after case was opened—all scrap iron and heavy paper and stones! Some one laughed hoarsely. Some one cursed.

It was a miracle, almost. Norene had not known. She had spoken as she did without reason, on the verge of hysteria.

Garza ordered his men below—but they found no contraband.

“I scarcely think you’ll trouble us further,” Norene said to him when he returned to the deck. “By the way, you and your men in the Mexican service are on the deck of a ship flying the United States flag. You’ve fired a shot across our bows, attacked our crew, seized the ship. The United States government shall hear of this!”

Captain Bill Adams, coming from his lethargy, suddenly realized the situation.

“Off my ship, you scum!” he roared. “Into your boats! Take us to Mazatlan, will you? Not without evidence! Off my ship!”

Garza was an officer who knew when he was whipped. He knew as well as any man that Captain Bill Adams had put into that cove to land contraband.

He wasn’t sure who was fooled—Captain Bill or himself—but he had an inkling that it was both.

With poor grace he ordered his men into their boats after releasing the members of the Amingo’s crew. He

would have to be satisfied with Riney, a murderer, and with Guerrero, who was wanted on other charges of inciting rebellion.

And down in his soul he hoped he never would hear from the incident again.

The boats pulled away. The searchlight died out. Captain Bill Adams roared out an order, and men sprang to touch match to the lights of the Amingo.

Forgetting the predicament, the certain death he had faced, Captain Bill was himself again.

“Tend to the wounded!” he roared. “And bless the swindlers that sold the *junta* scrap iron for rifles!”

Connor stretched his cramped muscles and made his way from the fore-castle to the deck. He had been dressing a bad wound in Morgan’s leg. The Amingo was on her way again, and day had broken, and the sea danced in the sunshine.

The Mexican coast was red with poinsettias. In the distance the gunboat steamed toward the south.

Wild Norene stood beside the rail, looking at the distant warship.

Connor stepped up beside her.

“Why did you do it?” he asked softly. “Why didn’t you let me die, let your uncle live? You didn’t know, when you spoke, that the *junta* had been fooled, that it would turn out such a farce. Why did you do it, Norene?”

“I didn’t want to think my uncle would hide behind another man, put his guilt on another man, even if to do otherwise meant his death.”

“And that was the only reason?” he asked.

“That — and because — because — maybe — Wild Norene has been tamed,” she whispered.

And the man at the wheel whistled softly as she turned and went into Connor’s arms in token of sweet surrender.

Nutting Dances

By

Frank Leon Smith



THE air in the long local room was thick with smoke from brands of ten-cent tobacco burning under forced draft. Twenty typewriters, mauled by a score of earnest young men, gave up a racket reminiscent of a flock of Curtis biplanes swooping by the grand stand. The floor was covered with a deep layer of crumpled newspapers through which office-boys plowed at frequent intervals.

At the horseshoe copy-desk the readers humped closer to their work. Flattened out, almost inside his huge roll-top desk, the little city editor presented the appearance of one who bore the responsibilities of the universe on his shoulders.

Industry—that's the word for the scene.

At his table near the rail the assistant city editor dropped a handful of galley-proofs and groaned. Then with a fierce gesture he pressed his fists against his brows and for a moment rested his tired eyes.

"Mason!" he yelled, swinging around in his swivel chair to command the long room.

No response.

Again he shouted—with the same absence of results. With a few warm

words in his wake, he flung open the gate in the rail and strode to the rear of the room.

There, in a space from which the discarded exchanges had been hurriedly kicked, Mason was slowly gyrating, locked in the close embrace of Howard Nutting, the imperturbable millionaire reporter.

"Nah—nix, Chas," Nutting was saying; "don't hop like a flea with a stone bruise—keep your feet on the floor. It's a sort of shuffle—*toe-heel, toe-heel, toe-heel*. Now relax a little; don't be so stiff—all right. *Ta-da-da-da, tee-da-dee, ti-dee-da,*" and, humming the strains of "Too Much Mustard," he backed the awkward Mason through the elementary movements of the one-step.

With his hands on his hips, his nose wrinkled in eighteen places, and a double curl in his upper lip, the assistant city editor successfully depicted supreme scorn as he watched the evolutions of the two reporters.

"Bend your knees a little," Nutting panted; "don't get up on your toes that way—you're no Mordkin. Keep your arm up—that's it—now try to get into the music a little—*tee-da-da-da, da-dee-dee, te-da-de-dade—dee—bing! ta-da-da—*"

Then the assistant editor exploded. "____ _ _ _ _!" he shouted, "what the ____ _ _ _ _! Hey! Cut it out! ____ _ _ _ _! Where do you guys think you are? Good ____ _ _ _ _! Has the whole town gone bugs over this blankety-blank dancing?"

Mason and Nutting parted suddenly and turned to face the angry editor. "What's wrong, Joseph?" inquired Nutting innocently.

"Oh, ____ _ _ _ _!" said the assistant city editor, and for a brief instant was inarticulate. Then he recovered and made up for lost time.

"I didn't hear you yell, Joe," said Mason—a short young man with a very serious cast of countenance.

"No, you were too busy with this turkey-in-the-straw stuff. What are you framing up? Some stunt for amateur night? I don't blame you much, Mason—but this skull Nutting—you're going to suffer, mister."

"Who, me?" queried Nutting sweetly. "Why, Joseph—"

"Yes, you," snapped Joe. "You put on your ear-laps and mittens and see me right away. I've got a nice little job for you. I was going to send Mason, but you seem to have so much energy—"

"Aw, Joe, have a heart," Nutting begged; but Joe walked away.

When Nutting presented himself at the rail a moment later Joe handed him a clipping from a morning paper.

"I don't suppose you have read this," he said. "It doesn't seem to dawn on you that you are working for a newspaper and ought to keep up with the news. Anyhow, we want pictures of this Venus person, and we want 'em quick. Hoist yourself over to the family chateau and don't you show your map in this dump again if you come away without the pics."

Nutting drew himself up very grandly.

"Why don't you send some one else?" he demanded. "I'm no photograph slooch—"

"Ah," and Joe grinned broadly. "Quite right, old top, quite right. I realize that picture skirmishing is beneath you, Mr. Nutting; but this case presents—ah—ah—unusual difficulties. I picked you for the job because you are husky.

"It may be of interest to you to know that the father of this young lady is one Battle-Ship Gorman, erstwhile middle-weight champion pugilist, now retired and living on his income. Señor Gorman, I am informed has lost none of his old time prowess; in fact, he's a terror.

"If you will incline your noble bean slightly to the right you will see that handsome young scribe, Pedro Sullivan who wears a splendid black eye, presented to him this morning by Herr Gorman. Now beat it, Nut—get going!"

"But Joe, my accident policy lapsed yesterday—" Nutting started to protest.

"On your way," said Joe, bending over his desk. "Don't forget to ask the girl if she stands for woman suffrage; and if you see the old man, get a few words from him on eugenics."

Nutting groaned and turned away.

A hurried perusal of the clipping told him that Miss Isabel Gorman, a member of the junior class at Varnard, had been pronounced by a world-famous surgeon to be the best-formed young lady in America. Miss Gorman, so the story ran, was not only perfectly proportioned, but was blessed with an unusually beautiful face.

She attributed her exquisite figure to her active interest in athletics. A tabulated comparison of Miss Gorman's measurements with those of the immortal Venus di Milo occupied a prominent place in the clipping.

As Nutting read he straightened instinctively and smiled.

"Wh-ee-ee," he muttered, "we-ll, this looks all right to me. Who's afraid of her old man? I ain't."

He stowed away the clipping, then

brushed his coat and hat with unusual care. On his way out he paused behind battered Peter Sullivan.

"Say, Pete—did you call on Miss Gorman this morning?"

Peter looked up from his typewriter, one eye completely closed and a sour expression on his face.

"Ah, go to—" he growled, "Are you trying to kid me?"

"No—I'm the next victim. Say, what's wrong with her father?"

Peter fingered the space bar on his typewriter.

"There's nothing the matter with his right—looka this lamp of mine. Ain't it a beaut? Why, I rang his bell and told him that I was from the *Chronicle* and wanted pictures of his daughter and an interview. He tried to close the door and when I stuck my foot against it and tried to argue with him, he fired me down the steps. He absolutely refuses to let the papers have pictures of his daughter. Says he defies all the scribes in the world to get under his guard. I wish you joy. Which do you prefer, a motor hearse or a black wagon pulled by mustangs?"

"I should worry," said Nutting, with an appropriate gesture.

After removing a few imaginary lint from his coat he left the room. In the lobby of the building he consulted the clipping.

"What was her address? Er—a wealth of flaxen hair—one hundred and forty pounds—forearm measurement—er—er 2610 Hicks Street, Brooklyn—yes—yes—large blue eyes. Oh, I just hate this assignment!" he said to himself.

Hastening to the bridge station he boarded a Brooklyn subway express. As the train racketed under the river he fell to planning a campaign. He wasn't afraid of her father—no, not he!

"Why, if Battle-Ship puts up his dukes to me I'll lean on him and lean on him hard," he thought. "I'll tell him, 'I hate to do this, old scout, but

you brought it on yourself. Now will you be good?' Oh, I don't anticipate any particular trouble with Gorman père."

Howard Nutting, it may be explained, was a tall, husky, blond young man who had inherited a large fortune. After leaving college his world seemed quite vacant and devoid of incident.

It was in the hope of finding adventure that he secured a berth on the *Chronicle* city staff, where, although he did not prove an eminently brilliant journalist, his never-failing good spirits, loyalty and willingness to "try anything once" endeared him to his associates.

When the train stopped at Borough Hall, Nutting jumped out and made his way to the street. A policeman gave him sailing directions and blithely he strode up the hill to Hicks Street.

"Wonder what I'd better say to the old man in case he comes to the door?" he asked himself. "Shall I tell him I am from the *Chronicle*? No—he might swing on me too soon. I've got to get in and shut the door behind me somehow. Once in I'll take a lot of throwing out."

As he drew near the house he was not without certain misgivings for all his bold thoughts of a few minutes previous.

Many times he had read of the ring ability of Battle-Ship Gorman, who, in his prime was famed as a savage slugger. Gorman had accepted every challenge, fought every comer, and after fifteen years of almost unbroken success had retired from the ring with a large sock of money and devoted himself to the management of his real-estate business.

When entreated—as he frequently was—to come out of retirement and defend the middle-weight championship he had won and relinquished—he merely growled and growled and pointed to his record.

He did not allow challenge, sarcasm

or abuse to shake him in his purpose never to fight professionally again. But his temper was peppery, and at least once a year an account of some street encounter of his found its way into the columns of the daily press. His antipathy for newspapermen, based on these unwelcome dramatizations of his flare-ups, was well known.

But experience had taught Nutting that there is no percentage in worrying about things that might never happen, and Ben Franklin's famous anxiety-dispeller was fleeting through his mind when he mounted the steps at 2610 Hicks Street and leaned against the push button.

In the brief interval between the turning of the knob and the opening of the door he had twice clenched his fists and assumed defensive attitudes, and twice had abandoned the pose—the second time with an involuntary gasp of admiration.

Obviously the girl who held open the door and regarded him with an air of innocent inquiry was the beautiful Miss Isabel.

In one hurried glance he ratified the famous surgeon's high opinion of her, and after a more comprehensive look he concluded that the eminent authority had been too conservative in the expression of his praise.

"Miss Venus di Milo, you're out of the running," he said to himself.

Snatching off his hat he bowed low.

"How do you do?" he began, "Is Mr. Gorman in?"

"No, father is out just at present," she replied in a voice that quite belonged with her attractive being.

Nutting smiled.

"Can you tell me when he will return?" he asked, spinning his hat on his forefinger.

"Why, he should be back in an hour or two, I fancy. Is there—"

"Now isn't that unfortunate?" he broke in, grinning broadly, "I'm terribly disappointed. I came way over here from New York just to see him and now—"

"Won't you come in?" she asked smilingly.

"Thank you," he exclaimed and stepped quickly into the hall.

As the door closed behind him he started involuntarily and turned, half expecting to see the sturdy Mr. Gorman standing in the corner.

"You are quite sure that your father—er—er—won't return for an hour?" he asked as she led the way to the sitting room.

She gazed at him with a roguish smile.

"He may change his plans and return at any moment," she replied.

"Uh—huh," he beamed.

She took a rocker near the window and he hauled a chair closer to the center of the picture and seated himself.

"If you will tell me your business with father, Mr.—er—Mr.—"

"Nutting—Howard Nutting—of the—yes—Howard Nutting," he said quickly. He had started to fumble for one of his *Chronicle* cards, but, on second thought, refrained.

"I came to see your father about you," he continued, smiling amiably.

"About me?"

"Huh—huh—yes, about—"

A new program suggested itself. He paused and eyed her intently.

"Why, we've met before, I'm sure!" he cried, starting up. "You are—why, of course—silly of me not to have thought of it before—you are Miss Isabel Gorman, are you not?"

"Yes," she affirmed eagerly. "Where—"

"Didn't I meet you at West Point?"

He knew very well that he had never seen her prior to her appearance at the door, but the scheme was working.

"Why, I don't know—did you?"

Miss Gorman had never visited West Point, but she was not immune to the subtle flattery.

"I have it!" he burst out. "It was at the Junior Prom at Princeton, two years ago; don't tell me it wasn't. You were a freshman at Varnard at the

time"—a quick calculation based on the clipping Joe had given him—"surely you haven't forgotten me so soon?"

She blushed and eyed him shyly.

Nutting, as has been said, was tall, blond, and husky. Also, very good-looking. All of which she noted, and her next remark proved that she was as good at the little game as he.

"I—er—one meets so many college men— Why, didn't you play on the football team?"

He smiled happily.

"Fullback—my last two years in school," he returned modestly.

"Why, of course!" she exclaimed.

"Well—well!" he laughed as he hauled his chair closed. "Who'd 'a' think it? This *is* luck. Well, Miss Isabel—ah—ah—tell me all about yourself. What have you been doing since I saw you last?"

She poked carelessly at the "wealth of flaxen hair" and replied:

"Oh, the usual school grind, with a dance now and then by way of variety."

"How do you like the new dances?"

"I'm just crazy about them. Don't you think they are grand?"

"You've spoke a parable," he affirmed.

"I've just received some new dance records," she said suddenly. "Would you care to hear one?"

"Would I—say—of course I would!" he exclaimed, leaping up as she rose to her feet.

When the phonograph had been wound and started they stood and listened a moment; then, without a word, he pushed the chairs against the wall.

They danced.

As you know, dancing is a great little demolisher of formality.

"Can you do the maxixe?" she asked as he cranked the machine for the second record.

"Sure—and you?"

"I can't seem to learn it," she said with a bewitching little pout.

"Cinch," he said briefly. "Got any music for it?"

She produced a maxixe record and he adjusted it on the phonograph.

"Now I'll make a bargain with you," he said, turning to her with a winning smile. "In my little rôle in the thrilling life-drama, 'What Becomes of Our College Fullbacks?' I do a turn in a newspaper office. We have learned that you have been pronounced the most beautiful young lady in the world, which, in my humble opinion, is a very mild testimonial to your charms.

"We would be honored if you would permit us to run your picture, with our little eulogy, in to-morrow's edition. If you will give me a photograph of yourself I will guarantee to teach you the maxixe. Is it a go?"

She listened wonderingly, a rosy glow in her cheeks, and when he concluded she faltered:

"Why—I don't don't know—really—father—"

"Now your father wouldn't need to know how we got the pictures, or even that we got them here," he said confidently. "How does he know but that we swiped them from the photographer? Aw, now, Miss Isabel, have a heart."

She laughed gaily.

"Would you—could you return them to me after—"

"I'll promise to get them back to you in good condition as soon as they have been through the engraving room."

"All right," she said. "Excuse me a minute."

While she was gone, Nutting took a few snappy, swaggering steps about the room and felicitated himself generously.

"Oh, you're there, Howard old boy, You sure are some speed demon," and so on.

When she returned she held up three large photographs.

"Which will you want?" she asked.

He examined them approvingly, looking now at her and now at the pictures.

"You sure are some queen, Miss Isabel—you don't mind my saying so, I hope? Why, I'll take all three of course. Then the boss can make his own selection."

"Well—if you are sure I will get them back soon. They are the only ones I have left."

"Right you are," he said briskly, and placing the pictures with his hat on a chair near the door, he leaped to the phonograph and pushed the lever.

"Ah—dog!" he cried, thrilled by the stirring strains, "Just can't keep mah feet on de flo'. Come on, lady!"

She joined him laughingly, and the lesson began.

"My, but you are light on your feet!" she exclaimed when he paused to wind the motor. "And you so big—why you must weigh at least—how much do you weigh?"

"Huh—huh! Oh, I dunno—a hundred and eighty-five or ninety or thereabouts. No fat either."

"A big man certainly is a graceful dancer when—"

"When he is graceful, eh?" he finished for her.

The lesson was continued.

At the end of an hour, Nutting suddenly realized that the time for Gorman père's appearance was about due.

