"THE PRODIGAL" by W.B.M.FERGUSON
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Caroline Lockhart

has written several novels that sold widely and were appreciated for their insight, character drawing and vitality. Her field is the West of to-day with its vast reaches of mountain, plain and desert, and its people as big hearted and clean as all out-of-doors. No story of hers has achieved greater heights than that which opens in the next POPULAR MAGAZINE, on sale August 7th, entitled:

"The Man From the Bitter Roots"

A Chat With You

TWO weeks ago we had something to say about old authors and new ones. We said that we would hold on to the old authors, and print everything they wrote, provided it was worthy of them and of the magazine, and that we would seek out and welcome the new wherever they were to be found. Just by way of making good on the last remark, we now announce a new four-part story by a new writer--new at least to the pages of THE POPULAR. The story is called "The Man from the Bitter Roots," and the author is Caroline Lockhart, author of "Me—Smith," which was a best seller a number of years ago.

THIS new story fell into our hands more or less by accident. It had been written with book publication in mind. Sometimes we go after a thing and get it, and have some little reason, perhaps, for feeling elated over the performance, and sometimes, on the other hand, the lesson seems to be brought home to us that there is such a thing as ordinary, old-fashioned, bull luck. The hunter may track the deer all day and fail—only to see the flash of a white tail where he least expected it. The fisherman may whip a stream for hours with not a bite, and another time a random cast in the unlikeliest pool may bring him the biggest of the season. Being ready and awake to the opportunity of course has something to do with it. Vigilance and stubborn optimism under the most unpromising circumstances are the tributes we must bear if we want the smiles of fortune. We knew enough to read the unpromising-looking stack of battered manuscript when we found it, and to hold on to it after we read it. And now, having given due consideration to these moral maxims and philosophical reflections, we will proceed to weigh the fish, to measure the horns of the buck.

WHEN you read "The Man from the Bitter Roots," you will realize that it is one of the best long stories that has ever appeared in this magazine. We say this with consideration, and with the memory of many great stories. If it had been written to our order it could not have met our ideas better, and few stories written to order have ever had so much spirit, atmosphere, and dynamic energy. It is the life story of a strong man. We see him first as a boy with a strong, definite character, struggling instinctively with harsh circumstances, a child taking a mad race across thirty miles of prairie only to find his mother on her deathbed. The first chapter of the book is the only one devoted to his boyhood, but in that chapter we can read the character, and something, perhaps, of the future of the man that is to be. We know that he may be killed, but never really defeated. We find him next in a lonely cabin, with a half-mad companion working on a mine in the wilderness of the Bitter Roots. The same boy grown to be a young man, big and strong, sane and patient and courageous, with the same kindness and tenderness

for dumb animals, the same placid determination. The fight that night in the cabin, the death of his companion, the snowstorm that follows and isolates them from all the world are things easy to read but hard to forget. The swift-changing scenes of that night flash vivid and unforgettable like a landscape shown to us by intermittent flares of lightning. The blizzard closes in, and they are alone, apparently separated from all the world, the dead and the living in the little cabin. But other actors in the drama are moving toward them. Across the white ridges of the Bitter Roots a city sportsman, hunting Rocky Mountain sheep, his guide, and his Chinese cook are cut off by the storm. To reach the cabin is their only chance, and the guide finally reaches it. These are the opening chapters of the first big installment, the opening action that prepares for the drama that is to follow. The city sportsman, the guide who is a great character, even the Chinaman are to play their parts in it. They are little figures brought together in the wilderness of snowy peaks by the hand of fate. Their conflicting characters are to react upon each other in the development of a great story.

THERE are other actors in the drama, other men and women and one girl, of whom we especially like to think as we review the story. We have said enough about it. We don't want to spoil it for you. It happens all in four big dramatic acts, with a number of scenes in each act, and you will have it all in two months. We read so many manuscripts here that sometimes we think that asking us to read a story as a treat is like trying to be nice to a letter carrier by taking him out for a good long walk. And yet we think we would like to read "The Man from the Bitter Roots" again. Perhaps we will.

SPEAKING of the older writers, we have all of us remembered happily some of the novels of Fred Bechdolt. He hasn't been in THE POPULAR for some time, but it is not his fault nor ours. Novels such as you are accustomed to read in THE POPULAR do not grow overnight in any man's mind. There's another Bechdolt novel, however, full length, to appear complete in the issue of THE POPULAR, out two weeks from to-day. "Forty Miles from Nowhere" it is called, and it is a story of the oil business. We don't say as much about it as about "The Man from Bitter Roots" not because it isn't worth it, but because you know Bechdolt well, and what to expect from him.

Gold and oil are not everything in life, and there are other activities to be read about in the next issue. There is a rousing story of an automobile racer, by Frank Condon; there is a story of the real-estate business by Holworthy Hall; there is a story of the egg business by Hamby, who can make even an egg seem romantic; and there is a story of the navy by Clarence Cullen, who knows how to write about the navy partly because he was in it. Only a few of the things in the next number, but surely they are enough to stir your interest just a little.

Begin "The Man From Bitter Roots," by Caroline Lockhart, in the next issue, if you like a story of the present-day West still full of glamor and lure.

VOLUME XXXVII NUMBER 3

CONTENTS

JULY 23, 1915

COVER DESIGN . . . . . . **W. H. D. Koerner**

THE PRODIGAL. A Complete Novel, . . **W. B. M. Ferguson** . . 1
Down and out, the hero of this story, after squandering his patrimony, finds that he has inherited a baseball club, also down and out. "What shall he do with it?" is the problem that confronts him.

THE COUP. A Short Story, ... **W. Douglas Newton** . 84
Being the tale of an aviator who soars over the field of battle while his passenger marks a chart with colored pencils—a proceeding that irritates the birdman more than the shrapnel bursting about him.

McHENRY AND DIEEINGHAM: ANGEES. A Short Story, **Holworthy Hall** . . 90
Theatrical promoting on a brand new scale, in which "Pepper" needs all his wits.

CAUGHT IN THE NET. Editorials, . . . **The Editor** . . . 102
Thrifty America—Social and Individual Efficiency—Old-Established Business—The Pittsburgh of Africa—The Uses of Adversity.

INSIDE THE EINES. A Three-Part Story, Part II. . . **Earl Derr Biggers and Robert Welles Ritchie** . 106
A novelization of the successful play that may be said to equal the stage production.

IN THIS CORNER—— A Short Story, . . . **H. C. Witwer** . . 140
As told by the manager, the inside story of this prize fight was enough to make your hair curl several times.

THE PROBATION OF P. D. A Short Story, . . **George Washington Ogden** 151
Among the sheep-herders of the West where the graduate-agronomist goes to get a taste of real life.

IT CAN BE DONE. A Short Story, ... **Foxhall Williams** . . 176
Megrue loved baseball but his affections were divided between putting them over the plate and lifting his elbow in another way.

PUPPETS ON A STRING. A Short Story, . . . **William A. Magill** . . 185
In which money changes hands with bewildering swiftness, and the man who thinks he has it, hasn't.

THE QUEER PLACE. A Short Story, ... **Frederick Niven** . . 197
There was a something about this checker-board that held attention in spite of yourself.

A VENTURE IN PRIVATE PRESERVES. A Short Story, **Raymond S. Spears** . 206
Wall Street in the woods experiences a new sort of craft and graft.

THE GIRL FROM NOWHERE. A Short Story, . **George Woodruff Johnston** 216
Suspicion naturally centered upon her when the famous ruby vanished.

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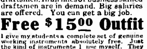

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THE POPULAR MAGAZINE
VOL. XXXVII. JULY 23, 1915. No. 3.

The Prodigal

By W. B. M. Ferguson

Author of "A Man's Code," "The Wrong House," etc.

This prodigal dissipates a quarter of a million in two years; and when his last cent is gone and he is headed for the Down-and-Out Club, fate picks him up and makes him inheritor of one of the strangest legacies we ever heard of. What he does with his strange legacy is the story. It is a tale of business and sport, with a spice of romance. Among other things, you will be introduced to a baseball diamond and learn how to run a ball team—and how not to. And that Ferguson is qualified to write about baseball you will admit, having in mind his novel, "A Man's Code," published some time ago.

(*A Complete Novel*)

CHAPTER I.

THE TRIUMVIRATE CELEBRATE AN AUSPICIOUS OCCASION.

