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"TALKING TALBOT"
By
J. R. Coryell





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Let's Talk It Over

DON'T you know, dear reader, that it's a mighty useful thing to be a good guesser? It reminds me of a story they tell about a circus in a small country town. The usual crowd of small boys was gathered about the entrance of the tent when a benevolent-looking old gentleman came along and stood watching them for a few minutes with a beaming eye. Then, walking up to the ticket taker, he said smilingly:

"Let all these boys in, and count them."

The gateman, thinking the benevolent-looking old gentleman was indulging in a bit of philanthropy, did as requested. When the last lad had gone in, he turned and announced:

"Twenty-four, sir."

"That's fine!" said the benevolent-looking old gentleman, as he walked away. "I thought I guessed right!"

As a matter of fact, an editor has simply got to be a mighty good guesser when it comes to picking out stories that he thinks will interest his readers, and whenever he guesses wrong he is not in the enviable position of the benevolent-looking old gentleman, able to just turn round and walk away—not much! He simply has to sit tight on the job, bow his head to the storm, and—guess again. All this is inflicted on you because PEOPLE'S editor has been muchly patting himself and being patted on the back for making such a good guess about "High Speed" in the September number. It just seemed to hit the bull's-eye of his readers' approval, judging from the nice letters he has received about it, hence all the pats.



TALKING TALBOT," the complete novel in this issue, represents another big guess which your editor believes is going to hit the bull's-eye of

your approval in exactly the same place "High Speed" did. You remember the remark some celebrated old fellow got off about rather being right than president? Well, that's just the way your editor feels this minute, and if you happen to think he is right, won't you just pass along the glad tidings and make him feel real good? Please do!

Mr. John R. Coryell, who made our guess about "Talking Talbot" possible, is a new contributor to PEOPLE'S pages, and may not be well known to some of you. The best introduction we can give him is to let him introduce himself in his own autobiography. Here you are:

"I'd as lief write my obituary as my autobiography, but I know better than to refuse when an editor asks for it, so here it is:

"Born in New York City, December, 1851, which makes me thirty-six, doesn't it? Or are my figures mixed? But it doesn't matter how many years I've lived; it's how I have lived them—and that is most joyously. There is nothing I would like better than to live them all over again.

"Public school and city college for preliminary education; travel and newspaper work, higher education. I was a mighty poor newspaper man, but I have been a good traveler. Africa and Australia are the only places I haven't been in, and their turn is coming.

"When I failed at newspaper work, I wrote popular science stuff for the magazines. Then I took up story writing for boys. 'Diego Pinzon,' a story of the voyage of Columbus, was pretty well known in its time. I wrote steadily for all the juvenile publications, until one day I tried my hand at a story for adults, writing under a pseudonym. That was a considerable success, and I have been pseudonymous ever since.

PEOPLE'S

"The creation of the now famous Nick Carter was one of my greatest successes."

"I don't know how many stories I have written, but the number goes beyond two hundred full-sized novels and many short stories. Now I am shamelessly writing under my own name.

"Why any one should care to know these things about me I don't know, but the editor thinks they will care; so please accept my apologies, anybody who agrees with me.

"I forgot to say that I have never been guilty of writing verse, but that I have written four plays. One of the plays was about to be produced in London when the war broke out. Isn't it an accursed war?"



SO many of you seemed to like our guess about "A Son of the Cincinnati" that we wrote Bedford-Jones to give us another chance to guess along the same lines. His response came in the shape of "Trails Chivalrous," and, believe me, it didn't take much guessing. It is simply great! It is historical, correct in every last detail, and presents a picture of the Great Lakes at the time of the War of 1812 which is both instructive and interesting. It is all action, full of virility and nerve-breaking adventure, with the sweetest, tenderest thread of romance running through it you ever read. You will get it complete in the next issue of PEOPLE'S, and it's dollars to one of your suspender buttons—if you happen to be built that way—that you will come back at us and say we are the champion little guesser.

Some wise old fellow once remarked that the more he saw of men the better he liked dogs. Mighty few men or women, either, but what feel the same way, and to this great army of lovers

of "man's best friend," we offer a splendid series entitled "Boru," by J. Allan Dunn, which will commence in the next number of PEOPLE'S. It is the story of an Irish wolfhound, and, besides being interesting and appealing to the last word, it displays an unusually intimate knowledge of the dog, and a truly poetic appreciation of the beauties of nature. We believe we are offering you a huge treat in presenting this series to PEOPLE'S readers.

"The Picaroons of Puget," by H. H. Matteson, is another magnificent series of stories, which will commence in the December number. They tell of the adventures experienced by the revenue service in their efforts to prevent smuggling and other crimes on the waters of beautiful Puget Sound. The first of the series, "Red Silk With Zeppelins," tells how the revenue officers, aided by the mysterious but beautiful Pyxie Laventure, break up the operations of a dangerous gang of thieves. You will certainly enjoy the splendid atmosphere and thrilling adventures Mr. Matteson provides for you in these stories.



WE have only room to announce "The Come Back" as the fourth number of "The Movie Makers," and "A Mile-a-Minute Boat," by George Foxhall, as the second "Adventure of Nicholas Knox." They are both mighty interesting stories. Of course, there will be the usual assortment of those short stories that have made the last few numbers of PEOPLE'S so unusually popular and interesting. Wolff tells you a splendid football story, and Captain Dingle spins you one of his inimitable sea tales. Yes, there are others, too, but we have told you enough to put you on the anxious seat until you receive your December PEOPLE'S.

PEOPLE'S EDITOR.



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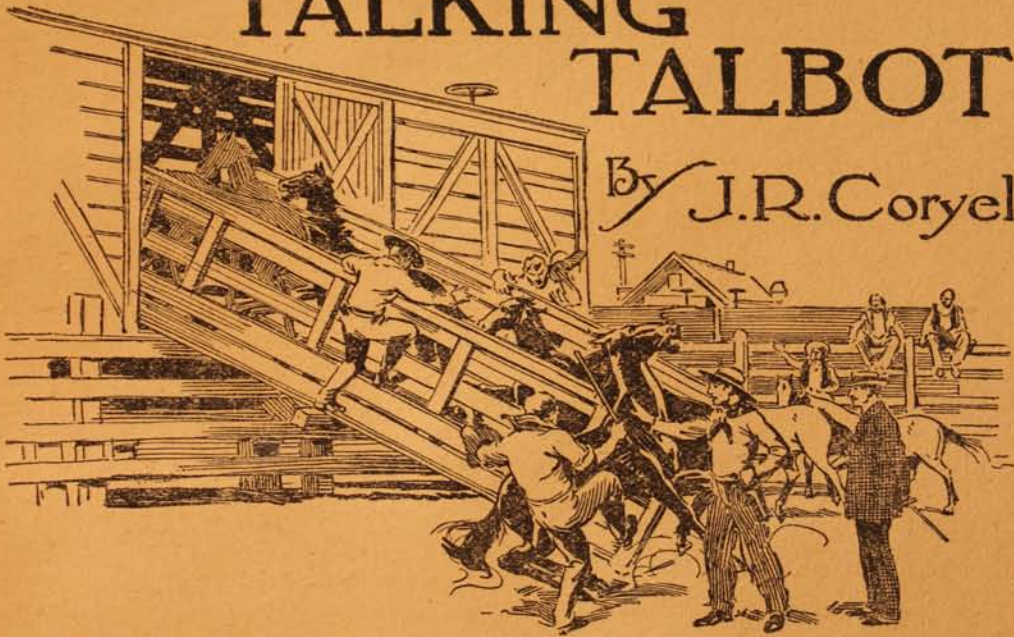
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NOVEMBER, 1915

No. 5

TALKING TALBOT

By J.R. Coryell



"For a few seconds he was conscious only of looking into a small inclosure, which had once been a garden, but which now bore not only the blight of a cold November, but of years of neglect. A small stone cottage stood in the midst of the garden, and beyond stretched the well-kept grounds of the castle."

CHAPTER I.

OH, how cruel! Make him stop!
Somebody make him stop!"

A lot of several hundred horses was being loaded on a train at a siding in Texas, destined for the British troops in France.

It was a scene of excitement, noise, and bustle; frightened horses plunging, biting, kicking, squealing; men shouting and swearing.

A party of men and women, betrayed by their dress as strangers, were sitting their horses, grouped together, watching the proceedings with a lively interest.

The horses were all broken, but terror and excitement had made them restless and difficult to handle. Most of the men, recognizing the state the animals were in, were gentle with them, but one big, evil-looking fellow seemed

to know no other method but that of violence, and finally had undertaken to drive a high-spirited, terrified horse into the car by kicking it brutally.

It was one of the ladies of the party who had voiced her horror, appealing to the gentleman near her, a man who sat his horse in a fine, military way.

"Make him stop, colonel!"

"The fellah's a bally brute," said the colonel, but hesitated in indecision.

Before he could have done anything, even had he moved quickly, another man had acted. With a swift, easy stride he was by the man's side, his hand on his arm.

"Stop that!" he said quietly.

Buck Corson, in the habit of doing as he pleased, shook off the hand and delivered the kick he had started. The next instant he was caught in a grip of steel and sent sprawling in the dust.

He fell almost under the feet of the horses of the spectators. He poured out a string of oaths as he scrambled to his feet, and would have had his gun out if two men hadn't caught him, crying out warningly as if with one voice:

"You fool! It's Talkin' Talbot."

Buck stared foolishly; then swallowed and sneaked away to another part of the place. Talbot, meanwhile, seemed to pay no attention to the man; but, having quickly secured the horse, was carefully running his hand over its belly to ascertain whether or not it had been hurt. Satisfied that it was uninjured, he petted it for a moment, and then led it gently up the gangplank.

"Talking Talbot!" murmured the young woman who had cried out. "What a funny name!"

"What a splendid specimen of a man!" said an older woman. "Who is he, Mr. Trenchard?" she turned to a ranchman who was one of the party.

Bob Trenchard smiled as all the faces were turned in curiosity to catch his answer. "He's generally called Talking Talbot. He's the owner of a ranch

near here, and he was clever enough to know that horses would be in demand in Europe, and to buy them up all over the country as soon as war was declared."

"Is he what you call a 'bad' man out here?" asked the young woman in a low tone, looking with mingled admiration and fear at Talbot, who was now moving away from the group.

"No," laughed Trenchard; "he's a good citizen."

"Well," persisted the girl, "I noticed that ruffian was frightened the instant he heard his name."

"He sure was. Talbot's a terror to that sort. The fellow came with a lot of horses, I reckon, and didn't know Talbot by sight. He knew him by name all right, though."

"He looks capable—what?" said Colonel St. John. The colonel was the purchasing agent for the British government.

"*We* think he's mighty capable, colonel," answered Trenchard. "He's Johnny on the spot if you know what that means."

"I cawn't say I do, but I'd like to."

"Well," hesitated Trenchard, "it's like this: if there's anything that needs to be done he's always doing it by the time other people are coming to the conclusion they'll get together and tackle it.

"This was a bad country when he came out here seven years ago. You never knew when your horses were going to be rustled. He'd been here a year, I reckon, and we were all talking about getting together and putting an end to the way things were going. He didn't do any talking at all, but just got out and shot up a few rustlers in that terribly quiet way of his."

"You mean he killed them?" cried the girl.

"He never killed one of them; didn't have to. The first time he came on a rustler with some of his horses the

man started to draw his gun. He got it out, but he never lifted it; Talbot's bullet shattered his thumb. Everybody thought it was an accident until the same thing happened to the next man. After five of 'em had their right hands shot up we all knew it was done on purpose."

"My word!" said Colonel St. John. "That's good shooting."

"Oh, he's some shot all right; the quickest gun thrower in Texas. Why, there was a real bad man heard about him—a cow-puncher from down near the border—and nothing would do but he must come hunting Talbot. Some of us heard about him and warned Talbot."

"Yes," cried the young woman; "and then?"

"Talbot was quiet for a moment, then asked where the man was. We told him the man was in the town. He saddled his horse without a word, and rode up to town. We followed. It was easy enough to find the fellow; strangers are known right off, you see. He was standing in front of a saloon, talking.

"I reckon some one told him Talbot was coming, for he stepped out as if he was going to stop Talbot. Well, Talbot was off his horse in a minute, and you may be sure there wasn't anybody behind either of them.

"'So you're Talkin' Talbot,' said the gunman.

"'So-called,' answered Talbot, very even.

"They watched each other steadily. I think there was something in Talbot that got the other fellow's nerve. Anyhow, he gave a quick glance around, as if he didn't half like the situation, Talbot all the while cold as ice.

"'I bin lookin' fer you,' said the other fellow.

"'I'm here,' was all Talbot said.

"'I hear you're some gun thrower,' said the other.

"'Well?' demanded Talbot.

"'I'm goin' to find out,' was the answer, and what followed was so quick you couldn't see it; but that fellow's bullet hit the dust within two inches of Talbot's foot."

"And Talbot's?" queried the girl. "Where did his hit?"

"Went clean through the fellow's hand, breaking two bones."

They all turned and looked at Talbot, who was moving about quietly, directing the loading. He was quite six feet in height, but so well proportioned that he did not look tall. He moved like a man who had enormous reserves of muscular power. He spoke seldom, but his manner was masterful.

"Why do they call him Talking Talbot?" asked the girl, whose curiosity was stimulated by her admiration. "Is it because he is so silent?"

The rancher laughed. "I reckon the name sticks for that reason, and partly because of the T. T. Alliterative, you see; easy to say. No, the boys got to saying that Talbot talked with his gun, and so the name came."

"He jolly well knows how to handle a horse," said the colonel.

"You bet he does," was the enthusiastic response. "Men, too. Why, Mrs. Martin, you must remember when Chester Talbot——"

"Is that Chester Talbot?" cried the lady.

"That's Chester Talbot. Why, colonel, he went to one of the small colleges back East, and was famous as half back on the football team. His last year they made him captain; and that year the team cleaned up everything—Harvard, Yale, Princeton, every one of them. Wasn't defeated once. The papers were full of it."

"And he's been out here all these years," commented Mrs. Martin. "He disappeared in a sensational sort of way, and this is the first I've heard of him."

"Oh, please do tell us about it!" cried the girl. "He just fits into a romance."

Mrs. Martin, seeing they were all interested, shrugged her shoulders and told the story: "It isn't much, though it created a lot of interest at the time. As Mr. Trenchard says, he was a famous football hero. His father was a multimillionaire, and failed—went all to pieces—just as Ches Talbot was graduated. He was engaged to Margaret Cranston—you know the Cranstons—and she threw him over. Then the story was that he took to drinking and went down into the gutter."

"Good gracious! He doesn't look it," exclaimed the girl.

"He never touches liquor," said Trenchard.

"Well, that was the story; and he disappeared, anyhow. And to think of his coming out here! You say he's making a success?"

"Sure thing. He'd make a success of anything he undertook."

"I wish," said Colonel St. John, "he'd undertake to land those horses in France for me."

"Not likely. Have you asked him?"

"Ya-as."

"He refused?"

"He looked at me—I never saw such eyes—as if to make sure I was in earnest. What? Then he smiled and walked away. Never said a word; not a bally word."

"But you understood him?" laughed Trenchard.

"Jolly well I did," laughed the colonel. "Felt like a bally ass, too. What? But he's just the man for it."

"He delivers them in New York, doesn't he?" demanded Trenchard.

"Ya-as. I pay him there."

"He goes to New York?" cried Mrs. Martin. "I wonder if he'll call on his old friends? I must write and tell all about him. Is he married?"

"No, and never looks at a marriageable woman. I reckon I know why,

now. Always thought there was a story."

CHAPTER II.

The trainload of horses had been delivered and paid for, and Chester Talbot was preparing to return to his ranch, anxious to be on his way. He had remained in Hoboken all the time; hadn't crossed the river to the big city.

If there was any bitterness in his feeling for his old home, it didn't show in his conduct. He had stood on the end of the wharf, while the horses were being loaded on the steamer, studying the wonderful sky line across the river with interest and admiration.

He had not wavered for a moment, however, in his determination not to go to New York. He knew he would certainly be recognized and called on for explanations. And why should he explain? No, his life was in the West. He would go back without seeing anybody.

A letter was pushed under his door, after the primitive fashion of the second-rate hotel where he was stopping. It made a very faint noise, but his hearing was very keen; he turned and saw it.

"A mistake," he thought; there was no one to write to him, no one in the wide world. He went over and picked it up and looked at the address. It was for him, and in a woman's handwriting.

He frowned slightly, his lean, brown face seeming to harden. Who could know he was there? Above all, what woman? And why should any woman write to him?

It seemed as if he was minded to toss the letter into the wastebasket. He held it by one corner for a moment, then changed his mind and opened it with cold deliberation.

"Dear Chester," it began. He looked for the signature: "Nathalie Brookfield." "Oh!" he murmured, his face

softening wonderfully as he began to read.

"DEAR CHESTER: I learned, by the merest chance, that you were here. I have waited, hoping you would come to see me. Since you do not, I must ask you to come—beg you to come, if that is necessary. You can do something for me; at least I think you can. If you are what you used to be, I am sure you can. Please come! I need you.

"Affectionately,

"NATHALIE BROOKFIELD."

He folded the letter and put it in his pocket, his face troubled. In another moment he was on his way. He took the tunnel cars and went under the river and as far uptown as they would carry him. A taxi took him to Fifty-sixth Street, just west of Fifth Avenue. He knew the house well.

He was shown to the reception room. It was just as he remembered it, and it brought a gentle smile to his face as he looked around. He heard a rustle of silk and faced the door. A beautiful woman of forty-five came toward him with hands outstretched, a glad smile on her careworn face.

"You came at once, Chester," she said gratefully, as he took her hands in his.

"Did you doubt that I would, dear lady?" he answered, studying her face earnestly. "I would have responded to such a call, no matter where I was. My one good friend when all the others had failed me."

"No, I didn't doubt you, Chester." She looked him over while he kept his eyes on her face. "All the change in you is for the better, and that is saying very much. You have prospered?"

"Thanks to you."

"Oh, no; thanks to yourself, Chester. And there has never been another woman?"

"No other, and never will be. If you had a daughter, perhaps." And he smiled with wonderful tenderness. "Yes," he went on, in a certain curt, decisive way peculiar to him. "I have

prospered. Not rich, but I have plenty for my needs, and in the way of making more."

"I am so glad, Chester. I never doubted that you would."

"Shall we sit down?" He arranged the chairs so that they would be close together and face to face. "If I speak of myself," he went on, before she could say anything, "it is because I want you to know what little there is to know before you tell me why you want me. You are in some trouble and think I can help you."

"Oh, I don't know," she cried, her lips quivering. "When I heard you were so near, I remembered your courage and resourcefulness, and turned to you. You seemed the very one. Now I don't know."

"I know," he snapped, his firm jaws setting. "I can help you, dear friend. Let me tell you about myself briefly. I have a ranch worth all of one hundred thousand dollars. I have over one hundred thousand in cash; I have fifty thousand safely invested. I have perfect health, some experience, and absolute confidence in myself. Everything, to the last drop of blood, to the last cent, I lay at your feet."

"Oh, Chester! So much for so little!"

"It is so little for so much, dear lady. Do you remember the broken-hearted, only half-sober boy you found one morning in his rooms? That boy you risked your reputation to save. You left a ballroom to come to me because you had heard I was on the verge of suicide. If you had been discovered there, or known to be there, your reputation would have been gone."

"I had loved your father."

"You sobered me, you made me look life squarely in the face, you put your arms about me and kissed me. You saved me. If you could only guess how grateful I am for the chance to do some-

thing for you, while sorry for the need. Now tell me."

The tears were rolling down her face now; hope had released them. "It is my boy, Donald," she said.

"Little Donald?"

"You forget the years, Chester. He's as big as you."

"He hasn't—hasn't started on the way I took?"

"Oh, no! But he was in Paris when the war broke out—studying art. He"—she bit her lip to control herself—"he went to the front."

"Yes?"

"He—he's been missing for six weeks."

"A prisoner in Germany, of course."

"That's what I hope; that's what I hope. But, oh, Chester! I can get no word of him. Not a word; and I've used money and influence. I'm afraid he's—he's——" She broke down and sobbed, her hands over her face.

Talbot started up and walked the floor several times; then went to her side, and, kneeling, put his arm about her.

"He isn't dead. Don't be afraid of that, dear lady. If he had been, you would have known it before this. He's a prisoner, and I'll find him. Don't worry any more."

She turned and looked into his strong face, wiping her tears away. "It was an inspiration to send for you. You bring back my courage. But"—and her voice faltered—"I don't know what you can do. I have had inquiries made through the German embassy; I have had Ambassador Gerard urged by our government and by personal friends to look for him. I have done everything that any one could suggest. You know I can command so much influence. What—what are you thinking of?"

"I'm going to search the prisons of Germany and Austria, dear lady."

"You——" He had spoken so quietly

that it seemed as if she could not have understood. "You will do what?"

He patted her reassuringly on the arm and rose to his feet. "I will see every prisoner in Germany and Austria; I will—— But there! I'm going to find him."

"But you can't leave——" she began protestingly.

"I can do anything in this world that I want to do, and I want to find Don more than I want to do anything else."

"But——"

"The discussion is ended, dear friend," he said, with an air of finality. "Now to ways and means."

"You will need money. Luckily I have plenty of that. But——"

"There are no buts. You will point out all the avenues of your influence to me, and put me in the way of using them. Come! You have memoranda, letters, information. I want everything. Shall we sit down now? Have you time?"

"How energetic you are! How hope-inspiring! And you are sure you——"

"Dear lady, do I look uncertain? If I could only make you understand my joy in being able to serve you! There! Don't waste time over that. Let me see everything that will help me. Show me what you've done."

They spent until midnight looking over letters, cablegrams, notes; in discussing the details of what had been done; in writing letters of introduction for Talbot's use.

"There!" he said finally, standing up and buttoning his coat. "Now to start things!"

"You seem to know just what you will do," she said, with a sigh of relief and a look of admiration. "Nobody else has."

"Nobody else cared as much. Good night. There's a man I must see to-night, if possible. He will give me my first start." He took her hand and kissed it with profound courtesy.

"When shall I see you again?" she asked.

"I don't know. I go now to make sure of my passage over under the best conditions; then on to Washington to interview these people and get my passport. I'll see you again before I start."

He went quickly. He was going to see Colonel St. John, if possible. It was late, but he knew the club the colonel put up at, and knew he was likely to keep late hours.

The colonel, in fact, had just come in, and on receipt of Talbot's card had him brought in at once. "Anything wrong?" he demanded, voicing his first thought.

"Nothing. Colonel, when you asked me to take the shipload of horses over to the other side——"

"It was a mistake, Mr. Talbot," interrupted the colonel, flushing.

"Is the offer still open?" asked Talbot.

"Why—why," stammered the colonel, "yes, I suppose so."

"I would like to consider it. Let me explain why." He told in a few words of the disappearance of Donald Brookfield, and of his determination to hunt for him. "It occurred to me," he went on, "that if I took your horses over, you might be willing to help me get to the front to talk with some of the fellows who were in the company with Donald. You see, I shall need all possible influence."

"It will be quite easy. The head of the commissariat department is a personal friend—a good sort. I'll give you a letter to him. He'll help you if he can."

"When is the boat to start?"

"There's a small lot of horses to come yet, but we're hoping to get her off on Saturday—four days from now."

"It's understood, then," said Talbot. "I'll see you Friday night. I'm off for Washington now. Thank you. Good night."

The next morning, as soon as it was possible to do anything, Talbot was going about Washington in a limousine which he had engaged for the day. Thanks to the letters he carried from a person of so much social importance as Mrs. Brookfield, he transacted his business with unusual swiftness.

With all his expedition, however, there was an inevitable quantity of red tape to be unrolled and tied and untied. He was compelled to go to one legation and another several times; to the state department many times.

He never lost his quiet imperturbability, however; never relaxed his pertinacious grasp on the object in view. He acted always as if he had no suspicion of failing to obtain what he asked for, and he frankly told the full story of his quest.

He was a difficult man to put off; and on the second day he went about reaping the harvest he had sown the first day, so that he was able that night to take the express back to New York.

Toward the end of the second day, however, he began to have an uneasy, unpleasant sense of being followed. It occurred to him at once that he might be the object of the attentions of an international spy, though he could not understand why he should be in face of the fact that he had so carefully told his whole story.

He laid simple traps for his shadow, if he should have one, and was soon rewarded by discovering a very innocent-looking Westerner always near. Then, being satisfied, and having nothing to conceal, he went his way without further concern.

The morning he reached New York, he was amused to find his shadow still after him. He went to his hotel in Hoboken for breakfast, the food there being satisfactory, as it often is at second-rate hotels.

He had not been at his table many minutes when his man sauntered in;

no longer a Westerner, but now a respectable business man. Talbot's blue eyes twinkled.

"I beg your pardon," he said, as the man passed him; "I think we've met before."

The man started the least bit. "I—I don't remember," he said.

"My name's Talbot."

"I think you're mistaken, sir."

"Not at all." Talbot was openly smiling now. "You were a Western man yesterday. Don't you remember how you followed me about from legation to legation, all over Washington?"

"I don't know what you're talking about."

"Yes, you do. Sit down and eat with me. Do! Yes, please do! I want to save you time and trouble. I'll tell you who I am and what I was going about for. Or do you know?"

The man was flushed and uncertain. There was something in Talbot's eyes that made discourtesy impossible and denial difficult. He tried to move away. "You are mistaken," was the best he could think to say.

"Not in the least. Don't you remember how often we met yesterday? Do sit down! You are wasting a lot of good time over me. I have no secrets. What government do you represent?"

The man turned, chagrin and anger depicted on his face, and left the room without looking again at Talbot. The latter laughed softly, shook his head slowly, and went on with his breakfast.

"I suppose," he murmured, "that the poor fellow must do something to justify himself. Good God! What a business!"

With this he dismissed the matter from his mind and went about the work he had yet to do. He must telegraph and write to his manager, get himself clothes suitable to the conventions of European life, see Mrs. Brookfield, and do innumerable other things, some trifling, some important.

One of his first acts was to go to the steamer, announce his connection with the shipment of horses, and secure his stateroom. Then, as early in the day as he thought admissible, he went to see Mrs. Brookfield; and had the satisfaction, on leaving her, of knowing that she was as happy as hope could make her under the circumstances.

The last thing he did was to see Colonel St. John and get from him his credentials and the promised letter. He slept on board that night, and was up early in the morning to look over the horses and talk with the men who had been engaged to take care of them.

As it came near to sailing time, he went on deck and looked about. The friends of the few passengers had gone ashore, and the usual talk was going on between deck and dock. He glanced idly over the wharf, and suddenly smiled. The man who had shadowed him in Washington, and whom he had accosted in the dining room, was furtively watching the vessel from the shelter of a shadowed corner.

"Poor fool!" he murmured, and was turning away when his eye was attracted by a man hurrying down the wharf, carrying a large box on his shoulder. There was just time for him to give his burden to some one on board before the gangplank was withdrawn.

"Somebody always comes at the last moment," said a sweet, musical voice.

He turned quickly, because it seemed that the remark was addressed to him. He looked down into one of the most beautiful faces he had ever seen. It was that of a woman who might have been anywhere between twenty and twenty-five.

She was evidently one of the passengers, and had been leaning on the rail watching the activity on the wharf. She smiled in a frank, friendly way as their eyes met.

"Yes," he responded coldly.

"I beg your pardon, sir!" said a voice behind him.

He turned quickly, pleased with an excuse for cutting short any conversation with the smiling beauty. The speaker was one of the men engaged to look after the horses. He was an alert, trim-looking young fellow, and had already attracted Talbot's notice.

"A letter for you, sir," the man said, holding it out. "A man just came with it. He brought a box for you. Where shall I put it?"

Talbot moved a few paces away and opened the envelope. The letter was written on the paper of the club where Colonel St. John stopped; and when Talbot glanced at the end of the letter he saw the colonel's name signed there.

MY DEAR TALBOT [Talbot frowned slightly at the familiarity]: When I was talking to you last night I quite forgot to speak of a box of samples I wished to have delivered at the commissary department. I am sending it by bearer, and I shall be greatly obliged to you if you will see that it is delivered to the address. You will not need to take any care of it, as it contains only samples of a few things I can get over here, in case they should be wanted by the army in France.

"What have you done with the box?" Talbot demanded, as he folded the letter and put it in his pocket for reference.

"It's on the main deck."

"Is there any place down among the horses where it will be safe? It is for delivery on the other side."

"Plenty of room in one of the feed bunkers."

"Put it where it won't be lost."

"Yes, sir."

The man went below; and Talbot, mainly to avoid the young woman who had spoken to him, went forward.

He was annoyed with the colonel for the familiarity of his address, and he was annoyed with himself for being annoyed. And yet it was certainly unlike Colonel St. John, who had treated him

throughout with an almost ceremonious courtesy.

By this time, the vessel was gliding slowly out into the river, hugging the wharf closely. As she went out, the groups on the wharf began to break up and straggle away. Once more Talbot saw the man who had shadowed him, but this time he was with another man, to whom he was talking earnestly.

Talbot looked after them, smiling, and yet puzzled. There was something familiar about the second man, and yet he could not place him in his memory. He tried for a moment to do so; then dismissed the matter. It seemed too ridiculous to think about.

Ridiculous as it was, however, his mind continued to revert to the man in the effort to place him. Also it reverted to the colonel's familiar address.

When he went below for lunch, he had a third trifling annoyance: the beautiful young woman sat at his right hand. He sat at the foot of the table.

CHAPTER III.

Talbot was not so silly as to be a woman hater. He had had a bitter experience once, however, and since then had had no desire to know any woman intimately.

He was sorry that this beautiful young woman had been placed where common decency would compel him to be polite to her for maybe ten days, unless—and he smiled grimly—they had bad weather and she was kept in her stateroom.

She certainly was exceedingly beautiful; and it was immediately evident that the other men on board were ready to make up for any indifference Talbot felt; for those at the only other table watched her as much as the limits of decency permitted, while those at her own table betrayed feverish eagerness to make her acquaintance.

She, for her part, bore herself in a friendly, pleasant way with every one, but yet with a simple dignity that forbade familiarity. She laughed easily but softly, and in a way that was a delight to listen to. In fact, Talbot found himself waiting for the low, musical ripple. It was exactly such a laugh as one might expect from the possessor of a voice of such golden richness.

Her beauty was of rather a sensuous sort; her lips full and very red—naturally so, Talbot decided very quickly; skin milky white and running into a shell-like pink in her round cheeks; eyes of a soft, melting brown; white, even teeth; a round, full throat.

Talbot also noted that her eyelashes were very long and dark, her hair wavy and of a lustrous brown, her chin deliciously rounded and with a tiny but well-defined dimple in it. Indeed of dimples she had a great plenty. They were in her cheeks most adorably when she smiled in the slightest degree; they were on her hands. No doubt they would be found at her elbows and—if she ever wore her gowns so low—on her shoulders.

As for her figure, it did justice to her face, being exquisitely rounded without the aid of superfluous fat. All her movements were free and graceful, as if a natural health and strength had been supplemented by careful training. When Talbot saw her on deck later, she made him think of a well-fed panther.

As his attitude toward the sex was not a pose, he did not hesitate to admit his pleasure in her any more than if she had been a beautiful horse. And when he discovered, as he soon did, that she paid no more attention to him than he did to her, he watched and enjoyed her with careless frankness, in the meantime eating his lunch and leaving the table as if she didn't exist.

The only other person on board who interested him at all was the young man

who had brought him word of the box of samples from the colonel.

This young man was a good-looking fellow, who gave the horses an eager, intelligent attention, who was always alert and always trim in appearance. He was the first to greet Talbot when the latter went down among the horses, and was always unobtrusively ready to answer any question or to jump to a word.

He was so constantly cheerful, so ready with his agreeable smile, and at the same time so competent, that Talbot, before the day was out, had practically made him foreman over the other men.

"Where did you learn about horses?" he asked the young fellow.

"On a ranch in Montana."

"And what are you going over with these horses for? It's none of my business, but I'm interested. By the way, what's your name?"

"Harry Furness is my name." He flushed, and went on unhesitatingly: "It is private business that takes me over."

"Pardon my question," Talbot said quickly. "I really asked because I have a ranch in Texas, and am always glad to get hold of a good man. You know my name?"

"Yes, sir; it's Talbot." He smiled in his engaging way. "They call you Talking Talbot." He looked his admiration.

"A silly name," said Talbot curtly, and walked away.

Harry Furness shrugged his shoulders and watched Talbot walk away, a faint, odd smile curling the corners of his mouth.

Late in the afternoon, they were stopped and boarded by a British cruiser. Talbot was surprised, as he had taken it for granted that it would be known that the ship carried horses for the British army in France.

The ship's papers were perfunctorily examined; and then the crew and pas-

sengers were examined with great care and particularity. It was then that Talbot learned that the beautiful young woman was Mrs. Frank Parker, of San Francisco, and a widow.

The person in charge of the examination of the passengers and crew was not a naval officer, but a civilian; and he plainly knew definitely what to do.

Talbot was surprised to find that he was treated with unusual courtesy and was scarcely questioned. He immediately concluded that his mission was known.

The other passengers were treated with varying degrees of inquisitiveness, some being quickly dismissed and others being questioned minutely. Talbot got the impression that the inquisitor was seeking some special person or bit of information.

Mrs. Parker, when her turn came, submitted with quiet dignity to the questioning, never showing any signs of impatience when the man pushed his inquiries to an extreme. Even when it looked as if the man suspected her of being other than she asserted, she did not lose her calmness, but replied readily and placidly, and occasionally smilingly, to the questions he asked her.

"I guess," growled a man to Talbot, "he's taking advantage of the situation to talk to her."

Talbot smiled. "I don't know," he answered, thinking of the way he had been shadowed; "a lot of fool things are done these days."

"I'd like to punch his jaw for talking to that little woman that way," said the man. Talbot remembered that he had been paying assiduous court to Mrs. Parker.

Just then the inquisitor suddenly ceased to question the lady, and left her with a bow that was almost profound.

"Well," said Talbot, with a smile, "it looks as if the fellow had succumbed to those fascinating dimples."

The other passenger broke at once into a rhapsody over the lady's beauty and charm, to which Talbot shut his ears, not being interested.

No one else on board was subjected to the same close scrutiny as the California widow until Talbot's young helper, Harry Furness, was reached.

His examination took precisely the course that hers had. In spite of his engaging frankness and the readiness of his replies to the most searching questions, the inquisition was persisted in rudely, and then suddenly dropped.

Talbot had a fashion of noting small things and putting them away in his brain. He did so in this instance, puzzling over the matter for a few moments and then dismissing it.

The next morning, when he went down to look at the horses, Harry said to him, in a low tone: "Do you know what's in that box, sir?"

"The one for the commissary department?"

"Yes, sir."

"It is supposed to have samples in it. I don't know what kind. Why do you ask?"

"I wish you'd come over to where it is before I answer you."

Harry's face was so serious that Talbot made no objection, but went at once with him to the feed bunker where the box was. He had seen it before, but had paid no special attention to it. Now he leaned over it and examined it closely.

Suddenly he stood quite still and hardly breathed; then he turned and looked at Harry, who was watching him.

"When did you discover this?"

"This morning. It may have been going on before, but I hardly think so. I'm sure I would have noticed it."

There was a very faint, regular ticking sound coming from the box. Talbot bent over it again, his mind working rapidly and connecting together

things which before had seemed to bear no relation to each other.

There was the man who had shadowed him, seemingly so senselessly; the man who had been with the shadower as the vessel moved out from the wharf; and that man was the same who had brought the box to the boat. Then the letter from the colonel, the letter with the familiar address.

"What's your idea?" he demanded of Harry.

"I thought it might be a bomb."

"It is possible. Do you think you could bring the captain to me at the stern of the main deck?"

"Shall I tell him anything?"

"Yes, say what we suspect. Hurry! God knows when it will go off if it is a bomb."

"Are you going——" began Harry.

"I'm going to take it with me. Hurry, my boy!"

Harry sped away, his face white, but his jaws set in a way that delighted Talbot, who had learned to judge men.

He picked up the box and held it to his ear. The ticking was distinct, and, in view of its possible meaning, decidedly sickening. Nevertheless he carried it with an appearance of calmness to the stern, avoiding any contact with the persons he met by the way.

One of these was Mrs. Parker. Their eyes met, and she smiled a good morning at him, as they had not met at breakfast. He smiled back with more friendliness than usual. He was thinking how shocking it would be if that beautiful creature were to be sent to eternity by the explosion of the thing he carried.

He walked swiftly but without appearance of concern, and when he had come to the stern of the boat, stood there to wait. The ticking of the thing inside the box was horribly distinct. Beads of sweat broke out on his forehead.

The captain and Harry Furness came,

both pale, and the former greatly agitated.

"Good God, man!" the captain cried huskily. "Why don't you throw it overboard?"

"I don't know that it is dangerous."

"Throw it overboard, I say! I won't have my ship jeopardized. I'm responsible for all these lives."

"Captain," said Talbot icily, "we are wasting time. If there is a bomb in here, it may go off at any moment."

"Then why——"

"Listen! I have an invincible objection to making a fool of myself. There may be harmless clocks in here."

"But——"

"And I want you to put me into one of your boats with tools to open this with. Then we shall know——"

"It shall not be opened on board of this boat. Throw it overboard, or I shall call my men and have it thrown over."

"It would take a great many of your men to do that," Talbot said, in a cold, even tone; "and the thing might go off in the struggle. Besides, I don't believe a man would come near me if I said what might be in this box. I am not asking you to let me open it on board. I want you to lower me and tow me far behind. I will open the box without danger to any one but myself."

"Get into that first starboard boat," the captain said, his face convulsed with fear and anger. He turned and beckoned some of the sailors who were on deck. "Lower away the first starboard boat there!"

"The tools!" said Talbot, looking at Harry.

The latter turned and ran quickly away. Talbot got into the boat, to the amazement of the men and of the group of spectators who had been drawn by the sight of something unusual.

Talbot, looking about, saw that Mrs. Parker was one of the group, and that

she was studying him with a far more puzzled expression than any of the others.

Harry returned with a hammer, chisel, screw driver, and a powerful pair of nippers, just as the boat reached the water. Before she could be cast loose, he had slid down the pulley ropes, holding the tools in one hand.

"What——" began Talbot, at the sight of the young man in the boat.

"I'm going with you."

Talbot started to speak, then flashed an approving glance at the other and did not say anything.

The boat, cast loose, fell rapidly away from the steamer to the end of the coil of line by which it was to be towed. Talbot held the box in his arms till the end of the towline was reached and the boat had taken its normal movement.

The sea fortunately was smooth, so that there was not a great deal of motion. There was more, indeed, from the wake of the vessel than from the waves.

Talbot had been studying the box carefully to see how it was fastened, and was ready to operate the moment the little boat was steady enough for the purpose.

There were a number of screws, which he took out with the screw driver; some wires, which he cut with the nippers. Harry silently handed him the tools as he needed them.

He tried the cover, but it still held. He pried it very gently. It gave a little. He looked at Harry.

"I don't believe it will go off by friction," he said. "The clockwork makes me think it will be by percussion."

"That's what I think."

Talbot tried again to pry off the lid. It yielded more and more, having evidently been held by a few blind nails.

"Remove it gently while I hold the box," he said to Harry.

The latter put his fingers under one

end of the lid and lifted upward. It came easily and without any suspicious sound that would have indicated pre-arranged friction.

There was paper on top. This Talbot carefully lifted away. Then the devilish thing was fully exposed. It was an ingeniously and carefully prepared time bomb.

"Enough dynamite there," said Talbot, "to blow the ship in two. The brutes!"

With steady fingers he disengaged the connection between the explosive and the machinery, and then put the clockwork on the bottom of the boat, leaving the dynamite in the box.

Harry leaned over the side of the boat, sick at his stomach. When he sat up again, Talbot said: "It is the motion of this small boat."

"No," was the response, "it was fright."

"Oh! Well, I don't mind telling you I was never so scared in my life. I never expected to get back to the steamer." He lifted his hand and signaled to the captain, who was at the rail, watching eagerly. The boat began to move toward the steamer, pulled by strong hands.

"I think, Harry," said Talbot, after a moment of silence, "I'd like to shake hands with you. You're the bravest man I ever met."

"Oh, Mr. Talbot!" stammered Harry, his face flushed and his eyes shining with pleasure, as he eagerly reached out and took the hand that was proffered. "But I was terribly frightened."

"Anybody not a fool would have been. But I don't see why you came. It wasn't necessary, you know. Why did you?"

The color receded from Harry's face, and then rushed back again as he met the searching glance of the keen blue eyes. He looked away and hesitated.

"Why did you, Harry?"

"Do you think I had any unworthy motive, Mr. Talbot?" he asked.

"No, I don't, my boy; but you had a motive I know nothing about, and I am very properly curious. What was it?"

The young man bit his lip and looked away, silent for a space of time. Talbot watched him closely. Harry turned suddenly and faced Talbot.

"I did have a motive, Mr. Talbot. I know there is no good reason for my being here that you can see; but—but I can't tell you what it was. You must believe there was no unfriendliness to you in it. Please believe that. I—I never knew a man I admired and respected as much as I do you, Mr. Talbot. I'm sorry I can't tell you why I came."

"All right," said Talbot curtly, "you don't have to."

"You won't trust me any more?" said Harry, in a troubled tone.

"It must have been a powerful motive to induce you to risk your life as you did. I don't see how I shall have any occasion to trust you. I suppose you won't do any harm to the horses."

"Oh, Mr. Talbot!" was the reproachful response.

As Talbot made no effort to conceal the nature of the contents of the box, there was intense excitement on his return. The captain first, and the passengers afterward, hailed him as a hero and were warm in their thanks to him.

"Don't thank me; don't praise me," he said coldly. "There's the person who deserves all this." And he pointed to Harry. "He discovered the probable nature of the box first; and, as you saw, he helped me open it."

With that he went to his stateroom and left the young man to bear the burden of praise and congratulation; but Harry, too, escaped as soon as he could, and went below.

After that Talbot treated Harry with a coolness that manifestly disturbed the

latter, though he only redoubled his exertions in performing his work and in trying to anticipate Talbot's wishes.

In spite of his attempt to make Harry the hero of the bomb affair, however, he found himself filling that rôle; and it was only by coldly repelling all efforts to discuss the matter with him that he extricated himself from the discomforts of it.

Oddly enough, the only person he ever talked with about it was Mrs. Parker; and she, perhaps, was the only one who had made no effort to discuss it with him.

It would have been impossible to say how an intimacy had grown up between them, since neither had made any visible effort to bring it about. No doubt almost constant propinquity had much to do with it. She was always on deck, no matter what the weather; so was he. And she sat next him at table.

One day they were talking about war and the courage it required to face death on the battlefield. She smiled at his comment, and said: "I'd like to know how you really felt out there in the boat when you were opening the box."

"Terribly frightened."

She laughed outright. "You looked as cool as ice."

"Oh, I was cool enough; I don't lose my head very easily."

"No, I don't believe you do," she said, looking into his eyes with an odd expression. "By the way, what made you think it might be a bomb?"

"That was natural enough, I think. Even my helper—that handsome young fellow who went out in the boat with me—thought so at once. As for me, I had good reasons. I had been shadowed all over Washington by a man; I saw that man talking to the one who had brought the box to me; and the letter the man brought with the box was a forgery."

"Nothing seems to escape you, Mr. Talbot," she said.

He shrugged his shoulders. "I presume I see very little; but when I undertake to do a thing I try to keep my wits at work. Do you know why I am going to Europe?"

The faintest color rose to her cheeks. "You are taking horses over for the British government, aren't you?"

"Yes, but that is only incidental. I'm really going over to find the son of a very dear friend." Then he told her about Donald.

"It's very interesting," she commented when he was through.

"I don't know whether it is or not," he replied, "but I like the fact to be known, so that it will be plainly understood that I have no political mission."

"You certainly haven't the appearance of a diplomat; you are far too uncompromising," she laughed.

"That's exactly the impression I want to give. I'm going to find that boy if he's alive, and I won't be turned from my purpose. I was foolish not to understand that that man didn't shadow me for my own sake. Hereafter I shall suspect everything unusual and keep away from it."

He looked squarely into the limpid brown eyes as he said this. Mrs. Parker looked back smilingly.

"I think, Mr. Talbot," she said, "that you would make a good friend and a bad enemy. I am like that myself."

He smiled, and presently went below to look at the horses.

CHAPTER IV.

One day not long before they expected to reach Havre, Talbot was taking his customary look at the horses when Harry Furness came to him and said: "May I speak with you, Mr. Talbot?"

"Certainly."

"I want to explain why I went out in the boat with you."

"The truth, Harry?"

Harry flushed. "Yes, sir. The fact that I didn't try to deceive you when you asked me ought to show that I'm not a liar."

"I don't think you're a liar; but on the other hand it would have been hard, on the spur of the moment, to make up a story then. You expected me to accept your action as a part of your readiness to serve me, didn't you?"

"Yes, sir."

"Well, go ahead! What do you want to say?"

"I—I started on this voyage for the sake of adventure."

"I can understand that."

"When you were put in charge the men talked about you and I learned that you were the Talking Talbot I had heard so much about out in Montana. Then I learned what you were going over for."

"How did you learn that?"

"You must have told somebody, for the men knew about it."

"Yes, I believe I've been *Talking Talbot* with a vengeance."

Harry smiled. "About that, maybe; not about anything else. Well, when I learned what you were going to do, I was crazy to go with you, and I made up my mind to compel you to like me by showing you how serviceable I could be."

"You made a success of that."

"Thank you, sir. Then we discovered the bomb——"

"When you discovered it," interposed Talbot quietly.

"I only suspected until you came. You seemed to know it must be a bomb, and it was the most natural thing to think under the circumstances, anyhow. It would have made the Germans very happy to have the vessel blow up with all these horses on board."

"But they reckoned without us, didn't they?"

"Without you. I wouldn't have thought of going out in the boat."

"You might have been more sensible and thrown it overboard. But that brings us to the time you went out in the boat with me at the risk of your life. Why did you do it?"

"It came over me, while I was running for the tools, that if I went with you you would know I was one to be depended on in a tight place."

"You mean," said Talbot, eyeing him keenly, "that you risked your life for the sake of inducing me to take you with me?"

"Yes, sir."

Talbot studied him for a brief while. "All right! I believe you."

Harry sighed as if a mountain of doubt had been lifted from his shoulders. "And you will let me go with you?"

"That's another matter. What use can you be to me?"

"I can help you in a lot of ways," was the eager response. "I understand French and German——"

"So do I; as well as I do English. I spent my childhood over here."

"Still I can help you a great deal. There are sure to be times when you will need help. I can't exactly be valet to you because I don't know how, but I'll do anything you tell me to. I wish you'd let me go with you."

There was an intensity of desire in his voice and manner that told of an inexpressible eagerness. Talbot smiled as he listened to him.

"Very well," he said. "I may be able to use you. Anyhow, I'm glad you told me the truth."

As a result of this conversation, friendly relations were reestablished between the two, and Harry showed his happiness in the way in which he went about his work.

The last day on the boat, Talbot and

Mrs. Parker were standing together by the rail. They had stood there for many minutes without exchanging a word. Suddenly Mrs. Parker laughed softly. He looked at her.

"Why do I laugh?" she said. "I was thinking how you had changed—or seemed to—since the first day on board."

"How?"

"You were so distant and forbidding then; now you and I are almost good friends. I wonder why?"

The last day on board is always a crucial time with acquaintances made on a short voyage. It is a question whether or not they shall even nod to each other if chance brings them together on land.

Talbot looked down into the beautiful face, a faint smile on his lips. He knew that she was perfectly well aware of the boldness of her words.

"I always meet subtleties by plain truth, Mrs. Parker," he answered. "With you, anyhow, I know that I would be thoroughly worsted if I tried to meet your subtleties with efforts of my own in that line."

"Was I guilty of a subtlety?" she asked. "Perhaps I was. I believe it is supposed to be a woman's way. My question should have been, why did you try to avoid my acquaintance when I wanted yours? Time has shown that we are suited to be friends."

"I avoided you at first because you attracted me by your very great beauty. I have distrusted myself ever since I fell in love with a girl and believed in her until she threw me over when I lost my money."

"What an odd man you are!" she said, flushing beautifully, but studying his face frankly. "Now, having said that, don't you think you could go on and satisfy the curiosity you have roused by saying the rest? I attracted you at first. Did I cease to attract you?"

She wasn't in the least coquettish, but was amusedly interested, as he could plainly see.

"You are more attractive than ever," he answered, his amusement as great as her own; "but I soon saw that your beauty was the least of your attractions. I liked the quality of your mind, and I knew that as a possible husband I had no interest for you. That is why I even made opportunities of seeing you."

"Am I blushing?" she asked.

"You are."

"I feel as if I were blushing from my toes up," she said. "I feel as if I had been laid on a marble slab and been dissected."

"That only shows that you understand all I didn't say from the little I did say. If you did, you will also understand that if the female of you blushed, the brain of you was complimented."

"And you don't deal in subtleties!"

"The truth sometimes seems subtle because it is unusual."

"Maybe. And now to return to our subject. My object in asking my first question was to lead up to another. Before I ask it, however, I must assure you that I shall never, never try to induce you to marry me."

"I am relieved," he laughed. "My opinion of you is such that I would be afraid you would win out if you undertook even *my* capture. Ask your question with the assurance of a fully truthful answer."

She looked at him quizzically. "I like to be successful in my undertakings," she said, "so that is one of the things I would never try to do with you. My question is, shall we plan to meet again? I am bold enough to say that I would like to know you. You see, being a widow, I dare to say things any other kind of woman would not."

"I should be sorry not to see you again, Mrs. Parker," he answered.

"You are a personality as well as a woman. You have a quality of positive force new to me in your sex. I feel honored. Do you know where you will be?"

"I shall go to Paris at once. I have engaged an apartment in a very quiet part of the old St. Germain quarter. I will give you the address before we go ashore. I am glad I am not to lose sight of you. Besides, I may be of service to you in your quest."

"Really? Why do you think so?"

"I know many persons of importance and power. It is true that you carry introductions, but you know these are peculiar times, and it is possible that ordinary influence will not suffice. Be sure to let me know if you have trouble."

He did not see her to speak to again after that. She sent him her Paris address by one of the stewards, and they waved their adieus to each other when she went away.

His first care was to see that the unloading of the horses was well started; then from the subordinate who had come to take delivery of them he procured the address of the commissary general, and went there with his introduction.

"The simplest thing in the world," he was told heartily when he had stated his wish to get to the front to interview the members of Donald's company. "Come to-morrow and we'll have everything ready for you."

General Allenby was so positive that Talbot never doubted. When he went for his permit, however, the general had a long face.

"I've just had word from General French that no one, with emphasis on the no, is to be permitted to go to the front; so I can't do anything for you. But you say you have good introductions to important persons in Paris. Go there! It's better, anyhow, for we

couldn't have promised anything for the French lines."

Not greatly chagrined by this, since it seemed of little importance, Talbot waited until the horses were all safely landed and handed over to the proper persons, and then went to Paris, followed by Furness, who did not fail to make himself very useful.

He put up at a hotel near the Louvre, and as early in the morning as any one was likely to be in evidence at the government offices started out with his letters.

At the American embassy everybody was very cordial and very willing; everywhere else he was met with extreme courtesy, but many excuses. He spent several days in going about, and then, one day, sat down in the garden of the Tuileries to think it out.

It was perfectly plain that he was not to be allowed to conduct his search for Donald at the front. Something was working against him. It wasn't that he was asking for something impossible, for he knew of two cases, at least, of permission to do the very thing he wished to do.

Suddenly he remembered what Mrs. Parker had said to him about the possibility of his meeting with difficulties.

"I had almost forgotten her," he murmured; "and I shouldn't have done that."

He sat there silent, motionless for a long time; then with a grim look on his face got up and went home. Harry was waiting for him.

"Any better luck?" he asked, seeing a smile on Talbot's face.

"I think it's coming out all right at last," was the response. "It occurred to me that I hadn't tried the department for foreign affairs, so I went there and think I shall win through now. I'm to see the minister at three o'clock this afternoon." He looked at his watch. "And I must be

off. Get everything ready for a quick start."

He hurried out, but when he reached the street stopped behind a kiosk and waited. "I may be mistaken," he thought, "but it is worth trying."

He had not been there ten minutes when Harry came swiftly out of the hotel, went to the Rue de Rivoli, turned to the right, and disappeared. Talbot went in pursuit.

Harry went on to the Place de la Concorde, turned there, and crossed to the other side of the river.

"The old St. Germain quarter," muttered Talbot.

Harry passed the Chamber of Deputies, and turned away from the river. All his movements were assured and unhesitating like those of one who has done the same thing before.

A few blocks from the river he turned into an obscure street, walked a short distance, and entered the open gate of a courtyard. Talbot followed cautiously and peered in. The courtyard was large and quite empty. The office of the concierge was at the left in a small lodge.

"I wish to see Madame Parker," said Talbot to a stout matron who was engaged in preparing vegetables for dinner.

She went to the door and pointed. "The first door on the left. She has the entresol."

"Those are her windows just above the door?" demanded Talbot.

"Yes, monsieur."

Talbot walked close to the building and entered the door indicated. He went up one flight with the least possible noise, and stood listening for a moment. There was a murmur of voices, and he recognized both of them. He knocked at the door.

It was opened by Mrs. Parker, who uttered a cry of surprise, but did not move to let him pass her. She did put

out her hand to him, however, and say in a loud voice: "Why, Mr. Talbot!"

"Yes," he said, advancing his foot over the threshold as he took her hand, "I had something I wanted to say to Harry, so I came right here."

An odd expression flashed into her brown eyes; then she laughed in the gayest possible manner, and bade him enter, standing aside to enable him to do so.

The room was empty save for the two of them. Mrs. Parker closed the door and watched Talbot as he searched the room and looked at two doors that opened out on the farther side of it.

"Come back, Harry," she called out, raising her voice slightly, and seemingly greatly amused. "He knows you're here."

One of the doors opened slowly, and Harry, very white and shamed looking, entered the room. He looked first at the stern and slightly contemptuous face of Talbot and then at the mirthful one of the young woman. Then he stood with his eyes cast down.

"Sit down, Mr. Talbot," said Mrs. Parker.

"It is unnecessary," he said coldly. "I only came to ask Harry what it means."

"I'm sorry, Mr. Talbot——" Harry began.

Mrs. Parker frowned, and interrupted haughtily: "Why do you say that? There's nothing to be sorry for."

"Yes, there is," Harry said in a low tone; "I have lost the good opinion of a man whose respect is worth having. I am sorry, Elsa."

At that note of intimacy, Talbot turned his eyes quickly on her and then back at him.

"My brother," laughed she. "Yes, there's been a deep and terrible plot, Mr. Talbot. I knew you would be difficult."

"Ah!" he murmured, with a smile that was most cynical. "Whatever you

do you do admirably. I fancied it would be so. But isn't it time to enlighten me and let me go my way in peace? Why have you taken all this trouble with one who has no concern with your lives?"

"Ah," she cried gayly, "but it is because we wish to have that concern that we have meddled."

"It is due to your meddling, then, that I have been unable to advance a step since coming here?"

"Entirely."

"And the plot is working as you intended?" he demanded.

"Not at all," she responded lightly. "I expected you to remember my suggestion that I might be able to help you when others failed."

"I did remember."

"But not as I wished. I wanted you to come to me and use my influence and be very, very grateful."

"In order that——" he questioned.

"In order that you would in exchange do something for me."

"Just a woman, after all," he said, with quiet scorn. "You prefer indirection for its own sake."

"No," she answered, without any loss of her smiling insouciance; "really, Mr. Talbot, you are unjust to me. But do sit down. You must see that we have much to say to each other, and if I sit I shall be at a disadvantage, with you towering, not to say glowering, at me. So sit down and be your eminently reasonable self."

She looked more seductively beautiful than he had ever seen her. The negligee she wore showed liberal portions of her white throat and bosom and draped in revealing lines about her rounded figure.

He did not believe there was any premeditation in this, and yet he had come to feel that nothing was altogether impossible with this very clever woman. Even her gentle mockery of him added to her piquant charm and

might be a part of her plan to win him.

He was very suspicious, but he sat down and crossed his legs in the manner of one who is prepared to be patient. He was hoping to find out the meaning of the attempt to force him into an undesired association.

"Well?" he queried.

She seated herself, laughing softly. "I never saw such an interesting man in my life," she said.

"You'll not need me now," interposed her brother somewhat sullenly. "I'll go get my things if Mr. Talbot doesn't mind."

"But I mind," she cried quickly. "Why do you give up so soon? I am still hoping that Mr. Talbot will give us voluntarily the assistance I had intended he should give involuntarily. Sit down! Anyhow, I should have a chaperon." She laughed again in her soft, musical way.

The young man sat down, shrugging his shoulders. Talbot watched, wondering how much of this was acting, how much real. He looked inquiringly at the smiling woman.

"You want an explanation," she said.

"I have no other reason for remaining here. You are very charming, but you don't interest me," he answered, with studied rudeness.

"Oh, truthful Talbot!" she laughed. "But you shall have your explanation. Will you first tell me when you began to suspect me of wicked designs on you?"

"Willingly. It was when we were boarded by the cruiser. I noticed then that you and your brother received similar treatment, and peculiar treatment. I couldn't guess then any more than I can now what your object was, but I decided to take your brother into my employment so that I might find out."

"Curiosity is a womanish trait, Mr. Talbot."

"I am indifferent excepting as my mission is affected."

"If I could help you find your friend," she said, with a sudden alteration of manner, "would you help me?"

"I should need to have evidence of your power to help me, and I should need to know exactly what you wished me to do for you," was his cool response.

"You have had evidence of my power to hinder," she returned quickly.

"And I have discovered the source of hindrance. Come, Mrs. Parker—if that is your name—this game of hide and seek is as childish for you as it is for me. Be as frank as you can. If I can help you and further my own interests at the same time, I will do so; but I will not be a puppet, and I will determine my own course. Your silly interference hasn't done anything but weary me."

"You speak almost as if you wished to make me an enemy," she said in a soft tone.

"No; I only wish to make it clear to you that I am not afraid of anything you can do. If you can help me, well and good; if you are only meaning to withdraw your malign influence I may as well tell you that I don't value it in the least."

His tone was very icy, very sarcastic, and it had its effect. The soft brown eyes darted a flame, and the full red lips closed tightly. But that was only for a moment; when she spoke her voice was as soft and caressing as ever.

"The more you say the more I want your help. This, then, is what I can do for you: I can see that you have every facility for making inquiries about your friend; or"—she paused and smiled with a faint air of triumph—"I will tell you at once what has become of your missing friend."

"You know?"

"Yes, he is——"

"Stop! Please understand that I shall feel under no obligations to you if you tell me. I must see to the end of your skein before I touch any part of it."

"O monument of suspicion! O most cautious Talbot!"

"As you say," he responded calmly.

A slight frown came and went slowly. The astute woman felt, as never before, that she was dealing with a man adamant to blandishments or cunning. She smiled and took a long breath as if entering on a new course.

"Your friend—don't be afraid; I am committing you to nothing—I have been able to locate your friend exactly. Won't you be grateful for the information?" She laughed mockingly.

"Grateful, certainly; but not indebted."

"Incurable! Well, he was taken prisoner by one of the Austrian regiments then in Alsace; really by a Hungarian regiment. He is now in a prison camp not very far from Budapest."

"Thank you."

"You see, I have sources of information."

"I hope they are reliable."

"Incorrigible!" She laughed again. "But I will put you in the way of obtaining assurance of the reliability of this. I can do more; I can make it possible for you to obtain the freedom of your friend."

"Now you are most interesting. I suppose it is this that I am to pay for in some way."

"Yes, and a small price."

"You are not to be the judge of my estimate of the cost. What am I to do?"

The brother and sister exchanged glances, betraying that they felt they had come to the crucial spot in the negotiations.

"It is essential that we get to Budapest. All we ask of you is to take us there with you."

Talbot knew he was being watched now with anxious scrutiny. His face was like a mask in its impassivity. He realized that in some way this was a game of wits. Why or wherefore he could not guess.

"And why do you ask me to take you there? I have no influence. I am an American as you are Americans; you can enter Austria and Hungary as easily as I."

"We are not Americans; we are Hungarians."

"You have American passports; they brought you safely to Paris."

"By themselves they would not get us into Hungary except to put us behind iron doors."

"How could I get you in?"

"As your servant my brother could get in, and I——" She hesitated, and her brother got up and went to the window.

"And you?" Talbot prompted.

She lifted her lovely head with haughty pride. "I would ask you to take me in as your wife."

The ghost of a smile passed over Talbot's face. Hers went white as she noted it. He shook his head slowly.

"It would be too much honor," he said.

"You mean you refuse?" she snapped, a new note of passion in her wonderful voice.

"You are conspirators, are you not?" he asked.

"What we are is not your concern. Once we are in Budapest you will see us no more."

Talbot rose to his feet. "You are so far right," he said coldly, "that who or what you are is no concern of mine; therefore I wish to have nothing to do with your enterprises. I have set out to find and if possible to take home with me Donald Brookfield. I am interested in nothing else." He moved toward the door.

"One moment," she snapped, her eyes

flaming, her whole attitude threatening. "I have told you I could help you to free your friend."

"Yes, you have said so; also you have said things that convince me that I don't wish to associate with you. I will work alone."

"You fool! You fool! You self-sufficient fool!" she broke out in a rage that was all the more impressive because it was so deadly quiet. "Because you have been a successful bully and gun fighter you think you can stalk through Europe in the same way."

He smiled, this time in sheer amusement. He studied her in her passion of anger, and thought her more than ever beautiful.

"Why didn't you pick out a more susceptible man?" he asked carelessly. "You certainly are marvelously beautiful."

The young man at the window had turned; now he spoke for the first time. His face was livid. "I think you'd better go, Mr. Talbot," he said in a tone hoarse with suppressed emotion. "I wouldn't like you to insult my sister."

"I have no intention of doing so," Talbot answered quickly but evenly; "but I dare you to deny that it was her intention to win my acquiescence through her beauty."

"Go!" said the angry beauty. "And I warn you to beware how you cross my path. Keep what you know or suspect to yourself. Your life will be blown out like a used match at the first suggestion of loose talk from you."

"Highly melodramatic," Talbot said, with a smile, and passed out of the room.

CHAPTER V.

Talbot walked slowly away from the house. He didn't doubt that he had been wise to refuse to be drawn into the scheme, whatever it was. It might be that the plotters would have been able to help him; they certainly had

hindered him, but his judgment told him that he had acted wisely.

The question now was, whether to go on without further thought of them, or to try to figure out first what the extent of their power was, and so be in a position to elude it.

There was young Hopkins at the embassy; he would be the one to advise him. He not only knew the ins and outs of European politics, but he had been a friend of Donald's, and therefore would be interested in the matter.

Hopkins was yawning over a long dispatch which he had just finished putting into cipher when Talbot was shown in.

"Wait till I seal this, and we'll have a cigarette together," the attaché said briskly. "Any luck?"

"That's what I've come to talk about." And then when they were settled in easy-chairs, with cigarettes, he told the story of his connection with the brother and sister down to the moment.

In his interest, Hopkins let his cigarette go out. He asked very few questions, for though brief Talbot was explicit. When he had finished he sank back in the chair and eyed the other.

"Phew!" whistled the attaché.

"Do you understand it?" demanded Talbot.

"Surest thing you know," ejaculated Hopkins, who in his expatriation loved to use all the slang he could. "Revolution; that's what."

"Revolution where? In Hungary?"

"Yes. Don't breathe it, but we've been getting information right along that there is a big plot under way to separate the two kingdoms while all this turmoil is on. Just how it is to be done we don't know. We do know, though, that the Allies are deeply interested in all the disturbances that will make things difficult for their enemies."

"That would account for the lady's ability to thwart my inquiries."

"Sure thing. As for the lady herself, no doubt she's the Countess— But there's no need to give you her name. She's the center of the work in America, and from all accounts is a little dynamo. So she's over here. Look here! If I were you I'd steer clear of those people. If you got in their way they wouldn't consider you any more than you consider the insect you unconsciously crush as you walk through the woods. There's a kingdom in question, you see."

"Well, it looks silly to me," said Talbot. "It looks like playing pretentiously an impossible game."

"Because of the pretty woman in it? You're way off, my friend. If the woman in question is the one I think, she's as ruthless and as clever as the most hardened conspirator you ever heard of. Women! Why, bless your heart, they are at the bottom of every successful revolution the world has ever seen. Don't make the mistake of despising her, whatever else you do. In such a matter she isn't a woman, but only a conspirator."

"What credence do you put in what she said about Donald being in Hungary?"

"None. It's six and half a dozen; fifty-fifty they're saying now, aren't they?" He laughed in appreciation of the new bit of slang. "But say!" he cried, with sudden recollection. "One of our American boys has come back from the front slightly wounded. He's in the American hospital. Go see him. He'll know whether or not Don was taken by the Austrians. And say! Do keep out of Countess—that woman's way."

"Do you think I'd have been wiser to take up with her proposition?"

"Not on your life! Even if she's telling the truth now, she wouldn't hesitate to sacrifice you, and Donald with you, the moment it was to the advantage of their plot. Here!" He scrib-

bled on a blank card. "This is the name of the young fellow in the hospital. Tell the doctor you come from me. Oh, another thing! Get a move on as soon as you can."

Talbot went first to the hospital. It was on the other side of the river, and the day was slipping away, but the Metro took him there in a few minutes, and when he arrived a few urgent words to the physician in charge gained him his interview.

The young fellow had nothing worse the matter with him than a bullet in his arm and a broken bone; so he talked readily. He confirmed the story of being opposed by Austrian troops at the time of Donald's disappearance. That was all he knew, but it was enough to satisfy Talbot that he couldn't do better than hurry on to Hungary and there investigate the prisoners' camps.

After some hesitation he went to a cable office and sent a message to Mrs. Brookfield. "Reason to believe Donald prisoner in Hungary." He had decided to give her that much comfort.

Then he went to his hotel to eat and plan for departure. It was evident the moment he entered his room that Harry had been there for his clothes. After a few moments he saw a note stuck in the frame of the mirror:

DEAR MR. TALBOT: Whatever you may now think of me, I must tell you that my feeling for you remains the same. Don't judge me too harshly until you know all the circumstances; as you may some day. You are threatened. I know that in your supreme courage you will be tempted to disregard the threat. Don't. There is real danger to you. A woman may be beautiful and yet implacable. By the way, the information concerning your friend is absolutely correct. Beware from this moment. H. F.

"Umph!" grunted Talbot. "I wonder if that lovely creature is really the tigress they would make her out. Countess somebody! And he a count. Well, there is a little melodrama left in life, anyhow."

He dined, and then went hunting for Hopkins to report his success and to hasten arrangements for his departure for Hungary the next day. Passports and money matters had to be looked after, and letters of introduction obtained.

He found the attaché at last, and, having made him acquainted with the new developments, arranged with him to get things started as early in the morning as possible.

It was late when he returned to his hotel, and he was prepared to enjoy a night's rest. The hotel was one of the small, old-fashioned sort, but very comfortable. Talbot had his first really restful night since reaching Paris.

As he sat over his coffee and rolls in the morning, he took stock of the situation he found himself in. His first and instinctive feeling had been not to take the lovely countess seriously, and even now he might have dismissed her as a mere spectacular incident if he alone had been concerned. Since his mission was to rescue Donald, if alive, he decided to pay the threatening beauty the compliment of running away from her as quickly as possible.

She might or might not be able to do something to him once he was in Hungary, but at any rate he would get there first and be through with his task before she could reasonably hope to get there.

He met with no delays as he went about, and even when his needs took him into the various government offices where he had met with wearisome difficulties before, he now found everybody ready and even eager to give him all the assistance he needed, and even to suggest some things that he had not thought of.

Thus he was advised to go across Switzerland, and the way made easy by passes and recommendations; he was put in the way of obtaining all he wanted of Austrian money of all sorts.

In fact, as if sorry for the delays previously spread out before him, everybody moved to assist him with smiling alacrity.

This kindness seemed on the whole as suspicious as the previous policy of hindrance had been; so when his business with the various departments was all transacted he went to Hopkins to ask his opinion.

The change of route involved his remaining one night more in Paris, anyhow, so he could take the time to talk the matter over with his sophisticated friend.

"I wouldn't bother you ordinarily," he said by way of preface, "but this storybook business of a plot with a kingdom for a prize and a woman flaming threats at me and a young diplomat full of mystery have ended by making me suspicious of everything."

Hopkins laughed. "You'll be lucky if it's never any more than a joke to you. I've been able to confirm my suspicion that the countess is here with her brother, and that she represents the Hungarian revolutionists in America. She has brought over a huge sum of money, and there is an inside but ostensibly unofficial movement of the allied governments to give her all the aid they can."

"You're sure of that?"

"Positive."

"Then she is dangerous, and I'd better get away from here the soonest possible."

"That's my notion of it. You see, Hungary is bent on having a government of her own, and now seems their best chance. I have private information that the Allies are promising every help to that end if the new government of Hungary will throw in its lot with them. All the fighting isn't being done in the trenches, you see. Now for your story."

Talbot told all that he had done, and

how he had been helped where previously he had been hindered.

"I confess I don't like the looks of it," said Hopkins, shaking his head and frowning. "Why should you be given such generous assistance? With the letters you have to Austrian officials, in addition to the help the French government has given you to get to Austria; then your letters to Swiss officials. Say, have you been followed about since you've been here?"

"I have been to-day, but it seemed too silly to pay any attention to."

"Silly! Do you know that the papers you carry would be a great help to anybody wanting to slip into Austria? I'll bet those plotters know everything you carry."

"Much good may it do them."

Hopkins looked him over approvingly. "You'd put up a good fight all right. But say! If everybody's been fitting you out so carefully to get into Austria, it's because it's important that somebody should have just that equipment. Now you're an American, and everybody who is at all interested knows just what your business is. You can get what no one else could."

"You mean they intend to use me as a cat's-paw."

"I don't say so positively, but anyhow it's sure that you carry papers that would be useful to a Hungarian revolutionist who wanted to get into Hungary."

"Yes, that's sure; but I'm not going to give them up."

"Do you know," said the attaché seriously, "that I think it would be a wise thing for you to stay with me to-night. I'll send for your luggage, and you can start the first thing in the morning."

"Well," answered Talbot after a pause, "maybe I would be wise to stay with you, but somehow I want to find out what I'm really up against. I believe I'll go to my hotel."

"You're armed?"

"Always."

"Well, for Heaven's sake keep out of trouble," said Hopkins, shaking his hand warmly, and inwardly congratulating himself that he was not in Talbot's place.

The streets were dark when Talbot went into them. Lights had been few and far between since the days when the fear of Zeppelins had fallen on Paris. To make matters worse there were no taxis to be had, and there was a fine rain falling.

Talbot stood for a while in the doorway, giving his eyes time to become accustomed to the darkness. When he started on his homeward way he listened for footsteps behind him, and occasionally glanced swiftly behind him.

He had gone half a dozen blocks before he was satisfied that he was being followed. Then he turned a corner suddenly and waited a while; then as suddenly went back as he had come. A small man with upturned collar almost ran into him.

Three times Talbot did this with the same result. The last time he stopped in front of the man, having contrived this time to have the meeting under a light.

"I'm going to my hotel," he said, getting in the man's way. "Will you go with me? It will save you such a lot of trouble."

The little man snarled something inarticulate, and was for passing Talbot, but the latter put out a restraining arm.

"No, but come then," he said quietly. "You have been going my way all day. Let's walk together at last. We can talk then."

"You are crazy," the other snapped. He spoke his French like a foreigner. "I don't know you. I don't want to know you."

"You are foolish to waste so much time following me then," Talbot said

quietly. "If you continue to do so you may know me without wishing to. I assure you I am going straight to my hotel. So good night to you."

The man went away quickly as soon as Talbot moved, and it seemed from the sounds he made that he was strangling. Talbot laughed.

"How funny these spies are!" he thought. "They become so angry when they are found out."

So far as he knew he wasn't followed any farther. He was wary in passing particularly dark spots, but saw nothing at any time to make him feel that danger lurked along his way.

Ever since he had lived in the open spaces of the West it had seemed to him that he was very sensitive to unfriendly presences. More than once this sixth sense of his had served him well; so that he had come to have faith in it, and to feel sure now that, excepting for the spy, there had been nothing evil or threatening on the streets.

He took his key from the clerk, asked that his bill should be ready early in the morning, and went upstairs.

It was between ten and eleven o'clock—a time when Paris hotels are at their quietest. Talbot took it for granted that now that he was in the hotel he had no need for caution, and yet he was cautious.

He went softly along the corridor to his room, listening intently, and half laughing at himself. "These revolutionists have given me the willies," he thought.

At his door he stopped and listened again before he put the key in the lock. There wasn't a sound to be heard, and yet he was uneasy. He took a small, quick-firing revolver from his side pocket and held it in his right hand, while he unlocked the door with his left.

His room was pitch dark and still, and yet Talbot could have sworn there was some one in there. He squatted

low, and, putting his fingers on the electric button by the side of the door, turned it, staring into the room ready to see what was there.

The light didn't come. He was sure now that some one was there. He didn't believe for a moment that something was out of order with the switch, except as it had purposely been made so.

He decided quickly. He might have slipped out and gone downstairs for a light and assistance. He preferred some risk and to have the whole affair in his own hands.

"Something's gone wrong with the light," he said audibly, but as if thinking aloud. "I'll have to turn it on at the bulb."

He closed the door, and made several deliberate steps toward the center of the room; then seemed to hesitate, as if seeking the bulb in the darkness. In reality he was listening. A faint sound came to his ears from just in front of him.

"Confound the thing! Where is that bulb? Oh, here it is!"

As he spoke he leaped lightly backward and crouched down. It happened as he had expected—a sudden rush and a blow that smashed the bulbs on the electrolier. And he was aware that there were two persons besides himself in the room.

"If either of you moves a step I'll shoot!" he said in a tone that was cold and hard.

At the sound of his voice the two intruders flung themselves in that direction. Instead of shooting, as he had threatened, he closed his hand over the barrel of the revolver, and hooked, in boxing parlance, taking the chance of landing.

He rose as he delivered the blow, and knew instantly that he had had the good fortune to land on the face of one of his assailants. The other one fell against him, and they grappled.

The tussle was sharp and short. It would have needed a veritable Hercules to hold his own with Chester Talbot in a mere trial of strength. In this case Talbot didn't hesitate to use the butt of his pistol freely, with the result that the man sank, limp and groaning, to the floor.

As he had been free from any attack by the first man he had struck, he took it for granted that he was disabled. He felt rapidly about, and found that both men were stretched on the floor. Instantly he struck a match and looked at them. They were only semiconscious, if that.

Another lighted match showed him that the bulbs on the electrolier were all out of commission. He turned to the light that stood at the head of his bed. It was intact. He turned it on, and then stood to take breath and view the battlefield.

Both men were covered with blood, but were not seriously hurt, and were recovering consciousness. He used their own handkerchiefs to bind their wrists with. He noted as he used them that they were of fine silk and faintly scented. The men were not ordinary ruffians, then.

A glance about the room showed that his effects had been thoroughly searched. He smiled grimly, and set about a search of their pockets and clothes generally.

He found nothing that interested him excepting a box of his own visiting cards and several business letters addressed to him. He smiled as he realized that they had come for what he had on his person—the letters of introduction, the passport, the money, perhaps, and the notes he had made from time to time.

There was nothing on them to give him any clue to their names or nationality, though of the latter he had little doubt. Even with the blood on their faces they were unmistakably Hun-

garians. That is, he assumed so under the circumstances.

The first man struck and the one least injured was now recovering rapidly, so Talbot used some stout twine he had to secure his feet first and then those of the other man.

After that he washed away the blood with a wet towel so that he would have a chance to see their faces properly when they recovered. This done, he lighted a cigarette and waited.

When the first man had recovered consciousness fully, Talbot helped him to a sitting posture, with his back against the wall. The man scowled, but was silent. Talbot smiled at him.

Presently the other man came to, and was treated in a similar way. The two men looked at each other, and then fiercely at Talbot. He was the first to break the silence.

"I am assuming, gentlemen, that you are Hungarian patriots. I know you are gentlemen by your conduct, and I guess you are Hungarians. Am I correct?"

One of the men, the second one to go down, growled incoherently and looked at the other, by reason of which Talbot took the latter to be the one of greater authority. It was that one who answered him.

"What are you going to do?" he demanded, with a haughtiness that was ludicrous under the circumstances, Talbot thought.

"I don't know," he answered slowly. "I don't know what is best to do. You annoy me exceedingly, and I might turn you over to the police." A flash of joy lighted up the man's face. Talbot noted it, and went meditatively on: "But I don't believe I will. I am more disposed to send for the American ambassador. Ah, I see that is distasteful to you. I propose then that we have an amicable discussion. What do you say?"

"What do you want to discuss?"

"To begin with, am I right in supposing you to be Hungarian revolutionists?"

"We are Hungarians."

"Why have you been here searching my things and assaulting me?"

"I must leave the answer to that question to your own imagination."

"Then we will consider your answer to be that I have some articles of value to you in your revolutionary activities. Now don't you think you are not merely unreasonable in acting toward me as you do, but even ridiculous?"

"I think you would better decide to do something with us, and do it," was the petulant response.

"Even the American ambassador? Would you like America to get busy and keep all Hungarians in the United States? You know that might happen if your revolution were thoroughly aired. And I have the influence to see that it does happen."

The man bit his lip. The other man muttered an expletive in what Talbot took for Hungarian.

"Now," said Talbot, with a grimace that was made impressive by the cold evenness of his tone, "I am tired of your silly attentions to me. If I have any feeling about your revolution it is one of sympathy, but above everything else I want to fulfill my mission over here. You know what that is, for I have taken extraordinary pains to make it known. I won't meddle with you if you leave me alone, but if you insist on your dime-novel, melodramatic, and altogether asinine methods of treating me, I promise you you will repent it. Have I made myself clear?"

