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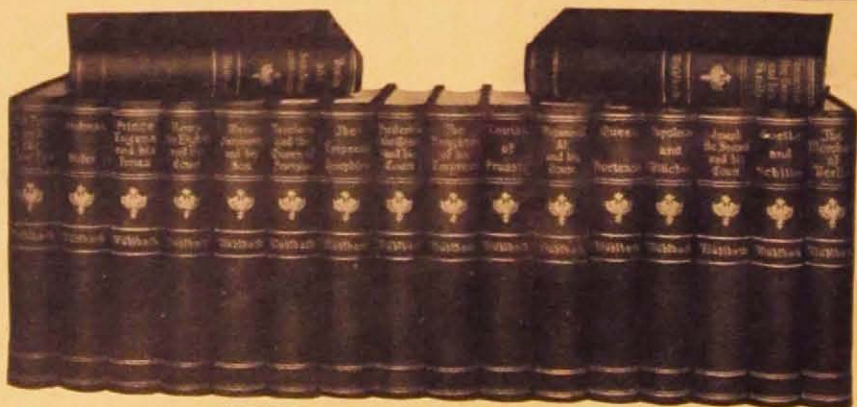
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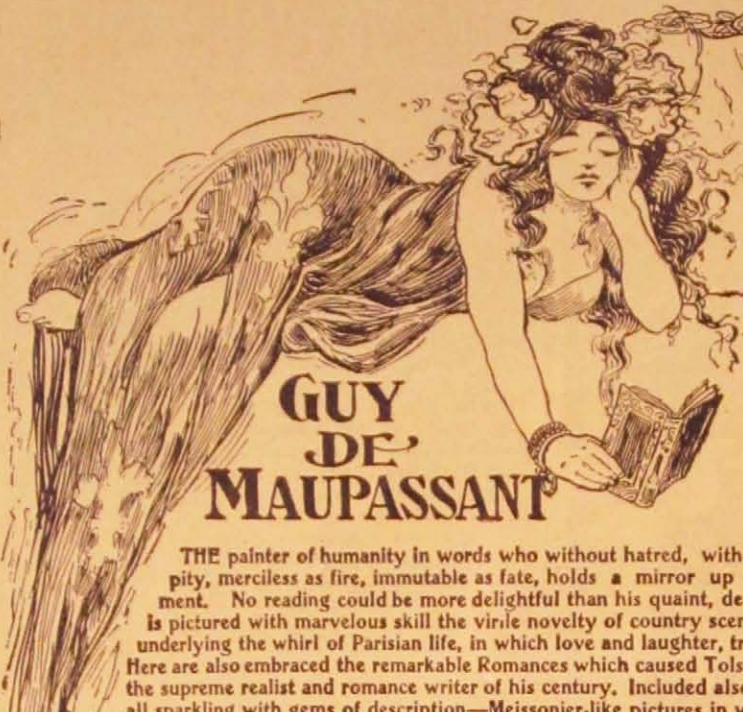
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VOLUME XII

NUMBER 2

The Popular Magazine

DECEMBER

CONTENTS

1908

STOCKY BROWN. A Complete Novel,	Craig Middleton	1
A vital, stirring story of American life, East and West; full of incident and character.		
A CASE OF PROFESSIONALISM. A Short Story,	Ralph D. Paine	76
One of Paine's inimitable college-athletics stories, with Hector Alonzo McGrath in a new rôle.		
SHADOW REEF. A Two-part Story,	Louis Joseph Vance	88
A surprising and thrilling tale of adventure and mystery in the South Seas.		
THE STALKING OF PAUGUK. A Short Story,	Herbert Quick	108
A tense drama of modern commercialism in a setting of the woods and open.		
THE RUE MONTERA MYSTERY. A Short Story,	F. Goron	114
The ex-chief of the Paris detective police relates another baffling case in his career.		
TONO-BUNGAY. A Serial Story,	H. G. Wells	125
The later instalments are more than fulfilling the earlier promise of this unusual serial.		
THE COME-ON. A Complete Novelette,	A. M. Chisholm	140
Financial failure is paved with get-rich-quick intentions.		
JACK BELLAMY, LAWBREAKER. A Series,	B. M. Bower	161
VII.—THE SCALES OF JUSTICE. In the final story of the series Jack Bellamy "gets what's coming to him."		
THE MAFIA AND THE CONTESSA. A Two-part Story,	J. Kenilworth Egerton	171
Anarchists and the Mafia shower unsolicited attentions on Tommy Williams in Sicily.		
A KEG OF AMBERGRIS. A Short Story,	Author of "The Black Barque"	192
The cargo of a sperm-whaler is hardly as pleasant as it is valuable.		
LOST CABIN MINE. A Serial Story,	Frederick Niven	201
A Western adventure story that is a masterpiece of its kind.		
MR. GARFIELD'S MATRIMONIAL EXPERIMENT.	Walter Hackett	221
A Short Story. Very funny from the reader's standpoint; not quite so from Mr. Garfield's.		

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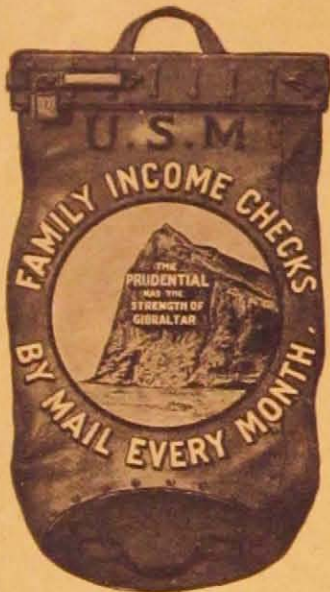
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THE POPULAR MAGAZINE

VOL. XII.

DECEMBER, 1908.

No. 2.

Stocky Brown

By Craig Middleton

Author of "Bud Magruder, Bad Man," Etc.

A realistic description of a raid on a New York gambling house, a train wreck and robbery, an exciting man hunt on a Western ranch, two pretty and attractive girls both interested in a manly and lovable hero—these are a few of the things that help to make "Stocky Brown" a really exceptional novel, worthy a place among "Popular" fiction. It is a story of modern American life, East and West, and has in it something of the energy and vitality of the life itself.



OUTSIDE the cabin, which perched itself half-way up the bare hillside, snuggling its back against the slope like a child seated upon a father's knee, there stood a small tent. The sun had not climbed well over the eastern plateau when the flap of this tent parted, and a girl, clear-eyed, rosy and brown from her morning ablutions, stepped outside. As she fastened the flaps open that the air might penetrate to the interior, you saw that it was an improvised dressing-room, set forth with rough benches holding pails and tubs.

For all her splendid young color which, for a moment, blinded the eyes of the beholders to less immediate effects, it was a somber face which fronted the cabin. The broad forehead, the straight, fine, black eyebrows, the delicately chiseled, unsmiling line of the red lips, all produced an effect almost tragic, once one had gotten beyond

the freshness and health of the girl's looks. She might have been some young Judith of the wilderness as she stepped across the ragged garden to the cabin door.

Inside the semidarkness made by the drawn curtains of some dark cotton stuff, her brother lay relaxed in sleep upon an army cot. She stood in the doorway watching him. The stern beauty of her look softened. Her eyes were able to discern in the tanned, boyish face with the closed eyes and the half-smile some traces of the rosy little boy she had adored with the whole-hearted adoration of an older sister. She passed softly through the room so as not to disturb him, and in the lean-to kitchen beyond busied herself with preparations for the morning meal. By and by she heard the sound of stirring in the next room, and in an instant Red Lawson appeared at the door. The recollections that had made her glance at him sleeping a tender one, were banished by the sight of him awake. There was no longer any suggestion of rosy

babyhood or innocent boyhood about this gaping, stretching, unshorn young bravo.

"Lord, but I'm tired," he remarked between two yawns. "Did you hear me come in last night?"

"Of course. And the next time you mustn't try to come in so quietly. It frightened me almost. Sounded so creepy."

"Did you wake up before I came in, or after?" Red's manner was almost anxiously questioning.

"I didn't hear you until the boards creaked. Why? Was there some one with you that you didn't want me to know about?" Crystal proceeded to the heart of the matter with great directness.

"Aw, don't you bother your head about who was with me or who wasn't," advised her relieved brother. "Say, how soon will the grub be ready?"

She did not answer, but with compressed lips and veiled eyes of anxiety she went on with her simple preparations. By and by the feast was spread upon the oilcloth-covered table—bacon and biscuits and coffee. Red ate voraciously, and his sister watched him, keenly conscious of the fact that he was avoiding her eyes. When he had gulped down his second cup of coffee and pushed his chair back from the table, she broke the silence.

"Wait a minute, Will," she said—for Red Lawson was "Red" in virtue of his complexion rather than by any rights of christening—"I want to speak to you."

Red scowled. For a moment it seemed almost that he might refuse to be questioned. Then sullenly he turned toward her, tilting his chair against the wall and filling his pipe as though to make himself as comfortable as possible during what promised to be an unpleasant conference.

"Fire away, since you've got something on your chest again," he remarked.

"Red"—there was the tension of agony in the girl's clear voice—"where have you been these last two weeks?"

"Didn't I tell you I was goin' out

prospectin'?" The boy did not meet his sister's eyes.

"Yes, you told me that. And I asked you then, as I ask you now, why you go about prospecting for new mines when you aren't willing to work the old claim enough even to keep title to it?"

"Ah, the old claim's no good, and you know it."

"I know nothing of the kind, and no more do you. Father had the greatest confidence in it. And since he—since he died"—she choked a little—"you have never been near it. Ten months and you have never been near the place that father believed so much in, that he believed was going to make our fortunes, that he died happy thinking it would provide for us in the end."

"If you're going to turn on the water-works," said Red, squirming uneasily, "I'm going to get out."

"I'm not going to cry. But I am worried half to death by the way you've been acting the last six months, Will. Where do you spend your time? Where are you prospecting? With whom do you go about? I know some of them, and I shudder when I think of your being their companion. The most lawless, the most dissolute—oh, Will, what has changed you so?"

"See here, Crystal," said Red angrily, "you ain't been left my guardeen so far as I've heard of. And I won't stand for any more of this infernal snivelin' an' cryin' an' caterwaulin'. You don't like my friends—very well. As far as I've noticed they don't trouble you much with their society."

The girl looked at him without anger but with a heart-breaking misery more bitter than tears. For a minute or two she did not speak and Red, a little ashamed of himself despite his bravado, feigned to be very busy with his pipe-stem. Finally she said with a sigh as though she gave up a struggle.

"Very well, Will, I'll try not to bother you any more. I see that it does no good at all. It only makes you angry and puts you farther away from me. But you are breaking my heart. When I see my father's son going with the

gang that you go with now, it almost kills me. You know how I've worked for you and father ever since I was a child ten years old. You know how I've tried to make you—such a dear little fellow you were when you were six, Will!—never miss your mother, and how I tried to keep father's house as she had kept it. I know you are doing wrong; I have no belief at all in these prospecting trips you talk about. And I am afraid, afraid—I don't know what of. Of all sorts of horrors—that those men you go with will not only corrupt you but will get you into actual danger of the law. Oh, I know they cannot absolutely ruin you—some time you will come out from under their influence. Aren't you father's and mother's? Aren't you mine? But, oh, I am so afraid, so afraid of what will happen before you come to your senses again."

The boy's face changed from sullen to half-ashamed, and from ashamed to wholly tender during this tense, passionate address from his sister. He arose and came toward her, patting her shoulder awkwardly.

"There, there now, Crys," he said with clumsy attempts to be soothing. "Don't you take on so. Your brother's got a head on his shoulders. He's not going to get into trouble, and you must remember that men look at things different from what women do. A fellow's got to see a little fun. Don't you worry. It'll all come out right in the wash. And you needn't worry either about the old mine. I'm going to find you a mine"—he laughed a slight, excited laugh—"which will make that hole in the ground of father's look like thirty cents. It'll be Europe for you, that's what it'll be."

Far from reassuring her, this speech seemed to fill her with new alarms. She gave a little cry, and twisting in her chair caught at his wrists.

"Will," she begged him in a sort of agony of affection, "swear to me that you're not in with those Montevidean cutthroats. Swear to me that you haven't been in their camp—that you have nothing to do with their schemes, that you——"

Red released himself surlily, and stood eying his sister in ugly fashion.

"What do you know about any Montevidean gang?" he demanded fiercely. "Who's been filling you up?"

"Oh, I've heard rumors—everybody's heard them. But what are they to you?" She clung desperately to the hope which she only half possessed. "What is it to you? You're not in with them—you are not, Will! Robbers, murderers, outlaws—oh, you are not in with them!" It was a cry of agony at the end, her appeal to him.

"Of course I'm not," declared Red, releasing himself from her fingers. "What put such a fool idea in your head? Of course I'm not. An' besides, you ain't got any right that I know of to talk like that about any one. You'd better look to yourself before you begin callin' other people names." He turned on his heel and went out toward the corral where his horses were. The girl watched him through the open door with miserable, loving eyes.

"If only I could believe you," she said woodenly. "If only I could believe you. But I can't, I can't!"

II.

On a pleasant afternoon in October Mr. Stocky Brown was walking down Fifth Avenue with Miss Agatha Ramsay. It would require no very expert physiognomist, looking upon the ingenuous countenance of the young man, to discover what his state of mind was in regard to Miss Ramsay. Admiration, not to call it adoration, beamed from his gray-blue eyes. Devotion was in the bending of his stalwart shoulders toward her.

Mr. John Randolph Brown was known to his intimates—and they numbered at least three-quarters of his acquaintance—by the endearing epithet of "Stocky," on the law of opposites. For he stood something over six-feet-one in his stockings, and his magnificent breadth was carried lithely and easily. People turned to stare at the handsome couple as they swept down

the street. Agatha Ramsay was rather tall for a woman, and her graceful stride kept pace with Stocky's. Beneath her brown and violet toque her pale gold hair caught the autumn sunlight and wove her an aureole. To Stocky's reverent eyes this was quite as it should be. Agatha, whom he was at that moment escorting from the cooking-class at St. Bartholomew's Mission, to which she so nobly, so magnificently devoted two afternoons a week, was a saint, no less. He would have been horrified, probably to the point of attack, had any one informed him that Agatha was a very worldly little faddist, and that the lower classes were merely her fad of the moment.

"Duncan was telling me last night," remarked the young lady, "what you will never tell me—how you charged up the hill in a perfect shower of bullets—"

"Duncan was drawing the long bow," declared Stocky. "It was no more exciting than going out to your uncle's barn for the eggs."

"And how you snatched the flag, all torn as it was, from one of the Spaniards, and how, stumbling back, you tripped upon an American soldier who seemed dead, but who wasn't. For when you fell upon him he gave a groan. And then—oh, it was magnificent, magnificent!"—the girl's voice quivered with excitement, either real or simulated admirably—"you lifted him and bore him back to your own lines."

"Pretty story; pity it isn't true," muttered Stocky, whose tanned face was very red.

"It was true, wasn't it?"

"Oh, cut off the trimmings, and there may be something in it. But I say, I don't want to talk about that grandstand play. I want to talk about something much more interesting."

"There isn't anything in the world more interesting than a deed of heroism," interrupted Agatha flatteringly, softly, but withal a little determinedly.

"Heroism be—dropped," said Stocky. "There is nothing in it, I tell you. It was merely a dearth of news that day

that made all the war-cry papers take it up. But now let's talk about you."

Agatha shot a long, whimsical, provocative glance at him from her velvety brown eyes shaded with a perfect thicket of dark lashes.

"You aren't going to be stupid, are you?" she asked.

"That depends on your definition of stupidity. I dare say I'm going to make a fool of myself. But, you see, you—you—you have a way of going to a fellow's head."

They were passing the Waldorf-Astoria when Stocky reached this point in the declaration which, unwise as he felt it to be, he found crowding to his lips. The afternoon press of vehicles glittered and sparkled in the middle of the roadway. Sumptuously dressed women smiled from their victorias. Automobiles accommodated their pace more or less to the crowded necessities of the street. The pavements were thronged with crowds of well-dressed men and women, smiling, chatting, hurrying along, apparently the most prosperous, the most care-free community in the world. Somehow, Agatha's glance, sweeping from the flower-decked tables, visible through the hotel windows, to the magnificent jumble of equipages in the middle of the road, seemed to be estimating something. So significant was her manner that Stocky's gaze traveled with hers. When he had noted it all—the flowers through the windows, the orchids pinned to the coats of the women walking or driving, the crush of vehicles—he turned to her with a slight look of bewilderment in his honest eyes. She was smiling at him with an imp of coquetry in the corners at her mouth.

"It's all very gay and pretty, isn't it?" she asked him.

"To be sure it is," agreed Stocky promptly. "If you'd ever helped to clean out a *reconcentrado* camp, if you'd ever fed on army rations in a pestilential swamp, you'd know how gay and pretty it all is. But what's that got to do with—with what I was saying—with you, with me—with us?" He dropped his voice daringly on the last

word. The young man who had won a day's renown in the manner which Miss Ramsay had related was no coward even when it came to making love to a millionaire's daughter.

"I'm afraid it has a lot to do with me," Agatha answered, with what seemed a regretful honesty. "It's all the life I know. It's the only one I've been trained for, the only one I'm fit for. We don't need to go on, do we? I am showing you myself in this ugly light only—perhaps I'm very vain—only to spare you."

"You're an angel," declared Stocky with fervor.

"No, only a mercenary little beast, who has a shrinking from the sight of pain—and from the experience of pain." She spoke the last words in a lowered voice.

"You mean that you would be hurt, too?" Stocky's manner was rapturous at the admission which he thought he had surprised. He bumped into a pompous old gentleman taking the air, and scarcely heard that personage's objurgations on his manners.

"Ah, I meant nothing. Do not press me. Be generous." Agatha spoke almost in a whisper, or in what did duty for one in the crowded, noisy thoroughfare.

Stocky had begun a word which sounded suspiciously like the first syllable of "darling," when he saw Agatha suddenly stiffen, suddenly bring her features into the conventional lines of gay indifference, and bow toward a hansom turning the corner into Fifth Avenue. Unconsciously he also assumed the attitude of the ordinary young man walking down-town with the ordinary young woman on an ordinary afternoon in October. He straightened and glanced toward the hansom, lifting his hat meantime. A man of forty perhaps, leaning back in the cab, returned the salutation, with a broad smile irradiating his large beardless face.

"It's Winterleigh," remarked Stocky in an injured tone. "Confound the fellow! He's always in the way."

"He doesn't really seem to me to be

so awfully intrusive this time," laughed Agatha. "You wouldn't deny him the ordinary wayfarer's right to the city's streets, would you?"

"I'd be glad if he availed himself more of the privileges of the city's streets when you're giving me a cup of tea on the Square," Stocky grumbled half humorously. "He's another one of us, isn't he? The noble army of Miss Ramsay's pretenders, I mean."

"You're a nonsensical boy," declared Miss Ramsay. "You're impulsive, head-long—leaping at conclusions, grasping at impossibilities—"

"Crying for the moon—why don't you say it?"

"And now you accuse one of the most eminent and level-headed persons in all the community of folly equal to that which you claim for yourself. Edward Winterleigh a pretender indeed! The district attorney's office has other things to think of, Mr. John Randolph Brown, than idle, silly girls."

"Winterleigh isn't on the job then as much as the taxpayers could wish," laughed Stocky. "Or else he suspects you of being in league with criminals and considers your mother's drawing-room a sort of annex to the detective department."

"Well, I shall listen to no more of your jesting," declared Agatha with decision. "I'm going to run in to see Loretta Whiting over here on Gramercy Park. You—you won't let what we have been saying make any difference, will you?" There was a pleading sweetness in her voice. "You know, even if I am a worldling, I need a friend or two. And what would mama's salon be if deprived of its latest and most glittering ornament, a true hero, fresh snatched from the Cuban battle-field? She simply adores Duncan now, though a few months ago he was the least-favored of her nephews, for bringing you into her radius. So, on her account—you'll let things be just the same, won't you?"

There was always an admixture of mockery in her sweetness, and her coldest utterances were always touched with something that seemed earnest and ap-

pealing. This made it difficult for the listener, who desired to believe her wholly one thing or the other, to discover just what she was. Stocky, desiring to think her half saint and all woman, an adorable combination of the celestial and the charming, found grounds for the faith that was in him in her manner if not in her words.

"Can't I walk as far as Mrs. Whiting's with you? No? Why not?"

"Ah, you don't understand. It isn't easy for me. Maybe I've had my little vision and my little dream, too. And I want to put them immediately away—perhaps. At any rate I won't see any more of you to-day."

"At least I'll steer you through this jam," said Stocky, turning east with her. "Tell me something—if I were a rich fellow—if I were an able fellow—if I—"

"You, a hero, wanting to change places with any one! What a foolish thing!"

"Hero be hanged!" said Stocky angrily. "I'm talking sense now. If I were a different sort of fellow—differently placed—"

"Oh, if wishes were horses, beggars might ride," declared Miss Ramsay impatiently.

"Well, I'm going to see if I can't rob a stable or do something of that sort," threatened Stocky. "So I must leave you here? Well, the queen's command—good-by."

"Until to-morrow," said Agatha softly as she left him.

III.

That Mr. Stocky Brown's young head was in a whirl upon his shoulders as he turned back from the east side of Broadway was no particular criticism upon the quality of his intellect. Older men, wiser men, more experienced men than he, had found themselves treading the earth rather dizzily on Agatha Ramsay's account. That young lady, considering her youth, had a rather astounding record of—she would not be coarse enough to call them flirtations—

to her credit. Had she been born into another circle than that of wealth there is no knowing how wide a swath she might have cut. As it was, she did her best, considering the cramping circumstances of chaperonage and protection in which she lived.

But had Agatha been much less alluring, much less intoxicating than nature and training had made her, it would have been no marvel if Stocky Brown had still felt somewhat light-headed after their encounter. Stocky's best friends never claimed for him judgment, moderation or any of the great conservative virtues of the world. Whatever was wild, whatever was daredevil, whatever was hot-headedly, wholeheartedly foolish—that was what was expected of Stocky on all occasions, and seldom did the youth disappoint expectation.

Take the matter of his heroism, for example. What was Stocky Brown doing in Cuba? Why was he not where he should have been, in the pleasant confines of an elm-shaded New England college on the day when he snatched his laurels from Fame? Because of that same hot unreasoning head of his. Stocky, a junior at the Roger Williams University, lately arrived at the age of twenty-two, had found the thought of the wrongs of the Cubans too much to bear in the placid quiet of the classrooms. The result was that he had been off to town and had enlisted at the earliest possible opportunity.

How his Uncle Ebenezer, who had disapproved of everything that Stocky had done since the moment he entered the world—even going so fundamentally far as to disapprove of Stocky's choice of a mother—had stormed when he heard of that enlistment! How he had called high Heaven and his intimate friends to witness that he had always foreseen and, foreseeing, had always and in all places foretold, what the result of Mrs. Brown's method of rearing her son would be.

"The one folly of my brother's life," Ebenezer Brown, commission merchant on West Street, trader of the old school, slow, thrifty, exact, had wailed. "He

went South to see about the Virginia eggs—and he comes home with a wife! A wife, if you please! A bit of thistle-down! It was the only foolish thing I ever knew my brother John to do. She knew nothing—poor Laura—she had nothing. Of course, after he died and left me joint guardian with her of the boy, I tried to do my best for them both. There was something about her—I don't know what it was—but she sort of wrapped around you. But she'd have no advice about John Junior. I'd have taken him into the business when he was fourteen—as a boy, of course, to run errands and sweep out the place, and begin where my brother and I began. But she would have none of it.

“He must go to school, he must go to college! He must have his head crammed full of all kinds of romantic nonsense and useless notions. I asked her where the money was to come from. She retorted with spirit—she had the funniest outbreaks of fiery temper for such a gentle, frail little thing—that she would pay for his education herself if she had to go out sewing to do it. Sewing! Of course I had to give in, and the miserable pittance that they had—for John, my brother, had sold out his share of our business to me and had made some foolish investments with the money, leaving his widow and boy next to nothing—went very largely for that boy's schooling. I'll say one thing for him, though, wild and harum-scarum as he was, he always loved that little woman. And when she died—she died when he had been at Roger Williams about a year and a half—he was nearly heart-broken. I wanted him to come away then and come right into the House, but he didn't seem to have any use for the business, and declared he was going to carry out his mother's wishes. I wonder how much he was thinking of his mother's wishes when he cut off to Cuba.”

In spite of his grumbling, which was sincere enough, Mr. Ebenezer Brown could not restrain some slight avuncular pride in the achievements of Stocky at the front. Upon the young man's much-heralded return, he showed his

appreciation of the fair renown he had bestowed upon the family name by once more offering him a position in the West Street commission business. But Stocky, inflamed and inflated by war and glory, was less inclined than ever toward the concern. He had delicately hinted that if his uncle could see his way to handing over the whole of his inheritance now instead of waiting until he was twenty-five, as the terms of John Brown's will had commanded, he would appreciate that token of affection and confidence. But that was one which Uncle Ebenezer did not feel inclined to make. He remarked, tartly enough, that he would continue to pay out the income of the principal on the first day of each quarter, as heretofore. He could see nothing in the fact that Stocky had made a spectacular fool of himself, doing dangerous things in Cuba, for believing that he had learned how to take care of money.

It was, as may be perceived from this history, a somewhat poverty-stricken hero who left Miss Ramsay on East Twenty-first Street and returned moodily toward the Avenue. It was the first time that the lack of money had ever seriously oppressed him. Of course it was always more or less annoying, but Stocky had had, on the whole, unextravagant tastes, always preferring adventure to vice. But now it seemed to him that virtue was in league with the desire for wealth, that it was with the highest and holiest part of him that he longed for money.

He had strode disconsolately halfway up the Avenue again, when he ran into Duncan Ramsay, through whom he had made his acquaintance with Agatha and her mama on his return from Cuba. Duncan was just about to turn in to his club, and thither he dragged the not unwilling Stocky. All of the Ramsay connection, indeed all the Ramsay entourage—with the possible exception of Mr. Edward Winterleigh—were very dear to Stocky in these days.

In the club-house the first person on whom Stocky's eyes alighted was Winterleigh. He nodded somewhat surlily

toward the big man. He felt that here was an alliance, which, even though it was not financially splendid, was much more worthy Agatha Ramsay. If Winterleigh did not yet have a vast fortune, he had at least brains, he had position, he had the things which a mere newspaper-created hero of a war could never hope to have.

Winterleigh greeted him cordially. He was a large man, this bulwark of the district attorney's office. His broad face was rather sallow but not unwholesomely so. His large body did not have the effect which so many large men give, of unhealthiness. You would say that he put on flesh because he did not trouble to deny himself any of the flesh-producing goods of life, but that he kept it in moderate control by gentlemanly habits of exercise and grooming. Beneath his massive forehead a pair of very remarkable eyes looked out upon Stocky. They were the kind of eyes you sometimes see in pictures of medieval Italian priests and potentates—cold, immensely calculating, immensely far-seeing, passionless in one sense and yet suggesting invincibility in passion.

Stocky received him with a sort of boyish hostility. It was one of Stocky's failings never to be able to disguise his feelings. Winterleigh, however, disregarded his attitude entirely, and under the genial influence of his conversation, to say nothing of whiskies, and sodas, the young man began to thaw out. Somehow, he scarcely knew how, the talk got around to money. Every one in the little group had some anecdote to relate of fortunes suddenly made, of the lucky moment securely grasped. Stocky listened with eager eyes. Winterleigh studied him attentively as he leaned forward and drank in these tales of sudden showers of gold.

It was after Winterleigh had gone that Evans, with whom Winterleigh had been talking when Stocky entered the club, addressed the boy half laughingly.

"I didn't like to mention it before old Ned," he said, "since he's in the district

attorney's office and is known to be so keen after the gambling-dens. But the fellow that made the most instantaneous fortune that I know anything about laid the foundations one night at Jarmead's. He was just plain gambling and had one of those runs of bull luck that happen every now and then to the green-horn. He'd gone into the place with something like fifty dollars. He came out with something over four thousand. And the next day, since fortune had resolved to play the bountiful lady with him, he got a chance to go in on an engineering deal that turned him in fifty thousand before the end of the year. He's a millionaire now. 'Tisn't a Sunday-school story, is it?"

"Not exactly," agreed Stocky. The boy's gray eyes were very bright and glittering. His face was a little flushed. If only some such luck as this could come to him!

"Ever been to Jarmead's?" pursued Evans. Stocky shook his head. "It's worth seeing. He's really done it up in great shape. If you care for that sort of thing—I don't mean the excitement of the game, but the sight of what's what in the town—I'll take you around some night."

"When?" demanded Stocky with startling directness.

"Oh, any time. Have you anything on for to-night?" Stocky shook his head again. "Then what's the matter with to-night? Dine here with me and we'll go around there later." Stocky laughed boisterously as he accepted the invitation.

With the beautiful insolence of youth, it seemed to him impossible that any enterprise upon which he had set his heart and whole desire could fail. Surely, to love Agatha Ramsay was merely natural. To desire to win her was inevitable. The desire to make himself worthy with whatever sort of worthiness either she or her family demanded—this was surely a righteous undertaking. Gambling in itself held no horror for him. Too many penny-ante games had been played beneath the roof of Roger Williams itself. So Stocky, inflamed by his afternoon's talk with the

girl, inflamed by the tales of sudden wealth which had followed upon that talk, somewhat inflamed by the before-dinner and during-dinner and after-dinner drinks at the club, went joyously forth that night to seek his fortunes in the most unlikely of all places—Jarmead's. He was able to feel as righteous as a knight entering a tourney. Was it not all for Agatha?

Had he been less filled with the vision of her, less bent upon making the vision his own, he would have been able to take an intelligent sightseer's interest in Jarmead's, which was indeed well worth attention. But as it was, the decorous house on the quiet side street—a house in nowise different from its brownstone neighbors—the quiet, sumptuous interior, the decorations, the paneled woodwork, the wonderful glass of the electroliers, the paintings, the statuary, the soft rugs—all the appurtenances that had made Jarmead's the most remarkable place of its kind in the country and had given its proprietor a double reputation of king gambler and connoisseur—all these passed almost unseen before Stocky's retina. The fever burned in his veins to win money. It was for that and that alone that he was there. He felt that his star shone upon him that night. He was eager to begin. The little decencies of intercourse which Evans was observing irritated him with a sense of wasted time. Roulette—the bettor against the house—would have been his choice of entertainment, but somehow, he scarcely knew how, Evans had contrived to make him one of a party of poker-players in one of the rooms. He sat down to the cards hot and excited. He had perhaps fifty dollars in his pockets. He ground his teeth together in the determination to multiply them.

The other men, friends of Evans, habitués of the place, took the situation easily and indifferently. They did not seem to notice Stocky's tension. When the first winnings fell to him, they were politely oblivious of his unprofessional jubilation. They lost to him with yawns.

The wonder of it all was that they continued to lose. There was some

fluctuation in the play, and Stocky was not uniformly the winner. But when at two o'clock in the morning they pushed their chairs back from the table he had several hundred dollars in his possession. His eyes were bloodshot with the strain and the maddening excitement of it. His hands shook as he stuffed bills and coin into his pockets, and he struggled in vain to make his voice bland and indifferent in acquiescing when one of the men said languidly: "Guess I'll have to give you a check, old man."

He went out into the cool of the night, into the deserted streets, their darkness punctuated here and there with white light, almost staggering. He had won! He had won! It was his fate—he was to be successful in all that he undertook, in every step that should lead him to the goal of his desires. This paltry four or five hundred dollars was nothing but an omen, nothing but the declaration that the fates fought his fight with him. What was it those fellows had said about to-morrow night and their revenge? What was it Evans had said about trying it out again to-morrow night? Oh, he would give them all the revenge they demanded! To-morrow night again he would multiply by ten what he brought in with him, and then to him also might come that chance of investment as it did to the man of whom Evans had told.

He walked half of what remained of the night to weary himself enough for sleep. He must force the blood that bounded so madly through him to more orderly coursing. He must cease this wild multiplication of huge sums in his brain. He must get rid of the beckoning, glancing vision of Agatha. And so he walked miles upon miles through the deserted streets.

In the morning he was somewhat refreshed, and swaggered very boldly down-town. The array of a florist's windows caught his eyes. He went in. He would send a votive offering to the goddess who ruled his destiny. Orchids, pink and lavender and white, in a great mass—Stocky was surprised but not

disturbed to learn their price—went speeding down to Washington Square.

There were some lilies-of-the-valley that caught his eye as he turned to leave the store. He paused, demanded to know their price. The florist told him with the prompt deference due a young man who had just placed so large an order. Stocky placed another order. It was for the cemetery beyond the city where his mother lay.

"She always loved those little white bells," he told himself chokingly as he left the place. "She always loved them. Poor little mother!"

IV.

There was a crush of carriages that afternoon on the north side of Washington Square. Early as it was in the season—indeed, the season could not be said to have begun at all—Mrs. Ramsay's little reception for the Danish actress was rather well attended. Mrs. Ramsay's affairs were held to be "so different." That was Mrs. Ramsay's boast.

"My dear," she was wont to explain at times, "I don't care for money, I don't care for family, I don't care for position. The only thing I really ask is that every member of society have some gift to cheer the ennui of society as a whole. People with brains, people with accomplishments, people with charm, even people with merely astonishing beauty—all of these are so much more worth while than millions or than any number of lines in the Blue Book."

Whereat the initiated might be forgiven for smiling a little. For Mrs. Ramsay, though indeed a lion-collector of no mean repute, was the wife of a millionaire. And though she hospitably and with much catholicity of taste invited to her drawing-room all who could contribute to its gaiety or its "difference," it was shrewdly suspected by the character-readers that Mrs. Ramsay's patronage of the arts and sciences in the persons of their impecunious professors, would never lead her to lose a penny.

On this particular afternoon, as has been said, the polite fiction that nobody

was in town yet was belied by the buzz and flutter in her drawing-room. The Danish actress, slim and fair and slightly insolent, was proving such an attraction as Mrs. Ramsay had hoped. It was late when Edward Winterleigh appeared in the doorway. There were a good many men already present—a polite sprinkling of critics, editors, and portrait-painters giving the tone that Mrs. Ramsay loved—but the newcomer immediately dominated the scene. It was not merely the question of bulk, though he loomed large beside the crimson velvet curtain; there were other men of inches and of girth in the assembly. It was not merely the combination of intellect, sensuality and power in his face, though in each of these attributes he excelled all the others in the room. It was not merely that he held himself with that indefinable air of knowledge, of authority, which makes a man distinguished in any company. But it was the suggestion—vague, scarcely definable, yet actually present in the man—of subtlety, perhaps of cruelty, which marked him apart from the others of the crowd. Large as he was, broad as was his face, healthily clear as was his skin, he always succeeded in giving the effect of something medieval, something inquisitorial. It was, as Agatha Ramsay had once told him, as though Cardinal Richelieu had come to inhabit the body of a bon-vivant, or Torquemada had put on the fleshly covering of a successful politician.

Mrs. Ramsay greeted him very cordially. She liked to think that her salon approximated those London ones of which we read, where political plots are hatched and great ladies have a finger in the governmental pie.

"I'm flattered," she told him. "The papers implied this afternoon that there were mysterious activities in your office, and we always associate those with you since you secured those indictments against the Mutual and the Ontario."

"Oh, the papers!" Winterleigh dismissed them lightly. His eyes were searching the room. When he saw Agatha, however, he did not permit them to proclaim the fact.

"Well, aren't you planning something particularly exciting?" his hostess asked.

"Well, yes, there is a little party on which ought to prove interesting. But it's a common, vulgar affair—nothing for ladies' shell-like ears."

"Oh, our poor ears!" laughed Mrs. Ramsay. "They're used to everything in these degenerate days. They've been inoculated to all sorts of things."

"Oh, but this isn't even interesting," he assured her. "Merely—of course, I rely on your discretion, though I imagine that no one in this assemblage is in league with our opponents—it's merely a gambling matter. We want to stamp it out if we can."

"Ah!" Mrs. Ramsay's voice became vague and uninterested. This was scarcely the juicy morsel of political gossip for which she had hoped. Her eyes, turning toward the door by which Stocky Brown, very alert and triumphant in his bearing, was just entering, gave Winterleigh his dismissal. He made his way to Agatha, who was flirting violently in a corner with a young man from the Danish consulate, who had come to pay his respects to a fellow countryman.

Stocky, after he had paid his respects to his hostess, glanced around for Agatha. As though bent upon thwarting him, Mrs. Ramsay introduced him to some girls who insisted upon exclaiming and gushing over his Cuban experiences. Stocky, scowling and embarrassed, parried their—he called it "guff"—and feasted his eyes on the sight of Winterleigh in intimate conversation with Agatha. He was very much in love and he was something of a young simpleton still as far as the reading of social signs went, but even to his englamoured eyes it was evident that Agatha was playing with the district attorney.

"By the way," he interrupted the young woman who was still gurgling on about charges and flags and wounded comrades, "who's Winterleigh? I don't mean what's his job or who is he now, but where did he come from? How long has he been in these parts?"

"Oh, haven't you ever heard about that? It was very romantic—nothing, of course, like leading forlorn hopes or standing at the cannon's mouth——"

"Ah, please let up," pleaded Stocky. The girl laughed and went on:

"Why, about six years ago some Westerner—a bad man from Colorado or Wyoming or some of those places—came East to spend some money. Our New York ways didn't appeal to him. He didn't like the conduct of some of those who tried to help him spend the money, and eventually there was shooting, unfortunately murder. Well, nothing would do the hasty-tempered gentleman from the West but that a Western lawyer whom he knew should be his counsel. He was really a wealthy man, you see, and a great many very good New York lawyers were perfectly sure that they could prove murder justifiable in his case, but he scorned them all. 'Where's Ed Winterleigh?' he demanded, and kept the wires hot with demands that that gentleman come and get him out of the hole into which he had gotten himself. Well, Mr. Winterleigh came—and saw and conquered. He opened offices here, and about two years ago got into the district attorney's office."

At that instant Winterleigh, under a big laurel-bush, was throwing back his head and laughing with that peculiar vim which only a "racy" story produces in such a man. Agatha, whose utterances had provoked this mirth, was looking at him with a little smile of restrained satisfaction. Stocky scowled more than ever. He gave a snort expressive of contempt for the material which the district attorney's office had acquired in Mr. Winterleigh, and demanded abruptly:

"Any money?"

"Nothing to speak of," said the young lady calmly. "A hundred thousand or so, perhaps, but nothing in"—she smiled a little maliciously toward the corner in which Agatha was disporting herself—"nothing in the Ramsays' class at all, of course."

Poor Stocky! He thought of the five thousand dollars which would be

his entire fortune in four years and of the income which he derived from it now. And Winterleigh with "a hundred thousand or so" was not in the Ramsays' class! Then he thought of his luck of the night before, of the luck which he was sure would be his to-night, of the splendid way in which he was going to force fortune to his own ends. He banished the scowl, and buoyantly approached Agatha's corner. She thanked him for his orchids in a way that set his pulses beating. It was so gentle, so intimate, so understanding. Winterleigh, hearing the thanks, looked a trifle annoyed for the fraction of a second, and Agatha's sentence may have been held therefore to do double execution, rousing one man's jealousy and another's hopes.

That night Stocky, with the obliging Evans, once more approached Jar-mead's. The decorous doors swung open to them, the softly carpeted stairs noiselessly received their footfalls. Stocky's heart beat high with hope. "There is a tide in the affairs of men, which, taken at the full, leads on to fortune," he reminded himself jubilantly out of his small stock of literary recollections. "Which, taken at the full, leads on to fortune." To fortune and Agatha!

This night he staked himself against the house and began to play roulette. So firmly had he persuaded himself of the assurance of his success that he was as much perplexed when luck began to go against him as though he were working a mathematical proposition which suddenly began to give absurd results in spite of the accuracy of all the preliminary steps. Why, his star was in the ascendant—he had told himself so! The world was to be his oyster, to be opened with a knife of Jar-mead's providing. And here luck—he forgot that luck was no fixed quantity but a very erratic and uncertain lady indeed—here luck was actually going against him! He snapped his jaws together and doggedly went on.

The other men who were betting upon the turn of the wheel gave him very little notice. The flushing or the

pallor of young fools was no new matter for most of them. The dealer, monotonously calling the turns of the play, paid no attention to him. He grew whiter and whiter as luck remained persistently against him. His eyes began to sink back in his head under the strained intensity of his gaze. His forehead, beneath his fair brown hair, was beaded with cold drops. Now he would bet a tiny sum, determining to make no Napoleonic plays until once again destiny played with him instead of against him. But after a few bets this would pall, and he would recklessly place a larger bet, challenging luck as it were. But the wheel revolved indifferent to his moods, the dealer made his announcements with quiet and monotony, and the other men played with almost bored familiarity.

By and by—it was when he was staking his last ten dollars, the last money of all that which he had won the night before—it seemed to Stocky that his collar was choking him. He tugged at it and at his cravat, and succeeded in wrenching the linen buttonhole from the button. Two or three persons did look at him then, somewhat coldly and disapprovingly. One was heard to remark to another as they left the roulette-table where they had stopped merely for a casual bet, and proceeded toward one of the rooms devoted to cards, that Jar-mead's was no place for a boy who didn't know how to behave himself. "Hang it," said the man, "if they haven't the money to lose, why, damn it, do they come here? Do they mistake Jar-mead's for a branch of the Charity Organization Society?"

Stocky watched the revolution of the wheel that last time with eyes fairly starting from their sockets. Evans from a doorway looked at him and shook his head.

"Poor beggar! That seems to wind him up. I wonder what Winterleigh's got it in for him for?"

The wheel spun, spun more slowly, finally stopped. The dealer unemotionally announced the result. Stocky gave a hoarse laugh. The last cent of his winnings, the last of his quarterly al-

lowance, was now gone. He would not be able to buy a seat on the Stock Exchange in the morning or a partnership in a brokerage concern or any of those glorious wild things he had been planning. He turned away from the table, and his place was taken by some one else.

On the sideboard in the room were decanters thoughtfully provided by Jarnead for his guests. Stocky, already staggering from the shock of his loss, made toward the buffet. One of the attendants poured him out a stiff drink of whisky at his request—his own hand was shaking so that he could not hold the bottle. He had just taken the glass from the man's hand, when there was a sudden crash of breaking glass all over the house. Every one turned, every one jumped. The crash was followed by another. Then there was the sound of wooden panels being beaten down.

"My God, a raid!" cried some one, and pell-mell out of the room the gamblers piled making for the stairway. Quite uselessly, for at the top of the stairs stood a cordon of policemen. At the same instant through the windows and doors of the first floor a score of uniformed men appeared.

Stocky, stunned, unfamiliar with his surroundings, was still standing by the sideboard, his collar torn, the glass of whisky in his hand. He gazed bewildered at the body of policemen. They were accompanied by men in plain clothes—some detectives, some reporters, some photographers. Taking charge of the whole affair, was no other than Winterleigh. The policemen rushed from room to room, confiscating the gambling paraphernalia, arresting gamblers. The reporters and photographers were doing their work with equal efficiency, and still Stocky stood staring. Evans came rushing to him and whispered to him.

"Don't give your own name, of course, old man. Nobody ever does."

"Give my own name where, when?" demanded Stocky stupidly.

"At the station," explained Evans calmly.

There was a flash-light explosion. The photographers were busy.

"At the station?" Stocky was still dazed.

"Yes," said Evans impatiently. "The station. We're all under arrest—don't you understand? We'll be hauled over to the Tenderloin station. Jarnead's man, Gaynor, will put up bail for us, and it'll be all right. Only don't give your own name. Fix your collar, old man. What's the matter with you, anyway?"

"Oh," Stocky tried to achieve an airy tone of voice, "I've just been cleaned out—that's all."

"That's nothing—happens to all of us now and then. You'll get it back again."

And then Stocky felt a strong hand upon his shoulder, and he was advised to come along now and make no row. He followed the advice implicitly, as did all the other gentlemen who were caught that night at Jarnead's. At the police-station he had sufficiently recovered his wits to follow the general example and give an absurd name in place of his own and an address which would have been some place in the North River had it been discoverable.

But alas for the hero! The next morning's papers, with their flamboyant accounts of Winterleigh's long-planned raid upon Jarnead's long-defiant establishment, had beside last night's photograph of "Solomon Applewhite of 963 West Twenty-seventh Street" the deadly parallel of "Private John Randolph Brown, hero of the skirmish at Manzenita." There was a six months' difference in date, but Stocky, the gambler, except for the slight matter of the torn collar, was Stocky, the hero of the skirmish. He saw the papers and knew that his shame—for it seemed that to him—would be known that day to his saint, Agatha; would be known that day to his guardian, his Uncle Ebenezer. He stuck his hands deep into his empty pockets and screwed his mouth into a whistle. But there were tears in his eyes, and when the telephone-bell in his room rang he went laggingly, miserably, toward it.

V.

By nightfall of that wretched day Stocky felt with the Psalmist that all the waves had gone over him. He was bruised and buffeted. Reporter after reporter had tried to invade his room to glean his version of the famous raid from the district attorney's office. Stocky, to be sure, had ferociously denied himself to all of them, but the irritating jangle of the telephone-bell in his ears prefatory to the announcement of their presence had worn on his nerves. He had not been able to deny himself to Uncle Ebenezer when that worthy man, looking absurdly like an animated and vastly chagrined russet apple, had bounced into his room and had sputtered and sizzled like one of the fruit which he suggested over a Hallowe'en fire.

Was this, he had wanted to know, his hand shaking on the damning newspaper, was this—this disgraceful, this outrageous, this unbelievable story true? Was his nephew not only gambling but gambling at Jarnead's, the resort of the spendthrift and the profligate? Stocky sullenly admitted that Uncle Ebenezer's nephew had been so engaged. He did not try to utter any words of extenuation. He felt that the worthy commission merchant would scarcely appreciate the point of view of a young man who was trying to lay the foundations of fortune and of domestic bliss in Jarnead's.

When Uncle Ebenezer, satisfied or at any rate assured that none other than his nephew was the reprobate of the morning newspaper stories, he fell to abusing Stocky's mother. He could have told her, he declared, twenty years before just what her courses would lead to. It almost seemed that he had foreseen through every month of Stocky's childhood and youth that night at Jarnead's, that he could have foretold to the hour when Winterleigh's great raid was to befall! Stocky's sullenness changed to active rage when the irascible old man began to transfer the blame for the night's occurrences from Stocky's own broad shoulders to those

of the gentle, loving, gay little woman on whose grave the lilies-of-the-valley were withering that moment. And active rage had led to a total disruption between the two. As a matter of fact, Uncle Ebenezer had sought his nephew with the design of reading him a furious lecture on ethics and of advancing him a small portion of his next quarterly allowance. But contact with the boy had curdled the milk of kindness in his breast, and he had gone out breathing renunciation of the lad and vowing a determination not to let him have his money an hour in advance of the time when it was due.

"Oh, be hanged to you and the money, too!" Stocky's final remark had been. It had left Ebenezer gaspingly speechless at the moment, for never before had his nephew been verbally disrespectful of him. But Stocky had slammed the door before the old gentleman had recovered words, and so he stumped to the elevator and snorted down in it.

It was late in the afternoon before he screwed his miserable courage to the point of calling up Agatha Ramsay. All day long his thought had been: "What must she think of me, what must she think of me?" For Agatha was firmly enshrined in his heart as a saint. Pity for human folly he admitted might be one of her saintlike attributes, but it would only be pity for human folly decently removed from her own vicinity. And never had he wanted her presence, the charm of her eyes, the sweetness of her smile, as he did on that bruised day. It seemed to him that if she could be less a goddess than he knew her to be, if she could, say, defer judgment, and for just one hour be tender and healing, he might again face the world and somehow redeem himself.

At the Ramsays there was a pretty fiction maintained that Agatha was *jeune fille*. No depth of knowledge beaming in her beautiful eyes, no worldly, wicked mockery dancing about her mouth, no swift, subtle understanding permitted this theory to be overthrown. And as *jeune fille* it was the law of the establishment that whoever wished to

speaking to her upon the telephone must approach her through her mother. Consequently, after Stocky's preliminaries with the servant, he was switched to Mrs. Ramsay's boudoir. She recognized his voice for all its wobegone heaviness.

"Ah, is that you, Mrs. Ramsay? This is Mr. Brown—Mr. Randolph Brown. Is there any chance at all of my catching Miss Ramsay at home?"

"Oh, Mr. Brown!" Mrs. Ramsay's voice was vivacious and not too unfriendly. Stocky's heart beat hopefully. "I'm afraid that Agatha is not at home."

"Oh, not at home," echoed Stocky dolorously at the other end of the wire. But Mrs. Ramsay was a good general, and it suddenly occurred to her that here was her opportunity to do something, the necessity of which she had been lately observing. Here was her chance—now that she had used Mr. John Randolph Brown, hero of Manzanita, to the fullest possible extent in her list of attractions—to get rid of handsome young Mr. Stocky Brown, hopelessly ineligible *parti*, before her foolish daughter's zest for emotional experiences should lead her into some ridiculous situation. So she answered crisply:

"I'll be quite frank with you, Mr. Brown. Agatha is at home, but I do not think it wise that she should—that you and she should have any conversation to-day. The papers—they were mistaken, possibly, but the resemblance between that unfortunate young man last night and your photograph—"

"Oh, there was no mistake," said Stocky valiantly. "Your friend, Mr. Winterleigh"—his heart swelled with hot jealousy as he said the name—"will tell you that it was I myself and no other. But is playing for money such a black crime?" Stocky knew well enough the stakes for which bridge was played at Mrs. Ramsay's.

"There's no black crime in the whole catalogue," Mrs. Ramsay assured him mellifluously, "except getting in the papers and being poor. You mustn't think me too harsh or worldly, but we

mothers must look out for our little girls. Even if you were a Vanderbilt and I had proof that you were a frequenter of gambling-places, I should think it wiser to curtail your association with Agatha. As it is—don't think me unkind—but I really must say that you had better not try to see her at present. For your own sake, you know, too. A young girl has her ideals—and Agatha thought of you as a real friend. To-day's revelations have hurt her."

So! He had committed the crowning infamy. He had hurt that tender heart in its tenderest place! He had hurt Agatha in her ideals, in her trust, in her friendship. Mrs. Ramsay's prohibition, for he understood it well enough to be that, was for the moment nothing in comparison with this other horror. To have hurt Agatha!

He was back at the table again with his hot, tired forehead upon his hands, when, without the preliminary telephoning, there came a sharp rap on his door. He called out a miserable "Come in," and Edward Winterleigh responded to the summons.

"My dear fellow," cried the district attorney, "I am perfectly overcome to have gotten you in this hole!" Stocky bewilderedly took the hand which Winterleigh extended toward him, bewilderedly he searched the broad, genial face. Winterleigh seemed genuinely concerned.

"Why, you didn't get me into any hole," declared Stocky. "I got myself there with my infernal folly."

"Oh, of course, we are all the original causes of our bad times! But I was the secondary cause of yours, and I'm sorry for it. If I had had an idea that you were a frequenter of Jarmead's I should certainly have given you warning—I know I could have trusted you to that extent. We've been leading up to this raid for weeks. You know all about it—the precinct detectives and officers were never able to get any evidence against the place! That miraculous blindness of theirs! So I planned this thing over their heads. But if I had had any idea—" He broke off and then resumed again: "Brown, old

man, how am I going to make it up to you?"

"Oh, don't bother about me," said Stocky, still a little bewildered. "There's no earthly reason why you should. I was a blithering fool to be in the place. I got caught—and those wretched cuts of me that flooded the papers after Manzanita did my business for me. Have a drink, won't you?" He hospitably drew forward bottles and a siphon from the litter of papers on the desk.

Winterleigh watched him as he dragged himself to the bell to ring for ice and as he produced a couple of glasses from the little medicine-chest in his bathroom. Any one watching Winterleigh must have thought that he was genuinely concerned for the person whom he watched, that he was earnestly thinking what could be done for him. When Stocky came back with the paraphernalia for the drink, Winterleigh leaned back in his chair and addressed him.

"See here, Brown," he said. "This is no town for you at present. You're too active for us, anyway. Ten years of real life—the real life of the army, or the navy, or the plains, might tone down your youthful energy to the place where you belong with the plodding multitude here. Why don't you go West? It's the place to lay the foundation of a fortune—a better place than Jarnead's," he added, with the flicker of a smile. "It would get you out of this momentary unpleasantness—of course, it's only momentary—but at the same time it's unpleasant. It would give you a chance."

"The West seems rather an indefinite post-office address," growled Stocky uninterestedly.

Into Winterleigh's eyes, bent upon Stocky's face, there came an expression that for the moment suggested cruelty and hate. It was gone before Stocky, who had been raising his glass to his lips, had placed that again on the table beside him.

"You mean that you have no Western affiliations which would make it easy for you to start in out there?" Winterleigh asked amiably.

"I don't remember a single acquaintance west of the Alleghenies."

"Well, I came from those parts, and I have enough acquaintances, God knows, to stock you, if you care to go. Think it over, Brown. I'm genuinely upset about this affair of last night and its effect upon you. I'd really like to make it up to you in some way if I could. I know the West, and I know it's the place for a man of your energies. If you'd care to go out and look around you, I've had a letter within the week from an old running-mate of mine out there who wants a foreman for his ranch—a fellow who could make some kind of an impression on Eastern buyers, and who knows the rudiments of arithmetic and grammar as well as how to brand a maverick. A month or two would fit you in those accomplishments which you haven't already got. What do you say?"

What did he say? For the first time that wretched day a glimmer of life ran through Stocky. The West—large spaces, fresh air, the open life, freedom—all these things struck some responsive chord in him as they almost invariably do in high-spirited youth. The West—the chance to blow out of him all those soiled and sordid fancies that were connected with his two nights' experiences at Jarnead's! The chance—the real chance—to win a fortune, and, purified by sunlight and air and wholesome activities, to come back and find Agatha waiting. For surely she liked him a little, and surely if she liked him she would wait for him. But to go away from her—how could he do that? And all the time Winterleigh watched him out of steady, calculating eyes.

"It's awfully good of you, Winterleigh," said Stocky finally. "But, after all, however appealing such a prospect is to me, I can't take it up. I'm cleaned out until next quarter and I've got to hustle around this town and try to get something to keep me going until then."

"I don't want to discourage you," said Winterleigh, smiling, "but this morning's papers are the worst sort of a recommendation for a young man looking for work in this city. And

what kind of work do you mean, anyway? Clerkship, salesman's job? That's not the sort of thing for you."

No, Stocky acknowledged miserably to himself, those were not the jobs for him, and it was true that his recent escapade would be no great recommendation to a careful employer. Winterleigh saw the working of his mind plainly on his ingenuous face.

"As for the money"—a swift raising of Stocky's chin warned Winterleigh not to go on in exactly the same vein that he had begun. "As for the money, if you made up your mind to anything of the sort that I've been suggesting, there isn't a particle of doubt that that gnarled old nut of an uncle of yours would advance you what you need." Stocky's chin resumed its normal position in relation to the rest of his body, and he nodded absently. Winterleigh rose and stood beside him, placing a friendly hand upon his shoulder. "Don't reject me now, at any rate," he concluded. "Think it over and let me hear from you to-morrow or the next day."

"I don't believe I need any more time," answered Stocky slowly, and raising honest, grateful eyes to his friend. "If you can arrange with my uncle, I think I'll jump at the chance. And—and"—he grew red as he struggled to express himself—"it's blamed good of you to take the trouble with such a blundering young fool as I am."

"Oh, that's all right. As I said, I feel myself the secondary cause of your troubles. Suppose I see old Mr. Brown in the morning and let you know what he says."

Stocky, remembering on what terms he himself had parted from his uncle, inclined to the belief that diplomacy suggested another mediator with that old man than himself. So he only said again gratefully: "You're awfully good."

When Mr. Edward Winterleigh undertook to accomplish things they were apt to be accomplished. By the afternoon of the following day Stocky was in receipt of a stilted communication from his uncle announcing that he would advance from the youth's next allowance

enough money for a railroad-ticket to the point Mr. Winterleigh had designated and for whatever sort of an outfit would be necessary for the new life. He added, still more stiltedly, that he would add to this sum a small one which he would ask his nephew to accept as a gift from him. Even more precisely, he named a day on which he would be glad to see his nephew in his office on West Street.

So it was arranged. The Ramsay telephone, to be sure, was obdurate, and Mrs. Ramsay merely assured Mr. Brown that she would deliver his farewells to her daughter. Agatha's own voice he did not hear again. Agatha's own laughing eyes did not cloud at his farewells. Furthermore, to his plea that he be allowed to write now and then to Miss Ramsay, her excellent mother returned a gentle negative. However, she assured him, she herself would be glad to receive communications from time to time assuring her of his good fortune. And she added that such communications would undoubtedly be of interest to her daughter also. It was the utmost concession that Stocky could wring from her, but on the whole he was not entirely dissatisfied. He had a vision of himself developing into a wonderful letter-writer, and he even included a camera among the necessities of his Western outfit with a view to illustrated correspondence!

VI.

Stocky, dreams, regrets, anticipations and all, was whirling westward. His thoughts as often upon the chances of the new life toward which he journeyed as toward the lady of his aspirations. He was young and the spirit of adventure in him had not been satiated by the brief Cuban experiences. In eager imagination he saw himself courting all the excitements of the wide country and the new career toward which he was hastening.

He had traveled all night and all day from Chicago, and was approximately nearing his destination. A roughly sketched map of the country had been

given him by Winterleigh, and he consulted this over his dinner. The main line of the Westward Ho swept west through the region in the midst of which the X Bar Y ranch lay, some sixty or seventy miles to the north of that property. About fifty miles west of the ranch was Hillery Junction, whence several short spurs of railroad radiated into the wilderness. One of these, slanting backward, east and south, gave the X Bar Y people a railroad-station only eighteen miles west their holdings. So that the traveler passed his journey's end—some distance to the north to be sure—while yet on his journey; and then doubling obliquely on his tracks, so to speak, returned to it. Stocky, making himself familiar with these geographical facts, consulted his time-table. He would arrive at Hillery Junction at three-twenty a. m. He yawned disconsolately at the prospect. There was a train out toward Mimosa, his own railroad-station, at five in the morning. The schedules were obviously not arranged for the convenience and ease of the X Bar Y people.

When he drew the curtains of his berth together early that evening, he bade the porter wake him at half-past two. He wafted a thought back to Agatha and tried to sleep. But his rest was broken. Though the Westward Ho made few stops each one of them seemed to him hideously jolting and disturbing. Through his light slumbers he was conscious of the throbbing, the intense forward vibration of the train. Dozing, his undertaking appeared to him in all the hues of folly. Why had he not gone into the dairy-commission business? Would that have removed him, socially, any farther from Agatha than he was removed by becoming "hired man" to Winterleigh's friend? And as for physical distances, he could, as butter merchant in New York, at least have walked past the mellow-tinted, square, sunny old house on North Washington Square! Why had Winterleigh been so eager to help him out of the town? Why—and why—and why—the questions revolved endlessly through his half dreams.

He must finally have fallen into a profounder slumber, for it was with a sense of being dragged back from far reaches of oblivion that he suddenly awoke to an incredible fury of noise—of escaping steam, of crackling wood, of shrieks and groans. A cry from his own lips was dying on the air with all those other screams of agony.

In a second or two, his brain worked. He knew that he was lying on the ground; he could turn his neck enough to make out a hissing blare of light some distance from him on the right—a burning car. He tried to move, but his arms and chest were pinioned under some heavy timber. This discovery made him realize that he was in pain, in a sickening, dizzying pain from the great weight upon him. He kept on crying and moaning, "My God, my God!" and tried to shut his ears to the anguished sounds ascending all about him in the darkness. Sometimes a wave of unconsciousness would pass over him from the sheer burden that he bore; then he would emerge to knowledge again.

By and by it seemed to him that there were vague signs of an orderly activity in the uproar and horror; that there was a sense of human presences moving on helpful errands. As this impression grew stronger, and as the light from the blazing cars illuminated the scene so that he caught sight of figures hurrying hither and thither, he tried to call. But the pinioned chest let through no sound loud enough to reach the ears of the workers.

Passing out of one of his periods of sick unconsciousness and coming into a realization of his position, he felt a presence bending over him. The car was burning less brightly now, and he could only make out a benignant human form in the darkness. But it spoke, and Stocky heard a woman's voice.

"O God, O God, forgive them!" he heard her pray. Dimly it seemed to him that she must think him dying, and that she was uttering some last prayers as a viaticum for him. But he knew that he was not dying, that if he could only be unpinioned he might even help

others, in this ghastly *mêlée*, to live. He tried to tell her so, but before he had formed any words she raised a lantern and swung it above his eyes. By its light her own face was revealed also. He had a moment's glimpse of sad, passionately appealing eyes below rough, tawny hair, of fine, black brows penciled above the eyes, of a straight, tense mouth. The somber, beautiful gaze met his full for a second.

"Ah!" she cried. "You are conscious." Then she straightened herself and called to some of the other figures which the boy had felt moving in the neighborhood.

"Here, here!" she called. "This man is alive and conscious."

They hurried toward him, and as they came she stooped. She had lowered the lantern and he no longer saw her face. But he thought he felt the touch of tender fingers for a moment on his forehead and he thought he heard again that prayer: "O God, O God, forgive them." But by the time two men came running toward him, she had slipped away in the gloom. She had seemed in haste at the end, for her skirt, caught upon a nail or splinter in the wreckage which pinned Stocky down, ripped as she jerked herself free.

"Any one alive and conscious here, speak," commanded a voice, and Stocky, by a great effort, gave a signal. Two men bent over him, one an uninjured passenger, doctor evidently by his bag, the other a train-hand.

"I'd be all right if I could move," announced Stocky. They fell to work quickly, silently, to free him. It seemed an endless process to the boy, and the first moving of the weights upon him gave him an anguish more intense, more exquisite, than the burden itself had done. He shut his teeth tightly upon the groans that wanted to make their way into the air. When he was free the man with the bag put a vial to his lips.

"Drink that," he commanded, raising Stocky's head with his free arm. The brandy trickled, smooth, warming, revivifying, down the boy's throat.

"There," he declared after a moment,

"I'm all right now. I'm ready to get up and help now."

"There's plenty to do," growled the uniformed man. "Curse them devils! May they be tortured to all eternity in hell for this! May——"

Stocky, staggering to his feet and clutching at the doctor's arm for support, gasped out: "Why, why—what does this——"

"Train-wreckers," said the doctor briefly.

"Wreckers?" Stocky gasped again. "But what for? What——"

"There was an express-messenger in the mail-car," explained the doctor briefly, "taking a supply of gold from Chicago to the bank down there in Copper City which is in difficulties. It needed a hundred thousand, they say, to keep from going under. Well—it will go under. The messenger's dead, the money's gone—and this—this——"

"The devils!" cried Stocky. "The mean, low devils!"

"Devils? I believe you!" The train-hand spoke with concentrated rage and hatred.

"Did they all get away?" Stocky's voice begged for an assurance that one, at least, was lying in the midst of the human wreckage, his sightless eyes turned to the stars.

"Every damned son of Satan," was the answer.

"And is there no way of apprehending them? Has word been sent——"

"Word? Do you think they left the wires ready for us to send our love to the home folks at every crossroads?" demanded the train-hand bitterly. "Tom Halsey is footing it with Rob Denny to the next stop—Yerkes, seven miles along—to send the word. And ten to one those damned Apaches—but Apaches would be gentlemen to them—will drop the two of them before they can get to Yerkes."

Stunned almost as much by this enlightenment as he had been by his injuries, Stocky staggered along in the wake of the two men. There were other figures flitting about that field of death. The air was cold—thin from the height of the elevation. In the dis-

tances, the mountains toward which the land was gradually rising bulked vast and mysterious in the unlighted night. Nearer, the foot-hills gave promise of refuge to the wreckers and robbers. Terrible was the landscape to the young man, terrible the brooding of the night, terrible the swiftness with which he had been hurled into unimagined cruelty and rapacity.

To kill—to kill like this! And for money! God, that such things should be! That that woman should be lying there with her face pressed downward into the earth, dead, dead, with her mangled arm thrown over her dead child—that that venerable man should have passed in agony from the world, that men and women should go halt all their days—for gold, for accursed money! He was no profound philosopher, Stocky; and he was too shudderingly full of horror to think very consecutively as he stumbled along with the others, obeying their terse instructions automatically; but the terror and loathing of the scene mingled somehow in his mind with the thought of Jar-mead's, and with the recollection of Agatha, smilingly directing his attention to the expensive luxuries of life—her necessities. Money—hideous, horrible greed of money!

"My last drop of brandy's gone," said Doctor Roth despairingly by and by as he rose from a survey of the moaning, mangled body of a woman.

"I had some in my bag," said Stocky. "Were any of the cars saved?"

"Only two were burned," answered the trainman. "One's lying on her head over there, and a couple on their sides. But two of them are straight."

Stocky made his way toward the track and found that his was one of the cars which lay on their sides. Still, one could walk gingerly through it. He picked his steps along through the broken wood and glass and found his section. His valise had been ripped open and his wallet was gone. But the brandy-flask had not been removed from its pocket, and the liquor, grown so desperately precious, had marvelously escaped spilling. At the moment he

was more rejoiced over this than disturbed over the loss of his wallet.

There was one pretty young girl among the less seriously injured, and the doctor hurried to her with Stocky's restoring drops. Stocky, moving some boards that had bound her feet, and helping her to sit up, suddenly thought him of the woman who had been his first messenger of salvation that night. Something in this girl's straight, pretty eyebrows recalled the finely arched ones over the sad eyes that had met his for a second.

"By the way," he said to Doctor Roth, "where's your woman assistant?"

"What woman?"

"The one who summoned you to me. The one who saw I wasn't gone."

"There hasn't been any woman working except that fine, gray-haired school-teacher from Philadelphia who is helping down there. There were not many women aboard the train, thank God!"

"No, no," said Stocky impatiently. "I mean the young woman—she's just a girl. Why"—he looked about him as though he thought she must be near—"why, you must have seen her."

"My dear fellow, you're dreaming. As soon as we counted up those fit for service, I organized the relief corps. There was no other woman in it except the Philadelphian."

"Well, I'm not dreaming," persisted Stocky. He thought he felt again her cool touch upon his forehead. "She passed a lantern before my eyes and she was saying 'God forgive them' as though it were a prayer for the dying or something of that sort—"

"The angel of the death-field," commented the doctor. "No, youngster, it was a figment of your imagination."

Stocky said no more at the moment. He was too busy to waste much time in words. But his native obstinacy combated this dismissal of his tragic-eyed visitant. He recalled the sound of her tearing skirt—he would go back to the place where he had been pinioned and would confront this unbeliever with tangible proof of her presence.

The dawn had come up over the

scene of wreckage, the messengers had returned from Yerkes with helpers—men and wagons and mattresses, women with lint and restoratives—the news of the disaster had been telegraphed on and the company was hurrying men and apparatus to the spot, before Stocky had an opportunity to go in search of his evidence. He found it clinging to a long, jagged splinter—a piece of woolen cloth, firm and heavy in texture, tannish olive in color, and in size about as big as his hand. Triumphantly he showed it to the doctor. One of the railroad employes, standing near-by, looked at it.

"By gee, it is a piece of a woman's dress," he admitted. "And there were only ten women aboard, and not one of them had on anything like that. I tell you what it means—it means there's a woman in that gang of——" His language trailed off into the unprintable as he tried to characterize the robbers.

"A woman in the gang that did this?" Stocky indicated the wreck, the improvised hospital-tent, all the horror that the roseate daylight was revealing. "A woman?"

"Sure. When they're bad there ain't nothin' too bad for them," declared one philosopher.

"Oh, but this woman—this woman couldn't have been that sort," explained Stocky bewilderedly. "Why, she——" He broke off. He found himself unwilling to describe the face he had seen, to give any clue to the vanished presence of the night. Why, these men with their absurd suspicions might make it troublesome for her.

Later, when one of the officials approached him and asked him for the piece of cloth, that nothing which might be useful in tracing the robbers might be lost, Stocky counted his falsehood no crime when he said that he had dropped it somewhere.

"That woman—never," he kept on telling himself. But where was she? Where had she disappeared?

Not until, twelve hours later, after the arrival of trains and supplies, he had begun to feel the inconvenience of losing a pocketbook in the midst of the

wilderness, did he cease to frame plausible explanations of the girl's presence. Then his more pressing necessities claimed his thoughts. He surmounted his difficulties, however, and by night-fall found himself at the station which he had expected to reach in the early morning. A wagon waited for him, from the seat of which a big, sluggish-looking, sallow man surveyed him.

"Evenin', sir," he observed. "Mr. Brown from New York? I'm Adams—Seth Adams, from X Bar Y ranch. Sorry to hear you had an exciting experience last night. Well, you're here, anyhow, an' that's something."

Stocky climbed up beside him after a word or two on his lack of baggage. It had been burned in the wreck, he explained. In spite of the fluency of Mr. Adams' welcome, he felt vaguely discomfited by the man's look and manner.

VII.

After his first speech of welcome, Mr. Adams developed great powers of taciturnity. To Stocky's bewilderment, he said nothing about Winterleigh, merely grunting when the newcomer mentioned their one common acquaintance and their introducer. Stocky's conventional assurances that he had left "your old friend, Winterleigh" well, seemed indifferent to Mr. Adams. He was a trifle more interested in the subject of last night's wreck, but it was an interest displayed rather by a tenser attitude of listening than by questioning. Stocky, describing the outrage, awaited some word of horrified loathing, of vengeful purpose. None came, merely a more attentive grunt than had greeted his former efforts at conversation.

"Are such dastardly crimes common hereabouts?" the young man demanded hotly, by and by. Adams looked at him from under his overhanging brows.

"Manners an' customs ain't as polite as maybe you're used to," he admitted.

"Polite!" echoed Stocky. "But this is crime—this is murder, arson, robbery—this is the sort of thing that makes the massacres of the Indians

seem gentle. This is by white men, by one's own people! Do you mean to say that there is no chance of hunting down the despicable cowards?"

"Oh, the Wells Fargo people will do some huntin'. They ain't goin' to let a hundred thousand dollars get by them without some effort to get it back. An' the Westward Ho won't turn the other cheek either; it'll do some Pinkertonin' an' detectin'. But if you ask me will they ever get the gang an' will they ever get the money—I think they won't."

"But the people who belong hereabouts—the people of whom these murderers are neighbors—aren't they going to do anything?"

"Sure they will." Mr. Adams' voice seemed to Stocky to hold an unctuous tinge of mockery. "The sheriff an' his posse will be quite busy for a while, ridin' about—oh, yes, there'll be a lot of motion for a while. Will it get anywheres? That's another matter. Of course, you can't never tell for sure. Maybe somebody'll catch one of the gang this time. I only know they ain't never done it yet. An' some of us, who have lived here a long time an' know our ground pretty well, some of us find it more profitable an' healthy to mind our own business than to fly off the handle." There sounded a sinister note of warning in the words.

They had left the straggling, half-finished settlement, with its low-built adobe buildings, its makeshift dwellings, patched together of packing-boxes, burlap and tin, behind them. They tended downward over a great plateau across which Stocky's unaccustomed gaze could scarcely discern the road. Adams managed the big team like an old stage-driver, and Stocky eyed him admiringly. There was a heavy load of stores for the ranch in the body of the wagon, but the gray pair carried it all buoyantly, gallantly. Their motion was inspiriting to the traveler, as were the vast stretches of sky, the unencumbered freedom of the plain, the tingling of thin, cool air from the mountains behind them, the torn shreds of color reflected in the horizon they faced.

He breathed deep, his nostrils and

lungs expanding to the splendid new demand upon them. In the invigorating, clean drafts, some of the horror of the night before was purged from him, and some of the shame and stain of that sordid, ridiculous episode which had brought him here. He wished that Agatha might be with him, drinking in this wonderful new elixir compounded of space and air and color; he had always felt in Agatha a spirit of adventurousness, or so he interpreted it. At that stage of his passion no one and nothing, not Agatha herself or her own deeds, could have persuaded him that the excitements she craved were not the healthful, vigorous ones which appealed to him.

From thoughts of Agatha, his mind turned to the girl of last night, to the tragic, lantern-lighted face bending above him, to the prayer—a blasphemy, if, as the trainmen had intimated, she had had a share in bringing about the disaster. He spoke of her to Adams, a little diffidently.

"By the way," he began, "there was one queer thing about last night. There seems to have been a woman mixed up in it."

Adams shot him a swift look—startlingly swift from one so heavy and lethargic in appearance.

"A woman? How do you mean? A passenger? I suppose there were several of them."

"Yes, poor souls," answered Stocky, shuddering with the recollection of the dead mother and child whom he had seen. "But this wasn't a passenger—at least, so they all declared. The doctor," he added, laughing a little, "wanted to make out that it was just a notion of my own—a vision of delirium, or something of that sort. But I wasn't delirious. I only lost myself two or three times while that accursed weight was upon me."

"Do you mean," asked Adams slowly, "that there was a woman there who wasn't a passenger on the train?"

"So it seems. The railroad people think she was one of the gang."

"One of the gang? They're locoed. Do they think that the gang carries a

lot of camp-followers around with it? The gang ain't no such fools." He spoke with conviction.

"I don't think she was one of them, either," replied Stocky, hotly. "But there was no more finding her than them afterward."

"I guess the doctor was right, an' you were sort of dreamin' in your pain."

"Not unless I dreamed a piece of her dress, too," said Stocky, somewhat nettled. "She tore it on the timber that pinned me down as she slipped away—an' I've got it."

"Did you see her?" The question was sharply put.

"As plain as I see you—for a second. She held a lantern over my face and I saw her by it. She was young——"

"How young?" The question was snapped.

"Oh, I can't tell exactly." Stocky was surprised at the vehement interest of his driver. "But young—nineteen to twenty-three or four, I should say."

"Dark?"

"No—that is, her hair was lightish—sort of between red and gold and pale brown, I should say; and her eyebrows were black."

Adams mopped his forehead, and his tense attitude relaxed.

"You must have been dreamin'," he asseverated.

Somewhat angry, Stocky made no further attempt to persuade the doubter of the reality of his vision. He felt in the pocket of the coat he had rescued from his section of overturned car for the little telltale piece of cloth. Then he fell to musing about the apparition.

They had stopped at a sort of half-way house in the midst of the plain, and they and the horses had eaten. Then they were on again through the velvety darkness, pierced with low-hanging, large stars. Stocky was worn out with his travels, with his excitements and accidents. He felt as though he had not slept since before that fatal evening when he had first gone to Jarnead's. The air was adding to his irresistible desire for sleep. He could no longer talk, no longer question, no longer care

about last night or any of the nights before, about the shining Agatha or the dark, mysterious visitant of the train disaster. All that he wanted was sleep. And he continually fell into dozes, and pitched about on the seat. Though he was jerked and jolted, he could not fight against the overpowering impulse.

Finally he had a dim consciousness that he was bidden to climb over the back of the seat to the body of the wagon, that he obeyed as blindly as a sleep-stricken child obeys the word to move, that wraps were piled about him and something placed beneath his head. He had a second's slumberous gratitude toward the person who had devised this comfort for him, but he didn't know who the person was. And then he knew nothing more until the baying of dogs and the cessation of motion simultaneously aroused him. He saw that they had drawn up in front of a low, wide, rambling building, brightly lighted.

"Here we are," announced Mr. Adams. "Home before two—I said we could do it."

There was a confused movement of figures before Stocky's sleepy eyes, and in his ears were the welcoming neigh of horses from some near-by corral to their gray comrades and the barking of the dogs. In the doorway of the low house two women were silhouetted. Adams steered him in their direction, and in another moment he found himself acknowledging a presentation to "my wife, Mis' Adams, an' her sister, Miss Barbara Merritt." Small, dark, withered, the two seemed to him tight-locked little boxes of human essence. Even in the drowsy greeting he gave them, he felt that dust and ashes were the contents of the package labeled "Mrs. Adams," and that something more inflammable was still unconsumed in the package labeled "Miss Barbara Merritt." But it was no time or place for analyses, even if these had been native to Stocky's disposition. He made the briefest salutations consistent with civility, and five minutes later was sound asleep upon a cot in a long, bare dormitory sort of room connected by a

covered passageway with the main body of the house.

If Mr. Seth Adams had manifested only a slight interest in the present state of his old friend, the militant figure of the New York district attorney's office, Miss Barbara Merritt, Stocky found, was inclined to bring the balance of curiosity to the normal. When, on the forenoon after his arrival at the ranch-house, he had wakened from a long, deep sleep, dressed, and made his way to the front of the building, he found the dark, avid-looking woman waiting for him. By daylight she did not seem so old as she had seemed the night before, and indeed she had some traces of beauty. Her eyes, except for the disconcerting intentness and keenness of their regard, were beautiful—large, expressive and dark; her features in their small, miniaturish way, were well chiseled. But all her look declared that consuming fires burned within her, marring and scarring what might once have been an attractive appearance.

She explained to Stocky that his evident exhaustion had caused the household not to arouse him at the usual hour. Her brother-in-law was riding about the place now, but would return by noon to introduce Stocky to his new surroundings and employments. Meantime, she was to give him his breakfast. She set it before him gracelessly, uninvitingly, and as she moved about she watched him with intent curiosity.

"So you are a—a friend of Mr. Winterleigh?" she said at last, moistening her lips as she spoke.

"I suppose we are friends, since he has given me this introduction to the West," replied Stocky, frankly. "But up to the time that he made me the offer, we were merely acquaintances."

"You met in business?" Again she moistened her lips, and her throat above the low collar of her brown calico wrapper worked.

"Oh, no." Stocky gave more attention to his eggs than to the changes in Miss Merritt's expression. "He's in the district attorney's office—as, of course, you know. I think he said that Mr. Adams was some sort of distant connec-

tion of his, so naturally you know about his career. And I—I'm nothing much—as yet."

No smile on Miss Merritt's part indicated that she wished to rebut Stocky's modest estimate of himself; indeed, it was evident that she had no interest in it or in anything connected with him except in so far as he touched Winterleigh.

"How did you come to know him?" she demanded.

"He—he knew some people I know—I knew," answered Stocky. He was miserably aware how he had forfeited the claim to the Ramsays' acquaintance. He could not call them his friends now. And he didn't wish to talk them over with Miss Barbara Merritt, who, even through the preoccupations of his appetite, impressed him as an uncannily disagreeable young woman.

"Men or women?" she pursued doggedly. He raised his eyes and surveyed her with a glance which might have abashed a less self-absorbed inquisitiveness than hers.

"I was introduced to him, if I remember aright, by Mr. George Duncan," he answered with punctilious exactness. "I have met him frequently at the house of Mr. Gordon Ramsay. I have also met him in other places, and know several others of his acquaintance. And you—do you know him very well out here? Has he been here much lately?"

Fixing him with her dark eyes, Barbara Merritt seemed deaf to his questioning.

"He has made a great reputation for himself since he has been in New York," she said, half questioning, half affirming. Stocky nodded gloomily.

"Oh, yes, he's done very well for himself."

"What great cases has he had?" She had seated herself near the table, and she leaned forward, chin upon propped elbow, to drink in thirstily the answer.

"Well," answered Stocky with a grim humorousness, "he secured evidence against the most famous gambling-house in the city for one thing—something which no one else had ever been able to do. And he's convicted one or

two murderers—even one or two with families and money to help them off; and he's indicted the head of a great corporation. He's been cutting quite a legal swath."

"Convicting murderers, indicting—thieves, I suppose?" Stocky nodded. "Closing gambling-hells—Ed Winterleigh!"

There was a mixture of exultation and diabolic mirth about her. Her dry lips expanded into a smile which struck Stocky as the most unpleasant he had ever seen.

"Of course you must all be very proud of him out this way," he remarked politely. "He's one of you, isn't he? Came from this region, did he not?"

She nodded and began to clear away the dishes, her veined eyelids over her dark, brooding, changeless eyes, her mouth awry in its forbidding smile.

When Adams returned to the house, he found Stocky refreshed by sleep and food, and forgetful, with the wonderful buoyancy of undefeated youth, of the horrors through which he had so recently passed. He was also impatiently ready to begin his work. Adams sleepily listened to the boy dilate on his energy and his desire to employ it. He nodded at the recital.

"I reckon we'll manage to keep you steppin' some while you're with us," he remarked. Stocky's heart sank at the suggestion of a term put to his stay at X Bar Y ranch. It would certainly behoove him to learn a great deal if there was a chance that after all he was not established here permanently!

"Well, what will you want me to be after first, sir?" he asked.

"Oh, you'd just better drift about with the boys for a few days, till you get your bearin's," said Mr. Adams soothingly. "Ride around with the boys—learn the lay of the land—get so you can keep your seat on a horse and can speak to a herd so as not to stampede 'em. Ride off to a round-up an' learn how it's done." Stocky's heart sank. All this did not sound to him like earning a salary, and he wanted to earn a salary. He needed the money in his

business, he told himself. He tried tactfully to suggest the same idea to Mr. Adams.

"Oh, you're on the pay-roll from yesterday," answered his employer. "But you'll have to get used to things before you can be put to anything definite. Don't worry—we'll make it lively for you when the time comes."

Almost immediately things were made lively for him, though apparently not in the sense Mr. Adams had intended. A horse was given to him to ride, and one of the cowboys whose long length was a match for his lent him some clothes to take the place of the outfit burned in the baggage-car. His first effort at mounting the beast, which he made nonchalantly enough, for he was familiar with horses, came near to being his undoing. The little brute had stood apparently quiet enough until Stocky's left foot was in the stirrup, his right leg about to come over the horse's back. Then suddenly "Lady Gay," as the mare was named, evidently in recognition of certain of her qualities, reared upon her hind legs, almost pitching the young man off. By some good chance, he got his other foot in its stirrup and pressed the spurs into the beast. For a second she resumed position on all four hoofs. Then she tried to throw Stocky off over her head, elevating her rear legs and almost wallowing with her forehead in the dirt before her.

The young man's earliest riding-lessons had been taken in his mother's old home when he was scarcely more than a baby. He could keep his seat under greater difficulties than most riders, but this seesawing of the Western pony was trying to him. The next time Lady Gay was on all fours he tried to drive her forward. He had lost his hat in the contest so far, and his fair brown hair was blown about his head like the aureole of a very militant and determined saint. His young mouth was pressed into a line of determination, his gray eyes shot fires. When Stocky Brown should learn to bring to the moral problems of his life the valor and the pluck he always brought to physical difficul-

ties, he would be a man in the fullest sense of the term.

Lady Gay shot off with him as though nothing nearer than the wall of purple mountains on the west should stop her. But twenty feet from this glorious start she bucked again. And then, round and round a circle of the plain they flew, the cowboys watching, cheering, advising, Stocky deaf to it all, solely bent upon the mastery of the creature under him. In ten minutes she had bucked and reared twenty times. He had held his seat, and now at last he was actually directing her course; she was responding to his hand upon the bridle-reins. She broke into a trot, and he rode her two or three miles across the plain, and back.

The men congratulated him when he returned.

"She broke Larry Grimm's neck—but he wasn't sober when she done it," declared one.

"Really broke his neck?" demanded Stocky, who had dismounted and was standing by the horse's head.

The answer was a realistic cracking of knuckle-bones by the first speaker.

"Real as that," he retorted. "It was under the daisies for Larry."

"Who's ridden her since?"

"She ain't been rode since. But the ole man give orders she was to be brought in for you. She's been rangin' since, but Bud got her about sunup to-day. I suppose the ole man knowed you could do it. You was in Cuba, wasn't you?"

Stocky nodded, a thoughtful frown between his brows, as he stroked the muzzle of Lady Gay. And then he was suddenly aware that Miss Barbara Merritt was out by the corral fence. Her eager eyes were upon him.

"Mastered Lady Gay, did you, Mr. Brown?" she said. "My—but Brother Seth will be pleased. I reckon he knew you could do it."

"Doubtless," said Stocky shortly, still frowning. But he was an adept in the cheerful art of putting aside disagreeable things. He did not long bother himself as to why his new employer had

set him to riding a vicious beast. It was enough for him that he had ridden her! He moved with a certain jauntiness that afternoon. He wished that Agatha might have seen that contest and its outcome!

If Stocky reasoned that this victory over Lady Gay was to be the end of his difficulties on X Bar Y ranch, he reasoned without his host and his companions. He was the most unsuspecting of human beings. He knew that no one in the country had any grounds of enmity toward him. How could he then see more than untoward chance in the succession of accidents that befell him?

He had been off on a fence-inspecting tour when the next serious one happened. He had proved himself a sufficiently apt pupil at such tasks as were assigned him, and after a few weeks he was promoted to the position of fence inspector of the great territory over which the X Bar Y cattle ranged. He had been absent from headquarters two or three days, sleeping in the open, "grubbing" on coffee and pork and hardtack, but enjoying life to the full. Religiously he thought at every dawn and sunset of Agatha; he wished that she could share the fulness and freedom of this exhilarating existence with him. But the thought of her, even of banishment from her, could not be a poignant grief to him in the midst of the clear air and the wide spaces, and he was happy with the wholesome, unquestioning happiness of clean and active youth. As he rode back toward the ranch-house at the end of the third day, he was looking forward with considerable appetite to a change of diet and he was whistling softly, contentedly, to himself, when suddenly a bullet grazed his shoulder. He leaped from his horse with a yell and looked in the direction whence the shot had come. It had certainly been from a low, shedlike shelter about half a mile from the home group of buildings. Stocky made toward it, rending the air with his demands that the shooter come out and explain himself. No one responded to the invitation, and the shed was deserted when

he reached it. He rode on, distrustfully examining every clump of sage-grass by the way. But nothing appeared, and to his story, when he told it on arrival at the house, no one seemed to pay much attention.

"Most likely some one thinks he sees a coyote," opined Mr. Adams.

"A coyote on horseback in broad daylight?" snorted Stocky, more enraged by the explanation than by the incident. "What kind of circus coyotes do you have out here?"

"Well, you're here without a scratch, ain't you?" demanded his employer.

"And no thanks to some fool who's a blamed sight too ready with his gun," snapped Stocky.

This and Si Townsend's determined effort to engage him in a row of dubious proportions and outcome rankled in his mind for a while. It was queer that the most cantankerous man in the outfit should single out him, the inoffensive Stocky, for insult and offense. It was queer that the dangerous horse, the casual bullet, any untoward and "unchancy" thing should always fall to him. However, as Adams said, here he was alive and well; and to-morrow he was to ride away from the ranch in search of a strayed pack of burros. To-night he would write a long letter to—to Mrs. Ramsay! He would have a chance to mail it on his donkey quest. And it should be a letter which should paint the plains and the mountains in delectable colors for a pink and white and gold slip of a girl!

VIII.

The traces of the missing burros led toward the mountains. It was toward evening of his first day's search that he stumbled upon a deserted hill camp. It was not entirely abandoned by human beings—there were signs of habitation. But the scarred face of the mountain where the mine tunnels had been driven was again endeavoring to cover itself with grass. Many of the cabins had fallen to ruin; on an old sign before what had once been a "general store" and was now the very monument of

desolation the words "Silverton Post-office" were dimly visible. Smoke curled from one or two of the cabins pitched against the steep background of rock and spruce growth, but there was no one abroad before any of the doors.

Stocky rode toward the nearest cabin that sent forth the signal of life within. He wished to inquire if the stray pack had been seen in the neighborhood. A halloo from his horse brought no immediate response. He waited a second, and had just formed his mouth into the rotundity of the call again when it seemed to his alert and listening ears that he heard a smothered sound of groaning. He leaped from his horse without calling again, and pushed open the crazy door of the cabin.

In the semidarkness of the low, earth-floored, almost windowless room, he made out a woman's figure stretched on a lounge and a man seated at its head with his hand over her mouth. Another man was at the fireplace—a mere hole scooped out in the corner of the room. Stocky drew his revolver before he questioned the men.

"Now you!" he cried, pointing at the man who had the woman pinioned. The man, a Mexican, sprang to his feet. His companion turned at the same instant. The room was so tiny that when they both stood they were both covered by the revolver. The woman, old and shriveled, evidently a half-breed, was mumbling out her fear and her gratitude.

"They were looking for my money," she wailed. "Mine, who have no cent save what my son gives me—mine, Lolita's, who live by charity! Oh, señor, señor, tell them I have no money—tell them to go. Tell them——"

But Stocky had no chance to tell them anything, for with a swift, graceful, sliding motion they passed under his very arm and out. He started after them, but the cries of the old woman prevented him.

"Oh, señor, let them go, in mercy let them go. Do them no harm or they will come when you are not here and will punish the defenseless Lolita for their hurts. Oh, señor, do not follow, but

take my thanks and my prayers. That is all I have to give."

She was a repulsive old woman as she crouched and mumbled—sallow and shriveled and hawklike, with greasy gray locks about her face. A miser, Stocky was sure she was; but he was glad enough that his opportune entrance had driven away the intruders whom the old woman was now characterizing in the most forceful terms.

"That's all right, ma'am," Stocky interrupted her fawning thanks. "Glad to be of use. No, no, I don't want any reward—that's not what I'm waiting for. I only happened to be here because I am on a hunt for a pack of burros and I've traced them in this direction. Have you chanced to see them? Branded with the X Bar Y brand?"

"X Bar Y?" cried the old woman. "Are you from the X Bar Y ranch? Then you shall be rewarded for what you have done this day for old Lolita. You shall have your reward! I cannot tell you how——"

"It's no matter at all, about that, ma'am," Stocky interrupted her. "Burros are what I'm after—not rewards. Have you seen them?"

Lolita had not seen them but, as she explained, she had been absent all the morning searching for "good herbs" upon the mountainside. Perhaps her neighbor, who had been at home all day, might have seen the burros—the burros of the X Bar Y ranch. X Bar Y! He should not lose his reward, the gracious señor!

Stocky cut short her thanks and promises again, and started toward the neighbor's whom she indicated. It was a cabin up a zigzag path, an eighth of a mile beyond her own. To Stocky's hello here, a tall boy with red hair appeared in the low doorway. He surveyed Stocky with the interest due to a strange figure in the wilderness.

"You're the new man down at Adams', ain't you?" he asked, and upon Stocky's affirmative reply, he invited the young man into the cabin. He had heard, he said, that Stocky had been in the recent train accident. He was queerly and feverishly interested in it. But

there was something about the manner of his questioning which put Stocky on guard. He spoke briefly about the events of the night, and omitted all reference to the girl who had found him.

"Lose much?" queried the red-haired youth.

"Not much—merely all that I had," answered Stocky shortly. "And that reminds me to ask you again about those burros."

By chance Mr. Red Lawson was able to tell Stocky that he had heard of a stray pack over Fiero way. And Stocky, inquiring the direction, rode thitherward. He found the stray animals, and went driving them before him back to the X Bar Y range. He was glad that his lot was cast at that spot rather than at the abandoned mining-camp of Silverton. He did not care for the inhabitants of the latter center as represented by Lolita and Mr. Lawson.