A TRIO of young men, occupying a conspicuous center table, had become the cynosure of all eyes in fashionable Augerot's cabaret that night, and the climax came when their leader, who looked the youngest of three, insisted upon taking the floor, to the strains of the latest musical hit, and executing probably the most fantastic one-step Broadway had ever witnessed. He was partnered by one of his companions, a fat, pink-cheeked gentleman.

In the midst of this exhibition the manager appeared, conscious of an unpleasant duty, and spoke a word in private. Whereupon the leader of the triumvirate ceased his terpsichorean efforts, clapped the other familiarly on the back, and then, turning, addressed the assembled company.

"Your pardon, ladies and gentlemen. Everybody's pardon," he began, with a most infectious if rather unsteady laugh. "No offense intended, I assure you. My friends and I are merely celebrating a most auspicious occasion, most auspicious, I assure you—a fool and his money being soon parted. Ladies and gentlemen, let us drink to the sentiment." And, heedless of masculine scowls, he raised an empty champagne glass, which slipped from his grasp and shivered to atoms on the floor.

In a far corner a girl was dining

alone for the moment, and now, as the triumvirate, shepherded by the diplomatic manager, made their flowery exit and the commotion died down, she sat staring at the closed door.

Her escort joined her presently. "The management should know better than to admit a crowd like that," he exclaimed. "And if it had been any one but that fellow and his friends they'd have been fired out long ago, neck and crop. Lorimer thinks because he has a fool's license he can get away with any nonsense."

"Lorimer?" echoed the girl. "Is that his name? I mean the one who made the speech and seemed the leader. Do you know him?"

Her companion shrugged. "I know of him, and so would you if you were a New Yorker. He's known from the St. Denis to the Plaza and back again. His wild escapades have been newspaper talk for years."

"He didn't look the typical fool," said the girl. "Who were the other two?"

"Oh, a couple of the same stripe. The one who looked as if he'd been blown up to eighty pounds' pressure is 'Fatty' Stuveysant; the other, Mortimer Conyers. He, at least, is old enough to know better. I don't know much about him except that he's a rounder and travels with Lorimer and Stuveysant. Prodigals all; that's the best you can say of them."

"Prodigals all," murmured the girl, a far-away look in her eyes. "And two of them so young!"

Meanwhile the triumvirate, homeward bound, had picked up a mutual friend—Billy Wate, sporting writer on the New York *Star*—and now, in his bachelor quarters, Lorimer was endeavoring to explain the evening's entertainment.

"The grand final blow-out of the season," he grinned. "The triumphant passing of the fool and his money, my friend."

"Do you mean that you're ruined?" exclaimed Wate.

"Absolutely, my dear boy," put in Stuveysant. "Behold three ruined prodigals! Gaze upon the impressive scene! Of course Conyers was more or less ruined anyway, but it's a new and diverting experience for Rummy Lorimer and me. For, you must know, my dear boy, that I've just completed the 'Circle of Love,' which consists in being kicked out the front door by an irate father, taken in the back door by a doting mother, and kicked out the front door again by the aforesaid father. In other words, my allowance has been amputated at the root, the parental roof has been forbidden me, and, like Hagar of old, I've been cast forth into the wilderness where the Whangdoodle mourneth for his first-born. Hence these tears." And Mr. Stuveysant helped himself to another high ball.

"Serves you right," said Billy Wate. "I only wonder the aforesaid parent didn't do it long ago. If you were my child you'd never have had a chance to grow a stomach like that. That façade of yours, Fatty, is an outstanding affront to all honest, hard-working citizens and a horrible example to the young."

He turned with some show of concern to Lorimer.

"Is it straight goods, Harry? Are you really down and out? A quarter of a million in two years?"

"Behold the remains!" Harry Lorimer turned out his pockets, and flipped some greenbacks on the table. "Birdseed, that's all. Yes, a quarter of a million in two years. Going some, eh? I never was a piker, Billy."

"No," said Wate slowly, "pikers never finish this way. Have you thought of what you'll do?"

Lorimer laughed. "No, I haven't

the least idea. I'm not a brainy, hard-working disciple like you with my daily bread at my finger tips. But come! This is a celebration, not a funeral. Fill up your glasses, boys, and drink to the auspicious occasion!"

A serving man entered. He wore a chronic air of disapproval, and answered to the name of Jukes.

"Beg pardon, sir, but that fellow is here again," he announced dismally, regarding the scene of inane revelry with a look of patient disgust. "That fellow Magee, sir. You said never to send him away without something, sir."

"Oh, Magee." Lorimer pondered a moment. "Well, send him in here, Jukes."

"In *here*, sir?"

"Yes, why not?"

"But—but, sir, the fellow's impossible! Quite impossible, sir. A dead beat——"

"Show him in, Jukes!"

Mr. Magee entered, preceded by the serving man, who held his nose in the air as if, under great compulsion, he were ushering in a bad smell.

Mr. Magee proved to be a shortish, broadish gentleman with a round, black head like a cannon ball, a pair of broken knuckles and immense hands, mud-colored eyes, a scar on the starboard angle of his lean, prognathous jaw, and a small aperture at the corner of his twisted mouth through which, when he condescended to speak, his voice emerged with all the modulation and tunefulness of a factory whistle. To these minor attractions may be added a slight impediment in his gait. Mr. Magee was dressed shabbily and inadequately, smelled of ancient hops, and was obviously none too well acquainted with soap and water.

Lorimer arose, and nodded genially.

"Well met, Mr. Magee! Gentlemen, permit me to introduce Mr. Magee, a victim of adverse fortune like ourselves."

The visitor looked as if he suspected himself of being the victim of rather an elaborate joke.

"Aw, say," he murmured sepulchrally, rubbing his large hands. "Aw, say!" These two words were the most frequently used in the Magee vocabulary, and could convey the most varying emotions.

"Have a drink, Mr. Magee," said Lorimer. "Fill up your glass and drink to the auspicious occasion."

This proved to be a happy inspiration, apparently the phrase of all others which Mr. Magee thoroughly understood and had no cause to distrust, for, after but a momentary hesitation, he helped nimself quite liberally, and, raising his glass and addressing the company generally with the salutation: "Down the brook!" he shot the contents into his capacious maw with admirable grace and precision. After which, drawing a threadbare sleeve politely across his lips, he stood at ease and seemed quite ready to oblige with a second performance.

"And now," added Lorimer, "the next question is a little loan, eh?"

"Aw, say!" murmured Mr. Magee.

"Well," continued Lorimer, "I'm sorry—for my own sake as well as yours, Mr. Magee—but you've just drunk to the last occasion of the kind. The fact of the matter is I'm broke —dead broke. I mention this trivial circumstance merely to save you the trouble of any future visits. After to-morrow this hospitable roof will cease to exist so far as I'm concerned. In the meantime, please accept this parting remembrance with my blessing." He laughed gayly, took the collection of "birdseed" from the table —the last insignificant, ignoble remnant of his fortune—and tendered it to the visitor.

That gentleman looked from the

rumpled bills to their owner and back again, varying emotions depicted in his little eyes. At length he shook his round, black cannon-ball head.

"Aw, say—nix, boss; nothin' doin'——"

"Go on," urged Lorimer. "Take it. I want you to take it."

Mr. Magee shuffled his feet and stretched out a hand, only to draw it back. He seemed to be groping for words.

"Nothin' doin', boss," he repeated. "You're a dead-game sport, Mr. Lorimer; you sure are, but I ain't the kind to take a guy's last cent, see? Say, you've been mighty good to me, and I don't forget it. I didn't know you was goin' broke—I'm sorry——"

As if suddenly overwhelmed at finding himself talking at such length, Mr. Magee stopped short, nodded the cannon-ball head several times, and limped precipitately from the room, leaving Lorimer staring at the money, a strange look in his eyes.

"Who is that fellow?" asked Wate as the door closed behind the visitor. "His handsome map seemed a bit familiar. I felt I should know it."

"He's a broken-down, ex-professional ball player," explained Lorimer. "Used to play with the Albany Vespers about ten years ago. He was some backstop, too, though the team wasn't much good."

"Bud Magee!" exclaimed Wate. "That's the fellow! I remember seeing him before the Vespers blew up. What do you know about the old Vespers of the Inter-State League, anyway?"