"Pardon me if I seem to look at my watch," he said, consulting his timepiece. "Really, Miss Isabel, though it breaks my heart to say it, I must tear myself away. Duty calls, and all that sort of silly rot."

He quickly swung the chairs back to their proper places and caught up his hat and the precious photographs.

"You are doing fine," he said at the door. "Really, you learn awfully quick. I figure that one more lesson will be all you need—er—when shall I call?"

"Oh, how about Friday evening?" she smiled.

"Fine. Gee, but I'm glad we've renewed our acquaintanceship. I think we dance rather well together, don't you?"

"Yes? Thank you so much for the lesson," she returned, extending her hand. "You won't lose those photographs, will you?"

"Only over my dead body," he declared. "If I don't return those pictures to you in excellent condition, I'll never show my face in this neighborhood again. Well, so long, Miss Isabel."

"Good-by, Mr. Nutting of West Point, Princeton, and elsewhere," she said with a little laugh.

He turned on the steps and eyed her quizzically. Then both laughed merrily.

"Say," he grinned, "do you believe in woman suffrage?"

"Why, what a question! Er—yes and no."

"I thought so. We'll talk it over when I see you Friday," he called from the sidewalk. "'By!"

On the way to the subway station he stepped high.

"Mm—mm—isn't she pretty?" he said to himself. "Fine little dancer, too. Oh, Howard, I guess you are kinder poor when it comes to the gentle chatter! Put one over on the old man that time. Battle-Ship Gorman, the terror—huh! A slugger—huh! Well, it makes all the difference in the world when the *Chronicle* puts a good man on the job. Guess Joe will be tickled when I breeze in with these pics."

He stopped on the sidewalk and inspected the photographs, wagged his head admiringly, then resumed his journey. At a corner news-stand he bought a copy of a magazine with large pages—a woman's magazine—and slipped the pictures inside to protect them.

As he clattered down the stairs into the subway, Miss Isabel's remark about his bulk popped into his head.

"You are so big—how much do

you weigh?" she had said, and, "A big man is certainly a graceful dancer—"

"Oh, boy," he mused. "Wonder how much I do weigh?"

The opportunity to learn was at hand. There were scales beside a bench on the platform and he had several pennies in his change pocket.

He stepped on the scales. Then, as the needle flew around the dial, he realized that he still held the magazine containing the photographs. With his eyes on the dial he reached behind him and dropped the package.

At that moment a train pulled into the station and a throng of passengers streamed out.

When he stepped from the scales and turned to the bench, the magazine, photos and all—was gone!

Battle-Ship Gorman slammed the front door and strode into the hall.

"Isabel!" he called.

"Yes, father?" she answered from somewhere above.

"Here's a book I brought ye. Picked it up on a subway bench," he continued good-humoredly.

He turned the pages of the magazine.

"This here book is full of pretty—well, I'll be—" he concluded as the three photographs of his daughter fell to the floor.

D I V O R C E D

By H. M. Sterling

YOU could not bear with me, and so
The days and years to come shall lack
Sweet priv'leges I used to know—
Like hooking dresses up the back.

Your golden head no more shall rest
Beside me in the bower, where
I gazed on you and idly guessed
What woman first had worn your hair.

Your spoken word that once could thrill
Me, even as the mellow lute,
I'll hear no more, in accents shrill,
Ejaculating "Ugh! you brute!"

And when at eve the sun's retreat
Blazons the sky with molten glare,
I shall not hasten home to eat
The deadly food that you prepare.

Something is gone which must have flown
With you, dear, when you hurried hence;
Your absence means—I might have known—
The absence of the Fiend—Expense.

HEART TO HEART TALKS

BY THE EDITOR

THIS is an age of queries, an age of research. We are of an investigating turn of mind. The toddling child begins to ask questions that no human being can answer. It is an age of why and because, and the simple things are quite as important as those that are involved.

For example:

WHY do some plants droop and turn to the earth after sunset? **BECAUSE** when the warmth of the sun's rays is withdrawn they turn downward to receive the warmth of the earth by radiation.

WHY do pawnbrokers display three balls in front of their shops? **BECAUSE** three balls constituted the device of the Medici family of Florence. They were primarily physicians, and the three balls indicated pills. Finally they became money-lenders, and their seals appeared on so many documents that had to do with the pledging of personal property as security for loans, that the device lost its original significance and became the emblem of money-lenders.

WHY does lightning sometimes take a zigzag course? **BECAUSE** electricity seeks the earth by the path of least resistance. The lightning flies from side to side to find the easiest path.

WHY do people lost in the darkness or in a jungle walk in circles? **BECAUSE** ninety per cent of the human race have one leg longer than the other, and at each step take a longer stride with the longest leg. This leads them to the right or left in the form of a circle.

WHY are three hundred thousand people waiting for the July 18 **ALL-STORY CAVALIER**? **BECAUSE** they know it carries the best fiction of any all-fiction publication in any language.

THAT'S WHY!



Just to prove that he can write more than one kind of a story, Fred Jackson has produced an unusual and fascinating murder mystery for the consideration of the readers of the **ALL-STORY CAVALIER**. And it's really *some* mystery!

THE BIGGEST DIAMOND

BY FRED JACKSON

is the tale, and it will begin next week.

The story is written around "The Little Brother to the Stars," the biggest diamond in the world, which *Schuyler Nelson*, multimillionaire, has purchased from the *Raja of Matan*. He shows the won-

derful jewel to his friends at a house-party; at the same time announcing his engagement to *Mrs. Genevieve Howell*, whose past is a trifle opaque.

His daughter *Molly* is furious at what she considers an insult to the memory of her mother; so the next morning, when her father is found lying in his study dead—murdered—suspicion falls on her. For she had quarreled with her father. And when they got the safe open at last—

But it would be a pity to spoil a good story for you. You know how well Fred Jackson writes. Just consider that he has woven all his charm into this baffling and powerful serial.

"**THE BIGGEST DIAMOND**" comes in four instalments.

The novelette for next week has an attractive title. It is called

LAFE JASON'S SPECULATION

BY WILLIAM H. HAMBY

Hamby, you remember, wrote "Jacob's Wages" and "The Mingling of the Waters," a very popular serial which concluded not long ago.

"LAFE JASON'S SPECULATION" is a tale of the Ozark Mountains, and has for its hero just the kind of an individual you and I like. He's thoroughly American and he's thoroughly human, is *Lafe*.

And he's only a poor Hilly Billy in Wahoo City. He hasn't any money or any influence, only the gray matter under his ragged cap and two sizable fists. But, after a while, he manages to open a small store; and, with *Nina Wingate* to help him, begins his fight for recognition and success.

Three precious grafters, of the wooden nutmeg variety, block his progress. Together they own about everything worth owning in Wahoo City. They're a hard bunch to beat.

Lafe tightens his belt and spars for an opening. Read about him. It'll do you a heap of good. Maybe next time the other fellow lands you a stiff punch on the point of your jaw you'll return the compliment with a soporific solar plexus.

The story is complete in the July 18 issue.

"SORROWS OF O-HANA-SAN," by Walter Elwood, is an unusual story about an unusual girl. The fact that this girl was a little Japanese maiden in no way detracts from the absorbing interest of the story, as you shall see when you read it. The tale opens in the Philippines, in the town of Valladolid, where an American, *Jim Hillore*, is the supervising teacher.

At the moment the story begins, *O-Hana-San* is riding a bicycle, said bicycle moving along on a slack wire stretched diagonally high above the pit of the sagging palm-thatched theater. No wonder *Jim* held his breath as the beautifully proportioned little lady daringly rode back and forth, balancing herself as she did so by means of her big beflowered umbrella.

Back in the States *Jim* had a girl of his own, and her name was *Rose*, but right then and there *Jim* forgot *Rosie*.

Of course, all this sort of thing has happened before, and no doubt always will, because men are men no matter what their mothers were.

After you have read about little *O-Hana-San* you are going to tell your friends to read about her, or I'll miss my guess.

"MULLIGAN'S SENSE OF HUMOR," by David A. Wasson, is a story of the sea, and not without its redeeming sense of comedy. Mr. Wasson knows sailors and the sea as you know the hammock on the veranda of your best girl's home!

This story has to do with a strike—a strike among the Marine Brotherhood. Genial *Patrick Mulligan* was the secretary of the order. The strike was aboard the steamship *Colossus*, of which *Jerry Hornbeam* was captain. This skipper was a relic of the halcyon days when the Yankee windjammers dotted all oceans. *Jerry's* fist was as good as brass knuckles, and his piercing glance had made more than one mutinous crew quail into subjection. That *Secretary Mulligan* not only had the paralyzing gall to call a strike, but also had the greater temerity to board *Captain Jerry's* vessel, was enough to make the master of the ship almost explode with rage.

Mind you, this is only the beginning of the tale, and we leave you to find out the rest for yourself.

"THE GOLDEN SILENCE," by Stephen Allen Reynolds, opens as *Colonel Worthington J. Brewster* becomes aware of the fact that his broker, a crook by the name of *Fox*, has deliberately swindled the colonel out of seventy thousand dollars.

The colonel was an old cavalry officer, and he carried a tough snakewood stick. He tried to control his wrath, but his good intentions went to the four winds of heaven, and then his stick came down on the *Foxy* crook—I mean the crooked *Fox*. When the old colonel was finally pulled off of the scoundrel, *Mr. Fox* had received one good leathering; but alas!—the seventy thousand bucks had gone, never to return. So thought the wise *Mr. Fox*; but the colonel had a son, and he came to the front for his daddy, telling him that he would never cease his efforts until he made *Mr. Fox* return the seventy thousand to his father. From that time on, the son got busy, and you will be interested in finding out how he eventually made good.

"HER LITTLE EXCELLENCY," by W. G. Tinckom-Fernandez, takes you to the Far East, the slumbering, inscrutable,

mysterious East. The author is a native of India, where he lived the early part of his life. He went to school in England, then came to America and graduated from Harvard, all of which goes to show that you are sure to get atmosphere in this story, and a fresh point of view.

The plot concerns an American man

and an English woman who meet in Bimballal, India. These two are commercial agents—that is, in our vernacular, drummers. They get into trouble, and then they get out again, and through it all there is a fascinating love story which will make you glad you are able to buy the ALL-STORY CAVALIER WEEKLY.

A BIRD'S-EYE VIEW OF THE LETTER-BAG

Naturally it is impossible for me to answer all of the letters that come to my desk. Many of them are more or less in the same vein, more or less laudatory, setting forth primarily the fact that the writers approve of the magazine; that they like certain stories, and propose to continue reading the ALL-STORY CAVALIER regardless of the high cost of living and the enforcement of the income tax. Others of my letters deal rather critically, point a moral of some sort, or express opinions that seem to me to justify the publication of the epistles.

On the subject of the wedding I have a few lines from Gloucester, Massachusetts.

WED

For years I met a *Cavalier*,
He called on me each week;
A jolly fellow, full of cheer,
A friend, indeed, to seek.

I thought him clear from woman's wiles,
Bound to a single life;
But recently, with happy smiles,
He introduced his wife.

M. A. WALTON.

IT'S GOOD ENOUGH FOR HIM

TO THE EDITOR:

I am enclosing my check for four dollars, for which send me the ALL-STORY CAVALIER WEEKLY for one year, beginning with the issue for June 20.

I have been buying the magazine from the drug-store here ever since I let my subscription lapse, but they have quit selling magazines and I just can't do without it.

The only thing I can suggest which would improve it for me is that you have your novelettes longer, say about fifty or sixty pages. The length of the instalments of your serials is just right.

You are publishing some mighty classy stuff these days, and the magazine seems to be improving with each issue.

J. E. McBRIDE.

Lamar, S. C.

SUITS BETTER THAN EVER

TO THE EDITOR:

Just a few words to show my appreciation for the ALL-STORY CAVALIER. I commenced reading it when it first made its appearance as a monthly magazine, and now that it is a weekly, it suits me better than ever. I have all the weekly numbers and intend to secure the rest of them.

Please publish more of Zane Grey's work, as he is a special favorite of mine. I also like the Burroughs stories and would like to see a sequel to "At the Earth's Core" at an early date.

I can find no fault with our magazine. Of course every one can't be pleased, and if I find a story that I do not like I pass it by, for there are plenty that I like right in the same magazine.

I can hardly wait for Friday to roll around, I am so anxious to get the next issue of the ALL-STORY CAVALIER.

J. C. ROGERS.

Box 31,
El Dorado, Arkansas.

FRED JACKSON'S FRIEND

TO THE EDITOR:

As a new reader of your weekly magazine, the ALL-STORY CAVALIER, let me announce to you that this book is one of the few that makes people get it every time. The story entitled "The Eternal Conflict," by Fred Jackson, in last week's issue, was fine.

EDITH T. BERMAN.

92 Ridge Street,
New York City.

HAS TWO FAVORITES

TO THE EDITOR:

I am an enthusiastic reader of the ALL-STORY CAVALIER WEEKLY. I never miss it.

Two of your authors are favorites of mine: Zane Grey and Edgar Rice Burroughs. Mr. Grey's "The Lone Star Rangers," was a story worth while. But why not give us another as good, with a girl for a heroine—that is, one who has had a shady past and gone West, only to be saved by a true-blue Western fellow? All girls are not saints. Mr. Grey, I am sure, could picture my heroine.

"Tarzan of the Apes" is the most enthralling story I have ever read. Some say, "but it's such a lie." Mr. Burroughs makes us forget the "lie" part and *Tarzan* becomes real. Success is assured the motion-picture actor who can enact *Tarzan* on the screen.

Good luck to your weekly.

MARY FLIER.

Caledonia, New York.

ZANE GREY WILL WRITE A SEQUEL

TO THE EDITOR:

I have been taking the ALL-STORY CAVALIER WEEKLY only a short time, and it gives me pleasure to state that I would not be without it. It is the best all-fiction weekly I have ever read.

"The Lone Star Rangers" is great, and I would appreciate it very much if Zane Grey would give us a sequel to it, with, for instance, both couples in their new home.

"The Beasts of Tarzan" is fine also. In fact, all the stories are good.

I like *Russ* and *Ruth* best of all in Zane Grey's novel.

I take several magazines and have only been buying the ALL-STORY CAVALIER about five weeks. I would not trade it for all the others.

Let us know if you can prevail upon Zane Grey for a sequel.

Hoping you accept me for membership in your great club of readers,

B. P. KNIGHT.

6933 Emerald Avenue,
Chicago, Illinois.

"WRITTEN TO ENTERTAIN"

TO THE EDITOR:

As a constant reader of the Heart to Heart Talks, I feel like kicking in a few myself.

I noticed in a recent letter where some learned gentleman had taken exception to

several errors on the part of Mr. Burroughs, this savant claiming that the Martian time as stated was wrong, besides finding fault with various other statements. I most respectfully desire to suggest to this savant that if he reads stories for the purpose of detecting possible errors instead of the entertainment afforded by them, the best thing he can do is to transfer his attentions to other fields. One would imagine that a person with the intelligence which a scientist is supposed to have would realize that all of these stories are written to entertain, and if there are occasional errors in them they should be excused.

Furthermore, unless critics can do better than the writers they criticise, I think they had better keep quiet altogether. I find all of these stories so very entertaining that I would hardly know which to select as the headliners.

Naturally, I am interested in learning whether or not we will get sequels to Mr. Burroughs's various stories.

I might add that "The Great Secret," "Wandering Men," and "The Grand Getaway" appeal to me quite strongly.

With best wishes for your future success,

S. H. PHILLIPS.

224 Wellington Street,
Ottawa, Canada.

LETTERETTES

I have read *The All-Story* and *The Cavalier* for years and like them very much. I think Edgar Rice Burroughs is your best writer. Tell him to give us a sequel to "At the Earth's Core." I am interested in "The Beasts of Tarzan." *Tarzan* is all right.

Wishing you the best of success,

NORMAN DICK.

Folsom City, California.

"The Eternal Conflict," by Fred Jackson.

And they say Fred can't write a story!

J. E. HARDWICKE.

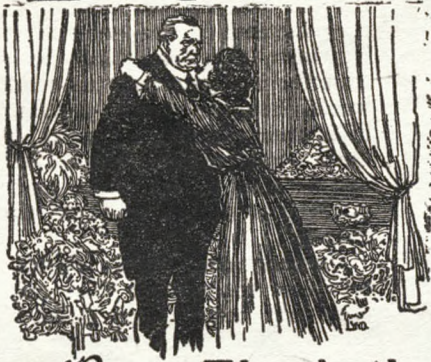
Winston-Salem, North Carolina.

As a new reader of the ALL-STORY CAVALIER I must say that the stories published in the past issues were very interesting, and the current stories seem more so. I have been reading *The Cavalier* for the past six months and wish you such success as any lover of good fiction should.

H. J. SWEETMAN.

Akron, Ohio.

Beside His Wife



By Elizabeth Irons Folsom

MR PICK, the undertaker, stepped briskly up to the glass and adjusted his necktie. He turned his head from side to side, critically examined the part in his hair and touched carefully a circular ring on each temple.

He shook down his trouser legs and, with his lips in the position of whistling, crossed the room with subdued spring in his step.