Nevertheless, the old half-breed's promises soon began to seem true. The "ugly" men of the outfit no longer "picked upon" him, after he had returned and told his story. There were no more invitations to fight, no more chance bullets. If he didn't like Lady Gay, found her at all unmanageable, so Adams said, he must have another horse for his own. Stocky did not understand the change for a while.

The mystery was deepened by another incident a few days later. MacCormack, one of the older hands, was going to Mimosa for supplies and mail. There was a great writing of letters the day before. Seth Adams himself, a most laborious penman, spent half a day in the room known as the office, striving with ink and paper. Stocky, coming up to the corral for something in the course of the forenoon, saw Barbara Merritt come out with a letter in her hand. She looked about her, but failed to perceive him, half-hidden as he was by a horse. She tore the letter across twice and threw it from her. The wind carried it along, scattering the pieces. Stocky had sufficient curiosity and sufficient distrust of Miss Merritt to pursue the fluttering scraps on his pony. He recovered enough of them

to see that they were parts of a letter from Adams to Winterleigh. Why should the girl so vindictively destroy what her brother-in-law had worked so hard to make? He fitted the scraps together as best he could and read:

There'll be no more funny business about him. He treated the old woman white. You've got the best reason to know that I never go back on any one who treats the old woman white. I'll guarantee to keep him here as long as you say, but there'll be no more—

Just a ragged edge was the rest. Stocky pondered greatly, but darkly. Then he personally delivered into MacCormack's great, gauntleted hand a letter bearing the superscription: "Mrs. Gordon Ramsay, 9 Washington Square, North, New York." Then he pondered more upon the mysteries surrounding him, and finally dismissed them with an "Oh, what's the use?"

IX.

The winter slipped by rather peacefully. There were snow-storms and blizzards now and then to break the monotony of bright weather; there were occasional fights and noisy misunderstandings among the big, rough force of the men. Stocky's individual troubles, as has been said, ceased. Only the misadventures supplied by nature or by the unaccustomedness of his work bothered him now. And as for them, by the time spring with its rains came he felt himself an assured plainsman, and the prospect of "losing his job" at the X Bar Y ranch would no longer have filled him with dismay, had such a prospect been imminent.

It did bother him somewhat that fortune did not follow swiftly upon his exertions. But even at fifty dollars a month and "found," Stocky saw Agatha glimmering at the end of as long a perspective as ever. Her mother's one or two letters, in reply to his ten or twelve exhaustive descriptions of his life, had had the effect of accentuating this distance. And as Stocky never dreamed of changing in his affections, the prospect troubled him a little.

It was no other than Seth Adams himself who gave the young man a suggestion on the subject.

"They tell me," he observed to Stocky one day, "that there's copper over in them hills back of Silverton—up toward the Santa Lucia peaks."

"Copper?" replied Stocky listlessly. He was thinking of stocks and bonds and trying to compute Mr. Gordon Ramsay's income per hour.

"Copper. It's a good thing to have. It wouldn't do a man no harm to stake out a claim, if he thought there was anything in it. An' if he wanted money." Mr. Adams' voice always had the significance of a slow monotone. But this was a little slower, a little more uninflected than ever, and Stocky looked up.

"Is it a tip you're giving me?" he asked, smiling.

"I reckon that's what it is. There may not be anything in it. I don't say there is. But a little prospectin' won't do no harm."

"You're very kind, Mr. Adams. I'll act on your suggestion the first time you can spare me for a few days."

"Go to-morrow," replied Adams indifferently.

That night Stocky was moved to remark to Big MacCormack that he had totally revised his first impression of their lethargic, dull, shrewd employer.

"He seems actually kind," declared Stocky.

"Don't you go runnin' away with the notion that Seth Adams has got a heart like a woman's, as these yere story-books say. He ain't. He's as sly an' as pison-mean as a rattler. He's as hard as the top of Perry's Peak, an' as cold. But you see you hit him on his one soft side."

"I? But how?"

Big MacCormack spat far and solemnly before he answered.

"Because you done a good turn to his ole half-Indian mother."

"His mother?"

"Straight goods. That greasy ole half-breed over Silverton way is his mother. An' he's got enough Indian in him to make him jes' as sure to

remember a good turn as to remember a bad one—and you won't hear of many bad turns Seth Adams has overlooked in his progress through this vale of tears."

"The connection with Winterleigh, then," mused Stocky, half to himself, "must be on the father's side." Big Mac gave a loud guffaw.

"Say, that's a good one," he observed. Stocky, innocent of any jocular intention, looked his inquiries.

"Why," explained the cowboy, in answer to the look, "if what they tell me is true, the men—Adams an' this yere Winterleigh that used to be hereabouts—is half-brothers. Uh, huh," he nodded affirmation to Stocky's stare. "That's what it is. Ole man Winterleigh was one of these Englishmen that know a good thing when they see it, an' he come out here an' natralized an' took up a claim an' prospered. An' had an alliance over the left with ole Lolita—I've heard some of the old men say she was a bird of a young one, for looks. Well, Adams was their son—she contracted a reg'lar alliance later with a no-account skunk named Adams, an' Winterleigh's boy jes' came naturally in for the name.

"Well, when he'd done prospered enough, Winterleigh gets himself yoked up by bell, book an' candle an' all other appurtenances of holy matrimony to Sallie Yeast. Ole man Yeast was an early settler—a tough, grizzled ole party, long as a pole an' as thin an' kinder sandy-colored. An' Mis' Yeast, she's cut on somethin' the same lines an' complexion, they tell me, but Miss Sallie Yeast, she's round as a young partridge, an' she's meltin' dark, not yellow an' saller like her pa an' ma, an' she has curly black hair an' is considerable of a peach. She looked more like a Spaniard that was a friend of the family than like her pa. I ain't never seen her or him. But that's how they roll it under the tongue round here—some of the old ones. Anyway Miss Sallie Yeast, whoever her own pa was, married ole Ed Winterleigh when he had thrun Lolita over. An' your fine lawyer's her son."

The ugly tale of ancient lawlessness of blood left Stocky musing. Winterleigh's face arose before him. Suddenly it had something cruel, something medieval, Spanish of the old days, in its smooth, bland surface.

"Sickening lot of bounders," was his comment on the story.

"They weren't no Sunday-school kiddies, for sure," agreed Big Mac, with entire cordiality and indifference.

"But how does it happen," Stocky pursued, "that Winterleigh and Adams are on any sort of friendly terms after the way the old man Winterleigh treated Adams' mother?"

"That's one of the funny parts of the whole thing. When ole man Winterleigh come to cash in, his missus havin' climbed the golden stair some time previous, what does that there Ed Winterleigh do but get his pa to acknowledge Seth Adams as a son, an' to leave him some of the property? They talk about it yet—an' it's full fifteen years ago—from here to Perry's Peak an' back again."

"It was a noble, manly thing to do," Stocky commended the act. At the same time Edward Winterleigh's face, measureless calculation behind the remarkable eyes, stood out before him; there was a smile of suave mockery on the lips. "It was a manly thing to do," Stocky's emphasis increased, as though in answer to the face.

"Maybe it was," opined the easy-going Mr. MacCormack. "It sure done one thing for Ed Winterleigh—it gave him a half-Indian or quarter-Indian he could count on. An' that's a handy thing to have at times."

One effect of this tale, true or false as it might happen to be, was to fill Stocky with more repugnance than ever to the thought of a marriage between Agatha and Edward Winterleigh. To the jealousy of the ardent lover, he now added other scruples. A man of such ancestry was not fit mate for Agatha. He saw the lurking, subtle cruelty of the alien race of Spain in Winterleigh, he saw the brutality of his own kindred race of England. Descended from some domineering, lustful

beast on the one side and with a strain of intellectual power and remorselessness on the other, what sort of man could he be? What heritage could he offer the girl? At the moment Stocky saw all his own ancestors in the most effulgent light of purity and high purpose; nor did he pause to consider the ethical standards of Mr. Gordon Ramsay, multimillionaire by his own exertions—or his own depredations, as one chose to name them!

Clearly it behooved him, John Randolph Brown, of unblemished family, of upright forbears, to get busy and to make a fortune which should be worthy the acceptance of Miss Agatha Ramsay. And the next day he set out for the mountains, with their reported veins of copper.

Less buoyantly he rode than he had marched into Jarnead's on that fatal night months ago. He no longer felt sure that Fate was playing with him and for him. He loved Agatha and wanted her as much as ever, though the immediate allurements of her presence no longer made his blood bound in his veins, no longer incited him to follies. He rode forth soberly, doubtfully, not quite hopelessly, perhaps, but with a very temperate hope.

He had found a good place to pitch his camp—which meant a place to unroll his blankets and to drag from his saddle-bag the tin pan and the tin coffee-pot which had been so small a part of his Western outfit, but which had finally come to be the only features of it to which he clung. There was a flat rock which would serve him for table and for windbreak, there was a spring bubbling twenty feet away. There was the odor of pine and juniper and spruce, and there was the sight of the new spring flowers of the mountains.

"Copper or no copper," Stocky told himself, stretching luxuriously after a banquet of coffee, hardtack and bacon, "this is a good place." He had filled his pipe and the odor of tobacco mingled pleasantly in his nostrils with the scent of the growing things about him. He would rest a while, and then he would do a little prospecting.

While he rested, fairly soaked in the beauty and warmth of the day, he heard a rustling beyond him. He leaned upon his elbow to scan the grasses and low growths for an adventurous snake. But it was no snake that glided through the brush. A pair of serviceable feet, clad in a pair of serviceable boots, moved along instead. Following the line of the body upward, Stocky saw a bucket swinging against a tan cloth skirt. Still his eyes traveled upward; a leather jacket was open over a flannel shirt, a soft felt hat was pushed back from a girl's forehead—tawny hair framed a pale face—Stocky sprang to his feet, dropping his pipe. The girl started back—evidently she had not seen him lying on the ground.

"You!" cried Stocky, as she turned her surprised gaze toward him. He would have known the face anywhere, he thought—the pale olive of it, the intensity of the eyes, the even, black line of the brows. He was sure that he had always known her lips would be that vivid red.

"Who are you?" the girl demanded abruptly. His manner had apparently alarmed her, and there was no recognition in her glance. She stood, palpably on guard, palpably taken by surprise, startled but not timid.

"I—I beg your pardon," mumbled Stocky, suddenly becoming diplomatic. Suppose she were not the visitant of the night! "I thought for a moment that you were some one I had seen before. I——"

"I think not," she said coldly, though her brows were drawn together as though in an effort to recall his face.

"I'm merely prospecting up here," he added. "Are you—are you camping near-by?" He nodded toward her pail.

"Yes. That is, I'm here working my claim and camping for a few days."

"You're not alone?" gasped the Eastern-bred Stocky.

"Surely I am. Why not?"

"Isn't it—dangerous?"

She laughed scornfully.

"I imagine you're an Easterner," she replied. "It's not dangerous. There is no place on the earth, I suppose, where

women are treated with such respect as here. No one would dream of molesting me, even if I were likely to meet any one, which I am not. This is the first time I have ever found any one in the neighborhood. And besides," she added, with a certain direct look of warning, "I know how to take care of myself. I have shot since I was four."

"It's a lovely land, all right," said Stocky, nettled at her manner. "You must excuse me for not knowing it on sight. You see, when a man's introduction to a country is the deliberate wrecking of his train—when it is murder, arson, robbery—it takes him a few days to understand the inhabitants who perpetrate and permit such outrages."

He watched her intently as he spoke. All the color left her face. She bit her red lip as though to keep it closed upon a cry.

"You—you were in the Yerkes wreck?" she faltered.

"I was. I escaped with my life and nothing else. You'll pardon my not appreciating the true nature of the populace at once."

She looked at him with wide, strained eyes for a moment. Then she turned abruptly away.

"I came for some water," she said sharply. "I must get back."

"Aren't you rather evading an opportunity?" demanded Stocky, barring her path. She looked up to his bronzed, stern young face.

"Let me pass," she commanded.

"Before I do, will you tell me what you were doing on that field of slaughter that night?" The bucket fell from her fingers. Her hand pressed her side.

"I—I—" she panted. Then she recovered herself. "This is ridiculous," she declared.

"Not ridiculous—terrible, disgraceful—anything you please except ridiculous. Remember how many lost their lives—remember the sounds you heard, the sights that those blazing cars lighted! Ridiculous! You'll have to revise your words."

"You are evidently crazy," declared the girl firmly, lifting her bucket once

again. "I don't know what you are talking about. If you were in the wreck and suffered, I am sorry for you. But I hope that the experience has not unhinged your brain."

"They were right, then," said Stocky sadly, "those men who said that you were one of the gang. I never believed it until now. I always thought there was some explanation. But you deny everything. Only a guilty person with a secret to hide does that. They were right."

"I tell you, you are insane," said the girl roughly. "Let me pass."

Stocky was fumbling in his pocket. She eyed him with something like alarm. He pulled his hand out. In it was a piece of cloth. She panted a little in her relief—it was not a pistol. He was not going to play the part of the avenger. He held the scrap against a fold of her divided skirt.

"See," he said, "it's the same cloth."

The girl retreated a step before his look of repugnance. Then she stood her ground.

"I tell you," she said obstinately, "that I don't know what you are talking about. As for that cloth"—she shrugged—"there are not so many shops in Mimosa that all the ladies whereabouts are able to have different goods for their riding-skirts. That piece you have does seem to match mine—and so will it match any woman's on the range! For anything I know you may be a drummer with a pocketful of samples."

"Do you know what I intend to do?" demanded Stocky. "I intend to lodge the information I have against you in the hands of the authorities. You're a woman—but if you could forget it long enough to go out with those miscreants on such an errand, by the Lord, I can forget it long enough to land you all where you belong."

"I tell you, you're crazy," she repeated, but the fight had gone out of her voice. She was frightened, that he could see. Well, it was a good thing that she should be frightened.

"You can turn State's evidence and escape part of your deserts, you know,"

he told her, a little contemptuously. She flashed a look of scorn at him.

"I swear to you," she said, "that I had nothing whatever to do with that—that accident. I swear it. I am well known through the region. No one would believe you. I had nothing to do with it."

"The Wells Fargo lawyers and the Westward Ho lawyers may not be so easy to convince of your innocence as your neighbors," said Stocky.

It was curious to him to observe that even while he badgered her, the girl's look expressed more of tragic helplessness than of hate. He recalled her words—the prayer she had breathed above him. He recalled that she had summoned aid for him that dreadful night. He had a moment's compunctions.

"See here," he said more kindly, "whatever you are, I can't believe you're as bad as those devils. Why don't you prove that you're straight and level by telling the truth—by setting the authorities in the right direction?"

"You persist in thinking me what you did at first?" She had rallied her forces. "You are crazy. I shall waste no more time in talking to you. Let me pass."

He stood aside and watched her as she strode with swift, sure steps, to the spring. There was elasticity, power, grace in all her motions. He could not but like the splendid swing of the young shoulders, the supple slimmness of the waist. He went back to his blanket and picked up his pipe. But smoking had lost its charm for him.

He did not hear the return of his neighbor to her camp. He did not look for her again. Indeed he did not want to see her. So, for the next few days he dug and splintered rocks and tested, and finally found something that made him do a little hasty surveying and stake off a claim, posting it with a notice to all and sundry that this was his, John Randolph Brown's. Then he fell into a golden sleep and dreamed of Agatha's golden hair, in which he was congenially employed in placing the most expensive stars caught from some

heavenly galaxy. In the morning he would ride down to Mimosa and record his claim. At the same time would he tell of his neighbor's connection with the crime which had been his welcome to the West? Somehow the idea of such a necessity made Stocky's sleep sad; it intruded into his dreams of Agatha. Instead of stringing starry pearls and diamonds for that lovely child of fortune, he found himself vainly struggling with ropes that enmeshed the other girl. And her strong, tragic face finally blotted out Agatha's roses and dimples from his dreams.

Suddenly he was awakened by a hand upon his shoulder. Some one was shaking him, calling upon him. Slowly he emerged from the dulness of sleep—slowly and painfully. His chest was oppressed, his nostrils smarting.

"Wake up, oh, wake up," a voice kept crying—and it was the same voice whose "O God, forgive them" had roused him on another night—"wake up! Fire—fire—oh, are you awake at last?"

She stood before him. There was a pungent odor through all the night air, there was a pinky glare in the distance and even near at hand an occasional far-blown spark fell. Stocky started broad-awake.

"It's a fire," she cried, "a fire! Wake up!"

It was fire, advancing from below them. Stocky gazed at her helplessly.

"There's only one way to fight it," she cried. "Beat it back with fire. Here—where are your shovels—your matches?"

In an instant, beneath her vigorous command, his dazed faculties began again to work. She wanted an earthen barricade thrown up, and a fire started beyond it to creep down and meet the one creeping up. They worked together with the more than human strength that is given to mortals in desperate emergencies. They said nothing—there could be no effort wasted in mere words. And by and by, dripping with toil, limp with that and with desperate fear, they saw the two lines of fire join well below them. And over

the blackened surface between their barricade and the oncoming flames, there was left nothing for flames to feed upon.

When she saw that they were safe, the girl fell upon her face and sobbed out: "Oh, thank God, thank God!" Stocky, shaken beyond his wont, put out his hand and touched her.

"There, there," he said soothingly. And then, after a moment's awkward silence, he went on: "We've got to call this a balance. You've saved my life to-night—there's no come-back on the wreck account. It may not be right or just," he pursued, caught in the tangles of abstract morality, "but I can't help it. I can't go back on you now. I may make myself an accomplice, but that'll have to be as it may. You've saved my life. Will you tell me your name?"

The girl's shaking sobs quieted.

"Crystal Lawson," she said tonelessly.

"Well, Crystal Lawson, I thank you. It's twice you've come at my need, even if you did make one of the occasions. But there—I'll never refer to that again. You are to wrap up and lie still, and I'll make you some coffee."

He stirred about, preparing the drink. When it was ready, there was a dim band of light low in the east.

"Sit up and drink it," he commanded. She obeyed him, her eyes upon the silvery coming of the dawn. For a while neither of them spoke. Then the sky began to flush and palpitate with the secret knowledge of the nearness of the sun.

IX.

It was with a sense of deep intimacy with Crystal that Stocky took the trail back to the ranch when the day was well awake. She rode by his side, weary-looking, silent, yet with that splendid, lithe strength in her muscles which no one night of harassment could destroy. In his simplicity, Stocky felt that they were intimate enough for her to listen to a little plain talk from him.

"You've got a brother, haven't you?"

he demanded. Crystal glanced sharply up. Her answer was a nod.

"I know you have—I saw him one day when I rode through Silverton. Well, can't he work your claim for you enough to keep title? It's no fit work for a girl, I don't care how fearless she is or how chivalrous the country."

Crystal seemed listless. She made no answer.

"Don't you think that what I'm saying is so?" Stocky urged her.

"Maybe—I don't know. I'm strong enough for anything. I've always lived out-of-doors, and I've always done everything. I can ride and fish and shoot like a man; I can dig and weed and plant; and I can at least keep hold of the mine. It was one of father's claims—he had great faith in it. But Will—that's my brother—doesn't believe in it. Most of the folks who started out by believing in the streak back there in the Silverton hills gave up believing some time ago. I dare say Will is right—every one else seems to think so. But it was one of my father's ideas, and—girls are different—I can't bear to let it go just out of—indifference. Will, he has so many other things now to interest him."

"He has no business to let you go off alone and do that work," growled Stocky. Crystal's face flamed.

"He knows I'm all right," she retorted angrily. "And he—he knows his own affairs best."

"Does he indeed?" said Stocky satirically. He was annoyed at her swift resentment of any criticism of the—"lazy lout," Stocky called him in his mind. "Well, there's one of his affairs he doesn't manage to my satisfaction, and that's his sister."

"It's lucky for him, I guess, that he doesn't try it much. His sister's an unmanageable creature." She spoke with a little ghost of a smile, but her eyes were somber and were fixed on the distances.

"There's one thing I wish you'd promise me," said Stocky earnestly.

"What's that?"

"Let me work your claim for you. I've staked one up there in the hills and

I have faith in it—I've had a hunch it'll make me rich. Well, I'm going to work it for all it's worth. Let me work yours for you enough to hold the title."

Crystal shook her head. "You don't understand," she said. "I am not only safe—I like it. I love being up there, away from everything and everybody."

"Thank you," laughed Stocky.

"I mean it," she said obstinately. "As things turned out, perhaps, I didn't mind your being there this time so much, but usually I crave the loneliness, the bigness, the peace." There was a little passion of desire in her voice, and her eyes were fixed on the blue horizon.

They had reached the desolate, abandoned silver-mining camp where Stocky had saved old Lolita from harm and had made brief acquaintance with Mr. Red Lawson. Crystal drew rein and looked at him.

"Your trail lies that way," she said, nodding toward the road to the X Bar Y ranch. "I can't help being sorry we met up yonder, but since we did, I'm thankful I was of a little use to you. Good-by."

"Good-by," said Stocky stupidly. He did not wish to leave her with all his mysteries unsolved, and with the future solution of them practically barred to him by her prohibition and their acquaintance. But there was something final in her grave manner.

He sat still upon Lady Gay while Crystal turned her pony in the direction of the lonely cabins left on the hill, like the wreckage on a beach after a storm. She wrung his heart somehow, he did not know why or how.

As for her, she rode on with one thought throbbing through her mind. "Oh, Will, Will, why couldn't you have been like that? Why couldn't you have been like that?"

Somewhat to her astonishment, her brother was at the cabin when she reached it—he was there so seldom lately. And, to her pitiful joy, he was in a tender mood. He was awkward in expressing gentleness, of course, but he helped her from her horse, he took

the beast to the corral, he came back and looked at her with some of his old, childish affection in his eyes.

"Crys," he told her, suddenly leaning across the table which she had begun to set, and taking her hand, "Crys—I'll never let you go up to that place alone again. I'm a pretty poor stick of a brother, ain't I? Well, I'm going to turn over a new leaf—you watch me."

"You're as good a brother as I want," she cried in a torment of remorse for the thought with which she had ridden home. "And if I have ever criticized and found fault—oh, you know, don't you, Will, that it was all for your own sake?"

The shadow of a frown passed over his forehead. But it was not for her apparently, for he nodded and said: "I understand, old girl."

She was so happy at the unexpected admissions, at the un hoped-for promise which she read into his words, that she burst into tears. And then she soothed his alarm at this most un-Crystallike exhibition by sobbing incoherently: "It's because I'm so happy, Will, it's because I'm so happy."

X.

"See here." It was Mr. Adams who addressed Red Lawson. The place was the trail leading out of Mimosa toward the plateau which embraced the Adams ranch. The time was cloudless mid-afternoon. The air was cool and fresh and still—as still as the broad, blue sky stretched above and around them, as still as stars, as snow. Their horses were going gently and their hoofs fell quietly on the dusty road. In the wideness and the stillness, in the uncompanied vastness of the plain, Adams' words sounded particularly clear and portentous. Red started visibly at them, and resolutely refused to meet Adams' challenging eyes.

"I said, see here." Mr. Adams repeated the words emphatically.

"I ain't sufferin' from any deafness," Red assured him flippantly. But a nervous color burned beneath the tan and brown of his skin, and he still failed to meet his interlocutor's regard.

"Well, I'm glad to learn as much. Because, if you ain't deaf an' pay attention, you're likely to hear somethin' to your advantage."

"I'm listenin'."

"You'd better look, too."

Thus commanded, Red drew his gaze reluctantly back from the horizon. He tried to meet Adams' stare with ease, but he failed. His own eyes wavered and finally fell. He laughed embarrassedly.

"Spit it out, can't you, Adams?" he demanded, with a show of bravado.

"I can. It's this." Adams rode nearer him and put a hand out to his horse's bridle to give weight to what he was going to say. "By the Eternal, if you're playin' fast an' loose with—me, it'll be the last game you'll play on this here planet, Red Lawson."

"Fast an' loose with you—what d'you mean?" Red snarled, with an air of resentment.

"Pete tells me you're against the hold-up of the new superintendent at the Fiero mines." Adams snapped the words out, his eyes on the boy's changing face.

"I—I am," the lad answered uneasily.

"You—you are!" Adams mimicked. "An' when did you set yourself up to decide what it was advisable or not advisable for the outfit to do? Or maybe you have got a private fortune we don't know about an' can give us what we are expectin' to take off that young man?"

"Ssh!" whispered Red, glancing from side to side.

"There's no 'sshin'' needed; there's no one here but you an' me. An' if you're on the level, there's no need for whisperin' an' sneakin'. An' if you ain't"—His lips closed ominously.

"See here," Red blustered in his turn, "I don't know what call you've got to come at me like this. I'm against the Fiero game—I think it's a big mistake. An' I've got the right to say so, ain't I?"

"You ain't any longer a free agent, Red Lawson," said Adams sternly. "That's what I want you to remember. That's what Pete thought you was in

some danger of forgettin'. You was a man grown when you came into this crowd. It wasn't no case of kidnapin'. An' I tell you it's a for-better, for-worse union all right. 'Till death do us part—death!" There was a world of threat in his manner.

"Oh, you can't frighten me with your bluffin'! As for my bein' a grown man"—Red's throat worked a little—"I was a fool boy, an' you know it, when you all got hold of me. I wasn't nineteen."

"Nineteen knows what it's about out here where they ain't in the habit of keepin' boys in the nursery until they're voters. You knew an' you was keen enough for it. An' now I tell you fair and square—you're in too deep ever to get out, if that's your game. You could be strung up five times over for what you've done. An' damned if I wouldn't just as soon you would be, except for this—too many good men would have to swing with you. An' that gets us down to the gist of the whole matter. You're suspected of a plan to squeal—to squeal! An' that's believed to be the ground of your objection to doin' up the new superintendent on pay-day at the mine. An' that's supposed to be the secret of your virtue, your sudden new virtue."

The color rose furiously in Red's face. "Damn you, I could kill you for that," he swore. "I tell you, no Lawson's a squealer! You know your miserable hide is as safe with me as my own—you know it! I'm no informer."

"I'm glad, for your sake, to hear you say so," answered Adams, more pacifically. "To tell the truth, I never more than half took stock in Pete's notions. But there's only way you can prove it to the boys—they are suspicious. You've got to take a lively interest in the doin's of next Monday week at the Upsilon Mines at Fiero!"

Again Red lapsed into sullenness, his fire of anger over the suspicions directed toward him, burned out. He made no reply.

"Did you hear?" Adams' tone was suggestive.

"Oh, yes, I heard."

"Have you anything to say?"

"Yes, damn it, I have!" cried Red, with sudden passion. "I want to get clear of the whole business. I tell you I'm sick of it. It ain't like what it seemed before I got dragged into it. I come of decent people, I do. My folks were some one back East. I'm no dirty greaser—an' I ain't the son of no fellow that couldn't go back home for fear of the noose or the stripes. I'm of decent people. I've been a fool an' I'm—I'm tired of it. I tell you"—his voice suddenly broke—"I can't sleep at night for seein' a little girl, like I saw her back there that night at Yerkes—a little thing with light hair all ground and matted into the flesh of her forehead, an' her mother's dead arm around her—I tell you I'm sick of it. What do I get out of it? You keep out of sight. You've got a business. If you have ten thousand dollars all of a sudden, why, you've made a lucky deal in beeves or your New York friend's been speculatin' for you! But if Red Lawson appears with ten thousand, he might as well walk up to the sheriff at once an' surrender. What good does money buried in the earth do me? An' I tell you I can't sleep at night—that wreck—you never said there would be wrecks, an' little children—an' I tell you I come of decent folks!"

His voice, with all its manifold inflections of uncertainty and weakness, had kept rising and rising.

"There's something in what you say," admitted Adams reflectively, a little disdainfully. "Maybe you ain't cut out for this by birth an' breedin'—an' brains!" he added contemptuously. "An' it sure is a pity to have money an' not dare to swagger with it. An' it probably does hurt when you join in family prayers with your sister—"

"Leave my sister out of it," commanded Red. He had regained control of his voice and spoke tersely. Adams, watching him from under beetling brows, thought it best to regard the command.

"Well, takin' one thing with another, maybe you ain't cut out for the game as we're playin' it. But you're in it,

Red, an' in it you've got to stay, for a while, anyway. I tell you the others ain't goin' to let you creep out an' turn State's evidence—an' escape punishment—"

"I told you once—" began Red threateningly.

"Either here or elsewhere," finished Adams. "Before either an earthly or a heavenly tribunal, as the judge said at the hanging of old man Muller. No, sir, not yet a while. You know too much, Red, to get out. As long as you live hereabouts, anyway. Maybe after the Fiero job, an' one or two others are done, we can let you think of leavin' these parts, you an' Miss Crystal. An' meantime, Red, be mighty careful how you let that there sister of yours suspicion anything!"

"She suspects enough already," gloomed Red. "She knows I can't travel with the outfit I do for any good."

"Well, let that be all that she knows. There ain't much in that. But it would be just as bad for you if a young lady of your family turned traitor as if you did yourself, Red."

"I tell you again," cried Red angrily, "there ain't any traitors in the Lawson tribe! If Cr—if she—my sister—knew everything, she'd never give me away—or those I'd traveled with. Poor girl—that wouldn't be the way she'd try to square it."

"Well, if you care such a whole heap for the comfort an' peace of that young lady, you won't desert until you get the signal from me. It would be mighty painful for her to have you meet with any accident—an' the tea grounds in my wife's cup last night spelt 'accident' for any one who balked at the Fiero game. Savvy?"

Red nodded miserably. The liberty of life which he had once seen in his chosen course seemed closing around him like a prison wall. He had intended, if he had intended anything, a flirtation with desperate living, with picturesque crime; and here he was fettered with a lifelong alliance! His jaws snapped together in an effort to keep back the tears—he pitied himself so.

XI.

Stocky was reading a letter as he ambled along on his horse. It bore the appearance of a much-read letter, although if one could have had the privilege of examining it, he would have seen it to be of recent date. Very thick and soft to the touch was the paper, very creamy the hue; and delicately scented had the document been until Stocky's leather and tobacco had impregnated it; in the dark-blue enamel across the top it bore an address dear to the young man's recollection. It was a letter from Agatha:

I wonder if you know how much a girl loves the thrill of adventure. And you are giving it to me so constantly! I am at this moment enjoying a delightful throb of it because I am doing something which is clandestine, which is forbidden! Does it please you, Mr. John Randolph Brown, to have me a transgressor for your sake? Are you conceited enough, though the most modest of Cuban heroes, to be pleased that my kind parents and guardians thought you dangerous enough to forbid you to me, so to speak? "I am grievously disappointed in Mr. Brown," said dear mama on the day after Mr. Winterleigh's famous raid—by the way, it was quite the making of him, politically, I believe! And to think it should have been the unmaking of you, dear Mr. Stocky Brown! Duncan calls you "Stocky," and I shall, too, if I want to. Well, as I was saying, mama was "grievously disappointed"; papa was also disturbed. Mr. Winterleigh was overcome with compunctions—he told me so, and therefore I know that he was! Everybody was horrified except your friend A. R. She—let me whisper you a secret. She would have loved to be there herself that night—clad in a cloak of invisibility, of course. But they forbade her even to remember the person who had been there!

Then your letters to dear mama! Nice, decorous letters they are—but I allow myself to read between the lines, if you please! And I range the plain, and climb the mountain, and brand the maverick, and lasso the wild horse, and generally enjoy myself. All the time, of course, I am properly going to dinners and dances and to St. Bartholomew's Cooking-school, and to Mrs. Wainwright's Lenten sewing-class, and I am playing bridge, and fitting on frocks and flirting with the same old people in the same old way! Heigh-ho! It's a tiresome world I live in. And that is why I am tormenting you and myself by this letter—you because you're a polite youth, my dear Mr. Stocky Brown, and you'll therefore want to reply when spoken to by a lady; but you can't without revealing to the lady's forbidding family that

she has disobeyed orders and written to you. Which you will never, never do! So you're tormented. And I'm tormented because I'd like the blue of the horizon for my walls too, and the stars for my roof, and the whole world to ride a wild pony across! Instead of which, mother is helping Mr. Winterleigh receive this afternoon—he's quite the social rage, and it's considered a great thing to go to his chambers—aren't we English?—and hear somebody sing, or see how commonplace a great painter can be! And I'll be there. His rooms are very good—but they seem a little crowded and stuffy to a person whose fancy is scouring the prairies.

And do you know why I am really writing? It is to say—don't, in the charm and delight of your new life, quite forget us all. Sometimes, when the wind is particularly good in your lungs, or the sunset particularly vivid across the west, remember one of us, at least, and say—say: "If only that poor Agatha could see this, feel this!"

And so no more at present from yours truly,
A. RAMSAY.

How Stocky's heart had leaped when the letter had been tossed out of Seth Adams' mail-bag one day! How he had grasped it with eager hands, and then been unwilling to open and read it there in the midst of the rough crowd. How he had carried it out to his favorite spot on the ranch—a green place where a bunch of cottonwoods grew around a spring, and the dry air was softened and sweetened by their damp fragrance. And with what tantalized feelings he had read it. How he had palpitated with joy and despair. How he had felt her near and then had felt her leagues upon leagues away. How he had been lifted up and cast down, torn with jealousies and healed with subtle, sweet assurances. How much of an enigma she was to him—half dear and sweet, half mocking, deriding! Which was she really? Which did she mean to be?

To-day as he rode alone on an errand to one of the farther points of the ranch, he was reading the epistle again. No number of readings could stale it for him, nor could any number quite make the elusive creature's intention clear in his mind. Had she meant to soothe with the hint that she cared, or to hurt with the suggestion that she was beset with attractions all inimical to him and his foolish hopes? He frowned, puzzled.

He was riding along a sort of low hill two or three miles distant from the ranch headquarters—a slope the almost straight side of which was rough with rocks and cactus growths. He was, to tell the truth, paying very little attention to his whereabouts or his general direction, when suddenly the ground gave way beneath Lady Gay's foot. The recent rains had washed out fresh arroyos and made the old trails, when these were along heights, treacherous. He and the horse rolled down the embankment, among the prickly growths that the sandy soil supported. Fortunately he had shaken himself free of his stirrups at the first, and he rolled down after Lady Gay and upon her, instead of before and under her. When, grasping at the sand and cactus, he finally managed to check his course and scrambled to his feet, his first thought was for the horse. But she, like himself, seemed to have escaped injury.

"This bank is made for scrambling down, Lady Gay," he told her, "not for scrambling up. We'll have to retrace our steps, about a mile on this level, unless you've got a pair of wings about you, to lift us up right here."

Lady Gay seemed to disclaim the wings. Stocky dug a splinter of thorn from his arm, brushed some sand from his face, and parted the tangle enough to look out. "Nasty going, old girl," he told his mare, "but we'll manage it." He stooped to look at her hoof, which she was holding awkwardly. "Only a pebble," he informed her; "not a break. Good horse! Suppose you look in my pocket for something." Stocky had won a new nickname at the ranch, "Sugar Brown," from the habit he had of sending for loaf sugar whenever a messenger went to Mimosa, solely for Lady Gay's benefit.

As the horse nosed into his pocket, the young man straightened himself again. In doing so, something peculiar in the thicket before him attracted his attention. It was formed not altogether by nature, he decided. Some of the cactuses were dead ones and had been bent horizontally across a sort of

aperture. Stocky pulled them away. He stood at the narrow entrance to a cave. He peered in, but could see nothing. The entrance twisted, and there was only a foot or two of blackness before him.

"My dear Lady Gay," he said, "you'll not think me rude if I leave you for a few minutes? No? I was sure I could count upon your good nature. But the truth is that this is the first cave I've ever seen outside the illustrations in my old 'Tom Sawyer,' and I'm going exploring. Talk about adventure!"

Stooping, he crept into the narrow entrance. For a few minutes he paused to accustom his eyes to the blackness before them. Then, with outstretched hands, he felt his way along. After two or three turns the space in which he stood suddenly enlarged. Instead of a narrow, twisting passage which threatened at every step to become impassable, he was in a wide, spacious underground chamber. It was filled with a faint light from apertures more tiny and haphazard and overgrown than the entrance. When he had stood erect and became used to the gray, gloomy twilight, he saw that the cavern had signs of human occupation. In one corner a piece of stovepipe rose from a hollowed-out pile of earth and evidently communicated with the outer air. On this rude earthen hearth were ashes. Some dirty quilts and blankets lay about also, and a greasy pack of cards was thrown near the primitive fireplace. Scraps of newspaper were there also, and some torn pieces of handwritten paper. A banjo with broken strings lay in a corner, and two or three empty flasks gave evidence of one taste of the occupants.

"Well, by Jove!" was Stocky's totally inadequate comment after a minute. "Well, by Jove!"

He stooped to pick up some of the newspaper to see if it gave a clue to the occupants of the cave. It was a Sunday supplement of ancient date containing the account of a highway robbery in Wyoming and of the chase of the robber through three States.

"The inhabitants of this homelike

dwelling like their news spicy and strong," commented the young man. He stooped to pick up a piece of a torn letter, hoping that it might be more enlightening. But the first scrap was a non-committal scrawl in regard to a horse deal, the pages with names upon them being absent.

"I wonder if these duffers pay rent to Adams," Stocky asked himself, stooping to collect a few more scraps. "I wonder if he knows he's got such a stronghold on his estate." He glanced at the next bit of paper. It was the first page of a communication to one "Pete," from a lady who wrote in the querulous tone of a wife; she wanted some money and she thought it very queer he should be gone so long.

"Maybe Pete has his own reasons for liking the cave," commented Stocky, opening another piece of paper. It was a typewritten sheet upon paper from which the official heading had been cut; yet somehow the color, the texture, seemed dimly familiar to him. The words gave him a start. He read:

The twentieth. All that you need know is that I regard him as in my way. The sooner and more unostentatiously he is removed from it, the better I shall be pleased. There are no connections here to make any troublesome inquiries; so any accident—mind, it must be an accident—will do. Cyclone, stray bullet, drunken bully's row—only nothing directly traceable to you. That's more for your own sake than mine.

The Yerkes affair was not a success. It must never be repeated. How often must I repeat that the bloody is unpleasing and unnecessary? And to put two big corporations on your track—the express company and the railroad will bound you till your dying day. As I have always maintained, it is infinitely cheaper to "corrupt" a trusted official and make him do the work for you. A bribed baggage-agent in the car with the express-messenger would have done. In this case, of course, I know that you expected to accomplish the other result also by the accident. If you had known him by sight, of course you could have—that is, probably you could have. As it was, the whole thing is particularly messy.

For Heaven's sake, do try to do something with that she-devil of a sis—

And there the letter ended so far as Stocky was concerned. No other scrap of paper was in the neat typewriting. No other had any bearing on the sub-

ject of the Yerkes disaster. Stocky, his head in a whirl, searched and searched. Eventually he found—his own wallet, emptied of everything which had made it valuable. But no more of the incriminating document did he discover.

So he had, by the merest chance, fallen upon an apparent headquarters of the gang responsible for the train disaster, and who could tell for what outrages besides! He could lead the sheriff here—he could carry those telltale pages to the officers of the law. He put all his accidental scraps of evidence together—his purse, the torn letters, the various signs of occupation in the cave. Perhaps an intelligence trained in the detection of crime could make something of all these. And the piece of cloth! His hand, which was busy in gathering the bits together, dropped loosely at his side. Until he knew that no evidence would implicate that girl, until he was sure of that, did he desire to give it all into some one's else hands? He saw her, so courageous, so alone—he couldn't believe the testimony of his senses against her eyes, against her stubborn silence even! He would do nothing to bring that girl into danger.

He made a little cache of his own for the things he had found—there was no use in throwing everything over, even though he did not care to be rash, to implicate Crystal Lawson in all these horrors. Then he made his careful way back to the daylight again. On the whole, he would not tell Mr. Seth Adams of the tenants he had. Stocky had more than a moment of sick conviction that the information might be no news at all to Mr. Adams. He began to put two and two together, and the resulting sum was too terrible for his simple mind fully to believe. But he would be on his guard for future confirmation of his suspicions.

He led Lady Gay out of the pitfall, back to the low, level ground, the clear, sunny day. He took a long, deep breath of the warm air. Already he could scarcely believe that he had just left the lair of criminals. It was like a dream, a tormenting, vivid nightmare.

"Let's forget it, Lady Gay," he said to the mare. "Maybe some old wizard is hypnotizing me into all sorts of fancies. Perhaps the whole thing is a delusion and I shall wake up by and by at home in New York with a nice little note from Mrs. Ramsay asking me to dinner. Oh, Lady Gay, if only I could be back there where there's no killing and no highway robbing, but only sunshine and dimples and blue eyes and orchids and cabs and candle-lighted tables and——" He drew Agatha's letter out again and kissed it.

XII.

"Well, what I want to know, what I demand to know," declared Barbara Merritt about six weeks later, "is when you mean to obey orders."

Like everything else around her, her voice was tense—tight, strained with emotion. It was harsh, too, and it always affected Stocky disagreeably. Stocky had gone thus far through the world nursing the agreeable delusion that women were, although appearances were sometimes against them, sweet, soft, tender-hearted creatures made for man's reverent protection. Barbara Merritt, by her silences, by her words, by her looks, by the aura that surrounded her, did more to combat that pleasant theory than all his other experiences put together.

When therefore, entering a lean-to shed outside the ranch-house kitchen he heard her taking her brother-in-law to task, he paused irresolute. He wanted to go in and to attend to his business, but he hated Barbara Merritt's presence to such a degree that it seemed almost easier to postpone his own affairs. While he debated, calling himself a fool for his uncertainty, Adams' voice replied.

"See here," said the woman's brother-in-law, "you're goin' on too much lately. Don't forget who owns this ranch an' who runs it."

"Yes, but who runs him?" demanded the woman impertinently.

"Whoever runs him, he runs this place an' all connected with it, himself."

"I tell you, if you don't obey your chief's orders," she retorted insolently, "I shall!"

"Are you fool enough to think that you can regain lost ground with him that way?" the man taunted her. "Don't you know that he's done with you, through with you, these five years an' more?"

She gave a low cry of rage, more like that of an animal than a human, and there was a sound as though she was hurling herself upon Adams. Stocky heard a growled "You would, would you, you damned wildcat?" and the sound of an overturned chair. He hesitated no longer, but slipped quickly out of the house. Adams and the woman could both take care of themselves, he knew, and he wished no more intimate part in the intricacies and ugly entanglements of the X Bar Y household.

His first buoyant delight in the novelty of existence out West, in the freshness and freedom of it, had given place to an anxious sense that he was surrounded by mysteries. Stocky liked the sunshine and the wide, open reaches of life, not its dark and devious paths. He felt himself incompetent to walk among these. "That takes a fellow with brains," he told himself quite humbly, counting himself a man of considerable brawn and some breeding rather than an intellectual human being. And gradually he had come to dislike his environment because of the subtle impression that nothing in it was what it seemed to be. Adams, with his taciturnity and his angers alternating, with his incomprehensible likes and dislikes, with his loyalty to the old woman of Silverton, with his absences, his isolation in a community where the rule was hospitality and good-fellowship; Mrs. Adams, in whom the passionate nature of her sister seemed to have simmered down to an intense capacity for silence and a constant expectation of calamity—Stocky had never seen any creature whose eyes so continually expressed a controlled horror of what she was about to hear; Barbara Merritt, with volcanoes of hate and desire and

all uncomfortable emotions burning behind her pale face; Pete, the chosen ally of Adams, an out-and-out drunkard, bully, gambler and thug, controlled only by the big ranch-owner's quiet eyes; mysterious comings and goings under the cover of night; mysterious messages, mysterious silences; a mysterious lack of bona-fide work about the great ranch—all these things had finally gotten on the boy's nerves to an extent that made him despise himself. "I'm like a woman with nothing at all to think about except my symptoms," he told himself.

As the pretense that he was to be trained for a definite position in the cattle business which was Mr. Adams' ostensible calling gradually declined, Stocky had more and more time to himself. He was free to come and go pretty much as he pleased—a freedom which he found rather degrading; he didn't like drawing wages for anything so intangible as his services had proved to be. However, he made the best of the situation. The time which was so lavishly accorded him he spent largely in working his claim among the hills. But he lost no opportunity of learning something about the cattle business, and having great physical aptness as well as strength, he was soon as good a cowboy as the outfit boasted.

After leaving the ranch-house during the ugly quarrel between Adams and the Merritt woman, Stocky went frowningly over to the corral and led out Lady Gay. He would ride out to a boundary fence which was reported in bad condition—he would do something to efface the impression of what he had overheard.

"I'm going to get out of this as soon as I can," he told himself. "It's a crooked joint. I'm afraid if Winterleigh were here, he'd have to do a little raiding on his brother's place. Lord, but he'd be a fine one out here! I'd back him to discover the retreat of the outlaws in a month and to disband them or have them swinging in another—he's got brains, that man! But I'm going to get quit of this. If only that claim up in the hills would pan out well. Or if

only Big Mac would do as he said when he cleared out of here. He said the place was too much for him, though he wasn't oversqueamish—and that he'd write me from Texas when he got back there, about the chances there. There's one thing certain, this is no place for me—it's crooked and queer."

He was saddling his mare and was stooping to tighten the surcingle, when there was a sudden rush behind him and a sharp pain went stinging through his left shoulder. As he jerked backward, the weapon that had been thrust into him was drawn out; he had in turning his neck a confused impression of Barbara Merritt's face, inflamed and transfixed with hatred and the joy of hatred gratified, and then, just as he was about to receive the dagger again in his chest, the vision widened to include the white, tragic face of her sister. Barbara's arm was held tightly. Stocky straightened himself, and looked at the pair. Barbara snarled like a thwarted animal, but she could not shake off the older woman's iron grip. In a second, the younger subsided into a half-frightened sobbing and whimpering.

"If you will go up to the house, we will stanch that wound—I don't think it's serious," said Mrs. Adams.

"I think I'll have some explanation first," said Stocky. Mrs. Adams' pale face grew more strained and weary. She still held her sister firmly.

"Oh, she's like this sometimes," she replied. "It's—a sort of craze, I suppose. But she won't have another outbreak in a year probably. There's no danger."

"How do I know that? Why shouldn't I give her in charge?" demanded the young man.

"You're bleeding quite freely, Mr. Brown," interrupted the older woman. "Please go to the house and let us stanch the flow, or you will be weak and sore to-morrow. Then you can talk as much as you want to and ask Seth anything you see fit to ask him. I tell you she's—she's not responsible. And I can promise you that she won't try anything of the sort again."

The shaking, weeping creature by her side said nothing. Stocky followed Mrs. Adams' advice and went up to the house. He was angry, but rather at the mental confusion which filled him at the attack upon him, than at the attack itself. What on earth had he ever done to Barbara Merritt that she should single him out for such an outbreak? He would demand some adequate reply from Adams—and then there pulsed confusedly through his recollection fragments of the talk he had overheard between the woman and her brother-in-law—talk of the chief, of orders unfulfilled.

"Oh, hang it!" cried Stocky impatiently. "In a few more minutes I shall think I'm the missing heir to a vast fortune and that these are the miscreants hired by the usurper of my rights to put me out of the way! I'm getting dotty, that's what's the matter with me. I've always thought the woman was half crazy, anyway. And she turns out to be a little more so than I had fancied—and there you are!"

Nevertheless, after he had listened to Adams' halting, dry explanation of his sister-in-law's periodical outbursts of homicidal mania, which Adams maintained was mixed with religious mania and which he also declared to be of the most infrequent recurrence, Stocky decided that the air of the ranch was too charged with mystery to be easy breathing for him at the time. He would go up to his claim, he said, for a few days, and give Miss Merritt a chance to recover from her attack, undisturbed and unexcited by his presence. Adams wiped his forehead with a look of relief when Stocky reached this determination.

• XIII.

Riding out of Silverton, he overtook Crystal Lawson. She turned such a changed face upon him that he scarcely knew it. Joy irradiated it as the spring irradiates the countryside. He suddenly realized that she was meant by nature to be like this—her eyes deep wells of happiness, her red lips full and

curving with smiles, her whole presence expressive of ample content. Perhaps, after all, she was not the visitant of the wreck! Certainly nothing could be more unlike that tragic vision than this cheerful—nay, this more than cheerful, this happy—young girl. She greeted him with utter friendliness.

"I'm disobeying orders," she said gaily. "I'm going up to the mine camp alone."

"No, you're not," Stocky laughed back at her, his youth responding joyously to the challenge of her vivacity. "I'm going along."

"Oh, that doesn't count," said Crystal.

"I'm glad you consider me such an intimate friend," he smiled. She blushed a little under the olive of her skin. Stocky's heart opened wide to take her in; she was not the lady of his adoration, of course; she was not all ivory and gold and turquoise and preciousness, but she was like nuts and berries and fruit juices and warm, spice-fragrant days. She wasn't to be loved and desired and fought for—by him, at any rate—but what a corking friend, what a bully comrade she would make! Agatha must know her some day! He beamed upon her in the pleasure of having really discovered her, as it were.

"But why are you disobeying orders?" he asked.

"Oh, I'm feeling so—so energetic, I suppose it is, that I can't stay still in Silverton any longer. I want to get up there and feel that there's no one to breathe up the air but me—you sha'n't count. I want a big, wide space to feel happy in."

"As happy as all that? Aren't you going to tell me about it?" Stocky had a sentimental streak in him, and he was hoping that she would announce that she was engaged. So much joy for a smaller event would be a waste, he thought.

"As happy as all that," she answered, "but not what you think, Mr. Mind-reader. It's nothing but—but my brother. I speak to you about him," she added, with a note of gravity in her

full, low tones that had for Stocky something the note of a thrush, "because you spoke to me about him. You criticized him—do you remember?"

"I didn't mean to be rude and impertinent," answered Stocky contritely.

"It's all right—now," she assured him. "For Will wasn't—hadn't been—doing just what I thought was right. He had worried me—you see I feel like a mother to him, although I'm only a year older. But he's changed. He's given up going about with the people I disliked. He is going to work the claim—we're so happy together. And now I'll tell you the real reason I'm telling you anything about it."

"Another real reason—more than that you wanted me to know how mistaken my impertinent remarks were?"

"Another. Besides, I'm willing to admit now that your remarks were not entirely groundless. The other is—Will says you—you 'gave him a disgust,' he calls it—for the crowd he'd been going about with?"

"What—me?" said Stocky, ungrammatically and embarrassedly.

"Yes." Her eyes dwelt upon him with deep gladness and friendliness. "It seems that one day when—when he hadn't been behaving very well—you rode up; it was the day you had just driven those Mexicans away from Lolita's cabin. And somehow, he says, you looked so different from the gang he'd been with; you weren't ashamed to be polite; you weren't afraid. Oh, what can I say about it all? Anyway, Will saw you—and I suppose the time was ripe; and he began to consider that dad had been your sort—not the sort that some of his friends are. And he began to think that he'd rather be in your class—"

"See here," cried Stocky, "don't go on, Miss Crystal. You cover me with confusion. If your brother knew what a poor kind of stick I am, he'd prefer Black Pete and the rest any time. I hadn't anything to do with any change that there may be in him—hang it, I'm not a Sunday-school-book hero. As you say yourself, the time was ripe. He felt like coming back where he belonged.

That's all. But"—he leaned down so as to look more closely into her glowing face—"I'm mighty glad, for your sake and for his."

She smiled unspoken thanks at him, and they rode on in pleasant silence for a while. That all her thoughts were still upon her brother there was no question, for when she finally spoke it was of him.

"He's coming up to-morrow," she said. And "Good," replied Stocky emphatically.

He came up on the morrow and when Stocky, after a day's work on his claim, went over to the cabin on the Lawson claim, he was struck by the change in the boy's looks. Yet, through all the improvement, there was still a strain of diffidence, of nervousness—almost of fear. Red showed no lack of devotion to his sister. It was pretty to see them together—pretty, and a little sad for Stocky, who yearned to have some one of his own to whom he could be devoted. As they sat around after supper, the men puffing at their pipes, the girl sitting contentedly doing nothing on a low stool before the fire, her elbows on her knees, her chin in her palms, Red remarked: "I wish I had my banjo."

"Do you play?" It was Stocky, of course, who asked.

"Oh, I strum a little."

"What's become of your banjo, Will?" asked his sister, idly.

"Lost it one time I was off camping," said Red.

Stocky half laughed. "I could guide you, I think, to the remains of one."

"Where?" asked Red carelessly, knocking the ashes from his pipe.

Stocky had never mentioned the cave to any one. But now he could see no indiscretion in it—was he not among friends at last? That had been one of the torments of his position ever since he had come to the West—he had had no friend, no one to whom he could say what he pleased without fear of misconstruction.

"In a robbers' cave," he answered, with mock impressment in his voice.

Crystal sat suddenly erect and tense. Red spilled some tobacco.

"A robbers' cave?" repeated Crystal.

"You mean just a cave, don't you?" amended Red when he had rammed the tobacco into the bowl.

"No—I mean a robbers' cave." Then Stocky began to wish that he had not spoken so gaily. After all, he had seen Crystal's face on the night of the train-robbery, he had a piece of her torn dress—why had he been such a blooming idiot as to lead the conversation back to that uncomfortable, unexplained event?

"Where?" Red jerked the word out. "Yes, where?" demanded Crystal, tensely.

Stocky started to tell them with much circumlocution in order to gain time. While he was still floundering, a long cry, as of some wild beast, quavered through the air. Crystal and her brother sat straighter. In the fire-lit twilight of the cabin, Stocky thought he saw her eyes turned with a look of heart-broken reproach upon Red. As for him, it was plain that he heard the cry with alarm.

"What's that? A wildcat?" asked Stocky, glad of interruption. The cry rose and fell again. It seemed very near. It seemed almost to pass along the very mountain above the cabin. Red arose and went toward the door.

"Will," said Crystal pleadingly.

"Just a minute, Sis. It sounds so near I guess I'll see if I can get a shot at it."

The darkness outside engulfed him. The cry sounded again, and from very near at hand it was returned.

"By Jove, there must be a perfect carnival of wildcats at your very door," declared Stocky, rising to follow young Lawson. "Do you mean to tell me that you wouldn't have been frightened, hearing sounds like that if you had been up here alone?"

"Don't go out," said Crystal woodenly. "Oh, don't you know that was no real cat? It—it was a signal."

She buried her face in her hands for a second. When she raised it, and arose to light the lamp there was no

trace of the merry girl who had ridden with him the day before. It was the gray-faced woman of former days—miserable, burdened, helpless, hopeless. Stocky, understanding only that one of Red's old associates had summoned him with a signal-call, that Red had responded, and that Red's sister, after what Stocky shrewdly suspected to be the habit of woman, was making a tragedy over it, took his leave as soon as Red reentered the cabin. The next day when he went over to see his neighbors it was closed and empty.

Somehow all the pleasure of the expedition was gone for the young man. Here, too, as well as at the ranch, were mysteries and darkneses. Truly he had fallen upon times trying for an easy-going, open-hearted, plain-speaking young man. He would go down to the ranch again and demand some explanation of things; he would tell Adams what he knew of the cave; he would put the authorities on the track of the desperadoes; he would do something to clear up the obscurities in which he moved.

He dawdled several days over his return trip, however. There mingled so much distaste with his impatience that the one almost neutralized the other. If he wanted to enter, with a bold demand for truth, the complexities of the situation, still he did not want to become, by knowledge, any more of a part of all the ugliness than he already was. If he felt it a duty to tell what he knew, to spur the jaded activity of the county officials, he had a dread of what the investigations might reveal about the girl whom he had called friend and comrade in his thoughts as they rode up the mountain slopes together. Altogether the situation was a tangle. Stocky jogged home by the roundabout route of Mimosa. Perhaps there would be a letter from Uncle Ephraim offering him a modest fortune, or from Mr. Ramsay, offering him a partnership, or news that the millennium had been formally proclaimed and inaugurated, or some equally likely way of escape from this accursed country.

But there was not. There was a let-

ter for him directed in Agatha's handwriting—a thick, creamy envelope the sight of which made his pulses bound. And there was a newspaper carefully directed in her mother's fine, neat script. Stocky indifferently thrust the latter into his saddle-bag—he supposed it would contain an account of Mrs. Ramsay's musicale for this celebrity or dinner for that, for the lion-hunting hostess had no objection to spreading the news of her captures broadcast, even in the most unlikely places—and he felt that that could wait. But Agatha's letter his fingers twitched to open. Only he must get out of the sun-baked, ugly little town. It was not a fit place to open such a letter.

On the plain, headed homeward, with nothing, apparently, between him and the sky, he drew it from his pocket and broke it open. His heart beat, his eyes were suffused. The folded sheet was bare on the last page—it was not then a long letter! He fumbled with it nervously. Only a line on the first page, under the blue enamel of the date, rewarded him:

Forgive me. Forgive me.

It seemed to Stocky that the whole world reeled. The blur before increased. He tried to brush it away—it must have deceived him, must have made him read falsely. He stared hard again at the paper. There was no mistaking the words. Agatha's hand had not trembled. Every curve was fully made and rounded; the whole graceful, decided, distinguished handwriting of the girl was perfect. What did it mean? What did she mean?

He had ridden ten miles or more, the beat of the horse's hoofs going through his brain like presses that printed there in uneffaceable characters the words: "Forgive me. Forgive me." Suddenly he remembered the other part of his mail. He dragged the paper out of the saddle-bag, he tore the wrapping off. He knew that somewhere within its pages he would find a clue to Agatha's note. Her mother had supplied that.

It was on the first page that he found it, under sufficiently large head-

lines. If the Gordon wealth had not commanded importance to oust from the first place of the paper politics and crime and scandal, the Winterleigh prominence would have merited it. The shining member of the district attorney's office was to marry the daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Gordon Ramsay—that was the great news of the day, along with a mine disaster and a Black Hand outrage and a Presidential forecast. The engagement was announced; the date of the marriage was not set—some time in the coming autumn would probably see the happy pair united.

And now at last Stocky knew how stronger than reason hope had been. He rode on with a sore, hot heart. By and by, of course, he began to make excuses for Agatha. She had told him plainly that his suit was hopeless on account of his lack of money and position. She had given him tender marks of affection—and remembering them now in the moment of his bitterness, the young man was in torment for them again—because she was young and simple. There was no pledge between them—she had always told him she was only "playing." Only he had thought, in his doting hopefulness, that she "played" chiefly in saying that! And he had known there was no hope—and her father and mother had doubtless coerced her into this— And then the recollection of Agatha's laughing, provocative face lifted to Winterleigh's amused, appreciative, sensuous one smote him, and he put his hand quickly to his eyes to shut out the vision.

He rode hard and he rode long, and by the time he finally turned his horse's head toward the ranch, he had regained control of himself. He felt ages older—he felt that he had done with youth, almost. He had determined upon his course. It was clear to him that Agatha was scourged with remorse over those afternoons; for them she begged his forgiveness—ah, his forgetfulness! Well, he would—forgive. He had nothing to forgive! But he would put the thought of her away. He would go back home—into the butter business or any other. He would

get out of the accursed tangle of life here. And then he would go home and efface himself. His path and the Winterleighs' need never cross. And by and by he would be an old man and it would not matter at all.

He was greeted with more than usual cordiality—almost with relief when he arrived at the ranch. Barbara Merritt, cowed and white, came up to him and made him a little speech of painful apology. There were times, she said, when she was impelled to do terrible things—though she herself did not remember them; but her sister told her so. And her sister had told her that lately she had tried to hurt him. Would he—but Stocky cut her short with kind words and, indeed, with a sense of pity. Poor girl, poor afflicted soul! He turned from her subdued and white face, to her brother-in-law, who stood near and watched her during the ceremony.

"So our friend Winterleigh," said Stocky, striving to speak lightly, and anxious to reduce his news to the level of the commonplace as soon as possible, "so our friend Winterleigh is going to be married."

"What!" The scream came, not from Adams, but from Barbara Merritt. Stocky swung swiftly around again, to find the meek, piteous creature of the moment before transformed. Her face, which he never remembered to have seen with color before, was aflame. Her eyes were two malignant lightnings. Her body was tense, poised as though for a spring.

"I said," began Stocky, while Adams caught his sister-in-law by the shoulder and shook her fiercely, crying: "Do you want another taste of the cellar, fool?"

"Let me go!" she yelled. "Let me go!" She wrenched herself free. "Now let me hear him say it again—the lie!" She glared at Stocky. Stocky looked from one to the other, bewildered and angry.

"I don't understand all this," he said shortly. "I must ask you, Mr. Adams, not to lay hands on that woman again while I am here. If she is a violent

lunatic she should be put under proper restraint, not left to chance subduing by brutality. And if she is not, there's less excuse for roughness—"

"Again, again! Say it again if you dare!" Barbara Merritt stood under his very chin.

"I said that Mr. Adams' friend, Mr. Edward Winterleigh, was engaged to be married to a young lady in New York."

"Say that it's a lie, a damnable lie!" She reached up as if to threaten him, when her sister glided in from one of the rooms beyond, summoned by Adams. She laid a hand on Barbara's arm and spoke to her in some dialect unknown to Stocky, apparently Indian. The girl subsided and leaned her face against her sister's shoulder. Finally she answered in the same uncouth tongue in which she had been addressed.

"She says," interrupted Mrs. Adams, looking sadly at Stocky, "for me to ask you if you are sure it is true or if it is only a newspaper report. And what the young lady's name is."

"I have reason to believe it is true," said Stocky, the line of Agatha's letter printed upon his brain. "And the young lady is—is a Miss Ramsay."

Barbara Merritt raised her face from her sister's shoulder and looked at Stocky with a concentrated rage and hatred he had never seen equaled. Then she faced her brother-in-law.

"He shall never marry her," she declared hissing. "Never—and you may tell him so," she added to Adams. Her manner, curiously enough, for all the absurdity of her assertion, was composed and sane. Adams briefly bade her be satisfied with the folly she had already committed and not add to it. She looked at him vindictively.

"I will see you all swinging from the gallows before he shall marry her," she declared. "Robbers and murderers—fools! Do you think that I shall submit to this when I can stop it? You get a retraction from him of this thing—ride and telegraph to him—or, before God, I will hang you all!"

"She is clean locoed," declared

Adams wearily, and yet with a little anxiety in his weariness. He motioned to his wife to take the woman away. Then he went on explaining to Stocky: "You see how it is, of course. Winterleigh—oh, it's ten or twelve years since he made love to this fool. An' she thinks she has a claim on him ever since. Lately these crazy spells have been comin' on her, an' they come oft-est by some connection with him. It was that you were a friend of his that turned her against you—an' you know the rest."

"I know both more and less than I desire to know, Mr. Adams," replied Stocky, with some dignity. "There are many things which have happened since my arrival here which I don't understand; what I do understand I don't like."

"We're rough, I grant you that," said Adams conciliatingly. "We haven't much polish—an' I have to keep a crazy woman on my place because she's my wife's sister an' my wife can't bear to have her taken away—even if any judge would commit her; the day she went up for examination she'd probably be as sane as you an' me. But I ask you, Mr. Brown, except that our Western ways ain't like your Eastern ones an' that my sister-in-law is a she-devil, have you anything to complain of?"

Stocky felt baffled. Of what could he complain for which he could prove Adams in any way responsible? Certainly he had been well treated by the man personally. He hesitated, feeling a little foolish.

"Because," went on the ranchman, pursuing his advantage, "I'd like to know what it is. An' to remedy it. You come here, Mr. Brown, recommended to me by a friend—bah, why not say the truth, which I know that you know? You come here recommended to me by my half-brother, a man whom I have every reason in the world to oblige. You've been here no time at all before you save my old mother from harm. Why should I not do my best for you in every way? When haven't I done my best for you?"

Stocky, apparently convicted of ungraciousness and ingratitude, turned red.

"You make me out a pretty poor sort, Mr. Adams. But you must remember that I had an unfortunate introduction to your country, an' that my recent experience with your sister-in-law was—well, disconcerting, at least. But from you I think I have nothing to complain of. I hope you'll overlook my growling."

"It was natural enough, I suppose," said Adams, achieving the effect of a dignified forgiveness. The two parted, Stocky going out to the quarters of the men. As he went he pondered the threats of Barbara Merritt. He did not feel sure at that moment that she was merely insane. And if she were not, what did she mean by including Edward Winterleigh in her threats? "Robbers—murderers—" the words rang in his ears. And there was the cave—and the directions from some one authority to some other as to the management of crimes, the conduct of train-robberies, the assassination of selected victims. Suppose that letter had been to Adams? Suppose— His mind groped, fascinated, horrified, among appalling possibilities. And gradually the blue bond paper with its neat type-writing formed itself again before his eyes. Where had he seen that paper?

"Pshaw!" cried Stocky, leaping to his feet. "I'm in a nightmare. I'll soon be as crazy as that vixen of a Merritt woman."

And then a pain crossed his heart that made him forget for the moment everything but it. He clenched his hands against it. How could he bear it? Yet he must—must bear it quietly, bravely—for had not she written: "Forgive me—forgive me?"

XIV.

It was a troubled sleep that Stocky had when finally he succeeded in sleeping at all. From one restless, disturbed dream he passed to another. It was not his own experiences which colored them—they seemed pure fan-

tasies, unconnected with anything he had ever known. He fell off high cliffs and caught himself half-way down their scarred faces; railroad-trains, demoniac and uncontrolled, pursued him, and no turning or twisting on his part could defeat their determination to grind him to pieces. He was all alone in regions of arctic ice; he was set to walk unimaginable distances over hot, shifting sands. All sorts of tortures he endured, one after another.

Finally it seemed to him that he awoke from his various nightmares, and that some one was calling him outside the familiar bunking-room. It seemed that he arose in answer to the call—it was like Agatha's voice was his confused impression as he seemed to stumble to the door, drawing on some clothes as he went. Outside that delusion seemed to vanish. The night was flooded with silver, and all the sheds and outhouses and the ranch-house itself stood very distinct in the moonlight. And it seemed to him that Barbara Merritt was waiting for him, and that it was perfectly natural that he should follow her and do her bidding. She wanted her own horse, he thought, which was not in the corral, but had been running the range for a week. "I must have him," she seemed to tell Stocky, "for I have a long ride that I must make before morning, and I couldn't trust any other horse to take me."

Then he thought that she showed him her wrists, red and scarred with ropes, and her arms, blackened with cruel pressure. "That is how he subdues me," she whispered, with a ghost of a smile; "but to-night I have escaped him." Then Stocky seemed to himself to pity her greatly, but she dismissed his pity lightly.

"I suppose I am a little crazy," she told him. "At any rate, he could easily prove it so if any one should hear of the cellar and the ropes. You see, it is crazy for any one to brood as I do, and to wait as I have waited, and to hate and to love like me. But now get me my horse, for I am quite sane now." And Stocky thought that he mounted

his own horse and rode to the top of a high mesa behind the house and easily found Barbara Merritt's horse, and brought him down, and finally watched her ride noiselessly away in the moonlight.

In this dream, which he thought indeed no dream but the true condition of affairs, he had just come into the long room with its bunks again, and had just thrown himself upon his bed, when he was taken roughly by the shoulder. He opened his eyes. He was on the bed half-dressed and the morning light was flooding the room. Adams stood over him—shaking him to rouse him.

"Get out of this quickly," he said. "I want to see you at the house," and left him.

But when Stocky reached the house, Adams was not there. Mrs. Adams met him, inscrutable and gray.

"Mr. Adams?" said Stocky briefly. "He wanted to see me."

"No, he didn't," replied Mr. Adams' wife woodenly. "He wanted to get rid of you so that he could see the other men without your hearin' anything."

Stocky looked at her blankly. She returned his stare out of dead eyes.

"I mean what I say," she said in her monotone. "He wanted to warn the others."

"Warn the others?"

"Warn 'em to scatter—to hide."

"Mrs. Adams, I don't know why you are speaking to me like this," said Stocky, gaining some possession of himself. "I don't know what you mean."

"I don't know just what I mean myself," cried the woman, her tonelessness suddenly taking on the poignancy of anguish. "I'm talkin' because I can't help it. Barbara's gone, my sister's gone, Mr. Brown—an' my husband knows she's gone to tell what she knows, an' he wants the men to scatter, to hide. An' he don't know yet how she got away. He had her tied down in the cellar."

"How did she get away?" asked Stocky dully. What in the dreadful night was fact and what was dream?

Mrs. Adams answered dully: "I did

it. I couldn't bear for her to suffer no more."

"And what has she gone to tell and where?"

"Oh, you must know! Last night when she called us what she did, she was speakin' God's truth. And now she's gone to tell. She can lead them to the cave as straight as a die—an' there they'd find enough to show who held up the Fiero superintendent las' week—that was while you was away workin' your claim. Maybe you didn't know. An' they'd find other things, maybe—an' Seth is warnin' them to scatter. He says we've all got to scatter. But I ain't goin'. I ain't goin' till my poor sister comes home again."

Adams swung noisily into the room.

"Ah, here you are, Brown," he said, with the assumption of bluff heartiness. "I've just been called off to Deming on business for a few days. I've been assignin' the boys their jobs. I want you to stay at headquarters an' tend things here——"

"See here, Adams," said Stocky quietly, "there's no use bluffing me."

Adams cast a swift glance of suspicion on his wife. She nodded.

"I've told him," she said unemotionally. Adams scowled blackly. Then his forehead cleared.

"Well, you'd have to know it sooner or later," he observed philosophically. "A little sooner doesn't make any difference. It's true we run one or two little side enterprises—an' my precious sister-in-law, we suppose, has gone to tell what she thinks she knows about them. But there'll be no proofs—there'll be no proofs! An' she's well known for a lunatic. It'll be unpleasant for a while, that's all. Now will you stay here an' keep house, or will you ride with us?"

"Tell me one thing," answered Stocky, amazed at the man's openness and at his own quiet acceptance of the situation. "Was this gang implicated in that train-wreck when I came out—the Yerkes wreck?"

A bricklike flush mounted Adams' broad, sallow face.

"We didn't know you then," he said, admitting and apologizing all in one breath. Stocky waved the apology aside. His personal animosity was singularly inert, lifeless. It was no crime against himself that he thought of.

"If there is any chance that that outrage will be discovered," he said, "I mean if there are any evidences left—I cannot stay here with Mrs. Adams. There is something else I must do. And let me tell you this, you——" The words of insult died upon his lips as he looked at the man; he had been too buffeted by experiences and emotions to feel anything very strongly now, even rage and disgust and horror. The futility of strong language seemed to him its strangest characteristic. "Let me tell you this, Mr. Adams," he amended his remark, "I hope with all the strength I am capable of that you will get exactly what you deserve."

Adams eyed him evilly for a second. "I suppose you realize that you're pretty much in my power," he said. "It'll pay you to keep a civil tongue in your head. It wouldn't trouble my conscience a mite to put you where you'd never wag it again, civil or uncivil."

Stocky fingered the revolver in his pocket, but with the same sense of deep indifference to his own safety and Adams' anger as he had toward everything else.

"I know you wouldn't lie awake nights over killing me," he answered. "But I'd try to arrange that you shouldn't lie awake at all. I don't intend to die without a fight—and you mightn't come out first in that."

Adams' hand, in his pistol-pocket, clicked something. Stocky watched him warily, poised as though for a spring at the first intimation of movement on Adams' part.

"Damn it!" cried the ranchman suddenly, drawing his hands empty from his pocket. "What do I want to waste time bandyin' words with you here? Have I nothin' else to do? You did me a good turn once, when you didn't know it. I've tried to pay you for it—I have paid you for it! We

stand square as far as that goes. But, all the same, I can't feel it that we're square enough for me to kill you. Get out of here—you saved my mother from harm; I'll never attack you unless it's to save my own life from you."

"Maybe I owe you somethin' for that," said Stocky, "but I don't feel the debt. I say it again—I hope you get what's coming to you!"

He opened the door and passed out. He ran to the corral. Already it was empty of horses, except two or three. He saddled one in haste and mounted. All that he desired was to reach Crystal Lawson and warn her that judgment was about to fall on the wreckers. If she belonged to them, let her escape. If it was only her brother—let him escape. Stocky was too immensely weary with all that he had endured to reflect upon his own inconsistencies.

The day advanced from the freshness of early dawn to the steady mid-morning heat. He rode and rode, up from the high plateau into the hills. Never in all his young life had he known such a weight of deadness as oppressed him now. The action of his mind was purely mechanical. Wonder, horror, sadness, fear, had no place in his tired heart. He only knew that he was riding to Crystal Lawson to warn her that danger threatened her. His very curiosity as to how she was implicated in all this lawlessness was languid.

On and on, the hot sun beating upon him as noon approached. On and on, the young flowers and grasses of the higher regions crushed beneath his horse's hoofs. On and on, the sweetness of the junipers and the scrubby aromatic growths in his nostrils. And by and by he came near the bleak little settlement that sprawled upon the rough mountainside. Here were larger evergreens, more shade, the sense of greater coolness. As he wound his way up beyond the abandoned mine tunnels, the rotted and rusty machinery, the ruins of workmen's houses and company offices, he had the first living sensation he had had that day. Before Crystal's

door a rough little platform had been built—a primitive piazza. On it there was a long chair with a bright, turkey-red cushion making a note of color. A Mexican olla swung from the rude roof. It all indicated one thing, which he understood, even in the dulled state of his mind. The instinct of the homemaker had been born in Crystal or in her brother—in them both, perhaps. It was all one with the glad light in her eyes the day they had ridden together. It was one with her joy—an outward and visible sign of an inward happiness.

As he rode up, Crystal herself came out upon the porch. She had a flower-pot in her hand and she set it upon the platform's rail at one side. Then she stood back and surveyed the effect, her head inclined to one side. Then came the sound of his horse's hoofs, and she turned.

He leaned from his saddle, not dismounting. He had the vague sense that he had many errands, much business, that here was but a part of his duty done. It was with difficulty that he remembered why he had come to her.

"What is the matter?" she cried at once. "You are sick—you are hurt—what is it?"

"I'm all right," said Stocky thickly. "I came to tell you something. You—you must go away." He swayed upon the saddle.

"Get down," she cried, jumping down the step and running to his side. "Get down. You're sick."

He slid down his saddle, and she put a strong arm about him and led him up to the turkey-red cushioned chair. He was conscious, as though from a great distance, of being gently, tenderly, pushed back and pillowed. He felt the reviving touch of cool water on his head, the reviving trickle of brandy down his throat. Then he came back from the immeasurable distances where his spirit had dwelt all the morning while his body had done so many things.

"I seem to have gone pretty queer," he said. Then he reflected. "I guess

I forgot my breakfast. Wait a minute," as Crystal at this confession darted into the house. "Wait a minute." He essayed to rise and follow her, but his limbs were weighted down with weakness and weariness. He sank again into the chair. In a second, it seemed, she was back again and was holding a cup with raw eggs to his mouth.

"Swallow them," she commanded, and he obeyed. After a minute life seemed to flow once more through him.

"I didn't come here for nursing," he told her, "but to warn you. The officers will be on the track of the parties who caused the Yerkes wreck this morning. If you—I wanted you to know."

She stared at him out of horror-stricken eyes.

"Then it was that!" she cried.

"What was that?"

"Black Pete was here a while ago, looking for my brother. Will was on the way to Mimosa then. If they come from there—but maybe Black Pete overtook him; he had only been gone half an hour."

"It was your brother then—and you were following him," said Stocky slowly, "following him to try to dissuade him——" But she had run into the house again. In a few minutes she came around on her horse.

"I shall bless you for this till my dying day," she cried passionately. "I must leave you—you must rest——"

"I am going with you," cried Stocky.

"No, no, no! Why should you mix up in these wretched things? And you are half dead now, and your horse is spent. Good-by. God bless you!"

She was off, while Stocky was still standing on the porch, clutching the rail to keep from swaying.

He went into the little house. It was very neat and it had a certain rough grace of its own, with its big, Navajo blankets, its antlers over the fireplace, its branches of pine in jars of Indian pottery, its unexpected, rough shelves for books. It was a very different cabin from its neighbors, be-

speaking a different standard of life. And to think that such utter ruin and disaster threatened it!

In the pantry he found more eggs and milk. Conscientiously he ate and drank, and gradually strength came back to him, and with it a more living emotion concerning those events in the midst of which he stood. When at last he was ready to take one of the horses from the little enclosure back of the house and to put up his own jaded mare, he was himself again, and himself cursing the time-destroying collapse which had cost him an hour. Whatever happened, he wanted to be with Crystal Lawson when the supreme moment of trial came to her. He mounted the new horse and struck off down the trail toward Mimosa.

It was easy following her trail for a while, and then suddenly, he was aware that the prints before him no longer tended toward Mimosa, but met him, coming from that town. He went slowly back to the point where her tracks disappeared from the road. So did all the others—all those which he had met coming from the town. He alighted and examined a tiny side path, leading in and up the mountainside. There was a whole congress of prints. Crystal's were no longer distinguishable, but they must be among the many—at least three horsemen had turned off the main road here.

Stocky turned and found himself pursuing a rough trail up the mountainside. Here and there he almost lost it, and went astray up the tracks beaten down by the cattle there for the summer grazing. But he always found it again and followed it, his faculties so concentrated upon keeping it that he had no thought left to expend upon the errand on which he was bent, and upon the question whether he went as a supporter or a defier of the law. Now the low, scrubby growths of the mountain would almost block his progress. Sometimes he would come out into a natural clearing among trees and would look in every direction among the pine-needles and the grasses for some sign that this was not the end of all things so far as

the trail was concerned. Then he would go on again.

It was Red Lawson's horse and no woodcraft of his own that finally led Stocky to the place he sought. He had traveled all the afternoon, and in the trees and the shadows of the higher heights it was already twilight when he struck a rough, overgrown level. There were giant boulders here, and tall trees, and some smaller growths. It was rough and awful as at creation's morning. Stocky, during his brief regin as Mrs. Gordon Ramsay's pet, had once sat in her box during a performance of "Die Walküre." The setting of that opera, through which he had ungratefully yawned, recurred to his mind now. The same gloom, the same mystery, the same trees and rocks, it seemed to him were here. He drew rein to try to determine how to thread his way, how to keep the trail. The horse turned deliberately in one direction—faced a giant boulder, it seemed to his rider.

"Go your own way, old boy," said Stocky; "I've no better suggestion to offer, and if your impulse is wrong, we'll come back and try it again."

Straight up to the clifflike wall the horse trotted. Knowingly he picked his way around its base. At one end there was a small opening, absolutely nothing at all at the ground, but four or five feet higher widening to a jagged two feet, and then closing into the cliff again. To this aperture—scarce bigger than the eye of a needle in this immensity, it seemed to Stocky—the beast trotted. He lifted a careful forefoot. Stocky lay forward on his back, his arms about the animal's neck. Upright, he must have been brushed off the saddle.

Across the small opening he was carried, and along a sort of passageway, under a low, natural ceiling, till he came to a space where he felt that he could sit erect again. He straightened himself in the saddle. Only the branches of trees interrupted his view of the sky. He was in a natural, rough amphitheater, surrounded by walls of rock and by trees. He had entered it,

he perceived, by the only possible entrance—one which he himself would never have believed to be an entrance. His first question was how he would be able to get back, for the space in which he was seemed destitute of any sign of life. Then suddenly he changed his mind. One of the lowering cliffs before him seemed to open and to let forth a man with a gun leveled directly at him.

Stocky had moments of natural common sense. He raised his arms now upon command, and the person with the gun advanced toward him, keeping the weapon disconcertingly pointed at him. In another second he was looking down upon Black Pete's ugly face.

"Get down," said Black Pete tersely. Stocky got down. Black Pete scanned the horse. "Ridin' Lawson's nag, are you?" he observed. "Does that mean you come fair an' square? Or are you a damned informer?"

"I'm no informer," said Stocky shortly, ridiculously angry with the term, although he felt that to be an informer in this case would be quite the most respectable part any one could play. Then he saw that others had emerged and approached. Red Lawson was among them, his face distorted with agonized emotions. Crystal, white as the face of death, was at her brother's side.

"He means no harm to—us, Pete," she cried, with a pause before the pronoun. Stocky could not tell whether it was a confession of guilt or a voluntary placing of herself beside her brother. "It was he warned me so that I rode after you and Will, and found you coming back along the Mimosa road. He means no harm."

"How did you get here?" demanded Pete.

"I picked out the trail as far as I could," answered Stocky. "This horse of Lawson's did the rest."

Pete continued to stare at him, only half convinced by his words and Crystal's.

"Take my gun if you don't believe me," said Stocky. "I'm bringing no one here. But that doesn't mean that

no one will be brought. An angry and revengeful woman is the leader of this—vengeance."

"You mean crazy Babbie? She can't find this place," boasted Pete. "She thinks the cave on the ranch is the cache for everything. I ain't afraid of her—well, I'm in charge here until the boss shows up. You seem to be passed in. You'll have to take the consequences all around. A shot now—or you're one of us when the time comes!"

"I'm damned if I am!" cried Stocky energetically. "I'm in with you enough to keep mum, but that's the limit. Once this has"—he looked at Crystal Lawson and spoke more gently—"once this has blown over, our paths lie very far apart, Pete Teague."

"Then what are you doin' here now, I'd like to know?" the big man growled. Stocky was moved to wonder a little back about that himself, but there seemed to be no reasonable answer.

Adams arrived by some circuitous route at the camp during the night. He inquired briefly if Stocky meant to keep quiet about what he knew and Stocky, pondering on the problem of innocent accomplicity, briefly gave his word. The camp—composed of a half-dozen desperadoes, all of whom Stocky had seen more or less often or more or less permanently on the ranch—seemed equipped for long concealments. In addition to this, there seemed little fear on the part of the men that they would be found. Adams said that he was quite sure his sister-in-law knew of no hiding-place but the cave on the ranch, and was of the opinion that when that proved tenantless, the officers would attribute the whole affair to her acknowledged "queerness." And all the time Red Lawson, with wretched face, clung to his sister as to a veritable salvation.

"Bust me, if I don't think the white-livered baby is afraid," commented Pete. The same thought had crossed the mind of Stocky. But he had a truer inspiration. Not fear, but remorse, was the fury tearing at the heart of the boy. To think that he had

planned to return to the ways of decency and sanity and had found himself too enmeshed to fight his way out! To think that when he had purposed a clean slate, a fresh page, that then, of all times, in the very moment of his repentance, punishment should fall! To think that after all his unpaid months of evil, he might be called upon to pay at the very threshold of good! So Stocky read his miserable, apprehensive eyes, his wretched brow and set lips. And so reading, with pity and sympathy, he felt that Crystal understood his comprehension and that she gave him a full meed of gratitude.

The second day Red approached him. "Will you talk to me a few minutes?" he asked. Stocky, who was playing solitaire like several others of the crowd, put aside his cards with alacrity. He and Red withdrew a little, out in the open.

"If anything happens to me and Crystal gets out, will you try to make it easy some way for her? We've got some people back East—she'll need to get away from all this; it'll remind her too much."

"Oh, come, I say!" said Stocky trying to make his voice ring with reassurance. "Nothing's going to happen. Except that you've learned your lesson and will walk straight hereafter."

"Oh, I have been such a fool," the boy cried, suddenly breaking down and burying his head in his hands. "I wasn't bad to start—only being my own master went to my head. And at first it wasn't much of anything—drinking too much, gambling a little; then camping up here and feeling a fine man; then a little cattle-rustling—even that seemed more like a lark. And then came that night at Yerkes. God! That woke me up. And by that time my sister was worried to death, and because I wouldn't let her know anything, she set herself to find out. And that night—Lord, that night, she followed me! To save me she followed me! And that was what she saw." He shuddered and Stocky nodded. He had had some glimmering idea as to the reason for the girl's presence there before.

"And after that I meant to quit. But it was easier getting in than out. They wouldn't let me out. They made me go into the Fiero business with them. Thank God, there was no killing there! And now—because that thundering bully, Adams, doesn't know how to manage his women folks, I'm likely to break her heart and to leave her alone. And she'll never know how much I loved her all the time, or what a man I meant to be to please her at last!"

Again his boy's miserable face was hidden in his hands. Stocky put out his own hand and gripped his arm with a clasp of friendship.

"If anything that you fear comes to pass," he promised, "I'll be a brother to her. And don't you worry about her love—don't you know she'll always understand all that you meant to be for her? But it's all coming right, Will, it's all coming right."

Only when the sun was directly overhead was there much daylight in the camp. On the third day that period had passed and the early afternoon twilight was deepening into real evening. It was very peaceful, in spite of the insecure foundations of peace. The picketed horses were grazing, a faint cloud, broken loose from the sunset's glories, floated overhead. Gold Tooth Jim, the extempore cook, was busy in the recesses of the hollow rocks. Some of the men were playing a quiet game of cards, one was reading a dog's-eared paper novel. Crystal, the awful tension of her face softening into something like relief, like hope, was seated under the overhang of a little rock with her brother. Adams had just explained to Stocky the impregnability of their retreat. "Only one man at a time can get in," he said triumphantly, "through that opening, even if any one could ever find the opening; and we could pick off as many as could ride up, at that rate." Stocky nodded. It seemed to him that this was true.

Suddenly the air above them was shattered with the sound of firing. Stocky jumped to his feet. The other men, more trained to such sounds and

such emergencies, sat as they were, and only their eyes moved. Every glance was directed upward to the sound of the shots. The top of the cliff opposite the camp seemed black with men, and every man had a leveled rifle in his hand.

"That cliff's always been inaccessible," said Adams with a curse. "How did they get there unless they're monkeys, not men?"

"Do you all surrender?" was megaphoned down to them.

"No, curse you!" cried Pete Teague.

"Shut your mouth, Pete," commanded Adams briefly. He reflected a minute. "We'd better do it, boys," he said. "They can pick us off one by one from there. If we give in, and they come around to capture us—as they'll have to—we can pick them off one by one. Savvy?"

"After you've pretended to surrender?" demanded Stocky hotly.

"After that!" replied Adams briefly.

"I shall warn them."

"If you do, it'll be the last word you'll ever utter. Remember you can't try me too far. I've saved you an' you know why. But you're only a butter-in here an' you'll play the game our way or not at all."

Stocky wavered. And in the momentary pause, Adams made a megaphone of his hands. "We surrender," he bawled.

"Throw down your arms," came the next command. They made a pile of their revolvers and rifles, all under the steady threat of converging barrels from above. Then gradually the gleam of the rifles was withdrawn. The top of the cliff seemed empty again.

"Fools," snarled Adams, "did they think we'd leave these lying here while they went 'round?" He stooped to pick up his revolver again.

"Look out!" cried Red Lawson, screaming high and shrill. He darted in front of his sister, who stood with tightly clasped hands at the edge of the pile of weapons. "Look out! There's some one there."

Two bullets whizzed downward through the peaceful air from the guns

of the lookouts left on the cliff. And the flash of light which marked the discharge had not vibrated to the eyes of those whom Red's warning alarmed before they saw him pitch forward on his face.

When the sheriff's posse made its way into the enclosure, they found a girl clinging tenderly to the dead hand of her brother. And another young man warned them to be careful how they dealt with her.

"The rottenest cheek," the sheriff was wont to relate the tale afterward. "But somehow, I just nodded my head an' acted like he told me. Pore girl! Pore girl!"

XV.

It was some ten months after these events that John Randolph Brown journeyed East again—a very different man from the impulsive, irresponsible youth who had come gaily out the year before, inflamed with the hope of riches, with the desire for adventure, with the love of a girl. He had had the adventure and had seen the reverse side of that medal so brilliant in the eyes of inexperience. He had, in all probability, found the riches, and he had found them too late for them to buy his heart's desire. And as for that, as for the golden girl, in the grave affection, the sad sense of loss which Stocky held for Agatha now, there was little resemblance to the passion that had tossed him hither and yon.

Yet he was only two years older than when he had taken his journey westward. He was not preternaturally serious or solemn by nature. There was something of yearning eagerness in the thoughts he sent forward, even if those he cast back upon the land he was leaving were grave enough.

Looking backward, he lived again through the arrest, through the long ride by Crystal Lawson's side to the county-seat. The thought of the peril in which she stood had not been able to touch her. She was in the deepest abyss which it is given mortals to know—in the abyss of grief over the loss of the creature dearer to her than

any other, and of his loss before he had had a chance to redeem, to prove himself. In the profundity where her spirit abode during that long ride down the green mountain, along the dusty plain, no one could reach her with messages from the earth's surface. Measuring his own trouble against hers, Stocky had forgotten that he was not in the most cheerful of situations—had forgotten that he was under arrest, that his innocence might be difficult of proof, that his future was more precarious than it had ever been before.

He forgot his own perplexities and tried to reach the sore soul beside him with some message of comfort. And by and by he had succeeded. He was a simple-hearted man to whom faith in the ultimate kindness of the universe came easily. And gently, hour after hour, he besought the stricken girl to remember that Red's "conversion" had been complete; that it had happened before danger threatened him; that his purposes had been all good, all glowing with rightness, before he died. And by and by she heard him and turned her eyes of burning sorrow upon him.

"It was true, was it not?" she asked in her low, tense voice. "He had changed, he had come back to himself. Oh, if only he could have lived to prove it, to undo what he had done! But he meant to—he meant to, didn't he?"

"You know he did," answered Stocky steadily. "You know it and I know it. He did not have to live to prove it to us, did he?" It was the little Virginia girl who had caused the staid merchant Brown to commit "his only folly" who spoke in her son's voice. Crystal looked at him with deep, searching eyes.

"You are sure of it?" she entreated. "As sure as that we're riding down this road together," replied Stocky earnestly.

Well, that memory was behind him to sober his exuberances now. And there were other memories—of the little court-room, of the judge, of his own escape from the charge of complicity in the gang's work, of Crystal's

discharge from the same suspicions; of the holding of the others; of the fierce, avid face of Barbara Merritt, giving her testimony; of her insane desire to implicate Edward Winterleigh in the doings of the desperadoes; of her confused statements that it had been Winterleigh who, years before, had shown her the mountain hiding-place, and the one precarious way to the top of the cliff commanding it. Curiously enough, although this was the only part of her testimony which the court evidently held to be inspired by insanity, it impressed Stocky. When she found that it was set at naught, she grew excited, and wound herself in the mazes of angry statements which only served to prejudice still further the opinion against her mental responsibility. But to Stocky her words held an odd, inexplicable force.

Well, all that had passed also, and by and by, through some marvelous legal technicality, some marvelous skill on the part of the attorneys for the defense—they had come from San Francisco, and fabulous stories about their fees were told—the gallows and the prison were cheated. Stocky remembered the wild cry of Barbara Merritt as the verdict in favor of her brother-in-law was rendered. He remembered Adams' eyes bent upon the woman, and he trembled for her. Afterward he saw the man with his wife and had another illustration of the strange ways of the human heart. Mrs. Adams had been excused from testifying on the ground that a wife need not appear against her husband. She had been at each session of the court, dry-eyed, dry-lipped, inscrutable in her locked and repressed way. When Adams joined her after his release in the corridor of the jail, Stocky was near-by. The big man faltered before the little woman.

