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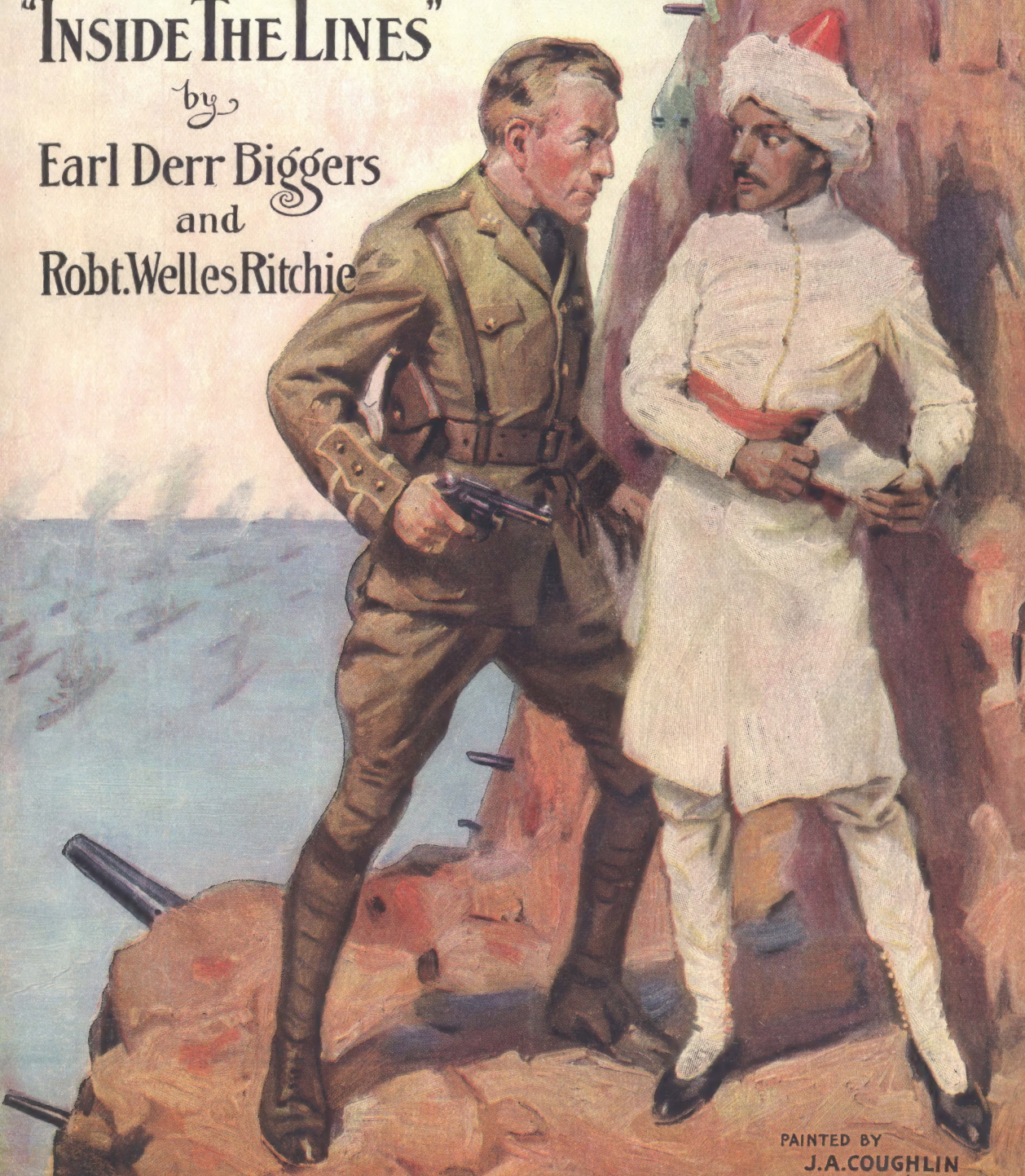
"INSIDE THE LINES"

by

Earl Derr Biggers

and

Robt. Welles Ritchie

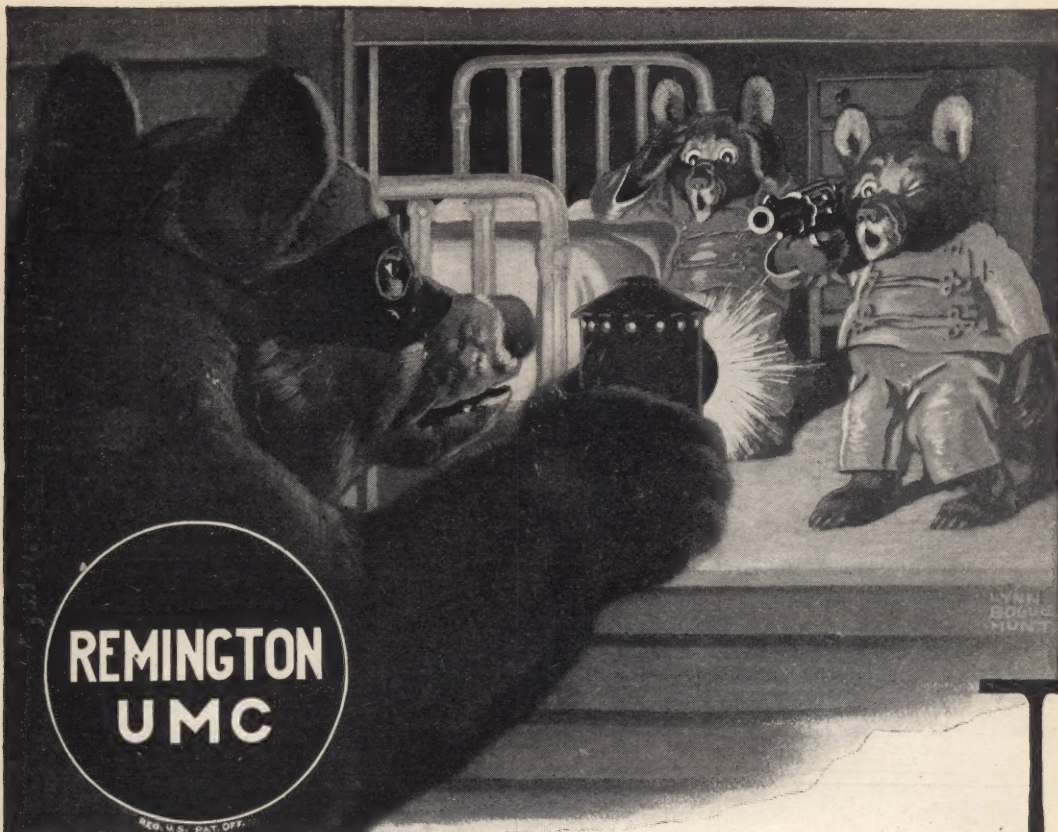


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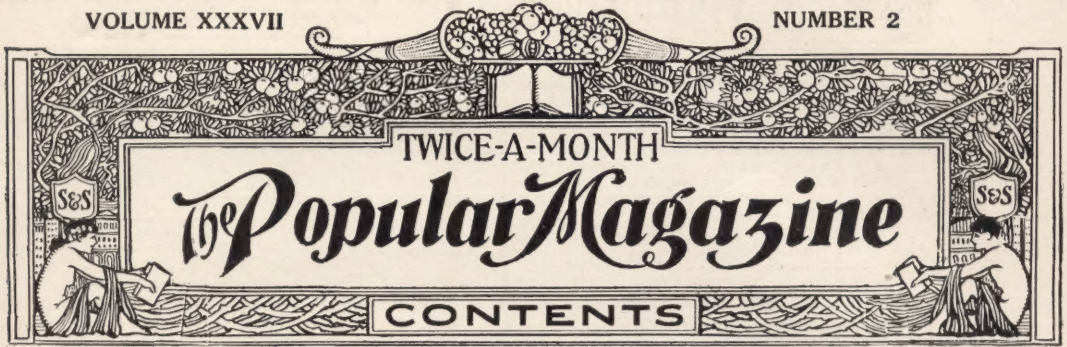
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VOLUME XXXVII

NUMBER 2



JULY 7, 1915

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THE POPULAR MAGAZINE

VOL. XXXVII.

JULY 7, 1915.

No. 2.

Unlucky Men

By George Washington Ogden

Author of "Custodian of the Post," Etc.

Bad luck is like money—it engenders its kind. Here is a man who never set his hand to anything that prospered. His son tackles the job of lifting the hoodoo, and learns, after some hard experiences, that a man must climb and fall, climb and fall, and creep to the goal at last on bloody knees to make the victory sweet. It is a story of oil. There is no lack of incident in this oil territory where men blew the bottom out of the earth and the tops off their heads almost daily.

(A Complete Novel)

CHAPTER I.

AN OLD MAN'S DREAM.

IN Oil City there was but one street, which was plainly inadequate for the present necessities and the future expectations of the place. It was a broad street, beginning at the railroad and blending into the prairie at the ridge of the hill, half a mile or more to the south.

Long as the street was, and broad, it could not contain all the houses in the town, and nobody seemed to be interested in plotting another thoroughfare and aligning the unplaced abodes in order, so they hovered on the flanks of Broadway as if they had spattered down in a shower. Most of them had grown from the nucleus of wagon or tent, and either a wagon or a tent

was prominent yet in the long run of them, like germinal nodules in some unlovely growth.

For Oil City was a new place, and canvas and corrugated sheet iron, and boards bright from the mills, were the most stable materials which men had laid their hands to in building yet. It does not require such a strong-sided abode to contain a man as it does to confine oil, and the architects and artisans of Oil City were going in day and night shifts to provide house room for that liquid marrow of the earth.

Oil City was a place where men handled the forces of nature familiarly, where they corked and uncorked whistling gas wells with no more thought of their own temerity than less adventurous people, in a great deal larger cities, give to turning the valves in their

house gas pipes. There they put down long, slender holes through the rind of the earth and opened its turgid arteries, which gushed their fat in black riches over the unprepared land, wasting daily enough fuel to move the commerce of Oklahoma State.

Hundreds of steel tanks, each having a capacity of many thousand barrels, stood out on the prairie in regular rows beyond the farther end of Oil City's Broadway. Never before in the history of oil had such tremendous preparations been made for storing it, for men never had struck so near the fountainhead before. It seemed that the parent fount of all petroleum lay beneath that spot, and those who had not been enriched by it already felt themselves rich in its promises.

If a man hadn't land to prospect for oil he had some service to render, some commodity to dispose of, some scheme, plan, or pursuit which would lead him, in his calculations, at least, directly to the wealth that oil was heaping up for its owners hour by hour, day and night.

Only a few months past the spot where Oil City now stood had been the site of a blacksmith shop at the junction of two main thoroughfares. And then one day somebody had brought in an oil well at amazing shallowness, back on the levels beyond the hill crest which the ambitious street of Oil City already had reached in its short and vigorous career.

When the drills of the first explorers demonstrated that they had located the largest body of petroleum ever tapped, the frontier of speculative adventure shifted from the fields farther north. Men packed up their drills and machinery, their folding houses, their tents, merchandise, hotels, restaurants; put their schemes in their valises, their dreams in their pockets, and flocked to the new pool to unfold them there in a night and stand ready for business with the rising sun.

Oil City was on the map the next morning, and business houses began to arrange themselves in straggling order along the public road.

But early as they were on the ground, the schemers and promoters found that capital—quiet capital, big capital—had arrived ahead of them. It had bound up everything that could be obtained in leaseholds for miles around, and there was nothing left for the schemers and promoters but the drippings from the bucket, represented by the royalties which landowners were receiving, or would receive in time, on the output from their wells.

Still the prospect was so good, even at that, that everybody expected to sack up his fortune there. As time passed the chances of realizing on these expectations were enhanced by developments in the field. The railroad came close on the heels of the capitalists, to carry away the product of their wells; troops of mechanics, regiments of laborers, corps of engineers, were brought in to build the immense steel tanks and sink the wells to that marvelous lake—it seemed almost a sea—of oil.

And that was the way that Oil City came to be there, a town founded upon expectation rather than the healthy outgrowth of necessity. The big business enterprise that had hold of the development of the field had no need for the place at all, for it had its own city of red turrets on the prairie beyond.

The company's several thousand workmen and engineers were quartered in various places over the vast field of activity, many of them in Oil City, but the principal reason for Oil City being there was that there always is somebody by to hold a bucket for the drippings of other people's fortunes.

In Oil City there were banks for the thrifty and saloons for the profligate; tented theaters for those seeking to be entertained, and a tented church for

such as desired to be saved in that rough-handed style. There were business places housed in tents with square-faced fronts of boards to give them the aspect of permanency, and a bank near the railroad with its tin walls painted to resemble bricks to impress upon the world a sense of its strength. There was a freight car with the wheels removed, standing beside a long bank of cinders, that served as passenger and freight station, and above everything, over everything, floated the gaseous, sharp scent of fresh-run oil.

The activity of Oil City grew. By day long lines of wagons labored through the muddy street in that fall weather which was over it in that time when we see it first. They carried drilling machinery and tents and supplies for the inland camps; fuel for distant engines which were sinking more wells, lumber for new houses, luxuries for the new rich. And in those times men were busy with hammer and saw, fortifying the flimsy structures in which they lived and transacted business against the coming of sterner weather. The smoke of busy restaurants rose high, and the smell of their condiments, their fries, their stews, mingled with the clean, thin breath of oil.

Aside from this activity, and partaking neither of its pleasures nor its profits, less than two miles intervening between his abode and this raucous infant city, lived the man who had a dream one day, and such strong faith in its promise that this lusty thing had grown out of it. Like most dreamers, too, the profits of his vision had passed over his head.

Seven years before the first drill bit through the crust which lay above the Big Pool, as it was now called, old Solomon Heiskell had told his neighbors that there was petroleum under that land. Old Solomon Heiskell, poor as bean soup, living in his log house on

his forty acres of scabbled hills, told them that he had gathered oil from the surface of a stream that had its rise from a big spring on his place, wrung it out of cloths and refined it in a homemade still.

People laughed at him, but old Solomon said that he'd show them. He sold off the few head of cattle that he owned and bought a drill to run by horse power. When he began his operations on the hillside above the spring the neighboring farmers owned that they had been mistaken in him. Old Sol wasn't a rogue, said they; he was a fool.

But he had one disciple—his boy Ared, his only child. The boy was just then coming up to the hurdle of manhood, long-legged as a colt. He was a thin-faced lad, after the mold of his pioneering ancestors, severe and solemn in his cast. His nose was big, and his forehead straight and high, with a great, shadowing sweep of black hair above it which always looked wind-tossed and vexed, no matter how calm the day. He commonly worked in the field, or rode after the cattle hatless, and his face was brown as sun and wind could make it. But under the shadow of his wild, tumbled hair his eyes were as calm and as blue as violets among russet leaves.

Before the cattle were sold to purchase the drill, Solomon had talked the venture over with the boy, who urged him to go forward with his idea of prospecting and prove to the neighborhood that he was right in his contention. So the drill was bought, and the first tedious hole was put down four hundred feet in the chin of the rocky hill, covered over with its beard of scrub oak.

At four hundred feet Solomon gave up his first hole, his theory being that oil could not seep from a greater depth than that. Instead of discontinuing his explorations, he scraped around and as-

sembled enough money somehow to buy an old boiler and engine, which Ared rigged up to run the drill.

All that winter the old man drilled, selling his hogs to buy the casing for the hole and pay his helper. Ared was teaching school beyond riding distance of home, the post in the home district having been refused him. The board wouldn't take any chances with a crazy man's son; it might run in the family, they said. Before the term was finished this distrust of his basic soundness had spread to the board that employed him, and Ared was discharged.

He went home, and put his savings into the exploration for oil. Between that time and spring they sank numerous holes in the hillside, but their labors were not rewarded by as much as the scent of oil upon their drill. Finally they agreed to make one supreme, far-driving effort, upon which their entire resources should be centered.

To provide the sinews for this Heiskell raised a loan of three hundred dollars on his forty acres of land. With this money in hand, Solomon and Ared squared their rusty old engine around to a fresh spot and went to work anew. Planting time came, but they were too much taken with their strange infatuation to leave off and put in a crop. They were down a thousand feet by May, and gnawing a little deeper day by day.

August, two thousand feet, and still going down; down through limestone and gravel, sand and granite, slate, salt, coal, iron; down to the backbone of the earth. One day the churnings from the hole told of zinc, another time of lead, but they were too deep down to be reached now with profit. Besides, Solomon Heiskell wanted none of those involatile metals. He was after oil. Oil would rise to the top of water, let it stand never so deep in his bore, and it could be pumped from any depth. If his dream came true, indeed, it would

gush forth in a black column and deliver itself into his hands.

At twenty-seven hundred feet the little old engine, as if quite exhausted and thoroughly discouraged by the outlook, stopped on a center and refused to move again. Investigation proved to Ared, who was the mechanic of the camp, that all the tinkering of all the machinists in Oklahoma never would set it at its chugging labors again. Like an old horse, or an old man that adversity and hard knocks have pelted to the ground, kindness and coaxing would avail nothing now. It was worn out in every part.

The money was at an end also. So old Solomon Heiskell put his hand on his big boy's shoulder and looked into his solemn, purpose-set face, and smiled. Then he shook his long gray hair and said it was the end.

What he said on that day in appreciation of the courage, fidelity, and support of his son struck deeper into the young man's heart than their drill ever had sounded the earth. It hurt Solomon Heiskell to stop there, after he had done enough to confirm everybody in the belief that he was a fool. There would be no proving his contention now. He had convicted himself.

"But it's there," said he, with undiminished faith, "and somebody will find it in time."

So they wound the drill up on its long rope, and left it dangling there above the hole, like the steel skeleton of some great thing on its melancholy gibbet.

A blight lay over Solomon Heiskell and his son from that day. People spoke to them patronizingly, as to inferiors, watching them keenly when they were near, as if to defend against any sudden outbreak of violence. There was no more teaching for Ared in that county, for the story of their vagaries had spread afar.

Following his profession, Ared went

to Kansas, where employment was offered, leaving the old man alone. People said that Solomon spent his days walking about among his prospect holes, sniffing at them like a dog at the burrow of a rabbit, as if he expected the oil to rise in them overnight.

After two years away in Kansas, Ared had returned and invested his earnings in a flock of sheep, which he herded over the hills. That was a good and fitting business for a cracked man, his neighbors said. It didn't take much brains to look after sheep.

After a year or two Ared began to prosper in a mild way. He enlarged his field by leasing hill land adjoining his father's acres, paid off the old man's mortgage, and his flock increased. He was well enough pleased to draw away from the people around him, for his ways were not their ways, and his fame was not enlarged by the strange figure that he made following his sheep over the hills.

He wore tall boots to his knees, like a cavalryman, and in the fall and winter weather he appeared in a long, gray, tattered coat, which he belted around his middle with a broad strap. Usually he carried a book in one hand, and his hat, which he clapped on his head when anybody approached, in the other.

Yes, there was no doubt about it, people said; Ared Heiskell was cracked. It ran in the family, like a geological fault. As for old Solomon, he hoed his peanuts and sweet potatoes, and shunned people as studiously as they avoided him. Solomon was ashamed of the thing that he had attempted and left half done. All he hoped for now was that he might live to see his theory vindicated, and the dearest thing that he kept warm in his disappointed old heart was the wish that his boy Ared might be the man to prove him right.

And so, when oil was struck at less than a fourth the depth of Solomon's

great well, back on the prairies two miles from him, where the land rose even higher than his bushy hills, people remembered his dream, which appeared now not altogether the distillations of an empty head.

"But not where he was diggin'," they said in vindication of their undying ridicule and contempt. "You wouldn't hit oil there under four miles. You've got to consider the lay of the land."

CHAPTER II.

THE SLAYING OF THE FLOCK.

So many people had come into that country since the founding of Oil City that the original inhabitants were drowned in numbers. The traditions of their twenty-year-old civilization were obliterated by the friction of new feet, and another story was beginning in that place.

Of the thousands who came and went there daily few knew the history of the rusty little boiler standing in the bushes on the hillside two miles east of town, with the swinging drill on the tall derrick near by. Derricks and drills were a sight common enough in that country now, and the wonder of them had passed away. The one curious fact which made this drill and derrick unique among hundreds was that of their inactivity.

Brush had grown up between the wheels of the boiler, saplings had reared their tops to a level with its stack. The evidence of abandonment was written in its rust.

When capital came in there before the rush and began to take leases on everything that looked like it would sustain a hole, it had not offered to include Solomon Heiskell's land in its exploration territory. This was a sad disappointment to the old man, and it lay bitterly along with the memory of his past struggle, which had indurated in his heart.

Solomon was an unusual figure, even in that place of strangely mixed and mingled men, so thin and tall, and hollowed out by his long-hidden fever. He went about in tall boots, his long gray hair reaching to his collar, his black necktie neatly arranged at the throat of his flannel shirt. His face was scholarly, large-boned, dry-cheeked, and always cleanly shaved. There were more dreams than schemes in his countenance, and men who were on the hot trail for a quick fortune never could be induced to listen to him twice.

Solomon believed that the business way to approach a man was to unfold his credential and the references of his past.

"For fifteen years I was principal of a school in Kansas City, sir," he would tell a stranger, with childish ingenuousness, "but I had to give it up on account of my health. It was my kidneys, sir."

With that Solomon would lift his eyes in apology for the kidneys, and lead on:

"When the Strip was opened I made the run. Others went faster than I could go with my poor team and my impedimenta, so I had to go farther. I made my way down to this country, and when I got here everything but the hills was taken up. My wife died here, and my son's grown to manhood here, and I've sold off all my original claim but the forty that this proposition of mine is located in. But my kidneys are cured," he would sigh, with satisfaction, as if that balanced the books of his adversity.

People who had taken root up and down the Broadway of Oil City grew in time to accept Heiskell as one of the institutions of the country. To strangers whom he sought out and attempted to interest in his "proposition" he was a garrulous old humbug who hadn't any more oil in his prospect than a chip. This indifference of capital,

and his inability to interest it, served only as a bellows draft to the rekindling fire of the old man's faith in his drill-scarred hillsides.

In the old days, when he and his son had failed of the oil, he had put down his dream, but he never had relinquished it. The obloquy under which he had lived since those times had been hard to bear, but his son's somnolence of ambition seemed now the unkindest thing that the snarl of fortune had presented. It was the rebuke of his age, the humiliation of his sinking years.

Ared had accumulated enough property in sheep to make a dignified effort with the drill once more, the old man argued, but it seemed that he meant to shame his father's blood. If he would sell his flock and put the money into machinery and explosives, Solomon felt that they soon would draw the eyes of the world to that spot by their success.

More than once in the past months the old man had broken the matter to his son, and it had become a snag between them which threatened to divide the hitherto unruffled current of their loyalty. Ared would not quarrel over it, neither could the old man's stories of the young and the old, the worthy and the unworthy, who were picking up riches every day move him from the calm of indifference into which Solomon believed he had settled from association with his foolish sheep.

Old Solomon spent many a malediction against the sheep, and pounded his brain through many a troubled hour in pursuit of some plan, always elusive and intangible, through which he might shake his big boy out of that wool-padded drowse. He must bring him back to the eagerness and strength of desire which animated the lad in the days of their first explorations; he must strike a spark in his somnolent breast.

Ared returned one evening from marketing lambs at the Kansas City stock-

yards, weary, dusty, yet mildly triumphant. Solomon told himself, with hidden contempt, that Ared made as much over the few hundred dollars thus realized as a far greater reward in a nobler field of endeavor would have justified. Yet, if the lad would unstrap his purse and put the money to some dignified purpose—and there was none more dignified than sounding nature's secrets and drawing away its riches—it would even mitigate the baseness of its source.

But Ared had no nearer intention of doing that with the profit from the increase of his flock than he had shown in the spring, when he sold his fleece. Solomon realized that, with bitterness.

Ared was asleep in his room, and his sheep were asleep in their fold near by, flock and master alike careless of the luring tumult of the world.

Old Solomon walked down the slope to the fold, and stood leaning his arms upon the gate, looking over at the sheep, the rancor of his disappointment in his son clouding his kind old face. It was a thing almost past belief, the extent of the hate which the old man carried in his breast against the guileless beasts, which he had invested with a dignity and importance quite undeserved. He was jealous of them, as a man grows jealous of reasoning creatures; he blamed them with the alienation of his son's heart from the ways and desires of a rugged man.

Heiskell lifted his arms in denunciative gesture, and cursed the sheep, his long, fantastic shadow reaching out over them as they lay asleep. An old ram, wrinkled of neck, solemn of face, which reposed near the gate, his head up, champng his last cud of the day's gleanng, rose stiffly and stood regarding his visitor in gravity.

"Yes, he has chosen between me and you!" said Solomon, threatening the horned patriarch with his fist. "For such low ministering he throws away

the golden chance of life. I'll not put up with it, you bleating devils; I'll not endure it another hour!"

Back toward the house he went, taking the steep slant of the path in long strides. In the chopping block near the corner of the house the ax was hacked, its helve pointing toward the moon like a finger lifted to call witness to the thing that Solomon Heiskell, in the pain of his unreasoning passion, was about to do.

He wrenched the ax from its place, turned, and plunged down the hill again, carrying the implement in his swinging hand at his side. Without a look back at the glittering window of his son's room, he threw the gate of the sheepfold open, closed it behind him with backward fumbling, and leaped to his work of destruction.

When he rested, scarce a score of sheep remained whole and alive of the three hundred which the fold contained.

In the brook Solomon Heiskell washed his blood-fouled shoes, and making a bundle of his soiled garments hid them under the bushes near the brookside.

Then, triumphant, he went back to the house.

Solomon slept late the next morning, for the bloody banquet had left him weary. The sun was up when he woke, its autumnal amber was washing the hilltops and reaching kindly into shadowed ravines. He knew that Ared must have been out of bed two hours before him, and he wondered that the lad had not come back to the house with a report of what he had found.

Puzzled over that particular, the old man hurried to his son's room and looked through his window down the hill to the sheepfold. The sheep lay there as he had left them, but Ared was not in sight.

"Looking for tracks," said he, nod-

ding, a hint of a smile on his face. "Well, let him look!"

When he had dressed he went down to the sheepfold, expecting to find his son there among the sheds. But no; there was no trace of him. Solomon called him; his voice went sounding and echoing among the quiet hills, but no answer came.

It was a shocking thing, in the light of day, to see the sheep lying there in their blood.

"Master Almighty, did I do that!" he whispered, clutching the fence to sustain his stricken limbs.

He gazed in sickening revulsion; his eyeballs were hot in his head, his mouth stood open, his lips were dry.

He loosed his clutch upon the fence, and staggered blindly away a little space, calling his son's name tremulously. No answer. Here and there he ran, then, in a frenzy of new fear. What had happened to the boy? What had he done with himself? Where was he?

He hastened to a hilltop which commanded the road to Oil City, and the sweep of country for miles on every hand, save to the southward alone, the region of the Big Pool and the great city of tanks which stood upon the level there.

There was no sight of Ared on the road, no glimpse of him among the hills. Solomon shouted his name through his cupped hands, facing this way and that. The echoes gave it back wistfully, but as for Ared the world was empty.

Solomon knew his son's tender nature, and he understood now, to its utmost reach, the terrible pang that he must have suffered when he saw the reward of his slow and bitter years of striving wiped out in one treacherous night. The discovery of such perfidious cruelty in a hand that he had loved had driven him away. The boy was gone, gone to wander the world with a curse in his memory for the

gray old man whose arm had plundered him.

Old Solomon Heiskell bowed his head upon his hands, and sat down there among the stones of his barren hills. He shivered in the agony of remorse, and wept, and then he flung his arms to the empty horizon and called loudly upon his son's name, as that other father called, in the cold hour of his bereavement, upon the name of one slain in the woods of Ephraim: "Oh, Absalom, my son, my son!"

CHAPTER III.

A SONG AT TWILIGHT.

Ared had walked away from home empty-handed, save for the money which he had received from the sale of his lambs. The slaughter of his flock would have been sufficient in itself to move him deeply, even though the author of the outrage had remained undiscovered.

It seemed the deed of a madman, yet he could not believe his father unbalanced. Through his constant association with him all the years of his life he had not marked any indication of insanity. He had been unreasonable about the sheep, true; but a man may have his prejudices and yet remain sane.

The young man could not account for the thing in any other way save from the very motive that drove Solomon Heiskell to it. That seemed a strange, fantastic, and bloody length for a mild-hearted man like his father to go. Yet he recalled how his father had urged him to plunge into the tide of financial adventure which washed their hills, and he had taunted him about the sheep with growing acerbity time out of mind. Now he had made havoc among them, thinking, perhaps, that he was doing his son a kindness thereby. He had dissolved the ignoble bondage, as he

was fond of calling it, at one effective blow.

Solomon Heiskell was to have his wish, then. He had chafed under his son's easy satisfaction with little, and that little hardly got; he had urged him to take the world bare-armed, and plant his feet sturdily among men for a fall, and bring home one of the big purses, such as others were taking down every day. Very well, he should have his way at last. But in what bitterness of heart his son was setting forth to enter the affray!

He could not trust himself to turn back to the house after finding those guilty garments tucked under the buck-bushes by the stream. Better no words at parting, thought he, than words of reproach, which might leap into a flame which would destroy forever what remained between them, excuses, extenuations, palliations—all.

As it stood now time would spread its coagulative balsam above the scar. After years he could return, when the sorrowful astonishment of to-day had yielded place to reasonable reflection. It would not be dangerous to speak of these things then as now, and until such time as he could say "It is all over with and forgotten," Ared felt that he must not see his father's face again.

Oil City was emptying itself of its diggers and delvers, its bearers of burdens, and all its plodding population of slow thought and humble aspirations as Ared walked along the main street while the east was yet red with the alarm of the coming sun. The masters who were sending them forth to toil could sleep longer; the doers of big things could turn again on their pillows and breathe another hour of sweet refreshment. It is the man with the small aim that works from seven to six in this high-shooting age.

Some detached themselves by pairs, by scores, here and there where new

excavations marked the sites of permanent buildings which the business of Oil City already justified; here and there others arranged themselves around cement mixers which were already mouthing out their gray streams into waiting barrows. But mainly the outgoing stream of men ran on to the place where oil had established its capital.

With no definite end in view Ared marched on with the throng, out upon the prairie levels where the big steel tanks for storing oil stood. It looked as if some Oriental city had sunk there into the prairie sea, leaving the tops of its turrets above earth to tell of its grandeur and extent.

Two thousand acres, men said, had been set apart by the company to build its vast storage depot upon, and there across the long levels the regular streets of red-painted tanks ran, hundreds of the reservoirs finished and in use, hundreds more in process of construction. Thirty thousand barrels was the capacity of a small tank, and there were wells in plenty within two miles of the place which would fill one of that size every fortnight.

From the place of storage the hundred-miles-long pipe lines stretched forth, carrying the crude product of the wells as far north as the Missouri River, as far east as the Wabash, to the company's refineries. Day and night the heavy stream of oil throbbed through these lines, forced on its long journey by the tremendous engines in the pumping stations.

Although Ared Heiskell had herded his sheep over the hills not three miles distant from the town of tanks, he had not been cognizant of the rapid development in the preparations for the housing of oil. The sudden discovery of its magnitude was an electrifying, awakening shock. Was it possible that he had been asleep within sound of such gigantic labors? Perhaps his

father was not without justification, when the worst was said, in his desire to send his son out among the giants of the earth who were achieving so tremendously.

All day his astonished faculties fed upon the wonders of the place. He walked far out into the field of exploration, where the rigs of drillers and the derricks of wells stood thick over the Big Pool.

Nobody was idle there save the solitary onlooker alone. A score of times, perhaps, during the morning he was hailed by sweating, grease-daubed foremen and asked if he wanted work. He began to feel like a deserter from the army of industry, with his repeated refusals piling in accusative heap behind him as the day filled on.

Ared found himself again at Oil City at nightfall. He engaged a bed in one of the hotels, and after supper went out to see the town take its pleasure on a more intimate footing than he ever had observed it before.

He wandered into a music hall, and fell to musing over the lot of the "orchestra"—one little old man who played the violin and the piano alternately, and who looked pathetically out of place.

Ared was roused from his train of reflection by the appearance of a new entertainer on the stage. It was a young woman conventionally dressed, who came forward with a frightened question in her serious dark eyes, and an appeal in the glance which she cast over the rough audience. But a softness, as of assurance, came into her strained face when she looked down at the old musician, who was no longer the figure of shrinking timidity.

The old man had straightened up with her entrance, and his face was lifted now almost eagerly, it seemed. He began the prelude to her song with his breath held, Ared thought, so anxious he appeared to please her. It

was "Love's Old Sweet Song," which is dear to all of us for its unstriving simplicity.

Her pure soprano tones caressed the melody as it fell from her lips. Each note seemed a kiss of summer winds. The chaffering of the drinking men in the boxes fell silent as she sang; the boisterous merriment of the house grew still. It was as unexpected in that place of debasement as a prayer.

"Just a song at twilight,
When the lights are low——"

Ared Heiskell leaned and listened to that exquisite voice as dulcet as falling water. He was strangely and deeply moved by the essence of a sharp and sudden longing, as one waking to find himself bereft. He felt how barren and empty, crude and purposeless his life had been. He could have wept for the endearments of love and laughter which, in his isolation, he had been denied.

She finished her song in the silence which held over the house like sleep, standing a moment while the old musician rounded out the soft, dreamy accompaniment. When it was done she bent her stately head in a little salute, more to her accompanist than to her auditors, it was plain. A flush had come into her cheeks. It relieved the fright of her eyes, and lighted up her youth and comeliness like a beam through a cathedral pane.

Some big-handed fellow in splashed corduroys near the front smote his palms together as she stood there poised as if to turn and flee. The enthusiasm of the house broke after him, and it rushed upon her in clamorous approval. A smile took seat in her eyes with that unexpected tribute. It diffused its quickening beams over her sweet young face. From his place near the stage Ared Heiskell saw tears glistening on her cheeks.

The spell of her voice was over him,

still echoing in his senses, the visions which it had stirred still held their brief enchantment. With his great broad hat in his hand he rose and swept her a bow like a plumed cavalier. It was the tribute of a gentleman to genius, unobtrusive and graceful. She understood, and accepted it as it was given. For a moment her eyes found his as she turned and left the stage.

She returned presently in response to their loud demand, and the old musician reached behind his piano and drew out a violin. She sang "The Last Rose of Summer," the old man supplying a feeling obligato. There followed a demonstration of approval similar to the first, but she could not be recalled farther than the wings, from which she bowed and shook her head in friendly denial.

Ared found nothing to interest him in the next entertainer, and he made his way to the street. He had been strangely and deeply stirred by the girl who had sung the old songs. "Ruth Sterling, in the Songs Your Mother Sang," the hand-painted bill on the boards in front of the theater announced her.

He paused there a little while, looking at the bill musingly. His mother had not sung those songs. Perhaps the mothers of other men had sung them; doubtless it was so. Yet he was better pleased that he should carry the memory of their first cadence in his ears from her fair, honest lips.

He went on, hesitating again a moment at the corner of the theater, where a hand painted on the boards directed to the office. It was dark along there. He glanced that way, thinking that she was coming there to get her pay. He wondered vaguely how much it would amount to. He passed on. Should he go home and declare peace? It was not yet late; perhaps his father—

There came a running step behind him and the sound of a panting breath. A hand was laid on his arm, and then

he heard her voice, recognizing it before he knew her face there in the glimmer of the distant lights.

"Oh, I'm so glad you came—I thought you weren't coming," said she.

Startled, amazed, he made no reply. He halted stupidly.

"That man—help me, take me away from here—quick!" she whispered, still implying by her demeanor that she had hastened to join one for whom she had waited.

"I didn't think you'd be ready so soon; I might have hurried," said he, carrying off his part of it very well now that he understood. "Which way?" he asked in undertone.

"Walk on—anywhere—hurry!" she returned.

A man with a flat mouth, champing a half-burned cigar, was clambering into an automobile in front of the theater. As Heiskell looked, the fellow gave the wheel a twist, rounded the machine sharply into the street, and drove after them. As he came alongside he slowed down to a pace equal with their own, driving as near to the walk as he could pilot his craft.

Heiskell stopped, his blood beating in his temples, his body tingling with indignation. She pressed his arm, drawing him across to the window of a jewelry shop, where she pretended to be interested in the display.

"Don't quarrel with him; he might shoot you or something," said she.

"Where shall I take you?" he asked again.

"I am staying at the Midland—or I was," she said, "but the proprietor says I owe him money, so I don't suppose I can go back there. He came down and collected my week's salary, and I'm discharged."

He felt the tremor of a suppressed sob in her arm.

"Never mind," he said; "you're well out of that place. You didn't belong there, not for a single minute."

"Thank you." She lifted her eyes, full of gratitude. "But I'm—I don't know anybody here."

"Neither do I," said he.

"And I'm—I haven't—I'm——"

"Out of money," he finished for her, seeing that her words hung.

She nodded childishly, looking down to hide her tears.

"The hotel man presented a long bill for extras which I never had," she said, "and he refuses to let me have my little old trunk. If I could get it I could borrow enough on my—certain things—to telegraph home for money."

The man in the automobile was circling slowly in the broad street as if he meant to gather momentum and plunge upon them after a little. Heiskell was watching him, reading deeper than his rustic appearance might indicate that he could see.

"Well, we'll see about that," said he.

"And he says that he'll have me arrested if I try to leave without paying him in full," she told him, shuddering at the thought.

"Yes, they wanted to leave you destitute; that was their intention," said he, as if communing with himself. "But he can't have you arrested; that's all talk."

"Oh, I'm so relieved!" said she. "Not that it does any good particularly," she added, "for I can't even——"

"Where are your relatives?" he inquired.

"None nearer than Kansas City, and I thought I'd have enough left out of my salary to take me nearly home, but——"

Heiskell pulled out his watch.

"There's a train in twelve minutes," said he, facing her toward the station.

"But I can't accept—you don't mean?" said she, breathless with the surprise of the sudden change in her dark fortunes. But there was the glad note of relief in her voice which she could not conceal.

"You belong at home," said he, with indisputable conviction.

"But if I had enough to send a telegram——"

"You'll do better by going yourself," said he.

He hurried her on.

"I was a fool to go out with that old show!" said she. "It broke up in San Antonio," she hurried to explain, "and my money gave out here on my way back. I didn't have even enough to telegraph home, and I wouldn't have done it—not then, anyhow. They didn't want me to go in the first place."

"Of course not," said he gently.

"But I thought a few years in musical comedy, studying as I went along, you know—and then I could emerge into grand opera, the desire of my life. Mr. Walther, that dear old gentleman—for he is a gentleman, anyhow—who plays the piano in that dreadful place, was with our show, too. He got me on at the Palace, and he'd have helped me to go home only he's always in debt to the house. After the show he drinks terribly, you know, and he sleeps around there somewhere under the stage."

"And he looks like the remnant of something fine, too," said Heiskell pityingly.

"Oh, he is—he's a musician from the core of his dear old heart!"

"And so you went off with a show," said he, smiling to himself at coming to the bottom of her simple little story.

"Yes, I thought it was the beginning of a career—I always wanted to sing," she sighed.

"Well, in future sing for those who love you, and be content," said he, searching her face gravely with his solemn eyes. "Where shall I send your trunk, Miss Sterling?"

"No, no—I'll send for that—I can't allow you—and that isn't my name, anyhow; it's the one I assumed for the stage. My own," she said contritely, "is plain Jane Sloane."

"Why, you're nothing but a child!" He patted her hand where it lay in full confidence on his arm. "Come on, we mustn't miss that train!"

"Father's a lawyer," said she, as if Heiskell's office of friendship demanded no reservations. "He's been a judge of our State supreme court, and, oh, I don't know what all."

"And he'll be as glad to have you home as I am to be able to send you to him," said he.

"But I'm not a child! I'm old enough to vote."

"Well, so am I," he laughed, "but that doesn't insure me against making a dunce of myself once in a while."

"I hoped to be able to return to them in independence, if not in triumph," she confessed ruefully, "and now I'm about to accept the bounty of a stranger. I'm taking a cowardly advantage of your generosity, sir, I'm afraid——"

"There's the train," he interposed, "we must get your tickets."

She protested when he would have bought her a sleeping-car ticket.

"I'll sit in the chair car, and be glad," she said.

They were obliged to hurry forward to the chair car, urged on by impatient brakemen who were waiting to give the signal to go. The train was moving as she mounted the steps, but he kept pace with it, for she was holding him by the hand. As the train began to gather speed, and Heiskell was reluctantly releasing her hand, she bent suddenly and kissed his bare forehead.

She ran up the steps, and disappeared within the car, not turning to look back. Hat in hand, Heiskell stood, dangerously near the moving train, gazing after it as if he expected another miracle. It was drawing away rapidly; presently its red lights twinkled past, and the possibility of a small romance between them was at an end.

But that touch of a girl's lips on his forehead remained, and it roused

him as nothing else had done. He had been asleep; much of the golden chain of life had run through his listless, open hand. He would clutch it now and cling until time surrendered its rewards. His first business, he told himself, was to go home and make peace with his father. After that he would turn and breast the world.

CHAPTER IV.

PURTY.

Solomon Heiskell was gone. The padlock was on the door, the old buckboard and horse were missing from their place. Ared found the silence of abandonment over the premises when he arrived before the sun lifted the hill.

He looked about to see if there was any word of farewell, any token of remembrance. None. Solomon Heiskell had carried his intentions away with him sealed up in his heart.

Better so, perhaps. Let him have time; let them both have time, said Ared, to repair their fortunes. The frame of a mind in prosperity is toward generosity in forgiving. It was for the best that the old man had gone.

But, said Ared to himself, if he was to come out of the scramble which he had squared his shoulders to enter, he must not overlook the little things in striving for the great. So said Ared, looking down the hill at the heaps of bloody sheep. There was a dollar each to be saved by stripping the dead animals of their skins. Two days' work would see it through, and then he could go down the hill again, the locked house behind him to wait their reunion there, to meet the world again.

The cool weather was with him, and even three hundred dollars from three hundred sheep pelts was not an item to be despised when a man was setting out to do battle with a giant on his own ground.

He was grateful for the sequestration

of the hills, and thankful that he had no too neighborly neighbors to whom the thing must be explained. When he had made an end of skinning the carcasses he heaped them in piles, drenched them with crude petroleum, and set them on fire.

Ared consigned the raw hides to a commission house in Kansas City, and went back to the house in the hills to pack his belongings and remove them to the seat of his new life and activities.

That day saw its developments for young Heiskell. Before mid-afternoon he had turned the first stone in what he hoped would prove to be the foundation of his new fortunes. He had become the owner of a complete drilling outfit—his armament for the assault upon the world.

He had seen the outfit standing idle on a lot among a cluster of tents, wagons, and patched shanties, and it struck him as singular that it was the sole idle drill—save that on his own hillside—in the country. Inquiry from the man in charge discovered the fact that it was for sale by the widow of the man who had operated it. A three-gallon can of nitroglycerin which he let slip out of his hands one day had removed him at once from the worries and competitive struggles of his kind.

There was a tent among the numerous things which went with the machinery, and this Ared pitched, with the widow's permission, beside the boiler of his outfit, and prepared to make his quarters there until he could secure a contract for sinking a well.

This done, he struck a line for the office of the *Oil City Star*, the copy for an advertisement in his pocket.

Heiskell's advertisement stated that an experienced driller stood ready to furnish estimates on, and carry out the work of exploration for, oil and gas.

After supper Ared sat outside his tent, feeling very well satisfied with the day's developments. Over across the

lot, a few rods distant, an old man was frying and baking his supper over the coals of an open fire. He had begun his preparations late, and seemed to have no lantern. Now and then he struck a utensil or a stick of wood with his foot as he moved about, swore at it, and gave it an extra kick. But in the main he seemed a cheerful old grub, for he sang now and then, with an air strangely lugubrious and slow of measure for the words, a song which seemed to be appropriate enough for the occasion, seeing that it was supper time.

"Oh, I'll eat when I'm hungry,
I'll drink when I'm dry,
If a tree don't fall on me
I'll live till I die."

That seemed to be the chorus of his song, which was a loose stringing together of disconnected and unrelated events, such as:

"I'm a reavin', I'm a rovin',
I'm a rairin' young blade,
Oh-h, I clim up Pike's Peak
And I set in the shade."

Heiskell had heard the cowboys, who drove Texas cattle up to Oklahoma for the spring grass when he was a boy, sing to the same tune long and rambling songs like that. He believed that the old man must have been a ranch cook in his day, or perhaps a cowboy, for he had the quaver and the nasal turn and the long-sustained notes at the end of their accepted style.

"Dad bust the luck, I know that bacon's burned by the way it smells!" said he, close on the recitation of his feat against Pike's Peak.

Heiskell lit a lantern, and went over. "Thanks, friend, I'm all out of oil," the old man said, "but I thought I could git supper ready before dark come. I could 'a' et it any time, for I know the road to my mouth purty well by now."

"It's a path we're all familiar with," said Heiskell.

"Well, I wish I could forgit that trail for a month or two at a stretch sometimes—it'd be a savin', I'm here to say, stranger. I'd 'a' went after some oil before this, but I've got a sick man in there that I had to look after. He's asleep now; he drops off that-a-way when I tune up my spout and sing."

"Anything serious?" Heiskell inquired.

"Well, yes, I might say it is serious, pardner," said the old man, pausing in his work of forking the bacon from the pan, the fork standing, tines upward, in his hairy fist, his big eyebrows drawn down in concentration, his sharp face set in serious lines. His hat was pushed back, and the lantern light struck him fairly, picking out his points like the high lights of a painting. He was a range man all over. Long, lean, dry; sharp-eyed, gray-mustached, brown as the bacon in his pan.

He resumed his cooking, moving his coffeepot from the coals, turning his corn pone out on the palm of his hand, and blowing the ashes from its crust.

"Yes, I might say it's about the worst thing a man can take," he continued, shaking his head sadly.

"What is it?" asked Heiskell, thinking of smallpox.

"Booze," said the old man. "It's got Purty down, hog-hobbled, and branded in forty places. It's struck into his brains; he's got the Lonesome Wil-
lies."

"Oh, well, he'll get over that," said Heiskell, with the lightness of inexperience.

"Yes, this time he will," assented the old man, rising from his squatting posture before his little fire, his meal being ready. "You're the feller that bought that outfit over there?" said he, jerking his head toward Heiskell's quarters, sliding his hand down his overalls to remove the grease, and then presenting it in friendliness.

"My name's Jeffries, but nobody don't

call me by it but Uncle Sam when he sends me my pension voucher," he said as they shook hands. "I'm known from the Nueces to the North Platte by the name of Triggerheel, and you're at liberty to call me that if you like it better."

"My name is Heiskell, and I'm glad to know you. I knew you were a cattleman when I heard you singing."

"Yes, I've driv' from Taixis to Montana in my time," the old man said, with the pride that every cattleman who followed that long trail discovers in his voice when he speaks of it.

"Eat your supper—I'll come back afterward and we'll have a chat," said Heiskell.

"If you'd be so kind and obligin'," said the old man, "I'd like to git you to stay here with Purty a little while till I run over to the store and git a can of oil."

Heiskell returned when he saw the old man toss his knife and fork into the frying pan and throw the grounds out of his coffeepot. The old man was taking up his song again to cover the clatter of storing his unwashed tinware away in his box.

"I'm a reavin', I'm a rovin',
I'm a rairin'—"

"Ye-es, I tell you! Ye-es, I tell you!" sounded a voice out of the tent.

Triggerheel took the lantern, leaving his song suspended there as if he intended to return presently and resume it, and went into the tent. Heiskell had approached, and could see within through the opened flap. The alcoholic patient was sitting on a mattress spread on the ground, propping himself with unsteady arms.

He appeared to be many years younger than Triggerheel, and he was disheveled and drink-parched, and his mustache drooped sickly in the fire of his inflamed face. His hair stood out in forty ways, his eyeballs were dis-

tended, his aspect savage and uncompromisingly mean.

"Gimme my gun!" he demanded, fixing his glistening eyes on Heiskell, who had stopped in the tent opening. "Gimme my gun—I'll blow a hole in 'im as big as a tub!"

"Now, Purty, you lay down and keep still," soothed Triggerheel, pressing him backward gently.

Purty was in that state where all men looked to him like foes, and his bloody desire was to make holes in them as they came, with indiscriminating savagery.

"Ye-e-s, I tell you!" said he tremblingly, like the bleat of a sheep. He turned against his friend, and tried to strike him with his open claws with a sudden, vicious swipe, like a cat aiming at a passing butterfly.

Triggerheel, taking advantage of his disturbed pose, flipped his charge down to the mattress and held him there with one hand, while he fumbled under the pillow of folded blankets with the other and brought out a hairbrush. With this he began stroking Purty's limp mustache. Under this remarkable treatment, which was eased of its ridiculous aspect in great measure by the old man's earnest tenderness, Purty closed his eyes and relaxed in contentment. Presently he was sleeping again.

When Triggerheel returned Purty was still asleep.

"Purty ain't his lawful, tax-payin' name—if he had any taxes *to* pay," Triggerheel explained. "It's Purdom, but down in Taixis they call him Purty. It's a name that's stuck to him ever since he was a boy, and I reckon always will."

"It seems strangely inappropriate right now," Heiskell said.

"You're right," nodded the old man. "Purty he ain't much of a sight for the ladies right now, and he ain't much better when he's up and a-goin', neither. He's cross-grained and onery, and he'd

steal the coppers from a dead nigger's eyes. Just as like as not he'll git up in the night, with his head clear enough to know where he's at and what he wants, and go through my pockets and light out. He has done it more times than one. It's a streak that runs in Purty, and he can't help it."

"Well, why don't you kick him out?" asked Heiskell, amazed.

"I'll tell you," said the old man slowly, beating the fire with a sprig of buckbush. "Purty he's collectin' a debt off of me that I'll never be able to pay back maybe as long as I live. That boy saved my life one time. Maybe it wasn't much *to* save—I reckon you'd find people in this world that'd tell you that—but such as it was it was kind of handy to me."

"Yes, it takes a good deal to offset a debt like that," Heiskell admitted reflectively, standing by with the lantern in his hand.

"It does so," said the old man. Then quickly: "You'll be goin' in for drillin'?"

"That's my intention," Heiskell returned.

"I'd like to hire out to you to do your tool sharpenin' and haulin' coal and water and what you'll need," put in the old man. "Somebody'll have to do it, and I've got as good a span of horses as they can hitch up in this country. I reckon you'll find me a right smart of a blacksmith when it comes to p'intin' a drill, too."

"I'll be glad to give you the work the minute that I land a contract, Mr. Jeffries, but I don't know how soon that will be."

"Not long," the old man assured him. "They tell me they're beggin' for drillers back in the Big Pool."

"Then the job's yours," promised Heiskell, "if your friend don't wake up feeling that he needs a horse, and ride one of yours off."

"Well, he might," allowed Trigger-

heel, after giving the thought due reflection, "but I don't reckon he will. He never done that bad by me yit—now, there he goes, wakin' up ag'in!"

As Heiskell went back to his camp he heard the old man's quavering tune rise again, following the lead of his endless song. He was in the tent with Purty, the light of his lantern yellow through the worn canvas, and his words came forth softened and mellowed of their harsh range twang:

"Oh, the cuckoo's a pur-ty bird,
And she brings us good ch-ur,
But she nev-er sings cuck-o-o-o
Till the spring of the yu-r-r-r."

CHAPTER V.

A GIRL IN CORDUROY.

Triggerheel came over the next morning some time after breakfast, the lower part of his face, where he had shaved off his bristling beard, as fresh and clean as a scalded hog.

"Well, Purty he up and left me last night," he reported, with unmistakable lightness and relief in his manner.

"Did he take anything with him this time?" Heiskell inquired, with interest.

"I kind of held out on the boy this time," Triggerheel confessed, a little flush of shame spreading over his weathered face, "and only left six bits in my pocket. I had the rest of it hid in a sack of oats. I feel kind of sneaky over it, too; reckon I ortn't 'a' done it—the boy may go hungry before he strikes anything."

"Mr. Jeffries, with all due respect to your feelings of gratitude for what he did for you in the past, I can't see how you feel any disturbance of conscience over holding out on a fellow like that."

The old man looked at him queerly, with something deep in his eye which seemed a warning, his head cocked on one side in attitude of respectful attention.

"I'm his friend, no matter what he looks like to anybody else," he said.

Heiskell noted that the old man delicately relieved Purty of any responsibility toward him. The friendship was on one side only. It was his obligation.

"I beg your pardon, Mr. Jeffries," said he as gravely as he felt.

Triggerheel held out his hand. They shook solemnly. The old man sighed, and brought out his pipe, as if comfortable in having missed a rock which might have wrecked his new-promised friendship at the beginning.

Heiskell did not expect any return from his advertisement for a day or two. In consequence, he did not stay close in camp that day. His inclination bent him toward a visit to the deserted house in the hills, and as there was a melancholy pleasure in following it he spent the greater part of the afternoon around the homestead.

Everything remained as he had left it the day before. His father had not returned; there was not even the footprint of a curious stranger in the dust before the door.

Triggerheel was waiting for him beside the newly acquired drilling machinery when he returned to his camp on the widow's lot toward evening.

"Lady here to see you," said he. "Said she'd come back."

"A lady to see me?" asked Heiskell, his heart leaping like a trout. "Who was she? What was she like?"

What, he wondered, could have brought *her* back? Of course it must be she; his experience did not include any other lady, and his imagination was not elastic enough, at that moment, to admit anybody else.

"I didn't ask her who she was," said Triggerheel, smiling in good humor, "but I reckon I can give you a runnin' description of her color, age, and p'int. I'd judge she was about sixteen hands high, what you might call bal'-faced,

clean-limbed, and a dark sorrel. I'd judge she was about twenty-five, but she might run thirty-two."

"Oh, I don't know *her*," said Heiskell, his wonder increasing. "What did she want, or did she tell you?"

"I reckon she wants a well drilled maybe," returned the old man, a bit out of patience with this stupidity. But his eyes softened as he added: "But maybe you was expectin' somebody else?"

"No, I can't say that I was." Heiskell blushed.

"Well, she was a peart and frisky-lookin' little lady, if you'll take an old feller's word for it," said Triggerheel. "She 'peared like she could jump a six-rail fence and never—sh-h-h! Here she comes back."

She was dressed in a corduroy riding habit, visibly and pantaloonly divided of skirt, with rows of large, cloth-covered buttons down the outer seams. Her low-crowned felt hat, broad-brimmed, leather-banded, bore plain proof that it was not a flighty bit of trickery, to be worn once in a while. It was greasy and dented and rain-beaten, and that part of her habit which came in most intimate contact with the saddle was worn as sleek as the keel of any cowboy's trousers between Oklahoma and the Gulf.

She was an out-of-door woman, of an out-of-door country. The vigor of it was in her stride, and the pliant freedom of her uncorseted waist. Her hair, which Triggerheel had described as "dark sorrel," was not far from his classification of color. It was tinted like the frost-stricken leaves of the scrub-oak tree on Ared Heiskell's hills. It was nested in a low, great coil upon her neck, out of the way of her hat.

"I am Miss Ryland, of seven miles south," said she before she had come to a stand, "and I'm here to talk business, if you're the man who owns the drill."

"Heiskell is my name, and I'm the man," said he, standing by deferentially with his hat in his hand.

"I know; I saw your name in the advertisement," she told him, with an impatient wave of the hand, as if brushing away some trivial and unnecessary thing.

Then she seemed to catch herself up, as if conscious of some unmannerly breach. "I have come to you with a proposition, Mr. Heiskell," said she, meeting his eyes honestly, throwing off her business mask, and speaking with natural sincerity.

"I'll be glad to hear it, Miss Ryland," he encouraged.

"It's just this way," she began, her words gathering way, the brown depths of her pellucid eyes brightening in her kindling animation. "I want a prospect drilled—several of them maybe—but I haven't any money to pay for the work. Whoever undertakes it must have courage and confidence enough to gamble on the future, and take his pay out of what he finds. I've got a lease on what I know to be one of the richest forties in the whole Big Pool district. Do you want to hear any more?"

Triggerheel had drawn out of hearing distance, with that delicacy which is no unusual attribute of rough-barked men of his kind. Miss Ryland looked curiously at Heiskell, who seemed momentarily unconscious of her presence. He was gazing toward the hills, but there was no way for her to know that he was turning over in his heart the pages of his past account with chance. All that she could make of it was that he appeared to be a most extraordinary driller.

"Do you want to hear any more?" she repeated, her voice dropping hopelessly.

Heiskell started, and spoke a quick apology.

"Certainly; I want to hear the entire

particulars. I am greatly interested," he declared.

"You're not like other men with drilling machinery that I've approached on this matter, and I'm glad to meet a man with above three hundred words in his vocabulary in this money-blind country at last. I hope, on that account, to be able to make you understand me, Mr. Heiskell." She said it appealingly, and there was something in her eyes which seemed to plead.

He bent his head, as if to imply that he was ready to be enlightened.

"I hope that I can make you believe me; maybe you're the man to put it through," she rushed on, her eagerness overcoming lucidity.

"If you will tell me," he suggested patiently. "Are you going it alone?"

"Mother and I, but she doesn't trouble about it; her health will not permit; so she leaves everything to me. Yes, it's in my hands, and I may say quite truthfully that I am going it alone. Father died five months ago," she said, with drooping head, speaking softly. "He held this lease on forty acres of the Earnshaw property south of here—perhaps you know where it is?"

"I know the Earnshaw place very well," said he.

"Father was among the early speculators in this field," she went on, "and he made a fortune before the others got fairly under way. Then he lost it in fruitless explorations and options which he couldn't hold, all but the lease that has come down to me. I'm not trying to lure you on, Mr. Heiskell, when I tell you that he refused fifty thousand dollars for it the week before he died."

"He should have taken it," said Heiskell, shaking his head soberly.

"I don't know," she demurred, "one well would be worth more than that. The big people own the leases all around me, and they've put down wells as close to the line as they can be drilled,

and are pumping out my oil in their truly Christian way. There isn't one of their wells that hasn't yielded more than fifty thousand dollars already."

"I was thinking aloud, prompted by certain experiences in my own past," he said. "Your father doubtless was right. How long does your lease run?"

"It expires the first of February—a few days more than two months from now, unless I bring in at least one producing well before that time. That's why I'm uneasy. If I develop one producing well by that time I have the option of renewing for five years."

She turned to him suddenly, stretching out her hands in earnestness.

"Mr. Heiskell, if you knew all that has been plotted and schemed against me, and all that has been thrown in my way of getting anybody to come in and develop this lease on shares, you'd begin to believe that it has a value back of it. Big as the plain evidence on all sides proves it to be, I haven't been able to get one driller to go in with me. They've been bought off, or bluffed out, or managed somehow. They'll not touch it. The big company wants the land, and it seems determined to get it. If my hands can be tied for eight weeks longer I'm out."

"I'd like to be able to save that lease for you, Miss Ryland," he told her, looking up suddenly from his reflection and meeting her eyes.

"If you'll take up this proposition with me, Mr. Heiskell," said she, lifting her hand as if to lay it on his shoulder in her earnestness, "I'll share with you as liberally as the generosity of your act deserves. I'll give you a fourth interest in the lease and all the returns rising out of it. Is that any inducement?"

"I think you are overliberal," said he generously. "I'll get a horse from my friend over there and ride out with you this evening to look over the lay of the land."

She thanked him, her face lively with this dawning of her deferred success.

"The moment that I heard you speak I thought I could make you understand," she said.

"I've been throwing dice with fortune many a long year now," said he, turning away to go for the horse, "and I haven't lost either my spirit or my faith, although my winnings have been pretty slim. I'll be ready in a minute."

CHAPTER VI.

A TOUCH OF OLD STYLE.

When Heiskell rode back to Oil City the town was through its supper. Its inhabitants, sated and glowing, thronged the sidewalks and ran in streams along the roadway of the street. The gnawing of saws and the beating of hammers continued into the night in the unceasing preparation of those who were fending against the coming storms of winter.

Heiskell delivered the horse to Triggerheel, and before the old man had time to question him—if, indeed, that was in his mind—he clapped the old fellow on the shoulder in friendly way and said:

"I believe we've struck a good thing. We'll move the outfit over to the new field of fortune in the morning."

After Heiskell had thrown a bit of supper together for himself, the old man came over and stood beside his fire.

"I was just startin' out to take a look around for Purty," he said. "I'd hate for anything to happen to that boy, and I'd like to see where he's landed before I move over there to the field. Wonder if you'd care to mosey around with me a little and see the sights?"

"I'll be glad to stretch my legs," said Heiskell, getting up.

"I don't reckon the world'd git off the hinges if I never run acrost Purty no more," said Triggerheel, "but I

kind of feel like I orto keep m' eye on him when I can."

"I understand how you feel about it, and no explanation of the interest you feel in him is needed between you and me," Heiskell assured him.

They walked on in silence a little way, until they came to the first saloon on that side of the street.

"We'll have to make a round of the swill stores," said Triggerheel. "We might as well take 'em up one side and down the other."

Heiskell agreed to the wisdom of the plan, there being too many to dodge between from side to side. They began by exploring the first place at hand. The man whom they sought was not among the smoking, smelling, stewing crowd within. Triggerheel emptied his lungs with a sound like a diver coming up, and drew a long breath when they were in the clean air again.

The Midland Hotel boasted the most exclusive bar in the town.

"Not much use lookin' in there for him, but you never can tell what kind of runnin' mates booze is goin' to hitch up," said Triggerheel. "Purty he's made up with summer-glove fellers several times since I've been keepin' my eye on him. We'll just take a squint in, anyhow."

There was a boisterous gale of song swelling within as they pushed the easy-swinging door, which turned suddenly into a barking chorus of cheers.

"Sounds like some of them Harvard-Yale fellers that gits loose and wanders off once in a while," said Triggerheel, standing with his hand on the door, as if hesitating over pushing the investigation in that quarter any further.

The room was hidden by a tall screen which served its purpose when the door swung open in summer weather. The riot of noise sank into a comparative calm for a moment, and somebody was calling on the house to step up and drink.

"If Purty's there, that's his chance," grinned Triggerheel. "We'll look around the corner and see."

A crowd of young men, ten or twelve in number, seemed to have possession of the room, and they were making the most of it. They ranged along the bar, arms on each other's shoulders, in continuous chain, and set up their college song again.

The central figure of the celebration appeared to be a young man of stocky build, who stood behind the line of his fellows waving his hat in an all-including invitation to come forward and drink. He was dressed in a worn and saddle-polished pair of leather chaps, with a broken fringe of thongs along their seams, a blue flannel shirt, stained by sun and rain, high-heeled boots, spurs. A soiled red handkerchief was carelessly knotted around his neck, the peak of its folded corners in front. His hat was brown and battered, circled with a band of Mexican carved leather, and the leather cuffs about his wrist were similarly adorned. A pistol swung in the low-dangling holster on his leg.

The whiteness of his hands, the ruddy freshness of his face, and the stiff manner of handling his feet in the forward-tilted boots seemed to betray him for a poor actor who had stolen the part. If he ever had ridden a mile of fence—for cowboys are only fence riders now—it must have been under an umbrella and on a cloudy day.

Triggerheel was struck speechless by amazement at the sight of this strange combination of archaic outfit and pinkly modern boy.

"Come up and take one on me, everybody in the house!" invited the youth, waving his hat as if to scoop them under the wing of his hospitality.

The few amused spectators in the room who had no part in the celebration grinned at each other and lined up at the bar. The pink cowboy turned to Triggerheel and Heiskell.

"Come on, boys," said he, "this is my night to roar! Turn me loose!"

"Let's git out of here," said Triggerheel.

They turned to leave.

"No, you don't, no, you don't!" said the young man in the old-time outfit, reaching out a restraining hand. "My friends are drinking with me, and anybody that refuses to drink with me ain't my friend!"

"That's right, Wallie!" sustained and cheered the chorus at the bar.

"What're you gents goin' to take?" asked Wallie, hands on hips in a real devilish attitude.

"Sonny," said Triggerheel, placing his hand kindly on the young man's shoulder, "there was a time in my life when I rubbed up agin' them bars, but I ain't touched a drop of no man's liquor for thirty years."

"Oh, that line of talk don't go!" said Wallie, jerking his head disdainfully.

"Me and my friend, we just looked in here to see if we could locate a feller we want to find," said Triggerheel, "and not to take a drink of any man's booze. When I refuse to drink with you, friend, it ain't because I hold you in any less respect."

"Oh, that don't go!" declared the youth, slapping his leg with his hat.

His friends gave him a grunting, growling, chopped-up cheer.

"If a man ain't my friend, he's my enemy!" said the spurred and pistoled young man.

"And that's no lie!" said the chorus.

"You'll either drink or dance!" announced the imitation cowboy, pulling out his pistol with a reckless sling.

Heiskell and Triggerheel had been moving toward the door. Already Heiskell was at the corner of the screen, the old man a few feet behind him. The pink desperado did not appear at all concerned whether Heiskell remained or departed, but he was set in his intention to exact tribute from the old

man. The rest of the noisy crowd added their clamor to the young man's demand. Triggerheel stopped, with no small show of dignity, and Heiskell, feeling that he was deserting his companion in a moment of stress, went back to him.

"Young man," said Triggerheel, "I ain't toted one of them things you're slingin' around there so careless in longer than I can remember. I don't like to see a feller handle a six-shooter that-a-way. It gives me a pain!"

"You don't know who I am!" said the young man, lifting his voice, which was as much inflamed as his face. "Well, I'll show you! I'm little Johnny Green, from the North Fork of Hell River, and I eat fishhooks with my pie! Now dance!"

He slung the fool pistol down to range near the old man's feet and pulled the trigger. The bullet plugged the board not five inches from Triggerheel's toe, and the old man hopped back in alarm.

"Dance!" commanded the little play cowboy, shooting off another cartridge, the bullet striking this time between Triggerheel's feet.

Heiskell felt himself frothing with anger. He saw disks of green between him and the lights as he lunged forward and made one mighty, blind swipe at the melodramatic hero's head. The youth's companions, awake to the folly of his display at last, interposed at the same instant, closing round him in a mass.

Heiskell's long arm plunged among them, and his bony fist found another mark than the one at which he had aimed. The chap who innocently stood buffer to the blow grunted when Heiskell's fist chucked the breath out of him, and he carried two down with him when he plunged, like a real football hero charging a line, into the bunch.

In the moment of confusion which fell upon the celebrants, Triggerheel

caught Heiskell by the shoulder as he was following up the charge, and wheeled him quickly around toward the door. He pushed him forward, and followed after.

From the street they heard the young man Wallie calling loudly for his gun, and the noise of scuffling and the clatter of heels as they struggled. But nobody came after them, and Triggerheel faced back toward his camp.

"I'm sorry, but I believe I missed that little rat!" panted Heiskell.

"You did, son, but you handed it out like a man, and the feller that stopped it had it owin' to him, anyhow. Well, you can saw *my* leg off!"

The old man was walking forward rapidly, breathing hard, gritting his teeth like he had a mouthful of gravel. Heiskell was surprised at his agitation. He had not counted him the man to run away from trouble in any such evidence of panic as that.

"Are we going to give up the hunt for Purty?" he wanted to know.

"Right now we air," said Triggerheel. "I've got some pressin' business on hand right now, and Purty he'll have to go."

The old man poled off toward his tent, saying no more, and Heiskell branched across to his own camp. He was preparing to go to bed when Triggerheel hailed him from without.

Heiskell took up the lantern and went out. There was the old man, transformed. He was dressed in a pair of wrinkled and moldy chaps, rat-gnawn and worn; a buckskin coat, with Indian decorations in paint over the front of it; a hat that must have weathered the storms of a decade, and a pair of spurs with rowels so big that they dug into the ground at every step. Two great, black-stocked revolvers lay in the high-buckled holster, worn after the old style which has come down to the Texas rangers of to-day:

"Son, I ain't had this rig on in twen-

ty-odd years," said the old man apologetically, "and I wasn't sure I had all of it in my chist. But I found it, and here I am. How do I size up?"

"You look like you'd won the right to wear the rig, anyhow," said Heiskell, making a mental picture of the difference between the genuine and the bogus, which he had so lately seen.

"I guess I done it, son," said he gently. "That feller took my breath away over there a little while ago, and I didn't know how to act. I'm goin' over to square up matters and things now. Care to go along?"

"Yes, I'll go along."

Triggerheel listened a moment at the door of the Midland bar. The merry gang was still there, and the cowless cowboy's voice was highest among the high. They were singing something in which the name of Old Wallie supplied the place of the beloved Alma Mater, which true college men are believed always to speak with reverence and emotion.

Triggerheel opened the door, Heiskell following. The boisterers had drawn to them several seasoned-looking young men, brown and whiskery and spattered over trousers and boots with the churnings from prospect holes. Heiskell knew them for the engineers in charge of the work back in the fields, for he had seen dozens of their like out there, bossing the gangs of bohunks around the wells, lines, and tanks.

The young man was standing on the foot rail in front of the bar, in the office of choirmaster now, waving his romantic hat aloft. There was such an uproar that none of them was aware of Triggerheel's entry until he laid hold of the parading youth by the shoulder and flung him to the floor with a bump.

When the startled crowd wheeled to see what had befallen their leader, the old man was standing there, his arms crossed in an easy, lounging attitude before him, a rusty revolver in each

hand. He said nothing, but the look that he gave them was enough to dry the words in their mouths. It seemed as if they had sense enough to realize, above all the alcoholic valor that they owned, that they were face to face with the real thing.

For a moment or two Triggerheel froze them with his savage eyes. Old Wallie, the hero of the song, was sitting on the floor, his hat a rod beyond his reach, scrambling around his twisted gear for his gun. Triggerheel gave him no time to find it. He made an expressive motion toward the door with one of his capable six-shooters, and Old Wallie headed that way with one pained, appealing look behind. The ruddy flame had sunk in his cheeks; they were now the color of a turnip. At the corner of the screen he hesitated fearfully.

"I beg your pardon, friend, but this is a kind of a rough joke——"

"It ain't no joke," reproved Triggerheel, waving him on.

The rest of the house, including the savant behind the bar, trailed out after them, big-eyed, silent. Nobody knew what was going to happen, and least of all Old Wallie, the bad article from the cold tributary of Hell River.

In front of the door, under the bright lights, Wallie would have paused to protest. He even spoke briefly, in a very youngish and humble voice, making no mention of his valiant parts, and quite out of mind apparently of his weapon in the leather below his shaking hand. Triggerheel shut him off by a jolt in the ribs with the end of his rusty barrel, and urged him out into the middle of the thoroughfare.

It was a new show for the crowds which banked quickly on both sides of the street. Nobody interfered, but Heiskell noted that there was a quick laying together of heads among the young men who had been drinking with

Wallie and a hurried departure of three or four in various directions.

Triggerheel would not listen to Wallie, who was pleading now.

"I danced to your tune, pardner, a little while ago, and now you're agoin' to dance to mine," Heiskell heard him say.

"But you're not—you're not——"

"Yes, I am; I'm the same feller," cut in Triggerheel. "Git down on your hands and knees!"

The crowd pressed chins on the shoulders of those in front, leaning over in eager silence to see. Nothing like that ever had been seen in Oil City before. People were not certain whether it was something in earnest or only an advertisement of medicine or somebody's smoking tobacco.

The young man stood like a horse in the middle of the bright street, and, using him like a horse, Triggerheel straddled him. The crowd came out of its wondering silence and gave them a cheer.

"Trot!" commanded Triggerheel, raking his mount's fat thigh with his spur.

Perhaps the young man was sober by that time. Those who have experienced the two extremes say that such a thing is possible. He started off, weaving and staggering under the weight of the old man, and Triggerheel raised one gun and fired a shot up among the wires which netted the air above Broadway. That done, he lowered the weapon and held it, smoking and suggestive of terrible deeds, under Old Wallie's nose.

It was a little touch of the melodramatic which the mingled seed of the earth collected there appreciated fully. It touched something wild and romantic in their own oily breasts. They whooped and capered and flung their hands high in encouraging applause. If it was going to turn out an advertisement at last, it was a good one, and the sell of it wouldn't hurt.

Triggerheel emptied his six-shooter

as his man horse stumbled on, lowering his weapons after each shot, as in the first instance, and rubbing the smoking muzzle under Old Wallie's college nose. When the last shot was discharged, Triggerheel gave his creature a parting rasp with his big spur and a kick to lift his lagging spirits. Then he turned him loose to go his way.

Heiskell had kept pace with the remarkable parade, and now he joined Triggerheel as the old man came to the sidewalk through the lane which the spectators opened for him in respectful admiration. Heiskell gave the old man his hand and spoke in his ear.

"They've gone for the police and the sheriff and all the other peace officers in the county—come on!" he urged.

They turned from the street and made their way between buildings in the dark. As they came out into the open, a man stepped before them and lifted a short club, commanding them to stop. In the half light which fell over the tops of the low buildings, Heiskell saw the glimmer of a badge on his coat.

"I'm the chief of police, and I don't know where my man is," said the stranger, "but he may pick you up if you don't duck along purty quick. Say, you give that feller what was comin' to him, all right, but you'll have to duck. I don't want to arrest you, old feller, but it'd be all my job's worth if Fleming was to find out I let you git away."

"Fleming?" repeated Triggerheel, as if he had heard amazing news.

"Sure; he's Fleming's nephew—come out here to break into business and brought a bunch of his college friends along in his private car to help him bust through. They've been makin' a dang nuisance of theirselves around town all day, but I dassen't to touch 'em. But you duck, and duck fast, see?"

They went on hurriedly, with thanks to the officer for his generosity.

"I'll change m' clothes and wash m' face, as the feller said, and I reckon

my own mammy wouldn't know me if she met me afterward," said Triggerheel. "And if it's all the same to you, I'll begin haulin' that drillin' machinery over to the young lady's lease to-night. If old Fleming was to find out who it was broke his little nephew in to ride, I'd have to smoke for it, son."

"Fleming? Who's Fleming?"

"Well, he's what you might call the big grunt around here, son. You must be a stranger in the Big Pool deestric' if you ain't never heard tell of Horace Fleming."

"No; I've lived nearly all my life within a running jump of the site of this town, you might say. But I've been running sheep back in the hills, and this business developed like a toadstool in the night right under my nose, and I knew just as much about it as a man in prison would have known up to two days ago. I never heard of Horace Fleming. What is he? What does he do?"

"Well, Fleming he's president of the Plains Oil Company, as they call the branch of the big feller that operates in this State."

"Oh, I see," said Heiskell.

"Yes. If Fleming wants to make a man, he can make him; and if he wants to shut him up in his hole and starve him out, he can come purty nigh doin' it every time. If he wants to run oil from a deestric', he runs it; and if he don't like some feller in there, he shuts down on all of 'em and starves enemy and friend till he fetches the man he don't like or that's went agin' him in some way down to his hunker bones. Oil City's Fleming, and Fleming's Oil City. Maybe a man could breathe here without askin' him, but that's about as fur as he could go."

"It's all news to me," declared Heiskell, relishing it as such.

"I used to know Fleming around San Antone when he sold bob wire," said Triggerheel. "He's a great big man

with t'backer on his mouth and cuss words jammed inside of him so thick they chock up his neck tryin' to git out sometimes. I reckon if he found out who it was give his relation a little touch up of old-style life, he'd fix it up somehow that I'd have to go to the pen."

"He couldn't go that far, no matter what his influence in this little spot of the State may be," denied Heiskell. "Well, you hitch up and rack out with part of the machinery, so you'll have an alibi. I don't believe anybody recognized you in that rig."

Triggerheel took off his belt and pistols as he walked on, removed his painted coat and wrapped them in it, together with his ancient hat.

"Well, Ed"—that was as close to the name Ared as he could drive—"I guess I raired up and made a fool out of myself," said he contritely.

"Oh, I don't think so," said Heiskell. "He'll not forget it in a hurry."

"Neither will Fleming," said Triggerheel portentously, his hand on the flap of his tent.

CHAPTER VII.

WORD FROM HEADQUARTERS.

Heiskell had assembled his machinery in a spot which he considered likely from all considerations, if there was any choice of place, indeed, in a piece of land which seemed floating in oil. It did not appear reasonable that an unprofitable well could be sunk anywhere within the borders of Josephine Ryland's lease, judging by the results which had attended drilling all around its edges.

The lease appeared to be, as she had declared it, in the very richest part of the great discovery. Derricks were as thick in the fields around it on every side as shocks of fodder in a cornfield, it seemed to one looking over the coun-

try from the eminence occupied by the little plank house occupied by Miss Ryland and her mother.

But the big company had set itself, like a devilfish, to the work of sucking dry her possessions with a thoroughness fully up to its nation-wide reputation for brutality. It seemed a trespass of meaner and more arrogant defiance than crossing over her confines and robbing her outright would have been. Its derricks formed a fence all round her lines, standing as close to the border as holes could be drilled; and in the stretch where no wells had yet been brought in a drill was at work seeking the hidden outlets of her wealth.

The sight of this fired Heiskell's blood to the task which lay at his hand. Not alone for what victory would yield him, but in larger measure for the circumvention of the brutal covetousness of the gang which had blocked her previous efforts.

Perhaps the big company would refuse to "run" their oil, as Triggerheel had said. That was only a present consideration. If he could bring in a well in the short time remaining of her leasehold, the five years' tenure which that would give her would bring a buyer for the lease at a price which would make both of them independent.

He had selected a spot where the fall of the land would make it easy to bank and conserve the output of a gusher, in the fortunate event of tapping the deposit at a point of high pressure. It was at the head of a ravine, a few hundred yards distant from the rough shelter which Ryland had built with his own hands on his last hope. There was a scrubby growth of brush and small timber along the sides of this draw; the rest of the lease was open meadowland.

"They know by this time that I've found somebody with courage enough to tackle the job," said Miss Ryland, standing by while Ared was testing the

engine, coupled by pipe with the boiler several hundred feet away.

"We'll remove all lingering doubt in the morning when we begin to raise the rig," said he. "We'll soon have the drill going, the boiler and engine are in first-class shape, and we'll work day and night till we get the oil."

Triggerheel was putting up a canvas stable for his horses, and the little camp looked all in a bustle. Miss Ryland was bright with the promise of these preparations. Her face had lost the strained tension which had added unearned years to her appearance, and she had left off her shabby riding habit and now appeared in a soldierly-looking blue serge with short skirt and trim jacket. She appeared very competent, undeniably handsome, and eager for the adventure.

Heiskell had put off his shepherd's raiment, as if divorcing himself from his past life altogether, and now appeared in the regulation uniform of the men who accomplished things in that country. He wore wide corduroy trousers, the legs of them folded inside his high, laced boots, a blue flannel shirt, and duck coat. Only he clung to his old hat, which flapped its wings in every high wind, like a melancholy old winter crow.

"I wish I could take hold and help you," said she, with a sigh for her own impotency.

"Your presence is an inspiration," said he, looking into her fine brown eyes, the oil can in his hand poised over the cylinder cup; "you have been so courageous in the face of the enemy."

He waved the can to indicate the line of derricks which all but inclosed her parcel of land. The alert, questioning look which his manner of speech had surprised into her eyes at their first meeting sprang there again. If he saw it, he did not understand, for he smiled as a pleasurable color swept her cheeks.

"I've done the best I could," said she.

"If I could have found a *man* before—they're such sneaks and cowards!"

"We'll get the rig up in a day or two, and then we'll see what's below," said he cheerfully, passing over her bitter reflection, his hand on the coupling of the little piston, traveling with it on its short stroke.

He watched her as she went up the hill, her slender ankles, as trim as a doe's, twinkling below her skirt. But there was a look of abstraction in his eyes, as if, though focused there, they saw something that was not and had not been. He lifted the tips of his grimed fingers to his forehead and touched it as if in salute. A shadow of a smile moved over his face, like the stirring of a gentle memory.

Heiskell sat close to his little fire, for the chill of winter was in the night, after Triggerheel had turned in, giving himself over to a new and pleasurable dream. In the old times—before the tragedy to the sheepfold—he had his romantic fancies, such as come to every young man in his day, but there never had been anything to rest them on save the nebulous shapes of desire. No woman ever had crossed his way and left her footprints in the dew of his morning. She of the adventurous night, who had come and sung and departed, was the first.

Now he had given her place, he had exalted her, as men raise the image of God's mother beside their altars. Each is beautiful and holy in measure with the devotion of him whose hands place her in the consecrated niche. To Ared Heiskell this woman of the song had grown more dear in the few days that had passed since they met and parted than the most treasured memory of his life.

There was no lure in other eyes, no meshes to entangle in other locks of barley-brown hair. He felt that he was richer in the one little kiss that she had given him than he would be if the labor

that he was to begin to-morrow should open the greatest gusher in the field.