"Not much," answered Lorimer. "I've an uncle who lives in Albany, and, years ago, I used to visit him a good bit. He was always a fan, and, in fact, owns a minor-league team to this day. I guess he has made a fortune out of the game. Well, as a kid, I saw the Vespers play in Albany."

"And when this fellow Magee came along with a hard-luck story—why, of course, Rummy fell for it," put in Conyers disgustedly. "The fellow's a dead beat and drinks every cent he begs. Why, his breath smelled like a brewery!"

"Well, dear boy, your own breath is nothing to brag about," said Fatty Stuveysant. "Why quarrel with a man's drink? No doubt Mr. Magee would prefer to smell like a distillery if he could afford it."

Here Jukes entered with a letter and the murmured explanation: "Came in the last delivery, sir."

Lorimer eyed it with misgiving. "Another remembrance from a creditor, I suppose," he grinned. "You never know how many people are thinking of you until you go broke."

Then the postmark caught his eye, and his expression changed. "You fellows will excuse me, won't you?" he exclaimed, tearing open the envelope.

He glanced through the letter, then gave a whoop, upset the table, and began a war dance about the room. Then while the others eyed him, amazed, he became very solemn, though his eyes, if not his feet, still danced.

"Gentlemen," he said gravely, "I regret to announce that a rich uncle has just died, making me his heir——"

"Hooray!" bellowed Stuveysant.

"Did you ever hear of such bull luck!" exclaimed Conyers, starting up from the couch where he had been half asleep. "Blow in one fortune and grab another! Of all the luck! Catch any one dying and leaving *me* anything but bad debts."

Wate whistled incredulously. "How much is it this time, Harry?"

"I don't know," replied Lorimer. "You fellows haven't given me a chance to explain. It seems—but here's the letter; read it for yourself."

His three companions clubbed heads

over the letter, Wate reading aloud. It was from a firm of Albany lawyers, and stated briefly that Silas Q. Lorimer had died suddenly. It concluded:

The Palestine Baseball Club, owned by our late client, has been bequeathed to you unconditionally, but the rest of the estate, real and personal, left in part conditionally. What those conditions are can be best explained in an interview. Kindly call on us at your earliest convenience. Yours truly,

OWEN & ATKINS.

"Conditionally," said Billy Wate, scratching his head. "U-m-m, I don't like that word. It may mean anything or nothing."

"Palestine!" ejaculated Stuveysant. "Who ever heard of 'em playing ball in the Holy Land?"

"Palestine, you fathead, is a small jerkwater dump near Albany," put in Conyers.

Lorimer nodded. "I've never been in the town, but my uncle was born there. This is the uncle I was speaking about. I told you fellows I used to visit him a good bit when I was young, but there was a family row of some sort, and it's all of a dozen years since I last saw him. So I needn't pretend to be heartbroken at his death. Say, what's a ball team worth, Billy?"

"Anywhere from a fortune to thirty cents," grinned Wate. "I never heard of this Palestine club, but if it's a first-class county team, drawing a good, steady gate, the franchise may be worth as much as twenty-five thousand. Mind, that's only a guess, and the thing for you to do is go up there and find out."

"Sure," agreed Stuveysant. "And the sooner the better, Rummy."

"Of course Stuveysant and I will go along as a sort of advisory committee," added Conyers generously. "You don't know the first thing about business, and we'll see that nobody throws any hooks into you."

"All right," laughed Lorimer. "How about you, Billy? Can you come, too?"

"Sorry, but I have to work for a living," replied the newspaper man. "I'll find out about this team of yours and drop you a line."

At the door, he found the opportunity of speaking with Lorimer alone.

"Look here," he began, with some embarrassment, "I want to warn you again about this fellow Conyers; he's helped you run through one fortune, and he'll help you get rid of another if you give him half a chance. Stuveysant's all right; he's a different breed of pup, and, whatever his faults, he's your friend to the finish. He isn't a sponger and has always paid his way——"

"Oh, forget it, Billy!" exclaimed Lorimer in mild distress. "I can't let you talk that way about Conyers; he's my friend. Mort's all right."

"What do you know about him?" demanded the reporter. "Less than nothing. A chance acquaintance picked up in a barroom. A man at least ten years older than you or Stuveysant and ten times that in experience. Look here, I've heard a few things about Conyers if you haven't. I've heard he touts for Sontag's—the joint where you dropped fifty thousand——"

"Good old Billy!" laughed Lorimer, thumping the other affectionately on the back. "You should be on the platform instead of Newspaper Row. But, honestly, you're all wrong about Mort Conyers. He's no saint, the Lord knows, but neither is he a blackguard."

"All right, my boy," shrugged Wate, lighting a cigarette. "Have it your own way. It's no skin off me."

CHAPTER II.

A FINE, JUICY LEMON TO SUCK.

Mr. Gabriel Owen, senior member of the Albany law firm of Owen & Atkins, pulled his lamb's wool whiskers and blinked solemnly over his specta-

cles. He was not very favorably impressed with the appearance of Mr. Henry Lorimer—known to Broadway by the delectable name of "Rummy"—only and beloved nephew of the late Silas Q. Lorimer. Nor, if the truth were known, was that young gentleman impressed with it himself. He was guiltily conscious that his eyes were congested, and that, despite his customary scrupulous grooming, he bore this morning all the unmistakable earmarks of a prodigal.

"The estate," Mr. Owen was saying, "exclusive of the baseball interests, is valued at about three hundred thousand."

Lorimer's first impulse was to let out a whoop, for this sum exceeded his rosiest imaginings. Instead, remembering his supposed state of mourning, he preserved his attitude of melancholy decorum.

"Half the estate," continued the old lawyer, "is left conditionally to your late uncle's ward, Miss Sands, of Oil City, Pennsylvania."

"W-what!" stuttered Lorimer. "W-what's that? His *ward?* Why—why I never knew he had a ward!"

"Nevertheless, she exists," replied Mr. Owen, who appeared to be taking a subdued pleasure in the interview.

"As we suggested in our letter," he proceeded smoothly, "half the estate is left to you conditionally—under the same conditions as those applying to our late client's ward. Those conditions are that you and Miss Sands become man and wife if either of you are to profit from the estate by so much as a penny. This, of course, is excepting the baseball property, which is yours unconditionally. At the end of five years, dating from the day of your uncle's death, if the terms of the bequest are not complied with, the estate is to be realized and the entire proceeds given to charity."

Having exploded this bombshell successfully, Mr. Owen leaned back, pulled his lamb's wool whiskers, and contemplated the effect. That effect was plainly visible, for Lorimer sat open-mouthed and in a state bordering on stupefaction.

"There is one more item," added the lawyer. "The Lorimer homestead in Palestine, where your uncle was born and where, after his removal to the city, he lived occasionally, is left unconditionally to Miss Sands."

"But this is preposterous!" exclaimed Lorimer, finding tongue at last. "I'm to get one hundred and fifty thousand if I marry somebody I never saw in all my born days! And she's to get the same! In other words, we're to sell ourselves; we're to be forced into a loveless marriage merely to obey the whim of an eccentric old man——"

"There's no compulsion in the matter, sir," corrected Mr. Owen mildly. "You can simply refuse."

"Of course I refuse," exclaimed Lorimer hotly. "I need money, but not so badly as all that. I'll marry *when* I please and *whom* I please, and I refuse to be dictated to in such a matter by any one above ground or—or underground. So far as I'm concerned—and no doubt I also speak for Miss Sands—that three hundred thousand may be given to charity at once and not five years from now. I don't want any part of it."

For the first time the old lawyer looked at Mr. Henry Lorimer with some dawning approval, though it was tempered by the cynical suspicion of the man of the world.

"Your sentiments are admirable, sir," he said dryly, "but you will have five years in which to change them. I may add, however, that Miss Sands has taken the same attitude as yourself."

"Any decent girl would," retorted Lorimer. "If my uncle had wished to keep this Miss Sands and me from

knowing each other, if he had wished to make us thoroughly dislike each other, he couldn't have hit on a better way than this. It's a wonder to me any lawyer would draw up such a will."

"The will, sir, is legal in every respect," replied Mr. Owen, with asperity. "You'll discover that if you attempt to contest it. Your uncle may have been a little eccentric toward the last, but there never was a question of his absolute sanity. A man can dispose of his estate as he pleases, sir, and his lawyer isn't responsible for whatever disposition he makes."