"I'll do what you've wanted me to, Mary," he said. "I'll pull up stakes and go to the coast."

"And Barbara?" whispered the little woman. Adams' face darkened. Then he watched his wife and the frown lifted.

"For your sake I will forget what

Barbara Merritt did," he answered. "You have things to forget—I will forget that. She can come with us if you say so."

"Seth," said the little woman with a choking gratitude, "you never was a little man, you never was a mean, little man!"

And then there had been the gradual scattering of the gang, and Stocky was camped upon his claim in the Silverton hills. Crystal had gone there, too, when she had escaped the jurisdiction of the court.

"I always feel better there," she had told Stocky with a patient fortitude. "Seems nearer the sky—no great reach to heaven. And—we were so happy there, he and I, that last time, until—you remember the wildcat that came and called for him to leave me and leave all the good he was planning and go back to horrible things?"

"I am going to forget that," Stocky had answered. "I'm going to remember the boy who wanted his banjo to play for you—the boy who built you the porch at Silverton. Ah, forget all the rest, Crystal. Dear, dear Crystal, forget all the rest."

Up on the hill he had gradually won from her some information about the relatives back East, with the result that he eventually found himself in formal communication with two maiden ladies of Cambridge, Massachusetts, concerning their step-niece. And later one golden evening saw him at Mimosa, watching a train pull out, through a window of which Crystal Lawson's apprehensive eyes stared back at him in mute farewell. The whole plain seemed desolate when she had gone, but he knew that he had done wisely to persuade her to go. The change which was so dreadful to her was what she needed to arouse her mind from brooding on the past. She was young, she was healthy, she was no longer despairing—she must respond to stimulus of novelty. The winter in Cambridge—he laughed, contrasting it with a winter in Silverton. He was lonely, but he was glad he had persuaded her to go.

Then he had gone back to his own camp and to work. And the miracle had happened. He had found copper. He had hurried to the experts in Mimosa and thence to the experts in Denning. He was excited, naturally. Riches seemed near, and though riches could not buy him another man's affianced bride, still they were exciting to contemplate. Exciting it was, too, to think that the whole region was veined with the precious metal, and that Crystal, who lamented in her letters the narrow circumstances of the two dear little ladies who had taken her to their hearts, might be able to give them the innocent joys they craved.

It was as the result of the opinions and the advice of the Western mine experts that he was going East now. He laughed boyishly to contrast his condition with his condition when he had gone West. Then he was leaving in deep disgrace, with barely enough money to take him to his destination, which, however it was put, was no other place than Coventry. Now he was coming back with money in his pockets to undertake the formation of a company to work the Agatha and Crystal mines. He had named his after his old love—he could not help it; and Mr. Lawson's mine had always been the Crystal. Stocky liked to link the names of the two girls thus—the name of the women he loved and could not hope to marry, and the name of the dear friend and comrade whom he never dreamed of wanting to marry.

His letters East had won quick replies. Uncle Ephraim was prepared to welcome him warmly. Mrs. Ramsay was sure that he had "outgrown the follies his friends had been obliged, for his own sake, to frown upon." Mr. Ramsay would be very happy to see him in his office at such and such a time. Winterleigh, in a brief note, was offhandedly affable and congratulatory. The men of the Eighty-seventh were for dining and wining and generally fêting their old hero. Duncan wanted to propose him for non-resident membership in a few of the best clubs—"if you're really going back,

old fellow, instead of working your mines from an office on the thirty-fourth floor of a New York building, as most of you big miners do," he had written. Only Agatha, of all his little circle, had made no sign that she had heard of his home-coming. Stocky was half hurt and half commended her in his mind for a delicate prudence. How could she, after that last letter to him, write to him of little commonplaces, make him pretty speeches on his roseate prospect of fortune?

In spite of everything—of instinctive, unquestioning decency which made him put hope of Agatha utterly away from him; of maturity of mind which made him no longer the plaything of his emotions; of cares and preoccupations and memories; in spite of all, it was with something of a tumult that he thought of meeting her again. Was not Mr. Ramsay only too politely amenable to the suggestion concerning the mining company? Was not Mrs. Ramsay quite as sure that he would be a lionlike adornment to her drawing-room, as before his wretched fiasco at Jarmead's? Surely he would have to see Agatha. He began to wonder when and how. When the train drew in under the Grand Central roof, he was in a confusion of hope, fear, and longing, and of misery because his hopes and fears alike were nothing to her, must forever be nothing to her.

The February dusk was falling over the sparkle of the Avenue as he drove down toward the hotel. Whatever the chance of forming a big Eastern company to mine the Agatha and the Crystal, the Westerners had believed in those properties enough to equip Stocky handsomely with funds for his embassy. Consequently, he was driving in a hansom, his eager face scanning the crush of roadway and sidewalk with the home-comer's look of exultation and fondness. Consequently, he was going to put up at a glittering hostelry. Consequently, if he had any moderately extravagant desires, he might blamelessly gratify them. The radiant tropics of a florist's window caught his eye. He poked open the trap of communi-

cation with his driver. "Stop here," he cried, in the old, impetuous Stocky fashion. In a minute he stood inside the flower-shop doors.

"Those are queer fellows," he said, nodding toward some orchids in the big window. The salesman, with a modest air of regretting that he so far surpassed all competitors, opined that Stocky would find nothing so remarkable, so "distangay," in the city. He shifted a jar of them so that the light fell upon them more directly. Every fragile blossom of pink and lavender, as ethereal as evening skies in spring, as fountains leaping in the sunny air, was stained with a deep blotch of crimson.

"I don't like them," said Stocky decidedly. Yet he kept on looking at them. He made a round of the store, peering into white-tiled storage-boxes and through glass cases. But by and by he came back to the wonderful flowers, their delicacy—spoiled was it, or only accentuated, by the red stain?

"Send a box of those," he said, and gave a name and address on North Washington Square. "No—no card." Then he stood looking around him. "Could you send some stuff over to Cambridge in any sort of condition?" he asked. Upon the clerk's assurance that the flowers of that shop were of a freshness and a durability which could withstand a journey ten times as long, he sought to choose again. Roses? No. Roses were for any one—the kind lady who dined you last night, the aspiring young actress to whom you were introduced at somebody's tea, your mother's old friend, the wife of the man you wished to interest in this or that. No, roses were not for Crystal. He wandered about quite unhappily. No flower seemed quite right for her. This was a poor shop, apparently. Out on the desert or up on the hills he could have found a dozen blooms appropriate enough. And finally, to the immense disgust of the florist, it was a box of shining laurel-leaves, among which lay starry jasmine-blossoms, that went off to Cambridge. And then the lilies-of-the-valley were

ordered for the grave of her who had been the little Virginia bride of so many years ago, and Stocky went soberly back to his hansom.

In spite of the cordiality of the letters he had received, there was no one to share his first evening with him. He felt rather lonely, even a little hurt. He had to remind himself that he had not announced the time of his arrival. He dressed himself as magnificently as his sartorial equipment permitted, and went splendidly down in the elevator to dine in state, even if it was a solitary and therefore unappetizing state. He wondered uncomfortably, feeling many eyes upon him as he threaded his way through the dining-room, if his evening clothes were already so bizarre as to attract attention, or his waistcoat, so lamentably out of date. Those clothes were only a paltry two years' old, he mentally explained to the crowd; they had been ordered to do grace to the scenes in which Agatha Ramsay had been wont to shine. It never occurred to him that anything except his clothes could seem remarkable, that his six feet plus of lean, muscular length was unusual, that his face was bronzed almost to Indian darkness, and that the fair brown of his hair and the clear, American blue of his eyes contrasted with it in a fashion to win ladies' passing glances.

After all, in spite of how in camp with one kettle, a frying-pan, a tin of coffee, a side of bacon, and a bag of corn-meal as his entire culinary outfit, he had planned the herculean feasts he would have on his return to civilization, he found small appetite for the meal he could order now. He had not the makings of a gourmet in him; after all, it had not been mere food which he had wanted out there in the hills; nor even food served in such surroundings as these—a discreetly distant band discoursing popular music and Wagner, with charming impartiality, overgrown carnations blooming amid the shaded lamps, noiseless, deferential servitors, and all the rest. It was these things added to the one thing that gave them all color and meaning and charm—in-

timate companionship. He wondered how Crystal would look upon such a scene as this, and began to sketch a scheme by which he could induce her and the two little old ladies to come over for a week of cheerfully, vulgarly ornate living in New York.

Suddenly his planning was arrested. A party swept in to a reserved table two or three removed from his. The women had dropped their wraps in some cloak-room outside the dining-room, and all their delicate lines were revealed by their frocks. They were hatless, also, and their shining, beautifully coiffed heads were held with the grace and pride of well-trained New York women. But Stocky stared past the rest of them toward one. It was Agatha, Agatha very slim, very sinuous, in a long, faintly shimmering black frock; Agatha, with golden hair piled royally on her royally held head; Agatha, the incarnation of young grace and wealth and pride and—and surely—pleasure. Yet as Stocky stared at her, his heart fell not alone with the thought of her inaccessibility, but with a vague realization of subtle change in her.

There was the slightest hardening of her soft outlines, as it were, as though the velvet were brushed from a butterfly's wings; there was the slightest intensifying of all her physical qualities—as though Time had applied a little make-up to her. And in the brilliancy of her look, the assurance of her smile and glance and bearing, Stocky saw no deepening of her joyousness. When she sat down, she was almost back to him. He saw a flower drooping at her ear; it was one of his orchids. All sorts of emotions began to riot in him, all sorts of absurd hopes and fancies. Winterleigh was not of this party; Agatha wore his flower—Stocky's. Agatha had written him nothing lately. Could it all mean that the engagement was broken? And that she hesitated to risk the meaning such a statement would have for Stocky? Could that look—a remote suggestion of the defiant, of the wilful—could that mean that she had broken with Winter-

leigh and dared her world to criticize her? The blood raced through his veins at the thought.

By and by the man opposite her at the table leaned toward her and said something. When she, in answer to this, turned her head so as to command a view of Stocky, that young man was conscious that he had been staring unforgivably—devouring her with his eyes. When she saw and recognized him—he half rose as she turned, and wholly did so when the flash of greeting lighted her eyes—he grew almost dizzy and light-headed. He crossed to her table in response to the dazzle of her look. In a minute he was clasping her hand, hearing her delighted outcry, bowing to the others.

"The prodigal returned—and leading his own fatted calves behind him—droves of them, swarms of them, herds of them—what is the collective for calves?" she cried. "Inviting the Stern Parent and the Elder Brother—that's Uncle Ephraim and all of us—to come feast. Indeed, Mrs. Jestley, that is exactly what he is. Don't you remember? Doesn't every one remember my excellent Edward's raid, and the famous hero whom he caught at Jarmead's—Mr. John Randolph Brown of Manzanita? Indeed, I sha'n't stop! And how Mr. John Randolph Brown's family and acquaintance frowned upon the Jarmead episode! And sent him into the wilderness to reflect upon the error of his ways. And now he comes back with all the——"

"Please, please," laughed Stocky. "Do, Mrs. Jestley, in mercy to a bashful cowboy, stop her."

"Bashful cowboys! There are no bashful cowboys," rattled Agatha, without giving Mrs. Jestley a chance to respond to the appeal. "All cowboys shoot up all places where food and drink are sold—Mr. Brown will produce a six-shooter in a second, and begin firing at all the art-glass electroliers around the wall—— And they all have beautiful half-breed girls in every town who play the Spanish guitar for them—haven't they?" she ended suddenly, with a direct look at Stocky.

"Don't let the cold water of fact quench your charming fancies, Miss Ramsay," drawled one of the men. "Mr.—er—Mr. Brown would not be so ungallant as to lop off a single dark damsel of your imagination, I'm sure."

"Certainly not," said Stocky, hurt he knew not why by all her banter. "They're all Miss Ramsay's own creation, and no one but herself shall put them to death."

"Mr. Brown," said Mrs. Jestley now, "there's a marvelous dancer who comes on late in a very stupid show at the Alcazar. We're bound for her after dinner. Won't you join us? There's an extra seat in the box. Miss Ramsay's young man failed us at the last minute——"

"Poor Edward!" supplemented Miss Ramsay. "He had to chase up to Mat-teawan to do something about a most uninteresting lunatic."

"So won't you take his place?" finished Mrs. Jestley.

Agatha looked at him. He could not tell whether it was an imp of mischief or some little spirit of pensiveness which lurked in her eyes as she repeated softly: "Yes—won't you take his place?"

"Thank you," he answered a trifle awkwardly. "I shall be very glad to come. Now—— I see my man has brought my coffee. I will join you again."

He went back to his own table, his head in a whirl. He could no more see Agatha Ramsay unmoved, he told himself, than he could drink strong spirits and feel no fever in his blood. And the look in her eyes baffled him. Why hadn't they married, anyway, she and Winterleigh? Surely once the words had been read over her that bound her to another irrevocably, she could not stir him thus. Surely then his heart must acknowledge the invisible barrier.

He went to bed that night, excited, miserable. He had not known that it was in him to desire another person's property. And it was in some such unenlightened way that Stocky regarded another man's affianced wife.

The jargon of "freedom" in the emotions had passed him by, and among all his adventures he had not counted acquaintance with the "live-your-own-life" men and women. So it came to pass that it disturbed him with a sense of disloyalty to find himself—so inflamed by the presence of Winterleigh's betrothed. It was an insult, too, to her, he thought. What sort of affection was it, he demanded hotly, which he pretended to feel? Would not any decent woman feel aghast to learn that she, promised to one man, was the object of another man's passionate desires?

He opened his windows wide, but the noise of the city, the air of the city, did not bring calmness. He longed for the great spaces of the hills, their clean winds. Then he thought of the other troubled soul who always took her troubles to that place of healing. And thinking of Crystal, Stocky became himself again.

XVI.

"When, my dear Miss Mænad, do you mean to marry me?" So spoke Mr. Winterleigh to his affianced. At the moment she deserved, in outward seeming at least, the term he had applied to her. Her eyes were glittering, her cheeks inflamed, the laughter of her red lips was high and uncertain. Her fiancé looked at her with a cool appreciation. Between them was a table littered with the remains of luncheon. It was the only table in the small, discreet apartment.

Agatha threw back her head and regarded him through lowered lids.

"Do you know, my dear friend," she said, ignoring his question, "you're quite the cleverest man I know?"

He bowed in mock gratitude.

"It is not cleverness to appreciate you, to want to marry you. It would be imbecility not to," he assured her.

"Oh, nonsense!" Agatha knocked ashes from the tip of her cigarette. "I'm not out for compliments to-day. I mean that I don't believe any other man on earth would have been clever enough to give a perfectly respectable,

perfectly accredited, engagement the spice of the forbidden by—this”—She nodded meditatively about the room. Winterleigh reached a bottle from the cooler and filled her glass again with golden bubbles.

“That was not cleverness, my dear,” he assured her. “And it was not the desire to please your palate by a taste of forbidden spice that I introduced you to Legari’s private rooms. How else was I ever to achieve speech with you alone? Your dear mother, Agatha, is a charming woman whom I greatly admire—”

“Admire? You fairly flirt with her.”

“Whom I greatly admire,” pursued Winterleigh suavely, “but she is too omnipresent for my feelings as a lover. At your home and in society in general you are too hedged about with thorns, my rose. So I inveigle you to Legari’s where I can at least”—he arose and came over to her chair—“where I can at least kiss you unobserved.” He did so.

“Well, whatever your intentions,” replied Agatha, accepting the salute indifferently, “there is a spice of naughtiness about it all that satisfies something wicked in me. Do you ever pause to consider, Edward, that I am a perverse and sinful young woman? I love what is not seemly, as, for example, champagne and cigarettes and back stairways to private rooms, and—and—unregistered kisses. Aren’t you afraid of me?”

“If you were a domestic pussy-cat,” answered Winterleigh quietly, “you could never have appealed to a man of my disposition. I’m a great criminal lawyer—I suppose I may say that here with no one but you to accuse me of vanity—not because I hate crime, but because I love crime; I feel it and its workings. I can follow the steps that lead to it in men who are reckless enough to indulge their taste for it. If you’re born with criminal desires, my dear—and a brain—perhaps I should emphasize that—and a brain—it is much better and more profitable to become a great criminal lawyer than to become a great criminal. You have more fun, a longer run for your money.

“You can follow your man’s career from the first dawning of his temptation; maybe it happened when he was a boy playing ball in the streets of a village, maybe it never assailed him until he was a man, established, as he thought, in uprightness. Well, you can see the dawn of the idea—you can trace its devious courses through him—through the grooves worn by convention, by affection, by all sorts of training. You can follow it to its end; and then you can be his defender or his prosecutor, just as seems better—just as seems more likely to provide more stars of glory or of diamonds for the head of your captive, Agatha, who was also born with a little devil in her, though he has been prudently concealed by the habits and customs of Washington Square, North.” He bent over her again, and this time the girl shrank a little.

“If you are not afraid, afraid that I shall break over the traces,” she said, “sometimes I am afraid of you. You—you—it’s the admixture of brains that makes you terrifying to the imagination.”

“Ah, and it’s just that half-terror which I count upon to help keep you in order,” he told her, laughing. “A little fear is a fine, wholesome ingredient in a wife’s love. But I’m talking nonsense. When will you marry me? That money from your grandmother which you so carefully and providently thought it best to wait for—haven’t you reached the age when her will said it was to be settled absolutely on you? Not that I care anything about that except that you deferred the ceremony until you should have that in hand. Why, by the way?”

“Oh, I don’t know,” answered Agatha. “A caprice, I suppose. And of course it wasn’t certain what papa would settle on me.”

“Sometimes I’ve thought it was a desire to defer—the happy hour?” He watched her as he made the suggestion. She started, and across her flushed face a deeper rose ran.

“How silly!” she commented.

“Yes, I see now that it was.” He

smiled strangely upon her. "I see now that it must have been. Sometimes I have been half-inclined to be jealous and to think that after all you weren't sure—that you were sparring for time—that you had some regrets for Mrs. Jestley's wonderful son, Gustave——"

"That imbecile!"

"Or old Fletcher, or young Brown, or one of the rest of your adorers." His eyes never left her face as he lightly recited the list. At Stocky's name there was a look of arrest, as it were, in her eyes.

"But I've gotten all over that since we've taken to coming here," resumed Winterleigh easily. "Of course no young lady as sophisticated as Miss Agatha Ramsay comes to a place like—well, comes to Legari's with a man, even a fiancé, unless—unless she likes him very well."

Agatha's proud head was erect.

"After all, you are not so clever as I thought," she said cuttingly. "I thought you were too clever to tell me that I had compromised myself. I thought you too clever to think that I would care—that"—She threw her cigarette away.

"My dear Agatha, you misunderstand me wilfully," said Winterleigh. "Of course I know that you would be nobly"—there was a satiric smile on his lips—"indifferent to censure. I was only thinking of young—Jestley, for example."

Then the color dyed her face deeply. She knew him and the workings of his mind well enough to realize that it was Stocky whom he meant, Stocky of whom he had had jealous doubts, Stocky with whose disapprobation he now threatened her. And she knew too that, for all her boast, all her indomitable pride of mien, she had a fierce desire that Stocky should, at least, never think lightly of her: if she could not make him love her—and since his return to the East she knew why she had deliberately tried to lure him to some expression of tenderness—at least, let him never think of her otherwise than as he did now, with his unworldly, old-fashioned restraint and respect.

Winterleigh watched the color flare and then ebb. He followed the coursing emotions of her mind. Then, when she looked pale and almost beaten, he leaned over to her and took her unresisting hand gently.

"My dear Agatha," he said gravely, "I have talked in a way unworthy of my devotion to you. Forgive me. Sometimes jealousy is a very goading thing and drives men to madness. I am jealous in a way—as why should I not be? After all, I am a nobody from God-knows-where—an astute lawyer who's able to make a decent income—no more; and even that is due to lucky investments—a tip here and there. My ancestry—how your good mother would scorn it! And here I have aspired to the beauty and the belle, the wit and the toast of her time. Do you wonder I am sometimes worried—frightened at my good fortune? Suppose it should all turn to fairy gold in my hands? Dear, forgive me."

"I suppose I shall have to," said Agatha, coquettishly looking at him. She liked her sense of being a lion-tamer. Alas! She liked the sense of so many things! She demanded so many emotions, so many excitements! Never for one whole day had she ardently desired and worked for one single end. Never had she known a clear, uncomplicated hour. All her emotional life had been a succession of little gusts. Now, five minutes after she had hated Winterleigh for basely, vilely, daring to show her that he had her reputation in his power; five minutes after she had desired Stocky's boyish chivalry of adoration, she was pleased with the vision of herself as beauty leading the beast by gay, silken threads. She pulled on her long gloves with a half-triumphant air as she looked across the table to her vis-à-vis.

XVII.

It was in April that Stocky became greatly puzzled by the inexplicable behavior of his friend Crystal. She had acknowledged the receipt of his floral tributes, two months before, with the

completest cordiality. Her first letters were full of anticipations of what they should do when he came over to Cambridge to see her. How he would love the little old ladies! How he would revel in the gracefulness of the elms, even though they were still bare! How he would weave romances for the staid old houses that stood behind them! How he would read history anew, here where so much of history began! Thus wrote Crystal, forgetting that the East was not to Stocky the unknown land it had been to her. The man laughed as he read her letters—it pleased him to see how completely at one with her she felt him to be; that was the very essence of friendship, he told himself. She even took for granted the unity of their previous experiences. It was a very different attitude from Agatha's baffling, bewildering, maddening, saddening one.

Then suddenly Crystal had developed a few inexplicabilities of her own. It was apropos of the visit to New York. The little ladies, when tentatively approached on the subject, had been reported as eager for the adventure. Stocky had rejoiced, thinking that if their objections to New York were overcome it would all be easy sailing. So he had written joyfully to Crystal, telling her of what he was planning, of the friends who would help him make this visit a memorable one for the two spinsters, of the dazzling Miss Ramsay who would undoubtedly appear to them as a personification of old romance, so brilliant, so beautiful, was she; and yet so kind—she would be sure to delight in showing the kind and tender side of herself to the old ladies.

Whereupon Crystal wrote him a brief little note stating that, after all, she found it to be quite impossible for her to come to New York at present. She was doing a little special work at Radcliffe—at which information the unacademic Stocky felt himself an illiterate boor, and half regretted that unfinished collegiate course of his. She really couldn't come. Stocky wrote in protest. She replied more tersely yet, and with more final emphasis. Only in

her last paragraph a hint of feeling, of friendliness, showed itself:

Please believe that I am not ungrateful for all that you would have us share with you. Indeed, indeed I am. But what I am doing here carries on the work my father tried to begin with me and my dear brother. All the gaiety and excitement you plan do not belong to the scheme. It would do me nothing but harm, I think, to change the peaceful current of our existence here. My time is short, anyway. I am going back as soon as the winter term is over. I long for my home. As for you, I remember now what I have sometimes forgotten, that this—or that in New York—is your true environment. I am, of course, so sorry not to meet the lovely Miss Ramsay. She must be all that is charming—quite like the belles of Bath and such places when there used to be belles indeed. However, it is only a pleasure deferred, I hope. Some time she will doubtless come West to see her namesake, the Agatha mine.

And Stocky pondered, pained and even belligerent. First he telegraphed that the whole thing was nonsense, anyway—by which he meant her elaborate objections—and that he was coming over to tell her so. He was coming the very next day. Then, there was a meeting called of the financiers whom he was trying to induce to finance the mines, and he had to telegraph the visit off. Whereupon came a long, wrathful reply from Crystal, forbidding him to come at all to Cambridge to see her. Figuratively, Stocky tore his hair in amazement. Literally, he seemed stolid enough.

The telegram had been handed to him in the down-town office he had taken; he had become such a busy man of affairs in these few weeks that telegrams delivered at his hotel were always sent to his office and vice versa. So that Crystal's bomb was fired into a meeting of grave gentlemen concerning themselves with the apportionment of stock. Stocky read it with unmoved countenance. His brown face had acquired, in the course of his relations with capitalists and promoters, something of Uncle Ephraim's power of concealment. So that no one knew that he was nonplused and outraged by the communication he had received.

Mr. Gordon Ramsay and he left the

meeting together, as they were apt to do in these days. They stepped into Stocky's automobile—he had set up that means of locomotion as soon as he had perceived that the company was to be a "go," in spite of the annoyance of red tape and green bills that must be endured before its final incorporation. He had always liked machinery, and he had recently learned to like open spaces. His new toy on the boulevards of Westchester County was not equal to Lady Gay streaming across the plain, but it was better than anything else available in the big city.

"I'll drop you at home," said Stocky, who was running his own car.

"Drop out with me. Dora has some people in to-day to meet Lady Gwendolin Mertha—the titled chicken-raiser, you know—or is it pigs?"

Stocky laughed. "I thought that was to-morrow," he said. "Mrs. Ramsay asked me to come meet her to-morrow."

"I think it's to-day," was the husband's response. "Though, to tell the truth, I can't keep track of Dora's pet attractions. She's indefatigable, my wife!"

"I'll stop and confound her by my presence if she has made a mistake."

But it turned out that it was Mr. Ramsay who had made the mistake. The big drawing-rooms were deserted. Stocky's heart sank.

"You win," remarked the host. "Wait a minute and I'll see if I can't care up some one to give us a cup of tea properly. Bootson, is Mrs. Ramsay at home?"

"No, sir," said Bootson. "But Miss Ramsay is in her boudoir, sir."

"Ask her if she will give Mr. Brown and me a cup of tea. I find tea is a habit that grows on one, Brown. I used to laugh at the women, but upon any word, it does give you a harmless lift at the fag-end of the day, braces you to last until dinner. And it hasn't the after-effect of the cocktail which some men take."

"Never cared for cocktails myself," said Stocky, his eyes upon the door. "Like my spirits plain better."

"Miss Ramsay will be down immediately, sir," announced Bootson.

She came, clad in an intimate, marvelous, clinging thing of pale gold-colored crêpe. Her father regarded it a little questioningly.

"It's a perfectly proper tea-gown, papa," she declared, "not a negligée at all, as your looks imply. Although, of course, I realize that Grandma Ramsay never, never wore such a garment in her life and that therefore it must seem altogether impossible to you."

The telephone jangled. Mr. Ramsay was summoned, talked, came back, swallowed some tea with a frown, and declared that he had to go out at once. Stocky felt that he ought to go also, but the golden vision lured him to stay. Besides, her tired eyes pleaded wordlessly with him to remain. They seemed to reproach him with having avoided her all these weeks. He stayed.

When they were alone, he was moved to tell Agatha of Crystal's amazing attitude—he felt that there was safety in talking of Crystal, in bringing her into the group as it were. Agatha listened keenly.

"So!" she said, when he had finished. "So you've been at your old tricks, Mr. Brown. When will you learn to stop flirting? It's no fit pastime for a man of affairs." Her face, for all the mocking smile on the lips, was sad and worn.

"Oh, you don't understand," cried Stocky impatiently. "This girl—flirting! You might as well accuse me of flirting with a straight young birch-tree, or a mountain brook. She's unspoiled nature——"

"Ah!" breathed Agatha sharply. He stared, but she said no more, only watched him out of burning eyes.

"But this foolish East of yours seems to have complicated even her! Look at the nonsensical stuff she writes me." He dived into his pocket and drew out a bundle of letters, Crystal's last effusion among them. Agatha silently read the pages he handed to her. When she came to the references to herself, her look brightened.

"My silly young friend," she began,

returning the sheets to him, "you have evidently been praising me."

"Not at all. I merely stated a few truths about you."

"Ah, you don't know any truths about me! But no matter. At any rate, your wild brook of the mountains—your *belle sauvage*—is angry. She's jealous, dear simpleton! Now, don't get cross and look as though you were thinking what a horrid, waspish mind I have. I haven't. But I am a woman—and I know what it is to be jealous. The girl is jealous of your praise of me. That's all. Go over to Cambridge, invade the bower of the two old ladies, seize your nymph in barbarian style by the shoulders, and say to her: 'The Agatha of whom you were so foolishly jealous is less than nothing to me, except as she may help you to a holiday; she is promised to another man, she is not the sort of woman I admire, and——'"

"Agatha!" cried Stocky. He leaned toward her. She was always intoxicating to his senses, and now the tormented mockery of her voice pierced his heart as well.

"Go tell her that," cried Agatha, "and see how the sunshine will play upon the mountain brook's face!"

"I can tell her no lies," whispered Stocky. "She makes me speak the truth—she is so simple and honest. And so if I said anything it must be"—he leaned closer to her, drawn by the magic of her beauty, by the command of her glances—"it must be——"

"Agatha, what do you think?" broke in the high voice of Mrs. Ramsay, drawing open the hall portières. "Oh, how do you do, Mr. Brown? Agatha, have you any tea left? I started to tell you that that queer electric genius with the fuzzy hair has a wife, so of course we can't ask him. Why, Mr. Brown, you're not going?"

Stocky was conscious of the incoherence of what he mumbled in reply. But he had to get out of the room, out of the surcharged air. He sprang into his machine and tore up the Avenue at a law-breaking speed, out through the Park, up the broad Seventh Avenue roadway, out and out into the country,

now growing sweet and luminously green with spring. His brain was in a turmoil. He had not imagined it was in him so nearly to be false to what he regarded as simple honor. Yet how sad her eyes were. She was not happy in that engagement. Who was Winterleigh that he should win this peerless creature? Why should not Stocky tell the ugly story of that half-crazed girl on the ranch, and save Agatha from the union which he was beginning to believe she hated? But was the story true or a delusion of a disordered mind?

On and on and on, through the quiet evening, until air and motion and the comparative stillness of the countryside calmed his nerves and restored him to himself. He turned to the right from among the low Pocantico hills and swerved down toward the shore of the Sound. There would be a moon tonight; he would eat his dinner at one of the Sound restaurants, and go leisurely home. And he would go over to Cambridge to-morrow and see the hitherto sane and sincere Crystal. That was all nonsense, of course, about her being jealous; only Agatha's own uncertain, wavering emotions, only perhaps, a lurking remnant of tenderness for him, made her interpret the other girl's vagaries so falsely. Anyway, he would go and see Crystal and be strengthened by her. He thought with deep yearning and affection of her, of her loneliness, of the sorrow that had embittered her life without, somehow, embittering her nature. Yes, he would go and see Crystal. And as soon as might be, he would leave this great city of noise and crowds, of feverish ambitions and emotions, and would get back to the wide spaces and the free air of the hills.

Soothed by these determinations, he ate his dinner in a road-house on the shore. Then having smoked a leisurely cigar or two, watching his few fellow diners with the interest that he was still young enough to feel, he went out to the hotel garage. And at that minute a runabout puffed into the yard towing another machine in the tonneau

of which sat two oversprightly young women. One of the men in the runabout jumped out, and Stocky recognized a friend of Duncan's and a casual acquaintance of his own, a man named Howitzer.

"Thank the kind Lord you're here, Brown," called out Howitzer, addressing him. "We came to utter and complete grief and smash about five miles out, and this gentleman"—indicating the other man in the runabout—"happened along and was good enough to drag us this far. But he was bound in the opposite direction, and he can act as pilot no longer. After we've had a snack here—are you alone?" he suddenly broke off.

"Yes, quite."

"Well, then, after we've had a snack here, perhaps you wouldn't mind taking us back to town?"

Stocky had never cared for Howitzer. But it was not in his nature to refuse a simple service. He did not suggest the excellence of the late trains from the shore villages, but said that of course he'd be very happy to be of use. Whereupon, the conveyer of the wreck having taken his leave, Stocky was introduced to Miss Hazel Lemoine and Miss Pinky Montmorenci and to the very complete and thoroughgoing disability of Howitzer's machine.

"I'll leave it here overnight," growled Howitzer, "and send down my chauffeur in the morning. I was a blamed fool to come out without him—he's a Frenchman and a James-dandy. But—you understand—servants talk, and madame wouldn't altogether approve of the young ladies. They're trying to get positions on the stage, both of them; have appeared in one or two musical shows. I'm doing what I can to get them places—I know a few managers. And, upon my word, they seemed so cooped up in their boarding-house when I dropped in this afternoon to hear their reports of some interviews yesterday that I couldn't resist offering them a little outing. It was really pathetic the way they jumped at the chance." Thus Howitzer in long and labored explanation of his companions

and his plight. Stocky merely nodded and grunted and developed a great interest in his cigar.

"Hang it!" muttered Howitzer, moving toward the dining-room in which he had already established his charges. "He'll get us home, anyway—and the train is out of the question with the madame spending the day with her sister at Cos Cob."

It seemed to Stocky, awaiting his passengers on a porch overlooking the moonlit waters of the Sound, that Miss Lemoine and Miss Montmorenci were prodigiously heavy eaters. When after a long time the dinner-party appeared he feared that they had been prodigiously heavy drinkers as well. He was annoyed. As he drove the car ahead through the blossom-scented spring night, the silly, ignorant, vulgar chatter from the tonneau grated on him. He thought of the mountain cabin and Crystal before the fire; he thought of Agatha's haughtily held fair head and air of disdain for all that was low and ugly. Pretty companions had he, Stocky Brown, friend of two such women, succeeded in picking up!

Perhaps in the vehemence of his desire to get rid of his embarrassing party Stocky drove with unaccustomed recklessness. Perhaps it was just pure fate. Mr. Howitzer always thought of it as Nemesis, and the young ladies as unexpected advertising. At any rate, when they were just reentering the upper end of the city, they collided with another madly driven car, and in a second they were lying in a heap in a ditch.

When Stocky, moving gingerly, found that he himself was whole, his first alarm was for the young ladies. Their shrill and uninterrupted cries reassured him as to their lives; from the other automobile's party—a group of drunken friends of the chauffeur who had taken it out of the garage—came a fluent stream of profanity. Only Howitzer's voice seemed silent in the general mêlée. Two policemen came running from the encircling darkness, another machine stopped to proffer service, a trolley-car making its late,

passengerless way out to the bridge, paused while the conductor ran to the scene of the accident.

The chauffeur's party was making charges against Stocky. For a minute or two he was indifferent to them, his mind solely upon Howitzer who lay with his face white and his eyes closed in the moonlight. One of the policemen discovered that his heart was beating, however, and Stocky breathed a sigh of relief, and gave his attention to the complaints of the other side. There were a few minutes of mutual recrimination, and then the whole combined party found itself bound for the precinct station in one of the machines which had paused to investigate and which the police had commandeered. All but Howitzer, that is, who was borne to the nearest drug-store, and an ambulance summoned.

At the station they all found themselves—except the young ladies—held for a later appearance. The chauffeur, considerably sobered by this, went sheepishly, under guard, to the telephone, to acquaint his employer with the situation. Stocky, fuming, followed. He had no real estate in New York to offer as security. He must follow the chauffeur's example and call for help. At the moment he could think of no one but Duncan. Duncan was to blame for this, anyway, introducing his bounder acquaintances to a man!

Duncan had just come into his rooms, as it happened, and was engaged in a telephonic talk with his cousin Agatha who had phoned him up earlier in the evening and had left the request that he call her up. Upon their cousinly intercourse concerning a dog which Agatha desired as an adjunct to the place at Tuxedo, the police telephone intruded. There was a triangular mix-up for a few seconds. Then Agatha discreetly retired from the talk, though not, as after developments showed, from the wire.

Of course, Duncan was as friendly and serviceable as any kindly disposed young New Yorker is naturally to a man with copper-mines up his sleeve. Of course, he would come at once and

get his friend out of his plight; and hadn't they better be prepared to arrange some soothing tale for Mrs. Howitzer's ears?

Meantime, the reporter of the *Morning Clarion*, yawning over the dearth of interesting news until the automobilists had come in, talked with the candidates for stage honors. He was an astute young man, and a young man with a memory. Brown? The young ladies thought he must be a rich young man from the West from what poor Mr. Howitzer had said at dinner, did they? Oh, he was one who had been quite a hero in the Cuban war and who had left the city in disgrace after a gambling-raid? Ah, yes, he remembered. Thanks so much. He made a few notes until Duncan and the irate owner of the other machine arrived.

When Stocky awoke the next morning he found himself once more the hero of a front page. He read the story attentively. It was marvelous to him how, by the most delicate manipulation of a few facts, the young reporter had framed a tale so incontrovertible and so false. Miss Lemoine and Miss Montmorenci, well known on Broadway, had been his guests, had they? They and Mr. Howitzer, who was stunned but not seriously injured, by his accident? He himself was beginning to be quite a figure in the sporting life of the city, was he? He would be remembered as one of those taken two years ago in the famous raid of Winterleigh, then assistant district attorney, at Jarmead's—the raid from which Jarmead had never recovered.

Well, the difference between now and the time of the affair two years ago was that now he couldn't be sent away for punishment. Uncle Ephraim might frown and puff and look portentous, but Uncle Ephraim wanted some part in the great Agatha mine property and would not carry his sternness far. And so with all the rest—except, perhaps, Agatha and Crystal. He could see Agatha's scorn of him on her curling red lip, in her disdainful eye, in her stately distance. He could see Crystal's wide-eyed amazement and

disgust, her silent withdrawal. It served him right, the whole thing, for not having told Howitzer to go to the devil in the first place!

He opened his mail. There was a letter in Agatha's clear handwriting. He scanned it, half hating to open it. The postmark caught his eye. It had been mailed at midnight. "Just when that garbage-collector was gathering that information from those women," said Stocky to himself, politely referring to the reporter and his informants of the night before. Finally he tore it open and read:

Can such things be? And is he merely human, after all? A little bird has been at my window to-night and he has told me naughty things! When will you come and be-forgiven?

"Well, I'll be hanged," said Stocky solemnly. "How the devil could she know this—this mess—before it was well in the station-house? Did Duncan tell her before he came to me? Precious busy, I call him. When will I come and be forgiven? What does she mean? Does she believe—what does she believe? Anyway, I'm going down to tell her the truth. She can take it or let it alone, but she's got at least to hear that I wasn't skylarking around with a pair of pseudo-chorus girls before I'd left her an hour!"

The day with its interruptions of reporters, of machinists, of detectives and what not wore on. Five o'clock found him again at the Ramsays'. He had no sooner entered than the buzz from the drawing-rooms warned him that Mrs. Ramsay's tea for the titled poultry-farmer was in full blast. He hesitated, looked about to beat a retreat, but Bootson stayed him.

"Miss Agatha, sir, is in her boudoir. She's not feeling well enough to be down-stairs. But she is receiving a few friends there. She told me to tell you." Bootson looked discreetly able to believe in the "few friends." Stocky made his way up the stairs, past the library on the front of the second floor, up another flight to Agatha's own bower, overlooking the Square, with its fountain, its young green leaves, its

children and nurses. But there were candle-light and lamplight in her room, and at his entrance, she pulled the curtains across the view of the Square. She was a little pale, and her eyes had delicate blue shadows under them. He had never been in this room before, and it, with its flowers and hangings and cushions, either slightly smothered him, or the sight of her.

She shook her head at him slowly, gracefully, mockingly, intimately.

"Oh, oh, Mr. John Randolph Brown!" she scoffed, but in the most melting tones. Stocky stood at attention. He did not know what this foreboded. He felt indefinitely hurt by it.

"And I have always believed you such a pillar of ice," she taunted him, still in that honey-sweet, alluring voice. "See how stupid I was! You were ice only because my poor attractions"—she spread her hands wide and stood before him in all her grace and beauty—"my poor attractions did not tempt you."

The perfume from her hair and from the flowers in the room, the daintiness and charm of all her appointments, the blue and gold and white that seemed to hold her as a beautiful case holds a beautiful gem, all smote upon him at the same instant. But with terror, rather than with fascination.

"Wait a minute," he said harshly. "You must not believe that rotten stuff in the paper this morning——"

"Ah, but my little bird? Shall I not believe that?" She stepped nearer and spoke with a mimicry of his own voice. "I'm here in the Hundred and Twenty-sixth Street station with Howitzer and two women—bubble busted. Come and bail me out.' Sha'n't I believe that either?"

He stared at her dully.

"Oh, don't be such an owl," she cried petulantly. "Don't you suppose I like you all the better for having a spice of the devil in you—if you care anything about my liking you?" she ended provocatively. She knew well enough how nearly she had broken down his barriers the afternoon before. Surely now—now that she knew him not impec-

cable, now that he knew her not a severe goddess—

"You don't understand," said Stocky thickly. "You—give me credit I don't deserve. It was all an accident. I can explain it to you."

"So you're still a good boy! Dear me! And I haven't found a fellow victim of amiable human weaknesses in you yet!" Her voice had grown bitter. She looked at him with eyes bright with mortification. Then she laughed, a high-pitched, reckless laugh.

"Pray don't be so serious," she begged. "There's no tragedy at all. I'm not the victim of an unreciprocated ardor for you, Mr. John Randolph Brown." He made a gesture of repudiation. "To tell you the truth, I am only an experimenter. I have—and very unwomanly you will doubtless think it of me!—a wager with Edward as to the possibility of tempting you from your icy attitude. Having once—well, I thought I should win the wager. However, I've lost. Edward will laugh at me. He knew your perfections better than I. We are to be married in June. He will want you to usher for him. But he will laugh at my failure!"

Stocky strode a step forward. He caught her in his arms and held her close and hard against him. He kissed her face, her hair, with hard, brutal kisses.

"There!" he cried, when he let her go, flushed, disheveled, breathless. "He will not laugh at you now, perhaps." And he was gone before she could frame a word.

XVIII.

Two days later the news that the date had been set for the nuptials of Miss Agatha Ramsay, daughter, etc., etc., heiress, etc., etc., daring, original, etc., etc., was duly promulgated through the public prints. The list of bridesmaids was given out and the list of ushers. A discreet biography of the expectant groom also appeared. His remarkable successes in law and finance were chronicled. The fact that Miss

Ramsay's trousseau was to be exclusively of American manufacture was sounded praisefully. Stocky read the laudatory, fulsome paragraphs with loathing and disgust. He hated himself for what he had done, for it had not even been a surrender to his own passion, to her charm; it had been the mark of his contempt for her and her lures; it had been his insulting seal of his recognition of her promiscuity. But he felt himself more degraded by that insult to her than he had degraded her.

One thing had befallen him which, but for the sick taste of the boudoir episode upon his palate, might have invigorated him. He had received a letter from Crystal:

Some one has sent me a silly newspaper, with a garbled story of you in it. I am so glad you were not hurt. As for the other stuff, you know that I don't believe a word of what it implies. You see, I have this advantage over your New York friends—I have lived with you on the hills and I know how impossible that sort of thing would be to you.

That was like her—fine and straight and outspoken. But how little she knew him! She would probably not believe that he could have insulted a woman as he had insulted Agatha Ramsay. How little she knew him! After all, carousing with those poor, painted make-believe chorus girls would have been a white thing compared to degrading the woman to whom he had given his boy's first love and ardor. Oh, he was a brute and a beast! Thank Heaven, the company was to be incorporated soon and he could get away from this hateful town!

Then came a note from Agatha:

If you wish to offer me any reparation for your insult, you will do what Edward asks.

That was all. What was Edward going to ask? Was he going to call him out to a duel?

On the contrary, Edward had no more gory purpose in view than to invite him to be best man at the wedding.

"You're Agatha's friend as well as mine," said the lawyer, looking at him out of sleepy-lidded eyes. "Neither of

us has a brother—my brother-over-the-left would scarcely do for Saint Bartholomew's, eh? So do it if you can, old man. Agatha's as keen on it as I am."

What perversion of natural feeling should make her so, Stocky wondered. But the command of her note was laid upon him. He found himself telling Winterleigh how proud and pleased he would be. Winterleigh repeated his words to Agatha that evening.

"I suppose you'll like to hear that it will be torture to him," he observed lazily. "Women are Apaches for torture. He must have been harder hit than I have imagined lately. Well, Heaven bless him! I like to see him writhe a bit, myself—in payment for the time I imagined you had a penchant for his eyes or his shoulders or something." Agatha laughed.

"Silly!" she said endearingly.

So the busy days went on, until the end of May was upon them. Miss Ramsay, who liked the public attention riveted upon herself without competitors, had selected the first day of June for her bridal. "It'll take the wind out of all later sails," she thought contentedly. She hated what she was doing in one way; she did not love the man she was going to marry, and the fascination he had had for her at first was evaporated into thin air. But she was in for it; and he was bound to be a figure of importance in the community; that was something; and he wouldn't expect impossible flights of goodness from her—he wouldn't want them. Oh, it was an ignoble match enough, but it would answer. Or, if it didn't—she shrugged her shoulders. Marriage was easily evaded nowadays.

There had been a final rehearsal on the second evening before the ceremony, and after it a bridesmaid-and-usher jollification at the Washington Square house. Agatha would not be married in the country. "I want the mob, the police, and all," she said. Finally it was all over and the party had separated.

In her big room with the Louis Seize boudoir opening out of it, she

accepted the ministrations of her maid with perfunctory gratitude. Afterward the maid told the other servants that never had she seen a young lady approach her own wedding with so little excitement. "It wasn't just that she wasn't excited," observed the abigail. "She wasn't even interested like."

The maid, hovering around the bride-to-be with the attentions which brides-to-be always command from all womankind, finally drew up the coverlets and turned out the light and tip-toed off. Agatha lay still in the darkness, and felt upon her once more the strange, baleful eyes of the man who was to be her husband in—in less than thirty-six hours now! She was oppressed by sudden fear of him. He was so sure of her—so sure of himself, of his power over her. Perhaps, after all, he would not be so easy to keep in subjugation or to throw off, as she had imagined.

In the darkness, the sense of dread kept growing upon her. She tried for a long time to sleep, but she could not. She turned on the light upon her reading-stand, and picked up her bedside book—it was a morbid novel of the drug-habit. She closed it again with a shudder of repulsion, for she saw herself experimenting some day with the new excitement of narcotics, becoming their slave, and finally living the life and dying the death of the woman in that dreadful tale! She caught up another—but it was a volume of decadent French verse. She thought she saw the eyes of her future husband smiling mockingly upon her and taunting her with her intellectual tastes and refuges. And while the taunting smile held her, there came a gradual change over the face in her vision. The smile vanished, the eyes were frozen, a snarl of hatred and terror distorted the cruel lips. She screamed and pulled violently at the bell next her bed.

Her maid came running to her—the bell communicated at the head of her bed with the servants' quarters. She found the girl cowering and sobbing hysterically.

"Laws me, Miss Agatha!" she ex-

claimed. "What's the matter? Is there any one moving below, in the library? Or have you been havin' a bad dream, poor dear?"

"That's it, that's it," sobbed Agatha. "Oh, such a frightful dream, Blossom. Blossom, you must stay here the rest of the night. You must sleep here."

And it was on the serving-woman's kindly shoulder and to the monotonous soothing of her "There, there, poor lamb, there, there, poor lamb," that the bride-elect finally fell to sleep.

XIX.

"Dora!" Mr. Ramsay stood at his wife's bedside in the morning light and shook her by the shoulder. Mrs. Ramsay, her face swathed in bands designed to prevent the sagging of muscles, sleepily opened her eyes.

"What's the matter, Gordon? What do you want at this unearthly hour? What time is it?" She turned fretfully to the clock on the stand. "This is outrageous," she declared with vigor. "It's not seven, and you know how late I got to bed and——"

"Oh, for God's sake, stop that!" interrupted her spouse in a shaking voice. "And wake up, Dora, and try to be a woman."

Something in his manner made her spring up. She faced him affrightedly.

"What is it? Is Agatha——"

"Agatha's all right—yet. But there's terrible news in store for her. Are you ready?"

"Go on."

"Winterleigh has been murdered."

She sat perfectly still for a second, her face in its grotesque bands growing whiter than the pillows behind her.

"How do you know?" she asked finally, in a wooden voice.

"His man has just called me on the telephone to tell me."

"It—how was—some one who owed him a grudge? Some convict?"

"No—a woman."

"A woman?"

"That is all Grimes is sure of. I have telephoned for Doctor Hamil to go with me. When I get there, I will

see what is to be done and will send out—my God, Dora! How will Agatha take it?"

They looked at each other with frightened eyes.

"I will let her sleep as long as possible—she will need all her strength to meet the shock. Go now, Gordon. I shall go down into Agatha's den and be there when she wakes. Call me on the telephone the instant you know anything more. Gordon!"

He had started toward the door, nodding. He turned back at her call.

"You're sure it was a woman? Not a man—not any man Agatha had treated badly? Letty told me—the other week—some time—about young Brown's having been here for an hour in her boudoir, and going out without stopping for my tea—and he was never here again until last night. You are sure—he's so reckless—gambler—those women——"

"Don't let your imagination run away with you, Dora." Ramsay patted his wife's shoulder. "Grimes was certain it was a woman. Evidently there was no attempt at concealment."

"Well—oh, it's unutterable, anyway. But this is not quite what that would be."

Agatha awoke at eleven. Through the sapphire hangings at her door she beheld her mother in her dressing-room.

"Ah, mama, dearest! You are here to greet the lovely bride! But it's not until to-morrow, is it? Or have I slept through? I feel rested enough for anything. Why, mother!" For her mother had entered and was standing by her bed—her mother, unmassaged, and unmarceled, with drawn, gray face and stricken eyes. "What is it?" the girl whispered.

"You will be brave, my darling?"

"Yes, yes—only hurry."

"Edward—oh, my dear, how can I?"

"Mother, go on. Don't try me like this. What is the matter with Edward?"

For three hours the poor mother had been framing words and sentences to break the force of the blow to her

daughter. But now all that she could say was:

"Edward was murdered last night."

Agatha's rosy face blanched. "Last night? Last night?" she cried. "Oh, then it was that I saw—it was that I saw!"

She stared at her mother out of unseeing eyes of terror, and kept repeating the words. By and by she explained the "dream" she had had.

"But now do you tell me," she added, with a sort of awful composure, "how it happened."

"It seems, from papers which she left, that it was a woman who—who thought she had a claim against him. Your father says that if half which the papers declare is true—the documents she left—he was—oh, my darling, I say it to help you—he was a monster! If they are true! But they are probably lies."

"I don't think so," said Agatha meditatively. "He was a perfectly unscrupulous man—and very able. Who was the woman?"

"A Westerner, it seems, from that God-forsaken place where he came from. But, my darling, do not ask any more questions. See, here is your breakfast on a tray. Can you eat anything, dear? Try, for all our sakes."

It was one of the most amazing and, on the whole, one of the most dreadful experiences of Mrs. Ramsay's life that her daughter did try and did succeed in eating her breakfast that morning when her lover, the man who was to have been her husband in another day, lay dead with a bullet in his head, a mile away from them.

XX.

The newspapers of the next few days—with which, it appeared later, Grimes had held pecuniary conversation before telephoning Mr. Ramsay—told very completely, with proofs and clever surmises, the story of what had happened. Winterleigh had gone home after the rehearsal-supper to his rooms in the Omaha. Apparently the woman had obtained entrance to them during his

absence. The hall-boy had a dim recollection of having admitted a small, queer-looking woman to the building early in the evening. No elevator-boy recalled having carried her up to Winterleigh's apartment on the eighth floor. So she had apparently watched her chance and slipped up the stairway when the elevators were in transit. How she gained admission to the apartment was a mystery for some time, until the superintendent recognized her picture as the likeness of a woman who had looked for an apartment three days before and who had maneuvered to be left alone with his key-ring for a few minutes while he went down to attend to some urgent matter in the engine-room. It so happened that he never missed his skeleton key until after the murder, when he put two and two together for the benefit of the detectives.

She had, apparently, waited in the rooms until Winterleigh had come in and had gone to bed. She must have hidden in a clothes-closet in the private hall, for Grimes, who had waited up for his employer, had seen no sign of her. Then, when Winterleigh had gone to bed, but not to sleep, for the cigar he had evidently been smoking was not half burned out, she had crept in upon him. His was not the face of a man done to death while he slept peacefully, but of a man who, with loathing and hatred, has seen death approach him. Well, she had crept in, and had shot him in the temple before he could leap from his bed, although he had evidently started up. His body lay sideways where it had fallen back from a half-erect position.

Then, turning her back upon him, she had carefully and with a sort of dreadful humor in her exactness laid out the documents that would prove her connection with the case. There were the newspaper clippings foretelling his wedding. There were old, stray paragraphs concerning his legal successes East and West. There were letters to her dated a dozen years before—to his "dear girl," his "sweetheart," his "bride," his "wife"! There were letters to others—to Seth Adams

and to Mrs. Adams—commanding this and that to be done; by and by there were letters without beginning or end, typewritten on a blue paper which Stocky, when he saw the awful exhibits, A, B, C, and the rest, recognized at last—the paper of Winterleigh's office. Whoever wrote those letters was the wonderful leader of a gang of desperadoes, planning their outrages for them, sharing their booty, promising help when necessary to his deputy. That deputy was one man; the others were to believe that the schemes had their origin in the deputy's brain. No one was to know of the master mind, weaving crimes, providing for the remotest contingencies of crime, in an airy New York office. The murderess wrote in the one document she left in her own handwriting:

But all the time I was there. Years and years ago he had loved me and made me his slave as he made all his slave that he wanted. He had ruined me and left me. First to Denver he went—and used from there to promise to return to me. Then to Chicago, and said I should soon join him. But I was always listening, and I robbed my brother-in-law's pockets and learned things that way. Then he went to New York. He sent a boy out to us that he wanted to have killed, but the boy did a good turn to my brother-in-law's mother, and so my brother-in-law would not kill him. Then I tried to, hoping to win my husband back again by services—for he was my husband. But they frightened me with stories of what he would do to me. Then he wanted money and wrote to us to rob the Fiero mine superintendent, and they did—the gang. And then the boy he wanted killed said he was going to marry a girl in New York; so I told the sheriff of the robbery and all the crimes and how he planned them. But no one believed that. I led the posse to the place in the mountains he himself had shown me, where we had camped together, he and I, when he first married me—for he did marry me; and where he had shown me the one secret way up the old, narrow ravine to the top of the cliff. But he got them all off with sharp lawyers, and I was very weary and so far away I could do no more. My sister and my brother-in-law took me with them to the coast. I could never get away from their spying. So I knew he had told them never to let me get loose of them. So I went out in a boat, first hiding my clothes and some money in a place I knew. And I fixed the boat to upset with my hat and coat to float upon the water. So that my sister and brother-in-law thought

me drowned and did not look for me on land. And I put on the boy's clothes—I am small and thin and light in my motions like a boy—and I made my way from them. And the papers I bought said he was going to be married. And one, a foolish thing about "How Bachelors Keep House," told me where he lived and how. So I got here and resumed my woman's clothes a few days ago. Now I know how his apartment lies and where he sleeps. I know when he is to be married, but he shall not be. For I shall kill him, and then I shall go down myself indeed. I do not want to live after he is dead.

BARBARA MERRITT

And, after the two weeks' wonder and scandal, this came to be accepted as the true history of the life and death of Edward Winterleigh. Some matter-of-fact persons never believed any of it except that the great lawyer died at the hands of an insane woman whose body was afterward recovered in the North River. Some imaginative persons, on the other hand, made Winterleigh organizer of all the crimes committed East and West for a decade before. Agatha Ramsay went abroad as soon as possible that her scattered nerves might be restored at the German springs. She eventually married a French gentleman of high title and ancient lineage whose temperament promised her all the excitement she could conveniently manage, and at last reports she was more of a Parisienne than any native.

XX.

There was a golden light all over the plain on which Mimosa stood. The dusty stretch was shot through and through with color from the setting sun. A girl, slim, erect, slight, rode a pony back and forth beside the station-platform. Her eyes beneath the sharply defined black eyebrows were clear pools of deep light; her olive skin had red in it, her lips were red. Health and some joyful expectation lit up her glowing countenance. Now and then she stopped to pat a horse picketed at one end of the station.

When the train drew in, she soothed her restive pony with gentle strokes. A man came running around the end

of the station—Stocky, his tan lost by ten months in the East, but his eyes eager and bright.

"Crystal!" he cried. "Oh, Crystal!" He caught her hand and all words failed him.

"Stocky! Dear, dear friend!" she said. He reared his head.

"If that's all you can make it, Crystal, I won't come any farther," he said. "You can't be friends with me. It's all or nothing now. I wrote you that—you knew."

She looked at him tenderly from the superior height of her horse's back.

"I think," she said honestly and slowly, "that that was the reason I made you wait so long to see me, and then

made you see me here. I wanted you to take time, Stocky, and be sure."

"I'm sure. Are you?"

She smiled with divine tenderness on him, and nodded.

"I've been sure ever since your box of laurels came that time. Till then I'd never thought about you that way. Then—then I did—and I've known since then, Stocky!"

He received the benediction of her deep eyes bent on him as though it were a stream of healing and cleansing as well as of joy. Then he mounted the horse she had brought down for him, and together they rode along the dusty street of the town to where the green of the parsonage showed.



DEPTH TO WHICH DIVERS CAN DESCEND

THE depth to which a diver can descend would appear to be limited by his power for withstanding the adverse influences acting upon him while carrying on his duties under water. Apparently a descent of thirty fathoms—180 feet—of water marks the limit of safety for even the few divers who possess the necessary physical fitness in combination with a disregard for danger beyond the average. Records in deep-sea diving have to be accepted with the proverbial grain of salt. We are told that a diver has reached thirty-three fathoms and a half while engaged in salvage operations recently on the west coast of South America; and, yet again, another diver working on the same wreck is reported to have brought up three bars of copper from a depth of forty fathoms at the expense of his life. An expert who has superintended a large number of diving operations has found that very few men, whatever their build, are capable of combating the severe strain which is brought to bear upon their physical energies for a few minutes at a depth of twenty or thirty fathoms. Many of his divers dared not venture below ten fathoms. Of 352 divers employed at greater depths, thirty were seriously injured, and the result was fatal in ten instances.



LITERARY NAMES OF AMERICAN TOWNS

THE town of Kipling has just blossomed out in Canada, where there is only one town of Shakespeare. The nearest the United States comes to having a Shakespeare on the map is the town of Shake, in Oregon. For some inscrutable reason the great English dramatist was never popular among the new town-namers in North America, although we have in the United States thirty Miltons, three Goldsmiths, four Dickenses, thirty odd Scotts, twenty Byrons, two Tennysons, and one Thackeray. Notwithstanding all the Browning clubs, there isn't a Browning on the American map.

A Case of Professionalism

By Ralph D. Paine

Author of "The Stroke-oar," "The Praying Skipper," Etc.

Those who have read "The Stroke-oar"—we hope every one has—are sure to be interested in the character of Hector Alonzo McGrath. Hector is, in a sense, the hero of this splendid tale of college athletics. The story is full of action and human interest and not without a touch of human pathos, although Hector by an act of self-sacrifice saves the day at the last.



FAST freight had been derailed with such disastrous results that a dozen cars of merchandise were heaped and strewn piecemeal across both lines of track. The early afternoon express bound to Cape May had been halted by this chaotic barricade, and its passengers poured forth in an irritable swarm to bombard the wrecking-crews with asinine questions. The red-faced, sweating foreman sputtered poor consolation from the deck of a derrick-car:

"Ye can see wid your own two eyes that 'tis lucky we'll be if we get this mess cleared away by sunset. Now run off and I've me be. Me timper is frazzled entirely."

In the face of this forceful admonition to mind his own business a slender, well-groomed young man of cheerful demeanor sauntered nearer the irate foreman and offered him a most excellent cigar, with the mild query:

"Are we really stuck here for four or five hours? I don't mean to be a nuisance, but there is a girl in Cape May and she takes it for granted that I never arrive anywhere on time. She won't blame the railroad for this. She will say it was all my carelessness. I

want to rush a telegram through to her and try to square myself."

The foreman grinned, mopped his face with his shirt-sleeve, and quite amiably returned:

"If the ties ain't tore up too bad we may get your train through in three hours or so, me boy. Ye can wire the gurril on the word of Peter O'Hara that for once ye are unavoidably detained."

"Thank you kindly, Mr. O'Hara. I will wander up the nearest road and chat with the natives if this wilderness happens to be populated," replied Hector Alonzo McGrath. "My fellow sufferers back yonder make me tired. They ought to be grateful that their own train isn't smeared all over the New Jersey landscape, instead of cursing themselves black in the face over what can't be helped."

With this philosophic finale young Mr. McGrath of Yale betook himself to the grade-crossing beyond the wreck and turned into the country highway which made a white streak through the sparse and sandy woodland. The prospect offered little promise of natural beauty or wayside diversion, but the explorer footed it resolutely, hoping to discover some sign of farm or hamlet to awaken his idle interest. The mid-summer heat was tempered by a lively

wind which blew from the eastward with the breath of ocean in its salty tang, and before long this casual wayfarer discerned a strip of marsh and the cool glint of a small tidewater river. Presently the road turned toward a ramshackle wooden bridge, and just beyond it McGrath saw a low-roofed, weather-worn farmhouse. He was hot and thirsty and desirous of resting in the shade of the ancient trees which guarded the dooryard of this humble dwelling.

"It is the old homestead, right out of a book," observed young McGrath to himself. "Ten to one the moss-covered bucket hangs in the well. And it wouldn't surprise me one bit to see a blue-jeans quartet file out of the barnyard, take the center of the stage, and sing close harmony. They may take me for a sewing-machine agent and throw me into the creek, but I am going to make a social call all the same."

He crossed the bridge, turned into the dooryard among beds of prim, old-fashioned flowers, and waited on the gray stone step for some response to his pull at the jingling bell-wire. In his last year at Yale, as yet unacquainted with the sensation of earning a dollar by dint of his own exertions, this Hector Alonzo McGrath pursued his light-hearted and whimsical way with small knowledge of what the struggle for existence meant to the world beyond the campus gates. To one older and wiser than he, this small gray cottage, its tottering outbuildings, its patched and unpainted barns, and its rudely fenced fields would have been eloquent of years of unremitting toil to hold poverty at arm's length. To the young collegian they were agreeably picturesque and nothing more.

Presently there appeared in the hall a woman of middle age, ruddy of cheek, brisk of footfall, with the kindest, friendliest eyes which smiled a brave cheerfulness. Her hair was grayer than it ought to have been and there were more wrinkles about those honest, cordial eyes than was meet for her years, as if life on this wide-swept, meager farm had been something other

than merely picturesque. As she smilingly replied to Hector's courteous petition she smoothed imaginary wrinkles from an immaculate white apron which obviously had been snatched up and donned in haste.

"Why, of course you can have all the water you want to drink, young man. The well is in the side yard. I'll bring you a pitcher and glass, or I can show you the way to the pump."

Hector hastily voiced his preference for the pump, and his hostess led him along a graveled path and through a densely covered grape-arbor fashioned of bits of spars which must have washed ashore from the sea toward which the wandering river led past the doorway. The random caller drank his fill from the gourd that hung beside the pump-handle, and was so evidently loath to depart that she suggested:

"Why don't you sit down in the grape-arbor and get cooled off? It must be dreadful hot and dusty walkin'. I hear there was a smash-up on the railroad. Did you come past it?"

"I belong in the Cape May express that is waiting for the railroad to be put together again. It is much nicer to be here than blistering over there on the track," replied the bold invader. "Please don't let me bother you. You can leave me here with perfect safety, Mrs.—er—I do not know your name. Mine is McGrath."

"Mrs. Harriet Trent, and I am glad to meet you," said she as they sought the shade of the curtaining grapevines: "It is selfish for me to think of my own disappointments, and I ought to be thankful nobody was killed, but I had my heart set on goin' over to Oakville this afternoon and I understand there's no trains runnin'."

"How far is it to Oakville?" asked Hector with genuine sympathy, for the smiling face of Mrs. Trent could not dissemble the note of wistful regret in her voice.

"It's only a mile by train and two miles by horse or afoot," she explained. "My son went over this morning and he counts on seeing me there by three o'clock. He is in the athletic games

at the county-fair grounds, and it's the first time he has tried to run and jump against first-rate, grown-up athletes. I feel pretty sure that Arthur can win without me, but we sort of looked forward to this for some time. And I am just too tired to walk that far."

Hector Alonzo McGrath smote his knee and declared with exuberant enthusiasm:

"Athletic games! Why, Mrs. Trent, I dote on 'em, all kinds, at any time. I am a student at Yale, and I have tried to make every team in the college for three years straight without the slightest success. But I am just as keen about it as ever. Please tell me some more about your son."

Mrs. Harriet Trent was beaming as she gazed into the ingenuous countenance of this attractive stranger, and replied with a zest to match his own:

"Why, I'd give most anything to have Arthur meet you, Mr. McGrath. So you are really in Yale college. He would just love to talk to you. He is going to enter Princeton college this fall. Now, what do you think of that? Of course you are surprised, but it is as true as I'm sittin' here. He seldom gets a chance to talk to college students like you. When he was a little boy I was dreadfully afraid he would want to go to sea like his father that was lost in his own schooner six years ago next November. But he took to books instead, got it straight from his grandfather Trent, and has talked about goin' away to college ever since he was twelve years old. It ain't been easy, but he went to the Oakville high school off and on, and studied all summers long, and now he's really and truly passed his examinations for Princeton college."

She paused, nervously twisted a corner of the white apron, and resumed with an abashed and slightly troubled air:

"I just run on till I'm clean out of breath, don't I? And me a perfect stranger to you! You must think I'm odd. But folks around here don't understand what my son is drivin' at."

"I love to hear you talk, Mrs. Trent,"

seriously returned Hector. "Can't I persuade this fine son of yours to go to Yale? Ye want that kind of men at New Haven."

"I wouldn't say anything against Yale college for worlds," she protested, "but Arthur won't listen to anything but Princeton. It was a young Princeton professor duck-shootin' down here five years ago that put the bee in Arthur's bonnet, and he's never thought of any other place since."

"But how will you get along without him? Can you run the farm alone? Have you any other children?"

"Nobody but Arthur," and her brave eyes were sad. "He will be home summers and vacations to look after things and I'll make out somehow. I don't worry about that. He wouldn't go away if he thought I was goin' to suffer. He is goin' to work his way through college, and if he prospers and finds jobs enough, maybe I can go to Princeton and stay a while in the winters. We don't borrow trouble nor cross bridges till we come to 'em."

"Great Scott, we have forgotten all about those athletic games," exclaimed Hector, glancing at his watch. "Of course you are going over to Oakville right now. Can't we charter a horse and buggy? I have plenty of time to go with you. I want to see your son win a few medals."

"Our old horse went lame last week and is turned out to pasture, and that ends it, though I thank you for your interest in me, Mr. McGrath. You certainly are good-hearted and well-meanin'."

Hector pricked up his ears at the sound of wheels rattling across the bridge. Darting madly through the gate, he was in time to hail a carrot-topped youth driving a grocer's wagon piled high with berry-crates. To Hector's importunities the red-headed one made this crushing rejoinder:

"Of course I can't give you a lift. Can't you see I'm goin' straight away from Oakville as fast as I can make this old plug travel? You must be loony. Gid-dap."

"A five-dollar bill looks sensible,

doesn't it?" calmly commented the other. "Dump those crates in the yard here, and right about face. I need your wagon."

The peppery lad began to toss his cargo overboard without another word, and despite her vehement protests at such unheard-of extravagance. Mrs. Harriett Trent was fairly kidnaped by her energetic guest and whisked toward Oakville in a cloud of dust. Hector banished the boy to the back of the wagon and handled reins and whip with such skill that the journey was made at breakneck speed. Mrs. Trent clung to his arm and maintained a courageous composure while he learned more and more from her confiding revelations how unconsciously heroic, how pregnant with loving sacrifices, and how fired with noble ambition had been the long struggle toward the goal of the chief desire of this mother and her son. Together they had wrought a miracle of zeal and faith and works in wresting success from adversity, nor could Hector McGrath find room in his heart for doubt that Arthur Trent would somehow fight his way through four years of college.

When the grocer's chariot clattered into the straggling outskirts of Oakville the joyful noise of a villainous brass band welled from the fenced enclosure of the county-fair grounds. The gates were plastered with posters whose rampant type proclaimed:

GRAND ATHLETIC CARNIVAL,
UNDER THE MANAGEMENT OF THE
OAKVILLE A. A.
FOURTEEN CHAMPIONSHIP
EVENTS.
GOLD AND SILVER MEDALS
AND
\$50 IN PRIZES.

"If this young Trent expects to get into college athletics he must not be competing for money," thought Hector with a start of dismay. "It will queer him as sure as a shot, with all the fussy rules against professionalism, even if he wins only a ten-cent piece. Doesn't he know any better? If he doesn't, I

ought to warn him. It's the only decent thing to do. Whoa, Dobbin."

But Hector did not wish to give the dotting mother cause for worry, and it would be foolish of him to raise a false alarm. Of course Arthur Trent must know enough to avoid spoiling his chances of an athletic career at Princeton by steering clear of competing for cash prizes at this picayune country meeting. It was the comfortable habit of Hector McGrath to let well enough alone and to meet disagreeable issues by deftly stepping around them. So he temporized, kept his reflections to himself, and escorted Mrs. Trent to a seat in the flimsy grand stand overlooking the trotting-track and baseball-field on which runners, jumpers, and weight-tossers were strenuously disporting themselves. The scene was like a caricature of the pretentious college-athletic meetings at which Hector was wont to cheer himself purple of countenance, but he had the true sporting spirit which finds its enjoyment in the contest itself and he was prepared to be thrilled regardless of environment or record-breaking finishes.

Near the "take-off" for the running broad jump stood a group of awkward, sunburned young rustics clad in motley, home-made athletic costumes. Somewhat apart from them, making ready for a trial leap, was a youth of different mold. There was no trace of the muscle-bound clumsiness of the farmer or the slovenly carriage of the factory-hand in his graceful, confident manner of handling himself. Trimly and compactly built, he appeared to possess both strength and fleetness in an uncommon degree, the combination of qualities seen in the successful half-back or end-rush of the college football-field. As he launched into his stride and gathered himself for the jump, Hector said aloud:

"He certainly makes those clothoppers look outclassed. By Jove, he is a corker."

"That is my son Arthur," cried Mrs. Trent, her voice a trifle unsteady with excitement. "Oh, do you think he can win?"

"He can't help it. He is a natural-born athlete," stoutly affirmed Hector. "Why, oh, why didn't a Yale professor have sense enough to shoot ducks down here and bag that boy of yours when he was young!"

"I am sure he will come over and see us as soon as he can, Mr. McGrath. I don't believe he knows I'm here."

A few minutes later a pompous village worthy bellowed huskily through a megaphone that A. Trent had won the broad jump, "distance twenty-two feet nine inches, breaking the record of the Oakville Athletic Association by a hull foot." The victor waved a joyous greeting to his elated mother and was about to run across the intervening track when the perspiring gentleman of the megaphone roared:

"All out for the quarter-mile run. Take your places at the start."

Mrs. Trent clasped her hands and breathlessly confided to Hector:

"This is the race Arthur wants to win most of all. The first prize is ten dollars and he needs just that much more to put in the savings-bank to pay his bill for tuition before he can get into college. It has been worryin' him lately and he won't have me deny myself any more than he can help. Do you suppose he can run faster than those big, hearty men, some of 'em years older than Arthur? There must be a dozen of 'em."

"I'm willing to bet ten dollars on him against the field," was Hector's prompt reply. "But he ought not to be running for money in this race. I ought to go over and talk to him. No, it's too late. They are lined up on the mark. Oh, I have no business to let him do it. He doesn't know any better. I—I——"

"What in the world is the matter with you?" anxiously asked the mother. "Are you afraid he can't win the race? Is he doing anything he hadn't ought to?"

The starter's pistol cracked and the bunch of runners shot away from the quarter-pole of the trotting-track. It was too late to intervene, and inwardly lamenting his procrastination and lack

of decision Hector could only stammer:

"I—I was only thinking I might give him some useful advice for the race. I know a lot about this kind of sport, Mrs. Trent. Of course he is going to win. Look how easily he runs. He is going to set the pace all the way. He would make the best of them hustle on a good track."

At the end of the first hundred yards Arthur Trent's rivals were pounding heavily in his wake and when half the distance had been covered they were strung out in a hopeless procession. Sprinting as though this were no more than a hundred-yard dash, the swift-footed youth tore down the home-stretch of the track, head up, striding powerfully, a winner in such easy fashion that he seemed to be running for his own diversion.

"He could have stopped to pick daisies or turn handsprings down the middle of the track and won as he pleased," declared Hector McGrath, who was dancing a jig and pounding the railing with his costly straw hat.

"He don't expect to have any time for athletic games in college and I don't know but what I'm sorry, after seein' him do so fine," murmured Mrs. Trent, with a sigh of relief that the intolerable suspense was ended.

Arthur Trent wheeled from the track and vaulting the barrier of the grand stand grasped his mother's outstretched hands. Her eyes were shining as she told him:

"It was just splendid. I am so proud of you. How many more races did you win before I come?"

"The shof-put, and the hurdles, mother," laughed the panting lad. "Four championships, and I have earned twenty dollars in all. Just think of that. And ten dollars of it belongs to you for a birthday present. It was lots of fun. I am going to make a try at the last event, too. That's the mile run. It's great to have you here."

As he surveyed the manly, resolute face of young Trent, Hector could not bring himself to say a belated word about "professionalism" in college

sport. It was too late to mend matters and he moodily looked at his watch. He must hurry away if he expected to rejoin the Cape May express. Offering his hand to Arthur Trent, he said sincerely:

"Glad to have a chance to congratulate you. It was great work. Your mother will explain how I happen to be here. I understand you are headed for Princeton, but if ever I can be of any use to you, just write to H. A. McGrath at Yale. There is a chartered grocery wagon at the gate and your mother is to ride home in it. I'll pick up a rig from some of the folks here and hustle to my train. Good-by, Mrs. Trent. I must get through to Cape May to-night. This is a great boy of yours, and he's the kind you deserve to have."

II.

After a blithesome, care-free summer, Hector Alonzo McGrath returned to New Haven to enjoy the dignified station and manifold responsibilities of a Yale senior. He found the football-squad hard at work under the leadership of Jim Stearns, and promptly offered himself as a candidate for any position from guard to quarter-back. With more candor than tact the outspoken captain informed him:

"You have tried for the eleven for three years, Hector, and you never came as close to it as fifteenth substitute. I don't want the unpleasant job of firing you from the squad, so be a good boy and roll hoops or play marbles until the chess season opens. It is a cinch you can make the intercollegiate chess-team this year if you don't overtrain or sprain your thinker."

"I had a notion you might want a good plunging half-back, Jim, but never mind," was Hector's meek retort. "You will regret it when your team is whipped. Yale has never appreciated me, but I won't be sore on you. You are a part of the system. You can't help it."

"Go chase yourself or I shall turn you over my knee and proceed to wallop you," declared the football captain as

he called his men from the training-house to the field for the opening lineup of the season. Hector McGrath found an outlet for his single-minded devotion in watching the daily practise, cheering the good plays, and riding back to the campus with the tired and muddy athletes. As the season wore on he continued to be a loyal "heeler" whom the worst weather could not dismay. He trotted out to the field with unflagging interest, elated when the work of the first eleven was encouraging, depressed and volubly worried when the "scrub" was able to score a touch-down or kick a field-goal. In fact he seemed to carry a heavier burden of responsibility upon his rather frail shoulders than did his friend and classmate, Jim Stearns, the captain.

The preliminary or practise-games played against college teams of no great prowess were satisfactory to the Yale coaches. The eleven was strong, fast, and slowly developing unity of action as the weeks of October slipped past and the shadow of the great contest with Princeton began to fall athwart the Yale field. So great was the confidence of Hector McGrath in the winning abilities of Jim Stearns' brawny, hard-driven young men that he began to overhaul his cash resources with a view to backing his faith with more substantial proofs. He had no intention of risking utter bankruptcy in the event of defeat, however, until an ill-fated impulse moved him to visit New York early in November as a relaxation from the strain of lectures and recitations, although his instructors might have disagreed with his opinion that he stood in need of any recuperation of the kind.

In the crowded lobby of a pretentious Fifth Avenue hotel Hector encountered one Aspinwall Smythe, a young man affecting loud garments and a manner of speech even louder. Hector had made his acquaintance in preparatory school after which the "disgusting Smythe person," as he called him, had somehow passed the barriers of Princeton and there maintained a precarious foothold through

freshman year, and then the campus knew him no more. Notwithstanding the brevity of his career as an undergraduate and his compulsory retirement from the shades of Old Nassau, Aspinwall Smythe was a blatantly aggressive partizan of Princeton, unusually eruptive on the eve of the football-match with Yale, when he flourished large bundles of his inherited wealth under the noses of such Yale men as he chanced to meet in public places and offered to "bet them to a standstill." Hector McGrath was accustomed to say of this pet aversion of his:

"Aspinwall Smythe is the only real grievance I have against Princeton. It is no disgrace to be beaten by her football-teams and when we whip her she takes it like a good sport. But she can't live Aspinwall Smythe down in a thousand years."

At this chance encounter in New York Mr. Smythe was flushed with wine and he fell upon Hector McGrath with a roar of triumph, proclaiming so that grill-roof, café and lobby might hear his war-cry:

"A Yale man and he's my meat! I thought I had driven them all into their holes. Hello, you little paper sport. Come down to the big city to bet three dollars on your team? I've been looking for Yale money for a week, and you Elis are too sandless to bet on your own eleven. Whoop, I've bluffed you all."

McGrath eyed this fat and florid nuisance with huge disfavor and curtly responded:

"There is no call to make a howling ass of yourself, Smythe. If you want to bet on Princeton, you won't have to look any further. Now put up or shut up."

With a foolish chuckle Aspinwall Smythe dragged from his trousers pocket a corpulent roll of bills and announced:

"Now it is your turn to shut up and run back to New Haven, you Yale shrimp. Take it in a lump at even money or leave it alone. I don't bother with pikers."

"I'll take it," snapped Hector, his

checks aflame. "Now count it, and than I will write a check to cover it. We'll let the hotel safe hold the stakes."

Mr. Smythe appeared somewhat subdued, but he dropped into a convenient chair and began to count his money with fumbling fingers. Hector McGrath stood watching him in a most distressful frame of mind. His bank-account was at low ebb, and he had drawn upon the paternal allowance three months in advance. That square-jawed father of his who had made his fortune in the steel mills of Pittsburg had a businesslike method of dealing, even in family matters, and Hector knew that any further appeals for succor would go unheeded until the day on which the next remittance fell due. It seemed as if Aspinwall Smythe would never finish pawing over that harrowingly plethoric wad of bills, but at length he grunted between puffs of his cigar:

"Twelve hundred dollars to a cent. Now aren't you sorry you met me, eh?"

"Oh, pshaw, you are dealing in mere chicken-feed. I thought you were really plunging on your team," observed Hector with desperate bravado. "All right. Wait until I get a blank check from the desk."

When this rash young man from Yale boarded the midnight train to New Haven he was in no mood for slumber. For some time he sat in a corner of the smoking-compartment of a sleeper busy with pencil and paper. At length he said to himself with furrowed brow:

"I am shy just about five hundred of that fool bet, and I must beat that check to the bank between now and the Princeton game. But I couldn't let that Smythe swine walk all over me. I don't think I had better try to touch any of the fellows. They may want to put their spare cash on Jim Stearns' team. The sooner I get at the horrible situation and look it sternly in the eye, the better for little Hector's nerves."

Losing no time next morning in taking the war-path, he first sought a retiring gentleman of sleek aspect,

Abraham Hamburger by name, whose charitable vocation it was to respond to undergraduate signals of distress by lending them cash on personal notes for a modest recompense of ten per cent. a month. Mr. Hamburger was cordial but unhappy as he declared with gestures more eloquent than his words:

"My money is all out, so help me, Mr. McGrath. I cannot give you four or five hundred dollars, no, not before December. But I can give you two hundred. It will help some, maybe."

Hector signed a note without reading it, stuffed the two hundred in his pocket, and fled in search of another accommodating gentleman known as Einstein. This campus philanthropist purchased second-hand garments, and had relieved many a case of acute financial distress by his ready presence. Finding Mr. Einstein loafing in the shade of an elm convenient to the dormitories of the Old Brick Row, Hector grasped him by the collar and swiftly propelled him toward his rooms in Lawrence Hall.

"I have more clothes than I need, Moses. They are apt to make me proud and undemocratic," vouchsafed Hector as they climbed the stairs. "Come up and look 'em over."

Without further parley the owner of the superfluous raiment bolted into his rooms and began to toss overcoats, evening clothes, riding-breeches and tweeds on divan, window-seat and chairs, chanting meanwhile:

"Every one of them as good as new and made by McTavish, the swellest tailor on Fifth Avenue. Here, let me pick out a pile for you to cast your vulture's eye over. One suit, two suits, three suits, a fur-lined coat, another good suit, a dinner-coat, a lovely outfit of swallow-tails. Oh, pshaw, make me an offer for the whole confounded lot."

Moses was fairly licking his chops. He had long ago noted the surpassing cut and fit of the clothing worn by Hector McGrath, and now this superb wardrobe was fairly hurled at his head. Too excited to haggle, he threw prudence to the winds and shouted:

"One hundred and fifty dollars. It is a big price, an awful price, but I will give it for the lot."

"Nothing doing, you robber," bel-lowed Hector. "But I will be a sport and make you a counter-proposition. I will match coins with you, double or quits. If *I* win you give me three hundred for my clothes. If *you* win you get them for nothing."

It was a torturing decision for Moses Einstein to have to make, but his blood contained a sufficient number of red corpuscles to thrill to this sporting challenge and after a moment of painful hesitation he faltered, quite out of breath:

"Double or quits, Mr. McGrath. Here is a couple of half-dollars. I will match you, best two out of three. I am a dead-game Yale sport."

The undergraduate was inwardly aquake, but he preserved a semblance of composure while the lips of the agitated Moses Einstein moved as if in prayer. The two coins rang on the table and Hector won the first round. Then the skittish goddess of chance allotted a victory to Moses. Honors were even, and there was tense silence as the twain slowly disclosed the coins that lay beneath their hands for the third match.

"I matched you and you owe me three hundred, Mose," whooped Hector. "Now you can run and get an express wagon for the most luxurious wardrobe in college. Me for the simple life! Clothes are a cursed nuisance."

Moses wrung his hands and uplifted his voice in heart-broken lamentation, but his sorrow failed to carry conviction. He had made an excellent bargain after all, in spite of the adverse result of his bold hazard. After his departure Hector surveyed the looted closets with emotions of dismay and consternation, but the three hundred dollars wrenched from Mr. Einstein had power to soothe, and he straight-way hastened to the bank and made good the amount of the check that he had so recklessly drawn to the order of Aspinwall Smythe. The football-

team was holding its practise behind locked gates and Hector had to way-lay Jim Stearns on the campus with the question which seethed uppermost in his mind:

"Just between us, Jim, are we all right? Are the men in good shape and do the coaches seem cheerful? I have plunged the limit, bet all my cash, sold all my clothes, and stand to starve and freeze to death before Christmas if we lose the Princeton game."

"If you are such an ass as all that, you ought to be put in a padded cell, Hector," was the unexpectedly disquieting reply. "We are going to have to play almighty hard to win. Our team is fit enough, but Princeton is going to turn out a great eleven this year. You are a little fool to be betting yourself blind two weeks before the game."

"Well, I hope you won't forget what it means to Hector," feebly returned the other. "If you lose, you will have to buy me a meal-ticket, Jim. In my low state of mind you are about as cheerful as a sore thumb."

III.

The day after Hector McGrath's desperate game of high finance with Messrs. Hamburger and Einstein he discovered on the sporting page of a New York newspaper certain tidings which caused him to blink in a dazed kind of fashion, rub his head, and ejaculate: "Now what do you think of that? Wouldn't it jar your underpinnings?"

The head-line of the surprising intelligence smote his mental processes in this wise:

PRINCETON MAKES A FOOTBALL FIND.

ARTHUR TRENT, A PHENOMENAL HALF-
BACK, PICKED TO PLAY FOR
OLD NASSAU.

Hector read with wondering interest the following despatch:

PRINCETON, Nov. 10th.

A sensational piece of news leaked from the secret football practise to-day. Hurlbert, right half-back, has been shifted to the scrub and his place taken by a strapping young

countryman from South Jersey, Arthur Trent, who will play in the Yale game. He is working his way through college and refused to try for the team early in the season on the ground that he could not afford the time. The captain and coaches finally brought sufficient pressure to bear and popular opinion fairly forced Trent into football-togs. He is a man of wonderfully fine physique, very fast on his feet, and tremendously strong. Although without previous knowledge of football, he has shown such astonishing aptitude for the game that he is considered the phenomenon of the Princeton season.

Hector flung the newspaper aside. Until now his absorption in the activities of the campus had shoved into the background of his memory that episode of midsummer when he had enjoyed the hospitality and the endearing companionship of the mother of Arthur Trent, when they had driven together from the gray, crumbling farmhouse to the county-fair grounds of Oakville. His first impulse was to rush in search of Jim Stearns and tell him that this Arthur Trent had made a technical "professional" of himself by competing for cash prizes, and urge that a protest be lodged against his playing with the Princeton team. This was an effective and summary way of crippling the enemy's strength. But as loyal as he was to Yale, as fond as he was of Jim Stearns, and as much he had personally at stake, Hector hesitated, and the longer he delayed the more his indecision grew. He vividly recalled the mother's pride in her splendid son, her devotion and her sacrifices, and her intimate part in the struggle to send him to college. It was true that he had won a paltry sum in athletic competition, but did he know that he was placing a bar sinister athwart his career at Princeton? Hector became more and more perplexed as to what he ought to do. Had Arthur Trent confessed his offense to the Princeton coaches and were they overlooking it as worthy of extenuation? And, anyhow, were the rules devised to safeguard the purity and sportsmanlike spirit of college athletics ever intended to punish such a case as this?

One fact was clear. Hector McGrath had it in his power to deprive

Yale's dearest foe of her phenomenal half-back. He had only to instigate a protest and offer himself as an eyewitness of the violation of the code, to carry conviction. What held him back from this step was a most worthy and wholly unselfish emotion. He could not bring himself to see that young Trent had done anything deserving punishment. To drag him into an ugly scandal, to let his name be bandied about in the newspapers as a "professional" unmasked by Yale in the nick of time, why, all this would be unjustified by the facts, and wickedly cruel both to the boy and to his mother. Trent was intrinsically the kind of man any college should be proud to enroll among its students. After wrestling with these reflections for a long time Hector said to himself:

"I don't want to see Jim Stearns whipped and I hate like poison to lose twelve hundred dollars. But even if it means a victory for Princeton to let this Arthur Trent stay on the team, I'll swear I don't see how I can feel square and decent if I get him fired in disgrace, and that is all there is to it. He hasn't been slaving like a nigger all these years to go to college to be an athlete. And his mother isn't living by herself in that tumble-down cottage to make a football hero out of him. They are the real things. I don't care what the college lawmakers say. They didn't want to bar that kind of a man when they made their rules. And if Arthur Trent wants to take that view of it and keep his mouth shut, it is none of my business."

This view of the problem sufficed no more than overnight. After the first recitation hour next day Jim Stearns slapped Hector on the back and remarked:

"You had better apply for that meal-ticket early to avoid the rush. We are up against it harder in the Princeton game than I thought. Did you hear they have taken Hurlbert out and put in an unknown named Trent at right-half? Hurlbert was as good as any man we have behind the line, and this freshman must be a wonder or they

wouldn't put him in as near the end of the season as this. I hoped you saved a good pair of walking-shoes out of the wreck of your wardrobe, Hector. You may have to hoof it home from Mr. Princeton's town."

Hector flushed, stammered, and looked aside. In the face of this speech it seemed the rankest treason to hold his tongue. But the vision of Mrs. Harriet Trent framed in her old-fashioned garden persisted in obtruding itself. Her son could knowingly do nothing dishonorable, and even now Hector could not square it with his sense of right and justice to turn informer. He managed to laugh at the captain's warning and replied with an effort to appear at ease:

"You will have that infant phenomenon tied up in a hard knot in the first five minutes of play, Jim. Wait until they send him at your side of the firing-line. It is a foolish move for Princeton to make at this eleventh hour."

On the following Sunday no fewer than three New York newspapers published photographs of Arthur Trent as the sensation of the Eastern football season. The accompanying paragraphs praised him for modesty and manliness and told how he had been waiting on the table at an eating-club and helping the local expressman in order to earn his college expenses. But the argument which swayed Hector McGrath's sympathies most strongly was the fact that even in these badly reproduced photographs, Arthur Trent had his mother's eyes, kindly, trustful, smiling at the world as if they knew no guile.

"I guess I will have to stand by the old homestead," was Hector's final verdict. "It may cost me twelve hundred good dollars, but the price isn't big enough to make me play Judas to the Trent family."

The great Yale-Princeton game of that year was played without the enthusiastic presence of that ardent "heeler," Hector Alonzo McGrath. His reasons for staying behind in New

Haven while the college, almost to a man, joyously departed to view the conflict were not wholly of a financial nature. To an impatient classmate who implored him to forego his mad resolution to maroon himself on the campus he explained with some heat:

"My nerves won't stand it. I come within an ace of blowing up whenever I see a big game, and this year I have too much at stake to risk it. No, I'm going down to Heublein's and take the bulletins as they come off the wire. There will be time enough between them for me to stow away a bracing drink and I can be quiet and within easy call of an ambulance if Princeton happens to score from the kick-off. Good-by, Bill. Just tell them that you saw me."

At the hour when the vast holiday multitude was filling the slopes of the amphitheater of another city, Hector Alonzo McGrath might have been seen to wander pensively across the New Haven Green and seek a shadowy corner of a deserted café. A stout, grizzled German waiter who had been called "Bismark" by his student patrons for a dozen years waddled to the table and asked with genuine solicitude:

"Is you sick or somet'ings, Mr. McGrath? How it vas dot you stays away from the game?"

"I am not strong enough to tell you, Bismark," wearily quoth the solitary guest. "I want you to bring the bulletins over to my corner as fast as they come in, and read them to me in a low, soothing voice. Don't let yourself get excited no matter what news you get, or you're likely to see me jump on the table and bark. I am on the edge of a collapse from excessive brain-fag. And with every bulletin bring a mug of musty ale."

Bismark bowed, made no comment, and ambled off to ask the cashier about the telegraph service, fearing that any delay in serving the bulletins piping hot might bring on one of the mysterious attacks so darkly hinted at. Hector's nerves were indeed unstrung. Now that it was too late to alter his decision

he was a prey to wretched misgivings lest after all he had chosen the wrong course. He was enough of a man to think of his duty to Yale rather than of his imperiled twelve hundred dollars, yet the latter motive was by no means forgotten and he miserably reflected:

"It is a toss-up whether I am a martyr to my convictions or just seventeen kinds of a blankety-blank fool. And some wise man put it down in a book that he'd rather be a rascal than a fool. Hither, Bismark! You needn't wait for a bulletin to fetch me that first mug of musty ale."