Three days later, work on the well was begun. If he could have afforded it, Heiskell would have employed a night shift to keep the drill going, but he felt that he would scarcely have capital enough as it was to carry this first hole down to oil. But he told Triggerheel that they would begin early and work late, bending the day at both ends.

"We'll run from kin to kain't, as they say down in the cotton fields," said Triggerheel, "from the time we kin see in the mornin' till we kain't see no funder at night."

Progress was rapid during the first few days through the earth and shale. When they came down to solid rock, Triggerheel said, in his always cheerful way:

"We've hit the outside of the safe, and it won't be long now till we bust it."

It was on that day that Josephine brought her mother down to see the drilling machinery and meet the driller. It was the first close sight of her that Heiskell had been accorded, although he had seen her daily from a distance as she sat at her window looking down on the work.

She was a frail, thin woman, pale almost to translucence. Her large, childish blue eyes were young in her old face, and perhaps it was from them that she drew the belief that she was fresh and handsome. Youth seemed to have dried out of her, leaving the skin of her face not wrinkled but drawn tight, and in this shrunken framework her big eyes rolled and turned their full, firm globes, shining with all the luster of her girlhood. She was painfully affected, and spoke with what seemed to be an acquired accent of the South.

She wondered and exclaimed over the machinery, holding her skirts tight about her wasted old shanks.

"My dotah tells me you're goin' to make us rich once mo'," said she, twist-

ing Heiskell a smile. "When we lived in New Aw-le-ans——"

"Mother, Mr. Heiskell says the string of drilling tools weighs half a ton," interposed Josephine.

"Gracious! Can it be so?" wondered the old lady, patting the thin strand of hair which coquettishly concealed the top of her ear. It was faded hair, but not gray, nature having carried out its plan of withering her even to that digression from its established rule.

"Even then, ten feet through this rock is a big day's work," he told her.

"Ten feet!" said she, in consternation. "Why, suh, it will take you a hun'ed days to go down a thousand feet, the depth my husband always said one must drill here to get a strong well. You'll have to has'en, Mr. Heiskell, or I and my dotah will be ruined!"

"The average depth of the wells around us is only seven hundred feet," said he, his eyes finding Josephine's in their strange, abstracted way.

"And we'll win," nodded Josephine, speaking to him, for him alone.

He smiled and placed his hand on the joint of the flashing little piston, as if encouraging a friend in some mighty labor.

"Yes, we'll win," he echoed, his strong face set in determined cast.

"It's a strange partnership you two have entered into," simpered the old lady, looking at him archly, as if to discover to them both that she could see deeper than they supposed.

Josephine blushed and plucked her by the arm.

"Oh, Jo, you red-ic'lous creature, I don't see *why!*" she giggled. "You must come up to dinnah with us this evening, Mr. Heiskell," she hurried on.

"Indeed you must, Mr. Heiskell!" seconded Josephine. "We've been very stingy of our hospitality."

"I'm a stranger; you owe me no hospitality," said Heiskell, with a courtesy

as deep and easy as the old woman's was artificial and strained.

"We can pour you a good cup of tea, and give you some gingerbread, creole style," said Josephine, lighting the inducement with a smile.

"The attraction is doubly sufficient without them," said he. "I'll be glad to go."

"When we lived in New Aw-le-ans, where Mr. Ryland was edito' of a papeh, we entertained our friends deservingly," said Mrs. Ryland, shaking her head in sorrow for the days of magnificence.

So it came that Heiskell sat at supper with his partner and her mother that evening—for it is still supper in that country, and will remain supper against all innovations for many a year to come. There was moonlight afterward, and a walk with Josephine.

They talked of other things than oil wells, royalties, geological formations, and the competition of the unfair and strong.

But, stray as they might from the subject nearest both their hearts, their feet seemed unconsciously to lead them back to the scene of the exploration when they turned to go home again. Triggerheel was smoking by his fire. He rose and made the deferential bow which he never neglected when Josephine appeared. After a few words with him, they went on up the hill.

"He calls you Ed," said she, half to herself, as if reflecting over it.

"He can't get around Ared," he told her, "and I can't blame him, either; it's a far-fetched sort of name."

"He doesn't seem to be afraid of you, though," said she.

"Afraid of me?" he asked.

"I was," she told him, "at first. It was several days before I felt grown up when I was around where you were—you seemed so severe and dignified that I felt like a child."

"Oh, you shouldn't say that!" he chided uncomfortably.

"Mother had the same feeling. That's why I couldn't induce her to come down and get acquainted before. But mother gets over things quicker than I do," she laughed. "She's on a footing of familiarity with you already."

"Well, if you can't be familiar you can at least be unafraid," he said. "I never bit a young woman in my life."

Perhaps she wondered whether he ever had kissed one. It was but a logical speculation for a woman.

They had come to the door. He gave her his hand in formal good night, and she retained it a moment unconsciously, maybe, her warm fingers clasping the tips of his.

"Well, partner, I'll not be afraid any more," said she, forcing a little laugh.

"Thanks, partner," he returned heartily.

Next morning the drill was going a little after dawn, and Triggerheel was on the road to Oil City after a load of coal. The old man had just drawn up to unload the fuel on his return near noon when he jerked his head toward the road.

"Feller comin' over from our neighbors," said he.

Heiskell looked.

"You're right," he said.

"Yes, it's that Harvard-Yale feller," said Triggerheel.

"It can't be!" said Heiskell incredulously.

"You wait and see," said the old man, going ahead with his shoveling.

The visitor came on briskly, and Heiskell saw that Triggerheel had been correct in his long-distance identification. It was the young man who had been broken in to ride by Triggerheel in the middle of Broadway, Oil City, not many nights past. He was dressed in the conventional laced boots and corduroys of the oil country, and he was plentifully splashed and begrimed. He

marched up to the engine where Heiskell stood, like a man with a purpose, and offered his hand.

"Sandford is my name. I'm engineer in charge of the work over the way," said he.

Heiskell met his friendly advance on like terms, and introduced himself. Sandford ran his eye over the machinery and nodded approval.

"You've got a neat little outfit here, Mr. Heiskell," he said.

Heiskell admitted that it was carrying its part very well. He said as much to himself in regard to Sandford, who appeared to considerably better advantage than he did when Heiskell saw him last.

Sandford appeared to take a friendly interest in the work. He inquired how deep Heiskell was down, his progress daily, and how far he expected to go. Heiskell told him that the job cut out for him was to get oil, and that his purpose was to seek it in another spot if he didn't get it there within a reasonable depth.

"You'll hit it at about eight hundred feet," predicted Sandford; "you can't miss it anywhere you drill. It's all under here, although we're doing the best we can to relieve the pressure."

He laughed over his joke, but alone.

"Yes, Miss Ryland ought to be collecting royalties from you every day," said Heiskell.

"I came over to inquire about the Rylands," said Sandford, in a quick burst of confidence. "I just learned yesterday that the name of the lessee here was Ryland, and I wondered if by any chance it might be Ted Ryland's family."

"I don't know. Maybe there's a Ted; I never heard them mention him," Heiskell replied.

"He's dead, poor old chap," said Sandford. "We were at tech together; he graduated a year ahead of me, and meningitis took him while he was on

his first job. He was an electrical engineer—died out in Omaha. Do you know whether they used to live in New Orleans, where Ryland was editor of a paper?"

"Yes, the old lady often speaks of it," Heiskell replied.

"Then it's the same family," Sandford declared, with evident satisfaction. "That boy was like a brother to me. I'll have to go up and pay my respects."

He turned, after proceeding a few yards up the path toward the house, and came back.

"Oh, say," said he, as if approaching an incidental that he had overlooked, "the old man—Fleming, you know—would like for you to stop in at the office and see him to-morrow."

CHAPTER VIII.

A HAND AT THE WINDOW.

Mrs. Ryland was as greatly excited over the visit of Sandford as if she had met an elephant. When Heiskell called in that night after the thumping drill was still, he found her dallying at the little round table at which she and Josephine had taken their tea. She greeted Heiskell effusively, and began at once unburdening herself of encomiums on Sandford's extraordinary parts.

"He reminds me so of Ted," she sighed.

"Why, mother, he's nothing like Ted!" protested Josephine. "He's as round as a doughnut, and Ted was tall, like Mr. Heiskell."

"In his presence and his refinement, I mean, child," the old woman corrected. "One could tell, Mr. Heiskell, if he nevah spoke a wo'd, that he'd been accustomed to the highest s'ciety. I think it was real nice of him to look us up that way."

"He brought me a message from his uncle," Heiskell nodded to Josephine.

The color drained out of the young woman's cheeks.

"What does he want?" she asked, the shadow of old anxieties in her eyes.

"I'm commanded to appear at court before his majesty to-morrow," replied Heiskell, smiling as if he held the matter lightly.

"I expected to hear from him in some way, as soon as he found out that we had a drill going here. If he'd been watching as sharp as he usually watches, he'd have beaten me to you in the first place. Are you going?"

"I came up to talk it over," said he.

"If Mr. Fleming offers terms," said the old lady, "my advice would be to accept, Mr. Heiskell and dotah. If your po' fath-a hadn't been so blind to his family's inter-usts, this qua'l nevah would have come down to us."

"He never offered us terms," said Josephine. "He wanted to strangle us for the spite that he nursed against our name."

"Oh, child, don't be too hawd on Mr. Fleming!" the old lady appealed.

"No, I'll give him all the credit he deserves," said Josephine. "He's a good hater."

"I never have seen the man," said Heiskell, "but Triggerheel used to know him when he was a barb-wire salesman in Texas. He gives him a rugged sort of reputation."

"I was goin' to speak to you about that Triggageel man," said Mrs. Ryland. "He makes me shuddah simply to look at him—he's such a desp'ate-lookin' character; don't you think so, Mr. Heiskell?"

"Why, no, he's as gentle as a woman," defended Heiskell. "I could tell you a story about his devotion to a worthless man to whom he feels himself indebted which might soften your judgment of him, madam."

"No," protested Mrs. Ryland, flushing under her eyes, "don't attempt to defend the fellah to me, suh! I'll not

have it, suh! I detest the fellah, and I shall insist that you send him away from heah at once! The very sound of his name gives me creeps!"

"Jeffries is his name," Heiskell explained. "I don't know what the nickname means, nor how he came by it at all. But he's a first-rate old fellow, and I'm sure he never gave a woman anywhere any reason for being afraid of him. What do you think"—he turned to Josephine—"about going to see Fleming in the morning?"

"I think perhaps you'd better go," said she.

"If he wants to talk business, he'd better understand at the beginning that there are two of us," he suggested.

"You mean I'd better go, too?"

"You're the general; I'm only the fighting force," said he.

"No, I don't believe it's best for me to go," she answered, after pondering a little while. "If Fleming had wanted to see me, he could have sent for me—he could have done that any time since father died."

"It seems so," nodded Heiskell, his head bent in reflection.

"Fleming is a heartless and unprincipled man," said Josephine, looking at him earnestly. "He got the impression that father tried to hold him up on this lease, and he told him he'd see that he never made a dollar out of it. Fleming has passed that word along to me in more ways than one. He never forgave father because he outgeneraled him in securing the government's approval of his lease ahead of him. This is Indian land, you know; the Earnshaws are Indians, and it belongs to minor heirs."

"Yes, I taught school in this district one term several years ago, and the little Earnshaws were among my pupils," said he.

While they talked, Mrs. Ryland drained the teapot into her cup and stirred and sipped the beverage with apparent indifference to their discussion.

She was wearing a loose-sleeved dress of youthful-tinted silk, doubtless a relic of the happy days in New Orleans. It was cut at least twenty years too low, and her poor old neck was as unlovely in its nakedness as a shorn and starving ewe's.

"Suppose that he wants to make terms?" suggested Heiskell.

Mrs. Ryland did not change her pose of indifference and lounging ease, her bony elbows on the cloth. But she rolled her big eyes, as the eyes of one move who strains to listen, and the tinkle of her spoon against the cup was stilled.

"Yes, suppose he does," said Josephine, bending her eyes in thoughtful calculation to the floor.

"What will the price of surrender be?"

Josephine looked into his questioning eyes.

"Mr. Heiskell, this lease is worth half a million dollars to Horace Fleming, or to anybody with capital to develop it and the necessary pull with the big company for marketing the output. But we couldn't begin to ask that for it," she sighed.

"What have you thought of?" he inquired.

"I've never settled on a price, even in my own mind," she said. "Of course I've had my dreams, but I should say a hundred thousand. Is that unreasonable?"

The tinkle of the spoon sounded in the cup again, as Mrs. Ryland dipped and poured, dipped and poured, and then lifted a spoonful to her lips.

"No, I think not," said he. "Shall I stand out for that in case he wants to talk business?"

"Father paid twelve thousand dollars for the lease for one year," said she. "Yes, I think we'd better stand for that."

"I'll go over in the morning and see

what he wants," said Heiskell, rising to leave them.

"I do hope you'll send that horrid Triggahheel man off," said Mrs. Ryland, offering him a languid hand, "as a special favor to me, deah Mr. Heiskell."

"I'm sorry that you feel so strongly in the matter," Heiskell told her, "but I'll answer for Mr. Jeffries. He'll cause you no trouble, and your fears may be banished, madam. Miss Ryland and I need him; we could hardly get on without him."

"Oh, well," said Mrs. Ryland, waving her hand as if to dismiss the subject, "I must beg you to excuse me, Mr. Heiskell," she continued, giving him what she doubtless believed to be an engaging, if not fascinating, smile, "for failing to take part in the conv'sation this evening. I have been dreaming of the past while you two young people discussed business. It seems to me that Mr. Sandford's friendly visit gave me a peek back into the wo'ld we lost when we left New Aw-le-ans to hunt riches in this terrible, wild land. Don't you think Mr. Sandford has a most distinguished presence, suh?"

The question provoked a smile on Heiskell's serious face. He recalled the distinguished performance in which Sandford was a chief actor which he lately had witnessed.

"Oh, he seems to stand up very well," said he.

"He made quite a conquest of mother," said Josephine. "I was over in town this morning and came in just as he was leaving. Didn't he kiss your hand, mother, or was he trying to slip off your wedding ring?"

"Oh, Jo, you red-ic'lous thing!" giggled the old woman. Then seriously: "You fo'get, dotah, that he was our po' Ted's bosom friend."

"But I don't forget that he's Horace Fleming's nephew, mother," the young woman answered, with significant gravity.

Heiskell had not overlooked that fact himself. He marveled at the thrift of the breed. In the half hour that Sandford had spent with the old woman that morning, he seemed to have recruited her to the enemy's cause.

Josephine carried her good night outside the door, and there she stood as he went down the path, looking after him as if the responsibility of his safe arrival at his quarters was part of her hospitable duty. Twice or thrice she reached out her hand to open the door, withdrawing it before it fell on the latch. When the shadows had swallowed him, and the sound of his feet passed on, she sighed and opened the door. Heiskell had not looked back.

CHAPTER IX.

THE BIG GRUNT.

The offices of the big company were in a new brick building on a prominent corner in Oil City. Early as it was when Heiskell arrived on the appointed morning, Fleming was at his desk, and he was obliged to wait until the general had worked through his first pressing orders of the day.

From the outer office where he waited, Heiskell could hear the big man's voice, now at the telephone, now talking directly to some employee who had been summoned through his private door. Fleming's tones were loud, and his orders were barbed with profanity.

A self-contained lad with a snub nose, which gave his face a cast of disgust, as if he had smelled the world when he first arrived in it and found it distasteful, and had been unable to right his facial expression ever since, sat at a desk near Fleming's door.

There was a fresh, clean pad on the lad's desk, and a little box of elastic bands. There was neither pen nor paper, nor anything which indicated that the youth ever recorded an order or engrossed a thought.

When, after more than an hour's wait, the blatant electric alarm on the boy's desk announced that Fleming was ready to receive his visitor, the warder got up, opened the door wide, and twitched his nose like a rabbit as he jerked his head in signal for Heiskell to pass.

From where he stood, Heiskell could see Fleming at his elaborate mahogany desk, a wrinkle across the back of his coat from a shoulder to shoulder. Fleming was working with both hands piling letters into the arms of his stenographer, and the set of his coat seemed to indicate that very soon he must work himself out of it, like a bull snake casting its slough.

There seemed to be something familiar in the set of the man; Heiskell wondered, as he entered the room, where he had seen him before. Fleming piled the last handful of letters upon the heap in his stenographer's arms, and turned to face his caller. Then Heiskell identified him as the man from whose unwelcome attentions Jane Sloane had fled on that most important of all his nights.

If Fleming recognized Heiskell, he displayed no indication of it. As he swung his chair about there was an expression on his face which he doubtless meant to answer for a smile, but the cast in his eyes seemed to proclaim that he despised himself for it. It was a rough-blocked, animal face, large-featured and lined a little in the brown, tough skin. His mustache was trimmed to the line of his straight, great mouth. His eyes were cynical, small, and his forehead shallow, with heavy black hair brushed down upon it in barberish sweep.

"Glad to see you, Heiskell," said he, offering his hand. "How're y'u comin'?"

"Very well, thank you," replied Heiskell, resenting inwardly the man's patronizing, managerial manner, and the sneer which lay in his eyes.

Fleming pushed the chair which his stenographer had occupied away from the corner of the desk with his foot, and nodded. Heiskell seated himself, his old hat on his knee.

"I hear you've got a purty good little outfit over there on the Ryland lease?" said Fleming, measuring Heiskell up and down with impertinent eyes.

"I get along very well with it," said Heiskell, drawing back into his shell of reserve.

"Well, it'll never pay you for the coal you'll burn puttin' down a hole on that land," Fleming declared, his face hardening. "That's an unprofitable undertaking for a young feller that ought to be goin' ahead. Well, say, Heiskell, I just wanted to give you a friendly steer, that's all."

He lifted his hand, imposing silence, as Heiskell would have spoken, perhaps hastily, as the quick coloring of his face betrayed.

"I know all about you and the old man puttin' down them holes up there on the hill and wastin' years of your time, and everything else you had, on 'em, and I want to put you right before you shoot off at an angle again. If you'll listen to me, you'll win out; but if you stick to the job you've tackled, you'll go broke and you'll hit the grit harder than you ever hit it in your life."

Heiskell swallowed his indignation and answered mildly, although he could not trust his eyes to look into Fleming's face.

"Your interest in me is generous, Mr. Fleming," he said, "but I guess I can manage——"

"That's where you've got another guess comin'!" Fleming took him up sharply. "You don't know any more about oil than a cat knows about Christmas. If you want to learn the business and make money, git under my wing—and I'm not offerin' men this chance every day, kid."

"In other words, you want me to stop drilling on the Ryland lease and let the option expire by default," said Heiskell, feeling quite cool and collected and beyond the danger of an unseemly explosion now.

"I'm offerin' you an opening, Heiskell, because I believe there's something to you, and I don't want to see you always buttin' your head up against a tree. You're an unlucky man, Heiskell, and you will be till you kiss a nigger, as the man said. Put your unprofitable pride and high-flyin' notions in your pocket and take my advice—it'll pay you a good deal better in the end than rammin' around bull-headed and blind in your own style."

"I haven't heard your proposition yet," suggested Heiskell.

"Well, to begin with, I need a man about your size over there on that property where Sandford's in charge. I want to move him. Take your drill over there in the morning and go to work on a job that'll pay. No young man ever hitched up with me and lost money by it."

Heiskell rose in stiff dignity.

"I didn't come here to listen to a dishonorable proposal," said Heiskell, forgetting that he had, not a minute before, as much as asked Fleming to make it, in his desire to sound him and learn how far he would ask a man to go.

Fleming had not forgotten, and he caught Heiskell up on it with a sneer.

"You didn't, eh?" said he. "What'd you ask me to make it for, then? Ain't the bait big enough, or what's wrong?"

Heiskell felt as if he could melt out through a nail hole if there had been one presented.

"I didn't mean to draw that kind of a proposal from you, anyway," he confessed, laying bare his hope.

"No, you thought I was ready to buy you and that fool girl off. Well, I'm not. I'll never pay the Rylands a cent

for that lease. Hell, I've got the cream from under that land already!"

Fleming turned back to his desk, as if to say the conference had come to an end. But he wheeled again suddenly.

"Suppose you got oil there," said he, his face congested, his eyes like an angry boar's, "who's goin' to buy it?"

"That's a bridge to be crossed when we get to it," Heiskell said.

"It's one you'll never git over, young feller. Well, you can either let go over there where you're at, and come in on the reservation and be good, or I'll put a knot in your tail that'll make you jump in seven different directions. I'm givin' it to you straight, so you'll know what to expect."

Heiskell's reason told him to go and leave it where it stood, but there was a word on his tongue that he felt must be spoken.

"Fleming, why can't you tote like a man with those women?" he asked. "That lease is a small matter to your company, and I can't understand where a man of your caliber can find either satisfaction or honor in carrying a quarrel against a man beyond the grave."

"That's none of your business!" said Fleming. He took a plug of tobacco out of his pocket and bit it savagely in the corner of his mouth, twisting his lips around it in every expression of a growl but the sound.

"That's all right, too," said Heiskell, hot in his turn, "but I'm going to serve notice on you now that I'm on that job to stick. I've got forty-one days yet to bring in a producing well, and I'll bring it in. If your company won't buy the oil, maybe it can be handled some other way."

Fleming got up with a stretching, yawning movement. The flush of anger had left his face, and that sour distortion that he drew for a smile moved round his mouth again.

"I've offered you peace——"

"At the price of manhood," said Heiskell.

"But you prefer war," continued Fleming, unruffled. "All right. This is twice that you've walked off with the girl—or tried to. Son, when I used to pack a gun down in Texas I always let a man call me a liar once. The next time I got busy. So you're goin' in to save another kitten, are you? All right, go to it!"

There was no question about the finality of the conference. Fleming figuratively put out the lights. He sat down at his desk and presented his back. Heiskell saw the door standing open before him.

Triggerheel had steam up when Heiskell got back to the works, and the drill was set going. There would be time enough, thought Heiskell, to report the result of his meeting with Fleming to Jo Ryland after shutting down for the day. She would know from his eagerness to get to work and retrieve the lost hours of the morning that the fight was to go ahead on the original lines. But she appeared in the yard presently, and he waved his hat for her to come down.

She came bareheaded as she was, the strong, icy wind in her hair. Mrs. Ryland, at the window, looked after her and sat rocking across the opening of the curtains as they talked.

"He tried to buy you off!" was her first word to him as she came panting up from her quick run.

He gave her a brief summary of his talk with Fleming.

A flame of admiration, or perhaps something more, sprang into the girl's eager face. "You turned him down for my forlorn hope, and I knew you'd do it when you went!"

"It isn't so very much to my credit that I can see," said he. "That much is expected of any white man in the run of the day. I was in earnest about this work before I met Fleming, and

I'm eager now. I'm going to turn your hope into a fruitful certainty."

"Well, you're a man, partner!" said she, in simple sincerity.

"Thank you, Jo," said he.

She started at the familiar address and lifted her handsome head, a smile dawning on her lips. But it glimmered out like a sickly fire when she saw his eyes, fixed in the unconscious abstraction which seemed a habit with him, far away on things in which she felt it useless to hope ever to see with him or enter into and share. She left him, and he seemed unconscious of her going.

Heiskell was completely insulated by the soft weavings of his dream. He had spun himself into insensibility to every feminine charm apart from her whose lips had set their seal upon his brow. Like a bold spider architect, he sat beside his fire that night, throwing out long, bright lines to blow in the zephyrs of his fancy and find anchorage upon the shore of ultimate felicity.

The song of Jane Sloane was in his memory always, the image of her face was etched upon his heart.

Triggerheel came over to Heiskell's tent after his late supper. He had been long on the road from Oil City with a jag of coal, and he was grimy about the nose and ringed round the eyes, like a raccoon, but his spirits were at the same even pitch where he maintained them against all discomforts and delays.

"That Harvard-Yale feller must be cuttin' a shine around the widder," he grinned, doubling his long legs under him and raking a coal out of the fire for his pipe.

"What makes you think so?" asked Heiskell, moved by the humor of the suggestion.

"He's up there at the house to-night, with an automobile as big as a furniture car," said Triggerheel.

"Maybe it isn't the widow he's after," suggested Heiskell.

Triggerheel squinted at him queerly.

"Mean to say you'd set there and see him spur around anybody else in that family?" he asked.

"If they'll stand for it, why shouldn't I?" laughed Heiskell.

"Well, you're the funniest feller!" marveled the old man.

"How's that?"

"Oh, n-n-nothing," said Triggerheel, marking in the ashes with a stick.

"Sandford may be a good enough sort of boy in his way," Heiskell remarked.

"Maybe so—for them that likes it; but I ain't one of 'em!" declared Triggerheel feelingly. "Well, I saw old Purty over in town."

"Drunk?"

"No, workin'. Got a job teamin' from the big company. Ain't a feller 'this side of a circus can handle a string of six mules better'n that boy."

"I'm glad to hear he's good for something," said Heiskell. "Did he pay you back that six bits he took the night he sneaked off?"

"Who—Purty?" asked the old man, in surprise.

"Yes, of course. Did he pay you?"

Triggerheel was silent a while, as if the question had a kick in it that took his breath away.

"No, Purty he never paid me," said he at last, in a sort of cold, far-away manner. "Say, I brought a Kansas City paper over with me. Would you like to see it?"

"Sure."

In those days the Western papers were spouting oil on every page, and the one that Triggerheel had picked up in town was no exception to the general rule. The come-easy money of the wild-cat promoters was spent in advertising with liberal hand, that one item being their only expense.

Every day saw some ephemeral or rascally scheme pass out of public review and a new one take its place, but the same gushers kept on spouting for them all. The cut of a spewing oil

well said to be in Texas in an advertisement yesterday might serve to illustrate one just brought in along the Kansas border, or in Oklahoma, to-day.

The first thing that Heiskell saw when he unfolded the paper in the light of his lantern was one of these mounting, spouting, spreading advertisements. At the first glance the big headline held him; for there seemed to be something familiar, something that he had read in print before, in the staring words "The Prophet of Oil," which stretched across the page.

His heart seemed to tremble and hold still in the expectancy of disaster as his eyes scanned the blatant announcement of the Prophet's Well Oil Exploration Company, as it was termed. And there, below the fold of the sheet, stood his father's picture, between two spouting wells, and underneath it: "Solomon Heiskell, the Prophet of Oil in the Big Pool District."

The picture was somewhat idealized, like a photograph retouched to cover the damage done by time to the original or to remedy some oversight in nature. Old Solomon's hair was longer in the picture than in life, and it had a romantic curl to it which its natural state did not display. His face was even more gaunt than his hard years had made it, and his eyes were uplifted like those of a prophet in a church window.

Ared searched the page for the answer. At the bottom he found it, where the names of the sponsors of the company stood in large type.

"Solomon Heiskell, President and General Manager," on one hand, and "W. Ivers Drumm, Fiscal Agent," on the other. "Make all checks, drafts, and money orders payable to W. Ivers Drumm," was the capitalized instructions beneath the fiscal agent's name.

That was the key to it. Solomon Heiskell was in the hands of a rogue. Ared saw in one swift picture the story of his father's adventures in pursuit of

his dream. He had gone about Kansas City—where the new company's offices were—in search of capital, and had met this man Drumm. Drumm had been quick to seize the advertising possibilities of the picturesque old man and his doubly picturesque story. Solomon had shown that story of his explorations for oil from the *Oil City Star*, and the shrewd promoter had snapped up the nickname which the local editor had given him.

Ared turned back to the beginning of the advertisement with a feeling of one disgraced. It was extravagantly worded, in that breathless, galloping style which the men of Drumm's school of finance found so convincing of sincerity. Breathlessly, like a messenger with a big story; hot, with sweat streaming down the face. That was Drumm's style.

The advertisement stated that the Prophet's Well Company owned outright a large tract of land in the heart of the Big Pool district, where it already had drilled to a depth of twenty-seven hundred feet in its determination to rest satisfied with nothing less than the fountainhead of oil itself. It said they were plunging deeper every hour. It was only a matter of days—perhaps hours—even while the advertisement was being read, in fact, it might have happened, until the drill must pierce the unmeasured reservoir which held this gigantic store of oil. The advertisement continued:

On our property a stream of almost pure oil issues from the hillside. Years ago, Solomon Heiskell set out to trace it to its source, but he lacked the means to push his explorations to success. Years ahead of anybody in the Big Pool district Solomon Heiskell knew the oil was there. He told his neighbors, he begged for the assistance of capital in vain. Time has proved him right. Millions are being taken from wells every week on all sides of our property. At every moment now our big well, the most remarkable oil well of its kind in the world, may open the heart of this deposit—

Two million shares in the company were offered for sale to the public to provide funds to push this work of exploration. The price was ten cents a share. "Ministers are investing their savings, widows are telegraphing their reservations," the advertisement declared. "Order to-day! Use the wire! A dollar invested to-day may return you a thousand next week!"

Plenty of exclamation points, lots of dollar marks, and a picture at the bottom of a pipe running from a well at one side of the page pouring minted money into a woman's apron at the other end. She was garbed in sad habiliments, and her bonnet was black, but she was smiling through the rain of fortune.

Ared's indignation was at flood tide when he finished reading the page. It was enough, thought he, that the loss and disappointment of that fatuous dream should lie on the shoulders of the two who had shared it in the past. To induce hundreds more to come forward with their small savings, in their longing for affluence, and invest in this dishonest scheme, was a thing which he would have believed to be far below his father's sanction.

For it was dishonest. There was no oil beneath those melancholy hills, said Ared, sick in his heart under the shadow of this dishonor.

With the paper trailing in his hand, he sought Triggerheel, who was preparing to go to bed.

"Did you see this?" he asked, indicating the advertisement.

"Yes, I kind of run my eye over it," said the old man, making out to be very busy with his boots.

"This advertisement says they're at work over there on the old place. Did you hear anything about whether they are or not?"

"No, they ain't," replied Triggerheel. "Purty he saw that in the paper some days ago, and he went up there to see

if he could strike a job. Nobody wasn't around there at all."

"I hope—you—well, I'm not connected with the scheme in any manner. You know that, don't you?" said Ared, ashamed for the taint which he felt had reached him already.

"I knowed you wasn't," said Triggerheel, with hearty comfort.

"Were they saying anything about it over in town, or did you hear?"

"I didn't hear," replied Triggerheel, "but if I was you I wouldn't worry. The old man can take care of hisself, can't he?"

"It doesn't look like it," said Ared bitterly.

"Lots of money's been made off of them oil-well-stock sales that-a-way," commented Triggerheel, "and some of 'em I knowed of down there in Taixis didn't have nothing like as much back of 'em as this one of your old man's. He's got a hole in the ground to show 'em if they git after him too tight, and that lets him out. Under the law they can't lay a hand on him as long as he can show development's been done, and a try after oil's been made."

"The worst of it is, he believes it's there," said Ared, "but I can't understand why he lends his name to such a plain swindle. He must know there's no work going on there—he *must* know it, unless he's lost his mind!"

"Maybe it is there," nodded Triggerheel. "If they go ahead and put down that well——"

"It's halfway to hell already," said Ared, turning on him almost savagely, "and it'll never run a drop of oil if it's sunk clean down!"

He went back to his tent, where Triggerheel saw his light burning for a long time after. Next morning Ared sent the old man on a special journey to the post office at Oil City, bearing a letter addressed to Solomon Heiskell, in some big building or other, up in Kansas City.

CHAPTER X.

IS HE A QUITTER?

Beginning earlier than before, continuing later than ever, Heiskell now prosecuted his fight against the strata of stone which interposed its stubborn barrier beneath his feet, and the racing hours which winged over his head. Stone and time. One ran away as fast as the other stood, offering its hidden breast to his slow-wearing drill.

Only twenty days of his precious allotment now remained. He was down more than four hundred feet, with from two to three hundred yet to drive before he could hope to reach the oil-bearing sand. Yet he had not permitted doubt nor despair to stand before him for a single hour after his meeting with Fleming. He was determined to prove to that hard-mouthed, coarse-souled man, as well as the little world which knew him and his story, that the Heiskells were not always unlucky men.

There was a red sunset that evening. It dipped the undulating landscape in hues of deceptive warmth, as cheery as an open fire, but the ground was hard frozen, and the wind bit with deep-piercing ache.

Heiskell had been cleaning out the bore with the sand pump, and the drill was silent for a spell. He stood by his little engine, his arms folded on his chest, looking over the sun-painted scene. The tintured light softened his lean, grimy face; the wind flattened the brim of his hat back against its crown, as if the silent forces of the evening had combined to show him in his statuesque unconsciousness for the model of determination.

He was thinking how the activities of this new business had changed the face of that landscape. It was quite different in the time when he, a stripling youth, stood as master in the district school.

Just beyond the swell of the land,

past the line of derricks at the border of the lease, the schoolhouse stood. There were walnut trees around it in those times; he wondered if oil had spared them. Perhaps not. It had taken much away from what had been a place of quiet peace. It had taken the quaint old log houses that the Indians had built, in their half-civilized days before the land was opened for settlement, and it had taken the fields with the corn shocks in them, and the grazing cattle, and the orchard trees beside the road.

He wondered whether it had given anything to compensate, in the true measure of human comfort and happiness, in return. To the simple landholders it had given wealth which they had not been schooled to enjoy, and it had lifted them with dizzy suddenness out of a station which they had graced in usefulness to a neutral atmosphere of strangeness and pretense.

Now he was there, striving for this wealth also, although his heart held no desire for it, or for the place of consequence which its winning might bring. Retirement and repose, a fire on the hearth, and a "song at twilight"—that was enough.

So he stood there with his dream going out again to roam the world for her. It seemed to him that it must always be an empty desire, a melancholy hope. He felt that he could have wept for her as for one dead. In this manner these somber reflections drifted over him at times, refining the memory of her to almost spiritual degree.

Triggerheel pulled into the radiance of the horizon, mounting the sharp line of the hill suddenly from the tip beyond. For a moment his wagon and team stood sharply on the background of sky—a mote of impertinence in a scheme of sublimity, it seemed—each spoke, free strap, and dangling chain drawn blackly on the red; and then the outfit

turned the swell and became gray and hued of earth.

The old man was bringing coal, for the winter weather had increased the daily ration of the boiler greatly. Heiskell came back from his dream rambling at sight of him, and went over to his tent, a hundred yards or so distant from the well, out of fire range in case of a sudden strike of gas, to set his coffee on to boil.

Triggerheel was scraping the last of the coal out of the wagon when Heiskell went over to the boiler to replenish the fire. The old man got down and came stamping to warm his hands at the fire box.

"I met Pardner as I come over," said he.

That was the manner in which they spoke of Josephine between themselves. She was "Pardner" to one as much as the other, for the old man had entered into the undertaking with all the fire of his dry, old body. He had seen the state of Heiskell's finances early in the fight, and had proposed straightway that his wages go into fuel from that day forward. If they won, very well, then they could pay him; if they lost, he was a game man and would lose with them without a whimper. Heiskell was too hard pressed to refuse the offer, and so they became "pardners" all round.

"I didn't know she was going in today," said Heiskell.

"Yes—her and her mother. They was skallyhootin' along in Harvard-Yale's automobile. He was settin' in under the works up in front, done up in a hairy coat like a dang old bear."

"Pretty sharp weather for that kind of a ride," said Heiskell.

"Pardner don't care about it, I'll bet a leg," Triggerheel declared. "She goes along to keep that wall-eyed old woman out of devilment."

Heiskell looked at the old man with one of his hard-fetched grins.

"'Afraid she'll rush the boy off and marry him?" he suggested.

"Well, Harvard-Yale he'd even tie up with the old woman to git his fingers on this lease, I reckon."

"Yes, men have gone to greater lengths than that for money," Heiskell agreed. "But marrying the old lady wouldn't give him the key."

"No, he'd have to marry Pardner," nodded the old man.

"And that's something unlikely," said Heiskell.

"She ain't got no more use for him than a cow's got for cigarettes," the old man said, with conviction. "There's Pardner comin' home," he added, looking toward the house, lined against the sky. The flamboyant colors were gone out of the west now. It was gray in the wake of day around the little house on the hill crest, and dusky in the little valley where the two men stood.

The women came trailing along from the road, leaning against the wind, the foremost one running as if eager for the shelter of her walls.

"Look at that old woman wavin' at him!" said Triggerheel disgustedly. "She hangs back there like she had to steal a little private signalin' with him. A feller'd think Pardner was her ma."

"The spirit of youth lives longer in a woman's heart than it shows in her face, I guess," said Ared, by way of explaining the old lady's frivolous conduct.

"Yes, no woman ever thinks she's too old to set some feller a-hankerin' after her. Well, say! I've been standin' here a-gabbin' till I clean forgot them horses! I'll have to drive around and feed."

There was a light in Mrs. Ryland's room, and her shadow was on the curtain as she crossed the window now and then. Ared was considering whether he should start up the drill again or shut down for the day, inclining to the latter course, for he was stiff and numb from

the inseting cold. But he put action on the thought off for a little, while he stood looking up at the light behind the curtain, wondering what mission could have taken the two women out with Sandford on a bitter day like that.

As he turned it in his mind, Jo came swiftly out of the shadow of bush and bank. She had thrown a cloak over her head, and the wild wind was pulling rudely at her skirts. A loose lock of hair was blowing across her face when she came into the light of the lantern that Ared held up to greet her.

"Jo, you'll be chilled to the heart," he cried. "You shouldn't run out like this."

"Only for a little minute," said she, her redundant young breast heaving as she drew her quick breath. "I just wanted to tell you that mother and I accepted Mr. Sandford's offer to take us over to town in the light of a convenience rather than a friendly overture. It was an occasion when both of us had to go at once."

"You don't owe me any explanation at all, Jo," he told her, a soft note in his slow and solemn tone, as always when he spoke to her.

"I didn't want you to think that we were courting the enemy," said she.

"I thought perhaps the enemy was courting you," he smiled.

"Well, he is, in his peculiar way," she admitted, with an easy frankness in her manner which no young woman can command when her own heart is involved. "Mother and I had to go over to court," she hurried on, as if to cover what she had said, "to settle up about some insurance that father left. We had to make some affidavits and things."

"So he's courting you, is he?" asked Ared, feeling a bridling of resentment against Sandford, a shadowy pang of jealousy, maybe, for this attempt at alienation.

She huddled a little closer to the roar-

ing fire box, and he adjusted the blowing cloak around her.

"He wants to marry me," she told him, looking earnestly into his face.

Ared was looking away over her head in that willful abstraction which at times made him appear boorish and crude.

"Well?" said he.

He appeared unmoved, uninterested. His exclamation seemed only the conventional expression such as one vents for want of something that springs from the heart.

"I don't believe you'd care—I don't believe you'd care at all!" said she, in wild suddenness which made him start.

She sprang away from him at that, and ran, her garments flying a moment in the circle of his lantern's light.

"Jo!" he called after her, moved sharply out of his pensive mind wandering.

The sound of her flying feet came back to him. He followed her a little way, and called her name again, in inflection of penitence and appeal. Once he heard her stop as if considering return. In a moment she ran on, her swift feet sounding over the frozen earth.

Heiskell went back to the boiler and banked the fire. So that pup wanted to marry her, did he—or, rather, marry the lease? Well, it was to be expected that somebody should want to marry Jo some day. It was no affair of his, but he'd like to see her go to a man with some weight of dignity to him, at least.

So Sandford wanted to marry the lease, eh? Fine business; great and excellent planning! To step out of school one day and marry a fortune the next would be an instance of modern enterprise, fitting, indeed, to the reputation of the family whence he sprang. But why should he care who married Jo, or when? It was all one to him, of course. Hadn't he his dream?

After the stubborn loyalty of his

blood, nothing should be allowed to come between him and his dream. Nothing, in fact, could come between, for the dream was annealed to his soul. To drive it from him would be to splinter the timbers of his life.

He liked Jo; he admired her free, young figure, the lift of her pretty head, the speaking sympathy of her true and gentle eyes. But he did not love her. Another had pressed the seal of priority upon his forehead; it glowed there like a warm hand and set him apart as favored among men.

He wondered why Jo had spoken in that way, charging that he would not care if she should marry Sandford. It seemed a foolish thing to ask, but love is still so blind, in spite of all the modern appliances to give it sight, as to believe it stands on an eminence when it moves in the shadows of the soul's deepest vales.

Why shouldn't he care? Of course he'd care! He must see her after supper and assure her; he must seek Jo and satisfy her of his lively interest in her future. The thing must not be allowed to stand between them like that.

It was quite dark now, and growing late. When he had finished his supper, he looked up the hill, thinking of going to Jo. But there was no gleam of light in the little house. Well, it could wait until to-morrow—it was no great matter, at the heaviest. Only it moved him with a new feeling of tenderness for Pardner to know that she was grieved to think that he did not care whether she married worthily or unworthily. Of course he cared! Poor little Jo!

After his usual custom of splicing the day at both ends, Ared was up two hours before dawn next morning. He opened the drafts under the banked fire in the boiler, shook down the ashes, and threw in coal, leaving it roaring as he went back to his tent to patch up a comfortless breakfast in the cold.

He had laid his hand on the canvas when he felt the ground shiver under his feet, and the air rushing upon him with suddenly gathered force plunged him headlong into the tent among his boxes and tins. The roar of an explosion rose with this appalling confusion, and his first thought was, as the hard-driven air lifted him like a straw, that the boiler had burst.

His lantern was blown out by the concussion, and the suddenness of it left him dazed. The tent wall had collapsed; the canvas lay over him where he fell. He groped like a man under water, the breath slammed out of him, gasping to fill his emptied lungs.

When he came clear of the wreckage of the tent, he heard Triggerheel shouting, asking him something. There was a hissing as of escaping steam, or of water on live coals, confirming his first thought that the boiler had blown up.

He answered Triggerheel's hail. Each asked the other what had happened and if he was hurt.

"No, I ain't hurt," said Triggerheel, running forward through the gloom, "but a great big chunk of creation or somethin' went through my tent!"

Ared was looking where he had left the boiler. The shape of it was altered, and the fire from its furnace was scattered abroad. A chunk of glowing coal lay near his foot, and here and there others shone in the dark.

Triggerheel came up, panting.

"Did she blow up?" he asked.

"I thought so at first," replied Ared, "but come to think of it, I don't see how she could."

"Well, somethin' busted!" said the old man.

"Yes, but it couldn't have been the boiler, for there was only four pounds' pressure in it when I fired up not five minutes ago."

They were hastening forward toward the slanting heap of wreckage which remained of the boiler. Triggerheel

suddenly laid his hand on Ared's arm, checking him, sniffing the air like a hound.

"Danamite!" said he. "Don't you smell it? Danamite, sure as hell!"

"You're right," agreed Ared, for the sharp, unmistakable odor of the explosive still hung over the wreck.

"Better not go steppin' around here in the dark too careless," Triggerheel warned, "maybe they's some that didn't go off. Wait! I'll git m' lantern."

Soon he came bobbing back with it, and at the same time another light flashed around the corner of the Ryland house.

"Pardner's coming," Ared said.

The destruction of the boiler was complete. It was torn and twisted and flung down from its wheels.

"Danamite!" said Triggerheel, with conviction. "Go slow!"

Josephine came running up, her cloak over her nightdress, which showed in a white fringe all around. Her head was bare, and her stockingless feet were shod in fragile slippers.

"Is Ared hurt—is—is—anybody—hurt?" she asked, agony in her voice.

"There's nobody hurt," Ared answered, hastening forward to meet her.

"Oh, what was it—what's that? Did they—"

"There was an explosion, of what we're not certain yet," he told her. "The boiler is a wreck, and out of business for good, it looks like now. I must hurry you back to the house now, out of this wind, and with daylight we'll look around."

Triggerheel was searching and peering under his lifted lantern. He was at the coal pile as Ared took the lantern from Jo's cold hand.

"I'll carry you—you'll freeze your feet," said he.

"Nonsense!" said she, bending her knees to bring the hem of her cloak to cover her white ankles.

"Here it is," announced Triggerheel,

picking something from the coal. "They salted the coal, left enough here to blow the side out of the whole dang State!"

Forgetful of her scant garments, they hurried to the old man. He had clawed out five half sticks of dynamite, each of them wrapped in black paper so cunningly that they might easily have been overlooked even by day. Each piece was primed with cap and stubby end of fuse.

"Right in front of the fire-box door, where you couldn't miss it," said the old man indignantly.

"What a cowardly outrage!" said Jo.

"One for Fleming," said Ared in low voice, as if checking it off to himself.

"You might have been—killed!" The last fearful word she spoke in a whisper.

"Never mind," said he assuringly and with a quickness in his words which told her that he was not insensible to her tender interest. "We should have watched—Triggerheel suggested as much several days ago."

"Turn about half the night through," nodded the old man gravely.

"Well, it's done now," said Ared almost lightly. "After daylight—Come!" said he, taking her by the hand as if the disparity of years and experience between them was that of child and man.

He led her in that manner of protecting tenderness to the door. She did not ask him what he meant to do now, whether he believed he could repair the damage, or whether that blow meant the death of their one hope. She did not ask him any of the hundred things which thronged her excited brain, but walked beside him silently, clinging to his broad, rough hand.

"We'll talk it over after breakfast," he told her as if in answer to her thoughts, and turned to join Triggerheel as she closed the door.

Triggerheel was standing beside the

coal heap, the little pile of explosives not a foot from his toes. He was holding the lantern in front of him, lighting three footprints in the dust which had settled when he shoveled the coal from the wagon the evening before. They were on the farther side of the pile, and undisturbed by the explosion.

"Look at them tracks!" said he.

"I see them," said Ared, bending over. "They're—don't they look small to you for a man's?"

"They do," said Triggerheel meaningly; "mighty small!"

"More like a boy's," said Ared.

"Well, when it comes light I'm goin' to see where they come from and where they went," the old man said. "Come over and have a cup of coffee with me this mornin'; your commissary looks to be out of fix."

Triggerheel was back at the coal pile with the first full light of morning, nosing on the scent of the tracks.

"Well, if there's a man this side of Georgy with feet that little he shorely orto be took up and put in a cage," said he. "I never knowed but one feller with feet within a size of them. Looks like she tromped in that coal dust a-purpose."

"Why, you don't think it was a woman, do you, Triggerheel?" asked Ared in amazement.

"I ain't a sayin'—not yit," Triggerheel replied seriously.

Ared left the mystery of the tracks to the old man, while he took inventory of the loss. As for the boiler, it was done for. The fire box was blown to pieces, the fragments were sown over several acres, and the flues were bent and twisted. The engine, due to its distance from the boiler, stood undamaged at the mouth of the well. But of what use was the engine without steam for it? That was Ared's thought as he walked about, turning the pieces of wreckage with his foot.

He had not been able to gather him-

self up yet after the shock. It was a grievous blow in a tender spot; it amounted almost to defeat, it seemed, looking at it in the blue-john light of that cold, harsh morning. First in his feelings was a vengeful resentment against the authors and instigators of the deed. It was in his mind, hot and strong, to ride in and accuse Fleming of the thing that hour.

Triggerheel came back after a little from his tracking.

"I follered 'em till the coal dust wore off," said he, "and then that hard-froze ground didn't take any more mark than air. She was holdin' straight for the road, but I'll bet you a purty she never went there."

Triggerheel looked meaningly and squarely into his partner-employer's face, and gave his head a little twist to emphasize his seriousness.

"Why, what do you think?" asked Heiskell, mystified.

"What's Harvard-Yale so thick with that old woman for?" hinted Triggerheel.

"Oh, that's carrying it too far!" said Heiskell.

"She don't like you, and she ain't got no use for me," said Triggerheel.

"But she wouldn't blow her own chances of saving this lease up in the air, even if that was so," Heiskell reminded him.

"Maybe Fleming promised to buy her out if she'd git shut of you. She'd do anything to hand you one."

"You don't know that," said Heiskell severely.

"I've got eyes in m' head," the old man hinted.

"And something else, too," said Heiskell, with a shadowy smile. "No, that was a man's job, Triggerheel; we'll dismiss all other suspicions, if it's all the same to you."

Ared said it with a straight look into the old man's eyes. Triggerheel nodded, a little displeased at the rebuke.

"All right, Ed; whatever you say goes," said he. "Well, what's next on the program, as the man said when he broke his leg?"

"I want to think it over a little while," said Ared, confessing his unsettled state.

"We'll have to think quick and do quicker," said Triggerheel.

"Or put down the cards," Ared agreed, turning away from him to survey the ruin again.

Jo was coming, dressed now to weather any kind of blasts, with laced boots halfway to her knees.

"Guess I'll make a fire and touch up that drill," suggested Triggerheel, finding therein an excuse for leaving them together, as he usually managed to do when Jo appeared. "Lucky job you h'isted her up out of the well last night, Ed."

"It sure was," admitted Ared.

"Reckon we'll need it in a couple of days or so," speculated Triggerheel, feeling tentatively out as if to sound the intention which lay in the young man's mind.

"Maybe," said Ared, thinking a thousand miles away, it seemed.

Triggerheel looked at him with a frown. It seemed to him as if Ared had fared mentally in the explosion along with the boiler. His wits appeared to be scattered all over the township, and the grit blown out of him as clean as the sand pump scoured the detritus of the drilling out of the well.

The old man felt a drooping in the heart. He had expected a great deal more of Ed; he had looked for a man with a lean, long face like that to stand up and let the world hammer him like he was made of brass. Now he seemed weak in the knees and off the head entirely over this simple—for to Triggerheel what was not irremediable was far from discouraging—blow-up of a boiler.

"Hell!" said he, with a forceful expulsion of breath which carried his chew out along with it. He turned away,

neither knowing nor caring whether Ared had heard him. Jo came up, paler than usual, with the same question in her eyes that Ared had read in the old man's only a moment past.

She managed a smile, but it had no warmth in it, and no cheer. It was as palely imitative of her old manner as the sickly sun of that morning was of the suns of summer days.

"Well, Ared?" said she, far more in that little questioning greeting than her words.

"I don't know just what to make of it, Jo," he answered, shaking his head like an old man.

He withdrew into himself with that, and fixed his eyes in his vexing—to Jo that moment—stare of abstraction, miles on miles and leagues on leagues beyond her.

"It seems——" said he, and left the words swinging, as if the chain of thought had broken.

"What?" she asked, irritably sharp.

She felt that she would like to lay hold of his shoulders and shake him out of that daze of wandering dreams, doubly vexed because she knew that she did not walk in the picture that he was making, wherever it might be.

"I don't know," said he, sighing. "It was a pretty hard jolt, just when we needed the machinery most."

"Yes, Ared, it was," said she softly.

He seemed to realize only then that she had drawn nearer to him in friendly relation. She never had addressed him thus familiarly by his name, never had spoken it in his hearing before that morning, when she called out, asking whether he was hurt. There was a sensation of fitness in this new footing of friendship and trust which was pleasing to him, like a new garment. He drew his eyes away from their far searching, and smiled.

"The question is—what next?" said he.

"That's it."

"And I don't readily know how to answer it," he confessed. "I've got to think—to consider."

She thrust her hand suddenly into her pocket, and drew out a letter.

"What will you do to me? I forgot all about it till this minute," said she. "I brought it over from the post office yesterday, and I intended to give it to you last night when I came down, but——"

"Never mind," said he, taking the letter from her hand.

The superscription was his father's precise Spencerian, and the envelope was clamorously decorated with the name of the Prophet's Well Oil Exploration Company. Ared's hands trembled like a lover's as he opened it, but his inscrutable face was immobile as stone.

Josephine waited for him to finish the letter, almost trembling in anticipation of his next word. Would it be surrender, as his hedging and evading the direct question seemed to forecast? Had she made a mistake in him? Had she exalted a man of straw?

CHAPTER XI.

A SCENT OF OIL.

Ared Heiskell did not lift his glance from the written page to surprise the look of soft appeal which lurked in her honest eyes. It must come, that revelation of the inner man, she knew, when he had finished that bit of writing.

MY SON: I have delayed setting my hand to reply to your letter of three weeks ago, for I did not wish to sow the hot words of passion and reap the tares of regret. I can speak with a cool heart to you now, and consider without heat all that you advised.

As usual, your timidity obscures your reasoning. You are in a panic over something which you consider a substance, but if you had the courage to run your arm through it, you would find it to be but a cloud. I am not in the hands of sharpers and schemers, as you imagine, being quite old enough, experienced enough, and *courageous* enough to

take care of myself. I am putting to a late use the faculties which Providence favored me with, and in a short time I shall place the fortunes of this family on the footing that you have shrunk from attaining ever since your major years.

I am associated with an honest man, a bold man, a *business* man. He has had long practice in taking the world's rapids, and he will stand at the helm, while I occupy the deck, and together we will send the bark of my fortunes through to the open sea. There is no shadow of question about this enterprise. The oil is there, on my land, as I have believed and known for many years. My reproach has been that my son had not the courage to seek and find it. But I have the means at last of reaching it, and enriching thereby not alone myself, but many who have joined me in the enterprise.

Mr. Drumm, my associate, was down to my property with a carload of machinery about one month ago, and a force of special men to prosecute the work of exploration. We are sinking the old well deeper. Mr. Drumm reports to me that you have left the place, and that he could learn no word of you from the neighbors or in the town. If my sanguinary—and I now believe partly insane—act of judgment against the flock which you so tenderly cherished, and held above the call of your duty and the ties of kinship and of blood—if that act, I say, resulted at last in driving you into a more manly pursuit, I shall feel justified. The loss which you bore through my act I shall adjust with you at an early day.

As for future advice, my son, first earn the right to give it before it is offered. Go your ways, and prosper meekly and mildly as you may. You always had a timid heart, and it is best, perhaps, that you seclude yourself and leave the world's big deeds to men. If there should come a time when you feel that you need an arm to lean upon, this one of mine, though old, is virile.

"Beyond the Alps lies Italy." You will remember that. I am climbing to my Italy in my old age. Do not attempt again, at the hazard of estranging me completely, to stop the machinery of this grand enterprise of mine. This is a man's work; it is too ponderous for the arm of a weak-spirited boy. Interference might, in future, result in mangling. Leave the world's big things to *men*. Your father,

SOLOMON HEISKELL.

So ended Solomon Heiskell's letter to his son. Pedantic in its phrasing, after the old man's pedagogic style, but exultant and arrogant in a manner alto-

gether foreign to his naturally tender and generous heart.

Ared lifted his face from reading it with his eyes narrowed, his nostrils distended, as if gathering himself for a dash through fire. He seemed unaware of Josephine's presence, so wholly engrossed by the sudden inspiration, or new determination, which the perusal of the letter appeared to instill. He beckoned to Triggerheel, who was kindling a fire at his forge.

"Come over and hitch up," he called.

Josephine felt her heart jump. Regret for what it had given him would not come back to it that day. Ared had come out of his mist of perplexity and doubt; he measured, before he had spoken a word to her in explanation of his abrupt activity, a bigger man than before.

Triggerheel, feeling the change of the wind in that order, dropped the bellows handle and hurried to his improvised stable, a grin on his dry old face. Ared turned to Jo, his hand in the bosom of his coat with the letter.

"I'll have the drill going by this hour to-morrow," said he. "There's an old boiler over at my father's place that I'm part owner of, and I'll just borrow his share and get his consent afterward. The flues are good; it would make steam enough for three drills if we had the rigs."

Jo's face was bright with the sunrise of her renaissance hope. She drew close to him, and laid her hand impulsively on his arm, her heart in her eyes.

"You've been a man, partner, at every step of the fight!" said she.

Before midday Ared drove with Triggerheel up to the bars in the fence at the old place. Everything stood as he had left it. No sign of the activities which the advertisement of the Prophet's Well Company proclaimed were apparent, and if Drumm, the fiscal agent, had come there with machinery and men, as his father had written, he

must have gone with them to the very bottom of the deep old bore.

"And pulled the hole in after him," said Triggerheel.

The boiler stood among the bushes, as Ared had seen it last, and the line of rusty pipe leading off to the engine beside "the most remarkable oil well of its kind in the world" lay there undisturbed. Even the drill swung there as before, on its thick rope, and the covering which old Solomon had placed over the projecting casing of the well still kept its place. Nobody had been meddling, for evil or for good. People who knew about the old explorations shunned the place for its unlucky blight; those who were strangers to it had no curiosity to satisfy. So it slept on in peace.

They cleared away the impeding saplings, and greased the gear of the boiler. The tongue had rotted out of it, and Triggerheel trimmed and shaped a lusty young tree to take its place. They were on the road again within three hours, and before midnight the old boiler had been tested and coupled up with the steam line carrying to the engine.

Triggerheel was weary, but well pleased. He wanted to stand guard over the plant until morning, but Ared sent him to his bunk.

"This is my night," said he.

"Ed, I thought for a minute this mornin' you was goin' to lay down on the job," said Triggerheel, making the confession manfully. "I take off my katy, and I apologize to you."

Ared swung a lantern from the timbers of the rig to guard against a dynamiter stealing up to it and striking them in that vital part, and then he set about building a shed over the boiler. He had it up by daybreak, and his bunk moved into it, along with his coffeepot and frying pan. If they blew it up they'd take him with it, he was determined, for he intended to live on that spot, day and night, until the job was done.

They took turn about at watching the plant after that, a plan which they carried out faithfully for a few nights. But the cold weather which had come on, together with the hard work of the long days, made this added task a burden too heavy to carry. So Ared said they'd have to chance it.

His new arrangement of "sleepin' with the b'iler," as Triggerheel called it, together with lanterns outside the shed, and two hung on the derrick, seemed to insure safety against another surprise. It was the best they could do, at any rate, and time seemed to prove the efficacy of the arrangement.

The work proceeded rapidly following the installation of the old boiler. For more than a week Mrs. Ryland had been confined to her room with influenza, and her imperative demands on Josephine had kept the "purty part of the firm," as Triggerheel often referred to her, cooped within doors.

Every night Ared carried a report of the day's progress to Pardner, and they talked over their chances in the little parlor dining room, with the old lady's door ajar so that her faintest call might be heard.

Those were days of excitement and strain for both of them, for the well was down to "suspicious-looking" rock, Triggerheel said. He had been present at the birth of many a well, some of them big gushers, and he was sharp to detect the indications.

"We're apt to bust through any day now," he declared one evening as he tested the eroded formation which clung to the bit of the hoisted drill when the day's work was done.

Ared hurried up the hill with this information, flushed and palpitating, for he was quickened now, not alone by his determination to win the lease for Pardner, but with the same eagerness that tinctured his old, insatiable days when he searched for the fount of the oil-laden stream.

"We'll make it," he declared. "We're good for a hundred feet in the eight days remaining to us, and Triggerheel doesn't believe we'll have to go anything near that far."

Ared was standing just inside the door as he eased himself of this big news, and he was oily and coal-grimed, and spattered with the remainings from the well. His hair was about his ears, and his lean face was earnest as a prophet's.

"Oh, I'm so glad to hear it—more for your sake now than ours," said Jo, giving him her hand impulsively. "You've worked so hard!" she explained, confused as if something which she had believed secure in her breast had leaped up and revealed itself.

Mrs. Ryland's door opened, and the old lady's long neck craned around the corner. Her eyes were wide and bright and full of life for a sick person, Ared thought, and there was a flush on her drawn cheeks.

"Did you say you'd fetched in a well, Mr. Heiskell?" she asked.

Jo started at her mother's words, and drew away the hand which Ared held hastily.

"You'd better lie down, mother," said she, blushing in further betrayal of what nobody had charged at all.

"No," said the old woman resolutely, emerging from her retirement, "I want to heah about the well; I reckon I've got a right to share the news, child, such as it is."

She came into the room, a shawl about her, fresh-made ringlets in her sapless old hair. She wore a great-flowered dressing gown, and there were rings on her foolish old fingers.

"I don't believe you're any nearer the oil than you were at the beginnin'," said she pettishly. "You've been drillin' and drillin' down theh a monst'ous time, it seems to me, Mr. Heiskell, and you've found nothin' mo' than wotah. And that's as much as you'll evah strike!"

"Mother, Mr. Heiskell has invested a great deal of time, labor, and money in this enterprise, and it's ungenerous of you to say that," reproved Josephine, with gentleness. It seemed as if she felt that a harsh word would break the frail creature as a stone would crush a vase.

"It's a triflin' business, in my opinion," said Mrs. Ryland, "and you've got only a little while mo'—a precious little while mo'."

"I am going to ask you to withhold your judgment, madam," said Ared, lifting his calm eyes to her face.

"I don't believe your machinery's strong enough, and you ain't got men enough," said she.

"I could have used one man more to advantage," Ared admitted, "but beyond that a thousand would have been useless as far as pushing the work any faster went."

"Well, I think you'd better give it up, and move your machinery away, suh," said the old woman. "It's sickenin' to see such poor, piddlin' doin's where the work of strong machinery and strong men is needed. Now you've played around heah till I and my dotah are brought face to face with ruination through you, and you'll nevah do nothin' in the end!"

"Mother is irritable, and perhaps a little feverish," said Josephine, placing her arm around the old woman and drawing her away toward her room. "You must not consider anything she has said, Mr. Heiskell."

"Certainly not," said he, perhaps a little more heartily than mere deference required.

Mrs. Ryland shook herself free from her daughter's arm with a petulant word. She turned again to Ared, who had laid his hand on the door to leave.

"Sheep-herdin' was your walk in life, I am told—mercy my soul! What was that?"

It was a shot, followed by others,

quick and sharp, from the direction of the well. Ared flung the door open, to be met by that lifting, pushing sensation which the rushing of compressed air from an explosion gives the human senses. Then there came the sharp detonation of dynamite fired above ground.

Ared was leaping down the path. He was unarmed, and the night was thick, but his strongest desire in life that moment was that he might overtake and lay hands on the author of this latest outrage. It was a fruitless wish. When he reached the well he found one of the timbers of the sixty-foot derrick blown off at the base and hanging free, and the whole rig so badly shaken and strained as to threaten collapse.

Triggerheel was not there, and did not answer to the shout that Ared raised. Ared hurried to the boiler shed after a lantern, and began making a survey of the loss. The engine was undamaged, likewise the well. The string of drilling tools lay on the ground, due to the sag of the structure, but appeared to be untwisted.

From the quick survey that Ared gave the wreck, he estimated that it would require two days to set things in working order again. The timber which the dynamite had torn off might be spliced, he hoped, and the rest of the rig braced. But it would be impossible to do anything before morning, precious as the intervening hours were.

Triggerheel came back from the direction of the road, one of his old black pistols in his hand.

"Got away," said he.

"Did you see him?" asked Ared. Then, before Triggerheel could reply: "How did they come to put it over this time, with two lanterns hanging on the derrick and you on the lookout?"

"My fault, dang my melt!" said Triggerheel contritely. "I'd been over givin' m' team some hay to chaw on for the night, and I was standin' there kind of

stretchin' m' neck around like a feller will, you know, when he ain't thinkin' of nothin' in pertickler. I noticed both of them lights burnin' at the well, and I looked up the hill, wonderin' if you'd come back. Just then I seen the blind go up in the old woman's end of the house, and she set the lamp on somethin' near the winder. That was all right, I reckon. She had a right to do that, I suppose."

The old man paused ruminatively.

"Of course," said Ared. "What's that long rigmarole got to do with that devil sneaking up on the blind side of you and setting off his dynamite under the rig?"

"That's what I was wonderin' myself," said Triggerheel. "The next minute when I looked over toward the well, one of the lanterns was out. I thought maybe you'd come back and was tinkerin' with the lights, but I dived into my tent and got m' six-shooter and poled off over this way. I didn't want to shoot, for I thought it might be you, and before I could hardly bat m' eye the other lantern begun to blink, but I saw a arm reachin' around from back of the timber, and I knowed it wasn't yourn. I turned loose on 'im, and he come back at me, and we had it back-'ard and fo'ward a time or two, me a runnin' up on him at every jump. But shucks, no man ain't as fast as dynamite. It was done before I'd went forty feet."

"Well, you did all a man could be expected to do under the circumstances," said Ared.

"I follered him," said Triggerheel, "but he was a younger man'n me, and he outrun me. Had a horse tied out there in the road, and he hopped it and got away. It was funny, too."

"What was?"

"The way that feller run," said the old man, as if pondering it. "Seems to me I've knowed a feller somewheres that had a run like that, and it seems

to me the set of that feller on his horse was familiar to me, too. But dang my melt if I can— Oh, well!"

"You're sure about the light in the window?" asked Ared.

"Dead sure," replied Triggerheel.

"What do you make of it?"

"I was just wonderin'," said the old man. "Maybe they've talked the old woman over—it wouldn't 'a' been much of a job—and she was to signal 'em when you was at the house. They wouldn't likely want to tackle you, but I reckon they figger I don't count."

"No," said Ared, after pondering it a while, and finding no room for suspicion in his generous mind, "I can't believe she had anything to do with it, Triggerheel. She just happened to move the lamp. She came out of her room just about that time, and was talking with Pardner and me at the door when the first shot was fired."

"Well, maybe she never," said Triggerheel, assenting, but unconvinced.

Daylight discovered to Ared that the shattered timber could not be spliced again upon itself. It would have to be replaced outright for its greater length, and he had no money to buy the material.

The only thing that offered a way out was to go to the river, where the cottonwoods grew tall, and hunt a slender one, from the trunk of which he could cut the required timber. Instead of two days, it might take three, and oil yet a hope almost as far away as on the first day that he drilled. It looked that dun morning as if they had lost the race.

Leaving Triggerheel in charge to guard what remained of the plant, Ared drove away while the morning was yet gray.

He was back at the works by dusk, a forty-foot tree trunk slung under the axles of the wagon. It was the best that he could find, but he believed that he could, with planks and bolts, brace

enough of the broken timber together to make it serve until the completion of the well. After a hasty supper he went to work, Triggerheel standing guard at the boiler shed, his high-slung pistols ready to his hand.

Jo Ryland came down late. More than once he had speculated on her absence, and wondered what had happened to shut her in the house so closely. Now, as she held the lantern for him, she explained.

"I saw you leaving this morning," said she, "but I didn't want to waste your time asking you what you were going to do. I knew it would be the wisest and best thing, whatever it might be."

"Well, I hope so," said he.

"I was afraid you might think that I'd lost interest in the work," she said, "but I couldn't leave mother a minute last night after those scoundrels set off the dynamite. She was frightened almost out of her senses."

"Quite naturally," said he.

"But this afternoon, when she quieted down, I rode over to town and put this thing up to the sheriff. I demanded protection against these outrages, but I might as well have gone to the graveyard and talked to a tombstone. He said it was a job for a private watchman."

"But what did he have to say about trying to find out who the dynamiters are?" asked Ared, straightening up from his task.

"He didn't seem to believe there were any dynamiters at all," said she.

Ared bent again to shaping the mortised joint in the timbers with his adze, Jo flashing the light on his work.

"I met Mr. Sandford as I was coming home, and I pitched into him as savage as a wolf," said she. "I told him to stand out in the clear and fight like a man, and you could have knocked his eyes off his face with a board. That

man can simulate innocence to beat anything I ever met!"

"He didn't even know anything about this last attack, I suppose?"

"No; he was as innocent as a lamb. He said we'd find out in time that his company had no interest in this lease, didn't want it, wouldn't have it at any price. He offered to help us out in any way that he could—even to sending men to stand guard over here at night."

"Does he still want to—marry you?" asked Ared, looking up at her suddenly.

"He's still carrying on negotiations with mother—he's never approached me directly in the matter," she returned. "I don't believe he's sincere even in that."

"You wouldn't marry him, anyhow," said he decisively. "He's not your kind of a man."

"Oh, no telling," she said lightly.

Jo seemed to be in very good spirits, in spite of the dark outlook. Ared liked her all the better for that, not knowing how many tears she had spent that day, nor how the clouds had seemed to lift from her heart as she saw him returning through the evening gloom.

"You didn't sleep any last night, Mr. Jeffries said," she told him.

"Well, neither did he."

"Don't you think you'd better let this go till morning, Ared?" she asked in that plaintively tentative way of a woman when she suggests a thing, yet hopes that it will not be done.

"There are ten good hours between now and day," he answered.

"But you'll have to take some rest."

"When we bring in the well," said he.

He straightened up from his hewing a moment.

"I tell you, Jo, I feel like an ant, building for those outlaws to tear down," he said. "I'm not going to take either my hands or my eyes off this work again until we're down where we started to go. Now you'd better run

back to the house—this is a rough kind of a night."

She left him, and went scurrying up the hill as nimbly as a squirrel.

All through that night and the next day he labored without pause at his task of restoring the crippled derrick. Jo marveled in admiration of his strength and endurance, but trembled in the fear that the labor and exposure might break his health.

It was some time in the third night of this ceaseless labor that Jo started from her bed conscious of a familiar sound. She hastened to the window, and softly raised the sash. Yes, the engine was going again. Ared had finished his repairs, and was filling out the night with the drill.

Triggerheel, who had grown to be quite a competent driller in those weeks, relieved him after breakfast, and Ared turned in for a sleep. But four days remained to them now, and it was Ared's intention to run the drill day and night.

Jo had insisted that she be allowed to enter the lists as an active participant in the final dash. She had enlisted herself as cook, and that day Triggerheel took his meals standing at the mouth of the well.

Ared relieved him at sunset, and scolded him roundly because the old man had allowed him to sleep so long. Even then Triggerheel refused to turn in.

"I just feel like I want to hang around," said he. "I'll keep up steam for you."

It was well into the shank of the night when Triggerheel, coming down from the boiler shed with his pipe fresh lit, stopped while yet a rod from the well, sniffed the wind, dumped the fire out of his pipe, and ground it under his heel.

"Don't you smell it?" he asked excitedly. "She's through, I tell you; we're down to the sand!"

"I could tell by the feel of it that she was through about five minutes ago," said Ared, "and I thought I scented it, but I wouldn't let myself believe it."

There was no mistaking the acrid odor which was growing stronger now in the casing of the well.

"It's oil!" said Ared, almost awed by the discovery.

"You mighty right it's oil," the old man said. "Got to keep every glimmer of a blaze away from here now, 'count of that gas. I reckon we better shut down till mornin'."

"It's the closest I ever came to oil, and I've drilled many a weary hole," said Ared, shutting off the steam.

But there was no lifting of triumph in his achievement as a personal victory, no thrilling satisfaction in that first moment over the thought of what it would mean to Josephine Ryland. Heiskell saw in his almost-finished task that hour only the dawning of his world victories in the name of her whom he had exalted on the altar of his dreams.

CHAPTER XII.

SOLOMON'S BLIGHT.

"We've won, in spite of them!" said Jo, flushed and triumphant, as she watched the black oil drip from the bit of the hoisted drill next morning.

"Not just yet," said Ared. "We've got to bring in a 'producing' well, under the terms of your contract, you remember. The oil stands several hundred feet deep in the bore this morning, but my hope was that we'd get a well that we wouldn't have to pump. I'll go to town this morning and fetch a shooter out. We'll have him give her a big charge—six or ten gallons—and maybe we can shake her loose."

"If you'll let a old feller put in his oar——" suggested Triggerheel, waiting there for permission.

"Cut loose!" encouraged Ared.

"Yes, you're one of the partners," smiled Jo.

"Well, then, I was goin' to say you might make arrangements for a pump while you're over there in town," the old man said. "If she don't run, we can h'ist'er out, and if you put even one barrel on top of the ground a day you've got a perducin' well, and I'd like to see the lawyer that could argy *that* down."

"It's a wise thought," admitted Ared. "I'll arrange for one, and if we need it we can bring it out."

They were in high spirits that morning, everybody talkative, even Ared. There was a gleam of excitement in his placid eyes, a flush on his weather-beaten face. And Jo, who had been paling under the strain, was as fresh as a morning-glory.

"Your eyes is so bright, Pardner, I'm afraid they'll set off a spark and fire the well," said Triggerheel, with great gravity.

Jo's pleasurable flush deepened at the sincere compliment, but Triggerheel saw that her eyes sought Ared's face, as if her heart was telling him how dear even that simple praise would have been if it had come from him.

Ared was standing in one of his trances. He had excluded the world and all within it from what he saw that moment, and there were no eyes to share his vision with him. Jo's breast lifted in a sigh which she stifled on her lips, and the smile died in old Triggerheel's eyes.

"I'll go and hitch up the team for you, Ed," said he.

"All right," said Ared, coming back to his duty with a start.

"Wonder who that feller is?" said Triggerheel, throwing his head up like a steer sniffing a stranger in the wind.

The others turned and looked with him toward the road. A man was that moment lifting the crest of the hill, and when he had mounted to the top he

paused. He was a tall, rugged man, with long hair blowing, a long staff in his hand. He seemed weary, and his hands were clasped on the stick, against which he leaned heavily.

"I don't know," said Jo. "I never——"

"My father!" said Ared, bounding away over shrub and stone to meet him.

There was no thought of past differences in Ared's mind that moment. It was enough that his father had sought him, even though he stood afar off, like David, uncertain of the welcome for which he yearned.

The strong wind of the winter morning was tugging at the old man's long coat; he leaned against the blast like one breasting a swift current. When he saw his son coming toward him, he stretched out a hand and let his long staff fall to the ground. It was as if he felt that a living pillar of strength was being offered him to lean upon, and that his forest prop would be needed no more.

Solomon Heiskell clung to his son's hand, holding it between both his own.

"My little son!" said he, tears on his sad old face.

Thus they stood a little; then Ared put his arm sustainingly around the old man's shoulders and urged him below the hill, out of the force of the wind.

When Jo saw them coming, she turned toward the house. There was room for others in Ared's great heart, but no place for her.

Ared brought the old man down to the warm boiler shed, and tried to settle him comfortably there. He felt in his heart that his father was the messenger of disaster in his own affairs, but Solomon was so weary and numbed from the exposure of his long tramp from the railroad over that Ared pressed him to go to bed at once and refresh himself.

The old man resolutely refused.

"There's no use staving it off, son.

I've come to throw my broken pride at your feet and confess that you were right and I was wrong. My castle of sand is in ruins. That fellow Drumm has absconded with every cent of the money, and I am left alone to stand answerable for this gigantic swindle."

Ared smothered an imprecation. "When did he leave? I'll track him—I'll bring him back!"

"No; he's too far ahead of us to hope to bring him back, son. He left three days ago, and before this he's on the water, bound for a foreign shore. He is gone, and the money of widows, of ministers of the gospel, working girls, orphans, is gone with him, and I am a felon in the eyes of the law!"

"I wish I'd gone to Kansas City when I received your letter; I felt that I should—I felt it!" said Ared in poignant regret, walking nervously up and down the cluttered shed.

"Aye, if you had!" said the old man.

"But it can't be mended now; we've got to stand up to it like men," said Ared. "Now tell me all about it."

"We sold about twenty-five thousand dollars' worth of stock in the company," sighed Solomon, shaking his head ruefully, "and Drumm was to have thirty per cent of the gross, paying all advertising bills himself. I trusted the man completely—he had bank references—so completely that I put everything into his hands. I failed to insist on an accounting, although it was agreed between us at the beginning that I should have a complete statement of receipts and disbursements at the end of each week, together with the amount of cash coming to me from sales of stock. I just allowed the matter to run on, accepting his excuses, which he offered in what seemed an honest and manly way now and then, that he was too busy to make up his books.

"Let's get the drill going first; that's the important thing," he used to say at the beginning. After that it was some-

thing else, in which I always agreed, for he was skilled in making tenable excuses, in the responsibility of which I always seemed to have a share. He told me that he had bought machinery, showed me the receipted bills for it, in fact—and hired experts to carry on the work here. He had various men in the office at times, and one in particular whom he introduced to me as his expert driller, who had worked for him in other fields. But they were all frauds, all a part of his deep, well-organized scheme to defraud not alone those hundreds of innocent investors, but myself as well. I believed, until I arrived here yesterday, that the rascal had at least bought the machinery and put men to work on the old well, after the repeated declarations of his—our—advertisement.”

“In spite of what I wrote you!” Ared could not stop the exclamation, though regretful of its utterance.

“I spoke to Drumm about it at the time,” the old man said, “and you will understand how completely he had me dazzled and blinded when I accepted the explanation that he made. He pointed out that you did not state, of your own knowledge, but upon what you termed ‘reliable authority,’ that the work was not going on. He quieted my suspicions by saying that your informant probably had not been near the place in weeks. But you were there—you knew.”

“No, not at the time of writing, but later I went over. This is our old boiler; I brought it over a short time ago, following an accident to my own,” said Ared.

“I thought there was something familiar about it. Well, it has swallowed many a hard-earned dollar of both yours and mine, lad. I hope it may return interest on the old investment, as well as the new.”

“I hope so,” said Ared fervently.

“I missed it yesterday from its place

among the bushes,” said Solomon, “and I thought some of these pirates had hauled it off.”

“Your creditors will be down on you in a flock more than likely. We must get ready to meet them, and arrange some kind of an adjustment.”

“Yes, I expect not alone the poor, deluded people who put money into the scheme to track me and confront me, but the United States officers as well. The postal authorities will be quick to act, for most of our business was transacted through the mails.”

“What are your plans?” asked Ared.

“I’ll turn over the property to the stockholders, such as it is, if you think it’s the thing to do,” Solomon replied.

“It might look to them like adding insult to robbery,” said Ared, with bitter memories rising of his wasted years on those bleak hillsides.

“They might look at it in that light,” admitted Solomon. “Its promises are not as golden, even to me, to-day as they once were.”

“Well, whatever the worst may be, I’ll stand up to it with you and take my share.”

“Your share? You have no share in it; you are clean of the spattering of this disgrace, thank God!” said Solomon, bowing his head upon his hands.

“The obligation rests on the name,” said Ared. “If things turn out here as I hope they may I’ll have something with visible value to quiet them until we can turn around.”

Solomon inquired about the work under way, and Ared laid the situation before him in few words.

“And you’re down to oil!” said Solomon, his eyes lighting up with eagerness.

“At last I’ve sniffed the smell of it on my own drill,” nodded Ared.

“Then your fortune’s made!” declared Solomon, thrilling with pleasure.

“My foot is in the door,” said Ared. “Whether I shall ever pass myself re-

mains for time to show. But my hope is strong."

Solomon got to his feet, and buttoned his coat about his chin.

"I'll go my way," said he earnestly, looking gravely into his son's face, "before my shadow blights the promise of your success. I'm an unlucky man."

"You'll be going back to the old place?" asked Ared.

"Back to the old place," the old man echoed. "They'll come there to find me, and accuse and upbraid me, and I must meet them there, and face them like an honest man. It will be in the papers in a day or two, for I left a notice on the door of that disgraced office, telling any who may seek me where I am to be found."

"That was the one open course," said Ared approvingly. "You have nothing to hide from, nobody to evade, for you haven't wronged anybody intentionally. When I put this work through to a finish, and bring oil to the top of the ground, which I hope to do to-day or to-morrow, I'll join you, and we'll see what can be done."

"You'd better stand clear, son," said Solomon, placing his hand on Ared's shoulder, "and keep out of my shadow. Misfortune follows me."

Triggerheel drove up, and presently came stamping in, ice on his mustache, his nose blue. Solomon was for striking off across the fields on a short cut to the old place, and it was only when Ared took him by the arm and led him to the wagon that he yielded. Even then he took his place with muttered protest.

"Bad luck is like money; it engenders its kind," said he. "I've never set my hand to anything that prospered."

Ared saw Mrs. Ryland at the window as they drove past the house, but Jo was not in sight. The old woman held her curtain aside and looked after them, jealous, it seemed to Ared, in her selfish, small way, of the confidence be-

tween father and son in which she had no share.

"I used to sit in the private office," said Solomon, "among the fine furnishings which Drumm bought on credit and did not pay for, you may be sure, and talk to the prospective investors who came in to do business at firsthand. I believed in the undertaking with all my heart, and I fear that I have convinced a good many people, and caused them to part with their money against their better judgment.

"This was particularly true of ministers and women. School-teachers, too. They used to come in pretty thick, but more ministers than anybody else, poor fellows. There were a great many women, too, and there was one lass that I remember with a pang. She had dove's eyes, as the Hebrew singer says, and my heart was warm toward her, thinking of you. We took her patrimony, and it is gone, and we took the earnings of widows and the small savings of young men, blasting many a hope and planting the seeds of discouragement and future carelessness in many a breast. It was wrong, cruelly, criminally wrong, but I believed in it from my soul."

"I know you did," said Ared, his pity straining to pain, knowing, as he knew, the depth of his father's humiliation, and his capacity for corrosive regret.

Ared put the old man down at the station in Oil City, and Solomon Heiskell turned his face resolutely toward the abandoned home in the hills.