"What do you want me to say?" the man asked.

"Good God! Am I to tell you what to say? You know whether or not you understand me."

"I understand you."

"Will you undertake to convince that

absurd countess that we are living in the world and not in a storybook?"

The man's face grew purple with anger. "I will undertake nothing. You will do with us what you please, and you will take the consequences. No harm has been meant you, and none would be done you if you had been or would yet be reasonable."

"You mean consent to be your puppet?" demanded Talbot, with such contemptuous scorn that the other ground his teeth together. "What a pack of idiots you are!"

Without another word he got up and stretched the two men out on the floor, side by side, placing the subordinate across the doorway so that the door could not be opened without pushing him out of the way. The other man he adjusted close to him, but with his head to the heels of the other.

"I expect you to lie as placed," he said sharply. "I'm going to bed."

He looked to the fastenings of their ankles and wrists, and reënforced the latter with twine. Then he bound the arm of one to a leg of the other.

"You'll not be very comfortable," he said as he undressed calmly, "but at least you'll be better off than I would have been if you had found me as easy as I found you."

"What do you mean to do?" the spokesman demanded.

"You will discover that when I do it. I am still ready to discuss my lack of connection with your silly revolution, but I prefer not to waste words with you. I may say, though, that I don't think much of your chances if you and your absurd countess are fair samples of the other leaders."

The two men on the floor talked together in a language unknown to Talbot.

"You know," he said quietly, "I shall gag you if you don't stop talking. I want to sleep."

Both men swore. There could be no doubt of that, even if what they said

was unintelligible. The fact was that Talbot could have done nothing to disturb them as his matter-of-fact preparations for sleep had done.

"If we promise not to interfere with you again will you let us go?" the leader asked.

"You've lost your chance to make terms, my revolutionary hero," Talbot answered, with a sarcasm that made the man writhe. "I'm sleepy now. In the morning I may decide to talk with you. I don't know."

Talbot, after putting out the light and opening his window, knowing that the men could not do anything without awakening him, got into bed, knowing himself to be a light sleeper, and closed his eyes at last.

He slept soundly and peacefully, and when morning came got up and dressed as if the men were not there. The leader spoke to him several times, but Talbot went about his toilet, whistling softly, as if he were quite alone.

Finally the man desisted, and Talbot finished dressing and packing. For convenience in traveling he had only one large bag.

When he was quite ready he took some towels, and set about gagging both men in spite of their fierce protestations.

"What you think doesn't interest me," he said in his grim way. "I am not going to hurt you or make you any more uncomfortable than I can help, but I am going to arrange so that you won't be disturbed till noon, anyhow. By that time I shall be far on my way. Perhaps I had better tell you that you have seen me in a mild, a very mild, mood. If you will take my advice—though I think you are much too big a fool to do it—you will not meddle with me again. And say! It's none of my business, but why don't you get a *man* to take charge of your revolution? You'll never get anywhere with that absurd countess, who evidently got all

her ideas out of the Balkan romances she has read."

What the men might have answered to this, Talbot neither knew nor cared. They were gagged and speechless, and he was ready to go.

He locked the door on the outside; then found the man in charge of that floor and gave him his bag to carry downstairs.

"I left a friend asleep in my room," he said to the man, slipping a five-franc piece into his hand. "Don't disturb him until after noon."

"No, monsieur."

"I'll give the key to the patron when I pay my bill, so you must let him out some time after noon. Will you?"

"Yes, monsieur."

Talbot paid his bill, publicly tipped everybody in sight, including the man already tipped, got into the old moth-eaten hack that had been brought out to take the place of the taxi autos requisitioned for the army, and was driven to the Gare de Lyons.

CHAPTER VI.

It was with no small satisfaction that Talbot found himself one day established in one of Budapest's best hotels.

He had gone first to Vienna, where he had used his credentials to such good purpose that he had been furnished with other letters to the proper persons in Budapest. He felt that his search for Donald was nearing an end, and, he hoped, a successful one.

He had told the people at the American legation of his experience with the Hungarian revolutionists in Paris, and they had not only taken his story very seriously, but had urged him to hurry through with what he had to do, and, above all things, to say nothing about it unless he wanted to find himself mixed up in it in spite of himself.

"There really is something in it?" he asked.

"The whole of Hungary is ripe for a rupture with Austria," he was told. "If the Hungarians were only united it would be a matter of days only. As it is there are two claimants for the throne, and a strong minority that favors a republic."

"And my little countess?"

"Your little countess is the most dangerous of the lot. She has been an exile for a number of years, and has spent her time gathering men and money in America. She is in favor of a return to the old régime—the nearest representative of the ancient reigning house."

"I thought," said Talbot, "she might be meaning to mount the throne herself."

"You think it a joke," was the quick response; "but let me tell you that if the man she favors is put on the throne she will undoubtedly be his queen."

"And to think," laughed Talbot, "that I have had the honor of familiar intercourse with her."

"Steer clear of them all," his adviser urged. "The three parties are at war among themselves. We got word a day or two ago that the other claimant to the throne had disappeared, and it is suspected that she has met with foul play, poor child!"

"Child?" queried Talbot, with mild interest.

"A girl. I'm told she's an unwilling participant, but it seems she has a few drops of the very oldest, simon-pure strain of blood royal in her veins and has been dragged into the affair."

"She's part Slav," interposed one of the attachés, who had been listening, "and that is supposed to make her desirable as likely to reconcile the Slavic part of Hungary. However, she's done for now. If the Magyar party has her she's not likely to bother anybody for long."

"Well," said Talbot, with a sort of

disgust, "I thought the Hungarians were a fine people."

"Fine?" was the general outcry. "Nothing better in the world; nothing better than the Hungarian people. We're not talking of them, but of the ruling class. The ruling class the world over is rotten and despicable to the last degree. The hope is that in the end the *people* will come into their own."

"Well," said Talbot, "they have my best wishes. In the meantime, I'm busy with just one thing, and nothing will divert me from it."

Budapest has the reputation of being the gayest city in the world, and the naughtiest, and when Talbot found himself set down there, where only a short time before he had not dreamed of being, he might have indulged a perfectly justifiable curiosity to explore it.

It was as gay and bright as ever it had been, even though the Russian army threatened from the Carpathians; but it held nothing seductive for Talbot. He was intent on finding Donald so that he might send the good word to the waiting mother in America.

He presented his letters at the headquarters of the military governor, and was received with a courtesy that almost revived the suspicions he had had in Paris.

When he was shown in to see the governor, however, he quickly forgot his suspicions in face of the promptness and frankness of his treatment by him.

"You are seeking a friend among our prisoners, I believe," said the governor.

"A young American who enlisted in the French army."

"Tell me all about it, please."

Talbot told his well-rehearsed story, refraining carefully from any reference to his difficulties. The governor asked a few questions, all of which Talbot answered.

"What made you think he might be here?" the governor demanded.

Talbot explained that he had been captured by the Austrian troops, which at that time were in Alsace.

"Was he wounded?"

"I don't know."

"It would make it easier to free him. But no matter! It shall be arranged somehow, once you find him."

He rang a bell, explained the situation to the young aid who came in response, and bade him prepare the necessary permits and passes to enable Talbot to search the detention camp.

"You see," he said, "we have but the one camp here. You will have some difficulty in reaching it, but with money you can accomplish it, no doubt. This young gentleman will give you all the information you require. Kindly report to me when your search is over. You understand that I am promising nothing more than that I will do my best for you."

"When his highness says that," laughed the young officer when they were outside, "it is as good as done."

At any rate, the plainly manifested good will of the governor made smooth sailing for him. Everybody helped him frankly and freely; so that the next morning saw him making his way to the camp.

It was quite fifty miles from the city, and was reached by a slow journey by rail for part of the distance, and by any conveyance he might get for the remainder.

It was still early in the afternoon when he reached the village that was nearest to the camp, but he found that by the time he could get to the camp, some three miles distant, it would be too late for him to gain admittance.

He had so far seen nothing in the nature of a spy, and, therefore, felt reasonably secure from the interference that had annoyed him so in Paris.

Almost everybody spoke German, so he had no difficulty as a consequence of not understanding Hungarian. The

head of the village, with great solemnity, had interviewed him at once on his arrival and had retired, bowing profoundly to the combination of authority from the military governor, a handful of gold, and avowed American citizenship.

The American gentleman was welcome to the best the village afforded; a conveyance should be ready for him in the morning to take him to the detention camp; in the meantime there were the paths in the forest and by the banks of the little river, where he was most welcome to walk. No doubt if his highness the Prince of Something unpronounceable were at home he would welcome the stranger at the castle; as it was the gentleman might find the exterior of the old castle worth looking at.

The suggestion of a walk in the noble forest near by struck Talbot as a very good one, and he had no sooner washed the dirt of travel from his hands and face than he set out.

The few people he saw—mostly old men and females of all ages—were not disposed to be friendly; or, perhaps, they did not understand German outside of the villages. At any rate, the workers in the fields only looked up and stared in response to his greetings, and then went on with their work.

An hour's sauntering walk through the wonderful forest brought him to a vast open space, at the farther side of which rose a great castle, flanked on each side by a high and apparently massive wall.

It was plainly a very, very old structure, though in perfect repair, and in the days long past must have been a formidable fortress. The romance in Talbot made him feel that he would like to explore the interior of it, but it was so plainly in use that he dismissed the idea.

He even refrained from approaching any nearer, lest his presence should an-

noy the inmates. Wishing, however, to get some idea of the size of the place, he kept at the edge of the woods, and started to skirt the wall.

He neither saw nor heard a human sound, and if it had not been for the smoke coming out of some of the chimneys he would have believed it uninhabited.

The wall stretched on and on, forbidding and insurmountable by ordinary means. Nothing less than a good ladder would have enabled any one to climb up and look over it.

He passed two doors in the wall; both were of recent date and of oak bound with wrought-iron straps. Later he came upon a small door of open ironwork, but very heavy.

He could not resist the impulse to look through the bars to get a glimpse of the grounds hidden by the great wall. He was obliged to stoop in order to do so.

For a few seconds he was conscious only of looking into a small inclosure, which had once been a garden, but which now bore not only the blight of a cold November, but of years of neglect. A small stone cottage stood in the midst of the garden, and beyond stretched the well-kept grounds of the castle.

For a few moments he studied the scene in wonder; then he became aware of a human occupant of the garden, and, flushing with shame, he stammered in German: "I—I beg your pardon; I—I—I'm a stranger."

Much chagrined at having been detected in so undignified a proceeding, he was hurrying away when a soft voice called out in tones of mingled terror and entreaty: "Don't go! Please come back!"

He turned back and looked again through the grating, ready to make the most abject of apologies, but saying nothing.

A simply but richly dressed young

woman stood in plain sight, in an attitude of fear, her hands tightly clasped in front of her, her lips parted, her eyes wide open.

In spite of her manifest terror it seemed to Talbot he had never seen so lovely a creature as this. Her slender but well-rounded figure, and the firm, fresh lines of her exquisite face indicated that she was about twenty years of age.

"I am very sorry," he said earnestly. "I didn't mean to frighten you. I am a stranger and was walking about the castle."

"You are a stranger?" she demanded in a low tone, glancing furtively around.

"Yes, an American."

"Oh-h!" she breathed, and softly moved toward him, her great gray eyes studying his face. "Not a Hungarian?"

"Oh, no; an American."

She approached closer, and the nearer she came the more wonderful she seemed in her pure, sweet beauty. "You are not deceiving me?" she asked, with a pathetic quiver of her sensitive lips.

"I give my word of honor," he answered. "Why should I deceive you? What reason would I have?"

She came to within three feet of the grated door, her little hands clinging tightly to each other, her eyes searching his face. But all the while she seemed to be listening intently and to be moving softly so that she might hear the better.

"You look honest," she whispered.

"Are you in trouble? Do you need help?"

She wrung her hands. "If I could only be sure."

"You may trust me," he said, with a fervor that he wondered at himself. "I never betrayed a trust in my life. Do you need help?"

"I am a prisoner here," she breathed, "and—and I am afraid."

"Who keeps you a prisoner? What

for?" demanded Talbot, instinctively trying the door to see if it could be forced open.

"Oh, I don't know if I dare to speak—to tell you."

"Who are you?" he asked.

"I am afraid," she half sobbed. "Oh, why did they drag me into this? I didn't want it."

"I wish you would trust me," he pleaded, his heart torn by her distress. "I will never betray you, and I will help you."

"I'm such a coward," she wailed softly. "I'm not fit for this sort of thing. If they had only left me where I was."

"If you would only tell me something that would enable me to help you," pleaded Talbot, more moved than he remembered ever to have been.

She looked fearfully about, and crept close to the grating. "I am the Princess Sonia," she whispered, and then clapped her little hand to her lips, terrified lest she had made a fatal mistake.

Talbot looked puzzled. "The Princess Sonia!" he repeated softly. "But what have you done that you should be imprisoned?"

"You don't know?" she cried, a new light of hope leaping to her eyes. "You really are a stranger then?"

"I reached Budapest yesterday for the first time in my life. I am here to rescue an American boy who is a war prisoner in the camp near here. On my honor, you can trust me."

She reached out eagerly, and put her soft little hand on his as it clung to the bar of the door. He shivered and grew weak at the touch. It was the most extraordinary sensation he had ever felt.

"Oh," she breathed, "I wonder if you can help me? I had lost all hope. I am so afraid. You see"—she lowered her voice so that he could hear her only by putting his face so close to the bars that he could feel her warm

breath on his cheek—"they wanted to make me head a revolution and become——" Her voice trailed off to nothing. She was afraid to utter the words.

"Now I understand," Talbot cried. "You are the poor little girl the Countess Elsa's party kidnaped."

"The Countess Elsa isn't here?" the princess gasped in fright. "Don't say she is here yet."

"I don't think she is. I left her in Paris."

"You know her? You are a friend of hers?" And the poor child crept away from him in horror.

"No, not a friend," he answered reassuringly. "Indeed, I think she is very near to hating me."

"Oh!" she said softly, and drew closer again. "Do you think she will be here soon?"

"I don't know. I suppose she will come as quickly as she can."

"They are keeping me for her," the princess said, staring at him.

"You mean she is to decide what——" He couldn't put into words a thought that seemed so monstrous.

The princess nodded her head slowly. "What to do with me," she said in completion of his phrase. "And I know what it will be."

He dared not ask her. He recalled the countess, and remembered what he had heard about her. He couldn't believe the frightful suggestion that lay in the low-spoken words of the princess, however.

"I don't believe she's as hard as they say," he contrived to murmur.

"She wants to be queen herself," the princess whispered. "She will be married to the duke. You know there was a plan to marry me to the duke. That is why I was stolen away and brought here."

"Do you love the duke?" demanded Talbot, understanding that he must be the pretender to the throne.

"I can't bear him. But they would have made me marry him, you know. You see,—it doesn't matter about me; I have to do what I'm told. But that's all over now; the Countess Elsa won't let me be in her way. As long as I live," she added piteously, "they think I'm a menace. And all I want is to live in humble obscurity. I was never born to be a queen. It was so unreasonable to want to make me be one."

"Have you no friends?" he demanded. "I mean is there any one I could appeal to for you?"

"What could they do?" she answered hopelessly. "The Countess Elsa's party is the most powerful. The leaders of my party must know where I am, but they have done nothing."

"Will you let me help you?" he asked.

"But"—she stared at him eagerly—"what can you do?"

"I don't know; but if you will trust me I will do my best to get you away from here and out of the country."

"Oh, could you? Do you think you could? I would be safe in Russia. I am half Russian, you know. But"—and her head drooped sadly—"you are alone, you say. You can do nothing."

"Will you let me try?"

He took one of her little hands in his and held it. She looked into his eyes as if fascinated.

"You give me courage," she said in a tone of surprise. "But I don't want you to get into trouble."

"Never mind about me. Tell me you will trust me, and let me try to get you away from here."

"You know you will be risking your life," she murmured. "They would kill you if they saw you now talking to me. Why should you take such a chance for me?"

"Do you suppose I could be happy if I did not try to help you? Come, that is settled. Have you any suggestions?"

"About escaping? Oh, no! I have

thought of everything, but nothing was worth while. You can see how secure they feel when they let me out here. The first day they made me stay in the cottage."

"Are you locked in at night?"

"Yes."

"And is no one about in the daytime? Can no one see or hear us?"

"There won't be anybody here till— Oh, some one is coming now. Go! Go quickly!"

"To-morrow, at this time, be here," he said, drawing back.

"Yes, yes!" And she turned her back on him.

He waited by the side of the gateway long enough to hear the rough voice of a man address the princess in Hungarian, and to hear her reply in the same tongue; then quickly and silently he went on.

It was hard for him to realize that such things as he had just been hearing of could be true, but the sight of the suffering Princess Sonia and her certainty that she was facing death deprived the plot of the comic-opera effect it had theretofore had for him.

And Sonia, the girl herself, appealed to him with her helplessness, her gentleness, and for her piteous unfitness for the rôle she had been called on to play.

But how was he to help her? What could he do there alone, an utter stranger, knowing nobody, ignorant even of the language of the people?

Suddenly, as he strode swiftly along, he remembered Donald. Up to that time he had forgotten him completely; evidence of his absorption in the troubles of the princess.

How was he to reconcile the two tasks? He was pledged to find and free Donald, if possible. He had pledged himself to succor the princess, and even if he had not pledged himself he would not have deserted her.

It seemed hopeless to reconcile the

two enterprises, and he went to sleep that night still racking his brains to find a way out of his distressing dilemma.

CHAPTER VII.

When morning came he saw his way no clearer than before, but at least it was so far simplified that for the moment there was nothing else for him to do but go to the prisoners' camp.

He had tried the night before to obtain a horse so that he might ride over, but all the good horses had been requisitioned for the army, and all the others were in constant use on the farms.

However, three miles made but a short walk, and he set out as soon as it was advisable. His thoughts were now, as they had been since last evening, all of the Princess Sonia.

He had tried to bring his mind to bear on the case of Donald, but it had not been a success. "I find him or I don't find him at the camp," he said to himself. "I can't do a thing about him till I know where he is. But that poor child! They never would kill her, of course."

But he wasn't so sure of that as he would have liked to be, and so he forgot Donald for the thousandth time, and let his thoughts dwell on the perils, the misfortunes, and the appealing charm of Sonia.

When he reached the camp he found his affairs were already in an amazingly forward condition.

He was taken to the headquarters outside the camp, and there his credentials were carefully examined by a young officer.

"You are the Herr Talbot described here?" demand the lieutenant, looking up from the passport that lay in front of him, and smiling agreeably.

"Yes."

"And you seek a prisoner, Donald Brookfield, according to this note from

his highness. I suppose you know him?"

"Not very well. It is seven or eight years since I have seen him, but I think I would know him. He might know me better than I do him."

The lieutenant rang a bell. "Bring in here that convalescent prisoner who is in the other room. I hope we have found your friend," he added to Talbot as the soldier went out.

Talbot sprang to his feet, surprised and delighted. If only the affair were moving correctly as well as smoothly! "You don't mean," he exclaimed, "that you have taken the trouble to hunt him out?"

"When his highness was here yesterday he gave orders to that effect. You have a good friend there, sir."

"His highness! The governor of Budapest?" cried Talbot. "He was here yesterday?"

"Yes, he came down in his automobile."

"Oh!" Talbot was surprised, though grateful. But why should his highness take so much trouble for him? He might have asked some impertinent questions in his amazement if at that moment the door had not opened to admit a gaunt shadow of a man leaning on the soldier's arm.

Talbot studied the sallow skeleton, trying to see in him the ruddy-faced, bright-eyed boy he had known. The convalescent stared at him for a few moments, then broke out, almost sobbing in his joy: "Why, you are Ches Talbot!"

"Are you Don Brookfield?" cried Talbot in a shocked tone, but leaping to his feet and going to him.

"What's left of me. My God! How good it is to see you! How's mother? Crying her dear old eyes out?"

He tried to be gay and casual, but he broke down and clung to Talbot, tears running down his thin cheeks.

"I come from your mother, Don.

Sit here!" Talbot put him in his chair. "Been sick?"

"Excuse these tears," said Don, smiling wanly; "but between joy and weakness I'm about all in. But what does it mean?" he demanded. "Am I to be exchanged?" He looked from Talbot to the officer.

The latter smiled pleasantly. "That's it," he said in good English. "There has been an exchange of prisoners, and his highness has ordered that you are to be included."

"Say!" murmured Don faintly. "That's good to hear."

"How can I thank his highness?" cried Talbot warmly. "He is a very noble gentleman. He gave me no hint of such generosity."

"His highness loves Americans," the officer said, smiling. "Now let me explain: The prisoners will go under escort to the Swiss frontier, where they will be exchanged. This young man will be set free there if he will give his promise not to bear arms against the German allies during this war."

"With all my heart," agreed Don.

"A paper will be given you to sign then."

"When do they go?" demanded Talbot, his thoughts on the princess once more.

"As early as possible this afternoon."

"But my friend is too ill."

"He will be conveyed to the train in an automobile, and on the train will have a comfortable bed. Oh, his highness doesn't do things by halves. Your friend will come to no harm on the way."

"But I must go back to the village," protested Talbot; "all my clothes are there."

"You will have all the time you want to overtake your friend; the prisoners won't be traveling on the de luxe express," laughed the officer. "Would you like to help him get ready?"

"I may go into the camp, then?"

"It will not be necessary. Your friend's effects—not very bulky, I imagine—have been brought outside. You are both free to walk about or sit anywhere you please. Only he must be ready by one o'clock."

"I shall be ready," said Don, with a fervor that made the officer smile.

Talbot was kept busy answering Don's eager questions and doing the many little things that were possible for his comfort on the journey. Toward the last he sat down with Don in a sheltered spot.

"Do you think you can stand the journey?" he asked.

"It'll do me good. If you knew what the camp is you wouldn't ask. They were fair and kind, but a detention camp is no place for a sick man. Why, I'm better already."

"It's evident I can't be with you on the journey, Don."

"Of course not. But don't worry about me; I don't need anybody to look after me."

"I expect to be at the Swiss frontier when you get there, but if I shouldn't be don't wait for me, but go straight on to Paris."

"Yes, yes."

"You're sure you don't want more money?"

"You gave me twice as much as I need."

Talbot remained there, and saw Donald start for the train, comfortably ensconced in the back seat of an automobile. He had a half-shamed sense of not completely fulfilling his mission in not trying harder to go with Don, and yet he knew that nothing could drag him from the place until he had done what he could to save the Princess Sonia.

He waved his hat as Don was carried away, and then, after thanking the young officer, and sending through him a message to the embassy in Vienna to be forwarded by wireless or

otherwise to Mrs. Brookfield, he turned his face toward the little village again, his heart bounding with the thought that now there was nothing to interfere with his determination to rescue the helpless girl at the castle.

The audacity of his purpose did not occur to him. He knew that if he failed he was quite likely to lose his life, but that he accepted as a mere incident. He had risked his life too many times for what relatively were trifles to let that weigh with him now.

It was impossible for him to make any very definite plans beyond getting the princess out of her prison, since he knew nothing of the country or the people; but in a general way he meant to compel the people of her own party to help her escape. That, he considered, was the least they should do.

When he set out that afternoon, he had his belt of cartridges, besides his money belt, on. Also he had found a coil of strong, pliable rope which he had converted into a makeshift lasso with the object of using it to obtain an entrance into the castle inclosure. This he concealed in one of the side pockets of his outer coat.

When he reached the part of the wall where the iron gate had been the day before, he found that it had been covered by a heavy, iron-strapped oak door, similar to the other two he had noticed.

He was chagrined and alarmed. Did it mean that his visit had been discovered? Or was it only done in the natural course of preventing any outlook from the grounds?

He was afraid to call out or make any noise to call Sonia's attention, so he went along the wall looking for a place to throw the loop of his lasso over. He had noticed several projecting stones the previous day.

He found one a few rods farther on, and had no difficulty in tossing his loop so that it fell over it. He tightened it

and then went up the wall very easily, hand over hand.

When he was far enough up to enable him to peer over, he did so with the utmost caution. No one was in sight, not even Sonia. His heart sank at that; but, as he was beyond the limit of the ruined garden, he hoped it was not significant of her absence.

He carefully climbed up and sat astride the wall. He detached the loop from the stone, doubled the rope, caught the doubled end over the stone, and slid down, pulling the rope after him.

He had so far seen no one, nor heard any suspicious sound. He hugged the wall so that the shrubs growing at its neglected base would hide him, and, so concealed, crept along to the garden.

A sort of fence that once had marked the limits of the garden had been replaced by a natural hedge of currant bushes and other wilder growths. This he pushed his way through.

The cottage stood about fifty feet from him. It gave no sign of life, although Talbot watched it for several minutes. He crept toward the back of it, and then, after listening again, moved cautiously along one side toward the front.

Peering around the corner, he saw the princess standing listlessly by one of the pillars of the little porch. She looked unutterably lonely and hopeless. He wondered if it was because she believed that the new door had shut him out from assisting her.

He stepped into view, but she did not see him until he spoke her name; then she turned with a start and a cry of incredulity and joy.

"*You!* You came, after all! But how?"

"Are you alone, princess?"

"Oh, yes. And I have been so unhappy."

"Did you think the new door would keep me from seeing you?" he asked, approaching her.

"I was so sure of it." She looked at him with her beautiful gray eyes sweeping him from head to feet, a flush rising to her round cheek. "I had given up hope."

"I will never desert you," he said.

"You are very brave, sir. I don't know what you can do, but you surely give me courage. How did you get in?"

He told her. She listened like a child who is awed by a tale of great daring. "You see," he finished, "this is not a difficult place to get into or out of."

She smiled rather pitifully. "Not for a strong, brave man like you," she said; "but I am such a coward; such a poor, little coward!"

"But you are going to trust me, you know, princess, and I am going to get you out of here. I came to tell you about it. Are we quite safe here, do you think?"

"Let us go over by those trees," she answered; "the shrubs will hide you if any one should come. But it is so early that is not likely. I thought of you all night, and all day to-day; then when the men came and put that door in place, I said to myself that I should never see you again. And now you have come, anyhow."

"I told you I would be here. I came to tell you that to-night I am coming to take you away to safety."

"To-night? Oh!" She clasped her hands together and looked into his face. "I wonder if you can do it. I believe you can. I never knew any one who made me feel so sure he could do what he said."

Talbot felt himself grow hot and red. "It is kind of you to feel that way," he said.

"You make me feel so. You say things so quietly, like a very, very strong person. I don't know why you should be so good to me. Do you know your life will be in danger? You mustn't think it won't be. Have you thought about that?"

He smiled. "I suppose I have thought about it, but it makes no difference. Besides, I think we shall get away."

She put her hand confidently on his arm. "I told you you made me brave. Do you know that you make me think of one of the old knights? They used to go around the world seeking adventures and helping distressed damsels." She laughed softly and looked up at him in a way that made his blood quicken. "You are my knight, aren't you? All the way from America. I've always heard that American men are so splendid. Please tell me what I'm to do."

His eyes were glowing softly; a light in them that no woman had ever seen there before. "You have only to be ready," he said, in a low tone. "I expect to be here about ten o'clock. That will give us all night to travel in. I'm afraid you will have to walk at first; later we may get a horse."

"Oh, I can walk. I'm strong in that way. I'm much stronger than I look. And I'll be brave with you; I know I shall. Yesterday I felt braver after you had gone, and now I'm wonderfully brave. I think it's having such a wonderful man as you for a real friend. Do you know," she added, with a half-roguish smile, "that I am letting you rescue me without knowing your name?"

"Chester Talbot."

"You are noble?"

"There are no noblemen in America," he answered, smiling.

"Ah, yes, I have heard that. Well"—she laughed softly—"I am almost a queen, so I make you Sir Chester Talbot. That is the way to do with one's knight, isn't it? And you are my knight?"

"Vowed to your service, most gracious queen."

"Oh!" she cried, turning pale and holding by his arm. "It frightens me

to hear you say that. That is what I have been called lately." She shuddered. "I wonder why I forgot? Oh, I hope you will be able to take me away."

She was very appealing and very charming in her clinging terror. Talbot covered the little hands that lay on his arm with his own.

"I will surely take you away," he said. "If you could tell me the name of any one we could go to to help us out of the country. Is there no one at all?"

"Not nearer than Budapest," she answered dolefully; "and even there I could not be sure. You don't know any one?"

"I might get help from the military governor. He has been very kind to me."

"What military governor?" she demanded quickly.

"Of Budapest."

"Prince Szchymysl?"

"I think that's his name. He's the military governor of Budapest."

"Oh!" she gasped, drawing away from him. "And it was through him that you came to me?"

"No, I haven't seen him since I left Budapest."

"He's your friend?"

"No, but he has been very kind to me. He helped me get my friend free from the prison camp. What is the matter? Why do you look at me like that? Is he unfriendly to you?"

"You don't know? Oh, you don't know!" she wailed. "Tell me you don't know."

"What? Don't know what? I don't understand."

She crept nearer again, studying his face anxiously. "If you are deceiving me," she said, "I shall never trust another human being."

"I am not deceiving you, little Sonia. Tell me what you fear. I don't understand at all."

"This castle belongs to Prince Szchymysl," she breathed.

She seemed to droop as she spoke, as if the mere statement of it made her weak.

Talbot put his arm about her to support her. "This place belongs to him?" he said. "To the military governor of Budapest?"

"Yes; I was brought here by his orders. He is the Countess Elsa's cousin and main support."

Talbot tightened his hold on the supple form of the frightened girl. He felt that he was again being tangled up in the old, silly plotting; only now he realized the danger that lurked in it.

"It does not matter," he said; "I shall take you away from here to-night, and we shall manage somehow. You are sure there is no one to whom you could go to be hidden?"

"You don't understand," she said simply. "Nobody cares for me, Sonia Kotorska, but only for the princess who has certain royal blood in her veins. They thought the nobles of Hungary would gather about me because of that blood. It was a mistake. Then they tried to marry me to the duke. The Countess Elsa, who is very terrible, they say, was before them, and besides had much money and many adherents. Then I was a burden to them, and yet I was a menace to the other party that was for the duke—the Countess Elsa's party. So I was stolen away one night, and brought here. The nobles who dragged me away from my home in Bosnia have no longer any use for me, and yet I am dangerous to the other party, they say. And I—I only ask to go back to my little castle on the Bosna. Now do you understand?"

"Yes, I understand, although it is so incredible. Well, little Sonia"—and with his strong arm still about her waist he looked down into her gray eyes—"I will have to save you alone. At least

you can be no worse off than you are. You will trust me?"

"I do trust you." She shyly disengaged herself from his detaining arm and smiled at him. "I will do what you tell me to; I will go where you say; I can be almost brave for you."

"Then, somehow, we shall leave to-night. Some one sleeps at the cottage to guard you?"

"Two men; soldiers."

"No more. That is good. You know how to ride?"

"Better than I know how to do anything else," she answered, smiling.

"Well, I am afraid there are no horses to be had, but I'll try to find two. If we could get to Bosnia, would you be safe?"

"Oh, yes. My own people love me, and, although they could not protect me, they would hide me or smuggle me into Serbia."

"Ssh!" he murmured. "I hear footsteps."

She listened, and her face grew white. "There are many men. Hear them? Oh, my Sir Chester," she moaned, "I am afraid."

She sprang close to him and nestled against him when he put his arm protectingly around her. He peered through the branches of the shrubs, and presently saw a small squad of uniformed men, headed by a noncommissioned officer, marching down a broad path toward the little garden. They were guided by a thickset man in civilian garb.

Talbot's hand was on his revolver, but at sight of the rifles carried by the men he dropped it back. Quick as he was, he couldn't hope to prevail over all those armed men. It was a time for finesse, not for force.

"Sonia," he said quickly and with passionate earnestness, "now is the time to show that you trust me and that you can be brave."

"I—I will try very hard," she panted,

studying his fiercely determined "Tell me."

"I think those men have come to you to the castle. I could die here for you, but I could not save you. I must go with them. I will follow and rescue you. Will you still trust me?"

"Yes," she breathed, her face white and her whole body trembling. "—you shall see what—what a little girl can—can do."

"Go out, then, dear. Let them see you. But remember: I shall always be watching over you. Go!" He looked at her, took her small hand and carried it to his lips.

CHAPTER VIII.

The Princess Sonia tottered for her first steps away from Talbot, and cast a piteous, despairing glance back at him; then, as if summoning the courage she had promised to display, she walked more steadily into the open where she waited for the coming of the men.

The squad of soldiers remained on the side of the garden, leaving the other man and the other man to approach the princess. And then Talbot thanked Heaven for the inspiration not to risk a struggle; for, with the men remaining at a distance, he would have succeeded without a chance.

He crouched so as to be the best concealed. The men approached within a couple of paces of the princess. The officer saluted; the other man bowed with scant courtesy.

"You are to go to the castle, Princess," the latter said.

"Why must I go there?" she asked with a terrible fear taking possession of her. "Why have these soldiers come? What does it mean?"

"I am only obeying orders, highness," the officer said, saluting again. "Will it please your highness to lead the way?"

Talbot saw her droop for a second, then half turn her face toward him and draw herself up. He was sure she was trying to show him that she could be brave when he was near.

He had already been struck by the formality of the escort. It was plainly an attempt to give an air of legality to what was in contemplation; and it made him realize that the power and the machinery of a state were controlled by the enemies of the princess.

He knew he was enlisted in a desperate cause, and he could see no way to success; but at least he could keep on trying.

He let the party get some distance away before he moved. He could see the princess leading the way up the path, making a picture of dignity and pathos. She looked so helpless, so small, so alone.

For a long distance he kept between the wall and the shrubbery; then, as the castle came nearer, he was able to steal out and use trees and clumps of shrubbery for concealment.

The castle was a huge building, or set of buildings; for, although connected by covered passages, it really consisted of the castle proper and a whole village of subordinate buildings.

Smoke issued from the chimneys of the main building, and from what Talbot judged to be the chimneys of the servants' quarters.

Although still fairly light out of doors, it was evidently dark enough indoors to require lights; for from openings in the curtains of the great windows of the second floor streaks of light came.

A deep and wide moat surrounded the castle, but there was no water in it, and the drawbridge was permanently down.

Over this bridge the men marched, led by the slightly swaying figure of the princess. It seemed to Talbot that half-way across she stopped and cast a for-

lorn look back. He wondered if she had begun yet to question if he would ever be able to find her.

It was not in his heart to blame the poor child if she doubted him, for he could see no way yet of doing anything.

He crept warily near to the castle and waited, hoping something would occur to suggest a plan to him. In a few minutes the squad of soldiers with the officer marched out again, broke ranks on the turf and went in disorder to the servants' quarters, laughing and talking.

While they were filing out of the house, a light broke out in one of the windows on the lower floor to the right of the drawbridge. That window was grated, as was plainly evident, and Talbot knew that it was where Sonia had been placed.

There was something too sinister in this disposition of the girl to be doubted, and Talbot could see her drooping and losing all hope. If he could only get a word to her to revive her spirits!

He studied the place as well as he could at the distance, and it seemed to him that where the wall of the castle had once presented a smooth surface all the way down it had in the course of time been worn away at the level of the water in the moat so that perhaps there might be foothold there now.

It was growing darker rapidly, so that he felt safe in approaching nearer to the castle. Finally he found a place that gave him a view into the lighted chamber.

He drew in his breath as he looked. It was plainly a cell, but it had been made fairly comfortable with furniture, though that fact did not seem to have much weight with the princess, who sat on the side of the little bed, a listless, pathetic picture of utter loneliness.

A fury of rage shook Talbot as he looked. Why should that sweet, innocent creature be made a victim of the

lust for power? He vowed that some one should pay for what she was being made to suffer; and he dared not think of what he would do if they had the hellish wickedness to take that sweet life.

While waiting for a deeper darkness to come, he made a hasty and cautious survey of the buildings, locating the servants' quarters, the stables, and other parts of the massive pile.

By the time he had done this, it was dark enough to justify him in trying to reach the window of the princess' cell.

He crossed the drawbridge lightly, and examined the wall carefully. He found that he could make his way along the face of the castle, with some risk of a fall into the deep moat. He trusted to his skill as an athlete to help him there, however; and presently was nearing the window from which the light shone.

Looking in first to be sure she was alone, he tapped on the glass. The princess started, half in alarm, half, it seemed, in hope, and looked at the window.

He tapped again, louder. She started up and ran to the window and shaded her eyes so that she might see outside. "Sonia!" he called gently.

She must have heard his voice, for she made a gesture of joy and nodded her head. Then she unfastened the window and opened it as far as it would go.

"You are there, Sir Chester," she cried, in a tone of passionate joy.

"Put your light very low," he whispered.

She ran over to it and turned it down. It was an old-fashioned oil lamp. Then she returned to the window.

"I was thinking you never, never could see me or speak to me again," she said. "I'll never doubt again. Oh, how brave and good you are!"

He reached in and took her hand and

put it to his lips. "While I live you can count on me, Sonia. Have you found out why they have brought you here?"

"No, but I am afraid. Oh, I am not afraid as I was before—before I knew you. But I know they have brought me here for some evil purpose."

"Don't lose hope, dear, no matter what happens. I must not stay here, or I shall be seen. Good-by for a little while."

He had held her hand all the while. He kissed it now twice, and then again. She drew her hand back, and in the dim light he was sure he saw her press the back of her hand to her own sweet lips.

"My brave, true knight!" she murmured.

"Sonia, dearest!" he said softly.

He crept back, and was almost on the bridge again when the door opened. He shrank back, and stooped so that he was in the shadow of one of the old supports of the ancient portcullis.

"I must have a word with you alone, prince," said a voice Talbot recognized at once as that of the Countess Elsa's brother.

"Yes, yes, Maurus," was the impatient response. Talbot was sure it was the military governor who was speaking.

"I don't like this plan of a summary court-martial. Elsa is too drastic in her methods."

"I tell you it is the one wise thing to do."

"It is the one wicked and cruel thing to do. Why should we stain our hands with innocent blood? Our cause is just, the people are with us, the whole game is in our hands."

"It will be in our hands when——"

"Maurus is still arguing?" broke in the rich voice of the Countess Elsa. "Nonsense! You are military governor, endowed with absolute power to act in the interests of the government. Do your duty, highness." The mocking note

was in her voice even while she urged what Talbot knew in his heart was the one most awful deed.

"But, Elsa!" pleaded the young count.

"Come, prince!" she said curtly. "The longer you put it off, the longer will Maurus waste our time. It is the only thing to do. What is one life to the security of a kingdom?"

The door was closed, and Talbot heard no more. It was what he had believed was contemplated, but to have heard it discussed in such a way left him quivering with horror.

He rose up, and stood staring out into the darkness. What could he do alone against these cold-blooded plotters? He saw no way but to act blindly. To be reckless under such conditions was to be wise.

Acting on this conclusion, he listened for a moment at the door that had just been closed, and then opened it. His revolver was in his hand, every sense alert.

The door, as it turned out, was an ordinary one made in the great arch that had once opened from the drawbridge into a semicircular courtyard. The massive grating that had once guarded the entrance had been replaced by masonry, excepting for the space occupied by the door. The courtyard remained as it had been.

In front of him, at the top of a flight of broad stone steps, was a great, wide door which manifestly opened into the part of the castle occupied by the noble owner. At his left, on the level of the stone flagging, was a small, plain door. A similar door opened at his right. This much was plainly visible even in the growing darkness.

He took it for granted that the Countess Elsa and her companions had gone in by the great door at the center; also that the door at the right led to the part where the princess was imprisoned.

His heart gave a bound. Why not take this opportunity to free her and

escape? It was a thing so little expected by her captors that they had taken no pains to guard her.

It was no sooner in his brain than he was executing it. He ran to the door and pulled it open. Once inside, he was in total darkness; but after a moment or two of hesitation he was able to see where a streak of light touched the blackness of the floor.

Feeling his way along the wall until he came to the light, he then tried to find some way of looking into the room to assure himself that it was the one he sought. The door was tight, however.

He might have spoken to her, but if it really were she who was there, it would serve no good purpose, and if it were not, the sound might serve to notify some unfriendly person that a stranger was there.

He felt about for the lock, and found that the door was secured by a padlock, the strap and staples of which were of heavy wrought iron, although the lock itself was ordinary. It would have withstood almost any pressure from within, but was easily breakable from outside.

With any ordinary tool, or even with a stout stick of wood, it would have been a matter of only a minute to burst the padlock; as it was, he took the thing in both hands, and, exerting his great strength, began twisting it.

It was not easy to do, and it was several minutes before the loop of the lock began to give way; but once it did begin, progress was swift. When the lock came apart, perspiration was rolling down Talbot's face. He wiped it hastily away and pulled the door open.

The princess had heard him working at her door, and, not suspecting that it could be he, had been alarmed; and, when he saw her, she was at the far end of the little cell, her back to the wall, her great gray eyes staring in terror.

"Sonia!" he cried softly.

"Sir Chester! Oh, Sir Chester!" she murmured, and ran to him in a passion of joy.

He took her two hands in his. He wanted to take her in his arms. "Put your hat and coat on quickly," he said. "We must escape at once."

She flashed a look of admiration at him. "You are afraid of nothing," she said.

Praise had never greatly mattered to him. He was a masterful man who knew himself capable, and had been, in the main, indifferent to the admiration his strength and courage had elicited. It seemed, however, that the opinion of the princess was of the utmost consequence, for the expression of it set his heart beating quicker.

He helped her on with her coat. Her hat was a readily adjusted felt affair that she merely pulled down over her brown curls. It was no time to speak of such a thing, but Talbot could not help thinking that the effect was ravishing.

He took her by the hand, whispering: "There is danger, but you must trust me."

She pressed his hand. "I'm learning not to be such a coward," she said, in her soft tones.

He led her out into the courtyard, and had reached the exit door when there came the sound of voices from outside.

Talbot could not understand what was said because Hungarian was used, but the princess gasped and pulled back in terror.

"The soldiers!" she whispered. "They are coming in! We are caught!"

There was the impulse to dash out and try to take them by surprise, but it was dismissed at once. He might overcome them, but the chances were terribly against it.

He turned and dragged her to the flight of steps and up them. She followed him docilely. He pushed open

the door and went in, closing the door after him. Then he stood there, ready to defend her against her enemies on the inside in case they should be attracted by any noise they had made in entering.

A murmur of voices came from somewhere, but no sound to indicate that any alarm had been raised.

He listened to the sounds outside. He could hear the heavy-footed soldiers enter and draw up together; then some loudly spoken words.

"What was said?" he demanded, feeling her two hands catch and cling to his arm.

"The man is going after me, and the soldiers are to wait there for him. Oh, Sir Chester!"

It was a desperate situation. Instinctively the princess got as close to him as possible, and he put his arm about her.

"Come!" he said, with sudden decision, and led her into the castle. "Make no noise. Do you know where we are? Have you ever been in here before?"

"This is a big hall," she answered, in a whisper. "There are big rooms on both sides of it. There is a great stairway in the middle— Oh!"

A door had been thrown open from a brightly lighted room. The princess trembled so violently that she would surely have sunk to the floor if Talbot had not sustained her. He held himself tense, his revolver ready.

A man looked into the hall. "They are not here yet," he said, and went back, leaving the door open. He had spoken in German, so that Talbot understood.

He knew what the words meant, too. The summary court-martial, that horrible mockery of the forms of justice, was to be held in that room.

"Come, dear!" he said, and led her toward the great stairway, which was now visible.

For a few steps she managed to go

with him, but the thought of passing that open door robbed her of strength, and she drooped. Without a moment of hesitation, he picked her up in his arms and carried her across the broad band of light to the stairway.

His intention was to make the upper floor, if possible; and, since it could be done only by taking the risk of crossing the band of light, he meant to do it even if they were discovered. What he hoped, and what happened, was that the persons in the room were not looking out.

He won to the stairs and up them before the outer door was flung open by the jailer of the princess, crying frantically: "She has escaped! She is gone!" He spoke in Hungarian, but his meaning was clear.

It was very dark where they were, but Talbot followed the baluster rail and found it ran around a sort of balcony that looked down into the great hall.

From inside the lighted room rose a hubbub of voices, followed by an eruption into the hall of the persons there. A swift questioning of the man took place on the part of Prince Szchymysl, whose rage grew as he learned what had happened.

Suddenly a voice rose clear and distinct above the others. It came from the opposite side of the hall. "If the cell was broken open from the outside," it said in German "it means we have a traitor among us. Where is Maurus?"

It was the Countess Elsa who spoke; her brother who answered from another part of the hall: "I am here, Elsa. Are you calling me a traitor? Is that what your words mean?"

"You were opposed to us. Did you help her escape?"

"If a man asked me that question, he would not live to hear the answer."

"I suppose we must take that for a denial," she cried sharply. "Come,

prince! Let us go to the cell. Set everybody searching for her. She can't have gone far." She changed to Hungarian and gave the frightened jailer a number of stern orders.

"This is a frightful misfortune," said Prince Szchymysl. "If the princess escapes, we are all in danger."

"Then lose no time," cried the countess, furiously stamping her foot. "Come! The rest of you wait here till we come back. Maurus, the least you can do is to join the hunt."

He turned and left the hall, followed by his sister and the prince. The others remained where they were, talking in low, frightened tones.

CHAPTER IX.

Talbot dared not move from where he stood as long as the men remained in the hall below. He stood with his arm about the frightened girl, supporting her.

It seemed a long time that they waited. The men below were too much perturbed to return to the room they had come from, and kept close together, talking in low tones.

After what seemed a long time, the countess and Prince Szchymysl returned in gloomy silence.

"Did you discover anything?" asked one of the conspirators.

"Nothing new," snapped the Countess Elsa. "The lock was broken on the outside, which can mean nothing but that we have a traitor among us. I thought it might be Count Maurus, but I know him so well that his answer satisfies me. It can be none of us. It must be one of Prince Szchymysl's men. But which one? Anyhow, she is gone, and we must decide what to do in the circumstances."

"My men and Count Maurus are searching for her," said the prince.

"If she gets back to Budapest——" began one of the conspirators.

Countess Elsa interrupted him: "She mustn't. Prince, your car is ready, is it not?"

"It waits in front of the castle, ready to go."

"We must get to Budapest at once. You can get your whole secret service out to intercept the princess. It is her life or ours. Are you ready?"

"Only to put my hat and coat on."

"You, gentlemen, remain here till morning," she commanded. "If the princess is not found, come at once to the city and report to the prince. If she is found and brought back"—she hesitated a moment—"well, don't take any more risks. Do you understand?"

"Yes," one of them responded, in a low tone.

"I'll not be two minutes, prince," she said, and turned and ran up the stairs.

The princess stifled a cry of fear and crowded close to Talbot. He stood still, hoping the countess would turn away from them; but fortune was against them; the countess turned and approached them, guiding herself in the darkness by the baluster rail.

"You ought to modernize this old place, prince," she called out, as she went along, then stopped suddenly and peered toward Talbot and the princess, trying to make out what it was she saw.

Talbot acted promptly, taking the boldest course. He pushed the princess to one side and sprang at the countess. The latter screamed and darted back.

She was not quick enough, however, and Talbot had her securely around the waist. She screamed for help, and the men below started to her assistance. She fought like a tigress, outraged by the insult she thought had been done her.

"I'll kill the first man that mounts those stairs!" Talbot cried, in a tone that rang high above every sound.

The men all stopped. They were brave enough, but there was something

compelling in the cold tones of that voice.

"Talking Talbot!" the countess exclaimed, in a tone of wonder, and instantly ceased to struggle.

The prince, ashamed of the hesitation of himself and friends, once more moved as if to rush to her assistance.

"You are a dead man, Prince Szchymsl, if you try it," snapped Talbot.

"Stay where you are, prince," said the countess quietly; "he could kill you all before you could reach me. It is my American friend." This time she laughed softly and turned her head and spoke to Talbot: "So you insist on meddling?"

"If you hadn't begun the meddling, I never would have crossed your path," he answered. "As it is, here I am, distressed to incommode you, but compelled to do so."

"So you released the princess. With what object, please?"

"To save her from assassination."

"Nonsense! She was in no danger. And now what are you going to do, if you don't mind telling me?"

"Not in the least," he answered, his coolness equaling her own. "I am going to hold you as a hostage for the good behavior of your friends below there."

"And do you find this way of holding me absolutely necessary?" She referred to the fact that his arms were about her.

"Neither necessary nor agreeable," he answered, "which reminds me that there is a much better way."

With this he held her firmly with one arm while he took from his pocket the rope he had used to climb the wall with. Finding the noose, he suddenly caught her two hands and brought them behind her, where he secured them by drawing the noose tight. This done, he proceeded to fasten her ankles together.

The countess bit her lip to keep back the flood of angry words that struggled

for utterance. The men below stood at the foot of the stairs in indecision, straining their eyes to see what was going on above.

"I should think you would know this won't help you," she said, when she had controlled her anger. "You can't carry me about the country, and sooner or later you will be trapped."

"I'm taking long chances, countess. Gentlemen," he said, raising his voice and addressing them, "a little conversation is necessary."

"You shall suffer for this, sir," said the prince. "I did everything for you, and you repay me in this way."

"On the surface," responded Talbot, feeling with one hand for the princess and drawing her to his side, "my conduct doesn't seem like a nice return, but there is so much that is not on the surface. However, I have a proposal to make. I am grateful to you for your help to me, no matter what your object was; and to prove it I will give my word of honor to rid you finally and completely of the Princess Sonia."

"What do you mean?" was the quick demand.

"I mean I will promise for her that she will leave this country and never lend herself to any attempt on the throne."

"How can you promise that?"

"Let the princess promise for herself, then. Princess, will you tell these men that you will do as I have said?"

Clinging to him, the trembling girl raised her sweet voice with an effort and said: "I do not want the throne; I do not want to have anything to do with it. I will never set foot in Hungary again if you will let me leave it in safety."

"One moment before you answer," cried Talbot. "I have the Countess Elsa in my power, and I shall not let her go until the princess is in safety."

"What pledge will the princess give

to fulfill her engagement?" the prince asked.

"That is a foolish question, prince. The princess loathes the whole affair, and asks nothing better than to put it all away from her. How can she give any pledges?"

"You seem to know her thoughts very well," said the countess.

"She has expressed them freely to me."

All the time that he had been talking, Talbot had been trying to find a solution of the situation. He knew very well that, determined as the countess was to eliminate the princess from the contest, nothing he had to offer would be of the least value. He knew, too, that, although the countess served very well for the time being to protect them, it was impossible for him to hold her permanently.

"There is one way by which she can give a pledge," the countess said.

"What is that?"

"Become your wife," was the mocking reply. "I am sure she must be grateful to you for what you have done for her. What do you say, Princess Sonia?"

"The Princess Sonia doesn't need to make any response to such a question," Talbot said quickly, then raised his voice and cried sharply to the men below: "All of you retire to the back end of the hall. I am going down."

The men resented the tone and hesitated. The prince voiced their feeling: "We do not obey commands from such as you."

"You'll obey this," Talbot said icily. "Countess, tell them that I can kill every one of them. I tell them that I not only can but will if they oppose me. My position is not one that leaves me any choice. Tell them, countess!"

"This man," said the countess, addressing the men below, "has the reputation of being the quickest man in America with a revolver. I would advise that you do as he wishes."

Her tone was mocking and sinister, leaving Talbot with the feeling that she wished her friends to understand that she had something in reserve. It only made Talbot more cautious.

"Follow me closely, princess," he said to her, then lifted the helpless countess and put her rather ignominiously over his left shoulder, thus leaving his right hand free to manipulate the revolver.

"Oh, Sir Chester," the princess murmured, "I am afraid!"

He put his arm about her and held her a moment while he whispered encouragingly: "You are not afraid; you are nervous. Be my brave little Sonia, and we shall win to safety."

He could feel her bosom rise and fall quickly, then was sure she pressed closer to him. "I will be brave," she said.

The Countess Elsa laughed scornfully. Whether she had heard or not, Talbot was stung by the laugh, for he had yielded to the ineffable sweetness of the interchange with Sonia, and he felt as if he had betrayed a weakness to this woman who was so cold and calculating herself.

He gave Sonia's little hand a squeeze to show that he appreciated what she was doing, and then started for the stairway as the men below retired to the back end of the hall.

He carried the countess easily, and when the hall was reached looked keenly about. He had little fear of the men as long as he had the countess for a shield, knowing that if they carried weapons, none of them was sure enough of his marksmanship to venture a shot at him.

There was a big chair at one side of the hall, and in this he deposited the countess, taking his position at the other side of her. Sonia had followed close behind him, holding to his coat like a little child.

"Is there a door at the front end, princess?" he asked, in a low tone.

"Yes."

"Would you be brave enough to go and open it while I remain here to keep an eye on these men and the countess?"

She put her hand on his arm as if to plead her cowardice, then took it off and breathed: "I—I will—will try."

He patted her arm in tender encouragement. He heard her sigh and saw her straighten up as she started off.

"What is your plan, Sir Chester?" demanded the countess sarcastically.

He found an amazing difference between her way of saying Sir Chester and Sonia's. Indeed he winced under the ridicule, though he gave no sign of disturbance.

"My plan is to escape," he said.

"And you are infatuated enough to think you can do it? Do you think you are in your own wild West? Better make terms, Sir Chester."

"What terms?"

"Give up the girl and leave Hungary. I know you are thinking it would be unchivalrous; but, after all, Sir Chester, you will have to give her up and lose yourself in the bargain. Where can you go?"

"I might find my way into Budapest."

"You will be overtaken before you have gone a mile."

"At least you will be there, too, countess. I would not think of going without you."

He had been watching for the opening of the door which would follow the fumbling of Sonia with the bolts; also he had kept a wary eye on the group of whispering men at the other end of the hall. Sonia came running to him with the speed of fear.

"It is open," she whispered.

He raised his voice. "Let no man move on peril of death," he said. He took up the countess again and backed his way to the door, guided by Sonia, as soon as she realized what he was trying to do.

He darted through the door and

closed it behind him. There was no way of fastening it on the outside, but he had anticipated that and lost no time trying it.

The prince's automobile stood on the driveway outside, the driver in it, ready to start at an instant's notice. A glance told Talbot it was a car he was familiar with, and that it was a high-powered machine.

Paying no attention to the chauffeur's look of astonishment, he placed the countess on the vacant front seat, suddenly took hold of the chauffeur and lifted him out of his seat as if he had been an infant, and tossed him unceremoniously aside.

"Get in, princess!" he said, at the same time assisting her. All the while he was watching for a sudden attack.

A swift examination showed him that the car was equipped with a self-starter, and that it was in working order. He leaped into the seat beside the countess, pressed the self-starter, and the car was off.

The countess had watched him, as he had done all these things in the confident, precise way of one master of the situation; and for the first time real alarm took possession of her. If Talbot knew what to do, he had it in his power now to thwart all her plans and even to make an end of her. But did he know?

In fact, Talbot did not know the extent of his power, but he guessed from a few of the things he had overheard that it would not be well for the conspirators to have the princess reach Budapest. On the other hand, he was afraid the risk for the princess might also be great.

He said nothing, however, but guided the car along the drive and into the forest road, setting up high speed as soon as the straight road was reached.

A backward glance had shown him the prince and his companions standing together in front of the castle, but he

gave himself no concern over them, though he wound an end of the rope that bound the countess around his arm.

"Permit me," she said composedly, "to express my sincere admiration of you, Sir Chester. I am sure there would be a kingdom of Hungary to-morrow if you led the revolution."

"Praise from you is sweet," he said dryly, then turned smilingly to the princess. "Are you comfortable?"

She smiled faintly. She really was wishing she sat in front with him; she always had more courage when near him.

"Are you making for Budapest?" the countess asked.

"Is there any other place you'd rather not go to?" he demanded.

"It holds as much disaster for her as for me," she answered.

"I had thought of going to Vienna," he said.

"It is open to the same objections," she answered.

He could see that she was alarmed, and wished to keep him from taking her to either of the two capital cities; but what he had better do he could not decide. He hoped she would give him a clew.

"Not quite the same," he said meditatively. "In Vienna your capture is worth far more than hers. Believe me, your worth is fully appreciated in Vienna. And I could make it by midnight or sooner with this car. Yes, you have decided me; I will go to Vienna."

"Princess Sonia!" cried the countess, with a sudden vehemence that betrayed her disturbance of mind. "Is it true that you wish to withdraw from your party?"

"I never have been in it willingly," the princess answered.

"It is hard for a woman like you to understand, countess," interposed Talbot, "but the princess loathes the whole business."

"Stop the car!" commanded the countess. "Let us make terms. And put something about me; I'm freezing."

"I beg your pardon." He stopped the car and wrapped a rug about the shivering woman. "What terms, countess? We have no time to waste."

"Free me and put me down here. I promise to refrain from any unfriendly act toward the princess on her agreement to leave the country and take no further part in any revolution in this country."

"What security have we that you will keep your promise?"

"My word," she answered proudly.

It was not quite the sort of security he would have wished, but he knew it was the best possible under the circumstances, so he pretended a greater confidence than he felt in accepting it.

"Very well, countess. I am sparing your life and making your ambition possible, so I hope you will be as good as your word."

He unloosed her and helped her into the road. She gave utterance to a sigh of profound relief.

"You are a strong antagonist, Mr. Talbot; Maurus knew you better than I did. Which way now?"

"Which way do you suggest?" he demanded.

"There's a fine road running south to the princess' home in Bosnia, not more than two hundred miles away. You could make it by morning."

"And where do I come to that road?"

"It is the first important road you come to. Turn to the left. You will have no difficulty in finding it."

"Any large towns on the way?"

"Let me see. There's Kecskemet, Felegyhaza— Oh, three or four. But you should have no trouble with them. You can go around them."

"Thank you, countess. Will you sit in front with me, princess?"

He helped her into the front seat, got into the car himself, and started. The

countess stood in the darkness, listening, a wicked smile on her red lips.

CHAPTER X.

For ten minutes, perhaps, the car sped swiftly on without a word being exchanged between the fugitives. Finally Talbot spoke: "What do you think of the countess' advice, princess?"

"I'm afraid of her," she answered timidly.

"What do you think will happen if we take that road?"

"We shall encounter many soldiers, I am sure."

"And most likely friends of Prince Szchymsl's. That was my notion. I know nothing of this country, however. Can you suggest anything? What about going to Budapest?"

"Please, no!" she answered in terror. "They will get me again and go on with the revolution worse than ever. Or they will make me marry the duke. Oh, Sir Chester, don't take me back!"

"I'll do nothing you don't wish me to," he answered. "But indeed, little Sonia, I don't know what to do."

"You are sure to know," she said confidently. "Perhaps you could get to Serbia or Bosnia. You are so wonderful."

He knew she wasn't trying to flatter him, but was speaking her real thought. He was deliciously thrilled by it, and was ready to give his life to bring her to safety; nevertheless, he was at a loss.

At the great road the countess had spoken of, he turned as she had directed. There was almost no traffic on it, and he went ahead at full speed, his glaring lights showing him that it was safe ahead.

He was absolutely adrift as to a plan of action. Whichever way he turned seemed to be charged with danger. He knew the country toward Serbia was full of soldiers; and the chances were

that the countess fully expected him and the princess to be stopped and held for the countess' orders.

He was cudgeling his brains in silence, when something happened that took the matter out of his hands; the fuel gave out, and with a few ineffective coughs the car stopped.

He jumped out and looked at the gas tanks. Both were empty; and as gas was one of the scarce things now, he knew he must abandon the car.

"Come, princess!" he said. "We must walk now."

"Where shall we go?" she asked, springing out of the car with the utmost blitheness, as if the breakdown was a matter of little consequence. It was only of human beings that she seemed to be afraid; ordinary troubles she met cheerfully.

"I don't know," he answered. "This looks like a forest here. Wait till I push the car to the side of the road."

He not only pushed it to the side of the road, but ditched it. He removed one of the headlights and put the other one out. He was not expecting pursuit at once, if at all; though he did not fail to consider that the chauffeur would know how little gas there was in the tanks. In any case, it was prudent to get as far as possible from that spot, where the car stood as evidence against them.

"Have you any idea where we are, princess?" he asked when he rejoined her.

"None at all. All I know is that the Danube must be a short distance to the west of here."

"The Danube! Perhaps we can reach it and find a boat in which to go down it. I forget my geography, but I think the Danube runs through Bosnia, doesn't it?"

"Oh, Sir Chester!" she laughed. "Is there something you don't know? The Danube goes near Bosnia, but doesn't touch it. It does run along the edge of

Serbia, though; and in Serbia we shall be safe; safer than in Bosnia. But everywhere there are troops these days."

"If we can find a boat, we can travel only by night and hide in the daytime. Would you be afraid?"

"I think I am afraid of nothing when you are by my side, Sir Chester. I am sure I would learn to be brave in time."

"You are brave now, little Sonia. Come, then! Take my arm and hold tightly. We will try to find the river."

The ditch by the roadside was a deep one, but easily crossed; and in a few minutes they were making their way through a noble forest, almost free of undergrowth.

The walking was good, the powerful light of the automobile lamp made the way clear, and to crown all the princess was happier than Talbot had yet seen her. Like the child she was, she had thrown her cares away, confident in the prowess and wisdom of her knight.

He felt anything but confident himself, but it rejoiced him to see how completely she trusted him; and he listened to her as he had never listened to music in his life.

He wished his light had been a smaller one, he wished they would soon come to the river, and he prayed that he could justify the confidence of the princess by taking her to safety.

In the meantime there was a strange delight in walking in the lonely woods with that beautiful creature hanging on his arm, pressing close to his side, and talking to him as if they had known each other for years instead of mere hours.

She was full of admiration for his strength, courage, and resourcefulness, and wondered how he had dared to do the things he had. And why had he? That seemed to puzzle her.

"I don't understand why you should take so much trouble for me," she said. "It isn't as if you had known me. You

just came on me, all frightened to death, and started in to rescue me. Why did you do it, Sir Chester? Did you have a reason?"

"You were reason enough," he answered, troubled to know what to say. "How could any man have left you in such a plight?"

"Would any American have done it, just as you did?" she asked.

"Some might have done it better. I don't feel very proud of making you take a walk like this at such an hour. Are you tired?"

"Oh, no! I'm not like a storybook princess. I have been a poor girl all my life, and if it had not been that I had some of that wretched blood royal in my veins nobody would ever have given me a second thought. Why, I am used to climbing the mountains; I'm strong, even if I am such a coward. Are you very much ashamed of me?"

"I'm proud of you, princess."

"I like it best when you call me Sonia."

"I like Sonia, too; but I thought maybe——"

"Maybe what?"

"That you might not like me to be so familiar. In moments of excitement or danger, it seemed natural to call you Sonia, but I wouldn't have you think I lacked respect for you."

"You lack respect!" and she laughed merrily, laying her head against his shoulder as she did so. "Isn't that funny? Why, you are the most splendid and wonderful man I ever heard of. You *are* like a storybook knight. I couldn't imagine you doing anything that wasn't exactly right and proper."

"I would never mean to," he said gravely.

"Of course you wouldn't. Ah, if you had been the duke——" She stopped, embarrassed.

"Who is this duke?" he asked hastily.

"The Duke of Jankovacz."

That meant nothing to Talbot, but he

said "Oh!" and then asked: "Why do you dislike him so much? You said you disliked him."

"I hate him. He's big and stupid and—and horrid. I met him twice in Budapest. The nobles who were trying to make me queen found they were not strong enough, so they thought it would be a good idea to marry me to the duke. You see, they wanted to get the power out of the hands of Prince Szchmysl and the Countess Elsa."

"Yes, I see. And so they contrived the interview?"

"Yes, the duke was secretly brought to my hiding place. I think he had seen me once before when I didn't know it. The first time we met, he did nothing but stare at me. I was frightened, and was as still as he was."

"Then he saw you again?" Talbot suggested. He was deeply interested in the matter.

"Yes. After he had gone the first time my nobles told me he was very much taken with me, and was ready to enter into an alliance. I let them know that I didn't like him, but they only laughed at me. You see, I was powerless in their hands."

"No, I don't see. Why were you?"

"Well, my uncle was on their side. He had brought me up, and I was afraid of him. I always had done what he wanted me to, though he had never troubled me much till this revolution was thought of after this awful war was started. He said I must be queen, and then he said I must marry the duke. What could I do?"

"Poor little Sonia! And the duke saw you a second time."

"Yes, he came again. I think he had been drinking a great deal that time, for he had plenty to say. He told me he adored me, and that Hungary would be fortunate to have such a queen; and once he tried to kiss me. I—I was afraid, but I struck him."

"My brave little Sonia!"

"Do you think it was brave? I was afraid you would think it horrid of me. My uncle said it was unwomanly. The duke only laughed and said he was glad I wasn't such a mouse as I seemed. How I hated him. I had never wanted to be a queen; after that it seemed horrible to me. The Countess Elsa would make a much better queen. She is very beautiful, isn't she?"

"Very; but not pleasing. Why didn't your nobles try to rescue you when you were stolen from them?"

"They knew that, with me gone, Prince Szchymsl would arrest them and try them by court-martial the minute they tried to do anything. You see, with me they could start a revolution any time. I don't know why, for I never could understand. But that is what they said."

"Would you have let them marry you to the duke?" Talbot asked.

"I suppose so," she answered, clinging closer to him. "I hated him, but I didn't know what to do. Was it very, very cowardly of me?"

"Perhaps," he answered hesitatingly. "It is hard for me to understand. Of course, you were in their hands."

"Sir Chester!" she said softly.

"Yes?"

"I wouldn't marry him now. I am braver than I was. I'm sure they couldn't make me do it now."

"I like to hear you say that. I am sure you would be very unhappy to marry a man like that."

"Do you think I would be brave enough now, Sir Chester?"

"I hope so."

"I know I would if I was sure you were ready to help me. You won't leave me until——" She stopped at the thought of a time when this wonderful man would leave her.

"I will not leave you until you wish it," he said.

They both fell silent after that, and were walking along quietly, preceded by

the cone-shaped flood of light, when they were suddenly halted by a voice behind them. The speech was Hungarian, and the princess, with a cry, stopped short.

Talbot stopped, too, understanding by the tone that it was a command to halt. He swung about, putting the princess behind him, bringing the light to bear on the speaker, and drawing his revolver.

"Who are you?" he demanded in German.

"Who are you who walks in these forests with an automobile lamp?"

"By what right do you ask?" demanded Talbot fiercely.

"The right of might," was the curt response. "Behind you and all about you are my men. Now tell me what you are doing here? And lower that light so that it won't be in my eyes."

Talbot lowered the light so that it fell on the earth only. He had seen that his interlocutor was in the uniform of an officer, and that several soldiers were back of him.

"We were automobiling," he said, "and our machine ran out of gas. We left it by the roadside and came hunting for a house, hoping we might get gasoline."

"Who are you? Put your weapon away!"

Still affecting a docility he was far from feeling, Talbot put his revolver back and answered: "I am an American, and have been visiting the prisoners' camp to find a friend. My passport is in order, and I have papers to show that I went by permission of the military governor of Budapest."

"Who is the lady?"

"A friend of mine."

The officer laughed. "Likely enough. Let me look at her."

"Will you be so ungentlemanly?" demanded Talbot.

"If you will kindly let me have your lamp you shall see," was the response,

with a good-natured laugh. "Come, sir! I must do my duty. I'm sure she can't be so ugly that she will object to being seen."

Talbot saw himself trapped and helpless. It was a time for wit, not muscle. He handed the lamp to the officer, who immediately turned it full on them.

"I beg you let me see your face, fair lady," he laughed.

"It is better," Talbot said, in a low tone to the princess, who was obstinately sheltering herself behind him. At his word she came into view.

The officer was now in the shadow, and they could not see his face. He was silent for a moment before crying out in a tone of wonder and delight: "It is the Princess Sonia Kotorska."

The princess, with a cry of terror, drew close to Talbot, whose revolver was out in an instant, though he knew very well that all the odds were now against him.

In fact, his weapon had hardly been drawn when he regretted it; and it only needed the words of the officer to cause him to put it away again.

"Put it back, sir; you are with friends. Come with me and you will be well taken care of and joyfully received. Your luck is surely with you, highness. How did you escape?"

He gave the lamp to one of the soldiers, issued a few orders in Hungarian, and stood at respectful attention, though Talbot noted that the soldiers formed about them; a guard of honor, perhaps, but none the less a security against their escape.

"May I ask who are the friends you speak of?" Talbot inquired.

"Let it remain a pleasant surprise," was the cautious response. "I pledge you my word that the princess will receive a royal welcome, as befits her dignity," and he made a low, respectful bow.

"What do you wish to do, princess?" he asked her.

"You must decide," she answered tremulously.

"Pardon me!" interposed the officer respectfully, "but I have no choice but to escort you to the castle."

"Whose castle?" the princess demanded quickly.

"Forgive me if in prudence I leave that question unanswered. May I hope you will follow me, highness?"

She looked up at Talbot, pressing his arm as if to let him know that she would follow his command.

"I think we must go, princess," he said aloud, adding, in a whisper, "I see no other way. I will not leave you."

"We will go with you," the princess said, with an air of dignity that sat well on her, Talbot thought.

The soldier carrying the lamp lighted the way at one side, the officer led, the princess and Talbot followed, the guard flanked them, and brought up the rear.

"Can you guess whose house it is?" Talbot asked her in a low tone.

"It may be one of my nobles; but I don't understand why he should not tell us so," she answered. "I am almost afraid again. You won't leave me? But I know you won't."

"While life lasts you may depend on me, Sonia. Never doubt that."

She pressed his arm in assurance of her trust in him. He felt her tremble, nevertheless, and it set his heart throbbing to realize how much he was to her, and that she trusted him so utterly.

Excepting for his occasional whispers of comfort, the walk through the woods was a silent one. The officer evidently had decided that it was better he should not try to converse with the princess. He walked ahead without even looking back.

After ten minutes' walk the many brilliantly lighted windows of the castle came into view. It was plainly a large place, and held many people.

As they drew nearer, music and singing could be heard, as well as gay laugh-

ter; and the shadows on the curtains of the windows showed many rooms occupied.

"There is a great dinner party on to-night," the officer said, turning and saluting.

"And you will not tell me whose castle this is?" the princess said.

"Forgive me, highness, if I ask you to wait. You have no more humble servant than I, but I am sure I am doing as my master would wish."

"You are sure, then, that I shall be among friends?"

"Devoted friends, your—your majesty," he answered, lowering his voice, as if startled by his own boldness.

"Don't say that!" she cried, clinging fearfully to Talbot, and then whispering to him: "It must be the house of one of my nobles. Oh, Sir Chester, keep close to me. I want to be brave, but I am afraid. I fear others besides my nobles."

At the main entrance they were left on the driveway by the officer, who had first given orders to his men which resulted in their gathering closer about the two.

Talbot looked at their guard, wondering if it might be possible to break through them and escape again; but when he saw how many of them there were he realized that it would be a mad thing to do. If they were going to meet avowed enemies, the case would have been different; but it seemed quite certain that whoever these people were, they wished the princess no harm, so that it would be wiser to accept the situation now and escape later if need there were.

The substance of this he said to the princess. "Be of good courage, Sonia. You may not like these people, but it is sure that they wish you no harm. Put a good face on it, whatever comes, and later, if you wish it, I will find a way of escape for you. Are you feeling a little braver now?"

"The fear comes suddenly, and I for-

get to be brave," she answered. "I shall be brave, I think. Don't be ashamed of me yet."

"I shall never be ashamed of you," he said fervently. "I know that you are a brave little woman."

"I am trying," she said softly.

The doors of the castle were thrown open, a burst of light flooding the scene out of doors. A large, handsome man, as he seemed at first glance, stepped to the threshold and looked eagerly out.

"The duke! It is the duke!" wailed the princess.

CHAPTER XI.

It did not take an instant for Talbot to realize what had happened: They had come upon the Duke of Jankovacz in the midst of his friends. Afterward he learned that it was the duke's own castle.

It was another kind of trouble, but at least it was not one that meant any immediate danger for the princess, and was far preferable to the peril he had rescued her from.

The duke was still standing in the doorway, peering out into the darkness, when Talbot bent over the shrinking girl and whispered: "Play your part boldly, Sonia. Be the princess you are, and trust to me. We shall escape from this as from the other."

He felt her press his arm and heard her murmur: "I'll try." Then he saw a glad smile break over the face of the duke, and saw him hurry down the steps with outstretched hand.

He cried out something in Hungarian by way of joyous greeting, and led her up the steps with a ceremony that betrayed the importance he endowed her with.

She was greeted with effusion and respect by the little party of men who had stood behind the duke, and with still more effusion and respect by the throng of gayly dressed men and

women who had remained crowded eagerly together a short distance away.

Timid and shrinking at first, the princess cast a swift look back at Talbot, and then accepted the greetings with a dignity that gained a wonderful charm from her sweet simplicity.

It was the most brilliant gathering Talbot had ever seen, what with the men in their gay and picturesque uniforms and the ladies in full dress.

The princess looked as out of place as he knew she was feeling; and he followed slowly after her, wondering how he was going to make any headway against so many.

He stood back and to one side, unnoticed save for an occasional glance from some one facing him in the throng. The duke maintained his place by the side of the princess, his handsome but dissipated face glowing with delight as he looked down at her.

There was much talk, but it was all in Hungarian, and therefore unintelligible to Talbot, until the duke said something that made the gay throng open out before him and the princess. Then she turned and, looking straight at Talbot, said in German:

"I owe my liberty to this American gentleman. Your highness, this is Herr Talbot. Herr Talbot, please come with us."

She said this with a decision that seemed amazing in her. Indeed, it had taken all her self-control to enable her to do it. But the truth was that she was afraid her courage would all go if she were separated from Talbot.

The American bowed composedly to the duke, whom he instinctively disliked, and went forward. The duke, looking him up and down with a swift glance, knew him for a man to be met on equal terms, so stretched out his hand in greeting.

Talbot shook the almost royal hand, and turned to the princess. "At your service, highness."

A twitch of her red lip and a fleeting dimple in her round cheek betrayed the sense of her amusement at the sudden formality of their relations.

"We are most grateful to you, Herr Talbot, for the service you have rendered our beloved Princess Sonia."

"Most grateful," repeated the small number of men who kept near all the time.

The princess flashed a look of intelligence at Talbot, and said: "Some of these gentlemen are nobles devoted to the duke, some are of my party. I presume they have come together to devise measures for my rescue."

Talbot was sure he saw some of the faces flush at her words, but the response was quick and eager: "Yes, highness; yes."

"Luckily for me Herr Talbot was there," said the princess, her courage high now, and her manner oddly lofty. "You wish to know the story of my escape? He shall tell it, for he knows it better than I. Shall I stand while he recites it?"

Talbot saw that she was playing her part as he had bidden her, boldly and like a princess, and it amused him all the more, therefore, to see the looks of wonder that were exchanged among the nobles.

"Shall we retire, highness?" demanded the duke, evidently taken aback also by this unexpected exhibition of poise and dignity.

"I presume they will all wish to hear," answered the princess, looking over the throng of ladies and gentlemen, whose lesser rank kept them at a discreet distance.

There was an instant murmur of desire from them to hear the story, and an equally swift frown of dislike from the small group. But Talbot, without fully understanding, saw that the princess wished to let all of them know what had happened; so, seeing a large

chair by the open fire in the hall, he quickly went to it and said:

"If your highness wishes to sit, here is a chair."

The duke bent his head and whispered something to her, but with her eyes fixed on Talbot, as if to maintain her courage, she shook her head and said in a loud voice: "No, highness; I prefer to tell it now and here. All of our friends will be curious, and they may as well hear the story at once. Besides, I am tired and cold."

The duke, who was plainly a masterful man, bit his lip, looked at the high nobles near him, shrugged his shoulders, and led her to the chair beside which Talbot stood.

The princess began to undo the fastenings of her coat, but instantly was surrounded by a group of ladies eager to help her. This act, as much as anything else, impressed upon Talbot the knowledge of the princess' importance, and his heart sank. These people must feel that the revolution was almost accomplished to be so ready to serve the princess in this eager way.

"If you would like to make a toilet first, highness?" suggested one of the nobles. "I am sure that among these ladies there will be plenty with which——"

"All that her highness wishes if she will put up with such poor things as we have to offer," cried the lady who was fortunate enough to be assisting her.

"Afterward," the princess said, seating herself comfortably in the big chair. "Won't you be seated, highness?" she said to the duke.

The duke bit his lip and looked angrily about him, but already a chair was being brought. In a few moments he also was seated within the circle that had been formed.

Talbot saw how his heavy brows were drawn down as he sat staring at the princess, who was exhibiting a side of

herself unknown to him. Then he felt the searching glance bent on him, though he pretended unconsciousness. He was beginning to feel that the duke was a man to fear as well as to dislike.

"Now will you tell them, Herr Talbot?" the princess said, looking up at him and smiling a bit tremulously.

She had been enjoying the play, but she, too, had caught the expression of the duke, and it recalled to her how afraid of him she had been. But there was Talbot—her Sir Chester—looking cool and unconcerned, as if in no wise disturbed; so she determined to go on with courage.

She wished them all to hear the story of the outrage on her because she was afraid of the compromises the high nobles might be inclined to make, for she knew they were all afraid of the Countess Elsa.

"It was not much of a story," Talbot said quietly. "I came upon her highness quite by accident in the inclosure of the castle of Prince Szchymsl."

"It was the prince, then?" murmured the duke, exchanging glances with the high nobles. A low murmur came from the other eager listeners.

"It was the prince," the princess said.

"I was going to carry her off from there," Talbot resumed, "which would have been easy, but she was taken to the castle and put in a cell to be held for court-martial."

An audible gasp came from the audience. The duke bent suddenly forward, his eyes glowing.