If there was anything that Mr. Pick particularly enjoyed, it was a funeral the details of which were left to his own planning. He disliked bereaved families having a large circle of relatives with ideas of their own concerning obsequies.

His professional joy was quenched in such work. In the case at hand he had been undisturbed, and just before closing the door, he surveyed, with properly depressed pride, the room that he had arranged according to his belief in the last and best in undertaking.

Across the corner of the small room stood the coffin.

Under it a white fur rug, the property of the undertaker, bristled conspicuously. The brass standards were shining to the last degree. Above the coffin was a canopy ring, from which

flowed a white lace drap, also the property of Mr. Pick.

This was parted, and drawn evenly to head and foot, displaying the still form. At one end of the fur rug was a "Gates Ajar" in tortured flowers. Exactly in the middle was a wreath, and in geometrical position at the other end was a floral pillow, where purple immortelles said, "Alice."

The chairs were backed carefully against the wall, and a row of yellow pine camp chairs, also part of the undertaker's equipment, were evenly placed.

Everything that could have made the room look natural, or as if it had been lived in, had been removed. There was a subdued light. One window, opened a dozen inches, allowed a fresh scent to come in from the yard full of poppies and sweet peas. Other doors and windows were properly closed.

The undertaker finished his last satisfied look around, closed the door gently behind him, and Alice Darst was alone.

It was almost the first time that she had been alone since the burden of life had slipped from her.

There had been so many things to do to her. Such a paraphernalia of

custom-made grief! Such a coming and going—such a curious peeping—such an officious strain at “doing something for her”—such a shedding of suitable tears from neighborly eyes. Being newly dead had brought nothing of repose.

When the door closed on Mr. Pick's black frock coat and pink cheeks, it seemed almost as if the placid limbs relaxed the more. There might have been almost a sigh of relief from lips that had taken upon themselves a something that was not quite a smile, but that was puzzling and unnatural to the man who had come through the hall door alone.

He had been ushered in ostentatiously by the undertaker, who had made way for him through the crowd of red eyed women in the hallway.

“Mr. Darst goes in alone to the body,” had said the undertaker, and curious faces were turned to watch the closing panels of the door. Then, the women forming the crowd found comfortable advantageous positions from which to view the ultimate re-appearance of Mr. Darst.

There was a general putting together of heads, and confidential conversations were resumed in hushed voices.

The man behind the door looked about the unnatural little room in a startled way. He felt as if he had never seen it before. The armchair at the window, which Alice had called his, and where he had spent the larger part of each Sunday with his papers and the proper periodicals, was no longer there.

The familiar litter of small things that had been his and hers he did not see. He had a feeling that he was in the act of moving out of the house which had been home.

He looked at the still face of his wife in the same anxious, startled way. He touched awkwardly the stiff satin pleating that stood out from the pillow where they had lain her head. He looked at her, curiously, impersonally.

It seemed to him as if he was trying to recall where he had seen that woman before, not as if he had been sent in to take his first look at his wife after she was arrayed for her burial. He had to make a physical effort, by bracing his feet and setting his jaw, to keep his thoughts where they belonged.

They seemed ready to follow his eyes out of the close little room, through the strip of open window and across the fields to something else—anything else. Even the most trivial of business matters intruded themselves into his consciousness in advance of the things he should be thinking about then.

“Don't you think they have frizzed her hair too much?” he said to the girl who had noiselessly appeared at the foot of the coffin near him.

The girl did not speak, and he repeated the question, as if the answer might be an important issue to him.

“Don't you think her hair is too much frizzed, Mary? I can't make her seem natural. Or maybe it's the thing they have put around her neck. There is something about her that seems strange. Do you see it?”

Again the girl did not reply and the man went on:

“It isn't exactly that she is smiling, but there's a queer look about her face—seems like that she understood, or knew something—”

“She didn't,” spoke the girl.

The man frowned.

He rested his hands on the edge of the coffin. They were strong, powerful hands, matching the strength of his big frame. He put one of them up and pushed back restlessly the thick, dark hair that waved over his forehead.

It was a not unhandsome head, set too far forward on shoulders that sagged a bit. One would know by looking at him as he stood, that he would walk slouchingly and carelessly.

“It seems strange that she should have gone off like this,” he went on in a puzzled, complaining sort of

way. "It was over so quick. Why, she had had those spells a hundred times before. I never knew that medicine not to take right hold.

"The doctor said it always would, and you know when he came at the last he couldn't understand. He said he had tried it out on her a dozen times—there must have been something else set in. He asked me if I was sure she had those powders every half hour, and I said I was—that we had given them to her ourselves and that when I was out—"

"I left every paper under a weight for you to count after she had taken the powder, you know," interrupted the girl.

"Yes, I know. Who would have thought that she would have gone so quick. There must have been something else—a stroke or something."

"Yes," said the girl.

"I wish she looked more like herself," he complained. "I can't seem to make it like her. Alice was a good girl. She was only eighteen years old when we came to live in this house. That's twenty-four year ago. I can't remember that she ever said a cross word. I used to think she was too quiet. Sort of reserved like, even with me.

"And she has that look now. As if she understood something that I didn't. After all that look is almost natural—for she knew more about things than I did. She was always thinking. She would sit and look out on the hills there, for hours it seemed to me, without saying a word—she wasn't lively company, but she was good. God! I don't know how I shall get along without her. It makes an awful hole, Mary."

The girl moved restlessly, her dark, shining eyes always on the man's face.

"She's been quieter than ever the last few years, but she liked to hear you chattering about. She liked to have you do things—she was pretty good to you, too, Mary."

The girl went suddenly to the open

window and barred the entrance of a big heavy bumblebee, who, conscious of the scent of hothouse flowers, had been whirling in ever narrowing circles about the window.

She pulled the lace curtains together and pinned them closely. She jerked them a little as she did so.

"I'm going to have her put away with her wedding ring on," the man continued. "I had thought I'd take it off and keep it, but I believe she'd rather have it on. She was always fond of me and of her home—poor Alice."

Then, after a minute: "She cared more about the home than I ever did. I'd have been glad to get about a little. I think I'll shut up the house now for a while. I was thinking about it last night. I'll go West. I've always wanted to. I'm free now and there's no reason why I shouldn't get about a bit. I could hardly stay here. It would be too lonesome—poor Alice—who would have thought I should have missed her so much and so soon."

"What are you going to do with me, John?" asked the girl.

The man looked at her for the first time.

He looked unseeingly and as if he was not noting the oval face, the soft olive skin, over which peach bloom color came and went as she spoke. He looked unseeingly, and then back impatiently to the face of the woman in the coffin.

"Well, of course, you and me couldn't live here together. There's been talk enough I guess, as it is. You'll have to go back to Chester. All Alice's things are yours. I know she'd want you to have them. But I can't stay here—I've always wanted to go West, anyhow."

"Will you come back for me?" said the girl.

The man frowned again. "Oh, I don't know when I'll come back," he said. "I sha'n't be tied. I'll stay as long as I like."

The color flamed into the girl's face.

She crumpled in her hands the folds of the lace drape at her side.

"Then you didn't mean all the things you said?" she asked.

"Sh-h-h-h," cried the man in a sibilant whisper.

"She isn't hearing," with a scornful laugh, while anger blazed in her eyes. "Then you didn't mean what you said, John, about loving me and what we could do and how we could be together if it wasn't for her—you didn't mean it, then?"

"Hush," repeated the man. "Don't you know better than to talk about such things here?"

"What difference does it make?" cried the girl fiercely. "I know. You're afraid of her. You always were afraid of her. You were afraid of her living and you're afraid of her dead. I'm not."

She rapped fiercely on the edge of the coffin. "He loves me the best. He says so. He has, ever since I've been here. I'm not afraid of you. Pout," and she snapped her fingers.

The man seized her hands roughly.

"You go out of here if you can't behave yourself," he said.

Then the tears came.

"Ah, John," she cried, clinging to his hands. "You make me crazy when you seem not to care. I can't bear that you should look at her all the time, and not at me. You know what we've been to each other.

"You know I've done everything you asked—because you said you loved me. I've taken chances and chances to be with you, because you wanted me. No, I won't hush. She's no better dead than she was alive, and you didn't care for her then—you've said so a hundred times.

"You've said, that if she was only out of the way—you swore you loved me—I tell you, I won't hush—you said those things a plenty while she was alive. And you were clever enough making plans to get with me alone—and now you talk—" The girl broke into wild weeping and wailing.

The door opened cautiously, and the sleek head of the obsequious Mr. Pick protruded.

There was curiosity rampant in every feature. But he saw only the husband standing stiffly by the side of his wife, and the girl, who had been a member of the family, sobbing aloud over the loss of her friend and her home. It looked like any other scene in any other house at such times. The flame of slowly burning gossip could not be fed by it. He closed the door again gently.

The man smothered a hard word, but he reached out and touched her shoulder not ungently.

"Go on up-stairs. We'll talk about this later. This is no time and no place. Go on up-stairs, Mary. Be reasonable. You musn't carry on like this here. Go on."

"You come, too, then," sobbed the girl. "Oh, John, you come, too. I'm so unhappy. You don't want me to be that. You always said I was made to be happy, because I was sweet—you've said a thousand times that I was sweet, John."

She had moved close to him and raised to him her face, that was like a flower. She slipped one hand up his arm, over his shoulder and tucked her fingers over the edge of his collar, against his neck—a baby trick of hers that he knew.

"You are sweet," he said slowly.

The smile, that began about her mouth and spread into her shining eyes, was radiant.

"Say it again," she whispered, and she stood on tiptoe, that her lips might almost touch his. "Say again that I am sweet. That was your first love word to me, dearest. Say it again."

She was so close that he felt the soft thump of her heart against him. He looked down into the alluring curves of her neck and shoulders—he quivered at the touch of her fingers in his neck, and bent his face to meet hers.

She flung herself upon him. She snuggled into his arms with little mur-

murs—she trailed the soft moisture of her lips over his cheeks, until he smiled—and then, in a sudden, he threw her from him, and recoiled.

“My God, Mary, she is smiling,” he cried in choking whisper; “see her. Oh, my God!”

The girl turned upon him—

“Coward,” she said, and in the word, standing alone, there was the red fury of rage that could kill.

The man saw it, and it touched a something responsive in him.

“Now, you’ve done enough,” he said; “go out of here. Your being here is an insult. I’ll have nothing more from you. You are bad clear through—you are like your mother.”

“Don’t you talk to me about my mother,” fired the girl. “She had blood in her veins—she knew how to live—and I hope I’m like her. Throw me off if you like. I don’t care. But your devotion to her is a little late. Too bad you couldn’t have had it earlier.”

She wrenched open the door and took a straight line roughly through those who were waiting there. Her feet barely touched the stairs in her swift ascent.

The watchers, through the open door, saw John Darst draw a camp chair from the military line of them, and sit heavily down.

It was long after dark that night when the girl sped along the path from the house. She had come out by the back door, hearing, as she tiptoed through the kitchen, the low voices of the watchers in the living room. She had finished the tasks for the night.

On the kitchen table were the covered plates, containing the sandwiches and cakes that would be eaten for the midnight lunch by the neighbors who were sitting in the dim light near the open door into the perfumed parlor.

The coffee was in the pot, ready to go on the gasoline stove. It was not strange that the girl should have come down into the kitchen after she had gone up to bed, but she moved stealthily

and slipped out the door like a slim shadow.

Down the path, like a shadow, she went, and under the thick orchard trees to the edge of the cliff.

There was a clump of lilac bushes growing close to the edge. They had been there so many years that they were almost like trees in their size and strength. The sprouts had spread until there was a small jungle of foliage, and beyond this, just at the edge, was the roughly put together bench that John had made one day, and had whispered to her in the hall to go out and see.

Alice had not cared for that part of the yard. She had been afraid of the cliff, and the dashing of the waves of the lake below had seemed cruel to her, she had said.

It was to the cliff that the girl went. Her lovely face was swollen with weeping. Her wonderful hair was loose, and she wore the same little gingham frock that she had had on all day. She unbuttoned the front of the frock fiercely as she ran.

She took from her bosom a closely tied up handkerchief.

She held this in her hand as she sat for a minute on the edge of the bench. The waves were lapping softly, there were moonlight beams through the trees, there was the soft sighing of the wind as it rounded the bank of foliage and came to her.

Almost she smiled and lifted her head to listen for cautious steps—such a replica was the night of many others she had spent there. Then she recalled that John was sitting in the dim light in the front room—that he had sat there all day.

The rage of the morning had not died. It seared and distorted her face. She beat her shut hands on the rough wood of the bench, and her lips drew back from her small teeth as the gusts of passion came and went.

There was fear, too—a fear that made her clutch her throat, even as she laughed scornfully.

“Fancy me being nervous. Fancy

me being afraid. I was not born a coward—some people were.”

She untied the corners of the handkerchief she had taken from her dress. But her hands shook, and she glanced over her shoulder and listened.

“Why do I hear things everywhere?” she asked aloud. “I’m not

afraid. I knew what I was doing and I really haven’t done anything. She would have died anyhow. It was a stroke, or something.”

Then she shook out the handkerchief, and from it there drifted down a small cloud of fine white powder that lost itself in the water of the lake.

A Personal Problem

By

H. Bedford-Jones



“ALL the island’s up at the commissioner’s to-night—he always gets a bale of ice up from Auckland on steamer day. You were surprised to find me here, eh?”

“So-so.” The fat man wiped his face and poured another drink. “You’re a damned ironic brute, Cranshaw! How was I to know that the John Smith, our Raratonga agent, was yourself? You have nerve. I always said you had nerve.”

The long, lean man looked across the table, inspecting his guest curiously. He had looked forward to the coming of the firm’s junior partner, but Hobson did not know it.

His thin lips crisped ironically as he squirted soda into his glass.

“Well, what are you going to do about it? Come, Hobson, let’s not mince words. You had me driven out

of Auckland; you took over my stock in the company; you married Agnes, and you’ve grown fat. I fancy you’re punished enough—you needn’t look at me like that, man! Avarua is good enough for me.”

Hobson was indubitably nervous. He had shaven before coming ashore, but his fat jowl was dusky again. He perspired freely, and as he mopped his face he shot uneasy glances at the other man from deep-set black eyes.

An overlarge diamond flashed on his fat hand, and another glittered in his tie.

“You’re a sly dog, Cranshaw, a sly dog,” he muttered, then his voice took on vigor. “What do you mean, anyway? You needn’t think that because your bally bungalow-is out here at the edge of town you can threaten me. I won’t stand for it. I’ll discharge you—

I'll show you up before the commissioner—"

"Hold on, man! Great Heavens, don't you see that I'm in your power?" Cranshaw leaned over the table, his face anxious, pleading.

But behind the anxiety in his gray eyes there was a hard coldness, quickly veiled.

"I'm not threatening you, Hobson—it's the other way around. I'm satisfied, here in Avarua; I'm the company's agent, no one knows who I used to be, I've a good salary. Come, don't bear malice! The old life is forgotten, so let the dead bury their dead. Don't be hard on me, old man! I know you didn't treat me square, but you married Agnes—I was beaten, and that's an end to it. Now I'm contented and prospering here. You won't give me away, will you? You won't discharge me, send me down into hell a second time?"

Hobson took a cheroot from the table and lit it. His flash of apprehension had vanished altogether.

"No," he returned slowly, judicially. As he was inspecting the diamond on his finger he did not notice the hard gray eyes across the table. "No, Cranshaw. I didn't treat you right, I'll admit, but bygones are bygones. As you say, you're in my power. I never quite believed you stole that money myself."

A burst of terrible irony ripped through the mask of Cranshaw's lean face, but it was gone instantly.

Hobson glanced up with complacent, cunning frankness.

"I misunderstood you, I guess," he went on heavily. "To tell the truth, I half expected you had got me here to—to—"

He paused, licking his lips. Cranshaw broke out into a loud, ringing laugh.

"Nonsense, man! Come, drink up and shake hands on it all—if you bear no malice we'll cry quits, eh? No, things have turned out for the best, far as I'm concerned. And so you'll

not bear hard on me, old man? You'll just forget who I used to be?"

Hobson's little leering eyes cleared of their suspicion and something very like a sigh of relief shook his fat chest. Their glasses clinked together.

"Here's how!"

The personal problem, it seemed, was closed finally and forever.

There followed an hour of labor over the table, since it was the junior partner's first "whirl around the circuit" of the islands; previously he had lived a cunning and contented existence in Auckland, far from savages and resident commissioners.

Cranshaw, however, had looked forward to his coming for some little time.

"You'd better stay ashore for the night," stated the resident agent, when the reports had been cleared up and balanced properly. "There's quite a surf running, and it'll be hard to get a whale boat, since all the natives are feasting. Steamer day's a great occasion here, you know."

"I'm not fond of insects," and as Hobson reached for the siphon his eyes flitted around uneasily. "I've heard stories about these islands."