Ared looked after him as he buffeted his way onward against the wind, until he passed out of sight at a turn of the street. A new necessity had come into the young man's life that morning; it called loudly above the pleasant music of his long dream. There might be no song at twilight for him now; the singer who raised her eyes as one under a holy benediction never might lift her voice to reward the constancy of his

heart. If there was fortune for him in his share of the Ryland lease, it must go first to restore what had been taken from the public in his father's name.

It was dusk when he drove back to camp and flung the lines to Triggerheel, who was waiting for him. Ared was in a strange humor, as far as Triggerheel's experience with him counted. He seemed sour, and disposed to smash things. He slammed on the brake of the wagon and jumped to the ground, beating his numb hands across his breast like a woodchopper.

He swore suddenly, with no word of preface, beating away as if to knock the breath out of his body.

Triggerheel looked up from unhitching a tug, a surprised look in his eyes.

"Triggerheel, they've bottled us up!" Ared exploded. "There's not a well-shooter in this district that'll touch this job, and not a quart of nitroglycerin to be bought for love or money."

"You don't tell me!" said Triggerheel, raising his shaggy eyebrows.

Ared swore again viciously and violently. "I've been up against some things in this world, pardner, but—my—eyes if this—outfit that runs this country don't beat any cast-iron combination you can name!"

Triggerheel brought the end of the lines around, and slapped himself sharply across the thighs, his face lighting up like he was hearing news from home.

"Go to it, I tell you; it does me good to hear you!" he said.

The long-quiet fire was raging in the slow-spoken, mild-eyed young man's breast. He flung his long arms and called down confusion on the big company, and the heads that guided it in that benighted land.

"I trotted up and down that—street over there till my—feet were hot; I rammed my nose against the bars like a wolf in a cage," said Ared, "but I couldn't overtake anybody that hadn't

been seen by some of that gang ahead of me. I couldn't shove in a door of any blink-eyed, whey-brained, shaggy-legged mother's son of a storekeeper anywhere along that street that hadn't sold the last drop of his hell-fired soup just the minute before I got to him. I tell you I'm tired of it, Triggerheel, and I'm one man in this county of jackasses that's goin' to rair up and buck this load of—grafters in the mud!"

"A-a-men!" said Triggerheel. "I didn't know it was in you, Ed, dang m' old dried-up skilletin, I didn't know it was in you!"

"There's nothing to be had in that man's town that'll help us put a barrel of oil on top of the ground in time to save this option," said Ared, cooling down in a measure, perhaps ashamed of himself on account of Triggerheel's enthusiastic applause.

"No soup, no shooters, no machinery—no nothin', heh?"

"Machinery hell!" burst Ared, the volcano beginning to boil again. "I tell you there isn't even a piece of wire in that town that any of us up here could buy. Fleming's put his flat foot down on everything, and he's got all those storekeepers down there humped up with their tails between their legs like a pack of hounds."

"Yes, all he's got to do is crack the whip; I told you that some time ago, Ed. Well, what do you aim to do?"

"I'm going to take the ten o'clock train to Tulsa to-night and get the material we need," Ared replied. "You meet me at the depot to-morrow evening with the wagon, for the stuff'll come down on the train with me by express."

"Pump and connections, and nitroglyceren and all?"

"I suppose I'll have to disguise the explosive in some way and carry it in the car with me; I don't believe I could ship it by express, but the rest of the stuff will be shipped."

"You aim to walk over there to town and ketch that there train, Ed?"

"Of course," said Ared shortly. "You'll have to stay here and see that these pirates don't sneak in and blow us up again."

"Yes, and you'd do it, too, and you'd tote that there soup with you, and you'd win out in spite of hell and half of Kansas, as the man from Indianny said. Well, you don't need to do that, Ed; you don't need to stir a foot off of this place. You don't want no pump for that well, Ed; what you need's a valve."

Ared looked at him severely a moment, and Triggerheel nodded, affirming what he had said.

"I don't know what you mean," said Ared pettishly, turning from him abruptly.

"I mean she's come in on her own account, and she's runnin' a stream of oil as big as m' dang old leg!"

"You don't mean—what in the devil do you mean?"

"She set up a-gulpin and a-gurglin' this mornin' about nine like a feller drinkin' out of a jug," the old man said, "and I just hung around to see what was up. D'reckly she busted like a bile."

Ared had set off in the direction of the well, and Triggerheel talked as he swung his long legs to keep up with the young man's eager gait.

"Does Pardner know?" asked Ared.

"I went tearin' up that hill like a jackass rabbit as soon as I seen it was a gusher that'd come in, and not just a spurt of gas," said Triggerheel, "and down come Pardner, just as she took her hands out of the pie dough."

They were near the well now, and even in the thickening dusk the fountain of oil could be seen, rising and sinking in the casing.

"It's comin' stronger all the time," said Triggerheel as they drew up beside it. "It's poppin' up higher now than it was a little while ago."

Ared was silent. It seemed as if the unexpected realization on what had appeared a doubtful chance when he came back from the town but a few minutes before had surprised the words out of his mouth like startled quail.

"I throwed a little dam acrost the holler down there about a hundred foot," Triggerheel pointed, "and it's collectin' there in a pond. Must be hip deep by now."

Ared did not speak. He bent over the rising and sinking stream of oil, drew off his sheepskin mittens, and tested the body of the product between finger and thumb.

"What did Pardner say?" he asked after a while.

"Nothin' at first. When she seen that oil runnin' over the casin'—it wasn't nothin' like as strong as it is now—she put her hands in it and kind of handled it, like a feller would gold nuggets if he'd open a pocket of 'em after humpin' the gizzards out of him over a pick for forty years. She lifted it up in her little pa'ms and poured it out, and the tears come a-gushin' over her face, and nobody here to kiss 'em off. I reckon if you'd 'a' been here then, Ed——"

"Well, it's real, anyhow," said Ared, releasing a great sigh, as if there had been the obscurity of doubt over it until that moment.

"Harvard-Yale was over this afternoon," said Triggerheel, with a chuckle. "Them fellers can smell oil like a buzzard smells a mess laid out for him on the pe-rairie."

"What was he nosing around here after?" asked Ared in belligerent spirit at the mention of Sandford's name.

"Come over to pay his respects to maw, I reckon," said Triggerheel. "Anyway, she come down here with him, and Pardner she come along, to see he didn't pull up the well and carry it off with him, I guess. He'd 'a' done it, too, if he could!"

"I guess you're right," laughed Ared to change the subject. "I'd like to use one of the horses after supper; they're not tired; they've just been standing around all day."

"No matter if they was tired," answered Triggerheel. "Goin' over to town?"

"Over that way."

"I thought maybe you'd want to hang around here this evenin' and talk it over with Pardner"—this with a speculative shading of regret.

"No, I'm going to see my father," said Ared, his head up, his face averted, his voice low, as if he imparted a confidence to the winds. "I'm going to tell him that the Heiskell luck has changed. I'll be back by midnight and relieve you. I wouldn't go at all but for the pleasure it will give my father to know that daylight's breaking over here. His big scheme has all gone up in a whirlwind, just as we thought it would go."

"The fiscalin' feller skinned out with the collection, heh?"

"Yes, he cleaned out the barrel to the bottom."

"That's the main part of the trade of fiscalin'. 'Most anybody can take in money on a scheme like that, but it takes one of them financ-ers you read about to git away with it clean."

"Well, that one knew his business then," Ared allowed.

"Gone, has he?" said Triggerheel speculatively. "Huh, might 'a' knowed it'd turn out that-a-way!"

"Yes, such schemes usually do."

"Well, he's got a hundred of mine along in his gripsack," Triggerheel sighed.

"How's that? You don't mean——"

"Yes, I fell for that feller's promise of big money for the widders and orphans," the old man admitted, grinning sheepishly.

"I'm sorry, Triggerheel——"

"I ain't a-sheddin' no tears over it,

anyhow," interrupted Triggerheel loftily. "Money goes, no matter how tight you hold it, and it'd 'a' got out of my hands some other way by now, I reckon. It was a chance, and I took a shot."

"When did you send the money? If you'd come to me before——"

"It was the day I brung the paper up to you. I read that feller's talk over once, and it seemed to me I could feel the money beginnin' to swell in m' pocket like seeds in the ground; I read it ag'in, and dang m' old melts, Ed, if I didn't feel like I was a coward to hang onto it with that chance a-darin' me to come on. That was before I seen Purty, and I loped off to the post office and sent that fiscaler a money order for a hundred dollars. Well, let it go—I ain't carin' a durn!"

"I'll make it good to you," said Ared, grimly positive.

"You will—not!" growled Triggerheel resentfully. "I ain't around askin' no man to pay me back money I put up on another feller's game."

"All right; we'll let it drop for the present."

"For good! I've got ten thousand shares of that paper, and it's as purty paper as you ever set your eyes on, Ed."

They were back at the well again, Ared having gulped a hasty supper. The saddled horse was behind him, his arm through its bridle reins, ready for him to mount and carry the good news to old Solomon in his gloomy home. Triggerheel had denied himself his pipe, for he would not risk even a spark near the well. There was a small hook of a moon in the southwest, dodging in and out among the thickening gray rack which blew up from the distant gulf.

"I think Pardner's coming," said Ared, listening.

"Yes, I heard her shut the door a minute ago," said Triggerheel.

She came out of the thicker gloom which bordered the path as they were speaking.

"I just *had* to come down for another look at it," she excused herself, coming up to where they stood.

"Well, it's something worth looking at," said Ared. "And to think of it being so obliging as to come in with a head like that while I was tearing around on my fruitless hunt for 'soup'!"

"It seems to me that it's bigger and bigger every time I see it," she laughed.

"That's because it is, honey," said Triggerheel. "Well, say, I'm goin' to run over to m' tent and take a draw on m' pipe while you two plan what you're goin' to do with your money, if you can spare me a minute?"

"Go ahead," granted Ared.

"I had to come down to assure myself that it was still going," said Jo seriously. "I don't know how I'll be able to live through the night, dreaming every time I shut my eyes that the oil has turned to water, or that the reality is only a dream itself. I'm glad—doubly glad—for your sake, Ared, that it has turned out so well."

"Thank you, little Pardner," said he, straight from the heart.

"You're just about starting somewhere; don't let me keep you," said she.

"I am going to carry the big news," he told her seriously.

"I hope that she—they," said Jo in soft, halting words, "will be as happy for your sake as I am, Ared."

"It's to my father; mother has long been dead," said he persistently, and, it seemed, permanently blind.

"Oh, he was here this morning, looking so lonely and heartbroken I thought as he stood there on the hill waiting for you to come. You must go to him—you must hurry!"

He did not mark the new lightness, the new eagerness, in her tones.

"He has failed to realize on one of his fondest expectations," he told her sadly, as if speaking of the dead.

"You must carry this cheer to him," said she in pity.

"Yes; it will warm his heart this winter night," said he, flinging the reins over the horse's neck, his foot seeking the stirrup eagerly in the dark.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE HIRED DYNAMITER.

It was past midnight when Ared returned. The night had grown warmer, and a mist was in the wind, giving false proportions to objects in the near landscape, drawing a gray obscuration over the distance. The timbers of the derricks at wells along the roadside stood out like the foundations of gigantic structures, enlarged by the eye-deceiving mist to noble proportions, their tops hidden in the vapors which had blown there from the steaming caldron of the gulf, eight hundred miles away.

There was a light in the Ryland house as he passed, at which he wondered, and as he rode down to the canvas stable to put the horse up he heard Triggerheel's voice in his old, doleful melody:

"I'm a reavin', I'm a rovin',
I'm a rainin' young blade——"

The sound came from the direction of Triggerheel's tent, but no light showed in it. Ared approached it cautiously in fear of tripping over a rope. In front he stopped and hailed the singer.

Triggerheel opened the flap, and the light of the lantern which stood in an upended box beside him revealed the old man kneeling at a pallet upon which a man lay stretched. Triggerheel held a hairbrush in his hand hoveringly over the prostrate man's face, which was in shadow.

"Oh, it's Purty," said Ared, his disgust unhidden.

"Yes, it's him," returned Triggerheel, with a sadness and a portent of some-

thing unrevealed in his voice which caused Ared to start.

"Why, what's happened?" he asked, bending forward, his hand on the canvas.

"The pore boy was misled into comin' around here and takin' a shot at me," said the old man.

"Did he hit you? Are you hurt?" Ared inquired in alarm.

"No, he didn't git me," said Triggerheel, "but I banged away, not knowin' who it was, and slammed a bullet through his lights."

"Well, you seem sorry you hit him," said Ared, the scorn for Triggerheel's outlandish softness for this villainous fellow finding expression in his tones, "but I think he got what was coming to him. Is he dead?"

"No, but he will be before daylight," said Triggerheel sadly.

"I'll take the other horse and go to town for a doctor," Ared said, turning away.

"No need; Pardner she rode over to Harvard-Yale's camp and sent a tele-foam in for one. But he said he couldn't come before mornin', and I don't reckon he could do nothin' for pore old Purty if he was to come now. Pardner she's standin' watch over the well, but I don't reckon nobody'll butt in around here any more to-night."

The old man stooped over his protégé, who would have been his murderer but for the uncertain shadows around the well, and stroked his mustache with the brush. Ared turned the box which sheltered the lantern light from Purty's face, and the yellow gleam fell over the pallet of blankets.

Purty's face was pallid, and his mouth hung open, but his eyes were closed, and he lay as one dead. Ared saw that the old man was right about the tenure which Purty held on the tenement of life. Before another hour ended he would be called to account for his ingratitude and treachery.

Ared moved the box around to face the tent wall again, and Purty stirred, throwing a hand from under the blanket.

"Sh-h-h-h!" whispered the old man, like a mother soothing a restless child. Then he began to sing:

"I'll tune up my fid-dle,
I'll ros-um my bow,
And I'll make my-self wel-come
Where-ever I go-o-o."

It was the same tune to which Triggerheel pitched all his songs, or perhaps a continuation merely of his one interminable piece, far-carrying, tremulously minor; a tune which cow-herders have sung on the night watches from the Rio Grande to the North Platte for fifty years.

"That used to soothe and quiet the boy," said Triggerheel apologetically, "along with breshin' his murstash, when he was in his worst spells of the Lonesome Willies. But I don't reckon it'll ever put the old feller to sleep no more."

"Did he tell you anything—who hired him to do it, or anything like that—before he became unconscious?"

"Yes, he told me all about it. Fleming hired him to put the danamite in the coal. Them was Purty's tracks I thought was a woman's—his foot takes a number five. I thought them tracks was littler than that, but he was wearin' woman's shoes that night, he said. I beg the old lady's pardon for the suspicion I had of her."

"Still, you suspected Purty at the time," said Ared, recalling what the old man had said then about knowing a man with a foot that small.

"Yes, I suspicioned Purty; it was a trick his size," sighed the old man, "for when booze drives a feller he never knows where or when to stop. He'll go through blood and fire, and he'll go through hell an' blazes. Well, that time I saw him hop his horse after he blowed up the rig I knowed him. But I never thought that even booze would drive

him to lift his hand agin' his one best friend."

"He's a yellow dog, clear to his rotten heart!" said Ared.

"Well, maybe so, maybe so," sighed the old man, "but he's about to start out on the long drive now, and I'd 'a' give m' best leg, Ed, if it'd 'a' been some other feller's bullet that done it."

"Sandford hired him to even up the score with you, after he saw that he couldn't block us on the oil, did he?"

"Well, you know, they had the pore feller on his back, as you might say, hangin' over the aide of hell and tarnation. They told him if he didn't do it they'd tip off to you who blowed up the b'iler and the rig, and he'd go over the road for the rest of his days. 'Sides, Purty he had to have booze. He'd 'a' walked up the side of a house after booze, and he'd 'a' div off of Pike's Peak after it."

"Yes, it's just like Sandford to put up a deal like that," said Ared, thinking of his negotiations for the hand of Jo Ryland as an imp aspiring to paradise.

"No, Harvard-Yale he wasn't man enough to tackle the job with his own little gun, so he put up that pore, deluted boy to do it. Well, well; it's done!"

"I'll go over and send Pardner to bed," said Ared. "There's no use watching the well any more to-night; they've done all they'll do."

Jo was walking a beat that she had laid out on the little level beside the well. She was as steady as a clock, but deeply moved by the old man's sorrow over the end which Purty had brought upon himself.

"He's been singing that way ever since he carried the sneaking assassin to his tent," she said. "He says there's a bond between them that no act of that fellow's can break, no matter how treacherous and mean."

"It's all on one side," said Ared. "The man's a drunkard and a thief, to

my knowledge, and I don't know what else. He's the fellow who's been planting the dynamite around here; he was conscious long enough to tell the old man that. Whether it was the boast of a scoundrel past redemption, or the one white spot on the edge of his soul, which the old man gives him credit for having, I don't know."

"Let us give him credit for the white spot," said she softly, turning to listen to Triggerheel's song.

"Yes, I'll grant him that for the old man's sake," said he. "What did Sandford say when you went over to telephone for the doctor—when he heard his lieutenant had been shot, I mean?"

"He wasn't there," she said; "nobody but the watchman. Sandford motors in to town every night."

"Oh, the cuck-oo's a pur-ty bird,
And she brings us good ch-ur,
But she nev-er sings cuck-o-o-o
Till the spring of the yur-r-r."

So Triggerheel's song rose, and Ared heard a little sob in the misty darkness close at hand.

"God bless him for his tender, faithful heart!" she said.

"And reward him, too, with a worthy friendship," he added. "Let me take you to the house; it's uncertain footing in this fog."

When Ared returned from escorting Jo to her door the light was out in Triggerheel's tent, and the sound of the old man talking to his horses came softly through the fog. Ared sought him, and found him harnessing his team.

"I'm goin' in after a coffin for that boy," said he.

There he paused, and Ared heard him swallowing, as if drinking his own sad tears.

"On your account, I'm sorry," Ared said.

"Well, I reckon Purty wasn't worth no grievin' after," the old man said. "There'll be coroner's inquests, and

sheriff's inquiries, I reckon, before I can lay him away to rest. But you and Pardner, you'll stand by a old feller and see him through, Ed?"

"We'll do more than stand by; we'll stand under and lift with you," said Ared, feeling out in the dark for the old man's hand. "We've already forgotten everything about Purty except that you were his friend."

CHAPTER XIV.

A WOMAN'S WORD.

Morning discovered an increased strength in the flow of the well. The first misty light of dawn showed the reservoir which Triggerheel had hastily provided for the waste by damming the gully, to be almost filled to the top of the barrier. Ared roughly estimated that the well was running not less than five hundred barrels a day. That meant somewhere around one hundred dollars a day as his share, if they could find a buyer for the oil.

That question had not stood out very large in his future during the days when he had labored at the well, for it was a bridge, as he had told Fleming, to be crossed when he came to it. Now he was up to the stream which divided him from prosperity and independence, and not even a bridge in sight.

It was certain that Fleming's company would not buy the oil. Fleming had told him that in as many words, and he had made the threat also that Heiskell never would realize any money out of that venture. The thing to do now, having made the leasehold secure for Jo and her mother, was to put a valve in the well and shut it off, and then find somebody who would buy them out.

Ared was weary, and heavy with sleep. There was still fire in the boiler, and the shed was warm. Sitting there in the vapors of his morning coffee, he concluded that he would have time

for a restoring nap before Triggerheel's return. Accordingly, he turned in, with everything on but boots and coat.

A hand on his shoulder and Triggerheel's excited voice in his ears called him out of his blank sleep. He sat up, his faculties scattered, expecting dimly, through the cumbering dregs of sleep, to hear that some fresh outrage had been worked against their property while he slumbered.

The sun had come out, and a beam of it illumined the disorder of the shed through the little window in the south. It also revealed in raw plainness to Ared's eyes Triggerheel and several other men, none of whom he knew. Triggerheel's face was white, his eyes staring, his mouth open, as if he had that moment received a knife jab between his ribs.

"Where is he, Ed?" he asked breathlessly.

"He? Who, what—I don't know what you mean!" said Ared, dazed, shaking off the sleep with a cold shudder.

"Purty—he ain't there; he's gone!"

"I'm the coroner," said one of the men in the crowd. "I came over here to investigate a killin', and find I've run into a mare's nest. Say, is this what you fellers call a joke?"

"Well, he was there, and dead enough for any coroner, too, the last time I looked into the tent," declared Ared, flashing up resentfully at the official's manner.

"How long ago was that?" inquired another man in a bearskin coat and large, coconut-fiber mustache.

"About six o'clock, just before I came in to make a pot of coffee," returned Ared.

"Well, I'm the sheriff," said the mustache, "and it don't look to me like you ever had a dead man in there, pardner."

"Wait till I get my clothes on," said

Ared, out of patience with the whole unaccountable proceeding.

"He's gone, Ed; gone slick and clean!" said Triggerheel, unmeasurable agony in his voice.

"You're the same crowd that's been imaginin' all kinds of things over here, danamiters, and such as that," nodded the sheriff, eying Ared with severe disfavor.

"He ain't there, Ed; he ain't there!" moaned Triggerheel distractedly.

Ared led the way to Triggerheel's tent. The place where the dead body of Purty had lain was empty, the blankets of which his pallet was made were gone.

"Well, where's your dead man?" asked the coroner derisively.

"He didn't get up and walk away," said Ared, stooping to examine the ground.

There was no trace of trespassers around the tent, but then the ground was hard frozen and clean. Careful men could have come and gone without leaving a track, and whoever had carried the body away had been all of that. They had not dropped anything, nor left behind even a straw with a bloodstain on it. The only trace of the tragedy remaining there was the trail made by Triggerheel when he carried the wounded man to the tent from the place where he had fallen.

Purty had been bleeding profusely, and the route over which Triggerheel had borne him was plainly marked. They followed it to its beginning, the old man pointing out where he stood when he fired the shot.

"Well, maybe you did," said the coroner in loud, skeptical voice, "but you'll have to show me!"

"Miss Ryland, in the house up there, saw him; she can bear out what we have told you," said Ared hotly. "What good would it do this man to tell you he'd shot the fellow if he hadn't? Jeffries had known him for years, and I

had seen him before. He was here, I tell you, and he was dead."

"Well, none of us sees him now," said the sheriff. This drew a laugh from the squad which the coroner had brought along to serve as jury.

"That's because some one has carried the body away," Ared declared.

"Who'd do it?" the sheriff wanted to know.

"The people who hired him," said Ared, looking pointedly into the sheriff's eyes. "They'd be about the last ones who'd want an inquest into the matter."

"There's not anybody in this county around hirin' people to do their shootin' for 'em," denied the sheriff haughtily. "If there is I never heard of 'em before."

"You don't act much like you're greatly interested in hearing of it now, either," said Ared.

The sheriff snorted his disgust, and turned to the coroner. "I guess we'd better go back to town, doc?"

"Yes, come on," said the coroner, walking away toward the two automobiles in which they had come.

"They made me come with 'em," said Triggerheel, watching them leave with a dazed expression, "but I'd already bought the coffin."

"You'd better go in with them and get your money back on it," suggested Ared.

"No, I wouldn't ask them fellers for the favor of a ride," said Triggerheel, "and 'sides that I want to look and search around. Maybe—say, you don't reckon the old feller could 'a' got up and walked off somewheres, do you, Ed?"

There was a wistful appeal in the old man's eyes which told of the sad hope he held that Purty might still be alive.

"He wouldn't have carried the blankets with him and cleaned up the ground that way," said Ared.

"No, they've carried the old feller off

to git shut of the evidence agin' 'em," admitted the old man, shaking his head sadly. "If we ain't got no corpse to show we can't prove nothin', and we can't start no in-quiry."

"They had plenty of time between six o'clock and sunup, and the fog was so thick then that Pardner couldn't have seen them, even if she'd been on the lookout. It was my fault; I should have watched."

"It's just as well the way they come and got him, I reckon. Only I'm a coffin ahead."

"We couldn't have proved anything on them, anyhow," said Ared. "Purty's dying confession to you wouldn't have been admitted as evidence, I don't suppose. You've got to have such things down in writing and sworn to. They'll bury him, I suppose, and that's all we could have done."

"Well, I'll borry Pardner's horse and go in after my team," said Triggerheel. "If that feller won't take the coffin back I'll be in a whale of a fix with it on m' hands. Reckon I'll just have to haul it around till I *do* need it some time or other."

In a little while Ared saw the old man ride away, the stirrups of Jo's saddle let down to accommodate his long legs, his old hat flapping in rhythm with the horse's swinging gait. It was not until he was beyond hail that it occurred to Ared that he should have sent in for a valve to shut off the waste from the well.

"Well, it means another trip later in the day," said he.

The well was showing stronger every hour, it seemed. Now, as he stood by watching it, the oil rose in a fountain out of the casing to the height of a foot or more, and a jet now and then reached so high that the heavy column broke and spattered in a shower several feet around.

Ared concluded that it would be well to disconnect the engine and remove it,

for in case the well continued growing in volume the oil might make a mess of the machinery. He was at work on this, it being then about midday, when Jo came down, refreshed and rosy from her sleep.

He told her of the disappearance of Purty's body, the visit of the county officials, and their sarcastic challenge of the truth and sanity of everybody who believed they had taken part in the tragedy of the night past. She was scarcely more amazed to learn this than she was to discover that she had slept through it all.

"Even mother went out while I snored," said she, laughing nervously. "I don't know where she went." And Jo drew a frown of perplexity.

She stood by while Ared worked with pipe wrench, disconnecting the steam line, plainly disturbed and uneasy in her mind. Now and then she looked up the hill to the point where the road came into view, her displeasure over her mother's morning excursion in her face.

"Has he stopped pestering you to marry him?" Ared asked her, looking up from his work.

"He's had mother trying to do some missionary work," she answered, quite seriously. "They're coming now, and it looks to me like— Yes, it is Fleming with them. What do you suppose that man wants here?"

"No telling," said Ared, a sinking feeling of foreboding in his heart, unreasonable and unjustified as he knew it to be.

For what harm could Fleming work against him now, indeed? There was the letter of the leasehold fulfilled, all in good season, in spite of the underhanded means which Fleming had employed to defeat him. There seemed nothing more of interest in the matter for the big man now, except that he came down from his high horse and negotiated with them for the purchase of the lease.

"Well, they're heading this way, anyhow," said Jo, a flutter in her heart, a cold sensation of hovering disaster settling over her.

Fleming was striding in the lead, his long overcoat blowing about his sturdy legs, which he set out with a stolidity that seemed to proclaim ownership of everything beneath his feet. Mrs. Ryland came after him, supported by Sandford's ready arm.

"Purty little well!" said Fleming, coming to a stop a rod distant from it, his legs wide apart, his hands on his hips. He nodded to Jo and Ared, the line of his cold mouth unbending.

"Purty a little well as I ever saw, Heiskell," said he, coming on. "How're you?"

"Very well," returned Heiskell distantly.

Mrs. Ryland and Sandford approached. Ared felt a coldness coming over his spirits, like a still, gliding shadow of cloud over the glad sunshine of meadowlands. The old woman removed her hand from Sandford's arm and beckoned to her daughter, although she stood near enough for even the lightest word to carry.

"What is it, mother?" asked Jo, her voice trembling, the color sinking out of her lips and cheeks.

"Come away from that man!" the old lady commanded sharply.

"Heiskell, you divil with the ladies!" said Fleming, with a chuckle which moved in his throat but did not disturb the blunt severity of his face.

"That will be enough of that sort," said Ared quietly.

Fleming turned to him with a frown.

"I'll say something in a minute, young feller, that'll— Oh, well!"

Sandford was attempting an aside to Jo, who stood near her mother, but she had no ear for his pleasantry, whatever it was. She looked in amazement at her mother, her eyes growing large.

"Mother, what does all this mean?" she asked.

"It means, my dotah, that I have taken the reins of my business into my own hands. I have been granted letters of administration ovah your fatha's estate by the cote," the old woman replied, with important severity, "and I have sold the lease of this land to Mr. Fleming. That is exactly what it means."

"Purty little well," said Fleming thoughtfully, as to himself, looking at the mounting flow of oil.

"But—but, mother, you *couldn't* do that!" protested Jo, as if by the earnestness of her own honest soul she would repudiate this treachery and set all right once more.

"It's done!" said Mrs. Ryland triumphantly.

Sandford was standing by, a grin on his fat face. He must have seen the light die in Ared's eyes as the cloud of foreboding became the hand of reality. Fleming said nothing more. He seemed content to wait until mother and daughter had come to an end between themselves. He stood turning his calculative eyes about the property, his plans for its future development doubtless already clear in his intention.

"There's a contract between Mr. Heiskell and us; we can't rob him in any such unprincipled manner as this, and I'll never consent to it, either!" said Jo, her face flaming with indignant anger.

"There's no writin'," said Mrs. Ryland coolly.

"No, but he has my word—our word, mother."

"Oh, a woman's word!" discounted Mrs. Ryland impatiently. She faced Ared defiantly. "My dotah had neither the right nor the power, Mr. Heiskell, to give away such valuable concessions," said she.

"Mr. Heiskell has staked everything that he has on this work," said Jo slowly, her voice sinking despairingly,

"and he has suffered loss at the hands of sneaking, cowardly people who tried even murder to stop him in his work. Mr. Heiskell shan't be thrown aside like this, mother; he must be compensated."

"He'll be paid for the work of drillin' that he's done," Mrs. Ryland nodded, "and no mo'. Let him present his bill to my lowyah, Mr. Evans. My lowyah will settle with Mr. Heiskell at the regular rate for such services."

Fleming strode down the gully to view the pool of collected oil. Sandford tagged after him, hands in the pockets of his great ulster. Jo turned to Ared in impulsive appeal.

"Mr. Heiskell, I'm ashamed—for my mother, for my name—to look you in the face!" said she.

"Dotah!" reproved Mrs. Ryland sharply.

"But I beg you, Mr. Heiskell, to believe that I knew nothing about this ahead of you—I beg you to believe me, Ared!"

"I do believe you, Pardner," said he sincerely, although his heart felt as hollow as a drum.

Ared knew that there was no bluff in this move of Fleming's. Mrs. Ryland had been the one weak spot in their defenses which they had not watched. He had not considered her as a factor, believing from Jo's assumption of authority that everything rested in her hands solely. He was of the opinion, indeed, that Ryland had willed his estate to his daughter, or had at least named her administratrix. But it appeared now that he had died intestate, and that Fleming had availed himself of this breach in the bulwark when he saw that Heiskell had saved the lease to the Rylands in spite of discouragements and delays.

Heiskell was not to share in that prosperity into which he had dipped his hands for one glorious hour. Fleming had sworn it. Now he was keeping his oath, although he had yielded on one

point—that of surrender to the heirs of his old enemy, Ryland. The widow and daughter would profit through the repudiation of Jo's agreement with Heiskell, but to what extent Heiskell, of course, did not know. More than likely Fleming had fooled the shallow-headed old woman out of that half million dollars' worth of property. Certainly he had not given her anything near its true value.

After her earnest appeal to Ared for his confidence, Jo had turned her back on her traitorous mother and the victorious forces, and started toward the house. She was dressed that day in the same brown corduroy riding habit that she wore when she had sought him in answer to his advertisement and laid her "proposition" before him. Her russet hair was loosely looped beneath her knocked and weathered hat, and her tall, laced boots set trim and snug about her shapely feet. She was as handsome, wholesome, and clean-eyed a lass as one might overtake in a long day's ride.

She bent her head as she left them, as if to hide tears which she was too proud to allow them to add to their mean triumph. Ared looked after her, not beyond, nor abstractedly above her, feeling her perfections of body and soul that moment as he never had rightly appraised them before. The sternness of his face softened, and a feeling of something more gentle than pity moved his heart. He turned to Mrs. Ryland, who was adjusting her faded hair above her ear.

"Madam, I don't know the price of your betrayal, nor the motive for it," said he, his voice deep and solemn, "but whatever it may be, you have lost this day far more than you have gained."

His look went again to Jo, toiling up the hill dejectedly, as if the light had gone out of her heart and the strength from her young limbs. Mrs. Ryland turned her big eyes after her daughter

and gathered up her skirts as if she meant to follow.

"Sheep-herdin' was your walk in life, I am told," said she, in high disdain, "befo' you attempted to enter the field of finance. You'd better go back to sheep-herdin' again!"

Ared bowed with a solemn deference to her age and sex. It was an act of spontaneous courtesy, and it nettled the old woman, as a crude mind always is provoked by unruffled politeness, more than any answer he might have framed.

"Stand out of my way, suh!" she commanded, although the field was open and he was not within ten feet of her.

He stepped back in grave dignity and bent his head. But his searching eyes were on her face as she passed him, and she knew that they pierced the pitiful vanities of her withered heart, and the judgment that she read in them made her shrunken cheeks burn.

Ared resumed his work of disconnecting the engine, doubly necessary now, and Fleming and his nephew returned to their automobile after a little.

Triggerheel came along when the sun was reddening in the west, and the wind had begun to set long fangs of ice on the edges of the puddles which the day's thaw had filled. There was a canvas thrown over something in the wagon, and Jo's horse trotted along beside the team.

"Well, Ed, he wouldn't take it back," said the old man, as he drew up near the boiler shed, where Ared was piling the pipe.

"Not even at a reduced price?" asked Ared.

"Not even at a fourth off of what I paid him for it," said Triggerheel. "I wouldn't come down any more than that, dang 'im! I'll keep it and haul it around till I *do* need it, or git a chanct to sell it to some feller that's lost his wife, maybe, or somethin' like that. Anything turned up while I was away?"

"Yes, everything's up," said Ared.

He related, then, in a few words, what had occurred, and the old man listened with a stunned look in his eyes. When Ared had told it all, Triggerheel drove along to his tent, where he stopped, wound the lines with slow, mechanical motion round the brake, and got out of the wagon. He lifted the canvas from the big pine box which contained the coffin and unloaded it without a word.

"Well, I'd hold her for a dollar a foot for the drillin', and I'd make her pay up for the casin', too," said he at last, turning to Ared, who had followed him, as if that offered a substantial consolation for their loss.

"That's about the way I'd figured it up myself," agreed Ared.

"With the money you git out of that you can make a new start," said Triggerheel, with brisk hopefulness, hurrying around unhitching the team. "We can go over to the Jerusalem field, up nearer Kansas, and maybe you can git in on a lease like we thought we'd got in on this."

"I've been thinking that way, too," said Ared, the edge of his disappointment taken off a bit by the old man's cheerfulness.

"Well, I don't hold nothin' agin' Pardner; she was straight with us," said Triggerheel.

"She's heartbroken over her mother's deceit," Ared told him.

"I knowed she would be," nodded the old man, "and nobody around to even hold her by the hand."

Ared set about the preparation of his supper, always a simple task, and this evening simpler for the reason that habit rather than the clamor of appetite prompted the observance.

Triggerheel came back from his quest early. He had been over to Sandford's camp, where he had talked with several men; but they were either deeply subtle or openly innocent, he was unable to determine which. At any rate,

he got no word of the body which had disappeared from his tent, and there was nothing of a suspicious nature around their camp, he said. The old man was very much depressed.

"That box'll stand before m' eyes every time I go in my tent to tell me that I sent that pore old feller out of this world," he lamented. "It'll stand there and accuse me and lay the charge of unfriendliness agin' me on account of that misguided boy. Ed, I'd hand over my deed to my lot in the E-tarnal City if I could wipe out what I done last night."

The old man was undergoing the sharp flagellation of remorse. His thin face was strained, his eyes were red as from secret weeping. Ared respected his loyalty, but could not justify his sorrow.

"In the morning," said he, thinking to break the dismal train of the old man's thoughts, "I'm going to collect from Mrs. Ryland's lawyer for this job, and then we'll have a settlement."

"That's all right, Ed; I ain't worried over that. I'm not down to the bottom of the old sock yit."

"I'll go on over and see my father while I'm about it, and knock the new props out from under his calculations again," said Ared. "It will hit him harder to know that our big venture has turned out so badly than it did us, I'm afraid."

"Yes, I reckon it will," Triggerheel agreed. "Well, if it wasn't for thinkin' what I done to that pore, misled boy, my mind'd be as light as a cottonwood seed."

He was bound to brood over it and go back to it, Ared saw. So he concluded it was just as well to allow him to have his fill of mourning over the scoundrel who had abused his friendship at every turn.

"If I'd 'a' knowed it was Purty," said he from the door, "I'd 'a' run in on him and took his gun away from him.

But I didn't reckon they could hire him to do a thing like that."

While Ared held no doubt in the matter at all, he kept his opinion to himself, and Triggerheel went along to his tent. But he came back again almost immediately on the run. Ared heard him coming and opened the door.

The old man's face was white in the light of the lantern which Ared held aloft, and his breath was quick. For a moment he seemed unable to get control of his tongue, and then he blurted:

"Did you take it away from there, Ed—did you move it?"

"What—did I move what?" asked Ared, shaking the old man by the shoulder, almost as greatly excited as himself.

"The coffin," said Triggerheel.

"No, I didn't touch it; I haven't been outside since I left you with the team."

"Well, it's gone," said Triggerheel. "Dang my melt if this ain't goin' a le-etle too fur! Them dang fellers, they've come over and stol'd it, too!"

A thorough search of the premises seemed to confirm Triggerheel's suspicions. The coffin was gone.

"That shows what sort of an opinion those brigands have of me!" said Ared, disgusted with himself.

"Well, I didn't need it, nohow," said Triggerheel, plainly relieved now that the edge of his indignation had worn off, that the thing was off his hands. "They must 'a' wanted it to bury Purty in, and that's what I bought it for. I don't reckon it matters who puts him away, just so he's buried decent."

"Yes, it would seem to show that they have a remote feeling of decency left in them, even though they steal to satisfy it," said Ared, relieved to see that the old man remained a philosopher through the worst that fate could hand him.

"Yes, but for out-and-out thievin' where're you goin' to find a outfit to beat 'em?" Triggerheel wanted to know.

"I hope if there is one we'll never fall in with it," said Ared. "Our experience with this outfit will last me a lifetime."

"Yes, they've skinned us at every jump," the old man said, "and I never was unlucky that-a-way in my life before."

It was an unfortunate remark for Ared's peace and his high resolutions, framed but a little while before. He returned to the boiler shed, wondering whether there was anything in luck and whether the shadow of the Heiskell house had stretched out after him to this new undertaking. His father had come to believe himself unlucky. Ared recalled how he had hastened away from there, uneasy in his mind, the moment that he had learned the terms upon which his son was sinking the well.

Perhaps there was something in Fleming's declaration that the Heiskells were unlucky men. It was a cold thought to take to bed with him, and a cheerless thing to lie with and try to lose in sleep.

CHAPTER XV.

"HEISKELL, YOU'RE A SPORT!"

Morning brought with it the tonic of reassurance, as morning will charge with new vigor even an expiring hope.

Triggerheel was already at work removing their belongings to the public road, where he was to establish camp and keep watch over the machinery until Ared could either strike a new contract or make arrangements for shipping to a new field of industry.

Ared went out to the road, where Triggerheel had drawn the boiler, on his way to the Ryland house after the order on the old lady's lawyer for a settlement. He noted a new cheerfulness in his faithful comrade's face, and was glad that he had emerged from the shadow of Purty's tragic end so soon.

"Well, it's all right, Ed—everything's all right," said he, as Ared came up.

"You mean about Purty?"

"Yes, about him. Feller was over here a minute ago and told me they put him away snug and decent in the coffin and shroud. I don't know who he was, but he p'inted the grave out to me—you can see it down there by the branch, side of them willers. The feller said 'friends' of that pore, misled boy put him away, and they wanted me to know about it so I'd feel easy."

"They are a very kind and considerate pack of scoundrels," said Ared.

"Yes, they're purty mean," nodded Triggerheel; "they ain't a man among 'em that ain't got a bent-in conscience, I'll bet you. Well, just so they buried Purty——"

The old man dismissed the matter with a wave of the hand, and went ahead with his work.

Ared went to Mrs. Ryland's door, where he waited while she wrote the promised order on her lawyer for the amount due Heiskell for sinking the well. Jo was not in sight, and Mrs. Ryland offered no excuse for her absence during their brief interview.

There was considerable delay in coming to a settlement with the lawyer, who questioned each item and challenged the aggregate as being excessive. His behavior appeared to Ared that of a man who knew himself to be a useless attaché, and who laid himself out in trivialities to impress his employer with a sense of his indispensability. He paid the account at last, and Ared left his office with fourteen hundred dollars in his pocket.

Two hundred of that amount, he computed, belonged to Triggerheel for his services and money advanced. In the remainder there was no profit, after the cost of the destroyed boiler and the casing used in the well was deducted. It paid him wages, and that was all, but even at that he felt that it was better

than that much time wasted. The experience was costly, but it was invaluable.

Ared dreaded the disclosure which he must make to his father, not so much because it seemed a confession of failure and inadequacy on his own account as for the sad disappointment it must carry to the old man's heart. Solomon's hope of staving off the deluded investors in his own venture by means of his son's prospects must now come to a sudden end.

There was smoke in the chimney as Ared approached the old place. Solomon had the house in order, and his long hair combed out smooth, the bow of his necktie arranged with all his old-time nicety. He had been reading his old books by the window of the neat, cozy room; one of them lay face downward on the chair from which he had risen to open the door to his son.

Ared lost no time in coming to the disagreeable tidings. His father received the news in silence, his head bowed upon his hand. When Ared had finished, the old man looked up with a smile.

"It is not defeat, son," said he comfortingly; "you cannot rightly call it that. You struck out like a man—you tried. That's a victory in itself."

Perhaps Solomon would not have received the news so calmly before the wrecking of his own venture. That proof of his fallibility appeared to have softened him and rectified his judgment. On hearing his father's words, Ared felt that he could now toss away the last regret for the miscarried calculations, charge it all to the account of experience, and begin anew with a stouter heart than before.

"I'm glad to see you take the news so calmly," said Ared. "I was afraid you might feel that I had failed."

"Success at one trial wouldn't be worth anything to a man," said Solomon. "It would only pamper his vanity

and make him insufferable. No, a man must climb and fall, climb and fall, and creep to the goal at last on bloody knees to make the victory sweet. I know it now. I'll never reach it; I'm too far along for that; but you will, son; you've made a start."

"I'm looking around for another handhold," said Ared, lifted beyond the clouds of his unfortunate day by his father's serenity, "and I will undertake to come to a basis of settlement with the creditors of your company. In a little while, I hope, I shall have something more tangible than a promise to offer them as security, and in time I'll discharge every dollar of your obligation to them."

"It's a melancholy legacy that I'll leave to you, my lad, and I have only my own impetuosity to blame for it. But I know you'll clear the name of any stain my muddle has put on it. Still it's a monstrous load—twenty-five thousand dollars!"

Solomon sighed as he named it, and shook his graying locks.

"Not so much to me to-day as it was sixty days ago, neither so hopeless of winning, nor so far away," said Ared. "Why, I've got the twenty-fifth part of it in my pocket now."

"Yes; you'll turn it, and see it mount," nodded Solomon.

"I'm going to stick to the exploration—it's bound to lead to something in the end; this close rub I've had with success shows me that. There are others who have lands and leases and lack the money for development. I can find them, and get better terms even than I thought I had on the Ryland lease," said Ared.

"I wouldn't urge you to put your money in it, but my faith in the old place is as strong—nay, stronger—than ever before," said Solomon.

"It's more than likely here," said Ared, "but it's a question of depth. Perhaps it's beyond all reach."

He spoke without either interest or enthusiasm, as one commenting out of duty on a tiresome theme.

"Time will put the harvest of my hope into somebody's hands, and I would to God that it might be yours," said the old man fervently.

"I haven't enough capital to put down a deep well, and I'm confident that it will take a deeper one than ever has been sunk in the West to reach it here," said Ared. "Now I'm going out to take a look around the place." He felt that he had been away from it a long while, and that many changes must have taken place meantime in those immobile hills.

Solomon Heiskell looked with admiration upon the strength of his son as he stood a moment there within the door. His rough clothing covered loosely his sinewy limbs, his long hair stood thick over his deep forehead as it did in the careless days of shepherding; but his face was set with the seal of a purpose which Solomon had not marked in it in the old times.

He seemed even more gaunt and beaten down to the bone than before. The ridges of his cheek bones were marked, and hollows fell beneath them in the way that nature pares down those predestined to suffer for the world and bear its burdens in the heat of the day.

Ared left his father to the composition of the letter to the investors in the Prophet's Well Company and sought the little, sheltered bench in the hillside where his mother lay between two straight young cedars in her little house whose door was closed to this world's tempests forevermore.

One had been there before him and removed the fallen grasses and blowing leaves. He stood a little while, the wind in his uncovered hair, then struck out across the hills, which were as dear to him in all their bleakness as the gray

deserts to the wandering seed of Ishmael.

Hunger faced him back toward the house after he had been walking and dreaming two hours or more. It was then long past midday, and the soft, warm mists were setting in again on the wind from the distant gulf.

There was a gray motor car which had a familiar look drawn up in the road before the bars, a wrapped, huddled figure at the wheel. Voices came from the house. Feeling again that cold foreboding which had stolen over him the day before when Fleming came into view, Ared drew near the door.

His heart leaped then, as he stopped to listen, for there was but one voice in the world that could thrill it so. A thousand quick fantasies came trooping into his mind to account for her presence there—Jane Sloane, the singer who lifted her eyes to heaven as she sang. Had she come seeking him, drawn by the far-reaching call of his strong love—had she come with his reward before his time?

Then another voice sounded, dispersing his illusions—the voice of Horace Fleming, throaty, dictatorial, coarse. Resentment surged over Ared as he paused, listening. How was it that this man should come constantly between him and the sunshine of life? Not so long ago she had fled to his protection in terror of Fleming, and to-day she was there under his patronage, as witnessed by his words.

"I just throw you this suggestion as a solution of the difficulty, and as a friend of Miss Sloane here," Fleming was saying, "and if you're wise, Heiskell, you'll think it over."

"I would drain the blood from my heart if that would satisfy you, my dear young lady," returned Solomon, in the voice of one harried and desperate, "but I could not pay you back the money if my life were forfeit, for I have none to pay."

"I am the heaviest investor, the worst-deluded victim of the swindle," said Jane Sloane, her voice sweet in denunciation and arraignment, "and I think you owe it to me, considering the way you and that man Drumm took advantage of my confidence, to do *something*."

"If you will have patience, miss, and wait till my son returns," said Solomon, "he may be able to impress you with the sincerity of his undertaking and his ability to carry it through, in which I seem to have failed. But I implore you to believe me, Miss Sloane, and madam, that I was sincere in my representations to you."

"But you must have known that you published false statements," said the voice of Jane Sloane.

"You assured us that there was oil here," said another feminine voice, smooth and deep, like Jane's, but older. "Where is it, where are all the activities which your misleading advertisements in the papers described?"

"Engines going night and day," said Fleming, quoting a persistent statement of the advertisements.

"I was deceived by my colleague in the particular of the work as completely as any of the rest," said Solomon, in voice of contrition and abasement which made his son's heart ache to hear. "I have told you that before. Drumm was as shrewd as he was dishonest, and he could not have cast even an honest shadow. But the oil is here, madam; it underlies this land, and future explorations will set me right on that particular, at least."

"I don't see how that's going to give me back my money, though," said Jane, with a sigh.

"You're wrong, Heiskell," declared Fleming, in authoritative voice; "there's no oil under these hills. You're clear out of the range of it, and the little bit that comes through on the spring down there is just a seep from above. Do

you suppose I wouldn't 'a' had my hands on this land long ago if I'd seen anything in it?"

"Time will tell," said Solomon.

"But this fiddlin' around won't give Miss Sloane back her seven thousand dollars any more than it'll deceive anybody, old feller," said Fleming, with new briskness. "Come across with the money now, Heiskell, and save yourself a big, sudden bunch of trouble."

"Sir——" began Solomon, his indignation almost choking him.

"You have robbed me, doubly robbed me!" said Jane, in stern reproof, her voice low. "Not only my money is gone, Mr. Heiskell, but you have taken away from me the dearest ambition of my life. I never can realize on it now—my money is gone."

Ared put out his hand to open the door, but checked it, the act unfinished, as Jane's mother spoke.

"Her father labored for years, Mr. Heiskell, to build up that little fortune for her," she said, "to enable her to go abroad to the great masters and complete her musical education and fit her for her career. Now he is gone, and the work of the latter years of his life is swept away, and I am not able to carry out his designs."

"God help me!" said old Solomon piteously.

Ared debated now whether he should go in or turn again to the hills and tarry until they had departed. He felt that it would be kinder to the dream which he had held in his heart to go away and leave her unseen; felt that he could thus hold it as he had made it and let it fade away and come to nothing after a while, like a fragile flower. But what discord would enter if he should see her there with the man whom she had made believe to shudder at and shun, browbeating and accusing that innocent, gentle old man! He was moving away softly when Fleming spoke again.

"Oh, cut it out, Heiskell!" said he

gruffly. "You can take care of the little fellers, all right, if you get Miss Sloane's claim out of the way. Maybe you can even put over that bluff framed up by your son—I don't know."

"If I had the money to pay Miss Sloane, or any security to give her, do you suppose I'd hesitate one moment?" asked the old man. "This little piece of land represents my entire assets, and all my creditors must share in that. I cannot favor one above another; if you are asking me to do that, you are asking the impossible."

"But we—Miss Sloane don't want your land; she wants money," said Fleming.

There was the noise of him rising to his feet and striding across the room. When he spoke again, his voice sounded from another direction, and Ared pictured him standing before the writing table at which he knew his father sat.

"Where's the whack you got out of it along with your fiscal agent?" demanded Fleming.

"Sir, do you mean——"

Fleming broke the old man off impatiently.

"I mean the money you carried with you when you skipped from Kansas City. Everybody knows how they split on a deal like that, and I know you've got a grip full of that money around here somewhere."

"Fleming, you lie!" said Ared, opening the door.

Fleming started, with a quick motion of defense, wheeling from the table, over which he had leaned. Whatever it was that he had in mind, he caught himself immediately and held his balance.

"I told you one time that I let a man call me a liar *once*, Heiskell," said he calmly.

"Count this one, then, and I'll come to your office to-morrow morning and repeat it," said Ared, meeting Fleming's

threatening eyes with steady challenge, one foot on the threshold.

Old Solomon Heiskell, sitting at the table, with its orderly stacks of books on either end, paper, pens, and ink before him, sighed as if he had been relieved of a crushing weight.

Jane Sloane was sitting with her back to the door. She started at the sound of Ared's voice, turned slightly in his direction, then leaned toward her mother, as if to seek her protection from the storm which seemed threatening in the room. There was no light of recognition in her handsome face. Her mother lifted her slow, heavy eyes—there was a somber cloud of veil banked across her forehead, pushed up so from her face—and looked at the young man inquiringly.

Ared entered the room and placed his hat on the table, taking his stand near his father. Old Solomon had risen.

"Mrs. Sloane and daughter, this is my son," said he.

"He comes in like a March wind," said Fleming, walking back to his chair, "but he wouldn't blow out a candle. He's harmless—he won't hurt you."

The two women looked at Ared curiously, the younger one with shy timidity, quickly withdrawing her eyes. He appeared anything but a financier to inspire hope and confidence in the breasts of skeptical creditors, in his bagged corduroys, smeared over with the stains of crude oil and the earthy pigments from the well that he had won and lost. But there was strength and decision in his rugged figure as he stood, tall and severe, before them.

Fleming sat down again, a sneer in his eyes, his hair combed over his forehead like a sheriff's, and hooked his arm uncouthly over the post of his chair. Father and son continued standing at the table, in the attitude of judges rather than the judged.

"Miss Sloane is the heaviest stock-

holder in my company," the old man began to explain, turning to his son.

"I have been listening outside the door," confessed Ared, without apology or embarrassment, "debating with myself whether I belonged in this conference or not. I heard enough—I understand."

"Well, where's my daughter's money coming from?" demanded Mrs. Sloane, with a certain tinge of scorn which her evident good breeding could not cover in her tones.

Ared could not trust his eyes to seek the younger woman's face. He had not looked at her, save as one component of the picture before him, since taking his place at his father's side, for he did not want it to appear that he appealed for the recognition which she doubtless had her own reasons for denying.

"Madam, I have undertaken the task of restitution," said he. "It may be slow—it is almost certain to be slow—but I will repay dollar for dollar. I cannot tell you this hour how I shall do it. All I know is that it shall be done."

Fleming's throaty chuckle rose at that, so nearly a laugh that he had to give it vent at the corners of his flat mouth. His facial expression did not change save for that, although the reflection of mirth was in his eyes. But no number of words at his command could have carried the derision which his chuckle expressed.

"You mean that you expect her to wait for years and years!" said Mrs. Sloane.

"No, I am going to begin repaying her to-day," said Ared, drawing out his wallet from his inner pocket.

He counted out the two hundred dollars due Triggerheel, and placed the remainder of the money on the table.

"There is twelve hundred dollars on account," said he. "This belongs to another man; I am not reserving it for myself."

Ared's voice was in his throat, and his hands were unsteady, it seemed, for one so sinewy and strong. Old Solomon looked at him, his face drawn with pain; protest, appeal, speaking from his sad old eyes. But Ared did not see him. His head was bent as he reached out and pushed the money a little nearer Jane Sloane's hand, resting in its neat glove on the table's edge.

She moved away from it with a start, as if conscious only then of his act, or as if to escape contact with some dangerous thing plunged toward her suddenly. Jane rose, tall, straight, impressive in her rare beauty, her face paler than he remembered it, and a little sharper in that look of wistfulness which had drawn his heart out of his bosom when she sang. Her dark hair swept from her temple, and lay against her cheek. There were tears in her great, soft eyes as she lifted them to his own.

Ared reached out his hand with quick impulse, as if appealing to her memory, longing to gather her to his bosom and console her, and lay the rare treasure of his love in the place of that lost ambition. For a moment her hand groped at her throat, as if gathering the edges of a mantle, but her eyes gave him no message of recognition. She turned from him, the money neglected near his hand. Mrs. Sloane reached over and gathered it up eagerly.

They were all standing now, Jane with her back turned to the table, her mother stowing the money away in her bag with hasty hand, as if doubtful of its reality, or distrustful of the transaction.

"It will help a little," said she, freeing a sigh of relief as she snapped the hasp of her bag.

Fleming came forward, a twinkling of something near to admiration in his eyes. He knew the history of every dollar of that money, how hard it had come into young Heiskell's hand, and

what a havoc of wryed hopes and intentions it must have left behind it in his heart.

"Heiskell," said he, speaking briskly to cover what there might be of sentiment or softness in his heart maybe, "no matter what they say about you, you're a sport!"

With that he stamped unceremoniously to the door.

Jane was the last to pass the door, which Fleming had left standing open. She turned her head when she reached the threshold in time to see old Solomon lay his hand on his son's shoulder and hear him moan, out of his stricken heart:

"Oh, lad—lad!"

CHAPTER XVI.

PARDNER.

Solomon was inconsolable. He charged himself with having pulled his son's fortunes down with his own.

"How are you to proceed with your undertakings now, with your capital thrown into this great hole?" he asked.

"I'll have to get along without capital for a little while, I guess," said Ared, with a smile. "Don't worry about that. I'll put an advertisement in the paper to-morrow and then go on over and pay my helper. Just now I think I'll take the kinks out of my back by chopping up a supply of wood for you."

Solomon smiled, as if his son's hopefulness found reflection in his own heart, but as Ared closed the door after him, and the sound of his lusty blows came in from the woodrick, the old man shook his head despairingly. He began pacing the length of the room with slow tread, hands clasped behind his back, chin upon his breast. Now and then he stopped before bookcase or mantel and looked at some object steadily, and now and then put out his hand to touch some article or set some little thing to rights.

There was a brooding cloud upon him; he seemed to have grown very old. His shoulders fell forward; his face was gray.

Ared was casting up his accounts as he tramped up and down in the yellow flare of the new-risen moon. The day's events had left him suspended without a plan for the future. For the want of capital he must go to work somewhere at once in that district, this time for the mere pay of drilling, without hope of any larger reward. Not only his material plans called for revision, but also the aspirations of his heart.

Jane Sloane seemed removed from him now by a distance which he might never gain. In her eyes he stood as a party to the swindle which had gulped down her money in a day, and with it her future plans.

There was no doubt that she had recognized him; his act of partial restitution had almost surprised it from her in words. But the silence which she had kept seemed to tell him that the past was forgotten, that his place in it had become blank. Now he must begin again, back, farther back, than two months ago, when he had left that place with the fresh blood of his slaughtered flock in his nostrils. And that without the hope of her.

He shook himself to fling off the somber thought. She was one in a world of women, heartless, exacting, unjust, no doubt. He would put her out of his life, and forget her great eyes, softened with the mist of tears, and forget her voice in the tender cadence of that old song, which came to the heart with so much comfort, and unfolded such a long, sweet vista of homely reverie.

Just a song at twilight,
When the lights are low—

But even as he resolved, it came back to him, and would not be denied. Perhaps she was all that he had charged,

but in the depths of his soul he loved her; perhaps she was not for him; doubtless her ambitions mounted far above him, but he must love her still.

"Why not?" said he to himself, throwing back his head, the moonlight on his strong, earnest face. And again, as if he challenged the answer: "Why not?"

There came a sudden dash of hoofs around the point of the hill, sheltered by dark timber, lean and bleak in the strong moonlight. A red was near the bars in the rambling, vine-grown rail fence. He turned and walked back, wondering who it might be, for riders on that road were seldom by day, and most unusual at night.

A moment dissolved all question. The rider veered over to his side of the road, and drew up before him.

"Pardner!" said he.

"I thought, somehow, that you'd be out in this moonlight," she said, jumping to the ground as light as a bird, and giving her horse's neck a caressing pat.

"What's the news?" he asked, feeling that something important, which perhaps involved Triggerheel and his own possessions, had brought her there.

"I just came to take up certain matters with you, and to clear things and explain," said she. "There's nothing new out of joint that I know of. Mother and I moved over to town this morning, and we're living high on the wages of betrayal at the Midland."

"You must not think of it that way, Jo," he reproved gently. "Your mother acted wholly within her rights. She's a better business man than we are, Jo; if we'd have been half as smart we'd have had a contract."

"I feel that both mother and myself are bound to divide with you the proceeds of the sale of the lease by just as strong an obligation as a contract in writing. We can't get away from that."

"I've been paid for the work of drill-

ing the well, Jo. That let's you out of it, so don't trouble over it any more."

"You have a moral claim on a fourth of the fifty thousand dollars that she sold out for to——"

"Was *that* all she got?" said he.

"Fleming robbed her," sighed Jo, "but she believes she made a brilliant bargain. Well, I'll have my share of it at the end of a year, and then we'll have a settlement."

"We've had our settlement, Jo," he told her gravely, laying his hand on her shoulder. "I'll never split a penny of that little share of yours, so put that out of your head."

"We'll see," said she, nodding seriously. "You don't know how much mother has been to blame in this—why, they sneaked letters to her, and—I found one of them yesterday when I was helping her pack. I don't know when she got it, and there was only a line of typewriting on it: 'Advance on royalties,' it said. I think there was money in it."

"Perhaps," said he easily, not caring now.

"It was that fat little Sandford, undermining us all along," she said, with hot spitefulness.

"Yes, he even hired that poor fool to shoot at Triggerheel," he told her.

He told her then, for the first time, the story of Triggerheel's breaking Sandford in to ride. She enjoyed the recital, and had her laugh over it, but she became suddenly grave again, as if mirth had become a trespass in her moral code.

"There's been more trouble coming your way to-day, too," said she.

"You've heard about that?"

"Yes; the Kansas City papers which came this morning had a lot in them, and the *Star* this evening reprints all of it, along with a story of its own. Have you seen it?"

"No, I haven't been in town all day—since early morning."

"There's a lot about it," she sighed. "The Big Swindle' the *Star* calls it, and an interview with that snippy chorus girl who used to sing at the Palace."

"What did she say?" he inquired, fearing that his voice betrayed him.

"Very little; Fleming did most of the talking," Jo replied.

With her answer something accusing flashed up within him against Jane Sloane, something that he had overlooked in his readjustment of a little while before. How did she come to be on such a sudden and friendly footing with Fleming, the man whom she had professed to fear so greatly that night that he sent her away home to her people? What was there in her tears when she could turn about so lightly? Perhaps they came from but a shallow fount, easily drawn, lightly prized. Fleming——

"Yes, he was here with them," said he, remembering that Jo might be waiting for him to speak.

"I saw him dashing around with them in that old tugboat of his," she said, "and that flashy chorus girl was the center of attraction in the dining room at the hotel this evening."

"She isn't a flashy chorus girl, Jo," he corrected gently, yet with an unusual earnestness which drew from her a sharp and curious glance; "she's a very well-connected and highly respectable young woman. Did you ever hear her sing?"

"I don't go to the Palace!" said Jo in high dignity.

"No, of course not," said he hastily. "I forgot that it was the Palace. You know it isn't so much the place, Jo, as the singer and her song."

Jo put her hand on his arm very gently, and looked him earnestly in the face.

"Ared, is she the *one*?" she asked.

"She's a very good singer—a remarkable singer, I believe, Jo," said he, dodging her question lamely.

"I knew there was somebody," said Jo, reproachfully sad, "but I didn't know who." She swallowed at something, then lifted her face bravely in the moonlight. "Tell me about her," said she.

"There's no use trying to hide things from you, Jo," he owned, with what seemed warm gratefulness for her penetration. Perhaps it eased his heart to share the secret with another. That is the way of love, which denies when taunted, then writes a sonnet, confessing to the world.

"Tell me about her, Ared," she pressed.

"I have put her out of my heart, little Pardner, and shut the door," said he.

"And nobody else ever will open it; it's that kind of a door," said Jo, shaking her wise head sadly. "If I knew that she was worthy——"

"She is—worthy of more than I could give. She put seven thousand dollars that her father left her into that scheme, Jo. It was to finish fitting her for her operatic ambitions, and he scraped and saved for years on it, they say."

"I'm sorry for her, then," said Jo. "Fleming is making a big talk in the paper about prosecution, and putting an end to wildcatters, and all that kind of stuff. Is there any ground for prosecution, Ared?"

"Unless I can come to some agreement with the stockholders, I'm afraid there is, Jo," he admitted.

"The *Star* says she's the heaviest stockholder of them all," said she.

"That's true, my father tells me."

"Well, it wouldn't give her back her money to send your father to prison, as Fleming threatens," said she.

"Far from it. I have assumed his obligations, but the difficult part of it will be to assure the stockholders with the security of a promise," said he.

"The paper says they sold over two hundred thousand dollars' worth of

stock!" said Jo, amazed at the ease with which he shouldered the load.

"Only a quarter of that," he corrected, "and I am undertaking to pay a fourth of that back to them at the end of six months."

"A fourth of twenty-five thousand dollars," said she musingly. "Well, there's twice that amount coming to you from the sale of the lease."

"You must not think about that, Jo," he chided. "I'm out of that entirely."

"That Sloane woman could help you so much if she knew you as well as I do, if she had the confidence in you that I have, Ared," said Jo. "Her assurance would quiet the other stockholders and hold them back on the—the—prosecution, if she knew you, Ared, as well as I do. But she doesn't—she never can."

"No, we are strangers; we never have worked and hoped together like you and I."

"And I only led you up to disappointment," said Jo sorrowfully, "but it may be as much——"

She left it unfinished, and turned abruptly to her horse.

Ared did not know that Jo was appealing for admission to the place from which he said he had dispossessed Jane Sloane. Anybody else would have seen it; Triggerheel had seen it, and his obduracy told her that his words had been hollow. The singer still filled his heart; there was no place for her.

"I'm going over to see how Triggerheel is making it in the morning," he said, "and I think I'll go into camp there with the machinery until I can get another contract."

Jo thrust her foot into the stirrup, and swung to the saddle quickly.

"And to-morrow I'm going away," said she.

He was amazed. He looked at her blankly for an explanation, but Jo drew up the reins and settled in the saddle,

her eyes on the lights of Oil City, blinking under the hill.

"Why, you didn't say anything about it when you came, Jo!" he protested, as if she had taken an unfair advantage.

"I didn't know it when I came," she answered.

She leaned toward him suddenly, and pushed back his hat from his forehead with something like the quick impulse of that other one when she had undone him with her kiss. But Jo did not go so far as that. She left her warm little hand there a moment, as if in benediction, looking straight into his eyes.

"I'll never see you again, Ared," said she, "and so I can tell you. I've tried to open the door, Ared, and I'd like to open it, and go in and comfort you. But you've locked it against me from the inside. Good-by!"

She was away, rods down the road, and the sound of her galloping horse's feet was loud in his ears before he understood. Pardner loved him, perhaps as he loved the other! She had been trying to make him understand; weeks back she had tried to make him see. In a flash the past was translated for him.

He felt that he could not allow her to depart like that without one word of comfort or a confession of the self-abasement that he felt for his blindness, but his voice seemed dead in his throat; it would not rise to hail her. In a moment more she was gone, and the beat of hoofs was dimming in the night.

He turned back toward the house, feeling disciplined, old. A little way from the door he paused, surveying the bleak scene, now softened like the recollection of an old regret under the mounting moon. The scars of their old explorations were there below him in the face of the naked hill, and beyond the old derrick, standing guard over the last, deepest bore.

It was given to the Heiskells, it seemed to him in his sad reflections, to

fasten their hearts upon, and waste their lives in pursuit of, the far, bright promises of empty dreams. He groaned in his heart, and turned again toward that dream-desolated hearth.

There was a dim light in his father's window. As he passed he saw the old man kneeling at his bedside, his arms flung out across the covers, in the attitude of one who had supplicated and been denied. Ared stood a moment before the weathered door, his head bent a moment in miserable reflection.

"Yes," said he, lifting his hand to the latch, "it must be that the Heiskells are unlucky men!"

CHAPTER XVII.

SOLOMON'S DREAM ENDS.

Old Solomon was up before his son next morning, moving about with a briskness which seemed to indicate that the clouds of depression were breaking before the sun of his normally optimistic soul. After breakfast he went over the letter which he had drawn up for the printer, designed to be mailed to his stockholders, after Ared's suggestion of the previous day. He made such changes and additions as Ared thought fitting, or as had occurred to him after his night's reflection.

Ared framed the advertisement which he proposed to insert in the *Oil City Star* that day, making a particular point of the fact that he was prepared to make explorations for oil on a percentage basis. This resolution he had taken even that morning, for he believed that Triggerheel would allow him the use of the money which he had reserved to that end. He intended to make a clean front of it to the old man, and place it before him squarely. If he desired to part company, then of course he would be free to go.

As he took the road Ared felt a strong pull of regret for his lost sheep, and for the lost peace which went out

of his life with them. He contrasted it with the uncertainty and turmoil of his present outlook, and wished, deep in his heart, that he had the power to set back the record and walk again in his old, secluded ways.

For him the hour was late, but he doubted whether he should yet find the newspaper office open on his arrival in town. From that reason he proceeded leisurely, turning over in his mind his meeting in that road with Josephine Ryland the night before.

If he could make her happier by dissimulation, thought he, or put that other one far enough out of his heart to give her room, he would go to Jo that hour. But such a compromise with conscience could not carry happiness for either of them, and it would be ungenerous and unjust to Jo to accept everything from her and give back nothing such as she demanded. He concluded that it was better to allow her to depart unseen again, and go her way and forget him, as he should be forgotten for his small deserts.

It was half a mile out from town that he met Jane Sloane, coming afoot along the road, which the thaw had softened and turned into tenacious clay. While she was still distant he knew her, and a score of shifting conjectures came to hand to account for her presence on that road, alone and in such apparent haste.

She came on, holding to the middle of the highway like one afraid of losing the road, instead of seeking a dryer footing on the side paths, where the turf was thick and the ground still frost-bound beneath it. They were not more than a rod apart, Ared walking in the path, when she recognized him.

Her face was as bright as the morning, and animated, it seemed, by some new eagerness. He saluted her gravely, and would have passed on, for all the agitation of his breast, which his stern, strong face did not betray. She came

over the muddy road hurriedly, and held out her hand to stop him as he would have proceeded on his way.

"Mr. Heiskell, I know you better this morning than I knew you yesterday," said she, with gravity in her voice in spite of the startling abruptness of her words.

"We were scarcely ourselves yesterday, none of us. You could not have been expected——"

"Oh, I knew you then, too, the moment you spoke in the door before I saw your face. I knew you then—I don't mean that."

"It wouldn't have been inexcusable if you had forgotten. I am just one common man in a world full of them."

"Not just that," she denied, meeting his calm eyes frankly. "But mother knew nothing of our previous meeting—will you accept that as my reason for my unaccountable, and seemingly thankless, conduct?"

"We met and passed in the night," said he simply.

"Will you turn back with me?" she asked. "I'm on my way to your place."

"It's easier going over here; the mud doesn't hamper you so," he said, giving place for her in the path, his wonder growing almost apace with his admiration of her, which was already beyond all bounds.

She hesitated in the path, Ared standing in the rutted road.

"But there's no use going on if your father isn't there," she said.

"He is there."

"Then I must see him."

She resumed the journey eagerly, striking out with free, strong limbs, her short skirt playing about her shoe tops. He walked on beside her, and if there was more trouble and disappointment going with her, thought he, then his sentinel forebodings were off duty. Instead of the heaviness and choking sense of impending disaster, there was a strange expectancy, untinged by ap-

prehension, in his breast. It seemed to make his feet light upon the way, and set a song ringing in his heart.

"I have done him a tremendous, cruel wrong!" she said, putting out her hand in a little speaking gesture of appeal. "I want to take his hand and tell him that I was mistaken; I want to tell him that I *believe* in him—if he'll listen to me now."

Ared's heart swelled with a great inrush of tenderness for her. Impetuously, not fully conscious, perhaps, of what he did, he laid his hand on her arm, a glad light leaping in his eyes.

"If he'll listen!" said he, inept in that moment of great happiness.

"Yes, if he can forgive my seeming heartlessness. I know you better today, Ared Heiskell, than I did yesterday—much, much better, and I want to talk with you, too."

She seemed as ingenuous as a child, and in such haste to go to the old man and carry to him the balm of her confidence. Thrilling with the most profound sensation of his life, Ared trudged on beside her.

"It will be like offering bread to the starving," he said.

"Yesterday, when you put that money on the table by my hand, I knew that I was wrong," said she contritely. "And then, when I turned in the door and saw that dear old father of yours with his hand on your shoulder, as tender as a sweetheart, and heard him speak to you in the eloquence of his sorrow, my heart was almost broken!"

She had fallen into a lagging pace as she talked. The roadway was winding there, and bordered with trees. The sun was not yet over the hill, and there was frost on the russet leaves of the scrub oak which clustered inside the moldering fence. Ared measured his gait to hers, his head bowed in melancholy review of the painful scene which she had described.

"All night his words were in my ears,

so pitiful, so hopeless: 'Oh, lad, lad!' I intended to come this morning; I would have come, even if Miss Ryland——"

"Pardner!" said he, stopping, looking at her with a cast of pain in his earnest face. "She shouldn't— Oh, little Pardner, little Pardner!" he said in voice of deep, sorrowful rebuke.

"This morning, before she went to the station to take the train, she came to see me, and she said—I'll not tell you what she said, but if I were a certain man I'd go down on my knees and worship her!"

"Poor little Pardner!" said he gently, as to himself.

"I was coming, anyhow; I ask you and your father only to believe that much of me," said she.

"You were coming," he repeated, with such eloquent earnestness that she turned to him with a quickening flash of gratitude over her mobile face.

"To give you back this money"—she presented it, drawing it from her muff as she spoke—"and tell both of you that I believe in you, and that I believe the oil is *there*, and to ask you to go on with the work and find it!"

"I set my heart to win up to you, Jane Sloane, no matter what the distance, no matter what the height," he said, his voice deep and slow, his eyes seeming to call her, like the drawing of a strong hand, to his arms. "And now you have come! I thought this day to be years ahead of me, and that I could reach it only by strife and sorrow and bitter blows. But you have come to me, you have come!"

Her face was white.

"But Pardner—Pardner loves you, lad. Do you want to go to her?" she said.

"Do you want me to go?" he asked, his hand on her shoulder tenderly.

"You didn't take back the money," said she, her face flushing rosy, "you must take it back."

"If you say the oil is there, then I say it also, and I believe it, as I believed it once, when I put the labor of my youth into the search for it, and gathered ashes for my gain. But if you say it's there, if you come to me with this message out of the hurrying world, then I'll say it's there, and I'll bring my machinery here to-day and begin the old quest anew."

"And we'll never stop till we get it, for I *know* it's there!" she said, her eyes glowing, her cheeks red as sunset.

"If we need that money that I paid you as capital, and you want to go that far with us in the exploration——"

"It's yours, not mine," she insisted.

"Then we'll use it," he finished, "for I haven't any more—that emptied the barrel. You keep it; you'll be the treasurer. Let's go on now, and carry the news up the hill. I want to tell him that to-day the Heiskell luck has changed—we're unlucky men no more!"

They faced again toward the homestead.

"Fleming knows the oil's there," said she. "I know that from what he said to mother as we were going back to town yesterday. He wants to keep the belief alive that there is none, so he'll be able to get hold of the land at last for nothing."

"Maybe," said he, a coldness falling over his spirits at the recollection of her relations with Fleming yesterday. She saw it, as any woman would have seen.

"I don't like Fleming any better, and I don't trust him any farther than I did that night you saved me from his unwelcome attentions," she said. "I want you to know this. I don't like him, and I don't trust him."

"I'm sure you do not," said he, the clouds passing away.

"He met us at the hotel yesterday morning—we came in the night before—and sort of took possession of us, like I think he must do of every-

thing that he wants, no matter what his right. He made out with a big bluff that he'd known me when I sang here that week, and mother was a little bit dazzled by his local consequence and flattered by his great show of interest in our affairs. He said he knew that your father brought a big share of the money the company had collected here with him, and that he could make him pay us. That's how we came to be with him yesterday. But I'm not with him to-day," she finished, with a quick little smile.

The timbers of the derrick at the old well could be seen from where they were now, but for three years or more the undergrowth had been so thick that the dangling drill and rusting engine had been hidden from passers-by. Ared pointed the derrick out to her.

"That hole is more than half a mile deep," he said, "and it's so well curbed against seepage that it's dry. Father has kept it covered, and the drill is hanging over it just as it was the day we stopped work on it more than seven years ago."

Ared must have admitted a note of his old discouragement and disbelief into his expression, for she spoke with new conviction and earnestness.

"It's there; Fleming wouldn't be so anxious to ruin you, and see your father sent to prison if he didn't know that a wealth of oil was hidden under those rocks. We'll find a new place for a well, and we'll go deeper, if we must, but we'll *get* it!"

Solomon was not at the house when they arrived. Jane remained outside while Ared looked through the rooms.

"No, he's not there," said he, joining her in a little while. "He's around somewhere; you'd better go in and sit by the fire while I hunt him up. If he knew what was in store for him he'd come on wings."

He went in with her to make her comfortable. The sun reached through

the open door and fell upon the hearth, where the morning fire had burned down to coals. Solomon's chair stood before it, as he had left it but a little while before. Ared moved it a little nearer the fire.

"Sit here, and I'll go out and find him," he said.

"He seems to have left a letter for you," she said, taking it up from the table, where it had lain among the litter of papers unnoticed.

"That's strange; and he intended to post it, too; it's sealed and stamped. That's very strange."

He stood, turning the letter in his hand, as one will do when there is dread or uncertainty of its contents. He put his hat down on the table, and brushed the thick hair back from his temples, as if settling himself to receive a blow. Perplexity, anxiety, mingled in shadows over his face, where the sterner emotions could make no mark.

She watched him, moved by his own indefinable fear.

"I don't suppose I'd be anticipating his confidence"—he looked at her questioningly, as if for permission—"by opening it? He intended that I should receive it through the post office, but——"

With sudden decision he opened it, dropping the envelope at his feet.

MY SON: It breaks my heart to leave you again, but we must part. There is nothing that I can do to help you in the mighty task that you have undertaken in my name, and my presence might hinder. This retreat will be the first knowing act of cowardice in my life.

Lately there has settled over me the firm conviction that there is ill luck in my presence. I feel that none of your undertakings will prosper if my shadow falls on them. I firmly believe that my coming into your last venture, when success was in your hands, was foredoomed by the evil forces which have directed my miserable destinies.

My earnest appeal to you, my son, is that you get rid of the old boiler which you removed from here, and shun this place, with all its unfortunate associations, until you

have made your fortunes secure. There is disaster in all things which my hands have touched, which my feet have pressed.

Before leaving I shall destroy the old derrick, drum tackle, and drill. You will know by this word whose hand has done the work, and attach no unjust blame. But for the associations which hallow this hearth, I would burn the old house to the ground. I have had it in my mind to do it, but the sacred memory of your mother has stayed my hand. I hope that her holy remembrance secures it against my blight.

I shall withdraw from the world's activities, and seclude myself under another name, seeking such humble employment as will serve to supply my needs. After a due lapse of time I will communicate with you, and when our skies have brightened we shall be reunited. There is hope in my heart that I may do something, achieve something, to requite you yet. I feel that I shall not quit this world leaving you no other legacy than that of debt and disgrace. So I go forth cheerfully, and in hope. May the Almighty sustain you in the manly fight that you have assumed in my name. My benediction, and farewell.

Ared handed the letter to Jane Sloane, and turned his face to the window to conceal his emotion from her eyes. When she had finished it, she turned to him excitedly.

"We must bring him back; we must go after him; I'll not let him go like this!"

"He hasn't gone yet," he said, "or the letter would not have been here. He's about the place somewhere, preparing to carry out his plans. I shouldn't wonder—listen! Do you hear anything that you—listen!"

"I heard it before," she whispered, scarcely breathing, "like rushing water. I thought it was a fall."

"There is none——" he began, only to stop like one distracted, and hurry outside. Jane followed, and found him standing near the corner of the house, his arms uplifted as if to ward a blow, his face white, his wild hair tossing in the wind.

"Look! The old well!" said he, catching her hand and setting off down the hill.

A little way from it they stopped, where the heavy drops from the breaking column of oil that gushed from the casing spattered the leaves at their feet. Bigger than anything of its kind that Ared Heiskell ever had seen, greater in its fulfillment than the most extravagant desire of his old dreams, was the volume of oil which the old well spouted. Now it rose half the height of the mighty derrick, with a roar like a wind in a forest; now it sank almost to the lip of the well, throbbing like an artery leading from the great, deep heart of the fountainhead.

All around it the ground was deep in oil, which had been thrown out so fast that it had not yet found its level and settled down in pools, and tossed and flung in the playing jet which rose and fell was the end of the great rope upon which the string of drilling tools had hung.

In the first amazed shock they had not grasped the great thing in detail. Now Jane clutched his arm and leaned, pointing.

"Look, it's a man! There's a man——"

Already Ared had plunged through the cataract of oil. In a moment he emerged again, bearing the body of old Solomon Heiskell in his arms.

They stretched him upon the ground a few rods from the well, and Jane Sloane wiped the oil from his face. Ared was feeling for a heartbeat, for the body was warm and limp, as if he had been stricken but a few moments before.

But Solomon Heiskell's troubled heart was still. There was no music for his ears in the sound of that mighty geyser, no triumph for his eyes in its towering column of wealth.

Ared understood how Solomon had brought in the well. Intent on his determination to destroy the derrick, and thus remove one monument at least of his disappointed years, he had lowered

the drill into the well and cut the rope. The heavy implement had plunged down like a cannon shot, down for an unobstructed half mile, to the last remaining shell of rock between the bottom of the bore and the pent-up treasure of oil. It had burst through, like a nail through tissue paper, and old Solomon's dream had come true in one quick stroke.

Whether the gas issuing from the long-pent well had smothered him as he leaned over it, listening for the drill to strike, or whether his heart had swelled and broken when he heard the oil gushing in the tube, none ever could know. Neither would it ever be known whether his weary, longing old eyes had beheld the golden stream, of which he seemed to speak so prophetically in his last written word to his son. Solomon Heiskell was removed from his strivings and his failures, but he had left behind him a legacy far from that of debt and disgrace.

"I believed him; I believed him, but I came too late!" said Jane Sloane, kneeling beside the old man's body, her hands pressed to her face.

"And I—I did not always believe him, and I have come too late!" said Ared, stretching his long arms, like one crucified, above the husk that had housed a vision too great for the conception of little men.

Evening. The coroner had come and gone, and the marveling multitude had beaten the old road with its thousand feet, and trampled round the mouth of the greatest oil well that the Southwest ever had seen. Old Solomon Heiskell's body lay in the room where he had slept his fevered sleep in life, and Jane Sloane's mother sat in his old chair before the fire.