The waiter trotted in with a slip of paper in his fist and the mug of ale on a tray, anxiously inquiring:

"Vat vill you have first, Mr. McGrath? Here is the trink und here is the openin' message from the game."

"Read it, Bismark. For Heaven's sake, read it quick."

"All right, Mr. McGrath. It says like this:

"Yale kicks off and Trent rushes ball back to midfield from Princeton twenty-yard line. Princeton loses ball on fumble. Stearns makes ten yards for Yale through left tackle on first down. Time called. Yale man hurt.

Dot is all, Mr. McGrath."

"Just like one of these college-athletic stories with Gibson pictures, isn't it?" was Hector's comment. "The brilliant freshman who makes the team at the last minute sails in and wins the game. I don't like the way this Trent person starts off. Fact and fiction seem to be agreeing too blamed well."

But through several successive bulletins, as sonorously proclaimed by Bismark, the name of Trent no longer came to harrow the feelings of the gloomy listener. Yale was having the better of it, and the first half ended with the Blue leading by one touch-down to nothing.

"Maybe he isn't going to be a story-book hero after all," sighed Hector. "Say, Bismark, would you rather be right than be President?"

"I haf sometimes thought I vas right till I asked my wife, but I haf never been President," very seriously an-

swered the waiter. "Vat is it on your mind so troublesome, Mr. McGrath, eh?"

"Well, I think I will put my problem up to you, Bismark. Do you think it pays to hew to the line, let the chips fall where they may?" In other words, you have lived a good many years and in your time you have had a bird's-eye view of several thousand young men at their meat and drink. Is virtue its own reward and is a conscience a nuisance of an organ, like your appendix, or not?"

"If you mean vat I t'ink you t'ink you mean, Mr. McGrath, I vill tell you dot ven a man can look himself square in his own eye he vill be happy. Dere is no room for arguments. I know und I have seen. Now vill I feed you anudder bulletin und a musty?"

"Let them come, Bismark. I feel stronger. You have spoken a wise word in due season. Ah, the cashier is waving a bunch of tidings at us. Hop over and fetch it."

It were painful to protract the agony of the second half in which Princeton scored a touch-down, then another, and held this margin of victory until the last moments of the game. Then the doleful waiter read in a voice weighted with woe:

"Stearns breaks through und has a clear field for Princeton's goal thirty yards away. He is run down und tackled by Trent three yards from Princeton's goal-line. Time called. Game ends, Princeton 10, Yale 5."

"And Jim might have tied the score if he hadn't been tackled by Arthur Trent," gasped Hector. "The freshman didn't win the game, and the joke is on the story-writers. But he kept Yale from breaking even and he cost me twelve hundred. And he broke Jim Stearns' heart. Well, Bismark, let's hear your tabloid philosophy again. How did you put it? What is the way to be happy when you're broke and sore on life in general?"

"Ven a man can look himself square in his own eye he vill be happy, Mr. McGrath. I vas sorry you feels so bad. But some day you vill be older den you vas at this minute und you vill forget football-games und such trifles."

"Good-by, Bismark; I am going to get some fresh air," said Hector cordially, and with slightly brightening countenance. "I am much obliged to you for your company. The returns are all in and the smoke is beginning to clear, and I honestly believe that I can look myself square in my own eye."



THE WAY COMPLIMENTS ARE RETURNED

SOME one was having a party at a small village. There was a town girl, who was visiting in the community, attending the party.

All the boys wanted a hurry-up introduction; and one in particular was very anxious. But the others managed to keep him out until she promised the other boys that she would let this particular gentleman down hard.

Accordingly he was introduced, and the conversation ran pleasantly. Slowly and skilfully she drew him out, and he tendered her his choicest compliments, especially on looks.

The other boys had nudged up close as possible to hear him drop.

"Thank you so much," she replied, "but I'm really sorry I can't say the same about you." Then she leaned back with the air of a conqueror, while the boys nudged each other and winked.

"W'y," began the young man, blushing but little, "I guess you could by doing as I did—tell a lie about it."

Shadow Reef

By Louis Joseph Vance

Author of "O'Rourke, the Wanderer," "The Private War," Etc.

In this story, which is one of the best he has written, Mr. Vance takes his readers to the South Seas on a trail of adventure and mystery. The story is brilliant in its quality of surprising the reader at every turn, its accurate character-drawing, its thrilling excitement

CHAPTER I.

THE SKIRTS OF HAPCHANCE.



IF it be but mouthing a truism to say, by way of preface to my story, that Fortune sometimes wears strange faces, I can but plead in extenuation my own recent experience; a review of which brings the platitude so insistently to mind that I am impressed I should get no further did I fail to relieve my conscience of the observation.

Fortune, I repeat, wears strange faces. It must not be held against me, as evidence of lack of intelligence, that I failed to recognize her in the guise of Secretan.

To get the flavor of the matter, you must have in mind a picture of myself, with all the grim attendant circumstance of my then state of life.

You must figure to yourself, first of all, a rain-swept corner on Kearney Street toward the end of a wretched rowdy day; gutters running yellow torrents; cobbles scoured clean and shining; belated cabs and cable-cars racketing past with dreary, tear-blurred windows; slender and crystal-line lances of rain gleaming like silver in the gloom, as the wind flung them slantingly athwart the aureoles of spluttering arcs; sidewalks swept and gar-

nished, all San Francisco that owned a home snugly entrenched within doors; and myself loitering disconsolate beneath the wooden awning of a corner grocery, an object—I could clearly recognize, though I affected to ignore it—of interest to a blue-coated policeman across the way, himself too cozy in the side door of a saloon not to be reluctant to venture forth and shoo suspicious-looking characters off the highway.

For I am sensible that I cut a suspicious figure as I loitered there, the collar of my too small coat turned up to mask the absence of linen, my trousers—so disreputable as to justify the prim evasiveness that once characterized the articles as "unmentionables"—six inches short of my ankles, sodden shoes gaping, a pulpy derby jammed down over my eyes, nothing in my pockets—not even bottoms—but my hands.

How long I had lingered in that spot—ten, twenty or thirty minutes—I cannot say. I did not, in fact, much care, having fallen into a heavy listless mood that colored my outlook upon life unpleasantly. I remember favoring the staring policeman with a lowering scowl that was in itself an invitation to step across and run me in; I would not have resisted. My whole being was absorbed in desire for cooked meat, drinks, and warm clothing. And there was no place in all that city,

famed for its hospitality, whither I might turn in search of any one of these—save the police-station.

Presently I became aware that I was become the object of another's regard, aside from that of the arm of the law; the proprietor of the corner grocery, a rotund Teutonic figure in soiled white apron, had stepped to his door. I conceived that he credited me with dark designs upon the few empty barrels and boxes which cluttered the sidewalk before his windows; and smiled, I suppose, grimly at the thought; a smile which he evidently chose to take as personal.

"Fy don' you choost mofe on?" he demanded with some unnecessary heat.

"What for?" I countered pleasantly. "I'm not doing you any harm, am I?"

"You choost mofe on!" he repeated with rising choler. "Unt uf you don'd, I'll choost call der boliceman!"

"Call him and be damned," I returned listlessly.

"Py golly!" sputtered the German. "I'll show you! *Hi, Mister Policemans!*" he bawled.

Out of the corner of my eye I saw the guardian of the peace shake himself and advance unwillingly from his shelter; a gust of wind and rain assailed him on the instant, and he came pelting across, head down, truncheon brandished, coat-tails flying.

And upon that—mark the inconsistency of human nature—I, who a moment ago had contemplated without disfavor the prospect of spending the night in a dry warm cell, instantly began to hedge and formulate excuses. Never before, low as the tide of my fortunes had run for months past, had I come into the custody of the law; and I suppose that no man submits to arrest, the first time, without repugnance.

"Here now!" blustered the policeman. "You move on, an' no shennanigan!"

"What for?" I flashed defiantly. "The streets are free, I believe."

"None 'r that, now! Move on, I say! What business you got hangin' around here——"

"Dot's w'at I want to know," interjected the groceryman.

"I presume," I replied, "that a man is at liberty to wait here and keep an appointment with a friend, if he wishes."

"Aw, cut it out! Move on!"

I saw the hand of authority stretched forth to grasp my collar, and recoiled instinctively. It was at this juncture that masquerading Fortune caught me by the arm and whirled me into an adventure, as mad, I conceive, as ever man knew.

A hand, indeed, was laid forcibly upon my person; but it was not the policeman's, nor did it touch my collar; in brief, it was inserted into my arm, and I found myself carried along a pace or two before I became actually aware of the intervention of a fourth person. To which enlightenment a voice ringing in my ear contributed materially.

"Come along, my dear fellow," it insisted, with a hearty and sincere intonation. "Good Lord! what a day! Will you *ever* forgive me for having kept you waiting so long!"

I hung back, vainly endeavoring to free my arm; and so was swung about face to face with, and got a good impression of the newcomer, of whose approach, to that moment, I had been entirely unconscious.

He proved an odd and pleasing little person; stoutish; with a round, lively face full-colored as a boy's, and unshaven; eyes gray and remarkable for a peculiar effect of size, out of all proportion to the rest of his features, caused by the thick and saucerlike glasses he wore. For the rest, he was uncommonly well dressed and groomed to be abroad afoot in such weather; his raincoat, worn carelessly unbuttoned, flapped back in the breeze, disclosing a dark and well-cut morning coat, a sober black-and-white plaid waistcoat, and gray-striped trousers, turned up above patent-leather shoes. Altogether the effect was something professional; you would have guessed him, first of all, a physician; next, possibly, a lawyer with a steady and com-

fortable practise; lastly, an unfrocked priest. And you would have been wrong in each instance.

"Come, come!" he iterated cheerfully. "There's nothing here to hold you, surely! And my cursed unpunctuality bids fair to make us late for dinner."

In a moment I had yielded to the persuading pressure of the arm within mine, and entered into the insane spirit of the misadventure—the case of mistaken identity that I believed it to be. This I was the more willing to do, since it afforded me the opportunity to escape and to confound my late persecutors.

With a malicious farewell glance over my shoulder, which surprised both pleasingly open-eyed and agape, I fell into step with my importunate if new-found acquaintance, and swaggered along under his umbrella, down-at-heel and out-at-elbow as I was, like, I dare say, a hungry wolf accepting the wayside companionship of a bleating lamb.

And a veritable lamb this impetuous person appeared to be; continually he assailed my ears with an uninterrupted blating. His voice was clear and a trifle high, his enunciation rapid and so markedly precise as to seem affected; and he prattled on, like a machine gone mad, guilelessly, artlessly, about everything and nothing of consequence.

Within ten yards he was smitten by an inspiration. This when he had—unconsciously, I fancied—revealed his name; it was some exclamation about the foulness of the weather: "As sure as my name is Dudley Secretan!" he affirmed with a great show of earnestness. And the next moment:

"Bless my soul, how thoughtless I am! Of course we must have a cab." He flung his round little person impetuously in front of me and waved both hands and the umbrella frantically at a passing hansom.

I remarked the cabby on his box eying our incongruous company with an open smile as he wheeled in at the curb; and looking back, beheld the policeman browbeating the German in return for his labor lost. And I think it

was this latter sight that decided me to continue to humor the little man's self-imposed deception—at least, until we were around a corner.

Meanwhile he was overwhelming me with apologies for what he insisted was his unpardonable lack of punctuality; and meanwhile assigned me a name—"Hemstreet."

"My dear Hemstreet!" he chirped. "You have no idea how sorry I am. But, indeed, I could not help it; a matter of business intervened; and unfortunately my youthful training was lamentably deficient, in that it never succeeded in instilling into me the precepts of punctuality. I have that quarrel with my early education; of late, as you know, my ways of life have not been such as would conduce to awaken me to time's value to men of affairs, like yourself."

And he went on, without a break, from the curb to cab, and for as long as we inhabited that vehicle. Once only did he turn his attention from me, and then it was on what I may call the forward deck of the hansom, straining on tiptoe to see the cabby's face over the roof and give him the address. I do not recall the latter clearly, after this lapse of time; but I remember being impressed that it was in a respectable neighborhood, if not Nob Hill itself.

Vainly I attempted to interrupt, with explanation and apology to awaken him to his misunderstanding and stem the tide of his babbling eloquence. He would have none of it. His voice flowed on forever indomitable, overwhelming my feeble utterances, regardless of my imploring accents, rising clear and penetrating above the swish and clamor of the rain and the rattle of our cab's progress through the streets.

So that at length I surrendered at discretion and sat back, resigned, if wondering where in that small if fleshy person was the storehouse of the fund of inexhaustible energy that animated Mr. Dudley Secretan. He filled in my silence without embarrassment, his monologue covering a vast range of subjects, some of which were astonishingly personal.

He was good enough to reveal himself a bachelor, without kith or kin, a man of leisure and some means. I gathered that he had artistic aspirations and had pursued his studies abroad. Further, that a lawsuit had gone poorly; that he heartily despised the city of his residence; that he had been disappointed in love.

About myself—or whoever he believed me to be—matters were more nebulous, naturally. However, I was christened "Henry"—a name which I have always despised; assured that my welcome would be hearty; that Secretan trusted that I would find leisure to pay him a prolonged visit; that he had received a letter from my sister in Indianapolis, but by circumstances been prevented from answering it.

And so on. In my exhausted and enfeebled state—I had paced the streets for want of a bedroom the previous night, and had not eaten for twenty-four hours—I soon wearied and, closing my eyes and resting my head back against the cushions, let him babble. My ears became heedless and I have no great recollection of what he said during the last ten minutes of the drive; although I doubt not that, in other circumstances, I had found it all entertaining enough.

But at the moment I was content to drowse and ponder a way to break the thread of misapprehension, and escape without incurring the outraged wrath of this genial Mr. Secretan. Little as I knew him, I was already by way of liking him immensely, and was conscious of a pang of regret that circumstances conspired so soon to separate me from his engaging personality.

For his part, he seemed to foresee nothing of the sort; tongue clacking cheerily, he was at peace with himself and the world. The glances that, from time to time, I stole at him through half-lowered lashes, showed his countenance rosily aglow with enjoyment and enthusiasm.

Presently—I awoke to the fact with a regret—the cab drew up in front of a house with brownstone façade, in the middle of a long row of counterparts.

As I had anticipated, the street proved severely respectable and wore an air of conscious position, of comfort and worldly rectitude, that assorted well with the manner of this one of its inhabitants.

The latter, no sooner than the cab apron was thrown back, hopped nimbly out, and had his umbrella up and a settlement effected with the driver before I could get to ground; then, as before, overcame my reluctance with an insistent firm hand upon my arm, piloting me up the brownstone steps.

I yielded, I hardly know why or how, and went with him. The open door above, held wide by a stately butler, diffused a glow of comfortable light upon the rain-streaked darkness without, together with a promise of warmth and comfort—such warmth and comfort amid a gentleman's surroundings as once I had tasted and now longed again to taste in every fiber of my famished, weary being.

And that prospect tempting me, regardless of the probability of imminent discovery the minute the light fell upon my rags and tatters, with the attendant humiliation of contumely and eviction, I yielded and preceded Secretan into his hallway. I think I can see yet the glare of amazed resentment in the butler's eyes, as they lit upon me, and I can still feel the inward shrinking from exposure that instantly assailed me; but—a circumstance I had no chance to forget—the lord and master of the establishment was at my heels, carrying the situation off with a high hand and an outstretched arm.

"Ah, Benson!"—this to the butler—"We are late, you see. No matter; I dare say that dinner will not suffer for fifteen minutes' postponement. Have Mr. Hemstreet's trunks arrived, Benson? No? *Too bad, too bad!* Mr. Hemstreet was caught in the storm, Benson, and thoroughly drenched, as you see. We must try to fit him out for the night, at least. I dare say we can make a passable shift to find him presentable clothing. Show Mr. Hemstreet to his room, Benson, and send

Jones to him with a complete change of clothing. Tell Jones I shall not need him this evening; I can dress myself for once.

"My dear Henry," turning to me, "I trust you will lack for nothing. I am only sorry that our abominable express service deprives you of your wardrobe for the night. But no matter; we are alone—and I believe that Jones has recently purchased a new suit of evening clothes which should fit you approximately. He has never worn them, so you won't mind. I have a thousand things to do; you will excuse my deserting you. We meet in half an hour, at a dinner which, I promise you, cannot be excelled in San Francisco."

In a maze, but conscious that there was something more than curious about this adventure, I followed the butler up the stairs—seeing in every line of his rigid back his temper of disapprobation. Beneath his eye I could have cringed, for I knew that the fellow had seen through my masquerade, and it comforted me not at all to reflect that my part in the affair had been, at worst, merely negative.

Yet—and this perplexed me not a little—it seemed as if Benson avoided my eye. At a door on the upper floor he stood aside, deferential as you please, and when I had passed through shut the door between us.

I found myself in a luxuriously furnished sleeping-apartment, upon whose hearth a fire of anthracite was blazing comfortably behind twinkling brass fender and fire-dogs. Still shivering in my sodden clothes, I made haste to step across and back up to this grateful warmth.

From here my gaze ranged the four walls of the room and penetrated to a farther closet, through whose half-open door I caught a glimpse of a porcelain bathtub and gleaming nickel fittings. A four-poster, canopied, snowy counterpane half hidden by a quilt of eider-down encased in silk, stood against the side wall. Between the windows a shaving-table stood arranged with implements complete. The bureau-top was strewn with bright silver combs

and brushes. Easy and inviting chairs were disposed handily. A gentle and diffused glow of electric light made the room radiant.

The sense of comfort it all distilled was inexpressible. I contemplated it with a swelling heart. All this—and more—had been mine once upon a time.

The arrival of the valet, Jones, disturbed a somber and covetous reverie, plunging me once again into a violent discomfiture. But by no word or look did the man—a perfectly trained servant, or I never knew one—betray his understanding of my position in that house. Apparently it was the most ordinary of occurrences for a palpable impostor to walk in at the front door and make himself at home.

Jones bore with him a steaming glass upon a silver tray, which he offered me. "With Mr. Secretan's compliments, sir," he said, eyelids lowered; "he said as how it would do you good after your wetting, sir."

The craving was strong upon me; against my better judgment I yielded, accepted and drained the dose of hot brandy and water. It did me no good upon my empty stomach. To the contrary it radiated through my system like molten flame, robbing me of every vestige of self-respect and compunction. Up to that moment, I protest, it had been my purpose presently to declare myself; I had been interested in and much engaged by the adventure, and more than a little allured by the thought of food and warmth. But I had determined not to let it proceed further; confessions were already formulating in my mind—as such things will in the minds of those who live by their pen.

But now—I submitted graciously to the attentions of Jones; permitted myself to be undressed, conveyed to a warm bath, wherein I wallowed joyfully if in a daze, stood out, rubbed down, and in a cozy dressing-gown was shaved, stepped without a murmur into not only another man's shoes, but into his socks, his underwear, his shirt and collar and evening clothes as well.

In brief I became another man, whol-

ly. The old life was cast into the dark abyss of yesterdays, sloughed like the skin of a snake. I saw myself vaguely, an unreal semblance of a gentleman, in a pier-glass, and like the old woman in the nursery rhyme cried—to myself—"Oh, this is never I!" Then graciously accepted a handkerchief from Jones' hand, tucked it of old habit into my cuff, and descended the stairs—I believe with outward self-possession.

Secretan was waiting for me on the hearth-rug of what seemed to be half a drawing, half a bachelor's living-room. He, too, had changed to evening clothes, and—I discovered with a start—had screwed a monocle into his chubby face. As I crossed to join him, heavy curtains at one end of the room were drawn aside, disclosing a table set and splendid with glass and plate and napery; and the butler announced dinner.

Constraint held my tongue during the first course; Secretan and I faced one another like guilty things—for while he ate he might not talk; and without the salt of his eternal flow of language the situation went flat and tasteless. But with the coming of the roast, and an accompanying draft of generous Burgundy, I lost discretion altogether. I gabbled. I know not what I said; possibly it would be easier to catalogue the topics upon which I failed to descant.

I remember that there was a mirror on the opposite wall, behind Secretan's chair and inclined at such an angle that it reflected my host's back, the table, and myself. Into this from time to time I must have glanced; for of all that evening—the dinner from the moment my lips were unsealed by the wine is a blank to me—I recall nothing but the presentment of a man at meat, his face flaming red above an expanse of snowy shirt-front, his eyes wild—a man who laughed and chattered and flourished knife and fork and wolfed his food. Shame overwhelms me at the recollection; for that man was myself, drunk, I have heard, as a lord.

If that is so, the nobility are a dissolute and disreputable set.

CHAPTER II.

THE MORNING AFTER.

A douche of cold water over my head brought me suddenly to my senses. I presume I must have been sleeping with my mouth open—a bad habit; in proof of which I got a mouthful of brackish liquid which came near to strangling me. Coughing and spitting, I staggered to my feet, and, the world reeling under me, would have fallen had not a hand, rough but not unkindly, caught my shoulder and steadied me. Whereupon I opened eyes on a new world.

I stood with difficulty upon the after-deck, near the wheel, of a topsail schooner of some hundred and fifty tons. So much I learned later; but its place is here. At the moment of my awakening to realization of this fact, the vessel was poised upon the foaming crest of a gigantic comber; an instant later she reeled in sickening fashion and slid a mile or more—or so it seemed—down toward the bottom of the sea; yet, before it was too late, apparently plucked heart of desperation, steadied herself with an assertive lurch, and began to negotiate the seemingly endless ascent of another wave, whose snowy ridge towered above us in imminent and to me frightful menace.

But nothing came of it. The schooner gained the summit without mishap, poised again in irresolute fashion, and again shot down the incline, leaving behind a smoking wake.

My fears abated by the gallant behavior of the little craft, I turned to get a more intimate knowledge of my surroundings. For as yet my brain swam and I had little actual comprehension of my position.

Overhead hung a sky of pellucid blue, marked with long, windy streamers of cloud as white as the canvas of the schooner, out of which a flood of sunlight fell like a shower of gold. The air was keen and bracing, full of the savor of salt, and a brisk wind twanged the rigging with ungentle fingers, eliciting clear and mournful æolian notes.

Beside me on the deck stood a grinning gentleman, of color with an empty, dripping bucket in his hand; at first I took him for a negro. Beyond him his apparent twin stood at the wheel, swaying gracefully as he shifted the spokes. Before me, a white man of medium height stood with feet wide, braced against the motion of the vessel, blue eyes twinkling out of a good-humored, bronzed countenance, hands thrust carelessly into the pockets of a pea-jacket.

Forward, two more figures lounged in the lee of the cook's galley, smoking.

The man in the pea-jacket spoke. "Ye'll be feelin' betther?" he inquired in a brogue of depth and richness.

The salt water that had roused me so effectually was dripping into my eyes. I dashed the back of my hand across them and faced him with a quivering assumption of defiance.

"Where the devil am I?" I demanded—probably not so coherently as I write it. "What ship's this, and how do I come aboard her?"

"The *Leddy av Quality*," returned the Irishman, curtly enough, I thought, and with a narrowing of the blue eyes; "twelve hours out av 'Frisco—and if ye'll be wantin' further information ye'd betther step below and put thim to the skipper—onless ye're minded to modherate yer tone whin sp'akin' to me."

"I've been shanghaied!" I cried, and damned him.

"Mebbe so; 'tis no affair av mine. I'll have ye know I'm mate of this vessel, and I'll thank ye to kape yer curses to yerself."

I was rapidly regaining my poise by now, and saw that I had made a mistake in rousing the man's temper. Inexplicable as I found my position, it bore scant resemblance to the tales of shanghaied men that I had read. Neither had I been assaulted, my teeth knocked down my throat and my ribs broken, nor was there any apparent disposition to pick a fight with me on the question of "sirring" the ship's officers. I gulped and reconsidered.

"If you're the mate, what am I?" I demanded, less clearly than I intended.

The Irishman, who had turned his shoulder, swung about and looked me up and down. "I'm hanged," he said at length, "if I know what ye are; but what ye are not is plain enough, and that's a gintilman. If ye've any more damns to distribute, kape thim for the skipper; I've said ye'll find him in the cabin."

He jerked a thumb toward the companionway and showed me the breadth of his back. Stupefied, I accepted dismissal with the hint, and staggered unsteadily to the ladder. A moment later I stood below, staring at the face of Mr. Dudley Secretan and trying to piece together the disjointed memories evoked by the sight of it.

As for that gentleman, he was seated at the table, poring over a chart, an open book at his elbow, a fountain pen poised in his fingers. Upon my entrance he looked up, smiled genially, removed the monocle, and swung about in his chair. "I'm glad to see you looking so well," he greeted me precisely in his mincing manner. He added: "Mr. Locke."

"Locke!" I echoed in dismay. "How did you know—?"

"Pray be seated, Mr. Locke." Secretan motioned me to a chair, into which I sank helpless and distraught. For a moment my erstwhile host—I was already beginning to remember—smiled upon me—or rather, beamed.

Then, "You have no notion, I assure you," said he, "how many things you can tell about yourself in a given space of time, my dear fellow. I confess I have rarely listened to so interesting a tale—outside of book-covers—as that which you unfolded at my table yesternight. Interesting," critically, "and moving; I was quite carried out of myself, upon my word. But let me reassure you that your confidence will be rigidly respected, so far as your past history is concerned. I have, however, taken the liberty of giving your true name to the crew; where we are bound it will never be connected with the unfortunate, but not—permit me—dis-

creditable circumstances you have recounted."

He ceased with a little bow and courteously waited for my response. I fear it was long in coming. A glow of sympathetic interest and mild satisfaction suffused his childlike countenance. I sat with drooping jaw, staring, flushing with shame when I remembered the circumstances under which I had made this man my confidant, who twenty-four hours before had been a stranger to me.

At length, "I'm afraid I do not understand," said I slowly. "You meet me in the street, a homeless wanderer; you pretend to recognize in me a friend and take me to your home; you dose me with brandy and wine—a potent mixture to a stomach for long accustomed to little beyond water and bread; you stupefy me with drink and carry me out to sea aboard a vessel, upon a voyage. I do not understand this," I repeated helplessly. "Be good enough to explain, or else turn back and leave me where you found me."

"I should be reluctant to lose you; but if you insist, after hearing my explanation, I shall do so. There is no disposition to detain you aboard the *Lady of Quality* without your consent."

"Then in God's name," I cried, "tell me what this means!"

"Pardon me; I but sought the proper form of words. You have my name; I have never worn another—I mean no offense, my dear sir. I believe myself to be a strangely unpractical creature, full of whims and crankisms."

"I can believe that," I interpolated.

"You have already had a taste of my quality," he assented, unruffled. "Whatever fortune was once mine has been dissipated this way and that—I admit that I hardly know whither it has flown, nor how I managed to speed its flight. The fact remains—as I discovered not a month ago that it is gone—vanished altogether. I ask you to conceive of all my sensations when I found myself, a man of middle age and settled indolence, with an unpardonable distaste for manual labor in any form. What was I to do?"

In spite of his affected ways of speech, his quaint mannerisms, this strange little body was affecting me with a curious magnetism. Indignant and at a loss as I was, I found myself lending his stilted phrases a sympathetic ear. Assured of this by my attitude—for Secretan was shrewd enough, when he chose to exercise that quality—he proceeded, gradually warming to his account.

"Was I to turn clerk and slave over ledgers that I did not understand? Could I go into the streets and earn a livelihood wielding a pick and spade? Should I husband the scant remnant of my resources and attempt to eke out a living by the sale of my pictures—which had long ago demonstrated to my entire satisfaction that they commanded no earthly market? I put the situation to you as a man of experience. Then opportunity came my way—the present opportunity."

He waved a comprehensive hand at the bare, painted walls of the cabin. "I happened one day to pick up a paper; my eye fell upon the column devoted to nautical news and advertisements; I saw a schooner advertised for sale at a moderate figure. The means at my command were ample to purchase the schooner, refit her, and leave me a margin at my bankers which, insignificant as it may have seemed in other days, proves comfortable enough to a small ship-owner.

"I made inquiries; I met the former captain and owner of this vessel. He was retiring to a life of market-gardening, with a competence amassed by trade among the islands of the South Seas. We struck a bargain; I became owner of the *Lady of Quality* and master not only of her fortunes but of my own. There is a living to be picked up by island trading; I ask no more than that and an opportunity to indulge my foibles—to read my favorite books and execute the horrible daubs which you will be asked to pass upon—if you conclude to stay with me."

He was in deadly earnest; I could have laughed in his face for the lovable solemnity of his expression, but

refrained from interruption. He prattled on, unfolding his childish scheme with the gravity of a judge delivering judgment, yet with an elusive and appealing touch, now and again, as though he yearned for approbation.

"I sold my house and its furniture, severed every tie which bound me to my birthplace—they were few enough—and prepared to embark. At the last moment I discovered an appalling defect in my plans." He paused.

"And that was?" I encouraged him.

"Mr. Locke, I have been all my days a lonely man, yet racked by hunger for human companionship. Upon this venture I was sure to find it of a sort; one cannot hold aloof from it, if one would, when hemmed in by the walls of a ship. But the sort was not to my liking; Mr. Brannan, the mate, is a sterling character, I am convinced, yet hardly of the order of intelligence that appeals to me. I determined that I must have one of my own sort as a companion. The problem confronted me of how to get him.

"I dare say you will ridicule the means I finally adopted; you already know them. I was acquainted with no one likely to fall in with my proposition; I had to seek such a person in the ranks of—of—"

"Of the failures."

"Thank you—though," he deprecated, "the term rings a trifle harsh. However, I sought diligently for a while in the lower ranks, but without success. Those who offered themselves were self-seeking, or of criminal instinct, or embittered and unsociable—I found a hundred faults with each. Then, in a moment of despair, I chanced upon you; a man plainly of birth and breeding, at odds with fortune through, it might prove, no fault of your own.

"The rest you know, in the main. My arrangements were all made, my servants accustomed to what you and they doubtless consider my freaks of madness; for it had been my habit to subject each candidate to a test similar to yours. If he behaved himself at table, if he wore his clothes like a man who had worn them before, showed

himself acquainted with the niceties of ordinary social intercourse—it was so many points in his favor.

"So, deliberately I abducted you, as deliberately planned to intoxicate you; I am a firm believer in the wisdom of the old saw that there is truth in the wine-cup; a man's true nature then comes to the surface. You alone of many survived the critical ordeal."

"I am complimented," I said, with a forced laugh.

"While you slept," Secretan continued without heeding, "I had you transferred to the *Lady of Quality*. By one this morning we had weighed anchor—I believe that is the term. It was my purpose to explain this to you earlier in the day and make you my offer; if you declined, to return and set you ashore. But you proved so sound a sleeper, my dear fellow, that it seemed at length advisable to waken you by the heroic methods advised by Mr. Brannan.

"One moment, and I am done with your patience. I offer you a comfortable living aboard a stanch craft; an opportunity to travel in what I am assured is held an earthly paradise; regular wages as supercargo, whose duties you will assume; and a one-fourth share of the profits of each voyage. What do you say?"

There was no need to think it over; no single tie bound me to my country; I do not propose to weary you with details, but the land was not dear to me. I looked into the rubicund, moonlike countenance of this singular creature, caught the plaintively anxious expression of his magnified eyes; and impulsively offered him my hand.

"I could have no other answer than yes, under the circumstances," I told him. "You offer me everything in exchange for nothing. I should warn you that you are taking chances; you have raked a bundle of human flotsam out of a teeming gutter of life, and you have no certificate that it will prove wholesome."

"I am content to run the risk," he replied, beaming as he gripped my fingers across the table. "I may as well

warn you at the outset that it is one of my pet hallucinations, to fancy myself as a judge of character. And I am rarely wrong."

In such wise Fortune came to me, disguised as Dudley Secretan.

CHAPTER III.

WE COME TO SHADOW REEF.

To this point in my narrative I have confined myself to the detailing, somewhat minutely and, I fear, tediously, the strange chain of circumstances which led to my association with this peculiar character, Dudley Secretan. I find myself now confronted with a problem of greater proportions, one always perplexing to a man of letters—that of exact elimination.

For it is one of the secrets of success in my trade—I have no hesitation in betraying it to a breathless world of inky amateurs; it is, perhaps, the one morsel of useful knowledge that I purchased at the bitter price of experience, in my long and unhappy term of bondage as slave of the midnight lamp—the knowledge of what *not* to tell in your study of Life.

The voyage of the *Lady of Quality* to me is a book of romance, whose illuminated pages are the glowing days and scented nights, whose text is made up of an intricate and interentangled series of incidents, insignificant in themselves but infinitely entrancing to one who lived and had his being in their procession; a volume wherein I, untiring, read—a thousand-and-one things with which I may not weary you.

That out of their agglomeration grew the story of Shadow Reef is beside the point. I often muse over this and that memory of our outward voyage and wonder would I have this tale to tell had I not, say, on a particular morning happened to cut myself while shaving, and so delayed the shore-bound boat at Honolulu, and in such wise started an endless chain of trivial events.

But we are impatient for the story, both eager to set foot on Shadow Reef;

the leisurely pen of reminiscence must be laid aside in favor of a more lively implement.

Yet certain men and things must not be slighted, since they belong to the work on the Reef. The *Lady of Quality* demands for herself a place; a stanch and able craft, roomy enough for our small company, comfortable, cleanly, swift, and able—I have it on Brannan's enthusiastic authority—to sail a point closer to the wind—whatever that may mean—than a missionary.

Brannan himself is worthy of a portrait of more just values than I have hereinbefore painted of him. A seaman to his finger-tips, steady, conservative, daring in emergency; a prey to periodical fits of deep melancholy which nothing might avail to moderate; generous, swift to pass judgment upon his fellow man—generally a judgment which circumstances forced him to reverse, which he did with a good grace; rabidly religious—he had been bred a stanch Roman Catholic—by spasms—which usually preceded a period of depression; unstable as water in the matter of his word, quick to promise and slow to fulfil, a ready borrower and a reluctant payer; master alike of his craft and of a most amazing and far-ranging vocabulary of blasphemy and vituperation; a violent man, uncommonly expert in the use of, and free with, his fists—there you have Mr. John O'Shaughnessy Brannan, upon whom devolved the navigation of the *Lady of Quality*.

For neither Secretan nor myself made the slightest pretension to nautical knowledge. Secretan, it is true, picked up the rudiments of the art with surprising quickness; and soon, relieving the brown Kanaka seaman who had first performed that duty, stood watch and watch with Brannan, and acquitted himself with credit in more than one emergency.

But for myself, I remained an ignominious to the end of the chapter; and so shall always be. The sea is my mistress; I will ever have none other; the infatuation which she first awakened in

me has passed into an abiding passion, and I should starve away from her. But of the art and mysteries practised of those who traffic upon her trackless domains, I have never gained an inkling.

And then Secretan—I were false to the cardinal precepts of my calling did I slight the presentment of this man at sea, as opposed to the Secretan who had lifted me from the depths.

He proved, on continued acquaintance, the most singular character imaginable. Irresistible and fascinating altogether, I found him, both as a study and as a friend. He early developed an adaptiveness to circumstance and his surroundings little short of amazing in one who had managed to reach his age—he was about thirty-five—and yet retain much of the ingenuousness of youth through consistently leading a narrow and hermitlike existence.

Ashore the most immaculate of well-dressed men, he soon learned to strike from his limbs the shackles of a conventionality which makes tailors' dupes and dummies of us all. I have seen him come on board from a brief sojourn in one of our island ports of call, lolling languidly in the stern of the boat, his chubby person encased in a stiff-bosomed shirt of dazzling whiteness, carefully creased trousers of snowy drill, a double-breasted blue-serge coat without a wrinkle, white canvas yachting-shoes upon his small feet, about whose size he was inordinately conceited, a priceless Panama upon his head, monocle shining like a pane of glass set in his cherubic pink countenance.

And an hour later behold the transformation!

The schooner is beating out to windward, close-hauled—the pilot long since dropped. Secretan appears on deck to relieve, or take command with, Brannan, arrayed in smiles and suit of shrunken pajamas, carpet-slippers on his feet, an infamous brier in one corner of his mouth, a shapeless canvas cap upon his head. It was his favorite sea-going costume.

I find I have omitted mention of the

monocle; for some inscrutable reason he clung to this ornament with a frantic devotion; it is inseparable from any picture of the man. And this despite the fact that it was utterly useless to him; when he wished to see he had to exchange monocle for common-sense spectacles; of whose uncommon magnifying power I have spoken.

I think his most engaging characteristic was a bubbling humor, unquenchable. The man would madden you with fault-finding—he had a feminine quality of nagging, was old-maidish to an insufferable degree about trifles such as hanging your coat always on the same peg—and then disarm your wrath with a grin accompanied by a puerile pun. I cannot defend his humor; it was frequently moss-grown and not infrequently pedantic; it was the spirit of it that proved both infectious and captivating.

He had a name for all of us. I enjoyed the sobriquet of the "Lit'ry Feller." Brannan was restive under the title of "Binnacle Bill," or of the "Ancient Mariner"—as the case might be. The three Kanakas who, with the Chinese cook, composed our crew, were variously "Adonis," "Ptarmigan," and "Davy Jones." The cook he dubbed "Pitti Sing," for two several reasons, which he gravely expounded; first, he wasn't; second, he looked like a prize pug Secretan had once seen at a bench-show. Himself Secretan called the "Dabster."

The pseudonym recalls his pitiful devotion to what he called his Art—the capital A being distinctly audible in his use of the word. For days at a time he would toil through the daylight hours over huge, pitiful canvases—panoramas of sun and sea, of island and surf, of moonlight and lagoon, of the piled drifts of the trade-wind clouds as they showed at noon; all horrible. Laboriously he would construct inhuman portraits of Brannan or myself or one of the crew; which, after they had been suffered to make of the cabin a chamber of horrors for a space, we would surreptitiously make way with and consign to the deep; a primitive

form of criticism which he endured, or learned to endure, with equanimity.

Not so his own unfitness for his tasks; that maddened him. Indeed, to me, the saddest feature of it all was Secretan's complete appreciation of the worthlessness of his productions. Openly, at times, he would weep with rage over his failures. "If only I could paint it as I see it!" he would wail.

Yet he slaved on, sweating and swearing at his self-inflicted drudgery; and, perhaps, derived some inscrutable comfort from this worship and study of the beauties of nature, which his brushes could not reproduce.

Lastly, to say a word for myself; it developed that Secretan had done not unwisely in assigning to me the berth and duties of supercargo. Under pressure I presently discovered latent in my make-up a vein of business ability, theretofore quite unsuspected. This I confess with becoming humility, as something that were more consistently lacking from the equipment of a Lit'ry Feller.

For all that, I took, and take, to myself some credit for the management of affairs, the driving of bargains, the mastery of those subtle laws of commerce which make ventures such as ours profitable. Secretan, in fact, by degrees and not unwillingly surrendered to my stewardship all such matters.

And we did not ill. The former owner of the *Lady of Quality* had not deceived the prospective purchaser, in asserting that there was a comfortable living to be gained from the Australasian trade. All things considered, we made out to our satisfaction; and at a year's end the balance on the credit side of our ledger was something which we viewed with complacency.

With which statement I am done with discursiveness. From this point we shape a course direct to Shadow Reef.

Destiny, in the shape of a Big Wind, took us to it. I recall that we were twenty days or so out of Sydney, after our first visit to that port. Upon Brannan's solicitation—the man knew the islands like a printed book—and be-

cause, for some reason, a profitable cargo was hard to get just then, we had stocked up with what is technically known as "trade"—a miscellaneous assortment of this-and-that, trinkets and cloths and oddments designed to please the unsophisticated eye of the Gilbert Islanders, but destined, as it turned out, never to come within a thousand miles of their habitat.

It was toward the evening of the twentieth day, we will say, that the wind came out of the northwest, on the heels of a spell of weather mild and fine beyond anything in our experience. We lay somewhere to the north of New Caledonia when the gale caught us.

By God's mercy the *Lady of Quality* lived through it. Shifting the second day and blowing directly from the southwest, the wind whipped us helplessly out of our course, into the east and north, for a solid week. Day after day the seas pursued us, raging, while the gale swept screaming beneath a sky like a roof of slate; day after day, hungry, exhausted, and cold, we fought for our lives upon a deck swept clean of every movable bit of gear, and, more often than not, knee and waist-deep with water. On the third day two of the Kanakas were washed overboard.

I have heard it said that waves never run more than fifty feet in height. Possibly. But judging from my own impressions I should say that a hundred and fifty were nearer the mark. For seven days I saw such walls of green rear up behind the little schooner, their riven crests milk-white against the sky's dirty blue, hanging twice and thrice the height of our mast. Or so they seemed. I have dreamed of them since, and wakened with the same clutch at my heart, the same catch at my breath, as I was used to know when waiting for those terrific combers to fall upon, to crush, and drive us shattered to the bottom of the sea.

Somehow they never did; somehow we won through. Toward noon of the seventh day the violence of the gale abated, and Brannan, going by dead-reckoning, was encouraged to set more

sail and strive to bring the schooner around toward the north. I dare say we were a couple of thousand miles off our course; and since we had been unable to take the sun for a week, our position was naturally not only unknown but a matter of anxiety to us all.

But still the sea raged; and spent and weary as we were, there was no rest for us. We fought all through the night, comforted only by the fact that the wind was steadily lessening in volume. Toward morning, indeed, it had died to the merest whisper of a breeze, and the sky above us was clear and shining. Whereupon Brannan, with a sagacious eye toward the stars, swore, and wore a face of trouble.

The seas abated rapidly from then on; at noon Brannan took observations and confirmed our worst fears. Approximately—I have no wish to be more definite, for reasons that will appear—our position was: longitude, 125 West; latitude, 15 South! We had been blown clear of the Islands; of which the nearest now were the Marquesas and the Paumotu, behind us many hundreds of miles.

We held a council of war in the cabin, over an admiralty chart, upon which Brannan had marked our position with red ink. We were in deep waters, and clear. All about us the chart was disfigured with a pox of soundings and cabalistic abbreviations, the least depth noted being 2475 *gy Gl oz.* I remember having my wonder excited and asking for an explanation of these hieroglyphics. To which Brannan replied shortly: "Two thousand, four hundred and seventy-five fathoms. Bottom, gray globigerina ooze."

I glanced at him surprised, for his manner was unusually impatient, his tone curt, his face when I saw it long and dark.

"What's the trouble?" I asked.

"Faith!" he cried. "Trouble and enough! Here we arre, the divvle av a ways from anywhere, short-handed, and with a damaged vessel."

"Damaged?"

"Just that. Did ye think we could

weather a storm like thot without suffering for our salvation?" His tone was witheringly scornful: Brannan never forgave me my misfortune, that I could not master the elements of seamanship.

I murmured something deprecatory; with which for an opening Brannan caustically informed me much that I already knew—that we had lost the foretopsail and with it topmast and gaff, that both boats were useless, stove in by the pounding seas, and that Adonis and Davy Jones were drowned; adding something which I had not known and which gave even Secretan a start—that the *Lady of Quality* had sprung a leak and was taking in water, if not rapidly, in quantity enough to be disquieting.

Upon receipt of this intelligence, Secretan, who had been lolling over the chart, studying it with troubled eyes beneath a wrinkled brow, looked up, his glasses flashing blankly in the sunlight that fell through the companionway, and observed mildly: "Bless my soul!"

"Aw, sure," Brannan hedged instantly—he had ever a softer spot in his heart for the owner than for the supercargo—"tis nothing beyond mending. I doubt not we'll pull through, but 'tis meself would be happier with land nearer at hand, a poort where we c'u'd put in to refit. Come another blow, the half av what we've had, and 'twill be a toss-up with the *Loddy av Quality.*"

"But this leak—when did you discover it?"

"This marning. 'Tis nothing to sweat about; if she gains no more than at present, a couple av hours at the pumps night and marning will clear the well. But manewhile we're short-handed, and 'tis meself has no taste for work at the pumps—nor will yersilves, wance ye've thried ut."

Secretan turned back to the chart. "And the nearest land?" he inquired.

Brannan peered over his shoulder. "Dominica in the Marquesas," he replied glumly. "With luck and fair winds, we may make ut. And thin again—"

His broken sentence was eloquent.

There fell a silence in the cabin, ended, at length, by Secretan.

"What's this?" he demanded, a stubby forefinger on the chart.

Again Brannan bent over the owner's shoulder. "Shadder or False Reef," he read aloud. "'Breakers reported eighty-eight. Searched for ninety-six be his majesty's ship *Swallow*. Not found.'"

"And how far will that be from our present position?"

"Fifty miles or more. Pwhy d'ye ask? Pwhat use is the shadder av a reef to the likes av us? "Searched for and not found"—isn't thot enough for ye?"

"Not altogether," said Secretan quietly. He continued to hold his index-finger on the spot, and I, too, leaned across the table, to pick out the information in the admiralty's italics, streaming off like a pennon from a little, faintly marked circle in the maze of soundings. Truly enough, it seemed to me, the reef could not be far from the *Lady of Quality*; and I gathered what Secretan presently explained, that his thought was to take the schooner there and, in the shelter of the probable island, anchor and refit to the best of our ability.

"Moreover," he concluded his explanation, "if the leak's to gain on us, and considering that we have no seaworthy boats, it will be as well to be within reach of land."

"But if there is no land?" Brannan objected.

"Drowning men," I contributed my sententious platitude, "clutch at straws."

"Or shadders," commented Brannan grimly. "But we're not be way av drrowning, just yet. To me way av thinking, 'tis a clear waste av time to go skallyhooting off looking for a reef—not so much as an island, mind ye—that a British ship made ut her special business to hunt for and didn't find."

"That's John O'Shaughnessy Brannan, his mind. But 'tis yersilf's the owner, Mither Saycretan. Give yer orders, and I'm yours to command."

"Wait a bit," I suggested. "Didn't I see a copy of a red book, called 'Is-

lands of the East Pacific,' somewhere around?"

"Ye did thot."

"Why ~~not~~ look it up there? If there's any other information about this Shadow, or False, Reef——"

"Ye'll make the divvle av a fine sailor, yit," commented Brannan sarcastically. However he acted upon my suggestion, and presently with Secretan was poring over a broken-backed and dog-eared copy of the admiralty publication in question—a legacy to Secretan from the former owner of the *Lady of Quality*.

"No intry," Brannan announced, with a note of triumph in his voice. "Pwhat did I tell ye? There's no such place."

"And naturally enough," amended Secretan, closing the volume and inspecting the back. "The work is of an earlier date than the first report of the breakers, according to the chart—eighty-seven, in point of fact. I think"—he leaned back in his chair and beamed benevolently upon Brannan and myself—"we'll have a cast for Shadow Island, just for luck."

"Well and good!" said the Irishman shortly. "I'm willing to be convinced, but 'tis me *prisint* conviction that this means no more than a few extra days at the pumps for all av us. Ye'll find nothing there—beyond, at most, a coral reef showing above wather at low tide."

With that he turned on his heel and left the cabin, delivering a parting shot in the shape of a grumbled regret that he had ever shipped with two "ignerunt landsmin."

Secretan's eyes met mine, and we both smiled quietly; we were well acclimated to the Irishman's temper, not in the least disturbed by his half-feigned disgust.

To cut the matter short, crippled as she was, the *Lady of Quality*, assisted by a fair but dying breeze, raised an island out of the South Pacific a little before noon of the following day. This somewhat to Brannan's disgruntlement, who made it an occasion for a tirade directed at the heads of an unconscious and, no doubt, complacent British ad-

miralty, its hydrographic office, and the men and officers of *H. M. S. Swallow*.

"There she bulks!" he exclaimed, as the configuration of a low, wooded knoll surrounded by a white flashing line of surf, came into view. "As large as life and steady as a rock—and barely charted! I'm wondering how long the officers of that *Swallow* looked for ut, that they didn't find ut. Faith, a healthy lot av navigators they must've been! Me sowl!" He spat with disgust.

As for Secretan and myself, we were entirely too pleased with the success of the owner's plan to crow over the Irishman. We had worked two spells at the pumps, with Ptarmigan and Pitti Sing lifting and sagging opposite us on the other arm, and our backs were broken, our hands blistered, our arms and legs stiff beyond belief. We had scant appetite for a voyage of indeterminate length punctuated by such exercise at regular intervals.

Moreover, the sight of land is always welcome to the seafarer, more especially to those who have endured days of violent storm and strain, as had we. The four of us, Ptarmigan the Kanaka, Pitti Sing the cook, Secretan and I, leaving Brannan at the wheel, clustered forward, greeting each new feature of the island with phrases of delight, as they unfolded and were made clear to our eyes with the onward progress of the schooner.

Slowly enough—I have said that the breeze was falling—we approached; and the nearer we drew the more unanimous was our subscription to the general verdict voiced by Secretan: "Nothing shadowy about *this* island!"

There was first of all the coral reef, a natural circle—so far as we could ascertain, perhaps four miles in diameter, enclosing a wide and placid sheet of water, in whose center rose the island proper. The latter, I should say, was two miles in length, from tip to tip, as we viewed it; by its tumbled profile, probably of volcanic origin; with a wooded hill rising perhaps two hundred feet at its eastern extremity, and a second, somewhat lower, near the center.

From this middle hill the ground sloped sharply westward, ending in lowlands and a broad and shining crescent of sandy beach.

"The very place for us!" Secretan declared, with bubbling enthusiasm. "There will undoubtedly be an entrance to that lagoon, and once inside we can anchor and refit, find and stop that leak at our convenience—and the weather," he added forcibly, "be damned!"

"It can't come too soon," I told him. "For my part I'm entirely willing to stretch my legs ashore again."

"If this breeze holds," he returned "you'll have the chance before night-fall."

And even as he spoke the wind fell and died without a sigh. With flapping sails and slack sheets the *Lady of Quality* lost momentum and rolled idly upon a smooth and smiling sea, a possible five miles from Shadow Reef—near enough, in fact, for the thunder of the surf upon the natural breakwater to be distinctly audible in the great stillness that brooded.

In that dead calm, the sea smoothed itself out in a space of time incredibly brief. By six bells of the afternoon watch we floated upon a surface like plate glass, broken only by the distant line of white where the lazy swells broke upon the barrier reef. Overhead the sky was cloudless and deep, and in the sea swam the reflections of a thousand coppery suns, dazzling.

The heat grew all but intolerable; we cast longing glances at the cool green slopes of the island as we loitered about the blistering deck, following the fickle shadow of the mainsail as it swung from port to starboard and back again, with the rolling of the hulk.

In the course of the slow hours the silence became intense, the thunder of the surf stilling to a low murmur, the ship resting soundless save for the all but inaudible lap and murmur of the waters beneath the quarters, the slow whining of an ungreased block or the more penetrating creak of the shifting boom. Toward evening, as the sun declined, a harsh sound arose upon the quietness; the clank-clank of the pumps,

as we, in sweltering agony, worked out the second half of our daily stint; and with it were the gurgle and splash of the bilge that streamed across the decks and vomited from the scuppers in miniature waterfalls.

CHAPTER IV.

A CRY IN THE NIGHT.

Exhaustion, in the natural course, followed such exertion. Too spent for words, we staggered from the pumps and threw our weary bodies at length upon the deck. Night fell as we lay there, lacking even ambition enough to eat. I think I must have passed into a sort of stupor, for it was four bells—ten o'clock—before I again realized the world.

Brannan was shaking me by the shoulder. "Here, me bye," I heard him say, "up with ye! 'Tis not good for ye to be lying there with the moonlight beating down on yer face—or so I've heard—in this climate. Come now."

I rose, yawning, rubbing my eyes; and conscious of a pang of thirst, lurched down the ladder to the cabin. Secretan was there, his round fat head shining with perspiration as he stewed over the contents of a battered old despatch-box, wherein as I knew he kept the ship's papers and other more personal matters.

The kerosene-lamp swung in its gimbals above the table, foul and smoky, as good as any stove in those close walls. The atmosphere reeked of burning oil; and I remember wondering dimly why Secretan chose that place and time for his business—whatever that might be. But I was too stupid to give the matter much thought; and after pouring a bottle of warmish soda over a stiffish dose of brandy, and swallowing the mixture, found my pipe, tobacco and matches, and returned to the deck.

The calm held breathless, and the world was very quiet and bright. The moon was high and near its full; the decks shone like silver and were stenciled black by the sharp shadows of

sail and mast and cordage. The white canvas of the mainsail glowed lustrous, almost opalescent, and even its shadowed side was luminous. A broad avenue of orange light rested all but motionless on the waters stretching nearly to the horizon, which was obscured with haze. Within this misty girder the sea lay desolate, save for the *Lady of Quality* and, over the quarter, the stark black shape of Shadow Reef.

Brannan was seated on the deck, his back to the binnacle, smoking and playing, with a deck of dirty and ragged cards, an interminable game of solitaire; an occupation which he seemed to find fascinating. I never investigated its mysteries, but got the impression that he had learned the game in some gambling-den in Hongkong. It must have been profitable to the house, if the latter backed the cards against the player; for to my knowledge, in all the period of our acquaintance, Brannan never succeeded in solving the puzzle.

I stood for a space at the rail, watching the island, and then, impressed that we were somewhat nearer it than when the calm had fallen, turned to the Irishman with an observation to that effect.

He nodded confirmation. "Yiss," he said, without removing pipe from mouth, or eyes from cards; "there's a bit of a current runs eastward around the reef, I judge—nothing to worry about."

"No danger of casting us up on the reef?"

"Divvle the bit. Besides, we'll have a hatful of wind before it could come to thot, or I'm mistaken. There are squalls off to no'th'ard."

As he spoke a low growl of thunder was audible; and looking in the direction indicated I became aware of a faint rose-colored glow just visible above the horizon, now waxing, now waning—the play of lightning reflected from a distant electric storm.

"Well," I sighed, "it can't come too soon to suit me. I'm sick of those pumps."

"We'll be in the lagoon be sunup;

I've marked the opening, off there to eastward, and if we don't run on a coral needle we'll be ashore at dawn, or shortly after."

As I sat myself down by the Irishman's side, taking a deal of comfort from my pipe and the attendant sense of peace and rest—for my slumber and the drink had refreshed me considerably—I heard Secretan snap the lock of his despatch-box, and scrape his chair across the floor as he got up from the table. A moment later, he appeared on deck, moist but cheerful.

"Hello!" he greeted us. "And a fine still night, if ever one was! Was that thunder I heard just now?"

We assured him that it was.

"I didn't know—might have been Brannan grumbling, you know."

"Don't pay any attention to him," said the Irishman in an audible aside to me. "'Tis facetious he is, and if we give him any encouragement, 'tis worse he'll be. Moreover, 'tis too hot to laugh."

"All right," Secretan chimed in. "You don't have to. I came on deck to talk business with you chaps—seriously now."

He squatted down before us and extracted a sodden gurgle from his abominable brier, schooling his countenance to a semblance of preternatural, childish wisdom.

"Did I ever tell you——"

"Yes," quoth Brannan, shuffling the cards. "Ye've told us all."

"Oh, cut it. I'm in earnest. I don't believe I ever told you the truth——"

"Shure, and don't *we* know that?"

"——as to my late lamented uncle."

"I never knew you had one," I interposed lazily. "When was *he* hanged?"

Secretan chuckled. "He wasn't, but from all I can learn about him, he should have been. If it hadn't been for him, I don't believe I should have been so keen about the South Seas; it was his legacy to me that put this business into my mind—that, and the advertisement I've told you about."

"So ye have," said Brannan solemnly.

"Go on and tell us about it," I encouraged Secretan.

"From all accounts my late lamented uncle was an old rip—one of these chaps that runs away to sea as a boy, falls into bad company, and—all that. He spent several years in these regions, a contemporary and associate of the notorious Captain Bully Hayes—or so they say. At all events he came home with a small fortune, chiefly in pearls, and drank himself to death on the proceeds. That's all. I know about my uncle, except that he died intestate; and as I was the only kin he had, all his effects and debts came to me. I settled up his bills, charged his memory with \$103.85, and kept his papers as curiosities.

"Now," continued Secretan earnestly, "when it came time for me to break up my happy little home, I happened to come across an old wallet of his that had been conveyed to me by his sorrowing creditors. In it, among other junk, I found this memorandum. And that is why I was so set on looking up Shadow Reef."

While he talked, Secretan had been smoothing out a bit of paper in his hands. Now he handed it to me, with a "What do you make of that?"

I held it up to the moonlight—which was quite strong enough to read by—and saw that the paper was apparently half of the fly-leaf of some old book. Near its ragged lower edge, on one side, was the signature (which I read aloud) of

GEORGE VAUGHAN SECRETAN

penned in a firm, bold hand.

"That was my uncle's right name," explained Secretan. "But down here, I've heard, he chose to call himself George Grimes——"

"Not Grimes the pearl pirate?" Brannan interrupted, lifting his head and putting solitaire aside for the nonce—plainly more than a little interested.

Secretan grimaced but admitted that such, he believed, was his "dear uncle's fame and incognito."

"Look on the other side of the paper, Locke," he added.

I obeyed and found that the same hand had written—apparently at a lapse of years, for the characters were feebler and the ink less faded—the two words:

FALSE ISLAND.

Below them were two lines of figures, three groups to a line, evidently the latitude and longitude of the island: figures which I here suppress for reasons that, as I have said, will become obvious.

Otherwise the paper contained a short statement, following the above:

Only safe channel N. W. opening to lagoon. All others dangerous.

"Now," said Secretan, when I had read this aloud, a clang of triumph in his voice, "tell us the probable location of Shadow, or False, Reef, or Island, if you prefer, please, Mr. Brannan."

"I couldn't hit it closer than yer uncle," announced Brannan soberly, "barring I take observations with the hog-yoke to-morrow. 'Tis clear," he added, "what ye're driving at."

"And that is?" I asked, interested enough by this time, you may believe.

"Uncle George didn't keep this memorandum for old sake's sake," said Secretan. "It seems patent that he had a purpose."

"Oh!" enlightenment coming to me. "Buried treasure?"

"Locke," said Secretan gently, "your imagination is at times singularly primitive and conventional."

"The man's been reading 'Treasure Island,'" remarked Brannan. "His moind's poisoned—such as it is. Listen to me, and I'll give ye a few details av the loife and adventures of Captain George Grimes."

"Fire away," said I.

"I would stipulate," suggested Secretan mildly, "a certain amount of respect for my poor uncle's memory."

"As your uncle, me dearr sirr,"

Brannan chuckled, "he was a foine man. But as Captain Grimes, he was a domned scoundrel, and I've heard tell of the toime when the pearl patrol would have given their heads for his—or nearly so. They wanted him bad,

but he was a slippery customer, and knew these islands like a book. They say no mon knew thim betther; there was not a protected reef from Burmah east that he hadn't taken toll av, giner'ly under the very noses av the patrol.

"But in the ind they made the seas hot even for himself, and with thot he up and disappeared, and niver sight nor sound av him was seen or heard for the matter of three years. At the ind av which toime he was picked up near Honolulu, in an open boat, all alone, half dead av thirst and starvation, with a bag av pearls as big as your head and a tale av shipwreck as long as your arm—and much less substantial."

"All of which goes to show?" I encouraged Brannan as he exhibited signs of running down.

"That Mистер Secretan's uncle—peace to his bones—had discovered a private pearl reef, all of his own, worked it until tired, and then somehow managed to lose his associates, get picked up, and kape his saycret. I've been told that a syndicate av pearl sinter raypresintitives from Sydney to San Francisco to interview old man Grimes and buy from him the location of his reef—'twas a small forchune they offered him, and a third profits into the bargain. But he laughed at thim, and said they'd made it all up out of their heads.

"Mebbe they had—mebbe not. But be this," and he struck the paper in my hand, "and be thot," indicating the island, "I'd be willing to make a small bet at decent odds that we've stumbled upon the very spot. And if so——"

He got suddenly to his feet, and I could see that the man's face was flushed, his eyes glittering, his sturdy frame atremble with excitement.

"If so," he said, in a tense tone, "we're on the threshold av our immortal fortunes."

"Or Secretan's," I cut in brutally.

"Not so!" interrupted the little man. "Don't misjudge me, gentlemen. If Shadow Reef be indeed what Brannan suspects—and my inclination is to agree with him—Fate has been instru-

mental in sending us three to it—for I never should have found it save by this accident—and—and if Brannan's right, and there are pearl-oysters in the lagoon yonder, we'll share and share alike."

"Spoken like a man!" Brannan declared. "Like a generous gentleman. But then——" The enthusiasm passed out of his manner; he fell thoughtful and disturbed.

"But what?" inquired Secretan.

"I'm wondering if be any chance yer sainted uncle could have failed to make a thorough job av his—shall we say av the disphosal av his companions? I'm wondering, too, if no one else has stumbled across this Shadder Reef, be accident, all these years. If there's been any wan before us, there'll be little profit in the business—me worrd for that!"

"I think," said Secretan precisely, "that, all other circumstances considered, it is extremely unlikely that the island is inhabited, or even known to living man other than ourselves. You forget that the seas here are supposed to be clear, save for the spot where breakers were reported nearly twenty years ago; and the *Swallow*——"

It is easy enough to surmise what he was on the point of saying about the *Swallow*; but he never concluded his sentence; the interruption wiped his lips clean of speech.

It was a cry ringing clear and shrill out of the strained stillness of that night—a human voice, you would have said; the wail of a man in mortal stress, inarticulate and terrible. Suddenly and unexpectedly it came, and only once it sounded, an agonized scream at first, passing into a wavering and broken moan at its fall.

You can figure for yourself the effect upon us who, even in our excitement, had schooled our voices to little more than whispers, in unconscious tribute to the still and solemn grandeur of the night; who were habituated to the thought that, saving the Kanaka and the Chinaman asleep in the fore-castle, no human beings other than our three selves existed within a radius of five

hundred miles, upon those desert and lonely seas.

A thunderbolt out of the blue had not been more strange and terrifying. For myself, I am least of all a superstitious man, yet have no hesitation in admitting that my blood chilled, my skin crept, a pricking stirred at the roots of my hair. While as for Brannan and Secretan, I can see them now, hanging breathless upon the quaver and fall of that uncanny shriek, and, when it had gone, leaving in its place a soundless void infinitely more disturbing than it had been before, standing motionless, with ashen faces and questioning eyes.

Brannan it was who first moved and spoke. He crossed himself instinctively, and his lips moved for a bit without sound before words came.

"Mither av mercy!" he cried, his brogue richer than ever. "And pwhat's *that*?"

His voice brought us out of our stupefaction. Secretan and I scrambled to our feet and, with the Irishman, stood staring off across the moon-smitten waters, toward the island whence, it seemed to us, beyond doubt the sound had emanated. It was, on a guess, a full minute before either of us thought to answer.

Then Secretan: "God knows!"

"Aye, or the divvle!" cried Brannan roughly.

"It must be some one in the island, in distress—some one shipwrecked," I hazarded my tritely obvious speculation.

"Naught av hiven or earth, me worrd for that!"

"What then?"

"God forgive me for belavin' ut a banshee——"

Brannan caught my eye and smiled in a sickly, shamefaced fashion. Yet laboring under such strong emotion as he was, it was easy to appreciate how such a cry should work upon his superstitious Celtic spirit. I believe I was little better, for the moment. Secretan, of us three, was the first to resume outward composure.

"Bosh!" he said, but without conviction, removing his glasses and abstractedly wiping them on a corner of his pajama jacket. "No such thing. Don't let's act like a trio of frightened children. It must be as Locke says."

"Aye!" cried Brannan, in a tremor of contempt for my suggestion. "A shipwrecked mariner, is ut? Thin why has he not built a fire, or thried to attract our attention before this? Since noon we've lain here——"

Against this reasoning Secretan found no argument.

"Yet on the chance of it, you might give a hail," he suggested.

"'Tis old I am to be hailing spiruts. *Thot* was no human voice."

Brannan stepped to the rail, cupped hands to mouth, and lifted up his voice—and Brannan had a throat of brass and lung of leather. "*Aho-o-oy!*" he cried, and the bellow of it seemed to shake the schooner. Yet in that heavy silence his great voice rang flat.

And there came no answer.

The Irishman turned toward us again, his face working, his mind plainly dominated by superstitious dread. "I'll get the glasses," he said in a choked voice, and disappeared down the companion-ladder. In a moment he was back, binoculars in hand.

"Take thim," he told me, "and tell me pwhat ye see."

I raised the glasses to my eyes, adjusted the focus, and out of the smudge of purples and blacks Shadow Reef leaped clear upon the field of the lens. Again and again I swept the visible contour of the island, but saw nothing, at length giving it up as a profitless employment and saying as much.

"Ye see!" cried the Irishman, with a thrill in his voice. "Marrk me worrds, 'twas a banshee keening the death av one av us—shure death 'twill be if we set foot upon that shore!"

"Oh, rot!" ejaculated Secretan. "Come below and have a drink. It's dollars to doughnuts that it was some bird or beast. Wait till to-morrow and I'll show you your banshee. And I say, Brannan, don't forget what my uncle said about the open channel. That's a good thing to remember. Pearls are pearls, and I can use my share of them, if we get any, but I've no particular anxiety to maroon myself, even in good company, on this bit of land."

A thoroughly sensible little body he was at times—Secretan; and now he kept up a continual flow of inconsequent chatter, meanwhile persuading Brannan to accompany him to the cabin. A generous brandy and soda put a new light into the Irishman's eyes; but by tacit consent we avoided the subject of that strange cry for the rest of the evening.

TO BE CONCLUDED IN JANUARY NUMBER.

PIGEONS CAN CARRY LIBRARIES

A PIGEON-FANCIER will tell you that in war-time the carrier-pigeon performs wonders in the way of swift traveling and sure delivery of messages. But it is possible for pigeons to carry more than merely the brief messages they usually do. They are able to carry quite nice little libraries.

The secret of this seemingly impossible feat is microscopic photography. The messages are first printed in ordinary type and then reduced by photography several hundred times. The photographs are taken on thin films, or pellicles of collodion, each of which, though it is less than two inches square, can thus contain 50,000 words.

Of these pellicles a pigeon can easily carry a dozen without interfering with its comfort or speed. But a pigeon has carried as much as three-quarters of an ounce for a short distance. This weight would represent something like 800,000 messages, or 16,000,000 words, so that, under these conditions, it would be quite possible for a pigeon to carry a small library of 120 volumes.

The Stalking of Pauguk

By Herbert Quick

Author of "The Broken Lance," "Inland Waterways," Etc.

Modern commercialism, its terrible ruthlessness, the strange conditions it produces, the desperate plight of those who fail in the fight in which there is no quarter are well illustrated in this story, which is at one and the same time a story of the woods and open, and a tale of high finance

"The fiery eyes of Pauguk,
Glare upon him in the darkness!"
—Hiorwatha.



HIS story has been blamed for its lack of a moral. People seem to expect one so to put to the rack the facts in the case that they will shriek out some well-tried message. Some have behaved as if they thought the moral here, but faulty. Colonel Loree of the Solar Selling Company, however, thinks the affair rich in the *hic-fabula-docet* element. So does Williamson, soliciting-agent for the Mid-Continent Life; and so—emphatically so—does the Mid-Continent itself. Trudeau, the "breed" guide, has had so few years in which to turn it over in his slow-moving mind as he has lain rolled in his blankets while the snow sifted through the moaning pines, that he has not made up his mind. As for Foster Van Dorn and Gwendolyn, their opinions—but the story itself is not long.

Williamson says that when he left Van Dorn's office with the application, he was as near walking on air as insurance men ever are. People had been so slow in writing their autographs on the dotted line—and here was a six-figure application, with a check. These, accompanied by the wide-eyed Williamson, exploded into

the mid-December calm of the agency headquarters like the news of a Tonopah strike in the poker-playing ennui of a Poverty Flat.

"What's that, Williamson?" ejaculated the cashier. "Five hundred—you don't mean *thousand*?"

"Why, confound you," sneered Williamson, "look at that application!"

"Let me see it!" panted the manager, bursting in. "Foster G. Van Dorn; half a million! Holy cat, Williamson; but this will put you and the agency in the lead, for— Is he good for it, Williamson?"

"Why don't you see that *check*?" inquired the lofty solicitor. "I tell you, fellows, there's always a way to land any man. Why, for a year, I've—by George! I'm forgetting to send Doctor Watson over to make the examination. Van Dorn's going on a hunting trip, and we've got to hustle, and get him na' d before he goes!"

The manager stood by Williamson during the telephoning. "Who is Mr. Van Dorn?" he asked, as the agent hung up the receiver.

"President of the Kosmos Chemical Company," replied Williamson. "Son-in-law and enemy of Colonel Loree of the Solar Selling Company, you know," said the cashier.

"Oh-h-h-h!" replied the manager, as

if recalling something. "I remember the 'romance' in the newspapers; but I thought the young fellow was poor. Fixed it up with the colonel, I suppose—the usual thing."

"Not on your life!" replied Williamson. "Loree would kill him if he dared—old aristocrat, you know; but Van Dorn's too smart for him. You remember he was an engineer for Loree's company, and met the daughter on some inspection trip. Love at first sight—moonlight on the mountains—run-away and wedding on the sly—father's curse—turned out to starve, and all that."

"I remember that," answered the manager; "but it doesn't seem to lead logically up to this application."

"Well," went on Williamson, "Van Dorn turns up with a company formed to work a deposit of the sal-ammoniac, or asphaltum, or whatever the stuff the Solar Company had cornered may be, and began trust-busting. The Colonel swore the new deposit really belonged to his company because Van Dorn found it while in his employ, and called him all sorts of a scoundrel. But the young man's gone on, all the same, floating his company, and flying high."

"I heard that Loree was sure to ruin him," interposed the cashier.

"Ruin nothing!" said Williamson. "It was a case of the whale and the swordfish. Van Dorn's got him licked—why, don't you see that check!"

"That does look like success," replied the manager. "I hope his strenuous life hasn't hurt his health—Watson is fussy about hearts and lungs."

"That's the least of my troubles," replied Williamson. "Van Dorn's an athlete, and a first-class risk. There's nothing the matter with Van Dorn!"

And yet, Trudeau the guide, far up in the Minnesota woods, looked at the young man and wondered at his behavior. They had come by the old "tote-road" to the deserted lumber-camp armed and equipped to hunt deer. Most young men in Van Dorn's situation were keen-eyed, eager for the trail and the chase—at least until tamed by

weariness. But Van Dorn was like a somnambulist. Once Trudeau had left him behind on the road, and on retracing his steps to find him, had discovered him standing by the path, gazing at nothing, his lips slowly moving as if repeating something under his breath—and he had started as if in fright at Trudeau's hail. He had been careful to give Trudeau his card, and admonished him to keep it; but he seemed careless of all opportunities of following up the acquaintance. Most of these city hunters were anxious to talk; but what troubled Trudeau, was the manner in which Van Dorn sat by the fire, wrote in a book from time to time, and gazed into the flames. Now that they had reached the old camp, Trudeau hoped that actual hunting would bring to his man's eyes the fire of interest in the thing he had come so far to enjoy.

"I'll fix up camp," said he. "If you like, you hunt. Big *partie* Chicageau men ove' by lake—keep othe' way."

"How far to their camp?" asked the fire-gazer.

"Bout two-mile," answered Trudeau.

"Chicago men?" queried Van Dorn. "How many?"

"Mebbe ten," answered Trudeau; "mebbe six. She have car on track down at depot. Big man—come ev'ry wintaire. Jacques Lacroix guide heem, Colonel Loree—big man!"

"Colonel Loree! From Chicago?" cried Van Dorn.

"*Oui*, yes!" replied Trudeau. "You know heem?"

"No," said Van Dorn.

The man who did not know Loree went to his knapsack and took out a jacket made of deerskin tanned with the hair on. It was lined with red flannel. He held it up and looked at it fixedly. Trudeau started as it met his gaze, and he came up to Van Dorn and pointed to the garment.

"You wear zat?" asked he.

"Yes," said the other. "It is a good warm jacket."

"A man w'at wear deerskin zhaquette," said Trudeau, "in zese wood",

in shooting seasons, sertaine go home in wooden ove'coat—sure's hell!"

"Oh, I guess there's no danger!" said Van Dorn, his lips parting with a mirthless smile.

"Non?" queried Trudeau. "You ben in zese wood' before?"

"Oh, yes!" replied Van Dorn. "Lots of times!"

"Zen you know!" asserted Trudeau. "Zen you are zhoking wiz me. Zeze huntaire sink brown cloth coat, gray coat, black coat, anysing zat move—she sink zem every time a deer. Las' wintaire lots men killed for deer. Pete St. Cyr's boy kill deer, hang heem in tree, and nex' morning take heem on back an' tote. A city huntaire see deer-hide wiz hair on moving, an' bim! sofenose bullet go thoo deer, thoo Pete St. Cyr's boy's head! Zat zhaquette damn-fool thing!"

"It goes either side out," said the hunter. "I can turn it, you know."

"I turn heem!" said Trudeau, suiting the action to the word. "Red is bettaire, by gosh—in zese wood'."

Trudeau watched his companion as he made his laborious way through the cut-over chaos until he disappeared; but he did not see him pause when out of sight of camp, and turn toward the lake.

"I would rather it were any one else," said Van Dorn, as if to something that walked by his side; "but what difference does it make? Why not let him finish his work?"

The sheer difficulty of the country brought back to Van Dorn something like the forester's alertness. The lust for lumber had ravaged the spiry forest, and left, inextricably tangled, the wrecks of the noble trees—forest maidens whose beauty had been their destruction; only the crooked and ugly having escaped. So deep and complex was the wreckage that it seemed like the spilikins of a giants' gante of jackstraws—gnarled logs, limbs like *chevaux-de-frise*, saplings and underbrush growing up through chaos. And spread over and sifted through all was the snow, as light as down.

Van Dorn must have told the truth

as to his former visits; for he went on like one used to this terrible maze. No-where could he take three steps straight forward; it was always climbing up, or leaping down, or going around, or crawling under. Here thick leaves upheld the snow, and in the dry pine straw on the ground, he could hear the forest mice rustle and scurry. There a field was smoothed over by the snow, as a trap is hidden by sand, covering debris just high enough to imperil the limbs of the pedestrian. Yonder was a tamarack swamp too thick to be pierced; and everywhere it was over and under and up and down, and desperately hard, for miles and miles, with no place for repose.

He gazed away over the strange abomination of desolation, blindly reflecting upon man's way of coming, doing his worst, and passing on with sated appetite, leaving ruin—as he had done here. He wondered why that tall tract of virgin pine over at the right had been allowed to escape, standing against the sky like a black wall, spiked with tall rampikes. He stared fixedly at the snow, the blue shadows, the black pines, somnambulistic again.

To the something that seemed to walk by his side, he spoke of these things as if it had been visible. Strange actions, strange thoughts for the president of the Kosmos Chemical Company, the great antagonist of Loree of the Solar Selling Company, the David to Loree's Goliath, the swordfish to the colonel's whale! Think, however, of David, with all the stones spent against the giant's buckler, and cowering within the lethal reach of that spear like a weaver's beam; or of the swordfish, with broken weapon, hunted to the uttermost black depths by the oncoming silent yawning destruction. And in Van Dorn's case, the enemy was an avenger as well as a natural foe.

Poor little Kosmos Chemical Company with its big name, its great deposits of "a prime commercial necessity"—see prospectus—its dependence on railways with which Loree was on terms of which Van Dorn never dreamed, its old and wily foe, skilled

to snatch victory from the jaws of defeat, raging for the loss of his ewe lamb, whom, notwithstanding his giantship, he had loved for twenty years to Van Dorn's two, and had dreamed dreams and committed crimes for! Not very strange after all, perhaps, that the man went on muttering somnambulistically. They say that one gripped in the lion's mouth is numb and filled with delusions.

Suddenly, putting life into the dead scene, a bounding form came into view past a thicket—a noble buck with many-pointed antlers, moving with great deliberate leaps among the giants' spili-kins. The delicate, glassy hoofs, the slender, brittle limbs and horns, fragile as china, seemed courting destruction in those terrific entanglements. Yet the beautiful animal, as if by some magic levitation, rose lightly from a perilous crevice between two logs, turned smoothly in mid-leap, struck the four pipe-stem limbs into the only safe landing-place, shot thence with arrowy spring between two bayonetlike branches to another foothold, and so on and on, every rod of progress a miracle.

He stopped, snuffing the air. Instinctively the hunter leveled his rifle; and then came into view the buck's retinue, two does, one large and martronly, the other a last summer's fawn. The sleep-walker's eyes softened, the rifle swung downward from the point-blank aim, snapping a twig in its descent, and with swift, mighty bounds, the deer vanished, putting a clump of bushes between themselves and the foe with unerring strategy.

"Toward the lake," said the hunter. "I'll follow!"

There came the report of a distant rifle from the direction of the deer's flight, then another and another. Some one was working a repeater rapidly. The hunter stopped, took off his deer-skin jacket, turned it hair side out, and like a soldier making for the firing-line, pressed forward after the deer.

Trudeau saw his man halt on the edge of the firelight that evening, turn his jacket, and come weariedly into

camp. Trudeau sat and thought that night, while the other slept heavily. Next morning there was a raging storm, and the guide was puzzled that the hunter refused to brave its dangers. It was not sure then, that monsieur desired the wooden overcoat? He told Van Dorn many stories of death in these storms, and watched for the effect.

"W'en man is lost in blizzard," said Trudeau, "ze vidow mus' wait an' wait, an' mebbe nevaire know if he is vidow or not."

"It would be better," said the other reflectively, "to have the proof ample—ample!"

Trudeau, pondering over this, watched his charge putting names in a book opposite amounts in figures; but he did not know that here was the lost fortune of an old aunt, there the savings of a college chum. Van Dorn looked them over calmly as if it had been a bills-payable sheet to be paid in the morning. Then the strange pleasure-hunter began writing a letter to a sweetheart to whom he seemed to be able to say only that he loved her better than life, that she must try to love his memory, and to train up the baby to respect his name, that the right thing is not always easy to discern, that sometimes one has only a choice of evils, that when a man has made a mess of it which he can straighten out by stepping off the stage, he might as well do it—and that he had had his share of happiness since she had been with him anyhow, and was far ahead of the game! Trudeau could not know what a foolish, silly, tragic letter it was, this product of insane commercialism. He thought life and the woods enough, and wondered at the shaking of the man's shoulders, and was amazed to see the tears dropping through his fingers as he bowed his head upon his hands—a man with a fifty-dollar sleeping-bag!

Over at the Loree headquarters there were roaring fires, fresh venison, a skilful chef, jolly companions, and the perfection of camp-life. The storm cleared. That strong old hunter, Loree, declaring that his business was to stalk deer,

marched off in the solitary quest which is the only thing that brings the haunch to the spit in the Minnesota cut-over forest. He was bristly bearded, keen of eye and vigorous, handled his gun cannily, and craftily negotiated the fallen and tangled timbers, his glance sweeping every open vista for game. There was no time to think of anything but the making of his way, and of the chase. Troubles and triumphs retired to the outer verge of consciousness. Primeval problems claimed his thoughts, and the primeval man rose to meet them. It was in this ancient and effective wise that he had sharpened his weapons, set his snares, and hunted down Foster Van Dorn—and left him in the money-jungle, apparently unhurt, but really smitten to the heart and staggering to his fall. It was the Loree way. As an old hunter, he knew just where his shaft had struck, and how long the quarry could endure the hemorrhage. Had he not said that the fellow should be made to rue the Loree displeasure?

Like a flash these half-thoughts became no thoughts, as a dark blotch caught his eye, far off on the snow, beyond a little thicket.

"What is that?" he said to himself. "It is a little hard to say, but the matter is worth looking into. Just the color of a deer! Just where a deer would rest! We must work up the wind a little closer, for some men are so foolish as to wear those duns and browns; but that!—that *is* a deer's coat. It won't do to jump him and trust a shot as he goes—those firs will hide him at the first leap. A long shot at a standing target—there! He moved! There's not a second to lose!"

A long shot, truly; but that graceful rifle thinks nothing of half a mile. There are many intervening bushes and saplings; but the steel-jacketed bullet would kill on the farther side of the thickest pine, and even a soft-nosed one will cut cleanly to this mark. The colonel's practised left hand immovably supported the barrel; the colonel's keen eye through the carefully adjusted sights saw plainly the blotch of deerskin down

the little glade; and the colonel's steady forefinger confidently pressed the lightly set trigger. *Spat!* The colonel felt the rifleman's delicious certitude that his bullet had found its mark, threw in another shell, and stood tensely ready to try the bisecting of the smitten deer's first agonized bound—but the blur of fur just stirred a little, and slipped down out of sight.

Panting in the killer's frenzy, Loree struggled over the debris to reach his game. How oddly the deer had fallen! Heart, or brain, likely; as it went down like a log. Here was the thicket, and on the other side—yes, a patch of reddened snow, and the body of—no, not a deer, but a man, dead, it seemed, clad in a deerskin jacket, a rifle by his side, and in his hand a note-book full of figures, its pages all stained and crumpled!

There was a shout in the far distance, but Loree heard it not. He knew his solitude, and never looked for aid. The white strangeness of the face of the man he had shot overcame the sense of something familiar in it; and the colonel, after a moment's scrutiny of it, addressed himself frantically to the stanching of the blood. A deep groan seemed to warrant hope; and stooping beneath the body Loree took it up and began bearing it toward the camp. He had an overwhelming consciousness of the terrible task before him; but the realization of the human life dashed out, some home blasted, some infinity of woe, and the bare chance of rescue rolled sickeningly over him, and he set his teeth and attacked the task like an incarnate will.

Logs and boughs and dead-wood held him back; countless obstacles exhausted him. He felt like crying out in agony as he realized that his age was telling against him. He felt strangely tender at this meeting with death in its simple and more merciful form. He clenched his teeth hard, felt his heart swell as if to burst, his lungs labor in agonized heavings—and when Trudeau the guide overtook him, he found him a frenzied man, covered with dark streaks and splashes of blood, unconquerably hurl-

ing upon his impossible task his last reserves of strength, with all that iron resolution with which he had beaten down resistance in his long battle with a relentless world.

"For God's sake," he panted hoarsely, "help me get him to camp! We've got a doctor there!"

"How's the colonel?" said the doctor, when he had done all he could for the colonel's victim.

"Knocked all to pieces," answered a young man. "Wants to know if we've found out who the man is."

Colonel Loree was interrogating Trudeau; surprised that he did not know the name of the wounded man.

"Non," answered Trudeau, "she tell me his name, and give me *carte*, but I lose heem an' forget fir'st day. Remember wood', remember trail, remember face ver' well—but name; she I forget. She write *lettaire* an' cry, an' all time put fig' in book. Zis is heem; mebbe *she* tell name!"

The smutched names were strange to the colonel; but on another page there were some inexplicable references to Kosmos Chemical affairs; and on the cover were dim initials that looked like "F. V. D."

"I know somesing is wrong," went on Trudeau; "for I tell her it ben *très dangéreuse* to wear deerskin zhaquette in zese wood' in shooting *seasone*. I turn zhaquette red out. She go toward your camp. I watch. I see her turn heem hair out. I tell you, messieurs, zat man want to go home in wooden ove'coat. She have *hungaire* to die."

"Here's a letter we found in his pocket," said the young man. "Look at it, colonel."

The colonel looked, saw his daughter's name, remembered the familiar look in the white, agonized, pitiful face; and saw the whole situation as by some baleful flash-light.

"Good God! Good God!" he cried. "It's Van Dorn! Get things ready to carry him in his bed to the car—quick, Johnson! And get to the wire as soon

as you can. Have Tibbals bring Gwennie—Mrs. Van Dorn—to Duluth. Wire the hospital there! You know what's needed—look after things right, Johnson, for I think—I think—I'm going mad, old man!"

Mrs. Van Dorn ran into her father's arms in the hospital anteroom. Through mazes of frenzied anxiety she felt an epoch open in her life with that embrace from the father who had put her out of his life forever, as they thought.

"Dear, dear papa!" she whispered, "let me go to Foster, quick!"

"Not just now, Gwennie, little girl," said he, patting her shoulder. "He's asleep. Did you bring the—*the baby?*"

"No, no! I thought—but Foster?" cried Gwendolyn. "Will he—will he

"He'll live, by Heaven!" cried the colonel. "I fired one fool for hinting that he wouldn't; and now they're all sure he'll pull through. Why, he's got to live, Gwennie!"

The colonel reached for his handkerchief, much hampered by Gwendolyn's arms.

"And when he's well," said he, "I want your help—in a business way. I'm too old to fight a man like Foster. He's got me down, Gwennie—beaten me to earth. If he won't come in with me, it's all up with the Solar. He's a fine fellow, Gwen—I—like him, you know—but he don't know how hard he hits. You'll help your old dad, won't you, Gwennie?"

To this point had the appeal of concrete, piteous need brought Colonel Loree, the ferocious, whose heart had never once softened while he did so much more cruel things than the mere shooting of Van Dorn. It broke Gwendolyn's heart afresh.

"Oh, don't, papa!" she cried. "I can't st-stand it! He sha'n't use his strength against you! I'll be on your side. He's generous, papa—he wanted to name baby Loree—and, oh, I must go to him, papa! I can't wait!"

The Rue Montera Mystery

By F. Goron, Ex-Chief of the Paris Detective Police

Edited by Albert Keyzer

Monsieur Goron's methods in crime detection may be said to consist in an acute receptivity to impressions, a dependence on swift intuitions, rather than jumping at conclusions and forcing of issues. His wonderful successes as head of the greatest police force in the world surely justify his processes. The stories of actual cases in his career make most interesting reading. This is the third of a very popular series.



FEW crimes have aroused more consternation in Paris than the murder of Madame Dellard, a lady of high standing, found with her throat cut in her apartment, 42 Boulevard du Temple. And excitement reached boiling-point when it became known that the man I arrested three weeks later as the presumed murderer was an army lieutenant, called Anastey, who subsequently acknowledged his guilt and was guillotined.

The case, however, gave me endless trouble, and whilst I was still battling with that difficult problem I received an early telephonic call to come at once to the Rue Montéra, a street close to the Porte de Vincennes. I jumped into a cab, and when I arrived at the address given me, a detached house with a little garden in front, I saw a crowd blocking the road, and two policemen at the gate. As I walked up the small gravel path to the house a police inspector came out and said:

"I am so glad you came at once, sir. None of us can make head or tail of this business."

He opened the door of a room on the ground floor, and there was an old

lady, her face blanched with fright, sitting in an easy chair; her maid, terror-stricken, was by her side. From a room opposite came the confused noise of voices.

Addressing the old lady, the police inspector said:

"Madame Maillard, here is Monsieur Goron. You'd better tell him yourself what happened."

But Madame Maillard could only bring out inarticulate sounds, and the inspector turned to the servant with the remark:

"It may take some time before your mistress is quieted down. In the meantime you can give Monsieur Goron an account of the affair."

The girl wiped her eyes, and in a trembling voice began:

"Yesterday afternoon, toward five, Mademoiselle Brunet came to pay my mistress a visit. The ladies are related. Whilst I was peeling my potatoes Madame Maillard came into my kitchen and told me that Mademoiselle Brunet would stay here the night, whereupon I put the little spare room—the one on the right hand when you come in—in order. At ten o'clock I accompanied Madame Maillard to her bedroom on the floor above to help her undress. On my return to my kitchen Madame

Brunet called out for a glass of water, and I brought her a siphon and a tumbler, which I placed on the night-table. Half an hour later I went to bed. This morning at six I came down-stairs, and, passing the young lady's room, thought I heard a low moan. I listened a moment and knocked. There came no reply, and I softly turned the handle. But the door was locked. I again waited a few seconds, and when the moan was repeated I beat the door with my fist, and shouted:

"Mademoiselle! Is anything the matter? Please open the door!"

"Again there was no response, and I woke Madame Maillard. We both hammered at the door without any result. We then burst it open, rushed in, and nearly fainted with fright! From below the bed protruded the head and shoulders of a man, covered in blood! And no trace of Madame Brunet! I ran for the police. They are now in the other room with the doctor, and the man——" The rest of the sentence was lost in a hysterical fit of crying.

I went into the passage, and opened the door of the spare room. A tall, military-looking man was bending over a figure on the sofa. By his side, on a chair, were a case of surgical instruments and a basin with water and towels. Two policemen stood near the door. I beckoned to them to leave the room. After a few minutes, when the doctor had finished attending to his patient, he turned to me.

"This seems an inexplicable business, Monsieur Goron," he said, pointing to the man lying senseless on the sofa.

"He is not dead?" I asked.

"No. But it will be touch-and-go with him. There is a fracture of the skull, and I fear it will be a case of trepanning. He has received a tremendous blow. Probably with that!" And he pointed to a blood-stained siphon on the floor near the bed.

I looked at the man. He had a common, expressionless face, partly covered with sandy whiskers, and wore a check suit of a loud pattern, with well-made patent-leather shoes that con-

trasted strangely with the vulgar ensemble. I was certain I had never seen him before.

I called up the police inspector, and in his presence searched the man's pockets. We found a purse with about forty francs in gold and silver, a cigarette-case, a worn pocket-knife, and a small revolver of a strange make. But no papers of any description.

The inspector and the doctor smiled when we came upon the revolver.

"That tells its own tale!" said the officer, with an ominous glance.

At that moment the ambulance carriage for which the doctor had sent drove up, and I made out an order for the man's removal to the infirmary of the depot. The doctor and a policeman accompanied him.

As soon as the carriage with the white flag and red Geneva cross had driven off I asked the inspector to give me an account of what he saw on his arrival.

"When I entered the room, sir," he began, "the man was lying face downward, unconscious, half his body under the bed. I took care that nothing was disturbed. The siphon is lying exactly on the same spot, and that chair near the window was knocked over. There is still the man's hat under the bed."

"You found the window open, of course?"

"Yes. As to the man, I am certain I had him in custody three years ago whilst I was in the Passy district. He was arrested along with four others who had been found loitering in that neighborhood. On two of them we found jimmies and revolvers, similar to the one he carried. He's an old offender, sir. But who struck him that blow? And what has become of the girl? It looks an ugly business!"

I made a careful examination of the room. The bedclothes showed that Mademoiselle Brunet had not slept in the bed very long. Except on the small carpet in front of the bed, there were no traces of blood anywhere; nor did I detect any signs of a struggle. As the doctor had said, the blood-stained siphon had evidently been the

weapon with which the man had been hit. I drew out the soft felt hat from under the bed and laid it on the table.

Suddenly the inspector called out:

"Hello!" And he held up a gray cloth cap he had picked up near the window.

"This confirms my suspicions," he continued; "the fellow had some of his confederates with him. One of them, I remember, had a remarkably big head! Just look at the size of this cap!"

I examined the cap, and then said:

"It strikes me that it belongs, not to a big man, but to a woman with a small head—a cyclist, probably. You did not notice the tiny holes in the lining, caused by the hatpins with which the cap was fastened."

I continued my search, but finding nothing that could throw any more light on the affair I returned to the room where I had left Madame Maillard. Although still much upset she was now able to give me a few details.