"Are you sure of what you are saying, Herr Talbot?" he demanded.

"Yes," replied Talbot quietly, "I am sure. I am sure because I overheard them planning it."

"Who?" demanded the duke.

"The prince, the Countess Elsa, and the others."

"The Countess Elsa was there?" demanded the duke in a lower tone.

"Yes, she was there, and I knew from what was said that the life of her highness was in danger; so I borrowed the automobile of the prince and brought her highness away."

There was a dead silence when he ceased speaking, and it was plain that fear had fallen on them all. The name of the Countess Elsa was evidently something to conjure with.

"It seems very easy as he tells it," cried the princess. "What he doesn't say is that he entered the castle, broke open the door of my cell, captured the Countess Elsa right in their midst, and single-handed took us both out of the castle before the eyes of all those men."

"You brought the Countess Elsa away with you?" demanded the duke.

"We left her on the way, about thirty miles from the castle, I should say," Talbot answered. "She promised to take no unfriendly step toward her highness if I let her go."

"She knew you would fall into the hands either of the prince's friends or of the troops of the emperor," said the duke.

"So I suspected; therefore I let her go."

Every eye was on the man who spoke so simply of the daring thing he had done. Without in the least intending it, he looked the part of a hero of romance as he stood there. It wasn't only the princess who thought him magnificent.

One of the high nobles approached the duke and said something in Hungarian which made the duke start and say to Talbot: "You have done a great service to-night, Herr Talbot. I hope you will join us at dinner. It will be put off until you can change your clothes—you and her highness. I trust you will permit me to supply the deficiencies of your wardrobe. I know you will be glad to wait for her high-

ness, ladies and gentlemen. Countess," turning to the lady who had assisted the princess to take off her coat, "will you see that her highness has proper attention?"

Talbot, seeing that he and the princess would inevitably be separated, bent over her as if to make his obeisance and whispered hastily: "Brave little Sonia! Keep it up! We shall escape this."

She had turned pale at the thought of being taken away, but his words reassured her, as she reflected that she was perfectly safe there for a while, anyhow. All she had to fear from the duke was his determination to make her his wife.

She rose, and allowed herself to be led upstairs. Talbot also was taken upstairs and conducted to a room, which he was told was to be for his use.

Valets came and brought him a choice of many garments, all of them absurdly ornate, he thought; but he realized that he must dress to appear in the dining room in that gay company, so he swallowed his dislike of the "comic-opera clothes," as he called them, and allowed himself to be shaved and arrayed in some one's clothes.

He retained his money belt and cartridges, and, at the risk of being detected with it, slipped his revolver into one of his hip pockets. Then feeling ridiculous in the brilliant dress of an officer of the army, but admitting somewhat reluctantly that he did look well, he went downstairs to the hall, where he was cordially greeted.

The duke and his small group of high nobles were not there, but in a few minutes a movement among the guests indicated that something was happening, and, looking toward the grand stairway, he saw the princess, an almost unbelievable vision of loveliness, coming down it.

She was in a low-cut gown of some clinging stuff that exquisitely outlined

her supple, rounded figure. A band of pearls sat like a crown on her brown hair, and a rope of pearls hung about her white throat.

Talbot caught his breath, and a feeling almost of despondency took possession of him. He could not fail to see that nature had planned her for the queenly rôle it was designed by men that she should fill.

He stood moodily back, but her eager gray eyes searched about until they found him, when, with a sigh that lifted her snowy bosom, her lips parted in a smile of pleasure.

She went toward him at once, swept him with her eyes for an instant, and cried out: "Now you are one of my followers in your gallant uniform, Herr Talbot."

"I was one before," he answered.

"No," she laughed, drawing very near to him, "you were leader before." Then she lowered her voice. "My party has increased in power, it seems, and I am more important than ever. Countess Elsa is less to be feared; other things more to be feared. I will play my part as bravely as I can, but you must rescue me from the new peril or life is worth nothing to me."

"I am devoted as always, highness," he answered in a whisper. "You can depend on me."

She frowned, and looked reproachfully at him. "Since when have I ceased to be Sonia?"

He drew a long breath. "You look so royal," he stammered.

"I am only cowardly little Sonia, whose surface courage is all due to you," she said. "Tell me I am still Sonia to you."

"You will always be Sonia to me."

The coming of the duke separated them, but enough had been said to restore to him his equanimity, and he saw her conducted to the dining hall by the duke without disturbance of mind.

She certainly played her part right

royally, as with her little hand resting on the duke's arm she went the length of the great room, smiling graciously at every one.

Talbot, watching her, saw her stop and look about before sitting down. He knew she was seeking him, and guessed in a moment that she was going to demand his presence near her; so when her eye caught his, he shook his head slightly.

She tossed her head, and pouted her red lips for an instant as if in rebellion at his wish, but suddenly smiled and took her seat at the right hand of the duke.

From where Talbot sat he could see her, though the length of the table was between them. The master of ceremonies had made his own judgment of the social value of an American gentleman, even though dressed as a Hungarian officer.

The dinner was a very merry one, with everybody drinking plentifully of the delicious native wines, and with everybody smoking cigarettes during the whole time.

It seemed to Talbot, who hardly touched his glasses as they were filled with the different wines, that the duke was doing more drinking than eating, and that he was beginning to feel the effects of it.

He saw Sonia flash a look of appeal at him now and then, but although he hated the big, handsome brute by her side he knew he must restrain himself and not betray any feeling.

After dinner the ladies left the men at the table, and then brandy and liqueurs were brought, and the duke seemed to pour the brandy down his throat.

This conduct manifestly disturbed the high nobles, and one of them whispered what must have been a remonstrance. The duke fell back in his chair and broke into a loud laugh, saying loud enough to be heard by all in the room:

"Don't worry! I'm drinking to the bride."

Talbot couldn't help but understand that this referred to the princess, and it made him desperately uneasy. He knew that a marriage between the two was contemplated.

He had promised to stand by Sonia, and at any cost he meant to do it; but he realized his insignificance there in the midst of all these people, in the heart of a strange country, surrounded and hemmed in by the armies of the empire.

The duke sought out the princess the moment he left the dining hall, and Talbot was obliged to stand aloof and see him bend amorously over the shrinking girl.

The princess, seeing at a glance that the duke had been drinking too freely, started up from her chair and drew back, casting an appealing glance about her and betraying what it was she sought by the relief she showed when her eyes fell on Talbot standing stern and grim not far from her.

She made a scarcely perceptible sign to him to come to her, and, reckless of consequences, he had started when a restraining hand was placed on his arm. He looked around and saw that it was one of the high nobles who had stopped him.

"Well, sir?" he demanded sharply.

The other was a distinguished-looking man of about fifty, with a keen, intelligent face and the manner of one accustomed to authority. He smiled suavely as he met the cold blue eyes. "A few words with you, Herr Talbot," he said.

"A very few, please. The princess wishes to speak to me."

"And it is precisely of that that I wish to talk with you," was the smiling response. "Will you not come over here and sit down with me?"

Talbot studied him for a moment, his face unsmiling, his eyes unpleasantly

cold. "I will talk with you when I have learned what her highness wishes of me," he answered, and started toward her.

"I can tell you what she wishes."

"I prefer to hear it from her own lips."

"You would intrude on the duke?" the other demanded, a note of anger in his voice.

"I do not intrude when I obey her highness' wishes." He stopped, however, for he saw the princess elude the reaching hand of the duke and come toward him.

The noble, seeing what had happened, waited beside Talbot until the princess, panting, but with eyes sparkling angrily, reached them. Then he spoke to her in Hungarian, evidently conveying reproach if not reproof. She answered him in German:

"He is drunk. I will not have him paw me. I will not endure it."

The noble answered her in Hungarian. She drew a deep breath, looked into Talbot's set face, and said angrily: "Speak in German, since Herr Talbot does not understand Hungarian."

"And why must Herr Talbot know what we say?"

"Because I wish it for one thing; for another because he rescued me from death when my party friends would have left me to die. I trust Herr Talbot."

There was silence then. Talbot looked anxiously about. The situation was becoming tense. The duke, with flushed face and slightly swaying body, was approaching; the noble was furious at the open rebellion of the hitherto docile princess; the princess was alarmed at her own temerity.

At this moment there was a sudden bustle at the other end of the great salon, and the noble, turning to see what it was, cried out in a tone of relief: "The archbishop!"

"The archbishop?" gasped the prin-

cess, catching at Talbot's arm. "Why is he here?"

"Is he not one of your highness' adherents?" the noble said, with an enigmatic smile.

"Ha, ha!" roared the duke, stopping beside them and looking at the prelate. "Welcome, monseigneur!"

He added more, but as he spoke in Hungarian, Talbot understood only the first words. Then he saw the princess turn pale and shrink close to him, and by that knew that the words had to do with her.

"He has come to marry me to him," she breathed, looking up appealingly at Talbot.

CHAPTER XII.

"It can't be done without your consent," Talbot said firmly enough, though in his heart he was not sure.

The prelate, a tall, portly man of imposing presence, was slowly approaching them as they stood a group apart in the vast salon. He bowed and smiled graciously as he moved along, and Talbot was quick to see that here was a force greater than any he had yet encountered.

"Save me, Sir Chester!" moaned the soft voice of the princess.

"Refuse to marry him," he said in a whisper. "Do nothing without me by your side."

He was at his wits' end, and was nervously feeling of his hidden revolver, though he knew very well it was not force that was needed now.

The archbishop reached them. He greeted the duke cordially, though lifting his brows on seeing that he was the worse for what he had been drinking. The princess he seemed unfeignedly pleased to see.

"Why, highness," he said benevolently, "I heard you were missing, yet here you are in the flesh and lovelier than ever."

"I was missing, and I would be dead

now, monseigneur," she answered, with recovered courage, "if it had not been for this gentleman. Herr Talbot, an American gentleman, monseigneur."

"What are you saying?" he demanded of her as he put out his large, white hand to Talbot. "You would have been dead? What do you mean?"

"I was in the power of Prince Szchymysl and Countess Elsa, and I was about to be court-martialed and executed when this gentleman saved me."

"We have heard that story too often already, highness," interposed the duke coarsely. "The gentleman shall have his reward. Let us get to the business in hand."

"What business?" she demanded. She kept close enough to Talbot to be able to reach out to him in case of need.

The duke laughed, and lurched toward her. She uttered a little cry and drew aside. He almost lost his balance, but recovered himself with a frown, and muttered something in Hungarian.

"I'll not be married," the princess cried, as if in response to what he had said.

"Highness!" remonstrated the noble who had tried to keep Talbot from her. The other high nobles, who had joined the group, murmured among themselves.

"My dear princess!" said the archbishop. "You are not in earnest."

"I am. I will not marry the duke. Look at him!"

He was standing unsteadily opposite her, leering in a most unpleasant fashion. The archbishop looked, and bit his lip.

"Let us have a private conference," said the noble who had already spoken.

"An excellent idea," agreed the archbishop heartily.

"Quite right!" said the duke thickly. "Come, gentlemen!"

"You will come, too, highness?" rather commanded than asked the noble.

The princess put her trembling hand

out and laid it on Talbot's arm. "And Herr Talbot, too."

"Herr Talbot has no concern with this."

"If I wish it, he has," she replied, her courage remaining with her. "And I do wish it. Without him I will not go to your conference."

"I trust Herr Talbot will see the impropriety——"

"I see no impropriety in doing what her highness wishes," he interrupted in an icy tone.

"Really, gentlemen," expostulated the prelate, "I do not see what harm there can be in the presence of this gentleman if her highness wishes to have him there."

"You don't understand."

"Gentlemen," said Talbot, impressive in his cold, impassive way, "you may as well understand that I am her highness' devoted servant, and will carry out her wishes."

He looked so extremely capable as he faced them all that the duke shrugged his shoulders and muttered something in Hungarian. Talbot felt Sonia's fingers tighten on his arm. She said nothing, however, and he could only guess it was a threat the duke had muttered.

"Come, then, if you will have it so," the noble said; "we are making a spectacle here."

"May I have the pleasure, highness?" asked the archbishop, bowing in his magnificent way. He turned, she took her place beside him, and the entire party went to a room across the hall.

There was silence while chairs were brought from different parts of the room and the members of the party seated themselves.

The duke had passed into a moody stage, and was glowering at Talbot. The nobles were exchanging angry and determined glances, and the archbishop was serenely complimenting the princess on her appearance. She and Talbot, a few chairs apart, were exchanging

glances—of encouragement on his part, of appeal on hers.

"Will you open the conference, Count Szolnak?" said one of the nobles, seeing that the duke was determinedly silent.

The noble who had already taken the lead in the matter glanced around as if to obtain the assurance that it was the wish of the assemblage that he should do so.

"The situation is most simple," he said. "The condition of the empire is such that a separation of Austria and Hungary is only a question of time. There are practically only two parties in Hungary; the smaller one hoping for a republic, the larger one demanding a constitutional monarchy.

"The monarchical party is divided, in a sense, between those who wish to see his highness, the Duke of Jankovacz, on the throne, and those who wish to see her highness, the Princess Sonia Kotorska, there.

"For a time there was conflict between these two parties, but now the leaders of both parties have come together and have decided that the welfare of our beloved country demands the union of the two aspirants to the throne to the end that there may be no sinful waste of blood.

"The marriage of the duke and the princess will bring instant peace to the country, and this marriage has been agreed upon by the leaders. That, I believe, is the present state of affairs, excepting that I neglected to state that advices from all over the country assure us that such a solution will meet with enthusiastic approval."

"I will not marry him," the princess said, her face white.

"You were willing once; why do you refuse now?" demanded Count Szolnak, with difficulty restraining his anger.

"Surely, my child," remonstrated the archbishop in his most paternal manner, "you don't wish to plunge the coun-

try into the horrors of civil war? Is not the present war shocking enough?"

"It will not create a civil war," she answered quickly. "I renounce any pretension I have to the throne in favor of his highness. I will not marry him."

"At least give us a reason," pleaded the archbishop.

"Look at him!" she cried.

They all looked involuntarily at the duke. He was still glowering at Talbot, but in a purposeless way and with his body swaying slightly, as if he were trying to balance himself. His face was inflamed, and his lips loosely apart.

The archbishop bit his lip, and the others turned their eyes sullenly away from him.

"Is this a common love affair?" cried out Count Szolnak. "Are high state matters to be made dependent on the whim of a foolish child? Yes, highness, a foolish child! Would you sacrifice a throne for yourself and plunge your country into a bloody war because his highness had taken a drop too much wine? Enough of this! It is your duty to marry the duke."

"I will not," she reiterated, her face whiter and whiter, and her eyes constantly seeking Talbot's. As for him, he felt his powerlessness, but sat there ready at any moment to make the best fight he could.

"Monseigneur," cried Count Szolnak, "you came here to unite these two and thereby serve our beloved Hungary. I beg you to do it."

"Princess," said the prelate sternly, "I cannot believe you will hold out against the wishes of the statesmen of the country and refuse to do that which will bring us peace in spite of the war now raging and spare us the more horrible conflict among ourselves."

"Oh, Sir Chester, help me!" she wailed.

He rose, and went over and stood beside her. "I am a stranger here from another land," he said, "but her high-

ness has chosen me to protect her from the evils which threaten her."

"If you are wise you will not meddle with what does not concern you, Herr Talbot," cried Count Szolnak.

"It concerns me when the princess asks my help. You, who think her so important now, did not raise a hand to save her when Prince Szchymsl carried her off. You feared him, and you feared the Countess Elsa. I feared neither of them, nor their power any more than I fear you and your power now. You would sacrifice her to that brute of a man who will not keep sober even when he is looking forward to such a bride. What sort of life are you dooming this delicate creature to? Shame on you!"

The nobles stared aghast at this arraignment of them; the archbishop moistened his lips and looked at the speaker in shocked amazement; but into the brain of the swaying duke, stupid with alcohol, there must have flashed a consciousness of what Talbot was saying, for without a word or gesture of warning he suddenly leaped to his feet and hurled himself at Talbot.

Talbot saw, and acted. He stepped forward slightly, and shot out his right fist. The duke, caught on the point of the jaw, fell back on the thick rug, senseless.

A cry of rage and horror broke from the others. Some of them sprang to help the duke, some of them looked as if minded to leap on Talbot; one of them glided to the table and pressed an electric button.

The princess had thrown herself into the arms of her champion, and he had held her for a moment close to him, soothing her terror. Then he disengaged his right arm and found his revolver.

What to do he didn't know. He was thinking of going to the door and trying to escape from the house. It seemed so hopeless that he was hardly

disappointed when the door opened and a footman appeared.

"A squad of soldiers quickly!" commanded the noble who had touched the button.

A long-drawn sigh of relief and triumph came from the men in the room. That was the way to deal with this preposterous interloper.

Talbot considered the door again. This was the most desperate case they had yet been in. If they tried to escape through the salon these men would set up such an outcry that their way would inevitably be blocked, and it was useless to think of using his revolver. He might threaten with it, but there would always be the soldiers to reckon with.

There remained the windows of the room. How high were they from the ground outside? Was there a moat?

"Come, Sonia!" he said to her, drawing her toward one of the windows. She followed him willingly, frightened but confident that her splendid knight would find a way out of the trouble.

But he felt more and more doubtful. How could he take her out into the cold in that scant dress? How could he ask her to walk the rough ways in those dainty satin slippers?

Then he remembered that there would surely be horses in plenty, and heavy coats of one kind and another. If only he could get out and hold these men at bay!

"Watch them, and tell me if they come near, Sonia," he whispered, and began to work at the fastenings of the window. The curtains he had flung aside.

It was a French window, opening to the floor. The fastenings were of the familiar French kind, and were soon undone. The window opened. Talbot looked back at the men. No one there was making any effort to hold him, and on the faces of some he saw a sardonic smile.

When he leaned out, he understood;

there was a black void there. He would have ventured for himself, but he could not ask her to take such a risk. If only he had had his rope with him! But he hadn't.

He turned back to the room. The duke was still unconscious, but showing signs of life. Two of the nobles had gone to the door and were waiting there.

He looked at Sonia. She stood there, trembling, but trustful as a child. She looked into his eyes and tried to smile.

"Brave little Sonia!" he murmured. "I am going to fail you at last."

"We cannot escape that way?" she asked.

"It is very high."

He was scanning the room, looking for a suggestion; time was flying, and the soldiers might come at any time. Suddenly he remembered how he had used the Countess Elsa, and in half a dozen leaps he was by the side of the duke.

He tossed the nobles aside as if they had been children, and, just as the door opened to admit the soldiers, he picked up the heavy body of the duke and ran with it to a corner of the room.

The princess had followed him at every step, and now was close by his side. He put her behind him, and, holding the body of the duke before him as a shield, cried out to the dumfounded men: "I will kill the duke if you force me to it."

The soldiers filed into the room, looking in amazement at the man at bay in the corner. The officer waited for orders. Through the now open door of the salon the curious throng of guests could be seen peering into the room.

The nobles, conscious of the absurd position they had been put in by this maneuver of Talbot's, consulted together for a moment.

"Wait outside," said Szolnak to the officer; "and close the door."

The squad of soldiers filed impas-

sively out again. Szolnak turned to Talbot, and studied his stern face.

"Well," he said, "what do you expect to gain by this?"

"Freedom or death," was the calm response. "Freedom under guarantee for the princess and me, or death to the duke and as many more as my revolver will account for. And I am in the habit of making every bullet tell."

"My dear man," exclaimed the archbishop in a tone of remonstrance, "you are acting in a very high-handed manner. You come here a perfect stranger and interfere with the operations of a whole government. Why not take your friends and leave us to deal with our problems ourselves? You would be wiser."

"The only thing that concerns me is the welfare of the princess," answered Talbot. "She doesn't wish to marry the duke, nor does she wish to sit on the throne; so it is you who are unreasonable in trying to force her to do so."

"And if we agreed to your outrageous terms, what must be done?" asked Szolnak. "What will you do? What do you expect of us?"

"I wish to go free from this place with the princess; I wish a pair of horses to ride, my clothes, and the clothes and wraps of the princess, and your oaths not to molest us."

Szolnak turned to the others and talked with them in low tones; then turned to Talbot again. "What will you do with the duke?"

"Let him lie on the floor. I wish him no harm."

"Very well; if the princess will assure us once more that she really refuses to succor her bleeding country, we will agree to your terms. How is it, highness? Do you desert us now? Are you without regard for your country? You have no gratitude to us who have done so much for you?"

The princess, her courage quite restored by this new victory of her cham-

pion over such overwhelming odds, stepped out from behind Talbot and answered firmly:

"This is not my country, as you very well know. I am a Bosnian far more than a Hungarian. You have done nothing for me, but on the contrary have done much to injure me by dragging me from my happy obscurity to compel me to marry a man I loathe, and to fill a position I have no fitness for. I am not deserting you when I go back to my home."

"So be it!" Szolnak turned to his companions. "We must do without her then. Get the clothes of these two, and have two horses saddled." He indicated the ones he would have execute the errands, and the nobles set out at once.

Talbot dryly interposed: "You might let the archbishop administer the oath to these gentlemen before they leave the room. Not that I suspect you of contemplating anything dishonorable, but it is just as well to have them included in the oath."

The nobles stood together before the archbishop, who, after a few moments of reflection, voiced the following words, which were repeated after him by the others:

"We nobles of Hungary, individually and collectively, do hereby take solemn oath before Almighty God that we will take no step to prevent the departure from this castle of the Princess Sonia Kotorska and Herr Talbot, an American gentleman; that we will furnish two properly equipped horses for them and restore their clothing; that we will take no steps to have them intercepted outside of these grounds."

They all took this oath and crossed themselves. Talbot at once carried the duke nearer the table, and placed him on the rug, then returned to the princess. The two nobles left the room to have the horses made ready and to get the clothing.

"I hope you will let us wear what we have on for the time being," Talbot said. "We will return everything later."

"You may keep them, or give them away," Szolnak said indifferently.

The door of the room had been left open again, and Talbot could see that the soldiers had been sent away. Everything seemed to be done in good faith, but he had an uneasy feeling that all was not well yet.

"How splendid you are, Sir Chester!" the princess murmured. "You are greater than an army. You always succeed."

"Wait, little Sonia," he answered; "we are not away yet."

His suspicions seemed to be rebuked, however, when the clothes were brought in bundles suitable for carrying on horseback, themselves covered by their outer clothing, and the way out through the salon left open to them.

Talbot had slipped his revolver in his coat pocket, and held it there ready for use. The guests, who had welcomed them so heartily early in the evening, now watched them in silent wonder as they passed through the salon, the princess clinging to his arm.

On the driveway in front of the great doors stood two horses, ready saddled. Talbot lifted the princess into her saddle, and then put his foot in his own stirrup. At that instant he was surrounded, dragged back, and, in spite of his furious struggles, securely bound.

The princess was lifted from her horse and carried into the house, too stupefied to utter a sound after one cry of dismay at the sight of her champion rendered helpless.

Both of them were taken back into the room of the conference, and the door shut. The princess was seated in a chair, but no restraint was put upon her. Talbot was also placed in a chair, but he was left securely bound.

"You have broken your oaths! You have dishonored yourselves!" the princess cried, starting up from her chair. "Monseigneur, what infamy!"

"Sit down, my child," said the prelate, "and try to be reasonable. No oath has been broken. There was no promise that nothing would happen to you within the grounds."

"You absolve them?" she gasped incredulously.

"There is nothing to absolve," he answered, smiling benevolently. He turned to the smiling nobles. "I leave the matter in your hands now."

The princess stared at them for a moment, then started toward Talbot. Szolnak interposed with outstretched arms. "No, highness; I regret the necessity, but you must have no more to do with him."

She looked as if she contemplated a struggle. Two of the others placed themselves beside Szolnak. She sank back in her chair, casting a glance at Talbot.

Talbot had not uttered a word as yet. He had been looking about, wondering what would happen next, trying to see some way out of the tangle. He noted that the duke was no longer in the room; he was sure he saw signs of some definite purpose in the conduct of these men.

"Have good courage, highness," he said as if in response to her look.

Szolnak whispered to one of his companions, who went out and returned with the lieutenant who had been in charge of the soldiers who had captured them.

"Draw your sword and guard that man, lieutenant. And tell me! Are you one of his highness' men?"

"Devoted to the death."

"And if you are ordered to run him through the heart, will you do it without question?"

"If his highness commands it."

"No, no, no!" cried the princess, starting up again frantically. "You shall not hurt him; you shall not!"

"That is a matter which is entirely at your disposal," the noble said, carefully standing in front of her. "If you will listen to reason nothing shall happen to him; otherwise he shall die as the spy and the traitor he is."

"What do you wish?" she faltered.

"You know well what we wish, highness; you know what the whole country is wishing. There is one thing that will unite the factions and the people—your marriage with the duke."

"Oh, no! Oh, no! I cannot!" she moaned.

"Then you wish this man killed?"

"What? No, no, no! What are you saying? He—he rescued me; he is my champion."

"He is a foolish meddler," was the cold response; "but he shall be sent back to his own country if you will consent to wed the duke."

"No, no! It is monstrous. Oh, Sir Chester!"

"Refuse, princess," he said.

"If you do not consent he shall die, and if he dies it will be by your will, highness." Szolnak was implacably in earnest.

At this juncture the duke entered the room. All traces of his previous intoxication were gone. He stood in the center of the room and looked triumphantly from the princess to the bound figure of Talbot.

"So," he said malevolently, "the interfering spy and traitor is in our hands. Why is he not disposed of?"

"We are using him in our argument with her highness."

"And what is the argument?" he demanded curtly.

"We are trying to persuade her to consent to her marriage to you, and we are promising that he shall return to his own country if she will consent."

"Is her consent necessary?" he demanded, red in the face with anger. "Must the welfare of the country wait on the whim of a foolish girl? What do you say, monseigneur?"

"Her consent is absolutely essential, highness."

"Then let her decide quickly since this fellow's life is of such consequence to her. This matter must be settled at once. Time is of the utmost importance."

Szolnak turned again to the princess, who had listened breathlessly to all that had been said. "Our opinion coincides with that of his highness. You must decide at once. Officer, are you ready?"

The lieutenant, whose face had become very pale during this conversation, turned to the duke and saluted, saying: "At your service, highness."

"Do as the count bids you!" growled the duke.

The lieutenant saluted the Count Szolnak, and faced Talbot with drawn sword. The count once more faced the princess.

She dropped into the chair again, and covered her face with her hands. For a few moments not a sound was to be heard in the room save the heavy breathing of the men who were all tensed with excitement.

The princess let her hands fall into her lap, and looked piteously into the various faces. When they came to Talbot they rested there for a space. "If—if I consent," she said, "do you swear you will set him free?"

"Yes."

"Without subterfuge? You—you will keep your oaths this time?"

"You or he shall word the oath, and we will take it in the most solemn way monseigneur can devise."

"Then—then," she cried wildly, "I—"

"Stop!" shouted Talbot. "Do you think I would accept life at such a

price? You shall not do it, princess. Besides, do you believe such sorry tricksters would play fair? They would kill me, anyhow."

"They will swear to set you free," she faltered.

"I will so word their oath that there can be no loophole," said the archbishop.

"You are too clever at the making of oaths," returned Talbot, with stinging scorn. "Have nothing to do with them, princess. My life is nothing in comparison with your life spent with that sottish brute."

"What!" roared the duke, fairly purple in the face.

"Let them kill me. I shall count it a small thing if suffered for you. Besides, you cannot trust them; they are such skillful liars."

Choking with rage, the duke would have interposed with a furious order to the lieutenant but for the calming hand of Szolnak on his arm.

"Let him talk, highness," he said. "It is better that he should make every possible representation to the princess in order that what we say and *do* will have more weight."

Talbot took him at his word, and went on: "Bear this in mind, princess. My death would be swift and easy; your life would be a prolonged hell with that beast. Be brave for the last time and you will never regret it."

"I cannot let you die," she sobbed. "I would live the remainder of my life in agony and remorse. Oh," she pleaded with Szolnak, "let me go to him, and I will persuade him. I will marry the duke then."

Szolnak stood aside with a triumphant bow. The princess tottered across the room to Talbot, and stood beside him, supporting herself by the back of his chair.

"You will retire a little way?" she said coaxingly to the lieutenant.

The young man, who was already

trembling with emotion, bowed and went some yards away without even asking by a look for permission from his superiors.

Talbot was devouring the lovely face of the princess. She followed the movements of the lieutenant, and then looked down into Talbot's eyes.

"Oh, Sir Chester," she said softly, sobbing gently all the while, "do not ask me to see you die, to know that a word from me could save you. I know these men; they are mad with ambition, and would count your life as nothing. I cannot do it. You must live. I will demand to see you set on a horse and given pledges before I will wed him."

"No," he said firmly, "I will not consent."

"But you must. You have done so much for me already, do not stop at such a little thing. If you die I will kill myself. I swear I will. I am a little coward, but I shall have the courage for that. You have been everything to me; you have changed me from a girl without spirit to a woman whose courage grows with every minute she is with you. If you die I die with you. And you know I will keep my word."

"Little Sonia," he said, "I could not live and know that you were in the arms of that beast. Perhaps if I—if I——" He stopped and bit his lip to keep from going on.

"If you what, Sir Chester?" she asked, bending over him.

"Perhaps if I tell you something you will let me have my way."

"I think nothing can make me change my mind," she answered sadly.

"I have known you such a short time, Sonia; really only a few hours."

"It seems as if we had always known each other," she said.

"Yes, it seems so to me. I am an ordinary man; an American, but in my own country the equal of any other,

while you are a princess with royal blood in your veins."

"Such a poor little princess!" she sighed.

"But there is a throne waiting for you; a throne which I think may be yours without this marriage with the duke."

"I don't want a throne, Sir Chester; all I want is to know that you are alive and well."

"But you are a princess and you may be a queen, and that is why I am guilty of a great presumption."

"Of what are you speaking?" she asked wonderingly.

"I am going to tell you that noble as you are and short as is the time I have known you, I love you."

"You love me?" she breathed softly, and looked into his eyes with an expression of ineffable wonder and joy. "You love me?"

"I can't help it, Sonia."

"Oh," she murmured, "isn't that beautiful! You love me! You the most splendid man in the world, love me!"

He looked into her face and wondered at what he saw there. For the instant both of them forgot the hopelessness of the situation.

"You don't mean, Sonia——" he began.

"You love me," she repeated softly, as if overcome by the marvel of such a thing coming into her life.

"And you, Sonia?" he asked eagerly. "Do you love me?"

"From the first moment, always; now and forever."

"Kiss me, dearest!" he said.

She bent over him, wound her arms about his neck, and pressed his lips with hers.

At this there was a furious outcry and a rush toward them. Sonia was snatched away from him, and the duke, tearing the sword out of the hand of

the young soldier, rushed at Talbot to thrust it through him.

The princess saw his intention sooner than any one else. She broke loose from the men who held her, and threw herself before Talbot.

"You shall not!" she cried passionately. "I love him!"

In his mad fury the duke raised the sword as if he would strike her. Szolnak caught his arm and held it.

"Are you mad, highness?" he said in a low tone. "Are you fighting for a kingdom or for the love of a silly girl?"

The duke listened, and flung the sword away. Great drops of perspiration broke out on his forehead. He turned away, saying hoarsely: "Make an end of this at once."

The others grouped themselves in front of Sonia as she stood protectingly in front of Talbot. Szolnak looked curiously at her for a moment and then addressed her quietly:

"You said, highness, that if we let you talk with him you would marry the duke. Well, you have talked with him."

She stared at him for a moment as if she were coming back from another world and had quite forgotten the events of this one. The next moment she smiled scornfully.

"If I were like you," she said, "I would remind you that I said that I would marry the duke if I could persuade"—she turned and smiled lovingly at Talbot—"if I could persuade Sir Chester. I could not persuade him. I will not even try to persuade him."

"Do you mean——" broke in Szolnak. She made a gesture of silence.

"I mean that he and I will die together if you wish it, but that I will not marry the duke."

"My brave Sonia!" murmured Talbot.

"Oh, I would learn to be so, I am sure," she smiled, turning to look at him, "if only there were time."

"Do I understand that you posi-

tively refuse to marry the duke?" demanded Szolnak.

"Positively."

"Gentlemen," he said sharply, turning to the other nobles, "I regret to ask you to lay hands on your future queen, but there is no other way. Will you kindly take her away from him?"

As gently as was compatible with the force exerted, two of the nobles dragged her away from Talbot.

Szolnak went to the officer, who, having recovered his sword, had been watching the scene in amazement, and took his sword from him.

"Please wait outside the door," he said. The officer saluted and left the room.

Szolnak now went over to Talbot with a firm, decided step and opened his coat, inner coat, and waistcoat, and finally his shirt, so that the flesh of his breast was bare.

"Monseigneur," he said, "you know, as we all know, that it is essential for the good of Hungary that the Princess Sonia Kotorska wed the Duke of Jan-kovacz. She refuses and lets us know that she loves this man and would rather die with him than do her duty."

"You have stated the case correctly and succinctly," replied the archbishop.

"As a patriot," Szolnak went on, "I cannot permit the princess to make such a choice; therefore I shall take such steps as will convince her of her error."

The princess had struggled very little when taken from Talbot. She had shuddered when she saw his garments opened to bare his great chest, but she had not moved. Now she gave a cry, broke away, and ran to Talbot, throwing herself upon him.

She had acted without reason, but it seemed to her that she must protect him.

"What shall I do? What shall I do?" she moaned in his ear.

"Be brave. There is nothing else you can do, dearest." Then he raised his

voice and addressed them all. "You have the power, and you may kill me, but you know as well as I that you cannot compel her to marry the duke. And I, whom she loves, beg her to be firm. I even forbid her by the right of my love to wed him. And after that what? If I am not mistaken her friends are more powerful than the duke's now; in which case beware of the consequences of what you do."

They tore her away from him, and held her firmly at the request of Szolnak, who once more approached near to Talbot.

"The fact that what you say is more or less true," he said, "is the very reason why the princess must marry the duke, and I hope to be able to persuade her." He turned to the princess, and in a cold, hard tone said to her: "Highness, this is not a time for hesitation, and I shall not hesitate. I warn you that this man shall die before your eyes if you do not consent to wed the duke and wed him at once. Will you do it?"

"By your love for me, refuse!" cried Talbot.

She looked at him, and she looked at Szolnak. She knew the merciless quality of these men so well. She had been a puppet in their hands far too long for her to be in ignorance.

"I—I refuse!" she faltered.

Without another word, Szolnak put the point of the sword on the white breast of the helpless man. Sonia screamed in agony. The noble turned and looked inquiringly at her.

"Well?" he said.

"Be firm, dearest," said Talbot, although the prick of the point was already painful.

"Oh, my love!" she panted, struggling furiously with the men who held her. "Oh, my dear love!"

Szolnak ground his jaws together, and pushed until the point entered the flesh and the red blood began to flow.

"No, no!" screamed Sonia. "Stop!

Stop! I can't stand it. I'll do what you ask. Forgive me, dear! Yes, take that sword away. I tell you I will do what you ask. But you must let me go to him. You must! I must go to him, I say!"

She struggled so like a madwoman that the men let her go. She ran frantically, and before any one could stop her had put her lips to the wound, one little hand reaching up and tremulously patting his cheek.

Talbot managed to turn his face so that he could kiss the soft, fluttering little hand. Then he turned his eyes on the group of nobles, and said in such tones of implacable purpose that there was none that was not affected: "You curs! Hear what I say! If you do not kill me I swear by all I hold dear that I will kill that sodden brute who is called the Duke of Jankovacz." He softened his voice, and murmured tenderly to the sobbing Sonia: "The wound is nothing, sweetheart. Don't fret for me. Let them wed you to the duke since you cannot endure to see me die, but believe me when I say that I will kill him. You will not have to endure him long, dearest."

"You will hate me," she wailed, "but I cannot bear this."

"I shall not hate you, dear. I shall always love you. Do what you think is best. I think you foolish to wed him, but if you cannot endure to see them kill me, then let the bishop do his foul work."

She was holding her dainty handkerchief over his wound now, and looking up at him with the tears streaming down her face.

"Could you endure to see me dying under your eyes when a word from you could stop it?"

"No, dearest," he answered tenderly. "I am sure I would do as you decide to do. But will it do any good? Do you believe they will dare to spare me? You know how utterly false they are."

"You shall be spared," Szolnak said. "I will see to it myself that you are taken to either Italy or Switzerland."

"It does not matter to me," Talbot said indifferently. "You have heard my oath, and I think you know that I keep my oaths."

"If ever you set foot in Hungary again," snarled the duke, "that instant you will die. Let us get on with this interesting wedding, Count Szolnak."

"Forgive me, dear!" sobbed Sonia. "I wish I could be braver, but I cannot. I know I would yield the moment I saw your dear blood flow."

"You are as brave as you are beautiful, my Sonia. I could say no more than that. Don't think of me any more."

"I shall always think of you."

"And I of you, dear; but since you must do this, let it be done quickly. Put no obstacles in their way."

But Sonia would do nothing until every man in the room had sworn the most solemn and particular oath that Talbot should be placed safely in either Italy or Switzerland, as he elected.

Then, unhindered by them, she bound up his wound, which was very trifling, and then kissed him tenderly on the lips.

"It is good-by, dear!" she said, the tears streaming down her fair cheeks.

"Yes, sweetheart; I know it is."

"You will not forget me."

"Never."

CHAPTER XIV.

The princess turned to Szolnak. "Set him free, since I have given you my promise."

"No," cried the duke, "he shall not be freed until after the ceremony has been performed."

"You see, dear," said Talbot, "how plain it is that there is no intention of keeping their promise."

"You have our inviolable oath, high-

ness," interposed Szolnak, with an impatient glance at the duke. "You can trust us."

Talbot laughed scornfully. "What does it matter, dear? If you trust them at all, which is folly, why not trust them altogether? Besides, it will not matter in the end."

"No," murmured the princess, "in the end it will not matter. Let the ceremony go on then," she said in a louder tone.

Talbot, always watching the beautiful face, saw by its expression that Sonia had made a supreme decision. He raged to have to sit there utterly helpless while she fought a hopeless fight for his life.

"Her highness cannot be wedded in that gown," the archbishop said, pointing to the stains of blood that were on it. "Moreover, such a ceremony should be public, particularly as the guests out there must be wild to know what is going on in here."

"You are right, monseigneur," answered Szolnak, after an exchange of glances with the other nobles. "Highness, will you cover your gown with your coat so that its condition may not be noticed, and then be so good as to make a new toilet?"

"You are wasting time," said the duke savagely. "What does it matter how her gown looks? As for the guests, half of them have fled, panic-stricken already; those who remain suspect a part of what has happened. They do not know that the princess has degraded herself with that fellow, but they know she was trying to avoid this marriage."

"The more reason, highness, why the wedding should be as public as possible. Besides, the more witnesses, the more there are irrevocably committed to us."

"Whatever you do, hurry," said the duke impatiently.

Talbot, nursing a terrible wrath in

his breast, was nevertheless all the while racking his brains for some plan of action. He had strained at his bonds without effect; now an idea came to him.

"Since in your mercy you have decided not to murder me," he cried suddenly, "is there any reason why I should be trussed up like this? It is neither necessary nor agreeable."

"You'll do well as you are," growled the duke.

"He must be unbound," said the princess passionately, turning to go to him.

Szolnak interposed. "I will see that he is made comfortable, highness, if you will go make a toilet."

Sonia, with a look of high resolve that Talbot could not fathom, permitted herself to be led from the room by one of the nobles. Szolnak at once rearranged Talbot's bonds so that only his hands were tied.

After this the young lieutenant was brought in to guard Talbot, while the others went into the salon to make such explanations as they saw fit, and thus prepare the way for the wedding.

Talbot, on pretense of stretching after the painful stricture of his limbs, put all the pressure he could on the cord at his wrists. He had already tensed his arm muscles, and held his wrists as far apart as possible when they were being tied, so that he had hopes of ultimately freeing his hands. That done, he would know what to do.

They had not taken his revolver from him, not knowing that he had it on his person, or having forgotten it.

He was still making quiet but ineffectual efforts to loosen the cord when the door was thrown open, and the lieutenant was bidden to bring his prisoner into the salon.

Many of the guests had gone, but so many remained that there was still a large and brilliant gathering in the great

hall. They all looked at him with a new curiosity.

Sonia had not come down yet, but the others were there in full view of Talbot, who had been so placed that any effort to escape could easily be blocked. Besides, a file of soldiers stood at the door leading from the salon to the hall.

The archbishop, in all the robes of his office, stood a little apart, talking with the duke and Szolnak.

Before many minutes, Sonia, accompanied by two ladies, came into the room. She was very unlike the timid girl of the old garden, Talbot thought. Her gown was not unlike the one she had just worn, but was a pale yellow. She wore no jewels at all.

It was her manner that made the great difference. She bore herself with a sort of fierce pride. When she entered the room she stopped and looked imperiously about. Only when her eyes fell on Talbot did her face soften.

Disregarding everybody else, she went directly to him, waving Szolnak aside when he attempted to interpose.

"I will have my way," she said.

"Why create a scandal?" he asked in a low tone.

"Any scandal is of your making," she said, and passed on.

She looked wonderfully beautiful as she approached Talbot, but he could see that her resolve, whatever its nature, had only hardened in the interval. How happy he and she might have been, he thought, but for these meddlers! Oh, if only the cord would give!

"Sir," she said to the lieutenant, "retire a few paces!" And when he had done so her face relaxed in a sad, sweet smile. "Dear one," she murmured to Talbot, "this is my farewell. I am sure I am doing the only thing I could do. But do not doubt me. No other kiss but yours shall ever touch my lips. I am a coward now only in my inability to see you suffer. In other things I know I shall be brave. I am glad you

came to me. Love is worth everything. Let me press your lips once more."

She bent forward, and with her hands on his shoulders pressed his lips with hers.

There was a cry of rage from the duke, and a murmur of wonder went through the whole assemblage.

"Good-by, sweetheart!" he said. "It may be for a long time or for a short one. I can see that you have some desperate plan in your mind. Wait two days at least. Give me that much time."

"I will if I can," she answered.

They exchanged one more look, in which it seemed to both of them as if the whole religion of love was revealed. Then she turned and went to where the archbishop stood.

"I am ready," she said to him. To the duke she said: "You may win a crown by this; you will not get a wife."

He looked her over with a glance at once wrathful and appraising. "I will take the risk of that," he said.

They took their places side by side, and a hush fell on the room. It was as if the strangeness of the wedding oppressed their spirits. The prelate took his place in front of the couple, and looked about him as if he would call attention to the fact that to him there was nothing unusual in the situation.

At that moment there was a commotion in the hall. The duke looked toward the door in annoyance.

"Hurry, monseigneur!" said Szolnak in a low tone.

Talbot, who by reason of his stature, and because of where he stood, could see better than any of the other principal actors into the hall, started in surprise, and stared.

The archbishop cleared his throat, and started to speak. A movement at the doorway, and then a clear, rich, mocking voice rang out:

"Come then, prince! We are among good friends."

Szolnak leaped from where he stood, and pushed aside the guests, who had made an involuntary movement to see from whom the voice came. When he was beyond them, and could see the doorway, he stopped with a muttered oath.

Prince Szchymsl and a beautiful woman stood there, side by side. He knew without being told that the woman was the Countess Elsa.

"Count Szolnak!" said the prince.

"Are we in time for the ceremony, count?" demanded the countess; then, closely followed by the prince, who bore himself fiercely, while she was all radiant smiles, she swept forward through the throng that parted to let her pass, and came into view of the wedding party.

"Ah!" the prince cried.

"I'm afraid we interrupt," said the countess, her lips smiling, but her eyes flaming. "Do we interrupt Count Szolnak?" she demanded, turning to him.

He bowed low. "It has just begun," he said in a low voice.

The Princess Sonia turned her head indifferently. The duke had been staring at the newcomers. The prince he knew too well to look at twice; the woman he did not know, but he guessed who she was as readily as Szolnak had done; so it was no surprise to him when the princess cried out:

"Countess Elsa!"

The archbishop changed color, and stepped back. It was amazing how the personality of the countess dominated them all.

"What a charming couple they make, prince!" the countess said. "But, dear me, Princess Sonia, is this the way you keep your word? You were to take no further part in the revolution. Which reminds me. Where is our friend, Sir Chester?"

"Here, countess," he answered; "here, awaiting your kindly help."

The countess looked in his direction, and such persons as had crowded between moved away. It seemed that every one knew of the mysterious woman who had been the very soul of the contemplated revolution.

The countess laughed with real merriment. "What! They actually have overcome the invincible hero!" She laughed again, and then turned and looked at the princess.

There was something so sinister in this look that fear woke in the unhappy girl, and with a cry she ran to Talbot's side.

"If only I were free!" he panted.

She began to tug at his bonds, but her little hands were quite inadequate to the task. "I can do nothing," she moaned.

Talbot raged, but was helpless. He had strained at the cord until his wrists were raw. There was nothing to do but await the issue.

"Countess," said Szolnak, who had been exchanging glances with some and whispers with others of the nobles, "with your permission we will go on with the wedding. As you know, it is the one wise thing for us to do. The whole country demands it."

"And if I refuse this permission you demand?" she cried.

"I should be sorry if you did, since your services to the country have been so great; but, with or without your permission, the wedding must go on. Monseigneur, continue! Princess, I beg you to return."

The countess flashed a glance at the prince, another at Szolnak, and then rested her eyes on the princess, who was nestling close to Talbot, and who only drew the closer to him at the words of Szolnak.

"Do you defy me, then, Count Szolnak?" she cried fiercely.

"I do not defy you, countess; but I

must act in accordance with the welfare of the country. Princess!"

But, swift to decide and to act, the countess caught the prince by the sleeve and whispered: "Keep by me! I will spoil their game yet." And in another moment she had reached the side of the officer who stood apart with his drawn sword in his hand.

He had no notion of what was going to happen, and was staring wonderingly at this beautiful woman who had come to turn everything into a turmoil; so she had no difficulty in snatching his sword out of his hand.

Sonia saw her coming with her glittering weapon, and feared at once for Talbot. She cried out and threw herself in front of him. "No, no!" she cried. "You shall not!"

The countess laughed aloud. "It really is so, then," she said. "Sir Chester, if I set you free and the little princess, too, will you stand by me?"

Talbot understood the instant the words were spoken. "With all my heart, countess," he answered, and turned his back to her.

In a moment the cord was cut. With a grim laugh, Talbot turned. "We can't fail, countess," he said.

"We need only a few minutes," she said in a low tone. "Do anything to keep them occupied. There will be a regiment of hussars here in a few minutes. Take the sword."

"I have my revolver," he answered.

He asked no questions because he understood the whole plan. Now that he was free he knew how to act. He saw that the nobles had been so taken aback by the act of the countess that they were unable to do anything. They simply stared at each other.

It was not a situation to be thrown away. With a leap he was by the side of the duke, his revolver at his head.

"One movement," he said threateningly, "and I will put a bullet in your

brain. And," he added ominously, "I would like nothing better."

Sonia was by his side immediately; the countess, followed by the prince, was there almost as soon.

"I think," said the countess in her mocking way, addressing Szolnak, "that we are masters of the situation. What fools you are! Do you think this child is fit to lead a revolution? Do you want to lose your heads? Do you think you can win because you marry these two? Where would you be without the money I bring and the regiments the prince contributes?"

"It is the logical thing to do, countess," answered Szolnak, recovering from his stupefaction at finding the tables so suddenly turned.

The duke sullenly said something in Hungarian. The countess burst into a good-tempered laugh, and answered in German: "Sir Chester, do you know what his highness says? He tells me that if he had first seen me he would not have been so warm for the other alliance. Are you not angry with such poor judgment?"

Talbot smiled grimly. "I had sworn to myself to kill him, countess, and I would have done it."

"I am sure you would, Sir Chester," she interrupted.

Talbot went on: "But if he will marry you I shall be satisfied."

The countess at that laughed more merrily than before. "Ah, Sir Chester," she said, "you and I would be the ideal couple; but, much as I admire you, in the same degree I detest you. You are much too masterful for me. We would never get on together. The little princess is a much fitter mate for you."

"He may have her," growled the duke. "Put down your pistol, fellow! I ask nothing better than to make the countess my wife. What do you say, Countess Elsa? Shall it be a match?"

Now that I have seen you I will have no one else."

There was a sudden noise of many hoofs trampling the turf and the gravel of the driveway.

"Put your revolver away, Sir Chester," the countess said. "We are masters now. There is our regiment."

Almost as she spoke there was an irruption into the hall of several men, followed by screams from the women in the salon and a crowding of the men together.

"Have no fear, friends," cried the countess in her full voice. "The prince has merely brought a regiment of hussars to show you a small part of his contribution to the cause."

Count Maurus strode into the salon and looked for his sister. When he saw her standing by the side of Talbot and the princess with smiles on her face he stopped where he was.

"Allies now, Maurus," laughed the countess in good humor. "What do you say to a compromise, Count Szolnak?"

"You are generous to offer a compromise when it is in your power to dictate terms," he answered, with no little dignity.

Talbot looked down at the princess, who stood by him trembling with apprehension. She had not understood as well as he had.

"It will all come out right, little Sonia," he whispered. "It will be to the interest of the countess to help us. You will see."

"Compromise or terms; what does it matter?" she cried in a voice to be heard by all. "I suppose we all think first of our country. We all are agreed that the Duke of Jankovacz shall be our sovereign. What need of terms or compromise or controversy? I think and I say that such an alliance as the one about to be made was a mistake. If I know the mind of the princess—

and if I don't she is here to set me right—she wishes nothing so little as the throne."

"Nor would I ever occupy it," cried the princess, lifting her head proudly. "If this marriage had been forced on me by the threat of the murder of the man I love I would have killed myself."

"Why, Sir Chester," murmured the countess, "you actually have made her over from a coward into a brave woman. My congratulations!" Then in a louder voice she took up the talk again: "But it is not only the wishes of the princess that are to be considered. In her heart she is more Slav than Magyar, and already that has affected the feelings of those whose aid we most want. If you do not believe me ask that regiment of hussars who have come here to honor their future king."

The applause at this was unmistakable. Indeed it was plain that the countess had completely captured the fancy of the high-spirited Hungarians.

Count Szolnak was quick to see that it would be foolish to strive against one who held the treasures, the men, and the power of persuasion. His blood quickened at the thought of having such a queen to serve, for he saw that the duke would soon be no more than a figurehead.

"Countess," he said, "let me be one of the first to acknowledge the superiority of your wisdom and judgment."

The high nobles and all the others in the room hastened to make their peace with the woman in whom they saw their future queen, and in a few moments they were crowding about her and treating her as if already she occupied the throne of the Magyars.

The countess, intoxicated by the easy triumph, turned smilingly to Talbot, who had watched the progress of her affairs, doubtful and prepared for the worst. "Confess, Sir Chester," she

said, "this is worth making a struggle for, isn't it?"

"That depends entirely," he answered, "upon what it holds for me."

She laughed. "Oh, we are allies now, and I am as faithful to my friends as I am bitter toward my enemies. You may safely put your revolver away. You will have no use for it."

"And the princess?" he said.

"Is in no danger from me. As long as I am in no danger from her she has nothing to fear from me. What a good friend you are! I was unfortunate in being unable to win your good will."

"You never tried. You set out to make a tool of me from the first."

"I didn't know you as well then as I do now, Sir Chester. I thought of you as an exceptional gun fighter. That's all I knew of Talking Talbot then; I know better now."

"Well," he said, "it doesn't matter now. If you had come to me and told me frankly what you wanted I might have refused, but it would have saved you all that trouble and waste of time in Paris."

She laughed. "It wasn't wasted. You brought to my friends here all the papers they needed. You didn't know it, but you carried them nicely hidden in your bag. They were taken out in your hotel in Budapest. As long as you refused to bring me in with you I let you bring my valuable papers."

"You are a hard adversary to get the better of," he said.

"You are a harder," she retorted. "You could have ruined all my plans if you had wished. I mean," she added, "if you had not fallen in love. You did, didn't you?" And she laughed.

"Yes," answered Talbot serenely, "I fell headlong."

"Good!" cried the countess. "I don't need to ask the princess if the same calamity happened to her. I knew that the first time we met."

CHAPTER XV.

Prince Szchymysl approached the countess and spoke to her in Hungarian. She answered quickly, and turned to Talbot.

"We are going to have a conference. Will you wait here until it is over?"

"Have I really a choice in the matter?" he asked.

"Absolutely," she answered. "I keep my word in letter and spirit. Maurus is in charge of the hussars and knows what my wish is in regard to you. The prince has told him. But if you will wait I think you will not be sorry."

"I will wait," he said.

The countess, followed by the duke, the prince, and all the high nobles, went into the smaller room that had been the scene of so much that was vital in Talbot's life.

Talbot and the princess were left standing together by themselves, while the rest of the party remained in small groups on the other side of the room.

For a few minutes Talbot and the princess maintained silence, both of them overcome by the sort of depression that so often follows periods of exaltation and excitement.

Talbot looked at her. She had been watching him, studying his grave face. When he turned his eyes on her she flushed and looked away.

She was very beautiful, very pure, very winsome. He recalled how sure he had been that there never would be any other woman in his life than the one who had treated him so shabbily, and yet here was this girl whom he had known so short a time and to whom he had given his heart utterly.

Of himself he felt sure, but had he any right to believe that she, in her inexperience, could know whether she loved him or only regarded him with admiration, respect, and grateful liking.

"Sonia," he said.

"Yes, Sir Chester," she responded,

looking up and then quickly down again, as if a bit frightened by what she saw in his face.

"You are a very true and honest little girl."

"Yes, Sir Chester," she breathed in alarm, looking up again and studying his face intently. "What is the matter?"

"Will you be honest and true with me now?"

"Now and always."

"Will you search your heart and try to answer me with perfect frankness?"

"You know I must, Sir Chester."

"When I was bound and in danger of my life you said you loved me."

"Yes."

"And I told you that I loved you."

"Yes." She never took her eyes from his while he spoke, but the quick movement of her bosom betrayed her emotion; fear and dismay were creeping into her eyes.

"You are safe now, and I am safe," he said. "I know how I feel because I am old enough to know, because I have had experience in emotion, because I have known many women. But you, Sonia; are you sure? Can you be sure? Can you even answer me now, or do you wish for time to think it over?"

"I don't think I understand you, Sir Chester. Why are you so stern? What have I done? Don't you love me any more? Was it a mistake?" Her lip trembled, but she did not move her eyes from his.

"It was no mistake on my part, Sonia," he said quickly, covering her hand with his. "I am serious, not stern. Your answer means everything to me. I love you with all my heart and soul."

A glad smile broke over her face, dimpling her cheeks adorably. "I am so glad. I was afraid. What do you wish to know? If I love you? Oh, Sir Chester!"

"I want to know if you are sure. You have had so little experience. I want you to search your heart."

"Oh, Sir Chester," she said, letting her brown head rest for a moment on his arm. "How can you ask me to search my heart when you must know there is nothing to find there but you; you, my knight, my wonderful man. If I could only show it to you? Sure? But you fill my life. It is like asking me if I am sure of the breath I breathe, or of the sunlight that brightens and warms me. It is I who should doubt, not you. Are *you* sure, Sir Chester? Why should you love me? Do you?"

"And you will give up all that your position here means to go with me to a strange land, to enter on a new life? You will trust me so much as that, Sonia?"

"I would rather wear rags and eat crusts with you than have all the world can offer without you. Oh, I can't tell you how much I love you, but it is as much as I can love at all."

"And you will be my wife soon?"

"Whenever you like. It is for you to say."

There were too many onlookers for him to yield to his desire to take her into his arms and hold her close to him, so he pressed the little hand that lay under his.

"I will try to make you very happy," he said.

He led her to seat where they would be partially screened by a large pillar, and there they sat and talked the wise-foolish things that come so naturally to those who really love.

There they were joined after a while by the countess and Szolrak. The latter was discreetly pleased, the former was radiant and triumphant.

"The wisest way with you, Sir Chester," the countess said, "is the most direct way; so I will take it. The duke and I are to be wedded here to-night."

"I fancied something of that sort would result. Well?"

"We all feel that the Princess Sonia Kotorska will be a menace to us."

"Yes," said Talbot, rising to his feet.

The countess laughed. "How ready for action! I say the princess is and must be a menace, but Mrs. Talbot will not be now or ever."

Talbot drew a long breath. "I understand."

"I didn't think it would take many words to make you understand," the countess laughed. "And you, princess; do you also understand?"

Sonia flushed, rose, and stood close to Talbot. "Yes, I also can understand what you mean."

"And you are ready?"

"I will do whatever Sir Chester bids me."

"Yes," murmured the countess, "now and always; and that is well for you, for Talking Talbot is the sort of man who will have his own way. But he is a good man, Sonia, and I think you are as fine and good as you are beautiful. I am sure Sir Chester has already told you that." She laughed. "Well, what do you say, Sir Chester? Will you take advantage of the opportunity and remove the princess from my path by marrying her now? There will be another wedding at the same time, I may tell you."

"Do you mean that I have a choice?" he asked.

"I mean that it is the only way we can be sure of removing the danger of a free Princess Sonia."

"Then I have no choice?" he persisted.

"Isn't it only a question of time?" she asked. "Are you not ready to make her your wife? Why do you hesitate?"

"Because I dislike the priest and I dislike the company," he answered bluntly. "I don't mean I dislike you, countess. As a matter of fact, I like

you, and I am sorry you lose yourself in your ambition."

"She thinks of her country, hungry for her own national life," interposed Szolnak. "As for the priest, one is the same as another for such a purpose. Besides, he, too, may be a patriot."

"Let it be as you wish," Talbot said abruptly.

"I shall not feel married," Talbot said, in a low tone, to Sonia, when they were left to themselves, "but at least it will be legal; and when we reach Switzerland we can be married again."

"Why did she call you Talking Talbot?" Sonia asked irrelevantly.

"It is a name they gave me in my own country."

"But you don't talk much."

"There is a saying in English that actions speak louder than words. I think the name has something to do with that," he answered, smiling as he thought of the effect on his Western friends of the coming into their midst of his beautiful bride.

"Then you have always done things," she said, moving her little head admiringly. "But of course you have."

"I've surely done something this time," he said gayly.

"And I was thinking of killing myself hardly an hour ago," she murmured. "I wonder if I could have done it. Do you think I could?"

"I am sure of it," he replied, with conviction. "And the duke would have followed you very soon."

"And you, too."

"I expected it. I hoped it."

Once more the archbishop stood up to perform the ceremony of marriage; but this time there were two couples, and both couples were eager and willing.

An hour later, Talbot and his bride, once more in their own garments, were seated on the back of the prince's automobile, which had been put in working order and brought to the duke's

castle. They had passports viséd and every necessary paper to speed them on their way.

Before they started, Count Maurus came up to the car and put out his hand to Talbot. "Will you shake hands now, Mr. Talbot?" he said. "I am sorry you ever came to any harm through your connection with me, and I want you to believe that I never intended such a result."

"I never doubted it, count. A man as brave as you is never the sort to do dirty work. I hope you are going to win out here."

"Some day, yes; but this revolution will never come to anything. I am sure of it. And that is another reason why I am here. Don't lose any time on the way to Switzerland. Get over the border as quickly as possible."

"You think there will be a counter-blow?"

"I do. The countess thinks it will come to nothing, and has risked everything on this marriage with that unspeakable duke. I would prefer a constitutional monarchy, or, better yet, a republic. And one or the other is inevitable eventually. Just now the dual monarchy is on the verge of ruin; but, as is often the case, has yet the power to crush a premature effort."

"Thank you, count, for your frankness; I'll lose no time on the way. I was going back for my luggage in the village, but now I won't."

"Unless there is something of value there, better let it go. Good-by. You may yet see me at your ranch, looking for the job you once offered me."

Talbot laughed. "It will be open to you always."

"Good-by, princess."

"I'm not a princess any more," she said; "I am plain—how do you say it, Sir Chester?"

"Mrs. Talbot," was the laughing response.

"Missis Talbot," she repeated. "It

sounds like snakes. Never mind, if it is English it will sound good to me. Good-by, Count Maurus."

"Oh, by the way, count!" said Talbot. "Were those two enterprising gentlemen found in my room in Paris?"

Count Maurus laughed heartily. "They were two furious men, and they always speak of you as that devil of an American."

"I don't see yet the necessity for all that melodrama in Paris," said Talbot. "Why was it?"

"Elsa had determined to use you; that is all. Once she fixes her mind on anything, she is immovable. But you should be satisfied; you have beaten her from first to last."

"And going home with my booty," laughed Talbot, squeezing the hand of his bride. "Well, good-by, and the best of luck!"

"Keep the place open for me," Count Maurus called after them, as the car rolled off.

They reached the frontier in time to greet Donald Brookfield when he arrived with the other prisoners. Already Don was able to walk with some briskness. His few days of freedom, taken with the radical change of scene and air, had done wonders for him.

He grasped Talbot's hand and wrung it enthusiastically. "I can never thank you," he said simply.

"You don't need to. I owe your mother more than you could possibly owe me. Come meet my wife."

"I didn't know your wife was with you," cried Don, in surprise. "How did you dare bring her over here?"

"I didn't."

"You mean she was over here already?"

"Yes."

"Oh! then you came on her account, too?"

"No. I didn't know she was here," laughed Talbot. "Oh, come meet her.

Sonia!" he said to her. "Come meet my friend, Donald Brookfield. She speaks French and German, besides some other languages," he said to Don, "but no English."

Donald positively stared at her in his profound admiration. "I—I didn't even know you were married," he said.

"I wasn't when I saw you," laughed Talbot; "and only half married now, according to my way of thinking; though Sonia is satisfied."

"I should think so, indeed," she cried, "with an archbishop to perform the ceremony."

"Anyhow," said Talbot, "we're going to have it done over again in Geneva, and I hope you'll be a witness."

"What does it all mean?" demanded Don. "I can see there is some mystery."

"I broke into a revolutionary plot and carried off the head of it; that's all," answered Talbot. "I'll tell you about it on the way to Geneva."

"You shall not, Sir Chester. I will tell you, Monsieur Donald. He would have it over in ten words; I shall take two hours."

"Believe me, I prefer to listen to you," said Don. "But why Sir Chester?"

"He was my true knight, and, since I was almost a queen, I gave him the accolade."

Talbot blushed twenty times during the recital, and tried to stop Sonia; but Donald, listening eagerly, begged him to "shut up" and her to go on with her story. When it was told, he remained silent for some time, then demanded:

"Have you any sisters, princess?"

"I'm not a princess any more, please. No, I have no sisters. Why?"

"At least you have some girl cousins?"

"No. But why?"

"If you had, I was going back at once. But I might have known you were the only one of the family. You are certainly lucky, Talbot."

"It is I who am lucky," Sonia protested, with a deep blush.

Very much to her amusement, she and Talbot were married again in Geneva, as he had said they should be.

"He's quite right," Don declared. "If you were my wife, I'd have three weddings, but I'd tie the knot fast."

Mrs. Brookfield met the steamer in the tug, and was taken down to Don's stateroom by Talbot. Later she met Sonia and took her to her heart in a way to make Sonia very happy.

"My dear," she said to the bride, "you have the best man in the world for a husband."

"I am sure of that," acquiesced Sonia.

To Talbot she said: "Chester, she will take New York by storm. Such beauty and such a manner will be a revelation."

"Not to New York," said he grimly.

"You'll never take her out into that wild country and bury her on a ranch?"

"New York is wilder than that country, dear lady. And she isn't a princess any more; are you, Sonia?"

"I am Missis Talbot," she replied, smiling at her own pronunciation, "and I am crazy to go to the ranch."

"Besides," laughed Talbot, "I'm expecting a genuine count to join me as one of my hands."

He had received word in Paris of the failure of the revolution and the narrow escape into Serbia of the duke and his new duchess. Maurus had sent word that he would soon be with Talbot in Texas.

As was to be expected, Sonia took Talbot's part of Texas by storm when he startled everybody by bringing a bride back with him.

Nobody wondered that he had been routed out of his obstinate celibacy by such a wonderful creature, and everybody is eager to help her in her studies of the Texas language.

The Plunder Ship



By
Headdon
Hill
Author of
"Guilty Gold"

Synopsis of Former Chapters.

Homer Ferrars forms a company to send the *Sea Hawk*, commanded by his disreputable brother Powlett, to the Indian Ocean for the purpose of pretending to raise a treasure ship sunk there 200 years before. General Sellon is taken in by the fraud. His niece, Maisie Sellon, is in love with Walter Lynden, chief mate of the *Sea Hawk*, but although he is a fine young fellow, Mrs. Sellon is opposed to the match. Captain Ferrars takes his sister Lena on the trip. She falls in love with Walter, who makes an enemy of her by not responding. Walter discovers that the expedition is a fraud, quarrels with the captain and is left for dead on the barren beach of one of the tiny islands near where they are diving for the treasure. He swims to an atoll, which he can see in the distance, and is

picked up by a beautiful yacht on which he is welcomed by Hussein Ali. They sail to an island which proves to be a small independent state. The sultan, named Zohrab, welcomes Walter. There he discovers Maisie and her mother, who have been rescued and surrounded by every luxury, but who are practically prisoners. Hussein wishes to marry Zohrab to Maisie so as to keep the sultan contented away from Europe, where he was educated. Zohrab is naturally kind-hearted and he is partly white, but Hussein exercises hypnotic power over him. When he discovers that Walter is in the way, Hussein has him shut up, but Zohrab's sister helps him to escape to a distant atoll. She promises to bring Maisie to him within five days if she can, but says that she will kill her rather than see her married to Zohrab.

CHAPTER XVIII.

"TURKISH DELIGHT."

IN those days of Zohrab's infatuation for Maisie Sellon, Hussein Ali never left him alone for a moment if it could be helped. The hypnotic influence, which was undoubtedly the secret of his power, though to some extent continuous in its action, was weakened by lack of contact between practitioner and subject.

So it was that Joanna, wishing to see Hussein alone, frittered away a whole morning in vain attempts; and in the end, so important was her business, had to seek him in her brother's presence. Followed by a stalwart native carrying a bloodstained sword, she entered the billiard room, where she knew that the two were together. Hussein was lounging on a settee, while Zohrab was listlessly practicing cannons on the table.

Hussein's snaky eyes, taking in the

young woman's eager entrance and the reddened blade of her companion, contracted in a sudden frown. He half rose, and opened his lips to speak, but was too late to gain the first word.

"The Englishman, Lynden, is dead," exclaimed Joanna, in the native tongue. "Abdoolah has slain him after a long chase through the jungle. Speak, Abdoolah, and tell them how fleet of foot you were in pursuit of the enemy of Jogore."

The man's story came pat enough. He was one of those who had been searching for the Englishman since his escape from the palace, and he had come suddenly upon him in a rice field at the east of the island not far from a steep precipice overhanging the lagoon. The quarry had started running, but he, Abdoolah, had overtaken him on the brink of the precipice and had cloven him to the neck so that the body fell into the water.

After his first sign of displeasure, Hussein had listened calmly to the man's statement, and Zohrab showed traces of growing anger, and clenched his cue, as though to strike the self-confessed slayer of the Englishman. Lest Hussein should extract the information from him, his sister had said nothing to him of Walter's whereabouts, but he had been hoping during the past two days that his English rival had made good his escape. The worst he wished Walter was that he would go away and leave the coast clear for him to win Maisie Sellon, for the barbaric strain in his nature made small allowance for woman's constancy.

Hussein's prompt grip of the situation relieved the tension.

"Your highness did not witness this occurrence," he said to Joanna, raising a restraining finger at Zohrab.

Not perceiving his drift, Joanna saw no need for another lie. She shook her black locks and stamped her cane impatiently.

"You could not have done so," Hussein went on, in his smoothest manner, "and for this reason: Abdoolah's story is not true. I know where the Englishman, Lynden, is at this moment, and no harm will befall him under certain happy circumstances which we all desire to bring about. I have too much need of Mr. Lynden just at present to compass his death."

This was startling news for Joanna, and she scanned Hussein's face for indications that he was aware of the part that she had played in befriending Walter; but the sphinxlike features remained inscrutable, only smiling cruelly at the now frightened swordsman. Zohrab heaved a sigh of mingled relief and perplexity.

"As for you, Abdoolah," proceeded Hussein, "a prison is the best place for one who tries to gain praise for a deed that he has not committed. It will rest with his highness whether to extend to you mercy or punishment when in due course you are brought up for judgment."

He clapped his hands, and three of the armed men who were always within hail of Zohrab rushed in. The delinquent was led away without protest, but casting appealing glances at his instigator. Joanna, however, averted her eyes. Too much was at stake for her to avow her share in the deception by pleading for the unfortunate, at any rate till he was in peril of torture or death.

The incident convinced her that with Hussein professing knowledge of Walter's whereabouts it would be wasted labor to devise schemes for taking Maisie to him on the atoll. Yet her woman's heart made her shudder at the only alternative of preventing the forced marriage—that of falling back on her knowledge of drugs.

As a matter of fact, she might have spared herself both the design and the justification if she could have taken a

peep into the obscurities of Hussein's mind. That astute diplomatist, having no reason to the contrary, quite believed Abdoolah's story of Walter's death, and was not at all displeased with it. His pretended disbelief was not due to any knowledge such as he had professed, but to a certain scheme to which Walter Lynden, still supposed to be in the flesh, was essential.

He had been on the point of putting this scheme in train when Joanna had entered, and he was now doubly anxious to do so. The ladies in the garden were well watched and guarded, but rumor flies by magic in the East, and it was essential to his purpose to forestall the episode of the bloodstained sword.

"I am going to visit our fair guests," he said significantly. "Is it the pleasure of your highness to accompany me?"

Zohrab had gone back to his occupation of knocking the billiard balls about. He seemed dull and apathetic, and all the rather childish brightness which Walter had noticed as mingling with his discontent had vanished. At Hussein's invitation, he first looked up eagerly, and made as though to lay down his cue, but immediately resumed it.

"What's the use?" he replied sullenly. "Miss Sellon is as cold as ice to me. For the last three days I have been making love to her, yet she does nothing but laugh. I begin to wonder whether I speak English with a native accent, or what is it that makes her laugh? God knows I have got money enough to tempt most women."

Hussein had continued to humor him by talking English to him when they were alone during the last few days.

"My dear master," he said, in an affectionately deferential tone that scarcely veiled the irony of the appellation, "you take the thing altogether too seriously. You forget you are an independent sovereign of vast wealth and,

within your own realm, of unlimited power. The girl is really at your mercy. Why, let me ask you for the twentieth time, should you behave like a rejected suitor? There is no need for consent."

For a moment Hussein thought that his words had struck home. Zohrab quietly finished his stroke without replying, and made a clever shot off the red into a side pocket. Then his fine, half-Semitic features blazed into a sudden tumult of fury as he flung aside his cue.

"Don't you forget, you black beast, that I am a white man," he thundered. "You control me, God knows how, in most things, but I am too strong for you in this. Miss Sellon may laugh and laugh; but, though I am on fire for her, I will not lay a finger on her till she gives me leave."

Hussein listened, not only without resentment, but with every appearance of deep respect.

"I go," he said, meekly raising his bowed head, "to secure that permission. Your highness has reminded me somewhat forcibly of the difference in the shades of our complexions"—the sarcasm was quite lost upon its subject—"but our hearts are of the same color, I may be allowed to presume."

The smoldering fire of his coal-black orbs burned deep into Zohrab's soul and partially regained the mastery.

"You are faithful, I know, and I spoke in haste," replied Zohrab, weakening. "Fulfill your promise and procure for me Miss Sellon's consent, I care not how, and there is nothing I will not give you for the asking."

"The golden gates?" said Hussein, with the sly insinuation of half jest that may, however, be taken for sober earnest at the will of the listener.

"Aye, even the golden gates," replied Zohrab; "but for voluntary consent only, mind you. And, look here, Hussein," he added, as the other prepared to depart, well satisfied, "you might tell

me what has become of Lynden. I am doing the poor chap a fearful injury in robbing him of Miss Sellon, and I should like to make him some compensation. You changed your mind and allowed him to leave the island unharmed?"

Again Hussein brought the hidden force of his wonderful eyes into play, and beat the will of the other into subjection.

"There I must ask you to excuse me, in your highness' own interests," he replied firmly. "When I have gained for you your heart's desire, and then alone, will it be well for you to hear the steps I took to clear Mr. Lynden from your path. The knowledge now might only hamper your courtship, but I have no fear but that you will approve in the end."

So saying, he left Zohrab no chance of protest by quitting the room. Making his way to the wing where the Sellons were lodged, he beckoned one of the men in attendance in the hall.

"I want to see the old Englishwoman alone; if she is with her daughter, call her out," he said.

But the man answered, with a grin, that there was no need. The ladies had quarreled, he believed. At any rate, they spent nearly all their time apart, the elder one in the sitting room and the younger one in the private garden of the wing, where she now was.

Hussein thereupon entered the room, and was welcomed almost affectionately by Mrs. Sellon, who was surrounded with evidences of the profuse hospitality lavished upon her and her daughter. A basket of mangoes stood on the small table at her elbow; a liqueur stand and an ice pail graced the Cairene stool at her side.

"Really this is too good of your excellency—to drop in for a friendly chat," she began. "I am afraid that I have no good news for you, though," she went on, when her visitor, with

many salaams, had seated himself. "Maisie was always an obstinate girl, and, though I am sure she does not dislike his highness, she won't listen to me when I speak of the proposed honor."

The signs of enormous wealth, the titles, and mock air of court etiquette observed at Jogore had done their work so far as Mrs. Sellon was concerned. Profoundly ignorant on all matters outside her own selfish interests, she was under the impression that Zohrab was the recognized prince of an independent and powerful state, and that Hussein, as his vizier, would certainly attend the Prince of Wales' levées when in London. The dazzling prospect of an alliance with so much power and splendor had led captive her greedy soul, and she looked forward to queening it as the mother of "Her Highness the Sultana of Jogore." She little thought that the blandly smiling Asiatic opposite had doomed her to a lifelong residence on a coral island.

"A little sentiment about Mr. Lynden still blocks the way to our hopes, eh?" said Hussein. "It seems a pity that an attachment of that kind should mar your daughter's career." And he appeared to lose himself in thought, the picture of an Oriental statesman trying to solve a knotty point.

"To think that that wretched young man should have turned up here," said Mrs. Sellon querulously. "If they hadn't met here again the other day, Maisie would probably have forgotten all about him."

"Annoying certainly, dear madam, but by no means an unmixed evil," said Hussein, in his silkiest manner. "In fact, I was just reflecting that Mr. Lynden might be used to solve our little difficulty by enabling us to put a gentle pressure on our pretty Miss Sellon. All is fair in love and war, says your English proverb, though I should not dream of advising this course un-

less I felt sure that it would have your maternal approval."

"But how are you going to lose Lynden? You sent him off to Bombay in the sultan's steam yacht, I thought?" queried Mrs. Sellon, in surprise.

"A polite fiction, madam, conceived in the kindness of his highness' heart to save your daughter anxiety on her ex-lover's behalf," said Hussein, with a cunning wink. "The fact is, however, that Mr. Lynden had infringed the laws of this state in such a heinous manner that I, as his highness' chief adviser, was compelled to have him detained. He is at this moment in the public prison of Jogore, and the punishment allotted to his crime under our code is—death."

Hussein looked at her meaningly, and Mrs. Sellon regarded him with an ox-like stare into which presently came an answering gleam. But she was a stupid woman, and had mistaken his meaning.

"You think that after he has been executed Maisie will give in and prefer a living man with a lot of money to a dead pauper," she said, with a callous laugh. "A good idea, but your excellency doesn't know my daughter if that is your plan. She would——"

"Pardon me," interposed Hussein gently, quick to see that he need not scruple to make his proposal to a woman of such stony heart. "I always lean to mercy if practicable, and that was not my notion at all. I think that if we made Miss Sellon's consent the price of Mr. Walter Lynden's life it would be a better move, eh?"

"Splendid!" cried Mrs. Sellon, clapping her pudgy hands in ecstasy. "Shall I go and strike while the iron is hot? She is in the garden."

"It will come better from you, madam. I will await you here," replied Hussein, rising to hold the French window for her.

Mrs. Sellon sailed across the garden and soon espied Maisie at the wicket

gate leading into the larger grounds where she had had her brief interview with Walter. Mrs. Sellon caught a glimpse of some one at the other side of the gate who vanished at her appearance.

Maisie turned to her mother with a stiff little laugh. The relations between the two had been strained for the last day or two.

"See!" she cried, holding up a lump of "Turkish delight" and plainly glad of a noncontentious subject of conversation. "I have made a new friend. That nice girl who received us after the wreck has just presented me with this. You frightened her away as she was beginning to explain the gift."

CHAPTER XIX.

A BARGAIN FOR A LIFE.

Mrs. Sellon sniffed contemptuously at the sweetmeat which Maisie held up for her inspection. In her hazy conception of the establishment in which she was being entertained, she had regarded the Portuguese woman who had received them on arrival as a sort of housekeeper and had almost dismissed her from memory.

If she had known that Joanna was the sister of the "Eastern prince," for whom she was angling as a son-in-law, also that she was within earshot behind the prickly-pear hedge, she would have been more discreet. As it was, she repeated the insulting epithet which had first won Joanna's enmity with a worse one on the top of it.

"The figure of fun!" she cried. "The young minx is currying favor with her future mistress, I suppose, seeing which way the wind blows. I have got something more important to talk about than her, though. Come, Maisie, you are going to be a sensible girl and accept the brilliant prospect offered you!"

"I don't wish to be disrespectful, mother, but if you have only come out

to repeat that absurdity you had better have stayed in the cool room," Maisie replied. "Why," she went on warmly, "leaving me out of the question, how can you ever expect to look my dear father in the face after countenancing such a ridiculous proposal?"