"I apologize, Mr. Owen, if I suggested anything of a personal nature by what I said," remarked Lorimer. "I didn't mean to, I assure you. You must make some allowance for a man who has just lost three hundred thousand. As for attempting to break the will, that never entered my head. I think I may be permitted to call it eccentric; but, at all events, I don't attempt to question its validity or that obvious truth that my uncle had a perfect right to do whatever he liked with his money."

The approving look deepened in Mr. Owen's shrewd old eyes, and he appeared considerably mollified.

"This," he said almost kindly, taking a long envelope from a tin deed box, "contains papers relative to the Palestine Baseball Club, the deed to Lorimer Park, and mortgage of same. Also, a communication from your late uncle."

Further red tape being wound up satisfactorily, Lorimer shook hands with Mr. Gabriel Owen and took his leave.

Some time later, in their suite in the Ten Eyck Hotel, he permanently interrupted Messrs Conyers and Stuveysant's game of pinochle by the account of his visit to the lawyers, the bombshell exploding among this new audience with all the success of its initial effort.

"Suffering mackerel!" gasped Stuveysant, collapsing on the bed. "Why, we're ruined all over again! What are you laughing at, Rummy? Where's the joke?"

"Well, what's the use of bleating?" grinned Lorimer. "I've only lost something I never had."

"Are you fellows crazy?" put in Conyers. "Where does the losing come in? Don't you as good as get the three hundred thousand if you marry the girl—for she gets the other half? Well, then, what more do you want? Of course your refusal to the lawyer was only a grand-stand play."

"Was it?" asked Lorimer. "You've got another think coming, Mort."

"Do you mean to say you're going to turn it down?" demanded the other incredulously. "In the name of common sense, why?"

"Because I'm not for sale," snapped Lorimer, with his first show of anger. "I may be a waster, but I'm no huckster. I *won't* marry for the sole sake of money, no matter how great the amount or my necessity, and you can paste that in your little brown hat. I don't want any part of my uncle's money under such conditions, and that settles it."

"Well, all I can say is that you're a monumental ass," observed Conyers bitterly. Stuveysant, however, had looked his silent approval. "We came up here expecting to fall into a fortune, and all we get is a ball team that mayn't be worth funeral expenses."

"I bet it's worth a fortune," declared Stuveysant confidently. "There's big money in the game, and I know a fellow that pulled half a million out of it."

"He never pulled half a million out of the bushes unless he sunk a couple of million at the start," sneered Conyers.

While they were arguing this point, a bell boy came in with a letter for Lorimer. It was from Wate, written the previous evening from the *Star* office, and ran in part as follows:

From what I can figure out, your ball team, known to fame as the Invincibles, are a bunch of sand-lotters, and the franchise worth about thirty cents in bad money. They're in the County League, and have finished last for the past three seasons. They're known as the "Cellar Champions" and the "Hashhouse Invincibles"—from the way they scramble the eggs and spill the beans. It looks to me as if your late uncle were something of a humorist, and had left you a fine, juicy lemon to suck.

I'll try to run up and look things over, so don't do anything definite till I see you.

A harrowing silence succeeded the public reading of this epistle.

"Ruined for the third time!" exclaimed Stuveysant tragically. "Of all the darn, miserable, rotten luck——"

"I told you so," said Conyers in gloomy triumph. "I just knew they'd pan out a bunch of sand-lotters. The Hashhouse Invincibles! How does it feel, Rummy, to be a bloated baseball capitalist——"

"Oh, forget it!" said Lorimer. "What's the good of croaking? I'm going up to this Holy Land and find out for myself just how bad things are."

"If we can even sell the franchise for car fare home," exclaimed Stuveysant hopefully.

"Sell it?" sneered Conyers. "Why, you'll have to pay somebody to take it away. A fine, juicy lemon to suck!"

CHAPTER III.

A VISIT TO THE OFFICE.

Palestine proved to be hardly deserving of the title bestowed on it by Conyers, for it was a thriving, if somewhat old-fashioned, town and not without some claim to history and distinction. Conyers, however, with that vast contempt of a certain type of New Yorker for anything not daubed with the Broadway brand of paint, affected to sneer at its unmistakable air of rurality evidenced by the long, quiet, shady avenues and wooden houses.

Lorimer had engaged rooms in the Empire House, the town's most ambitious hotel, and he now left Conyers and Stuveysant, and set off for the Palestine Baseball Club, which, he learned, had an office on upper Main Street in a building known locally as the Lorimer Block.

He boarded an uptown trolley, finding a place on the back seat beside a gentleman whose general plan of architecture may be best described as "gangling." He was big-jointed and loosely packed, with a long, blushing neck like a turkey cock, and an ill-favored jaw that kept munching a wad of gum with irritating persistence. He was evidently something of a local celebrity, for the conductor spoke to him with familiarity.

"Hello, Clark," he was saying. "Anything doing yet? Heard who's got the Invincibles?"

"I hear it's the old man's nephew," replied Mr. Clark shortly. "One of these tinhorn sports from New York."

"Didn't know he had a nephew," observed the conductor. "I s'pose he'll sell the franchise."

"Sell it?" laughed the other. "Why, you couldn't give it away. Who's sucker enough to hold the bag?"

"Well," said the other defensively, "I heard that Pete Delaney didn't think so worse of it at that."

"Piffle! Pete Delaney ain't the kind to ask to have a tin can tied to him. *He* won't buy the franchise, and the guy who does ought to have his head examined."

Lorimer located without difficulty the headquarters of the Palestine Baseball Club in a ground-floor office of the Lorimer Block, a substantial building

of modern design. The plate-glass window bore the following legend: "Philander Jellibond. Notary Public. Bonds, Mortgages, Deeds, Insurance."

He opened the door, and found himself, to his surprise, in a well-appointed office; a small fraction of this was railed off, and behind this railing a girl was typewriting industriously, so industriously that she seemed unaware of his entrance. She was dressed in black, with a wide turndown collar, which afforded Lorimer an excellent view of an extremely white and pretty neck topped by a mop of amber-colored hair.

He waited patiently, then finally went forward and leaned over the railing. "Good morning," he said affably. "I hope my—er—waiting isn't disturbing you."

The little stenographer jumped and swung around. "I—I beg your pardon," she exclaimed, flushing vividly. "I thought you were Mr. Jellibond."

She arose, quite self-possessed, and assumed a prim, businesslike air that sat strangely on one of her obvious youth. "What can I do for you, sir? If you wish to see Mr. Jellibond, he isn't here yet——"

"But I don't know if I want to see Mr. Jellibond," confessed Lorimer ingenuously. "If he happens to have anything to do with the Palestine Baseball Club——"

"He's the business manager."

"Then I'll wait till he comes in. You see, it's this way," he added almost apologetically, "I happen to own the club——"

"Oh, then you are the late Mr. Lorimer's nephew?"

"Exactly. And you, may I ask?"

"I am Miss Walker, the stenographer."

He raised his hat and made her a very polite bow. They looked for a moment at each other in silence, and then, entirely without cause, both suddenly smiled—the smile with which youth hails youth the world over.

"Well, Miss Walker," said Lorimer, "I'm looking for somebody who can tell me something about the Palestine Baseball Club. Perhaps you can oblige me——"

"I don't know, Mr. Lorimer. I'll try, I'm sure; but, you see, I've only been here two days. The regular stenographer got married and left, and, through the kind influence of Miss Sands, I secured the position, though knowing it might be only temporary. So, you see, I've only been here two days, and my predecessor—well, things seem to be in rather a muddle."

"From all I've heard," said Lorimer, "the Palestine Baseball Club is worth about thirty cents in bad money; yet I don't see here any particular evidence of frugality. In fact, it seems to me this office is only fit for a concern paying fifty per cent profit——"

"To all intents and purposes the headquarters of the Palestine Baseball Club are here," interrupted Miss Walker dryly, pointing to the railed inclosure wherein she stood. "The rest of the office is for Mr. Jellibond and his bonds, mortgages, and deeds."

"Oh, I see. We only pay for desk room?"

"We pay nothing. Your uncle built and owned this building. It must seem rather strange to you, Mr. Lorimer, that I should be telling you of your own uncle's affairs——"

"I only wish you would, Miss Walker, if you can—and will," said Lorimer. "I never lived in Palestine, and hadn't seen my uncle for over a dozen years. I know something less than nothing about his affairs."