"Alice Brunet is my niece," she said in reply to my question. "I had not seen her for over a year, and yesterday morning she wrote that she would come to spend the afternoon with me. She arrived rather late, and told me she wanted to travel that same night to Rouen. Feeling tired, however, she changed her mind, and asked to be allowed to stay the night here. We all went to bed at ten o'clock, and this morning early the maid——"

"Yes," I interrupted, "she told me what occurred this morning. I want to know a little more about Mademoiselle Brunet. Your servant referred to her twice as Mademoiselle, and twice as Madame. Is she married or single?"

The old lady's pale cheeks flushed slightly, and she hesitated a moment before replying.

"She is divorced," she remarked in a low voice, "and has resumed her maiden name of Brunet. She has seen trouble!"

"You saw the man. Do you remember ever having met him before?"

"No, Monsieur Goron. He's an utter stranger to me. A few years ago they tried to break into this house, and

once some washing left to dry in the garden was stolen. But this attempted burglary terrifies me! And what can have become of my niece?"

"Did your niece bring a bag with her when she came?"

"Yes, a small leather bag. And——"

At that moment there was a noise of quick steps on the gravel walk outside, the door flew open, and a young lady rushed in who threw her arms round Madame Maillard's neck.

"Auntie!" she cried. "Here I am! It was too dreadful! I wonder I have not gone mad!"

She dropped into a chair and covered her face with her hands.

Madame Maillard knelt beside her and gently stroked her hair.

"Poor Alice!" she whispered soothingly. "Thank the Lord you are safe! I dreaded they had killed you. But where do you come from? What has happened? Here is Monsieur Goron, who has come to investigate the affair."

Alice Brunet stared at me a moment. She was a good-looking, fair-haired woman with brilliantly white teeth, and a determined, almost hard, expression in the eyes, the expression of a woman with immense power for self-restraint, and who had fought some hard battles.

She made an effort to compose herself, and began:

"Last night, after I had retired to my room, I asked Rose for a glass of water, whereupon she brought me a siphon and a tumbler which she placed on the little table near me. I had had a busy day, and after I had undressed I sat up in bed thinking. I dozed off, but as I cannot sleep with a light in the room I soon woke up, and was just going to blow out my candle when I heard a creaky noise underneath my bed. I held my breath and listened. The noise grew more distinct, and I even fancied hearing suppressed breathing. At that moment I remembered I had not closed my window. I always sleep with my window open, but here on a ground floor it was madness, and I felt I had done a foolish thing. Too frightened to call out, I leaned forward

and, to my horror, saw a hand come from under the bed. Presently a bushy head emerged. How did it all happen? All I know is that I seized the siphon, and brought it down on the head below. By the flickering light of the candle I fancied I saw the room filled with men aiming blows at me. I felt stunned as if it had been I who had been struck. Had I killed him? The figure was lying motionless—I dared not look at it. A deadly sickness overcame me, yet, urged to get away from what was lying there, at my feet, I fastened my clothes on me, jumped out of the window, and ran out of the gate, straight ahead. How long did I run? I cannot tell. Morning was breaking, and I was still speeding along. Exhausted and sore, I finally found myself on the road to Pontoise. I entered a little inn, swallowed a cup of coffee, and having tidied myself, returned here as fast as I could."

She paused an instant, and with the same fixed look turned to me.

"But what happened here? Did you find the——"

"Yes," I replied, "the man was found on the floor, and I had him removed to the infirmary."

"He is—not dead?"

"There was a tiny spark of life in him when they took him away. It may have flickered out now. You hit him pretty hard. Is his face at all familiar to you, Mademoiselle Brunet?"

"I only saw the back of his head when I struck him, and afterward I was too nervous to look."

"In that case I must ask you to go with me to the infirmary. No, not now. I must first know how our man is getting on. Where do you live?"

"No. 122 Rue Laugier."

"Very well. One more question, please. Is this your cap?" And I produced the one found in her room.

"Yes. I generally use it when cycling in the country. I thought I had lost it."

There was a rattle of wheels. A cab drove up to the gate, a man quickly jumped out, and I recognized Plin, one of my most experienced assistants.

He had come to report on a special matter, and I went with him into the garden. When he had finished I told him in a few words what had occurred here, and said:

"I must leave now. You must manage to keep Mademoiselle Brunet here for another half-hour."

Plin eyed me curiously.

"What do you make of the business, sir?"

"The police inspector in this district swears he knows the fellow, who, he says, belongs to a gang of cracksmen."

"Quite so. But what's your opinion, sir? Did any special points strike you?"

"Many points struck me. As to my opinion, I think it is a deep business, a devilish deep business. And now I am off."

Toward four o'clock that same afternoon I went to the depot infirmary and inquired from the chief surgeon how our man was progressing.

"That fellow," he said, "must have his soul riveted to his body! The blow he received would have killed an average man. He is still unconscious, but we hope to bring him round. The pressure on the brain seems less strong. Common burglar, eh?"

"Looks like it. The moment he rallies let me know."

For four days the man hovered between life and death; and as by that time I had been fortunate enough to arrest Anastey, Madame Dellard's murderer, I could devote a little time to the Rue Montéra affair. Apart from a rather important fact I had brought to light after I had left Madame Mailard's, I had also made a few inquiries about Alice Brunet, and learned that Jean Richard, her husband, had been convicted of forgery. After her divorce she had acted as secretary to a man called Fenoux, insurance-broker, stock-broker's tout, and news-agent. Despite the imposing brass plate on his office door, Fenoux's business did not appear to prosper, for six months ago he owed his landlord two quarters' rent. Suddenly, however, he had come into money. He now had a comforta-

ble apartment in the Avenue de Messine, and could be seen every day in the Bois driving a fine pair of bays. Alice Brunet was no longer in his employ.

Plin, who assisted me in my inquiries in the Rue de Montéra affair, came to me on the morning of the fifth day with the news that the man "Duval" was out of danger, and that the head surgeon had just sent for me. It was one of Plin's peculiarities. Whenever we arrested an individual of whose identity we were not certain, Plin christened him "Duval" until his real name had transpired. When—as it frequently happened—we had several "Duvals" on our hands, the resourceful Plin overcame the difficulty by calling them the tall Duval, the pock-marked Duval, etc.

I found "Duval" in a little room by himself, in a quiet part of the building. The head surgeon and three other doctors were examining him attentively. A nurse was standing at the foot of the bed.

"It is the strangest case that has ever come our way," whispered the chief; "unless complications arise—which I don't foresee—he will be on his legs in less than no time. He will still be weak from loss of blood, but with his splendid physique his strength will soon return. Poor wretch! Recovery, for him, probably means a long term of imprisonment. I suppose he is an old jail-bird?"

"Possibly—I don't know him. Others say they do. Can I bring Mademoiselle Brunet here to have a look at him?"

"Yes. You had better come with her to-morrow whilst he is still unconscious."

I sent word to Mademoiselle Brunet, and the next morning we entered the sick man's room. He was lying with his eyes shut.

"Do you know him?" I asked.

She shivered as she gazed at the pallid figure, and her face grew white. Then she shook her head.

"No," she said, "I never saw him before."

"You are quite certain?"

"Quite!"

"In that case I need not detain you any further."

The chief surgeon's prognostication came true. His patient rallied wonderfully, and I therefore asked the anthropometrical office to take him in hand. Monsieur Bertillon took his measurements, but he informed me the next day that our man had never passed through their office.

"No," he said, "he is not one of our customers!"

Nor did any of my men recognize him, except Gallois, who backed the police inspector's opinion by stating that he had seen "Duval" in company with Brizard, a burglar, recently sentenced to seven years' transportation.

A few days later, accompanied by Plin, I again went to the infirmary.

"You can now have a chat with him," said the surgeon, "that is to say, if you can make him talk. He is as well as can be expected, and by the end of next week he can be handed over to the authorities."

"Has he spoken at all?"

"Very little. He replies to my questions regarding his condition, and asks for any trifle he may want."

I found him sitting up in bed reading a novel the doctor had lent him.

"What is your name?" I asked.

He remained silent.

"Why did you go to Madame Mailard's?"

There was no response.

"I suppose you know that when you leave this place you will be charged with a serious offense, and probably incur a severe sentence?"

He made a slight motion with the hand.

"You must also be aware that if once handed over to the examining magistrate he may keep you under remand for a very long time before sending you for trial? If, therefore—which is possible—you went to the house in the Rue Montéra without a felonious intent, now is the moment for you to speak."

The man raised himself on one elbow

and looked me straight in the face. There came, however, no reply.

"When did you leave Montreal?" I suddenly asked.

This time he gave a start, and a haggard expression came into his eyes. For a few seconds he appeared to waver and his lips moved as if he intended to speak. Then, with an impatient gesture, he pulled the bed-clothes over his shoulders and turned his face to the wall.

It was useless to prolong the interview. When we emerged into the streets I noticed that Plin looked at me inquiringly.

"I reckon my question about Montreal puzzles you?" I asked.

"It does, sir. How did you work it out?"

"Oh, it was very simple. When I searched his pockets in the Rue Monterá I also examined his linen and clothes. His shirt and pocket-handkerchief were marked S, but the name of the maker did not appear on his clothes. I then looked at the brass buttons of his trousers. They were quite plain, with the exception of one, which, with the help of a magnifying-glass, I saw was stamped 'Montreal.' I cut it off, put it in my pocket, and aimed a random shot with it. As it happened, it told, and may give me a clue."

"I dare say," grinned Plin, "you'll ferret it all out right enough before that fellow leaves the hospital. I suppose you see your way already pretty clear."

"No, and that is the trouble. I have come to a few curious conclusions, but they have to be tested. Judges and jurymen are rarely psychologists. It is not to be expected of them. A man lies hidden beneath a bed. He is discovered by a lady, and she half kills him. She had a right to do it—in self-defense. The man refuses to make any statement or to disclose his identity. The legal machinery is then set into motion. The examining magistrate will tell the accused that he is a common burglar and commit him for trial. Several members of the force will swear that he is an associate of criminals; the

jury will convict him; and the judge, having passed sentence, will compliment the lady on her pluck, and thank her for having brought a dangerous offender to justice. And, were any one to come forward and tell them that they have all been mystified, he would be laughed at. Luckily, I have still a week to look into what no doubt they will call 'a clear case.'"

The next few days, however, brought nothing but disappointments. I had wanted to know a little more about the wonderful Fenoux, and was informed that he had left for New York a week before the Rue Monterá affair. I had sent photographs of the man in the infirmary in every direction, but none of my French or foreign colleagues had recognized him. As to Mademoiselle Brunet, the reports about her were provokingly good.

"Monsieur Goron, I have known that young woman for years," said the police commissary in her district, "and I can assure you she is hard-working, and respected by all. That business with her husband was a terrible trial to her. He had a big salary, but he forged his employer's name, and all his money was squandered on the turf."

I thought the matter carefully over and tried to arrive at a definite conclusion. Why did that fellow refuse to speak? What reason had he for allowing himself to be charged with attempting a burglary, if—as I felt certain—he had come to the house for another purpose? But, in that case he would have to divulge a secret. What secret? I felt equally certain that notwithstanding her denial Mademoiselle Brunet was well acquainted with the man she nearly sent into the other world. Yet, in the face of these two people—the only actors in this strange business—remaining silent, I could hardly expect to arrive at the truth. For a moment I even felt tempted to let events follow their course. But as I knew that this unsolved problem would only weigh on my mind, I resolved to play my last card; and I sent to Mademoiselle Brunet asking her to call on me.

She looked very pretty in a smartly cut tailor costume.

"Mademoiselle," I began, "excuse me if I put a question I asked you already. Do you know the man found concealed in your room?"

"No, Monsieur Goron."

"You never met him before?"

"Never."

"Could you swear to that fact?"

"I came here to give you all the information I can, and you have no right to doubt my word!"

"Very well. We may come back to that later. Now, allow me another question. You told me how, having struck the man, you walked about all night half dazed. Is that a fact?"

She rose from her chair, and made a step toward me.

"What do you mean?" she gasped.

"What I mean is that I do not like being bluffed, and you have—pardon me for saying so—tried the experiment on me. Please sit down and listen quietly, for what I have to tell you is pretty serious. Your description of your flight from the room and your nocturnal promenade, until you found yourself on the road to Pontoise, was intensely dramatic. It would have a tremendous success in a court of justice, and draw tears from everybody. But it failed to impress me. That story somehow did not sound real, and the whole tirade—as far as I was concerned—had a contrary effect: it aroused my suspicions. I therefore left your aunt's house hurriedly, went straight to the Rue Laugier, placed a blank piece of paper in an envelope on which I wrote your name, and sent a little girl with it to the boarding-house where you are staying, telling her to ask, in case they said you were out, whether you had left town yesterday evening. After a few minutes the girl returned with the envelope and said that you came home last night late, and had left early this morning. And now you understand why I disbelieve your other statements."

In a slightly sneering tone she said:

"I am afraid, Monsieur Goron, that through moving so much among crimi-

nals you are apt to see malefactors everywhere, and you are doing me the honor to rank me among them!"

She looked at me defiantly, yet with an emotion she tried hard to conceal.

I waited a minute or so, and then burst out with the question:

"Why did you strike that man?"

This time she staggered and, burying her face in her hands, she cried convulsively.

When I saw she had regained her composure I laid my hand gently on her shoulder.

"Mademoiselle Brunet," I said, "pardon me if I have dealt a little roughly with you, but I must and will get at the bottom of that affair. That man lying now at the hospital may, for all I know, be a miscreant, but I cannot allow him to be punished for an offense I feel positive he never intended to commit. As to you, mademoiselle—"

She did not let me finish my sentence.

"Help me, Monsieur Goron!" she cried. "Promise to help me, and I will tell you all! I am no criminal!" she added, with a piteous smile.

"You need not tell me that," I laughed. "I never for an instant thought you were."

"When I was a little girl," she began in a low voice, "my mother had a volume of Dante's 'Inferno,' illustrated by Gustave Doré. I used to look for hours at a drawing representing poor wretches trying to escape from a sea of burning pitch, and always thrust back by an army of devils. I little thought that this drawing would symbolize my life! A moment ago I had the courage to taunt you for living in a world of crime, you who when you return home breathe a pure atmosphere, whilst I, do what I may, am constantly thrown back into my inferno! Whose sins am I expiating? Not my own, I hope, for I have always striven to act rightly.

"It began when I was ten years old. I had lost my mother, and one day my father was arrested on a charge of embezzlement. He died in prison, and my aunt, Madame Maillard, befriended me. I then married. My husband was

handsome, intelligent; he held a fine position, and my friends congratulated me on my luck. You know, of course, what occurred. He committed forgery. It also transpired that he had a liaison, and I obtained my divorce. I advertised for a situation as shorthand-writer and secretary, and was engaged by a Monsieur Fenoux. I was earning my living, and began to feel hopeful. Monsieur Fenoux worked me rather hard, but he paid me well for my services, although somewhat irregularly. One day I discovered that he was a cunning rascal, living at the expense of others. He wanted me to call on some one at the Hotel Continental and impersonate a foreign countess. I refused, and gave up my situation. An inexorable fate seemed to throw me continually among evil-doers.

"At Monsieur Fenoux's I had made the acquaintance of a Monsieur Salles, a French Canadian——"

"The man now lying at the depot infirmary?" I asked.

"Yes. On several occasions he had given me tickets for the theater, and a friendship had sprung up between us. When I told him that I had given Monsieur Fenoux notice he said I had done the right thing and that he would find me another situation. He added that in the meantime I could do some typewriting for him, and I gladly accepted his offer. But before a week had elapsed he began to pay me marked attention, and I decided to break off further intercourse with him. I therefore hurried over the work he had given me, and when it was finished took it down to his office. There was nobody in the little anteroom, but through the closed door of the private room I heard angry voices, followed by a smothered cry for help. I threw open the door, and there stood Monsieur Salles grasping a long thin man by the throat. On perceiving me he released his hold, but not a word was spoken. The other man pulled himself together, and walked out of the office, muttering something I did not understand. Monsieur Salles then turned to me.

"'I had to do it,' he said, 'and but for your dropping in I would probably have throttled him.'

"Without replying I handed him the typewritten copies.

"'Wait a second for me,' he cried; 'I want to send off a wire, and will return at once.'

"Whilst he was gone my glance wandered to some letters on the table, and you will understand my dismay when on one of them I recognized my ex-husband's writing. It was a short note, dated about six months before his arrest. It read:

"DEAR SALLES: I have not yet received the Martinot agreement. The moment it comes to hand I will send it you. Yours,
L. RICHARD.

"For a moment I stood stock-still. The document referred to was among those I had copied. What did it all mean? What fresh villainy was coming to light? I, that man's divorced wife, had possibly become an accomplice! Filled with an indescribable loathing, I gathered up the papers I had brought, including my ex-husband's letter, and stuffed them into the little bag I had brought with me, with the intention of starting that evening for Rouen, and made for the door. But before I reached it Monsieur Salles returned. I have no recollection of the scene that followed nor of what I said to him. All I remember is that he shouted that unless I returned him these documents he was a lost man, and that he finally grasped my arm. But I shook him off, ran down the stairs, jumped into a cab, and drove to Madame Maillard's. Monsieur Salles had followed me. As I got out at the Rue Montéra he again begged me to let him have the papers. But I pushed him away and entered my aunt's house. In the middle of the night I awoke to find him concealed beneath my bed.

"Mad with rage, I hit him with the first thing I could seize. Curiously enough, the thought that possibly I might have killed him never struck me, otherwise I would have been more frightened. Moreover, these papers had taken possession of my mind. Evi-

dently they were of great importance for Salles to have risked so much! I, a convict's daughter, a convict's wife, saw myself sharing their fate! Innocent, I would have to suffer with the guilty! But, although well-nigh despairing, I resolved to fight against my cruel destiny, and having dressed quickly, rushed home to put the papers in a safe place. I returned the next morning to my aunt's, and it was only then that I began to realize what I had done. You know the rest. And now, what do you want me to do? What do you want to do with me?"

I had listened attentively to this extraordinary story, and waited a few minutes for the lady to master her emotion.

"You did well to confide in me," I said, "and I will help you. In fact, you need help, for you have placed yourself in a strange predicament. You told everybody that you did not know the man, and that you hit him on the head because you thought he was a burglar. Supposing you had not made these disclosures to me, one of two things would have happened. Either the man—who apparently had a secret he is afraid to divulge—having maintained an absolute silence, would have been convicted of attempting a burglary, in which case you would have committed an abominable action in allowing this to be done. Or, afraid of the consequences of his act, he would have tried to clear himself by stating why he went to the house. Just think how this would have affected you! You would have stood in the position of one of his confederates—the very thing you were afraid of. Have you not thought of all this?"

She turned red to the roots of her hair.

"Monsieur Goron," she at last faltered, "I see how wrong I have been. But nothing of this struck me. I have been, and still am, under a spell. My mind is giving way under it!"

She put a hand on either side of her head and rocked herself to and fro in the intensity of her grief.

"Does Monsieur Salles know you are Richard's divorced wife?" I asked.

"No. I am sure he does not. He only knows me by my maiden name."

"So much the better. But it is absolutely necessary that this affair should be settled at once, and I therefore must see this Monsieur Salles to-day. Will you put yourself unreservedly in my hands?"

"Yes, Monsieur Goron. But you cannot fight against this spell!"

"Yes, I can."

In less than an hour I arrived at the infirmary, where to my regret I learned that the examining magistrate had already taken the matter in hand. No time was to be lost. I found the pseudo Duval reclining in an easy chair. He was very pale.

"Good afternoon," I said. "I hope you are better."

He gave me a quick glance and looked away. I took a chair near him and resumed:

"In a few days you will very likely be in the public prosecutor's hands. The consequences may then be fatal to you, for everybody believes you went to Madame Maillard's house on burglary bent. Yes, everybody—except myself. I guessed from the very start that other motives had prompted you to go to that house. I now know these motives. If you have committed some other offense for which you may have to answer, the law must take its course; but I want to save you from being charged with one you never perpetrated or intended to perpetrate. Now, will you speak?"

His color rose, he breathed heavily, but he remained silent.

"Monsieur Salles," I then cried, "it is no use your playing hide-and-seek with me. Mademoiselle Alice Brunet has told me all!"

He turned quickly toward me with heaving chest and an intense expression of pain in his eyes. He then suddenly held out both his hands.

"Monsieur Goron," he muttered in a husky voice, "you can grasp them. They are clean!"

I shook his hand, and said:

"Keep calm. If, as you say—and I believe your words—your conscience is

clear, my task will be easier. But, for Heaven's sake, speak!"

Talking rapidly, as if anxious to rid himself of an oppressive load, he said:

"You know Mademoiselle Brunet's secret. Now hear mine. It will not take many words to tell. I am from Montreal, where my father was in the export trade. His business was thriving, and some ten years ago he retired with a comfortable fortune. He bought a pretty villa on the outskirts of the city, and we might have been very happy. But, with nothing to occupy his mind, time weighed heavily on him; and he, who used to have a horror of gambling, began to speculate. Chance favored him at first, then his luck turned, and in order to retrieve his losses he plunged. Unfortunately he kept all his affairs from my mother and me, and we were powerless to interfere. One day he said he had embarked on a big scheme that would bring in a fortune. Strange men came to the house with whom he remained closeted, but nothing transpired of these secret meetings. Some twelve months ago he was seized with an apopleptic fit, and he is now lying paralyzed. I had in the meantime started business on my own account, and am doing well. Of course, I came to my mother's assistance to extricate her from the position in which my father had placed her. My father, we discovered, had lost the greater part of his fortune, but there was still enough left for both to live in comparative comfort. One day we received the visit of a man called Bedford, an American. To our horror we learned that my father had fallen into the hands of a lot of swindlers and had become seriously compromised. Two of these men have been convicted. One who committed forgery is called Richard——"

"Mademoiselle Alice Brunet's ex-husband."

Salles stared at me open-mouthed.

"Her husband! Are you positive?"

"Quite positive."

He remained a moment pensive.

"This then explains her extraordinary attitude. Well, this Bedford at-

tempted to blackmail us, and I foresaw a catastrophe. After infinite trouble I found out the names of the persons in London and Paris who had been swindled by the gang, my poor father having unconsciously helped them in their work, and the only way to save us all from disgrace was to refund the victims. Between my mother and myself we raised the necessary funds, and I at once started for Europe. In London I had no trouble to settle everything, but that scoundrel Bedford dogged me to Paris, and by every means tried to hinder me from arranging matters. I nearly killed him in my office the other day. For all that, I hoped I had overcome the worst difficulties, when, for reasons which at the time appeared to me inexplicable, Mademoiselle Brunet refused to return me some documents of the greatest importance. I followed her to her aunt's, and, determined to recover my papers at any price, I stole into the house and hid myself there. It was a reckless act, for which I suffered. Had it not been for Mademoiselle Brunet, I would probably be now on my way to Montreal. It is hard on me and on my poor mother! And this, Monsieur Goron, is the whole story."

I could not help stamping my foot.

"Why did you not tell me all this the first time I saw you, instead of allowing such an ugly charge to hang over your head?"

"Have you ever had your skull broken, Monsieur Goron?" he asked, with a bitter smile. "If not, you do not know the effect it has on the brain. Mine had ceased to work; and I was afraid to speak for fear of placing myself in a worse plight. Heaven knows how it all will end!"

"Let me have all the documents relative to the whole business, and leave it all to me," I cried.

I found the papers at the address he gave me, and Mademoiselle Brunet having at my request handed me those in her possession, I carefully went through them and satisfied myself that Salles' statement to me was true in every respect. I then laid all the facts before the public prosecutor, who at

once issued the order for the man's release. A week later Salles called at my office, and beaming with joy informed me that his mission was now successfully terminated.

"I am now returning to Montreal," he said, "and shall never forget your kindness!"

Three years elapsed. I had been asked to act as best man to an old friend, and at two o'clock in the afternoon arrived at the mairie of the Passy quarter, where the civil marriage was to take place. As I entered the building I saw a red-haired gentleman with a big gardenia in his buttonhole at the door, and I recognized Salles.

"Are you a happy bridegroom?" I asked laughingly.

"Yes," he replied, "and there comes the bride."

A hired brougham drove up, and an elderly lady and gentleman alighted, escorting Mademoiselle Alice Brunet, very gorgeous in violet cloth with a long train. On seeing me she turned crimson, and taking me aside, whispered:

"I suppose you are surprised?"

"No, I never am. But what about the spell?"

"It's broken, Monsieur Goron. And I am so happy!"

"You must have broken that spell the night you broke Salles' head?"

"Hush, Monsieur Goron," she called out, placing her little gloved hand on my lips. "We never refer to that!"

Salles now came toward us, but at that moment the usher called out their names, and kissing their hands to me they and their friends entered the marriage-hall.



THE LUCK OF LOTTERY NUMBERS

THERE is no one—not even a Monte Carlo gambler—who is more superstitious than the man who expects to make a fortune by a turn of the lottery-wheel. He is a firm and unshakable believer in lucky numbers, looks for them all day, dreams of them at night, and sees in the most trivial happening the key that is to open for him the treasure-house of fortune.

Many dream the lucky number; others choose their age, or that of a wife or friend, a row of odd or even numbers, or numbers drawn haphazard out of a hat; each pinning his or her faith absolutely to the number thus fantastically chosen.

In Europe to-day, and especially in Italy, the craze for lucky numbers is almost universal. A number is dreamed of, and immediately the dreamer rushes to the ticket-office to purchase it; a man falls from a scaffolding twenty-three feet high, and the number twenty-three is applied for; a woman sees a cat and dog playing together, she rushes home, consults her book of symbols, finds the two animals represented under number sixty-five; and that number must be obtained if it is possible, for it is sure to bring luck.



A CURIOUS HOTEL

THERE is a large hotel in Colorado which has a notable feature of interest in the fact that a trout-stream runs right through its dining-room. A guest is allowed to take rod and line and angle for the fish, which, when caught, are cooked and served to him at the next meal, and it is quite a regular custom for a guest to catch trout for his own breakfast. Needless to say, the stream is kept well stocked with fish, and is a great attraction to the guests.

Tono-Bungay

By H. G. Wells

Author of "The Invisible Man," "The Time Machine," "The Wheels of Chance,"
"The War of the Worlds," Etc.

SYNOPSIS OF CHAPTERS PREVIOUSLY PUBLISHED.

George Ponderevo, only son of the housekeeper of Bladesover House, falls into disgrace with his mother and Lady Drew, as the result of pouncing Archie Garvell for a slighting reference to his humble position in life. An imperious little girl, the Honorable Beatrice Normandy, is somewhat responsible for this boys' quarrel. George is banished from Bladesover for presuming to oppose his "betters," and is apprenticed to his uncle Edward Ponderevo, proprietor of a chemist's shop in Wimblehurst. He finds his uncle and his Aunt Susan most interesting characters. The former wants to be where things happen—London—America—any place where people "rush about—do things." In the excess of his ambition he invests on margin his own savings and a small trust-fund placed in his charge for George. The stock tumbles and he is forced to sell his shop and get a position in London as assistant apothecary. George stays a while in Wimblehurst and then goes to London as a student of pharmacy. He visits his uncle and finds him and his wife in poor quarters, but Ponderevo is still full of his schemes for amassing wealth. He whispers "Tono-Bungay" significantly as the great secret that will make them all rich, but won't vouchsafe any explanation. Later his uncle sends for him and tells him Tono-Bungay is a new patent medicine. The "medicine" strikes George as being a "fake" concoction and he is not inclined to accept his uncle's offer of a position and a share in the business of booming it. After some thought and persuasion he "comes in." They advertise "Tono-Bungay" broadcast and reap a tremendous harvest of money for "bottled faith," for the concoction is really without medicinal value. Other preparations and businesses are added and exploited with the result that Edward Ponderevo becomes a Napoleon of commerce and a power in London. People come to him with all sorts of new ideas and schemes, begging him to finance them. Among these is the enterprise of Gordon-Nasmyth to steal an immense heap of "quap," a conglomeration of radium, thorium, canadium and other rare and precious elements, to be had for the taking at Mordet Island on the west coast of Africa. They hold him off because of the doubts and difficulties of the undertaking. Meanwhile Ponderevo and his wife and nephew are living in ever increasing luxury. Ponderevo plans and begins the building of a stupendous residential palace, Crest Hill. George is interested in aeronautics and devotes most of his time to inventing and experimenting with flying machines and navigable balloons. While soaring his machine meets with disaster and he is badly hurt. Beatrice Normandy, who has again come into his life, nurses him to recovery. Their early romance is resumed and they confess to each other their love.



UT I was only beginning to gage the unaccountable elements in Beatrice. For a week after my return to Lady Grove I had no sign of her, and then she called with Lady

Osprey and brought a huge bunch of perennial sunflowers and Michaelmas daisies, "just the old flowers there were in your room," said my aunt with a relentless eye on me. I didn't get any talk with Beatrice then and she took occasion to tell us she was going to

London for some indefinite number of weeks. I couldn't even pledge her to write to me, and when she did it was a brief, enigmatical, friendly letter with not a word of the reality between us.

I wrote back a love-letter—my first love-letter—and she made no reply for eight days. Then came a scrawl: "I can't write letters. Wait till we can talk. Are you better?"

I think the reader would be amused if he could see the papers on my desk as I write all this, the mangled and disfigured pages; the experimental arrangements of notes, the sheets of sug-

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gestions balanced in constellations, the blotchesque intellectual battle-grounds over which I have been fighting. I find this account of my relations to Beatrice quite the most difficult part of my story to write. I happen to be a very objective-minded person; I forget my moods and this was so much an affair of moods. And even such moods and emotions as I recall are very difficult to convey. To me it is about as difficult as describing a taste or a scent.

Then the objective story is made up of little things that are difficult to set in a proper order. And love is an hysterical passion, now high, now low, now exalted, and now intensely physical. No one has ever yet dared to tell a love-story completely, its alternations, its comings and goings, its debased moments, its hate. The love-stories we tell, tell only the net consequence, the ruling effect.

How can I rescue from the past now the mystical quality of Beatrice; my intense longing for her; the overwhelming, irrational, formless desire? How can I explain how intimately that worship mingled with a high impatient resolve to make her mine, to take her by strength and courage, to do my loving in a violent, heroic manner? And then the doubts, the puzzled arrest at the fact of her fluctuations, at her refusal to marry me, at the fact that even when at last she returned to Bedley Corner she seemed to evade me? She returned to Bedley Corner, and for some weeks she was flitting about me, and never once could I have talk with her alone. When she came to my sheds Carpaby was always with her, jealously observant. Why the devil couldn't she send him about his business? The days slipped by and my anger gathered.

All this mingles with the making of *Lord Roberts b*. I had resolved upon that one night as I lay awake at Bedley Corner; I got it planned out before the bandages were off my face. I conceived this second navigable balloon in a grandiose manner. It was to be a second *Lord Roberts a*, only more so; it was to be three times as big, large enough to carry three men, and

it was to be an altogether triumphant vindication of my claims upon the air. The framework was to be hollow like a bird's bones, air-tight, and the air pumped in or out as the weight of fuel I carried changed. I talked much and boasted to Cothope—whom I suspected of skepticisms about this new type—of what it would do, and it progressed—slowly. At times I would go away to London to snatch some chance of seeing Beatrice there, at times nothing but a day of gliding and hard and dangerous exercise would satisfy me. And now in the newspapers, in conversation, in everything about me, arose a new invader of my mental states. Something was happening to the great schemes of my uncle's affairs; people were beginning to doubt, to question. It was the first quiver of his tremendous insecurity, the first wobble of that gigantic credit top he had kept spinning so long.

There were comings and goings, November and December slipped by. I had two unsatisfactory meetings with Beatrice, meetings that had no privacy—in which we said things of the sort that need atmosphere, badly and furtively. I wrote to her several times and she wrote back notes that I would sometimes respond to altogether, sometimes condemn as insincere evasions. "You don't understand. I can't just now explain. Be patient with me. Leave things a little while to me." So she wrote to me.

I would talk aloud to these notes and wrangle over them in my workroom—while the plans of *Lord Roberts b* waited.

"You don't give me a chance!" I would say. "Why don't you let me know the secret? That's what I'm for—to settle difficulties!"

And at last I could hold out no longer against these accumulating pressures.

I took an arrogant, outrageous line that left her no loopholes; I behaved as though we were living in a melodrama.

"You must come and talk to me," I wrote, "or I will come and take you. I want you—and the time runs away."

We met in a ride in the upper plantations. It must have been early in January, for there was snow on the ground and on the branches of the trees. We walked to and fro for an hour or more, and from the first I pitched the key high in romance and made understandings impossible. It was our worst time together. I boasted like an actor, and she, I know not why, was tired and spiritless.

"What are the difficulties?" I cried. "There's no difficulty I will not overcome for you! Do your people think I'm no equal for you? Who says it? My dear, tell me to win a title! I'll do it in five years!"

"Here am I just grown a man at the sight of you. I have wanted something to fight for. Let me fight for you!"

"I'm rich without intending it. Let me mean it, give me an honorable excuse for it, and I'll put all this rotten old warren of England at your feet!"

I said such things as that. I write them down here in all their resounding base pride. I said these empty and foolish things and they are part of me. Why should I still cling to pride and be ashamed? I shouted her down.

I passed from such megalomania to petty accusations.

"You think Carnaby is a better man than I?" I said.

"No!" she cried, stung to speech. "No!"

"You think we're unsubstantial. You've listened to all these rumors Boom has started because we talked of a newspaper of our own. When you are with me you know I'm a man; when you get away from me you think I'm a cheat and a cad. There's not a word of truth in the things they say about us. I've been slack, I've left things. But we have only to exert ourselves. You do not know how wide and far we have spread our nets. Even now we have a coup—an expedition—in hand. It will put us on a footing."

Her eyes asked mutely and asked in vain that I would cease to boast of the very qualities she admired in me.

In the night I could not sleep for thinking of that talk and the vulgar things I had said in it. I could not understand the drift my mind had taken. I was acutely disgusted. And my unwonted doubts about myself spread from a merely personal discontent to our financial position. It was all very well to talk as I had done of wealth and power and peerage, but what did I know nowadays of my uncle's position? Suppose in the midst of such boasting and confidence there came some turn I did not suspect, some rottenness he had concealed from me? I resolved I had been playing with aeronautics long enough, that next morning I would go to him and have things clear between us.

I caught an early train and went up to the Hardingham.

I went up to the Hardingham through a dense London fog to see how things really stood. Before I had talked to my uncle for ten minutes I felt like a man who has just awakened in a bleak, inhospitable room out of a grandiose dream.

CHAPTER IX.

HOW I STOLE THE HEAPS OF QUAP FROM MORDET ISLAND.

"We got to make a fight for it," said my uncle. "We got to face the music."

I remember that even at the sight of him I had a sense of impending calamity. He sat under the electric light with the shadow of his hair making bars down his face. He looked shrunken and sallow as though his skin had suddenly got loose and yellow. The decorations of the room seemed to have lost freshness, and outside—the blinds were up—there was not so much fog as a dun darkness. One saw the dingy outlines of the chimneys opposite quite distinctly, and then a sky of such a brown as only London can display.

"I saw a placard," I said; "More Ponderevity."

"That's Boom," he said. "Boom and his damned newspapers. He's trying

to fight me down. Ever since I offered to buy the *Daily Decorator* he's been at me. And he thinks consolidating Do Ut cut down the ads. He wants everything, damn him! He's got no sense of dealing. I'd like to bash his face!"

"Well," I said; "what's to be done?"

"Keep going," said my uncle.

"I'll smash Boom yet," he said with sudden savagery.

"Nothing else?" I asked.

"We got to keep going. There's a scare on. Did you notice the rooms? Half the people out there this morning are reporters. And if I talk they touch it up! They didn't used to touch things up! Now they put in character touches—insulting you. Don't know what journalism's coming to. It's all Boom's doing."

He cursed Lord Boom with considerable imaginative vigor.

"Well," I said, "what can he do?"

"Shove us up against time, George; make money tight for us. We been handling a lot of money—and he tightens us up."

"We're sound?"

"Oh, we're sound, George. Trust me for that! But all the same—there's such a lot of imagination in these things. We're sound enough. That's not it."

He blew. "Damn Boom!" he said, and his eyes over his glasses met mine defiantly.

"We can't, I suppose, run close-hauled for a bit—stop expenditure?"

"Where?"

"Well—Crest Hill."

"What!" he shouted. "Me stop Crest Hill for Boom!" He waved a fist as if to hit his inkpot and controlled himself with difficulty. He spoke at last in a reasonable voice. "If I did," he said, "he'd kick up a fuss. It's no good even if I wanted to. Everybody's watching the place. If I was to stop building we'd be down in a week."

He had an idea. "I wish I could do something to start a strike or something. No such luck. Treat those

workmen a sight too well. No, sink or swim, Crest Hill goes on until we're under water."

I began to ask questions and irritated him instantly.

"Oh, dash these explanations, George!" he cried; "you only make things look rottener than they are. It's your way. It isn't a case of figures. We're all right—there's only one thing we got to do."

"Yes?"

"Show value, George. That's where this quap comes in; that's why I fell in so readily with what you brought to me week before last. Here we are, we got our option on the perfect filament, and all we want's canadium. Nobody knows there's more canadium in the world than will go on the edge of a sixpence except me and you. Nobody has an idee the perfect filament's more than just a bit of theorizing. Fifty tons of quap and we'd turn that bit of theorizing into somethin'—we'd make the lamp trade sit on its tail and howl. We'd put Ediswan and all of 'em into a parcel with our last year's trousers and a hat, and swap 'em off for a pot of geraniums. See? We'd do it through Business Organizations, and there you are! See? Capern's Patent Filament! The Ideal and the Real! George, we'll do it! We'll bring it off! And then we'll give such a facer to Boom; he'll think for fifty years. He's laying up for our London and African meeting. Let him. He can turn the whole paper onto us. He says the Business Organizations' shares aren't worth fifty-two, and we quote 'em at eighty-four. Well, here we are. Gettin' ready for him—loading our gun."

His pose was triumphant.

"Yes," I said, "that's all right. But I can't help thinking where should we be if we hadn't just by accident got Capern's Perfect Filament. Because, you know it was an accident—my buying up like that."

He crumpled up his nose into an expression of impatient distaste at my unreasonableness.

"And after all, the meeting's in June, and you haven't begun to get the quap!"

After all, we've still got to load our gun——"

"They start on Toosday."

"Have they got the brig?"

"They've got a brig."

"Gordon-Nasmyth!" I doubted.

"Safe as a bank," he said. "More I see of that man the more I like him. All I wish is we'd got a steamer instead of a sailing ship——"

"And," I went on, "you seem to overlook what used to weigh with us a bit. This canadium side of the business and the Capern chance have rushed you off your legs. After all—it's stealing, and in its way an international outrage. They've got two gunboats on the coast."

I jumped up and went and stared out at the fog.

"And, by Jove, it's about our only chance! I didn't dream."

I turned on him. "I've been up in the air," I said. "Heaven knows where I haven't been. And here's our only chance—and you give it to that adventurous lunatic to play in his own way—in a brig!"

"Well, you had a voice——"

"I wish I'd been in this before. We ought to have run out a steamer to Lagos or one of those West Coast places and done it from there. Fancy a brig in the Channel at this time of year, if it blows southwest!"

"I dare say you'd have shoved it, George. Still—you know, George, I believe in him."

"Yes," I said. "Yes, I believe in him, too. In a way. Still——"

He took up a telegram that was lying on his desk and opened it. His face became a livid yellow. He put the flimsy pink paper down with a slow, reluctant movement and took off his glasses.

"George," he said, "the luck's against us."

"What?"

He grimaced with his mouth in the queerest way at the telegram.

"That."

I took it up and read:

Motor smash compound fracture of the leg
gordon nasmyth what price mordet now

For a moment neither of us spoke.

"That's all right," I said at last.

"Eh?" said my uncle.

"I'm going. I'll get that quap or bust."

2.

I had a ridiculous persuasion that I was "saving the situation."

"I'm going," I said quite consciously and dramatically. I saw the whole affair—how shall I put it?—in American colors.

I sat down beside him. "Give me all the data you've got," I said, "and I'll pull this thing off."

"But nobody knows exactly where it——"

"Nasmyth does, and he'll tell me."

"He's been very close," said my uncle, and regarded me.

"He'll tell me all right now he's smashed."

He thought. "I believe he will."

"George," he said, "if you pull this thing off! Once or twice before you've stepped in—with that sort of Woosh of yours——"

He left the sentence unfinished.

"Give me that note-book," I said, "and tell me all you know. Where's the ship? Where's Pollack? And where's that telegram from? If that quap's to be got, I'll get it or bust. If you'll hold on here until I get back with it."

And so it was I jumped into the wildest adventure of my life.

I requisitioned my uncle's best car forthwith. I went down that night to the place of despatch named on Nasmyth's telegram, Bampton, routed him out with a little trouble from that center, made things right with him and got his explicit directions; and I was inspecting the *Maud Mary* with young Pollack, his cousin and aide, the following afternoon. She was rather a shock to me and not at all in my style, a beast of a brig inured to the potato trade, and she reeked from end to end with the faint subtle smell of raw potatoes so that it prevailed even over the temporary smell of new paint.

She was a beast of a brig, all hold and dirty framework, and they had ballasted her with old iron and old rails and iron sleepers, and got a miscellaneous lot of spades and iron wheelbarrows against the loading of the quap. I thought her over with Pollack, one of those tall blond young men who smoke pipes and don't help much, and then by myself, and as a result I did my best to sweep Gravesend clean of wheeling-planks, and got in as much cord and small rope as I could for lashing. I had an idea we might need to run up a jetty. In addition to much ballast she held remotely hidden in a sort of inadvertent way a certain number of ambiguous cases which I didn't examine, but which I gathered were a provision against the need of a trade.

The captain was a most extraordinary creature, under the impression we were after copper ore; he was a Roumanian Jew, with twitching, excitable features, who had made his way to a certificate after some preliminary naval experiences in the Black Sea. The mate was an Essex man of impenetrable reserve. The crew were astoundingly ill clad and destitute and dirty; most of them youths, unwashed, out of colliers. One, the cook, was a mulatto; and one, the best-built fellow of them all, was a Breton. There was some subterfuge about our position on board—I forget the particulars now—I was called the supercargo and Pollack was the steward. This added to the piratical flavor that insufficient funds and Gordon-Nasmyth's original genius had already given the enterprise.

Those two days of bustle at Gravesend, under dingy skies, in narrow, dirty streets, were a new experience for me. It is like nothing else in my life. I realized that I was a modern and a civilized man. I found the food filthy and the coffee horrible; the whole town stank in my nostrils, the landlord of the Good Intent on the quay had a stand-up quarrel with us before I could get even a hot bath, and the bedroom I slept in was infested by a quantity of exotic but voracious flat parasites

called locally "bugs," in the walls, in the woodwork, everywhere. I fought them with insect-powder, and found them comatose in the morning.

Let me confess that through all this time before we started I was immensely self-conscious, and that Beatrice played the part of audience in my imagination throughout. I was, as I say, "saving the situation," and I was acutely aware of that. The evening before we sailed, instead of revising our medicine-chest as I had intended, I took the car and ran across country to Lady Grove to tell my aunt of the journey I was making, dress, and astonish Lady Osprey by an after-dinner call.

The two ladies were at home and alone beside a big fire that seemed wonderfully cheerful after the winter night. I remember the effect of the little parlor in which they sat as very bright and domestic. Lady Osprey in a costume of mauve and lace sat on a chintz sofa and played an elaborately spread-out patience by the light of a tall shaded lamp; Beatrice in a white dress that showed her throat smoked a cigarette in an armchair and read with a lamp at her elbow. The room was white-paneled and chintz-curtained. About these two bright centers of light were warm dark shadows in which a circular mirror shone like a pool of brown water. I carried off my raid by behaving like a slave of etiquette. There were moments when I think I really made Lady Osprey believe that my call was an unavoidable necessity, that it would have been negligent of me not to call just how and when I did. But at the best those were transitory moments.

They received me with disciplined amazement. Lady Osprey was interested in my face and scrutinized the scar. Beatrice stood behind her solicitude. Our eyes met, and in hers I could see startled interrogations.

"I'm going," I said, "to the west coast of Africa."

They asked questions, but it suited my mood to be vague.

"We've interests there. It is urgent I should go. I don't know when I may return."

After that I perceived Beatrice surveyed me steadily.

The conversation was rather difficult. I embarked upon lengthy thanks for their kindness to me after my accident. I tried to understand Lady Osprey's game of patience, but it didn't appear that Lady Osprey was anxious for me to understand her patience. I came to the verge of taking my leave.

"You needn't go yet," said Beatrice abruptly.

She walked across to the piano, took a pile of music from the cabinet near, surveyed Lady Osprey's back, and with a gesture to me dropped it all deliberately onto the floor.

"Must talk," she said, kneeling close to me as I helped her to pick it up. "Turn my pages. At the piano."

"I can't read music."

"Turn my pages."

Presently we were at the piano, and Beatrice was playing with noisy inaccuracy. She glanced over her shoulder and Lady Osprey had resumed her patience. The old lady was very pink, and appeared to be absorbed in some attempt to cheat herself without our observing.

"Isn't West Africa a vile climate? Are you going to live there? Why are you going?"

Beatrice asked these questions in a low voice and gave me no chance to answer. Then taking a rhythm from the music before her, she said:

"At the back of the house is a garden—a door in the wall—on the lane. Understand?"

I turned over two pages without any effect on her playing.

"When?" I asked.

She dealt in chords. "I wish I *could* play this!" she said. "Midnight."

She gave her attention to the music for a time.

"You may have to wait."

"I'll wait."

She brought her playing to an end by—as schoolboys say—"stashing it up."

"I can't play to-night," she said, standing up and meeting my eyes. "I wanted to give you a parting voluntary."

"Was that Wagner, Beatrice?" asked Lady Osprey, looking up from her cards. "It sounded very confused."

I took my leave. I had a curious twinge of conscience as I parted from Lady Osprey. Either a first intimation of middle age or my inexperience in romantic affairs was to blame, but I felt a very distinct objection to the prospect of invading this good lady's premises from the garden door. I motored up to the pavilion, found Cothope reading in bed, told him for the first time of West Africa, spent an hour with him in settling all the outstanding details of *Lord Roberts b*, and left that in his hands to finish against my return. I sent the motor back to Lady Grove, and still wearing my fur coat—for the January night was damp and bitterly cold—walked back to Bedley Corner.

I found the lane to the back of the Dower House without any difficulty, and was at the door in the wall with ten minutes to spare. I lit a cigar and fell to walking up and down. This queer flavor of intrigue, this nocturnal garden-door business, had taken me by surprise and changed my mental attitudes. I was startled out of my egotistical pose and thinking intently of Beatrice, of that elfin quality in her that always pleased me, that always took me by surprise, that had made her for example so instantly conceive this meeting.

She came within a minute of midnight; the door opened softly and she appeared, a short, gray figure in a motor-coat of sheepskin, bareheaded to the cold drizzle. She flitted up to me, and her eyes were shadows in her dusky face.

"Why are you going to West Africa?" she asked at once.

"Business crisis. I have to go."

"You're not going— You're coming back?"

"Three or four months," I said, "at most."

"Then, it's nothing to do with me?"

"Nothing," I said. "Why should it have?"

"Oh, that's all right. One never knows what people think or what peo-

ple fancy." She took me by the arm. "Let's go for a walk," she said.

I looked about me at darkness and rain.

"That's all right," she laughed. "We can go along the lane and into the Old Woking Road. Do you mind? Of course you don't. My head? It doesn't matter. One never meets anybody."

"How do you know?"

"I've wandered like this before. Of course. Did you think"—she nodded her head back at her home—"that's all?"

"No, by Jove!" I cried; "it's manifest it isn't."

She took my arm and turned me down the lane. "Night's my time," she said by my side. "There's a touch of the werwolf in my blood. One never knows in these old families. I've wondered often. Here we are, anyhow, alone in the world. Just darkness and cold and a sky of clouds and wet. And we—together. I like the wet on my face and hair, don't you? When do you sail?"

I told her, "To-morrow."

"Oh, well, there's no to-morrow now. You and I!" She stopped and confronted me.

"You don't say a word except to answer!"

"No," I said.

"Last time you did all the talking."

"Like a fool. Now——"

We looked at each other's dim face. "You're glad to be here?"

"I'm glad—I'm beginning to be—it's more than glad."

She put her hands on my shoulders and drew me down to kiss her.

"Ah!" she said, and for a moment or so we just clung to one another.

"That's all," she said, releasing herself. "What bundles of clothes we are to-night! I felt we should kiss some day again. Always. The last time was ages ago."

"Among the fern-stalks."

"Among the bracken. You remember? And your lips were cold. Were mine? The same lips—after so long—after so much! And now let's trudge through this blotted-out world together

for a time. Yes, let me take your arm. Just trudge, see? Hold tight to me because I know the way—and don't talk—don't talk. Unless you want to talk. Let me tell you things. You see, dear, the whole world is blotted out—it's dead and gone, and we're in this place. This dark wild place. We're dead. Or all the world is dead. No! We're dead. No one can see us. We're shadows. We've got out of our positions, out of our bodies—and together. That's the good thing of it—together. That's the why the world can't see us and why we hardly see the world. Ssh! Is it all right?"

"It's all right," I said.

We stumbled along for a time in a close silence. We passed a dim-lit, rain-veiled window.

"The silly world," she said, "the silly world! It eats and sleeps. If the wet didn't patter so from the trees we'd hear it snoring. It's dreaming such stupid things—stupid judgments. It doesn't know we are passing, we two—free of it—clear of it. You and I!"

We pressed against each other reassuringly.

"I'm glad we're dead," she whispered. "I'm glad we're dead. I was tired of it, dear. I was so tired of it, dear, and so entangled."

She stopped abruptly.

We splashed through a string of puddles. I began to remember things I had meant to say.

"Look here!" I cried. "I want to help you beyond measure. You are entangled. What is the trouble? I asked you to marry me. You said you would. But there's something."

My thoughts sounded clumsy as I said them.

"Is it something about my position? Or is it something perhaps—about some other man?"

There was an immense assenting silence.

"You've puzzled me so. At first—I mean quite early—I thought you meant to make me marry you."

"I did."

"And then——"

"To-night," she said after a long pause, "I can't explain. I love you! But—explanations! To-night—my dear, here we are in the world alone—and the world doesn't matter. Nothing matters. Here am I in the cold with you—and my bed away there deserted. I'd tell you—I *will* tell you when things enable me to tell you, and soon enough they will. But to-night—I won't, I won't."

She left my side and went in front of me.

She turned upon me. "Look here," she said, "I insist upon your being dead. Do you understand? I'm not joking. To-night you and I are out of life. It's our time together. There may be other times, but this we won't spoil. We're—in Hades if you like. Where there's nothing to hide and nothing to tell. No bodies even. No bothers. We loved each other—down there—and were kept apart, but now it doesn't matter. It's over. If you won't agree to that—I will go home."

"I wanted——" I began.

"I know! Oh! my dear, if you'd only understand I understand. If you'd only not care—and love me to-night."

"I do love you," I said.

"Then love me," she answered, "and leave all these things that bother you. Love me! Here I am!"

"But——"

"No!" she said.

"Well, have your way."

She carried her point, and we wandered into the quiet together and Beatrice talked to me of love.

I'd never heard a woman before in all my life who could talk of love, who could lay bare and develop and touch with imagination all that mass of fine emotion every woman, it may be, hides. She had read of love, she had thought of love, a thousand sweet lyrics had sounded through her brain and left fine fragments in her memory; she poured it out, all of it, shamelessly, skilfully, for me. I cannot give any sense of that talk. I cannot even tell how much of the delight of it was the magic of her voice, the glow of her near presence. And always we walked swathed warm-

ly through a chilly air, along dim, interminable greasy roads—with never a soul abroad it seemed but us, never a beast in the fields.

"Why do people love each other?" I said.

"Why not?"

"But why do I love you? Why is your voice better than any voice, your face sweeter than any face?"

"And why do I love you?" she asked; "not only what is fine in you, but what isn't? Why do I love your dulness, your arrogance? For I do. To-night I love the very rain-drops on the fur of your coat."

So we talked; and at last very wet, still glowing but a little tired, we parted at the garden door. We had been wandering for two hours in our strange irrational community of happiness, and all the world about us, and particularly Lady Osprey and her household, had been asleep—and dreaming of anything rather than Beatrice in the night and rain.

She stood in the doorway a muffled figure with eyes that glowed.

"Come back," she whispered. "I shall wait for you."

She hesitated.

She touched the lapel of my coat. "I love you *now*," she said, and lifted her face to mine.

I held her to me and was atremble from top to toe. "O God!" I cried. "And I must go!"

She slipped from my arms and paused regarding me. For an instant the world seemed full of fantastic possibilities.

"Yes, *go!*" she said, and vanished and slammed the door upon me, leaving me alone like a man now fallen from fairyland in the black darkness of the night.

3.

That expedition to Mordet Island stands apart from all the rest of my life, detached, a piece by itself with an atmosphere of its own.

Vile weather, an impatient fretting against unbearable slowness and delay,

seasickness, general discomfort and humiliating self-revelation are the master-values of these memories.

I was sick all through the journey out. I don't know why. It was the only time I was ever seasick, and I have seen some pretty bad weather since I became a boat-builder. But that phantom smell of potatoes was peculiarly vile to me. Coming back on the brig we were all ill, every one of us, so soon as we got to sea, poisoned I firmly believe by quap. On the way out most of the others recovered in a few days, but the stuffiness below, the coarse food, the cramped, dirty accommodation kept me, if not actually seasick, in a state of acute physical wretchedness the whole time. The ship abounded in cockroaches and more intimate vermin. I was cold all the time until after we passed Cape Verde; then I became steamily hot; I had been too preoccupied with Beatrice and my keen desire to get the *Maud Mary* under way at once, to consider a proper wardrobe for myself, and in particular I lacked a coat. Heavens! how I lacked that coat! And, moreover, I was cooped up with two of the worst bores in Christendom, Pollack and the captain.

Pollack, after conducting his illness in a style better adapted to the capacity of an opera-house than a small compartment, suddenly got insupportably well and breezy, and produced a manly pipe in which he smoked a tobacco as blond as himself, and divided his time almost equally between smoking it and trying to clean it.

"There's only three things you *can* clean a pipe with," he used to remark with a twist of paper in hand. "The best's a feather, the second's a straw, and the third's a girl's hairpin. I never see such a ship. You can't find any of 'em. Last time I came this way I did find hairpins, anyway, and found 'em on the floor of the captain's cabin. Regular deposit. Eh? Feelin' better?"

At which I usually swore.

"Oh, you'll be all right soon. Don't mind my puffin' a bit? Eh?"

He never tired of asking me to "have a hand at nap. Good game. Makes

you forget it, and that's half the battle."

He would sit swaying with the rolling of the ship and suck at his pipe of blond tobacco and look with an expressibly sage but somnolent blue eye at the captain by the hour together. "Captain's a card," he would say over and over again as the outcome of these meditations. "He'd like to know what we're up to. He'd like to know—no end."

That did seem to be the captain's ruling idea. But he also wanted to impress me with the notion that he was a gentleman of good family and to air a number of views adverse to the English literature, to the English constitution, and the like. He had learned the sea in the Roumanian navy, and English out of a book; he would still at times pronounce the e's at the end of "there" and "here"; he was a naturalized Englishman and he drove me into a reluctant and uncongenial patriotism by his everlasting carping at things English. Pollack would set himself to "draw him out." Heaven alone can tell how near I came to murder.

Fifty-three days I had outward, cooped up with these two and a shy and profoundly depressed mate who read the Bible on Sundays and spent the rest of his leisure in lethargy, three and fifty days of life cooped up in a perpetual smell, in a persistent sick hunger that turned from the sight of food, in darkness, cold and wet, in a lightly ballasted ship that rolled and pitched and swayed. And all the time the sands in the hour-glass of my uncle's fortunes were streaming out! Misery! Amidst it all I remember only one thing brightly, one morning of sunshine in the Bay of Biscay and a vision of frothing waves, sapphire-green, a bird following in our wake and our masts rolling about the sky. Then wind and rain close in on us again.

You must not imagine they were ordinary days, days I mean of an average length; they were not so much days as long damp slabs of time that stretched each one to the horizon, and much of that length was night. One

paraded the staggering deck in a borrowed sou'wester hour after hour in the chilly, windy, splashing and spitting darkness, or sat in the cabin, bored and ill, and looked at the faces of those inseparable companions by the help of a lamp that gave smell rather than light. Then one would see going up, up, up, and then sinking down, down, down, Pollack, extinct pipe in mouth, humorously observing, bringing his mind slowly to the seventy-seventh decision that the captain was a card, while the words flowed from the latter in a nimble incessant flood. "Dis England eet is not a country aristocratic, no! Eet is a glorified *bourgeoisie*! Eet is plutocratic. In England dere is no aristocracy since de Wars of Roses. In the rest of Europe east of the Latins, yes; in England, no.

"Eet is all middle class, youra England. Everything you look at, middle class. Respectable! Everything good—eet is, you say, shocking. Madame Grundy! Eet is all limited and computing and self-seeking. Dat is why your art is so limited, youra fiction, youra philosophia, why you are all so inartistic. You want nothing but profit! What will pay! What would you?"

He had all those violent adjuncts to speech we Western Europeans have abandoned, shruggings of the shoulders, waving of the arms, thrusting out of the face, wonderful grimaces and twiddlings of the hands under your nose until you wanted to hit them away. Day after day it went on, and I had to keep my anger to myself, to reserve myself for the time ahead when it would be necessary to see the quap was got aboard and stowed—knee-deep in this man's astonishment. I knew he would make a thousand objections to all we had before us. He talked like a drugged man. It ran glibly over his tongue. And all the time one could see his seamanship fretting him, he was gnawed by responsibility, perpetually uneasy about the ship's position, perpetually imagining dangers. If a sea hit us exceptionally hard he'd be out of the cabin in an instant making an outcry of inquiries, and he was pursued

by a dread of the hold, of ballast shifting, of insidious wicked leaks. As we drew near the African coast his fear of rocks and shoals became infectious.

"I do not know dis coast," he used to say. "I cama hera because Gordon-Nasmyth was coming too. Den he does not come!"

"Fortunes of war," I said, and tried to think in vain if any motive but sheer haphazard could have guided Gordon-Nasmyth in the choice of these two men. I think perhaps Gordon-Nasmyth had the artistic temperament and wanted contrasts, and also that the captain helped him to express his own malignant anti-Britishism. He was indeed an exceptionally inefficient captain. On the whole I was glad I had come even at the eleventh hour to see to things.

The captain, by the by, did at last, out of sheer nervousness, get aground at the end of Mordet's Island, but we got off in an hour or so with a swell and a little hard work in the boat.

I suspected the mate of his opinion of the captain long before he expressed it. He was, I say, a taciturn man, but one day speech broke through him. He had been sitting at the table with his arms folded on it, musing drearily, pipe in mouth, and the voice of the captain drifted down from above.

The mate lifted his heavy eyes to me and regarded me for a moment. Then he began to heave with the beginnings of speech. He disembarassed himself of his pipe. I cowered with expectation. Speech was coming at last. Before he spoke he nodded reassuringly once or twice.

"E——"

He moved his head strangely and mysteriously, but a child might have known he spoke of the captain.

"'E's a foreigner."

He regarded me doubtfully for a time, and at last decided for the sake of lucidity to clench the matter.

"That's what 'e is—a *dago*!"

He nodded like a man who gives a last tap to a nail, and I could see he considered his remark well and truly laid. His face, though still resolute, became as tranquil and uneventful as

a huge hall after a public meeting has dispersed out of it, and finally he closed and locked it with his pipe.

"Roumanian Jew, isn't he?" I said.

He nodded darkly and almost forbiddingly.

More would have been too much. The thing was said. But from that time forth I knew I could depend upon him and that he and I were friends. It happens I never did have to depend upon him, but that does not affect our relationship.

Forward the crew lived lives very much after the fashion of ours, more crowded, more cramped and dirty, wetter, steamier, more verminous. The coarse food they had was still not so coarse but that they did not think they were living "like fighting-cocks." So far as I could make out they were all nearly destitute men, hardly any of them had a proper sea-outfit, and what small possessions they had were a source of mutual distrust. And as we pitched and floundered southward they gambled and fought, were brutal to one another, argued and wrangled loudly, until we protested at the uproar.

There's no romance about the sea in a small sailing ship as I saw it. The romance is in the mind of the landsman dreamer. Those brigs and schooners and brigantines that still stand out from every little port are relics from an age of petty trade, as rotten and obsolescent as a Georgian house that has sunken into a slum. They are indeed just floating fragments of slum, much as icebergs are floating fragments of glacier. The civilized man who has learned to wash, who has developed a sense of physical honor, of cleanly temperate feeding, of time, can endure them no more. They pass, and the clanking coal-wasting steamers will follow them, giving place to cleaner, finer things.

But so it was I made my voyage to Africa, and came at last into a world of steamy fogs and a hot smell of vegetable decay, and into sound and sight of surf and distant intermittent glimpses of the coast. I lived a strange concentrated life through all that time, such a life as a creature must do that has

fallen in a well. All my former ways ceased, all my old vistas became memories.

The situation I was saving was very small and distant now; I felt its urgency no more. Beatrice and Lady Grove, my uncle and the Hardingham, my soaring in the air and my habitual wide vision of swift effectual things, became as remote as if they were in some world I had left forever.

4.

All these African memories stand by themselves. It was for me an expedition into the realms of undisciplined nature out of the world that is ruled by men, my first bout with that hot side of our mother that gives you the jungle—that cold side that gives you the air-eddy I was beginning to know passing well. They are memories woven upon a fabric of sunshine and heat and a constant warm smell of decay. They end in rain—such rain as I had never seen before, a vehement, a frantic downpouring of water, but our first slow passage through the channels behind Mordet's Island was in incandescent sunshine.

There we go in my memory still, a blistered dirty ship with patched sails, and a battered mermaid to present *Maud Mary*, sounding and taking thought between high banks of forest whose trees come out knee-deep at last in the water. There we go with a little breeze on our quarter, Mordet Island rounded and the quap, it might be, within a day of us.

Here and there strange blossoms woke the dank intensities of green with a trumpet-call of color. Things crept among the jungle and peeped and dashed back rustling into stillness. Always in the sluggishly drifting, opaque water were eddyings and stirrings; little rushes of bubbles came chuckling up light-heartedly from this or that submerged conflict and tragedy; now and again were crocodiles like a stranded fleet of logs basking in the sun. Still it was by day, a dreary stillness broken only by insect sounds and the creaking

and flapping of our progress, by the calling of the soundings and the captain's confused shouts; but in the night as we lay moored to a clump of trees the darkness brought a thousand swampy things to life and out of the forest came screamings and howlings, screamings and yells that made us glad to be afloat. And once we saw between the tree-stems long blazing fires. We passed two or three villages landward and brown-black women and children came and stared at us and gesticulated, and once a man came out in a boat from a creek and hailed us in an unknown tongue; and so at last we came to a great open place, a broad lake rimmed with a desolation of mud and bleached refuse and dead trees, free from crocodiles or water-birds or sight or sound of any living thing, and saw far off, even as Nasmyth had described, the ruins of the deserted station and hard by two little heaps of buff-hued rubbish under a great rib of rock, the quap! The forest receded. The land to the right of us fell away and became barren, and far off across a notch in its backbone were surf and the sea.

We took the ship in toward those heaps and the ruined jetty slowly and carefully. The captain came and talked.

"This is eet?" he said.

"Yes," said I.

"Is eet for trade we have come?"

This was ironical.

"No," said I.

"Gordon-Nasmyth would haf told me long ago what it ees for we haf come."

"I'll tell you now," I said. "We are going to lay in as close as we can to those two heaps of stuff—you see them?—under the rock. Then we are going to chuck all our ballast overboard and take those in. Then we're going home."

"May I presume to ask—is eet gold?"

"No," I said incivilly, "it isn't."

"Then what is it?"

"It's stuff—of some commercial value."

"We can't do eet," he said.

"We can," I answered reassuringly.

"We can't," he said as confidently.

"I don't mean what you mean. You know so liddle—but—dis is forbidden country."

I turned on him suddenly angry and met bright excited eyes. For a minute we scrutinized one another. Then I said: "That's our risk. Trade is forbidden. But this isn't trade. This thing's got to be done."

His eyes glittered and he shook his head.

The brig stood in slowly through the twilight toward this strange scorched and blistered stretch of beach, and the man at the wheel strained his ears to listen to the low-voiced angry argument that began between myself and the captain, that was presently joined by Pollack. We moored at last within a hundred yards of our goal and all through our dinner and far into the night we argued intermittently and fiercely with the captain about our right to load just what we pleased. "I will haf nothing to do with it," he persisted. "I wash my hands." It seemed that night as though we argued in vain. "If it is not trade," he said, "it is prospecting and mining. That is worse. Any one who knows anything—outside England—knows that is worse."

We argued and I lost my temper and swore at him. Pollack kept cooler and chewed his pipe watchfully with that blue eye of his upon the captain's gestures. Finally I went on deck to cool. The sky was overcast. I discovered all the men were in a knot forward, staring at the faint quivering luminosity that had spread over the heaps of quap, a phosphorescence such as one sees at times on rotting wood. And about the beach east and west there were patches and streaks of something like diluted sunshine.

In the small hours I was still awake and turning over scheme after scheme in my mind whereby I might circumvent the captain's opposition. I meant to get that quap aboard if I had to kill some one to do it. Never in my life had I been so thwarted! After this intolerable voyage! There came a rap at my cabin door and then it opened, and I made out a bearded face.

"Come in," I said, and a black voluble figure I could just see obscurely came in to talk in my private ear and fill my cabin with its whisperings and gestures. It was the captain. He too had been awake and thinking things over. He had come to explain enormously. I lay there hating him and wondering if I and Pollack could lock him in his cabin and run the ship without him.

"I do not want to spoil dis expedition," emerged from a cloud of protestations, and then I was able to disentangle "a commission—shush a small commission—for special risks!" "Special risks" became frequent. I let him explain himself out. It appeared he was also demanding an apology for something I had said. No doubt I had insulted him generously. At last it came to definite offers. I broke my silence and bargained.

"Pollack!" I cried and hammered the partition.

"What's up?" asked Pollack.

I stated the case concisely.

There came a silence.

"He's a card," said Pollack. "Let's give him his commission. I don't mind."

"Eh?" I cried.

"I said he was a card, that's all," said Pollack. "I'm coming."

He appeared in my doorway a faint white figure and joined our vehement whisperings.

We had to buy the captain off; we had to promise him ten per cent. of our problematical profits. We were to give him ten per cent. on what we sold the cargo for over and above his legitimate pay, and I found in my outbargained and disordered state small consolation in the thought that I, as the Gordon-Nasmyth expedition, was to sell the stuff to myself as Business Organizations. And he further exasperated me by insisting on having our bargain in writing. "In the form of a letter," he insisted.

"All right," I acquiesced, "in the form of a letter. Here goes! Get a light."

"And the apology," he said, folding up the letter.

"All right," I said; "apology."

My hand shook with anger as I wrote and afterward I could not sleep for hate of him. At last I got up. I suffered, I found, from an unusual clumsiness. I struck my toe against my cabin door, and cut myself as I shaved. I found myself at last pacing the deck under the dawn in a mood of extreme exasperation. The sun rose abruptly and splashed light blindingly into my eyes and I swore at the sun. I found myself imagining fresh obstacles with the men and talking aloud in anticipatory rehearsal of the consequent row.

The malaria of the quap was already in my blood.

5.

I can witness that the beach and mud for two miles or more either way were lifeless—lifeless as I could have imagined no tropical mud could ever be, and all the dead branches and leaves and rotting dead fish and so forth that drifted ashore became presently shriveled and white. Sometimes crocodiles would come up out of the water and bask, and now and then water-birds would explore the mud and rocky ribs that rose out of it, in a mood of transitory speculation. That was its utmost animation. And the air felt at once hot and austere, dry and blistering, and altogether different to the warm moist embrace that had met us at our first African landfall and to which we had grown accustomed.

I believe that the primary influence of the quap upon us was to increase the conductivity of our nerves, but that is a mere unjustifiable speculation on my part. At any rate it gave a sort of east-wind effect to life. We all became irritable, clumsy, languid and disposed to be impatient with our languor. We moored the brig to the rocks with difficulty, and got aground on mud and decided to stick there and tow off when we had done—the bottom was as greasy as butter. Our efforts to fix up planks and sleepers in order to wheel the quap aboard were as ill-conceived as that sort

of work can be—and that sort of work can at times be very ill-conceived. The captain had a superstitious fear of his hold; he became wildly gesticulatory and expository and incompetent at the bare thought of it. His shouts still echo in my memory, becoming as each crisis approached less and less like any known tongue.

But I cannot now write the history of those days of blundering and toil, of how Milton, one of the boys, fell from a plank to the beach, thirty feet perhaps, with his barrow and broke his arm and I believe a rib, of how I and Pollack set the limb and nursed him through the fever that followed, of how one man after another succumbed to a feverish malaria, and how I—by virtue of my scientific reputation—was obliged to play the part of doctor and dose them with quinin, and then finding that worse than nothing, with rum and small doses of a sirup, of which there chanced to be a case of bottles aboard—Heaven and Gordon-Nasmyth know why. For three long days we lay in misery and never shipped a barrow-load. Then, when they resumed, the men's hands broke out into sores. There were no gloves available; and I tried to get them, while they shoveled and wheeled, to cover their hands with stockings or greased rags. They would not do this on account of the heat and discomfort. This attempt of mine did, however, direct their attention to the quap as the source of their illness and precipitated what in the end finished our lading, an informal strike. "We've had enough of this," they said, and they meant it. They came aft to say as much. They cowed the captain.

Through all these days the weather was variously vile, first a furnace heat under a sky of a scowling intensity of blue, then a hot fog that stuck in one's throat like wool and turned the men on the planks into colorless figures of giants, then a wild burst of thunderstorms, mad elemental uproar and rain.

Through it all, against illness, heat, confusion of mind, one master impetus prevailed with me, to keep the shipping going, to maintain one *motif* at least, whatever else arose or ceased, the chuff of the spades, the squeaking and shriek of the barrows, the pluppa, pluppa, pluppa, as the men came trotting along the swinging high planks, and then at last, the dollop, dollop as the stuff shot into the hold. "Another barrow-load, thank God! Another fifteen hundred, or it may be two thousand pounds, for the saving of Ponderevo!"

I found out many things about myself and humanity in those weeks of effort behind Mordet Island. I understand now the heart of the sweater, of the harsh employer, of the nigger-driver. I had brought these men into a danger they didn't understand, I was fiercely resolved to overcome their oppositions and bend and use them for my purpose, and I hated the men. But I hated all humanity during the time that the quap was near me.

And my mind was pervaded too by a sense of urgency and by the fear that we should be discovered and our proceedings stopped. I wanted to get out to sea again—to be beating up northward with our plunder. I was afraid our masts showed to seaward and might betray us to some curious passer on the high seas. And one evening near the end I saw a canoe with three natives far off down the lake; I got field-glasses from the captain and scrutinized them, and I could see them staring at us. One man might have been a half-breed and was dressed in white. They watched us for some time very quietly, and then paddled off into some channel in the forest shadows.

And for three nights running, so that it took a painful grip upon my inflamed imagination, I dreamed of my uncle's face, only that it was ghastly white like a clown's, and the throat was cut from ear to ear—a long ocherous cut. "Too late," he said; "too late!"

The Come-On

By A. M. Chisholm

Author of "No Wedding Bells," "The Mother Lode," Etc.

"The man who knows it all" is usually an insufferable acquaintance, with his cock-sureness, his air of condescending superiority. However, he is good plucking, yes, the very best, for a man who knows more and doesn't brag about it. Promoters, sharpers and schemers of all sorts like to get hold of this know-it-all kind of man. Chisholm tells us of such a case in his characteristically humorous fashion.



THE soft light of an April evening bathed Ardendale tenderly. In its gentle purity the pale green of the new leafage was the color of the sea. Down the quiet streets the orderly rows of horse-chestnuts and maples were beginning to put on foliage and in the gardens the lilac buds were bursting; through the black, moist earth of the flower-beds tiny snow-drops pushed their way and the spear-bladed leaves of tulips stood stiffly upright.

In the library of Mr. Thomas P. Hooper's residence on one of the most exclusive streets of Ardendale, his daughter, Miss Maisie Hooper, sat with her fiancé, Mr. J. Addison Mortimer.

"But twenty-five thousand dollars would be plenty for us to marry on, Ad," she said. "And you are so clever that with your education you could get a good salary anywhere. I'm sure that pa would help you to a position here."

"I don't want a position," replied Mortimer. He was an exceedingly modern young man, inclined to stoutness as to person, and supercilious as to expression. A widely advertised college had thrown an education at him and some fragments of it had stuck; in

common with many others he made the mistake of assuming that a degree was of intrinsic value; and he held strongly to the belief that he was a thoroughly shrewd man of the world. He continued:

"Twenty-five thousand isn't so much. I know plenty of men who have half of that a year, and they think they're poor. Of course, if we were satisfied to settle down in a little house in this back-number village and vegetate we could get along, but it won't do for me. I regard this legacy simply as a nest-egg. You watch me make it hatch a clutch of dollars. We'll live in a real town, Maisie, with a couple of autos and a yacht, and diamonds for you. I tell you I'll make some of these old fogies who salt down their coin into five per cent. farm mortgages sit up and take notice. I'll be worth a million in ten years."

"I hope so, Ad," said Maisie admiringly. "I know how clever you are, but I don't like the idea of your going West to that mining place you spoke of. It's so far away."

"Railways and telegraph-lines have cut down the circumference of the world many times," said Mr. Mortimer with an air of superiority. "The West is the place to make money, and in this new mining-town, Galena, I will find all

sorts of opportunities. Why, young Hackett told me that his father, the senator, often buys a claim for five hundred dollars and sells it for a cool hundred thousand. It's capital that's wanted. Here's how it is. Say I strike some old miner with a good property. I buy half his interest for a thousand dollars. Then we form a joint stock-company with a capital of a million. Of this I have five hundred thousand shares worth a dollar each. Say I sell them at fifty per cent. of their par value, there's a quarter of a million. Or, if I let them go at twenty-five per cent. even, they would bring me one hundred and twenty-five thousand dollars."

"My!" exclaimed Maisie in admiration. "Could you do it, Ad? It's an awfully big profit."

"It's the way all big money is made nowadays," said Mortimer complacently. "I'm just giving you the bare outline and putting it simply so that you can understand it. Joint stock-companies are the basis of modern finance. I've given you one example. And then I know a dozen other ways of making a killing. I won't touch anything that doesn't look like big money."

"You'll know about mines, of course," said Maisie innocently. "You studied geology, didn't you?"

"A little," admitted Mortimer modestly. "But you don't need to know anything about mines to make money out of them; it's not the mining that there's money in—it's the manipulating of the stock."

A week later J. Addison Mortimer took train for the West.

II.

The brakeman announced Galena City in a weird language of his own, and immediately thereafter the air set friction to the flying heels of Number 97, west-bound. As she slackened way Mr. J. Addison Mortimer arose and followed an obsequious porter bearing his grip.

"Which is the best hotel here?" he asked the ebony one as they stood to-

gether in the vestibule. The porter scratched his tight-wooled poll apologetically.

"Ah dunno, suh," he said, doubtfully. "Dey's diff'unt f'om hotels back East. An Ah'se new on de run."

For which shortcoming he received but a measly two bits instead of the expected half-dollar, and in consequence dumped the grip with slight ceremony on the station-platform, leaving its owner to shift for himself.

As Mortimer stood uncertainly on the platform in the falling rain, jostled by muddy and unkempt men, he presented much the air of a sleek, pert young spaniel suddenly shot into a company of lean, sinewy sled-dogs. He was carefully dressed with an effect of studied negligée eminently proper for a mining-town. His clothes of rough tweed fitted him well; his head was covered by an expensive pearl-gray soft felt hat, and his shoes were tan, heavily soled and quite unsoiled; as a great concession to the free-and-easy spirit of the West his collar was a full half-inch lower than usual. But his air of cock-sureness was quite intact.

He picked up his grip and walked up the station-platform. A lanky individual stood watching the receding train. A stained and worn pony hat was tilted over his eyes, his trousers were tucked into mud-spattered boots, and he sucked on a ragged cigar. To him Mortimer turned for information.

"Excuse me!" he began politely.

The lanky man slowly withdrew his eyes from the vanishing coaches and surveyed his interlocutor. The eyes were a cold blue, expressionless and calm.

"Sure," he replied. "But don't do it again."

Mortimer was uncertain whether he had offended unconsciously or whether the other was making fun of him.

"Can you direct me to a good hotel?" he said with dignity.

This simple request seemed to surprise the lanky man.

"You wouldn't want a quiet boardin'-house with the advantages an' re-

finements of a Christian home, would you?" he asked.

"I said a hotel," said Mortimer, with added dignity.

"A high-grade, modern, first-class house, caterin' to the best trade?" suggested the other.

"Yes," replied Mortimer.

"Young feller," said the stranger solemnly, "this here is Galena City—not heaven nor Bosting, nor yet Noo York nor Chi. If you're of a contented disposition, so's you can thank God for a chance to shake dice for a third share in a one-man bed and three squares of air-tights a day, go to the Palace; if you're partic'lar, build a hotel for yourself."

Mortimer went to the Palace, where his modest demand for a room and bath was met by a counter-proposition of a billiard-table and sufficient whisky to insure sound slumber thereon or thereunder. The house was crowded, but he finally secured a room in common with a stranger, and thought himself in luck to do so.

For some days he looked about him seeking an opportunity for investment. Investments there were in plenty; not a man but was ready to put a figure on anything he owned or might acquire. But the figures were invariably high and Mortimer was looking for a gilt-edged proposition—one that would yield him one hundred per cent. profit and show it on its face. Modest gambles on quarter interests in unproved claims he passed up as too risky and too slow.

His first unfavorable impressions of Galena City were confirmed. The town was raw and hopelessly vulgar, as well as exceedingly dirty. It rained without intermission—a slow, soaking drizzle of needlelike streams that turned the yellow and red clays to clinging paste which gripped boots with a despairing clutch.

On the principle that so much water without needed a corrective within, the entire white population of Galena, male and female after their kind, imbibed freely of more or less undiluted alcohol. The only workers appeared to be

Swedes and Chinamen, lowly amphibians unaffected by the prevailing damp.

Naturally disputes, liquor-born and otherwise, took place. One gun-fight, of which Mortimer chanced to be a witness, occurred in a combined saloon and gambling-house. Until he dies peacefully in an Ardendale immaculate bed with nurses, physicians, and offspring unto the second generation in attendance Mortimer will remember it—the sudden hush of voices; the cold, deliberate, whip-lash word flung across the silence; following it vengefully the staccato bang of the guns, the upward leap of their muzzles, the wild stampede of the onlookers for safety. And then the coughing man who dropped to his knees beneath the pistol-spread haze, dying as he fell. Five minutes after every game was going full-blast.

All this was different from Ardendale, from college, from the East. It was raw, unrefined, shocking. Nevertheless Mortimer filled ten pages, letter-size, and sent them to Maisie Hooper. Two of the pages bore his impressions of Galena; two more described the fight and ingeniously explained his presence thereat; three contained an appreciation of the peril in which he had stood from stray bullets and speculated on the feelings of his correspondent if he had been accidentally killed; and the other three were of a private, personal nature—the kind that men curse and burn in after years if they have the luck to reclaim them, and women treasure in secret places for the term of their natural lives. Maisie cried a little as she read, and kissed the signature.

III.

It was on the day after the gun-fight that Mortimer, mounting three flights of stairs to his room in the Palace, disgusted with Galena and pondering the advisability of leaving for the East, found a stranger in possession of the apartment. He surveyed him with an unfriendly eye.

The newcomer, who was bending over a grip, rose at his entrance. He

was some years Mortimer's senior, of medium height but remarkably well built; his face was shrewd and alert and deeply tanned; he wore a neatly trimmed pointed beard, and his clothes, as Mortimer noted with grudging approval, fitted him to perfection.

"Sorry to intrude," said the stranger. "I tried to get a room to myself, but such a thing wasn't to be had. I won't incommode you more than I can help. And I'm clean, anyway."

"It's all right," said Mortimer rather more cordially than he had intended. There was something likable about the stranger. He seemed to be a gentleman, at any rate. "I've had a roommate of some sort ever since I came. Some of them——" He ended the sentence with a gesture of disgust.

"Rather impossible, I guess," said the stranger with a genial laugh. "Galena and misfortune make strange bed-fellows." But then you have probably seen worse layouts than this in your experience, and so have I. A man can't travel extensively without running into some queer things."

J. Addison Mortimer's traveling experiences might have been compressed into a small leaflet, but he was not displeased at being taken for a seasoned traveler. He said:

"Yes, that's so. The people who stay at home don't see much life."

Having thus accomplished an informal acquaintance they observed the formalities by exchanging cards. That which Mortimer received bore the name "Charles Anson Collingwood." Mr. Collingwood's address was Chicago, but the card gave no indication of the business of its owner.

Collingwood, changing to clothes irreproachable in cut but plainly intended for hard service, shrugged himself into a worn yellow slicker and disappeared, nor did Mortimer see him till evening, when he reappeared mud-stained and dripping from an afternoon apparently spent about the mines.

Mortimer watched his ablutions from the bed on which he lay.

"Been seeing the town?" he asked.

"Town be hanged!" Collingwood

rubbed his hair into fluffy dryness with a rough towel. "No, I've been chasing about in half a dozen properties, sizing them up."

Mortimer digested this information. Collingwood looked the part of a mining expert, and it occurred to him that his acquaintance might be worth cultivating. If the latter knew of any good thing he might get in on the ground floor.

"You are a mining man, then?" he queried.

Collingwood smiled and shrugged his broad shoulders.

"I am an investment specialist," he said. "Never heard of that particular line of business before, I dare say?"

Mortimer confessed that he had not.

"I'll have to qualify it a little," said Collingwood. "Of course there are a number of fields of investment of which I have no knowledge—no one man can cover everything. My specialties are rather restricted, but mining happens to be one of them. People back East have gone crazy over Galena, and I am here to look at the ground for some of them."

"There ought to be good chances for investment," said Mortimer tentatively.

"Plenty of chances to sink money," returned Collingwood skeptically. "The good things can't be bought with much profit."

"But there are plenty of claims and prospects," said Mortimer. He was curious to ascertain the specialist's opinion of this class of investment, for up to date it had been the only sort offered him.

"A prospect is a hole in the ground owned by an infernal liar," quoted Collingwood with conviction. "I never touch them. My business reputation wouldn't stand it. What I want to find is a good mine in need of capital, and that's a hard matter."

"I'm looking for an investment myself," said Mortimer importantly, "but so far I've seen nothing that commends itself to my judgment."

The next day they became better acquainted. On the second night they dined together, and by some magic

Collingwood was able to obtain a far better meal than Mortimer had yet eaten at the Palace. Wine followed and cigars, both paid for by Collingwood.

"No, no—nonsense!" he said when Mortimer insisted weakly on being allowed to "hold up his end." "You're out here for your own hand, and while the size of your pile is none of my business, it's a good bet that the people behind me can afford to pay for a little sparkle better than either of us. Heavens, man, I've bathed old Swedes in champagne and they thought it was cider—all in the way of business. And I've paid for a few days' bender for half a dozen wild and woolly gentlemen, and the bill ran into the thousands. What little we can drink and smoke will cut no ice in my expense-money."

Mortimer sipped his champagne critically. His acquaintance with the beverage was not extensive, being confined to an occasional modest pint by way of celebration; but he would not have this easy-going, high-priced investment specialist, who was plainly used to the best, suspect that expensive wines were a rarity with him. The cigars, too, were of a better quality than he had thought it possible to obtain in Galena; certainly he had never seen them in the hotel show-case, and they evidently cost much more than his ordinary smokes.

When one bottle was finished another succeeded it. At the end of an hour Mortimer was talking freely and boastfully. He was of that class for whom liquor smoothes away all difficulties of accomplishment, who esteem the thing desired as already done. His modest twenty-five thousand dollars expanded into an indefinite sum of large dimensions and he hinted solemnly at plans involving huge amounts. And he was not consciously lying; the peculiar thing about it was that he really believed every word he uttered, and considered himself a young Napoleon of finance.

Collingwood listened in silence, save for an occasional word. Although he

had taken his full share of wine it had not affected him to speech. With his hat tilted a little over his shrewd eyes and a cigar in the corner of his mouth he harkened gravely, occasionally filling Mortimer's glass.

"You're a wise guy—what!" said the latter. "Sit solemn's ol' owl an' say nothing. Why don't you cheer up some?"

"I like to hear you talk," replied Collingwood. "You've got ideas and the gift of expressing them. I'm enjoying myself."

"So'm I," said Mortimer. "You're a good fellow. Best I've struck in the mudhole. Say, let's go into business together."

"You've got too much capital for me," said Collingwood gravely. "How much did you say you were ready to invest here if you got a good chance?"

"Twenty thousand," said Mortimer proudly. "Look here, I've got money and ideas, but I want experience."

"You'll get that before long," said Collingwood without a smile.

"This is all new to me, unnerstan'," pursued Mortimer unconsciously. "Now, you're right in touch with things. If I ask you for advice as a friend you'll give it to me, won't you? Or maybe you could give me the straight tip if you found a good thing?"

"Well, you know," said Collingwood, evasively, "good things don't last, and have to be snapped up. Every time there's a cinch play you can figure on half a dozen men fighting for the first chance to get their dollars down on it. You have to have real money—cash—to put on the board, and as a rule there's no time to look twice at a proposition."

"I unnerstan' all that," said Mortimer, nodding his head with tipsy gravity. "I'm no piker. I've got twenty thousand to my credit in the bank here, and five thousand more at home, and I can plank down the cash on a good thing in half an hour."

"I'd like to oblige you," said Collingwood doubtfully. "But—you see—well, I'm not working for myself. Suppose I got hold of a good thing and turned

it over to you, what would my people say if they heard of it? Do you suppose they'd give me business again? Not on your life. And I couldn't blame them."

"I wouldn't say a word about it," protested Mortimer.

"These things always get out somehow," returned Collingwood. "I'd strain a point for you, but I can't afford to throw down my principals. It wouldn't be square, and you shouldn't ask it."

"That's right," said Mortimer. "I wouldn't ask you to do anything dishonorable. Business is business, though," he proceeded knowingly. "I'd make it worth your while."

"If I gave you a tip at all," said Collingwood, as if offended at the offer, "it would be as a friend, and I wouldn't take a commission. You haven't got money enough to buy me, Mortimer, understand that."

Mortimer protested that he had never thought of such a thing, and Collingwood accepted his statement.

"I'll see what I can do for you out of friendship only," he said. "Snaps are not to be picked up every day, but if I find what I think is a good thing I'll let you know about it and then you can use your own judgment."

"You're all right!" exclaimed Mortimer. "I like you. Let's have another bottle, on me."

"Not for me," said Collingwood. "I've had enough, and my head has to be clear in the morning. By the way, that room of ours isn't very comfortable and I've been trying for something better. If I get another would you care to bunk in with me or stay where you are?"

"I'm with you," said Mortimer. "The best's none too good for me." He exhibited a large roll of bills. "Drew out a bundle this morning," he said boastfully.

Collingwood had obtained a room on the first floor, and thither he and Mortimer moved their grips. The new apartment was large and well furnished and held two beds. It was a vast im-

provement on the little room on the fourth floor.

Mortimer dropped into a chair; in a few minutes he was nodding. Collingwood, lighting a fresh cigar, paced the floor softly, observing him.

"Confound it," he said, suddenly, "I was to see a man to-night, and I was so interested in our conversation that I clean forgot about it." He consulted his watch. "I may catch him yet. You won't mind my running away for half an hour, old man?"

"S all right," said Mortimer sleepily. "You toddle along, and I'll have a little snooze. Then we'll finish the evening somewhere."

IV.

Collingwood left the hotel and made his way toward the outskirts of Galena where, dodging mud-puddles gingerly, he finally arrived at a small shack of undressed and unpainted lumber. He opened the door without ceremony.

Inside a man in shirt-sleeves sat playing solitaire. He was some years older than Collingwood. His clean-shaven face was thoughtful, studious, and very honest; his eyes were blue and frank as a child's; indeed their expression was almost wistful. As he played he made note of the recurring card combinations in a small note-book.

He nodded absently to Collingwood, and carefully placed a card and shifted a pile. The next deal exhausted the possibilities; he threw the cards into a heap.

"Well?" he queried.

"Why don't you get a new game?" rasped Collingwood impatiently. "Try building-blocks, or something hard."

The other snorted.

"You think Romally's Solitaire is easy! Do you know how many chances you have of solving it? Just one in seven thousand and forty-five."

"What a lead-pipe it would be to keep a bank on a game like that," Collingwood commented, recovering his good humor. "All right, Frank. Throw the whole pack in the discard for a few days. This is where you get busy."

"I'm glad of it," said the other. "When I came to Galena I didn't figure on living in a blasted packing-box, with a bunch of assorted mountain-rats for company. Any time I have to see rats I want some fun first, and these are too genuine. Besides, if you want to know it, I'm down to white chips."

"If you'd quit spoiling good paper trying to figure out a system to beat cinch games you'd have a roll you couldn't carry," observed Collingwood. "It gets by me why a smart man like you is sucker enough to hand his coin to a bunch of gams. But you'll do it till you die, Frank Duprau."

Duprau glanced guiltily at sheets of paper covered with intricate calculations lying on the bare pine table.

"Some day I'll just choke 'em to death," he said, with conviction. "I've made mistakes in calculation, I'll admit, and I got what was coming to me. This time I'm all right. I'm figuring out a system that's a sure winner. When I get it I'll let you in on it."

"After you've tried it and they've got to you for your roll again, come to me and I'll stake you a couple of hundred if I have it," said Collingwood. "You ought to have more sense. You know a game for a brace and a skin, and yet you skip to it with your little old tin dollars and feed them into the hopper. If it was on the square you couldn't win. You're dotty on systems that keep you poor. But it's your money, and there's more coming. Now, forget your infernal systems and listen to me."

For ten minutes he talked earnestly. At the end of that time Duprau produced a safety ink-bottle and a bundle of stock-certificates. The latter were blank. He began to fill in names and signatures. The ink he used was peculiar; even as it flowed from the pen it lost its brilliancy and turned a brownish black—the exact color of writing a year or more old.

Collingwood watched him in silence until the work was completed.

"It may take three or four days," he said. "As soon as the deal is closed wire me. Your train leaves in two hours. We'll meet you in Red Cloud."

"Till then good-by," said Duprau, reaching for a sheet of paper. "Two hours till train-time, you say. I want to do a little figuring——"

Collingwood snatched the paper away from him and gathering up the pack of cards shoved both in his pocket.

"No solitaire or figuring out systems," he said firmly. "You never know when to stop, and I want you out of town to-night. Do I have to see you on the train, or will you cut it out?"