Men had come and capped the mighty well, and bound its wealth down to pour only at the turning of a valve, like a monster tamed to the guidance of the

human hand, for above the pangs of regret, and the wild ravings of sorrow, Ared had felt that there were obligations to the living, as well as duties to the dead. The Prophet's Well Oil Company was suddenly one of the richest concerns in the field of exploration, and seventy-five per cent of its stock remained unsold and in his hands. His heart warmed when he recalled Triggerheel's confession of having bought ten thousand shares. Now that hastily placed hundred dollars had made the old man rich.

As the last clamp was fastened, and the workmen went away, and the last wonder-stricken visitor had turned about, silent in the awe of the thing that he had seen, Ared spoke to Jane Sloane, standing by his side. The sun was red on the hillside; it tinged the pools of oil with shuddering crimson; it tinted the trampled landscape with the hues of a sanguinary field of strife.

"Now you are rich," said he.

"I suppose so," she replied. "But there is something lacking to give it the thrill. If I only had come sooner—if I only had come!"

"You were coming—you came," said he, satisfied that it was so.

"How precious a moment is in this fleeting life!" she sighed, tears following tears over her sorrowful face.

"You will be going away now," said he after a spell of self-communing silence. "Milan, Paris, Berlin, I suppose, to pursue your studies and round out your ambitions."

"No, I am not going," she said.

"The world will miss your song," said he softly, as if telling it to his own sad heart.

"I shall not sing for the world," said she, taking his hand and holding it tenderly, stroking it softly, as if to ease his pain. "I shall sing"—dreamily, looking away into the fire of evening—"I shall sing, but only for those who love me."

All on the Ground Floor

By Holworthy Hall

Author of "Reverse English," "McHenry and the Blue Ribbon," Etc.

Pepper McHenry presents a three-hundred-thousand-dollar proposition that he promises will net ten per cent. Pepper has a theory that the way to make money is by letting somebody else think he'll make more money by playing with McHenry

AT the end of seven busy months, the Cambridge Company, James P. McHenry, president and general manager, had successfully disposed of its ink-and-glue agency, its thriving specialty business, and its interest in Watson Burgess, the incorporated artist. Nothing remained to the promoters but a small office in the Flatiron Building, a number of pleasant memories, and seventeen thousand dollars in a convenient bank. This situation, as any acquaintance of McHenry will immediately recognize, was critical.

"This office isn't half big enough for me to think in," he complained to his partner, Pierson Dillingham. "Every time I start to work out a new scheme I take a long breath, and that creates a vacuum in this two-by-twice little hole, and then I sneeze. We ought to get a doggy suite somewhere, with a snobbish operator at a switchboard, and see people only by appointment. That always makes a hit."

"Yes," agreed Dillingham, with a faint trace of sarcasm. "We need a whole floor, don't we? A hundred square feet for office, and ninety-nine hundred square feet for you to think in! Why don't you go out in Madison Square and do your thinking, where the rent is cheaper?"

"A whole floor would be good," said McHenry, "but a whole building would

be better. With our name on it, you know. Then we could have some lithographed stationery and a cable address."

"Yes, we do need a cable address," scoffed Dillingham. "Our international relations are clogging up the wires frightfully, aren't they?"

"We must always look to the future," said Pepper sagely. "We must have room to expand. Eventually we might want to hire an errand boy. I think we'd better go ahead and put up a building. I saw an awfully good vacant lot somewhere."

"We have the cash to put up a building, haven't we? While we're about it, let's put up a couple of blocks."

"Oh, that's extravagant—we couldn't possibly use more than half a block at the most," deprecated McHenry. "But one building—one small, exclusive building—would be just about right. And the man who owns this lot is staggering on the edge of bankruptcy. I can get a ninety-day option at seventy-five or eighty thousand dollars for just five hundred."

"Marvelous! Incredible! What would we put up—a portable garage?"

"No—a nine-story modern office building, with a roof garden. It would cost about two hundred thousand dollars—nothing fancy, you understand, no imported terra cotta and stained glass, just a comfortable, everyday

office building, so we could have some lithographed stationery and a cable address——”

“Come on, Pepper!” begged Dillingham. “You take a good drink of bromo-seltzer, and to-morrow you’ll feel like a new man!”

“If I felt any better than I do now I’d see a doctor—the trouble with you, Pierce, is that you haven’t any imagination. You’re the best—not to say the only—partner I ever had, but you’d better let me be the mental giant in this deal, and you can be the horny-handed son of toil who superintends the sand blasting. I’ve just made up my mind—we’re going to erect a building. Now do you know anybody who could put up about three hundred thousand dollars?”

“I know a banker down in Wall Street—he has a high knee action so he won’t stumble over the bales of money he’s got—but he’s what they call hard-headed. Before he lets go of a penny for a baseball edition he bites it.”

“Then he’s a sucker,” said McHenry promptly. “He ought to let the news-boy do the biting. That’s the sort of man we want, Pierce. You lead me to him.”

“If you’re serious, I’ll introduce you.”

“I’m as serious as my face will let me. The point is, has he got the wad?”

“There’s no doubt about *that*—he financed my dad’s new factory. When do you want to see him?”

McHenry put on his hat.

“Oh, in about ten minutes,” he said. “Does he smoke?”

“Yes. We’ll stop downstairs and get some of those three-for-a-dollar——”

“You will *not*!”

“Why, we want to impress him, don’t we?”

McHenry shook his head in pained regret.

“You certainly weren’t on the front steps when they gave out the mighty

intellects, Pierce. You get some ten-cent straights, and pick out a bum brand. Why, you’d give this plutocrat the idea that we’re extravagant! I want him to think we’re a couple of tightwads! Gosh! You’d have a hot time trying to borrow money!”

Seated at his mahogany desk in his private room, Mr. Gallatin coughed sharply, and looked from the cigar McHenry had given him to McHenry himself. Then, almost as though by accident, he dropped the *Pride of Tarara* on the floor, and, in reaching for it, mangled it horribly with his foot.

“Have another,” said Pepper promptly.

“If you don’t mind, I’ll smoke one of my own—I’m not used to strong cigars. Thank you. Pierson said you had a proposition to make to us.”

“Pierson was right,” conceded McHenry. “He told me you financed the new Dillingham factory in Connecticut.”

The financier nodded.

“Yes—I’ve known Pierson’s father for a good many years—and Pierson, too.”

Dillingham acknowledged the acquaintance, and shifted the responsibility to Pepper by the simple expedient of looking out of the window.

“Well, I want to know if you’d be interested in a three-hundred-thousand-dollar proposition that would net you ten per cent.”

“What sort of proposition?”

“Real estate.”

The financier glanced at Dillingham.

“My dear boy,” he said, “friendship is friendship, and business is business. Pierson’s father has told me something of your—er—activity in the city—I think I know your general system. Now I’d do anything within reason for the son of an old friend; but I wouldn’t invest three hundred thousand dollars, or three hundred dollars, in a business

deal at ten per cent, or a hundred per cent, without proper security—and as far as I know, you're not prepared to offer it. Are you?"

"I'll guarantee your principal," said McHenry indifferently.

"But—pardon me, but we're talking real business, you know—exactly how much is your guarantee worth?"

"Part cash, and part contracts with firms rated from fifty to half a million dollars, first credit."

The financier took his own box of cigars from a drawer of his desk.

"Try one of these," he suggested. "And what's the nature of the proposition?"

"If you'll buy the land, and put up a nine-story building for us," said Pepper, gratefully substituting a real cigar for the Pride of Tarara, "I'll guarantee you, by leases, a net return of ten per cent. And the return will be absolutely net, because although you'll own the building, I'll agree to pay the taxes and maintenance. You won't have another cent of expense after you turn the place over to us on a forty-nine-year lease."

"Ten per cent net," mused Mr. Galatin.

"Exactly. You buy the land we specify, you put up the building, and the day we move into it we'll pay you ten per cent of the total cost and give you leases, as I say, from firms of high rating, satisfactory to you, that'll insure you ten per cent right along. And we stand the upkeep."

"Why—offhand, I should say that we might do business."

"This isn't an ordinary scheme," explained McHenry. "Of course, if you build an average rookery, you're bothered with getting tenants and paying a commission to an agent and collecting rents and rowing the janitor and having people threaten you on account of the heat and suing you for constructive eviction—and by our plan we give you

back your entire principal in ten years, and then you own the building. Now all I want is an agreement—that if we decide to go ahead with this thing, on terms that I'll give you now, you'll put up the money."

"I think I have a client who may do it, Mr. McHenry. Of course, there must be very specific warranties——"

"If there weren't, I wouldn't waste our time," said Pepper. "Come to life, Pierce! We'll need you to check up our figures."

In the sanctum of John H. Wilkins, the Human Crab, McHenry sat and grinned at the wholesale stationer.

"You're the most impudent young puppy I ever met," said Wilkins, also grinning. "Just because I let you unload a couple of good schemes on me, you think you can come in here and point out the rotten spots in my business."

"Well, I point 'em out all right, don't I?"

"That's the worst thing about you—you do. What bothers me is how you know so much that doesn't concern you."

"It concerns me to have you bothered."

"Stop fooling!" commanded the stationer. "Have you heard any new Ford stories since I saw you last? I've got a good one——"

"Then I've heard it," said Pepper. "Well, now that you've admitted you're all cramped up in this place, why don't you move into bigger quarters?"

"You don't know *everything*, do you? Have you any idea what rents are around here?"

"Oh, you ought to get ten thousand feet—three floors—for about seventeen five."

"Seventeen thousand five hundred! Run away and sell your papers! It costs me as much as that for the ground floor now!"

"They're pulling your leg," said Mc-Henry.

"No—that's a very fair rental."

"I can get you three floors, with twice as much space as you've got now, on a ten-year lease with privilege of renewal indefinitely, for seventeen and a half."

"Where?"

"Less than four blocks from here."

"On Broadway?"

"No—about half a block away."

"I don't believe it."

"Well, there's one terrible drawback."

"What's that?"

"You'd have to put up some money to start with."

"I knew there was a hole in it somewhere," said Wilkins, with gratification.

"Well, think it over. It's a co-operative building. There are nine stories and a roof. We begin by allotting each floor a rent of exactly half as much as normal rents are in this neighborhood. We add twenty-five hundred for the roof, and we'll let that to a lunch club or something. And that, as you know, is ridiculously low. That makes the total rent for the building forty-two thousand dollars. The people who go into it form a corporation, of fifty thousand dollars capital, and each man takes stock to the exact amount of his rent. We pay thirty thousand to the owners of the building, and that leaves twelve for the running expenses, which we pay ourselves. At the end of the year, we divide the remainder, if there is any—that's additional velvet. You see, Mr. Wilkins, all it means is that if you're willing to pay in advance, you can cut your rent in half."

"Who ever gave you the idea that I'll pay a year's rent in advance?"

"Well, you pay a big rent here, don't you? Thirty or forty thousand?"

"Thirty-six."

"Well, then, if you put up seventeen

and a half, that would equal only six months of what you're paying now, wouldn't it? You could do that all right."

"Yes, but how about the second year?"

"Well, during the first year all the leaseholders pay a monthly rent, properly divided into twelve parts, to the holding corporation. At the end of the year we'd have forty-two thousand more—pay thirty to the owners, and have the same twelve for upkeep."

"Then you're wrong—the first year would cost me just as much as it does now."

"Yes, but not *after* the first year. And if you took a ten-year lease you wouldn't pay any rent at all for the tenth year. The original deposit you made for your stock would cover that. And if any one decides to move after ten years, his stock reverts to the central corporation, and we sell it to the newcomer on the same terms. It's self-perpetuating."

"Who else is going into this?"

"That depends on you. If you come in we'll name it the Stationers' Building, and give you the first three floors and fill it with big stationers. You'd like that, wouldn't you?"

"I'll think of it."

"All I want from you," said Mc-Henry, "is an agreement that if we put it over you'll come in." He produced a subscription list. "You notice that this is entirely conditional. And incidentally, if we do put it over, of course you can map out your own floor space to suit yourself. Before we go any further I want you to look over the preliminary sketches."

"What do *you* get out of this?" demanded Wilkins good-humoredly.

"Oh—I just get in on the ground floor, the same as you do."

"Well," said the stationer, "you're a rattle-brained young idiot, but you

haven't bunkoed me yet. Let's have a look at those plans."

In the office of the Cambridge Company, McHenry and Dillingham sat in solemn consultation.

"It's a darned shame," observed Dillingham, after a pause. "We got it right up to the last ditch, and then we stuck."

"I don't see a flaw in it anywhere," mourned Pepper. "It cuts rents in half, it makes ten per cent net for Gallatin, it's a mighty good plan all the way, and yet we can't get more than four concerns to see the logic of it. They all stand on their hind legs as soon as the stock scheme comes up. You say *stock* to a New Yorker, and he gets red behind the ears and remembers the money he put in the Willopus-Wallopus Gold Mine and forgot to tell his wife about. What's the grand total?"

"Thirty-one thousand," said Dillingham, verifying the figures. "Not a chance, is there? That leaves only a thousand for expenses, and it'll cost more than that for a janitor and elevator boys."

"And the raw part of it," added McHenry, "is that we can't boost the rents. I made 'em low on purpose, but all the men who signed the conditional agreement would roar like catamounts if we tried to raise the prices. And that option is up in a week!"

"Couldn't we figure out a deal to let in a couple of concerns without making 'em buy stock? Couldn't we back 'em ourselves? I mean put up our own money, and collect from them month to month?"

"Well, that would make 'em pay double rent the first year just the same, and that's what they're bellowing about. Only——"

"Yes?"

"Well, it would tie *our* money up,

Pierce. And the whole beauty of this scheme is for us to get out from under."

"Then why don't *we* take a floor."

"Gosh!" said McHenry. He regarded his partner shamefacedly. "That's a fine idea," he said. "After all the noise we've made about this building, we haven't put ourselves in it anywhere!"

Dillingham laughed disquietingly.

"That's a good one! And we started the thing for ourselves!"

"No wonder they wouldn't bite! We've been showing the plans and talking ourselves blue in the face, and we forgot the Cambridge Company. Why, these fellows must have thought we were ordinary real-estate agents! I give me a pain in the neck!"

"If we put ourselves on the eighth floor," said Dillingham, "that'll add four thousand five hundred. We're still shy."

"The other floor is the fourth, isn't it?"

"Yes, and the roof."

"Eleven thousand for the three? Well, we'd better take 'em all. After the construction is under way it won't seem so vague, and we ought to sell out to somebody."

"It still ties our money up, doesn't it?"

"We've *got* to tie it up, Pierce. And I'd rather tie it up on my own hook than back somebody else. One way, the deal's off, and the other way we can go ahead. Well, suppose we figure on three floors. That'll make a corporation with six stockholders—Wilkins, ourselves, and the other four. Wilkins is the worst grouch of the lot, so we'll make him president and treasurer. Somebody else can be the other officers."

"I don't see that—this is our scheme!"

"It won't be long," said Pepper. "The man with the shoe string never gets let alone. Well—we'll call it settled.

We might as well start the wheels tomorrow. Everybody has said *if*, and so they'll all fall in a bunch. Gallatin will put up the money when we can show the subscription list and the leases, the lease holders will put up their money when they see the contract, the man who owns the land will hand over a deed as soon as he sees me waving a two-dollar bill at him, and the architect is championing his bit now, and wondering where I am. We'd better anticipate a little. The next thing we want is a thundering big advertisement to go in all the morning papers."

"Advertisement!"

"Certainly. To sublet our two floors and the roof. Call it a regular investment—take the eighth floor, for instance. Any reputable citizen, by coughing up forty-five hundred in cash, can have a ten-year lease on a floor worth, by current values, at least eight thousand."

"But—but we ought to get a profit out of it ourselves, Pepper."

"It wouldn't look right," contradicted McHenry. "It wouldn't look sporty for us to get up a coöperative scheme, and then not coöperate. Besides, we may want some more of Gallatin's money some time. And I've thrown it into these people awfully hard that we're not real-estate agents. The only legitimate thing for us to do is to get out even on the floor space."

"It's a fine idea," said Dillingham, after some thought. "Here we buzz around for a few months selling space in a fine new building, and when the show-down comes we haven't the offices we planned for ourselves, and then you spring this pleasant little surprise that we aren't going to make any money. What's the answer? You're not aiming to be a philanthropist, are you?"

"The profit is there," said McHenry, "but you don't see it."

"You bet I don't."

"It's hidden under a monument more imperishable than bronze."

"It's hidden under something thicker than ivory, you mean."

"Time will tell," said Pepper sweetly.

"Well, will you?"

"Eventually." He grinned at his partner. "The fact is, Pierce, when I've got a scheme that's awfully good I don't like to publish all of it. Now I'm afraid that even after I see Gallatin there'll be a little delay. Would you agree to come across with another thousand to hold that option for thirty days?"

"Why not let Gallatin put it up?"

"That's easy. Why should he? He hasn't anything to gain by it, and a thousand to lose. If the deal didn't go through he'd be in the mulligatawny. It's all right—it's up to us to hold the option. You're willing, aren't you?"

"Why, if you say so."

"It's a bet," said Pepper. "I'm going down to hold converse with the angel." He explored his pockets carefully. "Got any change?"

"Here's a couple of quarters."

"Plenty," said McHenry. "Shine, a nickel; car fare, a nickel; two Prides of Tarara, twenty cents. I'll bring you a dime change."

"A dime—you'll have to ride back, won't you?"

"No," said Pepper, sorrowing at his friend's lack of intuition. "I'm going to have lunch with the angel, and then he'll send me back in his limousine. What's the use of wasting a nickel?"

The advertisements duly appeared, and for the next ten days the officers of the Cambridge Company became salesmen, telephone operators, stenographers, stump speakers, and men of augmented vocabulary, and of powers of description hitherto unapproached. Dillingham was very willing to leave the final arguments to McHenry.

"A conservative business man," said

Pepper to one interested visitor, "who doesn't take advantage of this building of ours is guilty of embezzlement. You're deliberately charging yourself with twice as much rent as you need to pay. Look at it every way you can—where can you lose?"

"Suppose somebody fails?" inquired the cautious investigator. "What happens to his floor?"

"Why, it belongs to the corporation. The corporation can rent it for any old price, and divide the difference between the original rent and the rent they can get for it. Every time a stockholder fails it automatically reduces the rent of all the other stockholders about eight hundred or a thousand dollars a year."

"Then if they all fail," puzzled the man, "somebody would clean up a fortune."

"If they all fail," said Pepper, "the last man ought to make thirty thousand a year out of it."

"Well, if I should go into it, do I have anything to say about the management of the building?"

"Consider," said McHenry, squaring away for the last round, "where you stand in any other building. Suppose it's cold, and your radiators aren't working. What do you do? You send word to the superintendent, and by and by, when he's finished with the morning paper—of course *he* isn't cold in *his* room—he blows up the janitor. Then the janitor gets even by coming up to your office with some tools and blowing out the valves all over your place. The owner won't do anything, because the chances are that he's hired the cheapest employees he can get and he won't want to increase his overhead by paying higher wages. So there you are. In *this* building you address the janitor in your official capacity as a stockholder. You're partly his boss. You can cow him with one glance—you can make him cringe all over the

room, and then go down and shovel some more coal on the fire. Why shouldn't he? It's partly your coal."

"Yes, but would I have any active voice in the management?"

"A man of your standing ought to be a director at least."

"Will you make that a part of the agreement?"

"Surely," said Pepper, who had long since decided that all the stockholders must necessarily be directors. "I'll guarantee it."

And so, in the course of a few more weeks, there were enough conditional stockholders to insure the erection of the Stationers' Building, and McHenry was jubilant.

"Now," he observed to his partner, "we pull the string, and the whistle blows."

"As far as I can see," objected Dillingham, "you've simply bunked us out of a fine suite of offices and left us in just as bad a box as we were before."

"Pause and reflect," advised McHenry paternally. "We are now about to exchange lefts and rights to the theoretical jaw of your angelic friend with the money, and then we'll sit down and count up the profits."

"We can count 'em on one finger of one hand," said Dillingham.

"Not unless you're more of an octopus than I think you are. Get some of those Prides of Tarara, and let's go downtown. I think Mr. Gallatin may accept our kind invitation to lunch."

Mr. Gallatin was glad to accept; and another hour found all three in the basement of the Dun Building, where food is quick to be served and the prices are reasonable. The selection of the restaurant was McHenry's.

The president of the Cambridge Company didn't believe in spoiling the appetite of his guest and financial backer, so that he carefully refrained from discussing business until the coffee was

served and a *Pride of Tarara* had been forced upon the unwilling victim.

"Well, sir," he began, when the occasion seemed fitting, "we're just about ready to close the deal."

"That's good," said Mr. Gallatin, hating the cigar with all his heart.

"Yes; we've done about all we can. We've got tenants for every floor, and we've arranged to lease the roof to a big firm of photographers. Here's the final list, with the subscribers and their ratings. Does that look all right?"

The banker examined the list with close attention.

"It seems so. You made separate contracts with each of them, didn't you?"

"Not contracts exactly——"

"No, but conditional contracts, such as you made with me."

"I did that," said McHenry. "I've got 'em all here if you want to see them. So now, according to the agreement you made with us, you're to go ahead with the building, so it'll be ready for occupancy the first of next January."

"That's the understanding."

McHenry stepped on Dillingham's foot under the table.

"Well, sir, we agreed that you'd buy the land we specified as long as it was within a certain radius, and didn't cost over a hundred thousand dollars, didn't you?"

"Yes. Of course you settled on that long before this time."

"I did," admitted McHenry. "It's down on Sixteenth Street."

"Do you know who owns it? Is it for sale?"

"It's for sale all right," said McHenry. "And—as a matter of fact, I own it myself!"

"Wha-a-at?" exclaimed the financier, blinking.

"What?" said Dillingham, sitting up as straight as his school-teachers had tried to teach him.

"Right," said Pepper. "It's for sale for exactly a hundred thousand dollars and no cents. So I guess we can go right ahead with the building."

Dillingham began to see the light.

"But look here, Mr. McHenry," said the banker slowly. "I didn't understand this part of it. You're making a rake-off on that land, of course."

"You grasp the idea perfectly," conceded Pepper.

"But—why, see here! I don't propose to go into any deal that's organized like this. It isn't right——"

"What isn't right?" demanded McHenry. "You'll make ten per cent on your money just the same, won't you?"

"That isn't the point. You probably bought that land for eighty or ninety, and you're planning to unload it on *me!* I won't stand for it!"

"Well, I don't want to be rough or anything, Mr. Gallatin, but I'm afraid you've got to stand for it. I have a perfectly good agreement, which a perfectly good lawyer drew up for me, that says that you're to finance this arrangement on presentation of just such a subscription list as I've showed you."

"I can get out of any agreement that was ever made," sniffed the banker. "I have some lawyer myself."

"Well, I admit it. That's why I had him draw up this agreement. Naturally he didn't know it was for you. The names were blank."

Mr. Gallatin felt that he was released from any further obligation to McHenry's cigars, and produced one of his own.

"I'm sorry that you and Pierson are getting into this style of business, my boy," he stated. "It isn't a good beginning."

Pepper spread his hands expressively.

"Don't you think so? Well, look at it this way; you're to put up three hundred thousand dollars and get ten per

cent, aren't you? And, all by itself, that's a good investment, isn't it? The leases are all good, and it's a mighty clean transaction. *Well*, every man who has a floor in this building is saving from thirty to fifty per cent on his rent. They're all tickled to death. That's pretty soft for them, isn't it? And the man who owned the land was glad to sell it to me at any price, so we aren't hurting him any. And the architect and the builder haven't any kick coming. Everybody's making money somewhere. Why should you kick because I bought that land the week before last for eighty thousand dollars and sell it to you for a hundred? There isn't such a lot in it for us at that—it's cost us something for our time."

"Zowie!" murmured Dillingham. He showed signs of desiring to enter into the conversation, but, judging correctly that McHenry was able to take care of himself, he showed his excellent judgment by continuing to listen and to enjoy it.

"You bought it?"

"I bought it," repeated Pepper. "I put up fifteen thousand in cash, and gave a contract to pay fifteen more in ninety days, and took a mortgage for fifty."

"Meaning that you're gouging me for twenty thousand dollars, young man!"

"Never! Meaning that I'm giving you an opportunity to invest twenty thousand at ten per cent. And if the original plan was any good, don't you feel willing to slip in that twenty? You're getting the same return from it."

"It certainly doesn't come out of *his* pocket," said Dillingham.

"I can see that it doesn't," granted Gallatin. "Well, let it go at that. I'll keep our part of the bargain. Don't forget that we're to have a year's interest in advance, though."

"The agreements of these people be-

come valid," McHenry told him, shaking the bundle of papers, "the minute you sign a contract with a builder. And according to *our* agreement, you do that within ten days after we furnish you with this list that I've just quit furnishing, and deliver the plans. And the plans are waiting uptown somewhere, and the man who did 'em is watching the subway entrance to see when I'll come out. So I guess it's settled. How did you like your lunch?"

"Pretty well," said the banker. "Let's have another one." He grinned appreciatively. "Let's come on over to a little club I belong to and thrash out the details. There's one thing that makes me feel a little more confidence in you fellows," he added, as he put on his hat; "you're not extravagant. But ——" He coughed, as though a little uncertain of the spirit in which his suggestion might be taken. "I have a private brand of cigars I'd like to introduce to you. If you like them at all, I'd be glad to send you a box, with my compliments."

"I'd like to try them," said Pepper respectfully. Dillingham snickered behind his back and dropped the last of the Prides of Tarara in an ash barrel.

It was five o'clock when the conspirators arrived at the Flatiron Building and made their way to the small office on the top floor.

"Not a bad day's work," mused McHenry, switching on the light. "He's a speedy old chap when he gets started, isn't he?"

"You didn't mind, did you?"

"Well, hardly!"

He sat down at his desk and gazed dreamily at the opposite wall.

"What's eating you?" inquired Dillingham.

"Nothing. Just wondering how soon we could get the stockholders together to organize."

"That's a thought! They may put up a roar when they find out we're not in the building ourselves."

"Well, why should they?"

"I don't know why they should, but they might. We'll have to see a lawyer pretty soon, then, to have the papers drawn up."

"It's all done," said McHenry.

"Good! Then we want to see the architect——"

"I telephoned him," said Pepper. "He'll have the plans in Gallatin's office at ten o'clock to-morrow."

"Well, then, all that's left is the book-keeping."

"Right! As I make it out, there's about fourteen thousand in it for us. Twenty apparent profit, but we've got to count our time, and the advertising, and incidental expenses, and the cost of options. It isn't so bad."

"The part I can't make out," said Dillingham, frowning, "is why we needed all this hocus-pocus to swing a little deal in real estate. Why couldn't we have just *bought* that land, if you wanted to speculate?"

"We can't afford to speculate," said McHenry.

"Well——"

"Kind friend, vice president, and treasurer," explained Pepper, "don't you see the beauty of it? We didn't put up a blamed thing except for the options. That was all the gamble we had. Gallatin agreed to start the building, the others agreed to come in, everybody was happy, and we make some money. And as soon as I *knew* it would go through, I bought that lot! Why, you don't think I'd gamble in real estate, do you?"

"You look so darned virtuous—I almost believe you!"

"The way we make money," Pepper told him, "is by letting somebody else think they'll make more by playing with us. That isn't gambling; it's charity." He smiled angelically. "Now," he said, "there are about eight more people we can go to to raise money for other schemes——"

"Just the same," protested Dillingham, "I wish we'd taken one of those floors."

"Well, so do I." McHenry sighed and regarded the office disapprovingly. "There's no use in talking, Pierce—we've got to move. This place isn't half big enough for me to think in!"

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Inside the Lines

By Earl Derr Biggers and Robert Welles Ritchie

This is a novelization of the great play by Earl Derr Biggers which has drawn crowded houses for several months. Reading the novel one's mind naturally reverts to the famous play in which William Gillette was the star—"Secret Service." Here is the same tensivity of situation; here are the same danger-filled moments when a man's life hangs by a thread. The action takes place on the Rock of Gibraltar at the time when England is at war, a time when nobody is free from the suspicion of being a spy—not even an American girl returning with a trunk full of Paris gowns, reaching the Rock safely, and there being caught by the mischance of war's great mystery. You will hear much of this splendid American girl in these pages, and much of the "spy" system of Europe, with a glimpse of the Wilhelmstrasse, reputed to be the darkest closet and the most potent of all the secret chambers of diplomacy.

(In Three Parts—Part One)

CHAPTER I.

INTRODUCING JANE GERSON, BUYER.

I HAD two trunks—two, you ninny! Two! *Ou est l'autre?*"

The grinning customs guard lifted his shoulders to his ears and spread out his palms. "*Mais, mam-selle—*"

"Don't you '*mais*' me, sir! I had two trunks—*deux troncs*—when I got aboard that wabby old boat at Dover this morning, and I'm not going to budge from this wharf until I find the other one. Where *did* you learn your French, anyway? Can't you understand when I speak your language?"

The girl plumped herself down on top of the unhasped trunk and folded her arms truculently. With a quizzical smile, the customs guard looked down into her brown eyes, smoldering dangerously now, and began all over again his speech of explanation.

"*Wagon-lit?*" She caught a familiar word. "*Mais oui*; that's where I want to go—aboard your *wagon-lit*, for Paris. "*Voilà*"—the girl carefully gave the word three syllables—"mon ticket *pour Parez!*" She opened her patent-leather reticule, rummaged furiously therein, brought out a handkerchief, a tiny mirror, a packet of rice papers, and at last a folded and punched ticket. This she displayed with a triumphant flourish.

"*Voilà! Il dit* 'Miss Jane Gerson'; that's me—*moimême*, I mean. And *il dit* '*deux troncs*'; now you can't go behind that, can you? Where is that other trunk?"

A whistle shrilled back beyond the swinging doors of the station. Folk in the customs shed began a hasty gathering together of parcels and shawl straps, and a general exodus toward the train sheds commenced. The girl on the trunk looked appealingly about her;

nothing but bustle and confusion; no Samaritan to turn aside and rescue a fair traveler fallen among customs guards. Her eyes filled with trouble, and for an instant her reliant mouth broke its line of determination; the lower lip quivered suspiciously. Even the guard started to walk away.

"Oh, oh, please don't go!" Jane Gerson was on her feet, and her hands shot out in an impulsive appeal. "Oh, dear; maybe I forgot to tip you. Here, *attende-au secours*, if you'll only find that other trunk before the train——"

"Pardon; but if I may be of any assistance——"

Miss Gerson turned. A tallish, old-young-looking man, in a gray lounge suit, stood heels together and bent stiffly in a bow. Nothing of the beau or boulevardier about his face or manner. Miss Gerson accepted his intervention as Heaven sent.

"Oh, thank you ever so much! The guard, you see, doesn't understand good French. I just can't make him understand that one of my trunks is missing. And the train for Paris——"

Already the stranger was rattling incisive French at the guard. That official bowed low, and, with hands and lips, gave rapid explanation. The man in the gray lounge suit turned to the girl.

"A little misunderstanding, Miss——ah——"

"Gerson——Jane Gerson, of New York," she promptly supplied.

"A little misunderstanding, Miss Gerson. The customs guard says your other trunk has already been examined, passed, and placed on the baggage van. He was trying to tell you that it would be necessary for you to permit a porter to take this trunk to the train before time for starting. With your permission——"

The stranger turned and halloed to a porter, who came running. Miss Gerson had the trunk locked and

strapped in no time, and it was on the shoulders of the porter.

"You have very little time, Miss Gerson. The train will be making a start directly. If I might——ah——pilot you through the station to the proper train shed. I am not presuming?"

"You are very kind," she answered hurriedly.

They set off, the providential Samaritan in the lead. Through the waiting room and onto a broad platform almost deserted they went. A guard's whistle shrilled. The stranger tucked a helping hand under Jane Gerson's arm to steady her in the sharp sprint down a long aisle between tracks to where the Paris train stood. It began to move before they had reached its mid-length. A guard threw open a carriage door, in they hopped, and with a rattle of chains and banging of buffers the Express du Nord was off on its arrow flight from Calais to the capital.

The carriage, which was of the second class, was comfortably filled. Miss Gerson stumbled over the feet of a puffy Fleming nearest the door, was launched into the lap of a comfortably upholstered widow on the opposite seat, ricocheted back to jam an elbow into a French gentleman's spread newspaper, and finally was catapulted into a vacant space next to the window on the carriage's far side. She giggled, tucked the skirts of her pearl-gray duster about her, righted the chic sailor hat on her chestnut-brown head, and patted a stray wisp of hair back into place. Her meteor flight into and through the carriage disturbed her not a whit.

As for the Samaritan, he stood uncertainly in the narrow cross aisle, swaying to the swing of the carriage and reconnoitering seating possibilities. There was a place, a very narrow one, next to the fat Fleming; also there was a vacant place next to Jane Gerson. The Samaritan caught the girl's glance

in his indecision, read in it something frankly comradely, and chose the seat beside her.

"Very good of you, I'm sure," he murmured. "I did not wish to presume——"

"You're not," the girl assured, and there was something so fresh, so ingenuous, in the tone and the level glance of her brown eyes that the Samaritan felt all at once distinctly satisfied with the cast of fortune which had thrown him in the way of a distressed traveler. He sat down with a lifting of the checkered Alpine hat he wore and a stiff little bow from the waist.

"If I may, Miss Gerson—I am Captain Woodhouse, of the signal service."

"Oh!" The girl let slip a little gasp—the meed of admiration the feminine heart always pays to shoulder straps. "Signal service; that means the army?"

"His majesty's service; yes, Miss Gerson."

"You are, of course, off duty?" she suggested, with the faintest possible tinge of regret at the absence of the stripes and buttons which spell "soldier" with the woman.

"You might say so, Miss Gerson. Egypt—the Nile country is my station. I am on my way back there after a bit of a vacation at home—London I mean, of course."

She stole a quick side glance at the face of her companion. A soldier's face it was, lean and school hardened and competent. Lines about the eyes and mouth—the stamp of the sun and the imprint of the habit to command—had taken from Captain Woodhouse's features something of freshness and youth, though giving in return the index of inflexible will and lust for achievement. His smooth lips were a bit thin, Jane Gerson thought, and the outshooting chin, almost squared at the angles, marked Captain Woodhouse as anything but a trifle or a flirt. She was

satisfied that nothing of presumption or forwardness on the part of this hard-molded chap from Egypt would give her cause to regret her unconventional offer of friendship.

Captain Woodhouse, in his turn, had made a satisfying, though covert, appraisal of his traveling companion by means of a narrow mirror inset above the baggage rack over the opposite seat. Trim and petite of figure, which was just a shade under the average for height and plumpness; a small head set sturdily on a round, smooth neck; face the very embodiment of independence and self-confidence, with its brown eyes wide apart, its high brow under the parting waves of golden chestnut, broad, humorous mouth, and tiny nose slightly nibbed upward: Miss Up-to-the-Minute New York, indeed! From the cocked red feather in her hat to the dainty spatted boots Jane Gerson appeared in Woodhouse's eyes a perfect, virile, vividly alive American girl. He'd met her kind before; had seen them browbeating bazaar merchants in Cairo and riding desert donkeys like strong young queens. The type appealed to him.

The first stiffness of informal meeting wore away speedily. The girl tactfully directed the channel of conversation into lines familiar to Woodhouse. What was Egypt like; who owned the Pyramids, and why didn't the owners plant a park around them and charge admittance? Didn't he think Rameses and all those other old Pharaohs had the right idea in advertising—putting up stone billboards to last all time? The questions came crisp and startling; Woodhouse found himself chuckling at the shrewd incisiveness of them. Rameses an advertiser and the Pyramids stone hoardings to carry all those old boys' fame through the ages! He'd never looked upon them in that light before.

"I say, Miss Gerson, you'd make an

excellent business person, now, really," the captain voiced his admiration.

"Just cable that at my expense to old Pop Hildebrand, of Hildebrand's department store, New York," she flashed back at him. "I'm trying to convince him of just that very thing."

"Really, now; a department shop! What, may I ask, do you have to do for—ah—'Pop' Hildebrand?"

"Oh, I'm his foreign buyer," Jane answered, with a conscious note of pride. "I'm over here to buy gowns for the winter season, you see. Paul Poiret—Worth—Paquin; you've heard of those wonderful people, of course?"

"Can't say I have," the captain confessed, with a rueful smile into the girl's brown eyes.

"Then you've never bought a Worth?" she challenged. "For if you had you'd not forget the name—or the price—very soon."

"Gowns—and things are not in my line, Miss Gerson," he answered simply, and the girl caught herself feeling a secret elation. A man who didn't know gowns couldn't be very intimately acquainted with women. And—well—

"And this Hildebrand, he sends you over here alone just to buy pretties for New York's wonderful women?" the captain was saying. "Aren't you just a bit—ah—nervous to be over in this part of the world—alone?"

"Not in the least," the girl caught him up. "Not about the alone part, I should say. Maybe I am fidgety and sort of worried about making good on the job. This is my first trip—my very first as a buyer for Hildebrand. And, of course, if I should fall down—"

"Fall down?" Woodhouse echoed, mystified. The girl laughed, and struck her left wrist a smart blow with her gloved right hand.

"There I go again—slang; 'vulgar American slang,' you'll call it. If I could only rattle off the French as

easily as I do New Yorkese I'd be a wonder. I mean I'm afraid I won't make good."

"Oh!"

"But why should I worry about coming over alone?" Jane urged. "Lots of American girls come over here alone with an American flag pinned to their shirt waists and wearing a Baedeker for a wrist watch. Nothing ever happens to them."

Captain Woodhouse looked out upon the flying panorama of straw-thatched houses and fields heavy with green grain. He seemed to be balancing words. He glanced at the passenger across the aisle, a wizened little man, asleep. In a lowered voice he began:

"A woman alone—over here on the Continent at this time; why, I very much fear she will have great difficulties when the—ah—trouble comes."

"Trouble?" Jane's eyes were questioning.

"I do not wish to be an alarmist, Miss Gerson," Captain Woodhouse continued, hesitant. "Goodness knows we've had enough calamity shouters among the Unionists at home. But have you considered what you would do—how you would get back to America in case of—war?" The last word was almost a whisper.

"War?" she echoed. "Why, you don't mean all this talk in the papers is—"

"Is serious, yes," Woodhouse answered quietly. "Very serious."

"Why, Captain Woodhouse, I thought you had war talk every summer over here just like our papers are filled each spring with gossip about how Tesreau is going to jump to the Feds, or the Yanks are going to be sold. It's your regular midsummer outdoor sport over here, this stirring up the animals."

Woodhouse smiled, though his gray eyes were filled with something not mirth.

"I fear the animals are—stirred, as

you say, too far this time," he resumed. "The assassination of the archduke Ferd——"

"Yes, I remember I did read something about that in the papers at home. But archdukes and kings have been killed before, and no war came of it. In Mexico they murder a president before he has a chance to send out 'At home' cards."

"Europe is so different from Mexico," her companion continued, the lines of his face deepening. "I am afraid you over in the States do not know the dangerous politics here; you are so far away; you should thank God for that. You are not in a land where one man—or two or three—may say, 'We will now go to war,' and then you go, willy-nilly."

The seriousness of the captain's speech and the fear which he could not keep from his eyes sobered the girl. She looked out upon the sun-drenched plains of Pas de Calais, where toy villages, hedged fields, and squat farmhouses lay all in order, established, seeming set for all time in the comfortable doze of security. The plodding manikins in the fields, the slumberous oxen drawing the harrows amid the beet rows, pigeons circling over the straw hutches by the tracks' side—all this denied the possibility of war's corrosion.

"Don't you think everybody is suffering from a bad dream when they say there's to be fighting?" she queried. "Surely it is impossible that folks over here would all consent to destroy this." She waved toward the streaming countryside.

"A bad dream, yes. But one which will end in nightmare," he answered. "Tell me, Miss Gerson, when will you be through with your work in Paris, and on your way back to America?"

"Not for a month; that's sure. Maybe I'll be longer if I like the place."

Woodhouse pondered.

"A month. This is the tenth of July. I am afraid—— I say, Miss Gerson, please do not set me down for a meddler—this short acquaintance, and all that; but may I not urge upon you that you finish your work in Paris and get back to England at least in two weeks?" The captain had turned, and was looking into the girl's eyes with an earnest intensity which startled her. "I cannot tell you all I know, of course. I may not even know the truth, though I think I have a bit of it, right enough. But one of your sort—to be caught alone on this side of the water by the madness that is brewing! By George, I do not like to think of it!"

"I thank you, Captain Woodhouse, for your warning," Jane answered him, and impulsively she put out her hand to his. "But, you see, I'll have to run the risk. I couldn't go scampering back to New York like a scared pussycat just because somebody starts a war over here. I'm on trial. This is my first trip as buyer for Hildebrand, and it's a case of make or break with me. War or no war, I've got to make good. Anyway"—this with a toss of her round little chin—"I'm an American citizen, and nobody'll dare to start anything with me."

"Right you are!" Woodhouse beamed his admiration. "Now we'll talk about those skyscrapers of yours. Everybody back from the States has something to say about those famous buildings, and I'm fairly burning for firsthand information from one who knows them."

Laughingly she acquiesced, and the grim shadow of war was pushed away from them, though hardly forgotten by either. At the man's prompting, Jane gave intimate pictures of life in the New World metropolis, touching with shrewd insight the fads and shams of New York's denizens even as she ex-

alted the achievements of their restless energy.

Woodhouse found secret amusement and delight in her racy, nervous speech, in the dexterity of her idiom and patness of her characterizations. Here was a new sort of girl for him. Not the languid creature of studied suppression and feeble enthusiasm he had known, but a virile, vivid, sparkling woman of a new land, whose impulses were as unhindered as her speech was heterodox. She was a woman who worked for her living; that was a new type, too. Unafraid, she threw herself into the competition of a man's world; insensibly she prided herself upon her ability to "make good"—expressive Americanism, that, under any handicap. She was a woman with a "job"; Captain Woodhouse had never before met one such.

Again, here was a woman who tried none of the stale arts and tricks of coquetry; no eyebrow strategy or maidenly simpering about Jane Gerson. Once sure Woodhouse was what she took him to be, a gentleman, the girl had established a frank basis of comradeship which took no reckoning of the age-old conventions of sex allure and sex defense. The unconventionality of their meeting weighed nothing with her. Equally there was not a hint of sophistication on the girl's part.

So the afternoon sped, and when the sun dropped over the maze of spires and chimney pots that was Paris each felt regret at parting.

"To Egypt, yes," Woodhouse ruefully admitted. "A dreary, deadly 'place in the sun' for me. To have met you, Miss Gerson, it has been delightful, quite."

"I hope," the girl said, as Woodhouse handed her into a taxi, "I hope that *if* that war comes it will find you still in Egypt, away from the firing line."

"Not a fair thing to wish for a man

in the service," Woodhouse answered, laughing. "I may be more happy when I say my best wish for you is that *when* the war comes it will find you a long way from Paris. Good-by, Miss Gerson, and good luck!"

Captain Woodhouse stood, heels together and hat in hand, while her taxi trundled off, a farewell flash of brown eyes rewarding him for the military correctness of his courtesy. Then he hurried to another station to take a train—not for a Mediterranean port and distant Egypt, but for Berlin.

CHAPTER II.

A NUMBER FROM THE WILHELMSTRASSE.

"It would be wiser to talk in German," the woman said. "In these times French or English speech in Berlin——" she finished with a lifting of her shapely bare shoulders, sufficiently eloquent. The waiter speeded his task of refilling the man's glass and discreetly withdrew.

"Oh, I'll talk in German quick enough," the man assented, draining his thin half bubble of glass down to the last fizzing residue in the stem. "Only just show me you've got the right to hear, and the good fat bank notes to pay; that's all." He propped his sharp chin on a hand which shook slightly, and pushed his lean, flushed face nearer hers. An owlish caution fought the wine fancies in his shifting lynx eyes under reddened lids; also was there admiration for the milk-white skin and ripe lips of the woman by his side. For an instant, half the time of a breath, a flash of loathing made the woman's eyes tigerish; but at once they changed again to mild bantering.

"So? Friend Billy Capper, of Brussels, has a touch of the spy fever himself, and distrusts an old pal?" She laughed softly, and one slim hand toyed with a heavy gold locket on her bosom. "Friend Billy Capper forgets old times

and old faces—forgets even the matter of the Lord Fisher letters——”

“Chop it, Louisa!” The man called Capper lapsed into brusque English as he banged the stem of his wineglass on the damask. “No sense in raking that up again—just because I ask you a fair question—ask you to identify yourself in your new job.”

“We go no further, Billy Capper,” she returned, speaking swiftly in German; “not another word between us unless you obey my rule, and talk this language. Why did you get that message through to me to meet you here in the Café Riche to-night if you did not trust me? Why did you have me carry your offer to—to headquarters and come here ready to talk business if it was only to hum and haw about my identifying myself?”

The tenseness of exaggerated concentration on Capper’s gaunt face began slowly to dissolve. First the thin line of shaven lips flickered and became weak at down-drawn corners; then the frown faded from about the eyes, and the beginnings of tears gathered there. Shrewdness and the stamp of cunning sped entirely, and naught but weakness remained.

“Louisa—Louisa, old pal; don’t be hard on poor Billy Capper,” he mumbled. “I’m down, girl—away down again. Since they kicked me out at Brussels I haven’t had a shilling to bless myself with. Can’t go back to England—you know that; the French won’t have me, and here I am, my dinner clothes my only stock in trade left, and you even having to buy the wine.” A tear of self-pity slipped down the hard drain of his cheek, and splashed on his hand. “But I’ll show ’em, Louisa! They can’t kick me out of the Brussels shop like a dog and not pay for it! I know too much, I do!”

“And what you know about the Brussels shop you want to sell to the—

Wilhelmstrasse?” the woman asked tensely.

“Yes, if the Wilhelmstrasse is willing to pay well for it,” Capper answered, his lost cunning returning in a bound.

“I am authorized to judge how much your information is worth,” his companion declared, leveling a cold glance into Capper’s misty eyes. “You can tell me what you know, and depend upon me to pay well, or—we part at once.”

“But, Louisa”—again the whine—“how do I know you’re what you say? You’ve flown high since you and I worked together in the Brussels shop. The Wilhelmstrasse—most perfect spy machine in the world! How I’d like to be in your shoes, Louisa!”

She detached the heavy gold locket from the chain on her bosom, with a quick twist of slim fingers had one side of the case open, then laid the locket before him, pointing to a place on the bevel of the case. Capper swept up the trinket, looked searchingly for an instant at the spot the woman had designated, and returned the locket to her hand.

“Your number in the Wilhelmstrasse,” he whispered in awe. “Genuine, no doubt. Saw the same sort of mark once before in Rome. All right. Now, listen, Louisa. I’m going to tell you about where Brussels stands in this—this business that’s brewing will make the German general staff sit up.” The woman inclined her head toward Capper’s. He, looking not at her but out over the rich plain of brocades, broadcloths, and gleaming shoulders, began in a monotone:

“When the war comes—the day the war starts, French artillerymen will be behind the guns at Namur. The English——”

The Hungarian orchestra of forty strings swept into a wild, gypsy chant. Dissonances, fierce and barbaric, swept

like angry tides over the brilliant floor of the café. Still Capper talked on, and the woman called Louisa bent her jewel-starred head to listen. Her face, the face of a fine animal, was set in rapt attention.

"You mark my words," he finished, "when the German army enters Brussels proof of what I'm telling you will be there. Yes, in a pigeonhole of the foreign-office safe those joint plans between England and Belgium for resisting invasion from the eastern frontier. If the Germans strike as swiftly as I think they will the foreign-office johnnies will be so flustered in moving out they'll forget these papers I'm telling you about. Then your Wilhelmstrasse will know they've paid for the truth when they paid Billy Capper."

Capper eagerly reached for his glass, and, finding it empty, signaled the waiter.

"I'll buy this one, Louisa," he said grandiloquently. "Can't have a lady buying *me* wine all night." He gave the order. "You're going to slip me some bank notes to-night—right now, aren't you, Louisa, old pal?" Capper anxiously honed his cheeks with a hand which trembled. The woman's eyes were narrowed in thought.

"If I give you anything now, Billy Capper, you'll get drunker than you are now, and how do I know you won't run to the first English secret-service man you meet and blab?"

"Louisa! Louisa! Don't say that!" Great fear and great yearning sat in Capper's filmed eyes. "You know I'm honest, Louisa! You wouldn't milk me this way—take all the info I've got and then throw me over like a dog!" Cold scorn was in her glance.

"Maybe I might manage to get you a position—with the Wilhelmstrasse." She named the great secret-service office under her breath. "You can't go back to England, to be sure; but you might be useful in the Balkans,

where you're not known, or even in Egypt. You have your good points, Capper; you're a sly little weasel—when you're sober. Perhaps——"

"Yes, yes; get me a job with the Wilhelmstrasse, Louisa!" Capper was babbling in an agony of eagerness. "You know my work. You can vouch for me, and you needn't mention that business of the Lord Fisher letters; you were tarred pretty much with the same brush there, Louisa. But, come, be a good sport; pay me at least half of what you think my info's worth, and I'll take the rest out in salary checks, if you get me that job. I'm broke, Louisa!" His voice cracked in a sob. "Absolutely stony broke!"

She sat toying with the stem of her wineglass while Capper's clasped hands on the table opened and shut themselves without his volition. Finally she made a swift move of one hand to her bodice, withdrew it with a bundle of notes crinkling between the fingers.

"Three hundred marks now, Billy Capper," she said. The man echoed the words lovingly. "Three hundred now, and my promise to try to get a number for you with—my people. That's fair?"

"Fair as can be, Louisa." He stretched out clawlike fingers to receive the thin sheaf of notes, she counted from her roll. "Here comes the wine—the wine I'm buying. We'll drink to my success at landing a job with—your people."

"For me no more to-night," the woman answered. "My cape, please." She rose.

"But, I say!" Capper protested. "Just one more bottle—the bottle I'm buying. See, here it is all proper and cooled. Marks the end of my bad luck, so it does. You won't refuse to drink with me to my good luck that's coming?"

"Your good luck is likely to stop short with that bottle, Billy Capper,"

she said, her lips parting in a smile half scornful. "You know how wine has played you before. Better stop now while luck's with you."

"Hanged if I do!" he answered stubbornly. "After these months of hand to mouth and begging for a nasty pint of ale in a common pub—leave good wine when it's right under my nose? Not me!" Still protesting against her refusal to drink with him the wine he would pay for himself—the man made that a point of injured honor—Capper grudgingly helped place the cape of web lace over his companion's white shoulders, and he accompanied her to her taxi.

"If you're here this time to-morrow night—and sober," were her farewell words, "I may bring you your number in the—you understand; that and your commission to duty."

"God bless you, Louisa, girl!" Capper stammered thickly. "I'll not fail you."

He watched the taxi trundle down the brilliant mirror of Unter den Linden, a sardonic smile twisting his lips. Then he turned back to the world of light and perfume and wine—the world from which he had been barred these many months and for which the starved body of him had cried out in agony. His glass stood brimming; money crinkled in his pocket; there were eyes for him and fair, white shoulders. Billy Capper, discredited spy, had come to his own once more.

The orchestra was booming a rag-time, and the chorus on the stage of the Winter Garden in Berlin came plunging to the footlights, all in line, their black legs kicking out from the skirts like thrusting spindles in some marvelous engine of stagecraft. They screeched the final line of a Germanized coon song, the cymbals clanged "Zam-m-m!" and folk about the clustered tables pattered applause. Captain

Woodhouse, at a table by himself, pulled a wafer of a watch from his waistcoat pocket, glanced at its face, and looked back at the rococo entrance arches, through which the late-comers were streaming.

"Henry Sherman, do you think Kitty ought to see this sort of thing? It's positively indecent!"

The high-pitched, nasal complaint came from a table a little to the right of the one where Woodhouse was sitting.

"There, there, mother! Now, don't go taking all the joy outa life just because you're seeing something that would make the parson back in Kewanee rear up and snort. This is Germany, mother!"

Out of the tail of his eye, Woodhouse could see the family group wherein Mrs. Grundy had sat down to make a fourth. A blocky little man with a red face and a pinky-bald head, whose clothes looked as if they had been whipsawed out of the bolt; a comfortably stout dowager wearing a bonnet which even to the untutored masculine eye betrayed its provincialism; a slim slip of a girl of about nineteen with a face like a choir boy's—these were the American tourists whose voices had attracted Woodhouse's attention. He played an amused eavesdropper, all the more interested because they were Americans, and since a certain day on the Calais-Paris express, a week or so gone, he'd had reason to be interested in all Americans.

"I'm surprised at you, Henry, defending such an exhibition as this," the dowager's high complaint went on, "when you were mighty shocked at the bare feet of those innocent Greek dancers the Ladies' Aid brought to give an exhibition on Mrs. Peck's lawn."

"Well, mother, that was different," the genial little chap answered. "Kewanee's a good little town, and should stay proper. Berlin, from what I can see, is a pretty bad big town—and don't

care." He pulled a heavy watch from his waistcoat pocket and consulted it. "Land's sakes, mother; seven o'clock back home, and the bell's just ringing for Wednesday-night prayer meeting! Maybe since it's prayer-meeting night we might be passing our time better than by looking at this—ah—exhibition."

There was a scraping of chairs, then:

"Henry, I tell you he does look like Albert Downs—the living image!" This from the dowager, sotto voce.

"Sh, mother! What would Albert Downs be doing in Berlin?" The daughter was reproving.

"Well, Kitty, they say curiosity once killed a cat; but I'm going to have a better look. I'd swear——"

Woodhouse was slightly startled when he saw the dowager Americaine utilize the clumsy subterfuge of a dropped handkerchief to step into a position whence she could look at his face squarely. Also he was annoyed. He did not care to be stared at under any circumstances, particularly at this time. The alert and curious lady saw his flush of annoyance, flushed herself, and joined her husband and daughter.

"Well, if I didn't know Albert Downs had a livery business which he couldn't well leave," floated back the hoarse whisper, "I'd say that was him setting right there in that chair."

"Come, mother, bedtime, and after—in Berlin," was the old gentleman's admonition. Woodhouse heard their retreating footsteps, and laughed in spite of his temporary chagrin at the American woman's curiosity. He was just reaching for his watch a second time when a quick step sounded on the gravel behind him. He turned. A woman of ripe beauty had her hand outstretched in welcome. She was the one Billy Capper had called Louisa. Captain Woodhouse rose and grasped her hand warmly.

"Ah! So good of you! I've been expecting——"

"Yes, I'm late. I could not come earlier." Salutation and answer were in German, fluently spoken on the part of each.

"You will not be followed?" Woodhouse asked, assisting her to sit. She laughed shortly.

"Hardly, when a bottle of champagne is my rival. The man will be well entertained—too well."

"I have been thinking," Woodhouse continued gravely, "that a place hardly as public as this would have been better for our meeting. Perhaps——"

"You fear the English agents? Pah! They have ears for keyholes only; they do not expect to use them in a place where there is light and plenty of people. You know their clumsiness." Woodhouse nodded. His eyes traveled slowly over the bold beauty of the woman's face.

"The man Capper will do for the stalking horse—a willing nag. You know the ways of the Wilhelmstrasse. Capper is what we call 'the target.' The English suspect him. Catch him; you get his number and do the work in safety. We have one man to draw their fire, another to accomplish the deed. We'll let the English bag him at Malta—a word placed in the right direction will fix that—and you'll go on to Alexandria to do the real work."

"Good, good!" Woodhouse agreed.

"The Wilhelmstrasse will give him a number, and send him on this mission on my recommendation; I had that assurance before ever I met the fellow to-night. They—the big people—know little Capper's reputation, and, as a matter of fact, I think they are convinced he's little less dangerous working for the Wilhelmstrasse than against it. At Malta the arrest—the firing squad at dawn—and the English are convinced they've nipped something big in the bud, whereas they've only put

out of the way a dangerous little weasel who's ready to bite any hand that feeds him."

Woodhouse's level glance never left the eyes of the woman called Louisa; it was alert, appraising.

"But if there should be some slip-up at Malta," he interjected. "If somehow this Capper should get through to Alexandria, wouldn't that make it somewhat embarrassing for me?"

"Not at all, my dear Woodhouse," she caught him up with a little pat on his hand. "His instructions will be only to report to So-and-so at Alexandria; he will not have the slightest notion what work he is to do there. You can slip in unsuspected by the English, and the trick will be turned."

For a minute Woodhouse sat watching the cavortings of a dancer on the stage. Finally he put a question judiciously:

"The whole scheme, then, is——"

"This," she answered quickly. "Captain Woodhouse—the real Woodhouse, you know—is to be transferred from his present post at Wady Halfa, on the Nile, to Gibraltar—transfer is to be announced in the regular way within a week. As a member of the signal service he will have access to the signal tower on the Rock when he takes his new post, and that, as you know, will be very important."

"Very important!" Woodhouse echoed dryly.

"This Woodhouse arrives in Alexandria to await the steamer from Suez to Gib. He has no friends there—that much we know. Three men of the Wilhelmstrasse are waiting there, whose business it is to see that the real Woodhouse does not take the boat for Gib. They expect a man from Berlin to come to them, bearing a number from the Wilhelmstrasse—the man who is to impersonate Woodhouse and as such take his place in the garrison on the Rock. There are two others of the Wilhelm-

strasse at Gibraltar already; they, too, are eagerly awaiting the arrival of 'Woodhouse' from Alexandria. Capper, with a number, will start from Berlin to Alexandria. Capper will never arrive in Alexandria. You will."

"With a number—the number expected?" the man asked.

"If you are clever en route—yes," she answered, with a meaning smile. "Wine, remember, is Billy Capper's best friend—and worst enemy."

"Then I will hear from you as to the time and route of departure for Alexandria?"

"To the very hour, yes. And, now, dear friend——"

Interruption came suddenly from the stage. The manager, in shirt sleeves and with hair wildly ruffled over his eyes, came prancing out from the wings. He held up a pudgy hand to check the orchestra. Hundreds about the tables rose in a gust of excitement, of questioning wonder.

"*Herren!*" The stage manager's bellow carried to the farthest arches of the Winter Garden. "News just published by the general staff: Russia has mobilized five divisions on the frontier of East Prussia and Galicia!"

Not a sound save the sharp catching of breath over all the acre of tables. Then the stage manager nodded to the orchestra leader, and in a fury the brass mouths began to bray. Men climbed on table tops, women stood on chairs, and all—all sang in tremendous chorus:

"*Deutschland, Deutschland ueber alles!*"

CHAPTER III.

BILLY CAPPER AT PLAY.

The night of July 26th. The scene is the table-cluttered sidewalk before the Café Pytheas, where the Cours St. Louis flings its night tide of idlers into the broader stream of the

Cannebière, Marseilles' Broadway—the white street of the great Provençal port. Here at the crossing of these two streets summer nights are incidents to stick in the traveler's mind long after he sees the gray walls of the Château d'If fade below the steamer's rail. The flower girls in their little pulpits pressing dewy violets and fragrant clusters of rosebuds upon the strollers with persuasive eloquence; the mystical eyes of hooded Moors who see everything as they pass, yet seem to see so little; jostling Greeks, Levantines, burnoosed Jews from Algiers and red-trousered Senegalese—all the color from the hot lands of the Mediterranean is there.

But on this night of July 26th the old spirit of indolence, of pleasure seeking, flirtation, intriguing, which was wont to make this heart of arc-light life in Marseilles pulse languorously was gone. Instead, an electric tenseness was abroad, pervading, infectious. About each sidewalk table heads were clustered close in conference, and eloquent hands aided explosive argument. Around the news kiosk at the Café Pytheas' corner a constant stream eddied. Men snatched papers from the pile, spread them before their faces, and blundered into their fellow pedestrians as they walked, buried in the inky columns. Now and again half-naked urchins came charging down the Cannebière, waving shinplaster extras above their heads—"L'Allemand s'ar-mee! La guerre, vient!" Up from the Quai marched a dozen sailors from a torpedo boat, arms linked so that they almost spanned the Cannebière. Their red-tasseled caps were pushed back at cocky angles on their black heads, and as they marched they shouted in time: "A Berlin! Hou—hou!"

The black shadow of war—the first hallucinations of the great madness—gripped Marseilles.

For Captain Woodhouse, just in from Berlin that evening, all this swirling ex-

citement had but an incidental interest. He sat alone by one of the little iron tables before the Café Pytheas, sipping his *boe*, and from time to time his eyes carelessly followed the eddying of the swarm about the news kiosk. Always his attention would come back, however, to center on the thin shoulders of a man sitting fifteen or twenty feet away with a wine cooler by his side. He could not see the face of the wine drinker; he did not want to. All he cared to do was to keep those thin shoulders always in sight. Each time the solicitous waiter renewed the bottle in the wine cooler Captain Woodhouse nodded grimly, as a doctor might when he recognized the symptoms of advancing fever in a patient.

So for two days, from Berlin across to Paris, and now on this third day here in the Mediterranean port, Woodhouse had kept ever in sight those thin shoulders and that trembling hand beyond the constantly crooking elbow. Not a pleasant task; he had come to loathe and abominate the very wrinkles in the back of that shiny coat. But a very necessary duty it was for Captain Woodhouse to shadow Mr. Billy Capper until—the right moment should arrive. They had come down on the same express together from Paris. Woodhouse had observed Capper when he checked his baggage, a single shoddy hand bag, for *La Vendée*, the French line ship sailing with the dawn next morning for Alexandria and Port Said via Malta. Capper had squared his account at the Hotel Allées de Meilhan, for the most part a bill for absinth frappés, after dinner that night, and was now enjoying the night life of Marseilles in anticipation, evidently, of carrying direct to the steamer with him as his farewell from France all of the bottled laughter of her peasant girls he could accommodate.

The harsh memories of how he had been forced to drink the bitter lees of

poverty during the lean months rode Billy Capper hard, and this night he wanted to fill all the starved chambers of his soul with the robust music of the grape. So he drank with a purpose and purposefully. That he drank alone was a matter of choice with Capper; he could have had a pair of dark eyes to glint over a goblet into his had he wished—indeed, opportunities almost amounted to embarrassment. But to all advances from the fair, Billy Capper returned merely an impolite leer. He knew from beforetime that he was his one best companion when the wine began to warm him. So he squared himself to his pleasure with an abandoned rakishness expressed in the set of his thin shoulders and the forward droop of his head.

Woodhouse, who watched, noted only one peculiarity in Capper's conduct: The drinker nursed his stick, a plain, crook-handled malacca, with a tenderness almost maternal. It never left his hands. Once when Capper dropped it and the waiter made to prop the stick against a near-by chair, the little spy leaped to his feet and snatched the cane away with a growl. Thereafter he propped his chin on the handle, only removing this guard when he had to tip his head back for another draft of champagne.

Eleven o'clock came. Capper rose from the table and looked owlishly about him. Woodhouse quickly turned his back to the man, and was absorbed in the passing strollers. When he looked back again Capper was slowly and a little unsteadily making his way around the corner into the *Cannebière*. Woodhouse followed, sauntering. Capper began a dilatory exploration of the various cafés along the white street; his general course was toward the city's slums about the *Quai*. Woodhouse, dawdling about tree boxes and dodging into shadows by black doorways, found his quarry easy to trail. And he knew

that each of Capper's sojourns in an oasis put a period to the length of the pursuit. The time for him to act drew appreciably nearer with every tipping of that restless elbow.

Midnight found them down in the reek and welter of the dives and sailors' frolic grounds. Now the trailer found his task more difficult, inasmuch as not only his quarry but he himself was marked by the wolves. Dances in smoke-wreathed rooms slackened when Capper lurched in, found a seat, and ordered a drink. Women with cheeks carmined like poppies wanted to make predatory love to him; dock rats drew aside and consulted in whispers. When Capper retreated from an evil dive on the very edge of the *Quai*, Woodhouse, waiting by the doors, saw that he was not the only shadower. Close against the dead walls flanking the narrow pavement a slinking figure twisted and writhed after the drunkard, now spread-eagling all over the street.

Woodhouse quickened his pace on the opposite sidewalk. The street was one lined with warehouses, their closely shuttered windows the only eyes. Capper dropped his stick, laboriously halted, and started to go back for it. That instant the shadow against the walls detached itself and darted for the victim. Woodhouse leaped to the cobbles and gained Capper's side just as he dropped like a sack of rags under a blow from the dock rat's fist.

"Son of a pig! This is my meat; you clear out!" The humped black beetle of a man straddling the sprawling Capper whipped a knife from his girdle and faced Woodhouse. Quicker than light the captain's right arm shot out; a thud as of a maul on an empty wine butt, and the Apache turned a half somersault, striking the cobbles with the back of his head. Woodhouse stooped, lifted the limp Capper from the street stones, and staggered with him to the lighted avenue of the *Cannebière*, a

block away. He hailed a late-cruising fiacre, propped Capper in the seat, and took his place beside him.

"To *La Vendée*, Quai de la Fraternité!" Woodhouse ordered.

The driver, wise in the ways of the city, asked no questions, but clucked to his crow bait. Woodhouse turned to make a quick examination of the unconscious man by his side. He feared a stab wound; he found nothing but a nasty cut on the head, made by brass knuckles. With the wine helping, any sort of a blow would have put Capper out, he reflected.

Woodhouse turned his back on the bundle of clothes and reached for the malacca stick. Even in his coma its owner grasped it tenaciously at mid-length. Without trying to disengage the clasp, Woodhouse gripped the wood near the crook of the handle with his left hand while with his right he applied torsion above. The crook turned on hidden threads and came off in his hand. An exploring forefinger in the exposed hollow end of the cane encountered a rolled wisp of paper. Woodhouse pocketed this, substituted in its place a thin clean sheet torn from a cardcase memorandum, then screwed the crook on the stick down on the secret receptacle. By the light of a match he assured himself the paper he had taken from the cane was what he wanted.

"Larceny from the person—guilty," he murmured, with a wry smile of distaste. "But assault—unpremeditated."

The conveyance trundled down a long spit of stone and stopped by the side of a black hull, spotted with round eyes of light. The driver, scenting a tip, helped Woodhouse lift Capper to the ground and prop him against a bulkhead. A bos'n, summoned from *La Vendée* by the cabby's shrill whistle, heard Woodhouse's explanation with sympathy.

"Occasionally, yes, m'sieu, the pas-

sengers from Marseilles have these regrets at parting," he gravely commented, accepting the ticket Woodhouse had rummaged from the unconscious man's wallet and a crinkled note from Woodhouse's. Up the gangplank, feet first, went the new agent of the Wilhelmstrasse. The one who called himself "captain in his majesty's signal service" returned to his hotel.

At dawn, *La Vendée* cleared the harbor for Alexandria via Malta, bearing a very sick Billy Capper to his destiny. Five hours later the Castle liner, *Castle Claire*, for the Cape via Alexandria and Suez direct, sailed out of the Old Port, among her passengers a Captain Woodhouse.

CHAPTER IV.

AT 32 QUEEN'S TERRACE.

Many a long, starlit hour alone on the deck of the *Castle Claire* Captain Woodhouse found himself tortured by a persistent vision. Far back over the northern horizon lay Europe, trembling and breathless before the imminent disaster—a great field of grain, each stalk bearing for its head the helmeted head of a man. Out of the east came a glow, which spread from boundary to boundary, waxed stronger in the wind of hate. Finally the fire, devastating, insensate, began its sweep through the close-standing mazes of the grain. Somewhere in this fire glow and swift leveling under the scythe of the flame was a girl, alone, appalled. Woodhouse could see her as plainly as though a cinema was unreeling swift pictures before him—the girl caught in this vast acreage of fire, in the standing grain, with destruction drawing nearer in incredible strides. He saw her wide eyes, her streaming hair—saw her running through the grain, whose heads were the helmeted heads of men. Her hands groped blindly and she was calling—calling, with none to come in aid. Jane

Gerson alone in the face of Europe's burning!

Strive as he would, Woodhouse could not screen this picture from his eyes. He tried to hope that ere this discretion had conquered her resolution to "make good," and that she had fled from Paris, one of the great army of refugees who had already begun to pour out of the gates of France when he passed through the war-stunned capital a few days before. But, no; there was no mistaking the determination he had read in those brown eyes that day on the express from Calais. "I couldn't go scampering back to New York just because somebody starts a war over here." Brave, yes; but hers was the bravery of ignorance. This little person from the States, on her first venture into the complex life of the Continent, could not know what war there would mean: the terror and magnitude of it. And now where was she? In Paris, caught in its hysteria of patriotism and darkling fear of what the morrow would bring forth? Or had she started for England, and become wedged in the jam of terrified thousands battling for place on the Channel steamers? Was her fine self-reliance upholding her, or had the crisis sapped her courage and thrown her back upon the common helplessness of women before disaster?

Captain Woodhouse, the self-sufficient and aloof, whose training had been all toward suppression of every instinct save that in the line of duty, was surprised at himself. That a little American *inconnu*—a "business person," he would have styled her under conditions less personal—should have come into his life in this definite way was, to say the least, highly irregular. The man tried to swing his reason as a club against his heart—and failed miserably. No, the fine, brave spirit that looked out of those big brown eyes would not be argued out of court.

Jane Gerson was a girl who was *different*, and that very difference was altogether alluring. Woodhouse caught himself going over the incidents of their meeting. Fondly he reviewed scraps of their conversation on the train, lingering upon the pat slang she used so unconsciously.

Was it possible Jane Gerson ever had a thought for Captain Woodhouse? The man winced a little at this speculation. Had it been fair of him when he so glibly practiced a deception upon her? If she knew what his present business was, would she understand; would she approve? Could this little American ever know, or believe, that some sorts of service were honorable?

Just before the *Castle Claire* raised the breakwater of Alexandria came a wireless, which was posted at the head of the saloon companionway:

Germany declares war on Russia. German flying column reported moving through Luxemburg on Belgium.

The fire was set to the grain.

Upon landing, Captain Woodhouse's first business was to go to a hotel on the Grand Square, which is the favorite stopping place of officers coming down from the Nile country. He fought his way through the predatory hordes of yelling donkey boys and obsequious dragomen at the door, and entered the palm-shaded court, which served as office and lounge. Woodhouse paused for a second behind a screen of palm leaves and cast a quick eye around the court. None of the loungers there was known to him. He strode to the desk.

"Ah, sir, a room with bath, overlooking the gardens on the north side—very cool." The Greek clerk behind the desk smiled a welcome.

"Perhaps," Woodhouse answered shortly, and he turned the register around to read the names of the recent comers. On the first page he found nothing to interest him; but among the arrivals of the day before he saw this

entry: "C. G. Woodhouse, Capt. Sig. Service; Wady Halfa." After it was entered the room number: "210."

Woodhouse read right over the name and turned another page a bit impatiently. This he scanned with seeming eagerness, while the clerk stood with pen poised.

"Um! When is the first boat out for Gibraltar?" Woodhouse asked.

"Well, sir, the *Princess Mary* is due to sail at dawn day after to-morrow," the Greek answered judiciously. "She is reported at Port Said to-day, but, of course, the war——" Woodhouse turned away.

"But you wish a room, sir—nice room, with bath, overlooking——"

"No."

"You expected to find a friend, then?"

"Not here," Woodhouse returned brusquely, and passed out into the blinding square.

He strode swiftly around the statue of Mehemet Ali and plunged into the bedlam crowd filling a side street. With sure sense of direction, he threaded the narrow alleyways and by-streets until he had come to the higher part of the mongrel city, near the Rosetta Gate. There he turned into a little French hotel, situated far from the disordered pulse of the city's heart; a sort of pension, it was, known only to the occasional discriminating tourist. Maitre Mouquère was proud of the anonymity his house preserved, and abhorred poor, driven Cook's slaves as he would a plague. In his Cap de Liberté one was lost to all the world of Alexandria.

Thither the captain's baggage had been sent direct from the steamer. After a glass with Maitre Mouquère and a half hour's discussion of the day's great news, Woodhouse pleaded a touch of the sun, and went to his room. There he remained until the gold of sunset had faded from the Mosque of Omar's great dome and all the city

from Pharos and its harbor hedge of masts to El Meks winked with lights. Then he took carriage to the railroad station and entrained for Ramleh. What South Kensington is to London and the Oranges are to New York, Ramleh is to Alexandria—the suburb of homes. There pretty villas lie in the lap of the delta's greenery, skirted by canals, cooled by the winds off Aboukir Bay and shaded by great palms—the one beauty spot in all the hybrid product of East and West that is the present city of Alexander.

Remembering directions he had received in Berlin, Woodhouse threaded shaded streets until he paused before a stone gateway set in a high wall. On one of the pillars a small brass plate was inset. By the light of a near-by arc, Woodhouse read the inscription on it:

EMIL KOCH, M. D.,
32 Queen's Terrace.

He threw back his shoulders with a sudden gesture, which might have been taken for that of a man about to make a plunge, and rang the bell. The heavy wooden gate, filling all the space of the arch, was opened by a tall Numidian in house livery of white. He nodded an affirmative to Woodhouse's question, and led the way through an avenue of flaming hibiscus to a house, set far back under heavy shadow of acacias. On every hand were gardens, rank foliage shutting off this walled yard from the street and neighboring dwellings. The heavy gate closed behind the visitor with a sharp snap. One might have said that Doctor Koch lived in pretty secure isolation.

Woodhouse was shown into a small room off the main hall, by its furnishings and position evidently a waiting room for the doctor's patients. The Numidian bowed, and disappeared. Alone, Woodhouse rose and strolled aimlessly about the room, flipped the

covers of magazines on the table, picked up and hefted the bronze Buddha on the onyx mantel, noted, with a careless glance, the position of the two windows in relation to the entrance door and the folding doors, now shut, which doubtless gave onto the consultation room. As he was regarding these doors they rolled back, and a short, thickset man, with a heavy mane of iron-gray hair and black brush of beard, stood between them. He looked at Woodhouse through thick-lensed glasses, which gave to his stare a curiously intent bent.

"My office hours are from two to four, afternoons," Doctor Koch said. He spoke in English, but his speech was burred by a slight heaviness on the aspirants, reminiscent of his mother tongue. The doctor did not ask Woodhouse to enter the consultation room, but continued standing between the folding doors, staring fixedly through his thick lenses.

"I know that, doctor," Woodhouse began apologetically, following the physician's lead and turning his tongue to English. "But, you see, in a case like mine I have to intrude"—it was "haf" and "indrude" as Woodhouse gave these words—"because I could not be here during your office hours. You will pardon?"

Doctor Koch's eyes widened just perceptibly at the hint of a Germanic strain in his visitor's speech—just a hint quickly glossed over. But still he remained standing in his former attitude of annoyance.

"Was the sun, then, too hot to permit you to come to my house during regular office hours? At nights I see no patients—positively none."

"The sun—perhaps," Woodhouse replied guardedly. "But as I happened just to arrive to-day from Marseilles, and your name was strongly recommended to me as one to consult in a case such as mine——"

"Where was my name recommended

to you, and by whom?" Doctor Koch interrupted in sudden interest.

Woodhouse looked at him steadily. "In Berlin—and by a friend of yours," he answered.

"Indeed?" The doctor stepped back from the doors, and motioned his visitor into the consultation room.

Woodhouse stepped into a large room lighted by a single green-shaded reading lamp, which threw a white circle of light straight down upon a litter of thin-bladed scalpels in a glass dish of disinfectant on a table. The shadowy outlines of an operating chair, of high-shouldered bookcases, and the dull glint of instruments in a long glass case were almost imperceptible because of the centering of all light upon the glass dish of knives. Doctor Koch dragged a chair out from the shadows, and, carelessly enough, placed it in the area of radiance; he motioned Woodhouse to sit. The physician leaned carelessly against an arm of the operating chair; his face was in the shadow save where reflected light shone from his glasses, giving them the aspect of detached eyes.

"So, a friend—a friend in Berlin told you to consult me, eh? Berlin is a long way from Ramleh—especially in these times. Greater physicians than I live in Berlin. Why——"

"My friend in Berlin told me you were the only physician who could help me in my peculiar trouble." Imperceptibly the accenting of the aspirants in Woodhouse's speech grew more marked; his voice took on a throaty character. "By some specialists my life even has been set to end in a certain year, so sure is fate for those afflicted like myself."

"So? What year is it, then, you die?" Doctor Koch's strangely detached eyes—those eyes of glass glowing dimly in the shadow—seemed to flicker palely with a light all their own. Captain Woodhouse, sitting under the

white spray of the shaded incandescent, looked up carelessly to meet the stare.

"Why, they give me plenty of time to enjoy myself," he answered, with a light laugh. "They say in 1932——"

"Nineteen thirty-two!" Doctor Koch stepped lightly to the closed folding doors, trundled them back an inch to assure himself nobody was in the waiting room, then closed and locked them. He did similarly by a hidden door on the opposite side of the room, which Woodhouse had not seen. After that he pulled a chair close to his visitor and sat down, his knees almost touching the other's. He spoke very low, in German:

"If your trouble is so serious that you will die—in 1932, I must, of course, examine you for—symptoms."

For half a minute the two men looked fixedly at one another. Woodhouse's right hand went slowly to the big green scarab stuck in his cravat. He pulled the pin out, turned it over in his fingers, and by pressure caused the scarab to pop out of the gold-backed setting holding it. The bit of green stone lay in the palm of his left hand, its back exposed. In the hollowed back of the beetle was a small square of paper, folded minutely. This Woodhouse removed, unfolded, and passed to the physician. The latter seized it avidly, holding it close to his spectacled eyes, and then spreading it against the light as if to read a secret water mark. A smile struggled through the jungle of his beard. He found Woodhouse's hand and grasped it warmly.

"Your symptom tallies with my diagnosis, Nineteen Thirty-two," he began rapidly. "Five days ago we heard from—the Wilhelmstrasse—you would come. We have expected you each day, now. Already we have got word through to our friends at Gibraltar of the plan; they are waiting for you."

"Good!" Woodhouse commented. He was busy refolding the thin slip of

paper that had been his talisman, and fitting it into the back of the scarab. "Woodhouse—he is already at the Hotel Khedive; saw his name on the register when I landed from the *Castle* this morning." Now the captain was talking in familiar German.

"Quite so. Woodhouse came down from Wady Halfa yesterday. Our man up there had advised of the time of his arrival in Alexandria to the minute. The captain has his ticket for the *Princess Mary*, which sails for Gibraltar day after to-morrow at dawn."

Number Nineteen Thirty-two listened to Doctor Koch's outlining of the plot with set features; only his eyes showed that he was acutely alive to every detail. Said he:

"But Woodhouse—this British captain who's being transferred from the Nile country to the Rock; has he ever served there before? If he has, why, when I get there—when I am Captain Woodhouse, of the signal service—I will be embarrassed if I do not know the ropes."

"Seven years ago Woodhouse was there for a very short time," Doctor Koch explained. "New governor since then—changes all around in the personnel of the staff, I don't doubt. You'll have no trouble."

Silence between them for a minute, broken by the captain:

"Our friends at Gib—who are they, and how will I know them?"

The doctor bent a sudden glance of suspicion upon the lean face before him. His thick lips clapped together stubbornly.

"Aha, my dear friend; you are asking questions. In my time at Berlin the Wilhelmstrasse taught that all orders and information came from above—and from there only. Why——"

"I suppose in default of other information I may ask the governor to point out the Wilhelmstrasse men," Woodhouse answered, with a shrug. "I was

told at Berlin I would learn all that was necessary to me as I went along, therefore, I supposed——”

“Come—come!” Doctor Koch patted the other’s shoulder, with a heavy joviality. “So you will. When you arrive at Gib, put up at the Hotel Splendide, and you will not be long learning who your friends are. I, for instance, did not hesitate overmuch to recognize you, and I am under the eyes of the English here at every turn, even though I am a naturalized English citizen—and of undoubted loyalty.” He finished with a booming laugh.

“But Woodhouse; you have arranged a way to have him drop out of sight before the *Princess Mary* sails? There will be no confusion—no slip-up?”

“Do not fear,” the physician reassured. “Everything will be arranged. His baggage will leave the Hotel Khedive for the dock to-morrow night; but it will not reach the dock. Yours——”

“Will be awaiting the transfer of tags at the Cap de Liberté—Mouquère’s little place,” the captain finished. “But the man himself—you’re not thinking of mur——”

“My dear Nineteen Thirty-two,” Doctor Koch interrupted, lifting protesting hands; “we do not use such crude methods; they are dangerous. The real Captain Woodhouse will not leave Alexandria—by sea, let us say—for many months. Although I have no doubt he will not be found in Alexandria the hour the *Princess Mary* sails. The papers he carries—the papers of identity and of transfer from Wady Halfa to Gibraltar—will be in your hands in plenty of time. You——”

The doctor stopped abruptly. A hidden electric buzzer somewhere in the shadowed room was clucking an alarm. Koch pressed a button at the side of the operating chair. There was a sound beyond closed doors of some one passing through a hallway; the front door opened and closed.

“Some one at the gate,” Doctor Koch explained. “Cæsar, my playful little Numidian—and an artist with the Bedouin dagger is Cæsar—he goes to answer.”