"Your father thinks that we both went down in the *Tiber*; he ought to be glad to find that you are alive and married to a prince," replied Mrs. Sellon. "That is not the point, however. A good deal more depends on your decision than Colonel Sellon's displeasure—no less than a man's life. I should not care to stand in your shoes if you persist in your obstinacy."

"Oh, I don't think you need be afraid that poor Zohrab will die of love!" laughed Maisie merrily.

Mrs. Sellon eyed her daughter maliciously, spitefully conscious that she had it in her power to turn that laughter into tears.

"I was not speaking of his highness the sultan," she said, after a full enjoyment of the pleasures of anticipation; "my allusion was to your pursuing admirer, Mr. Walter Lynden. It is *his* life which will be imperiled by your refusal."

Maisie, experienced in her mother's extravagances, did not at first take her seriously.

"That cannot be, even supposing your friend Zohrab and Hussein Ali to be the heads of a gang of murderers," she said. "Mr. Lynden was to sail for Bombay five days ago; he is safe there by this time."

"That's just where he isn't," shrilled Mrs. Sellon triumphantly. "He broke the laws of this place—some disgraceful conduct, I have no doubt—and was not allowed to leave. He is still on the island, and has been sentenced to death."

Maisie, scenting the truth, or at least belief, in the excited ring of her mother's tone, went as pale as a sheet.

"But—but if this is true, how does it affect my decision?" she faltered.

"Simply because if you accept the sultan's offer, Lynden's life will be spared; if you refuse, he will be hanged," said Mrs. Sellon cruelly.

"And you would wish to see me the wife of a savage who would force me under such a condition as that—you, my mother!" cried the girl, as the bitter tears came into her eyes. "That is almost as hard as the sacrifice you are asking me to make."

"Ah, but it isn't Zohrab's doing," blurted Mrs. Sellon eagerly, gathering hope from her daughter's words. "He doesn't even know of it. Hussein Ali manages everything here, and it was he, with his sovereign's happiness at heart, who thought of this way of bringing you to reason. He commissioned me to put this matter before you, and he is waiting for your answer now."

Maisie, caught in the toils, looked helplessly round her, but there was no one in sight to whom she could appeal, or, for the matter of that, in the whole island, unless, she thought, with quick intuition, Zohrab himself would have pity on her.

"Then I shall throw myself on Zohrab's mercy," she replied, after a pause. "He, at least, shall know what is being done in his name. Go and take that answer to Hussein—that if Zohrab will himself come and impose these conditions on me, I will at least listen to him, if only to insure that the wicked plot has his sanction. From the sheepish way in which the poor creature made love to me, I do not believe him to be so bad as that."

"But——" Mrs. Sellon began to protest.

"That is quite final," the girl interrupted. "I must have this from Zohrab in person, or I shall regard the whole affair as a hoax, in which you will have been a not very enviable dupe—mother."

The last word was uttered with evi-

dent reluctance, and Maisie pointed her decision by turning her back. Mrs. Sellon cast an evil look at her, hesitated, and then, making her way back to the house with extreme dignity, disappeared through the French window.

Maisie remained on the scene of the interview, within a yard or two of the prickly-pear hedge, and close to the wicket gate. In her agitation she had plucked a tuberose blossom, and was unconsciously tearing off its petals one by one. The condition of her mind at present varied between intense irritation and rather more than a shade of uneasiness. The former was due to the belief, relapsing now into a confident hope, that she was the victim of an impossible situation created by her mother's infatuated folly; the latter to a growing impression that the ways of Jogore were not to be judged by ordinary standards. It was beginning to dawn upon her as a little singular that an island, ruled by a "sultan" from a "palace," and boasting steam yachts, European luxuries, and an armed soldiery, had not had its name familiarized to her either at school or during her residence in India.

Not for long was she allowed to pursue her reverie. A quavering but not unmusical voice broke the silence, and, looking up, she saw the young woman who had given her the sweetmeat, and who had vanished at the sight of Mrs. Sellon at the gate. The sight reminded her of the gift, and so did Joanna's tremulous question:

"You haven't eaten that *Rahat Lak-houm* that I gave you?"

"Not yet," said Maisie, nodding and smiling at the apparition, and holding up the lump of sweetmeat which she had retained in her hand.

"Well, don't, then—yet," said Joanna. "It is poisoned. One little nibble, and you will be in purgatory. If that fat old woman had not come out, I should have warned you; but I, Joanna of Goa,

could not stay to be called a figure of fun to my face."

"You did not mean to poison me, then?" said Maisie, drawn to and yet repelled by the quaint figure in European dress, but with Asiatic figure and complexion, mouthing at her through the bars of the gate. She was filled with shame that her mother's insults should have been overheard and understood by this pretty creature whose attitude was not unfriendly.

"I wished you to have the means of poisoning yourself," was the startling reply. "You have spoken good words of myself and my brother Zohrab, and I would not harm you willingly. But to such as you the fate which that fat woman and Hussein propose would be worse than death, so it is right that you should possess the wherewithal to choose the latter."

"You, then, are Zohrab's sister?" said Maisie faintly, for Joanna's words seemed to confirm Mrs. Sellon's statement as to Walter's peril and her own.

"Yes, I am the sister of Syed Bin Zohrab," replied the girl, with mingled pride and sadness. "You did right just now to insist on hearing that base condition offered by his own lips. He is not bad at heart, and has already withstood Hussein's temptation to take you to himself by force. If you see Zohrab *alone*, you may be able to persuade him to spare Mr. Lynden and yourself; but if, as is most likely, Hussein is present—well, you may want that lump of sweet stuff."

"Is it true that Mr. Lynden is still on the island and his life is threatened?" asked Maisie quietly. Fortified with the means of escape that Joanna had given her, she was able to give her mind wholly to scheming for Walter's safety. In the heyday of her bright young life she had no wish to die, but as compared with the other peril hanging over her, death had no terrors.

"He has not gone away, and Hussein

most surely intends to kill him," Joanna began; but before she could describe Walter's position on the atoll and the attempt which she had planned, but now dared not make, to take Maisie to him there, Mrs. Sellon appeared at the French window. At sight of her *bête noire*, Joanna vanished from the wicket gate, and Maisie was, therefore, unable to compare her story with the false statement which she was shortly to hear, that Walter was actually in confinement awaiting execution.

Mrs. Sellon came some way toward her, beckoning, and then called out: "His highness is here. He hastened over the moment your message was given him."

Anxious to be done with suspense, Maisie followed her mother quickly to the house, concealing, as she went, the lump of sweetmeat in the pocket of her dress. As she drew near, her knees trembled with the frantic hope that Zohrab had come alone; but directly she crossed the threshold and saw the hatefully smiling face of Hussein she braced herself with the courage of despair. It was a picture of a brave, self-possessed young Englishwoman that was framed for an instant in the window and then stepped quietly into the room.

Zohrab, deep in conversation with Hussein, looked up eagerly at the girl's entrance, and advanced with outstretched hand. Maisie ignored it, and ignored also the chair which Hussein placed for her, taking another one, the effect being that, when Zohrab fell back, abashed, and sat down, he occupied the relative position to Hussein which the latter had desired, though Maisie did not. From where she was seated, she had a greater opportunity of watching the play of Hussein's face and the motion of his ever-restless hands.

Maisie, after noticing with relief that her mother had passed through the room and disappeared, approached the subject abruptly.

"Is this true, what I am told about Mr. Lynden?" she asked, fixing Zohrab with her clear, penetrating gaze.

Under it the Sultan of Jogore cut a piteous figure. He essayed to speak; but, though his lips moved spasmodically, no sound came till Hussein made what looked like an impatient gesture.

"Quite true," he managed to falter out at last.

"I will trouble you not to prompt, sir," said Maisie sharply to Hussein. "Well, go on," she proceeded, turning again to Zohrab. "I must have your proposal and the conditions you wish to make in your own words from your own mouth, or I won't believe you capable of them."

It may have been that at that moment the frail girl's undaunted spirit came within an ace of casting out the devil that possessed the great, stalwart, simple-hearted Eurasian. He shook as with an ague, and, trying to speak, again failed. It may have been also that Hussein felt his vicarious kingdom slipping from him, for, with more display of control than he usually showed before others, he laid his hand on Zohrab's knee and shook him with a gentle, swaying motion. But he said never a word.

Slowly, very slowly, and with every sign of shrinking reluctance, Zohrab turned his frightened eyes on Hussein's face, and then the end was assured. Held spellbound by the snaky glitter that had fastened on him, Zohrab jerked his head round toward Maisie, and began to speak automatically, like a ventriloquist's puppet.

"Mr. Lynden has broken the laws of the state," he began. "He is under the sentence of death. He is to be hanged at daybreak to-morrow. I will spare him and send him away if you will consent to marry me."

The jabbering intonation ceased, and the speaker sank back in his seat so utterly exhausted with the effort that

Maisie knew afterward that it was at this moment that the idea of hypnotic suggestion first occurred to her in connection with the thrall in which Hussein held Zohrab. For the present, however, she was too full of wrathful contempt for any such lenient diagnosis.

"Laws of the state! Sentence of death!" she broke out indignantly. "How dare you talk like that about an English sailor! I know enough of the map of Asia to be very sure that there is no 'state,' as you call it, within three days of the Indian coast that would live a week after committing such an outrage."

Zohrab had subsided now that his task was done, and seemed incapable of further effort. It was Hussein who glibly took up the talking.

"Your argument refutes itself by its own truth," he said. "It is to the very fact of its being an unknown land that Jogore owes its power and independence, and it is to having endangered its privacy by endeavoring to leave in an unauthorized manner that Mr. Lynden owes his present position. We are compelled to make an example of him—if only as a warning to others," added Hussein, with a latent gleam of ferocity intended to overawe his fair opponent.

If so, it quite failed of its mark. She was quite prepared to sacrifice her life for her lover's safety, but she did not want to sacrifice it in vain, and all her wits were up in arms.

"If I were to comply with these outrageous terms, what guarantee should I have that such as you would keep your promise to let Mr. Lynden go unharmed?" she said shrewdly. "On returning to England, or reaching India, he would hardly remain silent on what has happened."

Hussein, believing Walter to be dead, was equal to the occasion. "We are not afraid of that," he laughed. "It will be pointed out to Mr. Lynden that he would do you, as the consort of his

highness, a grave injury by giving information about Jogore."

To Maisie, confident in her lover's unselfish devotion, the explanation was quite plausible, and she the more readily accepted it, as it pointed to her being speedily avenged. Since she meant to swallow the poisoned sweetmeat within two minutes of the ceremony that would fulfill her part of the bargain, Walter would not long have cause for the silence upon which Hussein appeared to reckon.

There was a long pause, during which Hussein watched her as a cat does a mouse, and Zohrab stole shamefaced glances at her. Looking out across the gray flowers through the window, she heeded neither of them, but stood wrapt in thought. When at last she turned and faced them, all the girlish freshness seemed to have gone from her face and voice, and no wonder, for she turned to pronounce her own doom.

"To save the life of a fellow countryman, I must yield to this outrage—as it is my mother's wish," she said slowly, adding the second reason lest Hussein should suspect her purpose from too ready compliance. "But," she went on, "there are two minor conditions on which I must insist. I don't know whether you profess any religion in this island, but the ceremony must be performed by a Christian minister, or I withdraw my consent. And before it takes place I must with my own eyes see Mr. Lynden depart from Jogore a free man."

The conditions might have staggered a less cunning player than Hussein, seeing that he believed Walter's body to be lying at the bottom of the lagoon, and that there was no one even capable of acting the part of a "Christian minister" at Jogore. Yet he was not the man to refuse a good offer, and, trusting to his wits to extricate him from the difficulty, he promptly closed with it.

"His highness is of the Mohammedan

faith," he said grandiloquently. "But I will at once dispatch the steam yacht to Bombay for a priest of your religion, and your other request—to witness Mr. Lynden's departure—shall most certainly be complied with."

So saying, he gently shook Zohrab, who, looking more like a sleepwalker than a victorious suitor, rose and followed him from the room. At the door Hussein faced about and bowed profoundly, but Zohrab passed out without so much as a glance at his future bride.

When they were quite gone, Maisie's overwrought nerves gave way, and, throwing herself on a couch, she burst into a flood of tears.

CHAPTER XX.

AN ALLIANCE WITH THE ENEMY.

So it was that Walter Lynden, from his precarious refuge on the atoll, saw the *Tulwar* speeding northward, her native commander being under orders to pick up any drunken sot of a European wastrel—a broken-down missionary for choice—whom he could find in the bazaars of Bombay, and bring him with all speed to Jogore.

That was on the morning of the fifth day from Joanna's visit to the outlying reef, so that, if she did not bring Maisie out to him during the ensuing night, he would know that her attempt at rescue had failed, and that the dread alternative which she had shouted to him from the boat would take its place. And, after the lapse of another twenty-four hours, Powlett Ferrars, in the *Sea Hawk*, might reappear at any minute to complicate—or save—the situation.

Though Walter was, of course, ignorant of the *Tulwar's* mission, he acted by a happy instinct, just as if he had known it. Dismissing a wildly conceived hope that Hussein had relented, and had sent Maisie and her mother to Bombay in the yacht, he decided to prepare for the worst, and take it for

granted that the ladies were still prisoners on the island, with no chance of success for Joanna's plan of escape for Maisie.

The *Tulwar* had not been hull down five minutes when his mind was made up as to what course he would pursue. He had not been altogether idle during the last few days, having spent much time in trying to learn the system of the submarine mines in the entrance channel through the reef which he had discovered. He had mastered the position of most of the explosive cases, tracing them by the electric wires leading thereto, but he had not completed the work to his satisfaction. He walked round the reef as far as the channel now, and devoted the best part of the day to finishing his investigation, with the result that before sunset he was acquainted with every one of the connections, and was in a position to switch them on or off at will.

By nightfall he was back again at the spot where the steam siren stood silent in the absence of its guardian angel, Bob Kent. At least, he hoped that the old seaman would come off to the atoll to give a "ghost dance," when, even if he did not bring Maisie, he might have news of her. But the hours passed, the brief twilight faded, and no sound of oars or grating keel came to cheer the lonely watcher. As a matter of fact, Joanna, in her cross-purpose game with Hussein, ignorant whether he really knew Walter's whereabouts, had persuaded the old man to sham sick, and thus avoid drawing suspicion to the atoll by a visit.

With the first flush of dawn, Walter gave up hope, and flung himself down for a few hours' much-needed rest before facing the ordeal he had set himself. It was a desperate remedy, at best, for a desperate situation, and he had very little hope of coming out of it alive himself; but it would be better than doing nothing now that the time

was up for Joanna's threatened poison to take the place of rescue.

When he rose, but slightly refreshed, it was the open sea to the northward that claimed his attention rather than the lagoon and the distant island of Jogore. According to his reckoning, the *Sea Hawk* might put in an appearance any moment now, and all day long he lay in what shade he could find straining his eyes to the quivering horizon for the first trace of her smoke.

Toward evening he was rewarded by the sight of a faint blue cloud, amid which, half an hour later, the two pole masts of the *Sea Hawk* took shape enough to gain his recognition.

The steamer appeared to be heading for a point on the atoll some two miles from the hidden channel, and Walter at once set out thither. Allowing for full speed, it would be an hour and a half before she arrived close inshore, by which time it would be too dark for him to be seen from her, and he would be free to choose his own method of making his presence known. His great fear was that he would be shot down before he had done his business with Powlett Ferrars.

One thing in favor of his plan he had already noted with satisfaction. The place for which the *Sea Hawk* was making was the most densely wooded in the whole of the encircling reef.

There was yet the chance that she might change her course, but if she kept on as she was going there would be no fear of her being seen from Jogore or any of the small craft fishing in the lagoon. She could approach and lie to under a complete screen of tall cocoa palms.

Another point he had for self-congratulation. The coral growths forming the atolls of the Maldives rise sheer from the depths of the ocean, so that up to the very beach the water is hundreds of fathoms deep. There being no anchorage, near or far, the vessel

could come within hail, as she had done six days ago, on her first appearance.

When he arrived at the palm grove it was as dark as it ever is in those latitudes when the brilliant stars are unclouded, but the green and red lights of the oncoming steamer, both visible, told him that he was right ahead of her. Nearer and nearer she drew till it was beyond doubt that Ferrars meant to land where he stood waiting. The only question was whether he would land a party to commence his "man hunt" that night, or wait till the morning. Walter smiled grimly as he fervently prayed that the former would be the case.

"I wonder if a man was ever so keen before to meet a shipload of cutthroats looking for him," he thought as he watched those steady red and green eyes shining at him from the sea. They never wavered. The course steered was straight for the sheltering palms, and then, like music on his ears, there sounded the thud of the screw, and a little later the hoarse cries of command as the steamer rounded to within biscuit throw of the shore.

Whatever happened now, being within easy ear shot, he could communicate with the ship at will; but he waited a little to see if a boat would put off. None came. On the contrary, the signs of activity on deck decreased, and he could see indistinct forms tumbling into the fo'c'sle. He knew that the steamer had been made snug for the night, and that all but the deck watch were going to their bunks.

"Well, here goes," he said to himself. "I should have liked to know if Lena was on board, but with that terrible threat hanging over my dear one I can't afford to lose the hours of darkness." And putting his hands to his mouth, he sent a mighty hail ringing across the water:

"*Sea Hawk*, ahoy!"

The sound of his voice was followed

by half a minute's dead silence, all noises ceasing instantly on the vessel at the unexpected hail. Then he saw a man's figure run hurriedly up the bridge stairs to join another already there, and then came an answering hail in Laban Booth's oily tones:

"You there on shore! Is that Mr. Lynden?"

"Aye," Walter replied. "Send a boat, will you? I have important information for the captain."

"That will stop their cutting me down or shooting me on sight," he thought as he noted that, after a brief conference, his request was being complied with. Five minutes later he was climbing the side of the *Sea Hawk*, to be met, to his surprise, by the outstretched hand of Powlett Ferrars and the blandly smiling countenance of Laban Booth. He had expected open enmity, but he mistrusted this cordial greeting more.

"Why, Lynden, this is a pleasant surprise," said Ferrars. "When you went suddenly off your head, and jumped overboard at Seluga, we never thought to see you again."

"After leaving me for dead and buried I don't suppose you did," said Walter coolly.

"The poor chap has not fully recovered yet," murmured Booth in an audible whisper. "How lucky that we've found him—for careful treatment. Bleeding would about suit his case, eh, sir?"

"Come below, both of you," said Ferrars, scowling at the speaker. "There's no need to palaver before all these gaping swabs," and he turned and led the way down into the saloon. "Now, what's this rot about being buried alive?" he went on, as he turned and faced Walter by the light of the swing lamp.

The fierce glitter in the bloodshot eyes warned Walter that he would be appealing to the wrong passion by pro-

voking anger when greed was the card he had to play.

"I won't argue the point," he said. "I'm willing to consider—aye, and to maintain—that I've been raving since you called me into your cabin that night off Seluga. And I'll go farther, and promise if I ever see England again not to blab about your throwing things overboard for the diver to find. And on top of all that I'll give you a hint that may lead you to what you're looking for—the treasure out of the old galleon. But there's something to be done in return—something that most men would do without all this bargaining."

Ferrars and Booth exchanged glances.

"I don't call it bargaining on your part to offer to forego a lot of trumped-up charges that you can't substantiate," said Ferrars cautiously. "What is there to do? It must be a pretty tall order to make you climb down like this."

"It's to rescue a couple of English ladies from a pack of black-hearted niggers that mean them no good," replied Walter.

And he went on to narrate his rescue by the *Tulwar* and his discovery of the shipwrecked passengers at Jogore, hiding nothing that had occurred, and describing fully the mysterious power of Hussein over Zohrab. But he saw that his hearers were much more interested in the wealth and luxury of the long-concealed stronghold than in the fate hanging over Maisie Sellon. Prompted, perhaps, by shyness, he did not disclose her name, or that she was the original of the photograph which had caused one of his quarrels with Ferrars.

"This beggar Hussein is the same that was mouching about this ship before she left dock—you're sure of that?" asked Ferrars at the conclusion of Walter's narrative.

"There's no shadow of doubt, and in my mind that fact shows a connection

between the treasure and this island," was the reply.

"We've got an old black duffer on board who knows something he won't tell," remarked Ferrars thoughtfully. "The same that came nosing about at Seluga. He turned up again with the same old yarn about the treasure having been fished up—the day after you—you went off your head, you know, and I took the liberty of kidnaping him and clapping him under hatches. He'll come in handy to say where the stuff's hidden, if this is the place."

"And if they ain't blowed the lot in buying all the pretty things Mr. Lynden talks of," put in Laban Booth.

"We'll chance that," laughed Ferrars. "Anyway, there'll be loot enough to make the job pay."

All this talk of the plunder, and never a word of the woman in trouble irritated Walter, but he strove hard to master himself.

"You'll have to go easy, because of the ladies," he said. "You won't have such a soft thing as it seems. There are a lot of well-armed natives under good discipline in the place, and they will fight hard at a pinch."

"And so, by G——! will the shipload of rakehells I have brought from Bombay under promise of such a turnip as this," replied Ferrars grimly. "The women must take their chance; but if we come out on top they'll be all right, never fear. The girl that this half-caste boss is sweet on is a pretty little bit of goods, I dare say?" he added, with one of his nasty leers.

Walter had committed himself, or that look might have altered his plans. He nodded, but ignored the question verbally in his answer.

"My notion is that if you ran in to-night in the dark you might take the place by surprise," he said.

"And a very good notion, too—mine as well as yours," drawled Ferrars. "He's been very useful, this stray bird

of ours, eh, Booth?" added the captain to his confederate. "But," after a significant pause, "I think we have got about all we want from him."

Laban Booth sniggered ominously, and began fingering the flap of his hip pocket, but Walter had another card to play—the best in the pack.

"I quite understand that it would be convenient to finish that funeral, but you will have to put it off," he said quietly. "It would take you a week to find the channel through the atoll, and then you'd end by being blown to where you'll go some day. The passage is full of mines, both electric and contact, which I have spent the last week in studying."

"My dear fellow, your head is a bit weak still. I was only chaffing, of course. I shall be only too glad of your pilotage," Ferrars replied, with forced geniality. "We'll rouse ship and get to it at once."

They all rose together.

"I will steer you to the opening," said Walter. "Then you will have to land me, and work her through as I disconnect the mines. By the way, Telfer, the diver, is on board still, I suppose? That is well. I shall want some one who can work under water. There's no depth, and no need for his diver's dress."

Ten minutes later the *Sea Hawk* was heading for the channel, with Walter conning her, and the surly quartermaster at the wheel on the bridge.

On deck, Mark Telfer, roused from his bunk, was rubbing his sleepy eyes, waiting for orders. And looking down, Walter caught the flutter of a pink dressing gown at the door of Lena's cabin.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE PASSAGE OF THE REEF.

Having brought the *Sea Hawk* to the mouth of the channel, Walter explained to Ferrars and Booth, who had re-

maintained close to him on the bridge, the zigzag course of the passage through the encircling reef.

"You must go dead slow, with no way on her, and stop every time I sing out if you don't want to be blown sky high," he said. "I shall give you the signal in good time before you approach each mine, and you mustn't come on again till you hear from me that the wires are disconnected."

"What sort of a lookout do they keep on the island?" asked Ferrars.

"A sharp one—to judge by the way they stopped my attempt at escape," replied Walter. "You had better have all lights covered before you come out into the lagoon, and if you are thinking of such a thing I shouldn't advise you to go on without picking me up at the other side of the reef. You will burn your fingers to a certainty if you try to approach the island without some one who knows the ropes to guide you."

Ferrars exchanged a grin with Laban Booth, whose broad face always reflected his commander's humor.

"Blessed if I don't like a chap that knows his own value," he sneered. "Never fear but what we'll pick you up, Mr. Lynden; we love you too much to lose you after all the pains we've been at to find you."

"There, if the diver is ready, you had better land us on the atoll," replied Walter, for Maisie's sake curbing a wild impulse to tell the pair that they could murder him as soon as they liked when they had put the English ladies at Jogore in a place of safety. The bitter drop in his cup was that he might be eating insults and veiled threats to no purpose, for he was sorely vexed in spirit now whether he had not made a great mistake. Powlett Ferrars could be trusted to put in a bold bid for the treasure, but he was a poor pillar to lean on as a champion of chivalry.

But as Walter went along the deck to go to the boat that was waiting to

put him ashore one ray of comfort flashed from the clouds that beset him. Passing Lena's deck-house cabin, he saw a white hand shoot from the doorway and felt a detaining clutch on his arm. The cabin was in darkness, but the starlight showed the face of Lena Ferrars framed in the entrance.

"Don't trust my brother," she whispered. "No matter what has prompted this rashness in giving yourself up—don't trust him. For God's sake give him the slip if you can! He will kill you as soon as you have found the treasure for him—if you are pinning your faith to that."

"I don't trust him," whispered Walter in reply, and made as though to pass on, for Ferrars and Booth were only a few paces ahead, leading the way to the boat. Lena, too, waved him away, but as he turned his back on her he caught another whisper floating after him:

"I'm sorry for what I did."

"She's human, anyway, and not the absolute fiend I thought her; that's a point in my girl's favor," he reflected as he went on to the ship's side, where Mark Telfer stood ready to descend into the waiting boat. Ferrars and Booth narrowly watched his meeting with the diver, but to his great relief Telfer was equal to the occasion, and merely nodded, showing no particular pleasure at his reappearance.

The *Sea Hawk* was lying but fifty yards from the atoll, so the trip to the shore was quickly accomplished, Walter noting that the two men who rowed the boat were strangers to him—not members of the original crew. A brace of beetle-browed, evil-looking ruffians they were, so far as he could judge in the dim light, and certainly not English. He put them down as Spaniards or Italians, though as they did not speak he could not be sure of their nationality.

Telfer, however, threw some light on

the subject, as he stood at Walter's side watching the men paddle the boat back to the ship.

"A pair of beauties, those, eh, sir?" said the diver. "Two of the new hands shipped at Bombay, and not the worst samples of the crowd by long chalks. Well, I daren't say it before Ferrars, but I'm glad to see you alive, Mr. Lynden. Almost as glad as I am to be alive myself, though that won't be for long, I reckon."

"We must do the best we can," replied Walter. "I have no real need of you on the job we're on, but I asked to have you with me so that you could post me in what's happened. We've got a minute or two while they hoist the boat up, and work the ship through the mouth of the channel. Just spit it out as quick as you can."

"Well," said Telfer, seating himself on a snag of coral, "it was given out that you'd gone off your nut and jumped overboard, though I knew better than that. Next morning I was sent down, and fetched up a lot of old truck—swords and guns and what not—that I'll swear in the court of law weren't there the day before. You mind my telling you I'd covered a lot more of the sea bottom that first dive than ever I let on?"

"I can bear you out in that," said Walter. "Ferrars chucked the stuff overboard himself. It was because I saw him that I was knocked silly in his cabin that night."

"Knocked silly, were you?" said Telfer. "Then that was why they came south from Seluga after I'd done my dive—to dump you hereabouts. They were messing about among these southern atolls for a day or two, with boats out at night and no end of jabber between skipper and Booth, and then away we went for Bombay and back again after shipping a fresh crew of as bloody-minded, unwashed dago cut-throats as ever stunk out a sailor's

boarding house. Ferrars must have offered a reward for condemned murderers that had escaped, I reckon. It promised to be too thick a cruise for me and I tried to do a bunk, but it didn't come off. Then we came back here, and I'm called out of my bunk for some sort of racket that I don't rightly understand, except that I'm main glad to see you in the flesh again, Mr. Lynden. I never thought to."

Walter patted him on the back. There was no time for gush. "Ferrars was talking about some old nigger they'd brought from Seluga," he said. "He's on board now, isn't he?"

"Aye—a cruel job," replied Telfer. "The old chap came worrying around in a canoe, and at first they stood him off. Then they changed their minds, invited him aboard, and clapped him in irons. The canoe they stove in, so that the poor black devils in her had to swim through the sharks for the shore. Ferrars and Booth go down and do things to that old man every night—it's my belief with hot irons. Anyway, it makes him scream."

Walter shuddered, but a hail came across the water and claimed him. The *Sea Hawk* had begun to forge slowly into the mouth of the channel, and the voice from her was that of Laban Booth:

"We're on the move; sing out when we're to stop."

"You can keep on, and stop twenty yards from the first bend," Walter replied, and, bidding the diver follow, he led the way along the bank of the channel to the first mine, which was just round the first acute angle in the Zed. It was a contact mine, designed to be fired by a passing vessel striking a wire stretched taut from an iron peg in either bank and communicating by a branch wire with the explosive chamber under water. It was not by any means a perfect contrivance, as all that was necessary to make the pas-

sage safe was to detach the wire from one of the pegs and pay out the slack till it dropped to the bottom clear of the ship's keel.

Walter correctly guessed that the arrangement had been devised for the convenience of the *Tulwar* and other vessels belonging to Jogore, which when requiring to pass would land a man to lower the wires to safety and tighten them up again when the vessel had traversed the danger point. The security of the channel, in fact, depended upon the locality of the pegs, and the secret of their use being only known to vessels authorized to use it. With that knowledge any vessel, authorized or not, could have passed safely to and fro at will but for an additional precaution. Close to the inner or lagoon end of the channel there were a couple of mines contrived to be fired by electricity from some point on the island, the weak point in this part of the system being that these two mines depended for their efficacy on the lookout that was kept.

Walter had only found the iron peg after a prolonged exploration, made possible by his enforced idleness on the atoll during the past week. They were driven into the rock a foot below high-water mark, and at full tide they, with their coil of extra wire, were invisible either from the channel or the bank. It was to this discovery that he owed the inspiration of the idea that now possessed him.

"You had better not watch me too closely," he said to Telfer when they came to the first angle in the zigzag passage. "It may come in handy to you to be able to swear that you couldn't find the place. I shall want you later on."

He swung himself over the shelving bank, and found the peg under the water. Having done what was needful, he hailed the *Sea Hawk* that she might safely round the bend. When she had

done so he hailed again that she must proceed slowly and then stop as before at the next angle. As he did not immediately reappear, Mark Telfer went and peered over the bank and saw him frantically busy below, his body swaying and one arm waving with a curious circular motion. It was much too dark for Walter's movements to be seen from the now slowly receding ship, and in any case they would have been unintelligible to those on board. For the expert in subaqueous matters, however, they had a grim significance.

"Why, you're never——" the diver was beginning in a throaty whisper, when Walter silenced him with an angry hiss.

"The sooner you realize that a word too much may cost your life the better," whispered Walter as he rejoined him on the bank. "As it is we shall have to hustle if they are not to smell a rat."

"Call me a fool; I see your game now," murmured Telfer as he raced across the reef in Walter's wake to the site of the second mine at the next angle in the channel. A contented grin had replaced the look of alarmed surprise that had furrowed his good-humored face at first sight of his companion's maneuvers.

At the second mine exactly the same performance was gone through; the *Sea Hawk* passed the dangerous point in safety, and Walter was again slow in returning to the bank after she had glided by. But this time Mark-Telfer called forth no rebuke by unnecessary comments.

"Now this is where you come in," said Walter as he rejoined the diver on the bank, and led the way to the next and last angle in the zigzag waterway. "This is an electric mine, and we're going to spoil it once for all. You've got the tools I asked to be put in the boat?"

Mark held up a carpetbag, and rattled the contents.

CHAPTER XXII.

HUSSEIN IS BUSY.

When Hussein Ali was awakened by a frightened attendant in the gray of dawn with the news that a strange steamer had entered the lagoon during the night, and was anchored or lying to within long rifle shot of the island, he cursed his informant for the son of an owl who had mistaken the *Tulwar*, the sultan's own steam yacht, for an alien vessel. But it was not his habit to leave matters to chance, and, though he did not cease to curse, he hurried into his clothes and quitted his apartment.

The "palace" of Jogore was built, as has been stated, some way inland, and, for purposes of privacy, out of sight of the lagoon. To verify or refute the astounding statement of the trembling menial, Hussein had to proceed to the summit of a wooded hill outside the walls, where by day it was usual to keep a lookout man posted. By night the precaution was dispensed with, and, indeed, such was the confidence in the secrecy of the channel and the efficacy of its protection that even by day the watchman was only placed there to signal the arrival of the *Tulwar* from her periodical trips.

There was a stone hut under the brow of the hill on the landward side, in which was kept the electrical apparatus for firing the two mines at the lagoon end of the channel, and the hut also served to give shelter to the watchman. This man, a swarthy Arab, had been the first to discover the presence of a steamer in the lagoon, and Hussein found him still staring at her through his telescope.

Snatching the glass from the man, Hussein leveled it, and saw at a glance that what he had believed to be the

impossible had happened. That coal-black vessel of three thousand tons was certainly not the smart little steamer in which Zohrab was wont to idle about the lagoon, and which was used for importing European goods from Bombay. There was no doubt that for the first time in the history of that curious "kingdom" the inviolate channel had been found and safely passed.

But Hussein's scrutiny was prolonged and told him more than that. He recognized the intruder as the *Sea Hawk*—the steamer to which he had paid that nocturnal visit in the Royal Albert Dock, on the eve of her much-advertised departure in quest of the lost galleon's treasure—the steamer whose expedition he had taken a hurried voyage to Europe to prevent by any means. As he shut the telescope with a snap, he remembered how he had crept aboard her with a knife, ready for Powlett Ferrars, and had stumbled on honest Walter Lynden instead.

Hussein Ali, though too cosmopolitan to be a strict observer of the rites of his creed, was imbued with the true Mahomedan fatalism, and the appearance of the *Sea Hawk* did not altogether disconcert him. It was disquieting certainly, but what was ordained had to be, and matters had not gone so far yet that by luck or judgment—the latter chiefly—he might not persuade fate to stand him in good stead. It would be time enough to accept the decree as against him when it had been openly declared—not a moment before—and in the meanwhile he would do his level best to prevent that disaster. It might be that he could twist the advent of the *Sea Hawk* to his own purposes.

With this philosophy strong upon him, he bade the lookout man report the slightest movement of the steamer, or, so far as they could be observed, of the crew, and made his way back to the

palace of Jogore. For the moment he put from his mind vague speculations as to how the steamer had safely passed the contact mines in the channel, or why she had come, and set himself face to face with the actual fact of her presence in the lagoon, and its bearing upon existing circumstances.

These, on the whole, were not quite to his liking—apart from the tremendous one that had dragged him from his bed two hours earlier than was his wont. He had retired to rest on the previous night happy in the belief that Walter Lynden had been slain, proud of his victory over Maisie Sellon, satisfied that his policy of effecting a more or less forced union between Zohrab and an English girl would bind his nominal master in closer bonds than ever; and yet, as he had closed his eyes in sleep, he had been conscious of a slight uneasiness.

This had been due to the behavior of Zohrab after the interview at which consent had been wrung from Maisie as a price of her lover's life—the lover, be it remembered, whom Hussein believed to be already dead. Dazed at first from the effect of the hypnotic pressure put upon him, Zohrab had grown sullen as the influence wore off, and finally almost rebellious. Hussein's uneasiness was due to a half doubt whether he would be able to keep his "subject" up to the mark till the return of the *Tulwar* with some individual able to travesty a marriage service.

By the time he reached the palace inclosure, his active brain had hammered out of an unpromising situation the germ of a very promising plot which should serve two ends. The chief one was the destruction once for all of Zohrab's scruples by hurrying on the union with Maisie; the second had reference to the final disposition of the *Sea Hawk*. That the steamer had a crew strong enough to attempt violence he was not aware, but he knew that the

magic word "treasure" must be the cause of her arrival, and he had no intention of allowing her to depart. The jealously guarded secret of Jogore was not to be endangered through sentiment about the lives of a few seamen.

On passing through the guarded gates into the inclosure, instead of going indoors, he turned aside and made for the quarters where the armed retainers lived. He saw at a glance that the rumor of the strange ship had penetrated here. The men were hurrying on their accouterments. The air was filled with a buzz of excitement, and amid the crowd stalked to and fro the Sikh commander of the forces of Jogore. Twenty years before Mirzah Khan had vanished mysteriously from his regiment at Rawal Pindi, after shooting his colonel, and there was still a big reward offered by the Indian government for his capture. Zohrab's father had had a genius for spiriting away and turning to his own uses malefactors who had made the mainland too hot to hold them.

Seeing Hussein, this man came forward and saluted.

"There is to be a fight at last, O Hussein Ali Sahib—a fight after all these years," he said, with a gleam in his eye. "I shall not have drilled these rascals for nothing, after all."

Hussein laughed a little at the other's enthusiasm. "It is well to be prepared, Mirzah Khan; but this little surprise may, after all, be settled by subtler methods than your strong soldier ways. How do you account for this vessel having passed the contact mines in the channel through the atoll? There is a hanging ahead for some one who has been remiss in his duty."

"That mongrel son of a dog, Ayoob, who commands the *Tulwar*, is responsible, anyway," replied Mirzah Khan, between whom and the chief of the "sister service" there was a long-standing jealousy. "When she went out the

other day, the lazy wretch who was landed on the reef to let her pass must have omitted to brace up the wires when she had gone by. Then this ship comes along, hits by the will of Allah on the passage, and, lo! there is an enemy within our gates. Ayooob should hang."

"He shall, if, as seems likely, your view is the right one," said Hussein, to whom this explanation had already occurred. "Now take orders from me, Mirzah Khan," he proceeded. "I have need of this ship and her people before your lust of blood can be sated, and for the present the armed strength of Jogore must be concealed. Details I leave to you, but no hint of the discipline and the numbers at our disposal must be disclosed, if, as is possible, some of the people from that ship come as the invited guests of his highness to the palace. You understand me?"

"It is an ambush that your excellency prepares," nodded the renegade soldier. "My men shall vanish as though swallowed by the earth. The sword that is to drink blood in the end can stay its thirst, knowing that it is to drink."

"One more instruction, and I have done," said Hussein. "Has that relic of bygone times, the English sailor, who plays the ghost, got over his sickness yet? He ought long ago to have been knocked on the head, but he may be useful to-day."

The Sikh made a gesture of contempt. "I heard from a man who passed his hut last night that he was drunk and singing," he replied.

"Then you shall sober him," said Hussein. "He alone, as you know, has charge of the atoll and the things that are thereon. Go to the old man as soon as you have made your dispositions here, and tell him to repair to the atoll at once, keeping his boat behind the island so that he will not be seen from the steamer. Inform him that the contact mines are disarranged,

and instruct him to wind up the wires left slack by the *Tulwar*. Thus, whatever befalls here in Jogore, shall yonder steamer be caught like a rat in a trap."

Mirzah Khan promised to dispatch Bob Kent to the reef within half an hour, and Hussein passed into the palace. His first visit was to the apartment of Zohrab, who had to be aroused from sleep to hear the news, and who, as Hussein had expected, was very wrath that the mines had proved such a failure in the hour of need. Not that Zohrab had the slightest wish for any one to be hurt by them, but their construction had been his pride and amusement for a whole year, and he was annoyed by the twinkle of scorn which Hussein purposely threw into his glance.

"I always told your highness that our strength was rather in the secrecy of the channel than in contrivances so liable to break down," Hussein said, with a trace of reproach. "However, perhaps it is as well that it has happened so. Who knows what the end of this intrusion may be? At least it may cause the abandonment of the marriage about which your highness first blows hot and then cold."

Looking up, Zohrab caught the full power of Hussein's baleful eyes, which, backed up by the insidious words accompanying it, once more vanquished the weaker soul.

"The marriage shall *not* be abandoned for forty strange vessels in the lagoon," cried Zohrab impetuously. "I trust to you to carry it through, and rid me of all interference by cunning, if force fails us, though surely we are strong enough in men and arms not to fear the crew of a trading steamer."

Hussein, in a flash of thought, decided not to say yet that the strange ship was the *Sea Hawk*. If Zohrab had known that fact, such was his partiality for Walter Lynden, that he

might have been openly hostile to the captain who had ill-treated him, and for the present, civility to Ferrars was essential to his scheme.

"Now that I know your highness' mind, I will certainly carry the matter through," said Hussein. "I see my way clear already, but in order to succeed it may be necessary to invite some of the people from the steamer to come to the palace, and appear friendly with them. Your highness has no objection to this course?"

Zohrab, bound in chains by those electric eyes, laughed hysterically. "I object to nothing that will give me Maisie Sellon," he cried.

It was ever Hussein's way to strike while the iron was hot, and he went away at once. Having interviewed the chief butler of the establishment, and made sundry arrangements in other departments of the huge household, he set out for the landing stage.

But he first dispatched a messenger to the garden wing with a note for Mrs. Sellon couched in these terms:

"An unexpected opportunity has occurred. You may prepare your daughter to be ready sooner than was expected. It would not be well for her to be taken by surprise."

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE ARRANGEMENTS FOR A WEDDING.

When the *Sea Hawk* had taken up her position within a mile of Jogore under cover of the darkness, Ferrars ordered all hands, save the deck watch, to turn in for a few hours' sleep. By Walter's advice the watch was strong and well armed, but nothing happened to disturb the repose of those on board.

No one preventing him, Walter had retired to his old cabin as a matter of course, and was glad to find his sea kit and other small possessions just as he had left them. Powlett Ferrars had either been too preoccupied to meddle

with them, or had carefully preserved them in case he was called upon to substantiate his version of how his chief mate left the ship.

The brilliant tropical day had not long broken over the lagoon when Walter quitted his bunk and went out on deck. Mindful to play the part allotted to him—that of "captain's guest"—he lounged about with ostentatious irresponsibility, but he took particular note of what he saw. The crew were busy washing down decks, and he saw at once that Telfer's description of the newly shipped hands was no exaggeration. An uglier set of mongrel riffraff he had never set eyes on.

Laban Booth, who was in charge of the deck, took no notice of him, but almost immediately Powlett Ferrars came out of his room and joined him. The captain had brought out his spy-glass, and took a long survey of the curving coast line of the island, wooded nearly everywhere to the water's edge with luxuriant growth, and smiling peacefully in the morning sun.

"I don't see this wonderful castle or whatever it is of yours," Ferrars growled.

"It is hidden in a dip of the ground behind that hill to the eastward," replied Walter. "As I told you, the whole policy of those who have been running the place has been to keep it concealed. That was what set me thinking that it owed its origin to the treasure from the old galleon."

Ferrars made no comment, but continued his scrutiny.

"And that white dome in the trees near the pier—that will be a temple?" he asked as he moved his glass round to the buildings that covered the entrance to the subterranean passage.

Walter saw no reason why he should give all his knowledge away at the outset, so he replied that the building was a sort of guardroom for the men who watch at the pier. It would be time

enough to tell of the underground way when Ferrars had shown how he was going to behave about Maisie.

Lena's appearance on deck put an end to further discussion. Ferrars greeted his sister with a harshly boisterous laugh, and his first words showed that he was not aware that she had seen and spoken to Walter on the previous night.

"Here's Mr. Lynden turned up again. Been having a good time on this merry island, while we were weeping our eyes out over him as shark food," was all the explanation he offered.

Lena, who looked paler and thinner than during the voyage out, welcomed Walter coldly, evincing no curiosity as to what had happened to him while away from the ship, or surprise at his return. But on her brother turning his back to receive the announcement of the steward that breakfast was ready in the saloon, she placed her finger on her lips, and raised her drooping eyelids to reveal one brief flash of warning.

During the meal, at which Ferrars, his sister, and Walter alone were present, the commander of the *Sea Hawk* markedly abstained from any reference to the business in hand, or to the information given him by Walter as to the extraordinary state of affairs on the island. Nor did he allude to the original purpose for which the steamer had visited those seas. He affected a jocular vein, rallied Lena on her want of appetite, and expatiated on the superiority of brandy and soda to coffee as a breakfast beverage.

Chafing inwardly at being able to gather no clew to his intentions, Walter fell in with his evident desire and avoided the forbidden subjects. Knowing the cunning of the man—a cunning less subtle than, but quite as dangerous as, that of Hussein Ali—he boded no good from this reticence on vital matters. But knowing also the ungovernable temper of Ferrars, he was

anxious not to provoke him till Maisie was safe, and so he, too, attempted to be frivolous.

Lena, who had been watching Walter furtively, seemed relieved by his demeanor, and thenceforward made a nervous effort to join in the trivial conversation, though it was not a success, except so far as it gave Walter an opportunity of seeing that a change had come over her. From the sensuous, self-possessed woman who had made advances scarcely decent, she had in one week grown into a highly strung creature whose forced gayety seemed perilously on the verge of hysteria.

The ordeal of that breakfast in the saloon of the *Sea Hawk*, though it lived for years in the memory of two who partook of it, was not unduly prolonged. It was broken by the advent of Laban Booth, who came rapidly down the stairs and whispered in the captain's ear.

"A boat putting off from the shore? Good business!" exclaimed Ferrars, rising. "I wanted the first overture to come from them. It will be easier to play the virtuous trader on board than on shore. I couldn't trust myself there without a pack of my Bombay ducks at heel, and their ugly faces would spoil the part."

He led the way on deck, the others following, and took a long look through his telescope at the boat that had just started from the pier.

"By gad, Lynden, I'd begun to think you were fooling us, but you've been talking gospel truth," he exclaimed. "The thing looks like a great state barge, pulls eight oars, and is covered with gold paint. They must be an oofy lot of niggers to put on side like that."

He took another look through the telescope and then passed it to Walter.

"You know the beggars and I don't," he said. "Who is the boss in the stern, under the big umbrella? Is that his majesty, the King of the Cannibal

Islands, who wants to wed the lady passenger from the *Tiber*?"

Disgusted with Ferrars' tone, which, under the circumstances, was hardly that of an English gentleman, Walter took the glass and scrutinized the oncoming boat.

"No, that is not the so-called 'Sultan' Zohrab," he replied. "It is Hussein Ali, the headman I was telling you of who has Zohrab under his thumb—the same who sneaked aboard the *Sea Hawk* in the Albert Dock."

"Ah, the gentleman with peculiar notions of hospitality," said Ferrars. "A right-down, foxy-looking specimen he is, too. Well, it will be a pleasure to meet him and try conclusions with him with his own weapons. But you mustn't show, Lynden. If I'm to come out top-side of him in the business between us, he will have to think that the ship is here by a fluke. If he guessed that I'd been posted in the ways of the place, I should have to fight him with all my cards on the table."

Walter saw the truth of the remark, and was quick to take a hint which he knew would be enforced anyhow.

"In that case I had better get out of sight before the boat comes alongside," he said. "I will go into my cabin, and leave you to deal with Hussein. But for God's sake, Captain Ferrars, remember that an English girl's honor is at stake, and that this brute has the cunning of the devil."

"I've got a bit of that myself," muttered Ferrars, with a grin, as Walter moved away and shut himself into his deck-house cabin, bubbling with rage at the callous brutality with which his appeal had been ignored. He was angry with himself, too, for having placed Maisie's fate in such hands as those of Powlett Ferrars; but what else could he have done, he asked himself in extenuation, with Joanna's threat of poison still ringing in his ears.

It was not long before the sound of

oars was borne upon the lazy air, and stationing himself at the open window of his cabin, but screened by the drawn curtains, he waited to hear what passed. Did the representative of Jogore come as an open or a secret foe to the intruder? For, with the lawless record of the concealed stronghold fresh in his mind, Walter was assured that he did not come as a friend. With the wild temper of Powlett Ferrars to reckon with, the first attitude taken by Hussein seemed to have a tremendous bearing on Maisie's fate.

The question was answered in the hail that was interchanged between the advancing boat and those on the deck of the steamer.

"May I come aboard, captain? You have some goods to trade with us poor islanders?" floated up in Hussein's silkiest accents.

"Right you are! Stand by while we throw you a rope," returned Ferrars in his heartiest sailor fashion. The preliminaries of the impending duel of wits were at least to be amicable.

There was a pause, and then a pid-pad of sandals on the deck told that Hussein had come up the side and was approaching the group outside the cabin. For some reason best known to himself he had discarded his semi-European attire for this occasion, and was arrayed as an Oriental of high degree. From behind the curtain Walter saw the snowy white garments of a Muselman magnate fluttering within two yards of him as Hussein bent low in homage to the commander of the vessel.

"Glad to see you, sir—all the more that we didn't expect it," said Ferrars, affecting the same bluff manner. "You seem to have a snug place here, though it's charted as uninhabited."

"Ah, you will doubtless have that error rectified—when you get back to England," was Hussein's noncommittal reply. "If you will visit us on shore you will find that we are not unworthy

of mention on the maps. I am here to bring you an invitation from His Highness Syed Bin Zohrab, the Sultan of Jogore, to come up to his palace."

Walter, listening with greedy ears, wondered what this meant, and from the silence that followed he guessed that Ferrars was equally puzzled. Could it be a treacherous design to lure the strangers on to the island, overpower them by superior numbers, and slay them to a man? That some such suspicion crossed the mind of Ferrars was made evident by his reception of the invitation.

"Thank you," he said presently, with a neat sarcasm that the subtle mind of Hussein must have appreciated, "I'm not fond of landing at foreign ports where there isn't a British consul."

"Ah, we haven't such a luxury yet," replied Hussein, and Walter could imagine the innocent smile that accompanied the admission. "Perhaps after you have had the island charted, and ships call regularly, that honor may be accorded to us. His highness is more than half an Englishman, by inclination, at any rate. It is because he requires the services of one whom he regards as a fellow countryman, that he begs you to visit the palace."

"He wants something of me, eh?" said Ferrars, with an eagerness which Walter, growing sharp by reason of his surroundings, could well understand. The commander of the *Sea Hawk* was keen to learn the card which his opponent meant to lay on the table, so that he could judge whether it was a genuine "lead" or not.

And then the card was played, and Walter, listening in a frenzy of wrath, knew that, whatever else remained behind, Hussein's bid for the "services" of Powlett Ferrars was real enough in design and intention.

"Yes, captain, his highness wants you to render him an obligation for which he is prepared to pay very handsomely,"

came the obnoxiously bland tones in answer. "What do you say to a thousand bright English sovereigns, no bankers' drafts or securities that you might, under the circumstances, reasonably doubt, but sterling coin? The fact is that a very pretty little romance has been taking place on our island. His highness has fallen in love with a young English lady saved from a wreck, has wooed her, and has won her consent to become his consort. You, as the commander of a British ship, have the legal power to perform the marriage ceremony in the absence of a priest of your religion. I see that you take my meaning?"

The proposal was received with a ripple of laughter, blending the snigger of Laban Booth with the rich contralto of Lena, and interrupted by the harsh chuckle of Powlett Ferrars.

"So I'm to play the parson, eh, and rake in a thumping fee?" said the captain of the *Sea Hawk*. "Well, Mr.—I didn't catch your name—Hussein Ali, is it—you seem to be as well posted in our laws as you are in our lingo, and, what's more, you've shown why you are so pressing. I'll take on the job with pleasure. When shall I come?"

"At once, if convenient," replied Hussein. "If you will land in one of your own boats, I will return now in mine, and wait for you at the pier yonder."

"You will want some witnesses. How many of my crew shall I bring?" asked Ferrars, with a trace of his old suspicion.

Hussein, knowing what was in his mind, and also what was his own ultimate design, was prompt with a cordial invitation to the whole crew.

"Honest sailormen like to dance at a wedding," he explained blandly.

"Mine don't. I only wanted—but there, it's all right. I will just bring a boat's crew," Ferrars replied, and Wal-

ter felt that he could supply the missing words in the captain's sentence. He "only wanted" to assure himself of Hussein's good faith by no objection being raised to his being backed by a strong following.

Again came the pid-pad of sandals, and from the other sounds outside it was evident that Hussein was going back to his boat. A moment later the voice of the surly quartermaster, Sharpe, was heard calling for hands to man the captain's "gig," and then the door of Walter's cabin was flung open and Ferrars stood before him.

"You heard all that palaver?" asked the commander of the *Sea Hawk*, eyeing his ex-chief officer maliciously.

Walter's condition, after listening to the calm acquiescence of Ferrars to Hussein's proposal, was only too pitifully noticeable.

"Yes, I heard," he stammered in his helplessness. "But surely, Captain Ferrars, you do not mean to——"

"I mean to use this royal nigger's need of a parson to find out where he keeps the plunder—if there's any left," interrupted Ferrars roughly. "And when I've found it I shall lift it; don't make any mistake about that. It was your own notion, you know. You've no cause to whine."

"I make no secret of it—I held that out as a bait to induce you to save Maisie—I mean the English girl who is threatened with this outrage," replied Walter, in his grief and anger making a slip which the other was quick to pounce upon.

"So you speak of the lady by her Christian name, eh?" said Ferrars, showing his teeth. "I thought I wasn't far out when, from the fuss you made about her, I spotted her as the original of that pretty picture." And he pointed to the framed photograph of Maisie Sellon over the bunk.

Walter kept his hands down with an effort, and checked the rage on his lips.

This scoundrel was his only mainstay, and, through force of circumstances, he had sought him himself.

"You can make your mind easy about one thing," continued Ferrars, with an evil grin. "I am not going to marry the girl to the King of the Cannibal Islands; that is to say, unless I take over the kingdom myself. A throne in these parts would be a bit lonely without a consort, and she's a dear little thing."

He was gone before Walter, realizing the full horror of his words, reached the cabin door—to find it slammed in his face by a dozen scowling ruffians, and himself a prisoner.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE DEATH WARRANT.

While Hussein Ali, on the deck of the *Sea Hawk*, was preferring his request to Powlett Ferrars, Maisie was walking in the private garden attached to the wing occupied by herself and her mother. Since a reluctant consent had been wrung from her, as a condition of Walter's life being spared, she had spent much time near the locked wicket gate in the hope of seeing Joanna again; but, either by accident or design, Zohrab's sister had kept out of the way.

During those sad days the poisoned sweetmeat was Maisie's most cherished possession, and it never left her person, walking or sleeping. The little sticky lump alone seemed to stand between her and unimaginable horrors, and her purpose was quite clear with regard to it. Having satisfied herself that Walter was beyond the power of his enemies, she would fulfill her part of the contract by going through the ceremony of marriage with Zohrab, and would then immediately swallow the poison.

With her mother she had almost ceased to have any conversation, not

from temper, but because the good lady's talk was nothing but wearisome reiteration of the brilliant prospects ahead. As the wife of "an Eastern prince," Maisie would, of course, have a house at Queen's Gate, attend all the drawing-rooms, and shine as a leader of London society.

"When you are once 'her highness,' and have got the Jogore diamonds safe at your own order in the strong room of a West End bank, there must be an end of this preposterous island," Mrs. Sellon had remarked, when sketching the splendid program. "A couple of months every second year you might manage, perhaps; but as a permanent residence, comfortable as they have made us, the place is impossible."

It is difficult to analyze Mrs. Sellon's conduct toward her daughter at this time. Probably her motives, like most human ones, were mixed; though it is more charitable to suppose that she was more actuated by a real desire for Maisie's welfare than by an unreasoning hatred of Walter Lynden.

No rumor of the arrival of the *Sea Hawk* in the lagoon had penetrated the carefully guarded garden wing, and Maisie had no means of finding out the nature of "the unexpected opportunity" mentioned in the message from Hussein that had been duly imparted to her by her mother at breakfast. The hint to "hold herself in readiness," had increased her eagerness to see Joanna to learn particulars, but no brown-faced lame girl appeared at the bars of the gate.

She had turned away from the gate in disappointment to saunter again in the shade of the trees when a low voice called "Miss Sellon," and, looking back, she saw Zohrab himself regarding her wistfully from behind the bars. Her first impulse was to return at once to the house, but she checked it on remembering Joanna's advice to, if possible, plead with her brother alone.

Strangely enough, considering their proposed forced relationship, the young sultan had never inspired her with the same loathing horror as his bear leader Hussein had, and she nerved herself to take the opportunity.

Despite his great height and imposing figure, there was nothing very terrible about Zohrab as he stood shrinkingly at the other side of the gate. He looked half inclined to run away himself.

"I hope that I did not frighten you," he said timidly. "I very much wanted to see—to explain that——"

Taking his measure rapidly, Maisie interrupted him with a wave of her hand.

"There is nothing for you to explain, and not much for you to apologize for," she said, weighing her words carefully.

"If you were a European, you would deserve to be whipped for your conduct to a defenseless girl; but as you are, I suppose, a savage, with a smattering of education and a pretense of being half civilized, your behavior was only to be expected."

She could not have chosen a better way with him. Every word touched him on the raw, and he winced as though slashed with a keen-edged blade. The white blood in him surged up to defend the assault on his pet vanity, and he hurried on the explanation which, to do him justice, had brought him there.

"You are harsh when you should really pity," he said. "I came to set your mind at rest—to say that I have acted toward you under compulsion, and that I deeply regret——"

"One moment!" broke in Maisie. "Will you prove your words by foregoing your mad intention, and by sending me and Mr. Lynden and my mother, of course, safe to Bombay?"

"I will—that is to say, I will endeavor to do so," replied Zohrab, with the air of a man who had been set a

task which he doubts his ability to perform.

"But what on earth is to prevent you? You are master here," said Maisie, determined to push her advantage to the full.

"In name I am ruler of Jogore, but in fact Hussein does as he likes with me," said Zohrab. "I know not how it is, but when he is present, and to a certain extent when he is away, my will seems to have passed into his keeping. He has gone out to a ship that came into the lagoon during the night, so I made an effort to come and say what I have."

"He must hypnotize you or mesmerize you or something," remarked Maisie vaguely. She was beginning to feel a certain sympathy for this great helpless creature who had threatened to do her so foul a wrong. "You don't really wish to marry me, then?" she added, unable to resist the feminine luxury of teasing him now that her horizon seemed to be brightening.

The awkward question caused Zohrab a good deal of agitation, but he managed to answer it without falling into the trap laid for a rude reply. "It would not have occurred to me to presume with such a proposal if it had not been forced on me by Hussein," he said modestly, and then, in his irritation at the chain that galled him, he flashed forth an angry protest.

"It is unbearable that I, Zohrab of Jogore, should be driven to such vile behavior against my better impulses; I, who have the power to slay this Hussein by lifting my finger. The people here love me, Miss Sellon, and my sister, too, for what my father and grandfather have done for them. At my bidding they would strangle Hussein before my eyes, yet such is his influence that I dare not say the word. I have tried to do so many times, but always something has seemed to grip me and tie my tongue."

For the first time during her brief acquaintance with him, Zohrab looked and spoke like a man, and Maisie, with quick intuition, treated him as one. She saw her way, with the clearness of one fighting for life, to obtain a weapon more potent and more pleasant to use than Joanna's poisoned sweetmeat.

"I see that you are afraid that when Hussein returns this influence of his will be as strong as ever," she said, after a pause.

"I fear it, believe me, as much on your account as mine," was the reply.

"I believe you, and I can show you a way to shake off this influence once for all, if, as you say, your people are devoted to you," said Maisie. "Is there any one who would obey your *written* orders—some one in authority who knows and would respect your signature?"

Zohrab peered at her through the bars of the gate, his handsome features illumined with the dawn of hope. It was a strange position—the girl offering to show to her would-be abductor a way out of the business, and the man clutching at the notion with every sign of joy.

"There is Mirzah Khan, who commands my soldiers," said Zohrab. "He can read, and would die to save me. He obeys Hussein with the fidelity of a dog, only because he believes that the orders Hussein gives him come from me. That is the way of the brute, Miss Sellon. Hussein gives orders to my people—which he has himself wrung from me, God knows how; and they, poor devils, execute them blindly, thinking to please me."

"Well, I am going to wring an order from you this time," said Maisie, looking him boldly in the face. "Have you got any writing materials about you?"

"No; but I will soon fetch some," Zohrab exclaimed eagerly, and he disappeared from the gate, to return breathless in a few minutes with a large

sheet of official paper and the latest thing in stylographic pens.

"Now write in whatever language Mirzah Khan understands," said Maisie firmly. "Draw up an order to him to make Hussein Ali a prisoner, and to execute him by whatever method is usual on the island within twenty-four hours."

Zohrab's face fell, and he shook his head. "I will do as you wish," he said, commencing to write, "but I fear that it will be useless. Do you know that I have written out death warrants for Hussein a dozen times in the last seven years, and something has always held me back as with a vise from handing them to the executive officer. I have torn them up, and things have gone on as before."

"They will not this time," said Maisie, with grim insistence, thus encouraging his pen to travel faster till he affixed his signature at the foot.

"Now give it to me," she said, compelling him to meet her gaze as he was about to put the document in the breast pocket of his coat.

"To you?" he faltered.

"Yes, to me," Maisie went on boldly. "Then if you cannot stand firm against Hussein and keep your promise to release us, I will make use of it, and you may be sure that nothing will hold me back from doing so. I shall not, however, let this come into Mirzah Khan's hands except as a last resort, for I am a woman and have no wish to send the scoundrel to death but in self-defense."

All this time she was speaking she kept her hand held out for the document, and, as she finished, Zohrab passed it through the bars of the gate, subservient as ever to the stronger will. Maisie hid it in the silk blouse which the native *dirzee* had made for her, and looked up to proffer her thanks, but found that Zohrab had turned away from her, and was gazing across the walled inclosure toward his portion of

the palace. At the same time the voices of persons advancing from that direction fell upon her ears, and a moment later Hussein came into view, accompanied by a European in the dress of a ship captain.

Hussein was talking gayly to his companion, who was looking about him with evident interest at the wonders of Jogore. While the two were yet afar off, something struck Maisie as familiar in the deeply lined, cruel face of the European, but it was not till they were within ten paces of the gate that she recognized with a thrill of horror the man who had insulted her in the railway carriage in London not two months ago. Even as she recognized him his fierce eyes were fastened on her face, and she turned and fled from the gate back to the garden wing without waiting to see if the recognition was mutual.

Hussein, who had been in high spirits before, expanded into open hilarity at the sight of the girl's rapid retreat from the gate. His surprise he adroitly hid.

"There!" he whispered to Powlett Ferrars. "I don't think you quite believed me when I said that Miss Selton's consent had been won. That pretty little scene ought to convince you."

"It does so," Ferrars replied, gnawing his straggling mustache, and taking stock of the tall young half-caste who came forward to meet them.

Hussein allowed his gushing mood to overflow at the approach of his "master."

"Ah, your highness, this is too bad of us to interrupt so pleasant a meeting," he began; "I trust that we have not alarmed your bride by our abrupt intrusion—a little maiden coyness, eh? This is Captain Ferrars, of the steamship *Sea Hawk*, who has been good enough to promise to satisfy Miss Selton's scruples by performing the need-

ful rites. A marriage celebrated by the commander of a British vessel, in the absence of a clergyman, is quite binding and legal."

Zohrab was an object pitiable to behold. As Hussein's glittering orbs fixed him, it was as though he were rent in twain by a thousand devils, pulling different ways. Powlett Ferrars watched him curiously.

"I—I don't question that—the legal part, you know—and it is very kind of the captain, but——"

That "but" was enough for Hussein. Scenting a revolt, he exerted all his powers, and sent out a mesmeric wave that gripped Zohrab body and soul and tore all his good resolutions from their moorings.

"But?" asked Hussein very quietly. "But—but I fear I am putting him to too much trouble," concluded Zohrab, with weak surrender in his tones.

"It is no trouble, sultan, and friend Hussein has promised me a princely fee," said Ferrars, forcing one of his hearty laughs.

Zohrab's protest was therefore left unspoken, and, accepting the situation, he turned to accompany the other two to the palace. They had not taken many steps before the tall form of Mirzah Khan was seen hastening toward them with lengthy strides. The Sikh warrior saluted and beckoned Hussein aside.

"Kent has been to the atoll and has returned," he whispered low. "There has been miracle work going forward. The old sailorman reports that the contact mines are coupled up and in position. That ship captain's vessel must be a phantom, to have passed over them unscathed." And the supersti-

tious Indian cast a look of awe at Ferrars.

For a moment Hussein was non-plused, but soon a smile illumined his subtle face. "My good Mirzah," he said, "let us leave a belief in spirits to the denizens of the neighboring islands. There has been human agency at work. Keep your men out of sight but well in hand, and be ready for any emergency. Act only on verbal instructions from myself, or on orders bearing the sign manual of his highness—then let it be unquestioning and without compromise."

Mirzah Khan saluted and withdrew, leaving Hussein plunged in deep thought. His keen brain had pounced upon half the truth. Walter Lynden was not dead, but was or had been upon the atoll, and Joanna, whom he had fondly regarded as his firm ally, had really tried to impose upon him with the trumped-up story of the hated Englishman's death.

"She must have been in alliance with him—have been helping him to escape," Hussein snarled between his clenched teeth. "Lynden must have discovered the mines, passed the *Sea Hawk* through, and then readjusted the contact wires so as to make his own terms with Ferrars. It is well that I am warned in time—but Joanna!"

Pulling himself together, he hurried on to rejoin Zohrab and Ferrars, who had sauntered on ahead. As he came up, Ferrars turned to him and said:

"I have just been explaining a little matter to his highness. This festive marriage ceremony must take place on board my ship. It won't be legal unless it is performed under the British flag."

(To be Continued.)

The Movie Makers

By Clinton H. Stagg

Author of — "Silver Sandals,"
"The Drowler," et cetera



III.—FEATURE STUFF

"Jimmy Hamilton, to whom all the world was an undeveloped picture film and to whom God had given a double-edged, case-hardened tongue for the purpose of shooting out verbal lightning, had spoken softly and kindly to Cissy Alton when she spoiled a scene that meant the cutting out of a hundred and two feet of film, at twenty cents a foot." The Kid had worked a miracle which was to reach farther than any one could guess.

THE sorrowful face of George Rogers, the perpetually sad comedian of the International Film Company's No. 1 company, had slipped into a sunny smile eight times in one day. After the fourth slip, George became absolutely shameless, and laughed outright. The Kid had punched him in the nose with a chubby red fist.

Jimmy Hamilton, to whom all the world was an undeveloped picture film and to whom God had given a double-edged, case-hardened tongue for the purpose of shooting out verbal lightning, had spoken softly and kindly to Cissy Alton when she spoiled a scene that meant the cutting out of a hundred and two feet of film, at twenty cents a foot. The Kid had tangled his fingers in Jimmy's hair and lifted his eyes a full inch above normal by a powerful pulling of small arms.

Ah Fling, the Chinese cook on the one-hundred-thousand-acre ranch that the International provided for its great Western motion pictures, had escaped lynching only by the strength of his kitchen door plus the time and distance to the next cook. Ah Fling had cooked a chop suey that would have made the Irish inventor of the dish howl with envy from the depths of his San Francisco grave. Ah Fling had put all the knowledge he possessed into that masterpiece, and they had discovered him feeding it to the Kid with nimble chopsticks. The Kid had almost succeeded in gouging out one of the Mongolian's eyes.

Gracie Heyburn, an adventuress, with a reputation for heartlessness and deceit wherever there were eyes to look at films, and Joe Bates, whose villainies usually only escaped the board of censorship by a vote of three to five,

were busy making lace bonnets and square-legged wooden horses. The latter also resembled either an Arkansas River house on flood stilts or a billiard table. The Kid had kicked them both.

And Polly Nelson, who was very young in the business, had to unlearn all the things about her fellow workers that she had spent six weeks in learning.

"It's the limit, Fling!" she declared, with much emphasis. Polly was speaking to the Chinese cook. Polly always talked to Ah Fling when she was sorely troubled or blue. He didn't understand what she was talking about, and accepted all her statements with placid silence. Polly found him much better to talk at than a tree or a rock. He was almost human, and he moved around in a way that was restful to Miss Nelson's eyes. "I say, isn't it the limit, Fling?" she repeated. "There's George Rogers. He was supposed to have all the grouch output in the world packed away in his cold-storage brain; there's Jimmy Hamilton, that always had blisters on his lips from the hot words he let through them; Gracie Heyburn, who can be as catty as anything when she forgets that her heart begins beneath her toes and extends to the end of the longest hair in her head; and Joe Bates, the original cheap-comedy slang artist, putting the soft pedal on his awful line of conversation when little Johnnie's around, for fear he might learn it. And you—— Oh, Lord, they've all got Kid-itis! It's worse than the limit, it's——" Here Polly jumped to her feet with a cry of joyous surprise. "Oo-oo! There's the little darling now!"

The book that Polly had been reading before she began talking slipped to the floor with a bang. Ah Fling leisurely finished polishing the pan in his hand, and picked it up. That was part of the ranch cook's duties.

Polly had seen Dorothy Carlton, the

girl they had found starving and exhausted in the mountains a week before with the baby hugged to her breast, just as she hugged it now. But it was a different Dorothy Carlton on this day. The old lines of hunger had disappeared under the skill of Ah Fling; the rings and the hunted look had gone from her deep blue eyes, and the smile had come back to her lips, for all the members of the International's No. 1 company had hearts like Polly Rogers'.

As Dorothy Carlton came up the steps of the leading actor's headquarters on the ranch, her whole face was alight with some great joy. As Polly got out of the door, Gracie Heyburn hid the unfinished lace bonnet, and jumped to her feet, with Joe Bates and George Rogers, who had been matching quarters in a corner. Some distance behind Dorothy came her husband, whose arrival three days before had made the Kid kill the picture that was to have been the International's masterpiece. Last of all came Jimmy Hamilton.

"Wonderful news!" cried Dorothy Carlton, as she reached the top step. "Simply wonderful!"

"Johnnie hasn't a new tooth?" asked George Rogers, with one of his new-found smiles.

"He hasn't *said* something?" put in Gracie Heyburn eagerly.

Dorothy Carlton smilingly shook her head. Then she turned to glance at her husband and Jimmy.

"We're going to *stay*!" she confided joyfully.

"Huh!" blinked Joe Bates.

"Sure you're gonna stay!" George Rogers was bewildered at even the necessity of such a statement. Lose *the Kid*!

Jimmy Hamilton stopped at the lower step and presented John Carlton with a flourish.

"Our new juvenile lead!" he introduced proudly.

"What?" came the chorus, half deep masculine, fifty per cent shrill feminine. Somehow that possibility had never occurred to any but the shrewd-brained Jimmy Hamilton.

"Sure!" repeated the director, and he seemed to be as proud as though he had conjured some wonderful new being from nothing.

John Carlton shook his head dubiously. "Mr. Hamilton insists." He was actually blushing. "I haven't had any experience——"

"You don't need it," cut in Gracie Heyburn quickly. "Some of the best leads in the business never tried to act in their lives before they got into this game. Look at Kildare, of the Worldwide Company, and here's Polly Nelson!"

"But I can't act," deprecated John Carlton.

"If you try, I'll have you shot at sunrise!" put in Jimmy Hamilton emphatically. "That's why I want you. There's getting to be too blamed much acting in the films nowadays. You've got the shoulders and the face, and you can keep your feet close to the ground."

"And brains!" ejaculated George Rogers, entering into the spirit of the thing.

"That'll make him feel strange among this crowd, but he'll get over it after a while." Jimmy Hamilton couldn't forget that he was a director, after all.

John Carlton laughed boyishly. "Well, Mr. Hamilton is taking all the risk. I think it will be wonderfully fine work, and the little lady, here, and myself can be together."

"For Heaven's sake, don't call him Mister Hamilton!" growled George Rogers. "Call him Jimmy. We're using his head now for all the balloon scenes that come over."

But John Carlton paid no attention, he had jumped up the steps two at a time and held his wife in his arms and kissed her, while the baby tugged man-

fully to separate his right ear from his head, while it laughed in glee at its defeat.

"Gee, folks!" wailed Jimmy Hamilton. "Don't waste that stuff!"

Laughingly they stood side by side, their arms around each other's waists, the child, in its father's arms now, crowing its delight at the world in general and the members of the No. 1 company in particular.

Dorothy Carlton spoke, and her eyes shone with tears of happiness she could not hold back. "You've been so good to us!" she murmured. "So good!"

"Good?" muttered Joe Bates, in the stagiest of stage whispers. "I'll bet he got the best lead team in the country for about half price."

"Why," defended John Carlton instantly. "He's giving *me* more than I'd earn on father's railroad in five years, working my way up! He's wonderfully good!"

"Goo!" crowed little Johnnie from his father's shoulder. "Goo!"

"Hear that!" The chorus was a great shout of wonder and amazement.

"Just as plain!" cried Gracie Heyburn. "Good! He said it was good."

"That settles it," murmured George Rogers in a voice of pretended sorrow. "If he says so, it must be so. The darned little *peach!*"

Instantly they were crowded around the happy mother and father of the precocious child that had uttered its first intelligible word. And it was perfectly intelligible to the leading members of No. 1 company even if it would require a little imagination on the part of one who hadn't seen little Johnnie laugh or felt the pull of his tiny, fat fingers. Out of the medley of voices, Jimmy Hamilton's finally came.

"And we can fix up that big picture, too," he announced. "Chop off the end, and play it over again. It'll be even better."

Professionally, Jimmy Hamilton

knew that it wouldn't, for Dorothy Carlton was too happy ever to get that same expression on her face again that had been there in the one big scene of the picture where she had sent her baby alone on the mule over the desert to find water, while she stayed to die with her husband. The look of suffering, of resolution, the lines of hunger that were real in the first picture could never be acted. The "big picture" couldn't be a masterpiece, after all, but it could be a wonderful production.

Perhaps the others all knew this, professionally, as Jimmy Hamilton knew it, but they were all convinced that he was perfectly right. So the Kid hadn't killed the big picture, after all! It would be played in a thousand cities.

"There, you old kill-joy!" exclaimed Gracie Heyburn triumphantly to George Rogers. George had made that pessimistic prophecy regarding the Kid killing the picture for days before it had come true.

George pretended not to hear, and talked very loudly to little Johnnie, who continued to repeat his characterization of Jimmy Hamilton. Frankly, this was the opinion of every one on the ranch, and they would have gone the limit for Jimmy Hamilton any time, but professional ethics prevented an open statement to that effect.

The girls finally separated Dorothy Carlton from the men, and bore her away with Johnnie to talk the things over. The men stayed on the porch to wait for Cissy Alton, who had ridden down to the nearest town for the papers and mail.

While Dorothy was laying Johnnie on his bed for his afternoon nap, Polly Nelson, whose unlearning was coming hard, could keep still no longer.

"Think of Jimmy taking anybody in that manner!" she exclaimed wonderingly. "When he hired me he scowled and snarled, and said I *might* do, but he *doubted* it."

"He's in love," Gracie Heyburn observed.

"In love?" Polly darted a shocked glance toward the open door of the Carltons' room. "You don't mean——"

"The baby, simpleton!" Gracie Heyburn said almost snappishly; then the reverent softness that Polly had never known till the coming of Dorothy Carlton came to her voice: "His own wife and baby were killed in the quake."

"I never knew, never suspected!" murmured Polly, as the snappish, big-hearted, jolly, growling paradox of a director took a new form in her mind.

"Jimmy's game," commented Gracie, still in that same low tone. "As game as they make 'em."

Dorothy came back then, and the three women chattered away like magpies, making plans, telling experiences, giving advice, while the men on the porch downstairs did exactly the same thing, only worse.

"Here comes Cissy!" discovered Joe Bates, pointing to a distant dust cloud.

"Hope the Crab in New York's still got the paresis," growled Jimmy Hamilton, rising and stretching his arms up over his head to get the kinks out of his brain. "If he has, he may pick out another good scenario instead of that floey-floey stuff he usually hands us. What we want now is kid stuff with a kick!"

"He'll probably send us a script that needs the New York Polo Grounds and Times Square," George Rogers declared sourly. George was still himself whenever the Kid was out of sight.

They stood on the porch steps, waiting.

"Hello, people, people, hello!" called Cissy singsongily, when she was within hailing distance. Then, as she stopped and let the mail bag drop with a thud, while she rubbed her arm tenderly: "You want a pack mule for that job, Jimmy, not a woman with an ingénue build." She spied John Carlton, and

gave him a perky little nod that was known from coast to coast. "Better be careful, son," she warned; "that pa of yours is tearing his hair out by the roots, which is going some for a man that's as bald as his picture shows."

"He isn't coming here?" Carlton asked the question nervously, but he accompanied it with a squaring of shoulders and setting of chin that brought a nod of satisfaction from the keen-eyed Jimmy Hamilton.

Joe Bates, who had opened the mail bag and grabbed the first paper, answered that question.

"By the looks of it, he ought to be in heaven by now," he declared. "This paper is four days old. He was about nine miles up in the air, then, and still going strong."

They crowded around him to read the big black letters that announced the disappearance of John Carlton, junior, son of John Carlton, president of the S. F. & G. system, following the kidnaping of John Carlton, third, by his mother. The police of every city in the world were looking for them, and the senior Carlton was figuratively frothing at the mouth.

"Every city in the world!" grunted George Rogers. "That lets us out. You're safe; and say, son," he put his hand on John Carlton's shoulder in a fatherly manner, "get Jimmy to make a contract for yourself, wife, and baby. I'll guarantee it'll take more than President Carlton, railroad king, to break it. Believe me!"

"That's the stuff!" The girls had hurried down to see the mail, and it was Gracie Heyburn who put in the emphatic corroboration.

Dorothy had seen the expression on her husband's face, and, with a low cry of fear, she ran to him. He put his arms around her and answered the unasked question.

"It's about father, dear. He's angry, and searching all over for us."

"He won't——" He ended the tremulous question with his lips. The Carltons were lovers, and didn't care if all the world knew it. "No," he answered earnestly. "We're on our own feet now; and those feet are firmly fixed."

"They are—very!" There was a queer note in Jimmy Hamilton's voice as he stepped up behind the Carltons and made the quiet statement that caused Polly Nelson to turn from Gracie Heyburn and look at him. Her woman's eyes saw new lines around the tight-shut lips, there was a look in his sharp eyes that she couldn't quite define—then she remembered what Gracie Heyburn had told her upstairs. His own wife and child had been killed in the quake; and here was another wife and child that could be helped. A new side of Jimmy Hamilton, an unsuspected side, but as suddenly as the lines had come to Jimmy's face, they went, and his voice had all the old-time business crispness, that was softened by a smile as he finished. "Come on down to the office and I'll fix up those contracts. Good scheme, George," he complimented, doubling into his pocket the big manuscript envelope that held the latest offerings from the New York office. "Come on, a couple of you, for witnesses!"