Miss Walker was eying him with a certain objective interest while she pretended to be looking elsewhere.

"Well," she said, swinging a diminutive foot, "I've only been here two days, and I never lived in Palestine,

either; all the same, I've managed to learn some things. This office is given rent free so long as the Palestine Baseball Club remains in the Lorimer family. If you sell the franchise the office reverts, like the rest of the building, to the estate. Surely the lawyer told you that?"

"Mr. Owen gave me some papers which I haven't read, and if it was in the will I must have skipped it," replied Lorimer. "But is Mr. Jellibond paid for being the business manager?"

"Certainly."

"Then what right has he to use the greater part of this office—and evidently the greater part of his time—in attending to business of his own?"

Miss Walker pursued up her vivid lips and eyed the ceiling.

"Apparently Mr. Jellibond had some such understanding with your uncle," she said, tapping her white teeth with a pencil. "But I see Mr. Jellibond coming across the street, and he can explain everything far better than I." She turned, with a subdued smile, to her desk.

The door opened, and Mr. Philander Jellibond, as if wafted by the early April breeze, blew into the room. Indeed, it seemed as if he generated a breeze of his own wherever he went, and that breeziness was the keynote of his character. He was a large, glistening gentleman in a tight frock coat and very high collar, with black string tie.

"My dear boy!" he bellowed, throwing wide his short arms as Lorimer introduced himself. "Silas Lorimer's nephew! Welcome, my boy! Welcome to Palestine and your inheritance!" Having relieved himself thus, Mr. Jellibond glistened all over and struck his most breezy attitude.

Little Miss Walker, her back to them, seemed entirely absorbed in her work; nevertheless, her shoulders had begun to shake, and during the ensuing interview it may be presumed that the little, close-set ears under the amber curls did not miss a single word.

Lorimer was not long in discovering that extracting information from Mr. Jellibond amounted almost to a physical feat; Mr. Jellibond was expansive, but vague, and as Lorimer persisted in his quest for information the other slowly and reluctantly abandoned some of his humid breeziness and grew rather more cold and distant.

"Your uncle, sir, and I were very old friends," he was saying. "In short, bosom friends. Some few years before his death, Mr. Lorimer's health made it obligatory that he should give up all active business affairs. He asked me to take over the business management of the Invincibles, and, purely out of friendship, I consented—in a moment of weakness. I say in a moment of weakness. As the season is less than three months' duration, and the salary offered me merely nominal, I couldn't be expected, of course, to wholly abandon my own fairly lucrative calling. In short, it was agreed that I should carry it on here—hence this satisfactory arrangement." And Mr. Jellibond waved a large, mottled hand which reminded Lorimer of a section of headcheese.

"Was that a written agreement?"

"It was not, sir," replied Mr. Jellibond in pained surprise. "I have said your uncle and I were bosom friends, so it was not put in writing. Most certainly not. It was a gentlemen's agreement. Do I understand, sir," suddenly looking very formidable, "that you doubt my word?"

"Not at all, Mr. Jellibond. I only wish to know how long the agreement is supposed to last. I infer, then, that it terminated automatically on my uncle's death?"

"I suppose so. I didn't take the precaution of protecting myself by a written agreement. I'm not that kind, sir,

nor was your uncle. I'm an open man, sir; open as the day!" finished Mr. Jellibond, throwing wide his short arms.

"Undoubtedly. But look here," said Lorimer in exasperation, "I merely want some information. It's nothing to me if the Palestine Baseball Club once paid and doesn't now. I'm here to sell, not to run it, and if you, the business manager, can't give me some idea of what it's worth, who can? How do we stand? *That's* what I'd like to know."

Mr. Jellibond hemmed and hawed and mopped his brow. "Well, for the past three or four years the team has been run at a loss——"

"How much?"

"A nominal sum, sir. That's all I can say. In short, it's impossible for me to be more explicit until I've gone thoroughly into the matter, a proceeding involving both time and trouble. I can't give you the precise figures offhand. I advise you to sell out if you get the chance. The franchise, I should say, is worth a thousand or so, and then there is Lorimer Park, owned by the club. Its value is probably ten thousand, and half of this is mortgaged at six per cent."

Not having examined the papers given him by Mr. Owen, this was agreeable news to Lorimer. He was richer than he had thought.

"In short," concluded Mr. Jellibond, getting up and making a great display of activity, "I really must ask you to excuse me for the present, for I'm a very busy man, sir. I shall be only too happy to go fully into the matter with you, but you must give me time. I'll appoint an evening in the near future, when we can go thoroughly into the matter together. You may rely, Mr. Lorimer, on my utmost assistance. In the meantime——"

And so, wafted on the Jellibond verbiage and breeziness, Lorimer found himself presently on the sidewalk without realizing in the least how it had happened.

He stood irresolute for a moment, and then, with a careless shrug, lighted a cigarette and strolled up the street. After all, he had learned enough. He owned a five-thousand-dollar interest in Lorimer Park, and the franchise was worth perhaps two thousand at the most. He would sell out for seven thousand cash or the nearest offer. The trouble, however, was to find a buyer.

CHAPTER IV.

AN OFFER IS MADE.

On returning to the Empire House, Lorimer found Stuveysant and Conyers absent, it developing later that each had gone off on some pleasure or business of his own. Thus, because there was nothing else to do, Lorimer remembered the papers given him by Mr. Owen and decided to have a look at them.

The title deeds to Lorimer Park, and other matters relating to the mortgage and the ball club, he glanced through hurriedly, his interest centering on the communication from his uncle. This was dated two years before the writer's death, and, from the context, it was apparent that Silas Q. Lorimer had known nothing of his nephew's subsequent graceless career. The letter was as follows:

My Dear Harry: No doubt it will surprise you to find your name mentioned so prominently in my will; but, for that matter, it has rather surprised myself as, after the quarrel with your father, I washed my hands of the New York Lorimers, and tried to forget I had any such relatives.

Twelve years have since passed, and, though your father and I never made up our difference, I have been thinking lately a good deal about you. I remember you as a lad, and with what favor I then regarded you.

I dare say you will think my will eccentric. No doubt, also, the fact of my having a ward will astonish you. One, however, cannot exist without human ties, and after your deflection—for which I don't blame

you, seeing you were but a lad at the time I quarreled with your father and had to do as he ordered you without inquiring into the merits of our difference—I found it necessary to procure a substitute. This was provided in the daughter of an old friend whom I had known in Pennsylvania. On the death of her father, Phyllis Sands became my ward, and she has proved a blessing and stanch support in my declining years.

You, Harry, are the last of the Lorimers, and you and my ward are the two I have cared for most in my lonely life. It is my earnest wish that you two should become man and wife. I have had the opportunity of studying the characters of you both, and I know that one is the necessary complement of the other. You cannot fail to make each other happy. For though I have not seen you for a dozen years, the child is father of the man, and I have heard very flattering reports of your university and business career.

At this point, Lorimer suddenly became restless and looked out of the window. It was with an effort that at length he resumed reading:

Neither of you need money. I know you inherited at least a quarter of a million from your father, while Phyllis has a small income. Thus neither of you can think I am using the money threat to compel my wishes as regards your marriage. I have left the large margin of five years so that you both will have ample time to become acquainted and to know each other.

Phyllis being less well provided for than you, I have left her the Lorimer Homestead; this, and the income from her father's estate, should support her in comfort, if not luxury. I mention this merely to show that, as in your own case, there is no necessity for her to share in the estate except under the conditions I have named.

As for the Palestine Baseball Club, the property is a little gold mine if rightly handled. It is temporarily run down because I've been unable to maintain the all-necessary personal supervision. My fighting days are over, and my grip has relaxed. Mr. Jellibond is not the man for the position he occupies; but, against my better judgment, I yielded to his importunities. I needed a man whom I knew at least to be honest.

It all depends on yourself, Harry, what you make of the property. It will mean hard and intelligent work, but nothing worth while can be won otherwise. The Invincibles have an old and honorable standing, and have given me the bulk of my fortune. I hope you will find your pleasure and profit in making the fine old club what it was in my best days; you have the means, and, like every healthy American, an inbred love for the great national game. The name of Lorimer has always been identified with the Invincibles, and my earnest hope and wish is that you carry that association on when I am gone. That you will do so worthily, and make the club what it was before I had to relinquish the helm, I have not the slightest doubt.