"You look apoplectic, too," mused Cranshaw. For an instant that odd, bitterly cruel light shot through his gray eyes. "Nonsense, man! That's all talk. Of course, there are a few cockroaches and such, but there's nothing dangerous. Absolutely no scorpions, and the centipeds don't kill. That's all talk. See here, I've two cots laid up in my sleeping-room—finest mosquito curtains in the island. Better stop, and it'll save coming ashore in the morning."

Hobson glanced through the door that his host flung open, and the sight of the wide, clean sleeping-room with its two draped beds evidently decided him.

"All right," he nodded.

"Better finish this bottle," suggested Cranshaw easily. He himself drank little.

"Come out to the steamer to-morrow," said Hobson, a half hour later, as they rose. "I'd like to show you—show you Agnes's picture—an' the baby's."

"Thanks," returned Cranshaw.

But his long, lean face seemed to quiver a trifle, and as he ushered his guest into the sleeping-room his gray eyes were baleful. That speech had been sheer venom, for Hobson was not drunk; he had merely forgotten for the moment his intense fear of Cranshaw.

Once ensconced with their mosquito curtains, the two men exchanged a few words before dropping off to sleep, then the darkness was broken only by the rasping snore of Hobson.

Curiously enough, Cranshaw's breathing seemed hardly audible.

For Avarua, the night was a cool one. The bungalow was at the edge of town, and the roar of the surf thundered dully from the outer reefs in unbroken cadences.

Suddenly, and without the slightest warning, a horrible scream echoed out from the veranda—shrilled up and off, and seemed to die softly in the distance.

"My God!" Hobson's voice rang out. "What's that?"

"*Mor kiri-kiri*," returned Cranshaw sleepily.

"What's that?"

"A flying fox—for heaven's sake shut up and go to sleep!"

Cranshaw did not sleep himself, however, for he lay motionless with his hand on an electric torch, and chuckled slightly as he listened to the irregular, panting breathing of the other man.

Slowly through the surf-mutter there pierced other sounds—slight, thin, bird-like sounds, as though innumerable watches were ticking in the room. Hobson's breathing sounded rather flurried, and Cranshaw's thin lips parted in a grim smile as he stared up into the darkness.

Peculiar though the ticking sounds

were, they were presently overborne by a still more peculiar sound—one which no human brain could define, without experience.

It was a ghostly tapping, tapping, tapping that seemed to come from the floor; a clicking, irregular, metallic tapping. It ceased with uncanny suddenness.

"I say, are you awake?"

Hobson's voice sounded stifled, hoarse.

"Cranshaw! Wake up!"

"Eh? What's the matter?"

Cranshaw spoke very sleepily, and smiled to himself.

"There's something on my curtains!"

"Shake it off and go to sleep."

A soft flurry of mosquito curtains, a subdued crash, and then a scuttling and tapping that once more ended abruptly. A gasp from Hobson.

"I say, the bally thing's back!" he cried. "For God's sake help me out, Cranshaw!"

"It's only a hermit crab wandered in, you fool. Wait—now take a look and give him a good fling off."

Cranshaw's arm protruded from his curtains, and he snapped the electric torch. He had no need where to look, for he had been expecting this visit from the junior partner for some time.

Hobson gripped his curtains in desperate haste and again shook off the thing that was climbing. He looked out, saw the hideous, bristly object clatter away on its spider-legs, and fell back with a subdued groan.

"Damn this place!"

Again silence and darkness fell upon the room, and again the noises of the night slowly seeped through the surf-thunder.

Outside the veranda the crabs were scuttling and clicking and rustling, scavenging with resistless vigor and great enthusiasm. A thin, far burst of song came from the government accommodation house, where the bulk of the steamer's passengers were gathered in jovial celebration.

Then through all the muffled night there again began to pierce that insistent watch-like ticking. Not as of one watch, but as of a thousand it was, steady and irregular and very thin. Occasionally a quite distinct crunch would echo through, as though some one had stepped on a beetle; only there was no one to step.

Once or twice there came a soft "flop" on the floor; whatever had fallen must have fallen from the ceiling.

The sounds were not exactly pleasant, especially to a fevered imagination. They might mean anything from ghosts to dragons.

And over all, slurring the staccato harmony of the ticking, was an almost inaudible soft scurrying—like innumerable feathers or hairy legs running about.

It was a weird symphony, a symphony of lesser noises, of louder silences, a symphony whose eldritch orchestration produced hideousness.

There was no discord. Over the crescendo and diminuendo of the ticking swept that soft horror of nearly inaudible sound, shot through by the louder crunches; there were other sounds also that could not be defined by human ears, but all blended into a terrible harmony, the more terrible because produced by darkness and rife with suggestion.

"I say, old man," Hobson's voice rose in a thick discord that ruined the symphonic whispers utterly, "what's all this bally rustling, eh?"

Cranshaw waited a little, smiling into the blackness, inscrutable.

"I say, Cranshaw! Let's have a drink, old man!"

"You 'wake again?" Cranshaw's voice bubbled out sleepily. "What's the matter?"

"I want a drink, that's all," came the half-shamed answer.

"No more whisky in the house—we finished up the last of it to-night. Go to sleep and quit your infernal nonsense."

"You're sure there're no poisonous things around?"

Cranshaw did not answer. The other repeated the question, his voice beginning insensibly to climb with the last words.

This time Cranshaw replied, but took no immediate heed of the question itself.

"Say, Hobson, I've just been thinking about something. You remember that mess I got into down at Auckland? I heard the other day that it was you who stole that money yourself. That's true, isn't it?"

The other held silence for a moment, until the ghastly symphony protruded into his brain.

"I—I wanted Agnes," came the hoarse words.

Cranshaw smiled to himself.

"Thank God you got her, Hobson—since *she* wanted money, it seems. By the way, you were quite right in thinking that I got you here to-night in order to pay you out."

"Eh? What's that?"

Hobson's voice leaped from the darkness, vivid with a horrible fear, pulsating and lingering under the roof weirdly.

Cranshaw spoke after a moment; his words were cold and sharp and quite impersonal.

"Hobson, you were a fool to imagine that I would ever forget or forgive. You had me snared for your own crime; you broke me; you got the girl I wanted; you became the junior partner in my place. I became John Smith, came to Raratonga, settled here and waited. I knew you would come sooner or later."

He paused, smiling inscrutably at the darkness.

Hobson was breathing stertorously, and there was another and queerer sound—like a fat man licking his lips in fear. The darkness intensified everything.

"I was in two minds, Hobson. I had a notion to take you out to the reefs for a swim. You don't know it,

but there are interesting things out there in the warm water—bubbly eels, spiny leper-fishes with every spine deadly poison, sting-rays, devil-fish, plenty, plenty snake and shark. But I decided against that, for I knew you had imagination. So I brought you here instead.”

Cranshaw still smiled into the blackness above him, lying motionless as he talked. He had no need to switch on the light to guess at the shaking mosquito curtains of the other bed, the pasty-faced man who clutched at them, the horrible fascination with which Hobson followed his every word.

“Now, my dear fellow,” he went on, his voice acridly smooth, “I want you to take a little look around. Then—”

“For God’s sake, Cranshaw!” burst forth the frenzied tones of the other man, shrill and smitten with hysteria. “I’ll give up everything—I’ll sign a confession and give you Agnes—I’ll make it all right if you—”

“Shut your mouth—and *look!*” snapped Cranshaw, and the words fairly crackled through the room as he shoved his arm and swept the place with light.

The light was blinding, merciless, leaving every inch of the room clean-cut and distinct, disclosing the whole fearful secret of the hidden orchestration.

About the floor and walls and ceiling were poised cockroaches—South Sea cockroaches, as large as mice or larger, with great waving feather-feelers. They flitted hither and thither by the hundred—moving masses of hideousness, making as they went that ticking which furnished forth the body of the night’s symphony.

And here and there, flashing away from the light more quickly than the light could follow, or flopping from ceiling to floor as the light swept up, were things that looked like sausages. Only when they moved, when the fearsome hidden red legs flashed out in all

their horror, could one recognize centipeds.

Yet these were not the most horrible nor the swiftest.

For heedless of the light, the occasional crunches swept up above the body of the symphony as the electric ray disclosed the hordes of cockroaches to their enemies. Great brown shapes darted here and there, back and forth, by the dozen; huge brown hairy things as large as a plate—hunting spiders—leaping on their pray, crunching once, and leaping forward anew.

The room was a wriggling horror in that moment, and when Cranshaw clicked off the light that triumphant “crunch — crunch — crunch!” was rising in a finale that drowned out the rest of the symphony—and shattered suddenly at his voice.

“Better not step out on the floor, Hobson—I saw a couple of those spiders on your curtains. I’ll take my chances, but you’ll stay here. If they get under your curtains you’re gone, remember—any one of those things means certain death. As I say, I’ll take my chances, because I’m going to leave you here.”

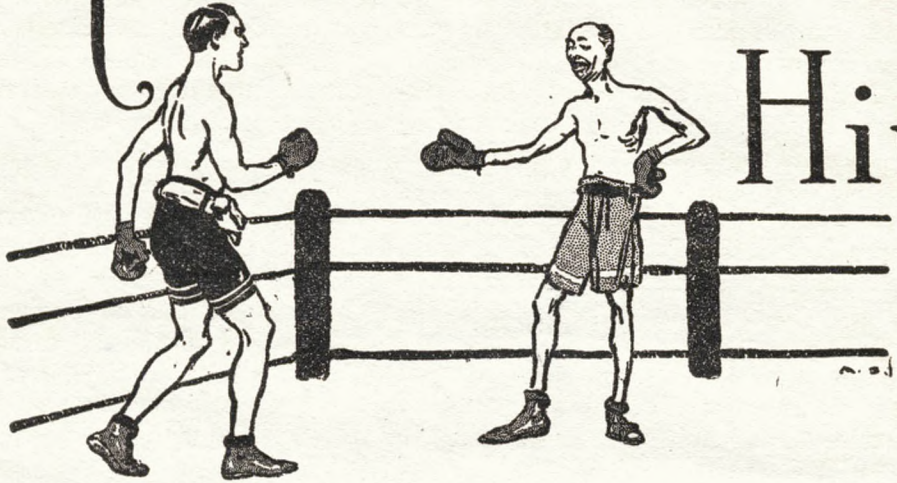
He calmly threw aside his curtains, reached out for his slippers, dumped the wriggling things out of them, and rose. Seizing a spray at hand, he sent a shower of boracic acid over the floor and calmly went to the door.

There he paused, with a cold laugh, to listen to the frenzied cries and promises and curses and prayers of the man who dared not leave his cot—and with that Cranshaw slammed the door,

“Damned coward!” he muttered, opening the tantalus on the veranda and pouring himself a drink. “He’ll be fool enough to believe me, and be afraid to try rushing from the room—the damned coward! And precisely at two o’clock apoplexy or heart-failure will take him off, and Agnes collects the insurance. Well, I’m satisfied to call quits.”

And the soda shot hissing into the glass.

A Hard Man to Hit



By J. A. Fitzgerald

BRADLEY HAMM had no use for a mollycoddle. One didn't need to be told that after a glance at the powerful frame, the pugnacious bald head and chin, the prominent, uneven teeth that rimmed his capacious smile, the big-jointed, full-bearded hands, the ungainly slouch, and the baggy appearance of the well-worn gray business suit that looked as if it had been cut with a knife and fork.

His success had been attained in the school of hard knocks. The very nature of his business—he was the owner of the extensive brick-yards on the outskirts of Clintondale—went a long way toward explaining the absence of velvet in his make-up.

At the same time, he was honest, companionable, and generous—characteristics which prompted his neighbors to overlook his lack of polish.

With these facts in mind, it is easier to understand the anguish with which he faced the probability that within the hour he would be called

upon to decide whether he wanted Ferdy Rollins for a son-in-law. It was a decision fraught with the greatest importance to the Hamm family—father and daughter.

“Yes” would make his pretty daughter Virginia the happiest girl in the world; it would make him correspondingly unhappy.

Now, Ferdy was not a mollycoddle in the strict sense of the word; but he came too near qualifying for that classification to suit the rough-and-ready brickmaker.

Hamm liked him well enough—but not as a relative. He conceded his upright character and ability to provide for his daughter and all that. But he deplored his lack of aggressiveness, his gentle manner, his willingness to compromise, his fondness for croquet, dominoes, and other debilitated pastimes, his highly perfumed and immaculate appearance on all occasions. Ferdy's pink-and-white beauty jarred him more than anything with the exception of his wrist watch.

These were his disturbing thoughts as he paced up and down the smoking-room of his comfortable home. For some time he had realized that the romance was nearing its climax; but he had clung to the hope that there might be some way of postponing what he regarded as a calamity.

"No two ways about it," he reflected; "Ferdy's not the type of man that can stand punishment of any kind. If he met with reverses he'd wilt like a morning-glory in cold storage. If anything should happen to me he'd have to look after my business." The mere thought of such a contingency started him chuckling. "I've got a bird's-eye view of him trying to run those brickyards," he went on. "What those mud-handlers would do to him would be a crime."

Further reflection was interrupted by the entrance of a servant with the announcement that the expected visitor was at the door.

"Send him along," ordered the boss of the house.

He took a last, deep, desperate breath, flung himself into a leather armchair, and crossed his legs.

He was a study in wrinkles. A mischievous smile flashed across his face as he heard Virginia and Ferdy whispering in the hall below. He lit his blackest cigar and began puffing for all he was worth.

The highly nervous visitor stepped into the room and was confronted by what appeared to be a heap of smoldering rags.

"Hello, Ferdy!" came from the center of the conflagration. A huge hand appeared through the volume of smoke.

"Goodness gracious, why—" Ferdy got such a fit of coughing he couldn't finish the sentence. Hamm suggested that he had a cold; but he couldn't reply. The brickmaker was glad that the smoke hid his joyous expression.

Ferdy got permission to open a window, and then, between coughs, managed to gasp that the tobacco

habit was abominable—more evidence that he would not make a desirable addition to the Hamm family.

The smoke lifted sufficiently to enable him to glimpse the wrinkled object in the armchair. He shuddered imperceptibly and averted his gaze.

"I—I suppose you like to take it easy when you get home," he said presently.

Hamm said he was always glad when the whistle blew. "We all work hard down there from—"

"And it's such a terrible smelly old place," interposed Ferdy, a look of horror in his big, blue eyes. "Wonder to me you don't chuck it and enjoy yourself. You've got all the money you will ever need."

It was all that Hamm could do to keep from telling him a few plain truths about himself right then and there; but he managed to reply with outward calmness that he liked the work and intended remaining in harness while he had his health.

Inwardly he was saying: "So this is the guy that I'm about to have wished on me! Smelly old place! Huh!"

Through the corner of his eye he caught Ferdy fussing with his wing collar; an audible gulp made it plain that the big question was already passing through his esophagus.

"I suppose you know why I wanted to talk with you," Ferdy blurted right out.

Hamm guessed it was about the big fight in Madison Square Garden the night before, and immediately launched into a eulogy of the principals. "I'd have given anything to have—"

"Mr. Hamm!" came the indignant exclamation. "That's the worst guess you ever made in your life. You know you never heard me discuss prize-fights or vulgar things of that sort."

The brick merchant protested that every one was discussing it. "The papers carried columns about it," he declared.

Ferdy retorted that the newspapers paid too much attention to such disgraceful proceedings. Hamm, tickled with the temporary delay gained by his ruse, disagreed with him. "The courage displayed by the loser—" he started to say.

"Courage, fiddlesticks!" came the scornful interruption.

"Yes, courage. I can just see you taking three or four smashes in the face when you had a chance to stay down and escape punishment. Not only you, but myself, for that matter."

"You needn't worry about what I'd do," Ferdy said hotly. "I'd stay there and take my medicine. I've got just as much courage as the next man."

His under lip quivered slightly as he said this; but he looked his host squarely in the eye.

His show of spirit astonished the burly brickmaker. It tickled him to see that Ferdy was getting angrier every minute.

"I don't doubt your courage, but—"

"Yes, you do, Mr. Hamm. You know you do; and I know you do. I'm no fool. I know that you would think a whole lot more of me if I was a rough-neck."

His shrewd guess threw Hamm off his balance. The latter could scarcely believe his ears.

"Prize-fighters! Bah!" Ferdy resumed with a sneer. "I don't call it courage to take a few smashes in the face when you know you are going to get four or five thousand dollars for doing it. I call that high finance."

Hamm said it was all very well to talk that way, but that it took a lot of pluck to stand up before a crowd and take a walloping.

Ferdy took a step closer and, in a voice shaking with suppressed emotion, said:

"I tell you what I'll do, Mr. Hamm. In order to prove my courage and back up the statements I have just made, I'll go in the ring with any man you care to pick out, and I don't care how

big or how clever he is. I'll probably get my head knocked off; but I'll show you that I'm not the sissy that you have taken me to be. I—"

"Ferdy!" came in reproachful terms.

"You know that I've guessed right, Mr. Hamm."

The latter regarded him with amazement. To say that he was overjoyed at Ferdy's willingness to fight doesn't describe his feelings.

Ferdy's appearance in a prize-ring, even if he never lifted his hands, even if he appeared alone, would have been sufficient to cause him to revise his estimate of him.