"We'll all go," decided Gracie Heyburn, with characteristic leadership. "We'll make it shot-proof and unsinkable. Come on, folks!"

So the procession started toward the director's office that was in the big studio building, where the interiors were taken, and where the films were developed. They all crowded into the small, littered office, and talked as Jimmy wrote the contracts. When the Carltons, happier than ever at this new evidence of desire to help, signed them on the proper lines, every leading member of the No. 1 company affixed their signatures as witnesses.

"It'll take more than John Carlton,

senior, ever to break that kind of a paper when I get through with it," declared Jimmy, and Polly saw the lines come again around his mouth, and she thought his words were very grim. But then Polly was young in the business, and she hadn't yet learned that all the imagination to be used had been given to scenario writers and directors.

"Now, run along, children," ordered Jimmy, as he pulled the manuscript envelope from his pocket. "Run along, and pray for paresis. If the Crab's sane, we'll never get another decent picture."

Polly wanted to stay behind. Somehow, she thought he needed a bit of extra friendliness, a word to show that she understood and sympathized, but already he had turned to his desk. His ivory cutter was ripping at the big envelope, and over his eyes were the lines of concentration that came when he looked at a cold, typewritten sheet of paper and saw moving, living characters live, die, love, and hate, men weighed and found wanting; sacrifice, vengeance. His mind saw them all between the cold black lines. Polly Nelson stood with her hand on the knob of the open door as the others walked out and away toward quarters. She looked at his bent head and hunched shoulders—shoulders that seemed to droop as though he were very tired. Then something told him of her lingering. He turned, and a word of womanly sympathy was on her lips.

"Close the door when you go out, Polly," he said sharply. "Busy!"

She choked back the words she wanted to say, with a little catch in her throat, and went out, pulling the door closed after her, and leaving him alone. The others were hurrying on ahead, but she made no effort to catch them. She wanted to be alone, and to think. So she walked the whole length of the big studio building, around its back, and the length of the other side. The happy

members of No. 1 company were too engrossed with their own affairs even to miss her. She walked to the front of the building again, and looked through the dusty window of Jimmy Hamilton's office. She knew that she could see his face there.

Polly Hamilton did see his face, but it was not the face of the Jimmy Hamilton she had known. It was drawn and haggard, the chin rested in the cup of his hands, and his eyes stared out straight before him, unseeing, unwinking, staring into nothing—or into the face of his dead wife and child, perhaps. Even as she watched, he shrugged his shoulders as though to throw off some heavy burden, his hands dropped to the papers before him, and he was Jimmy Hamilton, director, once more, planning moving pictures on a hundred-thousand-acre stage.

Polly Nelson was very quiet that afternoon, or as quiet as she dared to be in the laughing party, without exciting comment. It was a regular party on the big ranch that afternoon, and it included the small-part actors and actresses from the other big quarters three miles away. The Carltons were the center of attraction; that is, little Johnnie, who had waked from his afternoon nap, was, and his proud parents were content to be the edges, or rim, or whatever it is that goes outside a center.

At supper time the small-part people went back to their own quarters, and the leads of No. 1 waited anxiously for Jimmy Hamilton to crawl out of his hole and tell them what was what. When they heard Ah Fling deftly slide the big frying pan the length of the kitchen floor to the open-air kitchen for the cat's supper, Jimmy came stalking along.

"Another flock of floobs!" growled Joe Bates gloomily, as he saw the face of the director.

"I'll bet the old Crab picked up a

revamped French society drama that needs a marble fountain and the graveyard at Monte Carlo," declared Gracie Heyburn, with a positiveness that was based on experience.

When Jimmy Hamilton reached the bottom step of the porch, he stood for a minute in a pose which indicated that the president had died of cholera, that all Europe had been swallowed up in an earthquake, or that the price of film had gone up a quarter of a cent a foot. There was dire, earth-sweeping calamity written all over Jimmy as he stood there.

"Why, what's the trouble, Mr. Hamilton?" It was Dorothy Carlton who put the question when the gloomy silence had endured for seconds. Dorothy, in her innocence, didn't know that, with the exception of the day the "big picture" had come, this same scene had been enacted for months, every time a batch of scripts came from New York.

"The Crab has nipped the paresis in the bud, and he's more normal than ever, much more normal," groaned Jimmy. "I wired him I wanted kid stuff, with a kick. He sends me two scenarios laid in homes for disabled war veterans, a cavalry picture, and a New England romance, with every character being kept out of the grave by the hundred-year-old death rate; also"—he paused impressively—"a picture of two nursemaids and a cop chasing a baby carriage!"

"What!" howled the company members in chorus.

"Why," came the shrill protest of Gracie Heyburn, "they stopped *that* picture in the spring of 1903!"

"Huh-uh!" grunted Jimmy; then he smiled widely and wickedly. "But that's only a starter. Old Thompson sends me a nice letter saying there's no hurry for the pictures, the company's going to devote itself for the next two or

three months to feature stuff, featuring famous men and so forth."

Then a real howl went up!

"What d'ye mean, feature stuff?" demanded Joe Bates wrathfully. "Famous men! Why, looka me an' George, here, and Carlton."

"I told you the Crab was more normal than ever," declared Jimmy, and there wasn't a sign of a smile now. It isn't such a pleasant thing for a director to be told that another director will produce the first-run films.

"I need food, after that!" moaned Cissy Alton, when the clanging of Ah Fling's bell broke in on the silence. "Feature stuff!"

They trooped into the dining room silently, sat down silently, and then all began to talk at once, as though some silent signal had been given. All were harpooning old Thompson back in New York except the Carltons, who sat dumbly and listened. As the meal proceeded, they managed to pick up scraps of information here and there; to get a glimmering of the storm that had struck the hundred-thousand-acre ranch. The World-wide Film Company had released a lot of feature films that used the pictures of famous men in stories written around them. The films were making a bit hit, and it was up to the International to get in line.

There wasn't much chance of corraling famous men on a hundred thousand acres that had been picked because it was part prairie, part mountain, and part desert. So the No. 1 company would be a number three or four company while the Eastern troupes got in on the new line.

It was a gloomy finish and a gloomy after-supper smoke that the men had, while the girls had even a gloomier time trying to figure out what Grace George was wearing on Broadway. It got on little Polly Nelson's nerves after a while, and she took a sheaf of papers in a corner and tried to read. But her

mind was on the hunched-up, staring man who had been in the rough office of the studio building—then this new trouble had come to Jimmy Hamilton. But Polly remembered that snappish remark when she had waited; she knew that sympathy would not only be wasted but would be resented, so she forced herself to read. Naturally the Carlton story interested her. She devoured every line of it, and the last two lines of the very last story she read brought an exclamation from her lips.

"Feature stuff!" she murmured. "A big chance!"

Paper in hand, she rose and went out on the porch. As she had become interested in the stories, she had taken no count of time, and when she got out on the porch she was surprised to find that the girls had gone to bed, and that only Jimmy Hamilton and Joe Bates remained talking over their cigars.

"What's the matter with bed, little one?" called Joe Bates, as she appeared in the doorway, and Jimmy, too, looked up in surprise.

As she stood there a sudden desire came to Polly Nelson to give Jimmy her tip when he was alone. Somehow, the frivolous-tongued Joe Bates didn't seem to fit in the picture she had seen through the window of the director's office. So she answered lightly as she dropped into a chair:

"Too fine a night for bed, Joe; think I'll stay up and chat a while."

It was half an hour later when Polly's impatience had almost become rage, that Joe yawned, and announced that he was going to bed. For several minutes after he went there was silence on the moon-lit porch, and it was Jimmy Hamilton who broke it.

"Raise, Polly?" he asked quietly, turning his head to look at her.

"No, Jimmy, you're more than fair," Polly's voice, too, was quiet. "It's about that feature stuff." She saw his eyes narrow, as she held up the paper

she had folded under her arm. "Two lines here look like a big chance for us. President Carlton is going to inspect his S. F. & G. system this week, paying particular attention to the operation of small way stations. That coop of a place down at the southeast corner of the ranch is one of those way stations."

He almost snatched the paper from her hands, and there was a strange hardness in his voice as he said: "Let's see that!" Polly hadn't an idea that the thing had hit him so hard; she didn't suspect that *anything* could. He took the paper to the porch rail, and by the light of the moon read the lines she had pointed out; read them, with his eyes narrowed and lips set. "Thank God!" he muttered, as his eyes had corroborated Polly's statement. Then he turned to meet her curious stare. She saw that he was on the verge of saying something, but that he changed his mind suddenly.

"Can't overlook that bet, Polly," he declared, with characteristic brusqueness, jamming the paper in his pocket. "Always knew that some day I'd have a chance to write a scenario of my own, the way I wanted it. This is it! I'll write one around Carlton. It'll be a peach, too. Get to bed, now. I've got to work."

He nodded jerkily, and, hurrying down the steps, started in the direction of his office. Polly watched him go, as far as she could see him in the bright light of the moon; then she turned to the door with a sob that caught in her throat; a sob of sympathy and understanding. She obeyed Jimmy's order, but she tossed restlessly on her bed. Sleep would not come. After hours of tossing, she rose and looked out of her window. The light in the window of Jimmy's office burned brightly. He was working on the scenario; what kind of a scenario would it be—the story of John Carlton, junior, of his wife and baby? She shook her head. It couldn't

be that. Jimmy wouldn't dare make a film out of that, and with John Carlton, senior, appearing personally. Feature stuff must always make a hero of the "feature." Dawn came, the light still burned in the office window.

At the breakfast table, Polly, heavy-eyed, saw that he showed no signs of his all night at work. He even smiled cheerfully, though in a low-toned aside to her he cautioned silence. She understood that he did not want the Carltons to know that there was a possibility of the elder Carlton coming.

"Got a fair picture," announced Jimmy, when he had demanded a third cup of coffee. "Called 'Outcasts.' Rich girl marries a poor fellow. Her father casts her off. By Jove!" he had apparently just got a new thought. He stared at the Carltons. "Why can't we put in a scene with a baby, like Dorothy was when the girls found her, only adding an unconscious husband, or, better yet, have Dorothy and the baby just as they were, and have the husband, who was out searching for food, come back and find them." He gazed around at them with shining eyes.

Polly drew in her breath sharply. Was he going to work John Carlton, senior, into that picture? He wouldn't dare! She looked around the table, but Jimmy's enthusiasm was contagious.

"Great!" cried Gracie Heyburn.

"Big-time stuff with a punch!" asseverated Joe Bates.

Even the Carltons, who had caught the atmosphere of the big ranch in the week they had been together on it, accepted the idea joyously. They, too, had come to see only "pictures" and the making of films as the day's work. They had come to "sense a situation."

"Fine!" they chorused.

"And you know little Johnnie gets a hundred for every picture he gets in!" Jimmy Hamilton smiled. "There's two hundred to his credit now. That desert stuff drew a bonus."

The thanks of the Carltons were almost pathetic, and for the instant that all the others' attention was on Dorothy and her husband, Polly again thought she saw the tight little lines around Jimmy Hamilton's mouth. But they were gone again instantly, and she thought she must have been mistaken.

"You can have another day off," declared Jimmy, when they rose from the table. "I'm going to look over the ground for 'sets' to-day, and to-morrow we'll start in."

Immediately the No. 1 members began planning an all-day picnic. There were very few days when one or more of them didn't work. Polly Nelson took no interest in the plans. Her mind was somewhere else. When she got an opportunity she strolled out on the big porch in time to see Jimmy in his automobile scoot off in the direction of the railroad tracks and the small telegraph way station.

Her brow puckered in puzzlement. There was something on Jimmy Hamilton's mind that no picture had ever put there before. Was he going to risk his position merely for a chance to get a feature on President Carlton? But her mind refused to entertain it. Jimmy was square. He was hurt, and justly so, at his relegation to second or third place by the officials of the company, but he still had his common sense to tell him what the pictures of President Carlton on a moving-picture film would mean. Of course, if it could go through it would make the younger Carltons known all over the country, and the baby a household word. The baby! To her mind again flashed that picture of the hunched-up man at the desk, whose eyes apparently stared at nothing. Would he sacrifice everything to put the Carltons on the road to fame and money for the sake of the mother and child—and the memory of a mother and child that had been taken away from him?

They bore Polly away to the picnic, then, but all through the day her mind was on Jimmy Hamilton and the picture he had spoken of. There was no suspicion in the minds of the other players; no suspicion because Jimmy had failed to mention "Outcasts" when he had spoken of the batch of scripts that had come from New York. It was a "fair" picture, Jimmy had said, and that was all that concerned any of them.

That night, Polly got Jimmy aside and asked the question, and he answered it with a slow shake of his head, and it seemed a long while after when the words came.

"No, Polly," he said quietly. "It isn't their story." Polly raised her eyes quickly to peer into his, for she had detected a shade of peculiar emphasis on the "their." But his eyes met hers steadily, with no flicker of expression to tell what he had meant or whether she had been right, after all.

The next day began the work of the new picture. Once more Dorothy Carlton proved that she was a natural motion-picture actress, just as two or three other women have proved it to skeptical film directors throughout the country, for several of the best leading motion-picture actors and actresses never had any experience on the stage.

But it wasn't all natural acting in Dorothy's case. Once more the clever Jimmy Hamilton had given her a part that she had really lived; that she knew. In life, and in great acting, the heart is the prompter for expression, and through the early scenes of "Outcasts," Dorothy Carlton's face only had to obey the dictates of her heart, that had learned so bitter a lesson. John Carlton needed experience, and needed it badly. He was stiff and constrained, unaccustomed to playing parts before the clicking camera that would show him on the films in a thousand cities. His wife's work carried him through

the first scenes, and as time went on lifted him out of himself, just as it had lifted other actors out of themselves in the "big picture."

In the first two days of rehearsing and playing, Polly Nelson saw nothing remarkable in the scenes of the scenario Jimmy Hamilton had written. They were commonplace enough, and she saw that Jimmy was breaking the sequence of the scenes even more than location and setting of the various parts of the ranch required. Moreover, his usual snappy haste was missing. The work went through in a leisurely manner, and would have made the Jimmy Hamilton that Polly had known throw all the seven fits of rage.

On the third day, the mail was due at the town, and Polly volunteered to go after it. Her young brain was sorely puzzled, and she wanted quiet to straighten out its kinks. She rode slowly, there was no hurry, and tried to figure out in her mind the feature stuff that Jimmy Hamilton was holding back for. Something was in the back of his shrewd head. She knew it. Every time he looked at Dorothy Carlton, or John, or the baby, Polly surprised that curious look in his eyes; a look that Polly could not fathom.

She rode down toward the tracks, through the natural amphitheater two small hills made, through the narrow gorge that had been the scene of a hundred moving-picture holdups, because it curved sharply, and hid from view anything that might be coming down it, and also the railroad tracks a few hundred feet farther on. She always went that way because she always had a few words with the hopeless old derelict who watched over the way station and the telegraph key.

She didn't have to hail him this time. He was standing out on the rotten-boarded platform, and began to talk as soon as she got within sight.

"Here's a telegraph that just came fer

Mister Hamilton." By the time he had finished that sentence, Polly had brought her galloping pony to a dust-raising stop beside him. "The owl man will be here about half past two in the afternoon to-morra," he volunteered, with no thought of breaking State and national laws regarding the sanctity of telegrams.

"The old man?" puzzled Polly, thrusting the envelope into the bosom of her waist.

"Sure. The president, owld Carlton."

"To-morrow?" gasped Polly. Of course she had known that he was coming, but the shock of explicit information and the nearness of the crisis took her by surprise.

"Certain'y!" The aged telegrapher, who sought peace and quiet in loneliness, winked up at her with owlish wisdom. "Don't be tryin' to fool me. Didn't Mister Hamilton wire him t'other day that his son and daughter-in-law and baby was all here?"

"He did that?" The words came faintly from Polly's lips, and she suddenly felt numb all over as her whole world turned topsy-turvy. Jimmy Hamilton had told Carlton, senior, where the young Carltons had hidden themselves. Jimmy Hamilton had played the traitor!

"Funny——"

"I've got to hurry!" she choked, and she dug her spurs into the pony's flanks while he stared after her.

The ride to town was the longest Polly Nelson had ever made. Jimmy Hamilton a traitor to the people he was pretending to help! But it couldn't be possible—the picture there at the desk; then she remembered the eye narrowings, the grim lines around the director's mouth, the curious looks she had surprised in his eyes whenever they were turned on the Carltons. So it hadn't been all imagination. It had been true. But why? Why? Why?

She took the mail bag without bothering to answer the greetings as usual, and galloped full speed back toward the ranch. She went the way she had come, for she wanted to speak again with the old telegraph operator. Why had she gone away so quickly? He had been about to say something else, perhaps shed a different light on the thing. Polly Nelson didn't want to think that Jimmy Hamilton was anything but the man she had respected for so many weeks; the man who had shown a new and wonderfully human side in the last few days.

But she had no chance to speak with the old man. She saw Jimmy Hamilton's car, and she saw him and one of the ranch's moving-picture-machine men carefully looking over the ground around the station. He saw her coming, and walked rapidly toward her.

"O'Brien give you a message for me?" he asked curtly.

Polly handed it to him, but her eyes were looking down at the pommel of her saddle, and her lips were tightly compressed.

"Told you all about it, I suppose," he said, ripping the flap open.

She looked up then. "Oh, Jimmy!" she cried. "How could you?"

"Picture," he said sternly, and his eyes commanded her eyes to meet his. "My picture!" he said, and on that first word was the same peculiar emphasis she had noticed in a word he had used once before. Some of the sternness went out of his voice, and he rested a hand on her horse's neck as he went on: "Isn't it better to have it over now than always to have the suspense, Polly?" His voice became almost gentle. "You know how the contracts are. He can't get any of them away."

It was her eyes that forced his to drop when he saw that she read them. "I suppose the picture is the whole thing," she said colorlessly. "Nothing seems to matter, so long as the picture

is good. Perhaps it's because I'm young in the game, and it isn't all of me yet, as it is with the rest of you. Perhaps I haven't had time to get your viewpoint, but it seems to me that there are other and greater things in the world than moving pictures. I may be wrong, but there's things in this world that don't seem worth the price, somehow, and this is one of them. But it *is* your picture. I know nothing. Good-by!"

She swerved her pony to avoid running over him, and galloped away. The picture! That was everything. The picture! It seemed to Polly Nelson that she had heard nothing else since she went into the business. That was the God of gods, the Deity of Empyrean. "Don't spoil the film" had been dinned into her ears as the greatest of all laws. She had thought it had become part of her, too; that demand for the *picture*.

In the narrow gorge she saw another camera man scrambling up the steep sides. Another part of the picture! A small part, that had to be made perfect so that the whole might bring nickels and dimes to the coffers of motion-picture theaters. The picture! No price was too great to pay for a good picture. Hadn't she heard that over and over? Hadn't she marveled at the nerve of men who risked their lives a dozen times a day for a hundred feet of film. No price! Not even self-respect! Honor! For Jimmy Hamilton was about to sacrifice both for a few hundred feet of film!

Somehow, she forced a smile on her lips and a cheery word of greeting when she arrived at quarters, but she pleaded a headache, and skipped the supper table and its chatter. She wanted to lie on her bed and think it over, but nature stepped in and demanded its toll for the hours of sleep she had lost the night before.

The ringing of Ah Fling's breakfast

bell waked her with a start, and she hurried downstairs, to find Jimmy Hamilton his old-time, hustling self.

"We'll get a wiggle on to-day, folks," he announced. "We'll clean up the ranch end."

"Is there another end?" cried Cissy Alton joyfully.

"Sure," grinned Jimmy, but he didn't look at Polly as she joined the group. "Got to leave the father's city home and come back to it, you know. Come on, Fling, cram it all in one reel, now."

The breakfast table was a short and merry party. Every one was elated at the prospect of a trip to the city, and Polly noticed how deftly Jimmy kept the conversation away from the Carltons and the risks they would run in going to a city. There he showed his directorship as never before. Every minute of the morning was crammed with work, but after lunch Jimmy seemed to take more time.

They had all gone down to the little amphitheater near the railroad. Only Polly knew why, and she alone could anticipate the coming of President Carlton at half past two in his special that would be hidden by the small hill to the right that formed part of the gorge. The president himself would remain hidden till he burst unexpectedly upon them.

Jimmy Hamilton was telling the Carltons their story.

"You've lived a year and a half in your small mountain cabin, and the child has come. You've got to get down among people and stop living like animals. The husband gets a job on the ranch. Joe, fix that face of yours so you'll look like New York thinks a ranch foreman ought to look. You sit over there on that rock with the baby, Dorothy, and watch anxiously. You people get back! And stay back! All over this side! I want that gorge to show as a background. Shoot, Tommy!"

The machine began to click, and far

up in the hills Polly's strained ears heard the first toot of a train whistle. It was all being timed; timed well for the picture!

But Jimmy Hamilton kept talking at breakneck speed.

"Don't walk so straight, John. Slouch! You helped carry that kid twenty miles over the mountains. You're tired. Come on, Joe! Take off your hat, drag it down over your nose, John. Don't lift it like they do on Market Street! Scowl, Joe! Scrape your feet, John!"

So the directions went on, tersely, crisply, telling each move, putting each character on record. Polly, in the group of watchers outside the camera range, listened in vain for another toot of the engine. But she heard the rumble of the train back of the hill. No one else seemed to hear it, for they were all intent on Jimmy and the picture that was being played.

"Now we jump ahead twenty scenes! Had most of the ones in between this morning. The foreman accuses you of cattle rustling, John. Walk left and on. Stand watching, Joe! Come on, John! Meet! Don't slouch now. Straighten up and tell him he's a liar. Beat him to his gun! *Right!*"

Polly, watching Jimmy Hamilton with the eyes of a hawk, saw him glance at the top of the hill on the left. She saw a white handkerchief wave. That was a signal! For what?

"Back away, Joe. That's it! Come on, Dorothy! You've seen it from the hill, and you want to know what's the matter. That's it! Face the camera a bit more."

Then Polly Nelson saw. From the mouth of the narrow gorge came President Carlton, panting, blowing, alone!

"Get back, Joe!" ordered Jimmy, and his voice kept all other eyes on himself and the camera; all other's but Polly's. "Turn the other way, you two, *quick!*"

Like automatons obeying the voice

they had learned to obey, Dorothy Carlton, her baby in her arms, and John turned to face his father!

With a cry, the girl shrank back, and her cry was echoed by all of the actors who had been spellbound by the sound of Jimmy's voice.

President Carlton raised his hand in a gesture of anger. "You!" he cried, and there was accusation in his voice. "You!"

With a low moan that wrung Polly's heart, Dorothy Hamilton clasped the baby tighter to her breast, and trembled in fear. Her husband, too, had fallen back a step, numbed by the shock of it all.

"Come with me!" All the authority over ten thousand men on his railroad system was in President Carlton's voice as he made that demand of his son. He stretched forth a hand to grasp him by the arm.

"Tell him to go to the devil, John!" Jimmy Hamilton's crisp voice broke in, the tone as it always was when he issued a direction. John Carlton, junior, accustomed to obey instantly that voice and tone, straightened his shoulders. "Stand close to him, John. Right! Now back! Put your arms around your wife's waist."

Perhaps both their brains were incapable of thinking for themselves, but they obeyed that voice unquestioningly. President Carlton turned his head once, then ignored the group. His son must come home with him.

"Tell him you're going to stick to the little woman and the child, John. Tell him! Throw it into him! Cling to John's arm, Dorothy!"

Then John, junior, found his tongue, found it, and used it like a man. There was no disrespect, nothing but straight-from-the-shoulder talk. President Carlton tried to interrupt in his wrath, his face black, scowling, an unpleasant thing to look at. Dorothy Carlton clung to her husband's arm and spoke soft

words to the child in her arms, that had already begun to whimper in fear.

The other members of Company No. 1 held their breaths as they watched. That first curt order of Jimmy Hamilton had made them hear for the first time the steady click of the camera crank. They understood, and held their breaths lest they spoil it. Feature stuff! *Feature stuff!* And a side of President Carlton, philanthropist, distributor of charity, that the world had never seen. Feature stuff was what New York wanted, eh? Well, here it was, hot off the bat and sizzling!

Jimmy's voice broke in again: "Now step in and order him off the ranch, Joe!"

Joe Bates took his cue instantly. President Carlton whirled from his son. "Get out!" snapped Joe Bates, and there was no acting in his manner or voice; it was just plain anger. "Get!" His hand dropped to his revolver, an unloaded weapon that wouldn't shoot, anyway, and was therefore safe. But President Carlton didn't know that.

He backed away a step, and his face went white. "What—what——" he spluttered.

"Out!" snapped Joe.

John Carlton, junior, still in his daze, stepped forward protestingly.

"Step back!" ordered Jimmy Hamilton wrathfully, and John did it before he thought.

Joe Bates' gun slowly withdrew from the holster. President Carlton snarled something, then turned and stalked back the way he had come.

"That's all, Tommy," jerked Jimmy Hamilton, and the clicking machine stopped. Jimmy jumped forward and he raised his voice: "I want to speak to you, Carlton!"

There was something in the director's voice then that made Polly Nelson shudder. The big railroad president turned, and Jimmy Hamilton reached him in two steps.

"You've done a good day's work, Carlton!" he said, and there was that same note in his voice; a note half menace, half sneer, all danger. "See that machine there!" He pointed a long arm. "You were too full of your own wrath to see or hear it, weren't you? Know what it is? It's a motion-picture camera. And every snarl, every sneer, every nasty expression that showed on your face will show on a thousand screens next week. See down the gulch there? A camera caught you coming through. Notice that pile of boxes down by the station? Another camera caught your train, and you alighting. They're howling for feature stuff back East, Carlton, and I guess perhaps a couple of our news-interest camera men caught you in Frisco and on the way. I wired them to. And it's all going in a picture, Carlton, a peach of a picture! A feature! It's going to show the world the real Carlton, the dirty kind of a dog that'd put a woman out to starve in the mountains with a baby. And the camera can't lie, Carlton! People know it can't lie!"

No one on the one-hundred-thousand-acre International ranch had ever seen a look on the face of Jimmy Hamilton like the one that was there when he finished that last biting sentence. Polly Nelson clenched her hands at her sides, and she knew that the pain of the nails in her palms was the only thing that kept her from fainting. The others were silent, rigid, aware that they were not seeing play now. Dorothy Carlton hugged her baby tight, crooning to it to quiet its fears, for there was nothing else in her world just then. Her husband was of stone, incapable of movement.

The gamut of human emotion seemed to have crossed President Carlton's face in a few seconds, and then his lips curved in a sneering smile! He was himself again.

"So that's it!" he said quietly, but

there was threat in the quiet. "Black-mail, eh?"

The words that came from Jimmy Hamilton's lips then seemed to shake his whole body. "No! It isn't blackmail, Carlton!" Jimmy's voice was hoarse, low, so they had to strain their ears to catch the words. "I'll tell you the rest of this moving-picture story. It's called 'Outcasts.' The husband and wife and baby go back to the city with the hope of reconciliation. They go to a hotel, Carlton, a fine-looking, strong-looking hotel, that was built by a railroad that bribed building contractors and building inspectors and city officials till it was only a shell and a death trap, Carlton. And the husband goes out to see his father, leaving the wife to watch over their sleeping baby. Then he comes back, to find that the hotel has collapsed, that a hundred men are digging, digging, and that somewhere under a thousand tons of rotten brick and mortar and iron his wife and baby are dead!"

The fires of hell itself could not have blazed higher than President Carlton's anger then. "Damn you!" he screamed. "If you put that in, I'll kill you! By the living God, I'll kill you!"

Then a sneering smile came to the lips of Jimmy Hamilton; the same kind that had rested on Carlton's lips a minute before. "Your lying papers and your whitewashing investigators have made people almost forget that hotel, haven't they, Carlton? But they haven't made *me* forget it. The thing was inside of the quake zone, wasn't it? But other buildings that had been there for years before the hotel was dreamed of stood, didn't they? But the hotel you built collapsed like a pack of cards, Carlton, like a death pack of cards! And I joined the diggers, Carlton, and I worked till they carried me off to the hospital. But I didn't find my wife and baby, Carlton. They were underneath it all. They never found them—

not my wife and baby—you know what they did find when they lifted the tons from frail bones and flesh, don't you, Carlton! And the whole damn' world's going to see it! No, it isn't blackmail. Vengeance, Carlton, a twentieth-century brand, a truth in celluloid, and the people that see that picture won't forget it, nor you!"

He stopped for sheer lack of breath to look at the man before him. President Carlton seemed to have shrunk in his clothes, his face white, and his hands shielded his eyes as though to shut out some hideous picture.

"That picture's going to bring it all back, Carlton!" Jimmy Hamilton went on ruthlessly. "It's hell now, isn't it, even after these few years? But you'd almost forgotten, hadn't you? And now it's going to live, live, *live!* Damn you, but you'll pay! I took your son and the girl and the baby, Carlton, and I'm going to keep them here, for I want the boy to grow up clean and white, with people that are white. He couldn't be that with you and your rotten railroad offices, could he? And my wife looked like Dorothy, and my baby—"

An arm laid gently on his sleeve stopped him, and he turned, to see Dorothy Carlton looking up into his face with eyes that were filled with tears.

"Don't," she begged, "please don't! See! He's suffered enough. Please don't do it. You've been so good, so good! You won't make us suffer now. Be the good Jimmy Hamilton that's done so much!"

"Suffered!" cried Jimmy bitterly. "Suffered! Why, great—"

He stopped again. Two tiny hands clasped his shoulders. Two great, wise eyes looked up into his.

"Goo!" cooed little Johnnie. "Goo!"

"See, Jimmy, see!" He found Polly Nelson on the other side of him, her hand lightly touching his arm, her face with all its piquant charm upraised.

"Oh, Jimmy!" she sobbed quietly.

"There are bigger things in the world than pictures; bigger, finer things."

He looked away from her eyes. He saw the baby hands fondling the lapel of a coat worn by an old, old man, whose trembling fingers touched Dorothy Carlton's arm, and blindly sought to draw her to him.

"Bigger things!" he muttered. "Yes! Bigger things than the *picture!*"

It seemed minutes that he stood there, face haggard, drawn, the fight inside of him putting new lines on his face every instant. He was fighting the only world that he knew, was Jimmy Hamilton. He turned away from them sharply, brusquely, and walked to the camera. With steady fingers, he opened it, took out the reel, and the sunlight ruined a thousand feet of film.

CONAHAN

By LARRY EVANS

"Something was scratching at the packed snow in the doorframe; something whined; and when I loosened the door, and the wind blew it open, the thing staggered into the room. It was a dog, m'sieur—a dog half dead and more with fatigue, his shaggy yellow coat crusted with sleet, and his feet cut and bleeding."

THE log fire on the hearth of Father Le Fèvre's cabin had all but burned to embers. The room was warm, for the chinks were tight, but the wind outside, whining down from the north, pounded the panes with crystals that were fined and frost-tempered and sharp as needle points. And the glass that hung on the doorframe stood a shade under fifty below zero.

"It was a night like this, white and deadly cold." (Father Le Fèvre was staring into the fire again, and talking so softly that I could scarcely catch the words—merely thinking aloud.)

"We were sitting here in the cabin, Conahan and I. Just that day he had come down from the lumber camp twenty miles upriver, lean and hard, in his scarlet mackinaw and high moccasins, from months in the timber. We had been talking but little, and were just sitting quiet, glad of the fire, when we heard it that night—heard a cry come down the wind as you heard a moment ago the wind in the treetops.

"It brought me to my feet that night

—lifted me from my chair in one spring—and I stood staring into Conahan's face with a question in my eyes. He had merely lifted his head, but for all that he was straining his ears to catch a repetition of that sound. A minute, maybe two, we waited, and all we heard was the droning beat of the storm on the windows. Conahan scratched a match, and held it to the bowl of his pipe.

"'Tis the wind, father,' he said. 'Tis just the wind howlin' its devil's song in the br-ranches.'

"It sounded like a woman's voice,' I answered him. 'It sounded like a woman calling.'

"Conahan only nodded and leaned back. He was thinking of something else. But I was not convinced, and he was still straining to hear. Maybe that was the reason I was the first at the latch pin, and the first to throw open the door, minutes later, when another sound brought us both up, standing.

"Something was scratching at the packed snow in the doorframe; some-

thing whined; and when I loosened the door, and the wind blew it open, the thing staggered into the room. It was a dog, m'sieur—a dog half dead and more with fatigue, his shaggy yellow coat crusted with sleet, and his feet cut and bleeding. A collar hung about his neck, the heavy, padded collar of the sledge harness, and on either side of him the ends of the traces dragged in the snow. But he wasn't the usual sledge dog of the North, not a half-breed wolf, for the sheep-dog blood was plain to be seen in his sharp nose and close-laid ears—*oui*, and in the eyes of him, too.

"He lurched across the threshold when the door flew open, and stood swaying back and forth, his feet outspread to hold him steady, and gazed up at us—gazed and lifted his nose and whined softly. I put my weight against the door to force it shut, and when the latch fell he whirled, that broken, half-dead animal, and tore with his bleeding feet at the doorsill and barked shrilly.

"Conahan dropped to his knees beside him.

"*'Shteady, lad, shteady! Time enough yet, lad,'* he coaxed. And then to me: *'You'll be afther holdin' the light, father, and quicklike, man, for I'm thinking this is a matter av minutes!'*

"I turned and took the light from the table and squatted beside him. Conahan had the ends of the flat leather traces in his hands, and, for an instant, he examined them, with the dog whimpering madly and trying to lick his face; then he flung them from him and leaped erect.

"*'They're fresh cut—the tr-races,'* he cried. *'Fr-resch cut and clean-cut, too, with a knife that had an edge to the steel av it! Somebody, when they'd no longer the strength to fight fur-rther somewhere out there in the dar-rk, turned the lead dog loose. They must be close, for the fr-resch leather's sthll*

dry as tinder—and I'm thinkin', father, the dog will be takin' me to them.'

He whirled toward where his cap and gloves lay, steaming, before the fire, and the dog, reading all that he meant to do, turned and flung his spent body against the closed door and whimpered madly for haste.

"*'Aye, bhoy, I'm comin','* Conahan cried. *'Down, lad! You'll be needin' your str-rength—if 'tis not too late already. No, father, 'tis better you wait. Build up the fire and heat a drop av br-randy. I'm thinkin' it'll be but a minute I'll be gone.'*

"He went out, the dog leaping before him. I saw him bend to the gale, flounder in the soft snow, heard his voice drift back hoarsely, and then the storm swallowed him up. But he had read well the signs, and he did not have far to go. Just yonder across the river where the old trail from the Northwest country cuts into the main sled road he found them—he found a sledge already half banked over by the driving wind, and the played-out dog team burrowed in the lee of a drift.

"And he found more than that! Face down in the sugary snow there lay a figure—a figure slim and boyish in its furs and hooded parka—limp and asprawl, with the snowshoes that were bound to its moccasined feet at an ugly angle. There was a knife in one outstretched mittened hand—the knife that had cut the lead dog loose. With that same blade Conahan cut away the tangled snowshoes and slit the rest of the broken dog team out of harness.

"I heard him coming back. I had built up the fire when I heard the yapping of the dog, and when I threw open the door Conahan staggered in with that slim figure limp over one shoulder, dragging with the other hand the low, long sledge. Of all the things I remember of that night, I remember most vividly, I think, how he swore hoarsely when the sledge caught in

the doorway and hindered his haste. There was a man on that sledge, buried deep in the robes, his head resting on a small canvas-lashed pack at the forward end. As swiftly as I could I shut out the storm, and, dropping to my knees, lifted the corner of the blanket that covered his face. I—I do not know how long I stared; not long, no doubt, but I saw much in that one instant.

"His skin was the color of ivory—as white and set, nor was there any need to feel for the beat of his heart. He was dead, and he had died horribly, that man had. In his wide, staring eyes and twisted lips there was something that I never want to see again in any face. Why, he had gone across mocking at life itself!

"I drew back the corner of the blanket to hide it, and half rose—rose and turned, and stopped and stared. M'sieur, there before my bunk, his back to the fire, Conahan had halted, and he, too, was staring—staring as though he would never see anything else, into the face of that boyish figure that lay in the hollow of his arm.

"The heavy parka hood had fallen back, and down over Conahan's red sleeve there poured a mass of hair, swaying almost to his knees. It was thick—thick and heavy and rippling—and it quivered under the firelight like a thing of life, the color of raw gold. And—and there stood Conahan, staring into her face, staring as though he would never believe his eyes. I heard his breath come and go, come and go—so, through his teeth. Then he turned and spoke in a voice I had never heard pass his lips before.

"'Mither av God!' he breathed aloud. Men before now have prayed with half the awe there was in his words that night. 'Mither av God!' he said; and then lifted his eyes to mine.

"'Father, look ye!' he whispered.

'Tis a woman—'tis just a bit av a gir-rl!

"*Oui*, it was she—she who had cried out to us in the storm. Do you wonder, m'sieur, that I start up, even now, when I hear the scream of the wind in the trees—and that was years and years back?

"There is no need for me to tell you to-night how Conahan fought that night through to fan back into a blaze the one small spark of life that the wind could not beat out of her body. Isn't it enough to say that somehow he did it, now pouring warm brandy between her bloodless lips, now rubbing, with dry snow, her ankles, chalky white where he had cut away the frozen leather of the moccasins? Alone, quietly, without a spoken word, he drove back the cold that was creeping in upon her heart, and the only sound in this cabin that night was the hiss of his breath as he labored. She lived, m'sieur, she lived simply because Conahan, kneeling beside her, shut his teeth and would not let her die! I know, for did I not see with my own eyes?

"Just once, not long before dawn, Conahan looked up at me as I stood holding a fresh bucket of dry snow, and seemed to see me there for the first time. A question flared in his eyes as he jerked his head toward the body that lay quiet behind him on the sledge. I could only shake my head in answer, and he understood.

"'Then, if ther-re's annything that you can do, father,' he suggested, 'you'll be carin' a bit for that dog.'

"That girl lived, m'sieur—*oui*, I had said that before. She lived, and, when the wind went down with a rising sun, her eyes opened for the first time and glanced, only half sanely, about the room. But at that instant the dog lying before the fire whimpered and snarled in his sleep; she heard, and comprehension flooded her face. She half lifted herself and tried to stretch out her arm.

"'Jock! Good old boy, Jock!' she called, barely above a whisper. But he heard for all that, for he rose and whined, and tottered across to tuck his nose beneath her arm.

"And then, m'sieur, that girl did a strange thing. Minute after minute she lay there in the blankets, her white face half buried in that thick hair of hers, and looked up into Conahan's face; she lay and looked and looked, eyes wide and lips parted, until at last she reached out one small hand and put it almost timidly upon his scarlet sleeve.

"'You are real,' she stated quaveringly. 'You're real—and so we must have made it! I knew I was still sane . . . out there. I knew I saw your light.'

"She tried to smile.

"'I'm hungry,' she told him falteringly—*oui*, as simply as that. 'I'm very—very—hungry,' she told him, and with that she slipped off to sleep.

"I wish you could have seen the face of Conahan, as I saw it there that night."

Father Le Fèvre's voice hushed for a moment; then his head lifted, and he looked into my face for the first time since the beginning of the story.

"M'sieur," he asked, "m'sieur, have you ever thought that you knew a man—knew him well, I mean—almost as well as you knew yourself, and then waked to the fact that you knew him not at all? It is a strange sensation, *non?* Well, it was in the week that followed the coming of that yellow-haired girl to Singing River that I first realized that Conahan—whom I had known year in and year out, longer than I could remember—was a total stranger to me. Why, I found that I knew him only as he was known to other men the whole river length, for the strength of his shoulders and the weight of his fist.

"Conahan did not go back to the camp upriver that week. The first day

after the storm I moved what things I needed across to his shack and doubled up with him, so that she need not be disturbed. And the afternoon of that same day we drew the sledge with the quiet form beneath the blanket outside the cabin.

"You would hardly believe that any human being who had been so near the end as that slim girl had been could come back again so quickly. The vitality of the dog she called Jock was no less than her own; and after he had slept the night through and eaten ravenously in the morning, there was little or nothing to show what he had been through, except that he limped a little on his cut pads and whimpered once or twice with pain as he followed Conahan wherever he went.

"She came back with all the vitality of her youthful body, m'sieur. Yet not once during that first day did she ask for the man whom Conahan had found with her on the trail below the dam, or speak of the night before, or of the storm, save to ask quietly that Conahan would care for the dog team. And she lay quiet on the bunk and watched, without a word or a quiver of her face, while we dragged the sledge outside. But she understood quickly enough when Conahan turned back to her, his cap in hand, and waited for her to speak.

"'He died on the trail, days before you found us,' she told him slowly. 'I—I cannot remember just how long back, but he was dead the second day of the storm.'

"Not a shadow of emotion or a hint of pity colored her voice or marked her face. Her eyes only narrowed a little—narrowed and hardened—and her lips straightened into a line that made me remember even more vividly the twisted lips of the face beneath the blanket. And then she asked us to leave for her just that small canvas-lashed bundle upon which his head had

been lying. Conahan put it beside the bunk, and we buried the dead man that same afternoon.

"Conahan spoke scarcely a word while we laid him yonder under the pines, where he has lain quiet since. But he stared a long time into that white face with its broad forehead and twisted, mocking lips. He stared a long time, not with the horrified fascination that had held me, but with preoccupied gravity that I did not quite understand. I looked no longer than I could help, for it was not nice to see.

"Then he marked the mound and went, without a word, back to my cabin to sit at the side of that girl whose hair lay, shimmering like gold, fanwise on her pillow. But that night when Jean Coteau's wife had come to care for her, Conahan crossed to our shack, and, after we had eaten, leaped back to the subject, as was his custom, without preface or introduction.

"'They'd come far,' he said, half to himself. 'They'd been close to two weeks, or maybe more, on the tr-rail, for there was no food left on the sledge, nor even a scr-rap av meat for the dogs. And they did not know anny too well the counthry, I'm thinkin', for 'tis years and more since anny man has tr-raveled that tr-rail to come down from the Nor-rthwest.'

"He sat ramming tobacco into the bowl of his pipe with a slow forefinger and shook his head at my question.

"'She's slept the whole afthernoong long. She's scar-rce spoken at all. I'm thinkin' she'll never speak—av him, that is! Why, 'twas her father, man, 'twas her own father! Could you not be afther readin' that just fr-rom the face av him? She's that man's daughter—and, father, she's glad—she's only mighty, mighty glad he's dead!'

"Conahan was silent for an instant. His voice had been oddly gentle; now it became suddenly harsh and grating.

"'Ther-re's manny like him,' he went on, 'too manny like him here in the Nor-rth, with the for-rehead av a god and the evil lips av hell itself! Fr-rom where do they come? They're just the men fr-rom "over yonder"; they're the men who can't go back! And 'twas her own father, for she's his str-raight nose and wide-set eyes. Thank God she's not his lips—nor heart, nor br-rain, I'm thinkin'. And she's glad—she'll sleep the sounder now for knowin' that man's dead.'

"M'sieur, I would like to picture her for you, if I believed I could do it well. I would like to tell you of her wide, grave, gray eyes and little pointed chin, and her lips that always seemed to smile so readily; but, after all, is there any need? It is only how Conahan saw her that counts. And, as that first week passed, I realized, day by day—*oui*, hour by hour—that Conahan would never see the face of any woman in the world save hers.

"I pitied him. Can you quite conceive the conceit of it, of my pitying Conahan, whose brain more than matched my own, and whose body—but I have already told you the man he was! And yet I did just that thing. Each time I remembered the light in his eyes as he stood that first night staring into her smooth face, with her hair heavy as spun gold on his sleeve, each time I remembered the slim wrists and ankles of her I grew more and more sorry for him.

"For a blind man could scarcely have mistaken the thing that was in her features, and the features of that man who lay silent under the snow, for all the evil that masked it. You, and I, too, for want of a better word, call it breeding. And yet I was myself blind. I'd looked on Conahan, year in and year out, too blind to see the man he really was. Now I often wish I could only have known what blood it was that ran in that man's veins!

"Day after day strength came back to that slender girl who lay in my cabin until, except for her frost-touched feet that would be useless still for days, one would never have guessed how near the end she had been. Conahan housed the dog team that week and cared for them, and the rest of the time from sunup till dusk he spent beside her bunk or doing errands for her.

"Often as I passed or hesitated at the door, I wondered of what they talked, for she never spoke of whence she came or of what she might have been. Yet, hour after hour, I'd hear her light treble or his heavy bass.

"Each day was like that, until one evening at the end of the week I went back to our shack to find Conahan already there before me. He hardly noticed my entrance that night—he barely looked up at all—and I stood and gazed a long time before I realized what he was doing. M'sieur, he had her little suit of furred, boy's clothing spread out on the table in front of him, and was bent double above it, measuring seam for seam and jotting down the figures with a bit of pencil. Once in a while he would speak aloud to himself. I never saw a face more set or earnest.

"He took the trail that night—the trail to Beckett—and before the following midday he was back again, even his straight back bent a little under the weight of his loaded pack basket. Everything that that girl might be able to use—every conceivable thing that he could get for her—he had brought for her from Beckett.

"He could have driven, for the sled road was once more smooth as glass under the hauling. It was like him to want to bring back that pack upon his own shoulders. Yet, for all that, his face was more than dissatisfied when he entered our shack that day. He broke open a bundle and spread a garment out on the table before me, and then I understood. He held up the

cloth, between thumb and forefinger, for me to see.

"The feel av it,' he growled. 'The thickness av it! Father, 'tis about as smooth and soft as sacking!

"And that big riverman said ungodly things under his breath of the shop and its keeper at Beckett.

"But it's at least white and clean,' I tried to console him. 'What else matters now?'

"He broke in without waiting for me to finish.

"And no more than good enough for the wife of Jean Coteau,' he finished.

"Jean Coteau's wife is a good woman,' I chided him then. 'She's no less righteous for the coarseness of her garments.'

"I could have saved my breath for all the heed he paid. He slipped his shoulders into the pack straps again, but he turned in the doorway, his face clearing a little.

"But it's your-rself who'll be goin' out to the Mission in the spring. Maybe you'll be after br-ringin' back with you then, father—'twill be but little tr-rouble—'

"He broke off suddenly. I could no longer hide it. I could no longer keep it from showing in my eyes.

"What is it?' he asked. 'Father, what is there wr-rong?'

"How would you have told him? Well, I, too, found it hard to pick words that would not hurt him too much.

"Spring, Conahan!' I exclaimed. 'In the spring! Why, man, don't you know that long before the frost is out of the trails she'll have gone on out to her own people?'

"He stood and scanned my face—scanned it inch for inch. I have never been quite certain, but he may even have been smiling a little.

"Her people,' he repeated gravely. 'Out to her own people?'

"I had expected to see the pain flare

up in his eyes; I had expected to see his shoulders slacken and droop; instead, there he stood, smiling quietly, gently, as though I were no more than a child.

"'Aye, father,' he finished, after a moment. 'Aye, you would be right, no doubt. But I'd given it no thought, myself.'

"He went out. I watched him cross to the cabin to take her the things which he had grumbled were not fine enough for her body. And then I sat and half ate the heart of me out for him. I could almost hear her cry out like nothing so much as a pleased child; I could almost see her lying there looking at him out of eyes that had gone damp and blurred, when she realized what he had tried to do for her.

"I do not know how long it was—far too long, certainly—and then I started up at a hand on my shoulder. It was nightfall. He had sat with her until she slept, and there he stood beside me and looked down into my face for a long moment, before his hand tightened on my shoulder.

"'Father,' he commanded, 'father, you'll be afther stoppin', now. Don't waste your pity, man!'

"*Oui*, he had been reading me—reading as easily as he read the woods or the weather, every thought that had been with me day after day throughout the week.

"'You've been thinkin' only av the littleness av her,' he went on slowly, after a moment, 'av her fineness. But, father, I ask you now, does her fineness make the br-rain av me anny less clear—or my body anny less clean? You're afther rememberin' that I've br-roke ere now with my own hands men who would play me cr-rooked—you know they name me, the whole river length, the man who will have what he will have!—but have you been believin' that that would make me anny

less gentle, if 'twas gentle I wanted to be?'

"He wheeled and crossed to the door, and threw it open, the lean, hard bulk of him looming out against the background of the snow through the door-frame. I lifted my head then, and saw Conahan for the first time. The stiff stubble that had been on his face when he came down from the camp upriver was gone. His face was as smooth as my own, save for a little brush across the lip. And as he stood and half smiled at me, realization came like a blow in the face. In his tight, wide lips and weather-tanned jaw I saw for the first time the unspoiled, still unbeaten youth of him. *M'sieur*, I realized that Conahan was young!

"'You'll sorrow no more for me, thin, father,' he said, and his voice rang a little. 'I'll have no man pityin' me.'

"He went out and closed the door behind him. And that night, without rest or sleep, he flung off on the trail that wound north into the big timber upriver. Often enough there was a twist in his heavy speech; there was no twist in the soul of Conahan."

Again Father Le Fèvre paused.

"*M'sieur*," he went on, at last, "she did not go out to her people in the spring. I learned long afterward what Conahan must have known somehow, without asking, from the very first, that there were no people to whom the girl might go. Hardly more than a day or two after Conahan went back upriver she was up and about again, and the very first day she was able to walk I did a strange thing. Just why I did it I do not know, but it was I, for all that, who spoke first to the fur agent, and then to her, of the plan that came into my head.

"The agent's wife had been ill for years, and the little nurse he had brought up from the States to care for her had died in the fall. The agent

was more than glad to have some one to fill her place. And she—the girl with the thick, shimmering hair—why, I think now that she had not once even dreamed of going out from Singing River!

"She took the little board shack that stood against the agent's house, yonder across the square, and carried across to it that same day all the things that Conahan had brought her from Beckett. It took several trips, even with me to help, and last of all I carried over the little canvas-lashed pack that Conahan had taken from the sledge that first day. In no more than a day or two I had grown accustomed to seeing her slim figure in the suit of vivid blanketing which Conahan had brought her, flashing back and forth from her cabin or Jean Coteau's place to the door of the agent's house.

"I think she seemed more boyish than ever in that bit of a belted coat and short, thick skirt that reached barely to her moccasin tops. But she never wore anything over her head, and there was nothing boyish about the great golden mass of hair that crowned it and blew about her face.

"In all that time she spoke just once of herself. That was the same night after I had suggested her staying as nurse.

"'My name is Louise Hatfield,' she told me then, after a long moment of silence. I had not asked the question; I had not even been looking at her, but I could not help but wheel and lift my head at the words. Her voice came slowly, almost harshly, and yet scarcely loud enough to be heard. When I turned, her head was thrown back, and her lip was white and deep-dented by her teeth. I could not quite understand at that moment the light in her eyes; I could hardly know that it was loathing—bitter loathing for her own name, and so I answered steadily enough:

"'Very well.'

"But a day or two later I saw more clearly; I came to see some things very clearly indeed.

"I had crossed to her little shack just before dusk—I cannot remember the errand. There was a thaw in the air that night; the snow did not squeal under my weight, so she could not hear my approach even though the door of the shack swung half open. There was no light in the single room, save that from the fire on the hearth, and against that blaze she stood, half facing away from me. M'sieur, she had opened that canvas-lashed pack at last, and scattered all about the floor were things—things of the sheer fineness of which Conahan had never dreamed.

"She stood there motionless, back toward me, her arms outstretched, and from her hands, even with her face, a gown hung down quite to the floor—a gown of stuff as flimsy as the river mist, scarcely thicker than a man's frosted breath. With the firelight through it, it was the color of burgundy—red as blood. And the flickering light of the blaze quivered and glanced from bits of tinsel that crusted it thick from top to hem—bits of silver shaped like a butterfly's wings. It was a wonderful thing, a totally wonderful thing, and beside her, in a heedless heap, lay two slippers of satin, with heels no thicker-waisted than a man's thumb, and stockings like cobweb. They, too, were redder than the fire.

"All that I saw in one instant, just as you might see the river basin yonder under a lightning flash—just as vividly and as quickly. And while I stared she stooped swiftly and crushed that tinsel gown and the rest into a ball between her hands and jammed it down tight upon the burning logs. Straight and stiff and rigid she stood, while the flame crept over them. I could not see her face, but I heard the sound in her throat as she swayed a little, and then leaned hard against the rough-stone

chimney and buried her face in her arms.

"I turned and went back to my own cabin.

"Each time I looked at her after that the picture of her as she stood, when she had burned the spangled dress that night, with her head bowed against the stone chimney of her bare little cabin, flashed back to me. I thought of a thousand things I could say, when the time came. And, when the time did come, I said scarcely anything!

"It happened the night the wind swung into the south and brought the first warm rain. I knew instantly—I understood all that had happened, the moment she swung open my cabin door and stood there, her hair bright with bits of moisture. She was panting—she had been running hard. A minute or more she waited, and then she threw wide her arms—like that, m'sieur—and choked, and ran and knelt, and put her head on my knees. I waited till the dry sobs no longer shook her shoulders—waited until she grew quieter and lifted her head and looked up at me. It was a girl's face no longer; it was a woman who knelt there at my feet.

"'Father!' she begged. 'Father, can you help me a little now?'

"I leaned over and looked into her face, and for all the pain that swam in them her eyes were as brave and clear as the eyes of that collie, Jock.

"'You care for him?' I asked her, at last.

"'Care!' she echoed. 'Care! I'd die for him—I'd die so gladly!'

"I shook my head.

"'It is not enough,' I told her—and her body went slack. Her head bowed, and lifted again, and she wet her lips with the tip of her tongue.

"'I know that, too,' she whispered. 'I knew that—was not enough.'

"I rose and raised her to her feet.

"'Would you live for him?' I asked her then. 'Would you live for him day

and night? Do you care enough to keep on living, when nothing would be quite so easy as death?'

"She could not speak. She—she just nodded her head. Those gray eyes of hers were like stars in the dead white of her face.

"'Then that is all that any one could hope for on earth,' I said to her as gently as I knew how. 'That is all that any man could ever ask.'

"She bowed her head and crossed the room. But at the door she wheeled—wheeled and ran back to me, and knelt and put my hand against her cheek. And I married them that same week—Conahan and that slim girl with the hair the color of raw gold.

"I do not have to tell you that they were happy. You know Conahan well enough now yourself to answer that question. Why, day in and day out, during that summer, she went at dusk to the head of the rise there and waited for him. And one night, when I chanced to look from this window, one night when he had come off the basin later than usual and it was dark, I saw them pass the lighted windows of their own cabin, and she was not walking at his side. He'd swung her up on his arm and was carrying her back, not in a very different fashion from that first night when he brought her in out of the storm. The collie, Jock, trotted gravely at his heel. I heard faintly the lilting treble of her laugh. They were happy—happy enough!

"Summer ran into fall, and the men went back upriver—and with them went Conahan. She was more than a little lonely those first few days after his going. That was how it chanced that I was sitting on the steps before their cabin on the evening of the second day, when a canoe swung around the far bend of the basin and glided up to the bank. He was a stranger—the man who held the paddle. I could see that even while he was hauling the frail

craft out over the logs; he must have been some time on the trails, for the canoe floated light.

"He was not a river jack nor a prospector down from the hills. He was just a drifter, like yourself, on his way out to the States. And I was watching him—watching curiously, for new faces were not frequent here at Singing River—when I became suddenly conscious of the woman behind me.

"She had been standing in the doorway, talking and laughing a little. Now her voice trailed off into a queer silence, and when I turned she was leaning forward, tense as steel, staring at the newcomer—staring hard and breathing quickly. He did not see us, or even turn his head, and after he had passed from view toward Jean Coteau's, the girl's eyes swung to mine.

"'Why, do you know him?' I asked, in quick surprise. I spoke before I thought. It was quite a while before she answered.

"'I—I thought,' she faltered at last, 'I thought he was—— He looked like a man I once knew a little.'

"That was all she said—all she had a chance to say—for at that same moment the fur agent came hurrying across from his house and begged her to go back with him quickly. She went—went immediately—and Conahan came back down from the river camp not a half hour later that same night!

"Before he was a dozen paces from me he asked for her, and when I told him that the agent's wife was very ill, he stood for an instant, his face clouded. Then he turned aimlessly and started for Jean Coteau's, and I rose and went with him.

"M'sieur, have you ever felt, even without hearing or turning to see, the presence of some other person in the room behind you? Then you will understand a little how I knew, without real reason, that the thing for which I had

been waiting, day after day, was about to come that night.

"We crossed to Coteau's, but the men tilted back against the walls did not even notice our coming that night. They were listening to something else far too eagerly to hear us entering. The door was wide, for the night was warm, and as Conahan stopped stock-still in the doorway I looked over his shoulder and saw the thing that had halted him.

"There in the middle of the room sat that man whom I had seen hauling out his canoe from the basin, barely a half hour before. Every man in the room was bent toward him. Jean Coteau leaned hard across the bar. And on the stranger's knee lay the nose of that yellow collie, Jock.

"He had been talking of something that was holding them as one man. Just for an instant he had hesitated in his tale, and at the moment of our coming he picked it up afresh.

"'——He ran the biggest place in Larrsen,' he went on, speaking to the whole room, 'the biggest faro layout in the town. Men called it the straightest game in the Hudson Bay country, even if they did hate him better than any man in the North. They called him straight, and he wasn't; and they found it out that night.'

"'It happened like this: A stranger had come in from the southward, and the first night he bucked that game he came as near as any living man ever came to breaking the bank. She was dealing that night—the girl. There wasn't a cleaner, swifter handler of the cards in all the Northwest. Her game was straight, too. Don't doubt that!

"'Well, he nearly broke the house that night, and when they quit in the morning he laughed at the man who owned the layout and promised to be back in the evening to finish the job. Hatfield—that was the proprietor's name—just smiled a little, and told him he would be welcome, and when play

opened that next night he took the deal himself. The girl had his place as lookout.

"The room was full—jammed to the corners with men who had come to watch. At first he won—the stranger, I mean—and then the crazy luck that had been his the night before turned dead around. Steadily, with every fall of the cards, he lost and lost until, when he was about cleaned out, he shoved what was left of his stack across the cloth and asked the bank to make it all or nothing. The dealer laughed in his face and whipped out the cards, and he was sweeping in the chips when she swung down, panther-quick—that girl who had been lookout—and shot her arm over his shoulder and ripped open the crooked box!

"You could have heard a pin hit the floor in that room for an instant, and then things got pretty thick. A chair crashed over as Hatfield leaped to his feet. He screamed an oath at her and struck at her face. Then he reached for his gun. He would have killed her that night, only the stranger was quicker, a bit. He drew the quicker gun, and he got Hatfield first—high through the right shoulder.'

"He stopped again for a moment in his story. Eyes the whole length and breadth of that room were beginning to lift furtively to the face of the man there in the open door beside me. Conahan was standing like a man turned to stone. All but Jean Coteau understood, and Coteau only leaned farther across the bar and begged for the rest of the story.

"And thees ees their dog?' he asked. 'You know heem?'

"The stranger put his hand on the collie's head and looked down into his face.

"Jock!' he coaxed. 'Jock, sir!'

"And the dog cocked his ears and whined back at him.

"Know him!' that man cried. 'Know him! Why, he was the lead dog of the only sledge team below the Yukon that could have brought them through the storm of that next week. He was the lead for Hatfield's string. They went from Larrsen that same night, for Hatfield was hard hit and going fast. Nobody saw them leave; they were just gone the next morning. I don't know why she stuck to him, for men often wondered why she hadn't killed him herself long before that. I doubt if anybody will ever know. But she left Larrsen that night, and took him with her. Maybe it was because blood is thicker than water, after all, but that is hard to believe. But she was his daughter—that girl who dealt faro for Hatfield's bank—the daughter of Silent Hatfield. From Little Salmon to the Line men knew of her—they called her Lady Lou.

"The storm wiped out their trail three days out,' he finished. 'The stranger who had done for Hatfield tried to follow and lost them that third day. No word ever came back from them. Men who ought to know said that they couldn't have lived the blizzard out—but here is their lead dog, Jock. Tell me—did they win through?'

"He waited for his answer—and still waited. Nobody spoke. I felt Conahan's body tightening and tightening. Then, in one stride, he crossed to that man who sat with the dog's nose on his knee. By both shoulders he gripped him and half lifted him, and whirled him about in his chair. That stranger was no coward, for he looked death in the face that instant calmly, without flinching. I liked his face, for all that it was very hard about the lips. It was honest! I could see that, and Conahan must have realized it, too, for his grip slowly loosened. A long time he stared into the stranger's eyes before he spoke, with deadly deliberation.

"If you have lied to-night,' he

promised him, 'I'll kill you myself in the morning!'

"Then he turned—turned and went, more slowly than I had ever seen him go before, back across to his cabin. I went with him; I was afraid to leave him alone that night.

"The cabin was empty—she was still sitting with the agent's wife—and hour after hour he sat there in that room which she had made so much like herself, waiting for her. He sat with his face in his hands, never moving, never lifting his head. M'sieur, can you quite understand what that night was to him? Why, all that other men had found in many women, he had found in her alone!

"It was almost dawn when he lifted his head for the first time, his face white and stiff as a mask, and stared straight before him at nothing at all.

"'She lied to me,' he said aloud, answering the question that had been throbbing all night in his brain. 'She lied to me—if she did not tell the whole truth.'

"Then I heard her coming. She was running—she had seen the light. And she cried out to him as she stood in the doorway—cried out gladly to him, and—and then stood dumb, gripping the frame.

"She knew! She knew! She had seen the stranger pass across to Coteau's; she saw the face of that man before her, haggard and white, eyes devouring her face, and she needed no further explanation to make her understand. She started toward him impulsively, and then stopped. Minute after minute passed, with the painful pulse pounding in his temples. Then he spoke.

"'I have to ask you—for-r you failed to tell me all,' he said. 'I want it fr-rom your own lips.'

"He was half mad, and that was the question he flung at her. Her face flamed, and then went white, and she

leaned toward him as though she would not believe what she had heard.

"Then she stiffened, as though it were a lash he had struck her with, and she answered him quietly, almost word for word in the words of the stranger in Jean Coteau's:

"'I'm the girl who dealt faro for Hatfield's bank. I'm the girl they call Lady Lou.'

"Don't you see it was the pride of her he had touched? Why, it was the blood of that man who lay yonder under the pines, good blood for all his twisted lips. For there was another answer that she could have given him—*oui*, a far different one. There was no answer she would give to that question as Conahan asked it that night! And Conahan groped out with his hands on the table, as though his eyes no longer saw, and steadied himself erect. He swayed as he crossed to the door.

"I tried to bar his passage.

"'You cannot go now!' I cried out at him. 'Man, you cannot go like this!'

"'She lied to me,' he repeated hoarsely, 'she lied, for she did not tell the whole truth.'

"'Then I lied, too!' I was desperate that night. 'I lied, too, for I knew as much as that!'

"He looked down at me as though I were some curious creature that he had never seen before, and that was the only time Conahan ever spoke to me in anger.

"'Then I'll tell you now, so that you may know,' he said. 'Too much r-right-eousness will tur-rn stale anny real man's soul. Stand aside!' he warned—and I stood aside before the thing that was in that man's face.

"The stranger whose canoe lay in the basin was waiting for me when I went back to my cabin. He met me at the door.

"'Father,' he asked, 'father, what have I done?'

"'You've done a great hurt to a good

man—and a far better woman,' I answered him.

"Then I told him all that had happened—all there was to tell—from the night when Conahan first found her at the trail end below the dam. He understood, and sat silent a long time after I had finished.

"'I wish I could have known,' he said finally. 'I wish I could have told him the rest!'

"And then, there in my cabin, he told me the story of Silent Hatfield, and of the girl who was his daughter—the girl men called Lady Lou.

"Nobody ever seemed to know quite who he was, or from where he hailed, or why, in spite of all the care he took of her, he hated that girl-child as he did. Only a few who were keener than the rest realized that it might have been because she was white and golden—because, day by day, she grew more and more like the other woman who, when she could no longer stay with him and live, had run away and left him and the baby, too.

"'It was he,' the stranger told me, 'who bought her that crimson, spangled dress—her own father! He dressed her like any other woman of the dance halls, and set her to deal faro for his bank. Why, he simply went to work in cold blood to make her what all the others were, just because her face was fine and smooth, and reminded him of the face of the woman he hated! Of course, he wasn't sane. There are many men here in the North who have lived too long with one idea, and gone stark, raving mad.

"'But that was what he just tried to do—and he failed. And in the two years that followed he grew to fear that girl as he had never feared anything on earth. He'd taught her too well, for her own hatred of him grew to be a deadly thing. He failed, father,' the stranger said, 'and I should know, for I am the man who almost

broke Hatfield's bank; I am the man who shot him that night. And of all the men who knew that girl called Lady Lou, there is not one but would tell you what I have told to-night—not one who would not have shot gladly in my place.'

"Morning had come when the man had finished his story. He was going on out that day, and he paused just a moment in the door as he was leaving.

"'I wish I could have known,' he repeated gravely. 'Will you tell him, father, when he comes downriver again? He will believe it from your lips.'

"I looked across at Conahan's cabin after he had gone. It was broad daylight, but I could see through the window a light still burning. She looked up as I stopped in the doorway. Her eyes were dry—dry and feverishly bright. At that moment I wished only that she might weep. M'sieur, she was still standing—standing stiffly erect where she had stood when Conahan passed her and went out into the night.

"'Why,' I asked her then, 'why didn't you tell him all?'

"Something in her face as she looked at me recalled vividly the loathing I had seen in her eyes that day when she first told me her name—loathing for the very name she bore. She understood my question; she knew that the stranger had told me the rest, and she gazed fixedly into my face before she spoke.

"'At first'—her voice was a dull, weary monotone—'that first night I hoped no one would ever know; I hoped it had died with him, there in the storm. Then, when I grew stronger and could think clearly, I knew that couldn't be; I thought he knew—I thought you understood the day I told you my name—and did not speak because he understood.'

"She stood clenching and unclenching her hands.

"I fought a week in that blizzard," she flared out bitterly, "with nothing to keep me up, for the day he died he threw the provisions from the sledge while I was breaking trail, so that I would die, too. I fought two years to keep out of hell itself, because somehow I believed—I who had never been taught!—that some day there might be a man who would care, because I had made a good fight. I could have answered him—I could have told him that. Father, he had no faith!"

"*Oui*, m'sieur, that was it. It was the woman pride of her. What could I do—or say? The stranger had told me to tell Conahan the truth—all the truth—when he came downriver again, but Conahan did not come.

"Throughout the fall and far into the winter I waited, and he did not come down the river road. Many, many days I would have gone for him, except for what I saw in her eyes. I had interfered too much already.

"And she—she went on living not much different from the way she had lived before I married them. Days when she was needed she cared for the agent's wife, but she stayed on in Conahan's cabin. Often I'd see her at night through a lighted window, and cross to talk with her for a little while. I'd see her sewing, always sewing, and yet when I knocked, and she opened the door after a little longer wait than usual, there would not be so much as a needle in sight when I entered. Her small face was growing wistful those days—wistful and hungry-eyed—and her lips, that had always smiled so readily, smiled but seldom now.

"I should have understood—yet I did not! Had I known I would never have gone out to the Mission that winter. But I did not understand—and I was gone a month.

"The night I came back, and rode down the Beckett trail that runs into the square yonder, almost the first thing

I saw was Jean Coteau's little bay mare standing already hitched to a sleigh before Conahan's door. Coteau himself saw me coming, and he raced to meet me. And then he told me quickly, but not so brokenly but what I understood. I, too, was running when we crossed back to the cabin.

"The doctor opened the door for me. It seemed as though he was always where he was needed most—that doctor. I often wonder if he ever slept—or just died tired. He opened the door and held up his hand and shook his head—so. Then he stood aside for me to pass. Coteau uncovered and followed me in.

"M'sieur, I have never seen a face quite as beautiful as that girl's face was that night. It was as white as the night when Conahan found her and brought her in, save for two brilliant crimson spots that glowed beneath her eyes. Her lids lifted as I crossed to her, and she smiled a little and started to speak as though my coming at that moment was quite the most natural thing in the world. I had to lean close to catch the words.

"'I promised you I would,' she breathed. 'I told you I cared enough—to keep on living! It's hard. It would be very much easier—to die.'

"She fumbled under her pillow until her fingers closed over the thing she sought.

"'Will you take this to him?' she begged me. 'Take it, and give it to him, and tell him if he will hurry—I will try to be here when he comes. Tell him, father, please, that I am very tired—waiting.'

"She pressed the thing she had drawn from under her pillow into my hand, and then I saw what it was—just a bit of soft, white linen, m'sieur, a bit of a garment scarcely larger than a man's hand. I took it from her and nodded my head, and somehow found my way outside.

"Jean Coteau put the reins into my hands. His face was set.

"M'sieur, I am not going to tell you of that drive that night. I want to tell the rest quickly. But Jean Coteau had good reason to love that little thoroughbred mare of his, for she was little more than wet when the lights of the long bunk house, and, close beside it, Conahan's own shack, burst out ahead of me through the trees.

"I saw him through the window, even before I had leaped from the sleigh. He was sitting alone before a dead fire, his head in his hands. I—I hesitated a moment at the door, fumbling in my pocket for that bit of white cloth which the girl had given me.

"Then I went in.

"He came to his feet at my entrance. His face was thin, but it was granite hard. We stood a long time staring into each other's eyes. Then I went over to him.

"'Conahan,' I said, 'Conahan, man, do you believe that any but a good woman could ever have made stitches fine and soft as these?'

"And I held out that small garment to him.

"He took it—took it and held it in both hands before his eyes. He went white; then the blood poured back into his face while he gazed at it. I saw his lips quiver; saw him fight to steady them, before his eyes blurred, and he bowed his head.

"I told him the rest. We had lost too much time already. I told him that she had said he must hurry—that she would try to be there when he came—and before I had finished he was outside and swinging the sleigh around in the beaten track.

"And yet he dared not open the door of his lighted cabin an hour later, when we drew rein before it. He reached out his hand for the latch, and it trembled till there was no strength left in

the fingers. I pulled off my mitten and put out my hand, and saw that it was wet and stained with blood. My shoulder had hit that stump hard, m'sieur. Blood had been running down warm inside my sleeve. Conahan stared at it a moment in odd fascination; then he reached again, steadily this time, for the latch.

"'Father,' that big riverman murmured to me, 'father, you're more than a bit av a man!'

"He opened the door, and we went in.

"How can I tell you to-night how long he stood and gazed at her? I hardly knew that night how long it was. He just stood and stared and stared at her white face half buried in her thick hair, and then—then his head bowed, his shoulders dropped, and a dry sob racked him. Blindly he went across to her, and, as he knelt, he broke. Conahan went all to pieces!

"And she just put her hands on his bowed head, and—'Man, man!' she murmured, until his shoulders shook no longer, and he slipped his arm beneath her and held her close.

"He must have whispered a prayer in her ear, for she reached down and touched the bit of a bundle that lay beside her and put her cheek against his.

"'Stay!' she quavered, repeating his words. 'Stay! Why, I could hardly go now, could I—and leave two lonesome men?'

"The old doctor from Beckett caught my eye and nodded his head toward my cabin. I turned to follow him out, but at the door we both halted at the thin little cry that went through the room.

"The head of Conahan lifted as he heard. Then he turned his face toward us, the soul of him there in his eyes.

"'Hark ye, father! Listen,' he whispered. 'Listen, 'tis Conahan's son!'

THE NOCTURNAL ADVENTURES OF MR. NICHOLAS KNOX

No. 1

The Case of Rubies

By Fred Jackson

Author of "63 Lamartine Lane," etc.



Suppose that you were a multi-millionaire—young—alone in the world! Suppose that a building a block square and fifteen stories high was utilized to house the various money-making schemes that poured gold into your coffers! Suppose that you had so much money you could not spend your income, on yourself, no matter how extravagant you might be? What would you do with it? Would you just let it pile up and accumulate as Mr. Nicholas Knox *did*—or would you be inclined to listen to the Big Idea Mr. Aimes advances?

CHAPTER I.

THE HOLDUP.

MR. NICHOLAS KNOX descended from the car at his own door. It was a small, very smart town car, done in dark blue—and there were two men in attendance—two men who were of the same build and complexion, and who looked almost exactly alike in their liveries. The footman, holding the door as Mr. Knox alighted, bade him good night very respectfully—in spite of the fact that it was rather near morning. Mr. Knox replied to the courtesy with a vague nod, and, crossing the pavement that intervened, climbed the white stone steps to his dwelling—glistening in the moonlight.

No light gleamed anywhere, from any of the windows, for behind the shining glass and fine lace panels were drawn blinds and thick draperies. In-

side, the hall would be cheerfully lighted—the stairway, too, and his own suite on the floor above—and the “night man” would be moving about, making a solemn circuit of the many rooms. But from the outside, the place looked unutterably cold, lonely, and unhomelike.

Mr. Knox admitted this to himself, as he fumbled for his keys—admitted it as he had admitted it innumerable times before. For—perhaps—the thousandth time, he was wondering what in the world he could do about it, when he became aware that he was not alone in the broad vestibule. Some one—a man in evening clothes—had advanced noiselessly from behind the ornamental boxwood in the corner, and he wore a black silk mask over the upper part of his face. Also, he had a revolver, which was leveled directly at Mr. Knox's heart—or so it seemed to Mr. Knox.

His dark eyes opened wide with curi-

osity and interest—brightened with excitement. He was conscious of the first thrill that had stirred him in years. A burglar! A masked burglar, with a gun, in his own vestibule—exactly a block and a half from the weary policeman on fixed post—and only a few feet from the night man on duty somewhere within! Mr. Knox instantly forgot his fatigue, his inevitable boredom, his satiation. His heart began to beat actively. His blood began to flow more quickly.

"How d'you do?" he said pleasantly, turning a bit so that he faced the other exactly. "Fine night for a murder, eh?"

The burglar seemed for just an instant a bit astonished. However, he speedily recovered himself, and answered grimly, in a voice that was not quite steady:

"This isn't a joke. I'm in dead earnest, and this gun is loaded. I'd have no compunction about shooting you!"

"Really?" asked Mr. Knox, with some interest.

"Take your hand out of your pocket, and don't attempt to call for aid. Incidentally, I am a crack shot!"

"I shouldn't think of calling for aid," answered Mr. Knox frankly. "It would be too bad to spoil such an interesting situation. Seriously, you have turned a dull and stupid evening into a red-letter night. What can I do for you?"

The highwayman—evidently never having met with such a reception under similar circumstances—was silent an instant, studying his victim in the dim light. Then he responded curtly:

"I want money, of course. How much have you about you?"

Mr. Knox reflected.

"Oh, a hundred or so, perhaps."

"A hundred?" repeated the burglar in astonishment and disgust and disappointment. "A hundred dollars?"

"About that, probably. I usually carry somewhere in that neighborhood."

The burglar was silent. Mr. Knox waited an instant, peering regretfully at the other man.

"Isn't it enough?" he asked.

"Not nearly," answered the other slowly. "I might have known you wouldn't have much more with you. But I— Haven't you any checks?"

"Not here. Not with me. Heaps of 'em inside in my desk. If you'll come in—"

There was nothing in his voice but polite invitation. The burglar laughed softly, his amusement conquering his disappointment. Mr. Knox laughed a little, too.

"Would that be destroying the ethics of your profession?" he asked. "I dare say it would. Or do you suspect me of attempting to lead you into a trap?"

"The idea would never have occurred to me," answered the gentlemanly highwayman sarcastically.

Mr. Knox sighed.

"Yes, I suppose the natural thing would be for me to snare you—or try to. But, on my word, I'd no such intention. I was thinking that I might spend an hour or two pleasantly in your company. I suffer from insomnia, you see, and I get sick of books and chess. My man sometimes plays chess with me, and there's nothing else—but solitaire. I was thinking that a long, comfortable chat with you might keep me amused until my bedtime. How much money were you expecting to take from me?"

"I need twenty-five thousand dollars," answered the burglar slowly. "I've got to raise that much before morning."

"Twenty-five thousand! Is that your usual night's haul?"

"No," answered the burglar modestly, with the hint of laughter in his voice; "no, not my usual night's haul

exactly. This is an exceptional case. I've got to get twenty-five thousand before to-morrow."

"That's rather a lot," observed Mr. Knox regretfully. "I'm afraid I haven't that much in cash in the house. However, if you'd take my check, or some odds and ends of silver or jewelry—Would that do at all?"

"Don't make me laugh!" begged the highwayman.

"Still fearful of treachery? That isn't complimentary, you know, considering that I've given my word."

"Your word to a highwayman isn't very binding, especially when he has the 'drop' on you!"

"Put down the gun, then, and I'll give you my word voluntarily. You'll still have the advantage of me. Physically, you're bigger and more muscular."

The highwayman apparently thought that over. Then he put down his gun slowly. If there had been more light, he would have been seen to look a little dazed by this turn of things.

"Now," said Mr. Knox cheerfully, "here's a sporting proposition for you: Come in with me, and we'll have a drink and a little chat. You shall be my guest for an hour or so, entitled to all the courtesies of my hospitality. Then you are to be free to go, with my check for twenty-five thousand. And I give you my word—I'll do it in writing, if you like—that the check will not be stopped, neither will I attempt to seek you out and reclaim the money or punish you! How's that?"

"You aren't serious?" gasped the highwayman.

"I am. On my honor! Why, the thrill you've given me to-night and the entertainment I expect from your conversation are well worth twenty-five thousand dollars to me. I've so much money that twenty-five thousand dollars has absolutely no value to me. But thrills! Surprises! Good stories! In-

teresting philosophy! *Ideas!* Great guns, *those* things are invaluable! Don't you see?"

The burglar hesitated.