Their talk was desultory during the next minutes. The doctor seemed restless under the suspense of a pending announcement as to the late visitor. Finally came a soft tapping on the hidden door behind Woodhouse. The latter heard the doctor exchange whispers with the Numidian in the hallway. Finally, “Show him into the waiting room,” Koch ordered. He came back to where the captain was sitting, a puzzled frown between his eyes.

“An Englishman, Cæsar says—an Englishman, who insists on seeing me—very important.” Koch bit the end of one stubby thumb in hurried thought. He suddenly whipped open the door of one of the instrument cases, pulled out a stethoscope, and hooked the two little black receivers into his ears. Then he turned to Woodhouse.

“Quick! Off with your coat and open your shirt. You are a patient; I am just examining you when interrupted. This may be one of these clumsy English secret-service men, and I might need your alibi.” The sound of an opening door beyond the folding doors and of footsteps in the adjoining room.

“You say you are sleepless at night?” Doctor Koch was talking English. “And you have a temperature on arising? Hm’m! This under your tongue, if you please”—he thrust a clinical thermometer between Woodhouse’s lips; the latter already had his coat off, and was unbuttoning his shirt. Koch gave him a meaning glance, and disappeared between the folding doors, closing them behind him.

The captain, feeling much like a fool with the tiny glass tube sprouting from his lips, yet with all his faculties strained to alertness, awaited developments. If Doctor Koch’s hazard should

prove correct and this was an English secret-service man come to arrest him, wouldn't suspicion also fall on whom-ever was found a visitor in the German spy's house? Arrest and search; examination of his scarab pin—this would not be pleasant.

He tried to hear what was being said beyond the folding doors, but could catch nothing save the deep rumble of the doctor's occasional bass and a higher, querulous voice raised in what might be argument. Had he dared, Woodhouse would have drawn closer to the crack in the folding doors so that he could hear what was passing; every instinct of self-preservation in him made his ears yearn to dissect this murmur into sense. But if Doctor Koch should catch him eavesdropping, embarrassment fatal to his plans might follow; besides, he had a feeling that eyes he could not see—perhaps the unwinking eyes of the Numidian—were on him, avid for an excuse to put into practice his dexterity with the Bedouin dagger.

Minutes slipped by. The captain still nursed the clinical thermometer. The mumble and muttering continued to sound through the closed doors. Suddenly the high whine of the unseen visitor was raised in excitement. Came clearly through to Woodhouse's ears his passionate declaration:

"But I tell you you've got to recognize me. My number's Nineteen Thirty-two. My ticket was stolen out of the head of my cane somewhere between Paris and Alexandria. But I got it all right—got it from the Wilhelmstrasse direct, with orders to report to Doctor Emil Koch, in Alexandria!"

Capper! Capper, who was to be betrayed to the firing squad in Malta, after his Wilhelmstrasse ticket had passed from his possession. Capper on the job!

Woodhouse hurled every foot pound

of his will to hear into his ears. He caught Koch's gruff answer:

"Young man, you're talking madness. You're talking to a loyal British subject. I know nothing about your Wilhelmstrasse or your number. If I did not think you were drunk I'd have you held here, to be turned over to the military as a spy. Now, go before I change my mind."

Again the querulous protestation of Capper, met by the doctor's peremptory order. The captain heard the front door close. A long wait, and Doctor Koch's black beard, with the surmounting eyes of thick glass, appeared at a parting of the folding doors. Woodhouse, the tiny thermometer still sticking absurdly from his mouth, met the basilisk stare of those two ovals of glass with a coldly casual glance. He removed the thermometer from between his lips and read it, with a smile, as if that were part of playing a game. Still the ghastly stare from the glass eyes over the bristling beard, searching—searching.

"Well," Woodhouse said lightly, "no need of an alibi evidently."

Doctor Koch stepped into the room with the lightness of a cat, walked to a desk drawer at one side, and fumbled there a second, his back to his guest. When he turned he held a short-barreled automatic at his hip; the muzzle covered the shirt-sleeved man in the chair.

"Much need—for an alibi—from you!" Doctor Koch croaked, his voice dry and flat with rage. "Much need, Mister Nineteen Thirty-two. Commence your explanation immediately, for this minute my temptation is strong—very strong—to shoot you for the dog you are."

"Is this—ah, customary?" Woodhouse twiddled the tiny mercury tube between his fingers and looked unflinchingly at the small, round mouth of the automatic. "Do you make a prac-

tice of consulting a—friend with a revolver at your hip?"

"You heard—what was said in there!" Koch's forehead was curiously ridged and flushed with much blood.

"Did you ask me to listen? Surely, my dear doctor, you have provided doors that are soundproof. If I may suggest, isn't it about time that you explain this—this melodrama?" The captain's voice was cold; his lips were drawn to a thin line. Koch's big head moved from side to side with a gesture curiously like that of a bull about to charge, but knowing not where his enemy stands. He blurted out:

"For your information, if you did not overhear: An Englishman comes just now to address me familiarly as of the Wilhelmstrasse. He comes to say he was sent to report to me; that his number in the Wilhelmstrasse is nineteen thirty-two—nineteen thirty-two, remember; and I am to give him orders. Please explain that before I pull this trigger."

"He showed you his number—his ticket, then?" Woodhouse added this parenthetically.

"The man said his ticket had been stolen from him some time after he left Paris—stolen from the head of his cane, where he had it concealed. But the number was nineteen thirty-two." The doctor voiced this last doggedly.

"You have, of course, had this man followed," the other put in. "You have not let him leave this house alone."

"Cæsar was after him before he left the garden gate—naturally. But——"

Woodhouse held up an interrupting hand.

"Pardon me, Doctor Koch; did you get this fellow's name?"

"He refused to give it—said I wouldn't know him, anyway."

"Was he an undersized man, very thin, sparse hair, and a face showing

dissipation?" Woodhouse went on. "Nervous, jerky way of talking—fingers to his mouth, as if to feel his words as they come out—brandy or wine breath? Can't you guess who he was?"

"I guess nothing."

"The target!"

At the word Louisa had used in describing Capper to Woodhouse, Koch's face underwent a change. He lowered his pistol.

"Ach!" he said. "The man they are to arrest. And you have the number."

"That was Capper—Capper, formerly of the Belgian office—kicked out for drunkenness. One time he sold out Downing Street in the matter of the Lord Fisher letters; you remember the scandal when they came to light—his majesty, the kaiser's, Kiel speech referring to them. He is a good stalking horse."

Koch's suspicion had left him. Still gripping the automatic, he sat down on the edge of the operating chair, regarding the other man respectfully.

"Come—come, Doctor Koch; you and I cannot continue longer at cross-purposes." The captain spoke with terse displeasure. "This man Capper showed you nothing to prove his claims, yet you come back to this room and threaten my life on the strength of a drunkard's bare word. What his mission is you know; how he got that number, which is the number I have shown you on my ticket from the Wilhelmstrasse—you know how such things are managed. I happen to know, however, because it was my business to know, that Capper left Marseilles for Malta aboard *La Vendée* four days ago; he was not expecting to go beyond Malta."

Koch caught him up: "But the fellow told me his boat didn't stop at Malta—was warned by wireless to proceed at all speed to Alexandria, for

fear of the *Breslau*, known to be in the Adriatic." Woodhouse spread out his hands with a gesture of finality.

"There you are! Capper finds himself stranded in Alexandria, knows somehow of your position as a man of the Wilhelmstrasse—such things cannot be hid from the underground workers; comes here to explain himself to you and excuse himself for the loss of his number. Is there anything more to be said except that we must keep a close watch on him?"

The physician rose and paced the room, his hands clasped behind his back. The automatic bobbed against the tails of his long coat as he walked. After a minute's restless striding, he broke his step before the desk, jerked open the drawer, and dropped the weapon in it. Back to where Woodhouse was sitting he stalked and held out his right hand stiffly.

"Your pardon, Number Nineteen Thirty-two! For my suspicion I apologize. But, you see my position—a very delicate one." Woodhouse rose, grasped the doctor's hand, and wrung it heartily.

"And now," he said, "to keep this fellow Capper in sight until the *Princess Mary* sails and I aboard her as Captain Woodhouse, of Wady Halfa. The man might trip us all up."

"He will not; be sure of that," Koch growled, helping Woodhouse into his coat and leading the way to the folding doors. "I will have Cæsar attend to him the minute he comes back to report where Capper is stopping."

"Until when?" the captain asked, pausing at the gate, to which Koch had escorted him.

"Here to-morrow night at nine," the doctor answered, and the gate shut behind him. Captain Woodhouse, alone under the shadowing trees of Queen's Terrace, drew in a long breath, shook his shoulders, and started for the sta-

tion and the midnight train to Alexandria.

CHAPTER V.

A FERRET ON THE HUNT.

Consider the mental state of Mr. Billy Capper as he sank into a seat on the midnight suburban from Ramleh to Alexandria. Even to the guard, unused to particular observation of his passengers save as to their possible propensity for trying to beat their fares, the bundle of clothes surmounted by a rusty brown bowler which huddled under the sickly light of the second-class carriage bespoke either a candidate for a plunge off the quay or a "bloomer" returning from his was-sailing. But the eyes of the man denied this latter hypothesis; sanity was in them, albeit the merciless sanity which refuses an alternative when fate has its victim pushed into a corner. So submerged was Capper under the flood of his own bitter cogitations that he had not noticed the other two passengers boarding the train at the little tiled station—a tall, quietly dressed white man and a Numidian with a cloak thrown over his white livery. The latter had faded like a shadow into the third-class carriage behind the one in which Capper rode.

Here was Capper—poor old Hard-luck Billy Capper—floored again, and just when the tide of bad fortune was on the turn; so ran the minor strain of self-pity under the brown bowler. A failure once more, and through no fault of his own. No, no! Hadn't he been ready to deliver the goods? Hadn't he come all the way down here from Berlin, faithful to his pledge to Louisa, the girl in the Wilhelmstrasse, ready and willing to embark on that important mission of which he was to be told by Doctor Emil Koch? And what happens? Koch turns him into the street like a dog; threatens to have

him before the military as a spy if he don't make himself scarce. Koch refuses even to admit he'd ever heard of the Wilhelmstrasse. Clever beggar! A jolly, keen eye he's got for his own skin; won't take a chance on being betrayed into the hands of the English, even when he ought to see that a chap's honest when he comes and tells a straight story about losing that silly little bit of paper with his working number on it. What difference if he can't produce the ticket when he has the number pat on the tip of his tongue, and is willing to risk his own life to give that number to a stranger?

Back upon the old perplexity that had kept Capper's brain on strain ever since the first day aboard *La Vendée*—who had lifted his ticket, and when was it done? The man recalled, for the hundredth time, his awakening aboard the French liner—what a horror that first morning was, with the ratty little surgeon feeding a fellow aromatic spirits of ammonia like porridge! Capper, in this mood of detached review, saw himself painfully stretching out his arm from his bunk to grasp his stick the very first minute he was alone in the stateroom; the crooked handle comes off under his turning, and the white wisp of paper is stuck in the hollow of the stick. Blank paper!

Safe as safe could be, had been that little square of paper Louisa had given him with his expense money, from the day he left Berlin until—when? To be sure, he had treated himself to a little of the grape in Paris and, maybe, in Marseilles; but his brain had been clear every minute. Oh, Capper would have sworn to that! The whole business of the disappearance of his Wilhelmstrasse ticket and the substitution of the blank was simply another low trick the Capper luck had played on him.

The train rushed through the dark

toward the distant prickly coral bed of lights, and the whirligig of black despair churned under the brown bowler. No beginning, no end to the misery of it. Each new attempt to force a little light of hope into the blackness of his plight fetched up at the same dead wall—here was Billy Capper, hired by the Wilhelmstrasse, after having been booted out of the secret offices of England and Belgium—given a show for his white alley—and he couldn't move a hand to earn his new salary. Nor could he go back to Berlin, even though he dared return with confession of the stolen ticket; Berlin was no place for an Englishman right now, granting he could get there. No, he was in the backwash again—this time in this beastly half-caste city of Alexandria, and with—how much was it now?—with a beggarly fifteen pounds between himself and the beach.

Out of the ruck of Capper's sad reflections the old persistent call began to make itself heard before ever the train from Ramleh pulled into the Alexandria station. That elusive country of fountains, incense, and rose dreams which can only be approached through the neck of a bottle spread itself before him alluringly, inviting him to forgetfulness. And Capper answered the call.

From the railroad station, he set his course through narrow, villainous streets down to the district on Pharos, where the deep-water men of all the world gather to make vivid the nights of Egypt. Behind him was the faithful shadow, Cæsar, Doctor Koch's man. The Numidian trailed like a panther, slinking from cover to cover, bending his body as the big cat does to the accommodations of the trail's blinds.

Once Capper found himself in a blind alley, turned and strode out of it just in time to bump heavily into the unsuspected pursuer. Instantly a hem of the Numidian's cloak was lifted

to screen his face, but not before the sharp eyes of the Englishman had seen and recognized it. A tart smile curled the corners of Capper's mouth as he passed on down the bazaar-lined street to the Tavern of Thermopylæ, at the next corner. So old Koch was taking precautions, eh? Well, Capper, for one, could hardly blame him; who wouldn't, under the circumstances?

The Tavern of Thermopylæ was built for the Billy Cappers of the world—a place of genial deviltry where every man's gold was better than his name, and no man asked more than to see the color of the stranger's money. Here was gathered as sweet a company of assassins as one could find from Port Said to Honmoku, all gentle to fellows of their craft under the freemasonry of hard liquor. Greeks, Levantines, Liverpool lime-juicers from the Cape, leech-eyed Finns from a Russian's stokehole, tanned ivory runners from the forbidden lands of the African back country—all that made Tyre and Sidon infamous in Old Testament police records was represented there.

Capper called for an absinth dripper and established himself in a deserted corner of the smoke-filled room. There was music, of sorts, and singing; women whose eyes told strange stories, and whose tongues jumped nimbly over three or four languages, offered their companionship to those who needed company with their drink. But Billy Capper ignored the music and closed his ears to the sirens; he knew who was his best cup companion.

The thin, green blood of the wormwood drip-dripped down onto the ice in Capper's glass, coloring it with a rime like moss. He watched it, fascinated, and when he sipped the cold, sickly-sweet liquor he was eager as a child to see how the pictures the absinth drew on the ice had been changed by the draft. Sip—sip; a soothing numbness came to the tortured

nerves. Sip—sip; the clouds of doubt and self-pity pressing down on his brain began to shred away. He saw things clearly now; everything was sharp and clear as the point of an icicle.

He reviewed, with new zest, his recent experiences, from the night he met Louisa in the Café Riche up to his interview with Doctor Koch. Louisa—that girl with the face of a fine animal and a heart as cold as carved amethyst; why had she been so willing to intercede for Billy Capper with her superiors in the Wilhelmstrasse and procure him a number and a mission to Alexandria? For his information regarding the Anglo-Belgian understanding? But she paid for that; the deal was fairly closed with three hundred marks. Did Louisa go farther and list him in the Wilhelmstrasse out of the goodness of her heart, or for old memory's sake? Capper smiled wryly over his absinth. There was no goodness in Louisa's heart, and the strongest memory she had was how nearly Billy Capper had dragged her down with him in the scandal of the Lord Fisher letters.

How the thin, green blood of the wormwood cleared the mind—made it leap to logical reasoning!

Why had Louisa instructed him to leave Marseilles by the steamer touching at Malta when a swifter boat scheduled to go to Alexandria direct was leaving the French port a few hours later? Was it that the girl intended he should get no farther than Malta; that the English there should—

Capper laughed like the philosopher who has just discovered the absolute of life's futility. The ticket—his ticket from the Wilhelmstrasse which Louisa had procured for him; Louisa wanted that for other purposes, and used him as the dummy to obtain it. She wanted it before he could arrive at Malta—and she got it before he left Marseilles. Even Louisa, the wise, had played with-

out discounting the Double O on the wheel—fate's percentage in every game; she could not know the *Vendée* would be warned from lingering at Malta because of the exigency of war, and that Billy Capper would reach Alexandria, after all.

The green logic in the glass carried Capper along with mathematical exactness of deduction. As he sipped, his mind became a thing detached and, looking down from somewhere high above earth, reviewed the blundering course of Billy Capper's body from Berlin to Alexandria—the poor, deluded body of a dupe. With this certitude of logic came the beginnings of resolve. Vague at first and intangible, then, helped by the absinth to focus, was this new determination. Capper nursed it, elaborated upon it, took pleasure in forecasting its outcome, and viewing himself in the new light of a humble hero. It was near morning, and the Tavern of Thermopylæ was well-nigh deserted when Capper paid his score and blundered through the early-morning crowd of mixed races to his hotel. His legs were quite drunk, but his mind was coldly and acutely sober.

"Very drunk, master," was the report Cæsar, the Numidian, delivered to Doctor Koch at the Ramleh villa. The doctor, believing Cæsar to be a competent judge, chuckled in his beard. Cæsar was called off from the trail.

Across the street from Doctor Koch's home on Queen's Terrace was the summer home of a major of fusileers whose station was up the Nile. But this summer it was not occupied. The major had hurried his family back to England at the first mutterings of the great war, and he himself had to stick by his regiment up in the doubtful Sudan country. Like Doctor Koch's place, the major's yard was surrounded by a high wall, over which the fronds of big palms and flowered shrubs draped

themselves. The nearest villa, aside from the Kochs' across the street, was a hundred yards away. At night an arc light, set about thirty feet from Doctor Koch's gate, marked all the road thereabouts with sharp blocks of light and shadow. One lying close atop the wall about the major's yard, screened by the palms and the heavy branches of some night-blooming ghost flower, could command a perfect view of Doctor Koch's gateway without being himself visible.

At least, so Billy Capper found it on the night following his visit to the German physician's and his subsequent communion with himself at the Tavern of Thermopylæ. Almost with the falling of the dark, Capper had stepped off the train at Ramleh station, ferried himself by boat down the canal which passed behind the major's home, after careful reconnoitering, discovered that the tangle of wildwood about the house was not guarded by a watchman, and had so achieved his position of vantage on top of the wall directly opposite the gateway of No. 32. He was stretched flat. Through the spaces between the dry fingers of a palm leaf he could command a good view of the gate and of the road on either side. Few pedestrians passed below him; an automobile or two puffed by; but in the main Queen's Terrace was deserted and Capper was alone. It was a tedious vigil. Capper had no reliance except his instinct of a spy familiar with spy's work to assure that he would be rewarded for his pains. Some sixth sense in him had prompted him to come thither, sure in the promise that the night would not be misspent. A clock somewhere off in the odorous dark struck the hour twice, and Capper fidgeted. The hard stone he was lying on cramped him.

The sound of footsteps on the flagged walk aroused momentary interest. He looked out through his screen of green and saw a tall, well-knit figure of a

man approach the opposite gate, stop, and ring the bell. Instantly Capper tingled with the hunting fever of his trade. In the strong light from the arc he could study minutely the face of the man at the gate—smoothly shaven, slightly gaunt, and with thin lips above a strong chin. It was a striking face—one easily remembered. The gate opened; beyond it Capper saw, for an instant, the white figure of the Numidian; he had bumped into at the alley's mouth. The gate closed on both.

Another weary hour for the ferret on the wall, then something happened which was reward enough for cramped muscles and taut nerves. An automobile purred up to the gate; out of it hopped two men, while a third, tilted over like one drunk, remained on the rear seat of the tonneau. One rang the bell. The two before the gate fidgeted anxiously for it to be opened. Capper paid not so much heed to them as to the half-reclining figure in the machine. It was in strong light. Capper saw, with a leap of his heart, that the man in the machine was clothed in the khaki service uniform of the British army—an officer's uniform he judged by the trimness of its fitting, though he could not see the shoulder straps. The unconscious man was bareheaded and one side of his face was darkened by a broad trickle of blood from the scalp.

When the gate opened, there were a few hurried words between the Numidian and the two who had waited. All three united in lifting an inert figure from the car and carrying it quickly through the gate. Consumed with the desire to follow them into the labyrinth of the doctor's yard, yet daring not, Capper remained plastered to the wall.

Captain Woodhouse, sitting in the consultation room with the doctor, heard the front door open and the scuffle of burdened feet in the hall.

Doctor Koch hopped nimbly to the folding doors and threw them back. First, the Numidian's broad back, then the bent shoulders of two other men, both illy dressed, came into view. Between them they carried the form of a man in officer's khaki. Woodhouse could not check a fluttering of the muscles in his cheeks; this was a surprise to him; the doctor had given no hint of it.

"Good—good!" clucked Koch, indicating that they should lay their burden on the operating chair. "Any trouble?"

"None in the least, Herr Doktor," the larger of the two white men answered. "At the corner of the warehouse near the docks, where it is dark—he was going early to the *Princess Mary*, and—"

"Yes, a tap on the head—so?" Koch broke in, casting a quick glance toward where Captain Woodhouse had risen from his seat. A shrewd, appraising glance it was, which was not lost on Woodhouse. He stepped forward to join the physician by the side of the figure on the operating chair.

"Our man, doctor?" he queried casually.

"Your name sponsor," Koch answered, with a satisfied chuckle; "the original Captain Woodhouse of his majesty's signal service, formerly stationed at Wady Halfa."

"Quite so," the other answered in English. Doctor Koch clapped him on the shoulder.

"Perfect, man! You do the Englishman from the book. It will fool them all."

Woodhouse shrugged his shoulders in deprecation. Koch cackled on, as he began to lay out sponge and gauze bandages on the glass-topped table by the operating chair:

"You see, I did not tell you of this because—well, that fellow Capper's coming last night looked bad; even your explanation did not altogether convince. So I thought we'd have this little sur-

prise for you. If you were an Englishman you'd show it in the face of this—you couldn't help it. Eh?"

"Possibly not," the captain vouchsafed. "But what is your plan, doctor? What are you going to do with this Captain Woodhouse to insure his being out of the way while I am in Gibraltar? I hope no violence—unless necessary."

"Nothing more violent than a violent headache and some fever," Koch answered. He was busy fumbling in the unconscious man's pockets. From the breast pocket of the uniform jacket he withdrew a wallet, glanced at its contents, and passed it to the captain.

"Your papers, captain—the papers of transfer from Wady Halfa to Gibraltar. Money, too. I suppose we'll have to take that, also, to make appearances perfect—robbery following assault on the wharves."

Woodhouse pocketed the military papers in the wallet and laid it down, the money untouched. The two white aids of Doctor Koch, who were standing by the folding doors, eyed the leather folder hungrily. Koch, meanwhile, had stripped off the jacket from the Englishman and was rolling up the right sleeve of his shirt. That done, he brought down from the top of the glass instrument case a wooden rack containing several test tubes, stoppered with cotton. One glass tube he lifted out of the rack and squinted at its clouded contents against the light.

"A very handy little thing—very handy." Koch was talking to himself as much as to Woodhouse. "A sweet little product of the Niam Niam country down in Belgian Kongo. Natives think no more of it than they would of a water fly's bite; but the white man is——"

"A virus of some kind?" the other guessed.

"Of my own isolation," Doctor Koch answered proudly. He scraped the skin on the victim's arm until the blood

came, then dipped an ivory spatula into the tubes of murky gelatine and transferred what it brought up to the raw place in the flesh.

"The action is very quick, and may be violent," he continued. "Our friend here won't recover consciousness for three days, and he will be unable to stand on his feet for two weeks, at least—dizziness, intermittent fever, clouded memory; he'll be pretty sick."

"But not too sick to communicate with others," Woodhouse suggested. "Surely——"

"Maybe not too sick, but unable to communicate with others," Doctor Koch interrupted, with a booming laugh. "This time to-morrow night our friend will be well out on the Libyan Desert, with some ungentle Bedouins for company. He's bound for Fezzan—and it will be a long way home without money. Who knows? Maybe three months."

Very deftly Koch bound up the abrasion on the Englishman's arm with gauze, explaining as he worked that the man's desert guardians would have instructions to remove the bandages before he recovered his faculties. There would be nothing to tell the luckless prisoner more than that he had been kidnaped, robbed, and carried away by tribesmen—a not uncommon occurrence in lower Egypt. Koch completed his work by directing his aids to strip off the rest of the unconscious man's uniform and clothe him in a nondescript civilian garb which Cæsar brought into the consultation room from the mysterious upper regions of the house.

"Exit Captain Woodhouse of the signal service," the smiling doctor exclaimed when the last button of the misfit jacket had been flipped into its buttonhole, "and enter Captain Woodhouse of the Wilhelmstrasse." Turning, he bowed humorously to the lean-faced man beside him. He nodded his head at Cæsar; the latter dived into a

cupboard at the far end of the room and brought out a squat flask and glasses, which he passed around. When the liquor had been poured, Doctor Koch lifted his glass and squinted through it with the air of a gentle satyr.

"Gentlemen, we drink to what will happen soon on the Rock of Gibraltar!" All downed the toast gravely. Then the master of the house jerked his head toward the unconscious man on the operating chair. Cæsar and the two white men lifted the limp body and started with it to the door, Doctor Koch preceding them to open doors. The muffled chug-chugging of the auto at the gate sounded almost at once.

The doctor and Number Nineteen Thirty-two remained together in the consultation room for a few minutes, going over, in final review, the plans which the latter was to put into execution at the great English stronghold on the Rock. The captain looked at his watch, found the hour late, and rose to depart. Doctor Koch accompanied him to the gate, and stood with him for a minute under the strong light from the near-by arc.

"You go direct to the *Princess Mary*?" he asked.

"Direct to the *Princess Mary*," the other answered. "She is scheduled to sail at five o'clock.

"Then God guard you, my friend, on—your great adventure." They clasped hands, and the gate closed behind the doctor.

A shadow skipped from the top of the wall about the major's house across the road. A shadow dogged the footsteps of the tall, well-knit man who strode down the deserted Queen's Terrace toward the tiled station by the tracks. A little more than an hour later, the same shadow flitted up the gangplank of the *Princess Mary* at her berth. When the big P. & O. liner pulled out at dawn, she carried among

her saloon passengers one registered as "C. G. Woodhouse, Capt. Sig. Service," and in her second cabin a "William Capper."

CHAPTER VI.

A FUGITIVE FROM THE CITY OF DREAD.

"No, madam does not know me; but she must see me. Oh, I know she will see me. Tell her, please, it is a girl from New York all alone in Paris who needs her help."

The butler looked again at the card the visitor had given him. Quick suspicion flashed into his tired eyes—the same suspicion that had all Paris mad.

"Ger-son—Mademoiselle Ger-son. That name, excuse me, if I say it—that name ees——"

"It sounds German; yes. Haven't I had that told me a thousand times these last few days?" The girl's shoulders drooped limply, and she tried to smile, but somehow failed. "But it's my name, and I'm an American—been an American twenty-two years. Please—please!"

"Madam the ambassador's wife; she ees overwhelm wiz woark." The butler gave the door an insinuating push. Jane Gerson's patent-leather boot stopped it. She made a quick rummage in her bag, and when she withdrew her hand, a bit of bank paper crinkled in it. The butler pocketed the note with perfect legerdemain, smiled a formal thanks, and invited Jane into the dark, cool hallway of the embassy. She dropped on a skin-covered couch, utterly spent. Hours she had spent moving, foot by foot, in an interminable line, up to a little wicket in a steamship office, only to be told, "Every boat's sold out." Other grilling hours she had passed similarly before the express office, to find, at last, that her little paper booklet of checks was as worthless as a steamship folder. Food even lacked, because the money she offered

was not acceptable. For a week she had lived in the seething caldron that was Paris in war time, harried, buffeted, trampled, and stampeded—a chip on the froth of madness. This day, the third of August, found Jane Gerson summoning the last remnants of her flagging nerve to the supreme endeavor. Upon her visit to the embassy depended everything: her safety, the future she was battling for. But now, with the first barrier passed, she found herself suddenly faint and weak.

“Madam the ambassador’s wife will see you. Come!” The butler’s voice sounded from afar off, though Jane saw the gleaming buckles at his knees very close. The pounding of her heart almost choked her as she rose to follow him. Down a long hall and into a richly furnished drawing-room, now strangely transformed by the presence of desks, filing cabinets, and busy girl stenographers; the click of typewriters and rustle of papers gave the air of an office at top pressure. The butler showed Jane to a couch near the portières and withdrew. From the tangle of desks at the opposite end of the room, a woman with a kindly face crossed, with hand extended. Jane rose, grasped the hand, and squeezed convulsively.

“You are——”

“Yes, my dear, I am the wife of the ambassador. Be seated and tell me all your troubles. We are pretty busy here, but not too busy to help—if we can.”

Jane looked into the sympathetic eyes of the ambassador’s wife, and what she found there was like a draft of water to her parched soul. The elder woman, smiling down into the white face, wherein the large brown eyes burned unnaturally bright, saw a trembling of the lips instantly conquered by a rallying will, and she patted the small hand hearteningly.

“Dear lady,” Jane began, almost as

a little child, “I must get out of Paris, and I’ve come to you to help me. Every other way is closed except through you.”

“So many hundreds like you, poor girl. All want to get back to the home country, and we are so helpless to aid every one.” The lady of the embassy thought, as she cast a swift glance over the slender shoulders and diminutive figure beneath them, that here, indeed, was a babe in the woods. The blatant, self-assured tourist demanding assistance from her country’s representative as a right she knew; also the shifty, sloe-eyed demi-vierge who wanted no questions asked. But such a one as this little person——

“You see, I am a buyer for Hildebrand’s store in New York.” Jane was rushing breathlessly to the heart of her tragedy. “This is my very first trip as buyer, and—and it will be my last unless I can get through the lines and back to New York. I have seventy of the very last gowns from Poiret, from Paquin and Worth—you know what they will mean in the old town back home—and I must—just simply *must* get them through. You understand! With them, Hildebrand can crow over every other gown shop in New York. He can be supreme, and I will be—well, I will be made!”

The kindly eyes were still smiling, and the woman’s heart, which is unchanged even in the breast of an ambassador’s wife, was leaping to the magic lure of that simple word—gowns.

“But—but the banks refuse to give me a cent on my letter of credit. The express office says my checks, which I brought along for incidentals, cannot be cashed. The steamship companies will not sell a berth in the steerage, even, out of Havre or Antwerp or Southampton—everything gobbled up. You can’t get trunks on an aeroplane, or I’d try that. I just don’t know where to

turn, and so I've come to you. You must know some way out."

Jane unconsciously clasped her hands in supplication and, upon her face, flushed now with the warmth of her pleading, was the dawning of hope. It was as if the girl were assured that once the ambassador's wife heard her story, by some magic, she could solve the difficulties. The older woman read this trust, and was touched by it.

"Have you thought of catching a boat at Gibraltar?" she asked. "They are not so crowded; people haven't begun to rush out of Italy yet."

"But nobody will honor my letter of credit," Jane mourned. "And, besides, all the trains south of Paris are given up to the mobilization. Nobody can ride on them but soldiers." The lady of the embassy knit her brows for a few minutes while Jane anxiously scanned her face. Finally she spoke:

"The ambassador knows a gentleman—a large-hearted American gentleman here in Paris—who has promised his willingness to help in deserving cases by advancing money on letters of credit. And with money there is a way—just a possible way—of getting to Gibraltar. Leave your letter of credit with me, my dear; go to the police station in the district where you live and get your pass through the lines, just as a precaution against the possibility of your being able to leave to-night. Then come back here and see me at four o'clock. Perhaps—just a chance——"

Hildebrand's buyer seized the hands of the embassy's lady ecstatically, tumbled words of thanks crowding to her lips. When she went out into the street, the sun was shining as it had not shone for her for a dreary, terrible week.

At seven o'clock that night a big Roman-nosed automobile, long and low and powerful as a torpedo on wheels, pulled up at the door of the American embassy. Two bulky osier baskets

were strapped on the back of its tonneau; in the rear seat were many rugs. A young chap with a sharp, shrewd face—an American—sat behind the wheel.

The door of the embassy opened, and Jane Gerson, swathed in veils, and with a gray duster buttoned tight about her, danced out; behind her followed the ambassador, the lady of the embassy, and a bevy of girls, the volunteer aids of the overworked representative's staff. Jane's arms went about the ambassador's wife in an impulsive hug of gratitude and good-by; the ambassador received a hearty handshake for his "God speed you!" A waving of hands and fluttering of handkerchiefs, and the car leaped forward. Jane Gerson leaned far over the back, and, through cupped hands, she shouted: "I'll paint Hildebrand's sign on the Rock of Gibraltar!"

Over bridges and through outlying faubourgs sped the car until the Barrier was gained. There crossed bayonets denying passage, an officer with a pocket flash pawing over pass and passport, a curt dismissal, and once more the motor purred its speed song, and the lights of the road flashed by. More picket lines, more sprouting of armed men from the dark, and flashing of lights upon official signatures. On the heights appeared the hump-shouldered bastions of the great outer forts, squatting like huge fighting beasts of the night, ready to spring upon the invader. Bugles sounded; the white arms of searchlights swung back and forth across the arc of night in their ceaseless calisthenics; a murmuring and stamping of many men and beasts was everywhere.

The ultimate picket line gained and passed, the car leaped forward with the bound of some freed animal, its twin headlights feeling far ahead the road to the south. Behind lay Paris, the city of dread. Ahead—far ahead,

where the continent is spiked down with a rock, Gibraltar. Beyond that the safe haven from this madness of the millions—America.

Jane Gerson stretched out her arms to the vision and laughed shrilly.

CHAPTER VII.

AT THE HOTEL SPLENIDE.

Mr. Joseph Almer, proprietor of the Hotel Splendide, on Gibraltar's Waterport Street, was alone in his office, busy over his books. The day was August 5th. The night before the cable had flashed word to Colonel Sir George Crandall, governor general of the Rock, that England had hurled herself into the great war. But that was no concern of Mr. Joseph Almer except as it affected the hotel business; admittedly it did bring complications there.

A sleek, well-fed Swiss he was; one whose neutrality was publicly as impervious as the rocky barriers of his home land. A bland eye and a suave professional smile were the ever-present advertisements of urbanity on Joseph Almer's chubby countenance. He spoke with an accent which might have got him into trouble with the English masters of the Rock had they not known that certain cantons in Switzerland occupy an unfortunate contiguity with Germany, and Almer, therefore, was hardly to be blamed for an accident of birth. From a window of his office, he looked out on crooked Waterport Street, where all the world of the Mediterranean shuffled by on shoes, slippers, and bare feet. Just over his desk was the Hotel Splendide's reception room—a sad retreat wherein a superannuated parlor set of worn red plush tried to give the lie to the reflection cast back at it by the dingy, gold-framed mirror over the battered fireplace. Gaudy steamship posters and lithographs of the Sphinx and kindred

tourists' delights were the walls' only decorations. Not even the potted palm, which is the hotel man's cure-all, was there to screen the interior of the office-reception room from the curious eyes of the street, just beyond swinging glass doors. Joseph Almer had taken poetic license with the word "splendide"; but in Gibraltar that is permissible; necessary, in fact. Little there lives up to its reputation save the Rock itself.

It was four in the afternoon. The street outside steamed with heat, and the odors which make Gibraltar a lasting memory were at their prime of distillation. The proprietor of the Splendide was nodding over his books. A light footfall on the boards beyond the desk roused him. A girl with two cigar boxes under her arm slipped, like a shadow, up to the desk. She was dressed in the bright colors of Spain—claret-colored skirt under a broad Romany sash, and with thin, white waist, open at rounded throat. A cheap tortoiseshell comb held her coils of chestnut hair high on her head. Louisa of the Wilhelmstrasse; but not the same Louisa—the sophisticated Louisa of the Café Riche and the Winter Garden. A timid little cigar maker she was, here in Gibraltar.

"Louisa!" Almer's head bobbed up on a suddenly stiffened neck as he whispered her name. She set her boxes of cigars on the desk, opened them, and, as she made gestures to point the worthiness of her wares, she spoke swiftly, and in a half whisper:

"All is as we hoped, Almer. He comes on the *Princess Mary*—a cablegram from Koch just got through to-day. I wanted——"

"You mean——" Almer thrust his head forward in his eagerness, and his eyes were bright beads.

"Captain Woodhouse—our Captain Woodhouse!" The girl's voice trembled in exultation. "And his number

—his Wilhelmstrasse number—is—listen carefully: Nineteen Thirty-two.”

“Nineteen Thirty-two,” Almer repeated, under his breath. Then aloud: “On the *Princess Mary*, you say?”

“Yes; she is already anchored in the straits. The tenders are coming ashore. He will come here, for such were his directions in Berlin.” Louisa started to move toward the street door.

“But you,” Almer stopped her; “the English are making a round-up of suspects on the Rock. They will ask questions—perhaps arrest—”

“Me? No, I think not. Just because I was away from Gibraltar for six weeks and have returned so recently is not enough to rouse suspicion. Haven’t I been Josefa, the cigar girl, to every Tommy in the garrison for nearly a year? No—no, señor; you are wrong. These are the purest cigars made south of Madrid. Indeed, señor.”

The girl had suddenly changed her tone to one of professional wheedling, for she saw three entering the door. Almer lifted his voice angrily:

“Josefa, your mother is substituting with these cigars. Take them back and tell her if I catch her doing this again it means the cells for her.”

The cigar girl bowed her head in simulated fright, sped past the incoming tourists, and lost herself in the shifting crowd on the street. Almer permitted himself to mutter angrily as he turned back to his books.

“You see, mother? See that hotel keeper lose his temper and tongue-lash that poor girl? Just what I tell you—these foreigners don’t know how to be polite to ladies.”

Henry J. Sherman—“yes, sir, of Kewanee, Illynoy”—mopped his bald pink dome and glared truculently at the insulting back of Joseph Almer. Mrs. Sherman, the lady of direct impulses who had contrived to stare Captain Woodhouse out of countenance in the Winter Garden not long back, cast her-

self despondently on the decrepit lounge and appeared to need little invitation to be precipitated into a crying spell. Her daughter Kitty, a winsome little slip, stood behind her, arms about the mother’s neck, and her hands stroking the maternal cheeks.

“There—there, mother; everything’ll come out right,” Kitty vaguely assured Mrs. Sherman, determined to have no eye for the cloud’s silver lining, rocked back and forth on the sofa and gave voice to her woe:

“Oh, we’ll never see Kewanee again. I know it! I know it! With everybody pushing and shoving us away from the steamers—everybody refusing to cash our checks, and all this fighting going on somewhere up among the Belgians—” The lady from Kewanee pulled out the stopper of her grief, and the tears came copiously. Mr. Sherman, who had made an elaborate pretense of studying a steamer guide he found on the table, looked up hurriedly and blew his nose loudly in sympathy.

“Cheer up, mother. Even if this first trip of ours—this ‘Grand Tower,’ as the guidebooks call it—has been sorta tough, we had one compensation anyway. We saw the Palace of Peace at the Hague before the war broke out. Guess they’re leasing it for a skating rink now, though.”

“How can you joke when we’re in such a fix? He-Henry, you ne-neever do take things seriously!”

“Why not joke, mother? Only thing you can do over here you don’t have to pay for. If old Ned Peters could drop in from Kewanee, he’d have us splitting ourselves with that story of the sick mule. Anyway, mother, there’s the *Saxonia* due here from Naples some time soon. Maybe we can horn a way up her gangplank. Consul says—”

Mrs. Sherman looked up from her handkerchief with withering scorn.

“Tell me a way we can get aboard any ship without having the money to

pay our passage. Tell me that, Henry Sherman!"

"Well, we've been broke before, mother," her spouse answered cheerily, rocking himself on heels and toes. "Remember when we were first married and had that little house on Liberty Street—the newest house in Kewanee it was; and we didn't have a hired girl, then, mother. But we come out all right, didn't we?" He patted his daughter's shoulder and winked ponderously. "Come on, girls and boys, we'll go look over those Rock Chambers the English hollowed out. We can't sit in our room and mope all day."

The gentleman who knew Kewanee was making for the door when Almer, the suave, came out from behind his desk and stopped him with a warning hand.

"I am afraid the gentleman cannot see the famous Rock Chambers," he purred. "This is war time—since yesterday, you know. Tourists are not allowed in the fortifications."

"Like to see who'd stop me!" Henry J. Sherman drew himself up to his full five feet seven and frowned at the Swiss. Almer rubbed his hands.

"A soldier—with a gun, most probably, sir."

Mrs. Sherman rose and hurried to her husband's side, in alarm.

"Henry—Henry! Don't you go and get arrested again! Remember that last time—the Frenchman at that Bordeaux town. You were awfully impudent to him." Sherman allowed discretion to soften his valor.

"Well, anyway"—he turned again to the proprietor—"they'll let us see that famous signal tower up on top of the Rock. Mother, they say from that tower up there, they can keep tabs on a ship sixty miles away. Fellow down at the consulate was telling me just this morning that's the king-pin of the whole works. Harbor's full of mines and things; electric switch in the signal

tower. Press a switch up there, and everything in the harbor—Blam!" He shot his hands above his head to denote the cataclysm. Almer smiled sardonically and drew the Illinois citizen to one side.

"I would give you a piece of advice," he said, in a low voice. "It is——"

"Say, proprietor; you don't charge for advice, do you?" Sherman regarded him quizzically.

"It is this," Almer went on, unperturbed: "If I were you, sir, during this time of war, I would not talk much about the fortifications of the Rock. Even talk is—ah—dangerous if too much indulged."

"Can't talk, eh?" Sherman snapped. "Can't get our letter of credit honored; can't get a ticket home; can't talk. Say, my friend, I know some people back home in Kewanee, Illynoy, who'd hear that 'bout not talking and just curl up their toes and die. But maybe——"

Interruption came startlingly. A sergeant and three soldiers with guns swung through the open doors from Waterport Street. Gun butts struck the floor with a heavy thud. The sergeant stepped forward and saluted Almer with a businesslike sweep of hand to visor.

"See here, landlord!" the sergeant spoke up briskly. "Fritz, the barber, lives here, does he not?" Almer nodded. "We want him. Find him in the barber shop, eh?"

The sergeant turned and gave directions to the guard. They tramped through a swinging door by the side of the desk while the Shermans, parents and daughter alike, looked on, with round eyes. In less than a minute, the men in khaki returned, escorting a quaking man in white jacket. The barber, greatly flustered, protested in English strongly reminiscent of his fatherland.

"Orders to take you, Fritz," the sergeant explained, not unkindly.

"But I haf done nothing," the barber cried. "For ten years I haf shaved you. You know I am a harmless old German." The sergeant shrugged.

"I fancy they think you are working for the Wilhelmstrasse, Fritz, and they want to have you where they can keep eyes on you. Sorry, you know."

The free-born instincts of Henry J. Sherman would not be downed longer. He had witnessed the little tragedy of the German barber with growing ire, and now he stepped up to the sergeant truculently.

"Seems to me you're not giving Fritz here a square deal, if you want to know what I think," he blustered. "Now, in my country——" The sergeant turned on him sharply.

"Who are you—and what are you doing in Gib?" he snapped. A moan from Mrs. Sherman, who threw herself in her daughter's arms.

"Kitty, your father's went and got himself arrested again!"

"Who am I?" Sherman echoed, with dignity. "My name, young fellow, is Henry J. Sherman, and I live in Kewanee, Illynoy. I'm an American citizen, and you can't——"

"Your passports—quick!" The sergeant held out his hand imperiously.

"Oh, that's all right, young fellow; I've got 'em, all right." Kewanee's leading light began to fumble in the spacious breast pocket of his long-tailed coat. As he groped through a packet of papers and letters, he kept up a running fire of comment and exposition:

"Had 'em this afternoon, all right. Here; no, that's my letter of credit. It would buy Main Street at home, but I can't get a ham sandwich on it here. This is—no; that's my only son's little girl, Emmaline, taken the day she was four years old. Fancy little girl, eh? Now, that's funny I can't—here's that list of geegaws I was to buy for my partner in the Empire Mills, flour and buckwheat. Guess he'll have to whistle

for 'em. Now don't get impatient, young fellow. This—— Land's sakes, mother, that letter you gave me to mail in Algy-kiras—— Ah, here you are, all proper and scientific enough as passports go, I guess."

The sergeant whisked the heavily creased document from Sherman's hand, scanned it hastily, and gave it back, without a word. The outraged American tucked up his chin and gave the sergeant glare for glare.

"If you ever come to Kewanee, young fellow," he snorted, "I'll be happy to show you our new jail."

"Close in! March!" commanded the sergeant. The guard surrounded the hapless barber and wheeled through the door, their guns hedging his white jacket about inexorably. Sherman's hands spread his coat tails wide apart, and he rocked back and forth on heels and toes, his eyes smoldering. He knew the American eagle, as represented by Henry J. Sherman, of Kewanee, Illynoy, had bluffed the British lion to a whisper.

"Come on, father"—Kitty had slipped her hand through her dad's arm, and was imparting direct strategy in a low voice—"we'll take mother down the street to look at the shops and make her forget our troubles. They've got some wonderful Moroccan bazaars in town; Baedeker says so."

"Shops, did you say?" Mrs. Sherman perked up at once, forgetting her grief under the superior lure.

"Yes, mother. Come on, let's go down and look 'em over." Sherman's good humor was quite restored. He pinched Kitty's arm in compliment for her guile. "Maybe they'll let us look at their stuff without charging anything; but we couldn't buy a postage stamp, remember."

They sailed out into the crowded street and lost themselves amid the scourings of Africa and south Europe. Almer was alone in the office.

The proprietor fidgeted. He walked to the door and looked down the street in the direction of the quays. He pulled his watch from his pocket and compared it with the blue face of the Dutch clock on the wall. His pudgy hands clasped and unclasped themselves behind his back nervously. An Arab hotel porter and runner at the docks came swinging through the front door with a small steamer trunk on his shoulders, and Almer started forward expectantly. Behind the porter came a tall, well-knit man dressed in quiet traveling suit—the Captain Woodhouse who had sailed from Alexandria as a passenger aboard the *Princess Mary*.

He paused for an instant as his eyes met those of the proprietor. Almer bowed and hastened behind the desk. Woodhouse stepped up to the register and scanned it casually.

"A room, sir?" Almer held out a pen invitingly.

"For the night, yes," Woodhouse answered shortly, and he signed the register. Almer's eyes followed the strokes of the pen eagerly.

"Ah, from Egypt, captain? You were aboard the *Princess Mary*, then?"

"From Alexandria, yes. Show me my room, please. Beastly tired."

The Arab porter darted forward, and Woodhouse was turning to follow him when he nearly collided with a man just entering the street door. It was Mr. Billy Capper.

Both recoiled as their eyes met. Just the faintest flicker of surprise, instantly suppressed, tightened the muscles of the captain's jaws. He murmured a "Beg pardon" and started to pass. Capper deliberately set himself in the other's path and, with a wry smile, held out his hand.

"Captain Woodhouse, I believe."

Capper put a tang of sarcasm, corroding as acid, into the words. He was still smiling. The other man drew back and eyed him coldly.

"I do not know you. Some mistake," Woodhouse said.

Almer was moving around from behind the desk with the soft tread of a cat, his eyes fixed upon the hard-bitten face of Capper.

"Hah! Don't recognize the second-cabin passengers aboard the *Princess Mary*, eh?" Capper sneered. "Little bit discriminating that way, eh? Well, my name's Capper—Mr. William Capper. Never heard the name—in Alexandria; what?"

"You are drunk. Stand aside!" Woodhouse spoke quietly; his face was very white and strained. Almer launched himself suddenly between the two and laid his hands roughly on Capper's thin shoulders.

"Out you go!" he choked, in a thick guttural. "I'll have no loafer insulting guests in my house."

"Oh, you won't, eh? But supposing I want to take a room here—pay you good English gold for it. You'll sing a different tune, then."

"Before I throw you out, kindly leave my place." By a quick turn, Almer had Capper facing the door; his grip was iron. The smaller man tried to walk to the door with dignity. There he paused and looked back over his shoulder.

"Remember, Captain Woodhouse," he called back. "Remember the name against the time we'll meet again. Capper—Mr. William Capper."

Capper disappeared. Almer came back to begin profuse apologies to his guest. Woodhouse was coolly lighting a cigarette. Their eyes met.

TO BE CONTINUED IN THE JULY 23RD ISSUE.

B a t S h y

By Foxhall Williams

Author of "The Serpent," "The Politician," Etc.

Two men to interest you in this baseball story: one of them a pitcher as popular with the ball players as the well-known Charles W. Horse; the other a man who was "beaned" and became bat shy and the shining mark of every pitcher in every league he touched in his swift descent of the ladder of professional baseball.

THE Eagles didn't get Benson in the draft. They bought him for real money, which meant that some scout Barney Helfrick trusted thought he was pretty good. And, for a busher, he was. When he joined the club in the South the next spring he looked like one of those rare birds—a rookie with a real chance to make good. He was an outfielder, which wasn't in his favor, because the Eagles were pretty well fixed in the outfield. But he was good enough to get a real chance, and he hadn't been in camp a week before every one knew that he and Pete Barnes would fight it out for one of the utility outfield jobs. Barnes was a sort of semiregular, and had what call there was, but every one liked Benson, from Barney down to the trainer. Every one except Doc Marshall.

Doc Marshall was by way of being the greatest pitcher in the game at that time. He'd come up quickly, and he was right at the height of his fame. It was a good thing for him that he was, too, because if he hadn't been a wonderful pitcher he couldn't have lasted a month with the Eagles or any other big-league club. He wasn't a bad

actor; he didn't drink, or anything like that. And he wasn't what ball players call a nut, either. He was just the king of all the crabs. When he was pitching and some one made an error he would hold it against him for a week, and he always acted as if a man muffed a ball or made a wild throw with the idea of making him lose a game. When he was beaten—and it really didn't happen very often—he would never admit it was his own fault or even keep quiet about it. He prepared his alibis as he went along.

He was about as popular with the ball players as the well-known Charles W. Horse naturally. But the Eagles stood for him because he won games, and the fans, of course, didn't have to associate with him. They only saw him working. And he was worth going a long way to see. So he became a popular idol, and got paid for signing testimonials for soft drinks and smoking tobacco, and for letting newspapers advertise that he wrote baseball for them.

The year that Benson came up for his trial with the Eagles Marshall and some of the other veteran pitchers boiled out at Hot Springs, in Arkansas, and went down to Florida from there

to join the big squad. Maybe it was finding that there was a lot of talk about Benson going on when he got to camp that set Marshall against him; maybe it was just that he had a liking for Pete Barnes. Pete didn't reciprocate the feeling particularly, but he got along better with Marshall than any one else on the club could. But that was because Pete was one of those easy-going, good-natured souls who always can get along with every one.

Anyhow, Marshall began sneering at Benson as soon as he saw him. He went out to the ball field the day he reported, and started in.

"That's a hitter!" he said. "Say, wail till he runs up against some real pitching!"

Benson's strong point, you see, was that he was a natural hitter. He wasn't a finished ball player. He had all sorts of things to learn. But he could hit. That had been born in him. It was true enough that he hadn't struck much real pitching yet. The youngsters were taking all sorts of chances with their arms, of course, trying to make a hit with Barney, and they were curving them over, and putting steam into their pitching, too. But the veterans who hadn't gone to Hot Springs had been taking things mighty easy, just lobbing the ball over gently. They knew that a team goes South to get into condition, not to play mid-season ball. And yet, discounting all that, every one on the club, and the baseball reporters, too, had spotted Benson for a man who was going to be a hitter. One of that sort comes along about once every two or three years, and the old-timers can usually pick them.

But Doc Marshall thought he knew more baseball than any one on the club, and he stuck to it that Benson would quit hitting as soon as he faced some good curve-ball pitching—meaning his own. He wouldn't take any chances. He worked out with old Ramsay every

day, and when a nice hot one came along he told Barney he was ready to pitch a few innings. So he went in against the Yannigans, and he grinned maliciously, because Barney put Benson in the clean-up place on the Yannigan batting order—meaning that he batted fourth.

Marshall didn't bother with the first three men. He didn't have to. His reputation scared them, and he just tossed up the ball. Two of them struck out; the third, taking a wild swing, sent a ball rolling down to third so slowly that Syd Deane, on the bumpy Florida diamond, couldn't get it to first in time for the play. Then Benson came up, grinning cheerfully. He wasn't afraid of Marshall, and his manner showed it.

"Careful now," warned Marshall. "You don't want to crowd the plate—not when I'm pitching!"

Benson only grinned. And Marshall pitched his first good ball. Benson still grinned, and let it go by, and Barney Helfrick couldn't hide his smile as it broke a foot wide of the plate. Any other recruit on the club would have swung at that ball, coming up as if it would cut the plate. Marshall grunted, and started to cut the corners. But Benson still stood there, grinning, and waited for a ball he could hit. He got it, and Marshall swore as he drove it over Deane's head—a screaming liner that went to the left-field fence for a triple.

"Pretty lucky!" he said, when he had fanned the next man, and passed Benson, on his way to the bench.

"The lucky stiff! Any one's liable to get a hit like that!" he said, when he faced the volley of sarcasm from the other regulars.

But even Marshall stopped talking about luck when Benson got two more hits. Not because he wanted to, but because the rest of the team howled him down.

"All right!" he said savagely. "Just the same, I'll show him up!"

Benson wouldn't have been human if he hadn't enjoyed his triumph. Perhaps it would sound better to say that he took his success against the greatest pitcher in the game modestly, but it wouldn't be true. He talked back to Marshall the next time he faced him, and had the pleasure of seeing that famous star grind his teeth. And, of course, from the moment that Marshall really lost his temper, he was at Benson's mercy. Against the rest of the club he was just as effective as he had ever been, but Benson hit him freely—and hit every other pitcher just as freely, too. Day by day it became more certain that he would be the one to stay, and that Pete Barnes would have to go.

And then, one afternoon when Benson had, as usual, hit Marshall at will, the accident happened. Marshall did what he had done a score of times before; shot in a high ball that seemed to be aimed straight at Benson's head. It was pitched with all of Marshall's terrific speed. But Benson knew that ball of old, and didn't duck. He knew what would happen. The ball would curve down just before it reached the plate, and, while it would be a strike, it was a hard ball to hit. Better let it go by. Only—it didn't go by. It didn't break. It struck Benson on the side of the head, and he dropped as an ox does under the poleax.

An accident? What else could you call it? Marshall was a crab, but the fact that a man is a crab doesn't justify one in accusing him of murder. And it was just by chance that that ball didn't kill Benson. Only one man knew whether it had been meant to break, and that was Marshall himself.

Benson got over it. He was up and around in a couple of days, thanks to various circumstances that the doctors had involved and technical names for.

But—he wasn't a hitter any more. That blow had made him bat shy. Now a man who has been hit on the head by a fast ball is often affected so. Sometimes he gets over it; sometimes he doesn't. When a regular player, with a contract and a reputation, has such an experience, his club gives him time, as a rule, to overcome the trouble. Barney Helfrick couldn't do that for Benson. He had to remember the league rule limiting him to twenty-five men, and he couldn't take a chance on Benson's recovery. So Pete Barnes stayed with the Eagles, and Benson went to a minor-league club.

The incident didn't add to Marshall's unpopularity with the team, because it couldn't. And, after a while, it was forgotten. So was Benson. For a time Barney Helfrick kept in touch with him. But that became difficult. For Benson didn't get over that beaming. For him the days of joyous, carefree hitting seemed to be over. He pulled away from the plate; he ducked fast balls. And he became a shining mark for every pitcher in every league he touched in his swift descent of the ladder of professional baseball.

He touched bottom after a while. He stuck to playing baseball as long as he could, even when he reached a league where he got forty dollars a month, because he didn't know what else to do. And he didn't care much, either. He wasn't light-hearted any more and cheerful. His grin had vanished with his hitting, and he just lived from day to day.

In the off season, when there wasn't any baseball, he did odd jobs of one sort and another, and he drifted out to the coast finally, where the baseball season is very long and there are many little trolley leagues in which he could still get a job. For, aside from his hitting, two years of sliding downhill had made him, somehow, a much better all-around ball player than he

had been when he had his try-out with the Eagles.

He could field better; he was faster on the bases. And he eked out his batting by a sort of cleverness. Once the pitchers discovered his weakness his days in any league were numbered, he knew. And so he tried to hide it from them, and grew wise in many ways.

Even on the coast, though, he exhausted his baseball opportunities at last. And for a while he saw bad days, and many of them. Odd jobs were few and hard to get. And so Billy Hughes and the Monarch Studio came as a godsend to him. He drifted in idly one morning when Billy, for a wonder, was looking for more extra people than had turned up. And so, before he quite knew what he was doing, he was one of a crowd of supers performing evolutions before the camera. He had the trick of doing exactly what he was told; he was quick, and he happened to have the right sort of face. And the idea of being paid for anything so easy tickled him so that his old grin that would have become famous had he stayed with the Eagles reappeared. Billy Hughes nailed him after the day's work was over.

"Say—you going to stay in town?" he inquired.

"I dunno—why?" asked Benson.

"Oh, nothing—except I can probably use you two or three days a week. Give me your name and address. Or—show up here every morning, if you like, and see if you're wanted."

So Benson became an actor. He liked it. It appealed to the instinct that was in him to show himself, to be applauded, which baseball had satisfied so fully in the old days. Of course, he didn't hear the applause. That was all released for the benefit of an insensate strip of celluloid, and most of it was for the leading people, anyhow. But it was better than nothing. And there

was the money, too. It wasn't much, but it wasn't long before he was a regular, on a small salary—and it was bigger pay, at that, than most of his final baseball jobs had netted him.

He did all sorts of things in front of that clicking camera. He played small parts once in a while, and sometimes Billy Hughes told him he wasn't so rotten but that he might be worse. And he was a fine wheel horse in a big mob scene. He could lead a bunch of extra people and save Hughes a good deal of work. Altogether, by the time he had been working for the Monarch films about six months he was quite an actor, in his small way, and he was getting thirty-five dollars a week. Also, he had an interest in life again, and he braced up wonderfully. Sometimes he talked about his baseball days, but he was reticent when people asked him questions.

"Oh, I don't know," he would say, when they wanted to know why he had quit the game. And he would never talk about his try-out with the Eagles. That was the dark spot in his life, and he wanted to forget it. He couldn't, though. How could he forget about that blow on the head when every trolley car had a picture of Doc Marshall boosting something?

Then the Eagles came out to the coast for their spring training. Barney Helfrick was tired of Florida; the weather hadn't been right there for a couple of seasons, and there was a chance to pick up some real money for exhibition games, too. Benson pricked up his ears when he read that the Eagles were coming. He wanted to see them, and he didn't. But they were to train at a town a hundred miles or so from his stamping ground, so he decided he was safe. He didn't allow for Billy Hughes and the enterprise of the movies.

Hughes disappeared mysteriously a day or two after the Eagles reached

their camp. And when he came back he hunted for Benson. He was smiling when he began to talk, too.

"Say, Jim," he said, "I want you to wise me up on this baseball stuff. We're going to do a baseball feature, see? And I want to make a picture that'll go down with the fans. I don't want to pull any stuff that'll have them laughing. It's got to be straight, inside stuff. So you can come and hold my hand while I get up the scenario."

So Benson became an assistant scenario editor and property man. He laid out a diamond, and he went into Los Angeles with the regular props and bought a supply of bats and balls and other paraphernalia of the national game. And he invented some real baseball situations that Billy Hughes could work into his scenario, which, in other respects, was a perfectly conventional photo play.

"This is going to be some knock-out!" said Billy, with enthusiasm. "Of course that big stiff can't do the love scenes and the drama, but we'll double him for those. And when he gets out there in the box in the ninth and fans the side with three men on the bases maybe the fans won't tear the roof off some theaters! Oh, no! I guess this is going to be bad!"

Billy got more and more interested in the picture as he went on. He always did with every feature film he made, and that was one of the reasons for the way Monarch films made good. A good director always is enthusiastic.

"This is a big chance for you, too, Jim," he said to Benson. "If you make good in this film I can get you a raise maybe. You're the villain, and it's a fat part."

But though he'd had so much to do with getting the stuff ready for the picture, Benson didn't know much about it. Hughes didn't believe in letting actors know the story. When he was ready to make a scene he told them

what to do, and they did it. If they wanted to know what it was all about they waited until they saw the whole film on the screen. But, even so, Jim might have guessed what was coming. He might have known that there was only one star on the coast worth featuring in a big film—and that that star was Doc Marshall. When he found out he was about ready to quit.

"I wouldn't work with that big mucker on a bet!" he protested. "Say, Billy, he played a low-down trick on me once—you wouldn't ask me to stand for him?"

"Listen!" said Billy Hughes. "You got to work—that's all! Everything's ready. The Eagles go East to-morrow, and he's coming over to-day—it's the only chance we've got to get him, see? We've got to do some hustling to get all the baseball scenes in, anyhow. And I haven't got any one but you to shove in there. You're a ball player and an actor, too—see? And if you throw me down on this you can go get your time!"

There was something convincing about that argument. And Jim Benson was still easy-going and good-natured.

"Oh, all right!" he said finally. "He's probably forgotten about me by this time, anyhow. Any of the other boys coming over?"

"Oh, Barney Helfrick's going to be in one or two scenes. The rest of them are playing exhibition games."

It was a busy day, just as Hughes had predicted. Doc Marshall was a great pitcher, but nature hadn't cut him out for an actor. He had to rehearse every scene he was in about six times, and at that he spoiled more film than Hughes had wasted in three months before. Billy's scenario had him in all the stages of his baseball career; one scene showed him pitching for a college team; another getting his first trial in the big league, and so on.

The story was about the high-souled college pitcher, who signed a big-league contract to get money to save his sweetheart's father from going into bankruptcy. The villain—this, remember, was Benson—held a note, or a mortgage or something, and he wanted the great pitcher to fall down so that he could get the girl by threatening to foreclose. It was one of those stories that always have been popular. But there was a big punch at the finish to carry it over, and they got to that scene at last—leaving all the preliminary stuff to be done later, with an actor made up to look like Doc Marshall.

"Ninth inning, see?" said Billy. "Howling crowd in the bleachers. Three men on the bases—visiting team one run to the good. Nobody out. The manager tells the pitcher that if he makes good he gets a contract—and if he doesn't he gets the gate. That'll be an insert. The first two men up strike out. Then you come up, Jim. You want to register hate and determination just as hard as you can—see? He pitches to you and you try hard to hit it safe—but you can't. You strike out on the third pitched ball. Then the crowd runs down and carries Marshall off the field, see? And Irma'll be waiting at the clubhouse gate. Some scene!"

"Uh-huh!" said Benson disgustedly. "Regular grand-stand stuff—he ought to be good at it."

Marshall had been too busy to notice any one but Hughes very much. But once or twice he had looked at Benson curiously. And now, all at once, he remembered him. He was talking to Barney Helfrick when Benson passed, with a scowl, and he called to him.

"Sa-ay—you're Benson, ain't you?" he asked. "Quit baseball, have you?"

"Sure," said Benson cockily. "I could do something else. I'm luckier than some folks'll be when they get through."

"Well, you want to remember not to crowd the plate," said Marshall. "I wouldn't want to bean you again."

Benson choked on his reply, and went on hurriedly. But Helfrick caught up and stopped him, with a friendly hand on his shoulder.

"Glad you're making good here," he said. "Tough luck, though—you'd have been a grand ball player. Couldn't get over the effect of that wallop, eh?"

"No," said Benson honestly. "I've backed away from a high, fast ball ever since."

"Come on—come on!" shouted Hughes. He glanced up. "Light's getting bad—looks as if we'd have just about time to finish this. This is just baseball—we don't need a rehearsal. Batter up!"

The first batter took his place. He was one of the local nine, impressed for the day, and fanning against Doc Marshall was easy for him. He took three swings, and went back to the bench, trailing his bat. So did the next man. And then Benson came up, swinging three bats, and registering malice and hate and rage and grim determination—all of which he felt.

"That's the stuff!" said Hughes delightedly. "Marshall—look as if this was a real game and you had to strike this guy out! Not so confident—you're not supposed to be a great pitcher yet! Yeh—that's better! Now—talk to one another! Call him down hard, Jim!"

They obeyed that order to the letter. They said things, as they faced one another, that made Billy Hughes hope there would be no lip readers on the censoring committee that passed the film.

Then Marshall, with all his famous grace and ease, slipped over a fast, straight ball that cut the heart of the plate. It took real skill for Benson to swing over it—which he did because Hughes had explained that each strike had to be registered by a wild swing.

"Come on—pitch!" sneered Benson. "A baby could have hit that!"

The next was a real curve, a beauty, and again Benson swung. Again he missed, too. And then, taking plenty of time, Marshall pitched the third and last ball. As he wound up the three base runners started at full speed; that was a point Benson had thought of. And Benson set himself for a mighty effort. All at once he saw what the ball was—the old, high, fast ball, aimed for his head, that should break and drop over the plate. The sight of it aroused every bit of the primitive man in him. His whole body cried out for vengeance on that ball and the man who had pitched it. He saw Marshall's triumphant grin. And then, swayed only by a primal impulse, he stepped out, met the ball before it could break, and drove it into the right-field bleachers!

Instinctively he flung his bat away and raced for first. Above the clamor of the crowd, which had forgotten, in the thrill of that mighty blow, about the picture, he heard a strident voice—the voice of Billy Hughes. He realized suddenly what he had done. And when he touched first he didn't turn. He swung out widely and raced toward the distant fence behind which the clubhouse was supposed to be—which was just what he would have done had it been a real game.

He won the race with Hughes and the pursuing crowd by a good margin, tore past the astonished Irma Morice, the Monarch's leading woman, who was waiting to greet the conquering hero, with an extra camera to make the scene, and reached the open country beyond the fence.

He knew what he had done. He was enough of a movie actor for that, though, for that one fatal moment, he had forgotten, and had imagined himself a ball player again. And he didn't want to see Billy Hughes again for a

long, long time. He had spoiled at least three hundred feet of film; the chances were that he had queered the whole picture, because it was too dark to retake the whole scene, and Marshall had to go east the next morning. And so he kept on running, as a man who has stolen a purse runs when he hears the cry of "Stop thief!"

But he couldn't run forever in a baseball uniform. He had to go to his room to change into other clothes—he was prepared to sacrifice the part of his wardrobe that was still in the dressing room at the studio. And even a slow automobile will beat the fastest runner. So he found Billy Hughes waiting for him. Billy was smoking a cigarette, and he seemed reasonably cheerful.

"Hello!" he said. "You made pretty good time. Run all the way?"

"Uh-huh!" panted Benson, wondering why he still lived.

"Some clout!" said Billy, puffing at his cigarette. "What d'ye run for?"

Benson found his voice.

"Say, I'm sorry, Billy," he said. "Honest I am! I didn't go to hit that ball. It just sort of came over me. I couldn't help it. You see—he beamed me with a ball just like that once. That was why I quit playing baseball—and——"

"Tell me about that," said Billy, greatly interested. So he heard the story.

"Fine!" he said. "That's the hunch I was looking for. We'll just switch the parts around, see! You'll be the hero. We'll do some double-exposure stuff on the baseball scenes we made to-day—and that last scene'll be better than it ever thought of being the way I had it doped."

It took more explanations to make Benson understand. But when at last he did, he grinned widely.

"Say—what'll Doc say?" he inquired.

"I don't know," said Billy, unsmiling. "He said quite some after you'd—left us. But I wouldn't want to repeat that, either. I'm supposed to be a pretty rough talker, but I'm not in his class."

Doc Marshall threatened to get an injunction against the showing of that film. But he couldn't do a thing about it. It was the biggest success the Monarch had ever had, and there was a fat bonus for Benson. But there was more than that. For one of the men who saw the picture and heard the inside story of it from Barney Helfrick was Terry Magee, of the Blues. He

didn't hesitate. He wired to Benson the day he heard the story. And two weeks later Benson was in the outfield of the Blues on a day when they were playing the Eagles, with Doc Marshall in the box. He only got three hits, because Marshall had been batted out before he came up for the fourth time, and Trumbull, under orders from Barney Helfrick, gave him a pass.

"All he needed was a hair of the dog that bit him!" said Terry triumphantly, as he walked across the field with Barney. "He'll never be bat shy again!"



MR. TANNENBAUM'S GENEROSITY

WHEN Jake Tannenbaum was manager of the Mobile Theater he had at one time a box-office boy named Willie. Willie enjoyed Jake's favor for a long time, but at last the manager got wise to the fact that the box-office boy was loafing on his job. This worried Tannenbaum, and he called him.

"How much are you getting every week from me?" asked Mr. Tannenbaum suavely.

"Ten dollars," answered Willie.

"That's not enough," commented Jake, with real solicitude. "I raise your salary right away. Hereafter you get twelve dollars."

At the end of the next week Willie was summoned again into the managerial presence.

"Willie," Jake inquired benevolently, "how much are you getting from me each week in real money?"

"Twelve dollars," responded Willie.

"That's not enough," commented Jake, with real solicitude. "Hereafter you get fourteen."

This went on for two more weeks, Willie being raised finally to eighteen dollars. At the end of the fifth week the office boy, who was learning to expect a raise every week, stood once more before the manager.

"Willie," Jake put his usual question, "how much money do you get from me each week?"

"Eighteen dollars," replied Willie.

"Is that so?" commented Tannenbaum cheerfully. "Well, it's eighteen more than you get hereafter. You're fired!"

Willie's eyes began to bulge, and a lump that was a fine imitation of a Rugby football began to interfere with his enunciation. Finally, however, he was able to inquire:

"But, Mr. Tannenbaum, if you intended to fire me, why did you raise my salary so often?"

"That's easy," said Jake grimly. "I did it so as to make it harder for you."



THE SHERMAN ACT AND THE LAW MERCHANT

WHAT every lawyer knows is that a big per cent of all the laws passed by the various State legislatures and Congress are a little bit worse than worthless. As a lawmaker, we can think of only Moses as an unqualified success. It seems as if good and effective laws were beyond the power of any individual.

We have a big, valuable body of law—"the perfection of human wisdom" it has been called—but it wasn't made. It grew, like other strong and natural things. It was built up not out of the theories of any individual, but out of the experiences and judgment of thousands of men through centuries of strife and litigation. One considerable section of this common law which came down to us used to be known as the "Law Merchant." It was a code of commercial ethics, built up by the great traders and financiers of the world. The merchants of the Hansa towns, the seafaring traders of England and the Mediterranean, even those who went east in caravans, and made Cracow and Warsaw commercial centers in their day, knew this law, and traded according to its code. Commerce and finance do not change so much through the centuries. The same ambitions dominate men, and the same stratagems and devices are used to further them. The Law Merchant was a body of laws built out of human customs and human character. Largely through the influence of Lord Mansfield it became a part of the English common law some two hundred years ago.

Since that time, probably the most radical thing that happened in the line of commercial law was the Sherman Anti-Trust Law. It was a brand-new effort to establish rules for doing business in the biggest commercial commonwealth of the world. After the Sherman bill became a law the Supreme Court of the United States was called upon to decide as to its interpretation. Should it be interpreted according to the Law Merchant, or should it be interpreted literally? By a majority of one—five against four—the court decided in favor of literal interpretation. Very few people pretend to think that the prosecutions under this law have worked any particular good to the community. Henry D. Estabrook, a well-known Republican as well as a prominent lawyer, describes the decision of the supreme court as "one of its few colossal blunders."

Successive administrations in Washington would, we think, if they spoke plainly, be inclined to agree with Mr. Estabrook. Whether Taft, Roosevelt, or Wilson sits in the White House, the Sherman law rumbles along in its ponderous and expensive course. Long suits to force people to compete with each other, tedious efforts to unscramble eggs that simply won't unscramble—this is what the Sherman law gives us. Mr. Estabrook has described the act as a "blight on enterprise," and there are many who feel grateful to him for the words.

THE WORLD'S GREATEST CHARITY

THE greatest charitable undertaking in the history of the world, likewise the biggest commissary enterprise ever known, has been in progress since the first of last November. It is the feeding of 7,000,000 Belgians made destitute by the misfortunes of war. The foodstuffs and clothing are drawn from collection centers in the United States from 3,000 to 8,000 miles distant from the centers of distribution. Up to the middle of last January, fourteen ships, carrying more than 60,000 tons of foodstuffs and a vast quantity of clothing, had been dispatched from the United States to Rotterdam. At that time a total of forty-four ships were under charter for this service, and the value of the donations by the American people had approximated more than \$20,000,000.

When the war began, Belgium had 8,000,000 inhabitants. Of these, about 1,000,000 fled across the frontiers into Holland or France, or across the Channel to England, or were killed or taken prisoners. The seven-eighths of the population that remained speedily became destitute. The first efforts at their relief were through the American minister to Belgium, the American ambassadors to England and Germany, and the department of state at Washington. This resulted in a steamer with 2,500 tons of foodstuffs being dispatched from London to Rotterdam. On October 31st, the chairman of the Belgian Relief Commission, which had been organized by Americans in London, sent a stirring appeal to the United States for help. The British and French were under such strain that they could do little, and these nations, together with the Dutch, also had nearly a million refugees on their hands. The American newspapers also published a message from the King of Belgium, written under fire on the battle line in Flanders.

The first response to these appeals was almost immediate. Pending the organization of a systematic campaign, the Rockefeller Foundation loaded and dispatched a steamer about November 4th, with a cargo of 3,533 tons of foodstuffs. In December, the Foundation sent two more cargoes, the total value of its contributions amounting to more than \$1,000,000.

The Commission for Relief in Belgium was formed in the early days of November, and, coöperating with many other agencies, began the systematic collection and distribution of supplies, which has since extended to every part of the United States. Assembling depots were established and forwarding agents were appointed in every State in the Union. Arrangements were made to receive shipments at the principal seaports of the country. State after State collected and sent one or more shiploads, until practically every commonwealth in America was thus represented in this gigantic charity.

The ships go to Rotterdam, in Holland. Thence the food supplies are car-

ried by barges, by two canal routes, into Belgium. At certain points there are control stations, like the block signals on a railway. Every boat is numbered, and kept track of straight through to Brussels, which is the principal distributing point for Belgium. So perfect is the system of checks that has been devised that every pound of food is accounted for until it is consumed. The commission's distributing agencies in Belgium cook or otherwise prepare the food before it is given out in the form of rations, which consist of ten ounces of bread and a pint of soup per day per person, together with a little coffee and salt. Every Belgian is given a card like a meal ticket, which is duly punched when he receives a ration.

As the principal executives in charge of this work give their services free, and as many railroads carry shipments without charge, this great undertaking comes nearer delivering one hundred cents worth of food for every dollar contributed than ever has been achieved before. When the whole story of America's response to Belgium's need is told in its completeness, it will form one of the most beautiful chapters of history, against the sinister background of the great war.

TWO CASES IN POINT

REAL progress is marked by permanent advance in cool, settled public opinion, rather than spectacular single achievements. We may go wild over a hero, and at the next election vote down a proposition to pension him.

We may become white hot with enthusiastic excitement in smashing some spectacular wrong, and in two months help license seven hundred worse ones. But when, in the ordinary course of affairs, the majority of people come to hold an advanced standard or a clear idea of good government, then we have made progress indeed.

Missouri is one of the most conservative and strongly partisan States; yet in the early weeks of the present legislative session two significant things happened. The Republican members of the legislature met in caucus and decided to support all progressive and beneficial legislation, no matter by whom originated. There should be no filibustering, no blocking legislation; no fight on measures backed by the Democratic administration, because they were Democratic. Not only no fight; but they would actively support. Another significant thing. The election of a Republican representative was contested on plausible grounds. A Democratic committee unanimously recommended, and a strongly Democratic house unanimously voted, to seat the Republican because the evidence indicated he was really elected.

THE ROLLING STONE

THE Scotch are great people for the fine old proverbs. They are great people, too, for sticking to their opinions.

Many years ago, in the town of St. Andrews, a lad named Jamie Forgan got the reputation of being a rolling stone. "He'll gather no moss," the wiseacres predicted. This was after Jamie, who started out to be a lawyer when he left Madras College, left the law office to become a clerk in the

St. Andrews branch of the Royal Bank of Scotland, and from there went to London, and then to New York and to Montreal and to Halifax, and then back to England, where he landed in a berth in a bank in Liverpool.

The wise old men shook their heads some more when they heard that Jamie had left Liverpool and gone back to Canada. He remained in the town of Woodstock, in the Dominion, for a while, and then went West.

In 1885 he was in Minneapolis. "He'll not stay long," was the prediction of St. Andrews. He didn't. He went to Chicago. There he stopped rolling. Through him, Chicago now can claim the distinction of having the most remarkable family of bank presidents in the world. The "Jamie" Forgan of St. Andrews is James B. Forgan, president of the First National of Chicago, and the most influential financier of the Middle West. His brother, David R. Forgan, is president of the National City Bank. His son, James B. Forgan, junior, is president of the Second Security; and his nephew, Robert Forgan, is president of the West Town State Bank. There are more Forgans, and Chicago has more banks, so it is possible the present record may be eclipsed.

The moss that is money has been gathered in rare volume by this clever son of Scotland, but St. Andrews, proud as it is of him, still sticks to its faith in proverbs, and still tells what a rolling stone was Jamie Forgan.

THE AMERICAN

(In the year of the Panama celebration.)

THE world has made a fresh start, and he is on hand in plenty of time. He had the quality of good heart, which is more precious than scholarship. He carries a buoyancy which springs into his toe-tread and rolls out through his nervous speech. He has a scorn for the old, tired peoples, enmeshed in their despair. With his experiments he thinks it likely he will originate something that will sweep the globe. He approves of the creation, and welcomes the present moment of time. His worth may be obscured by dreary streets, false-hearted trading, sinful government, but his vitality beats through even the graft and squalor, and lets loose a dance of atoms till they rearrange themselves in comeliness. He is partaker in the stir of a life that has not visited our earth since rude tribes reshaped the principalities. He has tapped the sources of planetary renewal, and shall he not stagger a bit as the central energy comes racing through his frail shell? His spirit is in him without effort of his own. It is born in him at his nativity, carried with him through the working day, and laid aside only when he is snuffed out. And, even then, he expects to be set going on a larger area as soon as the mists have cleared.

All this exuberance of his being is set in a scenery rougher, wilder, more dear to his eye than the Old World gardens. There is a shagginess on the hills which not all the vineyards, in their fragrance, can breathe away. Sprightly, audacious actor on an unrivaled stage, he laughs up at the natural forces and frisks in the face of death.

For Charity

By Wilbur Hall

Author of "Chiroptera Insectivora for Luck," Etc.

An aggravated case of "American enterprise"—otherwise labeled "Business is business." It went against the grain of the driver of a racing automobile and he thought out a scheme that put the quietus on the business sharp and provided an auto race that was exciting while it lasted. You'll enjoy the race and you'll be even more interested in the unexpected and mirth-provoking climax.

THE sight of poor little Peter Guernsey strapped to a board in a wheel chair is what started me, then I got to stringing Herbie Fanning along and couldn't let go, and it ended with Fanning himself—that big bum!—getting a lot of credit, and taking it, too, for saving the Children's Hospital. That was worth all it cost—doing something for the hospital—but to think of anybody falling for Fanning's bunk about philanthropy! That was what got me!

It was after I turned over in the Federal No. 7 at the Roseville curve in the Point Loma road race last year and had been given up for dead for three months. When I was able to leave the hospital the Federal people said I'd better take a lay-off, and I had to agree with them, because my nerves were jumpy. For weeks I couldn't take hold of a wheel without seeing the ground coming up toward me, and the smell of burning cylinder oil would set me back three meals. Then gradually I began to gain. After a while I was able to breeze around under wraps in my little Federal, and one day I was introduced to young Smith out at the motion-picture studio. In ten minutes

he had me down on paper to perform in a six-reel feature called "At High Speed," and I hope I get locomotor ataxia in my fingers if ever I sign that kind of contract again. The only thing about movie acting that went with me at all was "playing opposite" Miss Hope Lane, the star, but even that didn't make up for the rest of it.

However, it was being out at the studio that led to my meeting the crippled boy, Peter Guernsey. I noticed some gray buildings a block away, and the nurses and the wheeled chairs on the lawn, and I began to sniff for the iodoform. It was a week or so, though, before I found that all the patients were little kids, and that made me kind of choky, which I don't mind admitting. When they told me that there wasn't a victim in those wards who was over fifteen years old I wanted to be a millionaire for half an hour and cast myself for Lady Bountiful. I was quite a ways from a bank roll, though, right then—most of my money was inside me in the way of silver plates and wires—so the next best thing was to go to a five-and-ten-cent store and give them two dollars and a half for a wagonload of toys and games, delivered.

Several days later the director wanted me and the car in a street scene, and he made it near the hospital. While they were fooling along with the performance the nurses brought out a wheel chair that was stretched out flat like a table, and on it was a little boy. They lifted him up on pillows so that he could see better, and he was as excited over it as though it really was something. I looked across between acts and waved to him, and he waved back and seemed a good deal pleased, so when I could I rolled my Federal over to that side of the street and climbed out.