It occurred to him that it might not be a bad idea to call Ferdy's bluff. He went about it diplomatically.

"The idea of your taking part in a scrap is absurd," he ventured with an irritating laugh.

"Is it? Well, I'm ready to show you."

Hamm hastened to regret that Ferdy had misunderstood him. "I wasn't questioning your courage when I said that," he lied cheerfully. "The absurdity I had in mind was the idea of such a well-bred young fellow as you mixing up in any such game. Suppose you should get hurt?"

"I expect to be," was the brave reply.

Hamm pretended to be horrified at this declaration. "Then you insist on—"

"Meeting any man that you care to pick," Ferdy put in. "Prize-fighting has not been in my line, but as that seems to be your idea of courage I'm going to show you that professional pugilists haven't got a monopoly of it."

The readiness with which Ferdy had walked into the trap tickled Hamm all over. He had hard work to keep from laughing.

"All right," he acquiesced, with a great show of reluctance. "But if anything happens, don't forget you're the one that suggested the bout."

"I know it. I'll take full responsi-

bility. 'And, remember, I don't care if my opponent is as big as Grant's Tomb."

It was agreed that the contest should take place at the Clintondale Country Club on a Saturday afternoon within the month, if Hamm could obtain an opponent for Ferdy by that time. The brickmaker was laughing inwardly at his success in diverting the young man's thoughts from the interview that he had in mind.

But as Ferdy was leaving he said: "Until I can prove to your entire satisfaction that I am not a milksop I will refrain from broaching the subject that brought me here to-night."

II.

FERDY'S voice rang with defiance as he made this last statement. But he had not taken half a dozen steps along the hall before it dawned upon him that he had been exceedingly rash; that he had booked himself for a beating at the hands of some expert face-destroyer.

His courage had slipped back to its normal place before he reached the bottom of the stairway. By the time he reached the street door he was kicking himself for having allowed his tongue to jeopardize his good looks.

For Ferdy was extremely proud of his face. So much so that he had hard work to keep from cheering when he looked in the mirror.

If he could have been assured that his opponent would confine his execution to the body he would have felt a great deal easier.

Such ring encounters as he could recall offhand did not offer much consolation in that direction. Invariably these contests had ended with "powerful right-hand swing to the jaw" or "crushing blow behind the ear."

In his terror he could feel the steady thud of fists against his delicately tinted profile; unconsciously he placed his hand on his head, expecting to find his nose up there.

Virginia, eyes and cheeks aglow with anticipation, met him in the pathway leading to the house. She extended both hands. He muffed them.

Her quick eye noted his agitated condition. She asked him if her father had given his consent.

He didn't hear her. He was thinking of liniment, court-plaster, splints, dermatologists, and such unromantic things.

After she had urged him repeatedly to relieve her suspense he said in a shaking voice:

"I did not ask him. We—we talked of something else."

Her face took on a puzzled expression. She knew that he had requested the interview for that purpose.

"You didn't ask him?" she queried doubtfully.

He said he hadn't; that he hadn't got that far. Then, with her amazement increasing at every word, he told her all that had occurred; of his determination to enter the ring to prove his courage.

"Ferdinand Rollins!" she gasped when he had finished. "Have you gone crazy?"

She had hit the nail on the head, he thought. He had been temporarily deranged when he made the rash bargain.

"I felt that I had to do something of the sort, Virgie," he protested. "I've had a feeling all along that your father believed me to be lacking in nerve. It was for you—"

"For me!" she interrupted. "I—I don't believe it. If you really loved me you wouldn't want to get beaten to a jelly. If you were bent on doing something for me you might have chosen something besides suicide. Oh, my poor Ferdy, I know—"

"Virginia!" he remonstrated. Her predictions were anything but soothing under the circumstances.

She burst into tears. She patted his soft, chubby hands and said she couldn't bear to think of their being incased in clumsy boxing-gloves.

"You're not very cheerful," he complained.

"Pity I wouldn't be with the prospect of your coming back to me without any teeth and two black eyes and your ears *en casserole* and—"

He clapped his hand over her mouth to shut off the rest of her pleasant prophecy. The fear that he might acquire an illustrated optic—perhaps a complete set—had occurred to him; but the possibility of being separated from his teeth was a contingency he had overlooked.

The mere thought of parting with one of his pearls threw him in a panic. He experienced a sinking sensation in the vicinity of the rathskeller.

He tried to wiggle his toes. He couldn't. They were frozen stiff. The frappéing process had reached his knees—and was spreading.

Her attitude indicated only too plainly that in her opinion he had already passed away. Tearfully she bade him good night and went in search of her father.

The latter told her all that had taken place, forgetting, however, to supply the motive which had prompted him to broach the subject of prize-fighting.

He didn't fool her. She said she guessed that he didn't try very hard to dissuade Ferdy; she intimated that he was satisfied with the way things had turned out.

Her intuition forced him to take the defensive.

"I'll tell you frankly, Virginia," he said. "Ferdy is not the type of man I prefer. He hasn't got enough red blood to suit me."

"And you're going to assist him in losing the little bit he has," she came back quickly. "I'll admit that he prefers his meat cooked. But that doesn't appeal to you. You're a man of strong tastes. You won't be happy until you see the poor boy with early closing signs on both eyes. If anything happens to him you'll never forgive yourself."

Her voice broke as she said this. Before he could make further comment she swept from the room.

He felt a bit guilty for permitting her to go without the assurance that Ferdy was in no danger, because he had made up his mind that no harm should come to him. As a matter of fact, he thought more of his would-be son-in-law right then than ever before.

On the way to the brickyard the next morning he took Barney, his chauffeur, into his confidence, telling him about the proposed match and the plan he had in mind.

"I want you to run down to New York to-day," he said, "and see if you can engage the services of some old, broken-down fighter. Be sure and get a lightweight, the thinner the better; one who's hard to hit, but who, if he is hit, will not have the strength to hurt Ferdy. I don't want to take a single chance on the boy's being injured. I'll be perfectly satisfied if he shows pluck enough even to enter the ring. Do you get me?"

"With one hand tied behind my back," was Barney's confident reply. He knew New York backward. "East Fourteenth Street, near the Bowery, is thick with old has-beens of the prize-ring. How much will I offer?"

"Could we get one for one hundred dollars?"

"What?" cried the chauffeur. "I could get a train-load for that stake."

"Be sure the fellow is hard to hit," were Hamm's last instructions as Barney boarded the train. "You see, if he has a good defense Ferdy will not be able to land a blow that might cause him to lose his temper."

"I've decided to stage the bout two weeks from next Saturday at three o'clock in the afternoon. The man you engage needn't come down until the day before. Tell him to phone me at the yard at my expense if anything occurs to prevent his making the journey."

"And while I think of it, Barney,

you take charge of Ferdy's training and give him the impression that we have engaged a real fighter. As nothing can possibly happen to him, we may as well have a little fun at his expense."

Barney was back in Hamm's office before the whistle blew that evening. His beaming countenance told his employer that he had been successful.

"I've got the guy you had in mind," the chauffeur began enthusiastically. "He's chasing middle age, is as thin as a rail, and gentle as a lamb. On top of that, he's got the reputation of being the hardest man in the world to hit; but he couldn't put a dent in a chocolate éclair."

"Good!" exclaimed Hamm. "You are sure he's hard to hit?"

Barney said that every one had assured him that the fellow was in a class by himself in this respect. The boss handed him a substantial tip.

"Oh, by the way," he added, "did you get his name?"

"They call him 'the Professor,'" said Barney. "I didn't worry about finding out his real name."

Hamm said it didn't matter.

"Some old hulk who picks up a few pennies giving boxing lessons, I suppose," he observed.

III.

CLINTONDALE was considerably rocked by the announcement that Ferdy Rollins, the town's most famous piece of bric-à-brac, had agreed to expose his classic countenance to the tender mercies of a professional pugilist.

Ferdy's insistence that the idea originated with him did not gain much credence. The knowing ones, aware of the disfavor with which Hamm viewed Ferdy's attempt to break into the family, guessed that the brickmaker had deliberately planned the discussion which led to the making of the match.

In common with Hamm, the men of

the town had never been madly infatuated with Ferdy. They laughed immoderately when they heard the news. Some of them were uncharitable enough to say that there was nothing Ferdy needed so much as a good smash on the nose.

The women thought differently; said the contest should be stopped.

Most of this comment reached Ferdy's ears. It didn't make him feel any better. Not that he could have felt much worse.

Fifteen or twenty times a day, during the training stunts, Barney would manage to let him know that his opponent was extremely large; that he could hit like a pile-driver, after which Ferdy would steal away and look in the mirror, first with one eye closed, then with the other, then with both ears pulled in and his mouth twisted to one side.

He was trying to get accustomed to the way he fully expected to look a few minutes after three on the afternoon of the battle.

Virginia helped to raise his spirits by weeping all over him whenever they met.

Speculation as to the size of the Professor increased as the time for the contest drew near, every new rumor adding from two to six inches to his height and circumference until the Clintondalers were fully prepared to meet an individual constructed on the general lines of the Statue of Liberty with a waist-line like a merry-go-round.

Needless to say most of the population was at the station to welcome him on the eve of the disturbance. Also, needless to observe that Miss Virginia Hamm and Mr. Ferdinand Rollins were the most eager ones in the big crowd that awaited his coming.

Ferdy wanted to see if he could detect even a scintilla of mercy in the eye of his executioner; Virginia wanted to see the heartless wretch who was expected to put Ferdy on a permanent diet of hot gruel.

When the train pulled in and discharged its passengers without dropping off anything that met the expectations of the crowd in a professorial sense, disappointed murmurings were heard on every hand.

The Professor had backed out was the word that passed from lip to lip.

Virginia pinched Ferdy with delight when it reached them. Ferdy didn't dare show how it affected him. He clung to Virginia for fear of turning an involuntary back somersault.

"Well, I guess he's ditched us," Hamm spoke up. He was mad clean through. "That's the worst of relying on one of those Bowery bums for anything."

It was because all hands had their heads in the air, firmly expecting to see the Professor stooping to dodge the clouds that they had failed to observe an individual who had left the train on the wrong side and was now crossing toward the station. Barney, worried to death because of the apparent miscarriage of his arrangements, was the first to spot the man referred to.

"Here he comes!" the chauffeur shouted excitedly. The others saw him dart forward and extend his hand to the weirdest-looking human being they had ever laid eyes upon.

Emaciated to the point of being ghastly, his grisly appearance was such as to cause several women in the crowd to shrink back with fright.

His shriveled figure rattled around in a rusty blue suit that was many times too large for him; a high collar that might just as well have been in the factory so far as it showed any inclination to become intimate with his neck emphasized his appalling lack of fatness; a straw hat whose brim looked like a portion of caviar fitted his smooth-shaven head entirely too soon, its inability to get a grip causing it to sway in the opposite direction whenever he moved his body.

This action filled those about him with an almost uncontrollable desire

to seize it and give it a twirl, for the other end of him, low shoes and trousers at half mast, showed a set of spokes on which a hive would have looked like a door-knob.

But it was his face that fascinated the onlookers. At first glance he appeared to be indulging in a broad smile; closer examination showed this to be his permanent expression.

The meerschaum-colored skin was drawn away from the mouth, leaving the teeth—good teeth, strange to say—entirely exposed, the effect producing his damage-proof smile. You were certain that if he tried to bring his lips together his face would tear.

Hamm refused to believe that he was the fellow that Barney had engaged. He pulled the chauffeur to one side and whispered impatiently:

"Do you mean to tell me that this apparition is a fighter?"

"That's—that's what they told me," protested Barney. "I'll admit he's trained pretty fine for—"

"Trained pretty fine!" interposed the boss. "I think he escaped from some medical college."

The brickmaker returned to the new arrival. "Are—are you the Professor?" he asked tartly.

"I'm the guy you're waiting for," came in sepulchral tones from the depths of the smile. "If the neighbors have finished giving me the once over I'll beat it to my hotel. I want to hit the hay."

In response to further questioning by Hamm, he said he was in condition to put up the battle of his life; that he had never felt better; that the distance, six rounds, suited him perfectly.

There was a titter when he told about doing his road work in Central Park.

He expressed a desire to meet his opponent, and Ferdy was pushed toward him.

Ferdy had never dared hope he would have such a decrepit-looking antagonist. The moment he became convinced that this rack of bones was

the man he would have to face his courage went up by leaps and bounds.

He drew himself up to his full height and shoved out his pink-sweated chest until he could hardly see over it as he strode forward to shake hands. There was a look of pity in his eyes as he surveyed the meatless figure in front of him. The contrast between the pair made Ferdy look positively brutal.

In an instant, as they stood with hands clasped, sympathy shifted from Ferdy to his opponent.

"It's nothing short of murder to permit that big, healthy boy to enter the ring with that living skeleton!" was an exclamation that voiced the sentiment of the throng as the Professor picked up his grip and moved slowly in the direction of his hotel. Those nearest to him swore that they heard his joints creak.

When he had gone the crowd pressed about Ferdy and begged him to be merciful with his opponent. Even Hamm was slightly worried. It was with difficulty that Ferdy concealed his elation. After all the anguish he had suffered he felt that he was entitled to do a little plain and fancy gloating.

"I give you my word, fellow citizens," he promised, "that I will not beat him up unless it becomes absolutely necessary. In my opinion you are wasting sympathy on him. They say he's greased lightning in the ring."

A loud laugh greeted this statement.

"I mean it," insisted Ferdy. "He's the hardest man in the world to hit."

He didn't believe anything of the kind, but he wasn't going to let the crowd think so. Belittling his opponent would minimize the measure of his own victory. He was certain that the vindication he sought was already in his grasp, for inwardly he had determined to make short work of the Professor.

His manner as he took Virginia by the arm and led her away was extremely haughty.

"A picnic," he chuckled as they turned the corner.

"I'm—I'm not so sure," she returned. "He's scandalously thin, but, oh, Ferdy, I'm so afraid he's going to muss you up!"

The delicate appearance of the Professor had reassured her to some extent. She admitted as much to her father at dinner that night. The latter was a bit surprised when she asked him for fifty dollars as she was leaving the house. It was considerably more than she had been in the habit of asking for.

"A little wager on Ferdy, I'll bet," he ventured.

She smiled, but made no reply. The effort to draw her out was unsuccessful.

IV.

SATURDAY found Clintondale eagerly awaiting the outcome of the contest. Ferdy's faithful training, as well as his apparent willingness to risk his good looks, eventually won the respect of those men who had been hostile to him.

The ring was erected in the gymnasium of the club. An hour before the time set for the bout the place was packed. Soon after noon Ferdy took his leave of Virginia.

"Be careful not to get hit in the face," she wailed after him.

He found her father in his dressing-room. Hamm asked him who he wanted for referee.

"That's so. We'd forgotten about that detail," said Ferdy.

Hamm said he hadn't forgotten it; that he had figured it would be an easy matter to get one of the club members. Ferdy vetoed this suggestion, saying that, in fairness to the Professor, the third man in the ring should be an outsider.

Ferdy didn't want any flaw in his title. His squareness served to increase Hamm's steadily increasing respect for him.

The brickmaker remembered having

seen a fellow tacking signs on fences a short distance from the club. A messenger was sent after him. The fellow came toward the club-house on the run.

"How would you like to make ten dollars for a half-hour's work?" Hamm asked him.

His eyes started from his head at the offer. He broke into a laugh.

"Honest," continued the brick-maker, noting his incredulous expression. "We want you to referee a fight."

Instead of replying, the other threw his hammer and signs to one side and saluted, indicating that he was extremely anxious to shake hands with the ten-spot. The alacrity with which he took his place in the ring made it clear that he would have been tickled to do the job for nothing.

Ferdy was the first to show. Clad in a baby-blue bathrobe, with slippers to match, he took his place in the corner assigned to him, to the accompaniment of a shower of applause.

All eyes were turned toward the door through which his opponent must enter. There was a roar of laughter when he burst on their vision. Near-sighted members had to look twice or three times before they were sure what they were laughing at.

Compared with his present appearance, he had looked excessively fat in his street-clothes. His trunks were made of bed-ticking.

With the exception of his sneaks and his smile, this was all he had on.

His reception seemed to please him and he bowed right and left. He sat in his corner, legs crossed and arms folded, looking more like a dish of cracked walnuts than a fighter.

The bell brought the men to the center of the ring. He made a sweeping bow to Ferdy before grabbing his outstretched hand. It had the effect of rousing Ferdy's ire. He got the notion that his opponent was kidding him.

The Professor showed a willingness

to mix things from the start. But Ferdy proceeded with the greatest caution.

It was not until some ribald spectator suggested that they get Ferdy a bean-bag that he decided to take a chance. He let fly his right fist.

To his great surprise and the surprise of the spectators it went right through the Professor's guard and landed in the middle of his smile. But it didn't impair the latter.

"Bully for you, Ferdy," shouted Hamm.

Thus encouraged, Ferdy gave the Professor a severe poke in the ribs. He pulled away his hand as he did so and shook it as if it hurt him.

The blow didn't disturb the Professor's grin. The old fighter was tapping Ferdy with considerable frequency, but it was apparent that there was no steam behind his blows.