"Come, come! My word of honor I'll stand by my bargain," went on Knox. "I simply can't miss this opportunity of conversing with a real, genuine, honest-to-goodness burglar!"

The burglar sighed.

"But I'm not a regular burglar," he admitted. "I've never attempted to burgle before to-night."

"No? Then you are a man of courage and nerve, anyway—and of ideas. And there must be a story behind your little flyer in crime. Come in! Burglar or no burglar, my offer holds."

"Very well," agreed the near-highwayman finally. "I'll take you up!"

Mr. Knox breathed a little sigh of content, thrust his hand deep into his pocket, found his latchkey, and opened the heavy, brass-trimmed door. The desperado, still in his black silk mask, and carrying his gun, followed his host into the big, gorgeously furnished, brilliantly lighted foyer hall. The night man, a huge fellow, ruddy-faced, sat in a big armchair by the grate, smoking a pipe and reading the newspaper. He rose in haste—at the sight of his master—and stood aghast before his master's companion.

"Evening, Rogers," said Knox absently. "Are there lights in the study?"

"Yes, sir," said Rogers, his eyes going wildly from Knox to the masked man. Trained as he was to express astonishment at nothing, this visitor was almost too much for him. Besides, there were the paper and the pipe to explain and ask pardon for. "Mr. Knox, sir—" he began, wetting his lips.

"Some of that French brandy, Rogers, in the study," said Knox, interrupting. "Unless you prefer a cocktail—or—something else?"

He turned politely to his guest.

"The brandy sounds inviting," answered the masked man, nodding.

"At once, Rogers," ordered Knox. Then he added to his visitor: "This way!"

They mounted the great staircase to the floor above. There Mr. Knox turned left, and threw open the door of his study. A low fire burned here in the grate, too, to battle with the chill and damp of the early spring.

"You will find this chair most comfortable," said Mr. Knox, indicating a huge-armed one. "Throw your hat and coat anywhere, and make yourself at home. I'll just change for a lounge coat, if you don't mind."

He passed through a second doorway into his bedchamber, and closed the door behind him. The burglar, left alone so unceremoniously, glanced about him, listened, shrugged, and dropped his revolver into the side pocket of his light topcoat. Then he removed the coat, threw it upon the couch, put his hat with it, and, removing his mask, added that. He stood revealed, now, a man of perhaps twenty-six or so, exceedingly well molded, and distinctly handsome. He was fair, and had blue eyes, but his features were rather rough-hewn, and his skin was tanned. He suggested the out-of-door man, the man who is engaged in "doing," rather than in directing and planning; but he wore his formal clothes as one who had been born to such things. Sinking into the big chair that Knox had indicated, he drew out a cigarette case. It was of gold, and initials were done on it in platinum—B. A. Selecting a cigarette, he lighted it, and put the case back into his waistcoat pocket, as Knox came back.

"This is infinitely better," he commented, with satisfaction, as his eyes fell upon his guest. He had changed his dress coat for a Tuxedo jacket of royal purple stuff edged with cardinal, and the colors emphasized his darkness

—skin ivory and pallid, eyes and hair very black. He had lighted a cigarette, too, but he smoked it through a very long, ivory-and-gold cigarette holder. Seating himself opposite the unmasked highwayman, he observed critically: "I was not mistaken in my guess. You are young and well born. Evening clothes give a man away, or establish his claim to gentility!"

"Yes," admitted the other, nodding. "My family is accorded a certain social recognition."

"In New York?"

"Yes. We live within a few blocks from here."

"It's odd I do not know you, then?"

"You know my people. I've been away from home for a long time. That explains why you do not recognize me."

Mr. Knox leaned forward expectantly.

"You'll introduce yourself, of course, it being understood that the manner of our meeting is to remain a secret between us."

The other nodded and shrugged.

"I suppose so. You'd be sure to know sooner or later, anyway, because we are sure to meet again. I am Bigelow Aimes."

"Aimes? Son of Robinson Aimes? I knew I saw a resemblance to *some one!*"

Young Aimes nodded indifferently.

"I am supposed to resemble my father somewhat."

"You do."

There came a knock at the door.

"Come in!" called Knox wearily. Rogers entered with a tray, on which were a small, curiously shaped bottle, two glasses, and a siphon of soda.

"That will do, Rogers," said Knox, as the night man set down his tray, his eyes seeking Aimes in some curiosity. "Don't lock up or extinguish the lights until Mr. Aimes goes."

"Yes, sir," said Rogers, departing.

Mr. Knox moved toward the table

and drew the cork from the curiously shaped bottle.

"Soda?" he asked, as he began to pour out the brandy.

"Please," said Aimes.

Mr. Knox prepared both glasses in the same fashion. Then, as he extended one to his midnight—or early morning—visitor, he said:

"I am all impatience. What in the world induced the son of Robinson Aimes to turn burglar?"

"The force of circumstances," answered Aimes coolly. "I could think of no other way to raise twenty-five thousand before morning, and it was up to me to raise that much—or see the governor go to the wall."

"What?" gasped Mr. Knox, staring. Aimes nodded.

"Almost nobody knows it, but—he's hard pressed. You don't interest yourself in the Street much?"

"No," answered Mr. Knox, shaking his head. "Rather not. There's no excitement for me in winning more money. I have too much, as it is!"

"I see. Well, if you were in touch with the Street at all, you'd know that things have been going on there—an upheaval of some sort—raids, counter-raids, manipulation. My governor was mixed up in some movement or other, and got the dirty end of the deal. Several of his friends combined to rob him. As a consequence, he has to have twenty-five thousand to-morrow or he'll go under. He's been trying all day to get it, but couldn't. You see, the fight's been on a long time, and he's drained his resources, and I guess you can imagine what a smash-up would mean! It would mean the loss of everything, for even my mother's properties have gone to aid him. She and my sister would, well, they simply couldn't live as they'd have to live if he went under. A flat, you know, no servants, no cars, no comforts. It would be simply impossible!"

Knox nodded thoughtfully.

"I dare say. So you had this idea for raising the money?"

"Yes. I had been thinking for hours, but couldn't find any way out. I was in the library at home. We all were. My mother and father were there, too. He'd just told us. Lliane was standing at the window—my sister, you know—and your car went by."

"My car?" repeated Mr. Knox curiously.

Aimes nodded.

"It's a funny world," Lliane said, when she saw it. "There's Nicholas Knox, with so much money he can't spend it all. He'd never miss what we need to save ourselves!"

"I see," said Knox, nodding.

"I asked my father if he had asked you to help him. He answered that he knew you hardly at all, that he had no security to offer you, anyway, and that your men of business would never hear of such a transaction, even if you were willing! That set my mind going, and almost at once I got this idea."

"It was a fearful risk to run," said Knox. "You might have been killed, or caught—arrested—disgraced at the very least. I wonder you dared risk it!"

"I was desperate," answered Aimes calmly. "I vowed that I would get the money. I vowed that I would prove myself in this emergency; that I would repay my father's years of affection, care, leniency, and belief in me. He's given me every opportunity to carve out my own career. When I flunked at Yale, he gave me another chance at Harvard. He gave me opportunities to travel and see life. Always he has denied me nothing that his money or influence could obtain for me. I wanted to prove my gratitude by aiding him in his greatest hour of need, and I was willing to risk anything to do it."

Mr. Knox smiled.

"Probably no burglar ever started out

with more creditable intentions. You have gone Robin Hood one better, but I should never have thought of such an extraordinary solution to your difficulty, if I had been in your place. Suppose I had resisted you? Suppose I had attacked you or had cried for help, instead of pleasantly falling in with your mood?"

"I'd have knocked you on the head with the butt of my gun—gently, you know. Then I'd have removed my mask, hidden my gun, and would have rifled your pockets. *Then* I would have rung the bell, and would have helped the servants carry you in. I'd have announced that you were held up, and that I had come to your aid! You wouldn't have recognized me without my mask, and I'd probably have been able, on the strength of your gratitude, to negotiate a loan!"

Knox grinned.

"You are ingenious! I suppose I *shouldn't* have suspected that my highwayman was Robinson Aimes' son."

"Of course not!"

"I would have been grateful to you for rescuing me from the robber, and I'd certainly have agreed to lend you the twenty-five thousand."

"If I had known any one to confide in," said Mr. Aimes, "I would have worked it that way in the beginning. I'd have had some one *else* hold you up, and *I'd* have rescued you. Only I didn't know any one else I could trust."

Mr. Knox laughed.

"You *are* a man of ideas!" he cried. "For what were you expelled from Yale?"

Mr. Aimes smiled reminiscently.

"For defending the honor of the university. A musical comedy came to New Haven, and the star wore a Yale jersey. He was just about everything we didn't want people to think Yale men were. He couldn't have won his Y playing checkers. So I induced a number of my fellow students to re-

monstrate with him. We visited him, and informed him what would happen if he continued to wear the Y. The next night, he wore it, and everything that we had predicted happened. He was deluged with overripe fruit and vegetables and eggs. Under my leadership, a gallant crew climbed upon the stage and wrested the sacred Y from his manly bosom. That was all!"

"Has your career been full of such adventures?" asked Mr. Knox enviously.

"I have managed to enjoy life," admitted Mr. Aimes.

"You've been particularly fortunate, then," sighed Mr. Knox. "I've only bored myself to distraction for twenty-six years."

"You don't *mean* that?" gasped Aimes.

"I do."

"Bored—with all your money?"

"What difference does money make?" asked Mr. Knox listlessly.

"All the difference in the *world*! Oh, Lord, what a time I could have had with your brilliant opportunities! What a *career*!"

"How?" asked Mr. Knox, opening his eyes.

"Why, every way! Why, there's *nothing* you couldn't do! Great heavens, if a waiter offended you, you could buy the hotel and burn it down. If you didn't like the way the Mexicans were behaving, you could buy an army and beat them into submission. Then *you* could run things to suit yourself. You could go in for politics and clean up the country. You could—why, you could do *anything* that you'd a mind to. How much money have you, anyway?"

"I don't know," answered Knox, shrugging. "More than I need."

"Have you spent your yearly income one year, to your knowledge?"

"No; I can't. After all, a man's ex-

penses are limited. I haven't even a wife, you know."

Aimes leaped to his feet and began to pace the floor.

"Such a waste!" he groaned. "It's positively sinful! Limited? Why are a man's expenditures limited? Mine shouldn't be. I'd have hard work getting through on it—no matter how much I'd have. Life would be one endless stream of adventures! I'd *live* in an atmosphere of excitement, mystery, marvels, magic. If things didn't happen, I'd *make* them happen. I'd have my nose into everything! I'd make history! I'd alter the map of the world to suit myself. I'd put myself above the law. I'd be—why, I'd just about run things. That's what I'd do if I were a multimillionaire!"

Mr. Knox was sitting motionless, staring up into the other's flushed face.

"But how would you go about it?"

Mr. Aimes shrugged.

"I'd find some way."

Mr. Knox leaned over and poured himself another drink.

"Have something?" he asked.

"No, thanks," answered Aimes shortly.

Mr. Knox drank the brandy and soda thirstily. Then he glanced up at Aimes again.

"Exactly what is your profession?" he asked.

Aimes shrugged.

"I studied engineering—mine engineering—but I haven't gone in for it. I've been traveling about sizing things up."

"You are free, then, to accept a post—employment?"

"Ye-es," admitted Aimes slowly.

"How would you like the position of 'amusement deviser'?"

"Of *what*?" cried Aimes, staring.

"Amusement deviser. Discoverer of adventures. Call it anything you please. All you'd be required to do would be to go about with me and—stir things

up, make things happen, involve us in interesting adventures. You know, something after the manner of that caliph of Bagdad and his grand vizier. What you said about my opportunities and about what you'd do in my place gave me the idea. I haven't the imagination, it seems, to do the trick myself. I wouldn't know how to go about it. You have the imagination, the courage, the nerves, but not the money. So why not a partnership?"

Aimes drew a long breath.

"Do you *mean* it?"

"Absolutely—entirely! If you could make life worth living for me, you'd be worth a fortune to me!"

Aimes grinned.

"It sounds too ridiculous! Drawing a salary for doing exactly what I most enjoy doing!"

"Will you?" asked Knox breathlessly.

"I will!"

They shook hands upon it.

CHAPTER II.

GRANTING WISHES.

"What shall we do first, and when shall we do it?" asked Mr. Knox, fumbling for a cigarette. Bigelow Aimes offered his case.

"Try these. I brought them back from London. It's a special brand of my own. Chap in Euston Grove makes them up for me."

Mr. Knox lighted the cigarette and inhaled.

"*Rather!*" he cried, in emphatic approval.

Mr. Aimes was not thinking of cigarettes, however. He was frowning thoughtfully at the queerly shaped bottle of brandy on the table between them, and his mind was on the earlier question.

"That caliph-of-Bagdad stunt is worth thinking about," he said. "I used to eat up those adventures when I was a youngster. Let's see, the caliph and

his vizier went around the city in disguise, didn't they? So far, so good. We can pass for any ordinary young fellows. No one meeting us will have any idea of the power we wield, or of the hundreds of millions behind us. But in stories, things happen to you. In life, *you've* usually got to start something, I find. We'd have a dull time waiting for adventures. How can we set the ball rolling?"

Knox watched the intent face of Mr. Aimes eagerly.

"I haven't an idea, or I'd have done it long ago. When I think of the nights I've spent here in this gloomy barracks reading dull trash or playing chess with Armand—or solitaire!"

"And parading under your very windows, perhaps, hundreds of creatures to whom a hundred-millionth part of your income would seem like heavenly intervention! Think of it! You here alone, bored, world-weary, and downtown an office building a block long and a block deep and fifteen stories high, devoted to the money-making interests that pour gold into your coffers. All the rest of the world, or three-fourths of it, at any rate, in need. It's terrible and wonderful! It gives you a startling power. Why, you could go about, if you chose, like a man of magic, conferring blessings, scattering happiness, granting wishes! Why not?"

He stopped short, his blue eyes firing.

"Why not? What better way to spend your money and get your nose into other people's business? What better chance for adventure? Every creature in the world has some secret wish, some far off, impossible wish that stands for happiness. The wishes differ as widely as the individuals who harbor them. Imagine going forth at night, mixing with the crowds, and studying faces until some *one* face stands out from the rest and attracts you! Imagine halting that one individual and demanding his or her greatest

wish. Imagine granting it! Imagine converting that endless stream of dollars into a real power to influence mankind! You could bring romance and poetry back to life. You could reawaken faith in magic and miracles. You could become famous. You could take your place in history alongside the renowned Caliph Harun-al-Rashid."

Mr. Knox nodded gravely.

"It sounds enticing, but do you think it practicable?"

"I do. Why not?"

"Are persons likely to believe we mean well by them? Aren't they apt to think us mad, if we stop them and ask them their greatest wish? Or aren't they apt to think we are intending to fleece them?"

"Possibly. But such obstacles will only add interest to our adventures. We must convince them of our seriousness. It will be no end of fun. We must carry enough money—in gold—to astonish the most skeptical, and convince them. I suppose most of them will confess that money is their chief wish."

"If many of them wish for millions, even my wealth won't stand out long against the drain."

"We won't stop that sort often. We'll pick out interesting, needy, imaginative ones—creatures capable of unusual and diverting wishes. Not mere moneygrubbers, or mere tramps or hobos or bums or beggars. Elderly scholars, struggling geniuses, thoughtful old ladies, wistful young girls, mediocre seamstresses, ambitious parlor maids, energetic white wings or policemen or firemen. Oh, we shall delve into the fascinating depths of human emotions."

"When shall we begin?" asked Knox eagerly. "It's twenty minutes to four!"

"Not to-night by any means," answered Aimes emphatically. "I am half dead now for want of sleep. And I

shall have to be up early to get that check cashed at the bank."

Knox nodded and leaped to his feet.

"I'll write it now, while I think of it. Twenty-five thousand? You are sure that will be enough?"

"Yes," answered Aimes.

Knox moved off in the direction of the desk in the corner, picked up one bank book at random from a heap of different ones that lay there, wrote the check, tore it out, filled in the stub, and balanced. Then he closed the book and replaced it with the rest.

"To Bigelow Aimes, twenty-five thousand dollars," read Mr. Knox. "Correct?"

He handed over the check.

"Entirely. You've—no idea how grateful I am for this, dear fellow! I——"

"Nonsense! A bargain's a bargain. You came in and chatted with me in return for that remuneration, and just between ourselves, you've been worth it to me, or you're going to be. Do you know how I've been spending my days until now? Going to dinners, balls, dances, receptions, teas, theaters, opera, horse show, garden parties—all the tiresome stunts on the social calendar. I've gone to bed one day at dawn, to awaken in time to be bored again the next night. All the sparkle and snap have gone out of things. If you can set things happening, as you say you can, to-night will mark the crisis in my life—the turning point—the moment when things became worth while, and I shall be eternally indebted to *you*."

Mr. Aimes smiled.

"I'll make things lively enough for you," he promised, folding the check and slipping it into his wallet. Then he reached for his hat.

"Why don't you stop the night?" urged Knox hospitably. "There are several hundred unoccupied bedrooms, and it's almost daylight!"

"But I live quite close, and I've even-

ing clothes on. No, I'd better get on. But I'll tell you what I will do: I'll dine with you to-morrow night at seven, and afterward we'll go out and look for trouble. What?"

"Done!" agreed Mr. Knox.

They shook hands warmly, as warmly as though they had been friends for years. Then Mr. Knox conducted Mr. Aimes to the head of the stairs, and watched Rogers let him out below.

The erstwhile thief strode contentedly down Fifty-seventh Street to the avenue, and down the avenue for two blocks, at which point he mounted the steps of the Aimes residence. Mr. Nicholas Knox entered his bedchamber, and, with the aid of his valet, went to bed. For the first time in a couple of years, he fell asleep at once.

Mr. Knox awoke at one o'clock upon the following afternoon. One was his usual rising hour. Armand, the French valet, who had served him faithfully for some ten years, had a cold shower prepared—beginning with the chill off and ending at a freezing temperature. Then Mr. Knox was rubbed down until his body glowed. And by the time he had completed his afternoon toilet, he was in splendid appetite for his breakfast, or luncheon, or whatever you might choose to call his first meal of the day. That afternoon there were only two teas and one reception, at which he felt called upon to appear, so he had time to stop at the bank and cash a check, getting five thousand dollars in notes and gold. This, against the evening's adventure. Then he drove through the park, picking up Mrs. Phillip Ladew and Miss Ladew, as he had promised the night before, and resignedly began his afternoon rounds. By six o'clock he was free, and, hurrying home, he changed in good time. Mr. Aimes, as it happened, was late. In fact, Mr. Knox had just begun to wonder if the whole thing had been a

hoax, if Aimes hadn't been Aimes at all, but some regular highwayman—if he had been tricked and deceived—when the gentleman himself was announced. He came in with the lithe, confident step and the eager smile that had won Mr. Knox so easily the night before. If ever there lived a more keenly alive young man than Mr. Bigelow Aimes, Mr. Knox had never seen him. Mr. Aimes radiated good humor and good-fellowship.

"Here we are!" he cried happily, shaking hands. "A little late, but none the worse for that. I've been as busy as a bee all day helping the governor. Up to now, thanks to you, things look fairly serene for him."

"Good!" cried Mr. Knox.

"Good?" repeated Aimes. "You've no idea what catastrophe that twenty-five thousand prevented. You'd have thought the whole family'd gone mad when I sprang that check at breakfast. My mother vowed she'd always believe in me. My father almost wept. My sister said she knew I'd manage somehow. Lucky nobody guessed *how!* Can you imagine their faces if somebody told 'em?"

"Nobody will," Knox assured him.

"I just let them believe that we'd known each other a long time, and that you gladly loaned me the money. You see, our being seen together in future will lend color to the tale."

"To be sure," agreed Knox.

"You haven't changed your mind about the big scheme, then?" asked Aimes eagerly.

"I've hardly been able to wait for to-night to come," answered Knox. "If you fail to start things going, I'll—well, I'll just give up in despair, and shoot myself!"

"No fear!" smiled Mr. Aimes. "Any one who goes out looking for trouble, finds it, and I don't care *what* we run into, so long as things happen. Eh?"

"Exactly," agreed Mr. Knox.

At that instant, the butler announced dinner, and they adjourned to the dining room. It was a huge, paneled place, done in dark wood and hung in royal purple. The huge table was set with gold plate and fine china, and decorated with American Beauties. Aimes, staring about him, grinned appreciatively.

"Reminds me of the 'Arabian Nights,'" he observed. "If this is the sort of thing you are up against regularly, I don't blame you in the least for wanting to suicide. Conceive of dining here alone with those stiff and disapproving ancestors watching every bite you eat!"

He nodded toward the portraits on the wall.

"I never dine here alone," answered Knox. "Not much. My club, when I've no company!"

"A place like this is all right when you have a grown family of seventeen and several grandchildren," went on Aimes. "Otherwise, I should prefer a few rooms somewhere, cheerful, cozy, and decorated more for comfort than for magnificence. I'll tell you what! Close this place, and we'll take an apartment somewhere together. Or, better still, keep this for headquarters, and we'll open a flat on the side. I suppose you know you are not going to be Nicholas Knox, when we are adventuring?"

"Who am I going to be?" asked Mr. Knox.

"Any one else you please, but not Mr. Knox. It would give the whole thing away. The newspapers would get on our trail, and good-by adventures! The big thing is to remain incognito. So it mightn't be a bad idea to have a flat somewhere under the names that we choose for our escapades. Let me see, I shall be—Mr. Bigelow—using my first name for my last. What first name begins with B? For euphony's sake, you know—Benjamin. Benjamin Bigelow. And you?"

"Anything," shrugged Knox.

"How about Merlin? The enchanter, you know. Mr. Merlin—Mr. Maurice Merlin? Does that strike you?"

"That's all right, I guess."

"Right! I'll have cards engraved for us to-morrow. Mr. Benjamin Bigelow and Mr. Maurice Merlin, and we'll have Bigelow and Merlin on the door of our flat, instead of Aimes and Knox, and we'll keep clothes and things there and a new valet who knows us only under our assumed names. We may as well systematize this thing!"

"It begins to sound mysterious," admitted Knox, smiling.

"Wait! It's only just begun!" promised Aimes. "We'll pick out an apartment to-morrow, and furnish it and install servants. You might open an account somewhere under the name of Merlin—just against emergencies, you know. But for the most part we'll carry cash on us. Have you some for to-night?"

"Five thousand," answered Knox.

"Ample! We'll probably not use it. I dare say half the time we'll have small need for money. Then, again, we may need a good deal. It all depends. One thing more: Have you a revolver?"

"Yes."

"Good! Take it along. With money and a revolver a man can do almost anything."

All these plans had been laid during the butler's trips to the pantry. Now, however, he remained in the dining room, and an under servant made the trips. Consequently, Mr. Aimes talked about South Sea Islanders, his luck at Monte Carlo, and the stupidity of the London cabmen, until the coffee and liqueurs had come.

Mr. Aimes had come at a quarter to eight, instead of at seven, as he had agreed. Therefore, it was precisely one hour later—a quarter of nine—when

the two adventurers descended the steps of the Knox house.

"Now," cried Mr. Aimes contentedly, "we have the night before us, and a fine, clear night, too. The world will be out of doors, and we'll have hundreds of individuals to choose from. Let us walk slowly, and keep our eyes open."

The early-spring weather had turned mild and pleasant. The moon was out. The sky was sprinkled with stars. As they sauntered toward the avenue, and headed downtown, Aimes went on meditatively:

"There's something intoxicating to me about the city at night. The many, many houses hiding and comedia knows what tragedies and comedies; the crowds; the lights; the hurrying vehicles. Mystery is everywhere. Hearts are breaking near us. Other hearts are signing with joy unimagined. Men and women are facing death. I feel the nearness of it all in the air."

Knox turned and stared curiously.

"I've always hated crowds," he said. "I never walk when I can ride, apart from the whole pushing procession."

"You've missed a lot! You must rub shoulders with all of humanity to understand the meaning of living, to enjoy and suffer."

They had reached the upper forties, and now had come opposite the old Duke house, built twenty years before by Phillemon Duke, the mining king. It presented the same dark, untenanted face to the world that the other palaces of the rich presented, but as they passed it, something happened. The broad doors at the head of the stone steps opened for just an instant, revealing a glimpse of a red-hung hall, and a white-haired old servant in attendance. A man came out, and, with a swift glance about him, a glance of dread, apparently, turned west. Then the doors closed again, and the house re-

sumed its appearance of unlighted gloom.

Aimes turned swiftly to Knox.

"Did you see the face of that chap?" he asked eagerly.

"Yes. Rather pale, eh? Scared looking."

"Rather," admitted Aimes decisively. "I think there is to-night's adventure. What do you say?"

"I am in your hands," answered Knox.

Aimes glanced again at the Duke house, then turned and peered ahead at the young man, who had come forth from it, and decided.

"Come on!" he cried briskly. "We may as well chance him. He looked as if he is involved in something. Let's quicken our pace and overtake him!"

It was not so easily done. Their quarry was making good headway. With his hands deep in the pockets of a light topcoat, his head down, he was hurrying west, toward Broadway, and he had come within a few feet of the chief thoroughfare before they came up behind him.

Then suddenly, as they drew near, he seemed to become aware of their approaching footsteps. Turning, he glanced at them over his shoulder, nervously, fearfully, appraisingly. Aimes caught a glance, nodded, and then——

"Just a moment, if you please," said Aimes.

The man before them turned ashen. Over his face flashed such an expression as neither man had ever seen before. He looked desperate, helpless, beaten, terrified. He looked like an animal driven to cover and face to face with inevitable capture. Wildly his eyes sought some means of escape, but Knox and Aimes were by this time quite close, and to elude them was obviously impossible. Relaxing, evidently accepting his defeat, the man collapsed, and would have fallen if Aimes had not

reached out and caught him at the last moment.

"Get a cab!" he cried imperatively to Knox. "You'll find one somewhere there on Broadway. Any kind of a vehicle!"

"Is he dead?" gasped Knox, horrified.

"No. Fainted. Hurry!"

Knox moved off at a good pace, looking in every direction for a vehicle of some sort. A roaming yellow taxi caught his eye. He whistled and beckoned, but the chauffeur had to make a detour to reach him, in compliance with the traffic regulations, and by the time he was back with the cab, a little knot of curious pedestrians surrounded Mr. Aimes and the man who had fainted. However, Aimes had been equal to the occasion. It was supposed that the cause of the collapse was too many cocktails, and no one interfered with suggestions. Knox and Aimes got their young gentleman into the taxi as speedily as possible, and Aimes called out to the driver:

"The Waldorf, as quickly as possible!"

Then he slammed the door, and the cab started.

"The Waldorf?" repeated Knox interestedly. "Why the Waldorf?"

"I've no intention of going there, really," explained Aimes; "but I had no desire to call my real destination in the ears of the crowd. We'll take him to my rooms, I think. I have some at the Polo Club, on Park Avenue. Will you tell the chauffeur?"

Mr. Aimes was leaning over the collapsed gentleman, in an attempt to assure himself that nothing serious was the matter, and he was assured, for as Knox leaned out to direct the driver, the fainting gentleman opened his eyes and looked up into Mr. Aimes' anxious face.

"Ah! That's better!" cried Aimes

encouragingly. "Stay where you are, and get a grip on yourself."

This as the other was struggling forward into a more erect position.

"Where am I? Where are you taking me? Who are you?" cried the terrified young man in an uncertain voice.

"You are in a cab, headed for my rooms at the Polo Club. As for my identity and that of my friend, that is a matter that is of no real concern. We mean no harm to you, if that is what you are afraid of. On the contrary, we are inclined to be of service to you, if we can; but all that can wait. We will be in my rooms in a few moments."

The young man who had fainted was silent now, frowning a little, regarding Knox and Aimes with inquiring, doubtful eyes. He was very thin, and he had a dull, unhealthy pallor that seemed to hint of insufficient sunlight and fresh air. He was extremely nervous, his long, slender fingers seemed continually in action, his features were singularly even and clear cut, which gave him an air of weakness, and yet he was by way of being good looking. He had very light-brown eyes and short-cut brown hair.

Aimes, studying him, drew out his cigarette case and offered it.

"Cigarette?" he asked politely.

The other seized one avidly, lighted it, and inhaled.

"Thanks," he answered then. "I—I—need something to steady me. I'm—just about all in!"

"That's evident enough," said Aimes. "I'm sorry if I gave you the last jolt by accosting you—startling you!"

The other shrugged, and said nothing, and a few moments later the taxi halted before the door of the Polo Club. The three men descended, and, while Knox paid off the cabman, Aimes and the young man he had accosted went on ahead into the lobby. Before the lift, they waited for Knox, then all

three ascended together to Aimes' rooms. He had two and a bath, a living room and a bedchamber. In the living room, he invited Knox and the third man to have chairs, and himself wheeled forward a cellaret stocked with various liquors, cigars, and cigarettes.

"Something to drink?" he asked.

Knox shook his head. The other man nodded.

"Thanks," he said. "Some whisky straight for mine!"

Aimes poured it out for him, took a swallow himself, and then, drawing a third chair up facing the other two, he threw himself into it.

"Now to business," he said calmly. And, leaning back, he regarded the young man thoughtfully. "I suppose," he went on, "you have been wondering who in thunder we are, and what in thunder we mean by picking you up as we have done, and dragging you down here!"

"Perhaps I have a vague idea," said the unknown young man a little hoarsely. His eyes were burning now, and some color had come into his pale cheeks, thanks to the goodly draft of whisky.

"I hardly think so," said Aimes. "If you have assumed that we are involved in your affairs in any way, you are mistaken. We know nothing about you, neither your name, nor your business, nor your associations. We never laid eyes on you until we saw you come down the steps of the Duke house tonight. At least I never did."

"Nor I," admitted Mr. Knox. He was gazing from Aimes to the unknown young man interestedly. His usual air of listlessness had vanished utterly.

The unknown young man was staring.

"You've got me guessing, now, for sure," he admitted frankly. "If you never saw me before, and knew nothing about me, why did you follow me and grab me?"

"For reasons of our own," answered Mr. Aimes. "The reasons behind our unusual behavior do not concern you, nor any one else, save ourselves. However, some small explanation is coming to you. Here it is: We followed you, and accosted you, because you looked as if you were in deep trouble, and we make a business of accosting people who look that way. It is up to you to take advantage, now, of an extraordinary opportunity. My friend and I are prepared to aid you, if it lies within our power to be of use. But, first of all, it is necessary that you answer one question truthfully."

"What is the question?" asked the unknown young man, after an instant's hesitation.

"What do you wish for most in the whole world? If there were such a thing as magic, and I and my friend had a knowledge of it, and if we could grant you one wish, what would you have?"

The unknown young man looked from Ames to Knox with a curious expression.

"He isn't mad," said Mr. Knox.

"Why is it that any one who behaves in an original and unusual manner is instantly suspected of being mad?" asked Mr. Aimes mournfully. "Must we all behave like a lot of puppets dancing on strings? Can none of us display a hint of imagination?"

The unknown man frowned a little. "Your question sounded so absurd," he said, half apologetically. "It seemed hardly likely that any one would stop a stranger in the street to ask him such a question unless there were some ulterior purpose behind the thing, or unless the person were mad. *Magic*, you know——"

He shook his head.

"I didn't say we *have* any magic power," answered Aimes. "Of course we haven't. I merely asked what you *would* wish for, if we *had*. I dare say there's no harm in compiling statistics

about secret wishes, is there? Can you think of any reason why we shouldn't go about asking people that question, if we have the time and the inclination, and if we desire to know the answer, for reasons of our own?"

"No-o," admitted the unknown man.

"Very well, then," said Aimes, "let us lose no more time over a useless discussion. Have you a wish? If you have, are you inclined to tell it to us? If you are, fire away. Otherwise, let us separate speedily and go our separate ways."

The unknown young man reflected.

"Of course I have a wish," he said slowly. "I have so many wishes, in fact, that I hardly know *which* one I'd have granted, if I *could* have one of them. I guess every one wants things—long life, health, money, happiness."

He finished wistfully, almost inaudibly.

"But if you could have just one, this minute?" asked Aimes. "If anything you asked for could come to pass, what would you have?"

"Money," answered the unknown man slowly. "At this minute I need three thousand dollars more than anything else in the world."

Mr. Aimes turned to Mr. Knox.

"The wallet, please," he said.

Mr. Knox drew it out and extended it, a long, black, leather pocket case. Mr. Aimes opened it. Inside were many bills—tens, twenties, hundreds, and two one-thousand-dollar ones. He drew them out.

"Here are your three thousand dollars," he said coolly, counting out the exact amount. "Yours in return for your story. Not as a loan, but as a gift; and with them you have our promise to consider what you tell us as absolutely confidential."

The unknown man was leaning forward, staring wildly at the money in Mr. Aimes' hands. He had gone white

again. His mouth had fallen open a bit. He wet his lips.

"What!" he cried helplessly. "You'll—give me that much—just to hear—why I—need it?"

"Exactly," answered Mr. Aimes.

The unknown man brushed a hand back across his head nervously.

"I'm going mad," he said, "or else—I'm dreaming—or else—you are quite mad! Three thousand dollars! You'll give it to me if I tell you why I need it?"

"You *are* slow to seize opportunities," sighed Mr. Aimes. "Suppose we are mad enough to throw three thousand dollars away for a story? What is it to *you*? Why don't you grasp this chance, and get yourself out of the scrape you are evidently in?"

"God knows what is really back of your offer," said the unknown man. "I don't. That's why I don't snap you up, badly as I need the money."

"Then you refuse?" asked Mr. Aimes, apparently waiting for the answer before putting the money away again. The unknown man leaped to his feet and began to pace the floor.

"No," he cried restlessly, "no, I *daren't* refuse! I *daren't*! I've no other hope, and I *must* get that much money, if I have to—to *swing* for it! When you stopped me—I—" He shook himself violently and threw up his head. "I'll take you! I've *got* to take you up!" he said. "I know very well that no one throws three thousand away for nothing without a mighty good reason, but I've *got* to take you; and, when the time comes, I'll pay the reckoning, whatever it is!"

He threw himself into his chair again.

"Well?" he said, rather defiantly.

"Better have another drink," said Mr. Knox solicitously. "You look pretty nearly all in."

The unknown young man nodded. Aimes poured it out for him and gave it to him.

"Your name?" asked Mr. Aimes then.

"Kenneth Neece," answered the unknown young man. "Do you know it?"

Both Aimes and Knox shook their heads.

"You've probably forgotten," he said dully.

"What?" asked Aimes interestedly.

"The name—the notoriety I had a couple of years ago."

"Notoriety?" asked Aimes.

"Yes. I was cashier in a New York bank, and absconded—at least that's what they called it. I didn't run away, though. I just juggled the books, and knew I should get caught. I did it because I had to have money. My mother was hurt in a railroad accident, and she had to have an operation at once. I hadn't the money, and the railroad headed us off fifty ways when we tried to sue. So I took what I needed from the bank."

"Strange I don't remember the case," said Aimes. "Do you?"

Knox shook his head.

"No, it isn't strange," answered Neece. "None of this came out. I just pleaded guilty, and took what was coming to me. My mother had died before they caught me, and I'd hidden the rest of the money that I took for my sister. There were just two of us left, and she was seventeen. I got seven years, but I got off with four for good behavior. I came out three months ago."

"How old are you?" asked Aimes slowly.

"Twenty-eight. I was just short of twenty-four when I was sent up; but I didn't mind going. I had the satisfaction of knowing that my mother had had everything she needed or wanted before she died, and that my sister had enough to keep her comfortable until I could get out again. She swore she wouldn't touch the money, but of course she had to. It wasn't so easy to get

work as she thought. Anyway, she tried, and she did get a job, in the end. It was on the stage. She went into the chorus under another name, so nobody'd know about what had happened to me, and two years after I went up she married Duke."

"Who?" cried Aimes wonderingly.

"George P. Duke. You said you saw me come out of the Duke house, didn't you? Well, that is her house, my sister's house."

"Your sister was——"

"Ann Neece, but she changed her name to Antoinette Terrel when she went on the stage. She married Duke under the name of Terrel. He doesn't know to this day that that wasn't her name, and that she has a brother who is a jailbird. She's never had the courage to tell him. His people raised a fuss, as it was."

Knox and Aimes were leaning forward, listening eagerly.

"But you go there, to the very house?" asked Aimes. "How is that?"

"To-night is the first time I've ever been there. She usually meets me outside, but to-night she didn't come when she should have, and I thought something might have happened, so I went there. She told me she'd sent me a note by messenger, but I never received it. Those infernal messengers never deliver promptly. It's probably waiting for me now, but, as it happens, the best thing I could have done was to go there."

"Why?" asked Aimes.

"Because Duke has missed her rubies. We thought he wouldn't, but he did. She pretended not to know what became of them, so he said they must have been stolen. He got in two detectives, and they said they'd search the pawnshops. If they find them, they'll discover that she pawned them herself, and she'll have to tell him about me. Then there'll be a smash-up! He'd

never stand for me. And she loves him!"

Neece leaped to his feet and began to pace the floor.

"She pawned them to get me enough money to go West and start again. We got three thousand for them. She couldn't give me that much without arousing his suspicion, but she said he would never miss the rubies. It was three days ago we pawned them. This morning I met a fellow who had the same cell with me for a while up the river. He got out before me, but he'd gone back to his old trade—thieving. Couldn't help it, somehow; and they were after him again. He's more than half gone with consumption, too, and I knew if they got him he'd die up there. So I divvied with him. I gave him two thousand, and kept one for myself, and he got away. Then to-night, when Ann was to come to say good-by, she didn't show up, and I went to the house. She told me that Duke had missed the rubies, and about the detectives, and urged me to get them out of pawn before the detectives found them. I didn't dare tell her I'd let some of the money go."

"So you need the three thousand to get the rubies out?" asked Aimes.

"Yes."

Aimes leaped to his feet.

"Where are they? Is the place open this late?"

"Yes; it's always open. It's what thieves call a fence. You can put up anything, at any time, for a fraction of the object's value. Then you can redeem it later, or leave it—either way. You can get almost any sum from this man, if your goods warrant it."

"You are sure it is open nights?"

"It's after dark he does the most business. Between four o'clock and daylight his office is crowded. Your wise thief loses no time in turning swag into money."

"Let's start down that way, then.

We've no time to lose, if the detectives are on the trail. If this is a well-known fence, they'll probably go there soon," said Aimes. "Especially since they think the rubies were stolen."

"They do," admitted Neece, "and they suspect Ann's maid, who is quite innocent, of course. They put her through a grilling, but could find out nothing. Ann would confess if they actually moved against the girl; but we hope to avoid that by getting the rubies back in time."

The elevator came up at this moment, and the three men entered, and were dropped to the street level. There Aimes hailed the first taxi in line.

"What is the address?" he asked Neece.

"Crogan's, a pawnshop on the Bowery. I forget the number, but I'll tell him when to stop."

Aimes repeated "Bowery," and stepped in. The cab started.

"There's a whole block of shops opening into one another," went on Neece. "Crogan's is on the corner. Then comes a secondhand clothing shop and a barber shop and a pool room and an Italian fruit shop, I think; and then a place that keeps women's things, and then a lodging house and a saloon. You can go into any place on the block and pass through into Crogan's office. If the coppers trail you, you can get out any way you like. It's a fine nest."

"How do you come to know so much about it?" asked Knox curiously.

"Morgan told me, the cellmate I told you about, you remember. Many a close run he's had to Crogan's, and many a close shave getting off."

"It's a wonder the police permit the place to thrive, if they know about it."

"Oh, they can't break Crogan. He's a political power down there, and there are a few big men in with him. There's money in pawnbroking if you are let alone to run the game as you please."

"I dare say," observed Aimes.

"Crogan gives you about a fourth of what a thing is worth; then, as a rule, he realizes more than it's worth when he lets go. Even if it is redeemed, he gets big interest, so he wins either way. He can't lose."

"Unless the police take away his stolen goods."

"They don't. Not as a rule."

They were encroaching upon lower Broadway, deserted now and silent; a narrow alley between gigantic walls.

"What I don't understand," said Knox thoughtfully, "is why your sister didn't go to your rooms to-night, as she had arranged. Even if her husband had discovered the loss of the jewels, and had called in detectives, how did that prevent?"

"She was afraid to go out, for fear she was being watched."

"I see."

"She was afraid if she should lead them to my rooms they might drag me into it."

"I see!"

"So she sent the note to a messenger office by one of the maids whom she knew she could trust. In the note, it seems, she directed me to get the jewels and send them to her at once by messenger. Then she urged me to lie low until she could communicate with me."

"It seems to me a lot of trouble could have been avoided if she had confessed the truth to her husband at once," put in Aimes. "If he loves her, nothing that she could tell him about you would make any difference."

"Of course not. I felt the same way, but she has set notions about his pride and the social prominence of his family. She says that the world doesn't care *what* my reasons were for taking what didn't belong to me. She's right in that, to be sure."

Aimes leaned out and scanned the neighborhood through which they were passing.

"You'd better keep your eyes open now," he said. "We're turning into the Bowery."

Neece turned to the window.

"It isn't much farther now," he said, and he drew out his pocket case and began to search for the pawn ticket. At first it failed to materialize, and Neece grew anxious. Aimes and Knox, too, followed his nervous fingers with curious eyes; but in the end it turned up just as the neighborhood was reached, and it was time to halt the chauffeur.

The three of them descended. Knox bade the cab wait a little farther along the block, and then followed Aimes and Neece into the dimly lighted shop.

It was the ordinary pawnshop, apparently. There were the three gilded wooden balls above the door, the window full of odds and ends, the iron gratings. There was the bell that jingled when the door was opened. There was the ancient counter show case to the left, with a cashier's box at the end, and a doorway leading into the back of the shop. There was a safe, too, with *Pat Crogan*, in gilt letters, on it; and there was a second doorway, not guarded by any gate. On it, however, in black letters, was painted:

PRIVATE.

The huge Irishman behind the counter looked up indifferently as the visitors entered, his gaze becoming fixed as he observed their apparent gentility, their evening clothes; and small wonder. They looked oddly out of place in that dingy, dirty shop, lighted only by gas jets that glimmered unevenly through murky globes.

Neece ignored the counter attendant, moved on toward the door marked private, and entered without the formality of knocking. Knox and Aimes, following, found themselves, not in the office of Pat Crogan, as they had expected, but in a sort of waiting room, which led into Crogan's office proper.

There was a worn old carpet on the floor, a row of common oak armchairs ranged around the walls, and there was a picture of Washington and another of Napoleon. This completed the furnishings.

Two men and a woman were already there, waiting. The woman looked like a Syrian peddler, and she carried a suit case similar to the ones they use for holding their linens and spangled shawls. She had the dull, listless face and vapid eyes of ignorance; but when her turn came, when genial Crogan came to the door to escort her in, a transformation occurred. She became, in an instant, a very eagle of a woman, shrewdness, wisdom, ingenuity gleaming in her face. The two men would have been taken for crooks anywhere. They had the low foreheads, the narrow, close-set eyes, the ape jaws of crime; and there was in their bearing a certain uneasiness that revealed an ever-present, secret fear. The Syrian peddler woman was with Crogan half an hour or more, coming forth without the suit case. The two men were then summoned, Crogan treating them with less cordiality than he had displayed to the Syrian woman, and dismissing them in a few moments. Then he approached Neece, Knox, and Aimes.

"You gentlemen together?" he asked.

"Yes," said Neece.

"You want to see me?"

"Yes," answered Neece, producing the pawn check. "We want to redeem this."

Crogan took the check and looked at it. It said simply: "Jewelry—\$3,000.00."

"You put it up?" asked Crogan, scrutinizing Neece.

"Yes."

"All three?"

"No. These gentlemen were not with me."

"Come in," said Crogan, retaining the

check, and throwing open the door of his office.

They followed him curiously, and found themselves in a small, square room. There were a desk and a chair and two other chairs for visitors. Besides these things there was a huge safe, open. On the desk were scattered books, papers, newspaper clippings, packages of pawn tickets, a scales, various bottles of acid, carefully labeled, and glass rods.

Crogan sat down at the desk, noted the number of the ticket, and drew a big book toward him. Turning a few pages, he nodded with some satisfaction.

"I thought I recognized you," he said, looking up at Neece. "You had them rubies, and there was a woman with you."

"Yes," answered Neece.

"The gumshoes were here looking for them this very night. Do you know that?"

"No," answered Neece. "You didn't give 'em up, did you?"

Crogan grinned. It was a hideous performance, for three teeth were gone from the front of his mouth, and they left gaping, open spaces.

"Three thousand I'm out on them sparklers," he said, "and four thousand it takes to get them back. I'm not handing out anything gratis to the gumshoes."

"Four thousand!" gasped Aimes. "A thousand advance?"

"And why not?" asked Crogan coolly. "It's little enough for the risk I run. You'd not get a nickel on them regularly on legal terms."

"Four thousand's right," interrupted Neece. "That was agreed to when we put them in. Have you got them handy?"

"I guess so," said Crogan. He rose, and moved toward the safe. Throwing open the great doors, he searched for the number on the ticket in his hand.

For some time he searched, going over countless tickets, while Knox, Aimes, and Neece looked at one another nervously and waited. In the end, Crogan turned back to them with a shake of the head.

"Don't seem to be here," he admitted. "It must have been sent over to the vault."

"The vault?" repeated Neece.

"Three doors along. I can't keep everything here, you know. Things I don't expect to go out for a long time I send over there, and as it comes time for their term to be up, they are sent back. I thought your stuff hadn't gone over yet, being as they only came in a couple of days ago, but I guess they have. If you'll wait here——"

He moved toward the door.

"We're rather pressed for time," said Aimes. "If you don't mind, we'll go along with you."

"If you like," agreed Crogan genially. "This way, then."

He led the way back to the waiting room, which had filled up again in the interim, through a doorway in the rear to a dark hall, and then down a rickety pair of wooden steps into a damp cellar. There was no light, but Crogan produced an electric pocket torch, which disclosed old boxes and barrels, piles of clothing, iron, and junk, and odds and ends of everything. Picking his course through this varied collection, he zigzagged along for perhaps a hundred paces. Then he turned sharply to the left, and mounted a second rickety stairway. The door at the head of that led into a kitchen in back of the barber shop. An Irish-woman was sitting there, beneath a blazing gas jet, looking at an evening paper and smoking an old corncob pipe. She raised two sharp, light-blue eyes at the strange procession filing into her kitchen, but said nothing, not even replying to Crogan's nod.

"Stop here a while," said the pawn-

broker then, "and I'll just be running up above to see. The vault's overhead."

There were four doors opening into this kitchen, three besides the one that communicated with the barber shop in front. Opening one of these three, Crogan revealed a flight of steps, and began to ascend. The door swung closed behind him.

Aimes turned and carefully examined his surroundings. Then, addressing the Irishwoman, he said—in French:

"Pardon me, madame. Do you understand this language I speak?"

Knox and Neece stared at him curiously. So did the stout woman whom he addressed.

"Go 'long wid yez!" said she.

"You do not understand?" asked Aimes again, in French.

"Fwhat is he jabberin' there?" asked the Irishwoman grimly, turning to Neece.

Aimes prevented any reply. Still in French, he addressed Mr. Knox.

"I do not like this business of the vault," he said. "It is an excuse. Be on your guard. Your gun is handy?"

"Yes," said Knox.

"Watch for my signal to draw it. It may be necessary."

Knox's eyes grew wide, but he nodded agreement.

"What is it?" asked Neece, who did not know French.

"He says that time presses, and the delay is most inconvenient," answered Knox.

Aimes walked deliberately to the nearest door and opened it. It gave into the shop, as he had supposed. There were three barber chairs and three Italian barbers in attendance. Aimes closed that door, moved to the next, and opened it. It was a cupboard, or seemed so at first glance. In the rear, however, an opening led on into the next building. Then came the door that Crogan had gone through, and then

one leading into a dark alleyway in the rear.

"Fwhat is it he's afther wantin'?" asked the Irishwoman uneasily of Knox.

"Tell her we want the quickest way to the street," said Aimes, in French.

Knox told her. She pointed toward the door that led into the shop.

"That way," said she. "Are you unsfolleyed?"

Knox shrugged, and replied that it was quite possible. Then Crogan returned. He had a jewel case in his hand—a dark-red leather one. Under his arm he carried paper in which to wrap it. Advancing toward the three men, who were waiting in attitudes of attention, he held out his burden and lifted the lid.

"Necklace, earrings, rings, tiara, and three clasps," he announced. "Right?"

Neece gave a vague glance at the glittering baubles and nodded. Crogan was about to close the box, when Aimes interfered. Leaning over, he inspected the jewels critically.

"They were not sealed when they were intrusted to you for safe-keeping?" he asked in apparent surprise.

"They were not," answered Crogan grimly. "Them as uses me, trusts me."

Aimes looked up into the man's flushed face, smiling slightly.

"Trusting is all very well among friends," he answered, "but you are a stranger to us, and our transaction is purely a business one. You examined these trinkets carefully enough, I dare say, before handing out three thousand dollars on them."

"What are you givin' me?" roared Crogan angrily. "Are you meanin' to accuse me of crooked dealing?"

"Not in the least," replied Aimes. "I am meaning to let you prove that you are entirely on the square! You have a dichroscope, I dare say?"

Crogan was apopleptic.

"So?" he roared furiously. "With

the gumshoes trailin' you, *you* stand up and tell *me* to prove I'm handling you straight! A lot of damned crooks tell *me* what I am to do! I've a mind to hand you over, by God! I've a damned good mind to send you where you belong! You who had no hand in this deal, anyway. You——" The stream of adjectives that followed exceeded anything Mr. Aimes had ever heard before in his life.

Mr. Aimes waited patiently until there was silence. Then——

"Did you say you have or haven't a dichroscope?" he asked.

Pat Crogan leaned forward and thrust his hard face close to Mr. Aimes, and Pat Crogan's jaw was set and his eyes were hard.

"I didn't say," he replied; "and, what's more, I don't intend to. If I have one, you'll not see it. That much I'll tell you straight!" Then, turning to Neece, he added: "You are the man I dealt with before. 'Tis you I'll deal with now, and no one else that rings in. Either you take these things off me hands for four thousand clean, or you leave them, whichever you like; but you does it *quick*. See? I've no time to be standing here passin' compliments!"

Neece looked helplessly at Aimes. Aimes smiled.

"We'll take them," said Aimes, "but we'll just call in a policeman to witness the transaction and to carry the rubies to some place where they can be tested. If they are the same stones that were delivered to you we'll make no howl about the thousand you made by usury. If the stones have been changed, you'll hand over the genuine ones, or you'll pay dearly for them! Do I make myself clear?"

Crogan grinned.

"A cop, is it?" he roared. "*You'll* be callin' in a cop?"

"You seem to be laboring under the misapprehension that we have some-

thing to fear from the law," answered Mr. Aimes. "I've no doubt most of your clients are forced to submit to your rulings, because they are thieves and have no redress, but you are dealing with birds of a different caliber this time, Mr. Crogan. If you think I'll not call in a policeman, watch me!"

He turned swiftly and threw open the door of the barber shop.

"Go out and hail the first bluecoat you see," he said, turning to Knox. "Don't come back without one!"

Knox advanced through the doorway and started for the front of the shop. Crogan grinned.

"I'm sorry I can't be stayin' here wid yez," he remarked, "but I'm a busy man. I'll just be afther returnin' these to the vaults, and when you are ready you can let me know!"

"I think not. You'll not take those things from this room until this little matter is settled. First come, first served! Your time belongs to us, for the present. We deserve something for that extra thousand dollars."

He had closed the door leading into the shop, and stood with his back against it. One hand was in his right-hand coat pocket.

"So?" said Crogan grimly. "So it's my masher you're afther bein' now, is it?"

He picked up the jewel case from the table where it lay, and moved toward the door that led upward toward the vault, but before he reached it, Aimes had whipped out his revolver and had leveled it at the Irishman.

"*Stop!*" he commanded in low, imperative tones. "Open that door and I'll drop you!"

Crogan turned, attracted by a sound from the aged Irishwoman at the table, and his face flushed as he found himself confronting a revolver.

"So *that's* it?" he cried.

"A nice little gun," answered Aimes. "A sound out of you or the old woman.

there, and *you'll* never live to tell about to-night. I am a straight shot."

"You think you're damned cute," whispered Crogan hoarsely, "but you don't know *me*, Mister Slick Guy! You have the upper hand now, but my turn will come. Some day I'm going to get you for this if it takes twenty years, and when I *does* get you——"

He ground his teeth.

"You'll be where you belong in less than twenty years," answered Aimes, "and where you can't 'get' any one!"

A knock sounded on the door leading into the shop.

"Who's there?" called Aimes shortly.

"Knox, with the policeman," answered an eager voice.

Mr. Aimes stepped aside, and, still keeping the drop on Crogan, called: "Come in!"

Knox ushered in a tall, ruddy-faced arm of the law, both of them stopping short at the tableau that met their eyes.

"What the devil is this?" cried the policeman, staring. "Pat Crogan, man! What's this, I say?"

"Leave the shop door open, Merlin!" cried Aimes.

Knox, responding to his other name, obeyed.

"This damned crook——" began Crogan.

"Be careful how you call names," warned Aimes.

"Take him up, Bill!" roared Crogan. "I'll make a charge when the time comes. I'll make it all right with the old man. Take him up, and let's have an end of this!"

Aimes did not look at the policeman.

"Have a care how you act, policeman," he said. "This man is conducting a resort here where stolen goods are received. He is guilty, likewise, of usury, and he has substituted stones in the jewelry that he has in his hands, and that was pawned here. That's theft! All three of these charges are going to be pressed unless he alters his

demeanor at once and makes restitution. I am Bigelow Aimes, son of Robinson Aimes. The man in the doorway behind you is Nicholas Knox."

"I made sure I recognized his face," gasped the policeman, staring. Crogan drew a long breath.

"Now," added Aimes slowly, "perhaps you are convinced that we have the power to punish this man?"

"Come, come," said the policeman pacifically, "sure, there's some way to settle the difference!"

"Yes," answered Aimes readily, "if he returns the identical stones that were pawned with him, and proves to our satisfaction that he has done so, we'll call the whole thing quits, and press no charges. Otherwise, a pretty career is going to meet an untimely end."

"Well, Pat?" said the policeman suggestively.

"How do I know they are the guys they claim?" asked Crogan.

"You'll have to chance it," answered Aimes.

"Sure I know the face of Mr. Knox," added the policeman.

"Very well," said Crogan, yielding. "I've the other set upstairs. I'll fetch it."

"The old woman can fetch it," interposed Aimes.

So Crogan told the old woman to get 75438 from Konheim. With many a grunt and groan and muttered curse, she climbed the stairs, returning presently with the real set that Neece had pawned. The other things that Crogan had intended to return were exact duplicates—worthless imitations. In that fashion he robbed the thieves who disposed of their stolen goods through him. It was seldom, indeed, that any of them wanted to redeem pawned treasures, but if they did Crogan cheated them, knowing that they had no redress and that they would be compelled to patronize him again. Nowhere else could they turn "swag" into cash in a moment.

Crogan had a monopoly, and if he turned the same trick now and then on honest customers who wandered in, the deceit was rarely discovered, and when it was discovered, the victim suffered in silence. Pawning, usually, is a secret business, and notoriety is never welcomed by the poor unfortunates who seek that means of relief from financial stress and storms.

It developed that Crogan had a dichroscope, by means of which a true ruby is instantly proven, and when Aimes had satisfied himself that all was right he, Knox, and Neece reentered the cab that was still waiting, and headed again for upper Manhattan.

They had been in the Bowery something over an hour. It was nearing eleven when they finally started uptown.

CHAPTER III.

STRAIGHTENING THE TANGLE.

"When we get near the house—my sister's house," suggested Neece, "I'll phone and see if the road is still clear. Duke had a business engagement, and had to go out, but he may have returned by this time. If there's any chance of meeting him, I'd better not risk going there."

"Suppose you get Duke on the telephone?" suggested Mr. Aimes.

Neece frowned.

"I hadn't thought of that," he admitted anxiously.

"If you should, just hang up, without speaking, and pay your toll and hurry away. Then central will report that there was a mistake, or that she can't locate the 'party.'"

Mr. Neece nodded gratefully.

"I'll do that," he promised.

"And if your sister comes to the phone?"

"I'll ask her if it is safe to bring them right up."

"Better say it that way, so that if

any one is listening on the wire you'll give nothing away."

"Right!" approved Mr. Knox. "You think of everything. I should have come away from Crogan's with the imitation gems!"

"So should I," admitted Neece.

Aimes smiled.

"A burned child fears the fire. Likewise, experience is the best instructor. I put up a diamond ring once, while I was at college, and got a hundred on it. In due time I took it out, but the next time I tried to raise money that way the fellow handed it back to me, and invited me to 'quit kidding.' My diamond had turned to paste!"

"What did you do?"

"Nothing. I reminded him that he had given me a hundred on it before. He answered, 'Not on that stone!' 'Maybe not,' I said; 'but I haven't had that ring touched since you gave it back to me.' 'Better watch your servants, then,' said he. I had nothing definite on him, you see. Besides, my governor wouldn't have liked the idea of my pawning things, so I couldn't go to law. All I could do was to put my loss down to 'extra instructions.'"

"No wonder pawnbrokers grow rich!" said Neece.

"Oh, they don't all do it, but lots of them do. I sized Crogan up for a rascal, so I thought it best to take no chances with him. May I never meet him after dark, when I haven't a gun!"

"I shall never be able to make up to you both for to-night's aid," said Neece slowly. "But I shall never forget what you've done for me!"

"For you? Rot!" smiled Mr. Aimes. "For the fun of the thing, my boy! For the excitement, the adventure, the danger. Your average man gets all this by proxy, through books and plays. We are more fortunate. We go in for things at firsthand. To-night you chanced to be the gainer. To-morrow night it will be some one else. And the

next night some one else again. But always we shall be involved. We will benefit by rare experience, thrills. It's just a game we play, you see, and you owe us nothing. But we shall be unspeakably indebted to you if you will never betray our identities. Will you favor us that far?"

"Surely," answered Mr. Neece. "I will do anything for you that I can. But for you, Heaven knows how tonight might have ended. It seemed to me, when you stopped me, that to kill myself and so relieve my sister of a burden was the best way out of it all!"

"So we saved your life, as well as a fortune in gems," observed Mr. Knox thoughtfully. "Not a bad night's work, eh?"

He smiled at Mr. Aimes.

"And the night is not yet gone," added Aimes.

Neece looked out of the window.

"Thirty-eighth Street already!" he gasped. "It seems impossible!"

"From where will you phone?" asked Aimes.

"Forty-second, I guess. There's a cigar store there on the corner!"

Mr. Knox and Mr. Aimes waited patiently when Neece descended. But for the fact that the jewel case still lay on the seat between them, they might have become suspicious over his long absence. Eventually, however, he emerged, halting to give the chauffeur directions as he stepped in.

"I had the deuce of a time getting a connection," he announced, as the cab started again; "but finally I got her. Duke isn't home yet, but he may come in any minute, and she is afraid I might meet him if I go there. So she is sending her maid to my rooms for the things. Then she'll tell Duke that the jewels turned up—that they had been mislaid merely, and that will end the whole thing."

"But will it?" asked Aime. "Will

her husband believe in that explanation?"

"Yes. She'll tell him that she put them into the wrong case by mistake, and that finding the right case empty she had raised the cry of thieves, while all the time they were there!"

"Admitting, then, that he believes her," went on Aimes, "what will you do? You've no money left to take you West, you know."

Neece hesitated.

"I'll find something to do around here," he replied. "I can find *something* to do, surely. I'll change my name, and take anything that offers."

"I'll send you West," volunteered Mr. Knox. "I've a ranch somewhere in New Mexico. And you look as if the life there would do you good."

Mr. Neece smiled. His face lighted as it had not since the three had met. His eyes shone.

"It used to be my ambition to be a cowboy when I was a kid," he said. "I never thought I should be."

They drew up before a little hotel on West Forty-seventh Street and descended. Knox paid off the taxi. The bill was something short of twenty dollars. Then Neece left word at the desk that a woman inquiring for him was to be sent up directly to his sitting room, and the three of them ascended.

It was a typical hotel sitting room. There was just enough furniture to provide necessities. Draperies, carpets, pictures, had been ordered by the dozens, and looked that way. A great bunch of roses that Mrs. Duke had sent were thrust into a water pitcher, for lack of other vessel.

"Not very elegant," said Mr. Neece, as he switched on the lights and closed the door behind him, "but a palace alongside of what I've had these past few years. Ever been through Sing Sing?"

"No," admitted both Knox and Aimes.

"You ought to go. You'd find it instructive. You wouldn't see it to advantage, though, not properly. You'd have to commit some crime against the law and be sent up, to see it right. Somebody ought to do that, and then write it up. I've often thought of that!"

"The old idea that prison should be dreaded as a place loathsome and noxious still persists in a good many minds," admitted Aimes. "I'm afraid Sing Sing isn't much worse than many another jail."

"I hope it is. I hope so," said Neece somberly. He looked older as his thoughts dwelt upon the subject. Bitter memories quickened to life, and Aimes, watching him, felt the necessity for an interruption.

"Smoke?" he asked, producing his cigarette case.

Neece hesitated.

"It should be my place to play host," he said, "but I have little to offer you—nothing worthy of you."

"You could offer me nothing to equal my own brand," smiled Aimes. "They come to me from London under enormous duty, but over there they are cheap, so it evens up. There's nothing like an English cigarette, in my estimation."

Knox and Neece joined him, and Mr. Aimes struck a match, from which all three drew fire. As he tossed away the burned-out stick, the telephone rang. Neece was across the room in an instant, answering.

"Hello?" he called. . . . "Yes. Send her up, please. I left word at the desk to that effect. . . . All right. Thank you."

He rehung the receiver and turned.

"My sister's maid," he said. Then he moved toward the door and opened it slightly, waiting there for the woman to appear.

"Your sister trusts her absolutely?" asked Aimes.

"Yes. She's had her for a long time, almost since she married."

Aimes shrugged.

"It just occurred to me that here is a big enough temptation to appeal to almost any one. Pigeon-blood rubies, fine, large ones, and so *many* of them!"

Neece nodded.

"But this woman has charge of all my sister's possessions!" And then he looked out of the half-open door, as the lift door clanged, and called: "This way, Nina!"

The woman who entered a moment later was short, thin, meek looking, an Englishwoman obviously, of incredible insignificance. She had an ordinary face and an ordinary figure, and she wore an ordinary black dress and black hat. There was nothing distinctive about her, nothing individual. Hundreds of her kind are serving the gentry all over the world, as their mothers served before them and as their daughters will serve in future. In a crowd, she would have gone her way unseen, undisturbed. Aimes, studying her keenly, was forced to admit that there was nothing about her to distrust.

"Here is a package, Nina," said Neece, "that you are to take back directly to Mrs. Duke. Has she told you about it?"

"Yes, sir," said Nina.

"You know what the contents are?" asked Aimes.

"Yes, sir," repeated Nina.

"Then you understand the necessity for getting back as speedily as possible?"

"Yes, sir."

Neece put the jewel case in her arms.

"Did you come in a cab?"

"Yes, sir," answered Nina.

"You'd better go back the same way."

"And don't stop anywhere," advised Aimes.

"No, sir," assented Nina. "Mrs. Duke said that she will communicate

with you, sir," she added to Neece. "Good night, sir!"

"Good night!" answered all three gentlemen. Nina advanced toward the door, which Neece threw open for her, but she did not depart, for the simple reason that she could not. The way was still barred by two gentlemen, who had, apparently, been in the act of entering. One of them was short and stout, with a protruding paunch in front. He was dressed in brown, and carried a brown bowler in his hand. He was freckled, green-eyed, and red-haired. The other man was bigger, and had a black mustache. He was frowning. Both men, finding the door so conveniently opened, walked in, and the frowning dark man closed it behind him. Nina had retreated, still hugging the jewel case. Neece, Aimes, and Knox were staring, taken completely by surprise.

"Just a minute, miss," said the red-haired man suavely. "You gentlemen will pardon this interruption?"

"Who the devil are you?" asked Aimes, rising and advancing.

"Schaffer, of the K. & S. Detective Agency," answered the red-haired man gently. "Are you Mr. Kenneth Neece?"

"I am Kenneth Neece," answered that gentleman.

"Oh, I see. And these gentlemen?"

"Our identities do not concern you," answered Aimes. "At least, so far as I am aware. Please be so good as to explain your presence here. It is not the custom in most hotels to admit strangers to the rooms of the guests without announcing them."

"It isn't the custom here, either," answered the dark, scowling gentleman by the door. "This is an exception. I am here to vouch for Mr. Schaffer. I am the house detective."

Aimes bowed.

"And your business, gentlemen?" he asked.

"Is with this woman," answered

Schaffer, "and with Neece—and maybe with you two, also. That remains to be seen. Just at present, my idea is to search these rooms!"

"For what purpose?" asked Mr. Aimes.

"For the purpose of finding some property belonging to Mrs. George P. Duke. Unless I miss my guess, the woman has it there in her hands."

"Have you a warrant to search these rooms?" asked Aimes. "They have been rented to Mr. Neece, and if you have no warrant, you are illegally forcing an entrance here."

"Never mind about that," said Schaffer coolly. "We'll settle about the warrant after."

"No, we won't," answered Aimes. "We'll not settle about it later. You'll produce your search warrant now, or get out!"

"You are not Neece," cried Schaffer angrily.

"But I am voicing Mr. Neece's protest and his attitude in this matter. If you overstep your authority, you will be prosecuted for it. I warn you!"

"Who are *you*, so high and mighty?" asked Schaffer sarcastically.

"That doesn't concern you."

"Oh, yes, it does," answered Schaffer.

"Oh, no, it doesn't."

"If it doesn't, then, it soon will. You're in none too good company, I'll tell you that!"

"I'll be in better company in a minute," retorted Aimes. "Show your warrant or get out!"

Schaffer looked at the scowling dark man by the door. The scowling dark man grunted.

"Go ahead. Don't pay any attention to that noise," advised the house detective. "If the things wasn't here he wouldn't be raising such a kick. Find them. Then there'll be time enough to settle that little matter about warrants."

Schaffer nodded, and advanced to-

ward Nina, who was waiting patiently for an opportunity to depart.

"I'll have a look into that, if you please, ma'am," he said, attempting to take it. Nina retained her grip.

"Mr. Neece!" she cried appealingly. Neece gazed wildly at Aimes.

"For God's sake, stop him!" wailed Neece. Aimes brought out his pistol, and leveled it at Schaffer.

"Hands off!" he cried grimly. "I'll give you until I count ten to get out of this room!"

Schaffer turned, and his jaw dropped as he found himself covered. Mr. Knox had followed Aimes' example, and was covering the house detective.

"One," began Aimes determinedly. "Two——"

"Wait!" cried Neece eagerly. "Just hold them here a moment. Give Nina a start on them!"

"Right!" cried Aimes, smiling. "Stand aside, there!"

"Aside!" repeated Knox, planting the muzzle of his revolver against the house detective's chest. "You know there's no penalty for killing any one who breaks into one's rooms!"

The house detective evidently feared to risk it. He backed ingloriously from the door.

"Beat it, Nina!" ordered Neece.

Nina made for the door, clutching her bundle close. Again Neece threw it open, and again Nina found her way barred, this time by a soldierly-looking, gray-haired man in evening things. He was tall, well built, very erect as to carriage, and had an air of command. Halting upon the threshold, he stared at Nina, then let his flashing eyes wander on over the tableau behind her. He observed Mr. Aimes, with a gun covering Schaffer. He observed Mr. Knox, with a gun covering the house detective. He observed Mr. Neece holding the door.

"What's this?" he cried authoritatively.

"For Heaven's sake, grab that girl!" shouted Schaffer in eager accents. "She has the things you want in that box!"

The elderly gentleman reached for the box.

"Give it to me, Nina!" he commanded.

"Oh, please, Mr. Duke, sir," begged Nina, "I——"

"Give it to me, Nina!" ordered Duke.

"If it is not his, Nina," put in Aimes cheerfully, "you are under no compulsion to give it to him!"

Nina gasped.

"Please, sir, it *isn't* yours, sir," she ventured.

"What are you doing here?" asked Duke, shifting his ground.

"That isn't his business, either, Nina," prompted Aimes. "When you are not on duty, your time is your own, isn't it? You can go and come as you please, can't you?"

"Ye-es, sir," admitted Nina.

Aimes changed his position so that he could cover Duke as well as Schaffer.

"You can go, Nina," he said, "when-ever you like. If any one ventures to stop you, I'll stop *him!*"

Nina took a tentative step toward the door. Duke grew crimson.

"Nina," he said, "you are only storing up trouble for yourself. If you persist in defying me, I will swear out a warrant for your arrest and accuse you of stealing my wife's gems! So far, I have hesitated because of your faithful service in the past, but this new attitude of defiance, this willingness to be advised by this person, is unworthy of you. If you have nothing to fear from me, there can be no harm in my glancing at what you have in your arms."

Nina stood motionless, troubled.

"Well?" repeated Duke impatiently.

"Take it on the run, Nina!" urged Aimes. "If he does have you arrested you'll be looked out for!"

Nina hesitated, and in that instant Schaffer cried out: "If you say so, I

can take her in charge, and you can appear against her in court, sir. That's legal enough!"

He fired the last few words at Aimes.

"She will sue you for heavy damages if you cause her arrest and prove nothing against her," warned Aimes.

"Arrest her!" snapped Duke.

"You are interfering with an officer in the discharge of his duty," said Schaffer to Aimes, grinning.

Aimes slowly put down the gun. Knox followed suit.

"Search her," advised Duke, as Schaffer put his hand on Nina's shoulder. "That's permissible, now that she's under arrest. Isn't it?"

"Right you are!" admitted Schaffer.

"Mr. Neece!" begged Nina desperately, clinging to the bundle that Schaffer was endeavoring to wrest from her.

"Can we do nothing?" cried Knox.

Aimes shrugged. Neece had turned pale. He was staring fixedly into space. Schaffer gained the box and knelt down with it, attempting to untie the knot. It opposed him.

"Here! Cut it!" cried the house detective, offering a pocketknife.

Mr. Schaffer cut the cord that Crogan had tied so carefully, and removed the brown wrapping paper. The red leather case was revealed.

"That's it!" cried Duke angrily. "I recognize it!"

Schaffer pressed the spring and lifted the lid. There lay the ruby ornaments, gleaming, flashing, scintillating, upon their nest of soft white satin.

"I thought so!" cried Schaffer triumphantly. "These are the missing jewels, aren't they?"

"They are!" declared Duke firmly. "Their presence here can mean only one thing—that the woman is guilty, and that these men are implicated. Arrest them all on my charge of burglary!"

Knox gasped, and stared in horror at Aimes. Aimes frowned.

"Just phone for a wagon," said

Schaffer to the house detective, "and some cuffs."

"You are letting yourself in for a nice mess," said Aimes to Duke. "I warn you."

Duke made no answer. Neece drew near to Aimes.

"Good God, it will go hard with me if I'm taken!" he whispered. "I'm hardly out, you know!"

"Can't we fight our way?" whispered Knox. "Imagine, if this gets out—if they get my name——"

"You'd better notify your sister," said Aimes to Neece. "Her explanation is the only thing that can set matters straight."

"I can't," he answered hoarsely. "I promised I'd not betray her. I can't!"

"But *she'll* explain, when she hears," protested Aimes; "and we will be compelled to make some explanation. We're sure to be recognized, either Knox or I."

"You can't tell the story I told you. You can't tell the truth. You gave me your word not to!" answered Neece. "You can tell anything you like but the truth."

Aimes looked dubiously at Knox.

"Let's fight our way out," said Knox again. "We've both got guns. You can put the lights out with one shot, and we can head for the door!"

"And be taken in the hall, waiting for the lift, or be compelled to hurt somebody. No, there must be some other way. I'll think of something in——"

The door was shut, and the house detective was leaning against it, with a revolver in his hand. As Aimes finished speaking, there sounded a knock upon the panel. Schaffer, at the telephone, calling central office, looked around.

"Who's there?" he cried anxiously.

"*Who's there?*" repeated the house detective.

"Let me in, please—*hurry, hurry!*" came in a woman's voice.

Neece threw up his head sharply, and listened. Duke leaped for the door, displacing the house detective with small politeness, and threw it open.

"*Antoinette!*" he cried.

A woman was standing there, a tall, slender, strikingly beautiful woman—or, rather, girl—for she could not have been much more than twenty-one or two. She was gowned in white satin very simply, the soft, gleaming material depending upon the lines of her figure to set it off. Her arms, throat, and shoulders were bare save for the cloak of royal purple that she had thrown about her. It was edged with white fox against the chill and dampness of the early spring.

She had dark hair, this girl, *very* dark hair, and a great deal of it, but it was dressed most simply. Her eyes were dark, too, and wistful, and she had a really wonderful mouth, all curves.

"*George!*" she whispered, with a little catch in her breath. For just an instant she remained motionless on the threshold, bewildered, frightened, unable to decide what she must do. Then, advancing straight to her husband's arms, she added: "You've heard?"

Her glance, sweeping the room as she advanced, had discovered Nina and Neece and the house detective, with a gun, and the casket of rubies on the floor.

"Heard what?" asked Duke curiously.

She stared up at him, puzzled. Neece spoke:

"He's heard nothing, and he's arrested the lot of us for stealing the rubies—me, Nina, and these two gentlemen, who are friends of mine!"

Antoinette Duke turned to him:

"You didn't explain?"

"No," answered Neece.

She raised wistful eyes to her husband's face.

"I have something to tell you, something important," she said. "Send away your men."

"Is it something about the jewels?" he asked, staring from Neece to his wife.

"Yes," answered Antoinette Duke softly.

Duke turned to Schaffer and the house detective.

"You can wait outside," he said. As they departed reluctantly he added: "The others are—were here when I came. Nina was here with them. I have no idea who they are. Perhaps you know, since you appear to know *this* one."

She glanced from Knox to Aimes.

"Your friends, did you say?" she asked Neece.

He nodded.

"You can speak before them, if you like. I confided in them. I had to. But let me say this before you begin: *Anything* that you tell him will be acceptable to me!"

"I am going to tell him the truth," answered Mrs. Duke. "There must be an end to mysteries, once and for all time."

Duke had been listening impatiently. Now he drew nearer to his wife, asking:

"What is the meaning of all this, Ann? Who is this man?"

"My brother," answered his wife softly.

"Your *brother*? But I thought you let me believe that you were alone in the world! And *his* name is Neece?"

"So was mine, rightly, when you married me. The other was just a stage name I chose. I was born Ann Neece. I changed it because of a misfortune that befell my brother, and made the name of Neece—undesirable. When you fell in love with me, I did not tell you this because I was afraid."

"*Afraid?*" repeated Duke curiously.

"Afraid it might make a difference

to you; afraid I might lose you. I loved you too much to risk that."

Duke drew her close, and murmured: "*Antoinette!*"

She threw her arms around his neck. "You'll never know how I have suffered because of this secret. I've had no real peace since we married, for fear something would happen to reveal the truth. I've lived in hourly dread of your finding out."

"What? That you had a brother, and that your name wasn't Terrel?"

"No, the reason behind my change of name."

"The reason?" Duke turned and glanced at Neèce. The latter was standing with folded arms, his head dropped forward. Duke's eyes wandered on to Knox and Aimes. They were standing together in the window embrasure. Both looked anxious.

"What was the reason?" asked Duke uneasily.

"He was bank cashier, and he used money that was not his!" answered Ann. Duke made no sound, nor did he release the woman he held in his arms.

"He did it," went on Ann, "because my mother was ill and needed things we could not afford to get her any other way. And afterward—when she died—he gave himself up and took his punishment instead of trying to escape. So—so to me—there has always been something—heroic about it all. But—but I couldn't expect *you* to see it as I saw it. Nobody else saw it so at the time. I was afraid you wouldn't marry me, and I loved you. I knew you were proud of your name and your position in society. I knew your family would object—even more than they did—if it all came out. So I hid it from you. When he came out of that dreadful place, I didn't let you know. I came to his rooms here to see him, instead of having him come to me, and when I found him weak and ill-nourished and

pale, I had to manage some way to get him money to go West and begin again. For your sake, I didn't want him near us. So—I pawned the rubies. I didn't think you would miss them."

"You *pawned* them?"

"Yes," whispered the woman wearily. "I thought I could save up enough to get them out before you suspected. He was going to start life again on the three thousand I raised, and he was not even going to write to me, but the very day after we'd pawned them, your mother came and got to talking about rubies. You asked me to show her mine. I didn't know what to do—how to explain. In desperation, I suggested that they might have been stolen, and then you insisted upon getting in detectives, and I knew there was nothing for it but to take the money from Kenney again and get them out, and pretend that they were mislaid. That's what Kenney's been doing to-night, and that's why I sent Nina here. She knew all along."

Duke glanced at Nina, who was standing meekly at the farthest end of the room.

"Poor Nina, how hardly I've used her!" he said.

"As she went down the street to-night," added Ann, "I was watching from the window, and I saw two men follow her, and I was afraid they might find the rubies on her, so I came, too. I think—that's all."

Duke drew her closer, and kissed her lips.

"If ever I doubted your devotion," he said, "you have given me proof to-night."

"You forgive me?" she sobbed softly.

"I have nothing to forgive, except the fact that you denied me your confidence. I'll forgive you that if you promise not to let it happen again."

"I never will," she promised. "And—Kenney?"

Duke turned, to smile at Neece, who was waiting in fearful anxiety.

"We'll take care of Kenney," said Duke.

The detectives were dismissed. Knox and Aimes were introduced, and their parts in the whole affair explained. They were thanked quite thoroughly by Duke and Mrs. Duke, and by Kenneth Neece, even by Nina, who never tired of telling afterward of Mr. Aimes' bravery. In a perfectly respectful way, she worshiped him forever, and never thought of him in any other attitude than that of a gallant defender, gun in hand.