He was a cheerful little customer, all right. "Do you know Barney Oldfield?" he asked the first thing, and I told him I did.

"Are you a race driver?"

"A sort of one," I said.

"Want to see the toy somebody sent me this week?"

"What is it?" I asked. I wasn't very much used to kids, but this one didn't seem to notice it. He put one thin little arm down beside him and picked up a red-and-blue tin automobile about three inches long.

"It's seventy horse power," he said; "and I'm going to enter it in the Vanderbilt. It's won the Indianapolis twice and the Phoenix race. But it isn't fast enough yet. How could I make it faster, d'you s'pose?"

"Why, you might gear it up. Let's have a look."

I guess it will sound young, but I wanted to help that sick boy play his game if I could, so I opened my tool box and took out the jack and a wrench, and pretended to jack it up and give it an overhauling. He was perfectly serious about it, and holding his breath and frowning, and the nurse with him was smiling, but not laughing—you know what I mean. After a while I let the jack down and put his toy car back in his hand.

"It's just like I thought," I said. "You've got her geared too low. Also you ought to have an imported carburetor, and your wheels ought to be smaller. I'll come out here some time, if you like, and we'll fit her up so that she'll beat anything in her class."

"Say, will you?" the boy said. "Honest?"

"Honest," I said. "I've got to be moving now, but I'll come back. My name is Art Kyne."

The boy gave a little jump. "Is it—honest?"

"Honest!"

"Will you tell me about going into the ditch at San Diego? The nurse read me that in the papers. It was awful. I thought you were going to win that San Diego." He stopped and looked at me a minute. "Are you—you're not fooling me about being Art Kyne, are you?"

And I had to show him my A. A. A. card and have the nurse give me an O. K. before he could really believe it. When I went away I asked him his name, and he said it was Peter Guernsey, and that he was paralyzed and would never be able to get up. But he didn't care about that—not now. We were going to gear up his seventy-horse-power car, and that was all he could think of.

I bought little Peter an automobile with real rubber tires and lights that could be switched on and a key to wind it up, and I was afraid he was going to dislocate some bones in the excitement. It didn't take us long to get pretty well acquainted. The head nurse, Mrs. Wesley, told me Peter had been abandoned by his folks and that the hospital had adopted him. He was eight years old, although he didn't look it, and he was laughing and happy all the time. I spun him all the automobile race stories I could think of, and then I asked him about himself. He wouldn't talk much there, but when the nurses

weren't around he leaned over and whispered:

"Will you tell if I tell you something?"

"You know I won't, Peter."

"The hospital is head over heels in debts!"

"No!" I said. "Is that a fact?"

"It's going to maybe have to close up—and that would be awful. Wouldn't that be awful?"

"Where did you hear this, Peter?" I said. I thought he was gossiping.

"Oh, I heard Mrs. Wesley tell Mrs. —I forget what her name is—she's one of the board women. And all the nurses, and even old Wallen—the janitor—they know. Of course the kids don't. They're too little to understand."

"How about yourself?" I said.

Peter made a funny gesture with his thin, puny hands. "Oh, I belong to the hospital. I'm different."

"I see," I said. "Tell me some more about it."

"Why, the board ladies always had plenty of money, but now it's hard times, and the subscribers are quitting paying anything, and there's a awful man has got a—a—I don't remember what the word is—but he's going to turn us all out in the street if we don't pay ten thousand dollars in about less'n no time. Out in the street—and think of all the little kids that've got the dip'theria and scarlet fever and are blind or have crooked legs! I guess that'll be awful, won't it?—honest!"

"This man has a mortgage—is that it?"

"That's it!" Peter cried.

I don't know whether I'm getting this over to you just as it hit me, because I can't give you an idea of that big playroom up there in the hospital, with little fellows toddling around with crutches and with bandages, and with their white faces trying to keep smoothed out in smiles instead of

wrinkling up with tears. And it was real to me because I knew little Peter Guernsey was telling me the truth. He wasn't the sort of boy to make up a long yarn like that. I had heard of men mean enough to adopt that old motto invented by some cannibal chief—"Business is business!"—and though it was hard to believe I had a hunch that I had stumbled on an aggravated case of "American enterprise."

"What would you do, Peter, if they closed the hospital?" I asked, to make talk until I could get this thing soaked in.

The little paralytic turned his head away and looked out of the window. "It's not me that matters," he said, "'cause I could sell papers. I saw a man once before they brought me here, and he was on Hill Street by the church there in a bed like mine, only it had a top on it to keep the sun off, and he sold papers and po'try he wrote himself. I couldn't do that—but I could sell the papers, couldn't I—honest?"

"It would be all right for you, then, wouldn't it?" I said, and I thought about the man that held that mortgage.

"Sure. But the little fellers that aren't big enough to sell papers, or that are blind or only got one leg or can't eat anything or that cough all the time—think about them! Say, wouldn't that be fierce on them?"

Well, I had had about enough. I couldn't say much to Peter, but I tried to make him think about something else, and then I left and hunted up Mrs. Wesley, the head nurse. She took me into her office and told me the whole story, and Peter was right. They had about a month, and the necessary ten thousand was as far away as ten million. Mrs. Wesley tried to laugh about it, but the tears kept crowding into the lead, and I asked her if ten dollars would help any. She said it would keep two children in the hospital for a week, so I bought in on the spot

"I wish it was ten thousand," I said, and had to hurry out. Something told me that if Mrs. Wesley should happen to mention the name of the man who wanted to foreclose that mortgage I would be in jail before night charged with murder, and I knew I didn't have money enough to hire a lawyer.

I could start a subscription paper around among the drivers—and that was about all. I tried to figure out a system for beating this human buzzard with the mortgage, but the more I figured the madder I got and the less sense I had. All the way into town I kept seeing little Peter Guernsey's face, and hearing the voices of those children around him—all of them trying to be happy, and some of them almost succeeding, and wondering what would happen if—

And right then I thought of Herbie Fanning.

I suppose there's one like this Fanning boy anywhere you go, and they must be of some use because there are so many of them. The particular specimen who had been christened Herbert by fond Mrs. Fanning was neither better nor worse than the average run of the breed. Herbie has less than no brains at all. Probably when he was right young he was partially sober part of the time, but ever since he's been old enough to have a dinner jacket he's been in one continuous pickle. If he had never touched a drop in his life Herbie would have had just sense enough to belong to the Y. M. C. A. glee club and to carry letters from one room to another in a lawyer's office if there was some one there to show him the way. Alcohol has a bad enough effect on a man with an intellect, but when Fanning addled his gray matter with whisky even his money couldn't prevent his being unanimously elected to the bonehead club.

Father Fanning had worked hard for

about forty years to accumulate a little, and he had succeeded to the tune of about eight or ten millions, and died before he had learned how to enjoy it. That left Herbie and his mother, and from all I ever saw of her I judge that her best line was holding on to it. She had her pictures in the paper every little while as chairman of the literary committee of the Tuesday Morning Club or financial secretary of the Indian Famine Relief Commission, but it was said that she modestly refrained from giving very much herself, and always passed that grand privilege on to the other fellow. The only charitable fund to which she was a regular contributor was Herbie. She thought he was one grand boy.

He was. He had the largest hands and feet in captivity, a lot of fat distributed in the most conspicuous places, a simple face, and an offensive manner. He was always dressed in the latest and worst style, and fancied himself to be a sport. He was well known to the police, the attendants in the hot baths, and all the stage-entrance doorkeepers and every taxicab driver and café floor captain in the city called him by name. Of course he owned a couple of automobiles, and because he had been arrested twice for driving at fifty miles an hour he thought he was licensed to bore in whenever two or three race drivers sat down to have a quiet glass of beer. He couldn't take a hint, and he had no feelings you could hurt with anything but a piece of lead pipe, so he had become finally a sort of hanger-on of the racing crowd in the city. But he was about as well liked as a flat tire in that bunch.

I was going to turn confidence man and sell Herbie a gold brick, and with the proceeds I was going to drop a monkey wrench in the works of this financial scavenger who coveted the Children's Hospital. Let the mixed metaphors go—it's a long way from col-

lege rhetoric classes to steering fast ones and rolling drunks on the side. I had a feeling that the end justifies the means, and if I had any scruples all I had to do was to run over in my mind what little Peter Guernsey had said. If they'd asked me I would have confessed to the grand jury—but I'm glad they didn't ask me.

I took a table for two in the one café Herbie never missed, and I wasn't kept waiting very long. He spotted me when he breezed in, and began skidding between the tables to get that vacant chair opposite me, and I went on with my steak and watched him out of the corner of my eye. He wasn't as drunk as he usually was at six-thirty Saturday evenings, but I knew him well enough to know that a matter of fifteen or twenty minutes was all that stood between him and his average gait. He threw his twenty-dollar hat and his imported Balmacan to a waiter, and sat down without bothering about an invitation.

"Hello, Artie," he began. "What they got you in solitary confinement for?"

I didn't warm up to him too fast. "Hello, nuisance; who let you in?"

"Came in to get out of the snow. Let's have little drink."

I let him order champagne to keep from arguing with him, and he was so surprised that he wound up and began to tell me about "two swell Janes" he wanted me to meet.

I said: "I guess the girls'll have to wait, Herbie. I've got a business deal on."

No one on earth but Herbie would have taken that sort of bait, because it was none of his affair, but he floundered right into the trap and kicked the door shut. "Business, huh? Well, that's my middle name. Let me get in on it."

I thought a minute. "I don't think it would suit you, Herbie."

"Why not?"

"There isn't enough in it."

Herbie lighted a cigarette. "You let me worry about that, Artie. Anything's good enough for you's good enough for me. I'm in on it—what?"

"Have you got any ready cash?"

Fanning reached for his roll. "Artie, you're friend of mine. I hold a lot of respect for you in my manly bosom—see it? Some bosom, eh? Rest of these small-town hicks that call themselves race drivers—I'm off on them. You're there, old kid. Wait till you get your bones back and you'll make 'em all eat your smoke. Here's my wad, Artie; go's far's you like."

I pushed it back across the table. "Nothing doing, Herbie," I said. "I'm not collecting small change."

He looked a little disappointed. "You don't want a roll—you want a bank account. Is that it?"

"It'll take about fifteen thousand, I should say, before I get through."

Herbie snapped his fingers and upset a glass of wine. "Fifteen thousand's little steep for me right now. Friend Mother wants to know where it's all going. Hard-hearted old lady! Couldn't make her see that much all at once."

I only had a month to work in. "Look here, Herbie," I said; "I'll let you in on the ground floor on this. The only thing you have to do is to keep your head closed about it. Can you do that?"

Herbie laughed and hiccuped. "Best thing I do, ol' kid. Never told anybody anything in my life. Mum's the word, eh?"

"It is if you want to get in," I said. "You know Monty Merrick?"

"Do I know him? He's the best friend I've got in the world."

I knew Monty wouldn't speak to Fanning if there was any one around, but I let that go. If the big fellows weren't all his friends he wanted them

to be. "Well, I suppose you know that Monty and Bob Brooke have had a row about which of them is the fastest pilot?"

"Sure," Herbie said. "I've heard all about that."

That was going some, because it wasn't so. "All right," I said. "Here's where we get in. Brooke is only bluffing. He's had a quarrel with his factory over carburetors, and he wants a big race to show the makers that the Faber isn't equipped to beat a good car. I'm going to put the race on between Bob Brooke and Monty with his Persis, and I'm going to clean up on Monty. He's due to win."

"Where do I get in?" Herbie said, and I showed him. He was to finance that match, which I told him would take five thousand, and then he was to get me ten thousand to place on the Persis. We'd split the profits fifty-fifty. Herbie hung back.

"That's great little sporting proposition," he said; "but how'm I going to jimmy fifteen thousand out of the family treasurer, say? You don't know Friend Mother."

"Couldn't you raise it on your jewelry, Herbie?"

Fanning thought a minute—that is, he took a memorandum book from his pocket and began going through it for something. Then he brightened up. "Got a fellow down here that likes to sting me for ten per cent a month, and maybe I can hook him. But look here—don't I appear in this? Why can't I be referee or manager—what?"

That was Herbie all over. A little authority and the spotlight and Herbie was as happy as a monkey with a looking-glass. I'll admit I hadn't thought of the possibilities. If he was made an official even he would know enough to keep his mouth shut about the race being framed. I grabbed that chance quick.

"Just what I was counting on, Herbie," I said. "I wanted you to start the race. Gentleman sportsman, you know, acting for the love of the game and all that sort of thing. You worry around and get the money now, and I'll hire a fellow I know to do the work."

I knew I had Herbie caught so that he wouldn't try to wriggle loose, and I broke up the session. By the next night I had the five thousand from him, had given Larry Hempel one thousand of that for the expense of promoting the race, and put the balance in the bank as the first deposit in the fund for the Children's Hospital. Herbie had raised the money from his mother.

"Told her it was for charity," he said, and laughed until he was red in the face at the joke. That made me laugh. Oh, Herbie thought I was some little companion all right!

Now I had to square the thing with Monty Merrick and Bob Brooke, and that was easier than it looks. Framed races are few and far between, according to all I've ever seen of automobile contests, because there's nothing to be gained by programming a race. On the other hand, it's not the easiest thing in the world to pull. There was a time, before the American Automobile Association took charge of speed carnivals of all sorts, when you could do anything you wanted to if you could get it by the newspapers. Now the man who wants to frame an automobile race has to get up early and think faster than a lot of mighty shrewd officials and representatives of the Three A. On top of that is the trouble the drivers themselves would make. You suggest a phony race to any one of the big ones—the only sort that will draw a crowd for a match—and you'd better be well acquainted with the shortest route to the nearest exit, and keep your hat in your hand, that's all!

But when I had told Monty and Bob

Brooke my scheme, and all about the Children's Hospital, and what I was going to do to Herbie Fanning, they signed up and became the bitterest enemies you ever saw outside a vaudeville comedy team. Larry Hempel, the lad who was to run the event, had a couple of press agents at work in a day or so, and the way they pictured these two big drivers would have made a Roman arena on gladiator days look like a Sunday-school picnic in Eastlake Park. The two master pilots had come to an argument over which was king. Each of them had won half a dozen races that year. One or the other was the peer of all the drivers in the world. Which one it was would be decided by this match. It was to be for blood. Friendship had ceased between them. Every ounce of power in their cars, and every trick of racing that they knew, would be exerted, and when the race was over the world would have a moot point settled. Some bull, eh? I know two press agents who could make a popular hero out of Judas Iscariot and get a crowd to attend a dog fight in a church basement. It's the pair that put on the advertising for this race.

Herbie was pleased to death with himself, and was so fresh with the automobile-race crowd around the city that I think he only narrowly escaped lynching two or three times. Monty Merrick and Bob Brooke, the two drivers who were to race, were the only ones who knew the inside of the thing, and naturally the rest of them couldn't see any good reason why they should have to eat three meals a day with Herbie Fanning and let him patronize them. The hardest job I had was to explain to the gang why Herbie had been chosen starter for the event. I guess I told about fourteen different stories, but I got by. And once or twice a week I drifted out to the hospital and tried to cheer up little Peter Guernsey and Mrs. Wesley, and make them be-

lieve it would come out all right. They couldn't see it, and I couldn't tell them.

The week before the match Herbie told me that he was going to have to borrow the ten thousand. Said he was going to get it from a loan shark named Riddell, who had done business for Herbie before, and who could be trusted to take the gold fillings out of his customer's mouth if necessary to make himself whole in the deal. Riddell knew that Mrs. Fanning couldn't afford to be unpleasant about any of Herbie's business enterprises, and he was playing perfectly safe. I wish, though, that I could get money as easily as Herbie got that roll. I counted it myself when it came, and went through the motions of getting it covered by Bob Brooke's backers. To give Fanning his due, he didn't care about the bet much either way. It was nuts for him to be starter in a big automobile race, and to have an excuse to load himself on the crowd of drivers and mechanics and team managers around town. Any way you take it Herbie Fanning got his money's worth.

The night before the big speed contest I telephoned Mrs. Wesley to ask how things were, and she said that the human leech who was holding that mortgage had sent them notice that it must be paid off within ten days or it would be foreclosed.

"He's in an awful rush, seems to me, Mrs. Wesley," I said.

"We've found out why," she said. "He wants to turn the hospital into a sanitarium for some client of his. As we understand it the deal is all fixed up. They're hoping we won't get the money."

"Well," I said, "maybe they'll fall down and break their necks between now and then. Don't worry, anyway. Perhaps we can do something."

I would have given a dollar to tell her what was on the boards. As it turned out it's lucky I didn't.

That one-hundred-mile match race between Monty Merrick in the Persis and Bob Brooke in his new Faber was some event. Those two came close to spoiling the whole plan the day before by hanging around together and buying a drink or so at the same bar, and one of the newspapers that was pretty sore on auto racing anyway came out with a story to the effect that the whole thing was a frame-up. But they didn't have anything to go on, and I think the yarn was good publicity. At any rate, we had a crowd that broke all records. I took one peek into the box office, and then I went out and squeezed myself. The Children's Hospital wasn't going out of business right away—that was a cinch bet!

The frame-up rumor made the A. A. A. committee prick up their ears, but I wasn't worried much about them. If Brooke and Monty kept their heads all the race committees in the world couldn't hang anything on us. And I'd trust that pair of drivers to put over forged entrance papers on St. Peter and get by with it. Of course Herbie Fanning might spill the beans, but I was watching him.

He appeared in a correct imitation of Fred Wagner's get-up, even to the plaid riding breeches and the flower in his buttonhole, and he liked himself immensely. I dropped a word or two of caution in his ear, and showed him that a slip on his part would land us all in the penitentiary and make the race drivers hate him for life, so that attended to his business for him. He was almost sober when Frank Lowry, who was there as assistant starter and personal conductor for Herbie, gave him the flags. Fanning was pretty nervous, and Lowry had to explain the flags to him twenty times and keep them untangled from Herbie's new puttees, but after a while the amateur starter got used to himself, and when he gave the two pilots the word he did

it, to my surprise, without falling into the wheels.

The track was one mile, and very fast. Monty jumped into the lead in the first lap, and held it for twenty; then he went into the pits and took two minutes to change a rear wheel. I've seen him do it in eighteen seconds, but no one tumbled, because his jack slipped and one of the pit crew broke a wrench, and several things happened. When Monty got away again Bob Brooke was two laps to the good and running like an express train. Fanning was watching them with a ten-thousand-dollar-bet look in his eye, and I could see he was a good deal relieved when Monty finally smoked out.

For fifty laps those two boys fought it out inch by inch, with Monty slowly but steadily climbing up, and the crowds were worked into excitement enough to make me sure that they would get their money's worth. In the seventy-second Brooke blew a shoe and had a narrow escape coming into the stretch, but he straightened her out finally and rolled in on the rim. He made a change of the two rears in thirty-four seconds, and when he went off he was still a few hundred yards ahead of Monty. To the ninetieth they held about the same positions, and then the Persis began to gain again.

The boys told me afterward that they came near to wrecking the scheme in the back stretch in the ninety-third, when Monty tried to pass and cut in too close. Bob Brooke isn't the kind of a driver to let a car pass him if he's got anything left in his motor, so he pushed on the wheel and swung out for the turn. Monty was playing, the way he does sometimes, and he couldn't check his Persis quickly enough. They rubbed hub caps for a hundred feet; then Monty pulled out, shut off his engine, and went in behind Bob again. On the stretch Monty quit fooling and

took the lead in a drive that set the stands crazy.

I had learned that the crowds watching an automobile race will come the nearest to going out of their minds if two matched cars, along toward the end of a race, run in to the pits together. Then it's a case of who will get away first, and the fans have a chance to engage in the great American sport of rooting. Give them a finish of that sort and the man who wants to show them it was a framed race can talk himself blue in the face and not get anywhere at all. That was what we pulled now.

Bob Brooke came out of the turn in the ninety-eighth lap about a length ahead of Monty, and then he shut off suddenly and began to limp. Monty stepped on his throttle, but at that minute his engine began to pop and spit, and he had to slow up and make for the pits. He beat Brooke's Faber in by half a second. The crowds were up and yelling before the drivers could raise their hoods, and it was hard to say which of them had the most support. Both the boys were digging into their engines, while the mechanics were jacking up axles—Monty's crew the front right; Brooke's the right rear. When Monty slammed down his hood Bob followed him, and the two reached their seats about the same instant. The mechanics and the pitmen were simply tearing up the ground to get the wheels locked on, and the rooting increased in volume.

One—two—three seconds—and Monty's mechanic made a running dive for his seat! The people who were backing Bob began to scream at him. He twisted around and beckoned to his mechanic, and little Henry Winchell put his shoulder to the seat back and they began to move—right on the tail of Monty's cloud of smoke.

But Monty's mechanic had missed his seat and fallen against his driver.

The little Persis teetered and swung around. Bob went by like a rifle ball, and Monty spun his wheel desperately to save going into the outside fence. Then he straightened her out, gave his mechanic a shove that landed him in his place with a jolt, and started away. The time lost wasn't worth talking about, but before Monty could get going Bob had taken the first turn, driving all he knew. They made the lap—from a standing start—in fifty-eight seconds, but Bob was still three hundred yards to the good when Herbie Fanning gave them the green flag. That last lap was a riot. The crowd was speed mad, and I thought for a while we'd have to pay for a new grand stand out of the proceeds of the day.

But the Merrick rooters couldn't lift the Persis over. Bob Brooke won by four or five lengths, and Herbie gave them the checker flag and turned to me.

"You're a fine race tout, you are!" he said disgustedly. "I thought you said it was fixed for Monty to win."

I was as humble as I could be, remembering the box-office receipts and the bet and the Children's Hospital. "I thought it was, Herbie," I said. "Somebody did me wrong—that's all. I had twenty-five dollars on Merrick myself!"

He was sober enough to be snappy. "Oh, you did, did you? You poor wretch! And I owe Riddell ten thousand. *Good night!*"

I had almost forgotten about the loan shark.

Two weeks after the match race Mrs. Wesley called me at the apartment house and told me that they were going to have a little party that afternoon and burn the mortgage, and she wanted me to come out. "Bring any of your friends who are interested," she said. "There's nothing formal about it."

I thanked her, and said that I might be able to make it, but she said: "Peter

particularly wants you to come, Mr. Kyne. Try not to disappoint him. It's a great day for us!"

So I promised her I'd go.

I had deposited the ten thousand the day after the race with the teller of a bank that I knew, and told him to attend to that mortgage business and not say anything about me. The other four thousand Herbie had put up for promoting the race, and about twenty-five hundred that I drew down as my share of the gate I had him put to the hospital's credit. He had done it all in good shape, and I knew there was a regular celebration on out there where little Peter Guernsey was with his high-g geared toy automobile and his wheel chair. But I had made myself scarce for fear I'd tell something.

Herbie Fanning was as bad as ever, and we'd had to kick him out of two or three parties. You couldn't drop a hint to Herbie—you had to load a shotgun with it if you wanted him to get it. He seemed to figure that he had bought into the crowd with that bet of his, and all the fellows were pretty tired of his pestering around. They blamed me for it, too. Can you beat that?

I really felt kind of sorry for Herbie, so the day of the mortgage-burning picnic I told Monty Merrick and Bob Brooke about it, and asked them to go with me, and I suggested that we take Herbie. "The poor simp put up for the party," I told them, "and it doesn't seem to be any more than fair to let him in on it."

Bob Brooke said he could get along without Herbie's company, but he didn't kick about it, and I called Herbie—out of bed—on the telephone, and he said that he'd be ready as soon as he could get his bath and dress, and have a little morning's morning. We went out in Bob's new touring car, and reached the hospital in plenty of time. I was a little worried about Herbie, though.

He must have figured that it was going to be a long, dry day, and taken a couple of extra "morning's."

There wasn't a very big crowd, but there was a certain amount of class to it, to hear Mrs. Wesley name them off in introducing us. She was busy making the arrangements for the ceremony, and as the president of their board of directors was late and they had to wait for her to arrive, I took the boys over and made them acquainted with little Peter Guernsey.

Peter was pleased to pieces with them. He knew what races Bob and Monty had won and what cars they had been driving in the last two or three years and where they'd been wrecked, and he kidded Monty about losing the title of fastest pilot of the world to Bob Brooke. Then, to be polite, I suppose, he said: "What does Mr. Fanning do?"

Poor old Herbie was about half pickled by now, and I knew that he'd made the morning's morning a full day. He couldn't follow much of the performance. He kept suggesting to Monty that they go upstairs and see if there weren't some live ones in the ballroom, and Monty would pinch his arm and tell him to shut up before he got us all in dutch. I told Peter that Herbie was just a capitalist.

"A what?" Peter asked.

"A capitalist—a man who lives off his money and goes around doing good with it," I said, and then I had an idea. I knew that Mrs. Wesley never would be satisfied until she found out about those bank deposits, and I thought the newspapers might dig into it for amusement, and I didn't want any free advertising as a philanthropist. Somebody might take it seriously and try to pluck me for an endowment for a university or something some time. So I leaned over and whispered to Peter: "Mr. Fanning is the man who sent the

money to pay off the mortgage. It's a secret."

Well, little Peter let out a whoop that could have been heard in the middle of a ribbon-remnant sale in a department store, and Mrs. Wesley came running. Peter went through it without stopping for breath or punctuation marks.

"Oh, Mrs. Wesley," he shrilled before she could reach the scene of the disaster, "Art says that Mr. Fanning is a capitalist and that he got him to give him the money and he's the one that got us out of head over heels in debts and isn't that beautiful and Mr. Fanning wouldn't have told himself I bet because he wanted to have a secret about it—isn't that right Mr. Fanning?"

I was staring at Peter, and Fanning and Mrs. Wesley were staring at me, and Bob and Monty were trying to crawl out of sight behind a screen thing there, because the crowd had heard, and the people were all coming on the trot to get the rest of it.

"Yes, Mrs. Wesley," I said; "there is the man who is paying off the mortgage. He didn't want it known, but I couldn't keep the secret."

I thought for once we'd have Herbie's goat. But don't you believe it for a minute. That big slow-foot stood up and bowed, too, and said that it was a pleasure he was sure. "And won't you all join me in a little——"

Well, I didn't let him get any farther with that, because I knew it *would* queer us. Herbie was going to offer to buy! I bored right in in a hurry. "No, Mr. Fanning," I interrupted in a loud, clear tone of speech; "the lady who is president of the board hasn't come, and until she does the program won't be started." I hoped they'd think Herbie meant to join in prayer or a hymn or something, and while they were figuring out what he did mean I led him away.

"For Heaven's sake, grab the glory

if you must, you bonehead, but don't tie the can to the proceedings and make these perfectly good people think we're a bunch of rounders!" I growled at him as we went.

"Sure, that's all right," Herbie said. "But what's this stuff about money for the mortgage? I don't seem to get it at all."

"Of course you don't, Herbie; but you're a regular Helen Gould! Let them think so—can't you?—and I'll explain later. Swell up your chest and try to look pious for a few minutes until we can get out from under." So Herbie practiced, and he did it pretty well for a man as badly marshed as he was. We went back, and the ladies congregated around him immediately, thanking him, and shedding a few tears. Herbie said it wasn't anything much, and that he loved children and that sort of bunk, and just then the front door opened. They all turned that way, and there was a little fat woman whose face was familiar, and who was "Madam President" herself. They shot the news at her before she could catch breath.

The mysterious philanthropist had been discovered! He was among those present! Wasn't it wonderful? And she started for us, escorted by the whole crowd as a guard of honor. Monty and Bob Brooke had deserted me completely, and were back in a corner laughing their heads off, and I swung around to steady poor old Herbie.

"Now, Herbie," I said, "brace up, because the big show is about to start."

Then I stopped. Herbie was slowly slumping down into a chair, and his face was turning four shades of pea green, and his breath was coming in gasps. I grabbed him. "Look here, Fanning," I said; "you stiffen up! What's the matter with you—sick?"

Herbie just wagged his head and hiccuped.

"That's Friend Mother!" he jerked.

Well, before I could get any more

than that the little dowager had Herbie in her arms and was weeping on his chest and calling him "her dearest boy" and "her onliest own son" and a lot of that touching material, and I backed away.

"Oh, why didn't you tell me, Herbie?" she sniffed. "I have been so wrong and so deceived all this time. And this is so dear and so sweet of you! The poor little children!"

Herbie mumbled something, and pried his mother off his neck and turned red, and then Mrs. Fanning turned to the crowd and made a speech. I didn't get much of it, but I knew what she meant. You could see it as plain as though she had been showing it on a movie screen. She wasn't giving any ten thousands to the Children's Hospital herself, but it was so much better for Herbie to do it than to buy himself an assorted order of drunks and lady friends that she wasn't going to fuss about that. That's the way I figured it; and then she came to the peroration, as we used to have it in the rhetoric classes, and that went like this:

"And to properly recognize my noble son's devotion I have decided to endow a bed in the hospital immediately and to call it the Herbert Fanning Bed."

Bob Brooke and Monty Merrick led the cheering, but they weren't far ahead of the rest of the crowd. This furnished a little interim so that Mrs. Wesley could bring out that mortgage and a box of matches, and they asked Herbie to light the bonfire. He stood up in the center of the group, looking as though he would rather be asleep on a table in the back room of a saloon somewhere, and because he couldn't think of anything else to do, I suppose, he opened up the paper and glanced through it. I saw him turn red again and open his mouth, but he didn't say a word—just lighted her up and put that mortgage where it would never bother little Peter Guernsey or any of

the poor waifs in the hospital again—never again! The only man I wished was there to see was the ghoul who had tried to throw those babies out. But his ears were burning at that, if there is anything in that superstition, because what I was thinking about him wouldn't get through the post office without being edited.

There was a lot of chatter going on around Herbie meantime, and some one brought in tea, and Herbie escaped and came staggering over to where I stood with Bob and Monty. I could see he was trying to puzzle something out, and then all at once he began to grin.

"Say, Art," he said in a kind of whisper, "do you know who it was had that mortgage?"

I was getting awful tired of Herbie by this time. "No, I don't, and I don't care. If you're through with letting these women slobber over you for your beautiful philanthropy we'll be going."

"Wait a minute, Artie," he said. "Wait a minute! This is rich! The man that had that mortgage was Riddell—old ten-per-cent-a-month Riddell!"

I leaned against the wall. "Not the man you borrowed the ten thousand of?" I said.

"The same little thief!" said Herbie, and began to laugh again.

Well, I could see rocks ahead for somebody, and it wasn't myself. When Riddell found out where his money had gone— And when Friend Mother found out where Herbie got his money to bet on the race between Monty and Bob Brooke— And when Herbie found out how he came to be a philanthropist and save the Children's Hospital—

I was glad I wasn't in the mess, anyway. And, as I told Mrs. Wesley before we left, she'd better cash any checks that came in for the Herbert Fanning Bed before payment was stopped at the bank—that was all.

The Gambler

By David A. Curtis

Author of the "Old Man Greenlaw" stories.

SYNOPSIS OF FIRST PART

Bound for the Portuguese island of Santa Clara, whose vice-regent is Don Luis Rodriguez, Bill Blair, gambler, meets Churchill, a New York banker, on his way to establish a big manufacturing plant; Churchill's stepson, Roy Somers; his daughter Ethel, and his wife. Blair falls in love with Ethel and hints as much to her. Young Somers is a reckless gambler and becomes a close friend of Blair. He offers to let Blair in on Churchill's scheme with the object of making a pile of money under cover. Freel, a tin-horn gambler, also on board, tries to win the friendship of Blair and make him his partner in crooked plays. Blair despises him and determines to teach him a lesson. Reaching the island they find many gambling games in progress. Blair promises Freel that he will play. "When I strike a match, that's your signal that I want more money in the pot," he tells him.

(In Two Parts—Part Two)

CHAPTER XIII.

A NOTABLE GAME OF POKER.

BLAIR'S characterization of the island of Santa Clara, when he told Ethel Churchill that it was an enchanted spot in which the progress of time had been stopped for centuries, was hardly as fanciful as it seemed, or, to be more precise, it seemed to him less fanciful than it was when he came, day by day, to see more and more of the people and their manner of living.

Keeping no count of the days, and having in mind almost nothing outside of his doctor's instructions, excepting his deep interest in the question of his own intentions concerning the girl whose personality had so impressed him, he yet could not avoid seeing more or less of what went on about him; and the more he saw the less real did everything seem. Even the gambling house, to which he went to keep his appointment with Freel, struck him as fantastic.

He had supposed himself familiar, as Freel had also supposed himself, with

the arrangements and management of all kinds of resorts given over to games of chance, but this one seemed curiously strange.

In the first place, there was nothing furtive in the atmosphere. Evidently gambling was so well recognized as a legitimate pursuit that no precautions were deemed necessary to avoid interference. Instead of the studied silence of a temple of chance in a community where gambling is forbidden if not inhibited, there was a noisy babble of many voices. Doubtless his ignorance of the language heightened the effect of apparent phantasm which impressed him so strongly, but aside from that there was an alien manner in the company that seemed grotesquely out of place in the pursuit of sport.

"One would think they were playing for chips," was the way he put it to himself, as he surveyed the crowd. Yet even as that thought came, he understood what was equally evident—that underneath the gay indifference with which the losers met their ill fortune there was desperate play in progress. All seemed intensely eager to win, but

failure seemed a matter of no account whatever.

Then, while he was looking on, puzzled by so queer an appearance, he saw something as startling as a violent clap of thunder without preliminary lightning. With no word of warning, a player at one of the tables drew a knife and with a simple thrust killed one of the other players. With another motion, equally rapid, he seized the cards from the hand of the man he had struck and spread them face up on the table.

Blair stood very near, but the game they were playing was one he did not know, and for a moment he failed to catch the significance of the display, nor could he understand the instant outbreak of exclamation that followed. It seemed, however, as if the aggressor had shown conclusive proof of foul play on the part of the man who had been slain, and the commotion ceased as quickly as it had begun.

Not all of those in the room had even suspended their play. The faro dealer at the other end of the room continued his deal as if unconscious of the slight disturbance, and the roulette wheel was started on a new round with no delay whatever. Only those in the immediate vicinity of the occurrence seemed even aware of it, and of these only a few left their seats. The clear explanation followed the act so quickly that all seemed satisfied excepting the dead man, who could, in the nature of things, have nothing to say.

One, who seemed to be in authority as manager of the place, stepped up quickly enough to see, as the players at the table saw, why the man had been killed, and he wasted no words. A mere look was enough to satisfy him that death had been instant, and, summoning half a dozen servants with a gesture, he pointed to the prostrate form, which they quickly lifted and carried outside.

Then the manager, shrugging his

shoulders, walked away. The man who had delivered the blow put away his knife, appropriated the money his victim had left on the table so calmly that it seemed a matter of course that he should do so, and settled himself in his seat for a continuance of the game in which the others joined him without further comment.

Inside of three minutes it was as if nothing had happened, and while Blair stood still looking at the same table, another bystander stepped forward and took the vacant chair. Evidently the incident was closed.

Then Freel appeared, and Blair, looking at him, became aware that he must have seen the killing also, though from a little greater distance, for his face was eloquent of horror. He was even a little pale, as if he had been sickened by the sight, and his voice trembled when he spoke.

"Hully gee," he said faintly, "but that was sudden! Steve Brodie never had nothin' on that guy. But, say, Mr. Blair, you stood right behind him. You c'd 'a' caught his hand before he struck, couldn't you?"

"Why, yes, I suppose I could," said Blair indifferently, and the other looked at him in amazement. The unspoken question was so plainly in his mind that Blair smiled curiously.

"Would you have stopped him if you could?" he asked.

"Well, I don't know, Mr. Blair," was the reply, in a voice that still trembled. "Of course, 'twa'n't none o' your business, lookin' at it one way, but—well, I don't know. I reckon I'd 'a' been fool enough to butt in rather'n to see a man killed like that."

"Seems to me he was the fool," said Blair steadily. "He only got what was coming to him apparently. You saw he was playing crooked, didn't you? According to what happened, I should say he must have known he was taking his life in his hand when he did that.

I don't see why I, or anybody else, should interfere."

He watched Freel closely as he spoke, and that worthy stammered in confusion as he answered:

"Probably not, Mr. Blair. But it seems hard, don't it?"

"Why was it hard? He committed the one unpardonable sin."

"Oh, I know," said Freel, as if driven to an unpleasant admission. "Of course it's unpardonable to cheat, but——" He stopped, unable to say more, being fairly cornered.

"You may call it unpardonable to cheat," said Blair, speaking very slowly, "but I didn't say anything of the kind. That is something that can't be argued. It depends on the point of view. What I meant was that he got caught cheating. There's no possible excuse for that.

"You want to remember that," he added, "if you ever sit in a game with me."

"Not likely I'd forget it," said Freel; "but you're not going to play to-night, are you?"

"Why not? We arranged to play to-night, didn't we?"

Freel looked at him admiringly. "I knowed there wa'n't nothin' much the matter with your nerves, Mr. Blair," he said, "but I never knowed you was as good as you are. I reckon you'd say I had no nerve at all if I was to tell you I couldn't play after what I just seen."

"I certainly would," said Blair.

"Come on, then," said the other, as if in desperation. "The poker tables are over yonder." And he led the way to another corner of the room.

There they found three separate games in progress, with spectators standing around each table. All the seats were filled, there being seven players in each game; and the appearances indicated that some, at least, of the bystanders were waiting for vacancies with the intention of sitting in when-

ever there should be an opportunity. In fact, one did occur presently, and, as a discomfited player left his place, the one who was about to deal paused for a moment, as if to see whether to serve six players or seven. It was no more than a moment, however, for one of the lookers-on took the empty chair immediately, saying nothing and not even asking permission.

Evidently the game was wide open, and it was equally evident to Blair, after he had watched the play for a little while, that the players were no tyros. They not only understood the game as it was played in the New York clubs, but they played well, showing judgment and courage as Blair saw readily enough, in the way they ventured their money from time to time.

This was true of the participants in each of the three different games, but, as Blair sauntered from one to another of the tables, he observed that which soon led him to confine his attention to one of the three. For one thing, there were fewer bystanders at that one, waiting for a chance to sit in, and he shrewdly suspected that the reason for this was that the game was far and away the biggest of the three. More money was in sight on the table than on either of the others, and appearances indicated that the seven who sat there were bolder and more astute in their play than those who sat in the other two games.

Accordingly he remained watching this group of players, quite indifferent to Freel's evident preference for one of the smaller games; and the latter, though he realized with some trepidation that he was in no proper form for such a contest as was ahead of him, realized also that he would either have to follow Blair's lead, or, by refusing to play, forfeit all hope of the partnership he desired so greatly.

The opportunity he had considered so tempting when he had first discov-

ered the existence of the gambling house seemed far less attractive now that he had seen what possibilities of tragedy it included; but, though his nerve had certainly been shaken, and he would gladly have postponed the ordeal, had it been feasible, he still had confidence in Blair, and doggedly persisted in his determination to go on.

It was not hard for Blair to understand his condition; but, so far from being moved by it to any consideration of pity, it satisfied him thoroughly. He waited patiently for the opening in the game that might come at any moment, making use of the interval to study the play of the different men with whom he would presently be engaged in a conflict for which he felt himself to be well prepared. Poker was his favorite pastime and pursuit.

He had less time to wait than he expected, for the cards were running well, and contested pots came in rapid succession. One after another the players in the game retired, having reached the limit of their resources apparently, and their places were eagerly taken by those who were waiting, until he and Freel were the next in succession.

The line seemed to be as rigidly maintained as if the place had been a bank or a barber's shop, and Blair was not the man to attempt an infraction of house rules.

Then two of the contestants went broke in the same deal, and Blair sat down at the table promptly, Freel taking the other seat, though with less alacrity. He was hardly as gifted in concealing his feelings as he should have been to be a really good poker player, though his hesitation was not sufficiently marked to attract the attention of any at the table, excepting Blair.

True to his word, Blair produced a cigar from his vest pocket and put it in his mouth as soon as he had taken his place and bought chips with a bill that he took from a small roll, laying the

remainder of the roll beside his chips on the table. He bit off the end of the cigar and settled it comfortably between his teeth, but as Freel noticed with quick appreciation, he made no motion toward lighting it. All was in readiness, and Freel, encouraged by this evidence that Blair had remembered his agreement, plucked up his courage, preparing himself for what proved to be the most memorable game of his experience.

It went well with him for a time. For the first few deals he neither won anything nor lost any more than it took him to come in against the ante; but presently, on Blair's deal, he caught a king-high flush, pat, and was gratified to find four players willing to stay against his raise before the draw. One of them, indeed, was confident enough to come back at him with a reraise, but Freel was too cautious to raise again, desiring the others to stay, and they all did so.

Furthermore, all four of his antagonists took cards in the draw, and the man who had raised him took two, showing that three big ones would probably be the best that would be out against him; though, of course, the chance of the draw was still to be counted. It appeared, however, that no one had bettered sufficiently to oppose a pat hand, and, although no one even saw the bet he made, the preliminary play had made him a considerable profit.

He knew perfectly well that the winning of a single pot in poker was a matter of small importance as affecting the result of the game, but the fact that he had won on Blair's deal had much significance to him. He would not himself have attempted any juggling with the deck after what he had seen only a little while before, even if Blair had not admonished him as he had; but he remembered what Blair had said concerning the possibilities of really expert work, and he had no doubt whatever that the

winning cards had come to him by Blair's design, wherefore he was greatly encouraged, and looked forward with renewed confidence to the play that was to follow. His respect for Blair was also greatly increased. No man whose technique was not absolutely perfect would venture on sleight of hand in such company as this. The fact that the artist had not dealt himself a contesting hand was still further proof of the excellence of his art. Freel's spirits rose, and he began to chortle inwardly.

Soon after this there came to him a hand on the deal of one of the other players which gave him an opportunity to test his own nerve, and he was still further encouraged by the result.

He judged three queens before the draw to be sufficiently strong to justify further play after one of those who came before him had raised. Accordingly he raised back. The next two players saw the double raise. Blair threw down his cards. The man who raised originally came back with a further bet. The next man made good without raising, and the next one dropped.

It was up to Freel again, and he had proof that four good hands were out against him. Plainly he could not raise again, and he might have abandoned the contest without cowardice, seeing that there was a strong probability of one opposing hand, at least, being pat.

It was, however, unlikely that either of the next two would raise, and, figuring the odds he would get in the betting, he decided that the chance of the draw was worth the cost of staying, so he stayed. His final bet had been fifty dollars, and there was nearly a thousand in the pot when it was closed, so that he reckoned his final investment a fairly good one, though he felt sure he was beaten before the draw.

Fortune favored him again. The man he feared most stood pat, as he had expected, but he found a pair of

sevens in his own hand after the draw. The others lost confidence, but when his antagonist bet out, Freel raised him a hundred and got a call. The opposing hand was a flush, so he won handsomely again.

Blair had played little, not seeming to be satisfied with his hands; but he had won a few small bets and lost no more than entrance money, so that he was a trifle ahead of the game. This, Freel reckoned, was because he did not deem it politic for them both to win, and he looked forward to Blair's next deal with anxious interest.

When it came, Freel was puzzled, but saw no reason to be discouraged, especially as he found four tens in his hand when he looked at it. The perplexity came when Blair lighted a match and then, after lighting his cigar and appearing to study his hand for a few moments, threw it in the discard.

Freel's understanding of the signal had been that it would come when Blair should want help in getting more money in a pot which he expected to win himself, and plainly this was not to be expected. A moment's thought, however, showed him that the result would be the same to them whichever one of them should win it, and the signal was undoubtedly meant to tell him to go as far as possible in the betting without any misgivings.

He needed little encouragement to back so strong a hand as he held, though if it had not been for the signal he would hardly have put up all the money he had in the world on four tens. But that was what he did, having absolute reliance by this time in Blair's good faith and feeling confident that he had so manipulated the cards in dealing that he knew what each man at the table held.

When he put up his last dollar, Freel called for a show for his pile, and, though there was some betting by the others after that, he looked upon that

portion of the pot which had been set aside as surely belonging to him, feeling only a regret that he was unable to see the additional bets.

Then, when the hands were shown down, four kings took all the money.

The shock dazed him, and he stared dully at Blair with a question in his eyes that he could not well put in words, even though he did not suppose that any one else knew the English language well enough to understand what he might say. But Blair's face was expressionless. As if to aid him in keeping it so, he smoked somewhat more rapidly than was his habit, but even that was no indication to the ruined man of what its meaning might be.

He sat for a moment or two, as if stunned. Then, realizing the situation, he rose and left the house without a word, half expecting Blair to follow him out. When he reached the open air, he waited for him to appear.

But Blair sat motionless, not even looking after the unhappy fellow, while another player sat down in the vacated chair. Then he continued to play until he had won a few hundred dollars, when he cashed in and sauntered away.

Freel was still waiting outside, and Blair half expected an attempt at violence, but it was with humble pleading that the other spoke to him.

"Why did you do it, Mr. Blair?" he said. "I reckon I was a fool to think you'd ever take on a pal like me, but I'd ha' played fair with you. Honest, I would, Mr. Blair. I may be a dog, but I wouldn't never ha' bit you. You could ha' got rid of me if you wanted to without feeding my wad to them dagos. I don't see why you done it. I've got my ticket back to New York, an' I'm goin', but I'll go back dead broke."

"You needn't do that," said Blair. "If a hundred will help you out——"

"I wouldn't take a cent from you, Mr. Blair," interrupted the other. "Not if I was starving I wouldn't. I ain't takin'

no charity from no man what's done me dirt, an' that's what you sure done. I only want to know why you done it, Mr. Blair."

Blair was silent for half a minute. Then, taking the nearly finished cigar he was still smoking out of his mouth, he looked at it thoughtfully and tossed it away.

"You're in the wrong business, Freel," he said quietly. "But when a man gets into a procession, he wants to keep in his own place. If he doesn't, he's liable to get stepped on."

And, without looking back, he walked away.

CHAPTER XIV.

"WHO IS MR. BLAIR?"

"Mother, who is that Mr. Blair we met last night?" Ethel put the question to Mrs. Churchill quite casually.

"I don't know anything about him excepting that he came here on the boat with us," was the reply. "I suppose Roy made his acquaintance on board, but he may have known him before. What did you think of him? You talked with him more than I did."

"He is very interesting." Then followed a full and animated report of all that Blair had said, and the older woman listened, saying little, but thinking much. "I'll speak to your father," she said, and without delay she did so.

"John, who is Mr. Blair?" she asked. "Don't know anything about him. Why?"

"Ethel wants to know."

"Ethel? I'll find out. Have you asked Roy? He introduced him."

"No. I came to you first."

"Quite right. Leave Roy to me. It isn't anything serious, is it?"

"It's always serious where Ethel is concerned."

"Right again, but I mean she doesn't—she isn't——"

"She's interested in him." Then fol-

lowed a repetition of the conversation in the moonlight, to which the father listened closely. When he had heard it all he whistled thoughtfully.

"Certainly looks serious," he said. "The fellow seems adroit. He may be all right at that, but probably he isn't. He's handsome, too. You don't think——"

"I don't think anything but what I've told you. Ethel's head isn't turned in the least, and she isn't going to make a fool of herself. Thank Heaven I have her confidence. There is nothing to be alarmed about yet, but you know, John, as well as I do——"

"Yes, yes. Roy, come here a minute!" This to the boy, who came toward the open window at the moment, fresh from a plunge in the surf.

"What is it, sir?" he said as he entered the room.

"Who is this Mr. Blair you introduced to your sister last night?"

"I don't know that I introduced him to Ethel in particular," said the youth, startled into an attitude of self-defense. "I introduced him to the party."

"True, but your sister was one of the party. Who is he?"

"I don't know any more than you do, sir," was the earnest reply. "I couldn't even swear that his name is Blair, though I suppose it is. I met him on the boat, and sized him up for a gentleman. If he isn't one he is a good imitation at least. You saw that for yourself, didn't you?"

"Yes, that much will have to be admitted, but it's hardly enough where Ethel is concerned. You should have been more careful, though it's as much my fault as yours. Probably more so," added the banker, who was a just man.

"But Ethel hasn't——" began Roy, who, whatever his faults may have been, was jealously alive to her welfare.

"No," snapped his mother in a tone she seldom used toward her son. "She

hasn't, but she's a woman, and he's a man. You mustn't forget that, and you don't want to bring them together again. Leave that to me, after we know more about him."

Then Roy whistled, too. "There's nothing serious?" he said inquiringly.

"Everything is serious where Ethel's concerned," said his mother for the second time, and Roy admitted it readily.

"Well, well," said Mr. Churchill, "no great mischief has been done so far, and when I get home I'll make inquiries. In the meantime don't let Ethel think it's of any importance, but don't let them meet again. That'll be easy enough, for we're all going back next week, unless I find it necessary to leave Roy here."

So, in their combined wisdom, the family settled the affair. Many things, however, sometimes happen inside of a week.

The very next morning after the holding of this council, Blair awakened earlier than usual. It was yet dawn, and in his anxiety to observe the letter and spirit of his doctor's directions he turned over to sleep again, but found it impossible. The fresh, cool breeze from the sea invigorated him, and the thought of his morning plunge set him tingling. It was only a few steps from his door to the edge of the beach, and, rising, he donned his trunks and stepped outside.

Early as he was, there was one a little earlier, and as he looked across the stretch of smooth sand, whiter than the light itself, at the sea that was greener than emeralds, and the sky that was bluer than sapphires, he saw that which made him rejoice that he was astir.

He had seen Miss Churchill walk on Broadway, and had noted carefully the perfect rhythm and grace of her gait. He had seen her tread the deck of a ship in motion with the firm, assured step of one who is confident of her

poise, and he had recognized, with the quick appreciation of a trained athlete, the physical culture that had developed a healthy body to an unusual degree of efficiency. Oddly enough, he had thought of her as one who would swim excellently well. Now he saw her running down the smooth beach to the margin, and diving cleanly through a great breaker.

Her bathing suit was a modern one. It covered her modestly, but had no cumbering drapery to hide the contour of her figure. Free, lithe, superb in development and in action, the woman of his new-born dreams enraptured him afresh, and he followed her down into the sea.

She was alone. For the pure joy of bodily exercise she had come forth into the morning, calling to her brother, who was too drowsy to join her at that hour, but seeking no other companionship and thinking of none. The delight of breasting the waves was enough.

In this she luxuriated. After the initial plunge she rose to the surface beyond the line of breakers, and struck out with the full confidence and the practiced skill of the well-trained swimmer for a long, solitary hour of rare pleasure.

Swift as she was in action, he who followed was swifter because of greater strength, not skill. Fronting the boundless expanse of the ocean, with the shore behind them, these two atoms came together in the vast solitude, as when Adam first saw Eve in an unpeopled world. It was neither time nor place for formal greetings, but his eager eyes found a pleasant smile of recognition in hers when she saw him approaching her.

"You swim uncommonly well," he said as he came up beside her, "but even so, you are rather venturesome. There are strong currents here and there among these islands. Are you not a little afraid?"

"No," she said simply. "I think I am foolish enough to like a spice of danger. I suppose there is really some danger always in swimming in unknown waters, but there is an exhilaration in matching one's skill against an irresistible force such as that of an open current. You cannot oppose it, but you can avoid it."

"Excuse me, but that is rank folly," he said bluntly, though he was almost startled by the accuracy with which she echoed his own philosophy. "If one's thought is to avoid danger it is better to avoid it altogether."

"I did not speak of avoiding danger," she replied. "There is a certain pleasure in encountering peril and avoiding the consequences of it. You said I was venturesome, and I suppose I am, but really I have no sense of fear so far as I know. I have never learned it."

Their talk went on with as little effort as if they had been strolling together in the woods, for she was swimming without much exertion from one long wave to another, and he had relaxed his stroke when he overtook her. The sea was smooth, and they both were as much at home in the water as on the land.

Coming a little nearer, he said: "I wonder how far you would carry that thought, and I wonder what you really mean by fear."

She made no reply immediately.

"I think I will not answer that," she said after a little. "I certainly would not hold my hand in the fire and think to avoid being burned. But I would not call it fear that would keep me from it. To avoid the inevitable is not cowardice."

"That's true enough," he said, feeling as if he had lost a bet. He had really intended to lead her into a discussion in which he would learn her attitude toward conventionality, but he saw that a further attempt in that direction would be useless just then.

Certainly their situation at the moment was unconventional enough, and her acquiescence in it might be taken to show indifference, but though she seemed fearless he had wit enough to realize that the situation was not of her making, and that it might be pride that kept her from showing annoyance, even though she might in her heart be resentful of it. Nevertheless, he was by no means minded to forego the opportunity he had seized, and this for more reasons than one. He had seen what she had not.

"Speaking of the inevitable," he continued as lightly as if the matter was of no great importance, "do you know that it is inevitable that we shall be carried out into mid-ocean if we do not turn back soon? We are caught in one of those currents I spoke of."

"Do you mean that really?" asked the girl coolly enough, but turning her head toward the shore with a quick motion. What she saw convinced her, and she instantly turned back. "We are certainly much farther out than I thought," she said as he turned with her.

With the first few strokes in the opposite direction there came to both of them a realization that there was a serious task before them. Swimming easily along with the flow of the water before that, they had traveled swiftly, adding the speed of their own relative motion to that of the strong tide, but when they started to return they made little or no progress. It was a situation to appall the stoutest swimmer, and Blair understood it readily.

He had little doubt of his own ability to reach the shore, but whether his companion could do so unaided, or whether he would be able to give her all the keep she might need, was at least open to question. The thought came to him that they might very possibly perish together, but he dismissed it impatiently. He had no intention of

perishing. It was a good chance, however, to test the girl's courage, and he took it mercilessly, though he knew very well what the consequence might be if she should be panic-stricken. He knew the experiment was utterly foolhardy, but the same reckless defiance of all things that kept him in the life he had chosen possessed him.

"The danger you spoke of so lightly," he said, with a smile that was intended to exasperate her, "has caught us both rather suddenly, and with it has come your opportunity to match your skill against an irresistible force, as you phrased it. Do you think you can do it? Can we reach the land, do you think?"

"It is doubtful, against this," she said coolly enough to remove the doubt as to her courage. "It is evidently the time to exercise skill. We are wasting strength in struggling against the current, but surely we can find our way out of it."

"It is, of course, the thing to do if we can," he answered, "but even if I had a chart I do not know that I could fix our location accurately. The best I can do is to guess at it." And, raising himself as far as he could in the water, he looked around anxiously. He had no trouble in seeing Santa Clara, but he was fairly dismayed to see how far away it was, and he could see no other land in any direction. There was therefore no means by which he could judge of the probable trend of the current, which might have aided him in determining whether to turn to the right or the left. At first he thought they were being carried out at right angles to the coast line, but as he looked more closely it seemed as if the lines were diagonal. He could not be sure, but it was a slight indication, and he determined unhesitatingly.

"It's only a chance," he said, "but I think we'd better turn to the left. Somewhere off to the right there is

probably some other island or some reef, and the current runs between that and Santa Clara, but as I said the only thing I can do is to guess."

Her reply was to turn with him toward the left, and for a long time they swam together in silence, side by side, feeling always the heavy impact of the water on their right shoulders, and realizing that while they might be slowly gaining in their approach to calmer water, where they might hope to make progress toward the island, they were being borne farther away from land all the time. And always there was the sickening doubt as to whether they might not have turned in the wrong direction.

Now and again he studied her face to find if she were showing signs of wavering, but there were no such signs, and his passion for her, now fully recognized, grew stronger with each look.

Not yet would he admit to himself a doubt of his own ability to save himself, but he questioned her strength, and he knew that if that failed their case would be desperate indeed. For the first time in his life he was thinking more of another's welfare than he was of his own.

"Are you getting tired?" he asked, trying to make the question seem casual, though it seemed certain that she must be. He was beginning to feel the strain on his own powers, and he feared greatly for hers, but it was out of the question as yet to rest themselves by floating.

"I can't afford to get tired," she answered, with a whimsical smile. "I'm like the boy trying to catch the woodchuck. There won't be any meat in the house."

"Good!" he said, delighted by the thought that she could make a jest of the situation without belittling it.

"But save your strength as much as you can. We'd better not even talk. Only let me know at once if you get

distressed. I have strength enough for two if it comes to that."

"Steady, old man!" he said to himself as he saw her nod understandingly while she kept on swimming with that strong, regular stroke which told of power still in reserve. "You are playing for the biggest stake you ever had in the game. It won't do to lose your nerve, but the deck is almost dealt out, and I'd give both legs to be able to call the last turn. If I lose it's the end of everything, but if I win——"

The latter thought heartened him, and he forgot the fatigue he was beginning to feel till, watching her face, he saw that the strain was telling on her at last. Each stroke was made with a little more effort than the last, and he knew the time was not far off when he would have a supreme effort to make. Yet even at that moment he was able to reckon up the chances and see that he must take advantage of all the strength she had remaining. The longer she could swim unaided, the better the chance for both of them, unless she should tire completely, and then his task would be almost an impossible one.

So, cursing the tide bitterly as he felt its unabated force, he swam on, husbanding his own strength as carefully as he could, through what seemed unending hours of hopeless struggle.

Not for a single moment did he deceive himself. Their only chance of escaping certain death lay in the possibility of getting out of that current, and for all he knew they might be getting farther into it. The thought of what the end might be made him shudder, strong as he was, and set him wondering what he would do with the remnants of that strength, in case he should find it absolutely impossible to save her.

The instinct to remain with her to the last was certainly strong, and he knew that he would not leave her so long as there remained a chance for both of them. But he knew also, and

admitted it to himself freely, that when her chance was gone he would leave her unhesitatingly and continue to make as good a fight as he could for his own life. A dog would not do that, and he realized that he was not even a dog.

Then, as he pursued his analysis with the cool tenacity he had cultivated so successfully, a miracle was suddenly wrought, and he realized that for the time at least he was another man. Not only would he remain with her while any hope remained, but he would not turn away to seek even life itself without her.

This new resolve came to him so unexpectedly that he was amazed at himself, and for a few moments wondered if he were indeed himself. "I thought I knew Bill Blair," he said to himself whimsically, "but this man proposes to keep on chipping in to the show-down, even after he knows he's going to lose."

Mercilessly clear as he was in self-analysis, he could not at the time understand the character of the change that had come to him, still less could he perceive what it foreshadowed, but he knew it had come, and with the knowledge came a strange peace.

The dread of what they faced had not been fear, for he was as fearless by nature as she, but there was no longer even dread. In its place was a calm determination to let nothing separate him from her. Not death itself should do it.

She, too, had full knowledge of the danger, and knew that her strength was failing. When that should go there would be little hope that even so powerful a man as her companion would be able to save them both, but the thought that he might save himself alone did not occur to her. Men did not do such things.

So, struggling on till all their confidence was gone, and little hope remained, they made a gallant fight against unknown odds. And when it

seemed as if the very end had almost come, as indeed it had, relief came instead.

With a throb of joy that came near being thankfulness to some higher power, he suddenly realized that the strain was lessening. He believed that they were getting out of the current, and he spoke promptly and hopefully.

"The worst is over," he said, "and none too soon. You are almost done up. Put your hand on my shoulder and let me do the work alone for a while. Rest as well as you can, for we have a long way to go yet. We can make it, though, if you don't give out."

He came up closer as he spoke, and, too tired and too wise to remonstrate, she did as he had bidden her. Holding him firmly, but so as not to interfere with his swimming, she suffered herself to be towed through the water, and presently perceived for herself that the worst of the peril was over.

"How strong you are!" was all she said, but the unspoken thanks were plain, and he felt himself twofold stronger.

The rest was easy, though so tiresome that the girl had to rest herself again and again in the same way, and it was hard for her to keep up, even by doing that, but she uttered no word of complaint. When they reached the shore she sank on the sand entirely exhausted, but it was fortunately near Blair's quarters, and there was no one about.

"Lie still for a moment and I will get you some brandy," was all he said as he left her hastily, though he had to set his teeth to keep from saying much more that was in his mind.

"I could win one hand in the game if I made love to her now, but it would be the wrong play," was what he thought as he ran to his room.

She swallowed the brandy, and it helped her immediately. Rising, she

gave him her hand and gripped his firmly as she said: "You know how I must thank you, but I cannot do it now." And she was gone.

He watched her as she made her way to where she would find her mother. There was a happy look on his face, but he said nothing even to himself.

And when Mrs. Churchill said: "I have missed you for over an hour; you must have taken a long swim this morning," Ethel replied lightly.

"I did," she said. "It was a wonderful morning." But she said nothing of her experience, telling herself it would be useless to make her mother anxious.

CHAPTER XV.

A PLOT WITH SOMERS.

Another man than Blair would have been likely to take passage on the *Queen* on learning, as he did, from Somers, that Mr. Churchill was about to return on that ship to New York, with his wife and daughter, but Blair did not. He made no pretense to himself, when he debated the question whether to do so or not, that it was because of the doctor's orders that he determined not to go. His concern for the condition of his nervous system had entirely passed, for he felt assured that he was already cured of what was, at the worst, a trifling derangement.

His first impulse had been to sail when Ethel Churchill did. He had no longer any doubt that he could at least become a favored suitor in her mind, whatever other difficulties might remain to be overcome.

"No use betting on every turn," was the way he put it to himself, reflecting that he had made a winning on his first two considerable bets, but there was another reason. He wanted to watch Somers' game a little longer.

"You'd better stay over here for another trip," was what Somers had said

when he told Blair that he himself was going to stay and take charge of the preliminary work of the new company for a time, at least. "I won't get my final instructions till the old man sails, and we'd better go over them together after he's gone. We can be together then as long and as often as we like, without exciting suspicion, and we can decide how to begin. There'll be some opening."

And Blair had agreed to remain. He saw no more of Ethel after the morning of their swim till she stood waving a farewell from the deck of the steamer. Then he felt certain that her glance was meant chiefly for him, though from a distance it seemed to be directed to her brother.

The ship was hardly out of sight when Somers came to him with a brief paper in his hand. "Read it," he said. "There's nothing in it that the old man has not told me already, but it gives me an idea. See if you get it." And Blair read:

I put this in writing, so that nothing shall be forgotten. The company will begin work promptly, and all operations will be supervised by experts who will be sent out from New York, and who will report to the home office. You will have no authority over them, but you will give them what help you can if they call on you for any. You are to provide quarters for them, and arrange for all the unskilled workmen they may require. They will bring their skilled laborers with them.

They will work on the surveys that Feldman made, which have all been verified. Fruit culture and mining operations will commence at once, and the asphalt lake will be attacked immediately.

Don Enrique will represent Don Luis, and will cooperate with you. You will represent me on the island, but you must not commit me to anything without explicit orders.

"About all you'll have to do," said Blair, after he had read the paper carefully, "would seem to be to hire workmen, put up shanties, and look pretty."

"That's what the old man means," said Somers savagely. "I suppose he

wouldn't have given me that much to do, if he'd realized all it means."

"What does it mean?" asked Blair thoughtfully.

"It means a heap. Getting quarters isn't important. It wouldn't hurt anybody to sleep outdoors in this climate. From what I can see, that's what the natives generally do. But where is he going to get the laborers? He'll want hundreds of them."

"He expects you to hire the natives, doesn't he? You ought to get them cheap."

"Cheap enough," retorted Somers, "if you could hire 'em at all. But how are you going to hire a man that never did any real work in his life and doesn't know what money is."

"Do you mean to say that Mr. Churchill has overlooked a question like that?" demanded Blair, surprised by the significance of it.

"Seems incredible, doesn't it?" said Somers, with a chuckle. "But it seems as if he really had. Shows how the cleverest men slip up, sometimes. He's never had any trouble in hiring men back home, and it simply hasn't occurred to him. I've done a little exploring my ownself since we've been here, and it struck me at once, but I didn't say anything to him, and it may give us a chance to copper a few bets. Of course, he'll get coolies or something when he wakes up, but I don't propose to wake him."

"I can't understand it," persisted Blair. "It's a vital point, and how a man like Churchill——"

"Don't waste sympathy on Churchill," laughed Somers. "He's got a big thing, and he knows it, but he'll grab off a few millions and get out of it as soon as he can. That's his way. As soon as he thinks the preliminaries are settled, he'll get out prospectuses and have the company stock listed. Then he'll buy publicity and launch a boom. And he'll feed the dear public

with stock at the highest price he can get, probably keeping enough to hold office in the company, but selling the bulk of his holdings. The time to sell short is just before he finds out that he has no workmen here, and by telling the public of that, we can knock the price hard enough to get a million or two for ourselves."

"No doubt," said Blair, with perfect gravity. "But what am I to do?"

"Go back on the next boat and get ready for the campaign. I thought it all out this morning. You'll want to get in with Armistead, the Wall Street reporter. He's the best man you can have to spread the news when we're ready. Then you'll have to have a broker on the floor, and you'd better go to Young & Young. They hate the old man, and they'll finance the deal if you give them an inkling of what's on. You can do that without telling them too much. Just say that you know all about labor troubles that the old man isn't expecting, and they'll jump at the chance. You watch that end, and I'll watch this, and, when the time comes, strike quick and hard. In a week we'll both be rich."

CHAPTER XVI.

TAKING A LONG CHANCE.

Blair met Don Enrique on the beach the following morning and invited him in for a chat.

"I have found your beautiful island so charming," he said, "that I shall be sorry to leave it."

Don Enrique shrugged his shoulders disparagingly. "It is beautiful enough," he replied, "but I fancy you would find it too quiet for your taste, should you remain here long. Yet I hope you will not hasten away for some time yet. The life here is uneventful, and there is little excitement to tempt one who is accustomed to the ways of a great city, but I'd like to show you something

more of what there is here before you go. I shall have to introduce you to some of the gentlemen who dally with fortune at the tables. I do not play often myself. My fortune is only a modest one, but I know many who find great pleasure in it. If that tempts you——”

“It does,” said Blair, well satisfied at the easy accomplishment of what he had in mind. “I am fond of play, and the higher it is, the better I like it. But I should tell you that I have already found my way to the tables. I dropped in at your club the other night and sat in a poker game for an hour or so, but the stakes were hardly enough to interest me.”

“Then I must get you a seat in Don Luis’ game,” said the other. “His highness does not visit the club, but he is devoted to poker, and plays it without a limit.”

“I’d like to sit in with him.” Blair’s eyes sparkled.

“You shall,” answered Don Enrique. “I can promise you at least one sitting before you leave.”

Blair told him he was going on the next boat.

“I may be glad to make a quick getaway,” he thought. And he was well pleased when Don Luis fixed the date of the sitting on the night preceding the *Queen’s* next homeward trip.

Concerning the outcome of the play, he had no apprehensions. There are few, even among the best poker players in the world, who recognize the possibilities of the game, but Blair was one of them. His veiled hint to Freel of what might be done by one who knew where every card in the deck lay after the deal was an exaggeration of what he himself could do, but he came as near being able to do it as perhaps any man did. And he had outlined his method fairly when he had questioned Freel as to his own ability.

As a general rule, he scrupulously

avoided all the ordinary forms of crooked play, having, after careful study, discarded them all as being too perilous for practice, but he had studied the most difficult art in the game until he was an expert.

His secret lay in memorizing the position of each card as it came to sight and watching the changes in sequence that came in the shuffle. This sounds like an impossibility, and to the average man it certainly is an impossibility, but there are only fifty-two cards in the deck, and one who has the patience and natural gift of a born juggler can, by years of practice, acquire the ability to do many things that seem impossible, and Blair had arrived at an approximation, at least, to that ability.

Training his eye and his memory together, he had reached the point at which he could, after a single rapid glance through the pack, recall the position of each card. Even so much is a fact that excites the wonder of the average man, but it was only the beginning of his task.

It still remained for him to be able to follow those cards through almost infinite changes in position, as rapid and perplexing as the changes of the kaleidoscope, and to memorize each new arrangement as it came. Even to see what the changes are in a rapid shuffle requires almost incredible skill, and the problems in permutation that are involved are almost incalculable. Yet he had been able to achieve skill in both these things, not infallible, for that would be beyond all belief, but sufficient to enable him to tell many of the cards his antagonists held after a deal.

When the party assembled in Don Luis’ cardroom, Somers was there. It was easy to see, at a glance, that he was already full of excitement at the prospect of the coming game, and Blair found no difficulty in seeing that Don Luis also noted that fact. He saw, too, that the haughty gentleman who greeted

him with lofty courtesy was not likely to miss seeing anything in the game. He would be no contemptible antagonist, but Blair felt assured that he would be an honorable one.

Concerning the others who sat around the table, it was not so easy to form a judgment, and Blair felt that if ever he needed to be wary, this was the time. His own method of play was absolutely beyond suspicion, depending as it did on his own observation and memory, and not involving legerdemain, or any irregular play, but it was hard to form an opinion of these men.

There were six players in the game, but the ceremony of introduction which Blair had expected as a matter of course in a private house was omitted, and three of them were entirely unknown to him. It was not hard for him to see that they looked upon him, as they did upon Somers, as a probable victim.

For the first few rounds, the game was uneventful, but Blair knew his own play was carefully watched for indications of his habits of betting, and accordingly he backed two hands beyond their merits, and deliberately attempted a bluff which could not be expected to succeed. No one knew better than he how to affect surprise at the losses he incurred, or how to appear to be hiding his surprise with a pretense of indifference. The foundation was easily laid for the coup he had in mind, and he waited patiently for the opportunity he would almost surely have.

Watching the others as keenly as he was being watched by them, he convinced himself that one of the three unknown to him was unusually expert in manipulating the cards, though he was too cautious to exercise his skill at every opportunity. Blair distinctly saw him deal a second in the draw. Saying nothing, he threw his hand in the discard, though he had intended betting on it. It was not his cue to

denounce a fraud which the others did not detect.

Moreover, he observed another thing that proved to him that crooked play was going on. From time to time very minute scratches appeared on the backs of some of the cards, which had not been there before.

The scratches themselves would have been imperceptible to an untrained eye, being very faint marks on the polished backs, such as might be made with the point of a fine needle, or a cunningly made finger ring, or even a carefully cut corner of a strong finger nail. They appeared only on the backs of the aces and kings.

Then he observed what increased the respect he already felt for Don Luis as a true sport, and indicated, at least, that he also recognized the marks. His highness said no word, and betrayed no sign of annoyance, but, from time to time, gathered up the cards on the table, after a few of them had been scratched, and threw them on the floor, substituting for them a fresh deck from the table at his side.

"I'll be sorry for that gentleman, whoever he is," was Blair's thought, "if His Nibs ever catches him at it."

The sitting proved a long one. They had begun soon after the cool of the evening had replaced the heat of the day, and it was near dawn before his opportunity came, but no one in the party except Somers displayed either anxiety or haste during the hours of the night.

Meantime, fortune fluctuated. He was himself able to avoid any heavy loss, though he made no large winning. He feigned caution, as if he had learned the penalty of rashness at the outset of the game, but there were several contests in which the pot had swollen to a considerable size, and all the players showed him that they were well able to take care of themselves in any ordinary poker game.

Somers had won two of these pots, and Blair judged from his expression that he had recouped himself for his previous loss, but he proved by the steadiness of his play that, despite his youth, he was no contemptible antagonist, and, displaying good judgment on several occasions, he managed, in the long run, to keep himself on the winning side.

Don Luis lost considerably, luck being against him, but he met his successive disasters with perfect coolness. The other three lost and won alternately, but no one of them wavered in his play. To an outsider it would have appeared like any other game of ordinary draw poker, interesting enough by reason of occasional struggles, but not more likely than any other to terminate in a sensational climax.

At length, long after an ordinary player would have despaired of getting such an opening as Blair was looking for, it came to him. It was on Don Luis' deal, and he was entirely sure that the cards were handled honestly. The same deck had been used for two full rounds, so that he had had a chance to locate a considerable number of the cards by his marvelous eye, and to remember their location after each deal.

He therefore knew, before the hands were lifted from the table, where ten of those cards had fallen in the deal. Don Luis himself had caught three aces, and Somers, three kings, but what the other two cards in either of those hands might be, he did not know. And the player he had already discovered to be a trickster held an ace, king, queen, and jack.

Ten of the cards which Blair had located had, by one of those accidents that happen from time to time in poker, fallen in such a way as to make it probable that exciting play would follow. There was a chance that two full houses and a pat straight might be out, and though he did not know whether either

one of them was complete, he would be able to tell positively from the betting before and after the draw whether any of them was, or whether, by a still more unusual chance, all three of them would prove to be so. In that case, nothing short of four of a kind would be enough to take the pot from Don Luis, but fours would be a certainty on which one might stake his life.

Beyond the ten cards mentioned, he had no foreknowledge of any. Those ten had fallen into place exactly as he might have desired them to do, had he had any power to place them, for he knew that the straight, if it were, indeed, a straight, was not also a flush. The ace was a club, and the king was a heart. So much knowledge as he had might prove to be of no value whatever to him, but, on the other hand, if by any miracle of luck he should himself hold fours, the chance he had waited for so long would have indeed come.

The mere possibility made his blood tingle as he lifted his hand, but there was no show of unusual interest to be seen on his face when he looked at his cards. Neither could it be seen that he was at all disappointed when he found, on looking, that he held no better than a pair of sevens.

"I sure am a rank outsider in this race," was his unspoken thought. "But the outsider sometimes wins." And he rapidly calculated the odds that would be against him should he decide to enter.

Even the faintest possibility of a winning such as might be made was not to be thrown away without thought, and although his two sevens would have gone into the discard promptly under ordinary circumstances, he kept in mind what would happen if the other two sevens should come to him in the draw. Hardly any imaginable play would be more desperate than remaining on a single pair, against such betting as there would be before the draw, but even a

desperate play might be justified in view of the size of the stake, and he set himself to consider whether, under the circumstances, he would be justified.

He did not need to consult the tables to determine the odds against him. He knew the mathematics of the game to a dot. With forty-seven unknown cards to draw from, the chance of his catching the other two sevens would be exactly one in three hundred and sixty-three and a half, or 2.727 . As he knew where ten of the forty-seven were, he had one chance in about one hundred and eighty. This last figure he did not take time to calculate exactly, but he knew it approximately. Accordingly he figured on whether to stay against odds of a hundred and eighty to one, and he determined to do so to the extent of a thousand dollars.

Should the betting go above that before the draw, he would retire from the contest and consider the thousand as thrown away, rather than venture more. And if he should fail to fill, as, of course, it was almost certain he would fail, he would be forced to acknowledge the loss of his bet. It was just such a chance as he sometimes took even when he could not possibly figure beforehand the amount of his winnings in case he should win.

Fortunately, as he looked upon it, he was not forced to the extent of the limit he had fixed for himself before the draw. He held the ace, sitting on Don Luis' left, and had put up the usual dollar ante. The next man, one of the strangers, came in, and the next dropped. Then Somers trailed, and the one with the possible straight made it five to play.

That brought it to Don Luis, and he made it ten. Blair made good on the double raise, but the next man threw down his hand. Then Somers, looking a little uncertain, came in without raising, so Blair knew that he had no more

than the three kings, but the possible straight came back with fifty more, showing that he must have the ten-spot that would complete the hand, unless he was trying a bluff most inopportunistically, and his previous play during the game was sufficient indication that he would not do that.

Don Luis' play left an open question, for he trailed. It was what he might be expected to do if he had three aces only, but if he really had a full hand, he might play that way rather than run the risk of driving out two who might probably stay longer. Blair, therefore, trailed once more, congratulating himself on the thought that he would probably get his draw at a much less expense than he had expected.

To his surprise, no less than to that of the others, Somers raised it a hundred, but only Blair knew how poor a play it was. Three kings was a wholly inadequate hand on which to raise, and a bluff at that stage was manifestly hopeless. It was plain that he was plunging on the possibilities of the draw, as Blair himself was, but blindly as Blair was not.

The man with the straight saw this raise, but went no farther, and Blair looked keenly at Don Luis, expecting him to trail also, but knowing that if he had really a full, he would probably raise it back.

There was a dangerous glint in the veteran's eye as he calmly laid six one-hundred-dollar bills in the pot, and Blair was satisfied. There was no prospect of any further raise, and he made good, feeling confident that Somers would do the same, but doubtful of what the other man might do. And Somers did make good. There was no question of his daring, after that, whatever might be said of his judgment, but the other, with a muttered oath, threw his hand in the discard. Evidently he knew Don Luis' game too well to go farther, even on an ace-high straight,

and Blair silently applauded his play, even though he regretted the loss to the pot which he still looked on as possibly to be won by him, even against such heavy odds.

That closed the pot, of course, and there was over two thousand dollars in it—two thousand one hundred and forty-two dollars, to be exact—with a chance of three hundred and sixty against two that Blair would lose his entrance money without a possibility of recovering anything, but with enormous possibilities in case the lightning should strike where he hoped it might.

He plainly saw the look of surprise and amusement on the faces of the others when he called for three cards in the draw, and he knew that they all, remembering his foolhardy plays at the beginning of the game, saw that he was attempting another of the same sort, but his own face was impassive as he let his cards lie face down on the table while he watched to see what the others would do.

Somers took his two cards, and Don Luis stood pat, showing him that he had made no error in his observation. The chance for Blair's great stroke still hung on the question of the draw. If Somers had made a full, he would back it to the extent of his pile, and Don Luis would press his supposed advantage to the utmost. All depended on what he himself had caught, and still he let his hand lie on the table.

Somers looked at his draw, and Blair saw by his face that he had indeed filled, even before he threw a thousand-dollar bill in the pot. His hand was worth betting on to that extent, and even more, against any unknown pat hand. The only question was how much farther he would go, and when Don Luis made it a thousand more, Blair saw by Somers' face that it would not be the last bit in the struggle.

One by one, he picked up the three cards that had come to him. The first

was a seven, as he had hardly dared to hope it would be, but the next was a trey. Everything depended on the one remaining card. It took all his strength to keep from showing his anxiety when he turned that over, but his training stood him in good stead, and nothing showed on his face when he saw that he had his fourth seven-spot.

He affected to study the hand for a long time, then drew forth his note case with what seemed to be a sudden resolve. Counting out yellow backs with ostentatious display, he put twelve thousand dollars in the pot, convincing the others, as he had intended to do, that he was trying an utterly impracticable bluff. There was a small fortune almost in his grasp, and he was resolved to make it as large as he could.

Somers was still confident, but he had not the money even to call. "I want to raise that," he said, in French, "but I haven't the cash with me. If you'll take my I O U, I'll do it." And he looked at Don Luis appealingly. Concerning Blair's willingness to take his paper he felt no doubt.

Don Luis looked grave, but remembering Somers' connection, and having no great doubt of his own strength in the game thus far, he showed the relentless rapacity of which Don Enrique had spoken.

"I have no objection," he said, and Blair nodded acquiescence, so Somers scribbled a note for twenty thousand on a card and laid it in the pot.

Don Luis looked at it, and putting out his own note case, deliberately counted out enough to raise the pot five thousand more.

Then Blair, for the first time, cursed his luck. To back a certainty he had no more money with him than barely enough to call, and even with Somers' paper in the game, he felt certain that Don Luis would refuse to take his. Being unwilling to subject himself to the mortification of a refusal, he was

forced to content himself with such winnings as lay within his reach, and he put in his money, declaring himself all in.

Somers seemed at first inclined to go still farther, but, on second thought, called also, throwing in another I O U, and they showed down their hands. The game was over, and Blair had scored one of the notable successes of his career.

CHAPTER XVII.

A STREAK OF LUCK.

Don Enrique came down to the ship next morning to say good-by to the guest who had paid so richly in treachery for his entertainment on Santa Clara. "His highness," he said, "has bidden me to convey to you his distinguished consideration. He does not seek to interfere with your plan of leaving us, but he desires me to express the hope that you will return at an early day. He feels that so good a sportsman as you have shown yourself to be will not be inclined to refuse him the opportunity of revenging himself in another game. It appears that you won from him rather handsomely last night."

"It is true that I won something," said Blair, "and I hope you will say to his highness that I would gladly remain now to give him the opportunity he desires but for important matters which call me to New York. I will, however, return at the first opportunity, and will take great pleasure in playing with him again."

They parted with a profuse interchange of courtesies.

When it came to the parting interview with Somers, there was less amenity. Somers was sore about his losses of the night before.

"You outheld me all right," he said sulkily, "though it was the most extraordinary play I ever saw, and, of course, I——"

"Stop a minute!" said Blair sharply. "When you know more about the game of poker, you will realize that it is bad form to criticize another man's play, especially when he wins from you."

"Oh, rot!" exclaimed Somers angrily. "I wasn't criticizing, and, even if I was, it seems to me you're pretty sensitive. Who ever heard of such a thing as staying on a pair of sevens against half a dozen raises in a six-handed game? Do you hold me for the paper I gave last night?"