"Guess I'd better cut it," Duprau admitted reluctantly. "I'll have lots of spare time in the next few days. All right; what you say goes."

Collingwood retraced his way through the mud and mounted to his room at the hotel. He fully expected to find Mortimer there, but to his disgust the room was empty. He searched the hotel immediately.

"That Bostonese jag?" said the bartender, in answer to his inquiry. "Yes, he was in here and I make him a Joey Brown. He licks it up and asks me where he can find a swift game. I tell him most anywheres, but he'll get skinned quicker at Carey's. Then he gives me the glassy glare and fetches the door in three tacks."

To Carey's went Collingwood, and there he found Mortimer bucking faro-bank. The Joey Brown on top of the champagne had done the business, for he was very drunk indeed. He had been allowed to win, but he was now losing; and with the fatuity of the loser he was increasing his bets.

Collingwood laid a hand on his shoulder. "How are you making it go?" he asked.

For answer Mortimer swore thickly and put a fifty-dollar bill on the eight open. He lost again.

"If you've had enough fun for one night," said Collingwood, "I want you to come with me. I've got onto a good thing and I've made an appointment for you. The man is waiting now."

"Let 'm wait!" cried Mortimer. "I'm going to break this game."

"Hang the game!" said Collingwood. "There's big money in sight if you come with me. Let the game go on. You

can come back and break it up to-morrow."

Beside the dealer stood Carey, the owner of the house, an old-time gambler with an unsavory reputation. Mortimer seemed a fairly plump pigeon to be plucked, and he resented Collingwood's interference.

"Stranger," he said, "your friend is backing his judgment his own way. He don't need to be night-herded. Let him alone."

Collingwood looked him straight in the eye; the gambler met his gaze squarely; they sized each other up.

"You mean well," said Collingwood coldly, "but I guess that lets you out." He turned to Mortimer. "Come along, old man."

But Mortimer would not come. Carey's remark had had the desired effect.

"You lemme 'lone," he said thickly. "See you in mornin'."

But Collingwood for reasons of his own was not willing to allow him to lose more money to Carey. He adapted himself quickly to the situation.

"Guess I might as well make a night of it too, then," he said. "Let me in on the game."

He ordered a drink and watched Mortimer throw it down his throat with satisfaction. He pressed on him a particularly black and heavy cigar. Carey watched these tactics with a scowl. At the end of fifteen minutes, during which he had lost but moderately, Mortimer's head began to sag. Two minutes after he fell sidewise from his chair and became unconscious.

Carey beckoned to two men. "Take him up-stairs and put him to bed," he ordered.

Collingwood interposed.

"Hardly. He's going back to his hotel."

"Is he?" said Carey. "There's where you make a mistake. When a man gets full in my house I look after him."

"Nice benevolent custom, too," said Collingwood. "I'll save you the trouble this time. He's going with me."

Carey, his face impassive as ever, leaned forward.

"See here, stranger," he said, "you're just a little too positive in your views to stay popular. Without giving offense I'm telling you that I don't let a man I don't know handle a drunk with money in his clothes. And I don't know you."

"It sounds all right," retorted Collingwood. "My objection to leaving him here is just the opposite; I do know you."

The controversy was attracting attention. The lookout on his stool pinched out the end of a cigarette and dropped it on the floor, gently sliding his hand into his coat pocket. The game was suspended and clear spaces opened automatically behind both Carey and Collingwood. It was significant of the experience of the two that neither had raised his voice. Their tones were almost confidential, but cold as cut ice.

Carey's eyelids narrowed and drooped a little lower. Twenty years before—fifteen, ten, even—he would have shot as the last word left Collingwood's lips. But now a gun was to be employed only as a last resort; and he felt that he could not afford to gain much more notoriety, even in Galena.

"Stranger," he said in a level voice the more ominous by its absolute calm, "I wouldn't say no more things like that if I was you. They're apt to affect your plans for the future. Now here it is," he went on, dismissing the remark with a large wave of his slim hand. "If you're a friend of this man I'd rather you'd take care of him and save me the trouble; on the other hand, as you're a stranger I can't let you do it. It's up to you."

"Well, we needn't block business talking about it," said Collingwood, accepting the flag of truce thus held aloft. "Let me see you in private for a moment."

Later, J. Addison Mortimer entered his apartments at the Palace assisted by Collingwood and another man; incidentally, he was quite unaware of the fact and manner of his home-coming.

V.

When he opened his eyes in the morning Mortimer groaned and shut them again. His eyeballs felt as if some one had tried to gouge them from their sockets; his head was one large pain when he moved it on the pillow, and his mouth and tongue seemed lined with dry, upstanding fur; the taste, when he endeavored to moisten them, was a compound of umber and burned sienna. He groaned once more.

Collingwood, splashing vigorously at the wash-stand, turned a whimsical eye on the bed.

"Good morning," he said pleasantly.

Mortimer raised himself to a sitting posture and took his repentant head between his hands. "I must have had an awful one," he said. "Where did we go last night? I don't remember."

Collingwood outlined the events of the evening. "I don't know how much you dropped at Carey's," he said. "I tried to get you away, but you wouldn't quit. I'm afraid it cost you something, and I nearly had a row with Carey, too. He didn't like my butting in."

Mortimer examined his pockets.

"I drew five hundred yesterday," he said ruefully, "and here's all I have left." He exhibited a very small roll of bills. "I was a chump, all right. Don't know how I came to get such a load; usually I can carry more than that."

Collingwood, behind the towel, smiled sardonically.

"You're a tank," he said with feigned admiration. "I feel a shade rocky myself, and I didn't try to stay with you. I've ordered a couple of revivers. After that we'll have breakfast, and then, if you feel like it, come around with me while I look at some properties."

Breakfast on Mortimer's part was almost a farce; but he managed to worry down a small portion of food and several cups of coffee; after which he felt better. His head though dull had ceased to ache, and while his regret at the loss of so much money was keen, it was tempered by the comforting thought that he had acted in a manner befitting

a man of the world. He even contemplated with satisfaction a confession to Maisie Hooper, and pictured her shocked attitude which should conceal a secret admiration, and her forgiveness following his promise never to gamble again.

They spent the morning in and about the nearest mines. Gradually Mortimer's headache vanished and his spirits rose. Collingwood was an entertaining and instructive companion, and his manner of meeting and handling men excited Mortimer's admiration. He wished that he possessed the cool assurance and matter-of-course business-like way of his conductor. Then, too, he appeared to know all about the mines—more, indeed, than the men in charge. This knowledge was revealed or rather hinted at more by what he did not say than by his words. At the end of a long explanation by a foreman covering the difficulties encountered, the disappointments, and the character and extent of existing and hoped-for veins, a shrewd question or comment would go to the root of the matter as surely as a surgeon's knife. And after leaving a property his terse comments were conclusive.

"Nothing there," he said, as they rode away from a much-talked-of mine. "They made the too common mistake. Put in a high-priced plant, up-to-date machinery and buildings on the strength of some assays and a lot of faith. And when they had spent a quarter of a million on such things they went to work to prove the property. Now it doesn't pan out, and they are trying to explain value into a worthless claim. Their whole layout isn't worth junk prices."

But at one property they were refused admission. A man sat smoking on a powder-box by the shaft-mouth.

"No one allowed in the mine," he said briefly.

"What's the matter?" asked Collingwood. "Timbering bad, or what?"

"Orders," replied the other laconically.

"How is your ore running?" asked Collingwood.

"Don't know."

"Working or shut down?"

"Sorter half and half."

Save for the man on the powder-box the place appeared to be absolutely deserted.

"Any one in the mine now?"

"Nopé."

"That's the Silver Queen," said Collingwood as they rode on. "They went in on rich ore, and it pinched out. They've been working it half-heartedly for some time, I hear. Maybe they've shut down for good." He was thoughtful for a few moments. "You can't tell. I wish I could have had a look at it. They may have uncovered the vein again."

"In that case they'd be working it, wouldn't they?" asked Mortimer with an air of shrewdness.

"Hard to say. They may be raising money to do it on a larger scale, although I did hear that there are monied men in it now."

Later they encountered a buckboard drawn by a pair of wiry ponies. In it sat a large, military-looking man, elderly, with well-kept white mustache and goatee; his face fairly radiated good nature and benevolence; he greeted Collingwood cordially.

"How are you, colonel?" returned Collingwood with equal cordiality. "Allow me to introduce my friend Mr. Mortimer—Colonel Jefferson Casimir."

"Glad to make your acquaintance, seh," said the colonel in a soft, typically Southern drawl. "Seeing the mines? You couldn't have a betteh guide than my young friend here. I hope to see more of you, seh."

Mortimer responded in kind. He liked Colonel Casimir at first sight. So did most men. He was so large, so genial, so courteous—the type of a Southern gentleman.

"Come and dine with me to-night, both of you," said the colonel. "I'm staying at the Commercial. Can't promise you much of a dinneh, but I'll guarantee the liquohs and segahs. Till eight o'clock, then."

He gathered up the reins, raised his

broad-brimmed slouch-hat and drove on.

"Colonel Casimir," said Collingwood as they watched the swirl of dust thrown from the drying road by the flying heels of the broncos, "is heavily interested in mining properties elsewhere. I didn't know he was in Galena. It looks well for the future of the district if he takes an interest in it."

"Don't think I ever heard of him," said Mortimer. "He seems very pleasant, though."

"You will hear of him very often if you handle mining properties," returned Collingwood. "Yes, he's the soul of good nature and hospitality, and honorable to a ridiculous extent, judged by modern business maxims. Still I never met a shrewder man, or one more cautious in business. I've never known him to be taken in. You'll find him an excellent host, too, and he has a fund of choice, original anecdote if we can get him started. His title isn't a courtesy one; he was through the war, but of course he was mighty young then."

The dinner at the Commercial was even better than that which Mortimer had enjoyed the night before, and Colonel Casimir as host left nothing to be desired. He seemed greatly taken with Mortimer, and asked his opinion several times on various subjects, an attention which flattered that young gentleman greatly.

"By the way, colonel," said Collingwood when, cigars afire, they sipped their liqueurs in well-fed comfort, "we tried to have a look at the old Silver Queen to-day, and were politely warned off. I'd like to know why. I heard that there was something doing in that property. Do you happen to know anything about it?"

"And what makes you think I know anything?" returned the colonel enigmatically.

"So you do know!" said Collingwood. "Come, colonel, what's the dark secret? That old hole in the ground shouldn't have anything to hide. Satisfy my curiosity, do!"

Colonel Casimir removed the long, black panatela from his lips and let a thin stream of smoke trickle ceilingward. His eyes, steel-blue, became very shrewd.

"Collin'wood," he said, "you are a business man and—I say it in no offensive sense—tainted with the cussed commercial spirit of this steam-an'-lightnin'-driven age. Therefo', you'll pardon me, I'm sure, if I prefer to keep my own counsel."

"Just as you please, colonel," returned Collingwood. "I suppose I am a little bit out for any loose coin; it's my business. But, so far as that goes, you can look out for yourself. If you can't show a good imitation of the commercial spirit at times I'd hate to meet a real business man."

The colonel chuckled.

"Needs must when the devil drives," seh," he observed. "I stahsted life, Misteh Mo'timer, if you will forgive the personal allusion, with two loving parents, some thousands of acres of the best cotton and cane soil in South Carolina, and enough niggers to work the acres. My education was liberal in some lines, includin' literature, hosses, cyards and fiaharms; none of them, as you'll perceive, bein' money-makers—at least in the hands of a gentleman. The war came. My father fell in the Wilderness, and my mother survived him only long enough to hear the news. I fought, a mere boy, through the war. When Lee surrendered and the Confederacy was broken I tuhned to peace an' the arts of peace. The plantation was mo'gaged to the hilt, as I discovered for the first time. It was sold. Personal property of every description had been given freely to the Confederacy. So that at the age of twenty I owned only a hoss, a pair of pistols, and a ragged gray unifo'm. I chucked the unifo'm, traded the hoss for clo'es, but kept the pistols. I went to work, seh—the first one of my family to do such a thing for a hundred yeabs. Business was foreign to my instincts, but I stahsted right in to acquiah a knowledge of it. And I found, seh, that while there's a right smaht of crooks

engaged in it, it is in the main hon'able. And I found, too, comin' right down to cases, that it consists in findin' out what a thing is worth to another man, and buyin' it from a third party for a leetle mite less."

"Or selling it for a little more," suggested Collingwood as the colonel paused.

"There, seh, speaks the commercial spirit which I deplore," said the colonel to Mortimer; "I never sold a thing for or asked more than it was worth, knowingly. I have made mistakes in judgment, I admit; and propeties which I have sold have been mismanaged by the buyers so that their value has diminished, but I do not hold myself responsible for that. On the other hand, I endeavch not to pick up a plate by the hot side. And because of that my young friend here calls me a hard man at a bargain."

"You didn't quite catch my meaning, colonel," said Collingwood. "I merely meant that you are able to protect your own interests."

"If I wasn't, seh," retorted Colonel Casimir, "I wouldn't have any to protect. There are men to-day, I regret to state, who have no business or other honah. When I deal with them, seh, I hold the cyards tight up against my chest and count the chips on the table."

"Illustration—your diplomatic silence about the Silver Queen, I suppose," said Collingwood. "If that is your meaning——" He half rose from his chair.

"My deah boy—my deah boy"—the colonel pressed him back gently with one hand—"you mistake me entirely. I feah my language might beah that construction, but such a monstrous thing was never in my thoughts. I know you to be an hon'able gentleman, and you are sufficient warrant for the discretion of your friend, whose acquaintance gives me pleasure. In proof of my trust in both of you, if proof is needed, I will throw this Silver Queen cyard on the table so that you may see it for yourself. I know that you will respect my confidence as I would yours.

"This Silveh Queen mine," he went on, "was a poor propehty, but it came to my ears that a rich strike has just been made which will put it in the first ranks of ore-producers. The news filtered to me underground, I may state. They are, however, in urgent need of ready money. I offered to buy, but they refused to sell, standing out for a sum which I considered exorbitant. I therefore began to buy shares. The company was stocked for five hundred thousand dollahs in one-dollah shares; non-assessable, of course. Of these, fifty thousand are in the treasury, unissued. They won't sell them below par, now, and they can't sell them at par for they are not worth it. Of the remaining four hundred and fifty thousand I have options on one hundred and sixty thousand at various prices. These I will take up, provided I can secure options on or buy more shares sufficient to give me control of the company in any event, even if they issue the treasury shares."

"Can you get them?" asked Collingwood. He was penciling rapidly on an envelope, following the statement of the case with keen interest. "You'll need, roughly speaking, one hundred thousand shares more to retain control in any event, as I figure it."

"Ninety thousand and one, to be exact," said Colonel Casimir. "Call it an even hundred thousand, which will give me a control beyond cavil. I hope to get them if my agents can locate the right man."

"But still I don't see why we couldn't get into the mine this morning," said Collingwood.

"That," replied the colonel, "is a part of the game. The present owners naturally want to depress still further the value of the shares, which are worth little enough on the market as it is, the Lawd knows. They have denied the repawt of a strike and have shut down. In that way they hope to buy up loosely held stock cheap, and possibly to induce me to allow my options to expiah—that is, if they know of them, which they will sooner or later."

"Are these shares strongly held?" asked Mortimer. He uttered the phrase in a very businesslike way, and he liked the sound of it. It seemed to him exceedingly technical.

"There you go to the root of the matteh, seh," said the colonel. "That question shows your practical business mind. Some of them are and some are not. But there is one block of a hundred thousand owned by a surly cantankerous curmudgeon named Lowrey, that will give me trouble. This man Lowrey was one of the original owners, and for his interest and services—for he is a mining engineer and a good one—he received one hundred thousand shares in the company that was formed. His methods didn't suit the majority, and they dismissed him and got a new man who made a mess of things. Naturally Lowrey is disgruntled and I doubt if he will sell his stock. I might induce him to cooperate with me if I could find him, but he seems to have gone prospecting, the Lawd knows where. However, I am having him traced. Let me fill your glass, Misteh Mo'timer. You are drinking nothing, seh!"

VI.

Mortimer carried away from Colonel Jefferson Casimir's dinner a most pleasant impression of his host, as well as a good deal of champagne; but so carefully had the wine been administered that he felt only a grateful exhilaration. Also he had been received on an equal footing by this pleasant-spoken old capitalist and his opinion on various matters had been asked for and listened to with respect. He felt that he was at last seeing things from the inside, obtaining an insight into the methods by which large fortunes are made. Unconsciously his manner grew dignified, as became a man of affairs.

"Going to bed?" asked Collingwood, when they reached their hotel.

"Think I'll write a few letters," replied Mortimer. "I've been too busy for correspondence the last day or two."

"Ah," said Collingwood. "See you later, then."

Mortimer sat down at the writing-table and set himself to composing a letter to Maisie Hooper. The champagne stimulated his ideas and he wrote freely, astonished at the ease with which the apt phrases flowed from his pen.

At first he had the room to himself, but as he was in the midst of his letter a man, obviously drunk, lurched in and, seating himself opposite, began to write. Mortimer surveyed him with disgust which the champagne beneath his own belt only accentuated. Why the deuce didn't they keep the hotel clear of drunks? The man was unshaven, roughly clad, and looked like a miner. There was, however, something familiar in his appearance. Where had he seen him before?

The newcomer wrote laboriously, chewing a rank cigar which he had difficulty in keeping alight. He addressed an envelope, but allowed a huge ink-drop to blot it. He discarded it and addressed another; then, folding up his letter, he left the room.

Mortimer was relieved. He finished his own letter and, out of idle curiosity, picked up the blotted envelope which lay face up on the table where the stranger had thrown it aside. This was the address he read, written in a rude, sprawling hand:

MR. WILLIAM J. LOWREY,
MINE ENGINEER,
OGALLALA HOUSE,
COPPERCLIFFE.

"Lowrey?" Why, that was the name of the holder of one hundred thousand shares of Silver Queen stock whom Colonel Casimir was trying to locate. He was an engineer, too. And like a flash recognition came to Mortimer. The man who had addressed the envelope was the very man who had sat smoking on a powder-box at the Silver Queen shaft that morning.

Holding the envelope in his fingers, Mortimer put two and two together. Here was a man at the Silver Queen writing to one Lowrey, a mining engineer. The balance of probabilities was

against there being two Lowreys, both mining engineers and both correspondents of a man employed at that mine. Ergo, chance had put him in possession of a piece of information very much desired by Colonel Casimir.

His first impulse was to take the envelope to the colonel's hotel, but immediately a thought struck him. Why shouldn't he make something out of it himself? If those shares were necessary to enable the colonel to acquire control of Silver Queen he ought to be willing to pay for them. Lowrey probably knew nothing of the reported strike. He might be willing to sell cheap. In that case if he, Mortimer, could get at him before the letter, he might make a nice little rake-off on the turnover.

He wondered what Collingwood would advise, but he rather doubted the advisability of confiding in him. Collingwood was a friend of the colonel and, besides, he might want to share in the good thing which Mortimer desired for himself. He determined to pump him skilfully.

"Quite a scheme, that of the colonel's to get control of Silver Queen," he observed casually as they smoked a final cigar before turning in.

"Most usual thing in the world," replied Collingwood carelessly. "No one buys a property outright now. The better plan is to get control of the stock. After that you can proceed to eliminate minority holders and acquire the shares at your own price."

"I don't quite see it," said Mortimer. "If the property is any good their stock will increase in value with yours, won't it?"

"Not if you know the game," returned Collingwood. "You, having control, can depress the stock artificially by rumors of all kinds. As a last resort you can amalgamate with another company, forming a new one, and assess the holders out of their boots. Part of them will forfeit rather than pay the assessments. Those who pay will get watered stock in exchange for their old holdings, and their values will be cut in half. Then, a little judicious

litigation will usually bring them to the selling point. Lots of ways to do it."

"Ah," said Mortimer, thoughtfully. "Is that what the colonel will do?"

"No, I hardly think so," replied Collingwood. "For one thing he's absurdly conscientious, and for another he has enough money already to be square in his dealings. Must be worth several millions by this time."

"What do you suppose he'd be willing to pay this man Lowrey for his shares?"

"Lowrey? Oh, that's the engineer. Well, I don't know—haven't gone into it. I know the stock has been absolutely unsalable. But then the colonel wants it badly, and I guess he has scooped in about all that is loosely held. If he has confidence in the property he might go pretty high—say to forty, or even more."

"And do you think Lowrey would sell for that?"

"Depends on a lot of things. If he is wise to the situation he won't. If he is hard up and sees a chance to unload for ready money likely he will, and probably for a good deal less. I wish I had an option on his holdings. I'd make the old colonel give up strong for it. But it's a mighty hard job to locate a prospector. He's probably stampeding around up above timberline, somewhere, and won't be in till the snow flies."

Mortimer said nothing for some moments. He was more than ever convinced that he possessed valuable information and he made up his mind not to share it with Collingwood. The question now uppermost in his mind was how much the colonel would pay for the shares. He was unwilling to put his money into an uncertainty.

"I suppose," he remarked tentatively, "that if the colonel said he would pay a certain price for those shares he'd keep his word?"

Collingwood shot a look at him. It was very keen, and an expression which Mortimer did not observe crossed his face. "The colonel is strictly honorable," he replied. "When he promises anything his word is away

ahead of the ordinary man's written agreement. Why? You don't know Lowrey, do you?"

"Never heard of him before," said Mortimer with assumed carelessness. "I was just wondering if the colonel was perfectly reliable. Plenty of men aren't."

"Well, he is," said Collingwood, with emphasis. "You can tie right up to what he says. He'd keep his word in a financial matter if it took his last cent. That's one side. The other is that he expects every one else to do the same."

Mortimer, satisfied, changed the subject, much pleased at his own adroitness. It remained only to interview the colonel and obtain a definite promise from him to take over the stock at a given price.

VII.

Mortimer found Colonel Casimir enjoying an after-breakfast cigar and reading the financial news. The colonel was spick and span, freshly brushed, cleanly shaven, newly polished, and even wore a flower in his buttonhole.

"Sit down, seh—sit down!" he exclaimed cordially, motioning Mortimer to a chair. "Fine mawnin', Misteh Mo'timer. Makes me feel almost young again. And how do you find yourself, seh, and how is my young friend Collin'wood?"

"Quite well, both of us, colonel," replied Mortimer. "I ran over this morning to have a few words with you about a matter of business."

The colonel did not appear surprised.

"In that case, seh," he said, "perhaps it would be as well for us to imbibe our mawnin' drink first."

"Not for me, thank you, colonel," Mortimer declined. "I really can stay only a minute."

"Well," sighed the colonel regretfully, "you young men pu'sue wealth to the exclusion of rational enjoyment. Prayah, seh, and a propeh amount of stimulant hindeh no man's journey. But as you please. Pe'mit me to offer you a segah."

Mortimer took the long, black pana-

tela and bit off the end nervously. The colonel cut a V in its counterpart with exceeding care, lighted it, and turned an eye of bland inquiry on the other.

"You spoke of business, seh?" he hinted gently.

"About the Silver Queen shares," said Mortimer, endeavoring to speak indifferently. "I gathered from your conversation last night that you were anxious to buy a control."

"I was speaking in confidence, seh," said the colonel, "but it is a fact. What then, seh? Have you stock to dispose of?"

"Not exactly," said Mortimer; "but I happen to know—that is, I think I could perhaps find some."

Colonel Casimir stroked his goatee.

"The fact is, seh," he said, "I am through foolin' about with small lots. I want enough to give me the control, or nothing."

"This isn't a small lot," said Mortimer.

"No?" The colonel's face expressed polite doubt.

"One hundred thousand shares," said Mortimer.

The colonel sat upright and regarded him with interest.

"Have you an option on them?" he asked with what seemed to be hardly concealed eagerness.

"Well—not yet," hesitated Mortimer. "I know who has them, though," he added, as the colonel sank back in his chair.

"Without bein' discourteous," said Colonel Casimir, "I have known as much for some time. When you speak of a block of one hundred thousand shares—I assume it is in one block—I also nachully assume that you mean Lowrey's holding. Am I right?"

"Yes," Mortimer admitted.

"Quite so. Well then, seh, I presume you have information as to his whereabouts."

"Perhaps I have," said Mortimer, with what he considered a knowing air. "The point is, colonel, if I can deliver you one hundred thousand shares, what will you pay for them?"

Colonel Casimir smoked for a moment or two in silence.

"Are you in a position to guarantee delivery?" he asked.

"Not exactly," Mortimer replied.

The colonel shook his head.

"Then I can't make you a definite offer for what you may or may not be able to sell. If you came to me shares in hand it might be different."

"I don't see why," said Mortimer. "I only want to know what they will be worth if I can get them. If I can't get them that settles it."

"The fact is," said Colonel Casimir, "that time is impo'tant in this matteh. They might be worth more to me to-day than a week hence, or they might not. I can't make you a definite offer, seh, open for an indefinite time. If I make one at all there must be a time limit on it."

"How long?" asked Mortimer.

The colonel considered, stroking his goatee. Mortimer waited anxiously.

"Put it this way. If in three days you can deliver me one hundred thousand Silver Queen I will pay fifty cents per share. If after that, up to one week, I will pay fo'ty. After that I don't want them at all. I'll fo'feit my options and stand my loss."

"That's satisfactory," said Mortimer, relieved. "I hope to get them in three days."

"Very good, seh," said the colonel. "Of course you unde'stand that in the meantime my agents will continue their inquiries, and if they can locate the owneh of this block and buy the shares for me they will be quite within their rights."

"Of course I understand that," Mortimer replied. "That's fair. Would you mind giving me a little memorandum of the agreement, colonel?"

"My word, seh," said Colonel Casimir with dignity, "is prob'ly as binding as any writing. And yet you are quite right. Mode'n business destroys old-fashioned ideas of honah. You shall have your memorandum, seh."

With the brief note penned by the colonel in his pocket Mortimer almost ran to the bank where he kept his ac-

count, for the train for Coppercliffe was due in half an hour. As he would need ready money to deal with a total stranger such as Lowrey he withdrew almost his entire balance, leaving only a nominal sum to keep the account open. On the two-hundred-mile run to Coppercliffe he was nervous and excited, and frequently felt the inside pocket in which he carried his money to make absolutely sure of its possession. He tried to formulate a plan of action which should give Lowrey no inkling of the value of the shares and yet adequately explain his desire to buy them; but he failed to do so and made up his mind to confine himself to a cash offer and refuse all explanations.

VIII.

He arrived in Coppercliffe late that night and went to the Ogallala House. Investigation of the register showed Lowrey's signature a couple of days old.

"Mr. Lowrey here still?" he asked.

It appeared that Lowrey was still in the hotel. Furthermore he was sick and confined to his room.

As an attempt to see him that night might have given the impression that the matter was urgent Mortimer decided to wait till morning, taking a chance on being before the letter which he had seen the Silver Queen man write—a letter which doubtless bore on the value of the property but which the writer might have been too drunk to mail.

After breakfast he sent up his card to Lowrey's room.

"Mr. Lowrey's sick," said the bellhop, returning. "He don't want to see no one."

Mortimer slid a half-dollar into his receptive paw. "You just show me up," he said.

He entered the room and closed the door behind him. The blinds were drawn, throwing the interior into partial darkness. The occupant lay on the bed, his unshaven face gaunt against the pillows. A pair of angry blue eyes glared at Mortimer. A table

flanking the bed was strewn with medicine-bottles; incongruous among them lay a pack of cards.

"Mr. Lowrey?" asked Mortimer, though he had no doubt of the other's identity.

"I'm Lowrey," said the sick man. "And who the devil are you, and what in blazes d'ye mean by butting into my room?"

"My name is Mortimer," said the other. "I sent up my card."

"And I sent you word I wouldn't see you," said Lowrey angrily. "I don't want to see you; I don't want to see anybody. It's hell enough to be laid up here by myself, but it's a heap worse to be stared at by a damn fool. Stop it, can't you. And get out."

"I'm sorry," lied Mortimer. "The boy must have made a mistake; he said you'd see me. But as I'm here I'd like to talk a little business, if you feel able."

"You go to thunder," said Lowrey. "I won't buy any books and my life isn't worth insuring. I know you fellows. If I could stir off this cursed bed I'd jam you through the fanlight."

"I'm not selling books nor insurance," Mortimer protested. "I'm not selling anything. I want to buy."

"Want to buy, eh?" growled the other. "If you think I've got anything worth selling I wish you'd hold it next the light so I can see it myself. It's a cinch that I'd have to go out and steal anything I sold. And look here! It's not safe to josh an old prospector, even if he is flat on his back."

"I'm not trying to do anything of the kind," protested Mortimer. "I understand that you own some Silver Queen stock?"

The sick engineer raised himself on his elbow and eyed his interlocutor closely.

"Well, suppose I do?" he said, at length. "Is that what you want to buy?"

"I might make you an offer, if we can agree on terms," said Mortimer diplomatically.

"How do you figure we can agree on

terms unless you make an offer?" said the engineer.

"What do you want for your whole block of stock?" inquired Mortimer in his most businesslike tone.

Lowrey scrutinized him in silence. Then:

"Did Farrel send you to buy me out?" he asked.

"Farrel?" repeated Mortimer, mystified.

"That's what I said. Farrel."

Mortimer had never heard of Farrel and was on the point of saying so when it occurred to him that it might be as well to assume a knowledge he did not possess.

"No, Farrel has nothing to do with it," he replied. "I'm here for myself, and for no one else. I'm buying for myself, if I buy at all."

"How much stock do you figure I have?" asked Lowrey.

"About one hundred thousand shares."

"Well, and if you buy a hundred thousand what good is that going to do you? The mine has been run rotten since Farrel's had it, and now they tell me the vein has pinched out. May be only a fracture, but anyway they've lost it. You must have some reason for wanting to buy, outside of the present value of the stock, and I want to know what it is. I've been away for months, and I'm not giving up anything in the dark. You say you're not from Farrel, and that goes. I wouldn't sell him a share of my stock, after the way he and his crowd have treated me. All the same you've got to show me. I've been a sucker often enough."

"What do you want to know?" asked Mortimer. "I ask you to set a figure on your stock. What does it matter why I want it?"

"I tell you I'm not letting go blind," said the engineer. "I never thought the Silver Queen was a world-beater, but I've spent a heap of time and some money on it, and my shares are all I've got to show. I know what they're worth on the market—about a winter's grub-stake and no more. That's why, when you come to buy them, I start

asking questions, because you don't look like a man that would play a dead card across the board."

"Not if I knew it," said Mortimer, pleased at the other's estimate of his shrewdness, and repented the words immediately. "But of course," he added, "a man has to take chances now and then; I'm willing to take one with these shares. I think I can handle them and make a fair profit, if you don't want too much."

"Not good enough," said Lowrey, shaking his head. "I don't ask you to let me in on the cellar, or even the basement, but I want a peep at the ground floor or we can't deal. That's whatever. And it's a safe bet that, sick and all as I am and so poor that if turkeys were a cent a pound I couldn't look pleasant at a jaybird, I can't be talked into a fool sale. You'll have to unbosom some more."

Mortimer thought rapidly. He had no doubt that Lowrey meant every word he said, and it was up to him to construct an impromptu yarn that should contain a fair element of probability and sound plausible. Thus up against it his conversations with Colingwood recurred to him.

"Well," he said, "I've no objection to giving you a look in. Here's how it is. Your friend Farrel and some more have a plan to amalgamate with another company, and any one who won't come in will be frozen out. Those who do come in will find so much water in the new stock which will be offered them in exchange for the old that they'll be disgusted, and besides, the new stock will likely be assessable. That's Farrel's scheme. Now, some other capitalists and myself want sufficient stock to block it, because we think we can sell the mine at a profit. We are willing to pay a good price, as compared with the market. That's the whole thing."

"Sounds all right," said Lowrey. "How would it be if I came in with you and agreed to vote my stock any way you wished?"

"It wouldn't do," said Mortimer promptly. "We are a syndicate, and

we want the absolute control among ourselves."

"So that it's freeze-out anyway," said Lowrey bitterly. "If I don't sell I get amalgamated and assessed out of my holdings. I know how that works; I've seen it done before, and it's just plain robbery but legal as hell. And if I do sell you give me a few cents a share. Nice, isn't it?"

"Oh, I'll give you a fair price," said Mortimer. His heart was beating rapidly for he saw signs of yielding. He plumed himself on the adroitness of his invention. "You know that Silver Queen is unsalable at present, but I'll give you ten cents a share. That's ten thousand dollars. Not so bad, after all!"

"It wouldn't be if you could get it for that, but you can't," said Lowrey.

"How much do you want, then?" asked Mortimer.

Lowrey considered.

"I should think thirty cents a share would be about right."

"Thirty cents!" exclaimed Mortimer. "Why, man alive, your stock wouldn't sell on the market for five!"

"I'm not selling it there," retorted the sick engineer. "You want it pretty bad, or you wouldn't be here. I'm not letting it go for ten cents, anyway."

After half an hour of bargaining Mortimer had raised his offer to fifteen cents and Lowrey had lowered his demands to twenty-five. There they stuck; a deadlock appeared imminent. Mortimer wondered if, after all, the other had heard from the Silver Queen man.

"I can't do it," said the sick engineer. "Look here"—he drew a photograph from under his pillow and held it up to Mortimer—"there's my wife and the kids. This stock is about all I have in the world; I'm crippled with rheumatism, and God knows what besides; the attitudes have got my heart so I'm no good any more. Sooner than let my stock go at fifteen I'll keep it and take a chance, or I'll sell out to Farrel. There's something doing, and I believe it will pay me to hang onto it anyway."

Mortimer was alarmed. He had hung at an offer of fifteen as if it had been his maximum, but he did not wish to arouse the latent obstinacy which he was sure Lowrey possessed in plenty. And besides, at any moment that letter might be delivered, if it had not been delivered already, or an agent of Casimir's might appear on the scene. In either case it would be good-by to his chances. It behooved him to close the bargain at once, if it took his last cent.

"I'll tell you what I'll do, Lowrey," he said, with an air of generosity. "I'll give twenty cents. It's more than the stock is worth, and I only do it because you seem to be in hard luck. If you refuse that I'm through."

He waited for a reply, his heart in his mouth. The sick engineer looked long at the photograph of his family, and his chest rose and fell with some inward emotion.

"I'll take your offer," he said, "because I have to. I'd like to keep the stock, if it wasn't for the wife and the kiddies. It's hell being poor—when you've got a family. Not married, are you?"

"No," admitted Mortimer, thinking of Maisie.

"Then if you did happen to lose your money it wouldn't worry you much," said Lowrey with a grim smile. "Not that there seems to be much chance of your losing it. You can look after yourself, I guess. Take a pretty smart man to skin you, eh? But you want to look out for Farrel; he's crooked."

"I'll look out for him," said Mortimer. "Now, have you got those certificates?"

Luckily Lowrey had them. He had intended to negotiate a loan with them, or to endeavor to do so, but his sickness had prevented it. The certificates were apparently in order; the sick engineer signed the transfers and Mortimer counted out crisp hundred-dollar bills. The transfer duly completed, the latter consulted his watch and found that he had just time to catch a train for Galena. He shook hands with Lowrey, hurriedly wished him a speedy return to health, and made for the station.

Mortimer had barely left the room when the sick engineer leaped from the bed with surprising agility and pressed the button. The bell-boy who responded passed Mortimer on the way.

"Son," said the engineer, "do you want to earn real money?"

"You bet," said the boy emphatically. He had found Lowrey a generous tipper.

"Then rustle out and spot the man who has just left here. His name is Mortimer, and he came in last night. He'll be paying his bill now. Find out where he goes and if he leaves town. If they kick at the desk, say you had a note for him from me. I'll fix it with them. Now hump yourself."

For half an hour he lay quietly in bed, fingering the sheaf of bank-bills. At the end of that time the bell-boy returned.

"The guy left on sixty-four, goin' west," he said. "I see him get on the train."

The sick engineer handed him a twenty-dollar bill.

"That's for you. Bring me up a bottle of champagne and half a dozen four-bit cigars as quick as you can step, and rush this message over the wire."

He was shaved and half dressed when the wine arrived, and humming a tune. When the east-bound pulled out of Coppercliffe a couple of hours later Mr. William J. Lowrey, the sick engineer, spry as a boy, was subsidizing the porter with a view to securing his best services in the matter of stateroom accommodation.

IX.

Mortimer stepped off the train at Galena City with the air of a conqueror. He had one hundred thousand shares of Silver Queen safely tucked in his inside pocket; and, as these shares had been purchased at twenty cents and were as good as sold at fifty, they represented a profit of thirty thousand dollars. It was almost incredible, but he had the written promise of Colonel Jefferson Casimir, capitalist, to pay fifty cents per share. This, he re-

lected, was the way fortunes were made. Instead of drudging along on a salary and investing his money in farm mortgages at a beggarly five per cent, he had struck boldly for the West and jumped into the game, with the result that he had made more money in a fortnight than the staid business men of Ardentale had made in their lives. Small wonder that he trod on air as he made his way to the Palace.

He inquired for Collingwood. Having turned the trick, he wished to tell somebody about it, and he had anticipated pleasurably that gentleman's surprise and secretly envious congratulations.

"Mr. Collingwood left this afternoon," he was told.

Mortimer was surprised. Collingwood had said he would be about Galena for a month, at least.

"Do you know which way he went?" he asked. "Did he leave any message for me?"

There was no message and no information. Not having any one to share his triumph Mortimer dined lonesomely, albeit as expensively as possible. He would have liked some form of celebration, but failing that he devoted an hour after dinner to a letter to Maisie. Lacking a present friend to listen, he spread the tale of his success over many sheets of paper, with much detail. And then, leaving the letter unfinished, he went to find Colonel Casimir.

Mortimer looked through the crowded rotunda of the Commercial, but nowhere could he see the broad shoulders, soft black hat, and benevolent face of the capitalist.

"Out somewhere," he soliloquized, and asked at the desk.

"Colonel Casimir left to-day," was the reply.

Mortimer's face expressed his consternation. But he reflected that the colonel had a perfect right to leave Galena. Only, it was peculiar that he had not mentioned the possibility.

"Any letter for me?" he asked. "My name is Mortimer."

"Nothing."

Mortimer sat down. It came to him

suddenly that he did not know the colonel's business address or a thing about him other than the information he had received from Collingwood. Nor did he know a thing about Collingwood beyond what he had been told by the colonel. A glance at the register showed that the latter had registered from Louisville. It so happened that Mortimer knew a man there, and to him he wired asking for information as to the business standing of Colonel Casimir. Meantime he made such inquiries as he could, but ascertained nothing.

He could not receive an answer to his telegram before morning, and he spent the night the prey of a hundred horrible doubts. He read over his letter to Maisie. The cheerfully light phrases seemed to mock him. His appreciation of his own boldness and business sagacity in seizing a situation and using it in such a way as to more than double his money, seemed ghastly in its folly. And in the morning a wire from Louisville appeared to confirm his apprehensions. It read:

Casimir unknown here in financial circles.

Mortimer, at his wits' end, spent the morning hoping against hope for a telegram from either Collingwood or Casimir. In the afternoon it occurred to him for the first time to make inquiries about the Silver Queen company. He discovered that they had offices, and thither he repaired. Although he was sure that his sale to Casimir had fallen through he had share-certificates in the company, and they might be of some value.

The Silver Queen offices were located in a back room of a newly erected office-building, and were apparently shared by several real estate and insurance men. A man sitting with his feet on a desk, smoking and reading a paper, was pointed out to him as Farrel, the president and managing director of the Silver Queen. He greeted Mortimer with slight ceremony.

"I have some shares in the mine and I'd like some information about it," said the latter.

"You're plumb welcome to information," said Farrel. "I don't remember your name as a stockholder."

"I've just bought the shares," said Mortimer.

"Hope you got 'em cheap, then," returned Farrel grimly. "If you want any more I've a bunch to sell at bargain prices."

"What are they worth?" asked Mortimer, with a sinking heart.

Farrel spat accurately into a wastebasket.

"By the square foot," he replied, "they'll come cheaper'n burlap. They'd make an artistic thing in wall-paper."

"You don't mean to say they're worthless?" cried Mortimer. "I was told there was a new strike."

"The men struck—and they're not paid yet," said Farrel calmly. "Here's the whole thing in a nutshell. The Silver Queen may be a good quarry, but it ain't a mine. There was ore once, but it has pinched out. The company is busted and high and dry. Some of us who were fools enough to sign notes to the bank for capital to develop with are being sued on 'em now. The Silver Queen is dead horse—wolf bait—all same the flowers of yesteryear. If you've bought any lithographs I'm sorry for you."

Mortimer drew out his bundle of certificates.

"I—I've a hundred thousand," he said in a choking voice, for after all he was very young, "and I paid twenty cents a share!"

Farrel spread out the certificates and looked at the signatures, at first carelessly and then with attention. He whistled.

"This isn't old Bill Lowrey's signature," he said. And after a moment's inspection: "And these aren't our certificates, either. Not that ours are worth much more; but these are forgeries. Tell me about it."

Mortimer told his story in shaky tones. Farrel listened with rough sympathy, tinged with contempt.

"Mr. Mortimer," he said, when the other had concluded, "you've fallen for the 'sick-engineer' game. It's a come-

on so old they worked it in Solomon's mines. Don't think I'm rubbing it in, but there isn't a chance on earth of getting your money back; if you have any left I'd advise you to put it in a bank and draw it out one dollar at a time. It's the only safe system for some people."

X.

The east-bound flyer roared into Red Cloud, halting just long enough to exchange mail-sacks. Red Cloud was three hundred miles east of Galena City, and one hundred east of Copper-cliffe. As she came to a grinding stop Charles Anson Collingwood and Colonel Jefferson Casimir swung aboard a rear coach, disregarding the protests of the porter. They made direct for a state-room and opened the door without formality. Inside sat Mr. William J. Lowrey, the sick engineer, deeply engrossed in a game of solitaire. He looked up as they entered.

"Well, by thunder! Red Cloud already!" he exclaimed. "Didn't think we were within an hour of it."

"I got your wire," said Collingwood. "Did you land the money, Frank?"

"You bet I did," said Lowrey, otherwise Frank Duprau, mechanic, lithographer, pen-and-ink artist and lock-expert. "I've got it in my kick—all cold cash."

"Spread her out," said Collingwood.

Duprau produced a thick bundle of bills.

"Even twenty thousand, less some expenses," he announced.

Collingwood counted the money with trained fingers; then he divided it into three portions; one of these he shoved in his pocket.

"I had the right hunch, stopping off at Galena," he said. "Did he give up easy?"

"Hypnotized," replied Duprau. "Where does he come from? Let's go there. There may be more like him at home."

"You got his whole stack, then," said Casimir. As "Big Jim" McDonough he was well but unfavorably known to

the police of two continents. His "come-on" operations had extended over thirty years, and the older he grew the smoother he got. He had shed his soft Southern accent as he would have taken off a coat; just as readily he could have acted to perfection the part of a French count, a crusty British cavalry officer with a liver acquired in India, or any one of a dozen roles.

"Charlie can smell a sucker in the middle of a lake," said Duprau admiringly. "He made a strong bluff at a best offer of fifteen cents a share. Then I flashed a picture of my wife and kids on him and swore I wouldn't let go under twenty. He gave it to me, claiming it was because I was in hard luck. Wouldn't that jar you? And him thinking he was skinning me thirty cents a share. That's your honest guy, every time!"

"Where did you get the picture?" asked McDonough.

"In a photo gallery. 'Type of American Motherhood.' It's great. I suppose we go right through to the good old Atlantic now, Charlie, eh?"

Collingwood, known to his few intimates as Charlie Smith, and to scores of swindled individuals by as many aliases, nodded absently. He was the real head and executive brain of the trio; they worked on his "frame-ups" with absolute confidence.

Duprau, finding his companions disinclined for further conversation, went back to his solitaire which for him was an endless experiment in the theory of chance.

At the end of half an hour he looked at the others. McDonough was smoking, his eyes on the ceiling. Smith was staring absently out of the window into the blackness of the night. Duprau regarded the latter with profound regret.

"Charlie has got a skirt back East, somewhere," he whispered to McDonough.

"We've all had 'em," said Big Jim, with tolerant philosophy. But he, too, presently stared out of the window; for, thirty years before, a woman who loved him had been waiting.

Jack Bellamy, Lawbreaker

By B. M. Bower

Author of "The Boss of the Two-pole Pumpkin," "Pirates of the Range," Etc.

VII.—THE SCALES OF JUSTICE

Perhaps in these days the scales of justice weigh only money, perhaps sometimes truth and sentiment tip them this way or that. At any rate, justice's final decision in the case of Jack Bellamy is eminently satisfactory to him and to the community

(A Complete Story)



WHEN I say I just happened to light on it, I mean it just that way. I was headed for a spot where I thought I could fix me up a hang-out that would do till I found some-

thing better, because I didn't feel no-way safe in my present abode, after Goodyear being there. Of course, now I look back at things, he'd have had quite a large-sized contract leading a posse to my cave, even if he had wanted to, because I packed him in during a blizzard and when he was too near done up to know where he was, half the time; and I packed him out again after dark and in a snow-storm. And even in daylight it wasn't any picnic finding the place if you was green to the country especial.

But after I'd got him out of there I felt like a she-wolf that smells human tracks close to her den of pups. Rain or shine, day or night, she's going to vacate that den if she lives. Maybe the man never got next to the place, but that don't make any difference to her—she holds to the theory that it's better to be safe than sorry. And that was how I felt about it. So I was hiking across the head of a coulée close to the one I'd been stopping in, thinking that on the other side was an overhang of rock about like the one I'd

fixed up before, and as I said I happened to light on this other place. The way it was, I fell through the earth and lit in a kinda tunnel made by water washing underneath.

I wasn't hurt much; just shook up and surprised a lot. I'd dropped about ten or twelve feet, and when I'd picked myself up and took stock of my bones, I seen I couldn't expect to go back the way I'd come, so I started to find the end of the blamed thing—and which end didn't matter none to me. It was plumb dark for a ways, and I was headed down-hill so emphatic I had to lean back and dig in with my heels in places. Some folks might've thought they was headed straight down to the hot springs, but I'd been near the top of a hill when I fell through, and I didn't lose my bearings going down. I judged I was headed for the coulée—or cañon, it was particular—that I'd been trying to get around. So I kept right on going and didn't worry a lot about the wind-up.

Pretty soon the tunnel give a twist—where the water had followed the loose rock and earth—and I seen daylight ahead, all right. And then I come out into a clean, level rock hollow that looked good to me, all right, for a hide-out. I went to the opening, and I was about half-way down in the cañon and the walls so steep a jack-rabbit couldn't get up 'em. Only for the spring floods

that would come roaring down through the tunnel and wash a fellow plumb out, I could have lived there indefinitely and serene with posses hunting through the Bad Lands with drag-nets.

I set down on a rock and looked around me and sized up the lay. On one side a spring dripped a little stream down over the rock wall and landed in a hollow the size of a dish-pan; run over the top and trickled off through a seam to the bottom of the cañon—or the center of the earth, it didn't matter which. There was the water right handy for cooking, and that was all I needed. There was other hollows in the rock floor, but they was dry, mostly.

Well, it all looked good to me, and by the time I'd smoked a cigarette over it I could fair see Porky and me enjoying all the comforts of home in there. The tunnel leading into the cave was small enough so a blanket would shut off the draft, and I could point the stovepipe into the tunnel to carry off the smoke, and fix up a blanket door over the opening, and—oh, I sure had it all arranged fine inside ten minutes.

Then I goes back up the tunnel, past the place where I'd fell through, to the head of the hole. It opened out in the middle of a bunch of rocks, secluded as sin. I don't know as I ever run onto such a peach of a place. It was about half a mile across a level bench to my other cañon, and I made long steps for home, and you can gamble on it. This was just after daylight, and I was all packed up and ready to move before that. I was plumb uneasy till I'd got out of my old camp and into the new, and soon as I'd got back from taking Goodyear out, I had overhauled all my stuff and packed things best I could for easy carrying.

So when I'd got Porky and me some bread to stay our appetites, I loaded up and went and dropped the stuff down that hole where I'd fell through. It was snowing and blowing so I didn't leave no tracks, either. When I'd got everything dropped into the tunnel that would drop, and had let breakables

down with a rope, I dropped in myself and took Porky with me. And after that it was pickings and I could get settled and take my time about it, and they could ride the high-lines all they blamed please looking for me. There's no use talking—when you've got a bounty on your scalp and you know there ain't a man in the country but would be tickled to death to cash you in, you get to feeling a lot better holed up underground like a wolf, and the deeper you burrow the better you feel in your mind.

So that's how me and Porky moved and settled inside twenty-four hours after Goodyear had gone. And it did break up the monotony of holding forth in the Bad Lands in the winter, all right, and seeing we had a dandy place to stay I was kinda glad we moved.

After that we lived in peace and quiet all through January and February, and the time didn't go as slow as you might think. I hunted quite a lot, and kept in fresh meat that way, which helped out on the bacon and beans and was fun besides. And I had to go up on the side hills for firewood, and pack it down the tunnel, and that was some considerable work, too. Porky used to gnaw the bark off all the stuff that had bark, so I made it a point to pack in some green wood for him; it amused him a lot and was healthy too.

So there we would be, warm and snug no matter how bad the blizzards tore things up on top. I could see where the wolves is in the right about making their home underground. I've wintered in line-camps that wasn't near as comfortable, and was blamed near as lonesome, too. Most I missed was a good horse or two and a saddle; I don't reckon I'd used my legs so constant before since I was a kid, and it kinda went against me till I got used to it.

So now I'm coming to the real funny part. You can maybe imagine me laying on my blankets with a candle so close to my head it's liable to singe my hair if I move inadvertent, and with old Bill Shakespeare in both fists and a cigarette in my teeth, kinda half smoking

and half dozing, and half watching Porky digging into one of the loose hollows in our floor. He was busy as a coon—which I mean the four-legged brand—and looked important as sin. He'd buried something in there and was trying to get it out, and his quills was rising and falling along with his interest in the work. I thought a lot of Porky by that time, and he was a heap of company for me.

So I watched him, some amused, till he'd got the hole just about empty and was dirt all over his face and hands. And it kinda bore in on me that there was something funny about his looks. At first I didn't take much interest; I just noticed indifferent that his face kinda had a shine, like these paper angels they hang on Christmas trees. Pretty soon I come alive enough to wonder why, and once I got to wondering I got interested as sin and took the candle and went over to him to see how about it.

I set the candle down on the floor and looked around, and say! I like to have had a fit right there. Porky was just wallowing in gold dust and nuggets, some of 'em big as the end of my thumb. Now, what do you think of that? And me living right there for two months or so and never tumbling to what was laying around careless within reach! Wasn't it plumb scandalous?

I guess I don't have to describe particular what took place there the next three or four days. You can shut your eyes and see one Jack Bellamy mostly on his hands and knees, scooping out every blamed hollow he can locate, and whooping like a drunken sheep-herder at Porky over the results. Say, I've read about such things but I never took stock in any real live man striking luck in heaps and chunks that way. Part of the time I couldn't help thinking the solitude had kinda gone to my head and turned me silly, so I was imagining that every hollow in that cave was alive with gold.

Times like that, I'd hike up the tunnel with my rifle on my shoulder and Porky at my heels like a dog, and go

off over the hills hunting deer. Generally, when I seen I could shoot same as ever and bring down whatever I took aim at, just like I always had done. I'd be some reassured in my mind and would go back and find the gold right there where I'd left it. And then I'd get to guessing about how much there was of it, and thinking of all the things it would do—properly applied. No use talking, gold is a mighty nice thing to have around. With a quart of dust and a handful of nuggets a man can keep himself interested a mighty long while planning out the things he's going to do with it—and I had several quarts of dust, and nuggets till they was that heavy it give me the blamedest queer tingling feeling all over me when I lifted 'em, just thinking how it was all gold, and all mine. You don't know how crimplly you get over it till you've swelled your biceps out lifting your own gold. And it was sure mine, all right—mine and Porky's. Nobody hadn't tore the bone out digging that stuff and then lost it; old Mother Nature had just naturally left it laying in the ground careless, and the spring floods that had washed out that tunnel and cave had sluiced it thorough and washed it down so it caught in the hollows of the rock and stayed there. No telling how many hundred years it had took—but it's safe to say it was longer than it'll take me to get away with it.

I guess it must have took me a week or so to get gentled down so I could view the situation anyways calm at all and think deliberate about me being rich; rich enough to buy out the best stock-ranch in the county, I reckon, and then have some left. So I didn't read no more after that, but put in the time deciding how I could have the most enjoyment in the shortest space of time.

Right there is where I bumped into a problem that kinda feazed me at first. I'd build me up a dream that was sure a peach, and then it would occur to me that I couldn't bring it to pass none, because I was an outlaw with a price on my head, and soon as I showed up

anywheres they'd slap me in jail; and if I was so unwise as to tell about my find, they'd likely swipe it whilst I walked to my meals with my hands on another fellow's shoulder too blamed intimate to be pleasant.

What do you think of that? Me cached down there in the Bad Lands with more gold than I'd seen in all my life or ever expected to, and languishing after a soft bed and feather pillows and clothes built for me especial and not in job lots, and all the things a healthy man likes and wants—and not daring to walk up to any man in daylight for fear he'd do me some underhanded trick that would put me all to the bad.

Justice? The name of it fair made me sick. And then I got to thinking over again how I didn't deserve no such a deal as I'd been getting; hadn't killed anybody or robbed no bank or train or nothing like that. All under heaven I could see that I was guilty of was objecting a lot to being close-herded in jail, and busting out when they locked me up for not doing anything. Why, a man is a plumb fool to stay in jail when he ain't done anything mean and can get out! And it wasn't my fault that the bars in their blamed window was set in rotten mortar, was it? I didn't mix that mortar.

So there I was, with gold enough to get out and have a fine, large time and yet held up by that weird reputation I'd got innocent and inadvertent. At first it had looked to me like a big josh—this being an outlaw without delivering the goods—but I'd got all over that; I couldn't see none where the laugh come in, and I was plumb ready to take it serious.

One night I was setting there in the candle-light with the nuggets spread out on a blanket, studying how I could get clean out of the country without being rounded up, and any way I looked at it that rep of mine loomed up large in the trail. And then I just thought to myself that seeing I hadn't done nothing so fierce I didn't see how they could do me any great damage if I just fought it to a finish.

"The scales of justice," I says to myself, "is used mostly nowadays for weighing gold—and I've got the gold. If I can't tip the scales my way with both gold and right on my side, what the dickens is justice and laws and lawyers for, anyhow? I'm going to amble right in and face Plummer and the rep he give me, and make 'em put up or shut up. This thing of packing a bad name is getting pretty blamed monotonous, especial when I haven't got it coming."

So after that heart-to-heart talk with myself I felt a heap better and went to sleep peaceful as anything. Next morning I commenced to get ready for the move I was going to make. It was like staking my whole pile of chips on one draw, but I felt good all the same. My packing up didn't take long, except that I had to cache my wealth safe till I could come back and get it, like the fellow in "Monte Cristo." Do you know, I couldn't help kinda wondering if I'd pan out the same and have to tell a side-pardner where to find it and let him wear the diamonds whilst I gazed down from paradise on the swath he was cutting with my gold. I tell you right now, that prospect didn't please me none to speak of.

Anyway, I took all I could with me and made me up some venison sandwiches so I wouldn't have to cook none on the road. I meant to do a stunt of walking that would make my grandchildren set up when I told 'em about it—in case I ever accumulated any—and cover the seventy or eighty miles to the county-seat—which I ain't naming—just as quick as the Lord would let me.

I didn't want to be *took* in, you understand; I wanted to *go* in and snub them gay sheriffs and truck up short, and ask 'em how about it. And without wasting no words, I can say that I got out of the Bad Lands without making no disturbance amongst the natives.

Second day out, I run onto a little place where an old fellow happened to be holding her down alone and building him up a ranch and a little bunch

of horses. He hadn't been out of there for six months, he told me, so I felt tolerable safe and eat dinner with him. He wasn't worrying none about Jack Bellamy; he was all for discoursing on why the United States paid Spain twenty million dollars for the Philippines—which was interesting enough at the time, maybe so, but what you might call stale news at present. He got real excited over it, though, and come up and shook his finger under my nose every time he turned loose a bunch of eloquence, and when we was eating he like to have jabbed my eyes out once or twice with his fork. He was sure an earnest-minded old cuss, and when I offered to buy a horse and riding-outfit from him after dinner, he was still worried a lot over them twenty millions and how they ought to been spent, so he wasn't none curious and sold me his saddle and bridle and a horse like he was handing me the materials for a cigarette. He didn't even come alive enough to haggle none on the price, but stuck the money down in his jeans absent-minded with one hand whilst he made gestures with the other and libelized the Republican party something fierce. He wanted me to stay all night, but I was in a hurry and rode off hasty. The last thing I heard was, "I tell ye, Mark Hanna——" The wind blowed the rest away, and I wasn't none grieved, because I had things on my mind a heap more important.

I tell you right now, I felt like a king once I got a decent horse between my knees again, and more optimistic than I'd been since away back. There's no use talking, a cow-puncher ain't all there when you take his horse away from him and set him on his own legs. I know I meditated a lot on how I come to be such a fool as to let them idiots buffalo me into hiding out, all this while. Looked to me like I should have called 'em long ago. And then I got to whistling, and seeing my horse was a stayer as well as a drifter, we hit that little, old county-seat along about sundown, stepping high, wide and handsome, and me with my hat

on the back of my head and elbows flopping gay-and-free-and-don't-give-a-damn.

I galloped right down the middle of their main thoroughfare and come near running over a dog-fight; swung round in a beautiful curve bounded on all sides, and the middle with yellow dust, and pulled up and made me a cigarette whilst I listened to the owner of one dog tongue-lash the owner of the other dog and tell how easy it would be to lick him to a frazzle and what a pleasure it would be if he just only had time to waste on him. He mourned too because he couldn't see his way clear to throwing away good lead on him, and the like of that. And it all seemed like old times come back, when I was just a common, ordinary bronco-twister and cow-puncher and wasn't figuring none in the public eye as the real thing in outlaws.

So pretty soon, when the excitement kinda died down and the dogs had gone off to diagnose what wounds they hadn't accumulated, I asked one fellow if Plummer was in town—which was the deputy sheriff that had caused all my woe, you remember. The man said he was, and what did I want him for especial, because he was over in the Ten-strike, just peeling a sheepman in great, thick layers, in a poker-game, and he wouldn't want to be disturbed for trifles.

I didn't want to make myself none of a bad man and a boaster, but I was feeling good and sassy. "Go in and tell him Jack Bellamy is out here and would like a whole lot to see him a minute." Say, the fellow like to have went over backward, but he just give me one good look and packed my message in to Plummer. And I set out there on my horse and made me another smoke, and nobody done a thing but rubber. They was as meek a bunch as I ever met up with, and it sure did amuse me, seeing I was in the joke and knew how plumb harmless I was really.

Plummer come out, all right; sure, he did! He come with two guns pointed ahead of him and gazabos peering

over his shoulder furtive, ready to dodge back just as quick as the fireworks commenced. I kept right on smoking, with one leg hooked over the saddle-horn and my hat back. I will admit I was playing a watch-me-boys game, but seems like them months I put in by my high lonesome in the Bad Lands had to have something to balance 'em, and so I was dead willing to create a sensation and have some fun out of the deal, if there was any. Up to then the fun had been as scarce as meadow-larks in winter. When Plummer was about twenty feet off he stopped and eyed me watchful.

"I heard you was plumb anxious to see me, Mr. Plummer," I says to him pleasant, "so I just thought I'd ride around and——" I stuck there for the simple reason that the fun oozed out of the situation, as yuh might say, and left me mad clear through at the way he'd acted up and give me the worst of it all along. If I'd been the kind of man he'd got me painted, I'd sure have ventilated him up some right there. He was one of these big, red-faced, bull-necked marks that you just hate the sight of on general principles. I couldn't to save my life go on making a show. I got too blamed serious for ever thinking any more about the general effect I was having on the audience.

Plummer come a little closer, scowling something fierce. "Jack Bellamy, you're my prisoner," he bawls out insulting.

"Oh, am I?" I asks him through my teeth—and then I turned loose and told him all the things I'd been saying to myself this long while whenever he come up as a subject for my thoughts to dwell on murderous. I don't know all I did say, and anyway, I guess the biggest share wouldn't stand repeating in mixed company. But I remember fine how I wound up.

"You made yourself mighty busy till you got me branded for a sure-enough outlaw," I says, "with a bounty on my scalp like I was a wolf. And now I'm here to call your bluff. I'm here to make you *prove* all them things.

You've chalked up the account to please yourself so far, but right here and now you've got to prove the items. You couldn't bring me into camp yourself, you"—we'll just as well skip like everything, along about here—"so I had to come in myself. You needn't get scared for fear I'll pull out—I'm going to stop right here and fight you in the court you've got backing your play. Lead the way down to that imitation jail you've got here. I'm going to stop there to-night"—which I knew fine I'd just about have to, and wouldn't give him a chance to haze me into it—"and I wish you fellows would round up all the lawyer sharps you've got in this burg and send 'em down to me. I'll size 'em up and take my pick." I waved my hand grand—and there was a gun in it. So Plummer led the way like a little man, and if you ask me why when he had them two guns in plain view, I'll never tell you. I know he didn't keep 'em pointing at me none too straight whilst I was making my war-talk, and that give me a chance to pull mine. And I guess my doing the unexpected kinda feazed him and got him rattled. Anyway, he led out all right, and I followed, with just about the whole town at my heels like I was a circus parade.

I went into the jail behind Plummer and told the jailer to put me down for the best room he had, and to serve supper immediate because I was hungry as sin. And do you know, they was that hypnotized with seeing me there giving orders about my own incarceration, that they done just about as they was told and didn't have nothing much to say. Which was sure lucky, for I would've looked plumb foolish if they'd forced my hand, and me not wanting to do nothing fierce.

I was setting on a corner of the table in the jail office smoking a cigarette and telling the gang what a lot of good things I didn't think of 'em, and they listening attentive like I was a Fourth of July orator shipped in from the next county, when in squirms a couple of fellows that looked like they thought it was their game. I sized 'em up out

of the tail of my eye and went on and finished what I had to say, and then one steps up and asks me if I'm Jack Bellamy.

"I sure am, old-timer," I answers polite. "If you don't believe me, just cast your eagle optics over the deputy sheriff and be convinced. Don't he look a lot like he was expecting to be rolled down-hill again?"

He glanced over to Plummer, and I seen by a twinkle in his eyes that he had some sense of humor in him, which pleased me a lot. What I was dreading most was to have them that had authority take me serious. I wanted to put the joke on Plummer and keep it there, which would ease things up for me considerable.

"You won't have Plummer to deal with now," he remarks, eying me keen. "I'm the sheriff, and I place you under arrest."

"Oh, joy!" I exclaims. "I've been wanting fierce to meet up with you, Mr. Sheriff. I always like to make my deal with the main guy. If you'll chase all these rooters out of here, I'd like to have a little heart-to-heart talk with you."

"They stay," he asserts, swallowing a grin. "I don't want to be accused of grafting on the quiet. Say on—and remember it will be used against you."

"Will it?" I took two or three draws of smoke and looked him over. "I hope it won't be the means of hanging me—but I wanted to ask for an immediate preliminary hearing so I can give bonds. They tell me they don't have felt mattresses nor real linen sheets in this hotel, and I'm a heap fastidious and object a lot to the accommodations. Also, it insults both my muscles and my brains to expect me to stay locked in a place that's so easy broke out of. If I should happen to get to dreaming in the night, I'd likely walk off and lose myself; I'm sure a terror to sleep-walk. So if you'll round up a judge of some kind, I'd be much obliged and vote for you next time you run for office."

"The bonds would likely be high,"

he warns, still looking through me and back.

"I've got a right to have 'em named," I answers, and got up and yawned. "If I can't produce the goods, that's my own funeral and you needn't even be one of the mourners, old-timer, Get busy."

"Well, I like your nerve," he concedes, and sets Plummer to telephoning whilst he kept an eye on me. He wasn't taking no chances—that sheriff wasn't, and I respected him for it.

Pretty soon we was bunched up in the office of a justice of the peace, and he was saying "Two thousand dollars" like he thought I'd wilt right there. I hadn't give 'em an opening to search me, you see, so when I rolled out my nuggets on the desk and called for scales to weigh 'em, their eyes stood out like frogs' and they crowded up till I was humped over the desk and couldn't straighten up for a minute till I'd rammed my elbows into their chests a few times.

The fellow that had come into the jail with the sheriff was a lawyer, and he looked to me medium honest considering his trade. So I handed him the nuggets casual for a retaining fee and told him to hunt me up a bondsman or two and watch my interests in the game and see that they didn't ring in any cold deck on me or anything like that. So he said he would, and took me under his wing right there.

For the week that went by before my case came up in district court that happened to be setting then, I was kept pretty tolerable busy wondering whether I was a hero or a curiosity to that town. I always had a crowd trailing after me when I walked the streets, and in every saloon they bunched around me like I was a Salvation Army on a street-corner. My lawyer—he was named Charley Oberly and was an all-right boy—told me not to tell all I knew, but to leave some of it for him to say in court. So I took the hint and didn't loosen up none on my weird and bloody career, nor how I come to be getting humpback carrying gold nuggets around, nor anything about it. I

did guy Plummer some, though, because it was against the rules to kill him off and I had to relieve my mind some way whenever our trails crossed; which he took care didn't happen none frequent after the first time or two.

So then, when my case come up and I went in with Charley to face the jury and take whatever medicine they mixed for me, the court-room looked like a prize-fight was about to be called, the audience was that eager and piled three-deep, seemed like. And I got a jolt, too. I hadn't paid no attention to details but left it all to Oberly, because I was paying him good and wanted to make him earn his money, and I was busy untangling myself from my admirers all the time. So the man that was to build up the case against me I'd plumb overlooked and hadn't thought nothing about. And here he was Goodyear! Goodyear, the man I'd packed on my back in a blizzard and took him to my cave and nursed him and fed him, and rubbed him faithful with Three-H and hair-restorer and lent him Bill Shakespeare to read—oh, thunder!

I was going to shake hands with him, but he eyed me cold and I got hostile and give him a glare that made his look caressing by comparison, and set down haughty and told Charley they could turn loose any old time now. I was disappointed as sin in Goodyear, because I did think he was human and would remember how I could easy have left him to freeze to death, and didn't. But what can you expect of a county attorney, anyhow? They're there for the sole and simple purpose of hanging every man they can, and building up a large, black name for every poor devil that comes into court. They're paid to do it, and they can't do it thorough and be human. So they ain't human; it's their trade not to be.

I will say one thing for Goodyear: he sure could talk white into black. It made me think of when I was packing him through that blizzard and he was arguing against it so that he made me feel as if I was committing a crime to save his life like that. That morn-

ing in court I came near thinking I had, all right.

The way he put the case, I was living for the sole object of breaking the laws and doing injury to my fellow men, and I was plumb dangerous to have around. He sure had me painted lurid! He told about me taking a prisoner away from an officer, and about me breaking jail, and then he went strong on me rolling Plummer down-hill to his train and getting off on Helga's snow-shoes. And he orated till the crowd didn't know whether they ought to shed tears over Plummer, or laugh themselves sick over him. Anyways, Goodyear elocuted with a large-sized weep in his voice.

"Think of it, gentlemen of the jury!" he implor'd piteous. "Our brave deputy sheriff, who has served us faithfully, subjected to such indignity and made to suffer such mental and bodily anguish! Picture that long, snow-covered bluff, that slope where all was white and innocent to the eye, and yet where this black-hearted scoundrel before you was about to perpetrate an outrage the like of which civilized man had never conceived. Think of him, gentlemen of the jury, driving before him up that hill the officer who had courageously placed him under arrest. Think of our deputy sheriff toiling painfully to the top of that bluff, with this heartless fiend driving him like a— a— a sheep! Picture Mr. Plummer lying down at the command of his prisoner, being spurned with the prisoner's boot and sent rolling down, down that awful slope. Great guns, gentlemen of the jury; what if Mr. Plummer had hit a rock?"

Well, say, I snorted right there and rocked back and forth in my chair and fair howled, I was that tickled. If they'd hung me next minute I couldn't have helped it. Plummer was setting there, red as a turkey-gobbler's brow, and when I looked at him I give a whoop involuntary. Next I knew everybody was laughing and howling, and the judge was near getting apoplexy and the sheriff pounding for silence, and the jury holding onto each other.

Such a time I never did see; it was plumb scandalous.

After a while things calmed down so Goodyear could go on; he didn't orate any further, but said the State was ready to present the evidence against the prisoner, and called up Plummer, which was cruel to the poor man. Seemed like he had to bring out all the most humiliating details, and Goodyear trying his blamest to make the jury see it serious whilst the audience snickered. There was another witness or two; folks that had been on the train. You see, Goodyear had picked on this one particular crime to hang me for, and he was trying to spread it out and make the most of it. And the more he made of it, the more ridiculous it showed up Plummer; till by the time the State rested, I felt as if I was even with Plummer and if I had to go to the pen I could go with a good grace, knowing that he'd be hooted plumb out of the country for the part he'd played.

When Charley Oberly got busy, he didn't do a thing to Plummer and the rest. Oh, no! And he didn't make sport of the whole thing or nothing! He told my tale the way I'd told it to him, and I will say he told it better and made me see myself a martyr to Plummer's damn-foolishness. Then he got serious, and got the jury to looking serious and sorry for me.

Then Goodyear got up again and told how, fun or no fun, the laws of the country had got to be upheld and respected. And that got me, because it was a fact, all right, that I had broke the law all to smithereens when I tackled Plummer. Assaulting an officer ain't any joke—not when you come right down to facts. I could see the jury change its mind as plain as you see a cloud come over the sun and put you in the shadow. Goodyear was a good talker, all right. In ten minutes or less I was feeling small and mean and couldn't look anybody in the eye. I felt like apologizing to Plummer, even; which goes to prove the kind of talker Goodyear was. The judge's spiel had been stern and proper and all that,

but it didn't begin to get me the way Goodyear done. Then Goodyear wound up the queerest ever.

He'd got the jury so they had GUILTY in big letters hanging on the ends of their tongues, when he broke off short and waited a minute till everybody got to wondering what was going to happen. Then he commenced something like this:

"While it may seem irrelevant and not bearing on this particular case, gentlemen of the jury, I want to tell a little adventure of mine that happened this last winter. You will have observed, gentlemen, that I limp quite noticeably. You may also have heard how I was lost last December and how searching parties had given me up when I appeared very mysteriously one night on the door-step of the store at Claggett. I refused at the time, you remember, to elucidate. I will do so now.

"Gentlemen of the jury, I was badly hurt from falling off a high bank that caved treacherously near the edge. I was separated from my companions, and could not walk. I lay for hours, shouting and firing my rifle at intervals to attract the attention of the others, but to no purpose. It was near night, and I was chilled through and hopeless of ever seeing anything beyond those high walls, when a man came sliding and scrambling down to me. He was a stranger, and I am going to tell you what he did. He took me upon his back when he found I could not walk, and he carried me somehow up that bluff. It was storming and growing bitter cold, and I begged him not to sacrifice himself for me. I realized to the full what he was doing—or no, I did not then. Afterward I knew.

"In spite of protests he labored through the storm, making no explanation but toiling up and down that heart-breaking trail. I am not a small man, and how his muscles must have strained under the load I leave you to imagine. I was faint when at last we reached shelter. That shelter, gentlemen of the jury, was a cave under an overhanging rock, as nearly as I could judge. It

was roughly comfortable, and he put me on his bed and worked over me like a brother. He cooked for me, did all in his power to ease my sufferings and treated me as an honored guest.

"Why he was living there alone he did not explain, nor did I inquire. Perhaps I could have guessed, if I had tried. Perhaps I could guess that his safety and his freedom depended on his keeping this place secret, and that he was jeopardizing that freedom and safety when he carried me, a stranger, into his retreat. I might possibly have guessed that he was dividing with me food that it would be hard for him to replenish; that the medicine he used on my injuries he might need badly for himself. I might imagine, when he at last insisted upon taking me on a sled down to Claggett, that I might receive better care than he could give, that he was taking a great risk; that he was running into a danger he must certainly have dreaded.

"I might have guessed, gentlemen of the jury, that the man who did all this; the man who lived down in that God-forsaken hole alone save for the company of a pet porcupine; the man who saved my life and risked his own—more than his own, for he risked the freedom dearer to him than his life; I might have known, gentlemen of the jury, that that man was Jack Bellamy,

the prisoner who is waiting now for your verdict."

He sat down, and nobody said a blamed thing for as much as a minute. Then the foreman of the jury looked around at the rest, and they rose up and yelled "Not guilty!" till you could hear 'em clear into the street.

I don't know why, but I got kinda silly for a minute. I couldn't see anything but blurs, and I kept swallowing at an ache that pinched my throat. And when somebody grabbed my hand, I couldn't for the life of me tell who it was. Then I blinked furious and could see that it was Goodyear.

"You blamed idiot," he was saying in my ear. "Couldn't you see it was for your good that I made my case strong as possible? Couldn't you see it would come out all serene in spite of hell-and-high-water? How's Porky? Did you bring him with you?"

I gulped a time or two and got my voice in working trim. "No," I said, "I didn't; but I'm going back after him and the rest of my gold-mine. And if you and Charley Oberly want to come along, I'll wait till you're through courting, here."

"You bet your sweet life I'll come," he grins.

Then the crowd like to have buried me clean out of sight, they piled in that thick to congratulate me.



THREAD USED IN SURGERY

ARE you aware that the modern surgeon employs in his work dozens of different kinds of thread for sewing up cuts and wounds? Among them are kangaroo tendons, horsehair, silk, and very fine silver wire. Many of these threads are intended to hold for a certain number of days, and then naturally break away. The short, tough tendons taken from the kangaroo, which are used for sewing severe wounds, will hold for about four weeks before they break away. Silk thread will remain much longer, sometimes six months, while the fine silver wire is practically indestructible.

With the entire outfit a surgeon is able to select a thread that will last as long as the wound takes to heal, and will then disappear completely. To accommodate this assortment of threads, special varieties of needles are required. Besides the needle craned in different segments of a circle, surgeons use needles shaped like spears, javelins, and bayonet points.

The Mafia and the Contessa

By J. Kenilworth Egerton

Author of "Queen Draga's Cape," "The Perfume of Madness," Etc.

Having landed Van Osten in jail, Tommy Williams seems entitled to a respite from his unsought-for battles with criminals and conspirators. There is no rest for him, however. The powerful hand of Van Osten moves his puppets of crime even from behind the bars of a Sicilian prison and our artist friend finds himself the object of the unsolicited attention of anarchists, the Mafia and what-not secret forces. He deals with them in his wonted way.

(In Two Parts—Part I.)



THE name "Ernesto Cambioni" which was printed on his card conveyed nothing to us and when he entered the studio which my friend Mr. Thomas Williams had fitted up

in Palermo he looked from one to the other of us inquiringly.

"I have the honor of addressing Mr. Williams?" he said interrogatively in English which scarcely betrayed his foreign birth. Tommy nodded and glanced again at the card.

"That is my name; what can I do for you?" he asked and the Italian glanced at me and smiled.

"That will, perhaps, need considerable explanation and I assume that I may speak freely before you both," he answered. "It would be better if I told you first my position. I am an official of the Italian secret service and I am employed in the international department; my special duties being to watch the anarchists and to safeguard the royal family and such visiting royalty as come to Italy."

"But, as neither my friend nor myself could by the wildest stretch of the imagination be classed as members of

that interesting brotherhood, I can hardly believe that you visit us in your official capacity," answered Tommy and the Italian laughed and shrugged his shoulders.

"Not exactly in an official capacity and I have never suspected for a moment that you were either of you in sympathy with those pests of society," he said after a moment's hesitation. "It has often fallen within my province to order the deportation of undesirable foreigners across the frontier. Believe me, I do not insinuate that either of you gentlemen fall within that category; for I know a great deal about you and it is all to your credit; but still I come to recommend to you as a matter of courtesy that you leave Italy at your very earliest convenience." He had stated such a startling proposition that I gave an exclamation of surprise; but Tommy, at whom he looked when he spoke, was entirely unperturbed.

"Let me understand you perfectly, please," he said, offering his guest a cigarette and motioning him to a chair. "You disclaim all official authority in this?"

"Yes and no," answered Cambioni quietly. "I do not speak as an official; but because of information which has

come to me in my official capacity. Let me put myself right in one thing. I have been much in America, watching the anarchistic group whose headquarters is in that country, and as an official I have made the acquaintance of two men in New York who know you well; Mr. Longley, the district attorney, and Inspector Clancy of Mulberry Street."

"And they gave us such a bad reputation that you wish to deport us," suggested Tommy, grinning.

"On the contrary, they told me things about you which make me wish that you might remain here and aid me in my task, which is no easy one," replied the Italian courteously. "I regret extremely that I feel obliged to make the other suggestion."

"I suppose that you know the reason that we remain so long in Sicily; it is not altogether our own choice," said Tommy and Cambioni nodded.

"In a nutshell, you have promised the local police authorities that you will remain to testify at the trial of one Van Osten, who lies in the Palermo prison under the charge of brigandage," he said. "I believe that your personal animosity against that man would induce you to remain here without that pledge; but I can assure you that you are wasting your time. You will never testify against him; the Sicilian customs are peculiar."

"I take it that you are not entirely in sympathy with the local authorities," said Tommy dryly. "They seem to regard our evidence as of the greatest importance." Cambioni was silent for several moments and then looked at Tommy with, at least, an assumption of perfect frankness.

"Mr. Williams, there is nothing to be gained by beating about the bush with you and I will explain as much as I can," he said earnestly. "I landed in Naples yesterday, direct from New York. You can imagine what my duties have been in America; for it is known that the headquarters of the Italian anarchists is there. You will recall that it was there that the assassination of King Humbert was planned

and that his murderer came directly from there. I, of course, have my spies among them and it may interest you to know that at a secret meeting held two weeks ago a certain important action was voted upon and it was unanimously voted to delay it until you had been removed as a precautionary measure."

"Great Scott, do they think that I'm closely enough associated with royalty to make my scalp of value!" exclaimed Tommy incredulously. "See here, Mr. Cambioni; are you trying to string me?" The whole story seemed so preposterous that I shared Tommy's incredulity and looked upon Cambioni as a crank; but he was undoubtedly in earnest and he made a gesture of protest.

"This is not a thing to be treated lightly, Mr. Williams," he said seriously. "There are always many wheels within wheels in this sort of a conspiracy. As a matter of fact, I am still ignorant of the details of the plot which they are working out; so much so that I do not know which particular royal house is threatened; but I do know as a positive fact that your death was decreed and that measures were taken to bring it about."

"And will you kindly tell me why a modest and retiring American artist should receive attention at their hands?" inquired Tommy in a tone which indicated his entire unbelief.

"I have no doubt that your own estimate of yourself would hardly be indorsed by all who know you; by Mr. Longley, by my confrère of the French service, Le Garde, and a few others, for example," answered Cambioni smiling. "Through your friendship with those gentlemen, you have been interested in many things which are outside of your profession, Mr. Williams. You can see that I am fairly familiar with much that you have done and I know that you have been mixed up more or less—always on the right side, of course—with several conspiracies which might have materially changed the face of Europe had they succeeded. Were I in league with the anarchists, instead of fighting constantly against

them, I am free to confess that I should not entirely disregard a man who had been largely instrumental in foiling the lifelong scheme of Nicholas Lobenski, who had aided in laying by the heels Cleo de Wynt, the cleverest political intriguer in Europe and, last but not least, the man whom Van Osten, a criminal who has successfully defied the entire Continental and English police, fears more than he does all of the organized forces whose duty it is to safeguard society from his kind."

Tommy is in many ways a very remarkable man; but he possesses one failing which is common in very ordinary ones and I saw that the detective's tribute tickled his vanity. It did more than that, however; for while the Italian had related his incredible story about the anarchists he had been studying him to read some hidden motive and something in Cambioni's tribute had apparently afforded him the clue.

I saw the old familiar Mephistophelian expression come to his face, the bright eyes looked sharply at the detective from between half-closed lids and the little cock of his shapely head which I knew so well indicated to me that he had found what he had been searching for.

"There is nothing in those past episodes which indicates animosity to anarchism, Mr. Cambioni," he said thoughtfully. "I have never mixed up great socialistic problems with the individual cases in which I have been interested. Of course, I understand your allusions to the Sicilian customs and I appreciate that it is not healthy to know too much when the accused man has influential or unscrupulous friends; but I was always able to keep my skin whole when Van Osten himself was at liberty and I think it will be easier when he is not personally at the head of affairs." The Italian's expressive hands were working nervously while Tommy spoke and when he finished he raised them and ticked off his facts on his fingers.

"You first ran across him in Paris a few months ago in the matter of the theft of Mrs. Mallories' jewels, I be-

lieve," he said. "You solved the mystery surrounding that when the French police were on the wrong track. That led to the pursuit of Van Osten and his capture at the very moment that a tremendous fortune was within his grasp." Tommy nodded assent and the Italian passed to the second finger.

"Following his escape you became involved with Le Garde in the pursuit of the 'Man with the Paw,' one of Van Osten's most valuable accomplices, and incidentally interfered with another one of his carefully laid plots to acquire a large fortune. It is more than probable that he would have succeeded but for you."

"And the fortune of war which seemed to be against him," amended Tommy and the detective shrugged his shoulders and indicated the third finger, which was ornamented with a sealing of curious design and setting.

"The fortune of war seems to have been constantly in your favor," he continued. "However, the result was the same and Van Osten lost most decisively and attributes his ill fortune to you. By a curious combination of circumstances you were again opposed to him when there was a possibility that he might make a great winning; for it was owing to your efforts that he was unable to regain the papers which would have placed King Peter of Serbia practically at his mercy."

"An honor which was thrust upon me and which I did not desire," commented Tommy. "Perhaps that experience was quite as disastrous to me as to Van Osten." There was a little of bitterness in his tone and Cambioni glanced at him sharply.

"The material loss to him was a great one," he replied. "That, of course, is a closed incident and he realizes that there is no use in crying over spilt milk. In your fourth contest with him, however"—and here a crooked little finger remained alone in the air—"you, yourself, were saved almost by a miracle and while you may have planned the campaign which ended in his capture, the actual glory of it belonged to another, with whom Van Osten will un-

doubtedly reckon in due time. Of course, your continued presence here and your persistence in following his trail caused him considerable uneasiness; but, as I have told you, it is not probable that you would ever testify against him." Tommy smoked quietly for a moment, watching the blue cigarette smoke curl in the air above his head and then tossing his cigarette away he leaned forward and looked the Italian squarely in the eyes.

"Mr. Cambioni, it might be as well to omit all of this fanciful imagining about the American anarchists and get down to the milk in the coconut," he said dryly. "It is fair to assume that you visited Van Osten before coming here." Cambioni nodded, entirely unabashed.

"I have just come from the prison," he admitted.

"Then, I believe it would be simpler to tell me just the nature of Van Osten's instructions to you; omitting all of the anarchistic embroidery with which you have ornamented them," said Tommy grimly and the Italian smiled and shook his head.

"My dear sir, I can assure you that there is no imagination about it," he protested. "As I told you, there are always wheels within wheels; but it is a cold, positive fact that your death was decreed by the anarchists in America and I have every reason to believe that the sentence will be carried out unless you choose to disappear. Leaving all of that out of consideration, you are living on a powder-magazine; for the climate of Sicily is not healthful for witnesses for the State."

"You are making a bad case for the administration of justice in Italy," suggested Tommy and Cambioni shrugged his shoulders indifferently.

"Sicily can hardly be called Italy, as we Romans understand it," he said. "In spite of the confederation, the Department of Justice at the capital has little control over the administration in the old kingdom of Naples. Were you in Northern Italy I could assure you all possible protection; but in Sicily the conditions are entirely different."

"As instanced by the case of Nasi," said Tommy and I saw that his random shot had gone home; for Cambioni gave an involuntary start and a suspicion of red came to his olive cheeks.

"You could have no better illustration of the powerlessness of the central authority," he answered quickly. "That man, a Sicilian deputy who filled the cabinet position of Minister of Education, was impeached and convicted on the plainest evidence of the embezzlement of millions. He was sentenced to a long term of imprisonment; but owing to his constitutional immunity as a deputy to the Italian Parliament he could not be arrested to serve it until his term of office expired. He gloried openly in his peculations; but the public opinion of Sicily saw nothing wrong in what he had done and he is regularly reelected as the deputy for Trapani at each election, so that he can laugh in the faces of the judges who have convicted him. It has made us the laughing-stock of Europe, Mr. Williams; but it should serve as a warning to you. No man would be convicted in Sicily if he murdered you to prevent you from testifying for the State. Your own government might make all sorts of demands and Rome would be as powerless to satisfy them as was Washington to punish the citizens of New Orleans who lynched a dozen of my countrymen."

"There will be no occasion for government interference; I don't intend to volunteer as a victim," answered Tommy, grinning. "This thing interests me as a psychological study, though, Mr. Cambioni. If you were a Sicilian I might perhaps understand it more easily; but the fact that you are from the North and a member of the police as well, makes it difficult for me to guess why you come to me as an emissary of Van Osten and tell me this fantastic tale of anarchism." Tommy's manner and tone were so contemptuous that I expected the Italian to resent the speech; but he accepted it placidly and simply shrugged his shoulders.

"I again assure you that the warning

I give you is genuine and entirely warranted by the facts," he said patiently. "To be perfectly frank, I consider the other danger quite as imminent and I should hesitate to guarantee your safety unless you leave Italy at once and go into retirement until things have blown over."

"In other words, if the anarchists don't get me, the Sicilians will," said Tommy sarcastically and Cambioni laughed.

"You treat it so lightly, Mr. Williams, that I can hardly believe it myself; but you have summed up the situation pretty accurately," he answered.

"'Threatened men live long,' is an old English saying," retorted Tommy. "There is another danger which threatens me that I consider far more serious than either of those you warn me of, Mr. Cambioni."

"Indeed! Then you must be in a bad way?" said the detective interrogatively.

"Yes, death from unsatisfied curiosity would be about the most disagreeable form that I could imagine, so I shall try to avoid it," replied Tommy. "It is quite within your power to place it beyond the possibilities."

"You are trifling with me, Mr. Williams," answered Cambioni impatiently. "I have told you that I did not come here in my official capacity, but because of information which had come to me in that capacity. It is impossible for me to confide all of my secrets in you; but my warning is none the less sincere."

"To be perfectly frank with you, it is too much like an anonymous letter for me to value it, though," said Tommy indifferently.

"You do not intend to profit by my advice and warning?" asked Cambioni.

"I do not intend to run away, if that's what you mean," answered Tommy positively. "The delays of the legal machinery may keep me cooling my heels about here for a long time; but I shall have an interesting problem with which to occupy my leisure moments."

"My reason for conveying this warning to you?"

"In part; but more especially the influence which could induce a trusted official of the government to act as the messenger of the greatest rascal unchanged," answered Tommy and Cambioni's expressive hands made a gesture which practically acknowledged defeat.

"Mr. Williams, your powers of induction were underestimated rather than overestimated by our mutual friends!" he said admiringly. "I want you to believe, however, that I have told you the exact truth."

"But not all of it!" retorted Tommy curtly.

"As you say, not all of it," acknowledged the detective. "My warning was sincere and you would do well to heed it; but if you will not I cannot force you to follow my advice."

"And I do not suppose that you will tell me the reason for the bond of sympathy between yourself and Van Osten?" suggested Tommy. Cambioni took considerable time for reflection before answering.

"Mr. Williams, the form of your expression is not a happy one; but I am willing to believe that you are not intentionally insulting," he said finally. "My first duty in this world is to protect the members of the royal house of Savoy. That protection has not been adequate in the past and King Humbert's death was the result of my predecessor's stupidity. I will tell you frankly that I would make any alliance which would protect the people who rely upon my sagacity and the punishment of the ordinary criminal is of less importance in my eyes than the gaining of information which will aid me. If I could obtain from you a pledge of absolute neutrality as regards Van Osten, it would enable me to get information which would place a dozen of the most dangerous men in Europe behind the bars; but I knew too much about you to venture to make such a proposition." In spite of his disclaimer I saw that he was watching Tommy furtively to see the effect of his tacit proposal and he was not left long in doubt.

"I should not make such a com-

promise to save all the crowned heads of Europe!" he exclaimed and Cambioni nodded.

"I have had my say, Mr. Williams," he said calmly. "The warnings are absolutely sincere and justified by the facts. If you do not profit by them it is your own fault and your refusal makes my task more difficult."

"Van Osten made an alternate compromise proposition, then?" demanded Tommy suspiciously and Cambioni smiled.

"You are a good guesser, Mr. Williams, and I shall be able to take advantage of it—after the inevitable has happened," he said with a significant gesture: "Caution on your part may postpone it; but it cannot make you safe. I have one more proposition to make to you and perhaps another of the great emotions may influence you where fear has failed."

"Be careful, Cambioni!" said Tommy, flushing, and there was a dangerous glint in his eyes. "I know that my correspondence has been tampered with; but it would not be well for the individual who has opened the letters to make open confession."

"And I would remind you that I have been in Italy for less than forty-eight hours, so I cannot be culpable," said Cambioni. "I have profited by the information of others, however, and all sorts of strange happenings are reported to the office of the secret police. Would it induce you to change your mind about remaining in Sicily if I could supply you with the address of two ladies who have disappeared in the maelstrom of Balkan conspiracy and whose whereabouts you would be glad to know?"

"You are familiar with contents of the Lady Diana's last letter to me?" demanded Tommy fiercely.

"With all of them," corrected Cambioni, as unperturbed by his anger as he had been by his raillery. "We know that the lady followed what she considered to be her duty at the expense of her inclination. This was not personal, Mr. Williams; it is the duty of the political police to know the doings

of all those who are interested in disturbing the existing order of things in any part of Europe. The information which we have gained goes no further; but naturally we could not let the two ladies pass beyond our ken. I know that the Lady Diana refused to let you follow her in the dangerous waters she has elected to navigate and that she took the only sure way to prevent it by disappearing quietly from Malta with the Princess Sonia. I can supply you with their address and I assure you that they are both in dire need of all the assistance they can get; but I must have the price of my information."

"Damn you, I believe you'd betray your brother to further your ambition!" exclaimed Tommy angrily and the Italian seemed to regard the taunt as a compliment.

"I am faithful to my salt and I serve the house of Savoy," he said proudly. "In that service I know few scruples and I consider it absolutely essential that you leave Sicily. I should be entirely willing to put you in possession of all the information I have regarding the ladies—and I assure you that it is minute and accurate—if it would accomplish that result."