Lorimer folded the letter and placed it in his pocket. Then he stared out of the window, his fingers beating a restless tattoo against the glass.

Conyers entered in the midst of his musings. "Well," he greeted, "have you found out yet what you're worth—you bloated baseball capitalist?"

"About seven thousand, I guess." And Lorimer told of his conversation with Mr. Jellibond. "The trouble will be to find a quick cash buyer."

"I've found you one," said Conyers calmly. "It's a fellow by the name of Delaney——"

"Pete Delaney?"

"Yes. What do you know about him?"

"Nothing. I happened to hear the name in a chance conversation on the car to-day. I suppose he's a local luminary?"

Conyers shrugged. "More or less. But the funny and best part of it is that I know him. I met him several years ago in New York, and hadn't seen him until I bumped into him on the street to-day. He was very glad to see me, and wanted to know what brought me to Palestine. So I told him; and, to make a long story short, he's willing to give fifty-five hundred cash for the franchise and Lorimer Park. How's that for work?"

"Fine!" exclaimed Lorimer. "You're certainly a hustler, Mort. But, look here; I think I should get at least another thousand——"

"I don't believe you'll get another

bid," interrupted Conyers. "I've learned a few things since I've been here. The franchise isn't worth sour apples. Delaney wants Lorimer Park, not the franchise; but he knows you won't sell one without the other because I told him so. He's got to take the good with the bad, see? Fifty-five hundred is his bed-rock figure, and we may miss our market by trying to grab too much. You see, we can't afford to sit around and hold out for a few hundreds more. Where's the money coming from to pay the mortgage, let alone anything else——"

"I know all that," said Lorimer. "But I'm not fool enough to jump at a man's first offer, Mort. It's a forced sale, of course, but Delaney doesn't have to know that."

The entrance of Stuveysant put a momentary end to the discussion. Mr. Stuveysant was somewhat excited and in high spirits.

"What do you think?" he exclaimed. "I've just seen Miss Sands!"

"Oh, is that all?" sneered Conyers. "I thought maybe somebody had been insulting you by offering you a job. Well, I suppose she's a rare old valentine, eh?"

"Valentine my eye!" exclaimed Mr. Stuveysant. "Talk about your Egyptian princesses! She's a peacherino on wheels! You just want to see her and talk to her. She's as nice as she looks too——"

"Why—were you *talking* to her?" demanded Lorimer.

"Sure!" said Stuveysant, unabashed. "You know me, Rummy. Think I'd pass up a chance like that?—the first regular looker I've seen since leaving New York. Why, it was like getting money from home! It's perked me up something wonderful."

"But how did you meet her?" asked Lorimer.

"Easiest thing in the world," replied Mr. Stuveysant airily. "I was curious to know what Miss Sands looked like, so I just went and found out, that's all. She arrived here a few days ago and has taken up her residence at the Lorimer Homestead. I learned that from the barkeep downstairs; he knows what's doing in this great metropolis if he doesn't know how to mix a Bronx cocktail.

"So I went to the Lorimer Homestead, and luck was with me, for I spied a divinity in the front garden. I went in and asked if this was where Miss Simpkins lived. The divinity said no; she, the divinity, was a stranger in town and her name was Sands, not Simpkins. Curious, wasn't it? Whereupon I apologized, and—and—well, somehow we exchanged a few ideas regarding roses and other Palestine flora before I was called upon to retire. She's simply great, Rummy. I only wish I had your chance, my boy."

"I haven't any chance, and, what's more, I don't want any," said Lorimer peevishly. "Don't start on that subject again. That Miss Sands happens to be an 'Egyptian princess' doesn't alter the situation in the least."

"Well," said Conyers, "I'll go over and see Delaney again, for we don't want to stay in this cemetery all year. What's your bed-rock figure, Lorimer? Will you take six thousand if he's fool enough to offer it?"

"I'll take it only if I have to," replied Lorimer. "Ask for seven and stall around for sixty-five."

Conyers had been gone about half an hour when a letter, left at the desk by a messenger, was brought up to Lorimer. He glanced curiously a moment at the firm writing before tearing open the envelope. The contents ran:

DEAR MR. LORIMER: Will you call at the office this evening any time *after* five? I have something to say to you about the Palestine Baseball Club. Please postpone all negotiations for its sale until after our interview. Yours very truly,

MISS WALKER.

"Ha! You old sultan!" exclaimed Stuveysant, whose keen eyes had seen the feminine writing on the envelope. "So that's how you've been spending the day? Made a conquest already, eh?"

"Business, my boy," replied Lorimer absently. "Purely business."

"Business my eye!" said Mr. Stuveysant. "You've been making a date, and I suppose you're going to keep it."

Lorimer drummed on the window a moment before replying; then he folded the letter and placed it in his pocket. "Why," he said slowly, "I think so."

CHAPTER V.

LORIMER LEARNS SOMETHING FURTHER ABOUT THE "LEMON" AND LITTLE MISS WALKER.

It is difficult to refuse a woman when evidently her whole soul is in the cause for which she pleads; more especially is it difficult if that woman be good to look upon. At least youth finds it no easy matter, and Harry Lorimer was young enough to appreciate the Walker physical assets. Moreover, it was not given him to refuse anybody anything within reason, native generosity being supported, during the past two years of his life, by a reckless carelessness as to his pocket. He had given lavishly right and left so long as there was credit at his bankers; now, however, he could not do the impossible.

Something of all this he was endeavoring to convey to Miss Walker as they sat alone and eyed each other across Mr. Jellibond's desk. That gentleman had gone to Albany, hence the request to call after five.

"It's out of the question, Miss Walker," Lorimer was saying. "Why should I hold on to the property as you suggest? In the first place, I can't afford to; and in the second, there's no money in it——"

"Not now, Mr. Lorimer, but there was once, and there should be again. No business on earth could pay if it was run like this. You've seen for yourself the kind of man Mr. Jellibond is; I don't say he did anything dishonest, but certainly the Palestine Baseball Club has been the merest side issue with him. He has this office rent free, uses nearly all of it for his own business, and is paid fifty dollars a week to manage the club——"

"What!"

"Yes, and not by the season but by the year. Your uncle trusted him implicitly and O. K.'d every report sent in. Here is a balance sheet for practically the last two seasons which I've managed to make up; you'll see here at a glance what it might take a month to get out of Mr. Jellibond."

"H'm!" murmured Lorimer, taking the paper and running a quick, experienced eye down the items. "Who is this field manager that gets forty dollars a week? Is his name Clark?"

"Yes. He was engaged by Mr. Jellibond."

"I saw him to-day on the car," said Lorimer, "and wasn't very much taken with his looks. What are these 'incidentals' that total thirty-five a week?"

Little Miss Walker went through her favorite maneuver of pursing her vivid lips and eying the ceiling. "I asked Mr. Jellibond, and he became quite peevish. He said something about gas, stamps, printing, and so forth."

"And this office boy? I haven't seen one so far."

"Oh, he's generally out running errands for Mr. Jellibond. He goes home at five."

Lorimer sighed and lighted a cigarette. "This is all very informative," he said, eying the balance sheet, "but I don't see what I can do. We can't prove anything irregular, and my uncle passed every report——"

"I'm making no charge against Mr. Jellibond," interrupted Miss Walker

stiffly. "I didn't request this interview for that purpose. My real reason for the interview, Mr. Lorimer, was to suggest that you not only keep the property but manage it yourself——"

"Who? Me?"

"Yes, you." Miss Walker folded her hands and looked at him. "I hope you won't think me presumptuous in all this——"

"Not a bit. I can only thank you and wonder why you've gone to so much trouble—for you must have worked very hard indeed during the past two days to become so well posted. Why are you so keen on my not selling to Delaney?"

She met his eyes frankly. "Because, for one reason, I don't like to sit by and see a person robbed, no matter who it is. Mr. Delaney's offer isn't fair at all. He's taking advantage of your ignorance and lack of interest. The potential value of the property must be considered as well as the actual, and I believe that potential value to be considerable.

"Then," she continued slowly, "there is what you might call the sentimental side of the question. Aren't there some things, Mr. Lorimer, that can't be measured in dollars and cents? Don't you think it would be a great thing, a very great thing, to try and make the club what it used to be? It seems to me the fight itself would be worth something. You are the last of the Lorimers, and the name for twenty-five years has been identified with the Palestine Baseball Club.