It was nearer two than one o'clock when finally Mr. Knox and Mr. Aimes parted from the others before the Duke house and went on up the avenue on foot. The moon was out. The stars, too. The electricity in the air that urges one on to adventure when the night is young had been dissipated. The peace of coming dawn was already evident, although dawn was still some hours away.

"I shall sleep to-night without rocking," observed Mr. Knox, "and without books, magazines, chess, or solitaire. I'm actually tired out, and no wonder.

It seems like a month since we started out adventuring!"

"Doesn't it?" agreed Mr. Aimes. "Something doing makes time pass quickly, and there have been things doing to-night."

Mr. Knox nodded, and sighed contentedly.

"We shall not fare so well every night, though," he observed. "We couldn't. That would be too good!"

"Nonsense!" answered Aimes. "It's entirely up to us and the person whose wish we choose to grant. We *did* grant Neece's to-night, you know."

"That's right," agreed Knox. "We surely did."

"If we keep on at this rate," added Aimes, "the world will be a lot better for our adventuring, and that is satisfaction enough for any man."

They had come to Fifty-seventh Street, the parting of the ways.

"Good night!" said Knox, holding out his hand. "You'll dine with me to-morrow at seven?"

"I'll lunch with you at one, and we'll look up that apartment we spoke about."

"Right!" cried Knox contentedly. "Until to-morrow at one, then!"

They parted, and the night swallowed them both.

The second of "The Nocturnal Adventures of Nicholas Knox," entitled "The Mile-a-Minute Boat," by George Foxhall, will appear in the December Number.

“BORU”

The Story of an Irish Wolf Hound by J. Allan Dunn

Commences in December PEOPLE'S.

Marty Esmond's Arm

By Wm.
Almon
Wolff

Author of
"In the Last Mile,"
"Baseball and
the Black
Art," etc.



"For the last three seasons Esmond had been changing his method in the box, and now the change was complete. He no longer relied at all on speed; a fast ball, when he pitched it at all, was mixed in simply to baffle the batters. He depended now on his control, on his ability to make the ball break as he pleased, to cut the corners."

WHEN the Eagles began their final dash for the pennant, in September, they were in a position to join the hot race to the wire because of the pitching of Marty Esmond. Marty had been pitching for the Eagles for nine years, and for a couple of seasons sporting cartoonists had pictured him, with white locks and a cane, hobbling into the box. He was exactly thirty years old, according to the records in the family Bible, but in league baseball he was a veteran of veterans. Not a man on the team now playing as a regular had been with the club when Marty pitched his first game. He was the one survivor of Manager Pat Dugan's first championship nine.

Up to the middle of September, in that year, Marty had pitched twenty-five games for the Eagles. Of these he had won seventeen, and six of the eight he had lost had been decided against him in April and May. The spring had been cold and rainy, and a veteran pitcher like Esmond needs clear, hot days to be at his best; a hot sun to bake out his muscles. Young pitchers do well enough in arctic weather; the old-timers dread the days when the stands are sparsely filled with shivering fans in overcoats and the coaches at first and third wrap themselves warmly in sweaters or mackinaws.

It looked, in the first weeks of that

season, as if Esmond was going back; as if he had about come to the end of his usefulness as an Eagle pitcher. Fortunately, however, for the team's standing in the race, appearances were misleading. With the coming of real weather, in June, he began to pitch, seemingly, as well as ever.

But it was a different sort of pitching. For the last three seasons Esmond had been changing his method in the box, and now the change was complete. He no longer relied at all on speed; a fast ball, when he pitched it at all, was mixed in simply to baffle the batters. He depended now on his control, on his ability to make the ball break as he pleased, to cut the corners. When the Eagles had a safe lead he served up balls that were easy to hit, trusting to his fielders to cut off hard drives; settling down to pitch only when there were men on bases and there was a real and absolute necessity for him to give of his best.

Pat Dugan knew that Esmond was going back; Charley Greene, now his regular catcher, knew it. But no one except himself knew the agony that Esmond endured during and after every game; the shooting pains that did not disappear from upper-arm and shoulder muscles for several hours after the last ball was pitched, despite the expert ministrations of Sam Jackson, the prince of rubbers.

Every day, before he pitched, Marty submitted himself to Sam, and the muscles of arm and shoulder were rubbed and kneaded until they were soft and pliable. But they tightened up under the strain of actual pitching, and every night, as Sam pounded and rubbed, and kneaded and pulled, Marty swore that nothing would induce him to go through the pain and torment again. But he knew, even as he made that resolution, that he would keep on, just as he knew that this was his last season. The stiffening that would come in the long win-

ter meant the end. The hot days of the Texas spring had rejuvenated him for the last time; next year he would be unable to pitch.

So, when this season was over, he would have to quit, and his one purpose now was to help the Eagles into another world's series.

It wasn't ambition alone that made Marty so keen to get into one more world's series. Of course he wanted to wind up his career on the diamond in a blaze of that sort of glory, but more than the glory he wanted—and needed—the extra money. Even a losing share of world's series receipts meant a check for about two thousand dollars; a winner's share might be half as much again. It was on that check, which hadn't yet been earned, that Esmond had to depend for a new start in life. He hadn't saved a cent; hadn't been able to.

Except for the anxiety he felt as to his future, Esmond took the inevitable and inexorably approaching end of his career as an Eagle calmly enough. He wasn't sorry for himself. Ball players, as a rule, know about how long they may expect to remain in fast company. They are sorry to leave it; they are sorry to see friends slow up and go to the minors. But they don't regard such things as tragic, certain authors to the contrary notwithstanding. Most of them, nowadays, have a comfortable nest egg laid up for the days when they have to leave the bench, and a good many spend their winters building up a business that they can step into when their playing days are over. Even the improvident ones can, as a rule, depend upon from two to five extra years in good minor leagues, where the pay is smaller, but is still big enough to give them time to get ready for other work.

Esmond, unfortunately, wasn't so lucky. When he stopped pitching for the Eagles it would be because he

wasn't physically able to pitch at all any more, not because he had lost just that fine bit of added skill that makes the difference between a major leaguer and a minor-league star.

The final month of the pennant race that year developed into a wild, nerve-racking drive, with the Eagles and the Kites both in the hunt to the very end. Pat Dugan, a veritable genius of the game, grew thin under the strain. He confided to Esmond and one or two others that he was losing a lot of sleep. On the bench, he was like a wild man. Errors that were made with the hands he could forgive; slow thinking, wrong thinking, resulting in what ball players call a bone-head play, drove him mad.

He lashed his young players unmercifully with his tongue when they went wrong. He had to, as he saw it. To come into the stretch, with a chance for the pennant, they had to play just a little bit better than they knew how, and only Dugan knew how much depended on their success. Let them win, this year, and they would be confident, irresistible for two or three more seasons; but if they lost, they would lose more than a pennant—they would lose, he knew, the chance to be transformed from a squad of promising players into one of those great baseball machines that stand out in the history of the game.

The youngsters on the team didn't mind the abuse. They were dazzled by the glamour of actually being in a real pennant fight. But Marty Esmond had as much at stake, in his way, as Dugan himself. His nerves were just as stretched and taut as Dugan's own, and when the manager called him down publicly for mistakes in pitching, mistakes that were due to the imperative necessity of saving his arm, Esmond grew hot and sullen. In ordinary times, he and Dugan liked one another; but these were not ordinary times.

Then, with less than a week of the race left, the climax came. Both the Kites and the Eagles were playing out the season against second-division teams. If both clubs won all their games the Eagles would win the pennant by a single half game. The standing then would be: Eagles, won, 97; lost, 56; pc., .634. Kites, won, 97; lost, 57; pc., .630. There was a postponed game that the Eagles couldn't play off; but if the Eagles lost one of the half dozen games that remained, and the Kites won all of theirs, the Kites would win the pennant, for the percentage of the Eagles would drop to .627.

Every game counted; none was more important than another. But it happened that circumstances gave a fictitious importance to a Saturday affair in which Marty Esmond pitched. The stands were packed. Even the fact that the tail-end Reds were playing couldn't keep the crowds away at such a crisis. The Reds turned loose a young pitcher who was the sensation of the whole league, one Schultz, who had joined the Reds too late to improve their standing, but was full of promise for succeeding years. He had beaten every team in the league. The last time the Eagles had faced him they had made two hits and no runs. In the first inning, errors behind Schultz gave the Eagles a run. Marty realized that it was strictly up to him to protect that lead, since the chances were all against any more scoring off Schultz.

So, for eight innings, he bent all his cunning, all his deep knowledge of the art of pitching, to the task. Inning after inning the Eagles went up, swinging wildly at the fancy shoots and dazzling speed of Schultz. Inning after inning, too, the Reds, though they hit Esmond hard, though they had men on the bases almost every time, tried vainly to get the hit that would drive home a run or two. In the pinch, Marty baffled them every time. He worked a con-

stant change of pace when there were men on the bases. At all other times he let them hit the ball, depending on the fielding stars who backed him up. This much he could do; he could determine almost exactly where the ball should be hit, and whenever he pitched a straight ball he turned deliberately and gave the signal to Keohan, the second baseman, who, in turn, signaled to the other fielders to shift, and cover the threatened spot.

Thanks to Marty's strategy, the score, when the Eagles took the field for the ninth inning, was still one to nothing. Three more outs, and the game would be won. The Eagles would not have to face Schultz again this season; no other pitcher they might have to meet would begin to be so dangerous.

Suddenly, in the ninth inning, everything went wrong. The first man up hit to Keohan. The ball, coming easily, took a bad bounce, and shot over his shoulder for a lucky single. The next man sacrificed; Burns, on first base, coming in for a quick play at second, threw just too late to get the runner, and both men were safe. The third batter, swinging wildly, trying to knock the ball out of the park, topped it, and the demon of bad luck turned the hit into one of those slow-rolling, sneaky bounders that are impossible to field. Three men raced for it together; by the time Keohan got it the bases were full, with none out!

Anything would tie the score now—a long fly, a short single. Marty grinned at Keohan as he took the ball, walked slowly back to the box, and stared contemplatively at Hammond, the next batter, who crouched menacingly at the plate. He had pitched hard that day; his shoulder was on fire with quick, stabbing pains that shot up through his neck to the back of his head. Dugan, on the bench, stared at him appealingly. Then, with three pitched balls, Marty struck Hammond out,

while the crowd raised a pæan of delight. Again he paused, and then was startled by another cry from the crowd, a welling shout, made up of derision and delight. He turned and looked at the scoreboard, to see a great five posted for the Terriers in their game with the Kites—in the ninth inning! He smiled, and relaxed. The Kites had lost; that meant that the Eagles could drop this game and still have a chance. But then, as he looked, the score for the Kites went up—a staring six, token of a rally that had won the game for them, after all!

He pitched to the next batter. Ball one! Again; another ball. He tried a curve. Ball three! The ball had refused to break. The pain in his shoulder had redoubled in intensity; it seemed to him that he could not pitch another ball. Dugan came running out. Marty welcomed the respite.

"You've got to give him curves," said Dugan tensely. "Even if you walk him, don't let him hit it! If he walks, you force in a run; but we've still got a chance to keep the score tied. Don't let him hit it!"

Once more Marty pitched. This time he curved the ball. His shoulder muscles shrieked as he achieved the task. Strike one! Then he knew, suddenly, that he could pitch no more curves. He must depend on the team behind him. At his signal, Greene came out anxiously.

"Can't help it," growled Marty. "I'm going to give him a fast one on the inside. He ought to hit it to Keohan for a double play."

Straight and true the ball flew for the plate. The batter lunged forward; the ball, a white streak, cut the grass a foot beyond Keohan's outstretched fingers. A clean hit to center! Two runs were in! Dugan, raving like a madman, tore into the diamond.

"Get off the field!" he screamed at Marty. "You threw the game—and the

pennant, most likely. What's the matter—you got money up on the Kites?"

Another pitcher came in. He retired the Reds with one more run, but the mischief was done. Marty had not finished dressing when the Eagles, discouraged, disgusted, sullen in defeat, poured into the clubhouse, without having been able even to get a man to first in their half of the ninth. And there he and Dugan growled and spat at one another like two angry cats, Dugan full of anger at Marty's disobedience, Esmond resenting Dugan's insinuation with all the strength that was in him. He might have guessed that it had been only a hasty taunt; that Dugan himself had probably forgotten it by now. But the words rankled, left him furious, as, without waiting for Jackson's rub-down, he made his way to the street.

If Marty had told Dugan the truth about his arm there would have been no trouble; but he couldn't bring himself to do that, somehow. Even though he knew that his pitching days were over, he still hoped against hope that the winter's rest might work some miracle; that the spring would see him restored to some measure of his former ability. This was foolish, no doubt, but certainly it was human.

That night he paid for his neglect to submit to Sam Jackson's rubbing. The pain in his arm and shoulder kept him awake. In the morning it was not much better. He went to a doctor who knew him, of course, and didn't try to hide his surprise and interest.

"I'll be frank, Mr. Esmond," he said. "It doesn't look very good. It may be neuritis—it may be just a temporary affection of the muscles. I'd prescribe a complete rest, electrical treatment—perhaps mud baths and such things at some spa. Oh, you needn't shake your head! I'm not going to prescribe at all. I'm going to do something highly unprofessional—send you to an osteopath. I don't say he can cure you, but

he'll help the pain, and he can't do you any harm."

"Osteopath, eh?" said Marty. "How much will he soak me, doc?"

"What do you care?" asked Doctor Emerson quickly; too quickly, if Marty had been in a noticing mood. "We all know the sort of salaries you fellows get."

"Oh, well!" Marty flushed. "I'm no pauper, exactly, but a lot of that talk about big salaries is bunk, doc. You don't want to believe everything those baseball reporters write."

"Well, don't worry," advised Emerson. "Kammer won't charge you too much; and it'll be worth it. Give him this card."

Esmond had just happened to visit Emerson. He knew no doctors, except the club physician, and he had purposely avoided him. Emerson's sign was the first he saw after he left his hotel, and that had controlled his choice. One doctor, he thought, would do as well as another. Had he asked for an opinion as to Emerson from those qualified to give it, he would have heard nothing against the doctor's professional skill; but he might have heard some of the stories about him that were current, stories of his rather lurid outbreaks amid the white lights of the city; of his intimacy with certain gamblers. Probably this would have made no difference, however. Marty might have felt, and justly, that Emerson could act as he pleased, without affecting his ability to heal a sore arm.

Doctor Kammer, the osteopath, diagnosed the trouble with Marty's arm quickly enough.

"You must not pitch again this season," he said. "If you do—that will almost certainly be the end. If you rest now, and submit to treatment, you may have an arm next spring as good as it was five years ago. I do not think you will, but you may; and it is certain that you can then do some pitching. But

if you abuse your arm any more now, if you subject it to any great strain, you may have very serious trouble—trouble so serious that you will not be able to write, to do the most ordinary things which arms are for. Now I will give you a treatment that will relieve your pain."

Marty left Kammer's office in a thoughtful mood. He took little stock in the suggestion that he might be able to pitch another season or so. No matter what doctors said, down in the bottom of his heart he knew. But about taking a rest now? He would almost certainly be called on for one more game, and, if the Kites happened to lose another game, and so let the Eagles into the world's series, after all, he would pitch one game at least of the big series. The way his arm felt now, he could do it, too. Why couldn't he have a treatment from Kammer every day, and take the chance?

Relief from pain helped his mental attitude. He worried less about the future. Something would turn up. He had lots of friends; he ought to land a good job, even without the big world's series check to tide him over. He decided to spend the rest of his Sunday in the country. He wanted to forget baseball for a while, anyhow.

When he came back, he dropped off a trolley car outside his hotel. He didn't intend to go in, though it was the unofficial headquarters of the Eagles. But three Eagles, spying him, rushed out, slapped him on the back, and dragged him into the lobby. There a meeting of jubilation was in full progress, with ball players, fans, and all and sundry taking part. The incredible had come to pass. The Kites had dropped two games of a double-header that Sunday afternoon, in their home town in the West. They had cracked under the strain. The disaster was due, it might well be, to overconfidence, the result of the Eagles' defeat of the pre-

vious day. Now the Eagles had their margin again; they could even afford to lose another game, and still win the pennant. For the first time in weeks Pat Dugan was smiling. He greeted Esmond jovially.

"Hello there, Marty, old boy!" he said. "Some news, what? Say! Forget that panning I handed you yesterday. It was pretty raw, but I didn't mean a word of it, really."

But Marty was not to be so easily appeased. His look was still sullen.

"I guess you meant it, right enough," he said; "and I guess you'd still be meaning it if the Kites had won those games to-day."

Dugan looked black for a moment. Then he grinned.

"Chase yourself off to bed, Marty," he said. "You're tired, old boy. Well, take it easy. I'll save you this week—so you'll be right for the big series. We'll be depending on you for that, you know."

Marty went off, glowering. So far as he could know, his meeting with Doctor Emerson, just outside of the hotel, was the result of pure chance.

"Well, how's the arm? Kammer fix it up?" asked the doctor.

"Sure! Feels great!" said Esmond shortly.

"Say, I heard about the roasting you got yesterday," Emerson continued. He passed his arm through Marty's in friendly fashion. "Rough stuff, that! Use you all up, and then pan you when you were suffering torture every time you threw a ball!"

The sympathetic note got an instant response from Marty. He was just in the mood to be confidential. He liked his associates on the team well enough, but he was a survivor of an older generation. These youngsters had their own friendships, naturally. He had had his intimates in the past, and they were scattered now. Some were in the minors; some had quit the game alto-

gether. There was no one to whom he could unburden himself. Consequently, before he quite realized what he was doing, he was telling Emerson everything.

"Gad! That's tough—it certainly is!" said the doctor. "I guess we outsiders get to thinking you ball players all have it easy. But who'd ever think a club like the Eagles would treat you so? They'd turn you off next spring, you say, if your arm was gone?"

"Oh, sure! Why not?"

"They ought to do something for you. You've made thousands for the club. Why, it's because of you that they're practically sure to get into the world's series. How about the series? Who'll win it?"

"We will—on the dope," said Esmond promptly. "The odds'll be on us, too. I'm good for one winning game, young Bentley ought to win twice, and the rest of the staff can pull us through once, among the lot of them. The Herons win in their league because they got so far ahead at the start no one could catch them. But they've gone bad the last few weeks. Their pitchers are on the bum, and Spike Mallo out with a broken leg."

"That's right," said Emerson thoughtfully. "I heard the betting would be about three to one on the Eagles. Some chance for a clean-up—if they lost."

"Don't you worry any about our losing," said Esmond. "If we beat out the Kites, we should worry about the Herons! They're not in our class—not the way they've been shot to pieces."

"I suppose not, but just the same there's no law against thinking about what a clean-up there could be if any one fixed it for the Eagles to lose, is there?"

Their eyes met, and in that moment Esmond began to understand. Neither of them said anything, but the pitcher's eyes were the first to fall. He knew now what was in Emerson's mind, and

he saw a way to end his diamond career with a small fortune, instead of just enough to give him a start. After all, the receipts, his share of a world's series, could not be figured in advance. Bad weather, any one of a dozen reasons, might cut down attendance. The thought was planted in his mind, at all events.

"I saw Kammer," said Emerson, with seeming irrelevance. "He says he told you not to pitch again."

"That's all he knows," said Esmond. "I've got to get in on that series."

"But suppose your arm went bad during a game? That might happen."

"Sure—it might!"

Emerson was wise. He said nothing more. They parted. But Marty was not surprised when he learned from the clerk of the hotel, in answer to his discreet questions, that Emerson numbered among his patients some of the biggest gamblers in town, including one man who had tried to start a nation-wide weekly pool on the standing of the big-league clubs, a scheme that had been broken up by the National Commission, which knew that the taint of gambling, once it affected baseball, would kill the game, as it had killed horse-racing in almost every State in the Union.

In the middle of that week the Kites dropped another game, and the Eagles clinched the pennant, even if they lost the rest of their contests. At once, world's series talk dominated the city. There was a good deal of betting, in a small way. The odds, as Emerson had heard they would, favored the Eagles. They had passed successfully through their great crisis, and the consensus of expert opinion favored them now over the Herons.

Dugan, the pennant once won, became his normal, genial self. He did everything he could to encourage his team of youngsters. He wanted them to go against the Herons full of confidence

in themselves, convinced that they were unbeatable. The result, as a matter of fact, did not greatly worry him. He expected his team to win, but he knew that he could accept defeat with equanimity, provided they made a good showing. This, of course, before the first game. After the series had once begun he would be after victory hammer and tongs. That was Dugan. He couldn't let up once the fight was on.

As for Marty Esmond, he saw the day for the first game approaching with mingled, uncertain feelings. His own injuries, as he saw them, dominated him. Emerson had worked skillfully on his feelings. He couldn't forget Dugan's accusation. He had done his best, and, as a reward, had been publicly accused of throwing a game. If he was going to be suspected, why shouldn't he get something out of it? Why shouldn't he feather his own nest, if he had the chance? The club to which he had given the best years of his life—the loyalty of nine years—to which, finally, he had sacrificed his greatest asset, his pitching arm, would cast him off without a thought as soon as he could no longer serve it.

Emerson knew that Marty would think along those lines. He met him, seemingly by accident, every evening. On the day before the first game of the great series he struck home.

"A lot of my friends are lined up," he said. "They've got this series doped out. It's going to run to six or seven games. You'll pitch the deciding game. If they know you're with us, they'll put up a lot of money. If they win, there'll be five thousand in it for you. You can pitch good, winning ball in the first game. That'll only lengthen the odds."

"How would I be sure of getting the money?" asked Marty.

"It'll be put in a safe-deposit box. If the Eagles lose, you can get the key from Tim Casey. You know him. He's held a good many hundred thousands of

dollars in stakes. He'll never squeal, either. What do you say?"

They were in front of Esmond's hotel, and at that moment the demon of mischance sent Pat Dugan by on the other side of the street. He saw Esmond, and came over.

"Just a minute, Marty," he said. He led him away. "What's the matter with you?" he asked. "Are you plumb crazy, letting yourself be seen with that crook? He's mixed up with gamblers. Why, if some of the newspaper boys saw you with him, they'd swear you were rigging up a plant."

"Yeh; an' I suppose they'd remember what you said to me on the field!" flamed Marty. "I suppose you think I'm crooked?"

"I think you're a damned fool—that's all!" snapped Dugan, and turned on his heel.

Esmond went back to the doctor in a white rage. He had made up his mind to turn down the offer, but now!

"I'm with you," he said.

He wouldn't let any man talk to him as Dugan had. He'd show them, by Jiminy!

The next day the big series began. Pat Dugan crossed the predictions of all the newspaper writers by sending young Bentley to the mound instead of Esmond, the old master.

"I'm going to save you, Marty," he said. "Your arm won't stand the work, but—you've still got the headpiece. I want to keep you, like an ace in the hole, for a pinch. This series is going to be close. If she runs to seven games, you'll pitch the last one—see? Or any time we need one game to win the big money, you pitch it."

Marty listened sullenly. He didn't believe Dugan. He thought the manager distrusted him, and he was more than ever convinced that Dugan had meant his taunt on that disastrous Saturday.

"My arm's all right now," he growled.

"I've been having an osteopath man-handle it every day——"

"Sure it's all right! Keep it so," said Dugan. "You'll have use for it. These birds are going to fight all the way."

That world's series was destined to go down as a classic. It was a fight from the first inning of the first game. The Eagles took that; the Herons came right back in the second, and tied up the series. Then the teams jumped West, and broke even again in the Heron stronghold. But, despite the closeness of the fight, the attendance in those first four games was disappointing. The Herons came from a small city, that was not, in any case, a good baseball town, and threatening weather had kept a lot of people away. Marty scowled as he read the receipts. The winners' share would be less than twenty-five hundred dollars apiece, for it is in the receipts of the first four games only that the players share.

Back East went the teams. The Herons won the fifth game. Another jump. The Eagles tied up the series. That made a seventh game necessary, and the toss of a coin brought it to the home of the Eagles.

"He won't let me pitch—he was only stringing me," thought Esmond to himself. But in the train, on the way home, Dugan told him quietly that he depended upon him. The newspapers announced that he was to pitch. On the morning of the last game, before he had finished dressing, Emerson knocked at his door.

"Well, it's up to you," he said. "The whole roll's down on the Herons."

"Get out!" growled Marty. "You needn't remind me."

The rest of nearly two weeks, and the constant treatments by Kammer, had made his arm feel as good as new; but that morning, when he went to the osteopath for a final treatment, Kammer scowled.

"Are you going to pitch?" he asked.

Marty nodded. "Well, it'll spoil all I've done for you. You'll be lucky if you can finish the game." He went into the reasons for what he said. Marty got some vague notion of certain ligaments and tendons, still too weak to bear the strain of pitching. He only smiled. They would furnish a fine alibi.

He warmed up easily before the game, just tossing the ball. Then he began to pitch, with an ease, a freedom from effort, he had not known all season. Ferber, the Heron star, opposed him. He had won two games already, shutting the Eagles out in one and allowing a single run in the second. He was young, as big as all outdoors, and seemingly without a nerve in his body. For six innings he and Marty indulged in as pretty a pitching duel as the most rabid enthusiast could ask for.

"I'll let 'em get a run—that'll be enough," thought Marty. "We'll never score on this bird."

In the seventh, Marty himself, who was proverbial for his weak batting, even among pitchers, swung wildly at one of Ferber's shoots, and lifted it into the right-field stand for the flukiest of home runs. The whole team slapped him on the back, grasped his hand, as he came to the bench, and the crowd went mad. But Marty saw Emerson scowling from a box right behind the Eagle bench. He dared not recognize the doctor, but surely any one must know what an accidental hit that had been.

In the eighth inning his arm began to trouble him. He stopped curving the ball and sent it up straight. But, though ringing drives left the Herons' bats, Marty's fielders performed prodigies behind him. Two hits went safe, but little Keohan, with two men on the bases, flew over toward third, speared a screaming liner, dropped back on second for the second out, and shot the ball to first in time for a triple play.

It was sheer robbery. Carson, who had hit the ball, had been entitled to a three-bagger, perhaps a home run.

"Got a horseshoe in that glove?" asked Dugan, when Marty went to the bench.

"Why don't you send Bergman in, if you don't like the way I'm pitching?" snapped Marty. Bergman had spent the afternoon in center field, tossing a few balls now and then, to be ready in case of need. But Dugan said nothing more, only stared hard at Marty, who turned to the water cooler for a drink.

Then came the ninth inning. The crowd was roaring. Marty turned, as he went to the box, and caught a glimpse of Emerson's strained, white face. It was the last chance. His arm was sore now; constant twinges warned him that Kammer had been right. In about two minutes he changed the whole aspect of the game. He passed the first man; the next bunted, and Marty messed up the simple task of throwing him out, so that two men were on the bases. Then, trying to catch the man on first, he threw low to Burns, and both runners advanced. That spoiled the chance for a double play. On the next ball pitched, Keohan, getting a slow ball, held it so long to keep the man on third from scoring that the bases were full.

"Take him out!" roared the crowd in unison, and from the bench came Dugan, beckoning to Marty. They met just off the diamond.

"Marty, I'm on to you," said Dugan. "You're trying to throw this game. You've done it—because you know Bergman isn't good enough to stop 'em with the bases full. He's no good after a man gets on. You're the only man we've got that can still win this game—"

"My arm," began Marty. Dugan's calm, pitying tone upset him; he couldn't bluster, somehow.

"I know," said Dugan. "Marty—you're going to stay in. *I'm going to*

trust to you—to the man that's been my chief reliance for nine years. I'm going to tell you something you haven't known—or any of the boys. This is my last game in uniform. I'm through to-day. You've started to throw this game—but I'm going to trust to you to come back and be the white man you've always been before."

He turned away quickly and went back to the bench.

"Pat!" called Marty. "Pat——"

He got no answer. Dazed, wondering, he went back and faced the batter, the howling mob in the stands. *Dugan trusted him!* And, all at once, the enormity of what he had agreed to do, the blackness of his treachery, came over him. He knew he couldn't do it. All those nine years of loyalty to Dugan, to the great game, swept over him. He set his teeth. Dugan was right. He, and he alone, could still save the day—if his arm lasted.

Then he began to pitch. Not for three years had he used such speed, such consummate skill. The first batter watched three balls cut the corners of the plate, and was out on strikes. For the second, remembering his weakness, Marty pitched a drop, a ball that involved an awful tearing of his shoulder muscles; but he had his reward. The batter struck, lost the ball on the drop, and sent it straight up in the air, to fall into Greene's big mitt for the second out.

But now great beads of sweat stood out on Marty's forehead. For a moment the pain in his shoulder made him dizzy, so that black spots danced before his eyes. One man to get, and his arm was going. It was the crisis of which Kammer had warned him. The nails of his left hand bit into the flesh and drew blood. He shot over a swift strike, seeing the batter out of position. Then a curve, a wide, sweeping ball, that broke and came in after the batter had decided to let it pass. Two strikes

—two out. He was in agony. He had one ball left, his old fast ball, with a fast rise; but he had not used it since early in July; even then the strain had been too much. To pitch it now meant, he knew, the breaking of those overstrained ligaments. But then, as the base runners all started, he pitched it. The batter swung—missed it by a foot. The game was over—the Eagles were champions of the world, but Marty Esmond's arm hung, numb and useless, by his side.

The club doctor lifted it in the clubhouse—looked grave.

"You'll be able to use it—but not to pitch," he said. "You finished it in that last inning."

"Never mind," said Dugan crisply. "Marty, come here!" He took him aside. "Marty, I was onto that business with Emerson. But—I knew you. You made good. Marty, I'm quitting to be president of the club. I've bought the stock. There'll be a new manager—and his name will be Marty Esmond."

GREATER LOVE

By BRAM STOKER

"There's a deal of poetry an' story-tellin' in books; but, Lor' bless ye, if ye could see the heart right through of even such men as me, you'd have no need o' books when you wanted poetry and romance."

WE was just standin' here at about eleven in the evenin', an' the moon was beginnin' to rise. We could see the little patch of light growin' bigger an' bigger, just as it is now, an' we knew that before many moments the light would be up over the sea. My back was to the sea, an' Bill was leanin' agin' the handrail, just like you now.

It ain't much, sir, after all; leastwise to you; but it was, aye, an' it is, a deal to me, for it has all my life in it, such as it is. There's a deal of poetry an' story-tellin' in books; but, Lor' bless ye, if ye could see the heart right through of even such men as me, you'd have no need o' books when you wanted poetry and romance. I often think that them chaps in them don't feel a bit more nor we do when things is happenin'; it's only when they're written down that they become heroes an' martyrs, an' suchlike. Why, Bill was as big a hero as any of them. I often wished as how

I could write, that I might tell all about him.

Howsumdever, if I can't write, I can talk, an' if you're not in a hurry, an' I'll wait till I tell you *all*, I'll be proud. It does me good to talk about Bill.

Well, when I turned round an' faced Bill I see his eyes with the light in 'em, an' they was glistenin'. Bill gives a big gulp, an' says to me:

"Joe, the world's a big place, big enough for you an' me to live in without quarrelin'. An', mayhap, the same God as made one woman would make another, an' we might both live an' be happy. You an' me has been comrades for long, an' God knows that, next to Mary, I'd be sad to see you die, so whatever comes, we won't quarrel or think hard of one another, sure we won't, Joe."

He put out his hand, an' I took it sudden. We held hands for a long time. I thought he was in low spirits, and I wished to cheer him, so I says:

"Why, Bill, who talks o' dyin', that's as hearty as we?"

He shook his head sadly, an' says he:

"Joe, I don't vally my life at a pin's head, an' I ain't afraid to die. For *her* sake or for yours—aye, even for her pleasure—I'd— No matter. Just see if I turn coward if I ever get the chance to do her a service."

Well, we stood there for a long time. Neither of us said a word, for I didn't like to speak, although I would several times have liked to ask him a question. An' then I gave up wishin' to speak, an' began to think, like him.

I thought of all the time Bill an' me had been friends an' comrades, an' how fond we were both of Mary, an' she of us. Ye see, when we was all children, the little thing took such a fancy for both of us that we couldn't help likin' her for it, and so we became, in course of time, like big brothers to her. She would come down on the shore with Bill an' me an' sit quiet all the day an' never say a word or do anything to annoy us or put us out. Sometimes we'd go out sailin', an' then she would come an' sit beside whoever was steerin' till he'd ask her to come up an' sit on his knee. Then she'd put up her little arms round his neck an' kiss him, an' would stay as quiet as a mouse till she'd have to change her place. That was the way, sir, that we both came to be so fond of her.

An', sure enough, when she began to grow up, Bill an' me wanted none other but her. An' the more she grew, the prouder we were of her, till at last we found out that we were both of us in love with her. But we never told her so, or let her see it; an' she had grown up so among us that she never suspected it. She said so long after.

Then Bill an' me held a kind of council about what was to be done, an' so we came to be talkin' on the bridge that night. Mary was growin' into a young

woman, an' we feared that some other chap might take her fancy, if one of us didn't get her at once. Bill was very serious, far more serious than me, for I had somehow got the idea into my head as how Mary cared for me, an' as long as I felt that I couldn't feel either unhappy or downhearted.

All at once Bill's face grew brighter, an' there was a soft look in his eyes.

"Joe," he says, "whatever happens, Mary must never hang her head. The lass is tender-hearted, and she likes both of us, we know; an' as she can only love one of us, it might pain her to think that when she was marryin' one man she was leavin' a hole in the life of his comrade. So she must never know as how we both love her, if we can prevent it."

When we got that far, I began to grow uneasy. I began to distrust Bill—God forgive me for it—an' to think that maybe he was fixin' some plan for to cut me out. I must have been jealous, that was it. But I was punished for my distrust when he went on:

"Joe, old lad, we both love her an' we love each other; an' God knows I'd go away, an' willin', an' leave her to you, but who knows that mayhap she'd like me better of the two. Women is queer creatures in lettin' a fellow see their hearts till they see his first."

Then he stayed quiet, an' so I says to him:

"How are we to manage to do that, Bill? If we tell her, won't she know that we both love her? An' you said you wouldn't like her to do that."

"That's just what I was thinkin' of," he says. "An' I see how we may do it. One of us must go to her an' find out if she loves him, an' if she does, the other will say nothin'."

I felt feared, so I asked him:

"Who is to go, Bill?"

He came over an' took me by the shoulder, an' says he:

"Joe, so far as I can see, the lass

cares for you the most; you must go first an' find out."

I tried not to appear joyful, an' I says:

"Bill, that isn't fair; whoever goes first has the best chance. Why won't you go, or why not draw lots?" I've had a many hard tussles in my time, both with men an' things, but I never had such a struggle as I had to say them words.

"Joe," says Bill, "you must do all you can to win her yourself, an' don't let any thoughts of me hinder you. I'll be best pleased by seein' her an' you happy, if so be she loves you." Then he stood up from leaning on the rail, an' says he:

"Joe, give me your hand before we go, an' mind, I charge you on your honor as a man, never while I'm livin', to let Mary know as how I loved her, in case she chooses you." So I promised. I felt Bill's hand grip like a vise, an' then we turned an' walked away home an' never spoke another word that night, either of us.

I didn't sleep much that night, and when it began to get to mornin' I got up an' went down to the sea an' had a swim, an' that freshened me up somewhat. I wasn't much of a swimmer myself, but I could manage to keep myself up pretty well. That was the point where I envied Bill most of all. He was the finest swimmer I ever see. He did a many things well, an' no lad in this county could come near him in anything he chose to do; but in swimmin' none could come anigh him at all. An' many's the time it stood to others as well as himself.

Well, when I had had my bathe, I went up toward Mary's home, an' found myself goin' in to ask her straight off to marry me. Then I began to think it was too early for Mary to be up; so I stole away on tiptoe, an' walked round the house. Then I thought I'd go an' look up Bill, an' came anigh his

house. But when I came to the door, as I didn't like to knock, I thought I'd speer in, an' see if he was asleep. So I stole to the window an' looked in.

I never shall forget to my dyin' day what I saw then. I wasn't a bad fellow, thank God, at any time, but I couldn't be a bad fellow or do anything I thought very wrong after that. There was Bill, just as I had left him the night before. He had never changed his clothes, an' the candle was flickerin' down in the socket, unheeded. He was kneelin' down by the bed, with his arms stretched out before him, an' his face down on the quilt. That was thirty-seven year ago, but it seems like yesterday. I thought at first he was sleepin', but I saw from a movement he made that he was awake. So I stole away, guiltylike, an' went down an' stood beside the sea. I took off my hat, an' let the wind blow about my forehead, for somehow it felt burnin', an' I looked out over the sea for long. Somehow my heart beat like as if it was lead, an' I felt half choked. I dunno how long I would have stayed there only for Bill. He came behind me, and put his hand on my shoulder and said, sudden:

"Why, Joe, what are you doin' here?"

I turned, startled, an' saw that he was smilin'. I was so thunderstruck at seein' the change, that for a moment I said nothin'. He says to me again:

"Joe, I thought you'd have more to do than think of eatin' this mornin', an' it's bad to court on an empty stomach! So come up to my place; I've got breakfast for the both of us."

I couldn't realize that this hearty chap was the man I saw prayin' after the long night. I looked at him keenly, but could see no sign of his actin' a part in his face. He was gayer an' livelier than ever, an' in such good spirits that he made me gay, too. I couldn't forget how I'd seen him a short while

since; but I laid the thought by, an' didn't let it trouble me. I went up to his place. It was clean an' tidy as ever, an' the breakfast was ready. He made me eat some, an' when I was done, he brushed me up an' tidied me, an' says he:

"Go in an' win, old lad. God bless ye!" I went away toward Mary's house; but before I lost sight of Bill, I turned, an' he waved his hand to me with a kind smile an' went in an' shut the door.

I went on toward Mary's; but the farther I went the slower I got. An' when I got to the garden gate I stopped altogether. I stayed moonin' about there for a while, till at last Mary sees me an' comes out. I don't know how to tell you what took place then. I ain't more bashfuller than a man of my years ought to be, but somehow it comes rough on a man to tell this kind of thing. Oh, no; it ain't that I don't remember it all; for I do, well. But, ye see—ye won't laugh at me? I know'd ye wouldn't; I ax yer pardon. Well, to prove it to ye, I'll say what I never said yet to mortal, except Mary—an' that only once.

Mary comes out to me, runnin' like a little girl, with her face all dimplin' over with pleasure, an' she says:

"Why, Joe, what brings you here at this hour? Come in, Joe! Mother, here's Joe! Have you had your breakfast, Joe? Come in!"

I felt that I would never have courage to speak out before her mother if I went into the cottage, so I stayed beside the gate an' let her talk on. As I looked at her then, I could hardly believe what I was come for; it seemed like doin' something wrong to try to change her from what she was. She looked so lovely an' so bright that it seemed a pity ever to wish her to be aught else—even my own wife. An', beside, the thought came an' hit me hard, that mayhap she wouldn't have

me, after all. I tried to think on that; but, Lor' bless ye, I couldn't. It seemed somethin' so terrible that I couldn't think it. However, I stood still, sayin' nothin', till she began to notice. I wasn't used to be sheepish before Mary or any one else; so when she had done her talkin' she looked at me sudden, an' then her eyes fell, an', after a moment, she blushed up to the roots of her hair an' says:

"Joe, what's the matter with you? You don't look as usual."

I blurted out all in a moment:

"No, Mary; nor I ain't the same as usual, for I'm in trouble."

She came close to me before I could say any more—she wasn't lookin' down or blushin' then—an' she says:

"Oh, Joe, I'm sorry for that." An' she put her arm on my shoulder. Then she went on, in a kind o' tender voice:

"Did you tell Bill?"

"Yes," I says.

"And what did he say?"

"He told me to come to you!"

"To me, Joe?" she says, an' looked puzzled.

"Yes," I says, in despair like. "I'm in trouble, Mary, for I want you to marry me."

"Oh, Joe!" she says, an' drew away a little. Then she says to me, with a queer look on her face:

"Joe, run an' tell Bill I want to see him—to come as soon as he can."

Well, them words went through me like so many knives, an' if ever I could have hated Bill, it would have been then. What could she want Bill for, I thinks to myself, but to find out if he loves her, too—an' to have him? I thinks how mad a woman would be to have me when she could get a man like Bill. I was afraid to say anything, so I set off smart for him, for I feared I wouldn't be able to tell him if I didn't go at once. I tried not to think while I was goin' down the road; but I couldn't get her words out of my head.

They seemed to keep time with my feet, an' I heard them over an' over again:

"Tell—Bill—I—want—to—see—him!
Tell—Bill—I—want—to—see—him!"

At last I got to the house, an' found Bill inside, mendin' a net that hung agin' the wall. He turned round quickly when I came in, an' his heart began to beat so hard that I could see it thumpin' inside his guernsey. He saw I wasn't lookin' pleased, so he came near an' put his two hands on my shoulders an' looked me in the face.

"What cheer, Joe?" he says, an' I could see that he was tryin' to control himself. When I told him the message, he began tremblin' all over, an' got as white as a sheet. Then he says to me in a thick kind o' voice:

"Joe, how did she look when she said it?"

I tried to tell him, an' asked him to hurry on.

"In a minute," says he, an' went into the other room.

When he came back I turned round, expectin' to see him got up a bit; but there he was just as he went in, in his old workin' clothes. But he was quiet lookin', an' had a smile on his face.

"Bill, old lad," I says, "aren't ye goin' to tidy up a bit? Mayhap Mary'd like to see ye neat."

"No," he says; "I'll go as I am. If it be as it may be, she won't like me none the worse for comin' quick; an' if it don't be—— Come on, Joe, an' don't keep her waitin'."

Well, we walked up the road without sayin' a word. When we came in sight of Mary's cottage it seemed darker to me than it had been.

Mary came out of the gate to meet us, an' when she spoke to Bill I dropped behind. They two went into the arbor that we had built for her. They sat talkin' for a few minutes—I could see them through the hedge—an' at last I saw Bill bend down his head an' kiss her. She put her arms round his neck

an' kissed him. An' at that the whole of the light seemed to go out of the sky, an' I wished I was dead.

I would have gone away, but I could hardly stir. I leaned up against the hedge, an' didn't mind any more till I heard Bill's voice callin' me. I came in at the gate, puttin' on as good a face as I could, an' came into the arbor.

Bill an' Mary was standin' up, an' Bill's face looked beamin', while Mary's was red as a rose.

Bill beckoned me over, an' when I came near, he says:

"Well, Mary, shall I tell him now?"

"Yes, Bill," she says, in a kind of a whisper; so he says to me:

"Joe, I give her to you! She wouldn't let none do it but me; for she says she loves me like as a brother. Take her, Joe, an' love her well, an' *God* bless ye both!"

He put her in my arms, an' she clung to me.

I was bewildered, an' could hardly see; but when I came to look about there was Mary in my arms, with her face buried in my breast, an' her arms round my neck.

Bill was makin' down the road, upright an' steady as ever. Even then, for a moment, I couldn't think of Mary, for my thoughts went back to when I saw Bill kneelin' beside his bed, with his arms stretched out, an' I felt—if you'll believe me—more sorrow than joy. I know now that Bill had wrestled with the devil that night, an' threw him, if ever a man did. Poor Bill! Poor Bill!

I suppose I needn't tell you what Mary an' me said? It wouldn't sound much, at any rate, altho' it pleased us. When I felt that she loved me I forgot even Bill, an' we was happier than tongue could tell.

Well, the time went on for a month or two, an' we was thinkin' of gettin' married soon. I was gettin' my cottage ready an' spendin' some of the money

I had saved to make it bright for Mary. Bill worked with me early an' late, but it wasn't only his time that he gave to me. He would often go into the town to buy the things I wanted, an' I'm sure he never got them for what he told me. I said nothin', for I knew that it would only hurt him, an' it was little enough that I could do for Bill to let him help if he chose. I used to watch him to see if he wasn't unhappy, but I never seed a sign of sorrow on him. He always looked happy an' bright, an' he worked harder than ever, an' was kinder to all around him. I knew he didn't forget—for how could he forget Mary?—an' I feared at times lest he might fret in secret. But I never seed him grieve. I could hardly imagine, when I would think on it, how Mary came to take me or love me when Bill was nigh her.

Well, the time wasn't long goin' by, for we was happy, an' had all our lives before us, an', at length, the day came round before we was to be married. It was Easter Sunday we was to be married on, an' all the people as knew Mary an' me—an' that was all the village—was goin' to have a grand holiday. We was to go an' have a feast out on the island, an' we was gettin' the boats cleaned an' nice an' smart for the occasion. In coorse, everybody had to bring their own dinners; but we was to join them all together an' make a grand feast. We had got a cask o' beer, an' we was to have great doin's an' a dance on the grass. There's the finest sod for dancin' in the countryside out yonder on the island, an' we'd got Mike Wheeler to bring his fiddle, with an extra set of strings. We weren't to come home till evenin', when the tide turned, an' then we would have a race home.

Well, Bill an' me, we both took tea at Mary's house that evenin', an' when we came home Bill asked me to go into his house for a while an' have a quiet

talk. We lit our pipes, drew up our chairs, an' sat down by the fire an' puffed away, without sayin' a word for some time, an' then Bill says to me:

"Well, Joe, there won't be a man in the church to-morrow that won't envy you—except myself."

I thought of him kneelin' down by the bedside that mornin' when he says that, so I thought to tell him. I put down my pipe an' came an' put my arms on his shoulder, as I used to do when we was boys together, an' told him all I knew. He just shook hands with me, an' says he:

"Joe, it was a hard fight, but, thank God, I won! I've crushed out all the old love now. Why, lad, to-morrow she'll be your wife, an' I'll care for her no more than any other woman—as a sweetheart, I mean, for I'm a brother to her now as long as we live—an' to you, Joe. It ain't that I think less of her, for I'd walk into the fire for her this minute, but—I can't explain it, Joe. You know what I mean."

"Bill," I says, "you've been a true friend to me an' Mary, an' I hope we'll always be able to show how much we both love you. May God judge me hard when I die if ever I have a hard thought of you as long as I live!"

We said no more after that. I went out, but came back in a minute to tell Bill to be sure to come an' wake me if he was up first; but when I was passin' the window I see him hangin' a coat up over it. It wasn't that he thought I'd spy on him again that he did that I saw that in his face; but he feared I might see him again somehow, and that it might pain me.

Well, I woke in the mornin' as soon as it was daylight, an' went down an' had a swim, an' then came home an' brushed my new clothes an' laid out the shirt that Mary had worked for me herself, an' washed as white as snow. Then Bill came down to me. He was to take his breakfast with me that

mornin', an' he came all dressed for the weddin' in a new suit of clothes. He was a real handsome, fine fellow at any time, but he looked like a gentleman that mornin'. Then I thought that Mary must have done right to choose a laborin' man like me rather than a chap like Bill, that was above all of us, except in his heart.

We went off to the church an' waited till Mary an' her mother came. All the people was there outside the porch, an' some of the gentlefolks was inside. The squire's family was in their pew, for, ye see, Mary was a favorite with them all, an' they came early to church to see her married. I felt very solemn then, but I could hardly feel as how Mary was goin' to marry me. There she was, as lovely as an angel, an' blushin' like a rose. I said my "I will" in a low voice, for it seemed awkward to me to say it loud; but Mary said hers out in a clear, sweet voice, an' then the parson blessed us, an' spoke to us so solemn that we both cried, an' Mary nestled up close to me. When it came to kiss the bride, Bill was first, an' claimed the kiss, so the other lads had to give up. Bill bent down an' took her pretty face between his two hands an' kissed her on the forehead.

Agin the weddin' was over, it was time for service, so we all went to our seats—an' I never felt solemn in my life than I did then; nor did Mary, either.

When the service was over we all came out; an' the people stood by on both sides to let Mary an' me walk down the churchyard together an' go first out of the gate.

We all went down to the beach, where the boats was ready on the shore. Some of them was freshly painted, an' a couple had bright ribbons tied about them. Bill's boat was the one that Mary an' me was to go in, an' Bill himself was to pull stroke oak in her. He had got for a crew three of the young

fellows we knew best, an' who was the cracks at rowin', an' we was determined to race all the other boats to the island. The lads had all run on before us, an' when we came down to the beach the boats was all ready, an' the baskets with the dinner put in them, so we all got on board, an' off we started.

Mary an' me, we held the rudder together, an' Bill an' his lads bent to their oars, an' away we flew, an' in a quarter of an hour came to the island, leading the others by a hundred yards. We all got out, an' the lads carried up the baskets to the slope up yonder, where you see the moonlight shine on the island, where there was a fine, level place on the edge of the cliff.

The grass there was short an' as smooth as a table; an' when you stood on the edge of the cliff the water was straight below you, for the rock went sheer some forty feet. Mary an' me stood there on the edge while the lads an' the girls got ready the feast, for they wouldn't let us put hand to anything; an' we looked at the water hurryin' by under us. The tide had turned, an' the water was runnin' like a mill race down away past the island, an' runnin' straight away for the head off there as far as you can see. The currents is very contrary here, so you'd better not get caught in them when you're sailin' or swimmin'.

We all sat down, an' if we didn't enjoy our dinner, all of us, it was a queer thing; an' after dinner was over the girls insisted on havin' a dance. We got the things all cleared off an' danced away for some time, an' then some one proposed blind man's buff. One young fellow was blinded, an' we all stood round; an' then the fun began. The young chap—Mark Somers by name—used to make wild rushes to try an' get some one, an' then the girls yelled out, an' they all scurried away as quick as they could, an' the fun grew greater an' greater. At last he made a dive over

to the place where Mary was standin' near the brink of the cliff. We all yelled to her to take care where she was goin'; but I suppose she thought it was merely our fun, for she laughed an' screamed out like the others—an' stepped backward. Before any one could stop her, she went over the edge of the cliff an' disappeared. I was sittin' up on a rock, an' when I saw her fall over the edge I gave a cry that you might have heard a mile away an' jumped down an' ran across the grass.

But a better man than me was there before me. Bill had pulled off his jacket an' kicked off his shoes, an' was at the edge before me. Before he jumped, he cried out:

"Joe, run for the boats, quick! I'll keep her up till you come. I can swim stronger nor you."

I didn't wait a second, but ran down to where the boats was drawn up on the beach. Some of the chaps came with me as hard as they could run, an' we shoved down the nearest boat. But in spite of all our efforts—an' we was so mad with excitement that not one of us but had the strength of ten—it took us a couple of minutes to get out fair on the water.

Well, when we was fair started I pulled so hard that I broke my oar, an' we had to stop to get another; an' then we had to row all the way round the spur of the rocks out there before we could even see whereabout Mary an' Bill should be. The men an' women on the rocks screamed out to us an' pointed in their direction, an' the boat flew along at every stroke. But the current was mortal strong, an' they had been for nigh five minutes in the water before we caught sight of them. An' it seemed to me to be years before we came anigh them at all. Mary was weighed down with her clothes, an' Bill with his; an', in spite of what a swimmer I knew Bill was, I feared lest we should come too late.

At last we began to close on them. I could see over my shoulder as we rowed. I could only see Mary's face, but that was beacon enough for me. I called to one of the men to slip into my place an' row, an' he did, an' I got out into the bows. There was Mary with her face all white an' her eyes closed, as if she was dead; her hair was all draggin' in the water, an' as the current rolled her along, her dress moved as if it was some strange fish under the water. I could see nothin' of Bill; but I hadn't need to think, for I knew that where Mary was there was Bill somewhere anigh to her. When we came nearer I saw where Bill was.

Look here, he was down under the water, an' with his last breath he was keepin' her afloat till we came. I saw his two hands rise up out of the water, holdin' her up by the hair; but that was all. Many's the time since then that, in spite of all I loved Mary, I was tempted to be cross with her—for we laborin' men is only rough folk, after all, an' we have a deal o' hardship to bear at times. But whenever I was tempted to say a hard word, or even to think hard of her, them two hands of Bill's seemed to rise up between me an' her, and I could no more think or say a hard word than I could stand quiet an' see another man strike her. An' I wouldn't be like for to do that!

Well, we took them into the boat an' came home. Mary recovered, for she had only had the shock of her fall; but when we took in Bill, it was only—

He kept his word that he spoke to me that night; he gave up his life for hers! You'll see that on his tomb in the churchyard that we all put up to him:

"Greater Love Hath No Man Than This: That a Man Shall Give Up His Life For His Friend."

There's no more left like Bill. An' Mary thinks it, too, as well as me.

The Turn of The Tide

By Herman Howard Matteson

Author of "Ten Boaf Bill," etc.



"By a devious route the young officer made his way to the bald, rocky dome of Mount Constitution, which arose twenty-five hundred feet above the sea level, and which, in clear weather, commanded an unobstructed view of no less than fifty islands of the San Juan group."

NO, his folks didn't give him that name; he earned it hisself. You know, 'Cultus' is Siwash talk for all that's ornery, cussed, and devilish. That's him—Cultus Kennedy."

"Is he really so bad," asked the younger man, smiling with the confident arrogance of youth, "or has he one of those traditional bad-man reputations, built upon a trifle originally, and puffed into formidable size through the years and many imaginative repetitions?"

"He's the goods, is Cultus Kennedy. He's swore to kill anybody that squawks on him, and he's swore to kill any officer that tries to take him. He's went across twice on each bet; that I know. My advice to you, Baker, is, if ever you get clost enough to him to take him, have along plenty of help of the quick, ackerate-shootin' variety. Cultus'll murder."

Old man Tracy, owner of one of the best salmon traps on lower Puget Sound, glared from the watch deck to

where the pot and spiller, with several fathoms of net, ripped into useless shreds, lay tossing about upon the tide rips. He drew a long breath, then burst into a torrent of profanity, directed equally at Cultus and his gang of fish pirates, and at Nat Baker and the State fish-and-game commission, of which latter organization the young man was an officer. "You fellers couldn't ketch a sick chub fish if some one gilled and gaffed him first. Why! You—I——"

The old man's lower jaw, pendulous for a moment, snapped shut, biting a final expletive fairly in two. His eyes rested fondly upon the figure of a young girl coming down the dock. "Elly," said he, his voice modulated in an affectionate greeting.

"Father, I just know that you have been scolding Nat—Mr. Baker. You shouldn't. It's hardly fair to expect him to accomplish in a few weeks what

others have tried for years to do, and failed."

"Maybe not. But look at that!" continued the old man irately, pointing to the wreck of the ruined trap. "There's five hundred dollars' damage; and besides, the chances is there was a couple of thousand dollars' worth of fish took out through that hole. And they purty near killed my watchman, Bosquith. His tongue was black as your hat, and stickin' out a foot when I found him this mornin' snubbed to that pile. I'm glad it was no worse. I think a heap of Bosqy. He's a good man. I've a notion to let him off for a week; he'd ketch them devils."

Baker, with gentle sarcasm, ventured to remind Mr. Tracy that his watchman, very recently, indeed, had enjoyed a rare and unusual opportunity to capture the pirates.

"But they snuk up on him," explained Tracy. "They didn't give him no chance. They busted him over the head with a belayin' pin. Well, this hollerin' won't mend this trap."

Ella and Nat, in silence, watched the old man until he disappeared from sight behind one of the warehouses which bordered the shore line. "I had something—something I wanted to speak to your father about," said the young man embarrassedly. "I guess this is rather a poor time."

The girl flushed, but did not directly answer the implied question. "The fish pirates have driven poor father nearly crazy, but you must not mind his savage speech."

"Did you see the watchman, Bosquith, when your father found him tied this morning?" asked Nat abruptly.

Ella gave him a quick, suspicious glance. "Why?"

"I am curious to know exactly how the rope was tied, and whether it was tied tightly."

"Surely, Nat, you do not suspect Bosquith. Be fair. It's foolish, very, very

foolish of you, to be jealous of him. But I'm afraid that you are—the least mite. Father appears to think so, too, and takes a delight in telling me over and again how faithful Bosquith is, and how much money he has saved up. Father thinks——"

"Father thinks that he would like to have Bosquith for a son-in-law. Now, isn't that it? But what does Ella think?"

"Nat," exclaimed she angrily, "I have known Mr. Bosquith a long time, and I like him very much. You must not speak so. Anyway, Mr. Bosquith has proven himself, and, frankly, thus far, you haven't."

Baker's face went scarlet. "No, I haven't," he replied savagely. "But wait! Ella, in less than twenty-four hours I will have proven myself; by this time to-morrow Cultus and his gang will be in irons. I mean it!"

"You mean it? How?"

"Not a living soul, even my captain, knows all the details, but I am going to tell you. You have heard your father remark, perhaps have seen, yourself, the light which, every few nights, shows from the top of Mount Constitution. I have been on shore duty for a fortnight, and I have been watching that light. Every time that the light has flashed, one or more traps in this pass have been pirated."

"A signal!"

"Yes, a signal. I have not been able to discover the pirates' hiding place, but I have learned that the light on Constitution shows only in answer to a previous flash from Waldron Island. One of the pirate gang climbs to the dome every night. If Waldron signals, he repeats it. Waldron guards the outlet to the pass, but is invisible from this side of Orcas Island. Our patrol cutter, when on duty in other waters, must pass Waldron. The sentinel there immediately flashes the news to the pirate on Constitution, who, in turn,

advises his fellows that they are safe to raid any trap from Lighthouse Rock to Point Francis."

"How strange!" exclaimed Ella. "Bosquith told me that the flashes on Constitution were signals given by engineers engaged in mapping the islands."

"Ah, Bosquith told you? I see, Ella! Mind you, now, I am not saying who it is—there is a watchman on some of these traps who is working with the pirate gang!"

"I know it is not Bosquith. It isn't fair——"

"I didn't say it was Bosquith. Anyway, to-night the cutter is supposed to be at Point Roberts, twenty miles away. I have seen to it that the information has been industriously circulated among the trapmen. I will stake my life that the news is in the possession of Cultus and his crew by now."

"Your plan?" reminded the girl eagerly.

"The cutter will not pass Waldron to-night, hence there will be no signal from there. The pirate will be on watch on Constitution, however, and I propose to make him prisoner. Then I will flash the signal myself. Simple? Yes. That is why it will work. The gang will think they are safe to loot the traps. They will get to work, and we will take them in the very act, for the patrol and three extra, swift motors, all filled with armed men, will also answer my signal from the top. Between dark and four bells I shall light the torch that will illuminate some pretty shady doings."

The girl's eyes were shining brightly, her cheek was flushed. "Nat," exclaimed she admiringly, "if you only do it!"

"Do it! Certainly! A whole lot depends upon this night's work, something even more important, perhaps, than the taking of Cultus Kennedy, something——"

Her quick, comprehending glance answered him. "Be careful, Nat. Re-

member what father told you. More than one member of that outlawed band will shed blood. I'll watch for the light, and I'll hope and think and wish just as hard for you as I possibly can."

"Thank you, Ella. I'm going now. To throw off suspicion, I shall climb from the Olga side. Good-by." She gave him a warm handclasp, and watched him until he disappeared around a bend in the trail.

By a devious route the young officer made his way to the bald, rocky dome of Mount Constitution, which arose twenty-five hundred feet above the sea level, and which, in clear weather, commanded an unobstructed view of no less than fifty islands of the San Juan group. A fringe of scrub pine grew to within a short distance of the top. After securing three or four dry branches thick with needles, to serve as a torch, Baker hid them in a handy spot, and began to look for an advantageous place in which to secrete himself. A clump of brush, looking out upon the northern aspect of the mountain and the greater portion of the pass, and not more than twenty-five feet from the stony pinnacle, accommodated him. He crept in, looked to see that his matches—which, waterman style, he carried beneath the sweatband of his hat—were safe, and began to survey the superb panorama which lay before him.

Down the mountainside, a distance of six or seven hundred feet, and facing toward the Tracy and Sinclair traps, was an old log cabin, long since abandoned to the tenancy of the birds and beasts of the forest. The faintest possible wreath of gray smoke curled from the tumbled-down chimney. "Campers," thought Nat, later reflecting that this conjecture seemed improbable, yet deciding that it would be imprudent, at that time, to make any further investigation.

The twilights are long in the San Juan highlands, and Nat, awaiting dusk

for what seemed an interminable time, occupied himself in reviewing, from every possible angle, his plan to capture the Kennedy gang, concluding satisfactorily that they were almost certain of apprehending the majority and scattering the remainder.

Ella, as night came on, unable to occupy herself with any of her usual tasks, began to pace nervously about the house. Finally she threw a shawl about her shoulders and walked out upon the watch deck of her father's fish trap. Bosquith, his throat swathed in several folds of bandage, a rifle in his hands, had just emerged from the watch shanty, preparatory to taking up his nightly vigil. He called eagerly to the girl, and hastened forward to meet her. Back and forth upon the planking they walked, the man alternately imploring and threatening over some momentous question. Several times, as if distraught, Ella turned and focused her gaze upon the mountain top, which arose clear and distinct from the deep shadows which enshrouded its base. Bosquith seized her hand. She withdrew it angrily, and turned as if to go back to the house. He resumed his pleading, and she paused to listen a moment. Then, reaching forth, she clasped his fingers. A second later she was running rapidly to the house. Bosquith entered his tiny cabin, threw a bundle of clothing into a dory which lay bumping against the piling, wrote rapidly a note, which he pinned to the shanty door, then climbed into the craft and rowed swiftly along the shore to the north. Ella, in almost the same moment, her slender form hidden beneath the folds of her father's tarpaulin coat, emerged from the house, carrying a small lantern. Fearlessly she turned into the darkness of a path that led away also to the northward.

Nat, busy with the speculations which continually traversed his mind, became more alertly watchful as the darkness

deepened. Unhappy misgivings with regard to Ella and Bosquith continued to obtrude themselves, however, but were suddenly dismissed when a sound, coming faintly from below, struck upon his hearing. Then a stone, loosened from the trail, went tumbling noisily down the mountainside; a branch switched back into place; a scrambling footstep followed.

He strained his eyes toward the spot where the trail emerged from the brush. More rocks went tumbling. Twigs cracked. Footsteps drew nearer and nearer. Whoever it was, was coming on at a rapid pace, with a fine disregard for caution, and making no effort at concealment. "So much the better," thought Nat. "My presence, very evidently, is not suspected."

He felt in the armhole of his vest, where he always carried his handcuffs, to see that they were safe, and un-snapped the flap to the holster which held his automatic pistol. "I'll just handcuff you to a tree, my friend," he communed, apostrophizing his approaching visitor, "then I'll set off the signal flash, after which you and I will march down the mountain, with you in front."

Suddenly Nat uttered a half-suppressed exclamation. No single human being ever made as much racket as all that. The sound was loud enough for half a dozen men. Yes, he could hear voices. A head covered with a rubber sou'wester hat appeared above the rock rim. Then followed a body clothed in the rough garb of a fisherman. Came then a second, a third, a fourth, and a fifth, the last a gigantic, shambling creature, hands hanging almost to the knees, evil, pig eyes searching the mountainside suspiciously, without a doubt was the dread Cultus Kennedy himself.

There had been a hitch in the program; something had gone wrong. Young Baker promptly dismissed any idea of employing the handcuffs; in-

stead, slipping the automatic from the holster and snapping the safety down into the firing notch.

Four of the pirates stopped at the base of the monolith which comprised the actual summit of the mountain, while the leader, growling peevishly, climbed to the top. One of the men nearly stepped upon Nat; the latter could have reached out and touched the fish thief upon the knee.

"Whatever do you s'pose is keepin' Capstan?" demanded the chief, with an oath. "We've clumb two foot to his one, and him and his fellers hain't here yet."

"Maybe they've found something," offered one of the band.

"Maybe. Capstan allers is slow, though, unless it's whisky he's after; they hain't nobody pearter than Capstan when a drink's in sight. It's time he was here." Cultus struck a match, and hauled forth, by a leather lanyard, a bulging-faced silver watch, a degree or so smaller than an ordinary alarm clock. "Here it is clost to two bells, nine o'clock!"

"Capstan was goin' to stop at the Tracy trap, you know, Cultus, and see that party," suggested the pirate who before had spoken in behalf of the tardy member. "He might of had to lay out in the jungles waitin' for him."

"I hear 'em comin' now!" exclaimed another of the gang.

Presently three men, traveling the same trail by which Nat had ascended, appeared, and joined the others at the summit. "There hain't nobody come back down by the Olgy way," stated the newcomers' spokesman.

"He sure didn't come down our way," replied Cultus. "That's a sign he's here. Spread out. Look sharp, now! Get him—or kill him!"

Promptly the seven men sprang into the brush and began beating about in every direction, pausing now and then to light matches and peer beneath the

thick, drooping branches of fir and larch.

"Somebody's been here, but gone!" shouted one who had stumbled onto a patch of trampled grass where Nat had secured one of his dry fir boughs. "The leaves and grass has just been mussed up recent."

"Well, look good," replied Cultus, lighting his pipe nonchalantly. "We know he's here. Get him!"

To attempt to make a fight against that gang would be a case of pure suicide. Nat well knew that while he might kill one or more members of the crew, his own life would be the price. Besides, any precipitate action would absolutely defeat the object of the plan, namely, to capture the whole thieving outfit. No, this was no time, place, or condition for a battle; this was a time for flight. If he could manage to get to the bottom he could give the alarm. A dozen determined men, with the assistance of three fast boats, could almost positively prevent the escape from the mountain of any of the eight pirates.

Could he, dared he, make a dash for it? If ever, now was the time, for Cultus alone stood between him and the path leading down to the north shore. From the dome, downward for a distance, there were but two trails, and these, in places, were almost perpendicular. What if he stumbled? He must risk it.

His good fortune in thus far escaping detection, Nat knew, might be attributed to the fact that he had chosen his hiding place in a spot so close to the summit. The seven men were beating the bush toward the Olga side. Cultus guarded the north beach path. Which should it be—seven men or Cultus? "Cultus will kill," had said old man Tracy.

Cautiously Nat arose from his stooping posture and softly parted the branches with his left hand. Feeling

ahead carefully, first with one foot and then the other, he contrived to extricate himself from the tangle without making any betraying sound. Inch by inch, until within little more than an arm's length of the pirate chief, the young officer crept.

He dared not risk a shot. At the first blow, he must strike Cultus insensible. Gathering himself for the spring, the automatic grasped tightly in his uplifted right hand, he launched himself into space and struck blindly, savagely.

Cultus' old corncob pipe saved him. In the instant, stooping to knock the ashes from the bowl, he received Nat's crushing blow upon the shoulder. The terrific impact brought him nearly to his knees, but with a horrible bellow of rage he flung his gorillalike arms about the young officer, and the two, fighting like madmen, the pirate to gain possession of the weapon, Nat to strike another, a decisive blow, crashed off the narrow, rocky table into the clump of brush.

The pirates, from every direction, ran to the assistance of their chief. Capstan, as powerful a man as his superior, seized Baker by the throat, another grasped his arms, another his legs. Cultus, cursing abominably, scrambled to his feet and drew a long sheath knife.

"Belay on that, Cultus," said Capstan sharply, as his leader drew back the blade to strike. "Let's figger this out. If it's our course to slice up this here young stinger fish, we can still do it later on, leisurelike and genteel."

Capstan had released his iron grip upon Nat's throat, but four of the pirates, one of whom had nearly broken the officer's wrist in wringing the gun from his grasp, now dragged the prisoner to the top of the rocky dome.

Cultus gave vent to a hoarse, mirthless laugh. "Say, you hain't so dam' smart. We knowed when you started

out from the Tracy trap, and we knowed why you was comin'. And what I'm goin' to do to you'll be a lesson to some of your meddlin' outfit. We'll learn you to mind your own business. They was fish in this sound before you come, and, likely, there'll be some left after we get through with you, and we're goin' to keep right on helpin' ourselves. Cumtux?"

Again Cultus whipped out his knife, but again Capstan interposed.

The latter, rapidly but thoroughly binding Nat's arms behind him with a strand of tarred rope, listened, without comment, to his superior's blasphemous account of the attack which had been made upon him. "He aimed to bust my binnacle wide open; that's what he done. Instead, he's stove up my sta'board rail. What am I goin' to do? Why, I'm goin' to make him look like a humpy salmon that's been fed through the blades of a iron chink."

"Stow that talk, until I and you have talked over what's to be done," said Capstan decisively. "The other boys can go on ahead with young stinger here, and we'll follow."

One of the pirates picked Nat's hat from the ground, but Capstan struck it from his hand and demanded a rag with which to fashion a gag. "Young stinger might take a notion to go to disturbin' the quiet," explained he.

Three bandanna handkerchiefs, none of the cleanest, were knotted together and bound tightly over Baker's lips. Roughly, the five pirates dragged their victim down the trail while Cultus and Capstan followed, their voices lifted occasionally in stormy debate. A brief stop was made at the deserted log cabin, when the party hurried on to the shore, bundled Nat into a boat, and, divided among three dories, rowed away toward the eastern end of the pass.

Presently the dory containing Cultus and his lieutenant, Capstan, came alongside the boat in which Nat was

the unwilling passenger. "We'll land at old Tracy's trap," ordered Cultus. Shortly, the craft bumped its prow against some piling, Baker was hauled to his feet and hoisted bodily onto the dock.

Cultus and Capstan still were wrangling over some question. "I tell you that's the system," said Capstan. "You do what I say and nobody can't never in a million years check this here job up to us. He's got it comin' to him. He'd squeal on us in a minute if he dast. What word he give me I had to choke out of him. Anyway, both of 'em is crazy about this girl, and everybody knows it. Women is generally at the bottom of such tangles; I read that into a book onct. Don't you see how everybody'll think he done it? But you hain't got no romance in your system."

Cultus profanely disavowed harboring any such weakness, but grunted permission for Capstan to go ahead with his plan. At a sign from the chief, Nat was dragged forward.

From the outer end of the trap, a light was discernible in the Tracy home. Usually a lighted lantern hung in the window of the watch shanty; to-night the place was dark. The watch deck itself was deserted. Nat, watching the flicker in the window of the trapman's house, wondered if Ella had thought of him, as she had promised, and whether she might not, even at that moment, be waiting and looking for the expected flash on the mountaintop.

One of the pirates, at a signal, held a revolver at Baker's head. "We're goin' to take your gag off just a minute. Don't holler. I aimed to gaff you up considerable with my knife," said Cultus, proceeding, with much pomp, to pronounce the victim's doom, "only Capstan, here, he thought it was a poor system. Maybe so. Anyway, I give in. By now, likely, you've begun to figger that it's poor dope to run

afoul of me and my gang. Still, what time you've got to think, you can think as you please. We knowed when you sneaked up the mountain, and we knowed what for. It was your last sneak."

"I know how you learned," answered Nat; "Bosquith, Tracy's watchman, told you."

"Correct," answered Capstan before Cultus could reply. "Bosqy was the boy."

"I'm goin' to give you a chance," continued Cultus. "It hain't no great shakes of a chance, I'll admit; fact is, it hain't more'n one chance in a million. I'm doin' it just to humor Capstan, here."

Nat's heart sank with a mortal fear, but his voice was steady and resolute. "All right. What are you going to do with me?"

"It's three bells," said Cultus, striking a match under the shelter of his coat and again consulting the enormous chronometer. "At five bells, the tide will be flood high. At the turn of the tide— Well, it'll give you nearly an hour. If you're lucky, somebody might find you before then. Capstan!"

At the word, the gag was again tied tightly about Nat's mouth and chin. Some dreadful foreboding of his fate struck in upon his consciousness, and he began to struggle madly as four pairs of hands laid hold upon him. Forward they dragged him to a sloping gangway built thus to accommodate boats at any stage of water. Capstan kicked the captive's feet from under him. They slid him, like a trussed pig, down the slippery planks, and thrust his body, up to the armpits, into the chill, salt chuck. With strands of rope, they tied him to two heavy, iron boat cleats, which were bolted to the dock timbers.

"We'll go back to our cabin, pack up our outfit, and put out for Fraser

River," said Cultus; "there ort to be fat pickin' up there for a spell."

"Yes," agreed Capstan jocularly, "and about the time these geeks in the pass begin to think they're shut of us for good, we'll come a-voyagin' back, and help 'em get rid of a few scow-loads of silvers."

The appreciative laugh from his fellows emboldened Capstan to attempt some further witticisms. He stepped down the gangway and gave Nat a tug by the shoulder to determine whether the ropes held securely. "Good-by, young stinger! In a few minutes, now, you'll either be whangin' a harp, or shovelin' coal. I've got friends in both places; so tell 'em 'klahowya' for me."

Cultus and his gang climbed into their dories, and pulled swiftly away toward the landing place below the deserted log cabin.

Nat, by torturing degrees, lying upon his back, his body slanted at an angle of about thirty degrees, felt the deadly chill of the cold salt water creeping upon him. Not until that moment did he sense to the full the fate that was upon him. In a few moments, pitifully few, he must meet his supreme agony. Speculatively he wondered, once the waters had risen and closed from him the last, sweet breath of heaven's air, how many seconds the eventful struggle would last.

Was he to die thus? Never! He gathered his feet under him and strove frantically to gain a hold upon the slimy planks which slipped always from under. Exhausted, finally he desisted.

Straight before him, Mount Constitution arose darkly above the dull, silver sheen of the placid bay. A few hundred fathoms away, within shouting distance almost, a dozen armed men in speedy boats awaited the flash from the dome which would bring some of them rushing straight to the very trap upon which, voiceless, powerless, he lay awaiting death.

"The signal from the mountaintop." That had been the slogan. The chief deputy had said: "The very instant that the light appears, with full speed ahead we will board and search every trap in the pass."

"The flash from the mountain! The signal! The signal!" Again and again, as if it were an incantation, Nat repeated his prayer.

How futile the prayer! Who would fire the signal? That had been *his* self-appointed task. Braggartly he had said that the light should show that night.

In a sudden access of fury, he rolled and flung his body about like a man in a maniacal frenzy. He strove against his bonds until his muscles ached. Possibly, he thought, if he could contrive to loosen the thongs ever so little, he might be able to hold his mouth and nose above water until the tide began to turn. Finally the pain of lacerated flesh, actually bringing surcease to the more poignant mental agony, he managed to tear one arm partly free. But the tide worked faster than he. An occasional wave flung its foamy crest fairly in his face.

"The signal! The signal!"

Again he attacked his fetters—but still they held. Another wave, the highest thus far, broke, for an instant submerging his whole face and head. Some of the brackish water entered his nostrils. Oh, so desperately he struggled to gain just one more unpolluted, revivifying breath! A roaring came in his ears. A merciful unconsciousness to pain began to possess him. Points of fire danced before him. One, single speck of light finally settled within the field of his vision, and grew, and grew—the flash upon the mountain!

No! No! It could not be. This was naught but the last, torturing phantasm which cruel death was blazing upon his brain before granting final, merciful oblivion.

But hark! Boats were coming! Men were shouting!

It *was* the light! Like a great wedge of gold splitting the darkness, the flaming signal showed upon the mountain-top.

"Nat! Nat! Come out of it! It's me, Nat, you know—Lobscouse, your bunky!"

Nat rolled his head painfully, then lapsed again into unconsciousness. In answer to the prodigious shout raised by the worthy Lobscouse, the patrol cutter and two of the motor boats ranged alongside the Tracy trap.

"I found Nat lashed to the gangway," explained Lobscouse excitedly. "I nearly stepped on him when I swarmed up onto the watch deck. He was tied and gagged. The water was breakin' all over him. In another minute, he'd 'a' been dead. Nat! Nat! Come out of it!"

Young Baker was tenderly lifted and placed aboard the patrol cutter. A hot drink, warm blankets, and the vigorous rubbing of coarse but friendly hands soon brought him to himself. "The pirates have gone to the deserted log cabin off North Beach," said he weakly. "Hurry!"

At once, the patrol and the convoying motors got under way, Nat, in the interim, patching together the details of his adventure. Only one question remained unsolved: who had set off the signal?

Fired by retributive rage, Nat insisted upon taking his place with his fellows and performing his part in the raid upon the pirate rendezvous. He walked rather weakly to the after deck and surveyed the three motor boats, as, muffled down, they sped alongside of the patrol. A quarter of a mile astern, and coming on at a rapid rate, were the lights of another craft, the identity of which, in the darkness, Baker could not determine.

Quickly the landing was made. The chief deputy had already planned the attack. "We'll take no chances. If we surround the pirates in the cabin, we'll set fire to it and capture or kill every one of them."

In a few moments the cabin was reached, and the deputies, following orders, quickly invested it. Lobscouse, his arms loaded with dry fir branches, crept to the rear of the structure, piled the mass against the windowless wall, and touched it off.

At the first crackle of flame, Cultus, six-shooter in hand, rushed to the door. "Surrender, Cultus Kennedy!" shouted the chief deputy.

The pirate fired point-blank at the officer and leaped back into the cabin. His shot, fortunately, went wild. The flames, roaring up the dry walls of the house, had now caught in the cedar-shake roofing.

"Come out, your hands above your heads!" shouted the deputy. Six of the pirate band, obeying, staggered from the door and gave themselves up.

"Cultus and Capstan are still in there," shouted Nat. "Look out!"

Two forms sprang from the door, and, firing in every direction, plunged toward the trail. A shot through the thigh laid Capstan low; Nat and Lobscouse threw themselves upon Kennedy and bore him to the earth.

At this juncture, the occupant of the motor which had followed the deputies, and who proved to be old man Tracy, puffed into view. "A thousand dollars if you get him!" he panted.

"Take your pick," said the officer, waving his hand toward the eight manacled criminals.

"No, I mean Bosquith. He's gone, and my little girl Elly she's gone, too. Bosquith left a note. He said he'd been stealin' fish and workin' with Cultus to get money so he could marry Elly. He said he wanted to reform, but Cul-

tus and Capstan wouldn't let him. The letter winds up, 'Ella understands.' The thousand goes to any man that'll ketch Bosquith."