"And I should refuse to listen to it, if you volunteered it without price!" answered Tommy who had regained a certain measure of self-control. "I recognize the hand of Van Osten in that proposition, too, and I wish you joy of your alliance. Now, Mr. Cambioni, that you have demonstrated to me the peculiar working of the mind of an Italian secret agent, I can tell you that I have had enough of your society to satisfy me for many a day. You can return to your friend in the prison and tell him with my compliments that my only regret is that he will not be hanged higher than Haman and that I shall do my best to send him up for life." The detective accepted his dismissal without protest, simply suggesting that we knew where to find him if we needed him, and after he had gone Tommy turned to me with a rueful smile on his lips.

"'Fools rush in where angels fear to tread,'" he said bitterly. "I haven't given you my entire confidence, old chap; close as we are to each other; and you have been considerate enough to refrain from questioning me. The brute was truthful in his statement about the Lady Diana, however, and I own up that I am not entirely happy about her." It was part of the unwritten law of our long and close intimacy that certain things should remain undiscussed between us and the last part of the conversation with Cambioni had been a revelation to me. Even now I wished to avoid a painful topic and I was glad of the opportunity to change the subject which Tommy himself had introduced.

"But what of the rest of it?" I asked. "I believe that the man was equally truthful in his warning, Tommy." He shrugged his shoulders and lighted a fresh cigarette before answering.

"In part, yes," he answered indifferently. "For an anarchistic group read 'Mafia' and for America, 'Palermo' and we should be reasonably near the truth; about as close as you can ever get with an Italian, unless you possess a vivid imagination."

"But I can't see that it makes much difference in the general result," I answered nervously; for I had been reveling in a peaceful life for several weeks and had no desire for further adventure. "A Sicilian knife will kill a man as dead as an anarchist's bomb and I have no ambition to be sacrificed on the chance of furthering the ends of justice."

"It wouldn't be so messy a death and there would be something to erect a monument with a glowing epitaph over," said Tommy, grinning. "We'll try to dodge 'em both, old chap; but I'm not going to let up on Van Osten."

"Then let's cut away until his trial is announced," I suggested and he laughed at my proposal.

"My dear boy, you have paid me the compliment to accept my conclusions without asking for the grounds on

which I formed them—which is lucky for your continued confidence in me; for it is largely guesswork. If that dago hadn't made me so hot under the collar by butting into my private affairs I should have turned him inside out before he left; but I was afraid I'd assault him if he stayed in the studio a minute longer. Now I've got to take a little time to think out what I might have pumped from him if I hadn't lost my temper; but it's only a matter of adding two and two together."

"And while you are making your patchwork the chances are that your conspirators will manage to perforate us," I objected and Tommy looked at me curiously.

"If I didn't know you so well, I should think that Van Osten's handling of you had destroyed your nerve," he said, grinning, and I held out my hands which still bore the marks of the prisoner's brutality to me.

"I don't know that I could be blamed for a little nervousness," I said and Tommy smiled reassuringly.

"It's just because I don't believe in getting in a blue funk that I won't consider running away," he said. "I believe that I am right in calling this a Mafia affair and I have no doubt that they will do their best to make it unpleasant for us here; but forewarned is forearmed. On the other hand, you may rest assured that wherever two or three Sicilian fruit-venders and organ-grinders are gathered together there is an organized lodge of that society in full working-order and there is no city on earth which would be attractive where we should be safe. The world is not large enough when you start to run away and the fact that Van Osten tries to scare us off betrays his fear of us. We'll fight it out on this line if it takes all summer and I'll do my best to see that he gets all that's coming to him."

"But, Tommy, you do realize that the situation is dangerous, do you not?" I asked.

"So dangerous that I shall not omit the slightest precaution," he answered seriously. "I'm not running my head

against stone walls; but I'm not going to be frightened by shadows until I know what casts them. If we run away from Sicily, we'll have a cold chill every time we hear a hand-organ grind out 'Santa-Lucia' or 'Funiculi, Funicula,' and the sight of a banana would give us nervous prostration. We'll make a clean-up here before we go and your Uncle Thomas will either join the Mafia himself or give it a jolt which will make its members keep at a respectful distance."

I realized that Tommy's boasting was designed to restore my own drooping confidence; a kindly effort which was not altogether successful; and my apprehension was not relieved when he took the precaution to hand me a loaded pistol and slip its fellow into his own pocket before answering a light knocking on the door of the studio.

II.

In spite of my nervousness I smiled at our melodramatic precautions when Tommy opened the door; for our visitor proved to be a girl of eighteen or nineteen years of age and her manner evidenced that she was apprehensive of her own reception. Tommy admitted her and then glanced expectantly at the hallway for a companion; but she motioned to him to close the door before she spoke.

"I am alone, which of course violates all of the proprieties; but it is the only way I could think of to get an opportunity to speak with you," she said nervously. "My errand must be my excuse and as you gentlemen are both Americans I trust that you will not judge me by the standards of my own country." She spoke rapidly with the volubility of extreme nervousness and Tommy looked at her curiously; the suggestion of suspicion in his eyes indicating that Cambioni's warning had produced due effect and that he was prepared to find danger in everything.

"Before you go farther, may I ask if any one knows of your visit here?" he asked quickly.

"No one; I slipped away from my people in the crowd coming from the cathedral and made my way here alone," she answered and Tommy walked over and locked the door.

"You will excuse the precaution; but there are times when it is better to be secure from interruption," he said as he slipped the key in his pocket. "If you were found here, it might lead to embarrassment for everybody concerned," he continued significantly. "May I ask your name and why you have honored us with this visit?" There was nothing cordial in his manner and his unusual reception of our visitor proved that he had taken Cambioni's communication more seriously than he had acknowledged.

"Have I done very wrong in coming?" she asked, flushing. "I should never have ventured, no matter what the urgency, if you had not been Americans."

"But the fact remains that we are temporarily residing in Italy and to a certain extent we must respect the customs and prejudices of the country," replied Tommy dryly. "I can assure you that you are as safe as if you had been accompanied by a dozen duennas; but that would hardly excuse you in the eyes of your own people and I doubt if it would save us from very unpleasant consequences if you were discovered here by your relatives who might have followed you." The flush died from her face and she started toward the door.

"If you will be kind enough to let me out, I shall not expose you to further danger by my presence," she said contemptuously. "I thought that I—"

"One moment, please!" interrupted Tommy. "There are reasons for my precaution and suspicion. You have yourself acknowledged that your visit here violated all of the conventions of your people. I know Italians well enough to appreciate what such a proceeding might lead to and at the moment we have every reason to walk softly and avoid all things which might be an excuse for trouble. If you will

be good enough to tell me who you are and the reason for your visit it might allay the suspicions which its unconventionality has aroused." The girl hesitated for a moment and as she looked from one to the other of us her large black eyes became suspiciously moist and her lips quivered.

"I am Elisa Drago, the daughter of the Baron Giuseppe Drago of Trapani," she said in a trembling voice. "I came here to say what I feared to communicate to you in any other way and to crave your assistance." The name meant nothing to me; but stored away in Tommy's brain were all sorts of queer odds and ends of information and the effect upon him was magical. His entire manner changed, suspicion gave way to interest and he was all cordiality as he invited her to be seated.

"I can only assure you that my apparent rudeness was entirely justified by circumstances," he said apologetically. "I am entirely at your disposition, signorina, and I trust that you will forgive me."

"Mr. Williams, is your nervousness caused by fear of the Mafia?" she asked, tacitly accepting his excuses by her change in manner.

"You came here to convey information; not to ask for it, I believe," he answered evasively and she nodded.

"I asked the question only to save time," she said. "It is because of that society that I am here."

"But surely the daughter of the Baron Drago is not in sympathy with the aims of that society!" he exclaimed and the gesture of protest gave eloquent denial.

"Mr. Williams, you know that he has spent his life in fighting all that it represents!" she protested. "I believe that you are familiar with the effects of the Mafia on the life of Southern Italy and know that it is the curse of Sicily. Its influence has spread outside and is carried wherever its members emigrate; but it has never before interfered with foreigners residing in Italy."

"Before?" said Tommy interrogatively and she nodded assent.

"Perhaps I should have said 'as yet'; but its action follows so quickly on resolution that it would be a distinction without a practical difference," she answered. "I know that some one has been before me in conveying a warning to you; but mine is none the less worthy of attention."

"I am listening!" said Tommy curtly when she paused, but the girl remained silent for a long time as if trying to find words.

"It isn't easy, Mr. Williams," she finally said. "No girl ever found herself in a more difficult position. You know the traditions of my family and yet I find myself here as the messenger of the Mafia; unofficially, of course; but nevertheless carrying its message."

"Which is?"

"That you leave Italy at once and never return to it," she said reluctantly.

"And you would advise me to obey that command?" he asked skeptically.

"As my father's daughter I should say defy them, as he has always done; as a girl whose whole future happiness is involved in your fate I beg you to obey," she said quietly and this time the moisture in her eyes formed tears which rolled unheeded down her cheeks as she looked at him imploringly. Tommy looked at her curiously for a moment before answering.

"You have told me too much, or too little," he said kindly. "Can you explain the reason for your conflicting counsels?"

"One part you should know without asking," she answered after a furtive dab at her eyes with her handkerchief. "You know the part that the Mafia plays in the politics of Sicily. At the last three elections my father has represented all that is best in the community and opposed the election of Signor Nasi in Trapani. You know that he has been unsuccessful; Nasi has always been reelected and it is the influence of the Mafia which has made that possible. My father's supporters are intimidated and do not dare to vote and the few who have risked it have had bitter cause to regret their temerity. We have all been persecuted

more or less; but so far we have not suffered personal violence."

"Yes, that part of it is familiar to me; it is the other—the reason for your advice to run away—that I am curious about," said Tommy and the girl's eyes did not meet his when she answered.

"Can't you accept the advice and act upon it without demanding the reason?" she faltered.

"Accept it, yes; but I could not promise to act upon it, even if I knew why you gave it," he answered and she rose from her chair and motioned to him to open the door.

"It is given in all sincerity, Mr. Williams," she said hopelessly. "I have done my best and I have told you that my happiness is bound up with your safety. I can't tell you more and I shall ask you to let me go."

"But I don't feel that I can do that until you *have* told me more," protested Tommy earnestly. "You have never, so far as I know, set eyes on me before; so I appreciate that your anxiety is not for my personal safety. I can imagine but one reason for it and perhaps if you will be frank I can assist you to——"

"No, no, no!" she interrupted vehemently. "You must not ask it—you must not attempt to discover from any one else, or you will bring misery and disgrace on me."

"Signorina, if you have told me the truth—and from what I have previously learned I believe that you have—you will understand that I am practically fighting for my life," replied Tommy soothingly. "I give you my word of honor that anything you may tell us shall go no farther; but I can't pledge myself to refrain from getting information which may serve me. I tell you frankly and honestly that I have no animosity for the Mafia and the reasons for its threats are an entire mystery to me; but I do not intend to run away, nor shall I submit to its decrees without a fight. It would be wiser for you to trust us absolutely, now that you have said so much; for I shall try to get at the bottom of this

thing as a matter of self-protection. I should much prefer to feel that I was not running the risk of injuring you in the steps I shall be forced to take and if you are not entirely frank with me I might do that in ignorance." The girl hesitated and a pitiful expression of fear came to the soft, dark eyes.

"I wish that I dared to speak," she said wistfully. "I have risked much in coming here, Mr. Williams, and that should convince you of my sincerity. That was my own risk, however; but if I said more it would imperil others. Oh, I can't! I dare not!" She shrank back from him and covered her eyes with her hands and Tommy glanced at me helplessly.

"Confound it, can't you suggest something!" he said in English. "I can't do anything with a weeping female and the first thing I know she'll have me making all sorts of rash promises."

"I wish that you would promise to do what she asks you," I answered quickly. "I'm for the simple life in some place as far away from Italy as steam will carry us." The girl's sobbing ceased with suspicious suddenness and she smiled through her tears when she dropped her hands from her face and turned to me.

"I should weep oceans of tears if it would influence him to meet your wishes!" she exclaimed eagerly in English as perfect as our own. "Do make him listen to me and go away."

"I'm quite ready to listen; but I'm not going away!" replied Tommy, flushing, before I could answer. "Signorina, this is serious and no time for play-acting. If you can be perfectly frank with me I am willing to do my part and I shall respect your confidence. If not, I shall have to go about getting information in my own way and I can give you no promise as to what use I shall make of it after I have obtained it."

"I am sorry, Mr. Williams," she answered humbly. "I was not acting; I was absolutely sincere. I should be willing to make any personal sacrifice to induce you to leave Sicily at once;

but I cannot betray the secrets of others."

"Then I shall try to find out so much of them as may affect my personal safety," answered Tommy, unlocking the door; for there was no mistaking the finality of her refusal. "If it leads to injury to yourself in any way, I trust that you will remember that I have tried to avoid that chance."

"I can only hope that you will reconsider your determination to remain here," she said wistfully, pausing in the open doorway to face us. "If not, I have no fear that information which you may obtain will harm me or those I care for; but your death, which is inevitable, will cause me the greatest sorrow I have ever known." She stepped back and drew the door close after her before either of us could say a word in reply and Tommy turned to me with an expression of disappointment on his face.

"I'm not sure that a dago, male or female, isn't more of an adept at concealing what is passing through the mind than the blandest Chinaman that ever laundried a shirt!" he exclaimed irritably, and throwing himself in an easy chair he lighted a cigarette and snapped his case close with a vicious click.

III.

The absorption of nicotin speedily soothed Tommy's irritability without deadening his mental processes and the closing of his case after he removed the second cigarette from it was so gentle that it was barely audible.

"Warnings are as thick as leaves in Vallambrosa," he remarked when he had discarded the end of the first after lighting the second from it. "I wonder what sort of a messenger will bring the next one."

"I trust that it won't be made of lead or steel," I replied gloomily. "If these beggars are in earnest there will probably be no further warning and the kind of action they usually take leaves little room for argument. I move that we make it twenty-three, Tommy." He blew a succession of smoke rings into

the air before answering and the set of his face told me that my advice would not be considered.

"My dear boy, I haven't the slightest doubt about their being in earnest in wanting to get rid of us; but I am skeptical about their courage in doing it in the only really effectual way," he said. "As a matter of fact, which has been demonstrated time and time again in my own experience, the man who is to be feared is the one who gets after you with a gun without saying a word; not the one who sends people to tell you what he intends to do to you when he catches you out alone. If they had dared to do us up it would have been simple enough to have accomplished it without giving warning, in any one of a dozen different ways which would have cast no suspicion on the Mafia. That's what made me suspicious when this Drago girl came here alone so closely on the heels of Cambioni's announcement. It was perfectly evident at first glance that she was not of the class which goes alone in Italy and I suspected a plot. Until she told me who she was I should not have been surprised to have a bunch of outraged relatives appear to carve us up with long Sicilian daggers. It would have needed no explanation; that sort of thing is considered quite proper in Italy; and we would have been quietly buried without any one even hinting at a Mafia murder."

"How in the deuce did you happen to know anything about her father—have you been studying Italian politics?" I asked and he laughed and pointed to a Palermo paper on the table.

"Not Italian politics, but the Italian language," he said. "I read that religiously to keep from getting rusty and incidentally absorb the news it contains. As a matter of fact, this Nasi business which is looked upon so lightly here is a matter of humiliation for all of Northern Italy. In Rome they realize that it makes Italy the laughing-stock of Europe and yet there is no way of getting at him so long as he can control his own constituency. Sicily

is always unsettled and any arbitrary action might lead to serious trouble; but I believe that the central government is this time trying to beat him at the polls. They have transferred such a large force of *carabinieri* to his district that the supporters of Baron Drago will be assured protection against the Mafia and if he can defeat Nasi he will be sent to serve out his sentence. I imagine that they have got the members of that brotherhood guessing so hard that they would hesitate to attract attention to themselves by really getting after us."

"But what have they got against us, anyway?" I asked and Tommy shrugged his shoulders.

"*Che lo sa?*" as they reply here when you ask an impossible question," he said. "That society has been more successful in concealing its real objects and its membership than any of the other associations which have come down from antiquity. I believe that originally it was purely political; but now its active membership is made up largely of the dregs of Sicily—which are just a little bit more loathsome than any other human refuse that I know of—and the politicians use it for their own ends; protecting its members from deserved punishment and winking at the blackmail which they extort from the decent members of the community. When it is a purely local affair they don't hesitate to assassinate any one who refuses to submit; but I reckon they steer clear of the foreigners in Italy. Tourists supply a good part of the revenue and it's less risky to blackmail the money out of the hotel-keepers and those who get it more or less legitimately than to try for it direct."

"But that still offers no reason for threatening us," I protested and Tommy held up his fingers in mimicry of Cambioni.

"It isn't necessary to go into details," he said. "We have been good little boys lately and have attended strictly to our own business; but in the past we have been foolish enough to mix up with the police and other undesirable people. Who knows how severely

we may have tread on the toes of some of the high cockalorums of that gang of thieves? It's either a matter of revenge for that, or a measure of precaution because they are up to some particular piece of deviltry which we might interfere with. I am as much in the dark about it as you can possibly be; but I'll bet if we ever find out we shall discover that our friend Van Osten is somewhere near the storm-center."

"Tommy, are we never to be finished with that man!" I exclaimed in dismay. "I thought he was safe enough behind the bars and that we had nothing to fear from him."

"It's because I want to feel confident of that that I refuse to be scared away by a bunch of blackmailers; at least, that's one reason," he answered, grinning. "By Jove, I believe you hit it!"

"Hit what?" I asked but he was so eagerly following out the idea which had occurred to him that he paid no attention to the question. I knew of old that it would be useless to insist until he was ready to speak and tried to possess my soul in patience; but I could make neither head nor tail out of the jumble of complications.

"Perhaps Cambioni is not such a blamed rascal as I took him for, after all," he said apparently irrelevantly after a long pause. "He made me angry by interfering in my private affairs; but we'll assume that he is honest, at least in his special work."

"And, if we do, it is the anarchists as well as the Mafia who are after us," I said ruefully and Tommy answered with a gesture of impatience.

"On the contrary, it makes that fairy-tale seem all the more improbable!" he exclaimed. "I do believe that he is faithful to the particular trust which is given to him and it's no light job to keep those devils from murdering the entire royal family. He was perfectly frank about his code of morals in that; he places his work higher than the ordinary administration of justice and he wouldn't hesitate to make a bargain which would turn Van Osten

loose if he thought it would lead to the safety of his charges. It is more than probable that Van Osten could supply him with valuable information; for he has been hand in glove with all of the underworld and I dare say has been an anarchist in his time if it suited his purpose."

"But why mix us up in it? If it is within his power to release a prisoner I don't see why he should come fussing around foreigners." Tommy looked at me in mock pity.

"My dear fellow, you should take something for that lack of perception of yours," he said. "Don't you see that the whole prosecution would drop if we were scared off? Captain Stuart expressly stipulated that he should not be dragged into legal proceedings and the other witnesses are Italians. If they could get rid of us the rest would be easy; for a word to them would be sufficient. Van Osten proposes that bargain and Cambioni jumps at it. If you will recall his conversation you will see that he virtually admitted it. Cambioni tries to scare us with his anarchist story; but fearing that won't work he has another string to his bow and passes the word to the Mafia to get busy."

"And Baron Drago's daughter?" I suggested; for he apparently left her warning entirely out of the theory.

"That's a case of cause and effect," answered Tommy confidently. "A Montague and Capulet sort of an affair, unless I miss my guess. I can't imagine anything else which would induce her to run the risk of coming here."

"As how?" I asked in bewilderment, unable to follow his rapid deductions.

"Remember some of our earlier experiences and how unsuccessful we were in guessing where women were concerned," he said, laughing. "I don't suppose that we are much wiser now; but the affairs of men enter into this. That young woman in coming here did a thing which would condemn her forever in the eyes of her class. I can imagine but one thing which would induce her to run such a risk."

"A lover?" I said and he nodded and smiled.

"You are improving!" he said mockingly. "You guessed right the first time. Sift it down and you'll find a nice little Mafia boy at the bottom of all her anxiety about yours truly. It's probable that he has scared her with some cock-and-bull story about having drawn the black bean which makes him the one to run us down, or something of that kind. I honestly believe that so far as any real danger to us goes it is all an opera-bouffe affair; but there is always the one little chance that some one of these assassins may be carried away by his artistic temperament and think that he's playing the game for keeps; so we'll be on the safe side."

"And leave Sicily?" I asked hopefully and Tommy tapped the pistol in his pocket and laughed.

"We shall not play the game quite so seriously as that, old chap; but it is time that we went to dinner and we'll carry these with us," he said, and comforting myself with his cheerful estimate of the lack of danger I prepared to accompany him. We were to dine at the Café Progresso in the middle of the town and there was no apparent reason for apprehension; but I found myself examining the revolver which Tommy had handed me most carefully and his eyes twinkled when I disposed it in a pocket where it would be convenient to my hand.

When we had turned into the café from the street the wild strains of a Hungarian *csardas* came to our ears as we entered. The head waiter had reserved a table for us in our favorite corner and as Tommy went through the menu and ordered our dinner I watched the musicians; a nondescript band of gipsies in red jackets with yellow-braid trimmings, the wearers just a little more unkempt and untidy, the uniforms just a shade shabbier than those worn by their kind in the restaurants of Paris. The leader, a small, wiry man, swarthy of skin with small, piercing black eyes and a shock of long black hair, seemed possessed of unusual nervous energy,

even for the conductor of a Hungarian orchestra, and it seemed to me that he devoted an undue share of attention to the observation of Tommy, who was absorbed in the congenial task of ordering the dinner. He turned to him constantly, leaving his wild companions to follow the strains of his violin rather than the movements of his nervous head in the keeping of time, and his eyes were like points of flame as he watched him from under his low brow and projecting masses of black lashes.

"It's only the manner of his kind and profession," replied Tommy, smiling when I told him that the man was watching him. "We are evidently foreigners and experience has taught him that it is not to the natives he must look for his profits when he passes the plate. He'll be around here to squeak his fiddle in our ears directly as a special compliment—and to get a special donation." I was familiar with the habits of the gipsy musicians; for I had seen them ply their trade in a dozen cities; but the interest which this man took in Tommy seemed different. I knew that he would circle around among the tables, pausing to play a few bars at each until he discovered one where the guests were particularly sympathetic; but never had I seen one of them single out a newcomer so markedly and watch him from the moment of entrance.

"We had agreed to drop all of our suspicions and worries during dinner," remonstrated Tommy good-naturedly when I reiterated the result of my observations. "You are getting as fidgety as an old woman. Forget it and pitch into this *antipasta*; we haven't found *salami* like this in many a day." Tommy's anxieties never interfered with his appetite nor his appreciation of good food and he refused even to turn around to look at the man until the first course had been disposed of. I watched him, however, and never for a minute at a time did he remove his sharp gaze from my companion; while he absolutely ignored groups of Americans and English at the other tables.

"I never saw the beggar before that

I know of," said Tommy, shrugging his shoulders indifferently after he had taken a glance at him. "They are all vagabonds and wander over the face of the earth, so it's possible that he may have seen me; but I can't discover that he's radically different from the others of his kind, unless it is that he's a trifle springier and more unkempt." The man had seemed to be stimulated to unusual effort in the way of nervous contortion by Tommy's attention and the music—they were playing a Magyar version of "The Mikado" at the moment—changed to a frankly barbaric air. There was something familiar about it to me, although I could not have given it a name; but Tommy whirled about in his chair and looked again at the leader.

"What is that tune, Tommy?" I asked when he turned back to the table; but he did not answer and from the puzzled look on his face I thought he, too, was at a loss for the name. It ended in a wild burst of melody in which the xylophone-player seemed to be trying to beat the strings out of the box with his hammers and every violin and viola-player scraped his hardest to a grand climax. Then, while the members of the orchestra rested from their labors, the leader's violin started a solo; inaudible at first in the clatter of the restaurant; but quickly compelling silence by its beauty. Then I knew what the other had been; the Servian national anthem which the Princess Sonia had played for us one evening in Malta; for the other was a wild love-song of the Balkans which the Lady Diana's rich contralto had chanted in the governor's drawing-room at La Valetta. Tommy's face was a study while the Hungarian played and when the song, which ran the full gamut of desire, longing, disappointment, passion and satiety, was finished he drew his card-case from his pocket and took out a bank-note.

"Have you had enough of it?" I asked, thinking that he intended to pay our dinner-check; but he shook his head and turning in his chair beckoned to the leader to come to him.

"You play well, my friend," he said in Italian when the Hungarian stopped in front of the table, violin and bow under his arm. Tommy was looking searchingly into the small black eyes while he rolled the bank-note between his fingers. "Have I heard your music some place before?"

"*Che lo sa, signori?*" answered the gipsy. "Many places have I been; in the Waldorf of New York, in Winter Garten von Berlin *habe ich gespielt, ches Maxim à Paris*—"

"But where last?" demanded Tommy, interrupting the polyglot speech which employed scraps of four different languages in a short sentence and holding the bank-note so that its denomination—which was large—was plainly visible. The gipsy looked covetously at it and then furtively about the room.

"You like the music of the mountains?" he said in barbarous Italian. "It is not the music of Italy, soft, sensuous and only fit for their hand-organs to play, which pleases the signor. He likes the music which tells of a land where men fight for those they love; where red blood runs in the veins of the men and fair women have eyes and thoughts only for the brave. Is it not so?"

"Where is that land, Magyar?" asked Tommy and the gipsy smiled and shook his head.

"I shall make my violin tell you," he said taking it from under his arm and before Tommy could interrupt him with further questioning he had drawn his bow across it and brought from its strings such a note as I had never heard. It was the wail of a soul in torment, the cry of a mother bereft of her child, the very essence of all the pain and misery which have ever been in the world; but it was as nothing to what followed. With head thrown back and eyes closed he played like a man in a trance; oblivious to everything about him, to the lights and confusion of the restaurant over which a strange hush fell as the air went on, to the hundreds of pairs of curious eyes fixed on him. The orchestra played a soft minor accompaniment; but no one

noticed it; for every one looked at and listened to the leader. It must have been improvisation; for never before nor since did any one in that room hear its like; but it was the improvisation of a man inspired. To me that violin spoke as plainly as ever did man by word of mouth and as I looked at Tommy's face, which became pale and drawn as he listened, I knew that he, too, heard the same story.

It was the call of a woman in agony for succor or mercy; now babbling out pleas for aid and sympathy, then protesting against her pain, again passionately demanding the justice which was denied her. Visions of stern rugged mountains rose before my eyes, I saw the rude hamlets attacked by hordes of savage horsemen, the brutality of the sacking of the towns, the massacre of the helpless, the nameless atrocities of barbarian warfare. Through it all, as one theme weaves in and out through the music of an entire opera, ran a strain which told of the agony and suffering of some one person and all the rest seemed but a setting; but it was an appeal, a cry of one in dire need.

I don't know how long the Hungarian played; it was one of those things which could not be measured by minutes or hours; but I was conscious that I wished to close my ears and at the same time feared to have him cease before the story was finished. I, too, was unconscious of my surroundings, save that I saw the white face of the player and it was in his eyes concealed by the closed lids that I seemed to see the pictures which his music conjured up; as the crystal-gazer under the suggestion of the charlatan sees strange visions in the depths of a sphere of glass. Then, at the moment when it seemed as if the dénouement of the story must come in the next few notes, the music stopped abruptly, the violinist lowered his bow and a murmur, half of protest, half of relief, came from the other guests. The Hungarian stood before us smiling and smirking; the typical begging itinerant fiddler; all inspiration gone from his face.

"My tune pleased the signor?" he said, extending his hand for largess, and Tommy crushed the bank-note in his hand and leaned toward him.

"Damn you, finish it!" he hissed so menacingly that the gipsy stepped back.

"It is for the signor to finish," he answered, his eyes fixed on the clenched hand which held the money. "The poor Tzigane begins many stories, he dreams many dreams, but he is a vagabond and it is the signors who always end them—when there is profit to be gained."

"And no one ever heard of a gipsy finishing a fortune until his palm had been crossed with silver," said Tommy, flinging the note to him contemptuously. "Tell me what you have to say!" The Hungarian caught the fluttering paper deftly and his small eyes glistened as he stuffed it into his pocket.

"The signor is generous!" he exclaimed and then in a voice so low that his words were hardly audible to us: "Not here Signor Williams; already half of the people in the restaurant are watching us and listening. To-morrow afternoon sketch near the bridle-path of Monte Pelligrino and I will finish my tune for you." He was bowing while he spoke and I think that the others believed that he was mumbling thanks for Tommy's generosity and before Tommy could question him further he backed away and made the circuit of the other tables, plate in hand.

"Come, let's get out of this!" said Tommy curtly. "I want to get where it's quiet to think this out." We paid our check and left the café and I realized that my own preoccupation had been so great that I had momentarily forgotten the danger against which we had been warned when I saw at one table Cambioni dining alone, at another Signorina Elisa Drago with a tall distinguished-looking man with a red ribbon in the lapel of his coat.

"Tommy, what the deuce was there about that man's playing which made me see things?" I ventured as we walked toward the studio and he turned and glanced at me curiously.

"You saw things, too, eh?" he said gravely. "What it was I don't know;

but he carried me many miles from Italy. Hypnotism, perhaps, for those mongrels are an uncanny lot; but what he made me see was, for a man whose heart is filled with anxiety for a woman he believes to be in danger, a realistic representation of hell!"

IV.

A half-finished sketch was on the easel under the great white umbrella; but the camp-stool in front of it was deserted and Tommy was stretched out on the turf with his hands clasped behind his head; the blue smoke from the cigarette in the corner of his mouth curling lazily in the still air as he watched with eager eyes the bridle-path below us. We were high on the slope of the Monte Pelligrino and below us on the right the beautiful plain of the Concha d'Oro with its lemon and orange-groves stretched down to meet the deep blue water of the Mediterranean; the white houses of Palermo gleaming in the sunshine between looking like a great cluster of pearls surrounded by emeralds and sapphires. We were both of us heavy-eyed and tired; for we had passed a sleepless night; Tommy miserable with apprehension for the safety of the Lady Diana, while I found in the mysterious warnings which had been conveyed to us so much to worry about that I could not keep my eyes closed. His impatience had brought us to the rendezvous with the gipsy long before the appointed time and he had worked doggedly at his easel for two or three hours; his brushes mechanically putting the paints on canvas; for his mind was not on his work.

"I can't explain the effect which that music had on us," he said wearily after watching the path for a long time in silence. "I never heard anything like it before and that infernal fiddle seemed possessed of a hundred tongues. I suppose that the airs which preceded it had put me in a proper frame of mind to be receptive to suggestion; but in all my study of hypnotism—and you know that I went into that as thor-

oughly as any one ever did—I never ran across anything like that.”

“I wonder if the others in the room were affected in the same way.” I ventured. “The Servian anthem and the Balkan love-song could not have conveyed a meaning to them; but when he played to us at the table there was absolute silence in the room and even the waiters stood quietly until he finished.”

“I know it and it suggested the scientific explanation of the Indian juggler’s rope-trick to me,” answered Tommy thoughtfully. “Dozens of travelers have described that, and many whose words are absolutely trustworthy declare that they have seen the juggler stand in the middle of a great open space and cast a rope into the air in such a way that it remained upright with no visible means of support. Up this a boy climbs; up and up until he is lost to sight in the sky; and after he has disappeared the juggler claps his hands, the rope disappears and the boy is beside him on the ground; bowing, smiling and preparing to pass the hat. Of course, the actual performance of that feat is beyond the range of possibility, even in the mysterious East; but hundreds of people are firmly convinced that they have seen it done.

“There is only one possible explanation for it; the juggler hypnotizes his entire audience and wills them to see it. I have seen the photograph of the performance taken by an English officer in India. He swears that he saw the rope thrown and saw the boy ascend and he took a snap shot of it. When he developed the plate it showed the circle of spectators standing with heads thrown back and mouths open in wonderment like a crowd of yokels watching a balloon-ascension at a country fair; but there was no rope nor no boy. The fakir had gone far enough into the mysteries to be able to hypnotize an entire audience; but he couldn’t hocus-pocus a sensitive photographic-plate.”

“And you think the gipsy hypnotized his entire audience last night?” I asked incredulously.

“I believe that he flimflammed us, at

any rate,” admitted Tommy ruefully. “I’m glad that he made his appointment for as retired a place as this; apparently we have the mountain to ourselves and if he gets away from me without giving an explanation it will be because he’s a better man than I am.”

“Is it to be a contest of hypnotists?” I asked and Tommy shook his head; but his eyes did not meet mine.

“You know that I gave that up,” he said slowly. “Not because I had ever put the power I had acquired to bad use; for I never abused it. I am afraid of it, though, afraid of what I might do with it, and I had resolved never to employ it again. It’s a temptation in this instance which I can hardly resist; for I don’t believe that my hand has lost its cunning at the game. Don’t you think I would be justified in forgetting my good resolutions?”

“I am in the frame of mind to believe anything justifiable,” I answered eagerly. “We are not bothering any one, we are trying to attend to our own business and yet we are placed on the defensive. I feel as if we had our backs against a wall and that we are entitled to employ any weapon of defense which comes to our hands.” Tommy looked at me quizzically and shrugged his shoulders.

“The trouble is that we are not arguing from the same grounds, so I can’t accept your advance absolution,” he said. “I don’t know that the Tzigane is mixed up with our other troubles at all. If I forget my resolution to get at him it will not be to save our own skins; but possibly to get us in deeper trouble by obtaining information which will induce us to follow the princess and the Lady Diana.”

“That would take us away from Sicily, at any rate,” I suggested.

“And for all we know to the contrary, out of the frying-pan into the fire,” answered Tommy. “Confound it, that beggar gave me the creeps and what he made me hear and see could have but one interpretation. A woman is in terrible danger and calls on me for help and if he refuses to tell me all he knows I believe that I should be

justified in torturing him to get the information."

"It's *the* woman, is it not, Tommy?" I asked, for the first time permitting myself such a liberty and he straightened up and threw away his cigarette.

"Yes, it's *the* woman, old chap," he said quietly. "The only one I have ever asked to be my wife. She cares for me, too; she makes no denial of that; but she refuses to bind herself further until the princess has come into her own."

"And to let you aid her in her efforts to bring that about?"

"Absolutely and flatly; after our last experience," he said regretfully. "She even refused to tell me where they were going, for fear I should follow, I suppose; but we know enough of the past to forecast the future if they have ventured within reach of the men they are conspiring against. She promised me that I should see her again when it was possible; that she would send for me if she were in trouble from which I could help to extricate her and it was her voice which called to me from that gipsy's violin last night. He knew my name; he knew the airs which would arouse my attention and make me listen to him; but gipsylike he wants to drive a bargain. He could have delivered her message, if he carries one, without this mystery; but in that he sees opportunity for profit." He paused for a moment and the look which came to his face told me that it would be ill for the gipsy to trifle with him.

"He will find me ready to bargain," he continued grimly. "I have come fairly well provided with the sinews of war and there is enough in my pocket to make him independent of fiddling for the rest of his life; but if he holds out too long he'll never eat another goulash and I'll have his information or kill him." He jumped to his feet as he spoke and gazed eagerly down the bridle-path.

"By Jove, he's coming!" he exclaimed. "I saw some one on the path down there, I am sure." A moment later he turned to me with an exclamation

of disappointment. "Only a *contadina* girl with her burden!" he said irritably. "Confound it, there's been no one about here all day and now that we want the place to ourselves I suppose that there will be people passing every minute!" I was watching the girl who climbed the tortuous path far below us, the bright hues of the *contadina* costume making a brilliant patch of color in the landscape and it seemed to me that she was coming up the path at an unusual speed. On her head was balanced one of the long, slender casks which the peasants use to transport their oil and wine and she steadied it with one hand while she used the other to aid her in climbing short cuts over the rocks when the path made long curves to avoid difficult places.

"Tommy, there's somebody after her; I never saw one of these people hustle like that!" I exclaimed.

"It's more likely that she's been loitering in the town and knows that there's a thrashing ahead of her if she doesn't make up the lost time," he answered irritably. "She can't get past us too quickly to suit— Great Scott! Do you see who it is?" She had approached so rapidly that we had a good view of her face and there was no mistaking it. Art had been called to assist nature in giving her skin the bronze which the *contadina* girls get from the burning Sicilian sun; but the eyes and features were those of the girl who had visited the studio and dined at the Café Progresso the night before. We were about fifteen feet above the path under the shelter of a high ledge of rocks and Tommy started to climb down to intercept her but she motioned to him to keep back.

"I have a message for you from my sister, Elisa!" she called. "She warns you to escape, Mr. Williams; you are both in serious danger!" She had paused in her own flight for a moment; but when Tommy would have questioned her she started on again.

"The man who was to meet you must fly, too!" she called back and before we got to the path she had disappeared around the corner of the ledge of rocks.

"Confound it, they must be twins!" exclaimed Tommy in bewilderment. "What the dickens could she have been driving at?"

"I move that we try to catch her and find out," I answered nervously; for her warning conveyed only one thing to me. "We should be easy fruit for the Mafia here and——"

"Damn the Mafia!" exploded Tommy. "I don't care a hoot for all the anarchists and conspirators in Italy; for here comes my man!" The gipsy was in plain view below, coming up the path with an ease which told of familiarity with climbing and Tommy had thoughts for no one else; but I had read fear in the girl's eyes and believed enough in her warning to wish to profit by it.

"Can't we adjourn our meeting?" I asked and Tommy turned on me fiercely.

"Go, if you want to!" he said warningly. "If you stay here, keep quiet and say nothing of having seen the girl until I have finished with this man. I must get to the bottom of this business and find out what the connection is between the different ones who are trying to bedevil us." There was no question of my deserting him and I knew that remonstrance would be useless, so I held my peace until the gipsy joined us a few minutes later.

"The signori have selected a pleasant place," he said, glancing about the small natural amphitheater in the rocks and then without further ceremony he appropriated the camp-stool before the easel.

"Are you ready to finish your story?" demanded Tommy curtly and the Tzigane looked at him with twinkling eyes.

"I have not brought my violin," he answered with just a suspicion of defiance in his tone. "The piper must be paid, you know, and I was not sure that you would meet my price."

"It would expedite matters if you would tell me what you have to dispose of and what price you put on it," answered Tommy impatiently and the Tzigane nodded.

"My wares are of value—to you," he said. "The signor knows my country?"

"I know the customs and manners of your kind the world over," replied Tommy. "I have no time to waste in words. If you have a message to deliver you would do well to trust to my generosity. You will gain nothing by making a mystery of it."

"Even if the message did not please you?" said the gipsy cunningly. "Our life makes my people suspicious, signor. We have learned that the people pay willingly only for that which they wish to hear."

"What is your name?" demanded Tommy irrelevantly.

"Boris, signor; it does as well as another for the moment," answered the Tzigane, grinning, and Tommy nodded.

"I'll remember that for your tombstone, if you make it necessary," he said grimly. "See here, Boris; if you have a message, tell it to me and I'll pay you according to its value. If you are only possessed of information which you think I might be induced to pay for, give me an idea of what it is and I'll give you a quick answer on whether I wish to purchase."

"The signor likes the music of the Balkans—when it tells of love. Last night he paid me generously for my playing. Would he be as generous if I sang songs of another kind; those which tell of war, of the fierce raids of the wild horsemen, of women carried off on saddle-bows, of——"

"I believe you told me of that with your infernal fiddling!" interrupted Tommy, who had taken his stand in front of the gipsy. "I heard enough to satisfy me as fiction. If you have facts to tell I want them. Have you a message for me?"

"I have a message for a man, if he be brave," answered Boris, watching him narrowly. "It will need bravery to obey the summons I bring, signor." Tommy stamped his foot impatiently and I saw that the man who faced him gathered his feet under him.

"This is nonsense, Boris," he said angrily. "I am willing to reward a

faithful messenger and it is my business whether I act or not after the message is delivered. Let me have it." The Tzigane held out his hand significantly.

"It must be crossed with money—much money, signor," he said, half fawning, half impudent. Tommy was looking him fairly in the eyes, an expression on his face such as I had not seen in many a day.

"Boris, you are a lying, thieving rascal," he said contemptuously. "I should not believe any message which came from your lips; for I read knavery in your eyes. What black magic you practise with your music that it makes men see visions I do not know; but the time for chicanery and cheating is over. Now, you will tell me all that I want to know, or I shall practise my own art on you." The Tzigane's eyes did not drop, but remained steadfastly fixed on his questioner. I was watching them both narrowly; for I expected that Tommy would seize him by the throat; and I saw the hand which had been extended for money slowly withdrawn. Every movement of the man was as lithe as those of a panther and before I realized what he was up to the hand slipped under his jacket, he was on his feet in a twinkling and a vicious-looking knife was poised for a thrust.

It was done so quickly that I had no time to draw my pistol and Tommy was entirely unprepared; but there was a sharp report from the rocks above us and the knife fell to the ground. For a moment the gipsy was motionless and then, as a small red spot appeared in the center of his forehead, he suddenly crumpled and fell in a limp heap at Tommy's feet. Tommy stood motionless for a moment; but the tragedy recalled the warnings against the Mafia vividly to my mind and jumping forward I seized him and drew him back to the shelter of the rocks.

"There's no sense in making an easy mark of yourself!" I exclaimed angrily. "There are more bullets where that came from and you know that they are sent to kill."

"They could have killed us any time this last three hours," he answered and he spoke like a man dazed. "A moment more and I should have had that man absolutely in my power; but now he is dead and his message is undelivered." The sound of his own voice seemed to rouse him from his bewilderment and his eyes flashed angrily as he looked at the body of the gipsy.

"The man who did that will have to reckon with me!" he snarled and his face was not pleasant to look at. "You can come with me or go back; but I am going to run him down." He had drawn his pistol as he spoke and before I could restrain him he darted again into the open space and started clambering up the rocks to the place the shot had come from. It seemed absolute madness; but I had been through too much with Tommy to leave him in the lurch and I followed; finding, at least, relief in action after hours of uneasiness and anxiety.

I fully expected that we should be shot at during that climb in which we were absolutely without shelter; but not a sound came from above and we gained the top without having been molested. We dropped over a wall of rock which formed a natural rampart onto a level grassy patch; a perfect miniature fortress with a path winding back from it to the broken ground above; but whoever had been concealed there had escaped. Tommy gave a cry of disappointment and clambered to a higher rock at the side from which he could get a view of the mountain back of us. A moment later I was at his side and tried to pull him back as a half-dozen shots rang out from above us; but he shook me off impatiently.

"They are not after us!" he said. "The brutes are trying to bag that girl." The men who were doing the shooting were invisible to us; but a half-mile to the left we could see the bright-colored skirt and bodice which the *contadina* girl had worn. She was dodging from rock to rock; taking advantage of every bit of shelter which they afforded and running across the open spaces like a frightened deer. It

was apparent that she was trying to reach the point where the mountain dropped in a sheer cliff to the sea and the shots were coming from above her.

"If she reaches that point, she'll be safe," said Tommy, who knew the country about Palermo as he did his pocket. "There are a dozen goat-paths leading along the face of the cliff from there and they can't get at her from above. Go it, little girl! By Jove; they've got her! No, she's up again. Run!" The shots told of at least a dozen men concealed in the rocks above her and once when she fell flat on her face we thought that she had been hit; but it was evidently a trip, for she was quickly on her feet and racing forward again. We could do nothing to assist her; for the puffs of smoke which alone betrayed the positions of the concealed men were out of range of the pistols we carried. It did not seem possible that she could escape; but she evidently knew every foot of the ground she was traversing and she never hesitated. We watched her breathlessly as she left the shelter of the last rock to run across the ten yards of open which lay between her and safety; a flash of red and yellow in the sunshine. There was a perfect fusillade of shots; but she ran on until she was within a yard of the edge untouched. Then a cry came from Tommy's lips; for just as safety seemed within her reach she stopped; her hands were thrown above her head and she pitched forward and disappeared from sight.

"It's a thousand feet sheer drop there," said Tommy pityingly. "We couldn't save her; but there is such a thing as retribution." He dropped back to the grassy place below and I followed him sick at heart.

"I suppose it's our turn now," I said as I looked down on the long path which we must follow to reach the safety of Palermo. Tommy leaned over and picked up something from the grass.

"We are either as safe as we would be in our little beds, or in spite of anything we can do they'll get us inside of the next half-hour," he admitted. "See here; this is a Union Metallic Cartridge Company shell and it was made in America."

"Where, you tell me, many members of the Mafia emigrate," I answered and he nodded as he slipped the shell into his pocket.

"Yes, and many of them come back from there," he answered. "This savors of the methods of the brotherhood, old chap; but if we could prove it we should prove the complicity of the police, which has always been suspected." I looked at him inquiringly and he pointed to the body of the gipsy below us.

"I believe that the bullet from this shell is in his head," he continued quietly. "I did not see the face of his murderer; but I saw the pistol and the hand which held it. The pistol was a Colt automatic and on the third finger of the hand on the grip was that curious seal-ring which you undoubtedly noticed on the hand of Cambioni yesterday afternoon."

"Then he fired to save you, Tommy!" I exclaimed, and he looked at me skeptically.

"The next half-hour should prove whether he did or not," he answered gravely. "The only trouble is that if you are mistaken in your guess the information will be of little practical value to us."

TO BE CONCLUDED.



A Keg of Ambergris

By the Author of "The Black Barque," "The Luck of the Impulse," Etc.

Bahama Bill, the giant negro diver of the *Seagull*, learns that the value of a ship's cargo may be in direct proportion to its foulness, and that the captain of a whaler can be very mean and ungrateful



HE sperm-whaler *Flying Light* came into Rio Bay and anchored near the *Seagull*, wrecking sloop, engaged upon work in the channel. The whaler was from New Bedford, Massachusetts, and she was as old as Neptune, dirty, greasy, oil-soaked. She had the blunt nose, tumbling topsides and sawed-off stern of the early types, her wooden boat-davits ranging along her bulwarks giving her a most top-heavy and peculiar appearance. Her small boats were, however, being put in fine condition and showed in marked contrast to her sea-washed topstrakes, bare of paint and spotted with tar, some of her seams spilling oakum and leaving Irish pennants hanging. She looked as though she had seen much work and trouble, and as her skipper, Enoch Brown, told of two years at sea with varying luck in the chase, it was easy to believe that she had indeed become one of the sea-god's own.

"We ben aout naouw erbout twenty-five month," said Captain Brown, talking to Captain Blye of the *Seagull* the evening he came into port, "'n' I reckon we uns clamped daown erbout all but a hundred barrel. Sparm-whales 's mighty sceerce in th' Pacific. We hunted the Solander ground, the Middle ground, 'n' went cl'ar up ter ther Pribilofs. Yaas, we done the Nothe Atlantic, the Hatteras grounds an' hit ther luck mostly off'n Trinidad an' ther

Martin Vas—struck inter er school o' young whales 'n' cleaned up six hundred bar'l. An' the best thing o' the whole cruise was running over an old bull, a solitary. Sick old chap 'n' spewed up er chunk o' ambergris 'bout sixty pound—worth fifty dollar an ounce—that's it in that cask nigh ther bulkhead. I keep it lashed fast here in the cabin so's I kin keep an eye on it all the time. You can't trust them dagoes none too much. Portugee an' Molaki, all them fellers knows what's what when it comes to values—you think it stinks? Well, I dunno—"

"There don't seem to be much doubt about that part of it," assented Blye, holding his nose and spitting in disgust. "You say it's worth fifty dollars an ounce?"

"I whun't say exactly, but that's erbout ther value they puts on it," said Brown; "ennyhow it's worth more'n fifty er pound—en that'll make it come to something likē five or six thousand dollars. The old bull netted up no more'n forty bar'l—thin as blazes—sick, 'n' that's what makes ambergris."

"So I believe is the case," said Blye; "I never was in a whale-ship, but it certainly sounds interesting—picking up a few thousand dollars floating about on the sea like that. I'd like to have you to dinner with me aboard my little ship. You come over just as you are and have a good fresh feed of fruit and beef. I've a stewardess who can cook a meal that'll make your mouth water."

"Naouw, I don't mind ef I do, cap'n, I don't mind ef I do—thank ye kindly.

I'll jest step forrard an' tell Mr. Wilson erbout it—then I'll drop in on yer jest as I am—you'll allow a coat's too warm daouwn hereabouts."

Blye rowed him aboard his own ship and Bahama Bill, his master diver, and Mr. Johnson, formerly master of a four-masted bark and now mate of the *Seagull*, came to the side to inspect the visitor. The few men who ran the pumps of the diving-outfit were more or less interested, but sat about the fore-castle. Miss Moore, the stewardess, served a meal that made the old whale-man's appetite go in jumps and the excellent ale Blye had purchased from a tramp steamer at Rio washed it down and loosened up the chords of speech. When they came on deck under the awning to smoke, the subject of treasure-hunting among the leviathans of the southern ocean was in full blast and attracted the attention of all.

"Naouw, you see," said the whale-man, "you whun't strike ile sometimes for months, but always you have that feeling in you that some day you'll hit it good and plenty, with the expectancy of grease. There were a fellow from Waachusett, one from Cohasset, and another from Nantucket——"

Bahama Bill listened with a queer smile to the accounts of the whaleman. He wanted to see the stuff that was so valuable, and when the skipper wanted to go back aboard his ship the big negro diver rowed him over.

"Mighty interesting line ob talk, dat what you dun give toe us, cap'n," said he as the small boat drew up alongside, "n' I'd take it mighty kind if yo' c'u'd show me some ob dat stuff—some ob dat grease yo' tell erbout being so hard to find an' so priceful."

The skipper took him below and allowed him to examine the stinking mass which he kept in a keg lashed in a corner of his room. Bahama Bill looked at it long and wonderingly.

"Sho' is mighty nasty stuff, cap'n—what make hit worth so much?"

"I dunno exactly, but they make it up into fine perfume. Most fine ladies use it, for all the best perfumes have it for a base to plant the other stinks on.

Say, for instance, your lady wants roses. She gits a bottle of perfume with a few drops of this stuff diluted in sper-rits, an' the rose smell is planted on it, so to speak—see? That's all I knows about it, but the price is real, it whun't fall none to speak of," answered the skipper.

"Hit sho' do seem like hit'll hold hit's smell a long time, en that's not sayin' hit's weak," assented the diver; "looks like jest a lump, a nasty mess of grease from de beef-coppers—only harder like. I dun sailed in ships what served beef wid de fat smellin' mos' like hit, yas, sare, English ships—yo' say yo' find hit in de sea? Jest spewed up by whales?"

"Naouw, my man, it is always from sick whales; healthy whales whun't spew none up that I ever heard tell of—whales what has it is mostly in the latitudes of the Martin Vas, that is, whales what I've found. The stuff floats and is picked up on the beach sometimes. Why, I knows a fellow from Cohasset——"

Bahama Bill listened to the deeds of the men from Cohasset, Wachusett and also from Nantucket, but while he might have mixed them with the deeds of men from Mattapoisett, Amagansett, Apponagansett and other equally easily remembered spots near New Bedford, he always had in mind that ill-smelling lump of ambergris, the fetid product of the bowels of a sick sperm-whale. There was no doubt at all as to the value of the foul mass. Blye assured him on that point, for Captain Blye had often heard of the stuff and so had Hacksaw Johnson, although neither of them had ever seen it before. The encyclopedias of all ship-libraries held accurate and clear accounts of its value and uses.

Bahama Bill rolled in the bunt of the mainsail that night and dreamed about many disagreeable things, but above all that foul lump of ambergris. The value had quite turned his head.

For several days following the salvage of the submarine vessel, the *Diver*, which had been accomplished at some expense and effort, the *Seagull* lay idle

in the harbor of Rio and very close to the *Flying Light*, the nearly full whale-ship which would soon be homeward bound. During this time the hairy, half-wild men ranged the beach of Rio and made things hot with their excesses. Whalemens are not the gentle, kind-hearted sailors found in missions or in crack packets. Their lives afloat are under strict discipline and they are docile under the stern laws of ships at sea where they have no show at all to advance themselves by any sort of misbehavior. The captain, no matter what happens, is always on top, with his mates to back him, and anything short of absolute mutiny and complete piracy results in the most terrific disciplining. Complete possession of a ship by her crew calls for their execution at their first port of call and they must go in sooner or later for water or food. But when ashore and free from the ship's rule, their behavior is much as has marked the South Pacific islands with lasting scars, and for unrestrained brutality and fearless crime the half-wild men of the sea are not equaled anywhere on earth.

They were a wild-looking set in the *Flying Light*. Most of them were dagoes from the Western Islands, or Kanakas from the Sandwich group, with some half-breeds from Tahiti. They seldom wore anything more than a pair of dirty trousers and as water is not served to wash with in whale-ships, these articles of apparel were filthy. The stench on a still day upon the whaler's decks was not pleasant and the rancid oil fermenting under the tropical sun added charms to the mixed odors which put the smell of ambergris somewhat in the nebulous. With bare bodies, hairy and burned to a mahogany color, tattooed for the most part nearly all over the chest and arms, with their trousers rolled to the knees, their bare and dirty, misshaped feet padding about silently in the sunshine, they truly resembled a lot of half-human brutes. Some wore shirts open at the neck half-way to the waist, but a pair of shoes was not to be found outside the slop-chest, bolted securely to the deck in the captain's room.

"I dun met up with some right smart sailormen in my time," said Bahama Bill to Johnson, "but fer de hardest set ob white folks, brown folks, an' I might say yaller, dem whale-hunters is sho' de limit. Thirty monkeys is sho' mo' to my taste 'n thirty fellers like dem dere. 'N' it seems toe me dat de skipper take a few chances wid dat grease he dun got stowed so safe an' soun' in de after cabin. Ten ob dem men last night lit on de guard at de docks and ef yo' wants toe see a dun-up set ob soldiers, yo' sho' ought to go in dere an' take a look at dem—nigh every one got somethin' 'n' looks like dey sho' was handy wid dere hands an' knives—all got away wid hit too."

"They're tough propositions, all right," assented Johnson; "whaling don't develop nothing soft in life, but I reckon the old man'll look out for the stuff he's got."

The whalman from the States sculled over the next day to report to Blye the amazing manner his men had roughed the town-front of Rio. From the sullen and silent seamen of the deep ocean they had suddenly developed into fiends with the inherent traits of all mixed crews, the traits the skipper knew very well and dreaded accordingly when he was in port where his iron rule was not to be exercised as upon the sea.

"It whun't do at all, it whun't do, Captain Blye," said he. "I got to get grub and water here and I got to sell that stuff aboard or run the risk of losing it before clearin' again—what the hell would you do about it?"

"Nothing but get busy and get out before you have more trouble," said Blye.

"Wall, naouw, I duhn't know—I duhn't know—o' course, I'll be delayed some by this affair. Oh, yes, I'll have to pay blackmail according to Hoyle an' set them dagoes right before I can get out again, but you see I got to go ashore myself and I duhn't like the idee o' leavin' this grease aboard where them men can get a whack at it. Just so much likker an' then there may or mayn't be something doing."

"Well, if you want to you can bring the stuff aboard the *Seagull*. We'll take care of it for you until you get ready for sea again," said Blye.

The whaleman eyed him curiously. He had not meant to get any such advice, any such suggestion at all. What he wanted was for Blye to go ashore and try to smooth out the matter of the rough-house between his crew and the authorities. He was a suspicious old seaman and he was silent for a time after Blye spoke, and the skipper of the *Seagull* knew what he was thinking about and was more or less ruffled accordingly. Blye had-always played fair. To be even suspected of a possible crooked play was always gall to him. He turned away and drew his chair to the other side of the quarter-deck and left the uncouth whale-hunter gazing after him with that unmistakably suspicious twinkle in his faded but extremely keen eyes.

"I duhn't want to hurt your feelings, my old friend, but you see Wilson has a share in the stuff and I can't be responsible for it," said he, seeing how Blye felt about it. "Wilson, you know, is my mate—been in the ship three voyages, and owns a sixth interest in her—you see how it is—"

Blye smoked silently and gazed out over the harbor. He was somewhat ruffled and took no pains to hide it. His manner told plainly that the whaleman could take his ambergris and go to the devil with it for all he cared.

Bahama Bill lay in the bunt of the mainsail and grinned at the talk.

"'Pear like dat whale feller don't trust none ob us toe much," said he to Johnson. "I reckon dere's somethin' in dat find ob grease after all."

II.

Aboard the whale-ship the heat was so intense that even under the small awning that Wilson the mate had stretched athwart the quarter-deck the seams bubbled until the pitch seemed as though it would run off like water. The second mate, Sundstrom, came up the ladder, for during the skipper's absence

he felt that certain rights he sometimes respected might be thrown aside. Wilson sat at great ease in his stocking-feet. A small terrier dog chased the flies from his socks where they rested upon the skylight coaming and Wilson eyed the animal amiably, noting his intentions. Sundstrom came toward him familiarly and drew up a stool which the captain kept for his personal use when aboard.

"Sile," said the second, flicking a bug from the mate's dirty collar, "I've been below trying to clean up a bit—dun chased the bugs and roaches from the forward cabin with that stinking brimstone—'n' while I was there I seen that keg o' grease. I dunno what to think, but sure Mike there's going to be trouble if the old man keeps it where the men ken git hand to it—I don't just like the way them dagoes shows up after the run on the beach."

"Well, what yer goin' to do erbout it?" asked the mate. "Want me to put the whole crew in irons while the skipper stays gamming erbout with all the dude seamen afloat?"

"Naw, I don't want nothin' o' the kind. Sile, but if you have a share in the stuff I'm telling you you better put it away somewheres, better git your half an' lace it down safe like—what you think?"

"I ain't got no time fer thinking—who's a-goin' to run this vessel if I stops to think—who's a-goin' to see we git new braces, who's a-goin' to see we git new lanyards fer the fore riggin', who's a-goin' to see we git grub to eat if I sit around and think all day, hey?"

"I was jest a-telling you," said the second, reduced to a state of proper awe at the manifest duties of his superior, "I was jest a-telling you, Sile, an' if the stuff goes don't say I didn't say so in time. Whalin' ain't what it used to be—you know that—and if you lose out this voyage you ain't goin' on another soon."

"Fergit it," said Wilson amiably, puffing slowly at his pipe; "what's the use of taking life so hard? Ain't we almost full of ile? If you got the bugs out of my room I'll go and turn in after

dinner and don't let no one turn me out till supper, unless it's the old man himself."

The sun was sinking behind the mountains before the old man thought of coming back aboard and in the meantime the mate slept in his cleaned bunk and the second dozed upon his chest in his room with the little dog near him.

Forward the men lay and rested, some under the whale-boats bottom up on the deck where repairs were being made, and others in the stinking closeness of the fore-castle, where the whale-oil lamp burned eternally, partly to furnish light but mostly to furnish fire for the reeking pipes. Two men from the Azores sat close under the port rail and smoked in silence. One of these was a hairy fellow, half-naked, long of limb and swarthy as a dago can become after a year under the tropic sun. He was ugly with small glinting eyes which were not resting at all like the body stretched in the waterways. Black whiskers covered the hard lines of his face and dirt and grease caked his seamed neck. Large devices tattooed upon his breast and arms offset the otherwise common muscularity of his frame. His shipmate sat hunched up with his arms around his knees and whispered now and again through black and stubby teeth, grinning often and looking aft. The slanting rays of the setting sun faded slowly out, the sea took on a darker hue.

"Now" said the shorter seaman who still sat watching.

They made their way aft so quickly that no one saw them as they entered the after cabin. Down the companionway they slipped with the agility of a pair of cats and in less time than it takes to tell it they were upon the keg containing the ambergris.

"Breake da kag—quick, taka da grease," whispered the shorter one.

But breaking the keg was not so easy. It resisted the efforts of the dago to such an extent that he found it necessary to strike it a heavy blow. He finally did this with the butt of the skipper's whale-gun which stood in a rack on the bulkhead. The shock sent

down the hammer upon the cap and a terrific roar followed, the charge tearing up into the deck overhead. The outfly aroused the little dog first and it broke into a furious barking. Then followed the second mate, who awoke with the full appreciation of the affair upon him. Calling to Wilson, he rushed for the after cabin just as Giuseppe and Henriquez sped up the steps of the companionway with something tucked under the latter's arm.

"Halt, you holy son of belial," yelled Wilson, throwing a belaying-pin with the accuracy developed from long practise. The pin hit Henriquez fairly in the back. The pain was intense, but he held onto his prize and limped awkwardly to the rail.

"Jump, jump—taka da swim," yelled the shorter man, Giuseppe, and Henriquez waiting not an instant plunged or rather fell overboard with a splash. He was followed by his shipmate, who made a clean dive and came to the surface three or four fathoms distant.

"All hands," yelled Wilson, running forward again, "get down the port quarter boat."

"She's on deck with two strakes out of her—fixin' her up, you know," said the cooper coming aft.

"Git me a whale-gun—quick!" roared Wilson.

No one went for a weapon and in the meantime the two men were swimming rapidly away with the tide, cutting slantwise for the lower point, which was thickly wooded. Wilson dived below and in a few moments came back with a gun used for firing a bomb into the back of a sperm-whale. It was an immense affair and very heavy. He poured a good handful of powder into its muzzle and shoved a bomb down upon it. Then he hooked the pivot outside the taffrail to keep back the recoil and cut loose at the two heads which were now some distance astern and going very fairly toward the shore and safety. There was a smashing report. The gun flew up and drove Wilson half-way across the deck with it and the missile threw up the foam within six inches of Henriquez' head, but that was all.

"Sorry, sir, but there ain't no other boat what's fit to go—all of them being overhauled, sir. The old man has the only boat that'll swim; you see we smashed two off the Martin Vas after that old bull, 'n' one off——"

"Name o' saints! have I got to stand here and see two sons of the devil swim away with a fortune?" yelled Wilson.

The report of the whale-gun echoing across the harbor aroused the interest of Bahama Bill, who was just getting the boat ready to take the whaling-skipper back aboard his ship. Hacksaw Johnson came on deck and with Captain Blye gazed long and studiously at the affair on the whale-ship.

It was too far away to see things definitely in the failing light, but all agreed that something was wrong aboard and that the old man had better get back to his vessel without delay. Johnson and Bahama Bill volunteered to row the boat.

"I whun't git thar none too soon, bul-lies," said the captain, seating himself aft; "pull like hell."

There were only two oars in the boat, the long one with which the skipper sculled over to the *Seagull*, and a short one. Johnson took up the short one and Bahama Bill, taking the long one for stroke, gave way with a will while Captain Enoch Brown directed and cheered them with words of advice:

"Port a small mite—thar, that's it, naouw stabbard some, stabbard some—jest a small bit moar—steddy, steddy, as you go—I duhn't give a damn so long as I git thar in time to see that grease is all to the good—— Good Gawd——"

The last exclamation came suddenly as Bahama Bill, swinging with full power upon the stroke-oar, snapped it short off at the row-lock and the blade quickly went astern. He flung the rest after it with an oath.

"Gimme sumthin' dat'll hold a man—gimme another oar—quick," he called.

"Naouw, that's all the oars I got aboard," said Brown, "and what's worse you've busted the long one, the short

one's too short to scull by—what'll we do?"

"Sing out fer another," said Bahama Bill, standing up.

The giant diver was just about to bawl out for Blye to send a small boat when he became aware of the mate Wilson waving wildly to him from the deck of the whale-ship.

"It's Mr. Wilson; naouw I think he whun't wait two minutes befoar swear-in' something rotten because we air here. Damn a mate who can't fit aout a boat with more than a pair of paddles—I'll hail him," said Captain Enoch Brown.

The uncouth mate was standing now upon the taffrail waving his arms and bawling something to his skipper. Brown stood up in the small boat and hailed him.

"What d'ye want?" he yelled. "Cayn't ye see we uns has lost an hoar—git a boat over an' come to us," he yelled.

But the mate still waved and howled, gesticulating wildly like a crazy man.

"He sho' dun lose somethin', 'n' dat's a fact," said Bahama Bill, "most like his haid, er what little sense he's got in hit—what's that he's pointin' to in the sea?"

Two small black objects showed in the direction of the irate mate's outstretched arm. He was now trying to show Brown the two swimming men who were making a getaway with what looked to be the ship's treasure.

"Two fellers swimmin' fer fair," commented Bahama Bill.

"Good Lord—it's the stuff, my grease," groaned Enoch Brown; "they're making away with it——"

The giant diver gazed at the heads of the swimming men now almost out of sight in the little chop of the harbor breeze. The light was failing fast, as it does in the tropics after the sun goes down, and they stood a good chance to get away without interference.

"I'll give you a share of it if you kin git it," said Brown hoarsely; "you claim to be a diver—cayn't you swim, too?"

"A little—maybe," said Bahama Bill.

"Take a try," said Hacksaw Johnson, grinning up at the big black.

"How much yo' say yo' kin spare ob dat stuff?" asked the diver.

"I'll give you an ounce, a full ounce—wuth fifty dollars," said Brown quickly.

Bahama Bill sat down upon the thwart of the whale-boat. Then he spat overboard in great disgust. "Yo' sho' is generous, white man," he commented sourly. Captain Blye was watching the boat drifting without oars and the stewardess, Miss Moore, hearing the shouting, came on deck also to take a look. She saw Bahama Bill sit down and womanlike divined the cause. She could still hear the mate of the whale-ship bawling about something lost and she came to the quick conclusion that it was the ambergris she had heard so much about in conversation during the last few days. Visions of profit came to her nimble mind. Suddenly she sprang upon the taffrail of the *Seagull* and screamed to Bahama Bill to go after the men. Bahama Bill sat up straight and listened with a broad grin upon his ugly mouth.

"Make hit a third 'n' I goes 'n' gits hit," said he slowly to Enoch Brown.

"I whun't, by gorry, I whun't do no sech thing—what, ten thousand dollars fer a little swim like that?" snarled the whaleman.

"Git hit yo'self then," snapped Bahama Bill.

But Miss Moore was still screaming to the diver in spite of Blye's protestations to shut up. Suddenly Bill sprang up as if an idea had reached his intellect. He peeled off his jumper and the next instant was over the side making a foaming path through the harbor in the direction of the two heads which had now almost gained the shadow of the shore. With a long-reaching overhand stroke the diver plowed through it, butting the small chop with his bullet-head and pushing up the foam in front of him so high that it poured over his face and shut off his wind until the end of his stroke. Then getting his nose out for just an instant, he drove along again, to repeat the movement.

As an exhibition of fine swimming

the scene was hard to better. The two dagoes were experts in the art, although as a rule whalemen can swim but little, as nearly all deep-water seamen are the poorest of men when in the element upon which they spend so much of their lives. Henriquez and his companion were taking it easy now, feeling that they had made their getaway and that they would soon be upon the wooded point where shelter could be had. The growing night would cut off all pursuit on land, for it would be impossible for any one but a native to trail them through the thick jungle. The small boats were out of commission and they grinned and joked at each other as they swam along, commenting upon the distress caused their commander.

It was a good mile to the beach and they were getting close in when they were aware of a deep snorting close behind them. It was the sound of something in the sea and whatever it was it was coming along with a wash and tear like a giant fish. Henriquez treaded water for an instant to get a better view astern. Then the black head of Bahama Bill came into view about ten fathoms behind and the snorting became painfully distinct. He was coming along handsomely and had sighted his chase.

"Geta da nig," panted Henriquez; "taka da knife—here."

"Comin' lika da whale, hey—pity da harpoon not here—I feex heem wida da lance—what?"

Giuseppe slacked his stroke. He was used to fighting and a negro more or less was nothing to him. He would attend to the fellow and Henriquez would keep along with the prize, getting into the shoal water and darkness.

In a few moments Bahama Bill was up with him.

The black head of the giant diver rose suddenly, lifted clear of the sea and he stopped swimming. The dago waited warily and suddenly made a pass with the knife.

Bahama Bill sank slowly down as the weight of the blow fell upon his neck. He was not expecting a knife-thrust and the blade had all but caught him in

a vital place. As it was, the point overreached him and the edge cut him but slightly—his impetuous advance had saved him by a fraction of an inch. He sank beneath the surface and then quickly swam deeper. Then he reached for the fellow's feet. He grasped one and with it fast in a powerful grip he started for the bottom of the harbor, dragging the dago with him.

Giuseppe felt the grip, knew it was the black man and thinking he had killed him with the knife-thrust, imagined that the negro was sinking and dragging him down to the bottom with him. He therefore made no effort to cut away but gave one yell to Henriquez for help and then went under.

Down, slowly down, the black diver dragged his victim. Three fathoms deep he drew him with mighty strokes and then the bottom mud struck his hand. He let go and shot upward and in a moment was breathing upon the surface waiting for the head of the fellow to appear again. Again and again did he drag the rascal down, letting him go only when his own wind was failing, and at the third sinking Giuseppe failed to rise again. In a few moments Bill was after Henriquez, following the direction in which he had seen him swimming before his fight. The tide was now flooding and the current was setting back toward the *Seagull*. Henriquez, hearing the snorting breath of Bahama Bill coming close astern of him, knew the fate of his shipmate, knew that a like fate awaited him, for he was unarmed and Bahama Bill would probably have the knife. He let go the ambergris and with overhand strokes put for the shoaling water with all speed.

He was a fine swimmer and the negro was badly winded from his race and fracas. Away they went through the dark shore water, their wakes rippling off like the sea from a boat's cutwater.

"I dun got yo', slack up, yo' dago 'n' gimme a share ob dat grease," called Bahama Bill.

"I giva da knife—I keel you," shouted Henriquez frantically at the same time driving with all speed for the

point, which was getting close. The black shadows were almost to him and he strove to gain them, hoping to elude the diver in the darkness. But the sea was smooth inside the point and while it was dark close to the land the smooth surface gave back a rustle and swash as he tore through it and the pursuing swimmer could keep him well in mind.

Straight for a jutting ledge swam Henriquez. If he could gain it all would be well, for he could surely hide in the jungle. Behind him came the diver, panting, snorting like a grampus, but keeping steadily at his work. Henriquez' feet struck the ground. He gave a mighty lurch ahead, grabbed a projecting ledge and hauled himself clear of the sea before Bahama Bill, who now fairly lifted himself from the water at each stroke, could reach the ground with his legs.

"I come back to keel you—black nigger man," panted Henriquez. Then he plunged into the bushes and Bahama Bill tore his way through the shallow and made the land at last.

A quick dash into the brush scratched the naked body of the diver sorely. He stopped and listened. There was not a sound, not a crackling of a twig to show the direction of the escaping Henriquez. He knew the fellow was close at hand in the bushes, but the darkness was now that of a tropical night and he could see nothing at all save the outer edge of the jungle, where the lapping of the sea was all that broke the stillness.

"Come out, yo' rascal, come out an' give me a whack at yo'," he yelled. The silence was unbroken and he gazed out over the harbor to see the riding-light of his ship shine out over the water. Captain Blye had evidently remained aboard.

"I dunno as there's enny use er tryin' toe git that dago," commented the diver after ten minutes' search in the jungle, "'n' when I comes toe think of hit I sho' don't call toe mind seeing him take nothin' asho' with him—I reckon he dropped de stuff somewheres befo' he landed." He spent half an hour searching the shore for a trace of the

missing prize and then he wondered at not having a boat sent after him.

"Hit's sho' strange—hit sho' is dat, dey sho' ought toe send a boat—looks like I dun got toe swim back abo'd."

Just then the sound of muffled oars came to him, then the voices of men and he recognized that of Enoch Brown, captain of the whale-ship.

"Well, I whun't give more'n two ounces of that grease; no, sir, I whun't give up the profits of a voyage jest to a nigger—it ain't fair, no, sir, it ain't right to expect me to—here's this Giuseppe half dead, got him just in time—here's Henriquez killed likely before this—I lose two good men—"

"Better wait till you get the stuff before you talk about giving it away," said the voice of Johnson, "and if I was you I wouldn't let on too much what you think of Bahama Bill—or there might be more men lost to your stinking ship—"

"Here I am—come right in," hailed Bahama Bill from the darkness of the shore, and the boat was headed instantly for the beach.

"Get him?" asked Johnson.

"I reckon you got the stuff?" inquired Brown.

"Got nothin'—'n' I ain't lookin' no mo' for nothin'—yo' kin take me back abo'd," said the diver.

"Sure you hain't got that grease hid in the bushes?" asked Brown anxiously.

"I may have to take your whurd, yaas, I can do that—but I'll search the p'int in the morning jest the same."

"Look here, white man, yo' cut dat line ob talk out—I ain't got yo' grease, but I makes plain dat ef I had got hit, yo'd git erbout jest one ounce—'n' dat's all—yo' see?" said Bahama Bill. "'N' while I'm talking toe yo', I'll jest make hit plain dat yo' is de meanest white man I ever see."

"Get aboard—look out, don't step on Giuseppe, he's laying there in the bottom—you nigh killed him," said Johnson, and Bahama Bill, giving the boat's bow a shove, jumped into her to row back aboard his ship. They took Cap-

tain Brown back to the whaleman and passed the half-insensible seaman up the side to the mate, who immediately began to belabor him for stealing the prize. Then Johnson and Bill rowed back aboard their little vessel. Blye met them at the gangway and grinned in amusement, but Miss Moore stood aft gazing forward at something in the water with the night glass.

"Let her drift back a bit—let go, now row straight ahead," said the stewardess; "it's coming straight with the tide."

The breeze had fallen as it always does in the tropical harbor and the smooth dark water showed a small object floating along with the inseting current. The men in the boat had hardly grasped the meaning of the woman's curiosity when the lump of ambergris came under the bowsprit-end.

"Quick, for Heaven's sake, don't lose it," cried the woman, and Johnson, who was forward, made a pass for the mass with both hands, grabbing it and hauling it aboard the small boat. All was done so quickly that the men were amazed.

"I've been watching it for an hour or more," said Miss Moore. "I knew the fellow would drop it when Bill started for him—dear old Bill—"

"Cut dat line out," snapped the diver.

"But you see, you would never have gotten it except for me—"

"Well, we'll have to take it back to the fellow to-morrow," said Blye; "we are not whalemen or pirates."

"But just a little—can't I have just a little bit?" asked the stewardess.

"I sho' thinks Miss Mo' has got toe have a little piece—erbout one ounce or so," said Bahama Bill, turning to his captain.

"All right, you can cut off a chunk of the stuff—cut off a couple of hundred dollars' worth, but no more—and that under the condition that you will take the stuff back to the ship in the morning," said Blye.

"I dunno as I would like ennything better—sho', I'll take de stuff back toe dat man in de mornin'—jest toe hear him talk."

Lost Cabin Mine

By Frederick Niven

SYNOPSIS OF CHAPTERS PREVIOUSLY PUBLISHED.

Francis, the young man who tells this story, in his quest for fortune in the West, finds himself almost penniless and without prospects in Baker City. He is lodging at the Laughlin House. The proprietor tells him the story of the "Lost Cabin Mine" up to date. It seems three prospectors had struck it famously rich in the mountains and had then run out of food. Two of them had made a desperate effort to get back to civilization but had dropped on the way. Mike Canlan, another prospector, had come across one of them half-conscious on the wagon-road to Baker City and started to carry him there. On the way he met Apache Kid, a picturesque Western character, and Larry Donoghue, his partner, a desperate, violent fellow. These two had volunteered assistance. They had brought the dying man to the Laughlin House. While Canlan had gone for a doctor, the man had muttered something about the Lost Cabin and Apache Kid and Larry Donoghue had heard. When Canlan had returned the man was dead. Evidently Canlan too had learned something valuable, for from that time he watched Apache Kid and Donoghue like a hawk and tried in various ways to find out how much they really knew. Francis meets the three of them at the Laughlin House. Donoghue tries to kill Canlan and Francis is instrumental in preventing the murder. Afterward Apache Kid and Donoghue propose to Francis to join them in a contemplated trip, offering him a salary he sorely needs. He accepts their offer. Apache Kid and he leave Baker City as secretly as possible. They are to meet Donoghue on the road to Camp Kettle. Apache Kid does not divulge the object of their journey, but the precautions taken suggest to Francis it is the search for the Lost Cabin Mine. At a half-way house Francis protects the daughter of the proprietor from the insults of a traveling man. The latter attempts to shoot him but Apache Kid saves his life. They resume their journey by stage to Camp Kettle. Arriving there, Apache Kid tells Francis definitely their destination is the Lost Cabin. They procure horses and rations and strike through the woods. Two men who have followed them hold them up in the forest and demand to be told the location of Lost Cabin Mine on penalty of death. Apache Kid parleys with them. Donoghue suddenly appears and shoots one of the men from behind a tree. Apache Kid kills the other. The three resume the journey. Mr. Pinkerton, proprietor of the Half-way to Kettle House, and a half-breed follow their trail, and warn them of another party coming to stalk them to the Lost Cabin and then kill them. This party now appears and in a pitched battle Francis is captured by the enemies. They torture him cruelly to make him divulge the location of the Lost Cabin, which he does not know. Finally Apache Kid rescues him by agreeing to join forces with the other party, and all go into camp together for the night.



THAT they were three unscrupulous scoundrels—"the toughest greasers that ever stole stock," as Mr. Pinkerton had phrased it when speaking of them and their cronies—using the word "greaser" in its loose, slang sense, not necessarily implying thereby that they were actually Mexicans, which is the meaning of the name—that they were capable of any treachery and cruelty themselves, there was no doubt. And as they were, so they would be very prone to judge others

and were, doubtless, already thinking to themselves that we three had after all—for the present at least—the best of the bargain; for had they set upon us and done away with us, where would have been their chance of coming to the Lost Cabin? As far away as ever; the Lost Cabin would still have been a needle in a haystack.

On the other hand, I guessed them already arguing, we would be glad and even eager to kill them, though they desired to keep us alive—for a time.

I suppose they took our handshake—Larry's and mine—for a sign of some understanding between us and scented

in it a treacherous design upon them, for they kept upon our flanks hereafter, at sight of which Donoghue laughed his ugly laugh and shook his horse forward a step, sneering at them over his shoulder.

Oh! We were a fine company to go into camp together, as we did within half an hour later, before the last grasshoppers had ceased their chirring, on the side of the knoll where was a spring of water, a little pool overhung by a rock with strange amphibious insects darting away from its center to the sheltering banks as we dipped our cans for water to make the flapjacks.

To any chance observers, happening into our camp at twilight, we would have seemed nothing more dire than a round-up camp of cowboys, I fancy, for after the meal, when pipes and cigarettes were lit and belts let out a hole or two and boots slackened, there was an air of outdoor peace around the fire.

Yet I need not tell you that the peace was on the surface—fanciful, unreal. As for me, the snake was leaping in my eyes out of the fire, when Apache Kid calmly struck up a song.

Heads jerked up and eyes glanced on him at the first stave. It seemed as though everything that any man there could do or say was to be studied for an underlying and furtive motive.

It was "The Spanish Cavalier" he sang, with a very fine feeling, too, softly and richly. There is a deal of the sentimentalist about me, and the air, apart from the words, was ringing in my heart like a regret.

"The bright, sunny day," he sang, "it soon fades away," and after he ceased the plain had fallen silent. The chirring of insects had gone and left the valley empty of sound. During all the journey I never heard so much as the twitter of any bird—except one of which you shall hear later—so I think that the gripping silence at the end of day must have been due only to the stopping of the insect life. By day one was not aware of any sound; but at the close of day, when the air chilled, the silence was suddenly manifest.

Then the singing ceased and the cry that I now knew well, the dusk cry of the coyotes, rose in a howl, with three or four yelps in the middle of it and the doleful melancholy baying at the close.

I looked round the group at the fire again.

"Well," said Apache Kid, the first to speak, "who's to night-herd the horses?"

The man Dan rose up at that. It was he who alone of all my tormentors on the cliff had spoken a word with anything of kindness in it.

"I'll take the first guard, if you like," said he.

Farrell looked across at Apache Kid. "One of your side, then," said he, "can take the next guard—share and share—time about, I guess; eh?"

Apache Kid threw the end of his cigarette into the fire and, drawing out his pouch, rolled another and moistened it before he replied.

"Why do you talk about sides at all?" he asked. "I thought we were a joint stock-company now?"

"Well, well," snapped Farrell, "I mean one of you three—you or one of your partners."

"Quite so; I know what you mean. I understand your meaning perfectly."

There was a pause and then said he, taking a brand from the fire and lighting his cigarette, so that I saw his full, healthy eye shine bright: "If you are going to talk about sides in this expedition—then so be it. But I don't think our side, as you call it, will bother with any night-herding; indeed, I think we need hardly trouble about saddling up or unpacking or cooking or anything—if you make it a matter of sides." And he blew a feather of smoke. "I think my side will live like gentlemen between now and the arrival at the Lost Cabin Mine."

Every eye was fixed anxiously on him.

"You see," he explained, "the fact is, you need us and we don't need you. It's a case of supply and demand and—seeing you talk of sides," he said, with what must have been, to Farrell,

an irritating insistence, "our side at present is wanted. It's almost a sort of example of the workings of capital and labor. No!" he ended, with a satisfied grunt, "I don't think there's any need for me to tend horses at all, thanks. I'm quite comfy by the fire."

There was a shrewd, calculating look on Farrell's face as he looked Apache Kid cunningly in the eye a space. I could wager that he was making himself certain from this speech that Apache Kid was the principal in our expedition. I think he really believed that I could say nothing of the Lost Cabin, even had I desired to, and from the way he looked then to Donoghue and looked back again to Apache Kid it struck me forcibly that he was wondering if it were possible that Larry Donoghue was not "in the know" to the full, but merely of the company in a similar way with myself.

Then he rolled an eye back again to Apache Kid, and I remembered the sheriff of Baker City then, for Farrell's words were the very words I had heard the sheriff use: "You're a deep man," he said.

"And I'm quite comfy, too," broke in Donoghue. "Thanks," he added. "And as for this young man beside me, I think he wants a rest to-night. A man that's had a snake wriggling at his nose for half of an afternoon is liable to want a little sleep and forgetting."

Everybody cocked an ear, so to speak, on this speech; but no one of those who did not understand asked an explanation.

Farrell looked with meaning at Mr. Pinkerton, who sat out of the affair, but neither he nor the half-breed spoke a syllable, Pinkerton pulling on his corn-cob pipe, and the half-breed rubbing the silver buckle of his belt with the palm of his hand, and studying the reflection of firelight in it.

"No, no," suddenly remarked Apache Kid, "you couldn't ask Mr. Pinkerton to do that, nor Charlie either. We can't be so inhospitable as to ask our guests of this evening to night-tend our horses."

"What the hell are you getting on

about?" said Farrell, and then, as though thinking better, and considering that a milder tone was more fitting, he said: "I never asked them to."

"No, no; you did not ask them to," said Apache, in a mock-conciliatory tone, and then, with a smile on his lips, he said gently: "But you were thinking that, and I—know—every—thought—that passes through your mind, Mr. Farrell."

You should have seen the man Pete at these soft-spoken words.

I must give you an idea of what this fellow looked like. To begin with, I think I may safely say he looked like a villain, but more of the wolf order of the villain than the panther; he had what you would call an ignorant face—a heavy brow, high cheek-bones, very glassy and constantly wandering eyes, far too many teeth for his mouth, and they very large and animallike. And if ever I saw superstitious fear on a man's face, it was on the face of that cutthroat.

He looked at Apache Kid, who sat with his hat tilted back and his open, cheery, and devil-may-care face radiant to the leaping firelight—looked at him so that the firelight made on his face shadows, instead of lighting it; for he held his chin low and the mouth open. His hat was off and only his forehead was lit up. The rest was what I say—loose shadows. Then he looked at Farrell, as though to see if Farrell were not at all fearful, and, "Say!" he said, "I'll take herd to-night."

Farrell turned on him with a leer and laughed.

"I guess you'd better go first then," said he, "before midnight comes, and let Dan go second, after a three hours' tend."

So Pete rose and tightened his belt, and went his ways; and that in less than no time, for the horses were already restive, as though the loneliness of the place had taken possession of them. Of all beasts I know, I think horses the most influenced by their environment.

"Well, if this don't beat cock-fightin'!" I heard Mr. Pinkerton's voice be-

hind me, where he lay now, leaning on an elbow; and then he said a word or two to the half-breed, who rose and departed out of the circle of the fire-shine.

In a little space he returned, leading his own mount and Pinkerton's by the lariats which were around their necks, and as he made fast these lariats to a stone Farrell looked at Mr. Pinkerton across the glow, and asked him, suspicious as ever, "What's that for?"

"Oh! Just so as not to be indebted to you," replied Pinkerton, and coming closer to the fire he rolled his one gray blanket round him and, knocking down the ashes of his pipe, lay down to rest, the half-breed following suit. But after they had lain down, and when I, a little later, at a word from Donoghue, suggesting I should "turn in," unpacked my blankets, which I had found among the pile of our mixed belongings, I saw the half-breed's eyes still open and with no sign of sleep in them. "So," said I to myself, "Pinkerton and the half-breed, I expect, have arranged to share watch and watch, without having the appearance of doing so."

And indeed one could scarcely wonder at any such protective arrangement in such a camp as this. Donoghue and Apache Kid, indeed, were the only two there who could close their eyes in sleep that night with anything like a reasonable belief that the chances of their awakening to life were greater than their chances of never breathing again the sage-scented air of morning.

CHAPTER XIV.

APACHE KID PROPHECIES.

You may wonder how it was possible for me to lie down, to roll myself round in my blankets, to fall asleep in such a camp, in such company as that. I, indeed, wondered at myself as I did so, wondered how I came by the heedlessness—for I cannot call it courage—that allowed me to compose myself to slumber. Anything might have happened in the dark hours, murder and sudden death; but I was excessively

fatigued; my body ached; my nerves, too, were unstrung by the torture of the cliff. Sleep I must and sleep I did, on the instant that I stretched myself and laid down my head. Perhaps the sigh with which I dismissed from my mind the anxieties that might have kept me wakeful was more of a prayer than a sigh. Across the fire of smaller branches that had cooked our supper, in the preparing of which each took part, a great log was laid, so that no replenishing would be necessary.

It was the sound of Donoghue's voice that woke me to blue night, star-shine, and the red glow of the log. His position was unaltered. I could have believed that he had not moved a muscle since my lying down, and the stars told me I had slept some time. He reclined with his legs crossed, his feet stretched to the glow, his hands in his pockets, and his unloosened blanket-roll serving for a cushion to the small of his back.

"There ain't no call for me to turn in," he was saying. "I don't have to turn in to please you."

I smuggled the blankets under my chin and looked to see whom he was addressing.

All the others of the company were lying down, but it was evidently Farrell who had made the prior remark, for he now worried with his shoulders in his blankets to cast them from him, and rising on an elbow, said: "Oh, no. You don't have to. But it looks to me mighty like as if you was scared of us—that you don't lay down and sleep. We're square enough with you."

Donoghue looked at him in that insolent fashion of opening the eyes wide, and then almost shutting them, and sneered:

"Well, well, what are you always opening your eyes up a little ways and peepin' at one for? One would think you was scared o' me; and that feller there, that Dan, or what you call him, he keeps waking up and giving a squint around, too. You're square with us? We're square with you, ain't we?"

Farrell flung the blankets back from him and cried out: "Do you know what

I'm goin' to tell you? I wouldn't trust you, not an-inch. I got my gun here ready, if you try any nonsense."

The gleam of an unholy satisfaction was on Donoghue's face, then he cried out: "Well, sir, if I find a man trust me, I'm square with him; but if he don't trust me, I don't play fair with him. That's right, I guess, ain't it?"

This, to my mind, was a very faulty morality, but it seemed not so to Farrell.

"Yes," he agreed. "I reckon that's generally understood," and then he showed quite a turn for argument on his own plane of thought.

"But you don't trust me neither," said he, "and if I was payin' you back the way you talk about, I'd up and plug you through the head."

Argument was not in Donoghue's line, but he cried out:

"And where would I be while you were tryin' it on?"

Farrell did not answer, and in the pause Donoghue did indeed continue the argument, unwittingly, to its logical conclusion.

"No, no, my boy," he said, "you wouldn't plug me here. You wouldn't plug me till we got you what you wanted. Oh, I know your kind well. You thought you held the trumps when you corralled the lad there," and he jerked his head in my direction. "But you didn't."

"It seems to me like as we did," said Farrell, with a vindictive leer, "else why are we here now?"

"Here now?" snapped Donoghue. "Why, you're here because my partner is so durned soft times. He wouldn't go—on—and leave the lad," he drawled contemptuously. "What good was the boy to you, anyhow?" he asked. "Looks as if you knew you were trying it on with a soft, queer fellow. I'd ha' let you *eat* the boy if you wanted and jest taken a note o' your ugly blue mug in my mind and said to myself: Larry, my boy, when you see that feller ag'in after you've got through with this—you shoot him on sight!"

"And what if the mug was to follow you up?" said Farrell.

All this while there was no movement round the fire, only that I saw Apache Kid's hand drawing down the blankets from his face. Pinkerton and the half-breed were a little beyond Donoghue and lying somewhat back so that I did not know if they were awakened by this talk. And just then Dan sat up suddenly, glared out upon the plain to the four points of the compass, and screamed out:

"The hosses! Where's the hosses?"

We were all bolt upright then, like jumping-jacks, and leaning on our palms and twisted about staring out strained into the moon-pallid plain.

Dan leaped to his feet.

"The hosses is gone!" he cried, and he rushed across to the two horses that were tied with the lariats.

"Lend me a hoss," he cried. "We must go out and see where Pete has got to with them horses."

"I len' you dis—you dog!" said the half-breed in his guttural voice and he flung up his polished revolver in Dan's face.

It was Apache Kid who restored some semblance of order to the camp.

"All right, Dan," he said. "Don't worry. It's too late now."

We all turned to him in wonder.

"Pete thought it advisable to take the whole bunch away. He agreed that it was advisable to make what little capital he could out of his expedition into this part of the country. On the whole, I think he was sensible. Yes—sensible is the word," he said, thoughtfully wagging his head to the fire and then looking up and beaming on us all.

"What you mean?" cried Farrell.

"Just what I say," said Apache Kid. "He simply walked the whole bunch quietly away five minutes after he bunched them together out there."

"You saw him doin' that! You saw his game and said nothing!" cried Farrell.

"Even so!" replied Apache Kid.

Farrell glared before him speechless. "What in creation made him do that?" said Dan, going back like a man dazed to his former place.

"You mean *who* in creation made

him do that?" Apache Kid said lightly; "and I have to acknowledge that it was I."

"You!" thundered Farrell. "I didn't see you say a word to him. You bought him off someways, did you? How did you do it?"

"Oh!" said Apache Kid. "I simply gave him a hint of the terrors in store for him if he remained here. You heard me; and he was a man who could understand a hint such as I gave. I took him first, as being easiest. But I have no doubt that you two also will think better of your intention and depart—before it is too late. He went first. You, Mr. Farrell, I think, will have the honor of going last."

"I don't know what you mean," said Farrell, like a man scenting something beyond him.

"No," said Apache Kid. "I understand that. You will require some other method used upon you. He suffered from the fear of man. That was why he went away. Now you, Farrell, I don't think you fear man, God——"

"No! Nor devil!" cried Farrell.