"That's how the situation appeals to me, Mr. Lorimer. Of course, it will mean the very hardest kind of work, but then isn't it better to wear out than to rust out? It would be another matter if you couldn't afford the time, but I happen to know that you can. Don't think I'm trying to exaggerate the good points of the proposition and minimize the bad ones. It won't be any triumphal march. If you refuse to sell out, you may make enemies. You will have a fight on your hands and plenty of the hardest kind of work. In a word, the situation is crying out for a *man;* and, from one or two things you said to Mr. Jellibond, I have ventured to think you may be that man, Mr. Lorimer."

He was silent, being more stirred by her words than he cared to admit even to himself.

"Now," concluded Miss Walker, flushing suddenly and looking timid, "I've said all that was on my mind, and no doubt I've said quite too much. It was good of you to listen so patiently. I didn't mean to be impudent or presumptuous. Nor do I ask or expect, Mr. Lorimer, that you take my mere word for all this; I only ask that you don't close with Mr. Delaney's offer in a hurry. I ask that you look over the ground carefully and find out these things for yourself."

"I thank you for all you've said," exclaimed Lorimer at length. "It's awfully good of you, and I appreciate it more than I can say. But there's a vital fact, Miss Walker, which you don't know—nor did my uncle when he left me the property and advised me to hold on to it. At that time—two years ago—I was worth about a quarter of a million; to-day I am worth nothing but this baseball property. It isn't that I'm afraid to take a sporting chance, but simply that I haven't any money to risk. I haven't a blessed cent. The truth is," he finished, "I've been all kinds of a fool. I didn't lose my money; I threw it away——"

"I know that," said the girl calmly. "This morning wasn't the first time I saw you, Mr. Lorimer. I've seen you before."

He stared. "Where? When?"

"Why, the other evening. You made a little speech, I remember."

Lorimer colored hotly and turned em-

barrassed eyes to the window. So she had been dining that evening in Augerot's. She had actually seen him in the rôle of prodigal and buffoon. He writhed inwardly at memory of the "auspicious occasion" and his stupid, silly speech.

"You said, on that occasion, you were celebrating the event of a fool and his money being soon parted," added Miss Walker, "so what I know hasn't been learned from any gossip that may be making the rounds of Palestine. My escort, that night, is a New Yorker if I'm not, and he told me something about you and your friends."

"That wouldn't be hard, I imagine," said Lorimer, with a shrug. "The New York papers seem to know more about me than I do myself. I've been no saint," he added, with a touch of bitterness, "but they've credited me with many things I never did—not that it matters in the least, of course. They can make all the copy out of it they want to; it's a matter of perfect indifference to me."

"Is it?" asked Miss Walker. She was tapping her teeth with a pencil and looking fixedly at his profile as he stood with half-averted head against the light. It was a face that held more than a hint of latent strength and power, a face both the masculine and feminine world instinctively liked.

"Is it?" she repeated. "Do you honestly think reputations don't count for anything? It seems to me they must be worth something when they are so difficult to win and so easy to lose."

"I hope you're not trying to read me a sermon," said Lorimer. "You don't strike me as being one of those foolish people who choose to believe a person does wrong because he doesn't know any better."

"Oh, dear, no," laughed Miss Walker. "Sermons are quite out of my line. Besides, they're awfully tedious, and I've quite enough to do with the beams in my own eye; I wouldn't dream of experimenting with other people's motes. I only venture to throw out, as a sort of general remark, neither new or diverting, that reputations are worth something, after all, and that, if they happen to be lost, why, one can happen to find them again. Also that hard work seems the best cure for boredom. Have you ever tried it, Mr. Lorimer?"

He turned and looked at her.

"Miss Walker, you know me for what I am—a prodigal and ne'er-do-well. I've dissipated a quarter of a million in two years; *that* is my record. You knew it, it seems, when you asked for this interview. You ask me now to keep the property and even manage it myself, yet say the situation is crying out for a *man*. Have you the smallest reason for thinking me that man? Doesn't all you know about me give the flat lie to that? Come, be honest with me. What is the *real* reason you don't wish me to sell out? You are clever—I've discovered that—but I'm not quite a fool, you know."

"If you were," said Miss Walker tartly, as she put away the carbon paper and began tidying up, "this interview wouldn't have taken place, Mr. Lorimer. It's because I don't think you a fool, no matter how successfully you may have played it, that I've ventured to say what I have.

"You say I know you're a prodigal and ne'er-do-well, but I don't know anything of the kind. I know you *were*, but we aren't to-day nor to-morrow what we were yesterday. Life doesn't stand still like that, and we have the daily choice of going forward or backward. You can't remain merely a prodigal, Mr. Lorimer, even if you want to; prodigals either reform or end in jail—if they don't blow their brains out.

"Of course, it's absolutely none of my business," she finished, "but, all the same, I think it a burning shame if a man of your years and evident educa-

tion deliberately elects to rot away his life in sordid idleness! Your duty and profit both lie here, and, after you've proved the truth of what I've done my best to show you, if you refuse to take hold and play the man, then I'll be very much mistaken in my estimation of your character.

"Now," added Miss Walker, biting her lips as she jammed on her hat, "you've made me say what I've been trying not to. No doubt if you do decide to take hold, your first official act will be to discharge me. But I don't care! I—I had to get it out of my system or—or burst."

Lorimer's reply to all this was entirely irrelevant:

"If I may venture in all humbleness to say so, you look simply great, Miss Walker, when you fire up like that. Upon my word, you do! A good, old-fashioned laying-out is worth taking just to see you look like that. And yet you said sermons weren't in your line!"

Miss Walker stabbed the amber curls with a formidable collection of pins, a proceeding Lorimer watched with considerable interest and trepidation.

"I don't know what you mean by 'firing up' and a 'laying-out,' Mr. Lorimer," she said, with dignity. "And I never sermonize. I was merely pointing out, quite impersonally and dispassionately——"

"Of course; that's what I meant. May I see you home, Miss Walker? There are several things I'd like to ask about this suggestion of yours."

"Certainly, Mr. Lorimer—on condition that if we discuss the matter further you won't lose your temper again."

"I?" he exclaimed, in astonishment. "Why—er—hum—— Oh, yes, I promise."

"Thank you," said Miss Walker sweetly and with the most engaging air of innocence.

They left the office together, walking the distance to her humble boarding house. And on the way, Lorimer restated the uncompromising fact that while ultimate profit and present duty pointed to his retaining the property, he lacked the means even if he were blessed with the submerged ability.

"I haven't any wealthy friends or relatives who might be willing to lend me the money; and it will take money to swing this thing," he finished. "What can a man do without capital?"

"What haven't men done without it?" she countered. "But you wouldn't need so much. For one thing, couldn't you put a second mortgage on Lorimer Park?"

They had reached the boarding house, and, from the penetrating glare of a neighboring arc light, Lorimer discerned dark circles under Miss Walker's eyes and her air of utter weariness. And it struck him quite suddenly and forcibly that this girl must have been working very hard and solely in his interests; whether right or wrong, she had at least the courage of her convictions and had spared no effort in trying to convince him.

Some measure of his appreciation he now attempted to voice, but she would not listen.

"It is less than nothing, Mr. Lorimer," she protested. "I did no more than I'm paid for doing. Good night, and—and please forgive me for losing my temper and—and saying things I had absolutely no right to say."

Lorimer made the return journey to the Empire House on foot, for he wished to think over all that had passed. And the more he thought over some things Miss Walker had said, the more the words, now unsoftened by the undeniable charm of her presence, stung his pride to anger.

"The idea of talking to me as if I were a two-year-old!" he reflected indignantly. "I'm to hold onto this wretched property simply because *she* says so—well, I won't hold onto it! No

woman's going to dictate to me. I'll sell out. I'll take Delaney's best offer."

Therefore, having arrived at this decision, Lorimer's greeting to Stuveysant on reaching the hotel was rather remarkable:

"I've decided to keep the property. What's more, I'm going to run the show myself."

Mr. Stuveysant's mouth opened slowly and he arose as slowly. "You're *what?*" he demanded, with terrible intensity.

Lorimer calmly repeated his statement, and Stuveysant's large bulk collapsed ponderously. He stared at the other with the utmost concern.

"You don't know what you're talking about, Rummy. Be rational, my boy; try and be rational——"

"I was never more rational in my life, my fat friend. In fact, I think this is the first lucid interval I've had in two long years."