As the round ended Ferdy was swatting his opponent right and left, with the crowd urging him on to greater efforts.

"Great!" shouted Hamm as Ferdy took his seat. The brickmaker was busy telling his neighbors that they had had Ferdy wrong. "He's got the heart of a lion," he kept repeating.

"Go right at him when the bell rings," counseled Ferdy's advisers. "Did his blows hurt you?"

Ferdy said he had scarcely felt them. "But make no mistake about the Professor," he said. "He's in wonderful condition. He's as hard as nails. I think I skinned my knuckles on him when I hit him in the ribs."

The Professor was in the center, beaming with good nature, when hostilities were resumed.

His smile was beginning to irritate Ferdy. It nettled him, too, to think that his blows were not more effective. The harder he hit the Professor the broader the latter's smile.

Hamm and most of the onlookers were astonished at the ease with which Ferdy belted the supposedly skilful boxer. A resounding smash in the

ribs only brought a low laugh from the bony athlete.

Losing his temper at this exhibition of indifference, Ferdy rushed at him and swung with all his might. The blow caught the Professor on the side of the head. He toppled to the floor, with the crowd yelling like Comanches.

"Take it easy, boy," shrieked Hamm. "You've got him if you only wait."

"One," shouted the referee.

Ferdy, quivering like stewed rhubarb, was standing over the prostrate figure. The Professor's smile appeared to be just as brilliant as ever, albeit his eyes were a bit glassy.

The referee's failure to continue the count brought protests from all parts of the house. He appeared to be in distress.

"Two," he managed to get out. "Tut-tut-tut-tut—"

"Whistle it," came derisively from one of the open windows.

But despite the urging of the crowd the referee never got beyond the syllable tut.

A hopeless look entered Ferdy's eyes as he realized that he had a stuttering referee to contend with. He shot a reproachful glance at Hamm.

"I didn't know any more about him than you did," roared the brickmaker.

In the mean time the Professor had clambered to his feet and was once more beaming on the man who had knocked him down. Realizing that he would have to knock him cold to overcome the handicap of the tongue-tied arbiter, Ferdy waded right in and swung on his opponent from every angle.

The bell found him breathless from his exertions and feeling of his hands in an apprehensive manner.

It was the same way for the succeeding four rounds, Ferdy landing ten blows to the Professor's one and growing weaker with every punch. It infuriated him to think that he didn't

have the strength to end the contest. There wasn't another swing left in Ferdy when the final bell ended the battle.

"Rur - rur - rur - Rollins wins on points!"

The decision, excavated from the referee's diaphragm with an effort that came very near strangling him, was greeted with wild applause.

Ferdy was too far gone to shake hands with his adversary. He was amazed when the Professor patted him on the back and told him he had done splendidly. Ferdy's fellow townsmen swamped him with congratulations.

One of the more enthusiastic ones seized his hands, an action which brought a yell of pain from him. Hamm, his face bursting with pride, got him free of the crowd and into the dressing-room.

"You're there, Ferdy, and no mistake," exclaimed the brickmaker delightedly. "There isn't a mark on you."

"Not on my face," said Ferdy. "But I'm afraid to look at my hands."

His fears in this respect proved to be well founded. They were black and blue, swollen out of all shape, and badly skinned in many places. He had to grit his teeth to keep from yelling when they removed the gloves.

After they had been properly bandaged, Hamm hustled him through a side door and into his automobile. Barney had promised Virginia he would break the speed laws bringing Ferdy back, and he kept his word.

"You don't know how proud of you I am, Ferdy," declared the brickmaker, as the car shot down the road.

Ferdy didn't appear to be very jubilant.

"You haven't got much reason to be," he returned quietly. "It makes me ashamed to think that I haven't got enough strength to knock out an old fossil like that. I wouldn't care, but I pounded him until I couldn't lift my hands. I think I must have hit him a million times."

Hamm had been surprised at the ineffectiveness of Ferdy's blows. But he didn't say so.

"Never mind about that," he said soothingly. "You got the decision. And better than that, you convinced everybody in Clintondale of your courage."

"Did—did I convince you?" He put this question expectantly.

"You bet you did," was the prompt reply. "So much so that it won't be necessary for you to ask me what you had in mind that night. You have my consent."

Ferdy blushed and shoved out his damaged right hand. Hamm seized it well above the wrist and shook it.

Virginia ran down the stoop to greet them. Her joy on beholding Ferdy's face intact caused her to overlook his upholstered hands. At her father's suggestion they went into the library.

"You wait here on the porch, Barney, and bring the Professor in when he comes," directed Hamm. "I told him to stop here on the way to the train and get his money."

Once inside, Ferdy lost no time in acquainting Virginia with her father's decision, an announcement which caused her to throw her arms about the latter's neck and assure him that he was leading the daddy league by several hundred points.

In the midst of this jubilation Barney entered, followed by the Professor.

"Well, you don't look any the worse for your experience," Hamm observed as he peeled one hundred dollars off a roll and passed it to the still smiling specter.

"Shucks, no," was the easy reply. "A friendly bout like that doesn't bother me."

Ferdy shot an offended look at him. A friendly bout, indeed! So that was how he regarded his avalanche of punches.

"I hope everything was satisfactory?" suggested the Professor. He

shoved the money in his trouser-pocket and fastened the opening with a three-inch safety-pin.

"Perfectly," returned Hamm. "But—but we were a bit disappointed with your poor defense. They said you were the hardest man in the world to hit."

"And I am," came with a quiet chuckle. "I'll leave it to Rollins." He turned to Ferdy with: "Did you ever hit anything harder in your life?"

Ferdy shook his head in the negative. "Like hammering a stone wall," he agreed.

His jocular manner rather annoyed the brickmaker. "I don't mean your condition," he said sharply. "I mean—"

"I know what you mean," the Professor interrupted in a more respectful tone. "Fifteen years ago when I was prominent in the boxing game I was regarded as the fastest man in my class. In fact, for some time after I began to ossify I—"

"Ossify!" cried Ferdy, jumping to his feet.

"Sure," was the nonchalant response. "I've been making my living as an ossified man for the last ten years. It developed from constant training for ring engagements. I happened to be out of a job when your agent came into the saloon on Fourteenth Street looking for a boxer. He said he wanted a has-been a particularly thin one, and one who was hard to hit. As I filled the bill to the letter the proprietor recommended me."

With the others staring at him open-mouthed, he dipped into the side pocket of his coat and pulled out a handful of greasy-looking cards and passed them around. They read:

"Professor Granite O'Brien, Ossified Wonder, Goober's Museum, New York."

Ferdy, livid with rage, shook both bandaged hands under the Professor's nose. "And yet you stood there and

permitted me to break my hands on you for six rounds knowing full well—"

"He's right," added Hamm with some heat. "You made no attempt to block his blows. It will be weeks before his hands are in shape again."

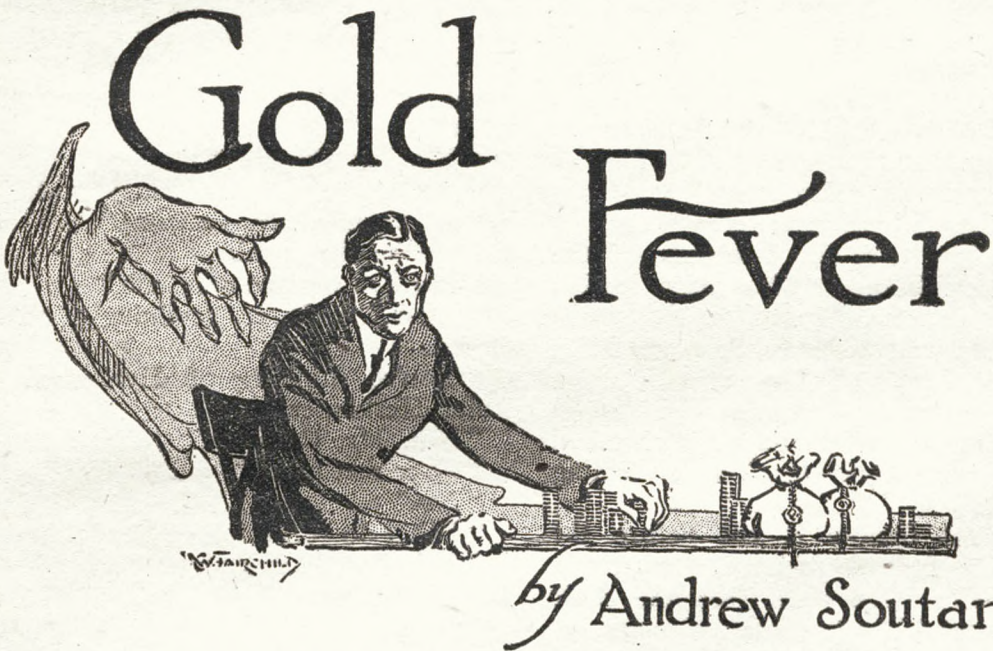
Instead of answering, the Professor turned toward Virginia with a pleading look in his eyes. Ferdy and his intended father-in-law, surprised at this action, followed his gaze, their surprise increasing when they observed that she was visibly agitated.

"What does this mean?" her father demanded.

"It means," came from Virginia, with a half-sob—"it means that the Professor is not to blame. It was my fault."

"Your fault!" they chorused sharply.

"Yes," she went on quickly. "Oh, Ferdy, can you ever forgive me? You owe your lacerated hands to me. I paid the Professor the fifty dollars papa gave me to let you hit him as often as you liked."



RANN PATTISON, the iron-jawed man who made a quarter of a million out of a premature piece of news affecting a nation's contracts; Rann Pattison, the financier who was said never to sleep, made certain that all his employees, save one, had left the office.

Then touched the ivory button on his table that should summon Stinnet, Noah Stinnet, the confidential secretary who had been with him for more than ten years.

Stinnet was small, thin of face, somewhat shifty of expression; but in his eyes there was that eager gleam

that found its counterpart in Pattison's.

"Sit down, Stinnet," said Pattison, and went to the door and turned the key in the lock.

The key he placed in his pocket, then he went back to the fireplace and commenced to pace the tigerskin rug.

Stinnet sat at the table in the center of the room, and the bony fingers of his right hand played on the back of his left.

Now and again he wetted his lips with the tip of his tongue, and, although he couldn't have had any idea of what was in the great man's mind,

he kept shifting his glances, first this way, then that.

He might have been expecting a blow from behind, but he was afraid to take his eyes off the big, heavy figure that was striding up and down in front of him.

For a minute the only sound in the room was the thud of Pattison's heels on the rug and the tapping of Stinnet's fingers on the back of his hand.

Pattison wheeled round suddenly.

"How long have you been with me, Stinnet?"

"Just over ten years, Mr. Pattison."

"And your interest in the business has never slackened, has it?"

"That's very kind of you, Mr. Pattison." But Stinnet's voice was weak.

"How much did we make over the Bahama deal?"

"Eighty-four thousand."

"How did we invest it?"

Stinnet, with the keenness of the secretary devoted to his work, rattled off the details glibly.

"And what did we drop on Mica Ore?"

Stinnet's answer was ready.

"How do we stand to-day? And where shall we stand next settling-day?"

Stinnet figured it out before the great man had paced the tigerskin rug twice. He rose from the chair and handed him the scrap of paper.

Pattison looked at it, smiled, rolled it into a ball, and flung it into the fire.

"Stinnet," he said, "I've come to the conclusion that you're indispensable to me."

"Mr. Pattison—"

"You have a genius for finance."

"Mr. Pattison, I owe it to you."

"I'm aware of it. That's one of the reasons that I have sent for you to-night. You've given up the whole of your life to finance, haven't you?"

"Every minute of my waking day."

"And dreamed of it at night—eh?"

"Ah!" said Stinnet.

"Tell me why!" Pattison demanded gruffly.

"Why, Mr. Pattison, I can't explain. It's got hold of me. I can't think of anything else."

"That's it," said Pattison, nodding his head and pressing his lips tightly together. "That's it exactly. It's got hold of you. It's had hold of me for years and years."

"That's why you're great, Mr. Pattison. That's why every one speaks about you as though you were—"

"Shut up!" said Pattison quickly. "That's why I'm small, you mean. I'm like you. I've given up the whole of my life to finance."

"Gold! Nothing else will satisfy me. I, too, think of it every minute of the waking day. I, too, dream of it. I live for it. There's nothing else worth while."

"No, Mr. Pattison."

"I'm a giant in the finance world."

"A colossus, Mr. Pattison."

Pattison shrugged.

"But I'm not the only one."

"No-o," Stinnet grudgingly confessed.

"You're thinking of Herkomer—Julius Herkomer."

"Yes, Mr. Pattison."

"Ever met him?"

"No."

"What do you think of him?"

"I think he's wonderful."

Pattison laughed.

"He's clever," he admitted. "At least, he was clever enough to engineer that fall in Panama Seconds. What did that cost us, Stinnet?"

Stinnet wrote something on another scrap of paper. Pattison glanced at what he had written and nodded.

"Nearly ruined us," he said. "Who could have told him that we were steeped up to the necks in the cursed things?"

Stinnet sprang to his feet.

"That's all right," said Pattison.

"I don't suspect you. You're too loyal a servant for that."

"Thank God, Mr. Pattison!"

"Why do you say that?" Pattison asked, lowering his voice. "Why do

you say 'Thank God' when you're talking about money?"

"I don't understand."

"You don't? Do you never read your Bible?"

"I'm afraid not, Mr. Pattison; I've no time."

Again Pattison nodded.

"Neither do I," he said. He paced the floor in silence for another minute; then, suddenly, he dropped a heavy hand on Stinnet's shoulder.

"Stinnet," he said, "it's a microbe—a fever—this gold! Once it gets into your blood, nothing can get it out. Have you ever realized that?"

Stinnet had never heard him talk like this before. He lay back in his chair, his mouth open.

"Yes," he said falteringly; "I have thought of it in that way."

"It whips your blood into an awful heat, doesn't it? And the heat takes the very breath out of your lungs. You begin to see things. Catch my meaning?"

"Yes," said Stinnet, more weakly than ever.

"Visions, I mean—distorted visions. You begin to talk gold, to eat gold—everything's gold! You blind yourself to everything else. You never see anything as other people see it.

"Tell me, do you ever walk into the country?"

"Seldom," said Stinnet.

"You've forgotten all about it, I suppose. Has any one ever talked to you about the beauty of the country?"

"No," admitted Stinnet. "I have no time to think about such things."

"Neither have I," said Pattison. "I was happy, immensely happy, when I had two thousand a year. I don't think I shall ever be happy again. Do you know why I'm talking to you like this?"

Stinnet shook his head.

"It'll surprise you. To-day there's been a searching of soul in this room. It commenced after I heard that Herkomer was likely to crush me.

"I ran my eyes over the position, and I came to the conclusion—perhaps this'll surprise you, Stinnet—I came to the conclusion that if Herkomer wished, he could crush me, and I should never be able to rise again.

"Supposing, Stinnet, you were in that position—my position—and a blow like that came down on your neck, what do you think would be your feelings?"

Stinnet's bony fingers gripped the edge of the table.

"I daren't think of it," he said in a whisper.

"My feelings," said Pattison, "were exactly the reverse of what I should have expected them to be.

"I was immeasurably relieved.

"First I said to myself, 'It has happened, Rann Pattison; you're down and beaten.'

"My idea, Stinnet, was to meet the trouble half-way, in order to see if I could accustom myself to the position, to see if I could stand a blow like that and live. And the more I thought of it the more I hoped that the blow would fall.

"There! That staggers you. It was the most amazing sensation I'd ever experienced.

"Here was I, a man whom the newspapers describe as 'Golden Pattison.' For years and years I'd been blind; I'd been stumbling along the highways and byways of a world made of gold.

"The trees were gold, the sky was gold, the mountains were gold. People who passed me in the street were gold. Everything was inanimate.

"My only regret was that the very air I sucked into my lungs wasn't molten gold.

"As I say, all those years I had been stumbling through the seven days' work of God, and I never once tried to appreciate what had been made for me.

"I used to hear people talk of the poetry of the countryside, and I used to set them down as brainless, insipid

fools, who hadn't the grit to get on themselves, and who were ages and ages behind me in acumen.

"People used to say to me: 'Why don't you travel more and see the beauties of the world?' And I hadn't the patience to answer them, because the only beauty the world held for me lay in big dividends, great coups that meant the building up of an already mighty fortune.

"But that sensation, Stinnet, when everything went! Don't get it into your head that I've gone mad. I'm quite sane, I assure you. In fact, today I've taken a saner view of life than ever before.

"That sensation that came with the belief that I was down and beaten! It was as though some one had suddenly smashed the office windows and a rush of wind had come in, straight through from the countryside right into my very soul!

"For the first time for twenty, thirty years I saw the sky. And in anguish, positively anguish, Stinnet, I cried out: 'Good luck to you, Herkomer!'"

"Well?" Stinnet's head was nodding. His fingers were pressing so tightly on the edge of the table that the tips were bloodless.