"Nor no more do I!" said Dan, turning on Apache Kid. "Nor no more do I. And if the loss o' the hosses don't cut any figure to you, it don't no more to us, for we're goin' through with you right to the end."

But I thought that a something about his under lip, as I saw it in the shadows of the fire, belied his strong statement. Apache Kid was of my opinion, for he looked keenly in Dan's face and remarked: "A very good bluff, Daniel."

"Don't you 'Daniel' me!" cried the man. "You're gettin' too derved fresh and frisky and gettin' to fancy yourself."

"That's right. A bluff should be sustained," said Apache Kid, insolently, and then dropping the conversation, as though it were of absolutely no moment, he rolled himself again in his blanket. And this he had no sooner done—unconcerned, untroubled, heedless of any possible villainy of these two men—than Pinkerton's voice spoke behind me:

"He's a good man spoiled, is that

Apache Kid. I could ha' been doin' with a son like that."

"I think you're kind o' a soft mark, right enough," sneered Farrell to the now recumbent form of Apache Kid. "I think you're too soft to scare me."

Apache Kid was up in a moment.

"Soft!" he cried, "soft!"

And on his face was the look that he gave the Italian livery-stable keeper at Camp Kettle only, as the saying is, *more so*.

I heard Donoghue gasp, you would have thought more in fear than in exultation. "Say! When he gets this ways you want to be back out of his way."

"Look at me!" said Apache, standing up. "You see I've got on no belt; my gun's lying there with the belt. I've got no knife—nothing. Will you stand up, sir, and let me show you if I'm soft, seeing that I have given you my word—not to kill you?" You should have heard the way these last words came from him. "Will you stand up and let me just hammer you within an inch of your end?"

Farrell did not quail; I will do him that justice. But he sat considering, and then he jerked his head and jerked it again doggedly, and, "No," he said, "no. I reckon not."

The fire of anger had leaped quick enough to life in Apache Kid, and it seemed to ebb as suddenly.

"All right," he said. "All right. Perhaps it is better so. It would dirty my hands to touch you. And indeed," he was moving back to his place now, "lead is too clean for you as well."

He turned as he reached where his blankets lay.

"Farrell," he said, "it is at the end of a rope that you will die."

CHAPTER XV.

IN WHICH THE TABLES ARE TURNED—
AT SOME COST.

After that peace came, and I dozed again.

It was a shot, followed by a scream, that awoke me; and those kind gods who guard us in our sleep and in our

waking caused me even at that moment not to obey the sudden impulse to leap up. Instead, I flung my hand to my revolver and lay flat—and in doing so saved my life.

Beside me, with the first quick opening of my eyes, I saw Donoghue kick in his blankets, like a cat in a sack, and then lie still, and the second shot rang in my ears, fired by the man Dan from across the fire and aimed at me. But truly, it was fated that Dan should go first of these two who remained with us of his side, as Farrell had called it, and it was I who was fated to do the deed. Let me put it in that way, I beg of you. Let me say "fated" in this instance, if in no other, for it is a terrible thing to slay a man. And then I saw what had befallen—after my shot had gone home and Dan lay on his face where he had fallen—dead, with the light of morning, of a new day, just quivering up the eastern sky, and making the living more ghastly.

Farrell and he must have quietly whispered over their plan where they lay—to make a sudden joint attack upon us. Dan's part had evidently been to put an end to Larry and to me, while Farrell attended to Apache Kid; for there was Farrell now with a revolver in each hand, and both were held to Apache's Kid's head.

At hearing my shot, for a moment Farrell glanced round, and, seeing that Dan had failed in his attempt, he cried out: "If you move, I kill Apache Kid here, right off. Mind now! I kill him—and let the Lost Cabin Mine slide. We'll see who's boss o' this round-up!"

And then it suddenly struck me as strange that they had not reckoned on the other two who were with us—Mr. Pinkerton and the half-breed. Even as I was then considering their daring, there came a moan from beside me. I flung round at the sound, and there lay Pinkerton with his hand to his breast. Yes; I understood now. That sound that woke me was not of one shot; it was two—Dan's first shot at Larry, and Farrell's at Mr. Pinkerton. But what of the half-breed? I bent to Mr. Pinkerton and, with my hand under his neck,

said: "Oh, Mr. Pinkerton! Mr. Pinkerton! Oh, Mr. Pinkerton! can I do anything for you?"

He looked upon me with his kind eyes, full of the last haze now, and gasped: "My girl! My girl! You will —" and he leaned heavy in my arms.

"I will see to her," said I. "Oh, sir! this you have got for us. It is through us that this has happened. I will see that she never wants."

These or some words such as these I spoke—for I never could rightly recall the exact speech in looking back on that sad affair.

"You—you are all right, my son," he said, "but if Apache Kid gets out o' this—he's—he's more fit like for—"

I saw his hand fumble again on his breast, and thought it was in an attempt to open his shirt; but then I caught the agony in his eye, such as you may have seen on a dumb man trying to make himself understood and failing in the attempt. Something of that look, but more woful, more piteous to see, was on his face. He was trying to hold his hand to me; when I took it, he smiled and said:

"You or Apache—Meg." And that was the last of this kindly and likable man who had done so much for us.

But what of the half-breed? Was he, too, slain? Not so; but he was of a more cunning race than I am sprung of. When I laid back Mr. Pinkerton's head and again looked around, the half-breed was gone from the place where he had lain.

There, on his belly almost, he was creeping upon Farrell from the rear. To me it seemed the maddest and-most forlorn undertaking.

There was Farrell with the two revolvers held to Apache Kid's head, talking softly, too quietly for me to hear, and Apache Kid replying in a low tone without any attempt at rising. And Farrell cried out: "Nobody try to fire on me! At a shot I fire too! My fingers is jest ready. I'm a desperate man."

I crouched low, my breath held in dread, my heart pounding in my side, at long intervals, so that I thought it must

needs burst. I did not even dare look again at that crawling savage, lest Farrell might perhaps cast another such quick glance as he had already bestowed on me and, seeing the direction of my gaze, realize his danger.

The result of such a discovery I dared not imagine. There was enough horror already, without addition. It was just then that Donoghue gave a queer little wheezing moan and his eyes opened; but even as I turned to him, "crash!" went a shot and I spun round, a cry on my lips; and there lay Apache Kid, as I had seen him before Donoghue's voice called me away from observing him. But now, he had clutched Farrell's right wrist in what must have been a mighty sudden movement, and was pushing it from him. He had leaped sidewise a little way, but without attempting to rise.

There, thrusting away, in a firm grasp, the hand that held the smoking weapon, he still looked up in Farrell's eye, the other revolver before him so that he must have looked fairly into it.

"You durn fool!" said Farrell. "You think I didn't mean what I said? Well, let me tell you that I run no, more chances. Oh! you needn't grasp this arm so fierce. I don't have to use it. But, Apache Kid, I'm goin' to kill you now. I reckon that that there Lost Cabin ain't for any of us—not for you, for sure. Are you ready?"

"Quite ready," I heard Apache Kid say, his voice as loud as Farrell's now, but more exultant still. It horrified me to hear his voice so callous as he looked on death. I wondered if now I should not risk a shot as a last hope to save him.

"There, then!" cried Farrell.

But there followed only the metallic tap of the hammer—no report, only that steely click; and before one could well know what had happened, Apache Kid was the man on top, shoving Farrell's head down in the sand, but still clutching Farrell's right wrist and turning aside that hand that held the weapon which, on his first sudden movement, had sent its bullet into the sand beside Apache.

"You goat!" cried Apache Kid. "When you intend to use two guns, see that they both are loaded, or else don't hold the one that you've fired the last from right in front of—" He broke off and flung up his head, like a wolf baying, and laughed.

He was a weird sight then, his face blackened from the shot he had evaded. But by this time, I need hardly tell you, I was by his side, helping to hold down the writhing Farrell—and the half-breed brought us the lariat from his horse and we trussed Farrell up, hands and feet, and then stood up. And as we turned from him there was Donoghue sitting up with a foolish look on his face and the blood trickling on his brow; and, pointing a hand at us, he cried out: "Come here, some o' you sons-o'-guns, and tie up my head a bit so I kin git up and see his hangin' afore I die."

Farrell writhed afresh in his bonds as he heard Donoghue's cry, and in a voice in which there seemed nothing human, he roared: "What! is that feller Donoghue not killed?"

"No, sir!" Donoghue replied, his head falling and his chin on his breast, but eyes looking up.

With the blood running into them from under his ragged eyebrows: "No, sir—after you!" he cried, and he let out that hideous oath that I had heard him use once before, but cannot permit myself to write or any man to read.

CHAPTER XVI.

SOUNDS IN THE FOREST.

We hanged Farrell in the morning, for he had broken the compact and he was a murderer. And we laid Pinkerton to his rest in the midst of the plain, with a cairn of stones to mark the spot.

Let that suffice. As for these two things you may readily understand I have no heart to write. And indeed, it would be a depraved taste that would desire to read of them in detail. I know you are not of those who will blame me for this reticence.

When I told Apache Kid of Mr. Pinkerton's last words he was greatly moved, as I could see, though he kept a calm front, and he told the half-breed, who left us then, to convey to Miss Pinkerton our united sympathy with a promise that we would visit her immediately on our return from our expedition.

Then we set out again, a melancholy company, as you will understand, Apache Kid and I carrying all the provisions that he thought fit to take along with us; for Donoghue was too light-headed to be burdened with any load, and lurched along beside us as we made toward the hills that closed in the plain to north, lurched along with the red handkerchief around his head and singing snatches of song now and again. The bullet had plowed a furrow along the side of his head, and though the bleeding had stopped he was evidently mentally affected by the wound.

It was drawing near nightfall again when we came to the end of this seeming cul-de-sac of a valley, and the hills on either side drew closer to us.

Before us now as we mounted, breathing heavily, up the incline we saw the woods, all the trees standing motionless, and already we could look well into the hazy blue deep of that place.

"I have been here before," said Apache, "but not much farther. We thought we might have to push clear through this place and try what luck there was in getting a shelter beyond. They pushed us very close that time," he said meditatively. But so absently did he speak this that, though I could not make any guess as to who it was that was "pushing" him "close" and who was with him on that perilous occasion, I forbore to question.

You have seen men in that mood yourself, I am sure, speaking more to the air than to you.

He turned about at the entering into the wood and we looked down on the plain stretching below us. A long while he gazed with eyelids puckered, scanning the shelving and stretching expanse.

"Two parties have followed us," he

said in a whisper almost. "God grant there be no more, else when we get the wealth that lies in store for us we shall hardly be able to enjoy it for thinking of all it has cost us. It has been the death of one good man already," he added. "Ah, well! There is no sign of any mortal there. We must push on through this wilderness before us."

He stopped again and considered, Donoghue rocking impotent and dazed beside us.

"I wonder where Canlan is to-night," he said, and then we plunged into the woods.

If the silence of the plain had been intense, we were now to know a silence more august. I think it was our environment then that made Apache Kid speak in that whisper. There was something in this deep wood before us that hushed our voices. I think it was the utter lack of even the faintest twitter of any bird where it seemed fitting that birds should be, that influenced us then almost unconsciously. Our very tread fell echoless in the dust of ages there, the fallen needles and cones of many and many an undisturbed year. It was with a thrill that I found that we had suddenly come upon what looked like a path of some kind. Apache Kid was walking first, Donoghue following, the knotted ends of the handkerchief sticking out comically at the back of his head under his hat.

"You see, we're onto a trail now," said Apache Kid, as he trudged along. "You never strike a trail just at the entrance into a place like this. Travelers who have passed here at various times, you see, come into the wood at all sorts of angles, where the trees are thin. But after one gets into the wood a bit and the trees get thicker, in feeling about for a passage you find where some one has been before you and you take the same way. A week, or a month, or a year later some one else comes along and he follows you. This trail here, for all that you can see the print of a horse's hoof here and there on it, may not have been passed over this year by any living soul. There may not have been any one here since I was here

last myself, three years ago—yes, that print there may be the print of my own horse's hoof, for I remember how the rain drenched that day, charging through the pass here and dripping from the pines and trickling through all the woods."

"It is a pass, then?" said I.

"Oh, yes," he explained. "It is what is called, in the language of the country, a buck's trail. That does not mean, as I used to think, an Indian trail. It is the slang word for a priest. You find these buck's trails all over the country. They were made by the priests who came up from old Mexico to evangelize and convert the red heathen of the land. I think these old priests must have been regular wander-fever men to do it. Think of it, man, cutting a way through these woods. Aha! See, there's a blaze on a tree there. You can scarcely make it out, though; it's been rained upon and snowed upon and blown upon so long, year in, year out. Turn about, now that we are past it, and you see the blaze on this side. Perhaps the old man made that himself, standing back from the tree and swinging his ax and saying to himself: 'If this leads me nowhere, I shall at least be able to find my way back plain enough.' Well! It's near here somewhere that I stopped that time, three years ago. Do you make out the sound of any water trickling?"

We stood listening; but there was no sound save that of our breathing, and then suddenly a "tap, tap, tap" broke out loud in the forest, so that it startled me at the moment, though next moment I knew it was the sound of a busy woodpecker.

We moved on a little farther, and then Apache Kid cried out in joy:

"Aha! Here we are! See the clear bit down there where the trees thin out?"

We pushed our way forward to where, through the growing dusk of the woods, there glowed between the trunks a soft green, seeming very bright after the dark, rusty green of these motionless trees.

"There isn't much elbow-room round

about us here to keep off the wildcats," said Apache Kid, looking round into the forest as we stepped forth into this oasis and found there a tiny spring with a teacupful of water in its hollow.

The little trickle that went from it seemed just to spread out and lose itself almost immediately in the earth; but it served our purpose, and here we camped.

Donoghue had been like a dazed man since morning, but now, after the strong tea, he was greatly refreshed and had his wits collected sufficiently to suggest that we should keep watch that night, lest another party were following us up. He also washed the wound in his forehead, and, finding it bleeding afresh after that, pricked what he called the "pimples" from a fir-tree, and with the sap exuding therefrom stanching the bleeding again, and I suppose used one of the best possible healers in so doing.

That there were wildcats in the woods there was no doubt. They screamed half the night, with a sound like weeping infants, very dolorous to hear. Apache Kid took the first watch, Donoghue the second, and I the third. I was to waken them at sunrise, and after Donoghue shook me up and I sat by the glowing fire, I remember the start with which I saw, after a space, as I sat musing of many things, as one will muse in such surroundings, two gleaming eyes looking into mine out of the woods—just the eyes, upright ovals with a green light, turning suddenly into horizontal ovals and changing color to red as I became aware of them.

We were generally careful to make our fire of such wood as would flame, or glow, without shedding out sparks that might burn our blankets; but some such fuel had been put on the fire that night, and it suddenly crackled up then and sent forth a shower of sparks. And at that the eyes disappeared. I flicked the sparks off my sleeping comrades and then sat musing again, looking up on the stars and alternately into the darkness of the woods and into the glow of the fire, and suddenly I saw all along the forest a red line of light spring to life.

I saw it climb the stems of trees far through the wood and run up to the branches. A forest fire, thought I to myself, and wondered if our danger was great in that place. I snuffed the air. There was certainly the odor of burning wood, but that might have been from our camp-fire alone, and there was also the rich, unforgettable odor of the balsam.

But so greatly did the line of fire increase and glow that I stretched forth my hand and touched Donoghue upon the shoulder. He started up, and, following the pointing of my finger, glared a moment through the spaces of the forest. Then he dropped back again.

"It is the dawn," he said, and drew the blankets over his head. "Wake me in another hour."

But I sat broad-awake, my heart glowing with a kind of voiceless worship, watching that marvelous dawn. It spread more slowly than I would have imagined possible, taking tree by tree, running left and right, and creeping forward like an advancing army; and then suddenly the sky overhead was full of a quivering, pale light, and in the dim blue pool of the heavens the stars went out. But no birds sang to the new day, only I heard again the tap-tap of a woodpecker echoing about through the woods.

So I filled the can with water, which was a slow process at that very tiny spring, and mixed the flour ready for the flapjacks and then woke my comrades.

I must not weary you, however, recounting hour by hour as it came. I have other things to tell you of than these—matters regarding hasty hot-blooded man in place of a chronicle of slow, benignant nature.

On the journey of this day we came very soon to what seemed to be the "height of land" in that part, and descending on the other side came into a place of swamp where the mosquitoes assaulted us in clouds. So terribly did they pester us that on the midday camp, while Apache Kid made ready our tea—for eatables we did with a cold flapjack apiece, having made an

extra supply at breakfast, so as to save time at noon—I employed myself in switching him about the head with a leafy branch in one hand, while with the other I drove off another cloud of these pests that made war upon me.

No sooner had we the tea ready than we put clods and wet leaves upon the fire, raising a thick smoke, a "smudge," as it is called, and sitting in the midst of that protecting haze we partook of our meal, coughing and spluttering, it is true; but the smoke in the eyes and throat was a mere nothing to the mosquito nuisance.

I think that for the time being the mosquitoes spurred us forward as much as did our fear of being forestalled in our quest. Mounting higher on our left where a cold wind blew, instead of dipping down into the next wooded valley, we found peace at last. As we tramped along on this crest, where our view was no longer cramped, where at last we could see more than the next knoll before us or the next abyss of woods, I noticed Apache constantly scanning the country as though he was trying to take his bearings.

Donoghue, who was now more like his rational, or irrational self, soon seemed to waken up to his surroundings, and fell to the same employ.

It was to the valley westward, now that we were upon the ridge, that they directed their attention. Donoghue, his loose jaw hanging, his teeth biting on his lips, posted on ahead of us and suddenly he stopped, stood revealed against the blue peak of the mountain on whose ridge we now traveled, in an attitude that bespoke some discovery. He was on a little eminence of the mountain's shoulder, a treeless mound where boulders of granite stood about in gigantic ruin, with other granite outposts dotted down the hill into the midst of the trees, which stood there small and regular, just as you see them in a new plantation at home. He shaded his eyes from the light, looked finally satisfied, and then sat down to await our coming.

Apache stepped forward more briskly; quick and eager we trotted up the

rise where Donoghue merely pointed into the valley that had now for over an hour been so eagerly scanned. There, far off, among the green forest bottom, the leaden gray glint of a lake showed among the wearisome woods.

"Ah! We'll have a smoke-up," said Apache, with an air of relief. So we sat down on our blanket-rolls in the sunlight. There was a gleam in my companions' eyes, a look of expectation on their faces, and after that "smoke-up" Apache spoke with a determined voice, dropping his cigarette-end and tramping it with his heel.

"We camp at that lake to-night," said he.

"To-night?" said I, in astonishment, for it seemed to me a monstrous length to go before nightfall; but he merely nodded his head vehemently, and said again: "To-night," and then after a pause: "We lose time," said he, "there may be others," and we rose to our feet.

"We couldn't camp up here, anyhow," said Donoghue, looking round.

It was truly a weird sight there, for we could see so many valleys now, hollows, gulches, clefts in the chaos of the mountains; here, white masts of trees all lightning-struck on a blasted knoll; there, a rocky cut in the face of the landscape like a monstrous scar; at another place a long-toothed ridge that must have broken many a storm in its day. Besides, already, though it was but afternoon, a keen, icy-cold wind ran like a draft there and the voice of the wind rose and died in our ears from somewhere in that long, rocky backbone, with a sound like a railway-train going by; and so it would arise and cease again, and then cry out elsewhere in a voice of lamentation, low and mournful.

Apache Kid was looking round and round, his eyes wide and bright.

"I should like to see this in winter," said he, "when leaves fall and cold winds come."

"There's no mortal man ever saw this in winter," said Donoghue, "and no man ever will."

I saw Apache Kid linger, and look on

that terrible and awesome landscape, with a half-frightened fondness; and then he cast one more glance at the leaden gray of the lake below and another at a peak on our right and, his bearings thus in mind, led the way downward into that dark and forbidding valley.

I shall never forget the journey down to that lake.

Winding here, winding there, using the ax frequently as the thin trees I mentioned were passed and we entered the virgin forest below, close and tangled, we worked slowly down-hill; and it was with something of pleasure that we came at last again onto what looked like a trail through the forest.

We were on the track of the indomitable "buck" again, I thought. But it was not so. His trail had kept directly on upon the hill, Apache Kid told me.

"I thought you saw it from the knoll there," he said, and then with a queer look on his face, "but you can't go back now to look on it. Man, do you know that a hunger takes me often to go back and see just such places as that on the summit there? I take an absolute dread that I must die without ever seeing them again. There are places I cannot allow myself to think of lest that comes over me that forces—yes, forces—me to go back again for one look more. I love a view like that more than ever any man loved a woman."

Donoghue looked round to me and touched his forehead and shook his head gently.

"Rathouse," he said; "crazy as ever they make 'em."

"But this is a trail we have come onto, sure enough," I said.

My companions looked at it quietly and I noticed how they both at once unslung their Winchesters from their shoulders, for Donoghue had again taken his share of our burdens.

"Not exactly a trail," said Apache Kid, "at least, neither an Indian's trail nor a buck's trail this time. What was that, Donoghue?"

A sharp crack, as of a branch broken near us, came distinctly to our ears.

Donoghue did not answer directly but said instead:

"You, walk first; let Francis here in the middle. I'll come last," and Donoghue dropped behind me.

Apache nodded and we started on our way.

Neither to left nor right could we see beyond a few feet, so close did the underbrush whelm the way.

The sound of our steps in the stillness was more eery than ever to my ears. I felt that I should go barefoot here by right, soundless, stealthy, watching every foot of the way for a lurking death in the bushes.

"Crack," sounded again a broken branch on our left.

"Well," said Apache softly—I was treading almost on his heels and Donoghue was close behind me—"twigs don't snap of their own accord like that in midsummer."

We kept on, however, not hastening our steps at all, but at the same even, steady pace and suddenly again in the stillness—"Crack!"

Again a branch or twig had snapped near-by in the thick woods through which we could not see.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE COMING OF MIKE CANLAN.

There was a cold shiver ran in my spine at that second crack, for it was fearsome to know that some live thing, man or beast, was following us up through the bushes.

"It's a lion, sure thing," Donoghue said behind me, "and it's goin' at this stalking of us darned careless, too. I wisht we could get to a clear place and give him a chance to show himself."

"Lion?" asked I, astonished.

"Yes—panther, that is," said Apache Kid.

"In the phraseology of the country, that is," I suggested.

Apache looked over his shoulder at me.

"You are pretty cool for a tender-foot," he remarked. "This is a bad spot for us to be stalked by a beast

like that. Let me come behind now, Larry," he continued. "We are getting to a clear place, I think, and he may spring before we get out."

"Not you," said Larry. "Just you go on ahead and let the lad keep in between."

Here the bushes thinned out considerably and when we reached this opened part Donoghue bade us walk straight on.

"Don't look back," said he. "Let him think we don't know he's followin'. Give him a chance to cross this here glade. We'll stop just inside them farther trees, and if he shows himself there, we'll get him then, sure thing. What between men and beasts we suttin'ly have been followed up some this trip, and I'm gettin' tired of it. This here followin' up has got to end."

But though we carried out Donoghue's suggestion, crossing the open space, entering again on the path where it continued down-hill in the forest again, and halting there, the "lion" did not show himself.

It was here, while standing a little space, waiting for the panther's appearance, if panther it was that shadowed us, that Apache Kid pointed a finger at the ground before us, where a tiny trickle of water, in crossing the path, made it muddy and moist.

"See the deer marks?" he whispered. "Neat, aren't they? This, you see, is a game trail from the hills down to the lake——"

"No good," broke in Donoghue. "He ain't going to show himself."

So we passed on, and soon the way became more precipitous; the underbrush cleared; the trees thinned; and in a jog trot we at last went rattling down the final incline and came right out with the impetus of that run upon the open ground around the lake, though of the lake itself, now that we were at its level, we could discern little—only tiny gray glimpses, so closely was it thronged about by rushes and they so tall.

A thousand frogs were singing, making quite a din in our ears, so pent in was the sound in that cuplike hollow.

But weary as we were, we rejoiced to have come to our desired camp and soon were sitting fed and contented round the fire.

Of all our camps so far this seemed to me the most secure. Consequently, it horrified me a little when Apache Kid remarked, taking his cigarette from his lips:

"Where do you think Canlan will be to-night?"

Donoghue considered the burning log:

"Oh! Allowing for him getting on to us pulling out, even the day after we left, and allowing for him starting out right then, he can't be nigher here than a day's journey, coming into the country the way he would do it—over the shoulder of Mount Baker and in that ways."

"He'll be over behind there, then," said Apache, pointing; "right over that ridge, sitting by his lonesome camp and perhaps half a dozen fellows dogging him up too, eh?"

"Like enough," said Donoghue; "but he's accustomed to bein' dogged up."

"Those who live in glass houses——" remarked Apache Kid, with a laugh that had no real merriment in the ring of it.

Donoghue raised his eyes to Apache's across the fire and laughed back. And they both seemed to fall into a reverie after these words. Presently Apache Kid snorted and seemed to fling the thoughts aside that had been occupying him. But anon he fell brooding again, biting on his lip and closing an eye to the glow.

It was after one such long, meditative gazing into the glowing and leaping embers that he spoke to me, and with such a ring in his voice as caused me to look upon him with a new interest. The tone of the voice, it seemed to me, hinted at some deep thought.

"Where do you come from, Francis?" he asked. "What is your nationality?"

"Why, I'm a cosmopolitan," said I, half smiling, as one is prone to do when a man asks him some trivial matter with a voice as serious as though he spoke of strange things.

"Yes; we all are," said Apache Kid, putting aside my lightness.

He mused again, plucking his finger-knuckles, and then turned an eye to Donoghue, who was already surveying him under his watchful brows.

"Shall I tell him?" he asked.

"Tell him what?" said Donoghue, looking uncomfortable, I thought, as though this mood of his partner's was one he did not relish.

"Tell him what we are—how we live—all that?"

From Apache to me and back again Donoghue glanced, and then: "Oh! tell, if you like," said he. "There won't no harm come from telling him. He's safe. He's all right, is Francis."

Again there was a pause.

"Well," said Apache Kid finally, ending his reverie. "The fact is that we—Donoghue and I—except upon occasion, when we want to make some sort of a character for ourselves, to show a visible means of support—the fact is, we are——"

"Spit it out," said Donoghue. "Spit it out. It ain't everybody has the courage to do it."

I considered what was coming.

"The fact is," said Apache Kid, "we are what they call in this country road-agents—make our living by holding up stage-coaches and——"

"By gum! we've held up more nor stage-coaches," cried Donoghue, and began fumbling in an inner pocket with eager fingers.

"And banks," said Apache Kid, gazing on me to see the effect of this disclosure.

Donoghue stretched across to me, his loose face gleaming with a kind of joy.

"Read that," he said. "Read what that says," and he handed me a long newspaper cutting.

What I read on the cutting was:

DARING HOLD-UP ON THE A. T. & S. F. ROUTE. THE TWOSOME GANG AGAIN AT WORK.

"That's us," said Donoghue, gloating. "It reads pretty good, but Apache here says there ain't no sense in the

headin' about the twosome gang—says them journalist boys is no good. Seems to me a right slick notice—that's us, anyway."

Apache Kid seemed disturbed, annoyed.

"Well! what do you think?" he said, fixing me with his eye.

"I'm sorry," said I.

Donoghue threw back his head and laughed.

"It's not the right sort of way to live?" said Apache Kid, questioningly. "You know I can make out a fine case in its defense."

"Yes," I replied. "I have no doubt you could, and that's just what makes me all the more sorry to think of your doing this. Still, I feel that your having told me prevents my stating an opinion."

"If some one else had told——" he began.

"Then I might speak," said I.

"Should it not be the other way about?" he asked, half smiling.

"Perhaps it should," said I. "But if you honor me by telling me, it is enough for me just to say I am sorry. Would you have me preach?"

He looked on me with great friendliness.

"I understand the sentiment," said he. "But I should like you to preach, if you wish."

"Well," said I, "I have no doubt you could, with the brains you have and your turn for sophistry, make out a very entertaining defense for such a life. 'Murder as a fine art,' you know and——"

"Murder?" asked Donoghue; but Apache Kid silenced him with a gesture, and I continued:

"But neither you nor those who heard your defense could treat it otherwise than as a piece of airy and misplaced, misdirected wit, on a par with your misplaced love of adventure."

He nodded at that part, and his face cleared a little.

"That but makes me all the more sorry," said I, "to know you are——" I paused. "A parasite!" I blurted out.

"Parasite!" he cried; and his hand

flew down to his holster, wavered, and fell soundless on his crossed legs.

It was the first time he had looked on me in anger.

"What's parasite?" asked Donoghue.

"A louse," said Apache Kid.

"Hell!" drawled Donoghue, and glanced at me. "You need lookin' after."

"There are parasites and parasites," said I. "In this case it is more like these deer-lice we came by in the forest."

We had suffered from these, but I have not said anything of them, for it is not pleasant.

"Well," drawled Donoghue, "they are fighters, anyway, they are. You kind o' respect them."

Apache Kid smiled.

"Yes," he said, in a low voice, "it's the right word, nevertheless."

Donoghue jeered.

"Waal! Here's where I come in! Here's the beauty of not being ediccat to big words nor what they mean, nor bein' able to follow a high-toned talk except the way a man follows a poor-blazed trail."

Apache surveyed him with interest for a moment and then again turning to me he heaved a little sigh and said:

"I wonder if you would do something for me after we get through with this expedition. If I were to give you a little wad of bills, enough for a year's holiday at home, I wonder if you'd go and take a squint at the house where my folks lived when I left home; find out if they are still there, and if not, trace them up. You'd need to promise me not to let that sentimental side of you run away with you. You'd need to promise not to go and tell them I'm alive; for I'm sure they have given me up for dead years ago and mourned the allotted space of time that men and women mourn—and forgotten. It would only be opening fresh wounds to hear of me. They have grieved for my death; I would not have them mourn for my life. But I—well, I sometimes wonder. You understand what I mean and——"

"Watch your eye!" roared Donoghue.

"Watch your——" but a shot out of the forest sent him flying along the ground, he having risen suddenly and stretched for his rifle.

Instead of clutching it he went far beyond, plowing the earth with his outstretched hands; and right on the first report came a second and Apache cried: "Oh!"

He sagged down all in a heap, but I flung round for my revolver—the Winchester I had had no practise with. I heard the quick dull plod of running feet and before I could get my finger on my weapon a voice was bellowing out:

"Don't shoot, man; don't shoot! It's Canlan; Mike Canlan. You ain't hostile to Mike Canlan."

I wheeled about, and there he was trailing his smoking rifle in his left hand and extending his right to me; Mike Canlan, little Mike Canlan with the beady eyes, the parchmentlike, pockmarked face, and the boy's body.

Had my revolver been to hand, he had been a dead man, I verily believe—he or I. As it was I leaped on him crying:

"Murderer! Murderer!"

Down came my fist on his head and at the jar his rifle fell from his grasp. The next stroke took him on the lips, sending him backward. I pounded him till my arms were weary, he lying there with his faded, pockmarked face and his colorless eyes dancing in pain and crying out: "Let up! Let up, you fool! We ain't hostile. It's Canlan!" he cried, between blows. "Mike Canlan."

At last I did "let up" and stood back from him.

He sat up and wiped the blood from his mouth and spat out a tooth.

"Ah, lad," he said, "here's a fine way to repay me for savin' your life. Think I couldn't have laid you out stark and stiff there aside them two?"

My gorge rose to hear him talk thus. "Easy I could have done it," he went on, "but I didn't. And why?"

He sidled to me on his hams without attempting to rise, and held up a finger to me.

"Why, lad, you saved my life once, so

I spared yours this blessed night. That's me, that's Mike Canlan. And see here, lad, you and me now——"

"Silence!" I cried, drawing back from his touch, as he crept nearer.

I had seen murder done, of the most horrible kind. I had seen a big-hearted, sparkling-eyed man, not yet in his prime, struck out of life in a moment. What he was telling me of himself was nothing to me now. I only knew that I had come to like him and that he was gone—slain by this little, insignificant creature that you could not call a man. And I had seen another man, whom I did not altogether hate, sent to as summary an end. I held this man who talked in the singsong voice at my feet in horror, in loathing. I bent to feel the heart of Apache Kid, for I thought I saw a movement in his sun-browned neck, as of a vein throbbing and——

"Oh, they're dead, dead and done with," cried Canlan. "If they wasn't, I'd shove another shot into each of 'em just to make sure. But they're dead men, for Canlan killed 'em.

"If they wasn't, I'd shove another shot into each of them!"

The words rang in my ears with warning. I had just been on the point of trying to raise Apache Kid; a cry of joy was almost on my lips to think that life was not extinct; but the words warned me and I turned about.

"He's dead, ain't he?" said Canlan, and I lied to him.

"Yes," I replied. "He is dead, and as for you——"

"As for me—nothing!" said Canlan, and he looked along his gleaming barrel at where my heart fluttered in my breast.

"You and me," said he, "has to come to terms right now. Oh! I don't disrespec' you none for not takin' kindly to this. I like you all the better for it. But think of what you've fallen into all through me. Here's half shares in the Lost Cabin Mine for you now instead of a paltry third—half shares, my lad. How does that catch you?"

I was not going to tell him the terms I was here on, but I said:

"Put down your rifle then, and let us talk it over."

"Come, now, that's better," said Canlan cheerily; but I noticed that a nerve in his left cheek kept twitching oddly as he spoke, and his head gave constant nervous jerks left and right, like a man shaking flies away from him, and he sniffed constantly, and I think was quite unaware that he did so. But I did not wonder at his nervousness after such a heinous deed as he had performed that evening.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE LOST CABIN IS FOUND.

"Come, come," said Canlan, suddenly, with an access of the facial twitching and another sudden jerking of his head. "If them's your blankets, pack 'em up and let's git out o' this, back to my camp the other side of the lake."

I thought it as well to obey him, for if either of these men yet lived and should by any fortune emit as much as a moan, I knew that Canlan would make a speedy end then. If they lived, the best I could do for them was to leave them.

And yet there was another thing that I might do—snatch up one of the revolvers and straightway mete out justice—no less—upon this murderer.

But he was on the alert and shoved his Winchester against my neck as I stooped, tying my blanket-roll, with my eyes surreptitiously measuring the distance to the nearest weapon.

"See here," he said, "I can't be runnin' chances with you. I've let you off already, but I can't be givin' you chances to kill me now. Funny thing it would be for me to let you off for having saved my life once, and then you turn round and plug me now. Eh? That would be a skin kind of a game to play on a man. If that's your gun layin' there with the belt, you can buckle on the belt but keep your hands off the gun, or I gets tired o' my kindness. See?"

He snarled the last word at me, and over my shoulder I saw the leer on his

gray face as he spoke. So I packed my blankets without more ado and buckled on my belt, with the revolver in its holster hanging from it, and at Canlan's suggestion took also a bag of flour with me.

"I guess there ain't no call to see what them two has in their pockets by way of dough," said he. "We don't have no need for feelin' in dead men's pockets now—you and me," and he winked and laughed a dry, crackling, nervous laugh, and stooped to lift a torch from our fire.

With this raised in his hand he whirled about on me and said: "Now remember, I trusts you," and led off at a brisk pace from the trodden circle of the camp-fire. He had the tail of his eye on me, and I followed at once.

We skirted the lake, keeping under the trees, the torch sending the twisted shadows flying before us and bringing them up behind; and just at the bend of the lake I looked back at that camp, and it brought to my mind the similar, or almost similar, scene I had witnessed in the place of smoldering stumps behind Camp Kettle.

We plodded round the north end of this little lake, and then a horse whinnied in the gloom, and, "Here we are," cried Canlan, and stooping he thrust the torch into the embers of the fire he had evidently had there and trodden out suddenly. He kicked it together again, and soon the flames were leaping up vigorously. Then he turned and looked on me.

"Well," said he, "you and your friends must ha' traveled pretty quick. Clever lads! Clever lads! Did you know that you was goin' to try and spoil Mike Canlan's game that day I gave you good-by at Baker City?"

"Not I," I replied. "I did not know then that you knew the secret."

"Ah, well, I did! Clever lad Apache thought himself, I guess, slinkin' away down to Camp Kettle and cuttin' in that ways. Well, I ain't surprised he took that way. He knows it well. If all stories is true, he's played hide-and-seek in that same valley more nor once with somebody after him."

He blinked on me, and then sniffed twice, and suddenly pursed his lips and said:

"But that ain't here nor there. Are you on to take my offer o' half-shares in this?"

The whole man was still loathsome to me, and I cried out:

"No, no! And would to Heaven I had never heard of this horrible business."

"Well," drawled Canlan, "I'm gettin' some tired o' havin' no sleep nights for sittin' listenin' for fellers follerin' me up. Not that they'd kill me in my sleep. I guess I'm too preciouslike for that. I've been keepin' myself up on tanglefoot all the way in, but I didn't bring nigh enough for them mountains, and it's give out. It's give out this last day and a night, and by jiminy I'm gettin' them again. I feel 'em comin' on. It ain't good for a man like me wantin' my tonic. Say," and his face twitched again. "I'm jest holdin' myself together now by fair devil's desperation; when I get to the end o' this journey I'm gettin' some scared my brain-pan will jest—" he stopped abruptly and began on a fresh track: "Well, it's natural, I guess, for you to feel bad to-night, you bein' partners o' them fellers so recent. But you'll be better come morning. Say, if I lay down and sleep you won't shoot me sleepin', eh?"

"I won't do that," said I.

"That's a bargain, then," he cried, and before I could say another word he threw himself down beside the fire.

He drew his hand over his brow and showed me it wet.

"That's for wantin' liquor," he said. "A man what don't know the crave can't understand it. I know what I need, though. Sleep—that's what I need; and I'm jest goin' to force myself to sleep."

I made no reply, but looked on him as he lay, and perceived that his ghastly face was all clammy in the fire-glow as he reclined in this attempt to steady his unstrung nerves. For me, I sat on, scarcely heeding the noises of the midnight forest. I heard a mud-turtle ever

and again, with that peculiar sound as of a pump being worked. That was a sound new to me, but the other cries—of the wildcats—I heeded little.

Once or twice I thought of taking a brand from the fire to light me round to the camp across the lake, that I might discover whether indeed both my friends were dead. But, as I turned over this thought of return in my mind, Canlan brought down his arms again from above his head where they had lain relaxed, and, opening his eyes, rolled on his side and looked up at me.

"Don't you do it," he said.

"Do what?" I inquired.

"What you was thinkin' of," he replied.

"And what was that?"

"You know," he said, thickly and grimly, "and I know. Two men alone in the mountains can't ever hide their thoughts from each other. Mind you that!"

"What was I thinking of doing, then?" I asked.

"That's all right," he said. "You can't bluff me."

"Well, what then?" I cried, irritated.

He sat up.

"You was thinkin' of goin' right off, right now. No, it wasn't to get in ahead of me at the Cabin Mine. I'm beginning to guess that Apache Kid didn't let you know so much as that. But you was just feelin' so sick and sorrylike that you thought o' getting up quiet and takin' my hoss there and—"

He was watching my face as he spoke, peering up at me and sniffing. With a kick he got the fire into a blaze, but without taking his eyes from me. Then, "No, you wasn't thinkin' that, either," he said, in a voice as of disappointment that his power of mind-reading seemed at fault.

"Derned if I dew know what you was thinkin'," he acknowledged. "Oh, you're deeper than most," he went on, "but I'll get to know you yet. Yes, siree; I'll see right through you yet."

He lay down after this vehement talk, as though exhausted, wiping the sweat from his brow where it gleamed in the little furrows of leathery skin.

In the cleft of his chin I noticed one bead, that evaded his hand, gather and drop. He was not a pretty man, I assure you.

A feeling as of pride came over me to think that this evil man was willing to take my word that I would not meddle him in his sleep, as I saw him close his eyes once more—this time really asleep, I think.

But to attempt to return to Apache Kid's camp I now was assured in my mind would be a folly. At a merest movement of mine Canlan might awaken, and if he suspected that I entertained a hope of at least one of my late companions being alive, he might himself be shaken in his belief in the deadly accuracy of his aim.

I pictured him waking to find me stealing away to Apache's camp and stealthily following me up. I even pictured our arrival at the farther shore—the still glowing fire, both my companions sitting up bleeding and dazed and trying to tend each other, Canlan marching up to them while they were still in that helpless predicament and blowing their brains from his Winchester's mouth. So I sat still where I was and eventually dozed a little myself, till morning came to the tree-tops and slipped down into the valley and glowed down from the sky, and then Canlan awoke fairly and stretched himself and yawned a deal and moaned, "God, God, God!"—three times.

And I thought to myself that this reptile of a man might well cry on God on waking that morning.

Neither he nor I, each for our own reasons, ate any breakfast. My belongings I allowed him to pack on his horse with his own, so that I might not be burdened with them, the chance of a tussle with Canlan being still in my mind. Then, after we had extinguished the fire, a thought came to me. It was when I saw that he was going to strike directly up-hill through the forest that I scented an excuse to get back to my comrades. True, my hope that they lived was now pretty nigh at ebb, for I argued to myself that if life was in them, they would already have

managed to follow us. Aye! I believed that either of them, supposing even that he could not stand, would have *crawled* along our trail at the first light of day, bent upon vengeance; for I had learned to know them both as desperate men—though to one of them, despite what I knew of his life, I had grown exceedingly attached.

"I'll go back to our old camp," said I, "and bring along an ax if you are going right up that way. We may need it to clear a way for the horse."

He wheeled about.

"Say!" he said. "What are you so struck on goin' back to your camp for? Guess I'll come with you and see just what you want."

He looked me so keenly in the eye that I said at once, knowing that to object to his presence would be the worst attitude possible: "Come, then," and stepped out; but when he saw that I was not averse to his company he cried out:

"No, no. I have an ax here that will serve the turn if we need to do any cutting. But I reckon we won't need to use an ax none. It's up this here dry watercourse we go, and there won't be much clearin' wanted here."

It was now broad day, and as I turned to follow Canlan again I gave up my old friends for dead.

The man's short, broad back and childish legs, and the whole shape of him, seemed to combine to raise my gorge.

"I would be liker a man," I thought, "if I struck this reptile dead." And the thought was scarce come into my mind and must, I think, have been glittering in my eyes, when he flashed around on me his colorless face, and said he:

"Remember, I trust my life to you. I take it that you've agreed to my offer of last night to go half-shares on this. God knows you'll have to look after me by nightfall, this blessed day—unless there may be a lot o' drink in that cabin."

At the thought he absolutely screamed:

"A lot o' drink! A lot o' drink!" and

away he went with a sign to me to follow, scrambling up the watercourse before his horse, which followed with plodding hoofs, head rising and falling doggedly, and long tail swishing left and right. I brought up the rear. And thus we climbed the greater part of the forenoon, with occasional rests to regain our wind, till at last we came out on the bald, shorn, last crest of the mountain.

Canlan marched the pony side on to the hill to breathe; and he himself blowing the breath from him in gusts and sniffing a deal, he pointed to the long, black hilltop stretching above us.

"A mountain o' mud," he said. "That's it right enough. Some folks thinks that everything that prospectors says they come across in the mountains is jest their demented imaginatings like; but I seen mountains o' mud before. There's a terror of one in the Crow's Nest Pass, away up the east Kootenai; and there's one in Colorado down to the Warm Springs country. You can feel it quiver under you when you walk on it—all same jelly. See—you see that black crest there? That's all mud. This here, where we are, is good enough earth though, all right, with rock into it. It's here that we turn now. Let me see——"

He took some fresh bearings, look-

ing to the line of hills to the southeast. I thought I could pick out the notch at the summit, over there, through which Apache Kid, Donoghue, and I had come; and then he led off again—along the hill this time, his head jerking terribly, and his whole body indeed, so that now and again he leaped up in little hopping steps like one afflicted with St. Vitus' dance.

Up a rib of the mountain, as it might be called, he marched, I now walking level with him; for I must confess I was excited.

And then I saw at last what I had journeyed so painfully and paid so cruelly to see—a little "shack," or cabin, of untrimmed logs of the color of the earth in which it stood, there, just a stone's cast from us, between the rib on which we stood and the next rib that gave a sweeping contour to the hill and then broke off short, so that the mountain at that place went down in a sharp slope, climbed upon lower down by insignificant, scrubby trees. But there—there was the cabin, sure enough. There was our journey's end.

Canlan turned his ashen face to me, and his yellow eyeballs glittered.

"It looks as we were first," he said, his voice going up at the end into a wavering cry and his lips twitching convulsively.

TO BE CONTINUED.

A MERE MATTER OF BUSINESS

THE manager of the big store stood stock-still outside of the little boxlike chamber which held the telephone of the establishment, for he was a very startled manager indeed. Within the chamber he could hear Miss Jones, the typist, speaking, and this is a scrap of the conversation the scandalized man overheard:

"I love you, dear, and only you! I'm weeping my heart away! Yes, my darling, speak to me once more! I love you, dear—I love you so!"

The young woman rang off and stepped out of the cabinet to confront the angry manager.

"Miss Jones," he said, "that telephone has been fixed where it is for the purpose of convenience in conducting business, and not for love-making in office hours. I am surprised at you. Don't let it occur again!"

The young woman froze him with a glance.

"I was ordering some new music from the publishers for No. 3 department," she explained icily.

And then the manager felt that this was a cold world indeed.

Mr. Garfield's Matrimonial Experiment

By Walter Hackett

A pretty dangerous experiment it was that Mr. Garfield tried, one we should hardly care to advise husbands to copy. All sorts of trying complications are likely to result. Here they are principally humorous, at least to the reader.



THIS is a plain narrative of John Garfield's matrimonial experiment. Garfield told it to me himself, and I will repeat it to you as nearly as possible in his own words. I

have his permission to do this as both of us believe it may be of some value in settling the marriage question. If it does, we shall expect to be looked on as public benefactors. The narrative follows:

I did not marry until I was forty. I never had time until then—I had hustled from the time I was a kid. But at forty I got hold of a patent that made my pile. After that I had nothing to do but boss people and count my money. Neither of these things was very amusing, so I got restless and decided that what I needed was a home. That is what most men decide when time hangs heavy on their hands. When they get it, it keeps them busy trying to think of other places that will keep them away from it.

Well, as soon as I began to think about a home, I thought about getting married, and when a man begins to think about getting married, it is all over with him. All but the ceremony. That came quickly enough in my case. I was married and settled before I realized it. You see, when a man has money, the mothers do the rest.

My wife was a nice girl, and, to do her justice, I think she cared for me.

I mean at first before she knew me, which seems to be the only time that women care for their husbands. When she did—well, that is what I am going to tell you about.

For the first six months, our life was perfect. I never knew anybody could be so happy and keep out of jail. Every night when I came home, she would be waiting to open the door and throw her soft white arms around my neck. Then we would call each other pet names and sort of coo. Yes, me! Forty years old and six-feet-two in my stocking-feet and talking baby talk! And what is more, I liked it. Why, I used to spend all my time during the day thinking up new names to call her when I should get home. One day, I tried some of them on my stenographer by mistake. It took two solid hours of oratory to make her understand it.

As I said, this lasted about six months. Then the novelty wore off; that is, it did for my wife and she stopped meeting me at the door. Instead, she hired a butler—a portly person with an accusing eye who always looked at me as though I was not fit to live. It used to take all my courage to ring the bell and face him when I got home in the evening. And I tried to let myself in with my latch-key, but he caught me at it and looked so annoyed and shocked at my bad form that I begged his pardon and never tried it again.

After I got by him, I used to look for my wife. For a while I would greet

her with baby talk. Not for long, though. She would just give me one cold look out of her eyes and say:

"John, do your utmost not to be a fool. I know that it is hard, but do your best. And did you secure seats for the theater to-night?"

Well, if I had not secured them, I did, and right away, too. Not that we ever went to any musical comedies or farces or any place where you could get any amusement. No, sir, she would not stand for that. We used to go and see plays where everybody was miserable because they were married. Usually, the principal characters ran away from their husbands or wives with somebody else's husband or wife after which they committed suicide. Then everybody but me would applaud and say that after all there was nothing like real art.

I want to tell you that it was not long before that sort of thing got on my nerves. It got on my wife's nerves after a time and she would mope around in a way that frightened me. I could not do anything to help her, because every time she looked at me she moped more than ever.

Then I decided to go and consult my friend, Bob Perley. Bob had been married twice and had buried both wives, so I looked on him as a kind of expert.

He heard me through, and then he leaned back and lighting a cigar said: "Garfield, you are only facing a crisis that every married man must face. If you face it successfully, your marriage will be a success; if you do not, nothing will ever make it so."

That was rather discouraging, so I wiggled a bit in my chair as he went on:

"No woman is happy unless her mind is occupied. If you have sufficient ingenuity to keep your wife's so, you will have a happy and a pleasant life; if you do not, only a judge or an undertaker can give it to you."

Naturally, I was considerably interested. I leaned forward in my chair and tapped him on the knee.

"What would you suggest," said I,

"that I do to keep my wife's mind busy?"

"Ah," he replied, wagging his head at me very solemn, "there you have me. Every woman is different; some entirely so. In the old days, the good old days I might call them, they kept the women as drudges and slaves. They used to work from before sunup until after dark, and they liked it. Unhappy marriages then? No one ever heard of them. The women's minds were busy and they were happy and contented. But, nowadays, we have the new thought and the suffragettes are ever with us, both of which are so new that they are premature, and one cannot treat his woman sensibly, so it is necessary to invent ways to keep them from thinking about themselves."

Now, I am free to admit I did not know whether there was any sense in what he was saying or not, but it sounded impressive, so I made up my mind to act on it. After considerable thinking, I hit upon the idea of French lessons and suggested them to my wife. She jumped at the idea and for three weeks worked at them with a will—three happy weeks they were for me—she was quite like her old self. But about the time she changed the cook's name from Mary to Marie the novelty wore off and she began to mope again. This start had opened up a new line, however, and I suggested German. That lasted nine days. Then followed, in quick succession, Italian, Spanish, Arabic, Polish and Russian. None of them was continued longer than a week. In despair, I suggested Chinese, but she declared she was sick of languages.

So we switched to various other accomplishments. Music—instrumental—lasted two weeks; vocal, one hour and forty minutes.

Cooking held sway for four days, sewing for three; while social-settlement work occupied her for a week. Then my ingenuity began to give out. As it was, I had been neglecting my business for some time figuring out new things to keep her busy. But I had proved that Perley was right. Whenever she was busy, we were an ideal

married couple. Accordingly I went to him again. This time with more confidence than ever.

"Bob," I said, "is there anything that will keep a woman interested permanently?"

"Yes," he answered, "there is."

"What is it?" I asked.

"A man," he replied laconically.

"Well," I complained, "my wife does not seem to be interested in me."

"Ah," he put in, smiling broadly, "that is the point. You"—he emphasized the *you*—"are married to her."

"But I don't understand!" I said.

"The only man who permanently interests women," he explained, "is a man to whom they are not married."

I admit that that struck me all of a heap.

"Do you mean," I said angrily, "that I must permit some other to make love to my wife in order that we may be happy together?"

"I meant what I said," he retorted hotly; and he was considerably nettled by my tone. "I simply recited facts to you. I did not offer advice."

"But, Bob," I said, a great deal more gently, "is there no other way to interest a woman for all time?"

"None that I know of," he replied and that ended the interview.

I came away right downhearted. It looked like my marriage was to be a failure and I hate to fail at anything. Besides, I was fond of my wife. The darkest hour, however, usually comes just before the dawn, and it was just when I was most downcast that I hit upon a great idea. What suggested it, I never could tell. I have invented tons of other things that have made some money, and they all came in just the same way. A sudden flash in the brain and then the whole thing clear in my mind. That is how this came to me. Why not let a man who never existed fall in love with her? That was safe and at the same time should prove effectual. I regarded the thing as an inspiration.

I decided to put the plan into operation at once. So I bought some stationery and went to my office. Then

I wrote a letter to my wife in an assumed hand. The letter declared that the writer had seen her driving in the park—she used to go there every afternoon—and he could not refrain from writing to her to express his sincere admiration. That was all. I signed it Raymond Montgomery. It was fine and high-sounding and romantic.

Well, I posted it, and the next morning I saw it lying on my wife's plate with the rest of the mail on the breakfast-table. I watched her when she read it, but apparently it made no impression. She just rang the bell and ordered the butler to tell the coachman that she would not drive that afternoon. She continued reading her letters.

That was discouraging, but life has taught me that if you are persistent you can do anything—or nearly anything. So I wrote another letter in the same handwriting. This time it was one of apology and regret. She had not been in the park that day, the writer said, and he feared his temerity in addressing her had kept her away. He begged a thousand pardons, and implored her to continue to drive that he might see her now and again. It was signed as before and posted, and the next day it lay by her breakfast-plate. She read it, but as before with no apparent interest and again announced that she would not drive in the park.

That worried me. All that I was succeeding in doing was in destroying one of her occupations—which made it worse for me. Therefore, I decided that Mr. Raymond Montgomery would write no more. I was rather glum when I went home that night. When she had nothing to amuse herself with during the day, home was not a very pleasant place. It was a surprise to find her in better spirits than she had been for months. She was even more than polite to me. Her mood continued the same, until the next morning at breakfast. When she came to the table she looked languidly over the mail. Then rather anxiously; then a quick color swept into her face, and a frown of annoyance spread itself upon her brow.

I asked her what the matter was, and she said—well, it is not necessary to repeat what she said, but it was rather uncomplimentary. She drove that day, and the next morning at breakfast made no secret of her disappointment in the mail she received. And I understood. My plan was a success.

Accordingly I wrote her another letter, and followed it with one every day. She always read them in the same careless fashion, but she always looked for them. I knew they were making her think, too. She was always so pleasant and happy. The only trouble was keeping the thing up. I could not continue writing short notes, presently it was letters. Now, no one can continue writing a one-sided correspondence. They had to be answered. Well, I engaged a post-office box in my assumed name and sent her the number.

She did not answer that. I was thankful she did not, too. I concluded she must be tired of the whole thing and stopped writing for a day or two. But she moped terribly when I ceased and I had to begin again.

After that, well, sir, it was like a nightmare to me. It is now for me to look back upon it. I was caught in a whirlpool, one that I had myself created. I could not stop and every letter got me further into trouble. Why, in two weeks, I was writing love-letters to my wife under an assumed name and she was answering them. I felt like I was two different men, and I did not know which I was the sorrier for. You see, when I got writing love-letters to her, I wrote what I really felt—what I always longed to tell her but never dared.

At last the climax came. It had to. She suggested a drive in the park. You do not know the shock it gave me.

She had made all the arrangements when and where we were to meet. At first, I decided to do nothing about it. Then I feared that, in her disappointment, she might do something rash, so I went to the street corner she had indicated. Presently a carriage drove up and I jumped in. She was sitting alone in the vehicle, and when she saw who it was her face went white and her hand went to her heart.

"What do you mean by this?" she exclaimed after a moment. By George, sir, I admired her more.

"Why—er—why," I stammered, "I—er—I wanted you to know that I am Raymond Montgomery. I wrote you all those letters."

It sounded foolish when I got it out. Worse than that even, but it was the only thing I could think to say.

"You wrote those letters!" she repeated, with fine scorn. "A clod like you! Never!"

But I succeeded at last in convincing her that I did. Oh, but I was happy to convince her. If she loved him, surely she would love me and all would be well. That shows how much I didn't know about a woman.

"So you thought it fine sport to make a fool of your wife?" she asked bitterly when I had done.

I declared to her that this was not so—that in those letters I had written her of the real love that I felt for her—the love that she would never let me express. She heard me through without a word. Then she asked me if we might drive home.

The next day she left me and went back to her family. On the day following I was served with a summons in a divorce-suit. Ever since, whenever I take a long breath, it takes all my strength to keep from swearing.



A Chat With You

ALMOST every day we receive letters from those who wish to write stories for the magazine and want information as to the "rules," as many of them express it. There are no "rules." Any one who writes a story in the English language, worth the telling and intelligible, is sure of a hearing in this office. At the same time there are one or two points about the stories we are looking for which may interest writers and a great many who are not writers, because they give you some idea of our methods in trying to get fiction to suit the greatest possible number of people.



WE want stories told in good English. We don't want any literary affectation whatever. Vitality, energy, interest—the qualities that make a story strong and desirable—are very seldom combined with a literary pose on the part of the writer. Shakespeare was sneered at by the learned Ben Jonson for his lack of culture and literary quality. Remember that writing a story is only telling it on paper. If you want to find out whether it is good or not, whether it is worth while, whether we and our readers will be interested in it, apply the following test.



WAIT till you are at a party or gathering of some kind of good, nice, well-educated men and women. Then tell your story. Tell it as if it happened to a friend of yours, in the third person, and put all the ginger and enthusiasm, all the descriptive power possible into your telling. Tell it as if it were true. Note the effect on your audience. If the man you buttonhole looks bored from the start, don't trouble

to write the story. If he becomes interested, go ahead with it. If gradually all the other conversation in the room becomes silent, if at the close of your narrative you find the company all listening to you with breathless attention, go ahead rejoicing, for the indications point that your story is worth while.



WHENEVER in doubt as to some particular point in a story, think of your roomful of nice American people and its effect on them. If you are meditating any discussions or expressions at which some of the people present, women especially, would be likely to rise and announce in icy tones that they must be going, leave them out. They are in bad taste and things that are in bad taste don't belong in a good story. The whole point of a story is that it must interest in a pleasant, not a gruesome or shocking way, that it must leave a good taste in the mouth, and that, if possible, it must give some new insight into the characteristics and conditions of men and women.



THAT'S all there is to it. It looks simple, but it is harder than it looks. We want you to send in stories to THE POPULAR if you think you have it in you to write them; but you must remember that in doing so you are entering into competition with the best writers in the world. A man may be the pride of his village as a baseball pitcher, but fall down deplorably if tried out by the Chicago champions, for instance. The big-league team has the choice of players, not from one village, but from the whole country. We are searching hard for good material all over

A CHAT WITH YOU—Continued.

this country and in Europe, as well, so that if you qualify with us you have beaten out a good many others. We print a terribly small proportion of the material that we examine, and print only the best.



IF you really are a good writer you won't be discouraged by anything that we have said. We are giving you the best of our advice on the question, and it is the result of wide experience. If you are going to write, be sure that you have a story to tell before you start, and remember always that you are talking to your readers through the medium of the printed word. It is your business to interest them and get them a little excited, if possible, about what you have to say. Don't ever try to impress them with your literary style or with any airs and graces. Be honest and straightforward in writing. You will find that it pays, as it does in talking.



NEXT month's magazine will open with a complete novel by Arthur Stringer, "The Gun-Runner." It is a full-length novel; a publisher is already preparing to bring it out in book form at \$1.50. It is a better, bigger, more thrilling book than either "The Wire-Tappers" or "Phantom Wires" by the same author. We remember the promise as to future standards we made a month ago and we are going to deliver the goods. There is not another magazine in the world that would plan to publish a story of this length, interest, and importance complete in one number. That isn't boasting; it is the cold-blooded statement of an absolute fact. Think it over. Isn't it so?



THE GUN-RUNNER" is a "wireless" story of the kind that Stringer alone can write. It has a high tension, an atmosphere, a quality of romance and breathless excitement that

you cannot find anywhere else. It is to be followed by a new series of stories by Stringer, which we will announce next month. We have them on hand now, and are waiting anxiously for the time to come when you will read them.



THERE are a dozen things in the January POPULAR each worth featuring for itself. There isn't a story in it that won't make people talk and think about it. The big naval story, "The Fleet With Salt on Its Tail," is a vivid description of an engagement in which an entirely new strategy is adopted. Read it; it is away out of the ordinary. Herbert Kaufman's business story, "The Fifth John James," ought to be read by every man who earns his living by the way of business. Don't say that there isn't plenty of romance and adventure in modern business, that there are not opportunities for the man with brains. Read the story. It was written by a man who knows something about the business world himself.



BY this time you have all made the acquaintance of Ralph D. Paine. For the next year his work will be a regular feature of THE POPULAR, a story or a complete novel appearing in every issue. All the characters whom you met while reading "The Stroke-Oar" will be heard from again. Hector Alonzo McGrath, who tried so hard and failed for all the teams, makes good triumphantly and surprisingly in the story which appears next month, "How Hector Won His Y."



WE promised to tell you something this month about a new find. It is a story, a long story called "Bill Harris—His Line," by Howard Fielding. It is so unlike any other story that we have ever read that it would be very hard indeed to give an adequate description of it. It tells of an association formed for the reform of a number of prominent criminals, and has more interest, plot, incident, and character than we ever expected to see in a tale of its length. Look for the first part of this story in the February number.

No Stropping

No Honing



Give Him a Gillette Safety Razor for Christmas

HE will use it, never fear! And thank you from his heart every time he shaves.

Over two million men are using the Gillette—any one of them will tell you he would not be without it for ten times its cost.

Shaving in the old way is the bane of a man's life. It means time wasted at the barber-shop—or tedious stropping and scraping with the old-fashioned razor, with the certainty of cuts and scratches if he is nervous or in a hurry. Besides, as you know, he is not always shaved when he ought to be.

The Gillette makes shaving easy.

Takes only five minutes for a smooth, satisfying shave, no matter how rough the beard or tender the skin.

No stropping, no honing. Any man can use it. It is the one razor that is safe—cannot cut his face—and it is the only razor that can be adjusted for a light or a close shave.

A man is conservative. He takes to the Gillette like a duck to water once he gets acquainted—but, as with other improvements, it sometimes takes a woman to lead him to it.

The Gillette makes a beautiful gift, with its triple silver-plated handle, in velvet lined, full leather case.

Standard set, as illustrated above, \$5.00.

Combination sets, \$6.50 to \$50.00.

Send for illustrated booklet today.

The Gillette is on sale at all leading jewelry, drug, cutlery, hardware and sporting goods stores. If your dealer cannot supply you write to us.

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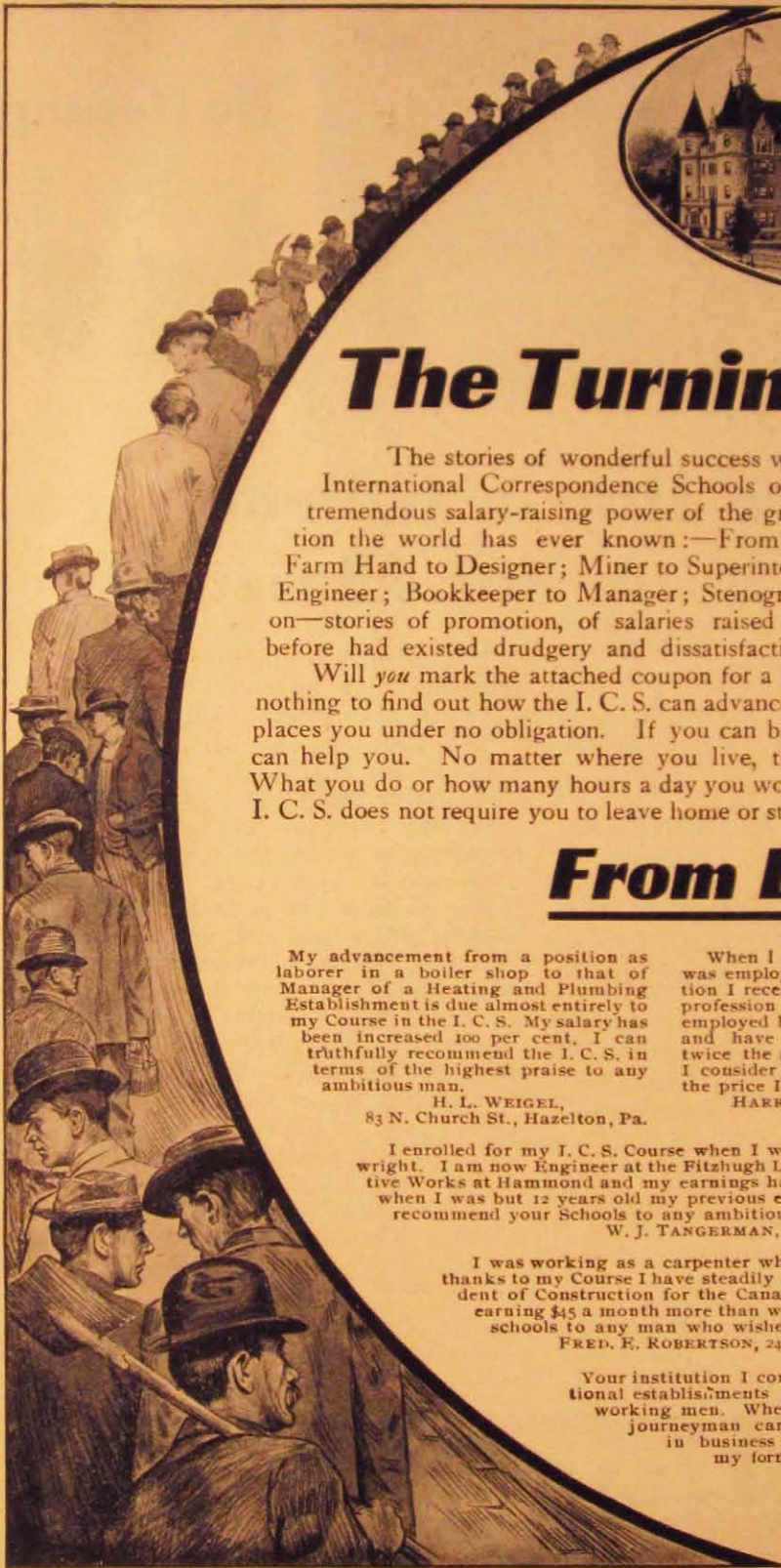
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Factories: Boston, London, Berlin, Paris, Montreal

Gillette Safety Razor

NO STROPPING NO HONING

Tell the substitutor: "No, thank you. I want what I asked for. Good-bye."



The Turning Point

The stories of wonderful success won through the help of the International Correspondence Schools of Scranton, Pa., prove the tremendous salary-raising power of the greatest man-helping institution the world has ever known:—From Carpenter to Draftsman; Farm Hand to Designer; Miner to Superintendent; Blacksmith to Chief Engineer; Bookkeeper to Manager; Stenographer to Treasurer—and so on—stories of promotion, of salaries raised and independence, where before had existed drudgery and dissatisfaction.

Will you mark the attached coupon for a bigger salary? It costs you nothing to find out how the I. C. S. can advance you. Marking the coupon places you under no obligation. If you can but read and write, the I. C. S. can help you. No matter where you live, the I. C. S. can reach you. What you do or how many hours a day you work makes no difference—the I. C. S. does not require you to leave home or stop work—mark the coupon.

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My advancement from a position as laborer in a boiler shop to that of Manager of a Heating and Plumbing Establishment is due almost entirely to my Course in the I. C. S. My salary has been increased 100 per cent. I can truthfully recommend the I. C. S. in terms of the highest praise to any ambitious man.

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83 N. Church St., Hazelton, Pa.

When I enrolled for my I. C. S. Course I was employed as a steamfitter. The instruction I received enabled me to advance in my profession and I am now Chief Engineer employed by E. G. E. Wallace, of Rochester, and have increased my salary to nearly twice the amount it was when I enrolled. I consider my Course to be worth ten times the price I paid for it.

HARRY WORMHOOD, R. F. D. No. 3,
Rochester, N. H.

I enrolled for my I. C. S. Course when I was working as a helper to a millwright. I am now Engineer at the Fitzhugh Luther Company Car and Locomotive Works at Hammond and my earnings have been doubled. As I left school when I was but 12 years old my previous education was necessarily scant. I recommend your Schools to any ambitious young man.

W. J. TANGERMAN, 846 Hickory St., Hammond, Ind.

I was working as a carpenter when I enrolled with the I. C. S., but thanks to my Course I have steadily advanced. I am now Superintendent of Construction for the Canadian Bank of Commerce and am earning \$45 a month more than when I enrolled. I recommend your schools to any man who wishes to better his position.

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Your institution I consider to be one of the best educational establishments in the country, especially for working men. When I enrolled for my Course I was journeyman carpenter. I am now a Contractor in business for myself, and have doubled my former earnings.

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of the Poorly-Paid

Perhaps you have a liking for some other line of work. It may be you want to qualify for promotion in your present position, or that you want to break away from a "dollar a day" existence. The I. C. S. will make you a specialist in *your chosen line of work*—will train you for promotion—will raise your salary. Mark the coupon.

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Taylor Co., of Louisville, Ky., and my earnings have been very greatly increased. I consider your Course so excellent that I am constantly advising young men to enroll with you.
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c. o. Wright & Taylor,
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Please explain, without further obligation on my part, how I can qualify for employment or advancement in the position before which I have marked X

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Show Card Writer	Mechan. Engineer
Window Trimmer	Plumber & Steam Fitter
Commercial Law	Stationary Engineer
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Civil Service	Building Contractor
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I Must Absolutely Prove That 10 Acres of this Irrigated Land



Geo. E. Barstow
President
Pecos Valley Land & Irrigation Co.

Can be Made to Earn Over **\$100.00** A Month For You

I Will Sell it to You for \$3.00 a Week

BARSTOW TEXAS



Any one who is familiar with the results from Texas Irrigated Land will tell you that the safest, surest way to gain a large and permanent income from a small outlay is to get hold of a few acres of Texas Irrigated Land.

But, heretofore, it has required some capital—at least a few hundred dollars—and it has been necessary for the purchaser to go and live on the land and develop it.

Now, my company makes it possible for you to get ten acres of the finest kind of Texas Irrigated Land, all under cultivation, income property from the very beginning, if you can save \$3.00 a week.

You can go and live on it—absolutely assured of an independent living from it alone.

Or arrangements will be made to have it cultivated for you for a small share of the crops.

Now I can and will prove all this from the highest authorities in the land.

All you have to do is—write to me and say, "Prove to me that ten acres of your Texas Irrigated Land can be made to produce an income of from \$1,000.00 to \$5,000.00 a year."

I have the proof, so read what my company will do for you.

New Safe Land Plan

I will deliver at once to the Citizen's State Bank of Barstow, Texas, a Warranty Deed to ten acres of the land of the Pecos Valley Land and Irrigation Company as per the subdivision of the Company's property made by John Wilson and filed for record with the County Clerk of Ward County, Texas.

I will deliver at once to you, one of our Secured Land Contracts for the Warranty Deed at the Bank—on the contract appears a certificate signed by an Officer of the Bank and certifying that the Bank has your deed and will deliver it to you according to the terms of your Secured Land Contract. The Bank acts as an independent agent for both of us—to guarantee fair play.

You must pay \$3.00 a week, or at the rate of \$3.00 a week in monthly, quarterly, semi-annual or annual payments.

Or you can pay as much faster as you like.

At the end of each year—if you take more than a year to complete your payments—you will be credited with 5 per cent per annum on the amount you have paid.

\$15 down and \$3 a week paid regularly, and the interest credits, will mature your Contract in a little over two and three-fourths years.

But you can mature your Contract by paying the same total amount, \$483, in a day, a month, six months, a year, or in any less time than 2 1/2 years, and whenever your regular receipts and your interest allowance credit receipts total \$483, all you have to do to get your land is to take or send your receipts and your contract to the Citizen's State Bank at Barstow, Texas, together with twenty-eight vendor lien notes each for \$39, payable one every three months for seven years.

The Bank will then give you your Warranty Deed to the land, which, according to the Contract and the Deed, must be fully irrigated and all under cultivation.

Remember this is ten acres of land which I must first prove is capable of producing an income of from \$1,000 to \$5,000 a year.

You get this land for \$483, which you can pay in less than three years—\$15 down and \$3 a week—and you then have only four \$39 notes each year for seven years and pay out of your income.

Can you hope in any other way, so safe and sure as this, to have so large an independent income in so short a time!

I believe the purchase of Texas Irrigated Land to be the best way for a man of small means to make himself independent. And I believe I am qualified to pass judgment as I have been interested in irrigation matters locally and nationally for 15 years.

The results are simply astounding to those who are unfamiliar with the great subject of irrigation.

And I believe the happiest man these days is the man with the little ten acre irrigated farm—(President Roosevelt says, "Even 6 acres is enough to support a family and keep it busy").

The owner of a Ten Acre Irrigated Farm doesn't have to "knuckle to the boss," nor strain his conscience in the struggle of the intense commercialism of the day.

His income is practically untouched by "financial depression." His living and peace of mind are not dependent upon the whim of any man.

He is king in his own little domain.

He can make his little ten acres earn as much as a quarter section (160 acres) unirrigated, would produce as much as between twenty and eighty thousand dollars in cash would bring, loaned out at 6 per cent.

He has his close neighbors, his telephone, good roads, schools and churches—in fact, all the comforts and conveniences of life that come with the prosperous close-knit community, though they pass by the great isolated farm.

The land I want you to buy is all good rich soil, irrigated from Canals and Ditches already constructed in the most approved modern fashion and carrying an abundant supply of water taken from the ever-flowing Pecos River.

It is within a few miles of Barstow, Texas, and Pecos City, Texas, (the two towns are only 6 1/2 miles apart—the land lies between the towns and a little to the north) and served by the Texas & Pacific Railway and the Pecos Valley Line of the Santa Fe System.

With rich soil, a splendid climate and the uncertain quantity—moisture—eliminated, agriculture and horticulture can here be scientifically carried on to the splendid profit of the land owner.

The abundant crops of large and in every other way superior hay, grains, cotton, vegetables and fruits are equalled in only a very few favored spots.

The justly celebrated Barstow Grapes are considered by many to be even better—variety for variety—than those raised in Southern California—and we are 1,500 miles nearer the great Eastern market.

Let all this be the merest outline of what I desire to show you in detail. I am only attempting to make it clear to you that you can have an assured independent living income in less than three years if you can possibly save \$3 a week.

I have promised to submit the proof. All you have to do is write for it. Will you do that today, even if you can't comment right away? I want the address of every man or woman who is willing to save \$3 a week if I can prove that the result will be financial independence in less than three short years.

There is nothing philanthropic about this proposition, but I especially want to hear from the wage-earners. I have worked for fifteen years to develop this Irrigation System and this community. It would be gratifying to me to have those who most need it reap the benefits of my labors.

It will be more convenient for you to address me at St. Louis, and I am equipped there to best answer you.

GEORGE E. BARSTOW, President
Pecos Valley Land and Irrigation Company, of Barstow, Texas.
838 Missouri Trust Bldg., St. Louis, Mo.

Safeguarded

The Bank will deliver your deed direct to you when your \$3.00 a week and interest credits total \$483.00
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Nature's Choicest Food

The choicest Michigan beans run 23% nitrogenous—84% nutriment. Those are the beans we buy.

They cost us, sometimes, as high as eight times what other beans would cost. But the value is there.

We bake those beans in live steam, so the skins are unbroken. They are baked until they are mealy, yet they are nutty because they are whole.

We bake in small parcels, in a heat of 245 degrees. The result is, our beans are digestible. They don't ferment and form gas.

Then we make a tomato sauce from vine-ripened tomatoes. It costs us five times what common tomato sauce sells for in bulk.

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We have made beans the popular food—the every-day food—the choicest dish on the table. Are you getting your share of the benefit?

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PORK AND BEANS

Don't judge Van Camp's by other brands. Don't judge them by home-baked beans. This dish is our specialty—our claim to supremacy.

We have spent 47 years in learning how to prepare it.

We are baking more beans, by several

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Van Camp's are distinct. They show the cost and the skill we employ in them. They will save you work, and save your meat bills. Let your people have what they like best.

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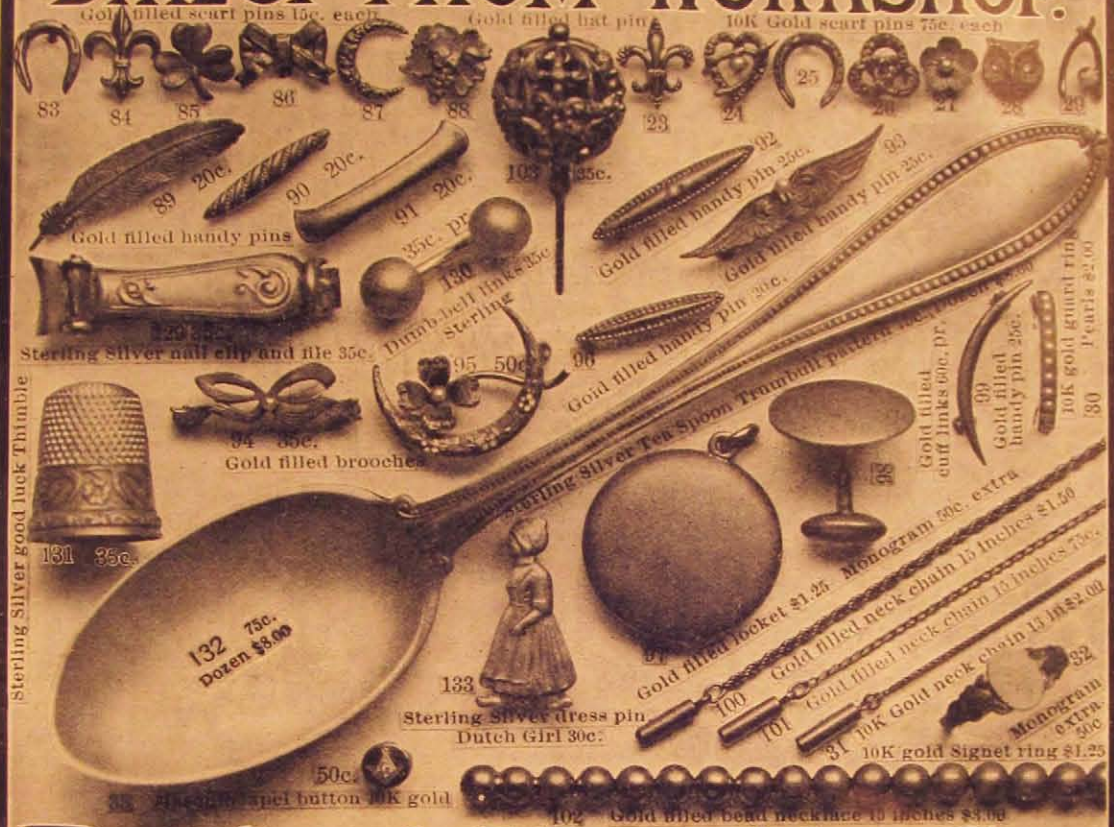
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Now a word as to New York styles. New Yorkers are the best dressed men in the country. We are right here on the ground, and we know what is going on. We can make clothes for you that will make your local tailor sit up and take notice.

No matter where you live—from Maine to California—our perfect system of home measurement, in connection with the samples of goods which we send you, will enable you to have your tailoring done quickly, at a low price, and with a degree of satisfaction that will surprise you.

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Our Style Book, containing:—

Representations of the fashionable cuts in clothes for this Winter.

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Unsolicited testimonials from men who know and have tried us. We have pleased customers all over the country from the Atlantic to the Pacific.

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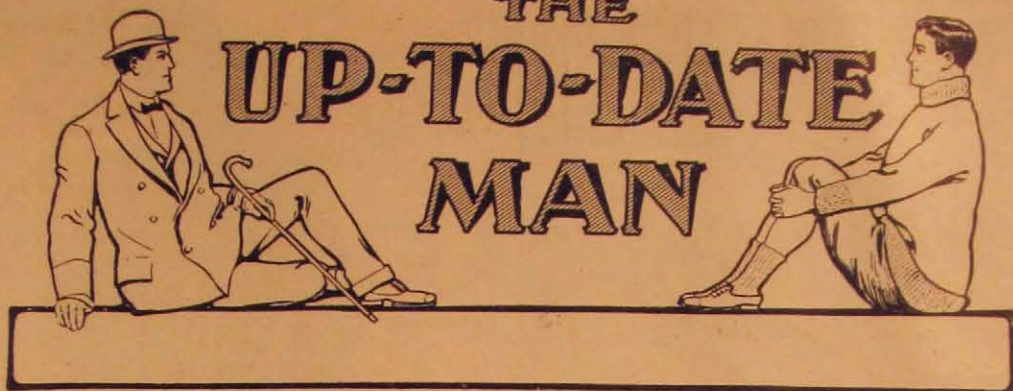
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Send no money, write to-day for this handsome 14-inch, beautifully curled, carefully selected Ostrich Feather, any color. If you find it a big bargain remit \$1.85 each, or sell 3 feathers and get your own free. Enclose 6c. postage. Write for catalogue. ANNA AYERS, Dept. E-43, 21 Quincy St., CHICAGO

THE UP-TO-DATE MAN




FOR intermediate weather, the long Chesterfield is undoubtedly the best all-round overcoat. It extends a trifle below the knee, is curved very slightly—if at all—to the figure and does not flare at the bottom. The elaborately creased and pressed garments are not at all manly-looking and one generally sees them on persons whose notions and ideas of style are derived from colored fashion-plates of the tawdry sort. There are always men who feel that they must go the fashions of the day "one better," and it is these who make a mock of even a rational mode and compel its total abandonment.

The Chesterfield has a velvet collar to match the cloth, usually black or medium gray, long and wide lapels ironed to a soft roll, and a deep center vent. The object of the vent is to render walking easier, for the ventless coat hinders the wearer's movements and swishes awkwardly around his legs. Folded-back cuffs are rather too pretentious-looking to be acceptable on so plain a coat as the Chesterfield, though they are not incorrect. The fly-front garment has been in vogue for many years, but the newer style is to have the buttons come through. Plaids, herring-bones, faint stripes and shadow effects are variously used. The brown Chesterfield in a deep, rich shade,

though becoming to few men, has an uncommonness which commends it to those who seek a treasured expressiveness in dress.

The overfrock, so-called because it closely resembles a double-breasted frock coat, is worn chiefly with formal evening dress. The skirts are long, shaped to the waist and a bit full. The cuffs are folded back and narrow. Black and gray are the accepted colors, for no others harmonize with the extreme simplicity of either evening or afternoon clothes. The Chesterfield is quite as proper as the overfrock, and, indeed, is preferable to accompany afternoon dress, because to wear a frock greatcoat over a frock undercoat seems to sin against the fitness of things. The overfrock or paddock, as it is popularly known, is no longer considered good form for morning and business, but is restricted wholly to ceremonious occasions.

The Inverness or cape overcoat is purely an evening garment. It is always black, soft in finish, quite long and satin-lined to the edge. It may have sleeves or not—they are usually omitted—and has a half-cape. No coat is more picturesque than the Inverness and none rivals it in its air of old-world grace. It is an admirable garment for the theater and functions of an avowedly ceremonious nature. Just why the



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Inverness is rarely worn except by elderly beaus would be hard to explain. The younger generation seemingly will have none of it, preferring the Chesterfield or the overfrock. Abroad they are partial to the Inverness and the Frenchman considers it almost as indispensable as the evening suit itself.

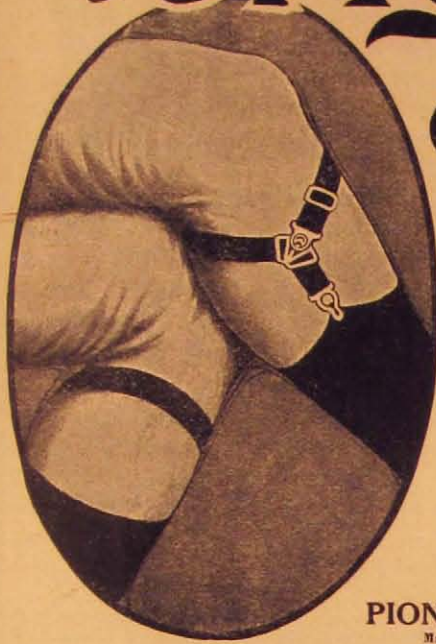
Fur-trimmed overcoats are good form only in the thick of winter. They look clearly absurd when worn without the excuse of befitting weather. It is better to have the cuffs plain instead of fur-trimmed, the collar being very deep and so as to enable it to be turned up over the ears when the wind whistles. Sable, mink and astrakhan are the preferred furs. Fur caps are not worn in this climate, though they

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are appropriate enough to accompany fur coats and besides, look undeniably "wintry."

Fur-lined gloves are very "comfy," notably for motoring and the outdoor sports, though there is little occasion for them in town. High storm-boots with water-proof soles will be found of much practical service during months when snow and slush are underfoot.

White evening waistcoats—black is not worn nowadays—are preferably single-breasted and pocketless. The pocket is superfluous, since it is seldom used and, moreover, it hinders smooth laundering. The linen waistcoat is too stiff and the silk garment cannot be laundered, but must be dry-cleaned, a tedious and difficult process. Therefore, the soft cotton waistcoat will be found more satisfactory than either. This is cut at the front opening in a shape midway between the old "U" and the newer "V." Egg-shape is, perhaps, the best description of it. The lapels and edges are silk-stitched some distance from the edge and the bottom points are not so peaked as formerly. There are deep side vents and the waistcoat hugs the waist.

The correct white evening tie measures from one and a half to two and a quarter inches and is graduated in form. While both linen and silk are proper materials, cotton is soft, more pliant and yields a firmer, fuller knot, besides being lighter and cooler. If a silk tie be worn, it should harmonize in shade and pattern with the waistcoat. Cords, tiny detached figures and embroidered ends—all are correct and a matter of individual preference. Lawn ties have been discarded, as the fabric is too flimsy for graceful knotting.

In choosing the evening ties, the shape of the collar worn must be considered. If it be a poke or a lap-front, the tie should be broad and adjusted straight across rather than pinched in the center. Contrariwise, if it be a wing—and the wing continues to be favored by many men who cannot wear the other forms with comfort—the tie should be a modified "bat-wing," snug of center and spreading of end.

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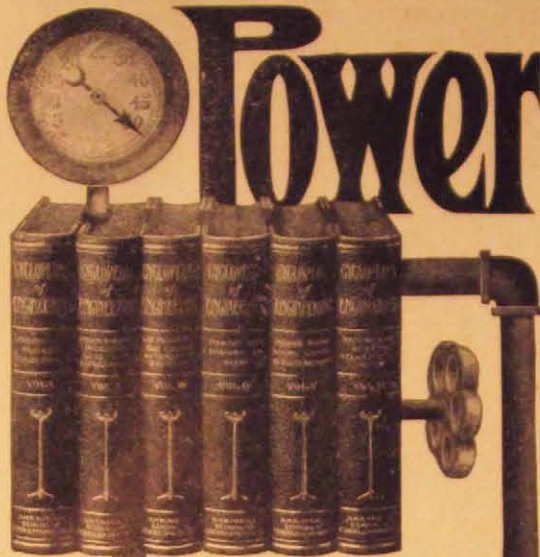
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Pop. Mag. 12-08.

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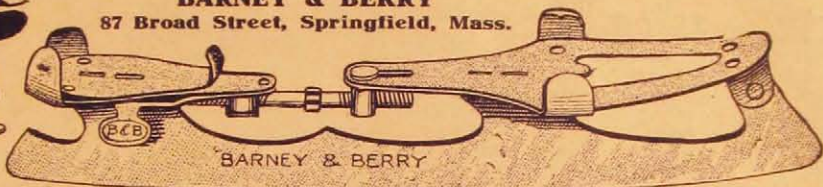
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Popular Magazine 13-08

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"The Maid of Millions," by one. How a girl who has unlimited money spends her life.

"The Sins of the Fathers," by Cyrus Townsend Brady.

"Love Making in Foreign Lands," by Frank L. Pixley, author of "King Dodo," "The Burgomaster," "Prince of Pilsen," etc.

"Christian Science Faith," by Clara Louise Burnham, author of "Jewel Story Book," "The Opened Shutters," etc.

How My Face Won \$10,000.00—by Miss Della Carson, First Prize winner in Chicago Tribune \$10,000.00 Beauty Contest. Miss Carson, how she manages to look like a girl 16 years old, whereas she is nearly thirty.

Other contributors in these four issues are: Roswell Field, Ella Wheeler Wilcox, Elliott Flower, Elia W. Peattie, Margaret E. Sangster, Opie Read, Gen. Charles King, Harriett Prescott Spofford, Forrest Crissey, Allen D. Albert, Maud Radford Warren, Stanley Waterloo, Frank L. Stanton, John Kendrick Bangs, and many others. **The WOMAN'S WORLD is printed in colors and is a great little magazine.**

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"The Most Interesting Thing In the World," a fascinating symposium by George Ade, George Barr McCutcheon, Forrest Crissey, Will Payne, and William Hodge, the actor.

"The Journal of Julie," the confidential and personal experiences of a young country girl winning her way in a great city.

"The Old Homes and the New," by Hon. Adlai E. Stevenson, former Vice-President of the United States.

"Why Girls Go Astray," by Edwin W. Sims, United States District Attorney, written strictly from the viewpoint of a lawyer who deals with this delicate and difficult problem.

"The Sins of Society," by Joseph Medill Patterson, author of "A Little Brother of the Rich." Mr. Patterson says "That society women relegate all functions of usefulness excepting one—the bearing of children—and that they are not inclined to discharge this function as they ought."

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Popular Magazine 12-04.

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*** "Cecilia, kid," said the shop-girl, oiling the sharp saw of her voice as well as she could, "there's an onion outside. With a young man attached. I've asked him in to dinner. You ain't going to kick, are you?"

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"Nit," said Hetty. "It ain't him. You're up against real life now. I believe you said your hero friend had money and automobiles. This is a poor skeezicks that's got nothing to eat but an onion. But he's easy-spoken and not a freshy. I imagine he's been a gentleman, he's so low down now. And we need the onion. Shall I bring him in? I'll guarantee his behavior."

"Hetty, dear," sighed Cecilia, "I'm so hungry. What difference does it make whether he's a prince or a burglar? I don't care. Bring him in if he's got anything to eat with him." ***

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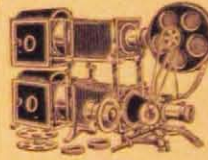
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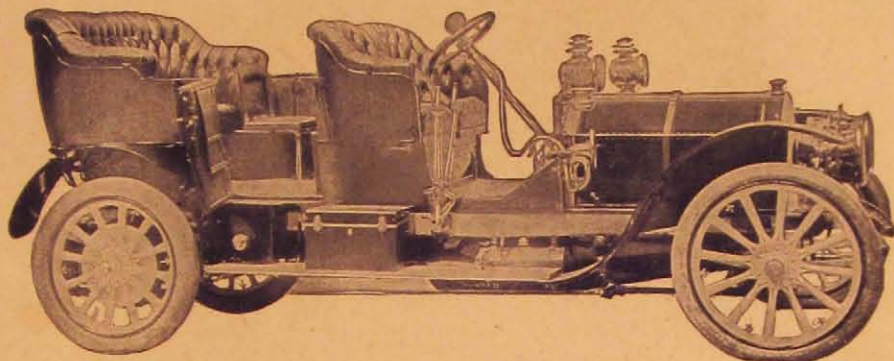
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