"I certainly do."

"Very well, then. I'm no welsher, and I'll pay you in full, but I can't do it to-day. I haven't so much money with me, but you know I can get it."

"Yes," retorted Blair, "and I know you will."

"Under compulsion, I don't know that I would," said the other coolly. "And if you take that attitude, I don't know that there will be any further relations between us. I'm not sure about trusting you."

Blair laughed. "You are a little bit late," he said. "You've trusted me already. Remember that I not only hold your paper for a gambling debt, but I know every word of your private instructions as agent of the Santa Clara Company. It may sound a little brutal to remind you of it, but I've got the whip hand. You can't break with me now unless I choose to permit it. You've simply got to run straight with me, whatever you do with anybody else."

"Well, you don't imagine for a moment that I am under your orders, do you?" retorted Somers, with some spirit.

"I haven't given you any orders yet," said Blair deliberately. "It's time enough to consider that when I begin. But you can see for yourself that you are hardly in a position to refuse to do anything I might see fit to tell you to do."

"So blackmail is your game, is it?"

exclaimed Somers, flashing into violent anger. "You'll find you have the wrong man to deal with. I'll be——"

"Again you are going too fast," Blair interrupted. "Not only have I given you no orders, but I have made no demands. It'll be time enough to talk of blackmail when I ask you for something. Meantime, it's just as well to skip the hard words. All I've done so far is to expose enough of my hand to show you some of the cards I can play if I decide to do it. You can see for yourself it's a strong hand."

"I can see I was a fool," said Somers bitterly.

"Your education is beginning. It seems likely to be somewhat painful, but if you keep that fact in mind, it may make it easier for you as you go along. You spoke of coming to a better understanding, and I've simply been clearing up a few points that were in the way. Now about this scheme that you proposed, of coppering Mr. Churchill's bets, I don't mind saying that it sounds childish to me, but even at that I may decide to try it. That will depend on some other things. If I do, I'll let you know, and we will play it on the lines you laid out."

"What!" exclaimed Somers, in real amazement. "Do you mean to say that you are actually thinking of going into that with me after saying what you have?"

"Why not?" replied Blair, with a smile. "You've got to trust me, because you can't help yourself now, and I can trust you, because you won't dare to play me false. If you do, you'll simply force me to play some of those cards I mentioned."

"What kind of a man are you, anyhow?" said Somers, forgetting his rhetoric in his boundless wonder.

"I'm a gambler," said Blair, "and I sometimes take long chances. You saw me take one last night. The odds may be against me this time, but I think not.

There's one thing more, though. Don't play poker with Don Luis' crowd. You play a fairly good game, but you are not in the same class with them. And don't try any more sleight of hand till you've practiced longer. You don't do it well enough yet, and I saw a man killed the other night for trying it. It doesn't appear to be safe in Santa Clara."

It was a badly crushed Somers who went ashore, attempting no reply. Blair looked after him complacently as he went, but he did not turn even for a farewell glance. "I don't think I need fear anything from him," thought his mentor, as he looked. "He'd kill me gladly if he had the chance, but he won't dare try anything short of that."

Calling up the steward he had purchased on his previous trip, he gave that functionary additional cause to keep him well in mind and settled himself comfortably in a steamer chair for a period of reflection.

The future looked very pleasant to him, not the less so because he felt that all he had so far accomplished had been the result of his own unaided effort, and that the strength and ruthless determination that had made so much possible were unimpaired. Having done what he had, he was capable of doing much more.

Rejoicing thus in his own strength, he recalled, also, the physical powers that had enabled him to bring back the woman he loved from the very threshold of the other world, and he exulted that ability also, till the memory of his exploit brought a recollection of the strange resolve he had made when ultimate failure seemed almost inevitable, and the current of his thought changed.

Why had he formed a determination so foreign to all that he knew of himself? Was it because of the overweening passion for the girl, which he now acknowledged freely to himself, or was it, by any possibility, his own re-

vulsion against the baseness of his earlier thought that he would leave her at the last extremity? And this he pondered, perceiving that the question touched the very foundation of his whole philosophy of life.

And the dream came back to him in which, only a few weeks ago, he had played with fate and lost his all, staking the pride of his manhood on the final turn, and waking with the question he had put away without an answer—whether the game was fair to himself.

Well, he would answer it now. He had never shirked a fair question before, and this was, at least, an open one. Was he playing fair with himself when he took foul advantage of others?

It was deeper water than he had swam in with Ethel, and the current that had carried him so far was stronger than he had fought against, that morning. That thought came to him, and then another. With her beside him, could he make his way back? And he decided that he could. But would he?

Well, he had not yet lost that final stake in the game, and his pride revolted at two things he had done which he might yet undo. For the rest, he would wait till he knew whether she was to be beside him or not. If not, he would probably follow the current.

And when he landed in New York, he bought a draft and sent it to Don Luis with a note, saying: "I won this money unfairly when I was your guest. Therefore, I return it."

To Somers he wrote: "Here are your I O U's. Quit playing poker. Play fair with your father, and be a man."

CHAPTER XVIII.

BLAIR DECLARES HIMSELF.

"Show him in," said Mr. Churchill briefly, and he set his jaw a little more tightly. It was all that was necessary to change his expression from one of

strong, steady purpose to one of great sternness. Blair's card had just been brought to him in his office at the bank.

Immediately Blair entered. A glance at the old man's face determined him instantly as to the words with which he should open the interview. He had given thought to this, not knowing, but having a shrewd suspicion, as to what the manner of his reception might be. That would depend on how much Mr. Churchill knew.

"I have called," he said, "to ask for a few minutes of your time, and I judged it better to come here than to go to your house."

"Be seated," said Mr. Churchill, and Blair sat down with manifest deliberation.

"I must begin," he said, "by telling you something about myself. I am a stranger to you, but——"

"It is unnecessary," interrupted the banker. "I know all about you."

Blair bowed. "That saves time," he said coolly, "and I can state my errand immediately. I wish to pay my addresses to your daughter."

"That is absolutely not to be thought of," replied the other.

"Nevertheless," said Blair, bowing again, "I intend doing so. It would be vastly better, of course, to do it with your consent, but I have some reason to think that I may be successful even without it."

"Do you dare to insinuate——" exclaimed the old man angrily, but Blair interrupted him.

"I insinuate nothing. If I were not perfectly certain that Miss Churchill is all that a woman should be, my own feelings would be entirely different to what they are. But there are circumstances of which you may not be aware. Has she told you that I have had the priceless privilege of saving her from certain death?"

"She certainly has not!" was the reply. "Supposing you tell me yourself,

since you are cowardly enough to use such an argument. I will not be likely to believe your story, but it may be well to hear it."

"I do not ask you to believe it," said Blair. "You can question her after I tell you. But in the meantime, let me remind you that if I were inclined to be cowardly, I would hardly be talking to you now."

"I'm not sure of that," retorted the banker. "It's hardly the part of a gentleman to use such an argument as you advance, but let that pass. What is your story?"

"Whether I am a gentleman or not is a matter of little importance to any one but myself, when it comes to the last analysis," said Blair, flushing, "but your prejudice on that point certainly is important to me. I presume you will deny that a professional gambler can be a gentleman. It is a popular prejudice," he added, with great bitterness.

Mr. Churchill waved this point aside with an impatient gesture. "Go on with your story," he said. "I must know that before I can understand exactly how matters stand."

"That is true," returned Blair, recovering his poise instantly. "It happened in the ocean, near Santa Clara. Miss Churchill was in swimming one morning, and was carried out toward the open sea by a current that was too strong for her. I swam after her, and was lucky enough to bring her ashore, though it seemed for a time as if we would both be drowned. She was entirely exhausted, and my own strength was almost gone when we reached land. Had I not chanced to see her, nothing could have saved her."

The old man sat speechless for some moments. It was evident that the thought of his daughter's peril had overpowered him. When at length he spoke, his voice was a little tremulous, but he had recovered his self-command,

and there was no abatement of the disfavor he had already shown so plainly.

"You do not need to be told," he said, "how I regard you. I assume, now that you have told your story, that it is true. You have too much intelligence to tell me so extraordinary a thing if it were not true, knowing how easily I could disprove it. I must acknowledge, therefore, that I am under an obligation to you which cannot be expressed in words, but I am also free to say that I see no way in which I can repay you, and the sense of being under such an obligation, so far from inclining me toward listening to your proposal, increases my hostility to you. Doubtless you can understand that; unreasonable as it sounds."

"I do understand it perfectly," said Blair, "and I expected nothing else. I only told you in order to show how strong my hand is. I do not imagine for a moment that Miss Churchill will marry me because I happened to do something that any longshoreman might have done. Neither do I suppose that the fact will be any argument in my favor with you. I am not so crass. What I do realize, and what I want you to realize, is that having done what I did, I no longer stand in the position of a stranger in your daughter's mind. She cannot ignore me as a man, whatever she may think of me as a suitor."

Mr. Churchill looked at him thoughtfully. "You are bolder than I thought it possible for a man to be, to come to me with such a proposition as you have made, even after having played the hero as you say you did."

"Pardon me," said Blair, breaking in before the other could say more. "I said nothing about heroism. I simply had the good luck to find Miss Churchill when she was in danger, and to get her out of it as any other strong swimmer might have done if he had been there. I am bold enough, if you choose to use

that word, to presume on that fact as an introduction merely. I claim no other advantage from it. I have used it to compel you to give me a hearing, but I shall not use it with her in any way whatever. I do not and shall not appeal to her gratitude, for I do not want it. My appeal to her will be on other grounds.

"I know my handicap. No doubt she will at first look on a professional gambler in much the same way that you do, but I shall play fair with her, as I have played fair with you. If she believes, and continues to believe, as you do, that a professional gambler is not entitled to any consideration whatever, I lose, for that is what I have been for years, and I am not fool enough to ask you or her to believe that I am going to reform, nor do I imagine it would make any difference to you if I did. The fact that I have been a gambler damns me forever in your eyes.

"Nevertheless, I am going to win her if I can. I did not even hope for your consent, but neither you nor she will ever be able to say that I tried to do it clandestinely."

Blair rose to go.

"Wait a moment!" said Mr. Churchill. "Do I understand that you are going to try to see my daughter without my consent?"

"I have told you already," said Blair, with the easy smile that concealed his thoughts so well, "that I shall do nothing clandestine." And he went out, still smiling.

When he reached the sidewalk he called a taxicab. "Now for a quick play," he said to himself as he entered it. "If I'm lucky enough to see her alone, I may make a good start, at least."

He was lucky enough to see Ethel Churchill alone, for he had not waited more than two or three minutes in her father's drawing-room, after sending up his card, before she came in, more radi-

antly beautiful than ever in his eyes. Unaffected pleasure lighted her face.

Grasping his outstretched hand warmly, she said: "I cannot tell you how glad I am to see you again, Mr. Blair. I simply could not talk that morning on the beach, and you must have thought me strangely indifferent, not even to thank you for what you did. I might have written to you, and perhaps I ought to have done so, but I had a strong feeling that I would see you again before long, and would be able to thank you better than I could do it by letter."

"Don't try to thank me," he replied. "I am already richly rewarded by the thought that I did what I was most fortunately able to do. It was rather a close call, wasn't it?" he continued, speaking lightly.

But she would not take it lightly. "It was terrible," she exclaimed, with a strong shudder. "I can hardly bear to think of it."

"I hope you will never think of it again," he returned earnestly. "I certainly did not call to revive any such memory to you, although your father seemed to think I was trying to take advantage of a mere accident when——"

"My father!" exclaimed the girl, in surprise. "Have you seen my father?"

"Yes. I called on him to-day. I was forced to mention the matter to him to prove that I was not on the footing of an entire stranger to you."

"I should say not," said the girl, "but I am sorry now that I did not tell him myself. I would have done it if I hadn't been unwilling to give him needless anxiety, after it was all past."

"I am rather sorry that I did tell him," said Blair, "more especially as he seemed to think I was boasting, and that it was not the part of a gentleman to recall such a thing. I don't think I boasted, and I made no claim as to whether I was a gentleman or not. People's ideas differ as to what a gen-

tleman is. Certainly I had no intention of making any claim for gratitude, and I told him so, but at first he was not inclined to believe me. I think he did so, though, before I came away."

He was talking desigedly to arouse her curiosity, and as he watched her face he saw that he had succeeded.

"You seem to have had a somewhat unusual interview," she said. "Do you mind telling me something more about it?"

"Assuredly not. It was for that purpose that I came directly to you after leaving him. Do you remember what I said to you the night we walked together in fairyland?"

She nodded gravely, but said nothing.

"It was in reference to that that I came. I called to ask him if he would consent to look on me as his possible son-in-law. He refused, as I knew he would, absolutely, and I told him I intended to leave the decision to you, regardless of his refusal."

Still he watched her face, but it was inscrutable. There was no sign of either pleasure or displeasure, and if she was surprised, she did not show it, but waited, in silence, for him to proceed.

He had not really expected her to speak, though he was trying to make her, and, after a pause, he went on:

"Your father says he knows all about me, Miss Churchill, but I do not imagine that he has told you what he knows, and I presume that you know nothing at all about me, but——"

"I know that you are the man who saved my life at great risk of his own," she interrupted.

"Please try to forget that," he said. "The truth about that is that I saw you go into the water that morning, and I followed you, without realizing, at first, that we were likely to get into such danger as we did. I would have followed just the same, if I had realized

it, for I loved you from the first moment I ever saw you.

"Wait a moment," he continued quickly, as he saw she was about to speak. "Don't think that I am asking anything more of you, now, than that you listen to me. As I said, you know nothing of me yet, but I propose that you shall know everything. If I can, I will make you love me, but if that happens, it will be without your father's approval, and probably against his positive commands."

He saw her lips tighten slightly at that, and, well satisfied with the sign, he continued:

"I told him to-day that I greatly preferred addressing you with his consent, but that I would certainly do it, whether he consented or not. I have the right, or, at least, I claim the right to do that, and I do not believe you would allow any one, even your own father, to dictate to you in such a matter. Am I correct?"

"You are certainly bold," she said very seriously, but with the suggestion of a smile, in which he found no discouragement, "and you have found a decidedly original line of approach, but I will meet you fairly. I believe a man has a perfect right to declare himself if he does it openly. As to the other question, my father has never yet dictated to me."

"He will now," said Blair positively.

"Why do you say that?" she asked.

"Because he has a violent prejudice against me."

"But why?" she persisted.

"Because I am a gambler," and he saw her frown a little as she hesitated.

"At length she said: "I suppose most men gamble, more or less."

"Yes, but I am a professional. I play the same game with cards that they play in Wall Street with stocks and bonds, and your father strongly disapproves of my way of playing. If you have the same prejudice that he has, I shall prob-

ably lose out, but I do not propose to woo you under false pretenses. I might promise to reform, but that would be too trivial. You would not believe it possible for me to do it, whether it is or not. And you would be no more likely to love a reformed gambler than one who professed nothing of the sort."

Rising, he drew himself to his full height and stepped a little closer to her; then stood looking ardently downward into her upturned eyes. Too clear-sighted to be swayed entirely by his personal appearance, she, nevertheless, felt its influence. Too upright in judgment to ignore the tremendous difference between a professional gambler and herself, she yet remembered the comparison he had made between his own pursuit in life and that of her father. Feeling, rather than reasoning, told her that it was the craftiest sophistry, yet she found in it an argument that sounded well. Her impressions of him had all been most favorable up to the moment he had made his proclamation of his own disqualification, and she remembered those impressions. Then he made his appeal.

"I have not asked you," he said, "nor shall I ask you, now, for any answer. You cannot have, as yet, any such feeling for me as I mightily desire, and nothing short of that would satisfy me. All that I venture to do at present is to ask that I may see you as an acquaintance hereafter, with your full understanding that I love you, and that I seek for your love in return."

"I can grant you so much as that, Mr. Blair, without hesitation," she said. "You have made my acquaintance already, and I have no desire to deny it."

"Even though I have declared myself?" he said eagerly, hoping for some betrayal of feeling in whatever she should say to that, but she baffled him completely.

"Even though you have declared yourself," she said, with perfect com-

posure. But she arose as she spoke, and the intimation was plain that she considered the interview at an end.

In her calm gaze he could read neither response nor refusal, and he left the house, not knowing whether or not he had blundered.

That night Churchill was closeted with the shrewdest detective he knew. To him he told only that he had reason to know, and did know, that Blair intended to rob him.

"I know just who and what he is," he said, "but I want to know everything he does from now on. If it is possible to crush him in any way, I want to crush him. It is a crude thing to have him spied upon, but I cannot afford to neglect any precaution. He is a dangerous man."

The detective agreed to that readily. He, also, knew Blair. What neither of them yet knew was how dangerous he could be.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE MARE ENTERS THE GAME.

The mare had eaten her head off while Blair had been away, but even the loss of that part of herself had not improved her temper, and though Jimmy exercised her for a few days when her master failed to appear, he soon gave it up as a bad job, and thereafter devoted himself to keeping out of her way. In consequence, the unhappy animal had grown wilder than ever, and even Blair looked at her doubtfully when he visited the stable the morning after he came back to New York.

He felt the need of physical exercise almost as sorely as did the mare, but when he saw her condition, he realized that he was likely to have overmuch of it should he mount her. Only for a moment did he hesitate, however, and that was rather on account of her un-

kempt appearance than because of the violence of the struggle he would have with her.

"You have neglected her, Jimmy," he said sharply.

"No, sorr!" said Jimmy very emphatically. "I've not what you'd call neglected her. I fed an' watered her reg'lar, but I have not forced anny attentions on her, sorr. Sure, she prefers to be alone."

When it came to saddling the mare there was work for three men, and it was accomplished with difficulty, at that. Without attempting to mount inside the stable, Blair had her led outside, and then vaulted to his seat suddenly, giving her no warning, and the battle was on. Had his horsemanship been less perfect, he must have been thrown before he was fairly seated, and, as it was, he had need of all his strength and skill before he had her cantering through the bridle path in the park.

His attention was still fixed on her motions so closely, however, that he failed, for the instant, to see two other horses enter the path from the carriage road a hundred yards ahead. The mare saw them, though, and the flutter of a riding skirt so startled her that she reared instantly, and so violently that she toppled over backward.

Blair was quite unconscious when Ethel reached him, and the mare was a quarter of a mile away. He had thrown himself clear of the mare when she fell, but his head had struck on a rock by the narrow path, and the blow had stunned him so that he lay motionless while she struggled to her feet. So much might not have been very serious, though the concussion came near being fatal, but the frantic animal, wholly without malice this time, had kicked him on the lower side of his wrist in such fashion that the iron-shod hoof had gashed him deeply, severing an artery, and the blood streamed out in

quick, rhythmic jets. In a few minutes all would have been over.

"Is the poor man killed?" asked Mrs. Churchill, as she rode up after her daughter. Both women leaped to the ground.

"No," said Ethel, "the blood would not flow like that if he were dead, but he will be dead very soon if I can't stop it."

Just where the tourniquet came from no one but the two women ever knew, but it appeared quickly, and almost as quickly it was in place. Slipping her crop under it, Ethel twisted it up till her mother winced at seeing how tightly she was compressing his arm.

"Don't twist his arm off," she exclaimed, almost hysterically.

"No fear of that," said Ethel coolly, "but that blood must be stopped, no matter what happens." And she gave the crop another twist.

It was stopped almost immediately, owing to her practical knowledge, and when she had satisfied herself of that fact, she said: "Get a machine, mother, as quick as you can. There's no telling how badly he's hurt till we get him to a hospital. Stop the first one you see. Nobody will refuse to help in a case like this."

It was very early, and they were in one of the least frequented parts of the park, but they knew it would be easy to summon help. Mrs. Churchill started to mount her horse, which had stood beside her when she dismounted, but suddenly paused, excited as she was. She had recognized the man who lay on the ground, still insensible.

"Why, it's Mr. Blair!" she exclaimed, in great astonishment.

"It is," said Ethel. "He saved my life only a few days ago, and he's liable to die himself now, any moment, if he isn't taken care of. Hurry, mother, hurry!"

Climbing into her saddle nimbly, the mother sped away, and the girl set about

finding what other injuries there were to be attended to. She had never before realized, as she now did, the value of the training she had had.

His head was bleeding slightly, and she turned her attention to that first. She could not tell whether the skull was fractured, but she soon satisfied herself that it was not crushed, and before she could go further, he opened his eyes:

"Is it you?" he asked, wondering, and not recalling for the moment what had happened to him. Then it all came to him, together with a realization that he was suffering great agony from various injuries, and he smiled with joy.

"This is, indeed, my lucky day," he said, starting to rise. But the motion brought so sharp a twinge that he swooned again.

Then came a park policeman, who, noting the conditions, beamed with approbation as he saw that Ethel still held her crop firmly in her left hand.

He had blown his whistle for help as he came along, and almost immediately up came other policemen, and Mrs. Churchill with an automobile she had commandeered.

The injured man was quickly lifted and taken to a hospital, whither Ethel and her mother followed him, remaining long enough to learn that his condition was precarious.

"But you certainly saved his life for the time," said the house surgeon, looking with great admiration at Ethel. "That tourniquet was well put on."

"I owed it to him," she said simply, but the doctor understood it only as a somewhat exaggerated statement of the obligation of common humanity.

Common humanity did not keep John Churchill from a feeling of profound satisfaction at the thought of Bill Blair's condition when he learned of it, but he could have gnashed his teeth with rage when he learned, also, that it was Ethel who had gone to his rescue

so opportunely. "Fate seems to be at work," he muttered.

CHAPTER XX.

RECKONING ODDS.

"What are the odds, doctor, for, or against?" asked Blair, as soon as he came to a realization of his situation. What his condition was, he could only guess, but he reckoned it serious, not only because of queer pains that tormented him in various parts of his body, but because he had wakened to find himself, prostrate and bandaged, in a strange bed, in what he saw must be a hospital. His recollection of his fall was clear, and he blamed himself unduly for having fallen, thinking that if he had been as good a horseman as he had supposed himself to be, he would have been quick enough to save himself, which was probably a mistake. But he wasted no time thinking of that. What was done, was done.

He remembered that he had struck his head in falling, but that was all he knew. True, there was a dream in which he had recognized his goddess, and had spoken to her. There was a look in her eyes that thrilled him even now as he recalled it, but that had been only for a moment. She had not spoken, and the dream had faded suddenly. He set it down to delirium. Aside from that, all was a blank until he found the doctor pattering with him, and a nurse beside him, looking on gravely. His mind was clear, despite the torture he was suffering.

"Who brought me here?" was his first question, and the doctor, seeing that he was no longer raving, answered:

"Two ladies found you in the park, and you were brought here in somebody's auto. They did not give their names, but they said that yours was Blair."

"I suspected I must be Blair," he said, with a dry smile, "but I didn't

feel certain. Don't you know who the ladies were?" The thought had come to him that possibly it was not a dream that he had had.

"The park policeman said he thought the younger one was a Miss Churchill, but whoever she was, she's a mighty capable young woman. She put a tourniquet on you just in time."

"Was it as bad as that?" asked Blair, with a strange glow of feeling at the thought that it was indeed she whom he had seen.

"It is much worse than that," said the doctor very seriously. "I would not tell you if it were not necessary for you to help us all you can. Your will power may be a factor. You are hurt internally, and we do not yet know how badly. If you can manage to keep your self-control and not get violent again, it will help a lot."

"I'll try," said Blair simply, "but what are the odds, doctor, for, or against?"

"That I can't say definitely as yet, but I'll tell you frankly when I know more about it. In the meantime, is there any one you want us to send for?"

"No," said Blair, "not now."

"Better tell us now. They won't be sent for excepting in an extremity."

"No. I'll play a lone hand. I always have done it, and I'll do it now. I won't want anybody here if I am going to get out of this, and if I don't, it won't matter." And in this he remained firm, though the nurse, under instructions, tried again and again, in the weeks that followed, to learn who he was and who his friends were. Meantime, he did much thinking in the intervals when thought was possible. He thought many times of asking Ethel to come to him, but stoical pride kept him from letting her see him in his helpless condition, and he decided against it.

They had found a large sum of money on his person, but nothing that

would serve to identify him, when he was stripped on arriving in hospital. The money he afterward told them to use as freely as might be necessary for anything he required, but he would give no information about himself, and when Ethel and her mother called to inquire about him, they said they could tell nothing excepting that his name was Blair. Neither would they give any account of themselves beyond admitting that their name was Churchill.

They would call from time to time to learn how he was, they said, and this they did daily, always bringing flowers, since they were assured that everything he needed was being provided for. There was no message left with the flowers, nor did they ask to see him—for that the mother insisted upon—but the flowers themselves were a great help to Blair in his long, hard fight for life.

Things had happened when he came out. He was the physical shadow of what he had been, though no longer in any physical peril, and the learning of these things, one after another, taxed him heavily. One of them was that the mare who had avenged herself so thoroughly for the indignities she had suffered in the course of her severe training had been shot because of his injuries. It was not the first thing he learned, of all that had happened while he lay unconscious, but it did not seem the least important of all of them to him. He had loved the mare well.

When he came to the door of the apartment where he had lived, he found that his key would not fit the lock. Ringing the bell, he found strangers inside, and, on making inquiries, discovered that Ito had removed everything removable that was in the rooms and had disappeared. Robbed thus of his most intimate belongings, without the faintest chance imaginable of ever being able to recover any of them, as he realized, after a moment's thought, he

was thus suddenly confronted with the problem of deciding, first of all, what stopping place he should find for himself.

Though he was thoroughly and well cured of his injuries, and no longer in need of hospital treatment, he was actually no more than a convalescent, and greatly in need of a comfortable resting place, where he could have competent care until he should recover the full measure of his strength. This place, he had confidently expected, would be found awaiting him in his own rooms, and Ito could be relied upon to look after him better than any woman alive. So well used had he become to that functionary's deftness and capacity, that he had not entertained a doubt. But Ito had played him false.

And, after all, what had Ito done to him more than he himself held proper to do? Finding himself temporarily in charge of something desirable, he had calmly appropriated it. For aught that Blair knew, the ethics of the mysterious Japanese were the same as his own, and he held possession to be the only defensible title to any kind of property. His own loss was great, for there were items in the list of what he had lost which he had reckoned as priceless, since money would not replace them, and they were dear to him from association. Aside from these things, however, there had been enough to make up a considerable total of money value, and he reflected sardonically that the astute Oriental had probably returned to his own country, enriched for life by a lucky chance of which he had availed himself with commendable aplomb. It was very like what Blair had done at Don Luis' poker party.

The humor of the thing appealed to him, and he smiled at his own discomfiture, though he was bitter in resentment. If he could have seen his way to invoke legal punishment, he would have done it, regardless of his

own inconsistency, for he held not even consistency binding on him when it came to a question of possession. But the case was plainly hopeless, and, resigning himself to that fact promptly, he turned away.

"No use contesting a pot after it's raked in," was the way he put it to himself. Though he had been despoiled sadly, he was not impoverished. New York was full of opportunities, and he was still well furnished with money.

For the first time in his life, he experienced a sense of his own loneliness that dismayed him. Formerly he had exulted in it. Self-centered and self-satisfied, he had believed himself to be beyond the need for companionship. Seeking no ties other than those which would minister to his own desires, and holding those so lightly that they bound him not at all when his own convenience no longer called for them, he had found himself all sufficient to himself.

Dimly and without understanding the lesson of it, he perceived this now, but the perception brought no enlightenment. His only concern was touching the condition it had brought him to. Hardly better off than a stranger, in the great city he knew better than most men knew it, he saw clearly that he was absolutely alone in it, with no friend but his money to rely upon.

Well, the money was enough, and as he returned to his taxicab, staggering slightly from fatigue, he scoffed at himself for his weakness, as he reckoned it, in giving a thought to any one outside of himself.

Blair was driven to his favorite hotel, but there he found himself still more of a stranger than he had realized. It was no longer the old place, and he saw not one familiar face. It was still a hotel, however, and since one hotel was probably as good as another, he stepped to the counter and asked to be assigned to the best room available.

CHAPTER XXI.

FREEL GETS BUSY.

There had been one familiar face in the hotel corridor, though Blair had failed to see it when he entered, and Peter Freel was not one from whom he would have expected a welcome if he had recognized him, though that worthy had profited by the severe lesson Blair had given him in Santa Clara.

His reflections while he was on his homeward voyage had been far less enjoyable than Blair's had been, but in a way they were salutary. Freel had decided to give up gambling. Arrived in New York, he had found an opportunity to ally himself with the detective force. Barnes, a sleuth of national reputation, employed the ex-gambler.

That morning Freel, on signal, had followed Barnes into a small restaurant, in which, at this hour, there were no other customers. Seating himself at the next table to that which Barnes had taken, he ordered coffee and rolls, not even looking at his employer.

When the waiter was out of hearing, Barnes said: "Do you know Bill Blair?"

"Yes," said Freel, not caring to show his surprise. "I know him very well." He did not add, as he might have done, that he had spent much of his time of late in a fruitless search for that very person, on the chance that he might probably have returned from Santa Clara.

"Then here's your chance. Do you know where he hangs out?"

"I know where he used to," said Freel, "but the last time I saw him was in the West Indies."

"Were you in Santa Clara with him?" asked Barnes, surprised in his turn.

"We went on the same boat, and I thought I was with him after we got there, but he done me dirt, and I left him there."

"How was that?"

"I framed up a job with him to do up some o' them dagos in a poker game, an' he sold me out," said Freel sullenly.

"Do you want to get square?"

Freel's only reply was a sudden glance at his questioner, but it was enough.

"Then you're the very man I want," said Barnes, well pleased. "He's been back for some time, but he's been in hospital. Got thrown from a horse. He's coming out to-day, and two men are trailing him, but I don't want you to work with them.

"He'll be around as usual, and you ought to be able to find him yourself. Anyhow, I'll try you out on it. If you find him, don't lose him. I want to know everything he does. Call me up on a public phone every day as soon after noon as you can. Here's the number." And he scribbled it on a card.

"Don't use any names when you talk," he continued. "Call yourself G 22, and ask for me as the Chief. Tell me all you learn about him, and I'll tell you what to do, but, whatever you do, remember that you don't know me."

He rose as he spoke and went to the desk to pay his check, leaving the card and a roll of bills on Freel's table as he left.

Freel put them in his pocket without looking at them, and, calling the waiter, ordered another cup of coffee.

Later in the day, he was sitting in the hotel corridor when Blair entered.

CHAPTER XXII.

LUCK TURNS.

"Miss Churchill is not at home, sir," said the servant, when Blair presented himself at the door of her father's house.

The voice and the manner were per-

fectly civil, but when he would have presented his card, the door was very deliberately shut, and when he turned away, raging inwardly at the insult, and understanding perfectly that it would not have been offered to him if the servant had not been carefully instructed what to do, he saw a policeman standing near the foot of the steps, grinning at him most offensively.

"Better not come round here no more," he said, as Blair reached the sidewalk. "I have me orders to run you in if you do."

And Blair passed on, saying nothing. The conclusion seemed certain. She had seen, on reflection, the madness of retaining any interest in such a man as he was, and was holding herself aloof.

Moreover, he no longer had any claim even on her gratitude, for she had repaid him for having her life by saving his. Nevertheless he nursed his hope, though he saw more clearly, day by day, how unreasonable it was. "There's always a chance in this game," he reflected, "and, sooner or later, I'll see her somewhere, face to face. In the meantime, if I try to force my hand, I'm liable to lose out completely." For he would not even yet acknowledge that he had already lost.

Later, he did, indeed, meet her face to face, but there was much that went before that.

Standing, one night, on the same steps where he had stood with Studley, the night he had first seen her, and dreaming of her as he now dreamed almost constantly, he spied Don Enrique, passing along the sidewalk. And Don Enrique, seeing him, came directly up. His greeting was as ceremoniously polite as his bearing had always been, but Blair detected a reserve in his manner.

"I have come to your city on a mission of the most melancholy," he said, in more labored English than he was

went to use. "Young Señor Somers most unfortunately died in Santa Clara, and I was command by Don Luis to escort his body to New York. I have arrived here to-day, and I have delivered it to Señor Churchill, but I could not give him the true account. It was too sad. So I tell him the story of a gallantry to explain the stab. But to you, his friend, I may tell the truth. He was detect in the cheat at cards."

"He was no friend of mine," said Blair indifferently, "and I am not surprised. I have myself seen him play crooked."

Then he checked himself, remembering that he had sat in with Somers at Don Luis' game without objecting. For once he had made a false move, and he saw instantly that Don Enrique had perceived it. It seemed evident, also, that that gentleman knew nothing about the restitution that had been made, and Blair was not minded to enlighten him. The explanation would involve too much, and his consideration for Don Enrique was too slight.

The latter's reserve was a little more apparent than before when he spoke further, but all that he said was: "I thought it well you should know. You are acquaintance with Señor Churchill, and you can judge to tell him or not."

Then he said: "I may not see you again, so I will say the good-by now." And, without offering his hand, he walked away. It was plain that he classed Blair with the man they both despised, and his unspoken contempt stung deeply.

Attempting no remonstrance, the man he had left stood motionless for a time. His well-trained features were impassive, but his reflections were far from pleasant.

That Somers was dead caused him no concern, but the thought came that Ethel might possibly have learned something of what had happened between Somers and himself, and that this, be-

ing probably only half knowledge on her part, might explain the difficulty he had found in communicating with her. Moreover, even a full explanation, supposing he could make it, would not be likely to help him in her estimation. Truly, the error he had committed in his treatment of that hapless youth was not to be undone so easily as he had thought.

It was disheartening. His full strength had not come back after his illness, and the thought of another barrier, seemingly insurmountable, between him and her made him reckless indeed. For the time, nothing seemed open to him but the pursuit he had followed so long, and that seemed once more inviting.

"Is Gardner's open?" he asked of a man who passed him at the moment, and whom he knew as a frequent, but not a regular, player.

"Yes," was the answer; "and he's dealing himself. There's been something of a run against the house lately, and he took the box to-night. The crowd is there, and he's taken off the limit. Says he'll break the luck or go broke before morning."

Such news would have sent Blair to the scene at any time, and just now it was specially attractive. He started forthwith for Gardner's, and, on entering the place, found that the report was correct. The rooms were fairly crowded, and around the faro table at the front end of the main parlor was gathered a group of the best-known players in the city, including fully half a dozen professionals, who had been drawn by the rumor from their own establishments.

There was no vacant seat at the table behind which the most noted dealer in the country had taken the place of the regular man, but when Blair was recognized, way was opened for him to the front rank of those who stood behind the chairs. Securing a

position almost facing the dealer, but a little to his right, he began watching the game from the best possible point of observation.

He placed no bets for the first few minutes, preferring to study the situation and the run of the cards before beginning, but fully determined to put up important money after he had satisfied himself that everything was as it seemed to be. The suppressed excitement of the game was the most intense he had ever seen, and it required no extraordinary power of observation to see that Gardner himself was wrought up to the highest pitch. Continual losses had made him well-nigh desperate, and he was playing the game of his life.

The play was very high. When Blair laid a hundred-dollar bill on a case card for his first venture, the bet looked small beside others that were on the table, but the bank roll had been declared at two hundred thousand, and there was no question as yet of the bank's solvency. There would be none, for not even Gardner would venture in that company to take a bet that he could not pay.

Nevertheless, he was losing. Enormous sums changed hands on every deal; but, though the bank took in thousands at a time, it paid out more thousands. The run against it was not yet broken, and Gardner, realizing it, grew more desperate, as his roll grew less and less.

Then, as Blair was warming up to the game, being already a considerable winner by reason of his cautious, deliberate play, he saw a thing that almost startled him into an exclamation. Others had seen it, too, but they all looked on in silence. It seemed incredible, but there was no possibility of a doubt. It had happened.

In gathering up the deck for a shuffle before the next deal to come, Gardner had left the dead card—the trey of

spades—in the box. So great a blunder was not to be expected of the clumsiest dealer that ever sat behind a faro table. Nothing but the actual sight of it would have made any one believe that Gardner could have made it, but they had seen it. Nothing but his tremendous excitement could be taken as an explanation of it, but, as they looked at him, they saw that he had finally lost his poise. It actually seemed as if his hands trembled ever so slightly for the first time, as he completed the shuffle and shoved the fifty-one cards back in the box over the tray that had remained there.

No man spoke, but those who had seen it, and there were many who had, were busy calculating the possibilities to come. There was some betting as the cards came out, turn by turn, but nothing like as much as there had been on the previous deals, and Gardner, noting this, grew fairly furious. His face was always pallid, but now it grew almost livid as he raved and swore at them in seemingly uncontrollable rage, and they listened in amusement, watching the case carefully till only the last three cards remained to be shown. Then there was a flood of money and chips poured out on the table. The three remaining cards were the eight of diamonds, the king of clubs, and the trey of spades. The bank would pay four for one to the player who should call the last turn correctly, and a dozen men called it for all the money they had. Knowing that the trey was the last of the three, they knew it must come either king, eight, or eight, king. Some played one way and some the other, but the most of them played it both ways, preferring to take a certainty of three for one, rather than a chance for the greater odds.

Blair was among these latter ones, and, though there were many big bets, his were the largest, though even on the certainty he would not put up quite all

of his capital. He placed ten thousand one way and ten the other, standing to win thirty thousand, whichever way it went.

Gardner paused suddenly, as if bewildered by the unexpected play, and looked around inquiringly. At first it seemed as if he had lost his nerve, but, rallying himself with an effort, he jeered at them.

"Looks as if you had something on me, don't it?" he said angrily. "Maybe you have, but I don't believe it yet. Go on! Take all you want of it. I might as well settle the whole thing now. Either you break me or I win enough for one night."

But no one bet further, for those who had not seen the slip were daunted, and those who had seen it had placed all they could, or all they cared to, and very slowly Gardner dealt the last turn.

It came king, trey, and he raked the table bare. He had slipped one card under the trey when he put the deck in the box.

No one found anything to say when he looked around again, smiling this time, and slowly the crowd melted away.

As Blair was leaving the room, Freel spoke to him. He had been looking on.

"You was right, Mr. Blair," he said, "when you told me a man'd get stepped on if he got out of his place. I reckoned you was at the head of the procession, but you got stepped on that time, didn't you? You ain't such a much, after all." And he laughed heartily as Blair passed on in silence. The tinhorn had found some satisfaction, even though it was not revenge, for his wrongs.

The next day, Blair stood in the same doorway. There is a saying that New Yorkers like to believe in, that if you want to see anybody on earth, and don't know where he is, you can always find him by standing on Broadway. Blair had no implicit faith in the saying, but it justified itself this time, for as he

stood there he saw Ethel Churchill coming along in the crowd, and he stepped forward eagerly, to meet her, before he saw that she was not alone.

He was about to speak, but the words died on his lips when he saw that she did not even know that he was there, and he thought he could read her answer to anything he might say in the look she was giving to her companion. There was another man in the game, and he knew the man too well to believe he had any longer a chance.

It was Studley, the man whose friendship he had thrown away, and Studley saw him. There was no flicker of recognition in the glance he threw at the gambler, but with a quick motion he guided the girl to one side, so as to prevent her touching, or even seeing, him, and they walked steadily on, leaving Blair with his hand uplifted to his hat.

Slowly lowering it, Blair turned back to his place in the doorway, where he stood for a long time, seeing nothing. Then he drew a long breath, and said half aloud: "It was a wonderful dream, and I might have been very happy, but I never could have been comfortable with her." And, stepping into the café, he surprised the bar-keeper, who knew him well, though only by sight, by calling for a cocktail.

CHAPTER XXIII.

WHAT HAPPENED AFTER.

Following these events came an interval in which Blair disappeared entirely from the ken of any who knew him. Even the detectives who had watched him so closely lost track of him, and, though they sought diligently, found no trace of his movements. What he did, during the time in which he secluded himself, was never known to any but himself. What his reflections were, reviewing those events as he must have done, being the man he was, can only be told by inference from what hap-

pened afterward, but no one, knowing him even partially, could question that it was a period of close study and renewed resolution.

Indomitable as he had deemed himself, dauntlessly as he had borne himself, he had been beaten in the game so far, and no one knew it so well as he. It was no humiliation to have suffered defeat in a struggle against the laws of nature, for he had always freely acknowledged their irresistible power. His pride had received no mortal blow, and, though he had played away all his other counters, there was at least that with which he could continue the game. It was all he had, but pride is sometimes as potent as religion itself. He had always reckoned it more so.

It was Frank Studley who had a more intimate knowledge of the conclusion of the story than any one else but Blair himself, and Studley told it briefly. He said:

"When I renounced my friendship for Blair, after he had convinced me by his own words of his utter unworthiness, I fully believed what was afterward said by the most famous gambler of his generation, that there was no such thing on earth as a respectable gambler. I still believe it. If Bill Blair had continued to be a professional gambler, I would consider it impossible for him ever to enjoy the respect of any right-minded person. But he did not.

"My knowledge of all that happened after I had broken with him dates from the time when I called to see Mr. Churchill at his office. I had met Miss Ethel some little time before, and I had gone to the bank on the same errand that first took Blair there, to ask her father for her hand.

"My reception was different from his, for Mr. Churchill did me the honor to say that he would be greatly pleased if I should become his son-in-law, but he also told me of Blair's suit, and of all the circumstances which had led him,

as Ethel's father, to fear the result of it.

"My own fear of the same thing was no less than his, for I felt that I knew Blair even better than he did, and I had no more thought than he had of any possibility of Blair's rehabilitating himself. He encouraged me to hope, however, that I might win his daughter even against so dangerous a rival, and, with his full approval, I made the effort to do so. From that time on I was as deeply interested as Mr. Churchill himself was in knowing everything Blair did. I fully approved of the employment of detectives, under the circumstances, knowing that Blair was an avowed enemy of society, and I approved as well of the precautions Mr. Churchill took to keep Miss Ethel from knowing that Blair was trying to communicate with her. It seemed to me that as things were it was fair to use almost any means of keeping the two apart, and the day I succeeded in guiding her past him on Broadway without letting her see that he was there I felt that I had had a narrow escape, as indeed I had for the time.

"But we reckoned without our man. I had always believed, and I still believe, that I knew Bill Blair better than anybody else did, but I was not prepared for the next move in the game, even from him.

"Several days, or possibly a week, after that encounter on the street, he called at my office. It is impossible to think that he was not seriously embarrassed, in meeting me again after all that had happened, but there was no trace of any such feeling in his manner, and though he must have seen that I was greatly disturbed by his coming, and that I took a hostile attitude instantly, he affected to see nothing, and spoke with entire calmness.

"I did not intend ever to intrude on you, Frank," he said, "after parting with you as we parted the last time. But I

have no alternative. We are in the same game, and I will not play against you without laying my hand on the table. Very likely your hand is the stronger, but I shall play mine to a finish, and I am playing wide open. I am done with all trickery, and I will win honestly or not at all.

"You gave up my acquaintance, as I expected you would, when I told you why I had determined to follow gambling as a profession, and I do not ask you to renew friendship or acquaintance now, but I owe it to myself to tell you that I have renounced gambling. Whether you believe it or not, and whether or not I succeed in winning the woman we both want, I shall gamble no more.

"Just what I shall take up instead I do not know yet. Probably it will be civil engineering, though I realize the handicap I have put on myself, but one thing is sure: I shall marry Ethel Churchill if I can.

"We are rivals, or I believe we are, and if we are not, I believe you will tell me so, and I know you well enough to assume that you have already obtained her father's consent. I declare myself to you, therefore, feeling sure that you will play as fairly as I, and relying on you to see that there shall be no misunderstanding of my attitude."

"Do you mean to ask that I shall tell her father this?" I exclaimed in astonishment.

"Would anything else be fair play on your part?" he retorted; and whether he was right or not, I felt obliged to agree with him. Even now I am forced to admit to myself that I could not do otherwise than as he wanted me to, nor can I regret, honestly, that I did it, as I really did.

"But that was not all of the interview. Taking a small memorandum book and a handful of cards and paper slips from his pocket, he said: 'This

may be more or less theatric, but it will be some evidence at least that I mean what I say. This is a list of all the money that is owing to me in the world. It represents loans that I have made out of my winnings, and winnings that I have not yet collected, and these are the I O U's that I hold.' Then he tore the memorandum book and the slips into small fragments and threw them into my wastebasket.

"Well, I did not give him my hand when he left me that day, nor did either of us make any professions of renewed friendship. I cannot say that I fully believed at that time that he was entirely sincere in all that he said, and I did not at all believe that his destroying those memoranda was anything but a trick. It seemed unworthy, even of him, and I resented what I considered claptrap. Moreover, I feared his rivalry too much to desire his friendship, even had I been convinced of his sincerity. There was one thing, however, that prepared me in some measure for the astonishing things that followed.

"Before he left me that day he said: 'Frank, I am going to be just as honest with you now as I was when I told you why I had chosen to be a gambler, and I'll tell you now why I have changed. Whether I would have done so without the hope of winning Ethel Churchill, or whether I would not, I do not know, but one thing that her father said to me when I talked with him made a strong impression on me, and it came to my mind again and again while I lay in the hospital, very doubtful whether I would ever come out alive.

"He said he wished I were a different man to what I was. I told him then that if I wished to be different to what I was, I would be different. At that time, I had not the faintest desire to be anything else but what I was, but it set me thinking differently from what I had ever thought before, and I came to see, as I had never seen before, that

I would stand better in my own estimation if I should be a different man. So I determined to make my own words good, and now, entirely regardless of what anybody else may believe, or refuse to believe, I am different.' Then he left the office.

"I must repeat once more that I knew Bill Blair intimately, and I believed that if anybody could raise himself from such a position as he had deliberately taken, Bill Blair might be able to do it. It seemed to me, however, that it would be an impossibility, even for a man of such strength as I knew he had. Nevertheless, I perceived that it was the part of wisdom for me to lose no time in reaching a full understanding with Ethel Churchill.

"I therefore went to her that evening and declared myself plainly. She was not unprepared for the avowal, and nothing could have been more gracious than the manner in which she listened, but she was greatly troubled, and, as it presently appeared, her concern was entirely on my account.

"It would be unbecoming in me to quote her words, but the gist of her reply was that she had no present intention of marrying, and she made it clear to me, as kindly as so hard a thing could be said, that I had come to her too late. My own disappointment is no important part of this story, but though Blair's name was not mentioned, it was evident enough that she was still thinking of him, and when I told her father of what I gathered from the interview, his distress was almost beyond words.

"Even after that, however, he encouraged me to hope that I might be successful, if I would be content to play a waiting game, and he urged me strongly to do so. I had known John Churchill all my life, and respected him, as all did who knew him, for a man of inflexible will, masterful of purpose, but eminently just, though somewhat arbitrary in his methods. He was a very

powerful man in every way, being still under sixty and particularly well preserved, but it seemed to me during the few weeks that followed before we reached the conclusion of the matter that he was aging rapidly.

"So it came about that I learned from Mr. Churchill himself, soon after it happened, just what she did, and, as nearly as I may, I will set it down in his own words.

"My daughter came to me last night, with her mother,' he said, 'after I had supposed they had retired for the night. She was very pale. I do not remember that I ever saw her show such signs before of deep emotion, but she was very calm, and there was no possibility of questioning the fact that she had reached her final determination. Her mother was greatly agitated, but I saw by her face that she was fully convinced, though most unwillingly, that she had reached the end of her influence over her child, so far as the one great question was concerned.

"Ethel said: 'Daddy, I have talked it all over with mother, and, while I have not been able to get her consent to what I want to do, she has agreed to let you decide the matter, as, of course, we would both expect you to do finally. I went to her first, because she is a woman, as I am, and she knows what lies deepest in a woman's heart.

"And I know positively what lies deepest in mine. I have not decided hastily, nor blindly. I have considered everything so far as I can. It seems certain that there is much unhappiness coming to me, whatever the future may be, but, daddy, I'd rather be unhappy with the man I love than happy without him, if it were possible for me to be. I can't put it any stronger than that.

"Now, don't misunderstand me. I have not forgotten that I am your daughter, and I'm not going to do anything you forbid me to do. If you say

I must not marry Mr. Blair, I will not, and I will try hard to find what happiness I can without ever seeing him again. Don't think I shall pose as a martyr. But, daddy, you said to me once that you would give me to the man I loved, even if it made you unhappy, and he is the man."

"Well, Frank, what could I say? I had certainly told her that, and I meant it, but I did not surrender without going over the matter again and again. We talked till near morning, and I never argued with anybody in my life as I did with her, but there was no shaking her. She claimed the right, as a woman, to marry the man she loved, if she married at all, and there is no doubt that she loves Blair.

"So I could not deny the right she claimed. I told her over and over that it was not my happiness that I sought, and not even her mother's, but hers, and she met me with the same word that she would rather find unhappiness with him than happiness without him. So I saw that she is indeed a woman now, and I sent the letter she had written to Blair, for she did not even know where to send it. There were only three words in it. It said: "Come to me."

"Of course, Blair went, and there is not much more to tell. Ethel took him on trust, and those of us who loved her could do nothing but hope, though it seemed like hoping against hope, that her faith would be justified. But Blair has established himself in a modest office as a civil engineer, and I believe he has it in him to make good, if he keeps straight.

"And now there lies on my table an invitation to Mr. Frank Studley to attend the wedding, which is to be a private one, of Mr. William Blair and Miss Ethel Churchill. I shall not go, but I do not believe she will find unhappiness with him."

“Can” McCue

By H. H. Knibbs

The “can” was tied to him early in life. A big handicap, but he had courage and determination, and he ran the race of life in a fashion that was decidedly spectacular

CAN” McCUE was little and red, and built on fighting lines. Otherwise he never would have survived that November night in the basket on Officer McCue’s doorstep. Officer McCue returning in the small hours had all but stumbled over the basket, realized its contents instantly, and had forthwith carried the basket to his good wife Norah. “Some wan has tied the can to the poor little cuss. We been wantin’ one of these, Norah. Here’s wan widout the usual and expinsive ceremonies attached. Take him to your warrum heart, me dear.”

Nor would Can at the age of thirteen have arrived at the dignity of delivery boy for the Halloway Department Store had he been other than a bundle of wire nerves and grit. He had a potently aggressive steel-blue eye, a sharp tongue, and a quick fist. Nevertheless, he loved animals. From assistant on the delivery wagon he became driver. He was then but fifteen. He drove recklessly but satisfactorily. His foster father, Barney McCue, was on the force. All the officers in his district knew the diminutive Can. Or, if they did not, Can knew them, which served his purpose. He was wont to interpret traffic regulations to suit himself, and covered his route with alacrity.

The fifty dapple-gray delivery horses were backed diagonally against the long rear wall of the store. Can was systematically distributing packages and bundles when his horse, “Romeo,”

backed suddenly, upsetting Can, who poised on the tail gate of the wagon. Now, Romeo was an unusually well-behaved horse. Can reasoned swiftly. He picked himself up from the cement driveway, wrath in his eye and a red-tagged, glittering new golf stick in his hand. His immediate neighbor, a Teutonic youth, dodged back from Romeo’s head. Can trailed the glittering golf stick and advanced on the enemy. “Was it you backed me wagon, Kraut?” he asked, smiling wickedly. The stolid youth whistled, but did not reply. Can stepped close. “Was it you, Fatty?”

“And if it was me?” queried the stout youth, clenching a suggestive fist.

“Nothin’—exceptin’ you’ll be weighin’ mebbe a hundred pounds more nor me, or I wouldn’t need to use this.” And the golf stick—a flail of righteous wrath—rose and fell twice. The stout youth subsided. “Down and out,” muttered Can. Unabashed, he climbed back to his wagon, polishing the steel-shod head of the golf stick on his sleeve. He whistled a minor ditty of triumph. His ancestry was glaringly evident.

The only and omnipotent John Halloway, president, happened to glance down at the delivery line just as Fatty had viciously backed Can’s horse. Otherwise Can’s prestige would have suffered obliteration. The omnipotent saw Fatty collapse, and descended in person to the delivery floor. Can’s wagon was loaded and ready to start. “Here, you, Number Eight!” called Halloway.

"Yiss?"

"What do you mean—driving off and leaving this boy here—he's hurt!"

"Oh, him! Well, your honor, he backed me wagon, bein' too lazy to back in right himself. I ain't got the time to talk wid youse now, or I'll be late makin' me route. Fatty can tell you it's the truth himself."

"But hold on! The boy's hurt." And Halloway stooped and lifted the concussive but thoroughly frightened Fatty to his feet.

"It is as I intinded it, your honor. 'Tis what's been comin' to him many's the day. Giddap, Romeo!" And, with a clatter of slithering hoofs and a grinding of wheels on the pavement, wagon Number Eight rounded into the drive and disappeared down the crowded alley.

John Halloway sent the injured youth home and had another boy put in his place. He also jotted Can's number in his notebook, and returned to his office. In fifteen minutes he had—well, not forgotten, but shelved the incident.

Can's natural aggressiveness buoyed him above the flotsam of employees that drifted in and out upon the tide of business that surged through the great department store. Again he came to the immediate notice of his superiors. Horses had not, at this time, taken to the wearing of straw sunshades. Can, being original, spied a sample of this new equine headgear, and bought it for Romeo. The sunbonnet was trimmed with green ribbon, which may or may not have had something to do with Can's purchase of it. The sunshade was decidedly humane on the blinding hot streets of July in New York. The advent of Romeo wearing his garish headpiece created a stir in the delivery line. Halloway, ever alert, noticed it at once. He called up the delivery department and asked for particulars. He ascertained that Number Eight was re-

sponsible for the innovation. Incidentally, he recalled Number Eight's manipulations of the golf stick. "Find out why he bought that—er—sunbonnet," he telephoned. "Hold on—this is Mr. Halloway—and order shades for each of the horses. No! To-day!"

An hour later, the omnipotent's desk phone rang shrilly. "Delivery. Hats for horses will arrive eight a. m. tomorrow, Mr. Halloway. Smart & Likely—two-fifty a gross. Number Eight says he bought his because he's Irish. That's what he said, sir. Yes, sir."

"Is he a good boy?" queried Halloway, smiling into the receiver of the telephone.

"Smartest of the lot," replied the delivery foreman.

"Send him up, after he's through," ordered Halloway. He snapped up the receiver, opened a drawer, and selected a burly cigar—unprecedented happening in business hours—and lighted it. Tentatively he puffed until his office door was opened and Can, cap in hand, edged through.

"How old are you?" queried Halloway, as the blinking Can twisted his cap, wondered which of the Olympians had summoned him.

"I'll be sixteen in—in jist elevin months and wan week comin' somewhere arround the third of November, your honor."

Halloway swung round in his chair. "Ever been arrested?" he asked.

"And how did you know?"

Halloway smiled. "I'm supposed to know everything about my employees." He studied the thin, aggressive face of the boy. Can shuffled his feet. "Wance—for reckless drivin' of Romeo and disignorin' the traffic regellations and argumentin' wid an orficer. He was a new Dick—but he knows me now."

"Oh, he does, eh? That's interesting. Who paid your fine?"

"Fine! Me?" And the diminutive

Can's chest swelled. His eyes glared. "Now, Judge McCloskey would look well the day, finin' any wan drivin' for *this* store, I dunno. I towld him that John Holloway himself was me uncle—but you needn't be tellin' the owld slave driver I said so—and the judge let me off. Say, do I get docked for comin' up here and gassin' wid youse?"

Mr. Holloway's face was expressionless. "Who do you think I am?" he asked presently.

"You? I guess you're wan of the guys what hands out the josh for old man Holloway—the wan wid the whiskeys in the picture over the stairs to the basemint that says, in gold letters: 'John O. Holloway, President.' I never seen *him*."

"And who is your father?"

"Me father! And didn't ye know me father was Orficer McCue? Huh! I t'ought every wan knowed I was the prize package what come in the basket wan winter evenin'. I t'ought every wan knowed that."

"What do they pay you?"

"Same as the rest. Five a week—barrin' expinsis for Romeo."

"Romeo?"

"Me horse. Yiss. I'll be after buyin' a new collar pad wance—and gettin' his calks sharpened up wance—when the other plugs was skatin' all over the avenoo 'count of the ice. The barn boss says I was too fancy partic'lar about Romeo, so I tells him to go on sleepin'—and I pays for the extras mesilf. Me father says I done right—and if I was good to Romeo and stuck to me business I'd be presidint of the works some day. I dunno. I never got nothin' out of it yet."

Holloway wheeled in his chair and took up the telephone. The conversation was unintelligible to the anxious Can. Then Holloway turned to him: "Report at the meat department tomorrow morning. Mr. Krause will have a place for you. You'll get eight

dollars a week. And, remember—no golf sticks!"

And the great man's back was toward the thoroughly astonished Can. He picked his steps slowly toward the door.

To desert his Romeo and work in "the meats"! He hesitated. "And Krause—Fatty's father! And why didn't the big stiff there l'ave me with me wagon and Romeo the day? The nut!" Can's belligerent eyes were filled with tears.

"Haven't you gone yet?" queried Holloway, swinging round.

"Yiss, your honor. And who'll I be tellin' sint me to the meats?"

Holloway smiled. "It's not necessary. I have arranged that. But if you really want to know—it's Mr. Holloway, the president."

Can immediately disappeared.

He regained a modicum of his poise as he sauntered to the delivery desk. His cap was tilted at an aggressive angle.

"Did John O. hand it to you?" queried the sympathetic foreman.

"Hand it to me? Not what you'd notice! I towld him I was disinfected wid the way you was runnin' the delivery, and asked him to give me a job in the meats—and more pay. I got the job. But you want to take good care of me Romeo, or I'll be down here wid me cleaver—see? And what I done to Fatty won't be in it wid what I'll do to the wan that gets gay wid Romeo."

Can straightway presented himself at the meat counter. It was near closing time, but Can reasoned that he might pick up some experience which would be of value to him next morning. Krause, the foreman of the meats, allowed him to help carry the trays of "cuts" to the cooling room. "But you get nothing for this afternoon," said the foreman, wiping his fat fingers on a smeared white apron.

"That's where Krause is wrong," soliloquized Can, crowding past with a tray of meat. "I git the experience—and wise to it that you're out to do me already, knowin' I was the wan what put Fatty to the bad."

Can's lean red face took on more color as he worked in the meats. He obeyed his foreman with smiling alacrity. Krause could find no fault with him, yet even his stolidness was susceptible to the undercurrent of belligerency that accompanied Can each time the brisk lad passed him with a tray of cuts. The foreman knew that Can was worth any two boys in the department, yet he begrudged him his place, having in mind Can's emphatic treatment of his son. The foreman bided his time, sullenly admitting to his superiors that Can was "good enough."

That John Halloway should take occasion to pass through the meat department that particular noon is inexplicable. He did, however. Can, with a large and murderous-looking knife, was calmly slicing a huge disk of Bologna from a sausage somewhat smaller than a dirigible. He deftly split a roll and placed the meat between the halves. Halloway paused for an appreciable second. "See here," he said quietly, "do you make a practice of this sort of thing?"

"Sausage, your honor? Indeed, and no." And Can solemnly munched his improvised sandwich. "I'm after eatin' headcheese to-morrow—and it'll be the boiled ham Wednesday noon, and Thursday it's the pickles. Friday the dried herring——"

"How long have you been helping yourself this way?"

"Me? Sure and ever since the first week I been here."

"Well, you'll have to stop it. It doesn't amount to much, but it's a bad precedent. And this is no place to eat your lunch."

Can almost choked on his last mouthful. He glared at the great John Halloway with a baleful eye. Slowly, very slowly, he untied his apron and folded it carefully. "Yiss!" he hissed. "And that's what a guy gets for tryin' to build up the business! I'm through wid the job. You can get another guy to come at sivin and sweep up after the coon what pertinds he swep' out—and worrk till five-thirty widout leavin' the job for more'n a drink of water the day. And savin' the comp'ny me hour at noon—and"—Can breathed heavily—"and instid of stayin' out wan hour and a half and lettin' the noon trade go—like some I could name widout namin' all the foremen in the store. And then you fire me for a slice of sausage and a bun—three cints for me noon hour, I dunno."

But his tirade was interrupted by a stout woman in black, who glanced covetously at a porcelain tray of veal cutlets. Can's professional instinct overcame his anger for the moment. "Twinty-two a pound to-day. Fresh this mornin'. Yiss, ma'am. Three pounds? Sixty-six cints. Pay at that windy over there. Yiss, ma'am. Sure, and they wouldn't be trustin' the likes of *me* wid the change. Thanks. We have thim fresh every mornin'—exceptin' Friday. And the fine day it is, ma'am." And Can shot the wire basket overhead, and smiled winningly.

"How long did you say you'd been helping out at noon?" queried Halloway.

"The six months I been here—barrin' wan week to get the hang of it."

"Understand the cuts pretty well?"

"If I didn't better'n them fellys what sends 'em up I'd go out to the stockyards to school," replied Can, still belligerent.

"Well, put on your apron and go back to work. You can get your lunch at the delicatessen from now on. I'll arrange it."

Can's eye never left Halloway's broad back until the latter had disappeared through the annex entrance. Then—"Huh!" snorted Can. "He'll be makin' me foreman of the meats wan of these days. And, be gorry, that's what I'm after goin' to be!"

But his stay in the meats was brief. Again he came to the notice of his superiors. Nearly every one liked him, despite his flame of a temper. Krause, the foreman, was a natural and almost disastrous exception. Krause returned one afternoon, his fishy eyes heavy with drink. Otherwise he appeared as usual. Can's natural perceptions noted this condition, and he became wary with the stealth of the dog that circles a bush wherein a cat is hiding. He smiled perpetually, and worked with redoubled energy. On one of his hurried trips from the cutting room, Krause blundered into him, upsetting a tray of steaks. Can swore eloquently. Krause awakened to sudden anger and struck Can across the face. Can sat down amid the ruin of his tray of steaks. The clerks laughed. At this Can became strangely white and silent. He picked himself up, gathered the steaks, and, taking them to the rear of the department, washed them carefully. Then he wrapped the meat up and laid it beneath his section of the long counter. From there he stepped to the cashier's window and spoke to her.

Krause, stooping laboriously, examined the package of meat. "Can McCue, hey?" he wheezed. "Well, this is for Mr. Halloway to know about, I think, yes." And Krause called up the president personally and reported that one of the clerks had been stealing meat. "And that will just mebby get *him*," muttered Krause, hanging up the receiver.

The cashier, who liked Can, kept silent.

There was a stir of excitement as Halloway, frowning, stepped briskly

into the meat department, accompanied by one of the department managers. "What's this, Krause? Why didn't you report to the manager? Who has been taking meat?"

Krause took the bundle from beneath the counter and handed it to the manager.

"Well, what of it?"

"He dropped it and then wraps it up, and says nothing," explained Krause.

"Who?"

"McCue, there."

"Again!" exclaimed Halloway. "This thing has got to stop! I can't be bothered this way. Here! Where's McCue?"

"Me? Yiss," said Can, stepping forward.

Can gazed at the package—then at Krause. "He says I swiped it, your honor?"

"Yes."

"Did he say that he run into me and upset me tray account of his bein' stewed wid the beer? Did he tell you I warshed the meat and weighed it and tied it up, yiss? Did he say I *took* it, your honor?" And slowly Can worked toward the meat block where lay Krause's knives. Can made a selection—a decidedly lean and hungry-looking blade. He whetted it and whistled a wild, minor chant, meanwhile glaring at Krause.

"Here! What are you up to?" began Halloway. But Can, nose in air, kept on whetting the blade. "It's about right for pork," he said, replacing the steel.

Knife in hand, he stepped to the cashier's window, followed by Halloway and the manager. "Miss Reilly, would you please and be tellin' the boss how me account stands at this windy?" he asked.

"The damaged meat? Yes. He paid me for it," she said, addressing Halloway. "Regular price—twenty-five a

pound. He said he could use it at home."

Halloway wheeled on Krause. "Do you hear that? Now take off your apron and go upstairs and get your time! I could smell your breath before I got within a yard of you! McCue, come up to my office."

"Yiss, sorr. I'll be changin' me apron."

The department manager and Halloway strode away. Can moved quietly toward the now thoroughly frightened foreman. "You called me a thief to the boss. Now, down on your fat knees and be beggin' me pardon, or I'll make this floor harder to clean up than it was yesterday evenin', the day." Can's eyes glittered, and he brandished the knife suggestively. "Down on your knees, or——" and he waved the knife.

Krause sank to his knees and recited a formula that Can took delight in wording. Then, "Hooray for Ireland!" shouted Can. "I wouldn't 'a' cut ye for a minnit, but I scared ye good."

Again Can stood before Halloway. "I don't know what to do with you," said the omnipotent, glaring at Can. "Why didn't you let well enough alone, instead of threatening Krause with a knife? I can't have this sort of thing! Krause told me about it. What do you mean?"

"I—I—was just puttin' the fear into him, your honor. But say, boss, I've the owld man have his job. He's good for nothin' else, and I'm not wishful to wipe out the whole fambly."

Halloway smiled. "That's all right. But what am I going to do with you?"

"I was wishful to be foreman——" began Can.

"Foreman? Of the meats?"

"Yiss."

Halloway repressed a smile. "You can take elevator number four—freight. Same pay, and no one to quarrel with. And don't let me hear of your making

a disturbance again. This is your last chance. It isn't the meat—it's the knife business that I refer to."

Halloway strode briskly down the hushed aisle of the Sisters' Hospital and stopped at a cot on which a swathed figure moaned with pitiful regularity. He stooped over the figure. "Here I am, Can," he said cheerfully.

Dulled by opiates, Can was slow to recognize his employer. Wearily his eyes opened. The moaning ceased. "And it would be yoursilf, John B.?"

"Yes."

"You and me's had enough trouble as it is, runnin' the store, widout that mess of a fire," said Can. "But we got 'em all out, in the freight elevator, an' that was wan good thing." And Can turned his head and lay gasping. Halloway glanced at the nurse.

"Now, if there is anything——" he began.

"I was jist waitin' till the big pain let go, your honor. It comes suddin-like, and then lets go a bit. Say, a felly can't live, all burned up like this, can he?"

"You'll be better in the morning," said the nurse.

"Knowin' what you're meanin', I say thanks for that," moaned Can. "But, your honor, it is this: I been workin' for you me whole life"—Can's service covered a period of three years—"and I'm nothin' but runnin' the elevator, and freight, at that! Would you be tellin' a big fat lie for the likes of me?"

Halloway was puzzled. "I don't just understand, Can."

"I was wishful to be foreman of the meats, wan of these days," said Can. "Now, if you was to dhrive up to Mother McCue's house, seventeen-seventy-wan Bright Avenoo, it is, in your big auto, the day, and say to her that you was intindin' makin' her b'y Can

foreman of the meats—next week, mebby, now, would that be askin' too much, your honor?"

Halloway whipped an immaculate handkerchief from his pocket and blew his nose. "I'll do it gladly."

"Thanks, your honor. It won't be long I'll be botherin' you for any job at all, at all! I heard wan of thim docs tellin' the nurse they wasn't enough skin left on me body to tell whether I was white or a nagur, your honor. I'm thinkin' it's all off wid me. But it was wan gran' fire, your honor. And you needn't to be scared me ghost will be botherin' you for a job, now, the day."

"I'd give anything to save you," said Halloway, smitten with pity for the waif's terrible condition.

"And you'd be the foolish man to do that, the day. Mebby you could run the store widout me. I dunno. But you couldn't widout the cash." And Can's voice trailed off to a whisper. "But we—mustn't be caught—connivin' like—this, your honor." And Can, the fearless, Can, the irrepressible, turned his bandaged head away and prayed that he might live to see his mother, and then die speedily.

Halloway stood looking down upon the twisted figure. "Good-by, Can!" he said, and a pain gripped his throat.

"Good-by, your honor!" whispered Can. "You'll be puttin' on me tombstone that I saved the girruls on the fourth, it is, your honor? It would be plazin' Mother McCue tremenjous."

Silently the big man passed down the aisle. Meeting the doctor, he questioned him. The latter shook his head.

"But he's a fighter," said Halloway. "He's a fighter, man! See here!" And straightway there was a consultation wherein Halloway's generous check figured potently. Skin grafting was men-

tioned. Money, despite its indifferent power, has been known to save life.

The ninth day passed, with Can eloquently wroth with every one in sight, and in fact wroth with every one he had known in his limited career. Even Halloway came in for a share of Can's picturesque vituperation. "The owld pirate!" he complained to the nurse. "Him callin' up on the tellyphone iviry day instead of comin' in the big machine—and me saved the whole fourth from bein' roasted in their shoes! It's a nice boss he is, the day."

"He came every day," said the nurse gently. "We wouldn't let him see you."

"Well, he'll be seein' me when I get me legs to workin' again," asserted Can. "You was listenin' when he towld me I was to be foreman of the meats," he added shrewdly.

Six months later, Can, the indomitable, scarred, smiling, and jacketed in dazzling white, stood behind the counter of the temporary store of the Halloway Company. Across the band of his cap was lettered the magic word "Foreman."

An agent from the stockyards approached, glanced at Can, and hesitated. "Is the foreman here?" he asked.

"Can you read?" queried Can.

"But—"

"If you want to see Krause, I'll tell him. If it's about that pork you sent up the other day, I can tell *you*. Krause and me is foreman, but I been long enough in the business to know bad pork widout smellin' it. We'll be allowin' you tin cints a hundred on what we sold—and you can take the rest back wid the compliments of Can McCue, eh, Krause?"

And Krause nodded.

The Man Who Could Do Everything

By Albert Payson Terhune

Author of "The Fate Chaser," "An Amateur War Lord," Etc.

(In Four Parts—Part Four)

CHAPTER XXVI.

KEELER WATCHES A MOUSETRAP.

A T a tiny card table in one corner of the big living rooms in the house that had been Royce Milwood's, Wayne Wisconsin Keeler was seated. On the floor beside him lay his discarded shoes.

The house remained as it had been on the night of the murder; pending the arrival of heirs-at-law or the appointment of an executor of Milwood's estate—or some other legal process.

Milwood had left no will. And, as no relatives had come forward, his affairs had been allowed to remain in abeyance. Thus, the house was untouched. Its shades were pulled down, its shutters were closed, and a policeman was posted, day and night, in front of it.

The policeman's presence was for a double purpose: to guard the vacant premises from thieves or morbid hunters of relics, and to provide for an off-chance that an old and asinine tradition might be fulfilled—that "the murderer might return to the scene of his crime." This last despite the fact that the police were smugly certain they had the murderer in a cell.

This afternoon, for some reason, the ever-present policeman had temporarily left his post. The early thrill of the murder being swallowed in later sensations, the staring little crowd that for

the first few days had loitered on the sidewalk outside the grounds had melted. Perhaps, to-day, the falling of a cold, drizzly rain may have had something to do with the vacant condition of the street before the house.

For more than half an hour Keeler had been there. He had entered the side door by means of a key supplied by Chief Pyne. And he had purposely left this door unlocked. As he had wished to be on the spot in good season, he had not taken time to lunch before coming thither. Instead, he had stopped at a corner delicatessen, bought a "health lunch," and carried it to the house with him.

This repast he had set out on the little table which he found near a corner window. The shade was down and the room was gloomy. But there was light enough for eating; and, consulting his watch, Keeler decided there was ample time, too. So, after taking off his shoes, he made ready for clothing the inner man. He always felt braver and cooler on a full stomach; as do most people.

But perhaps few people would have chosen the menu which just now graced Keeler's impromptu banqueting board. His midday meal consisted of five cents' worth of zwieback in a paper bag and a half-pint bottle of Kumyss.

Drinking out of the bottle, which he held right sportily in one hand, Keeler dived from time to time into the rattling paper receptacle with the other,

fishng out a flinty morsel of the zwieback and crunching it conscientiously. He was quite content with his surreptitious feast, there in the big, dusty room, with its eerie silences and clustering shadows. He counted twenty chews to every swallow of the dry zwieback; and he was duly careful not to swig his Kumyss, but to sip it with true hygienic slowness.

In the *Health Journal* which had converted him to these horrible diet orgies of his, he had also read that a patient, while eating, must keep his mind from all serious or disturbing topics. Wherefore, he shoved out of his brain all save lovingly inane thoughts; and sought to become, for the moment, even as a ruminant cow.

Long practice had made this feat surprisingly easy to him. But long practice had not yet taught him to gauge the exact flight of time during these much-chewed and scanty-mentalized meals.

Thus, by mere chance now, did he hear, in an interval of hailstormlike munching, the faint creak of an outer door.

He set down the bottle and the half-gnawed chunk of zwieback with the guiltily shamed haste of a child caught red-handed in the jam closet. He got noiselessly to his feet, drew out and glanced at his battered nickel watch, and realized, with horror, that in the gross delights of gluttony he had miscalculated the time by a full twenty minutes.

"To think!" he wordlessly scourged himself. "To think that the pleasures of the table should have made me risk the loss of everything! I'm a worthless, bestial gourmand, that's what I am!"

Even as he berated himself, he was speeding on stockinged soles to the wide doorway of the room. There, between the drawn folds of the portières, he crouched, ready to dodge back or for-

ward at the slightest cause. The hallway, into which he peered through the half-inch opening of the meeting curtains, was even darker than the living room where he had been sitting. But his eyes, fairly well accustomed to the dim light of the house's interior, could make out the scene in front of him.

The hall was vacant. If, indeed, he had heard a creaking of the side door, and if that creaking betokened some one's entrance into the house, there was certainly no sign, yet, of such an intruder.

Keeler knew the lay of the ground floor from several previous visits. He knew that every room on that floor opened into the hallway. And, though two or three of the rooms, on the side opposite the living room, led into one another, yet no one was likely to use so roundabout a method of traversing them, when the hallway provided a shorter cut from one side of the house to the other. To reach the stairs, it would be absolutely necessary to come out into the hall.

Keeler waited, tense, breathless, his mouth open, that he might hear the more distinctly. But, save for a rat scurrying between the walls and the muffled hoot of an automobile horn far down the street, no sound greeted him.

And, on the spur of the moment, he decided that his carefully planned position was a strategic error. There was a door leading into the living room from the rear. Suppose some one should enter the room, silently, from that quarter—the watcher would at once become the watched. Keeler was aware of a nervous tingle at the thought. The situation seemed to call for a change of base.

On velvet feet, he slipped between the portières and sped down the hall, running close to the side wall to lessen the chance of a board creaking. The journey was scarce fifty feet in length; yet to his overstrained senses it con-

sumed hours of time. Every door he flitted past seemed on the point of flying open and disgoring some hidden and terrible foe. A myriad unseen eyes watched his progress.

Yet in a second or two he reached his goal—the closet wherein he had sat, waiting, on the evening of his call on Milwood. Once there, he breathed again. Now, at least, no secret lurker could creep up on him from behind.

In that hiding place he could, by leaning forward, command a full view of the hall, clear to the front door. And he could not be seen. For he was in the hallway's very darkest part.

As he stood there, a very low and nasally sighing sound assailed his ears, causing him to start ever so little. It came from just behind his head. Then, with an impatient shake of his puny shoulders, he recognized the noise. It was the wind buzzing and droning in the broken speaking tube—the tube through which, before the tragedy, he had heard and half heard the scraps of talk in Milwood's study.

But, that night, the wind had been blowing in sharp gusts. To-day, there was only a vagrant breeze stirring. And the buzz was scarce audible.

For a minute longer Keeler waited, his eyes patrolling the hall and its short double line of closed door. Then, as he watched, a room door halfway down the hall slowly opened.

No sound accompanied the turning of the knob or the moving of the hinges. The door simply opened; very slowly, indeed. Keeler had to strain his eyes to make sure they were not tricking him; so slowly, so impalpably, in that shadowy gloom, did the neutral-colored portal swing outward.

Inch by inch, the door opened; still with no sound; still with no one coming through its slowly widening aperture. For perhaps eighteen inches it opened, pushed with the utmost care

from an unseen hand at its farther knob.

Then the motion ceased. The door stood ajar and moveless for a long half minute, while Keeler crouched and waited for the invisible person behind it to issue forth.

Just as he was assuring himself that the latch had been imperfectly fastened, and that an eccentric wind current from somewhere had pushed against the panels and forced them ajar, the door began to close as slowly and as noiselessly as it had opened.

Little by little it shut. There was no click of the hasp as the door edge came flush with the jamb. It closed firmly and without a trace of sound; a manifest impossibility unless the steadiest of guiding hands chances to be manipulating the knob.

Keeler's thin hair began to ripple along his scalp. He had prepared himself to expect any one or *anything* to come through that mysterious opening. But the uncanniness of a door opening of itself, then closing and latching itself again, was too much for his nerves. He could almost feel a new presence in the gray-dim hall; as though an Invisible had come out when the door was ajar and had closed the portal after it. A gentle sweat began to dampen the watcher's forehead and his palms.

Then, in a way that seemed to him, by contrast, almost businesslike and thunderously noisy, the closed door of the hall's rear room, just opposite him, swung wide. A man came out.

Even by that faint light, Keeler had no trouble at all in recognizing the stocky little figure and sallow face of the Japanese servant. And at once the fear of the unseen fell away from him; to be succeeded by a mild ecstasy of relief.

This was no longer a matter of ghosts. Keeler understood. Ichi had prowled around the outside of the house; had found the side door un-

locked, and had entered. He had gone through to the middle room, just behind the big living room; had started to open its door; had then gone back into the rear room for some reason, and had, at last, come out of the latter into the hall.

In the reaction, Keeler was so ashamed of himself for his momentary panic, and so anxious to atone for it, that he would willingly have atoned by stamping into a French camp just then, bawling: "*Deutschland Uber Alles!*"

Ichi paused for a moment, glancing furtively around him, as he stepped out into the hall. Then, with quick, light tread, he crossed the wide passageway, opened the door next to the closet against whose rear wall Keeler was pressing, in the darkness, and passed into the rear room on that side.

Keeler waited for perhaps two seconds. Then he left his hiding place and glided after the Jap. The latter had left open the door whose threshold he had just crossed. Keeler stood in the doorway. This was the dining room; as he not only remembered from his former inspection, but as the sight of dustily polished table and sideboard told him.

But the room was empty. The Jap had evidently passed through it to another.

On one side was the kitchen extension; on the other the library. The doors leading to each were open. Which way had Ichi gone?

So little time had elapsed that the Jap could scarce have left the dining room by the barest fraction of a second before Keeler reached its threshold.

Keeler started to follow, meaning to take the direction of the kitchen as the more likely goal of a servant than the library.

He raised his right foot to step forward. As he did so, the dim room suddenly burst into a billion flashes of many colored lights. Lights that

crackled and stabbed into Keeler's brain.

The walls contracted with a rush. The ceiling collected itself into one tremendously hard lunge and fell, with a crash, on the top of his head. The floor sprang welcomingly upward to meet him. It hit him a fearful blow in the face.

Then the whole house gently melted into nothingness. And Keeler, for the first time in his life, discovered he was a wonderful swimmer. He was swimming dreamily, but at incredible speed, through a cool, jet-black ocean of nothingness.

CHAPTER XXVII.

WHOSE KNOCK-OUT?

Keeler vastly enjoyed his cool swim through the blackness of the eternal seas. But presently—or in a century or so—some impertinent meddler reached down a hand from the unseen heights above, caught him about the neck, and lifted him bodily from the delicious caress of the waters.

Though the swim through darkness had been a rare delight, yet the emerging from it into the light of day was a matter of agonizing torture. His head, which had been so drowsily comfortable, was gripped by hideous pains that pierced and rent him.

Billows of deadly nausea swept his very soul. Uncouth babblings smote upon his aching ears. And these coarse babblings gradually began to group themselves into clumps of meaningless words. Then the words took on meaning, and he heard some one eighty miles off remarking complacently:

"He's comin' around all right. I saw him bat an eyelid; and he's breathin'. Once more with the water!"

An icy dash of wetness deluged Keeler's racked head, sluicing out the last sweet remnants of drowsiness.

"Good!" went on the unwelcome dis-

turber of his rest. "Now with the flask!"

Keeler felt his locked teeth pried apart, none too gently. Something—stinging, sweetish, and burningly painful—filled his dry mouth and gurgled like liquid flame down his throat.

Snorting, sputtering, strangling, he tore open his eyes and struggled to his full senses.

He lay on the table in Milwood's dining room. But now the shades and shutters were wide open. Above him leaned a thick-necked man who held a flat, brown bottle in one hand, while with the other he supported Keeler's head. A second man stood close by, grasping an empty pitcher. From the sides of the table onto the floor rug, little rivulets of water were dripping.

Keeler sat up dizzily. The man with the flask put an arm around his swaying shoulders. And now Keeler recognized the thick-necked flask wielder; yes, and the man with the pitcher, too. He had seen them both, dozens of times, at detective headquarters.