"Well," said Pattison, "that's all. It was a dream—nothing more. Herkomer hadn't beaten me, and I woke up to find myself where I started, ready to do battle with any man who ever faked a balance-sheet.

"But that glimpse of a sane life started me thinking, Stinnet. I feel that I have ruined my whole life. I've been giving too much time to the accumulating of money, because the fever's in my blood. My wife—"

He took in a deep breath and looked at Stinnet steadily for a second.

"My wife," he repeated. "I have begun to wonder if I have done the right thing by her.

"Don't speak, Stinnet—not yet. I know that you're amazed at this new attitude of mine, this new line of

thought, but I've never been moved so much as I have to-day.

"Here's a strange phase of the whole business, so far as it affects my wife. If people were to ask her suddenly and she were to reply without subterfuge or evasion of any kind—if they were to say to her: 'Has your marriage been a happy one?' I think she would say, 'No.'

"If they were to say: 'Has it given you all the love that you expected?' she would be bound to say, 'No.'

"You see, Stinnet, I've never had time to indulge what you and I yesterday might have called the sentimental side of a man's nature. I don't think I've spent more than two hours in any week in the company of my wife.

"And here's the strange phase that I hinted at. I have stayed away from her; I haven't indulged the sentimental side of my nature; I haven't given her the love that she might have expected, because—because I love her so dearly.

"There's a paradox, but a very easy one to think out. Just go to that door, Stinnet, and make certain that the cleaners are not there."

Stinnet stumbled, rather than walked, to the door, came back for the key, opened the door, looked out, and went back to his chair.

"Give me that key," said Pattison, and he placed it again in his pocket. "Where was I? Ah, yes! I said that I loved her dearly. Of course I did. Every cent that I've added to the pile has been for her.

"There's been no one else to prod the ambitious spirit if it threatened to flag. I've said to myself again and again: 'It's all for Mirabel.'

"I wanted every single soul in this city to *envy* her. I wanted them to say: 'That's the wife of Rann Pattison, the wealthiest man in the world. She's the wealthiest wife.'

"It's true, Stinnet.

"And now I've been brought to realize that I've made her a martyr—

for that's what it amounts to. I've neglected her.

"She's been very patient, but I can't hide from myself the fact that I haven't been a devoted husband, because devotedness is something greater than signing a check to meet the household bills. Now I come to you."

Stinnet started guiltily.

"To me, Mr. Pattison?"

"Yes, to you. I'm responsible for spoiling your life.

"I've taught you to think of gold as I think of it. I've robbed you of interest in any other thing. Isn't it so?"

"I love the work, Mr. Pattison."

"Ah! There you go. You've never had time to love anything else, have you?"

"No, Mr. Pattison."

"You've been privy to my thoughts for over ten years."

"Yes, Mr. Pattison."

"You know as much about my business as I know of it myself?"

Stinnet shrugged his shoulders deprecatingly.

"You know you do, Stinnet. Didn't I say just now that you were indispensable to me? I've taught you to understand everything connected with the finance market."

"And I'm grateful to you, Mr. Pattison. No one can accuse me of ingratitude. You've made a business man of me."

"I've infected your blood. The microbe's in it. You have the fever."

A stronger light gleamed in Stinnet's eyes, and he nodded eagerly.

"You've never had time to think of anything else, have you, Stinnet?"

"No, Mr. Pattison."

"I've shown you how, by the application of a little strategy, by the assumption of a little carefully thought out bluff, you can make gold positively shower down from the ceiling on your table?"

"Yes, Mr. Pattison." He was answering in sharp, half-checked breaths.

"In short, Stinnet, you've given

your life up to me, in order that I might use it for my own purposes."

"It has been willingly given, for what was I when I first came to you? A clerk.

"Yes, I'm grateful, Mr. Pattison. My whole life is given up to the work. I think of nothing else. I don't want to think of anything else, and, as I say, I'm grateful."

Pattison stopped his restless pacing and leaned against the mantel-shelf.

Stinnet's face was turned up to him; the light striking down from the shaded lamp made it appear more unhealthy than it really was.

Pattison, without moving a finger and without seeming to take a fresh breath, said:

"You're grateful, are you? Then what the devil do you mean by making love to my wife?"

Even in that moment of strain Pattison admired what he believed to be nerve.

Stinnet had not moved an inch, but his fingers ceased the restless tapping.

He was looking up at his accuser with a peculiar expression of defiance on his thin face. He made no attempt to refute the calumny, if calumny it was. Pattison's own attitude was remarkable in a way.

If he had been theatrical in his accusing, he was the reverse in the few moments that followed. He propped himself against the mantel-shelf and met Stinnet's gaze.

His calm was laughable, and yet it was one of those calms that make the heart jump.

"Don't trouble to deny it, Stinnet," he said in a persuasive, ridiculous tone of voice. "I can stand anything but lies. And don't get it into your head that I'm going to kill you and make a newspaper job of it.

"Why should I? You're indispensable to me in business. See the irony of it? See how the fever holds you down—ties you down.

"Supposing I kicked up a fuss and you got away. You could skip off in

search of this Herkomer and umbosom yourself to my detriment in less than ten minutes. You could put him wise on certain points, and I should be down and out before I had a chance of a breather."

"I do deny it." Stinnet's voice was stronger than ever before.

But now the gleam in his eyes had changed color; it had been red, now it was white—white because of the fear that had come upon him; he fancied that Pattison was bordering on insanity.

"I don't see how you can," and Pattison shook his head despairingly. "I have had you watched so carefully for months and months.

"Eh? Yes, that's another symptom of the fever—you can't trust anybody—always full of suspicion. You've been writing a great many letters lately, Stinnet."

Stinnet slipped out of his chair. He seemed to be much taller and his eyes were clearer.

"What if I have?" he asked with great boldness. "Mustn't I write a letter to—to anybody because of this—this fever, as you call it?"

"Sit down," said Pattison sharply, assuming the tone of the bully. "I want to think for a minute."

"Think as long as you like," said Stinnet truculently.

"And you've been using a little branch post-office—leaving your letters to be called for—" musingly and as though he were fitting all the clues together.

"The letters were addressed to a 'Miss Daivnish.'"

"What if they were?"

"Oh! Now we're beginning to understand each other. I was going to mention that I came across one of the envelopes. It was typewritten, but there's a faint 'a' on the machine in your room, Stinnet. I've often noticed it in your memoranda. There have been meetings, too—clandestine meetings—"

"Look here, Pattison—"

"Mr. Pattison, you weasel!"

"Mr. Pattison, if that suits you better. You've opened my eyes."

"I guessed that."

"And I've seen that all these years I've been a—what you called me."

"A weasel, Stinnet—a boneless, creepy weasel."

"But you've helped me to get back to—to a sense of manliness."

"Cut it out."

"You've accused me of—I won't repeat it. Let me tell you this: I have a wife of my own."

Pattison bit at his lips.

"And if you like, you can come home with me now, and repeat to her what you've said to me."

"If you breathe a word outside this office of what has passed to-night," said Pattison, "I'll put my foot on your neck just as I would on the neck of—of a weasel! I think I'm big enough to face this business steadily—there's going to be no mock heroics, no whining."

"I don't know Mrs. Pattison. I haven't been in her company."

"I feel like kicking you now," said Pattison grimly. "If you owned up, I should have blamed myself for everything."

Stinnet pushed his chair back from the table. Pattison said again, "Sit down!"

"I shall not sit down," said Stinnet. "Haven't been in her company."

"By God! I haven't been in my own wife's company long enough to remember her voice! I've been here—*here*; slaving my heart out in your interests. I've given all that was best in me to you—"

"No, no, Stinnet. Blame the fever."

"I blame you. When I came to you, more than ten years ago, I was a clerk, with an income of two hundred a year."

"You're down on my pay-sheet today for two thousand."

"And that income of two hundred was an assured income—the income of a legacy well invested."

"Fever! Yes, you have infected me, but I'd give ten years of my life to be in the old position and with the old feelings. Two hundred a year and happiness. God! Your ingratitude's stiffened me."

Pattison took two steps forward, and his heavy hands fastened on the bent shoulders of Stinnet.

"Look at me—straight in the eyes. So! Now, answer me this, and if you lie I'll choke the life out of you! Have you always been loyal to me?"

"Take your hands away!"

"Have you always been loyal?"

"Take them away—you're hurting."

"Yes or no?"

Pattison removed his hands from the thin shoulders.

"I understand your silence," he said thickly.

But he didn't, in this particular case. He drew the key of the door from his pocket and tossed it to Stinnet.

"Get out," he said curtly, and stumbled to the chair vacated by the secretary. Stinnet lost no time in getting outside the building.

II.

A TALL woman, much younger than her years, but with an expression of sadness always haunting her eyes.

A woman good to look upon, with clear-cut features and high temples that spoke of intellectuality. Her eyes *could* be soft, but there was something in them that suggested self-confidence, a strong, independent spirit, something that would warn a man or a woman not to presume on the fallacy of sex inferiority.

At times the mouth was very hard; the lips were continually moving to the calculations of the brain.

Society knew little about her, for she cared little about society. Yet she would have been a most gracious ornament to it.

Her figure would have attracted attention in any ballroom—so slim, lithe,

and beautifully fashioned; also, she dressed with rare taste, though always she became the gown—the gown only added to her magnificent dignity.

She was a silent woman, needing none of the stimulus craved after by society women in general—no gossip, no petty, meaningless afternoon functions, nothing to help her while away the time in her life. This, in spite of the fact that Pattison had never awakened to a full sense of his obligations.

No matter what the spirit or tendencies of a woman, no matter whether she be cold of nature or preoccupied with thoughts and problems that are not generally attributed to the sex, there is always a moment when the husband may play the lover, and she will appreciate the loving.

To look at this wife of Rann Pattison, one would have said that he had never understood her, or, rather, that she was a misunderstood woman.

Once some one remarked, with daring flippancy, "Mr. Pattison must be a stranger in his own house—he seems always to be working."

If the flippant one had expected this tall, beautiful woman to make an outburst of confidence, and confess that she was lonely and neglected, the expectation was not realized.

Mrs. Rann Pattison said simply, "Is it not a man's duty to work? No one—no man—ever killed himself with overwork."

She was sitting in her own room when Pattison reached home after his scene with Stinnet. She was reading an evening newspaper, but dropped it on the floor as he came into the room.

"You're early, Rann," she said. "I didn't expect you."

"I suppose not," he said. "Do you ever expect me?"

He wasn't looking at her, nor she at him; his head was slightly inclined forward, and he was looking at all the corners of the room, as though he half-expected secrets to come stalking out of them.

"Ever expect you? Perhaps not,

now you come to mention it. I was saying to some one only the other day that if I were a widow—”

“Who was the some one?”

She turned round in the chair to find him standing in the middle of the room, gazing at her scrutinizingly.

Never before had he spoken so roughly, so imperatively, but instead of the tears that might have come into the eyes of a weaker woman, she narrowed hers and gave him back look for look.

“Perhaps it was a servant,” she said coldly. “Perhaps it wasn’t. What’s happened to you to-day?”

“Why do you ask that? Do I look as though something had happened to me?”

“Yes.”

“You have an observant eye.”

“So I’ve been told.”

“Well? What should you think could have happened to me?”

“I’m sorry,” she said, stooping to regain possession of the newspaper. “I was reading the *feuilleton* in this paper.”

He smiled contemptuously.

“A love story?” he queried.

“Yes, and quite interesting. You see, I want to make myself believe that sometimes men are—well, men, not bullies.”

He came up behind her chair and placed a hand on her shoulder.

“I beg your pardon,” he said. “But is there anything that you would detest more than a display of sickly sentiment?”

“Having had so little experience I can’t say,” she replied. “But, tell me, why should you talk to me like this tonight? With all your faults—”

“Oh! I have faults?”

“Every man has. I was going to say, with all your faults, you have always tried to be courteous.”

And for the second time that night Pattison threw a bomb.

“How long has this affair with Stinnet been going on?” he asked.

And for the second time that night

Pattison was compelled to admire nerve.

She waited a long time before giving him answer, and he didn’t attempt to flurry her. She should have a fair opportunity of framing any answer that she had to make.

“About twelve months,” she said with suddenness that fairly equaled his own.

It almost took away his breath, but during the day, and while fighting out this trouble in his own mind, he had actually prepared himself for this answer, or for, at least, a confession, and he had argued against his natural inclinations just as he had in the case of Stinnet.

He was responsible for what had happened.

“Twelve months?” he said. Then he asked her to take her eyes off the paper and look at him.

“Are you taking this seriously, Mirabel?” he asked.

“What did you expect me to do,” she said—“faint?”

“I don’t know. I suppose the ordinary woman would have done something of that sort.”

“Do you class me as an ordinary woman?”

“No,” he said in an unsteady voice, “I don’t. I have never known a woman to take a blow like that so coolly.”

“What blow?” she asked sharply. “You asked me a straightforward question, and, being a woman who knows the folly of prevaricating when she is faced by a man like yourself, I gave you a straightforward reply.”

Pattison sat down on a chair near her. He said:

“Yesterday I considered myself a strong man, one fully able to combat any old trouble that came along, no matter how suddenly it came. But I’ll give you best; you have me beaten.”

“I don’t understand you.”

“Perhaps the tumbling of the market this morning has affected my brain—that and one or two other things—but I’m not certain that I’m in my own

house, speaking to my own wife. Did you quite get my meaning when I asked you how long this affair with Stinnet has been going on?"

"Quite," she answered.

"Do you know that I 'nailed' him in the office to-day—this evening?"

Again she took advantage of his comparative calmness carefully to think out her answer. Then she said:

"I was afraid it would come to that. I can see now that I allowed my enthusiasm to carry me too far. Stinnet wasn't the kind of man that I should have listened to."

Pattison said: "Mirabel, I don't know how this affair is affecting your mind, but I swear that I'm not certain whether I'm standing on my head or on my heels.

"Do you realize what I'm asking you—what I'm questioning you about?"

"I think I do," she replied. "You asked me how long my acquaintance with your confidential secretary has been going on. I told you, about twelve months. What else do you wish to know?"

"By God!" said Pattison; "you're the ideal strong wife—"

"Not of the ideal strong man, Rann."

"You dare to sit there and tell me in cold blood that your acquaintance with my hound of a secretary has extended over twelve months! What about these letters?"

She had risen from her chair, and, as before, was giving him look for look.

There was no fear, no trembling, no flushed cheeks nor quivering lips, no asking for quarter.

"What letters?"

He snapped his fingers.

"You've been frank, devilishly frank, up to now. Don't commence to humbug. Letters have passed between you."

"Yes, I admit it."

"Where are they? Have you kept them?"

"Some of them."

"I want to see them."

"By what right do you ask?" she demanded.

"Right?" he exclaimed. "The right of a husband!"

"A husband? I was beginning to doubt that there was such a thing."

"You've never complained."

"Does a man need to be complained to before he remembers the vows he took at the altar?"

"Don't let us get away from the subject. These letters—I want to see them."

"You can't."

"Are they in this house? Or has your cunning—"

"There's been no particular cunning about it," she said. "I admit that Stinnet has written me letters."

"And you've treasured them, I'll bet?"

"For a time—yes."

"And how often has he been to this house while I've been away?"

"When I've been here," she said, "he's never been once. I don't know how many times he may have been while I've been away. To tell you the truth, I've never seen him."

Pattison was rapidly losing that remarkable control which he had shown when he first entered the room. He struck the table with his clenched fist and raised his voice.

"How do you expect me to believe that?"

She surveyed him calmly for a moment, then:

"Do you wish the servants to overhear this display of temper?" she asked coolly. "Did you behave like this when you nailed Stinnet, as you term it?"

"Do you mean what you say, that you've never seen Stinnet?"

"Not to my knowledge," she said.

"But you admit receiving letters from him?"

"Yes. Probably a dozen—no more."

"And that you treasure them?"

"Yes," grudgingly.

"Do you admit they're in this house, now?"

"I refuse to answer."

He left her standing in the middle of the room, and in two strides was at her private desk.

She called out to him, in a thin, pained voice: "Rann! Don't do it!" He wrenched the lid from the desk as though it were made of paper. She didn't look round. Her cheeks had gone very pale. The iron nerve might have been deserting her.

She heard him rummaging among the papers. Then came a second or two of silence, as though he were reading; then he cried out, gasping as though it were difficult to believe his eyes.

Still she did not move from her position in the center of the room. He came up behind her and thrust before her eyes a typewritten letter.

She nodded weakly. There was no need to hide anything now.

"That came from Stinnet?" he asked.

"Yes," she said, "it did."

"Then, in the name of God, explain the meaning of it! Do you see what he's written?"

"I know it by heart." Her head was held high, and she was answering him without looking at him. Only the heaving of her bosom showed how deeply she was affected.

"He writes saying that for ten thousand pounds he will give Mr. Herkomer the desired information concerning my operations in Western Pacific!"

"Yes."

"That letter was sent to you and picked up at the post-office for you by Miss Daivnish, who happens to be your second cousin."

"Quite right," she said, and sighed.