"Ella gone!" Nat, dazed by the words, tried to think clearly what they meant. "Ella gone! Bosquith gone!"

The tinder-dry cabin was now a roaring mass of flame, brilliantly illuminating the whole mountainside.

"Look!" Lobscouse pointed to the dome, where a figure wrapped in the folds of a tarpaulin coat stood silhouetted against the lurid sky.

"It's Elly! It's Elly!" shouted old man Tracy, capering about rheumatically. "She hain't went with Bosquith. I knowed she wouldn't. Elly! Elly!"

"Yes, father." Her voice came clear and distant from above. "Is Nat all right? I found his hat on the dome. I knew he was in trouble, so I fired the signal."

Nat trumpeted his hands to his lips, and, in a voice none of the steadiest, he shouted: "I'm all right, Ella! I'm coming right up. It's too dark on the trail for you to be alone."

THE PROOF OF IT

By GEORGE FOXHALL

Author of "The Climber," etc.

"Wilberforce Scott was the son of Wilberforce Scott, universally known as Will, or Wilber. Wilberforce, junior, was not known as Will, nor as Wilber. At any rate he discouraged the abbreviations. His father had not been stall-fed, hand-laundered, tailored, or sugar-coated in a foreign land. He was a home product."

IF there is anything in the world that can equal in fatuity, vacuity, and the entire absence of any visible mental functioning a certain type of wealthy American youth who has been stall-fed on Piccadilly, hand-laundered in Grosvenor Square, tailored on Bond Street, and sugar-coated in English country houses, the product should be advertised at once. The challenge will pass unheeded. There is no competitor.

Wilberforce Scott was the son of Wilberforce Scott, universally known as Will, or Wilber. Wilberforce, junior, was not known as Will, nor as Wilber. At any rate he discouraged the abbreviations. His father had not been stall-fed, hand-laundered, tailored, or sugar-coated in a foreign land. He was a home product.

In an odd moment between two days, Scott, senior, having just said good night to certain fellow captains of in-

dustry who had spent the evening with him, was sitting in front of his library fire, ruminating upon the chances of making two million dollars grow where only one million grew before. Enter Wilberforce, junior, fresh, or stale, rather, from a dreary farce.

Wilberforce scowled over the pages of *Punch* as he flicked them over unobservingly. Then he swung one leg across a corner of the table and turned a glance of indolent appeal to the male author of his being.

"Fawther," he said, as one speaks to a fellow sufferer, "don't you find life an infernal baw?"

"Possibly," admitted senior, rather absently. "What the devil's a baw?"

"Oh, a daily round that leaves the emotions unsatisfied—the—aw—intellect unstretched, you know."

"Every try roller skating down Fifth Avenue?"

"N-no! That wouldn't be just the thing. Besides, I cawn't roller skate. There is no doubt about it. Life offers dashed few inducements."

Senior turned his head half around and examined his son critically.

"I apologize," he murmured.

"Apologize? For what?"

"Well, I suppose it's largely my fault that you have to carry this awful burden of life."

Wilberforce laughed indulgently. "Oh, well, now, I don't exactly blame you, you know, fawther. I—well, I don't object to my fellow men very much. There's no need to apologize, really."

"I'm apologizing to your fellow men; there seems to be an apology due to somebody, at any rate."

Scott, senior, propelled his chair violently backward with the impetus of his powerful body as he arose suddenly.

"Will, you're a fool!" he snapped.

"But it's my own fault, so I'll have to endure it. You're a damned fool!"

This conclusion seemed like a suitable termination to the day's activities, its finality being beyond argument. So Scott, senior, retired, Wilberforce penduluming one leg from the corner of the table, staring into the fire with an air between perplexity and resentment. Deciding that the pose was one well calculated to excite the sympathy his soul craved, he did not change it when his sister Florence peeped in.

"Mother got home yet?" she asked.

"Haven't seen her," replied Wilberforce, his tone emphasizing the testimony his looks gave that he was stricken to the heart.

"Why the dejection, little firefly?" demanded Florence.

Wilberforce looked at his sister as though to prepare her for the dreadful shock.

"Fawther says that I am a damned fool," he announced.

Florence frowned and shrugged.

"I wish dad wouldn't swear so," she complained. "Good night, Willy."

Wilberforce stared at the door meditatively. At first he was merely resentfully conscious that the desired sympathy had not been forthcoming, but as he ruminated it dawned upon him that the lack of sympathy had been of a very positive character; that, in short, Florence agreed with everything except her father's profanity. "Willy," moreover, was his pet aversion.

He flushed angrily and sprang to his feet, snapping his cigarette case open and shut with a vicious speed that made wonderful the fact that he had actually extracted a cigarette. There was the germ of efficiency there, surely! He didn't light the cigarette, however. He pitched it, with a forcible outcurve motion, into the fire. Germ of a temper, too!

"That," said a voice behind him, "is a perfectly reckless way to treat a gold monogram."

He turned. His mother was smiling at him from the doorway. She closed the door and came toward him.

"What on earth has disturbed you, Willy?" she asked.

"Mother," he begged, "please be kind enough not to call me Willy. I have been called names enough for one evening."

"Why, my son, who can possibly have done such a thing?" Perhaps Mrs. Scott was referring to the aroused symptoms of vitality, rather than feeling any astonishment that anybody should call her son names.

"Fawther and Florence have called me a damned fool."

"Not in chorus, surely? Florence?"

"No. Father called me a damned fool. Florence—aw—regretted the profanity."

Mrs. Scott sighed and smiled.

"Your father is quite too frank," she said. "I wouldn't let it upset me, Wilberforce. Good night, my son."

She kissed him, sighed, and smiled again, and went.

"I should say he is too frank," muttered Wilberforce. "Altogether too——" He paused suddenly to consider. Frank did not seem to be the word he would have chosen. Frank! Dash it all, why frank? And his mother had certainly offered no sympathy. She had not even asked why his father had called him a fool. No, she had taken the provocation for granted.

He snapped out another cigarette by the same process of magical speed. This time he struck a match, but was arrested in the act of applying it to the tobacco by another opening of the door. Peterson the butler entered.

"Do you wish me to wait up, sir, or will you put the lights out?"

Wilberforce regarded the butler for a moment in moody silence. His lacerated mind panted for vindication.

"Peterson," he demanded at last, "do I look like a damned fool?"

Peterson's mouth and eyes assumed grotesque proportions.

"I beg your pardon, sir?" he asked.

"The question is a simple one," Wilberforce insisted. "It has been—aw—hinted to me that certain people have little confidence in my mental endowments, whereas I don't think I look at all like a—well, like a fool. Do you?"

The line of Peterson's duties had not extended into this intimate region heretofore, and the situation caught him unprepared.

"I certainly should not *say* so, sir. Besides, no man should be judged by his looks."

The longer one examines this dictum, the more ambiguities seem to wind their way through it. Peterson, though quite unconscious of the fact, had created a masterpiece. Wilberforce did not examine it very long. There was enough meat in it at one glance, for him. He took one swift look at

Peterson's innocent countenance, then hurled another gold monogram to un-aesthetic destruction.

"Get my hat and coat!" he snapped. "I'm going to take a stroll."

Wilberforce did take a stroll. He strolled due east, disregarding, in his absorption, the fact that if one strolls due east on Manhattan Island one is almost sure to arrive at atmospheres more reminiscent of Whitechapel and Petticoat Lane in alliance, than of Grosvenor Square.

It was late. The street he had followed was dim and almost deserted. Wilberforce was ruminating, more in sorrow, by this time, than in anger. He left the regions of human residence and struck a no-man's land of warehouses and factories.

A citizen approached him—a citizen of burly figure and uncultivated appearance. They met under a lamp-post, the citizen with his back to it, Wilberforce, naturally, facing it. Their sizes were as David and Goliath. Wilberforce was not Goliath.

"Got a match, mister?" asked the cit.

Wilberforce stopped, unbuttoned his overcoat, and took his gold match safe from his vest pocket. The citizen's large and grimy hand closed upon it.

"I'll help myself," he said obligingly. He reached out at the same time and extracted Wilberforce's gold watch, with its diamond-studded fob, from the other pocket.

Wilberforce watched the movement with hypnotized surprise. The fellow slipped both articles into his pockets.

"Glad I met you, mister," he assured his victim, as one to whom life is just one pleasant meeting after another.

That old adage about it taking two to make a quarrel is all wrong. It takes two to make a peace. Just one can start something. Besides, Wilberforce needed a match, also. As the citizen proceeded, with the intent of passing him, Wilberforce used that violent out-

curve motion for the third time that evening, only this time the motion terminated on the point of the citizen's chin. There was nothing deadly about Wilberforce's hook, but it was followed by Wilberforce's hundred and thirty pounds with a suddenness that left no time for argument.

Anybody who has paid three dollars for the privilege of watching two husky truck drivers maul each other harmlessly in a fourteen-foot ring has surmised that only one big man in five thousand has the faintest idea of how to hit. Our cit was not the five thousandth man, and to this fact Wilberforce doubtless owed his life.

Like a wild cat he was all over the big fellow, who cuffed and mauled and bruised and scraped and rolled on him, tearing his clothes and bumping his nose into a streaming redness by means of a cast-iron skull. Wilberforce was picked up and bounced down. He was dragged around and swung around, but always he managed to keep one hand frantically gripped on some part of his antagonist, and frequently he managed to make the other hand beat a frenzied tattoo upon the citizen's unbeautiful face.

At last the big fellow managed to hurl him a few feet away, but in doing so slipped to his knees, looking up watchfully at his persistent little enemy.

The mark was clear, and Wilberforce lost no time in selecting it. Every ounce of his bodily force, plus his fighting rage, concentrated in the point of his right foot and was propelled upon the chin of the unknown collector of articles of vertu, and that worthy immediately and abruptly withdrew his opposition.

Wilberforce regained his possessions without delay, supplementing them by one piece of lead pipe he found in the fallen one's pocket. He debated for a moment the justice of dropping the ac-

quisition gently on the cast-iron skull. For the first time he took stock of the surroundings. He found that he was quite near the river, among a dingy, smelly mass of river-front commercial buildings, which accounted for his having, as it were, pursued his battle in peace.

Abandoning the idea of connecting the lead pipe with the skull, he slipped it into his pocket, wiped, as he fondly believed, the blood from his face, and retraced his steps rapidly.

Inside the door he met his father.

"Thought I heard you come in," he began. "Your mother said——"

Wilberforce had got to his feet, and stood revealed in all his gory dishevelment as his father switched on more light. The sight halted senior's explanation. What "mother said" was never told.

"For the love of Heaven," he pleaded, "where did you interrupt the disaster?"

Wilberforce told him, exhibiting the lead pipe as a trophy.

His father gazed at him, stunned. "Let me get this clear," he gasped. "He didn't try to beat you up, or anything? You just swung on him with the intent of knocking him down and recovering your property; not because you had to defend yourself? You started things?"

"Of course! He believed that all he had to do was merely to take my things and walk away with them. I considered the assumption insulting, and I had had quite enough insults for one evening."

Scott, senior, continued to stare at his warlike offspring. Then he laughed.

"I said you were a damned fool, and this confirms it," he chuckled. "But, son, that's the kind of foolishness that has built this country—never counting the odds. I reckon you belong here all right."

And they shook hands, man to man

The Skipper's Pig

By
Captain A.E. Dingle

Author of "The Devil's Round," etc.



"Put together into one small schooner an Irish skipper, a Dutch mate, a Chinese cook, and a Malay crew, add one very ordinary, rather small, black pig, and stir—what's the answer? Figure it out."

DENNY, the pig, while alive, came near to getting its master's throat slit; in departing this life, poor Dennis bequeathed to Captain Paddy Lavin, the aforementioned owner, the freedom of the seas adjacent to the Malay archipelago.

Put together into one small schooner an Irish skipper, a Dutch mate, a Chinese cook, and a Malay crew, add one very ordinary, rather small, black pig, and stir—what's the answer? Figure it out.

The *Colleen*, Lavin's schooner, jogged lazily along through the warm seas west of North Borneo, and a portent of trouble hung over her like a black thundercloud. Amidships, in a pen under the fore boom, a small black pig lay on its side, squealing with the pain of a broken leg. Near by, on the deck, a heavy block lay where it had bounced, after falling from aloft and missing the pig's head at the expense of

its leg. A Malay seaman was disappearing into the tiny fo'c's'le, nursing with both hands a bruised ear and bleeding nose; and Captain Paddy Lavin soothed his injured pet with one hand, while the other, bunched into a lump of knuckles, threatened further damage to the retreating seaman.

"Ju better make pork oudt o' dot pig, cap'n," grinned Zim Voog, the mate. "Maype de next time somet'ing hit Denny squvare amitships; den ve can't eat him vit'out spreatin' him on hart-tack vit a knife."

"Hell's bells!" roared Lavin furiously; "an' d'ye think Oi'll slaughter Dinny afoor his toime, beca'se av a bunch av murdherin' swine as is afraid th' touch av clane pork'll sind 'em to Gehenna! Nix!"

"Vell!" grunted Zim, with a shrug; "dot's de t'ird time somet'ing's dropped on him. De next time——" the mate turned away, with a growl of disgust.

"Th' nixt toime, my bucko, Oi'll spread-agle th' brown divil as drops it. Th' crew ain't asked to *ate* pork; and Oi'll ate whut Oi loike, matey; an' fer want av an ice chist, Oi'll kape my pork fresh by kapin' it aloive till it's wanted."

"Dot's all right, cabtin," grumbled the mate, squinting anxiously forward, where half a dozen sullen-faced Malays chattered and gesticulated to the fiery address of a villainous, piratical Sea Dyak. "Dey don't got to eat de pig, but dey got to schweep oudt de pen, yoost de same. An' it's yoost playin' mit dynamide to make dem touch dot pig. Bedder let Soon Wat stick him, cabtin, 'fore we gits schtuck ourselves yet."

Zim Voog walked aft to resume his watch, and left the skipper busy with his pig. Lavin rigged a rough but strong shelter over the pigpen, listening the while to the excited chattering of his brown-skinned crew.

The seas in which the *Colleen* traded have been notoriously unsafe for small sailing craft since the days of the Moguls. Sea Dyaks, of piratical ancestry, in their swift proas, lurked below every sea line that opened to view; only let a sailing vessel drift into a calm within sight of the coast, and her reinsurance would be worth a premium. Captain Lavin had reason to know this, having lost the *Colleen's* predecessor in a hot scrap with Dyak pirates, himself remaining the sole survivor after a ten-mile swim in the darkness of a thunderous night.

Only his Irish obstinacy, coupled with his Irish grit, kept him in so hazardous a business. Only the fact that his grit was as great as his obstinacy had hitherto plucked him out of bad messes his obstinacy had plunged him into.

On this present voyage, against his mate's earnest advice, he had shipped as serang, or native bos'n, the evil-visaged Dyak who now held the crew

under his fiery oratory in the bows. Since leaving his last port, where the pig had come aboard, the sullen obedience which had marked the crew hitherto was intensified into seething unrest that culminated in sundry attempts on the pig's innocent life.

Forbidden by their religion to touch the unclean beast, the crew resorted to cunning schemes to compass his demise; and the attempt that had but now almost succeeded was the answer they gave to an order that they clean out the pigpen.

The skipper's ears were open while he tinkered at the pen, and as the Dyak's inflammatory harangue rose to an unguarded shriek, the most vital passages smote on his ears with something as near to a shock as Lavin was capable of experiencing.

Paddy slowly hoisted himself erect, and took a long, keen look around the horizon. The sea line was unbroken, save for a purple blur in the northeast that might be a cloud, or the loom of land as yet below the horizon.

He sent a glance aft; the stolid Dutchman was apparently deaf to the voices forward, for he stumped the short poop with hunched shoulders, hands in pockets, peering into the compass at every turn, glancing aloft at the tops'ls at each pause, and punctuating his walk with a sidelong jerk of his thick neck to squirt a long, thin stream of tobacco juice far over the lee rail. Zim had made his protest; the rest was up to his skipper.

Lavin picked up the block from the deck, displayed it ostentatiously as he stepped to the rigging, and slowly mounted to the main crosstrees to replace it. For a moment the crew stared at such an unheard-of proceeding on the part of their skipper; then applied themselves anew, with cunning grimaces, to the Dyak's fervid oration.

At the masthead, Lavin commanded a wider sweep of ocean. Far down in

the west the sea blazed like molten brass; the sinking sun threw its vivid coloring over an expanse of oily calm. The faint air, that barely gave steerage-way to the schooner, was but the dying breath of a sick breeze. She, too, would lie motionless as a log before darkness fell upon her.

Snatching his binoculars from his pocket, the skipper swept the farthest point of the horizon; his gaze dwelt for several moments in the west. With a deep curse, he snapped the glasses shut and slipped down a back stay to the deck.

He shot an order to the mate, who, in reply, sent the Malay seaman forward and took the nigh useless wheel himself, with a smirk of indulgence for another of the skipper's oddities of fancy. Then Lavin stepped into the companionway and entered the little cabin, where, soft-footed, wooden-faced Soon Wat flitted from table to pantry, setting out supper.

"Stoord, you savvee kill pig?" suggested the skipper softly.

"Sabbee plenty fine all ri', capen," admitted Soon Wat, with a smileless shrug.

"S'pose can kill him so he no squeak lillee bit?" The tone was anxious.

"Can do easy. Hit him one time on head wit' lillee chippee hammer; he go sleep, then——" Soon Wat finished his illustration with an expressive sweep of the big carving knife across his own throat.

"Good!" approved the skipper. "Then stand by as soon as supper's cleared up. And don't let the crew see you take the pig out o' th' pen."

Lavin added some whispered instructions that brought a gleam into Soon Wat's almond eyes, which was as near to a smile as that wooden face could compass; then he rejoined the mate, and waited for supper to be announced. The fore deck was deserted now, the crew were getting their own evening

meal, and a buzz of droning voices floated up through the tiny fo'c's'le scuttle and mingled strangely with the growing squealing of tackles and creaking of structure that filled the schooner, now that the breeze had left her, and she swung dizzily across the swell.

The swift descent of a tropical night left the decks in gloom fifteen minutes after the sun sank below the hard-ruled sea line, and Soon Wat reported supper. The skipper took a final look around, and went to snatch a hurried meal, leaving the mate with a job to occupy him, and starting the steward on his own little task.

"Give Dinny th' wallop now," he ordered. "Finish th' job in th' lazaret. An' you, Zim, git th' empty tar bar'l up an' dump some oakum into it. Don't let that Dyak put a hand to anything, an' kape ivery yaller dog away frum th' pigpen. There's a proa 'way down in th' west, an' pullin' this way wid sweeps. She'll be hours befoor she comes up wid us, but the Dyak is expectin' her, mate.

"Whin she runs alongside, ye'll see some sport. So don't bodder wid thim swine for'ard, Zimmy. Only kape yer gun handy, in case that brown pirate gits gay befoor we're ready fer him."

Soon Wat gave the pig swift dispatch, and vanished below, with his victim under his arm before any of the crew came on deck. Not a sound had escaped the stunned pig to attract attention. The pain of his broken leg had kept him whimpering, and now that his whining had ceased for good, the manifold and increasing noises of the becalmed vessel prevented the sudden cessation from being noticed.

The stolid mate, while in the dark regarding his skipper's notion, was good officer enough to obey without question, and good man enough to back his skipper to the human limit.

The Malay crew filed on deck at the heels of their Dyak leader, and stood

clustered in a dark mob on the lee, or blind, side of the idle foresail. That they were but working up courage for mischief the mate was convinced; he called softly through the cabin skylight for the steward to pass him up a handful of cold food, and planted himself at the lee main rigging with a sandwich of salt horse in one fist and the snug butt of a forty-five in the other.

Lavin joined him immediately, and scanned the heavens in impatience for the rising of the moon. The murmur of voices in the gloom forward broke into jerky patches of argument; the Dyak's scornful tones blazed frequently into angry threats; his audience seemed to be divided among themselves as to the degree of allegiance they owed him.

"Murder!" swore the skipper fervidly, as snatches of talk reached his ears. "Me noble Dyak ain't goin' to wait till the proa shows up, if he kin whip thim yaller hounds into motion! Listen to him, will ye! Here, Zim—jist kape yer gun p'inted, giniralloike, on thim scum. Oi'm goin' to lug th' Dyak out be th' ears!"

The skipper sidled along the side opposite to that on which the crew stood bunched. With jute-soled shoes and stealthy tread, he reached the fore rigging and clambered noiselessly aloft. Crossing over at the lower masthead, he swung off by a backstay and slid down until he hung plumb over the crowd.

The Dyak's gestures showed that he had worked himself up to the climax of his harangue; his Malay mates shuffled apart in little knots, jabbering excitedly; the weaker-willed were reluctantly giving way to the arguments of the stronger.

Lavin's ears burned furiously as he caught scraps of the talk. To hear the murder of himself and his mate discussed right under his nose was a new sensation; his hot Irish blood forced an oath from his lips, and the chatter-

ing crowd beneath him started apart in terror.

The Dyak sprang aside, gazing around, everywhere except aloft, and in the moment of surprise, like a gorilla out of a treetop, two hundred pounds of fighting Irishman dropped fair upon the treacherous rascal's shoulders.

Zim Voog, from the obscurity of the poop, could be certain of but one thing: in place of a jabbering mob of malcontents, now out in the darkness forward rolled a biting, kicking, cursing ball that language alone indicated to be Lavin and the Dyak. The crew, already worked up to a state of nerves by the unclean presence of the pig, shot below as the skipper dropped, convinced that a visitation had come upon them for their attempts on the porker's life.

There was nothing to keep the mate aft. The vessel swung and rolled aimlessly to a glassy swell, her head pointing all around the compass. As the sounds of strife grew fiercer, and rolled nearer, Zim hauled out his gun and stepped cautiously toward the noise.

"Kape out! Don't shoot!" snarled Lavin between fierce gasps. "I got a better notion than killin' th' divil—Ah, ye murderin' pirate!"

Even in the blackness of the bulwark shadow, Zim had caught the flash of steel. Lavin's exclamation followed the thrust of a creese, and now the handle of the Dyak's weapon stuck out from his shoulder like a clothes peg.

"Roll out, skipper!" growled the mate, dodging around the grappled pair with pistol shoved forward. "Roll out, till I poomp him full mit leadt!"

"Nix!" barked Lavin, panting. "Oi've got him fast. Ye kin pull this dam' knife out, though—that's it, pull—Oh, pull, blasht ye! Ow! Roight, Zimmy. Now, git out till Oi sherag th' skunk!"

A sudden glow suffused the sea as the moon broke through the heat haze hanging low on the horizon. Her beams

touched the schooner, throwing fleeting shafts of silvery light athwart the decks as the little craft rolled and dipped to the heave of ocean.

One such shaft of light fell upon the combatants, and the mate stood back, satisfied. The Dyak's spine was bent bow shape over the bits; one of Lavin's bony knees seemed to have become rooted in the man's solar plexus; both of the skipper's steel-muscled hands were joined in a grip upon the brown throat, and the light shone upon staring eyeballs set horribly prominent in a mask of mortal terror.

"Now, git th' handcuffs an' leg irons, Jimmy," panted Lavin, rising as his antagonist sagged supinely under his hands. "Shackle him up to th' forestay, whoile Oi git this hole in me showlder plugged up."

When the skipper came on deck again, after having Soon Wat bandage his wounded shoulder, the moon was flooding the sea with brilliance. The mate locked the irons of the Dyak around the wire forestay, and finished the job by dashing a couple of buckets of water over him.

The schooner lay directly in the path of moonlight; and, as their eyes became accustomed to the change from black darkness, skipper and mate could see, down at the end of the shaft of moonlight, a dark speck that seemed to grow as they watched it.

Soon Wat emerged from the companionway fifteen minutes later, wiping his hands on his apron, and spoke to the skipper.

"Roight!" said Lavin, a wide grin lighting his face. "Here, Zim," he called to the mate, "break out a keg o' powdher, an' give it the stooard." As the mate disappeared below, he added to Soon Wat: "An' whin it's ready, put Dinny back in his pen, an' stay wid him. Savvy?"

"All ri'—me sabbee!" grinned the steward, and followed the mate.

The skipper stood alone again, and with the nearer approach of the distant dark speck impatience gripped him. Focusing his night glass upon the speck, he made her out to be unmistakably a Dyak proa, with brown mat sails hanging idly from her long, sloping yards, urged forward slowly by a pair of heavy sweeps.

She was within a scant mile now, and in the continued absence of wind would be up with the schooner in half an hour. Even should a breeze strike down, Lavin knew the sailing qualities of such craft well enough to feel certain that his vessel stood no chance with the proa in anything less than a half gale.

Forward, he saw the heads of the crew bob up from the fo'c's'le one after another, until the whole crowd stood huddled just abaft the forestay. A muffled whispering carried aft to him, and, breaking in on it, the hoarse voice of the half-choked Dyak vouched for that worthy's tenacious hold on life.

Lavin strolled forward quietly, apparently aimlessly. The feeling of the Malays showed itself in the alacrity with which every brown head bobbed back through the tiny scuttle, and Lavin returned to the poop with a guffaw of hilarity. His mirth was increased by the fervid torrent of invective poured out upon the skulkers by the ironed Dyak.

The mate rejoined him shortly, and on his heels came Soon Wat. The steward carried a burden, placed it in the pigpen, and disappeared therein himself. Voog caught sight of the proa, now plainly visible to the naked eye, and looked at the skipper for enlightenment.

"Got yer gun?" asked Lavin shortly.

"Yaw," grunted Zim. "But two guns ain'dt wort' mooch to fight dem—"

"Sit tight, Jimmy; sit tight!" advised Lavin, measuring with his eye the distance of the proa, now sweeping down upon the starboard bow.

"Just watch me, son! The Dyak's safe unless some smart gazabo thinks av cuttin' th' lanyard av th' forestay. Then he'll be loose, an' ye'll have to plug him.

"Whin th' proa's within two fadom av th' bow, drop a match into yer tar bar'l, an' 'twill be loight enough, wid th' moon, fer ye to see th' foireworks. An' unless Oi'm crazy, 'twill be the lasht av our crew's religious scruples regardin' pork."

"Vell, s'posin' de virevorks don'dt stop dem? Ve'll pe——"

"They will. Shut up!" snapped Lavin, stepping down to the main deck, as the proa rasped alongside and the clank of the grappling iron was heard at the bows. "Come on!"

The proa had crept up with a spurt in the last few fathoms, and the tar barrel blazed up as the vessels touched. Now a wide circle of glaring yellow light rendered the scene as bright as day, and the chained Dyak shrieked a greeting to his countrymen in the proa, bidding them swarm in and butcher the schooner's helpless whites.

The Malays took heart again, and, with the first sound of boarding, trooped up from the forecastle and joined the Dyaks for a murderous rush aft. At a command from the chained Dyak, the pirates passed arms to the Malays, and now fear fled from their swart faces as each wiry arm flourished a wicked, wavy-bladed creese.

"Now!" gritted Lavin, leading the way. Followed closely by the mate, he charged forward, blazing into the mob until his gun was empty. For an instant the pirates backed, and stood bunched in the bows. Then they realized that the white men were helpless until they could reload their weapons, and a howl pealed out upon the still air as the Dyak lashed them to fury for an annihilating onslaught.

What Lavin had foreseen happened. A creese blade flashed through the rope

lanyard of the forestay, and, with a shriek of triumph, the Dyak sprang erect, shaking aloft his irons, and gathering himself to lead the rush.

His leg irons stopped him for an instant, and he fell, bringing his followers together in a huddled mob as he shrieked to them to lift him up. It was the crucial moment.

"Now, again!" barked Lavin, flourishing his empty revolver and starting another rush. As he passed the pigpen, the mate hard at his heels, the skipper shot a sharp command into the dimmest corner of Dennis' late home, and halted suddenly at the foremast.

A brown wave of howling, bloodthirsty Dyaks hung poised on the edge of the little fo'e's'le head, every glaring eye and frothing mouth vividly visible in the light of the blazing tar barrel and the silvery sheen of an electric moon.

The mate's face registered doubt as to what was to come next, mixed with anger at the skipper's foolhardy throwing away of their lives—then fear, as the pirates gathered to rush.

"Hooroar!" howled the skipper, smiting his pop-eyed mate hard on the back and dancing with glee. "Lookit!"

From the darkness of the pigpen soared a black shape. It sailed over their heads, and as it went, every eye saw the rotund form of the skipper's pig, breathing sparks and smoke through its nostrils.

For five seconds it sailed through the air, scattering a stream of sputtering sparks, and emitting the sulphurous reek of Hades. Then, with a heavy thud, the body fell among the startled pirates, and a howl of superstitious terror burst from the schooner's Malay crew as they scuttled below like one man. Then came the climax.

With the roar of a bursting shell, the pig exploded. A flash blazed out that blanketed the light of barrel and moon. One cry of terror went up from the huddled pirates; it gave way to frenzied

moans of agony as the fiercely blazing wads of oakum with which the pigskin had been packed flew into the faces of those nearest.

The Dyak, hurled far aft by the force of the explosion, fell at the skipper's feet, his face blasted beyond any semblance to human features, and from the bows sounded the frantic efforts of the proa's surviving crew to haul their vessel clear.

Soon Wat's wooden face peered over the edge of the pigpen, and from some hidden recess of his being a smile escaped. It spread over his yellow features like a pantomime mask. Zim Voog stood with open mouth, arms hanging loosely at his side, almost as scared as the pirates.

"Hustle, now, and put out the blaze!"

snapped Lavin, jumping forward and stamping on the fiery wads. He stopped to empty his recharged gun after the hastily receding proa.

Then, putting his head down the fo'c's'le scuttle, he hailed the Malays. Did they want to work? They did, if that "debbil soor" was locked up. Would they ever try to kill the skipper's pig again? They would not! They only wanted protection from its wrath. They'd surely be good.

"All right!" grinned the skipper. "Up ye come, ye yaller rats!"

He laid a powder-grimed hand on the mate's shoulder, and sang out to Soon Wat, so that his badly shaken mate could fully appreciate his words:

"Stooard, ye grinnin' divil, give us a rale supper, now. Pork chops!"

A GRAVE SITUATION

By HARVEY L. GRAY

"Joe surveyed his possessions. First to meet his eyes was the potato field, with its well-ordered rows of plants showing excellent mid-June development. But Joe, ungrateful to nature failed to enthuse over his bumper potato crops. While he went on growing potatoes, he had another ambition which greatly overshadowed potato cultivation."

WHEN you can show something tangible—say a couple of thousand dollars in the bank, and some established business bringing in a steady income—then, and not until then, will I consent to your marriage to Gertrude." John P. Crowinshield leaned back in his easy-chair with an assured "that-settles-it" air, and frowned with paternal patronage upon Joseph Bender, a youth of twenty-five years, who, being in love with Crowinshield's only daughter, had called to "speak to father."

Now John P. Crowinshield was a substantial citizen, and, as president of the only national bank in the county,

chairman for the twelfth consecutive time of the board of selectmen, owner of vast timberlands, a sawmill, and a large, prosperous farm, he had come to realize in no uncertain way that his word, while not "law" exactly, was universally respected. Naturally, of course, he supposed that his present caller would accept his manifesto.

Nevertheless, young Bender, un-bearded and surprisingly youthful in appearance, actually had the audacity to question the wisdom of the statement concerning the two thousand and a steady income. In fact, he showed unusual spirit and lack of awe in stating his case.

"Two thousand dollars my necktie!" he exclaimed irreverently. "All you need is confidence and grit. With such a smart girl as Gertie to help me, I'd have that two thousand in no time—and add more for good measure. I'd turn this county upside down. Why, that little farm of mine——"

"That little farm of yours," broke in the father of Gertrude, with determination, "is a minor factor in this case. For Heaven sake, son, do you think for a minute that I'd let you start Gertie off on that little place of yours to help you feed your hens—or help you hoë potatoes? Why! It's ridiculous on the face of it! What have you accomplished in the three years since your father died and left you the place? Answer me that!"

Joe hitched himself into a fighting attitude and raised a chubby forefinger.

"I've accomplished this," he began eagerly. "I've laid the foundations for the finest little poultry business you've ever seen. I've——"

"Chickens!—a business!" exploded the older man, with sarcasm. "Why, when I was a young man, the women-folks raised chickens for pin money. That isn't a business—it's a fad started by some 'back-to-the-farm' crank drawing pay from a city newspaper. Pish!"

"Things have changed since you were a young man," objected Joe sturdily.

"Hens have changed precious little in that time," answered the other, somewhat pleased with the sentiment.

"There's money in it," insisted Joe doggedly.

"That," said Crowinshield, "is a question which has never been settled beyond a reasonable doubt." He smiled easily. "Besides," he added, "Gertie would tire of the life within a year. It would be too much of a change from her present surroundings."

Joe frowned for a moment, then brightened.

"Why not let Gertie decide for herself?" he suggested, turning to the corner where "Gertie" sat expectantly waiting. "She's twenty, and she knows her own mind." Gertie's father laughed indulgently.

"Gertie's in love," said he; "and at the present time I haven't a doubt but that she would go to Zululand if you wished. She don't know her own mind yet."

"Oh, don't she, though!" exclaimed Gertrude, with spirit. "Well, if a girl doesn't know whom she wants to marry when she's twenty, then she never will. What's more, I've half a mind to marry Joe without your mean old consent!"

Her father rose, crossed the room slowly, and laid a hand upon her shoulder.

"Gertie," he said softly, "I would do anything within reason to make you happy. You are all that I have, dear. Furthermore, I like Joe, and I have no objections to your marriage to him—at the proper time. He's a good lad, only he's not far enough along in life to afford a wife. Just wait a while, and then, when the right time comes, both of you will thank me for offering this advice. At any rate," he added, his lips tightening firmly, "further talk on this subject is useless. You must wait; that settles it."

After a violent discussion lasting fully an hour, both young people, despite their mutinous opinions, were forced to see that the father's word *did* settle it.

After a night's sleep, Joe, albeit somewhat sour over his unsuccessful interview with his would-be father-in-law, was compelled to admit at least to a portion of his wisdom. Then, being Joe Bender and springing from stern New England stock, he set about him for means to bring his requirements up to the necessary standard.

As he sat on the back steps of his

home, enjoying his after-breakfast pipe, he took a mental inventory of his visible assets. They consisted of the farm of twenty acres, saddled with a nine-hundred-dollar mortgage, a good house and barn, a horse, wagon, and some farm equipment, and about four hundred industrious hens. Ten of his twenty acres comprised the best potato field in town, if not in the county. In addition to this, he had a balance of about three hundred dollars in the bank, his net earnings for the past year.

"Not what you'd call a cheerful layout," observed Joe, as he puffed reflectively at his pipe. "Still, it *could* be worse."

Joe surveyed his possessions. First to meet his eyes was the potato field, with its well-ordered rows of plants showing excellent mid-June development. The spring following his father's death Joe had planted the piece to potatoes as an experiment. Before that time it had been an indifferent cornfield. The result was more than gratifying, and when harvest time came the field was the envy of every farmer who knew of the place, and particularly of Amos Studley, Joe's next-door neighbor, a middle-aged farmer of some means, who was a crank on potatoes.

Yet Joe, ungrateful to nature, failed to enthuse over his bumper potato crops. While he went on growing potatoes, he had another ambition which greatly overshadowed potato cultivation. His heart was with his hens, and his gaze turned from the potato field to the other half of his farm where his feathered friends were scattered about, busily scratching and digging. His look was one of fondness. It was his ambition to establish a large, modern, and scientific poultry farm run on a profitable basis. He had faith in the idea, and also the whole-souled support of Gertrude Crowinshield.

There was some foundation to Joe's ambition. He "had a way with hens"

which had returned him a neat little profit from his small brood. But he looked higher. He wanted to possess two or three thousand hens, housed in modern pens equipped with sanitary runs, feeding troughs, and the like. But such an establishment cost money, he knew, and money was the one means of barter that Joe had not. He was confident, however, that eventually he would be able to gratify his ambitions.

As Joe bestirred himself about his day's work, an automobile swung into the yard on two wheels and slid on locked wheels almost to the barn door before it came to a stop. The driver, a dapper young man of perhaps thirty years, "stalled" his engine and alighted. Joe recognized him as Henry Clay Barnum, an intensely enthusiastic young person endowed with considerable wealth who "went in" for things on a huge farm a mile or so up the road. His hobbies ranged from prize cattle to bees, and he changed from one to the other whenever a new idea assailed him. His changing moods kept his friends dizzy. Just now he was raising poultry on a large scale—fact is, everything he did was on a large scale. Incidentally he was particularly fond of Joe's company, and had hindered that young man not a little by stealing him away from his work during the busy seasons to go hunting or fishing.

This morning he was unusually blithesome, and Joe sighed. It was probable, he thought, that the fish were biting like the devil—or some other reasonably good excuse for putting off a day's work.

"I'm sorry, Hank," said Joe, following this line of reasoning, "but I'm too blamed busy to get away this morning."

"Oh, that's all right," answered Barnum brightly, as he pulled off his driving gloves and fished for a cigarette. "I'm not going to interfere with your work this morning. I'm here on business; in fact—I might as well get it

over with at once—I came to tell you that I'm going out of the hen industry."

The announcement did not surprise Joe any. He had expected it to come at some time or other. Nevertheless, he experienced a slight pang of envy. Joe had been of material aid to Barnum when that impetuous person had disposed of a whole trainload of hogs to take up the business of making hens lay. He had chosen most of the equipment for his friend, and superintended its installation. When complete, it embraced all of the ideas Joe entertained for his own place, if his means ever permitted. Now that the equipment was for sale, he bemoaned the fact that he was unable to buy it.

"Yes," repeated Barnum, "I'm going to raise Airedales—dogs, you know—and I'm going to let you have the poultry layout, hens and all."

Joe jumped. It was too good to be true. He held out his hand impetuously.

"You can have it," Barnum went on, "for eight hundred dollars—cash." Joe's face lost its smile.

"Why cash?" he demanded, with a frown. "You infernal hog, you've got more money than Coal Oil Johnny!"

"Oh, have I?" Barnum wanted to know. "Well, you have another guess, my son. At the present time I couldn't lay my hands on five hundred dollars I could rightfully call my own. That vast amount of wealth you allude to is held in trust, dammit, and it's doled out in semioccasional spoonfuls. There's nothing due for several months, and I simply must have eight hundred immediately, if not sooner."

"Why?" demanded Joe.

"Why? Because," explained Barnum impatiently, "that New York dog fancier refuses to talk business with me unless I can scare up three thousand dollars. He fails to be impressed with my line of credit. You see," said he, taking from his pockets a mass of

literature appertaining to that breed of dogs known as Airedales, fairly teeming with the words "sired" and "dammed," "there's money in these dogs——"

"Sure, sure," interrupted Joe somewhat sharply, "I know; but what I want to know is, why can't you let me have that poultry equipment of yours on a note, say, for three months, six months, or a year?"

"Nothing doing on the time, Joe!" answered Barnum positively. "Jenkins must have cash for his pups, so I must have cash for my hens. Why," he exclaimed suddenly, "you could raise eight hundred on this jewel of a farm without an effort!" Joe laughed ruefully.

"Unfortunately," said he, "there's a little parasite on this 'jewel of a farm' already—I inherited it. But," he added hopefully, "perhaps I could raise the money in some other way. Will you give me an option?"

Barnum considered this carefully. "It might be arranged," said he. "My option for the dogs is only for a month, you know." He smiled, and eyed Joe shrewdly. "Fred Rand has made me an offer," he observed. Joe started.

"I'll give you twenty dollars for a two weeks' option," he offered, his manner changed. Now that Rand was a factor, he would raise the money if he had to steal it. Rand, it might be added, at one time attempted to win away from Joe the love of Gertrude Crowinshield, with disastrous results to Rand's right eye. Since then there had been a coolness between them.

"Twenty dollars for an option," repeated Joe impatiently. "How about it?"

"Done!" exclaimed Barnum. "Now rustle around for that twenty. I'm in a hurry. And, mind you," he added, turning from the operation of cranking his automobile, "two weeks is all you'll get. Although you and I are

good friends, I'll sell out to Rand if you don't get the coin. Business is business."

"That's fair enough," said Joe. "Only don't trouble yourself about Rand," he added grimly; "I'll get the money."

When he considered means of raising money, Joe's mind turned instantly to Amos Studley, regardless of the fact that their relations never had been what you might call neighborly. They seldom met but to quarrel, usually about Joe's potato field, and usually, during these discussions, Amos lost his temper. Secretly Joe maintained a liking for his choleric neighbor, while deep down in his heart, Amos nursed an admiration for the youthful Bender. Therefore, Joe decided without hesitation that Amos should purchase his potato field.

Three elements entered into Joe's determination to sell his land to Studley. First, Studley's potato field adjoined the parcel of property he wished to sell; secondly, Amos made a specialty of potatoes; and, thirdly, Amos had plenty of money. These arguments were unanswerable, thought Joe.

Ten minutes after Barnum had left, Joe crossed his field and found Studley instructing two swarthy sons of Italy in the art of applied hoeing. Apparently the lesson had not been wonderfully successful, for the farmer's wrinkled face was flushed. Had Joe been less engrossed in his "big idea," he might have scented an impending squall, and waited for a more favorable moment to broach his proposition. Instead, he sailed blindly but enthusiastically ahead.

"Got five minutes, Amos?" he asked.

Amos eyed his neighbor silently for a moment, then walked off a few paces.

"I s'pose," he began, with a frown, "that you've come over here to kick

about one of my cows getting into your field?" He looked up expectantly.

"Nothing like that," answered Joe, with a short laugh. "I've come over on business." Amos stiffened.

"Oh, business!" said he, with fine sarcasm. "Now, why didn't you mention that in the first place? You would have saved time for both of us." He frowned for a moment. "Waal?"

Joe spat accurately at a potato bug, ground the enemy into the earth with his heel, and cleared his throat.

"Amos," he said, "I want to get rid of my potato field. Twenty-four hundred dollars and it's yours. How about it, shall I see about the deeds to-day?"

"You shall not," answered Amos positively. "I don't want your blamed old potato field. I might take it as a gift, because it's good potato land; but as for buying it"—he laughed shortly—"not on your life! I've got troubles enough now." He started back toward the laborers, but Joe restrained him, with a firm hand upon his shoulder.

"Not so fast, Amos," he protested. "I need the money, and I could get along without the land. You could spare the money and could use the land to good advantage. It adjoins your own potato field. Think it over."

"I've thought it over all I'm a-goin' to," answered Amos, shaking off the hand. "I tell ye I don't want the land. Whether I've got the money or not ain't got anything to do with it. I don't want any more land, and, what's more, no man is goin' to force his potato fields down my windpipe!" He regarded Joe defiantly. Joe regarded him silently for a moment, then his face hardened.

"Amos," said he, "when I try to force land on another man I'll not be in my right mind. It's a straight business deal with me every time. And, let me tell you," he added, his voice rising indignantly, "you'll have to get down on your knees and beg before I'll sell you that land now!" He snapped his fin-

gers disdainfully, and departed with his head in the air.

Amos regarded him for a moment, then cackled. "The knees of my pants won't bag fer some time," he remarked dryly.

Joe returned to his work with anger in his heart, and, although he worked with feverish energy until late in the afternoon, he could not shake off his feeling of resentment. After a hearty supper, however, as he sat on his favorite spot on the back steps, smoking, he cooled off somewhat. He racked his brain for means of disposing of his land, or some other way of raising eight hundred dollars. He went to bed without a solution.

For ten days, Joe tried every scheme he could think of to raise money. He centered his energies in an effort to sell the potato field, but failed to get a bite. A young married man from the city visited town in search of a small place. Joe promptly collared him, and took him out to his place. No house went with the field, however, and the stranger politely declined to buy.

Joe tried the national bank, but John P. Crowinshield spiked that gun. He laid a fatherly hand on Joe's shoulder, and advised him not to fool with second mortgages. He didn't want to see Joe get in too deep, he explained.

Undiscouraged, Joe sought Henry Craig, an old family friend, who, with his wife and widowed daughter, lived in the north part of the town. Craig listened politely, then shook his head.

"But this is such a beautiful opportunity!" explained Joe in despair.

"I'm sorry, Joe," answered Craig, "but I can't do it. If you were in real trouble I'd be only too glad to help you. But this is different. Win that girl with your own wits and muscles, Joe; not with a friend's money."

Joe drove home in gloomy spirits. He was not discouraged, but for the life

of him he could not figure out where that eight hundred dollars was coming from. However, he still hoped that opportunity would knock at his door before the option expired.

Opportunity arrived the middle of the next forenoon, while Joe was repairing a henhouse. It came from town in an automobile and amid a cloud of dust. Barnum played the rôle unconsciously, and entered the yard, ignorant of the fact that he was to act the part of the good angel.

"Ah, there, Joe!" said he briskly, as he hopped out of his pulsating motor car. "Just thought I'd stop off and spread a little gossip." He laughed softly. "There's a merry row up-town," he said.

"Uh huh!" answered Joe, continuing his work on the henhouse.

"We're going to have a new cemetery," said Barnum.

"A what?"

"A cemetery! Place where they bury people, you idiot!" exclaimed Barnum, with good-natured impatience. "Lemme explain: Father Murphy, of All Saint's Church, has just awoke to the fact that his dead parishoners are scattered about the township sort of promiscuouslike, as you might say, and he can't see the fitness of it. He wants an honest-to-goodness, regulation cemetery, same as the other churches have."

"What is there scandalous about that?" asked Joe.

"There's no objection to his having a cemetery," answered Barnum. "Nobody cares a hang if he has a dozen of them. What they're frothing at the mouth about is the fact that he has his eyes on the old Dean place."

"The deuce you say!" exclaimed Joe, shocked.

"The same," said Barnum. "You can imagine the outbreak that greeted that bit of news. Jim Dean, you know, is so mean that he'd die happy if he could only put something over on his

fellow townsmen. Poor Father Murphy didn't stop to consider that the old Dean place was the first place in town to be cleared back in the days of the Indians. I didn't know about it myself until recently."

"Well," demanded Joe, "what are they going to do about it?"

"Oh, they protested," answered the other, with a laugh. "Yes, indeed, they certainly did protest! Father Murphy met them fairly, but his parishoners didn't fancy the tone of the protest. Can't say as I blame 'em, at that. You can't beat the average New Englander in stating hard, cold facts in a way that will not fail to be understood. The average corn-fed has a tongue about as soft as cold steel."

"But, tell me," insisted Joe impatiently, "what's the answer?"

"A compromise," answered Barnum. "And you've got to hand it to the father for being a good scout. He's offered to let his option slide if somebody will find him a satisfactory substitute for the Dean place. He did more; he offered two hundred dollars to the man who'd find it for him. How's that for a fair offer, eh?"

Joe puffed his pipe thoughtfully for a moment, then slowly a grin spread over his face. He looked at Barnum and laughed.

"Well, wh——" began Barnum, puzzled, but Joe interrupted.

"When you left town," asked Joe, "had anybody produced a cemetery?"

"No!" exclaimed Barnum in disgust. "Not even a gravestone. Those people uptown are like reform politicians, they try murder on the slightest provocation, and then fail to carry out their bluff. Why?"

"Because," answered Joe, dropping his hammer and making for the barn, "I'll save them the bother."

Joe hitched up his horse and drove directly to the parish house of All

Saints' Church, where he was closeted with Father Murphy for over an hour. He emerged smiling, shook hands with the parish priest, and took the steps in a jump. As he went briskly through the gate he almost collided with Amos Studley.

Joe beamed upon his neighbor with extreme good humor. Past differences, so far as he was concerned, were forgiven.

"Fine day," said he, as he hopped into his buggy.

"Jus' so," muttered Amos, as Joe drove off. He paused a moment and gazed at the retreating buggy, puzzled. He wondered—but it was too preposterous! He dismissed the thought from his mind, and walked on.

Meantime Joe drove out to see Henry Craig. He found that gentleman engaged far out in a cornfield. Joe talked steadily while Henry listened. At first he frowned in perplexity, then he grinned, and bit off a chew of "Honey Dew." Before Joe finished talking, he was laughing, and he was laughing long after Joe had driven off.

Amos Studley, going out to feed his stock early the following morning, stopped short halfway between the house and barn, and stared. A strange sight greeted his eyes.

"What the devil!" he exclaimed. The cause of this outburst was Joe Bender, a notoriously late riser, performing strange antics out in his potato field. Under one arm he carried a bunch of roughly hewed stakes, while in the other hand he carried a hatchet. He would pace off a distance, drive a stake, pace off another distance, and drive another stake. This he continued for upward of an hour, until the entire field was dotted with stakes.

Amos found time to watch his young neighbor occasionally as he performed his morning work. He saw Joe drive off toward town about eight o'clock, and

abandoned his work for a moment to watch him. When the buggy had disappeared from view, he smiled craftily.

"Evidently Joe don't know the law," he chuckled, highly pleased.

Nevertheless, after his chores were finished, he crossed the field and studied the stakes with interest. Thanks to Joe's crudity, he could make neither heads or tails out of them. After puzzling over it for a while, Amos gave it up, and returned to his work.

Joe drove back from town about an hour later, and in the buggy with him sat Father Murphy. Amos, ever watchful, witnessed the arrival, and covertly watched them from a sheltered spot. The two men walked slowly about the field, Joe doing most of the talking and much pointing, while the priest was content to listen. After a time, they climbed into the buggy and returned to town.

Throughout the performance in the field, Amos had chuckled softly to himself. Now that they were gone, Amos seated himself upon his front veranda and waited. When Joe returned, about an hour later, alone, Amos strolled out to the road to meet him.

"Just wanted a minute's talk with ye," he explained, as Joe halted his horse in response to an upraised hand. Joe waited expectantly.

"Well?"

"H'mm!" began Amos, a crafty smile playing over his features. "See you had a visitor this morning." Joe's face cleared, and he smiled.

"Oh, yes," said he. "Father Murphy was out here on a little matter of business." Amos also smiled, but his features hardened somewhat.

"Aimin' to sell that tract of yours to him fer a cemetery, I suppose?"

"We discussed it," Joe admitted. Amos' face lost its smile, and he hitched himself closer.

"Do you happen to know," he demanded, raising a soiled forefinger,

"that when a passel of land is set aside for a cemetery, the consent of the abutters must be secured before the deeds can be passed?"

"I surely wouldn't attempt to sell a piece of land for such a purpose without first acquainting myself with the law," answered Joe pleasantly.

"Waal," Amos punctuated each word carefully, "I'm goin' to break some news to ye. The fact is, I ain't a-goin' to give my consent! Do I make myself puffictly clear?"

"Absolutely," said Joe. "But, you see, Amos, your consent isn't necessary."

"It ain't, eh?" exploded Amos. "Waal, now, I guess I'm goin' to have a whole lot to say about it! Jest you go about plantin' a cemetery under my nose, an' see ef I don't make my consent necessary!" He shot a look of venom at his youthful neighbor, and the light of battle blazed in his eyes. Joe returned the gaze calmly, and proceeded to fill his pipe. When he had it going to his satisfaction, he ventured a reply.

"I repeat," said he, "that your consent is not necessary. You see," he went on, holding up a restraining hand, to hush an impending protest, "when I staked out the place this morning, I laid out a twenty-foot street between your property and mine, both at the side and in the rear. My plan is to have a chapel at the rear of the lot, and the street will lead up to it. So, you see, that street removed you quite effectively as an abutter. That's plain, ain't it?"

Amos stared at his neighbor glassily, bereft of speech. Slowly the light of battle faded from his eyes. He rallied for a moment, however.

"You can't do it!" he said bravely.

"Oh, yes, I can," answered Joe, with a boyish smile of triumph. Amos was helpless.

"Would you treat a neighbor like that, Joe?" he asked huskily.

"Business is business," answered Joe grimly. "And, besides, I need the money."

"But, Joe——" objected Amos; then suddenly his manner changed. "Come into the house," he directed hastily. Joe, with a covert smile, climbed down from the buggy, and followed Amos into the house.

"Now," said Amos, as they seated themselves at an ancient desk, "let's talk business. I guess you're right about that street business, and the only thing left for me to do is to buy." Joe shook his head.

"Can't be done," said he firmly. "You must remember that Father Murphy has a prior right in this matter. Besides," he added, with a grim tightening of the lips, "perhaps you have forgotten our former interview on this subject. You were positively nasty about it then, Amos. I remember distinctly telling you——"

"Now, look you here, Joe," Amos protested, "let bygones be bygones, and look at this thing sensibly. You know I can't have a cemetery under my very nose——"

"You're no worse off than I am," interrupted Joe, with a smile.

"That may be all right," answered Amos. "But—think of it! A cemetery! Why, my wife would leave me in a minute. Now, wait a bit!" he pleaded, as Joe made an effort to interrupt again. "There's lots of other places Father Murphy could use as a cemetery, and they won't bother anybody. Forget that little spat we had the other day, and sell that land to me, if you must sell it. Father Murphy will understand."

Joe considered this carefully. "I don't know," he worried. "I've given Father Murphy to understand——"

"That's all right," Amos cut in. He saw that Joe was wavering. "You can

fix it up with him. If you can't, then I will. I'll see him myself."

Joe gazed thoughtfully at the ceiling for a moment, then reluctantly he gave in.

"There!" exclaimed Amos. "I feel better already. Get your papers fixed up, and I'll hand you a check for twenty-four hundred——"

"Three thousand," corrected Joe sharply.

"Eh?" Amos looked up in surprise. "Three thousand! You said twenty-four hundred the other day. I distinctly——"

"My figure to Father Murphy was three thousand," answered Joe firmly. Amos laid down the pen he had been toying with.

"Why, that land ain't wuth that much money, Joe!" he protested.

"Maybe it ain't to you," answered Joe. "But——"

"All right," said Amos hastily. "Make it three thousand. But"—he eyed Joe sternly—"it ain't wuth it—you know it ain't."

At precisely ten o'clock of the morning following, Amos, who with Joe had been over legal documents in the office of Jefferson Smiley, an aged attorney, arose and eyed Joe triumphantly.

"That settles your little cemetery business," he said, as he thrust some legal papers into his wallet. Joe was about to voice a rejoinder, when the outer door of the office opened to admit the Reverend Thomas Murphy, rector of All Saints' Church. He was accompanied by Henry Craig, puffing contentedly at a long cigar. Greetings over, Joe and Craig joined in conference with the lawyer.

Amos and Father Murphy, left to their own devices, met in the center of the room.

"Well, father," began Amos pleasantly, albeit a trifle constrained. "I'll have to admit that I played you a rather

shabby trick." The clergyman elevated his eyebrows in surprise.

"I don't believe I quite understand," said he, mystified.

"Why, about Joe's land," explained Amos. "Now, you understand," he continued in a low tone, "I really couldn't have a cemetery right in my front yard. So I just got in ahead of you, and bought the property. I have the deeds in my pocket now."

The priest frowned in perplexity a moment, then slowly his expression changed, and a smile played about his features. His eyes twinkled, and he shot an amused glance toward Joe Bender.

"There must have been a mistake," said he. "I had no idea of buying Joe's property."

"Eh?" gasped Amos, the breath leaving his body. For a moment he was speechless.

"See here," he exclaimed, when he had regained his speech, "didn't Joe Bender take you out there yesterday with the idea of selling that place for a cemetery?"

"Oh, yes," answered Father Murphy pleasantly. "But our inspection was merely perfunctory. Joe explained be-

fore we went out that it was probable that the place would not be what I wanted, and as soon as I looked at it I quite agreed with him. Then he took me over to Mr. Craig's place and showed me a piece of property that just suited me. That's what brings us here this morning."

"Why, the darned rascal!" exclaimed Amos. "I paid him three thousand dollars for that property of his simply because he said he named that price to you."

"That's right," answered the priest, with a laugh. "He did say his price was three thousand. But he might just as well have made it a million." He paused, as a sudden thought occurred to him. "Well, well," he exclaimed in a pleased tone. "That makes it nice. He'll be able to do it now."

"Do what?" asked Amos, mystified.

"Why, get married," Father Murphy explained. "He's engaged to Gertrude Crownshield, you know."

Amos turned slowly and glared across the room at Joe; then gradually his face relaxed, and a faint smile of admiration played in the corners of his mouth.

"He'll be a good provider," said he.

THROUGH PURGATORY

By JOSEPH IVERS LAWRENCE

Author of "The Amateur Lucifer," etc.

"I shall ride through Purgatory, my friends, on one of my best horses—Ladybird—and I'll wager a thousand dollars with any man here that my wife will ride with me, and finish the run. Any takers?"

TWENTY-TWO men and women sat around the table in the great, beamed, and paneled dining room of the Arlings' house, and partook of the truffled partridge and champagne cup provided by their host for the hunt breakfast. Ben Arling had compounded

the cup with his own hands, and his slightly flushed face and ready laughter showed that he had sampled it freely during the process.

"It's not very good sport to tell where the drag has been laid," he said, in answer to an idle question from a neigh-

bor, "but in this case it's almost too good to keep. This time I laid the drag myself, and it's one of the sportiest courses I ever laid out. We go west from here, over the Tomlinson farm—that's easy!—and then we take to the old Drake place from the road and follow the line due south across the place; it's a regular steeplechase course in itself! I figure that we'll be pretty well warmed up by that time, and after we leave the low meadow at the end of Drake's, we follow the road for a quarter of a mile and go down the valley below the sawmill."

Harry Tennant, four seats away, uttered a smothered exclamation, and leaned forward. "You don't mean that you're going to take us through 'Purgatory,' do you, Ben?" he inquired tensely.

The host grinned, and his face was never pleasant to look at when he grinned. "Yes, I'm going to take you through Purgatory," he answered. "I don't think any one will refuse to go where the M. F. H. leads, do you?"

Marshall Crossfield, Arling's predecessor as master of foxhounds of the Westgate Hunt, set down his glass and looked up with grave disapprobation. "I will follow you to the end of the Drake place, Ben," he said, "but after that I shall withdraw from the run, and make no apologies for doing so. I think no one here will question my courage, but I am riding Featherheels this morning, and I value his legs as much as I do my own neck. I think too much of my horse to ride him over the stones and brush in that valley, and the jumps are all dangerous."

"Rather unkind of you to bar out the women in that manner, Ben," spoke up the dashing Mrs. Winant. "You evidently want it to be a man's run after you quit the Drake place. Of course, not a woman will stay after that."

"Not a woman, of course!" echoed

Marshall Crossfield, with a shake of his head.

Ben Arling grinned again. "I can speak for one woman," he said, "my wife will stay with us to the end of the run, and she's riding Erebus."

A murmur of astonishment and consternation swept over the company.

"Peggy Arling!" exclaimed Mrs. Winant indignantly; "you can't be such a fool!"

The hostess, upon whom all eyes were now turned, flushed deeply, then grew positively pale. She had been the beauty and belle of the community before she married Ben Arling, but in two years she had grown to be a white-faced, large-eyed, pathetic figure of resigned unhappiness. Arling was no longer a moderate drinker, and his "affairs" were more numerous than they had been in the days of his dashing bachelorhood.

Mrs. Arling spoke in a low voice. "I am going to ride Erebus," she said, "but I didn't know that the drag was laid through Purgatory. I thought Ben cared too much for—for his horses, to ride there. No one has ridden there since Tom Fielding was killed."

"It can't be done, Ben!" declared Crossfield stoutly. "It's not good sport to endanger life, and it's not good sport to dare every one to take such a fool-hardy chance. Why, you wouldn't let your wife go in there if she really wanted to do it; and you're crazy if you go yourself."

"The whole trouble began with poor Tom Fielding's death," said Arling, with a shrug. "Tom would have had the same tumble, with that horse of his, if he had been riding anywhere else. His horse was done for when he tried to take the jump. His death was shocking, of course, but the people made too much fuss about it. Everybody said that Purgatory was a death trap, and that no one would ever ride there again. Well, I'm trying to redeem the poor old

valley. If I'm willing to ride there myself, and let my wife, that shows what I think about it, doesn't it?"

"I'll follow you, Arling!" called out Ted Braddock, just out of college, and desirous of having a voice in affairs.

Crossfield frowned upon the young man contemptuously. "If you get over the first jump, my boy," he remarked reprovingly. "Well, I won't follow you, Arling," he added, "as I have already said; and I should hate to think that Mrs. Arling would do anything so reckless."

"I didn't expect to stir up such a tempest," said Arling, evidently not displeased with the developments. "I shall ride through Purgatory, my friends, on one of my best horses—Ladybird—and I'll wager a thousand dollars with any man here that my wife will ride with me, and finish the run. Any takers?"

"What an ass!" gasped Crossfield, under his breath, to Harry Tennant beside him; but Tennant, who had been a suitor for Mrs. Arling's hand before her marriage, simply turned a deep red, and gritted his teeth.

Mrs. Winant's eyes flashed dangerously as she turned upon the host.

"I'd horsewhip a man of mine that would take as caddish a bet as that, Ben Arling!" she cried. "But as a woman I'll take your bet. I'll bet you a thousand that Peggy doesn't finish the run. She has too much good sense to do such a thing—on a wild horse, at that. It's bad enough for you to let her ride Erebus, but she can do it over fair country. She won't be idiot enough to try the valley, and my thousand is good enough to say so."

"I don't bet with women, as a rule," returned Arling, "but you're too good a sportsman for me to refuse, Mrs. Winant.

"Peggy," he exclaimed boisterously, turning to his wife, "there's a thousand up on your sportsmanship, old girl! I'll back you against any one as the best

horsewoman in the Westgate Hunt. I'll trust you with Erebus, and I'll trust you to ride through Purgatory. Is it a go?"

A slow smile trembled over the lips of the hostess—it was the same smile she had worn when she heard of the scandal linking her husband's name with that of a certain woman rather too well known in society—and she raised her eyes and met his unflinchingly.

"I usually do ride to the end of the run," she said simply in a voice that was steady, but hardly natural, "and I shall probably do it to-day, if my luck is with me."

"Good girl!" chuckled Arling, with his unpleasant grin. "Peggy's the kind of a wife a man can depend on, gentlemen!"

Crossfield groaned softly, and gripped Tennant's knee fiercely under the table. "By God, Harry," he muttered, "that woman is either crazy or absolutely desperate! If she does it, it's nothing short of suicide!"

"Murder!" replied Tennant, in a strained whisper which brought Crossfield around facing him with a start.

Crossfield opened his lips to speak again, but shut them firmly, and shook his head when he saw the agonized look upon Tennant's face. It told him more plainly than words that Tennant still loved Peggy Arling as much as he did when he had asked her to marry him, and been refused—more than Ben Arling had ever loved her. It had been the love of a good man, perhaps too silent and dignified, against the passion of a smooth-tongued, swashbuckling hero of the moment.

The hostess rose from the table, and in a moment all the pink-coated men and variously habited women were on their feet, chattering, and moving toward the yard, where the dogs were barking and the horses stamping and neighing.

"Crossfield—just a moment, if you

don't mind," said Tennant, catching the older man by the arm and drawing him into a corner of the big room.

Crossfield was agitated and nervous. "Well, what is it, Harry?" he asked, as he watched the faces of Arling and his wife near the doors opening on the terrace.

"I'm not asking a casual favor, Crossfield," said Tennant. "I want you to do something for me; I don't want you to refuse. You know that my horses aren't much good nowadays—I've let my stable run down. I'm riding my old hunter, Muldoon, to-day, and you know he's not what he used to be; he wouldn't last through a stiff run."

Tennant was talking fast, in a strained whisper, and Crossfield was listening, mystified, vaguely alarmed.

"I want a horse, right away, Crossfield," the younger man went on. "I want you to sell me Featherheels. He's the best horse in the hunt, and he'll last. I don't know—what's going to happen, Crossfield, so I'll write you my demand note on a sheet of paper. That will make it safe. How much will you take?"

"Good Lord, Harry, what you going to do?" gasped the older man. "Don't go and make a fool of *yourself*! I don't want to sell Featherheels, anyway; he's the best horse I ever had. I refused twelve hundred for him, and I——"

"I'll give you fifteen hundred!" exclaimed Tennant impatiently. "I've got to have the horse, Crossfield. If Arling and—Mrs. Arling ride into that valley to-day, I'm going, too!"

"I thought so!" grunted the other. "Why, Harry, you can't——"

He paused suddenly at the look in the young man's eyes, and caught his breath sharply. "Perhaps I'm wrong, Harry," he said softly. "Perhaps you can. But I don't sell horses under such circumstances—it would be too much like trading on human life. Go out and take Featherheels, if you want him.

Bring him back—if you can, my boy. I—— Oh, God help you! That's all!"

Tennant caught his hand and wrung it passionately, then turned without another word and hurried out of the room. Crossfield did not follow. He gazed after the gay pink coat and the spotless buckskin breeches and shining boots, almost choking himself with a sobbing laugh as he thought of the extravagant irony of the picture.

He sat down weakly on a chair by the fireplace and listened to the sounds that came through the open windows. The people were mounting, and the dogs' ardent chorus mounted to a bedlam of barks and yelps. Horses squealed viciously as they collided, and nipped at each other in the crowded yard, and some of the keen sportsmen cursed their fractious mounts roundly without regard to the ladies, whose own sporting vocabulary was in some cases not too formally restrained.

Crossfield heard the shrill, throaty voice of Arling as he ordered the professional huntsman away with the hounds, and cursed him pettishly for not hunting his own dogs, as he had done in his days as M. F. H. Then he heard the shrill voice raised in fatuous banter, and he liked it no better.

"Some class to Tennant!" cried Arling, as he espied the man named mounted upon Featherheels. "I don't blame you, Harry, for chucking your own skate, if you can have that one. But old Crossfield'll never let you ride that horse through Purgatory."

Crossfield strained his ears for the answer, and barely heard it.

"I shall ride wherever you lead, Arling," Tennant replied quietly.

Then came a single note on the huntsman's horn to announce that the hounds had taken the scent of the drag, and there were spirited cries of enthusiasm and a clatter of eager hoofs as the hunt went streaming out of the yard.

Crossfield rose and went to the door,

and he saw three belated men still on foot in the yard, tinkering with saddle gear. One of them was young Ted Braddock, and he was having a prodigious fuss with his stirrup leather, which undoubtedly had been carefully adjusted by his groom earlier in the morning. His horse was a fine chestnut gelding, one of the best in his father's stable, and the sight of it brought a sudden impulse to Crossfield.

He strode quickly across the yard, took the stirrup leather out of the youngster's hands, with friendly familiarity rather than rudeness, and hastily measured it for himself on his extended arm.

"I'll take your horse, if you don't mind, Ted," he said boldly, as he shifted the buckle. "Tell your father I said that the country was too sporty for you in this hunt."

"Oh, I say, Crossfield!" exclaimed the youth indignantly, jamming his hands into his breeches pockets and watching the commandeering of his mount with a wry face. "By Jove, that's rather too much, you know! You said you weren't going to ride, you know. Now, if you've changed your mind, you might at least take Tennant's horse."

"Tennant's horse is no good," explained Crossfield, as though that ended the matter. "Sorry, Ted, but I've just decided to ride. This will be a hunt that I wouldn't care to miss. Hope I'll have a chance to do something for you some time."

He swung into the saddle, leaving the young man still protesting, and rode out of the yard at a fast gallop. The feeling had come upon him that he must see who entered upon the projected dash through the dangerous valley, and he felt an added satisfaction in the thought that he might be saving Captain Braddock's son from a rash adventure by depriving him of his horse.

The field was at the third fence on the Tomlinson farm when Crossfield

overtook it on the fast chestnut, and the hunters cheered him gayly as he went over the rails after them. It was a fresh, breezy morning, and the horses were full of ginger, many of them having to be held hard on the curb in their exuberance of spirit.

As Crossfield passed the riders that were holding to the rear, he saw Ben Arling and his wife riding hard at the front, with Harry Tennant following closely. Peggy Arling's big, rangy black, Erebus, was already shining with nervous sweat, and the delicate veins stood out like cords on his satiny skin. Peggy was pulling hard on the curb, and the notoriously vicious horse was flirting his head and fretting at the restraint with constantly increasing anger.

Arling's own mount was one of the best hunters in the field, Irish bred and English trained, but as mild-tempered as Erebus was vicious, and Crossfield was furious when he perceived that Arling was holding steadily about a length in advance of the black horse, thereby aggravating its ill humor and making it the harder for his wife to hold.

Some of the women sought the open gates and the gaps in the hedges, but it was a fast company in general, and the jumps on the Tomlinson and Drake places were taken at a steady drive. There were no spills, and all but four members of the field were in joyous mood. Ben Arling rode with his face red and set, but with the grin rarely leaving it. His wife's pallor had increased, it seemed to Crossfield, and her eyes were larger than usual. Harry Tennant was simply grim; he rode hard, with his eyes to the front, never opening his lips or turning his head to reply to the casual jests that were flung at him from the rear.

Two miles of good country were covered; then, before any one seemed to realize it, the last meadow on the Drake place was behind them, and the old saw-

mill could be seen by the roadside, a quarter of a mile away.

The hounds swarmed down the road, and the hunters saw them break and pause beyond the mill; then, leaving the road, they disappeared into the verdant valley below. They saw the huntsman trying to check them, but without success, and then they saw him ride after his charges into the ravine, but at a cautious pace, with his horse held in.

"I'm through for to-day!" cried Mrs. Winant, pulling up her roan mare. "No Purgatory sticks and stones for my pony. Come back here, Peggy Arling!" she added vociferously. "Where are you going with my thousand dollars on your precious head?"

But Peggy Arling did not heed the cry or turn to make any answer. She and her husband, with Harry Tennant close behind, were tearing down the road at a pace which brought cheers from some of the men, but which meant to Crossfield that Erebus could no longer be held by a woman's hands.

There was a hedge at the mouth of the ravine with a convenient break in it, but none of the three riders stopped for the break; they jumped the hedge, one, two, three, about a length apart, and started on the run through the course which had been the death of one of the hunt's best riders ten years before.

Five daring hunters followed them, either through recklessness or fear of ridicule, but they rode with tight reins, feeling their way, and Crossfield told himself that they would not finish the run. For himself, he had no desire to risk his neck or his borrowed horse, so he left the party in the road without a word, running his horse a furlong beyond the mill and down a smooth highway that paralleled the valley. He knew a way that would bring him to the finish of the run without costing him more than a hard ride.

Peggy Arling's face was colorless as

she guided her runaway horse over the rough turf of the narrow valley toward the first jump. She knew that her husband was now behind her, and she could hear other horses, but she did not know who rode them.

Ben Arling let his horse out until he came near her. "Sit tight, Peg, and let 'im go!" he called to her sharply. "He's good for the jumps!"

She did not turn her head or so much as nod to show that she heard him, and Erebus took off at the three-foot stone wall with scarcely a break in his wild pace, clearing it as though it were no more than a hummock on the turf. Arling's mount, Ladybird, was well in hand, and it took the wall conservatively, losing a couple of lengths in doing it.

Tennant came on, a close third, and he had a handful in Featherheels. The horse had been trained as a steeple-chase racer, and it took off abruptly, with little pause, and did not "dwell" on the farther side of the jump; so Tennant, accustomed to country hunters, found himself pitching in the saddle like a novice, and holding on for his life. He knew, however, that the horse could stay—that it would be with him when he called for action.

They came presently to the first nasty jump, a rail fence with a ten-foot breadth of brushwood on the near side. Erebus checked his mad flight when he came to it, and took the long leap with an obvious effort. There was stubble on the far side, with pebbles and sand, and the black horse floundered an instant, snorting angrily as he gathered himself together and dashed on.

Arling went over cautiously, picking his jump, and was a dozen lengths behind his wife when he went on. Featherheels took it like an old racer, and was close to Ladybird when he gained the turf beyond the stubble.

The three now rode for the water jump, a wide, deep brook that tumbled

noisily over rocks, with a rough hedge four feet high and as many broad on the near side of it, and with nothing but muddy gravel at the take-off. That jump, it was often said, was the beginning of "hell." Beyond it there was only a half mile more of the valley, but in that stretch were six jumps, terminating at the five-barred gate with the three-foot drop beyond it—the jump that had killed Tom Fielding.

Peggy's hands no longer tugged at the reins; she merely held her seat. Her hat was off and her long, fair hair was loose and fluttering behind her as the black horse ran wild. His hoofs threw up the gravel as he struck the take-off, and he slid for a yard, but it did not stop him. He rose splendidly over the hedge, clearing the difficult jump like a bird, and ran on beyond the brook, faster, wilder than ever.

Arling and Tennant came close behind. They had passed the plodding huntsman, and they could no longer hear the horses of the other riders. Tennant was holding back Featherheels, as Arling came to the jump first. Ladybird slid into the wet gravel and floundered. Arling struck her with his crop and swore. She reared, floundered again, and refused.

Featherheels took off without a slip, and cleared the hedge and brook prettily, then Tennant checked him in his run, and looked back for Arling. The latter had not followed. Tennant looked anxiously ahead, and saw Peggy and the black horse clear the next fence, then he whirled about, rode roughly through the brook and a ragged gap in the hedge, and saw Arling walking his horse slowly toward the bank that led up to the road above the ravine.

"Arling," called Tennant sharply, "is your horse hurt?"

"No, but she's done—she refused!" replied the M. F. H. curtly.

Tennant touched his horse with the spur and leaped to Arling's side. He

caught the mare's bridle with his right hand and pulled her sharply around.

"No man or horse will refuse now, Arling!" he cried. "We'll finish the run—you and I!"

Arling swore, and struck him over the head with his crop. Tennant took the blow; but he turned Ladybird's head toward the water jump and struck her furiously across the rump with his own crop. She squealed shrilly, and leaped forward. Before her rider could check her, she was over the brook, and he was striving desperately to keep his seat.

Tennant took the jump again, close behind him, and raced even with him across the marshy turf beyond. Arling strove to rein in the mare, but Tennant struck her again with his crop.

"Go on, Arling!" he thundered. "Go on, or I'll kill you!"

The mare was entirely beyond Arling's control, in spite of his strength and horsemanship, and he fought to keep his seat just as his wife was fighting to keep hers.

Tennant pressed hard upon the other rider at the second jump beyond the brook and slashed at the mare again as she took off. They went over together, and Arling swayed in the saddle, catching at the mare's mane to save himself.

Arling's mount stumbled and went to her knees, and the man almost fell, but the merciless Tennant threw his horse back on its haunches, to reach back like a polo player and cut the mare again with his crop.

Ladybird was panic-stricken when she dashed on, and she was breathing hard from fright and strain. The next fence was no more than three and a half feet, but she topped it with her heels as she went over, and narrowly missed a crash.

Arling's pallor was now more from fright than anger. He had lost his nerve. He was afraid of the horse under him and afraid of the man that rode relentlessly at his side. He could

not stop his mount in her frantic flight; he could not even fall from the saddle at such a pace, and least of all could he move a hand to combat his enemy.

With their eyes strained ahead of them, the two men saw the woman and the black demon rise over the brush hedge and disappear into the thick foliage that lay beyond it.

"That jump, Arling!" gasped Tennant breathlessly; "and then the high gate! We'll finish together!"

They were over the hedge the next instant, and Arling was like a pale ghost clinging to the saddle. It was a three-hundred-yard dash to the gate, and Tennant's breath almost stopped as they began it. He did not believe that Peggy's horse could make the gate. His own mount was now showing the strain of the long run, and he expected to make one in the fatal crash. The ghastly picture flashed through his mind in one of the awful remaining seconds: three riders falling at the gate where Tom Fielding fell—the spot made tragically historic for years!

He saw the opening in the tall trees where the blue sky showed above the highway that ran past the gate. He saw Peggy's fair head against the light, rising and falling with the leaps of her horse. Tennant was as wild as the horses now, and he looked at the frantic mare beside him with savagely calculating eyes. It seemed to him that her pace was flagging, and he raised his crop and struck her again with all his strength.

Then he saw the gate. The girl he had loved and lost, whom he had gone on loving in his secret heart, was dashing toward it, and her horse would never clear it. The three-foot drop below it would not be needed to complete the tragedy.

Suddenly the topmost bar of the gate fell. The next one followed it. A man was pulling them off, working furi-

ously to tear down the barrier in front of the charging black runaway.

In another instant but two bars remained, and Erebus fairly loped across them, gaining the road in safety.

The man at the gate courageously threw himself upon the last two bars as the other horses came on, tearing them away from the posts, and leaped for safety. Arling's mare was almost upon him as he did so, and his leap added to her terror. She shied sharply to the right, and crashed into the stout post. Her rider went into the air, and fell in the middle of the macadam road, twenty feet beyond.

Featherheels, quick of eye and hoof, jumped over the fallen mare and landed in the road below; then, heedless of his rider, and still ardent in the chase, raced after the black horse, which was disappearing around a turn in the road.

Crossfield, who had ridden around the ridge to the south of the valley, and reached the gate in time to tear it down, gazed upon the strange scene for a moment in a helpless daze; then, hurrying to the pink-coated form huddled in the road, he knelt beside it.

A few minutes later a horse walked sedately, and a little wearily, around the turn of the road and approached him. Tennant was in the saddle, and he held Peggy Arling, limp and senseless, in his arms.

"She's not hurt, Crossfield," he said simply, as he came nearer. "When I stopped the black horse she fainted, but I caught her."

Crossfield nodded solemnly and got to his feet.

The horse stopped, and Tennant looked down at the still form on the ground. "I suppose I have murdered a man, Crossfield," he said.

The other shook his head slowly. "I wouldn't say that," he answered. "Three people rode through purgatory to-day, Harry, and only two of them came out."

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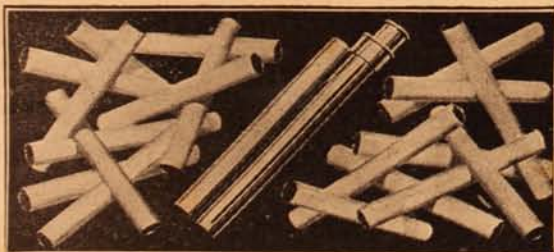


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