And in the doorway of the dining room stood another man he knew—no, *two* men. One had the other by the collar. One was a plain-clothes man of Pyne. The prisoner whose collar he hung to, bulldogwise, was Ichi. A scared and pitifully abject Ichi, who bore scant resemblance just now to his fearless ancestors, the Samurai.

"All right, Mr. Keeler?" queried the thick-necked man. "Another swallow of the old stuff will put you on your feet."

Keeler summoned all his wobbly and scattered strength to push aside feebly the advancing flask.

"No!" he mumbled. "Alcohol's a poison. I—I read it contains— It —"

Suddenly his memory and his dogged will power came back to him in a rush. Lurching free of the detective's supporting arm, he slid to the floor and

stood reelingly, gripping at the table edge for support.

"Quick!" he muttered thickly. "Search the house. Don't let him get away. Search the house and the grounds."

The detectives laughed tolerantly at his almost incoherent vehemence.

"Easy, Mr. Keeler!" laughed the thick-necked man. "Easy, there! We've got him all safe. Don't you worry!"

"Got him?" croaked Keeler, trying to concentrate his mind once more, and scarce able to control his dazed faculties into a semblance of sanity. "Got him! Thank goodness! Where is——"

"He bolted out of the house at a dead run, looking like the devil was after him," explained the officer. "We nabbed him, and then we came back to see what had scared him so. And to look after you, too, like the chief said we must when he sent us to shadow him. We found you all crumpled up on the floor there, by the door. I put you on the table, and Harris ran to the pantry sink for some water. And——"

"Where is he?" demanded Keeler, unheeding.

"Where?" echoed the plain-clothes man. "Why, right there in the doorway. Kivlin's got him. Are you too groggy to see that far? He——"

"Not the Jap!" cried Keeler, impotent fury surmounting his dizziness and nausea. "The other! Quick! Go through the house. The grounds. Turn in an alarm."

"An alarm?" laughed the thick-necked man. "Who for?"

"For—for—I don't know," replied Keeler drunkenly. "Oh, search the house, can't you? He may be here, yet."

"Listen, Mr. Keeler," interposed the detective, speaking as though to a sick child. "You take a good big hooker of this booze and you'll feel more like yourself. We've got the measly Jap. No use searching the house for him."

"The—the other——"

"There ain't any other!" declared the man, a whit less patiently. "I tell you, there ain't any other. This guy was the only one that came in. We was close behind him. And——"

"But the other!" persisted Keeler, his thick speech gradually growing clearer. "Search the house, men! Search every room, every closet, every corner. He may not have gotten away yet. He may still be hiding somewhere here."

"I was like that oncet," volunteered the man in the doorway who held Ichi. "The time the gas-pipe crowd laid for me and put me out. For pretty near an hour after they'd brought me around I could 'a' swore I heard little birdies singin'. And I thought the amb'lance surgeon's whiskers was purple. That's straight. I did. I——"

"Search the house!" entreated Keeler, wholly unimpressed by these interesting glimpses into hallucinatory psychology, and staggering toward the door as he spoke. "Do as I say! Come! We'll start with the ground floor. He may——"

"Hold on there, Mr. Keeler!" interposed the thick-necked man. "Go easy. You're liable to harm yourself if you don't keep quiet for a spell."

He laid a detaining hand on the little man's shoulder as he spoke. Keeler couldn't any more have shaken loose that grasp than he could have pushed a stone wall down. He understood for the first time what must have been the feeling of Æsop's shepherd boy when that sensational youth yelled "Wolf!" for the last time. He saw there was no immediate hope of making his meaning clear to these well-meaning numskulls. Forcing his dazed mind to think collectively, he started on another tack.

"Did you leave anybody on guard outside?" he asked.

"Outside?" answered the man with the flask. "No. Why should we? We

nabbed this Jap outside. There wasn't any one else to watch for. So we all came in to see where you were and to——"

"The policeman who's usually on duty out there? Chief Pyne told me he'd have him ordered away for a couple of hours. Is he back yet?"

"Not him. His two hours ain't near up. And he won't waste time comin' on peg-post dooty here till he's got to."

"Then any one could have gotten out——could be getting out *now*?"

"Anybody could. But anybody isn't. There's no one to——"

"Listen to me!" commanded Keeler, striving to curb his wild impatience and speaking with almost unintelligible softness. "This Jap didn't knock me senseless. It was some one else. Won't you search the house, *please!*"

"Some one else?"

"Yes. The Jap crossed the hall and came into the dining room. I followed. I was barely a second or two behind him. He had hardly had time to go through one of those two doors. And just then I was struck. It must have been from behind. For there was no body in front of me. He——"

"That's simple enough. He'd heard you followin' him, and he skipped around to that next room and out into the hall and come on you from behind. It's an old trick."

"He couldn't have done it. There wasn't time. I tell you, he wasn't more than two seconds ahead of me. Some one else——"

"I see how it was," spoke up the man who had discoursed so learnedly of songbirds and purple-whiskered ambulance surgeons. "I had the same thing, that time I was tellin' you about. Last I remembered I was turnin' into Waverly Place from Sixth Avnoo. And they found me halfway down Macdougall Alley, where I'd been done up. I didn't remember one thing about gettin' there; nor I don't even yet. The

ambulance surgeon says that's most always the way when a guy's knocked cold. Their mem'ry stops quite a spell before the time when they get hit. The last few minutes or seconds before they falls asleep is always a blank to 'em. Tom Sharkey told me he was in a fight once when——"

"There *was* some one else!" fiercely protested Keeler. "Search——"

"Kivlin's right," decided the thick-necked man. "I've heard of a dozen cases like it. The last thing you remember was followin' this chap into the dinin' room. That ain't sayin' it's the last thing that happened. Why, for all you know, he may 'a' turned on you, and you had a mix-up with him, and he put you out—all without your rememberin' anything that happened after you——"

"Wait!" implored Keeler, thrusting his hand into his cash pocket and fishing out a little wad of bills. "Here's six dollars. It's all I have with me, except some change. Take it for your trouble in searching the house. Now go and search!"

"We don't want any dough from a friend of the chief," stiffly returned the thick-necked man. "If it'll help chase the bats out of your mansard, we'll search the place."

And search it they did, with tolerable thoroughness, Keeler insisting on going with them, in spite of his dizzy weakness and headache. Kivlin alone remained in the hall with Ichi, who by this time had won back his usual cold stolidity.

The search was fruitless. So was the cross-examination through which Keeler sought to put the Jap. Ichi would say nothing, save that he had come hither to collect some of his clothing, and that he had seen no one there. Not even Keeler.

"Then why did you run out?" demanded Keeler.

"Because I had hit you. I thought

maybe you dead," replied the Jap, his mask of a face breaking up into a grin of pure mischief.

"Because you had hit me?" insisted Keeler. "Why, man, you just said you didn't see me."

"Maybe I hit you with eyes shut," explained the Jap, his grin broadening into a snicker.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE "DISPLAY AD."

It was dark that night when Keeler reached the far-uptown and far-upstairs bedroom that he miscalled "home." He was so dead tired that he went straight to bed and to sleep, without so much as taking his regular "fifty deep breaths" at his bedroom window before turning in. He had had a busy day. And he was looking forward, on the morrow, to a busier.

From the Milwood house, he had returned to the Poplar Street Headquarters with the detectives and Ichi. There, when the Jap had been locked up again—this time not as a "material witness," but on a charge of felonious assault—Keeler had gone straight to Chief Pyne.

The chief, having heard the detectives' report, had received Keeler with jocosely sympathy. But, after a half hour of earnest conference, the little man had departed, leaving the chief once more battling between intention and common sense, and had even forced from him a decidedly reluctant promise concerning the morrow.

From Brooklyn, Keeler had gone to the *Chronicle* office, and had written, for insertion in the next morning's paper, an advertisement for which he demanded and bought "display space" far in excess of the item's apparent value.

His day's work done, he realized all at once that he was sickeningly tired, that his head ached deliriously, and that

there was a bump on the back of his thin-thatched scalp the size of a pigeon's egg. He had been through a wakeful and strenuous day; a day rife with shocks and nerve rack. And he yearned mightily for bed.

Keeler's sleep was miles too deep for dreams. It was the glorious beast slumber of utter exhaustion. And from it, early in the morning, he emerged as from a cold plunge—still stiff and a trifle sore; but wholly refreshed.

As was his wont, he made a pilgrimage to the door at once, and came back bearing the spoils of the brief foray in the shape of a copy of the *Chronicle* and a letter.

Crawling back into bed, he propped up the paper in front of him, and then tore open the letter. It was signed "Hilda van Vleck." It had been sent to him early the previous afternoon, as the envelope showed, by special delivery, and addressed to the district attorney's office. Thence it had been forwarded to his home. He spread wide the stiff page and read:

DEAR MR. KEELER: YOU promised to respect my confidence, and I am still holding you to that promise. Though, thank Heaven, I am *wholly* convinced, now, of my dear husband's innocence.

As soon as you left here, this morning, I telephoned to him at his office, to come home at once. He reached the house half an hour ago. I told him of my talk with you, and that the district attorney's office and the police suspect him of murdering poor Mr. Milwood. He was terribly overcome. At first I could hardly prevent him from going straight to the district attorney, but I persuaded him he was in no immediate danger. Then he broke down and told me all about that awful night. And I believe *every single* word he said. For he never tells me lies. *Never!* Not once in a year.

Mr. van Vleck admits he left home with every intention of thrashing Mr. Milwood within an inch of his life, if not actually killing him. When he got to Brooklyn, it was very late, and there was a thunderstorm. He is not familiar with Brooklyn, and he got on the wrong car.

He got far out into the suburbs before he

found out his mistake. The car conductor told him how to get to Marken Street. It was a mile. He had to walk. Part of the way was across vacant lots and fields.

Mr. van Vleck got to Mr. Milwood's just in time to see two or three policemen hurrying out of the house. He asked what was the matter, and they said there had just been a murder.

My husband waited around in the rain for an hour or more, to learn the details of it. Then there was a block on the cars. The current was affected in some way by the electric storm, he says. And he had to walk all the way to Brooklyn Bridge.

He was still so upset and so ashamed of himself for having gone to thrash a man who was already being murdered by some one else, that he wouldn't say a word about it to me or to any one—till to-day.

He thanks you for promising to keep quiet about it, if possible; but he says, if necessary, the testimony of the car conductor and of the policeman he spoke to will give him an alibi. So while he hopes he won't have to appear in court he is *sure*—and so am I—he will be vindicated. I thought you'd like to know. So I'm writing at once. Very truly yours,
HILDA VAN VLECK.

Keeler read the letter. Then he re-read it. Then he laid back for a space, with his eyes shut and his scanty eyebrows puckered. Then he sat up, reached for his coat, drew out the "suspected list" and a pencil, and crossed off Van Vleck's name.

"Leaving," he mused, glancing down the overscored names, "only the Tramp. And to-day will end *him!*"

He put back the list in his pocket and picked up the *Chronicle*. Riffing the paper's voluminous pages, he came presently to what he sought. On an inner page, in display type, and surrounded by a "bull's-eye border," was the following advertisement, full four inches in depth and across the width of two columns:

MILWOOD HOUSE TO BE DESTROYED TO-DAY.

The dwelling house at 9999 Marken Street, Brooklyn, formerly owned and occupied by the late Royce Milwood, will be torn down to make way for a storage warehouse to be built on its site. The work of demolition

will begin promptly at two p. m. to-day, at which time the J. D. Lowerie Company's wreckers will take possession of the building and set to work at once destroying it.

Bids for timber, firewood, bricks, et cetera, from the house may be made at the aforesaid company's offices.

This notice is inserted in accordance with Section 746 of the Building Code of New York State.
BY ORDER OF THE COURT.

CHAPTER XXIX.

ARRANGING A SENSATION.

Keeler read his carefully composed advertisement with gentle satisfaction.

"I wonder," he said, half aloud, "if there is a Section 746 of the Building Code. Or if the Building Code has that many sections. Or if there's a wrecking firm named 'Lowerie.' Also, just what is the penalty for inserting a fake 'ad' in a reputable newspaper. As a lawyer, I suppose I ought to know the last answer."

He got up and made ready for the day.

He went, first, to the district attorney's office in Brooklyn and obtained leave for a word or two in private with his chief.

"Well," the district attorney hailed him, "how is the vacation coming on? Let me see—you wanted leave to mix in the Milwood case, didn't you? They seem to have the man who did it."

"No, sir," denied Keeler respectfully. "Not yet. But we hope to before night."

"But Craig——"

"Craig will be free before night, sir. Unless I am very much mistaken, we shall have the real murderer within a very few hours. I called here to ask another favor. Would you mind giving orders to have him brought directly here when we get him?"

"But——"

"You see, sir," explained the ever-apologetic Keeler, "you were good enough to let me 'mix in,' as you call

it, on this case. I'd like to have the satisfaction of proving to you, first-hand, that you didn't make a mistake in giving me that permission. Also, sir, to show you that members of your staff are sometimes even more competent than the police. And," he finished, "I think I can promise it will be interesting to you, too, sir, to hear the story."

"All right," assented the district attorney, impressed in spite of himself with his subaltern's desperate earnestness. "I'll give the order. But who is the man, if it isn't Craig?"

"Do you mind, sir," begged Keeler, wiggling in his chair and smiling across at his chief in the propitiatory fashion of a puppy that seeks to dodge punishment; "do you mind very much if I keep that back, as a surprise to you? You see, sir," he added, in explanation, "I've spent a lot of thought and all my annual holiday on this business. And I'd like it to wind up with a sensation. I've—I've always wanted to be the center of a sensation. All my life, sir. And I've never been. If you don't really insist——"

The district attorney chanced to be in a genial—almost expansive mood. The morning's papers had not hammered him. In fact, one of them had devoted a half-column editorial to chanting his praises. And he was in high good humor. He placed no implicit faith in Keeler's far-fetched prophecy of success. But he liked the little fellow, and the latter's eager appeal mildly touched him.

"All right," he vouchsafed, "suit yourself. If I hear the crowds cheering and the salutes fired some time this afternoon, I'll know the sensation's on its way here and that you are in the center of it."

"Oh, no, sir!" the ever-literal Keeler reassured him. "There'll be no crowds and no cheering. I promise you. We'll bring him here very quietly, without any fuss."

"I see," observed the district attorney tolerantly. "Well, as I used to know Royce Milwood pretty well, I hope, for his memory's sake, the sensation will be worthy of such a sensational chap as he was. I don't think I'm betraying any secret when I tell you that I've learned a few things about Milwood lately. I've had a talk with some of the Washington secret-service men. It seems, if Milwood hadn't made such a sensational exit from life, just when he did, he was due for a still more sensational entrance into a Federal prison. He had been under surveillance for days before his death. The case against him was completed at last. He was to have been arrested the very next day. The very day after he cheated the law by dying. There is every reason to believe he knew it, too. He had made plans for flight. The secret-service people found out that much."

"Yes, sir," said Keeler, "I know. And now——"

"You knew? How?"

"I made a few inquiries."

"H'm! And now run along and let me get to work. Is it spoiling the effect of your 'sensation' to ask where and how you expect to catch the murderer?"

"There is an advertisement in this morning's *Chronicle*," said Keeler, feeling his way around possible conversational snags, "that work on tearing down the Milwood house is going to begin this afternoon at two. At twelve, the policeman on duty there is going away. I—I think, some time in the next two hours after that, a man is going into the Milwood house. If he *does*—he will be the man we want."

"Keeler," replied the district attorney, "you don't need a vacation; you need a course at some really good sanitarium, under the personal supervision of an alienist."

"Yes, sir," admitted Keeler, in no wise offended, "perhaps so."

"And you have the nerve to tell me this rigmarole about——"

"Just wait till this afternoon, sir," entreated Keeler, "before you pass judgment. And give the order I ask you to. To have him brought straight here. He will be the right man. I'll stake my job on that."

"Yes," was the grim reply, "I rather think you will."

"It's a bargain, sir. Good-by—till this afternoon."

CHAPTER XXX.

THE TRAMP.

Marken Street, Bay Ridge, drowsed in the midday sunshine, like a sleepy cat on a warm doorstep. In front of the Milwood house loitered the solitary policeman to whose presence the neighborhood had grown quite accustomed.

In the disused garage barn, back of the house, sat two men. They had sat there since before sunrise. Burly men they were, in ready-made dark suits and derbies, and with square-toed and super-polished boots.

In the living room of the house, behind the lowered shades, a third man of like aspect sprawled on a leather divan. He, too, had been on duty since before dawn. So had another man who nodded in the one comfortable chair in the reception room across the hall.

A covered grocery wagon, driven by a bony youth, and drawn by an equally bony horse, turned into the street and rattled along the roadway, drawing up, with jolting suddenness, in front of a house opposite Milwood's and two doors farther down. The driver jumped to the ground, moored his steed by means of an iron weight on the end of a rope, dived one arm into the inclosed body of the cart, yanked forth a basket of groceries, and disappeared around the rear of the house.

Which, as any watching neighbor could have testified, was odd. For the

house was vacant. Its occupants had moved out two days earlier. And, equally odd, was the fact that the boy did not reappear.

But the good folk of Marken Street are not overcurious or given to idle deductions. And a genuine mystery on that very block—in the Milwood house across the way—had more than sated their inquisitiveness, for the time being. So no one disturbed the somnolent horse or the deserted wagon.

This was just as well, perhaps. For, on piles of empty sacking in the bottom of the cart reclined no less noteworthy a collection of groceries than Wayne Wisconsin Keeler and a very grumpy, sheepishly self-disgusted celebrity, Chief Pyne by rank and name.

"Yes," the chief was grunting under his breath, his cross words barely audible to Keeler, "we're a pair of wall-eyed fools. But I'm foolisher than what you are. For I've got more to lose. Gee, if the noospapers ever get onto my hidin' in a grocery cart, with my eye to a torn place in a canvas cover, why, I'd be laughed out of the department."

"If we lose, I lose my job," returned Keeler, in the same tone. "I told you that. And my job means as much to me as yours means to you. But we're not going to lose."

"So you said. But——"

"And so you believe, in spite of all your grumbling!" snapped Keeler, with an unexpected show of spirit. "If you didn't believe it, way down in your heart, you wouldn't be here. And you wouldn't have posted those men in the barn and in the house."

"Huh!" sneered the chief, in lofty disgust.

But he did not continue the argument. An argument which had just had a tenth repetition in two hours. He and Keeler put their eyes anew to worn spots in the ragged sides of the

canvas. And silence brooded over their odd vigil.

Presently the policeman in front of the Milwood house looked at his watch, yawned, stretched, and made off down the street, with the air of a boy at the end of a school day.

For a space, stillness and midday calm held the block. A cat crept toward the middle of the street in a laudable effort to stalk a bevy of sparrows. Two little girls came in sight and, arms about each other's waist, ascended the steps of a near-by house. A man rounded the next corner, glanced idly along the street, and slouched down the block.

"There he is!" whispered Keeler.

"Who?" queried Pyne. "Him? The guy that needs a shave and has fringe on the feet of his pants? Gee! He's just a hobo."

"Watch him," returned Keeler.

The prospect that met the newcomer was not one of startling interest. The block dozed in the midday sun. Its men were at business in New York; its women and children at luncheon. Midway between the two intersecting streets a cat stalked sparrows, and a bony horse attached to a grocery cart switched flies with his semibald tail. For the rest, there was not a human being in sight.

The man whom Pyne had so slightly referred to as a "hobo" scarcely deserved the title so far as looks were concerned. True, his felt hat was dusty and had lost most of its nap, his chin bore the growth of several days' beard, and his black suit was shiny and frayed and grease-spotted, with an ill-mended rent here and there.

But his shoes—first sign of sartorial deterioration—were of good leather and fitted well. Nor, though they needed polish, were they old. Keeler alone noted this fact.

But Pyne himself saw that the man did not bear himself after the hopelessly collapsed fashion of a human

derelict. He slouched; but his shoulders were squared, and he gave the appearance of latently lazy strength rather than of bodily degeneracy.

The "hobo" came down the block in half-aimless fashion, glancing now and then from a soiled card in his hand to the house numbers he passed, as though to verify an address.

He passed the Milwood house—Pyne nudged Keeler in contemptuous triumph—then hesitated, turned back, and, card in hand, passed hesitatingly up the walk leading to the veranda, seeming to seek a better view of the house number.

He mounted the steps, with the same hesitating yet perfectly open demeanor, and crossed the width of the porch to the front door. There, feeling for the bell with his left hand, he glanced rapidly up and down the street and, with a key that had been held in his right palm, swiftly unlocked the door.

He swung open the door, stepped inside, and closed it behind him. So swiftly did he do this that the three successive motions seemed one. It was achieved with the deft speed of a conjuror's trick.

A half second later, the muffled toot of a police whistle sounded from just inside the house.

Pyne and Keeler threw themselves from the wagon back, tore across the street, and, abreast, raced up the walk. Keeler could hear thudding feet along the paved way that led around from the rear, and he knew the garage's two occupants were hurrying on their way to the scene of action.

As he and Pyne dashed up the walk, other sounds rose above those of the detectives' running feet. Sounds of scuffling, of stamping, of swearing, of hard-flung bodies banging against walls and furniture. Fifty men seemed to be battling in the hallway there, if Keeler might judge from the racket that came from the house's interior.

Then, of a sudden, the double front doors flew outward beneath a crashing impact, and three writhing bodies were precipitated bodily upon the veranda floor.

Keeler had but the briefest vision of this new stage of the encounter. For, on the instant, one of the trio shook itself free of the other two, leaving a ripped coat and waistcoat in their grasp.

It was the "hobo." By a feat of strength worthy a professional wrestler, and with all the lightning skill of a football half back, he had wriggled free of the two men who were grappling him.

Coatless, his vest and dirty collar gone, his soiled shirt torn from neck to waist, his unshaven face livid, the fugitive cleared the veranda at a stride, and, easily dodging Pyne's cumbersome effort to tackle him, cleared the porch steps in one beautiful leap. Ahead of him lay the empty street and—freedom.

Yet, alas, that so splendid a bound for liberty should have so disastrous an ending! Instead of landing lightly and safely on his feet in the middle of the unobstructed walk, the "hobo" came to ground right ingloriously and on all fours.

And this for the reason that Wayne Wisconsin Keeler, close behind Pyne on the steps, had hopped upward at precisely the right moment and had clutched with both hands the only portion of the fugitive's flying body which chanced to be within his reach.

He had grabbed the man by the left ankle, and he hung on. The swinging foot caught him square in the chest, knocking him breathless. The impact of the hurtling body swung him off his own feet and into the air. But he hung on.

Keeler described a parabola through space and struck the flagged walk with the broad of his back. *But he hung on.*

A frantic kick from his sprawling captive lifted him bodily into the air again and brought him back to the

flagging with a resounding and agonizing thwack. The imprisoned ankle twisted and jerked with a spasmodic force that sent the blood spurting from Keeler's finger nails and shook him as a puppy worries a dishrag. But—he hung on.

Breathless, tumbled about, battered, dragged along the walk, in anguish of body and in deadly fear, he hugged the writhing ankle to him, and endured the fearful punishment inflicted by its attendant leg and by the leg's mate.

All this for a hundred years or more. At least, for the second of time required for four husky detectives to launch themselves upon the madly tugging "hobo."

In fiction alone can a Hercules, prone on the ground, defend himself against a quartet of powerful opponents. And in a half minute, the grossly unequal struggle was ended. The fugitive lay on his back on the flagged walk, his wrists snugly handcuffed, two plainclothes men sitting on his legs, Pyne's black automatic shoved against his panting stomach.

The man lay there, his broad chest heaving, his eyes ablaze with helpless murder light, his shirt and undershirt in ribbons. Pyne, seeing the prisoner was beyond chance of escape, turned his attention to a huddled little figure close by. Keeler, his eyes shut, every instant expecting death, and not at all aware the battle was over, lay asprawl on the ground, breathing in moans and still clinging tenaciously to the captured ankle. He was dully grateful, through his stark confusion of senses, that the hand-wrenching motions and kicks had momentarily abated.

The chief, with the gentleness of a woman, pried loose the thin, tight-locked fingers and lifted Keeler to his feet.

"Mr. Keeler," he said, his voice hoarse and choked by a sudden emotion very foreign to him, "you've done it.

We've got you to thank. You're—you're a dandy little hero, that's what you are! I want to beg your pardon for ever thinking you weren't the cleverest, nerviest guy on top of the earth. Ain't badly hurt, are you, sir? Paint's a bit scratched, héy? But cylinders all right. Lord, but you're a *man!* A *he man!*"

Then the prisoner found voice.

"You little shrimp!" he snarled. "But for you I'd have won free!"

Keeler drew an agonizing but needful volume of air into his lungs. Then—

"Thank you, Milwood," he managed to say.

CHAPTER XXXI.

HERO KEELER.

The district attorney of King's County sat in his Court Street office. On his usually heavy face was such a look as a *matinée* girl wears just as the curtain is about to go up. A half hour earlier, a telephone talk with Chief Pyne had put him in possession of decidedly startling facts—the skeletonized story of the capture, the identity of the prisoner, and the announcement that the captors, with their prey, were on the way to his office in Pyne's car.

"And little Keeler was the man to down him," the district attorney was repeating to his secretary. "Meek little Keeler, who never had the spunk to hurt a fly. Hung onto him by the leg till the rest could catch up. Look at the way he worked up the case. How he did it, I can't——"

An attendant came in with word of Pyne's arrival. And presently into the room came five men. Pyne led the way, ushering in his exhibits with true showman pride. After him came two plainclothes men, with a prisoner between them, his wrists shackled to theirs. The captive had secured from some charitable officer a coat which was wrapped closely about him, buttoned up to the

very throat, masking his tattered undergarments.

Keeler brought up the rear. There was a walnut bruise on his forehead. One of his eyes was blackened. His under lip was badly swollen. So was his nose. His usually prim neatness of costume had given place to dishevelment that was almost rakish. His hands were bandaged; and through one of the bandages showed bloodstains.

The district attorney rose—actually rose—and came forward to greet him. He sought to shake his battered aid by both hands. Finding the hands shapeless with bandages, he shook Keeler's wrists.

"My boy!" he declared effusively. "I'm proud of you. *Proud* of you. The whole staff is proud of you!"

And this from the saturnine district attorney! Keeler could have wept aloud—more through utter rapture than from the pain occasioned from the emphatic pump-handling to which his sprained wrists were subjected by his chief.

It was his hour!

The district attorney turned to Milwood.

"Well, sir," he remarked. "It seems you weren't content to stay dead? I can't say I commend your choice."

"No?" queried Milwood, with perfect courtesy of voice and manner. "Oddly enough, that is just what I said about the people of Kings County last year when I heard they'd elected you. I suppose you wish a statement from me, and all that sort of thing?"

"Presently," answered the district attorney, flushing. "Just now I prefer to hear from the man who thrashed you. Mr. Keeler, I——"

"Thrashed me?" repeated Milwood. "Thrash' is such an ugly word. I recall thinking so when they used it about the man who beat you so badly for State senator. May I sit down?"

"Keeler," said the district attorney,

presenting his back to the pleasantly smiling Milwood. "This morning I said I wouldn't press you with questions till you were ready to talk. Are you ready now? If you are, I should like very much to know how you discovered this was not the man who was murdered—when every one else, including the whole detective force—declared he was."

Keeler, drunk with joy, and eager as a child to recount his triumphs, straightway forgot the deferential shyness that always gripped him in his chief's presence. Speaking with methodical dryness, he began:

"I knew, sir, because the man who was killed was not a tennis player."

"A—— Wasn't a——"

"A tennis player, sir. Perhaps you've noticed, people who play very much tennis always have a callous ridge—right along *here*."

He indicated the space between the middle knuckle of his right forefinger and the crotch between forefinger and thumb.

"I haven't one myself," he added, "because I don't know how to play tennis. But all players have. Milwood plays tennis all summer, and he plays squash all winter. Look at the ridge on his right hand. It's the biggest I've ever seen. I've noticed it lots of times. Just as boxers have a——"

"But what has that to do with the murder?"

"The man who was murdered didn't have any such ridge on his right hand, so I knew it couldn't be Milwood."

The other men, except Milwood, were looking at the speaker with the admiration children lavish on a conjuror. Such mute tribute after years of snubs and good-natured neglect was as a glimpse of paradise to Keeler. He went on:

"I saw it when I bent to see why the dead man's hand was closed so queerly. It was closed that way because

some one had put a silver bullet in his palm—after he was dead. I'll explain that part later, if you'll let me, sir. Well, it was then I knew Milwood was alive somewhere. And I set to figuring out where he could be and why he had wanted people to think he was dead. He *must* have wanted people to think he was dead, you see, or he wouldn't have dressed the other man in his clothes."

"Well?" as Keeler for the first time hesitated.

"Well, sir," answered Keeler, somewhat less vaingloriously, "it was then I started out on the wrong one of the two roads that were open. I wasted a full week on it."

"How do you mean?"

"I started out to find who did the killing, instead of looking for Milwood, sir. I thought if I could get an idea who did that, I could hunt up Milwood himself later on. He'd keep. The body was in a suit of Milwood's clothes, you remember. And the face was destroyed by acid. I knew several people had threatened to kill Millwood. My idea was that Milwood expected to be killed that night, and that he had gotten someone else to dress in his clothes and perhaps make up his face like Millwood's, and then stay at the house that night while Milwood ran away. I still think that is probably what happened. Milwood's clever. We call him 'the man who can do everything.'"

"Thanks," said Milwood.

"Then, I thought, the person who came to kill Milwood killed this other man by mistake and escaped. And that Milwood perhaps came back and put acid on the victim's face, so people would think it was he who was dead. And so the person who had tried to kill him would think so, too, and wouldn't hunt for him any more."

"Good theory," approved the district attorney. "A little tangled in spots. But not bad, for you."

Keeler winced at the last two words. They seemed to wobble his new-built pedestal. But he resumed:

"Then I set out to discover who had killed this unknown man by mistake for Milwood. And I wasted nearly a solid week in proving to myself that none of the people I suspected could possibly have done it. I was about at the end of my tether yesterday morning. Then Millwood put an insulting—a damnably insulting—advertisement in the *Chronicle* about me."

"About one Wayne Wisconsin Keeler," interpolated Milwood.

Keeler shrank from the words as from a blow, and he glanced at the district attorney in terror. But the chief only said:

"Go on, man! Go on!"

And Keeler, with fresh courage, obeyed:

"It made me lose my temper, sir. I'm sorry. But it did. And then I did what I ought to have done a week back. I set out to find Milwood. I believe he killed that man—whoever it was—and made it seem he himself was killed. By his advertisement, I knew Milwood must still be somewhere near New York. And it looked queer to me that he shouldn't try to get farther out of the way. The only reason I could think of for his hanging around here was that he didn't have any money. I knew he was well off. And I knew he'd been getting ready to disappear. So I put two and two together and I figured that he had realized on all his investments before the murder, and had the money in the house, ready to carry off with him. I don't know yet why he didn't take it along the night he went away. But it's clear he didn't. So I guessed he was looking for a chance to come back and get it, and that he didn't dare to while there was a policeman watching the house."

"Good!" said the district attorney. "Very good!"

Keeler beamed delightedly; and continued:

"The thought came to me that perhaps he had given it to Ichi to hide somewhere for him and bring it to him. You know, sir, the Jap's story was fishy. I thought he might be standing in with Milwood. But Ichi was locked up, and couldn't get at the money, if he'd really hidden it. So I told Chief Pyne, here, my idea, and got him to let Ichi out——"

"On a string," supplemented Pyne.

"And I got him to have the policeman taken away from in front of the house for a while. Then I went there and hid, waiting to see if Ichi would come. He did. But some one else had gotten in, too, while the policeman was away. And that 'some one' came up behind me and knocked me in the head. I knew a sneak thief wouldn't do that. A sneak thief would want to keep out of the way till both Ichi and I had gone. It would only be some one who didn't mind Ichi's being there, and who did mind my being there. Some one who wanted a word with Ichi. That description didn't fit any one but Milwood."

The district attorney once more nodded approval.

"The man got away," said Keeler. "So I asked Chief Pyne to help me set another trap for him. He 'planted' men there. And I put an 'ad' in the *Chronicle*—I knew from his own dastardly advertisement that Milwood reads the *Chronicle*, and would be on the lookout for 'ads' in it—I put an 'ad' in the *Chronicle* saying that wreckers would begin tearing down his house at two o'clock to-day. And the policeman had orders to go away at twelve."

"But——"

"If he saw that 'ad'—as I knew he must—and if the Jap had really hidden the money somewhere in the house—Milwood was certain to go for one last look for it before the place was torn down. And—he did."

Keeler cleared his throat, tenderly caressing his fast-closing blackened eye, and finished:

"That is all, sir. Except that Craig couldn't have fired the silver bullet, because the silver bullet he wore on his watch chain was the one I found in the dead man's hand. Where *you* put it!" he flashed, wheeling melodramatically on Milwood.

"Wayne Wisconsin, my boy," said Milwood, almost respectfully, "in thoughtless moments, from time to time, I have now and then referred to you as a 'dub.' Even as a 'shrimp.' My apologies. That is the highest praise I can give you. You have intervals of almost human intelligence. You're about the only man of my acquaintance who has."

CHAPTER XXXII.

MILWOOD TALKS.

Keeler bent his head awkwardly, in recognition of the compliment. Milwood, in the same tone of lazy banter, added:

"But it seems a pity that so much mind should have so little body to cover it. Why, man, your intellect is almost indecently exposed. By the way, gentlemen, you've forgotten the good old formality. I feel slighted. No one has taken the trouble to tell me that 'anything I say may be used against me at my trial.' It's one of those white lies that——"

"It *will* be," snapped Pyne. "Remember that!"

"I hate to contradict a police official," said Milwood. "It's such a waste of words to do it. Give them time, and they're certain to save one the trouble by contradicting themselves."

"That's a pretty bum joke, Mr. Milwood. I——"

"I hardly expected a policeman would see the point. A family skeleton has no funny bone. But we are wasting the

time of our admirable host, the district attorney. The very fault the taxpayers are forever laying at his door. Do you wish a statement from me, Mr. District Attorney, or do you not? I'm quite ready to talk."

"It is optional with you," said the district attorney coldly. "As Chief Pyne has just warned you, anything you may say will be used against you at your——"

"At my trial? You are mistaken. As the people of King's County have a way of hinting—there will be no trial."

"In a murder case——"

"Murder case? This is no murder case. There was no murder committed."

"Homicide, if you prefer."

"Homicide? Not even that. I didn't kill the poor fool. No one killed him. There was no homicide. There wasn't even suicide."

"The man died of old age, I suppose?" suggested Pyne, with mammoth sarcasm.

"The man died of rush of silver to the head," amended Milwood. "But he wasn't murdered. He didn't even attempt to kill himself."

"Is that also one of those 'white lies' you spoke of just now?" asked the district attorney, derisively incredulous.

"Most lies start out by being white," responded Milwood. "But they get tanned by exposure. However, as it happens, this isn't a lie at all. I didn't kill Parkman. No one killed him. He didn't even commit suicide. I'm rather tired of repeating that."

"And I'm tired of having my intelligence insulted," rapped the district attorney, "by such——"

"I don't insult imaginary quantities. I'm telling the truth. Sometimes I do. I told it, for example, the day I called here to see you last year, and you showed me all through your new offices; and I said——"

"I remember what you said," sharply interrupted the district attorney. "I warn you, Milwood, this insolent flippancy is not doing you any good. You are here on a charge of murder. And you——"

"You say the dead man's name was Parkman?" asked Keeler, so interested as to commit the unforgivable rudeness of interrupting his revered chief.

"Yes, Parkman. Shall we drop this airy chit-chat and get down to facts, gentlemen? I'm quite willing to tell you anything you may want to know. But my time is valuable. I have an appointment in lower Manhattan in an hour."

"An appointment in—— You'll be lucky if ever you are free to keep appointments again. It won't be for some years, at——"

"It *must* be inside of an hour. I always keep my appointments."

"This is cheap bluffing."

"Wait till the hour is up before you say that, please. And now, do you or do you not want my version of the affair? I'm ready to give it without prejudice and without asking immunity. Do you or don't you want it?"

"Oh, *please!*" begged Keeler, in childish eagerness. "Please, Milwood!"

"Go ahead!" grunted Pyne.

"I'll be as brief as I can. You've probably heard I was in trouble with the Federal authorities over what they chose to call a misuse of the mails and one or two other silly charges. There was a leak—a leak I paid well for—and I got the tip. One afternoon I had word the government case was ready enough for an arrest. And I was to be taken into custody next day. It was time to get out. I was prepared, as Keeler guessed. I had gotten together, in cash and negotiable securities, about twenty-two thousand dollars. I had it in a steel strong box in my desk. When I got the tip, I made my plans to take the steel box on a journey, and to start

just before dawn. The route was all planned. They wouldn't have found me in a thousand years. Anybody got a cigarette?"

No one answered. Milwood continued:

"I had a dinner on for that night. The night before I was to start. The night before the day they had arranged to arrest me. That afternoon, as I was leaving the Half Moon Club, I ran into Parkman."

"The tramp?" asked Keeler excitedly.

"I fancy he looked enough like one. These are some of his clothes I'm wearing now. So you can judge. Though how *you* happened to know I met him is more——"

"Who was Parkman?" demanded the district attorney.

"A chap I'd been associated with in a mine deal, some years back. We were old chums, Parkman and I. It was more by luck than skill that I was able to jump from under when the crash came. He was slower in dodging. And they got him. For a five-year term. He was turned loose only a month or two ago. And he started on a still hunt for me. He traced me, by and by, and came up to me that day. I don't mind confessing it shook my nerve. He was the last fellow on earth I wanted to see, just at that critical time. I gave him the slip. But he followed me. He found, somehow, where I lived. And that night he paid me a call."

"That night?" echoed Keeler. "But I saw——"

"After the people had gone. I was in my study. I had just changed from my evening clothes into a business suit. I was getting ready to go. But I was worried, for I had had word that evening that some one was hiding in the grounds. And a—a friend in the government employ had just called me up and told me there was a secret-service man watching the house to keep me from going away in case I might

have a notion to leave before they could arrest me. That complicated matters. I couldn't very well walk out with my steel box under my arm—it weighed like lead, and it was a foot square—without being caught. My only chance was to get out in disguise. But any secret-service agent would suspect if a man should sneak out of my house at such an hour carrying a big bond box. And if I should be caught going out with all that money on me, it would amount to a confession. I was wondering how to——"

"But Parkman?" broke in Keeler, impatient.

"Quite so. Parkman. Forgive the digression. I was in my study there, alone. Ichi had locked up and gone to bed. I heard a window open behind me. In crawled Parkman. He'd climbed up the waterspout. He didn't see me at first. I was in the other corner of the room, with part of a bookcase between him and me. He sat on the sill and kicked off his shoes. I heard them drop onto the turf below. That was a cheap burglar trick he had picked up in prison, I suppose. A fool trick, at that. He was always an ass. He kicked off his shoes and then swung himself into the room in his stockinged feet. That was when he saw me."

"I see!" shrilled Keeler, in delight. "I see! That's why there was mud on the waterspout, and why there was none in the room. Remember, chief?" he appealed to Pyne. "And no one slid down that pipe afterward. For the mud was still on it in the morning. The mud from Parkman's shoes."

"By all means," smiled Milwood, "keep it up, sonny. The busy little brain is never still."

"Go ahead!" ordered the district attorney, as Keeler purpled with mortification at the tone of merry patronage. Milwood complied willingly enough.

"We had an unpleasant five minutes, Parkman and I, till I persuaded him

I'd not been to blame for his bad luck and that I was willing to help him all I could. I took the cringing tone that all weak idiots love. And he began to think he had the whip hand. I let him think so. And, very gently, I was steering him to suggest what I wanted him to suggest—or, rather, to demand. You see, he and I were pretty much of a size, and we weren't unlike in looks. I wanted him to shave, groom up a bit, put on a suit of mine, take a big suit case full of worthless stock certificates and so on, and go away. He would be certain to be nabbed by the secret-service man in front of the house. By that dim light, in the storm, he'd easily pass for me. Especially to a stranger who barely knew me by sight. The secret-service man would either nab him or else trail him. In either case, the coast would be clear for me to escape with my bond box before the secret-service agent could find out his mistake. I was sure he hadn't been able to see Parkman shin up the waterspout. It was too dark. And, besides, it was at the other side of the house."

"Now, that *was* clever!" applauded Keeler, in reluctant admiration.

"It was," modestly agreed Milwood. "I have a way of being so. That's what makes me different from the rest of you. No offense, Mr. District Attorney. Well, I jockeyed Parkman into ordering me to do that very thing: To fit him out with clothes and cash and send him, rejoicing, on his way. I consented—after a deal of whining and begging him not to be so harsh and implacable in his treatment of a dear, old friend. I gave him a suit of mine. He put it on. I was just going to get some shaving things for him when he caught sight of a nail clipper in a drawer of my desk. He took it out and began to cut his nails. And, while he was cutting them, he began to notice a lot of old weapons that hung on the

wall. 'I may as well be heeled, too,' he said. 'I'll just help myself.' And he did. He happened to be standing just under a little 'gag' pistol I'd bought in the Black Forest. It was one they'd used in the seventeenth century for shooting witches and warlocks and sorcerers and werewolves and such mythical vermin. You may remember reading—but, then, you wouldn't, for it is *literature*, and not in daily newspapers. Anyhow, people used to think that demons inhabited witches and werewolves, and that an ordinary weapon had no power to harm them. So sacred guns and pistols were made, and 'sacred silver bullets' molded—a leaden bullet could not harm witches. The weapons and silver bullets were blessed by the local priest.

"This was such a pistol—the one above Parkman's head. When I bought it, it was still loaded—it's a flintlock, of course—with a silver bullet. And a second silver bullet was in a sort of box in the butt. By the way, I once gave that second bullet to Craig, the man you've very brilliantly locked up for murdering me. I——"

"You say the pistol? How——"

"It was loaded when I got it. I never took the trouble to draw the load. There was something quaint in the memory of an unsophisticated old German having loaded it, in the firm belief it would kill some one 'possessed by devils.'

"The light was not strong in the study that night. I suppose Parkman thought it was a more modern pistol. Anyhow, he reached up for it. It was hanging on a nail by the trigger guard. Parkman gave it a yank. The trigger must have caught on the nail. Anyhow, the pistol went off.

"It made a tremendous racket and a lot of smoke—with all that old-fashioned black powder, such as our ancestors made. Parkman tumbled in a heap. He struck against a vitriol

carboy as he fell. It upset. The pistol had been directly above him. And the silver bullet drilled a hole clean downward through the top of his head. A queer shot. I never saw one just like it."

"Never mind that. What——"

"Ichi came running in in his pajamas. The shot had waked him. He caught sight of the body—lying, face down, in a puddle of vitriol—before he saw me. And he set up a yell. I saw he mistook Parkman for me. That gave me my idea. Up to then I'd been cursing my luck that the man I'd counted on to fool the secret-service agent had passed beyond the chance of helping me. Now I saw a loophole."

"And," intervened the district attorney, "that was your first thought on the death of your old friend and dupe?"

"I'm not a hypocrite," disclaimed Milwood. "I thought 'if Ichi can be fooled into thinking it's my body, perhaps other people can.' I brought Ichi back to his right mind and I made him turn the body over. Then I saw my plan was feasible. The vitriol had—had done horrible things to the face. No one could have recognized it. I worked out my plan of campaign and explained it to Ichi. He is devoted to me——"

"The blazes he is!" mocked Pyne; but Milwood paid no heed, and resumed:

"I thought I'd try to confuse the trail just a little. So I had a rug tacked down over the vitriol on the floor. Then I put in Parkman's hand something I'd picked up on the stairs a half hour earlier. I had a slight grudge to pay——"

"Against Craig," supplemented Keeler. "And the thing you found on the stairs was his silver-bullet watch charm. It had fallen from some one else's bracelet."

"Yes? I fancy so. Next, I arranged

for the body to lie close to the door. So close that the door couldn't be opened unless the body was shoved away. I told Ichi where to hide my bond box—in a cupboard of the attic. Then I rehearsed him in the story he was to tell. From what I read in the papers, he seemed to have told it pretty well. I advised him, if they tried to give him the third degree, to break down and say he'd heard Craig threaten to kill me, and to tell about the silver bullet Craig used to wear."

"You mean to say——" broke in the district attorney; but Milwood went on serenely:

"Last of all, I made Ichi lower me by a rope from the study window to the ground. It was dark. No one could see. I told him beforehand to climb out of the room through the transom, then nail the transom shut and put putty over the nail heads. I thought all that might give the police a little something to puzzle over."

"It did," vouchsafed Pyne.

"I put on Parkman's clothes and stuffed a hundred dollars in his vest pocket. Ichi lowered me to the ground. I went around to the other window and groped for Parkman's shoes. I found them; and I dropped them, with the pistol, down the corner sewer. Ichi had already taken the vitriol carboy to the cellar before I left. The coast seemed clear. The secret-service man hadn't seen me. I was sure Ichi would be turned loose in a few days. I had told him where to find me with the bond box. Then the bad luck set in."

"There seems to have been just a little bad luck already," ventured Keeler, in a laudable effort at irony. "For Parkman, anyhow."

"Bad luck, as far as I am concerned," politely corrected Milwood, "means bad luck to *me*. It began twenty minutes later, when I thought I was far enough away to venture on boarding a trolley car for Flatbush Avenue. I was

bound for Great Neck. Or, rather, to a pleasant little hotel near there. I had given Ichi the address and had told him to bring me the bond box to the hotel as soon as he could get off. I boarded the car and felt for the roll of bills I had just put in my vest pocket. It was gone."

"Gone?"

"It must have fallen out when Ichi lowered me, or else when I leaned over the corner sewer mouth."

Chief Pyne chuckled aloud, as at some pleasing thought.

"I hadn't a cent with me. I couldn't go back for money, for by that time the alarm would probably be raised. I got off the car and walked for the rest of the night. In the morning I pawned an old Etruscan ring—the only thing of value on me. I got two dollars for it. I've been living on that ever since.

"Of course, I had to give up the Great Neck idea. I went back to Marken Street as soon as I dared. A policeman was in front of my house. I kept near there, off and on, every day afterward. But yesterday noon was the first time the policeman was off duty. I got into the house and went to the attic cupboard. The bond box wasn't there."

Again that mysterious and jovial chuckle from Pyne.

"I ransacked the whole house," said Milwood. "In the middle of my hunt, I heard some one else come in, and I hid. Then I heard a third person come into the house. I peeped out. I saw Ichi go into the dining room from the hall. Keeler was just behind him. I wanted to get the bond box from Ichi. I cracked Keeler over the head from behind. Ichi heard him fall and came out into the dining room. But at sight of me, the idiotic Jap bolted before I could stop him. I got out as quickly as I could, for I heard men shouting in the yard. To-day I came back, and after I'd passed the corner once or

twice I saw the policeman leave his post. I went in for a second look for the bond box. That's all."

"Not quite all," contradicted Keeler. "That abominable advertisement you put in the *Chronicle's* 'Personal' column yesterday!"

"Oh, that!" laughed Milwood. "I picked up a copy of the *Chronicle* at a branch Y. M. C. A. reading room the day before. I always read 'Personals.' They amuse me. I hit on yours. Any fool could have known who 'M. C.' and 'Alan C.' and 'W. W. K.' stand for. I judged you were meddling. So I went without two free-lunch meals to put that other 'Personal' in the next day's paper. Just a gentle rebuke. And as a goat capturer. I remember, as a kid, how you hated to have people know your funny middle name."

"It was dastardly!" blazed Keeler. "But—but I got even. It was my advertisement about your house being torn down that got you there to-day."

"About my house being torn down?" echoed Milwood, in astonishment, whose genuineness could not be doubted. "What do you mean?"

"Didn't you read this morning's *Chronicle*?"

"No. I never read the *Chronicle* unless I happen to pick it up by chance. What's this nonsense about tearing down my house?"

Keeler could have wept.

"Hold on," spoke up Chief Pyne, coming to his relief. "Now that you've talked so freely to us, Mr. Milwood, turn about is fair play. I'll just give you a bit of news. The rest of you, too," he added, glancing at the district attorney.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

"THE MAN WHO COULD DO EVERYTHING."

The intermittent and oft-repressed chuckles wherewith Chief Pyne had punctuated the last phases of Mil-

wood's story now broke bounds in a genuine guffaw. The district attorney looked up in cold and wondering disapproval at the detective chief's unseemly mirth.

"'And therein is the Scripture fulfilled,'" quoted Milwood, in a pietistic whine, "concerning 'the laughter of fools'—or am I thinking of what Goldsmith says about 'the loud laugh that speaks the vacant mind'?"

"The 'loud laugh' is on *you*, friend," grinned Pyne, no whit offended. "Listen—to begin with, you overlooked a big bet in thinking that hundred-dollar roll fell out of your pocket. It didn't. Ichi lifted it. Lifted it out of your vest pocket just as you grabbed the rope to climb down from your window to the ground."

"Ichi?" repeated Milwood, with crass incredulity.

"That same Little Brown Brother," Pyne assured him. "The one who is 'so devoted to you.' He's just about as devoted to you, Mr. Milwood, as he'd be to an attack of smallpox."

"Rot! I ought to know. He's been in my employ for years. As for his stealing——"

"My friend, you may recall that we stopped the car at detective headquarters on the way here, and I left you people and went in there for a few minutes? Well, I learned a lot while I was inside. I had the Jap hustled into the front office. I pointed you out to him. I told him you'd just confessed."

"Confessed? Confessed what?"

"That he was the murderer. I told him we'd have him in the chair inside of two weeks on your testimony. That loosened him up with a vengeance. Lord, how he talked! Gave me the whole thing, and straight.

"I wish you had told me," yawned Milwood. "It would have saved me the trouble of talking so much. I re-

gret I cast so many of my verbal pearls before swine."

"Blaze away!" chuckled Pyne. "He substantiated what you've told us, all right. But he said a lot more. For one thing, that he hates you like poison, because you knocked him down that night. He was planning to kill you himself—quite a passel of people seem to have had that pleasant ambition in life. He was meaning to creep in and do it when you went to sleep."

"Ichi?"

"It appears, from what he says, that he comes of good folks, back in Japan. A family, I take it, called 'Sammy Rye.'"

"Samurai," corrected Keeler.

"Yep. Just as I said. And it's a killing matter to hit one of them with the fist. So Ichi was layin' to get you, when, all of a sudden, he hears that shot and runs in to see what's the row. When he finds out what's happened and that you're meditating a sneak, he thinks he's got his revenge dead easy. Easier than by killin' you. He says, out in Japan, when men go dead broke or are fugitives from justice or anything like that, they have to sell themselves out as servants or go to the hills. It makes 'em outcasts. And he says it's a heap worse to be an outcast than to be dead. And Brother Ichi cast *you* for the alloorin' rôle of outcast."

"He told you all this? The little cur!"

"All this, and more. To make sure of havin' you be an outcast, not only from the law, but by bein' broke, he lifted your wad. Then, when your back was turned, after he's done the stunts you told him to with the transom, he takes the bond box and hides it. Not in the cupboard in the attic, but up behind an old-fashioned fireplace in your back kitchen. No wonder you couldn't catch him!"

"He——"

"When I turned him loose yesterday, he makes a break for your house to see if, by any chance, you'd found the box. And maybe—for all I know—to help himself from it. Just as he gets to the kitchen he hears a bump. He turns around and sees Mr. Keeler, here, layin' on the dining-room floor and you standin' over him. Ichi thought you suspicioned him. He thought you'd killed Keeler and that you'd be killing him next. So he's scared stiff and makes a get-away. Right into the arms of my men. Now, then, is 'loud laugh' on you, or isn't it, Mr. 'Man who can do everything'?"

Milwood sat back in his chair, exhaustion and defeat writ plain in every line of face and body. Slowly he turned to the district attorney.

"I'd like to ask a favor of you, sir," he said, in a humility as pathetic as it was unusual. "I am beaten. Will you let me telephone to—to a very dear friend—before I am locked up? I want one private word with her. Surely it can do no harm," he urged, pitiful in his defeat. "You've got me fast enough. I want to—to say good-by to her. May I? There's a telephone booth in the anteroom, if I remember rightly."

To Keeler's amaze, the district attorney answered:

"Yes, Mr. Milwood, you may do that. I see no harm in permitting it. But, of course, a detective will go into the anteroom with you to guard you, and will stand outside the booth while you are talking. He will not be able to hear you. But he will see you don't escape."

"Just as you like," said Milwood, with courtly dignity. "I thank you from the bottom of my heart. And—and I beg to apologize for the language I used toward you to-day. If you will order my handcuffs removed—I can't very well talk privately in a booth when I am manacled to two detectives—I shall be your debtor. Chief Pyne him-

self can go along, if he wishes, to see I don't try to escape."

At a word from the district attorney, the handcuffs were removed; Pyne ostentatiously drawing a pistol at the same moment and covering the prisoner. The district attorney picked up the telephone on the table in front of him.

"While you are gone," said he, "I will just call up the Federal authorities and tell them you are here. They want you rather badly, you know."

"I know, sir. And—I thank you again."

Milwood crossed the door of the adjoining room; Pyne, pistol leveled, at his heels. Milwood opened the door.

"Wait!" barked Pyne. "I'm taking no chance on your bolting. Let me go through first."

He backed through the doorway into the anteroom, warily keeping the prisoner covered. Milwood followed; at an order from the district attorney, shutting the door behind him.

On the same instant, the district attorney's manner underwent a change.

"Hello!" he called eagerly into the transmitter of his desk telephone. "Switchboard operator? Connect this wire with the anteroom phone. Quick!"

Turning to Keeler, he said:

"It will do no harm to find out who his possible accomplice is, and to hear what he says. He'll talk freely, because he will think nobody can overhear."

Delighted with his own acumen, he raised the receiver to his ear. In the same gesture, he motioned Keeler to pick up a second appliance for the right ear. Keeler, now understanding his chief's unusual clemency in granting Milwood's favor, hesitated. He was not minded to do any more eavesdropping. But the district attorney commanded sharply:

"Put the other receiver to your ear.

It may be necessary to have you as witness."

Keeler reluctantly obeyed. He lifted the little cap of rubber that dangled from midway down the green cord running from the wall apparatus to the telephone. Thus, each with a receiver to his ear, the two waited.

It seemed to Keeler that they waited an interminable time, without hearing a sound. To him, the fever of the chase being spent, this spying on a man's private talk over the telephone was distasteful.

All at once, Milwood's voice sounded through the double receiver. The dignity, the pathos, the proud humility were gone from his tone. It was gay, mocking, debonair.

"Mr. District Attorney," came the scoffing voice. "You're there, aren't you? I felt quite certain you would be. I told you I wanted to say good-by to a dear friend. *You* are the dear friend. A man is known by the company he keeps. That's why I'm leaving yours. A man is also known by the company he promotes. That is why I am forced to dodge the Federal authorities, too. Good-by. Would you mind quoting to Pyne from the old wheeze about 'he laughs best who laughs last'? My regards to the excellent Keeler.

Perhaps he and I may have another merry little bout, some day. If he——"

The district attorney, recovering from his astonishment, dropped the receiver as though it burned him and made a dash for the anteroom door. The door was locked. It required two minutes' time and the combined efforts of Keeler, his chief, and the two wondering detectives to break it open. At last the lock broke, and the four men piled, pell-mell, into the anteroom.

On the floor beside the empty booth lay a writhing man, clad only in underclothes, and who was snugly bound with his own suspenders and shirt, and gagged with his felt hat and his necktie. The door leading out into the corridor was also locked on the far side.

"Slugged me in the jaw and put me out!" sputtered the chief, as they pulled away his gag. "When I came to I was like this. Clothes, gun, cash, watch—all gone. He stumbled. I tried to catch him from falling. And it was then he slugged me. Where is he? Let me get at him! He's done—*me!*"

"He's the man," muttered Keeler, with a note of awe in his mild voice—a voice lost in the tumult about him—"he's the man who could do—*everything!*"

THE END.



FILLING UP THE DRESSING ROOMS

WHEN John S. Harley, who is known as one of the best dramatic press agents in this country, blew into Cleveland, several weeks ago, advertising Fred-eric J. Haskin's moving pictures about the work of the United States government, his friends in that town began to kid him.

"How does it feel to be out ahead of moving pictures?"

"Why don't you get some live people in your company?"

Questions like these were shouted at him every minute.

A friend came to the rescue.

"Gentlemen," he said, with great solemnity, "it isn't fair to guy John Harley about his company. He probably will fill the dressing rooms of the theater with Haskin's troupe of trained shadows."

An Even Break

By H. C. Witwer

Author of "Deegan's Moment," Etc.

Concerning the wonderful girl who entered the subway, the wonderful diamond that the old gentleman was wearing, and the observant man who observed that when the wonderful girl disappeared, so did the wonderful diamond.

IF it had merely been a large diamond, Lomax would have looked at it with a speculative eye and resumed his perusal of the sporting page as the express lumbered through the abyss under Manhattan. But when his fascinated gaze persisted in gluing itself to the dead center of the beams of fire and life it shot forth, he decided, after a feeble resistance, that he must possess it.

Lomax had never seen the mate of the ball of dazzling flame marooned in the center of the old gentleman's massive white shirt front. It quivered like a living thing. Its owner nodded sleepily as the train jolted on. Such calousness amazed Lomax. If the stone had been in *his* shirt front, he would have been sitting as erect as the footman on Mrs. Smyth-Browne's limousine. He would have allowed nothing to obstruct the view.

Having determined to transfer the diamond from the sleepy old gentleman to his more appreciative self, Lomax glanced warily around the car at the other occupants. Near the forward platform a rough-looking individual was engaged in an animated conversation with the guard. Almost directly opposite was a smug this-suit-at-ten-dollars clerk. At the rear end of the car—Lomax involuntarily sat erect. No, Lillian Russell would be stouter—could it be—but she was in

Paris— The other passenger was a combination of what musical-comedy managers assert are in their choruses and what Psyche would resemble in modern garb, all rolled up into one ravishing girl. Lomax's spell of admiration was only broken when the guard shouted:

"NinesixchangeferWes'Farms!"

It was effective, and brought Lomax back to the matter on hand. The direct descendant of the temptresses of St. Anthony rose and glided down the car toward the open side door. Lomax also left his seat and stood opposite the old gentleman and the mammoth diamond—one hand ready for the deft downward swoop, the other, steadying him, on a strap. The girl brushed against him. Lomax apologized and stepped politely aside, allowing her to pass. When she stepped through the doorway—the old gentleman's diamond had disappeared!

Lomax gasped audibly at the flawless technique the girl had displayed. Just one swift flash of the beautiful arm, a quick jerk of the lovely wrist, and the stone had vanished! On the crowded platform, Lomax got a brief glimpse of a swirling skirt disappearing at the top of the stairway.

Five seconds later, Lomax emerged into the street. The girl had gained the corner when he saw her. She hesitated for a fleeting moment, then

started down Ninety-sixth Street toward the river. Lomax lit a cigarette and, smiling grimly, swung after her. The street was dark—almost deserted—Lomax was himself again.

It was halfway down the block that he caught up with her. He did not cough and “er——” Lomax was crude, but successful. He grasped the girl by the arm and swung her around brutally, facing him.

“Classy is no name for your work,” he said, “but I was right behind you in the car!”

Swiftly the girl appraised him.

“Are you a detective?” she breathed, trembling in his rough grasp.

“Yes,” answered Lomax, assuming a menacing look.

The girl jerked her arm away and fumbled in her muff.

“Here!” She thrust a glittering object into his hand. “Here—take it! I—I don’t know what made me do it. I’ve tried—— Oh, how I’ve tried to stop! I—oh! Can’t you understand? Let me go, and keep the stone. Think, it’s yours—you’ll get nothing for taking me in. I——”

She broke off, sobbing hysterically.

Lomax didn’t hear what else she said—he didn’t know she was there. The stone glittered and scintillated in the palm of his trembling hand. He gazed at it, hypnotized. Why, it was worth *thousands!* He glanced up—the girl was gone!

“You’re a slick one!” growled a hoarse voice in his ear.

Lomax, startled, turned so abruptly that the stone fell from his grasp. The newcomer lunged for it. Lomax kicked him without a pang, and as the man, caught off his balance, fell, Lomax regained the stone.

“Easy, boss,” whined the fallen one.

“What do you want?” asked Lomax sharply.

The man got up warily. He had an evil, predatory face.

“I wants dat sparkler!” he said.

Lomax laughed shortly.

“I saw you take it from th’ skirt,” explained the man.

“If you are here in one minute, I’ll have you sent up for a year!” Lomax said deliberately.

“Shoot!” said the other, assuming a truculent attitude. “I’ll wise ‘em up that you got th’ stone. They’ll be some noise over dat when the old guy wakes up.”

“So you were in that car, eh?” asked Lomax, after a pause.

“Sure! That skirt’s some nifty worker, ain’t she?” answered the other, becoming more at ease.

Lomax reached in an inner pocket and brought out his wallet. He took a yellowback from a thick roll of bills and pushed it into the other’s hand.

“On your way!” he commanded.

The man looked at the bill, at Lomax, and at the heavens. Then he crushed the bill in his grimy hand and walked off, without a word.

Lomax put the diamond in his wallet and reached for his cigarette case. Although it was quite cool, he mopped his brow and opened his overcoat. A young, clerkish-looking individual crossed from the other side of the street and stopped in front of Lomax.

“Don’t make no fuss now, because there’s some bulls around the corner waitin’ to hear me blow this!” was his salutation as he held a whistle before Lomax’s face.

“I’m afraid I don’t get you,” said Lomax, tossing away the unlighted cigarette.

“Well, you will!” returned the other grimly. “I want you to take a little ride downtown with me and tell the commissioner the story of the missing diamond. I hear you wrote it,” he added, with sneering facetiousness.

“I haven’t the slightest idea what you are talking about——” began Lomax.

“Say,” interrupted the other wearily,

"why don't you guys get some new stuff? If I ever nailed one of you birds an' he said, 'You got me right!' I'd fall over dead! Well, come on, let's go!"

"I'll give you one hundred dollars to remember an engagement around the corner," suggested Lomax hopefully.

"Don't break your wrist!" admonished his captor. "Come on, it's getting late."

"Two hundred dollars," said Lomax.

"Say!" exclaimed the man abruptly, "you're a fine generous guy, ain't you? That stone's worth fifteen hundred dollars if it's worth a nickel! I watched it all the way up from Brooklyn Bridge before that skirt of yours nailed it. I knew somebody'd get it."

Lomax removed the diamond from his wallet and passed the leather case over to the man.

"There is five hundred dollars there. Take it. I won't get anything like what this stone is worth, and you know it." Unconsciously he repeated the girl's appeal: "You won't get anything for bringing me in. Five hundred dollars is a lot of money—think what you can do with it—maybe the wife——"

The man stood pensively for a moment, and Lomax gulped down the lump in his throat.

"Gimme th' roll!" he muttered finally. "I'll take a chance!"

Lomax grasped his arm as he started off.

"Wait," he said, "I've given you all the money I have. Give me enough to get home with, will you?"

The man glanced up suspiciously, then sank one hand in his pocket and extended a worn dollar bill. Lomax took it, bowed, and called to a passing taxicab.

Madame Carrero was dancing her daringest at the Cabaret Malpert. A reckless, joyous crowd filled the café.

As madame discarded the seventh veil, a vision of femininity, a smug this-suit-at-ten-dollars clerk, a rough-appearing character, and an elderly gentleman entered. They were bowed to a table well in the rear. The elderly gentleman scanned the wine list, smacking his lips anticipatively as he gave a few sharp orders to an obsequious waiter. The clerkish-looking one threw a roll of bills on the table, and the elderly gentleman began to count the money, thumbing each bill almost affectionately.

"Those last stones are beauties," remarked the girl. "Max gets better all the time. I suppose if we'd pay a dollar a piece for them, he'd give us real ones, eh?" she laughed, enjoying her quip.

"If that guy had fallen any harder he'd 'a' broken his neck!" declared the rough-looking member of the party.

"Five hundred and fifty dollars," announced the elderly gentleman, finishing his count. "I guess that's bad, eh?"

The girl picked up one of the bills idly—then she sat up straight in her chair and held it to the light, with flushed face. The clerk, observing her action, tore it roughly from her hand. He studied it deeply, then, with an oath, tore it in two and tossed the ragged pieces at the open-mouthed elderly gentleman.

"You're a good guesser!" he said.

An oppressive silence fell on the merry party—the rough one broke it.

"Well," he said, with a ponderous attempt at cheerfulness, "it's an even break. He gets the fake diamond, and we get the stage money."

The clerk awoke from his trance, and woke the others by crashing his fist down on the table.

"Where d'ye get that stuff?" he cried. "I gave that guy a dollar!"

A Chat With You

THERE was a time in the past when general magazines had a habit of featuring special articles on the cover to induce interest in the buyers. That time is past. If there's only one or two fiction stories in a magazine now you are sure to hear about them. And in most cases at present the stories to which attention is called are baseball stories. If any magazine ever had the right to claim anything, THE POPULAR has the right to lay claim to be the pioneer in the publication of baseball as well as other sporting fiction. Ten years ago no one read any baseball stories in the magazines because there were not any to read. We knew that the public would like baseball stories if we could only get some one to write them. It took a lot of time—a year or so—considerable money, and some work and trouble. The first baseball story of any note was a novel by Charles Kroth Moser, which we published so many years ago that only the older readers remember it. Then followed the series of stories by Foxhall Williams, Charles Van Loan, Bozeman Bulger, and others who have since become famous. We are going to publish another baseball novel in the next issue, but it is a different kind of a baseball story.



EVERYTHING in this world has its day. The baseball player has his in fiction as in actual life. After you have read forty or fifty corking stories about the performances of the players on the diamond and off, you begin to wonder if

there is not another side to the game. Surely you have heard of the people known as baseball magnates. Surely the appearance of the new Federal League has been called to your attention, and surely you must have wondered if there was not a story to the financial and business end of the game as well as to the actual play. After all, the stage manager may lead a more exciting life than the matinée idol, and the owner of a team may have an even livelier time of it than the man who plays shortstop, and who doesn't have to worry over anything but the actual game itself. You can lose a fortune with a baseball team just about as quickly as with a string of horses, and the only thing more interesting than losing a fortune is winning one. This also may be done with a baseball team, although they say that in that, as other things, the chances are growing slimmer all the time. In the next issue of the magazine, when you start the book-length novel, you will be invited behind the curtain, and you will begin to see something of the machinery of the game that the public never sees. The novel is called "The Prodigal." It is written by W. B. M. Ferguson, and is one of his best.



WE receive a great many letters. Most of them are so original as to deserve a special answer, and every letter gets a personal answer anyway when the writer gives his name and address. We have one letter before us now from a man who took exception to

A CHAT WITH YOU—Continued.

what we had to say a month or so ago about crime and criminals, and we would like to talk to him, but we don't know his name, and we don't know where he lives. There are a number of letters before us also which we must answer here for the same reason. They all say practically the same thing. The writers have been reading the magazine for a number of years, they think it better than ever, but they would like to see more of the old favorites—and here they name a few.

The answer to this is that we are giving you all of the old favorites that is humanly possible. If a man once qualifies as a POPULAR writer, he stays in THE POPULAR. Look at B. M. Bower, Bertrand Sinclair, Ferguson, Chisholm, Egerton, and a lot of others. We have everything they write, and we wonder if those who write asking for more ever think of the pains and labor and thought that must go into any story to make it worth reading. We have a new serial coming by B. M. Bower. It took years of experience to get the human material out of which the story is built. It took the greater part of a year to write it. It will appear within two months in THE POPULAR. How, then, is it possible to have the work of B. M. Bower in every issue? We could string a serial out to ten or twelve installments, as some magazines do, but does any one really want that? Answer if you do.



THERE are some people who seem to dislike the sight of new faces, but we must look into them and learn to like them, too, if we are to live and grow. We want the old friends, but we

must keep building and adding to the group. THE POPULAR is a bigger magazine now than it was once, and needs more people to help in its growth and life. We want all the old friends. They became famous through the pages of THE POPULAR, but they all started once, and if we had not been as keen then as now in our hunt for the new writer you never would have known them. G. W. Ogden, whose novel opens the present number, is comparatively new to the pages of THE POPULAR. Do you mean to say that the magazine isn't better for him? Or that he isn't good POPULAR material? How is a man going to get a start if we don't give him a chance? In a year or so Ogden and Stacpoole and Biggers and Ritchie and Hall will be as famous as Bower and Sinclair are now. The thing to remember about this magazine is that it is alive at all times, and that growth and development are necessary with live things. Furthermore, the attitude of prejudice against a new writer just because he is new strikes us as being narrow, mean, and un-American. We are sure that it would be the worst possible attitude for any magazine. The man whose acquaintance you make to-day you will know and love to-morrow. We don't want Chinese walls or policies of exclusion. We are always hunting for the new writer who has something to say, and, whether you know it or not, that is the reason you like THE POPULAR. You'll get all the old favorites can write. We never let go of a good man—but we sincerely trust that there are a lot of new, unheard-of writers worth a place in THE POPULAR, and we are going to continue to hunt for them.



THE UP-TO-DATE MAN



The readers of the magazine may write to this department about any problem of dress. Every question will be promptly answered, provided that a stamped, self-addressed envelope is enclosed.

PERFERVID patriotism is fond of dangling "American fashions" before our eyes and bidding us cut the cord that ties us to Europe. Those who goad us on to do this fail to grasp the true purport of the mode. For fashion, in its broad meaning, is not national, but international—it belts the globe.

The truly well-dressed man is a citizen of the world, who is at home in any part of it. It matters not whether he be American, Englishman, German, or Frenchman. He carries no telltale sign of hailing from this country or that. His manner of dress is *cosmopolitan*; that is, it merges the best style thoughts from every country into a harmonious whole.

For example, this summer the well-turned-out man looks very much like a composite of South American, East Indian, and European idler at Monte Carlo. He wears cool silk or linen suits, pared down to the "irreducible minimum" of weight.

Such tropical-cloth suits, consisting of jacket and trousers only, are worn both in town or out, though, to be sure, their most fitting place is turf, field, and country

club. Porous—the air sifts through them as through a screen. Washable—just drop them into the tub. Two good models—the plain jacket and that with a gathered back.

The coat illustrated here is typical of the style decreed as correct for double-breasted summer sacks. Made of soft flannel, it is very high-waisted, with patch pockets and broad-peaked lapels. This is a very smart jacket, which may be worn either with trousers to match or with separate trousers of white flannel or serge.

Also shown is a fashionable summer helmet of Madagascar straw. It has a pongee ribbon, and the under brim is

lined with green to rest the eyes from the sun's glare. Some of these helmets have vents in the crown and behind the sweatband to keep a current of air circulating around your head.

The fad of wearing country coats of a different fabric from the trousers is on the spread. Such coats are both knitted and woven, and come in solid colors, as well as checks and overplaids. These are admirable for tennis, seaside, boating, and the beaches.



Straw Helmet with Pongee Band and Green Underbrim.

A novel summer belt, just introduced, differs from the ordinary in that it expands and contracts just like an elastic garter. You never have to pull it in or let it out. It stretches to and fro around the waist with your every posture and movement. Moreover, this belt is all leather, and can in no wise be told apart from the usual hard-and-



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.22 Pump Action

Model 29 has 23-inch Round barrel; take-down; a first-class repeating rifle; 15 shots; \$9.25.

Model 20 has 24-inch Octagon, heavier barrel; take-down; Ivory Bead sight; 15 shots; \$11.50.

Model 20 Full Magazine Rifle—the only pump action repeater giving 25 shots at one loading; \$11.50.



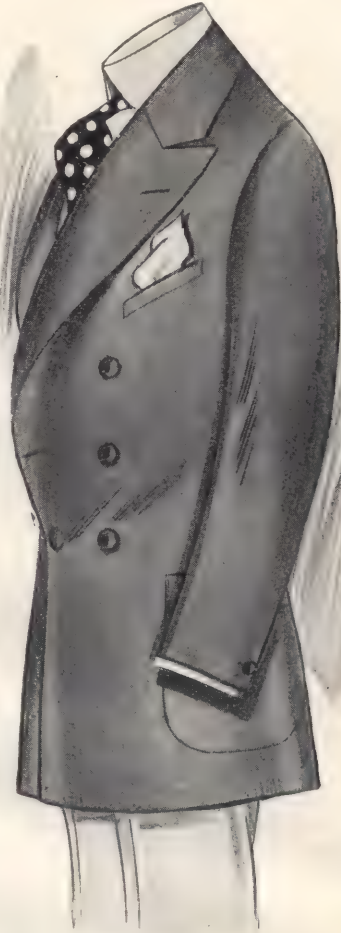
.32 Rim Fire—Model 1892, with lever action—uses .32 short, long and long-rifle rim fire cartridges; also .32 short, long and long-rifle center fire; 17 shots. A splendid all-around rifle for settled districts. With 24-inch Round Barrel, \$12.15; Octagon, \$13.15.

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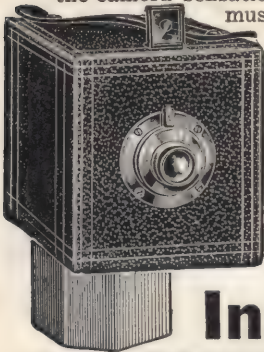
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gether, but the shirt drapes over the trunk tops, giving the effect of a short skirt. Thus you enjoy all the freedom of the one-piece swimming suit with the propriety of the two-piece cut.

While soft collars are worn in town during the grilling days, they belong more correctly to the country and the sports. To get them to stand up with some show of stiffness, the inner band should be starched and the outer one left unstarched. In this way, you avoid that crumpling of a soft collar which makes it look unpleasantly mussy.

In panama hats, there are three principal shapes this season—the flat brim, the drooping brim, and the brim with a "pencil curl," so called because the edge is just about what could be wound around a pencil. The Alpine shape in all straw hats has been revived, and either the plain, flat ribbon or the broad, spiral ribbon is allowable.

A smart effect is obtained by having your straw-hat ribbon and your four-inch scarf match each other in color and pattern, as pin dots, polka dots, club stripes, heather mixtures, and so on.

Trousers this season may be worn either with or without bottom turn-ups, though the tendency is to discard them on fabrics hefty enough to drape well without folding. Plain trousers hang better over the instep, and don't have that thickset, bulky look that many materials give.

Summer gloves are made of thin, light, porous fabrics, as silk, but some men will have none of these, because they seem womanish. Leather gloves, like chamois, with perforated palms to admit the air, have now been lifted from sport to town wear.

In choosing white flannel trousers, be mindful that the fabric is thick enough not to show your garters through the weave. It is fatally easy to be exposed to ridicule this way. You will be well repaid to pay a good price for flannel trousers, as the first rain makes a pulp of the cheap sort, and no amount of pressing can restore their shape.

BEAUNASH.

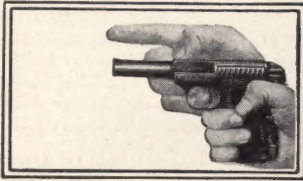
NEW HAMMERLESS
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The ONLY Automatic
that has

Model 1915

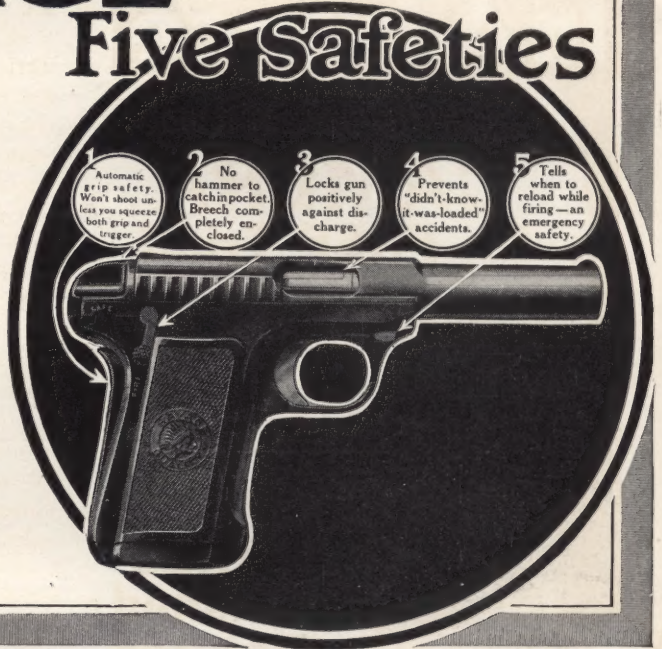
10 Shots Quick
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Aims
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Write for Catalogue No. 57, just issued.
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Five Safeties



1 Automatic grip safety. Won't shoot unless you squeeze both grip and trigger.

2 No hammer to catch in pocket. Breech completely enclosed.

3 Locks gun positively against discharge.

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CAILLE 5 Speed
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5 Motor

Makes Launches of Rowboats

Instantly attached. Has five mechanical speeds—two forward, a neutral and two reverse—secured without stopping or altering speed of motor. Push-button controlled. Magneto built in flywheel. Silencer on exhaust. These and many other features described in catalog No. 10. Marine motors from 2 to 30 H. P. shown in catalog No. 24.

The Caille Perfection Motor Co.
1553 Caille Street
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\$250 A Month

The masterpiece of watch manufacture—adjusted to the second, position, temperature and isochronism. Encased at the factory into your choice of the exquisite new watch cases.

19 Jewel Burlington

All sizes for both men and women. The great Burlington Watch sent on simple request. Pay at the rate of \$2.50 a month. You get the watch at the same price even the wholesale jeweler must pay.

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Our scientific treatment removes the appetite for drink or drugs—does not nauseate. Only registered physicians are permitted to administer the remedies in our authorized institutions. During the last thirty-five years, half a million have been cured.

THIN FOR YEARS

"Gains 22 Pounds in 23 Days"



Plump, well developed men and women attract attention at the beach as well as in the city.

"I was all run down to the very bottom," writes F. Gagnon. "I had to quit work I was so weak. Now, thanks to Sargol, I look like a new man. I gained 22 pounds in 23 days."

"Sargol has put just 10 pounds on me in 14 days," states W. D. Roberts. "It has made me sleep well, enjoy what I ate and enabled me to work with interest and pleasure."

"I weighed 132 pounds when I commenced taking Sargol. After taking 20 days I weighed 144 pounds. Sargol is the most wonderful preparation for flesh building I have ever seen," declares D. Martin, and J. Meier adds: "For the past twenty years I have taken medicine every day for indigestion and got thinner every year. I took Sargol for forty days and feel better than I have felt in twenty years. My weight has increased from 150 to 170 pounds."

When hundreds of men and women—and there are hundreds, with more coming every day—living in every nook and corner of this broad land voluntarily testify to weight increases ranging all the way from 10 to 35 pounds, given them by Sargol, you must admit, Mr. and Mrs. and Miss Thin Reader, that there must be something in this Sargol method of flesh building after all.

Hadn't you better look into it, just as thousands of others have done? Many thin folks say: "I'd give most anything to put on a little extra weight," but when someone suggests a way they exclaim, "Not a chance. Nothing will make me plump. I'm built to stay thin." Until you have tried Sargol, you do not and cannot know that this is true.

Sargol has put pounds of healthy "stay there" flesh on hundreds who doubted, and in spite of their doubts. You don't have to believe in Sargol to grow plump from its use. You just take it and watch weight pile up, hollows vanish and your figure round out to pleasing and normal proportions. You weigh yourself when you begin and again when you finish and you let the scales tell the story.

Sargol is absolutely harmless. It is a tiny concentrated tablet. You take one with every meal. It mixes with the food you eat for the purpose of separating all of its flesh producing ingredients. It prepares these fat making elements in an easily assimilated form, which the blood can readily absorb and carry all over your body. Plump, well-developed persons don't need Sargol to produce this result. Their assimilative machinery performs its functions without aid. But thin folks' assimilative organs do not. This fatty portion of their food now goes to waste through their bodies like unburned coal through an open grate. A few days' test of Sargol in your case will surely prove whether or not this is true of you. Isn't it worth trying?

50c BOX FREE

To enable any thin reader, ten pounds or more under weight to easily make this test, we will give a 50c box of Sargol absolutely free. Either Sargol will increase your weight or it won't and the only way to know is to try it. Send for this Free Test Package today, enclosing 10c in silver or stamps to help pay postage, packing, etc., and a full size 50c package will be sent by return mail free of charge. Mail this coupon with your letter to the SARGOL CO., 401-G HERALD BLDG., BINGHAMTON, N. Y.

If you want a beautiful and well rounded figure of symmetrical proportions, if you want to gain some solid pounds of healthy "stay there" flesh, if you want to increase your weight to normal—weigh what you should weigh—accept this Free 50c Package today.

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“And those who Husbanded
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Turkish Blend
CIGARETTES

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