"But I don't understand it!" He stamped his foot. "Do you mean to tell me that Stinnet knows my wife is acting as an agent for Herkomer; that through her he can sell my business secrets?"

"Stinnet is not aware of my connection with the matter. He has been dealing with Miss Daivnish, who, to him, is a typist in the employ of Mr. Julius Herkomer."

Pattison was fuming in his perplexity.

"Then, where the devil do you come in?" he asked.

And she hit him with her answer just as he had hit Stinnet earlier in the evening:

"I am Julius Herkomer!"

Pattison, satisfied now that the world was unreal, and that he was moving in a dream, stumbled to the chair that she had left a few minutes before.

He didn't ask for any further explanation. She gave it without the asking.

"I am Julius Herkomer," she repeated, "and for twelve months I have been using the brains that are mine."

"For what purpose?"

"Oh, just to make life possible. That's all. At least, that was how I felt when I started. But it began to grow on me."

"Does Stinnet know anything about this?"

"I told you a moment ago that Stinnet knows nothing save that he was offered ten thousand for certain information.

"At the time the offer was made to him 'Mr. Julius Herkomer' was not aware that Mr. Rann Pattison was involved."

He was trying to overcome the effects of the blow, the stunning, stupefying statement that his own wife was the substance of the shadow that had been haunting him for months.

"Stinnet," she went on, "is just one of those small creations that are made to be used by others. I sha'n't tell you how I discovered that.

"As a financier, as a man who has to know as much about human nature as about the money market, you will understand. This afternoon a letter was sent to Stinnet—it should have

reached him by now at his home—asking him to call on Miss Daivnish as soon as possible. There was bad news for him."

Pattison was sitting with his mouth wide open.

"He was going to be told—and it's the truth—that Mr. Julius Herkomer has shot his bolt. A coup which he believed to be as simple as cashing a check over a bank counter failed him only this morning. In the space of five minutes he was a wealthy financier and a beggar."

Pattison spoke, but his words were hardly audible.

"Beaten — Herkomer? What over?"

"Panama Seconds."

"By God! He 'killed' me on them."

"Yes, I know, and he was 'killed' in turn."

"You 'killed' me!"

"Yes—as Julius Herkomer."

"Knowing that you were 'killing' me?"

"No," his wife replied. "I told you just now that I didn't know that you were involved. Well, why don't you do it?"

"Why don't I do what?"

"Kill 'Julius Herkomer'—literally?"

He was breathing loudly and the corners of his eyes were all puckered. When he spoke again it was in a voice that frightened her—not a rough, accusatory voice, but the voice of a young man—a young man who has suddenly awakened to life and seen a great and glittering world unfolded before him.

"Mirabel!" he said. "Do you realize that I'm ruined?"

She said, "Are you?" as carelessly as though she were answering a question about the weather.

"When I've squared my debts there will be about fifteen hundred a year left to us."

"Us?"

"Of course."

"What do you mean by 'us'? I 'killed' you!"

"'Killed' me?" he said. "No, Mirabel, you've remade me! Come here!"

It was as though the blood in her heart, chilled for a time by all that he had uttered, had suddenly thawed and was rushing to the extremities in hot waves.

"No," she said, "not yet. I am Julius Herkomer—I was Julius Herkomer—and I'm going to tell you why."

"I know, I know!"

"You don't—you can't."

"Go on, then."

"I was left alone too often—"

"Just what I told Stinnet."

"Never mind Stinnet. Listen. I was left alone day after day, night after night. I had everything that money could buy, but there are lots of things that money can't buy.

"It can't make a house less like a prison. There was a time when you and I were very happy—that was when you were in the beginning of things, when your income didn't exceed three or four thousand dollars a year.

"Then you commenced to make more. It came not by degrees, but in swift rushes, just as though the gold-caverns of the world had been opened at your command and the gnomes had thrown up to you their subterranean treasures.

"You told me a great many things about your business, how it was creeping up, how you meant to corner this and corner that, how easily it could be done.

"And then, when you began to leave me to myself and I began to want for something to do, I said to myself: 'Why not interest yourself more in his business—why not take a hand in it yourself?'

"Out of the amounts you advanced for household expenses I saved. Day after day, while sitting here alone, I studied the markets of the world. I

approached a broker in the city—by letter. I opened an account with him and made a few investments off my own bat.

"The man told me I was a fool, but he lived to follow every move that I made. In a very short while I realized that I had a gift for finance—for more than that.

"I seemed to be able to look ahead, to sum up potentialities that the majority of women never dream about. And then it got hold of me—"

"The fever, Mirabel?"

"Yes, you can call it the fever. I suppose the ordinary woman, elated at the success of her initial ventures, would have rushed to her husband for congratulation.

"But then, you and I have lived so far apart that I felt I shouldn't appreciate any congratulations you might have to offer.

"Besides, this fever was on me. I wanted to go on, making more, and the more I made the higher became the temperature. A fever—a lust! No one who hasn't experienced it can describe it."

"I can," said Pattison in a low breath.

"You can? Has it come to you—the awakening?"

"Yes," he answered, and went nearer. "It came to-day—came in the most wonderful way imaginable. I had been advised that Herkomer was nailing me—that I wasn't likely to get out of the complication with a whole skin, so I sat down and argued with myself:

"I put the proposition to myself: 'Supposing you are done for, what then?'

"And instead of the blind, ungovernable rage that I'd expected, I was happier.

"I'll confess, Mirabel, that I thought again of you as I used to think in the old times when we had that small income. I realized that those were great days."

He paused, as though expecting her

to speak, but she made no movement. She was still standing, with head erect and eyes fixed as though on some distant object.

He stepped forward so that it was easy to put his left hand round her shoulders.

"Did you hear that, Mirabel?" he asked. "Those were great days."

Her lips moved never so slightly.

"Great days," she repeated, and there was a world of yearning in her voice. "Great days," she repeated; "but now—we are beggars."

"No, not beggars, Mirabel. We are far from that stage. It's as though we had passed out of the sick-room, out of the fever hospital, into the cool air. Do you feel like that?"

She nodded her head, and as she felt his arm closing more tightly on her shoulders she lowered her head.

"Mirabel!" He would have kissed her cold cheek—cold with a beautiful freshness—but a servant knocked at the door and entered with a letter.

It was from Stinnet. They, both of them, recognized it.

"You open it," Pattison said, but she held it out to him, and he tore open the envelope. Stinnet had written to Miss Daivnish:

Please burn all the letters I have sent to you. Herkomer's fall means nothing to me. I don't care. I don't want any ten thousand. I'm leaving the city to-night and going into the country. I have been run down; I am going into the country for a cure, and I don't think I shall ever come back to the city. Please do not address any further letters to me at the office. I have left Mr. Rann Pattison's employ.

Yours faithfully,

NOAH STINNET.

Pattison threw the letter in the fire. Then he stretched out his hand and turned the light slightly lower.

The flames in the grate leaped higher, casting a red glow over the room. He placed his arm around Mirabel's waist and led her to the divan.

"Let's talk, Mirabel," he said—"let's talk of the old days."

Four String Power

by 

Ralph Roeder

HAVING announced, some half-hour before, that at eleven that evening, which happened to be Christmas Eve, he intended to marry Mlle. Elise de Aube, the comic opera star, the good-looking youth in the evening clothes had since, with his customary, pleasant-humored nonchalance, awaited the inevitable storm.

Across from him in an Italian-carved chair was the Pig-Iron King, also in evening clothes, which set off a more powerful, if less graceful figure than the son's.

The boy was now reiterating quietly:

"I am going to marry her."

"But I tell you that she is a chirping actress, and I despise any one, man or woman, who chirps or fiddles for a living. Why, there are a hundred decent girls in New York who would have you in a minute!"

"Possibly, but—well—this Elise is a thing of fire and shadows, a whirlwind, a chameleon. She makes life dance! It's all wrong, I know, but you've brought me up on the extreme of things. You live it yourself. How do you expect me to be clammily respectable, when you loot and raid and dash and dare every day in business?"

The father's lips clamped shut, but the shadow of a tremor crossed his straight gray eyes.

"I—I—" he began, then stopped abruptly. "I'll let Dryker talk for me."

Dryker was the Pig-Iron King's lawyer. The father continued:

"He will be here in five minutes. You will talk to him?"

"Certainly, governor, certainly," smiled the youth. "Anything you say. But I doubt, governor, whether he knows any more about the tender passion than you do. And it will cost a heap of money. Judge Dryker's fees are about a hundred an hour in the daytime, aren't they? Goodness knows what they are at night!"

"Confound the money! Haven't I offered you a hundred thousand twice to stop this idiocy?"

"No, it was not the amount I objected to, governor; it was the uselessness of it."

A green-and-scarlet-liveried butler appeared in the doorway.

"Mr. Dryker is here, if you please, sir."

"Show him in!"

Hanton L. Dryker entered, apologetic, capable, suave, composed. He

was the most successful lawyer in New York, his mind being another of the perfectly disciplined type of the Iron King's, somewhat more finely machined, perhaps. As the latter marshaled forces to the utter elimination of the usual human considerations, so Dryker marshaled ideas, summoning the greatest number of them, favorable or unfavorable, as required, upon any given subject in the least possible time and in the best possible language.

"You know the situation, Dryker," snapped the Iron King briefly. "This boy wants to marry an actress—that De Aube woman. I apologize for taking you from your Christmas tree, but he wants to marry her to-night."

"In sixty-two minutes," corrected the youth, glancing at a bronze clock over the fireplace. "The Russian prince gets second choice. If I'm not on deck at eleven, it's he. And there is a string behind him."

"She said she wouldn't marry any of us until the first run of the 'Dresden Doll' was over, and it's over to-night. I just nosed the Russian prince out. She is a rare and clever little girl, Elise is, but she doesn't have to wait a minute for any of us; so proceed, please, Mr. Dryker."

The great lawyer nodded courteously and, taking a seat near the mahogany table—a seat so placed as to dexterously put him in a position prominent but unobtrusive—began to speak, his voice, even and regular, having admirable adaptation to the occasion.

He touched, quite apologetically, upon the natural solicitude of a father of great wealth and national prominence upon his only son's marriage to a woman of semipublic character, and mentioned in that connection, quite offhand, the unfortunate outcomes of a dozen or more such *mésalliances* of the last five years; he went over the not openly impeachable, yet very newspaperly career of the young

lady in question, giving it more in detail and with much greater accuracy than the young man himself knew; he terminated with a general review of all of the evils to result from such a marriage—balanced, comprehensive, and at once inoffensively restrained, but bitingly direct.

At its conclusion both the father and the son sat under its spell.

"That was just what I wanted to say when I broke the glass!" declared the Iron King vehemently, terminating the silence. "Can't you see the idiocy—the utter folly of it all?"

"Yes, I do!" The boy's face bore an enigmatical smile. "Yes, but—but is it all that you wanted to say, governor, because I believe there was more? I know what the more is myself, though I cannot say it, and Mr. Dryker, with all respect to him, couldn't say it—it is not in him, but it is in you and me; that is, it used to be."

"And that's at the heart of the whole matter, it is the taste for brown bread and spring water. We had that taste, but it's been cloyed out. It is too late for it even to appeal to me, and yet I know it, and I know you know it. I think there is just one person who could tell it to me just right."

He rose and, walking very quietly to the end of the long room, stood in front of an oval, black-framed picture of a remarkably sweet-faced woman.

"If the dear *mater* was here she could. Do you remember, governor, the way she used to sit in the evening after supper at the little organ we had in the parlor, while I stood just chin-high to the keyboard, and play that old song of hers—'Annie Lyle' it was?"

The father winced a trifle.

"Annie Lyle" brought to him memories of more than his wife. His fiddling brother Amos had played that—played it into the favoritism of the wife. Poor Amos, who with music

had wooed her while the elder brother with hard, stubborn achievement had also wooed and, true to his record for victory, won.

But on evenings later, when the Iron King, in the bitter novitiate of his great iron-control struggle, would come home to the cottage silent, absorbed, bitter, and hard as the iron itself, the lonesome little wife would quietly seek the chapel organ in the parlor after the silent supper and play very softly "Annie Lyle," and see the moonlight on the creek and Amos with his violin and the other boys and girls laughing.

Then, her craving for "the things that dance" gratified, she would rise and, smiling bravely and soothingly, minister to that strange, powerful husband of hers, ease his mind of any distraction to material things, and send him forth for the next day's fight, nourished, unhampered, and fit.

Fiddling Amos had gone his vagabond way, scorning the increasingly good positions offered from time to time by his rising brother. Music he loved, and music only, and the Iron King—they first called him that during the years he spent in St. Louis before going to New York—thinking music a worse than useless thing, had refused to give one cent toward Amos's advancement in it. Amos was now in the orchestra of a moving-picture theater out West.

"Yes," the son was saying whimsically, coming back and facing the Iron King again, "*mater* could tell, and only *mater*."

Then his eyes took on again their wearily gay, disillusioned smile.

"But she is not here, and we have to live; and Elise is, for all her little escapades, too good for the Russian prince. Besides, I tell you, she makes things dance. It is twenty minutes past ten. I shall need fifteen minutes to get to the theater."

He pressed a button twice.

The butler came, bringing a fur-lined overcoat and opera hat, and a

walrus traveling-bag. He assisted the young man into them.

"Good-by, Mr. Dryker; good-by, governor."

He held out his hand to the Iron King. The massive lines of the father's face had begun to shrink and mottle. The basis of all his great, implacable strength was oozing away. The machinelike mind, which had seemed so invulnerable and self-sufficient, had really been of a very simple type—the type which, in fighting for some one object, becomes in its repression of self terribly strong.

The boy, his son, had been that object from the day of his birth in the little Missouri mining town. True, the father had blundered almost inconceivably, imagining the boy would somehow emerge a veteran, full fledged, from the Harvard gold coast to step into his own hard-fisted, toil-won place. He had raised a highly trained business for the boy, but no highly trained boy for the business. He had forgotten, too, that mothers also transmit traits.

The doorway of the room was huge and heavy, as everything else in the mansion; the boy reached it and turned.

"Good-by, governor," he said very softly.

In the silent moment after his words a sound came from the street outside.

Louder it sounded, but still very clear, a violin played by some wandering Christmas waif, some caroler on strings.

Clearly, sweetly, high the notes crystallized into an air—"Annie Lyle."

The three men stood in the huge, quiet room and listened. The music had to penetrate through a thick shell to reach the heart of the Iron King. It did not reach Dryker at all. But to the mother's son it spoke the message of the little parlor organ and of the brown bread and spring water. The tension of his sensitive eyes gave way in a sudden brimming of mois-

ture. Shamedly, shrinking, half angry, he turned to face his father.

"It's funny — it's funny, but that music's got me! I guess I've got a yellow streak in me, or I'm still only a big kid."

He set down the walrus traveling-bag and viciously jammed a push-button near the door.

"A little Scotch, quick, Otaki!" he

ordered the Japanese second man, who appeared almost on the instant.

The bronze clock was pointing to three minutes to eleven. The young man stepped back into the room, smiling; the Scotch was placed on the table.

The clock struck full eleven.

"Your glasses, governor — Mr. Dryker. To the Russian prince!"

A MILITANT HEN

By Pearl A. Brown

It happened in the barnyard—
 A shrill, defiant cry;
 "The female of the species,"
 And she made the feathers fly.
 In haste I sought the battle-ground,
 Where I found old Uncle Ben;
 Says he: "Dar's suppin' mighty wrong
 Wid dis pesky ole black hen.

"She druve de hens all off de nests;
 Dem aigs am jes' a sight;
 An' she run dem li'l' chickens roun'
 Twel dey drap down in a fright.
 De roosters try ter make 'er quit;
 An' de fu'st t'ing dat I know,
 She up an' chase 'em down de creek,
 An' dey sho' am laying low.

"I'se jes' a ruminating,
 Wot's got dis ole black hen;
 She's acting like dem wimmen fo'ks,
 Wot 'lows ter boss de men.
 You kin tell by de way she hollers .
 Dat 'er mouf she'll never shet;
 She's sho' been hit by that loco-bug
 Wot yo' all calls 'Suffragette.'

"'Tain't no use for man ter grieve
 When woman plays de fool;
 De good book sez dat man am fu'st,
 An' woman he must rule.
 An' when de devil takes a hand
 Wid de wimmen an' de hens;
 It's time fer man ter spile his game,
 An' see de trubble ends."



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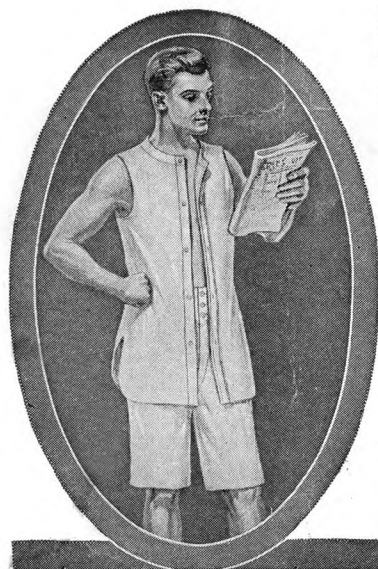
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