"But what do *you* know about running a ball team?" wailed Mr. Stuveysant. "And where the Sam Hill will you get the money?"

Lorimer laughed gayly. "Oh, running a ball team doesn't require any superlative genius; all you want is a good field manager. As for the money, I'll raise it some way."

Stuveysant gazed with helpless and suspicious amazement at his friend. "What's got into you, anyway? You talk as if somebody had left you a million. You speak of tackling a job like this as if there was nothing to it but counting the gate receipts. Do you realize for a moment what it will mean? It means working your neck off. It means *living* in Palestine——"

"I know all that. And do *you* realize, my fat friend, what it means to deliberately rot away your life in sordid idleness?"

"Huh?" Mr. Stuveysant sat up and looked alarmed. "You talk like a person out of a Sunday-school tract. Be rational, my boy——"

"Do you realize that it's better to wear out than rust out?" continued Lorimer. "Do you know that work is the best cure for boredom? Do you realize that you can't remain merely a prodigal; that you must go forward or backward, and that if you don't blow your brains out you'll end in jail? Do you realize that it's a burning shame if a person of your years and education doesn't take hold of things and play the man——"

"Help!" cried Mr. Stuveysant. "Who's been talking to you? Come, out with it; no shuffling!"

"No one has been talking to me in the sense you insinuate. I've merely been going into the Palestine Baseball Club finances with Miss Walker, the stenographer. I told you I had a business engagement."

"Oh, I see. And what does Miss Walker look like?"

"I haven't the least idea," replied Lorimer, shortly and quite untruthfully. "What has her appearance got to do with it?"

Here the boisterous entrance of Conyers gave another twist to the conversation. He had succeeded in getting the promise of an extra five hundred from Delaney, had made something of a celebration, and was quite well pleased with himself. Therefore, when he learned of Lorimer's decision, his feelings may be better imagined than described. His initial incredulity and amazement soon gave place to anger when he discovered the other to be in earnest.

"This is a Harry of a note!" he exclaimed, the drink showing in his eyes. "You can't crawl out at the last minute this way! I've given my word to Delaney, and the deal's closed. You've got to stick!"

"I'm sorry," said Lorimer, "but I only looked into the proposition after you'd gone, Mort. If the property is

worth six thousand to Delaney, it's worth that to me."

"That's beside the question," retorted Conyers angrily. "You should have thought of all that before. It's too late now, and the deal is closed."

"Nonsense!"

"I tell you it is! I'm your duly authorized representative, and you told me you'd take six thousand——"

"I told you I'd take it only if I had to. Well, it happens I don't have to. I won't take six thousand nor sixty thousand!"

"You've sold it for six thousand! Delaney will hold you to it. He's got more money to spend on lawyers than you. I tell you the deal's closed."

A change had slowly taken place in Lorimer; the slack lines of his figure had tautened, a new look had come into his eyes, a new set to his mouth. The careless, good-humored, easy-going companion the other two had known was no longer in evidence. This seemed an entirely new creation, a stranger to them.

"Look here, Conyers," he said, "it strikes me you think I'm a bigger fool than I am; that I've been one in the past because I hadn't the brains to be anything else. You seem to think I'm going to give up the Palestine Baseball Club as easily as I've given up other things. Well, I'm *not,* do you understand? You'll be my 'duly authorized representative,' with power to dispose of the property, when I sign an agreement to that effect or give you power of attorney. I told you I was sorry if I'd put you to any trouble, and I hate to talk like this, but it seems to me you've got a whole lot to say for Delaney in this matter and mighty little for me."

Conyers jumped up, very red in the face. "How dare you say that? How dare you insinuate I'm pulling for Delaney? So this is all the thanks I get for trying to help you out? Well, it's just what I expected! I've tried to keep you from making an ass of yourself, and all I get is abuse. I know what you've been doing; you've been down at the office listening to a lot of lies from that yellow-headed stenographer who has her own ax to grind. Oh, I've heard all about it——"

"You keep Miss Walker's name out of this!" cried Lorimer, his hands clenching.

It was here that Mr. Stuveysant rose to the occasion with a celerity belied by his bulk. He took Conyers and ran him into his room, locking the door on the other's threatening and uncomplimentary verbiage.

CHAPTER VI.

GETTING RID OF THE DEADWOOD.

Billy Wate arrived at the Empire House the following morning as if Palestine were but a stone's throw from Newspaper Row. Lorimer and Stuveysant, for the sake of economy, shared the same room, and, to Wate's astonishment, he found them half dressed despite the early hour. From the adjoining room came Conyers' snores, the session with Delaney having its inevitable aftermath.

"Well, you're a couple of nice early worms—or are you just going to bed?" greeted the reporter. "I got a day off and blew up in the milk special for a look round. Fact is, Harry, I've been hearing a few things about these Hashhouse Invincibles of yours since I wrote you, and the thing looks pretty good to me——"

"You're a bit late on the wire, my boy," interrupted Stuveysant, wielding the razor with terrifying grimaces at his vast reflection. "Rummy reached the same conclusion last night—thanks to a mysterious, starry-eyed damsel who slugs a typewriter for a living. Yes, he's even going to run the whole show himself, and I'm just hanging round to

find out what particular style of funeral decorations he prefers."

"What!" exclaimed Wate, with genuine pleasure. "Tell me all about it."

So Lorimer related in detail his interview with Miss Walker, omitting, however, all reference to prodigals. Wate listened with keen and interested eyes.

"This Miss Walker seems to be a live wire, all right," he said, as Lorimer finished. "Her advice is sound. I couldn't get any inside stuff about the Palestine club until I met a fellow called Brown who was born round here. His kid brother, by the way, is on the Palestine *Journal*. Brown thinks well of the proposition and that it's a good thing if you can push it along."

"Oh, he'll push it along!" said Stuveysant. "I tell you he actually wants to *work*. Where do you think he's going now? Why, down to the office, like a common slave. By some occult method one perfectly good prodigal has been simply ruined."

Lorimer reached the office before nine; but, early as he was, Miss Walker was already busy at her desk.

Another had also forestalled him—the gangling gentleman with the long, blushing neck whom he had seen the previous day on the car. Mr. Clark had draped himself over the railed partition, his hat was on the back of his head, a cigarette pasted to his upper lip, and he was giving himself all the airs of a welcome and honored guest. Lorimer was ignorant of what had passed, but believed it could not have been very pleasant, for Miss Walker had flushed to her ears.

"I tell you," she was saying, as he entered, "that I don't know when Mr. Jellibond will be in. His hours are uncertain——"

"Now, sister, don't get excited," remonstrated Mr. Clark easily, leaning over the railing and patting her on the back. "I don't mind talking to you till he does come in——"

Here he was given a shove that sent him sprawling over Mr. Jellibond's desk.

He arose to confront Lorimer, but quite another Lorimer from the one Miss Walker had known. There was something in his level eyes, the set of his jaw, that arrested the ready flow of profanity on Mr. Clark's lips and the no less ready swing of his fist.

Mr. Clark drew back and looked Lorimer up and down; then, as if ashamed of his momentary misgivings and satisfied of his own superior physical bulk, he hitched up a shoulder, swaggered over, and put his face down close to the other's.

"Fresh guy, ain't you?" he asked. "Only for there being a lady present, I'd kick the pants up over your head. I've a good mind to take you apart just to see what makes you go——"

"Take your face away, Mr. Clark; I don't like it. I don't like your language, either, or your manners. I don't like anything about you. Miss Walker, have we a contract with this gentleman? Do we owe him anything?"

"No, Mr. Lorimer."

"Very well," said Lorimer, opening the door. "Good morning, Mr. Clark. Don't come here again."

"Oh, the tinhorn sport from New York!" jeered Mr. Clark, recovering from his astonishment. "You don't require my services, eh? Well, I should worry, Percy! I should certainly worry! Let me tell you that you or nobody like you can fire me, see? I ain't workin' for you, and you couldn't hire me to. I was through with that bunch of sandlotters callin' themselves a ball team anyhow——"

"And you're through now," said Lorimer. "Get out!"

Mr. Clark got, but after his own fashion, this involving several further

uncomplimentary remarks and various dark threats.

"And," said he, finishing his valedictory address on the sidewalk, "I'll be runnin' the Invincibles when you're panhandlin' on Broadway. You just wait and see."

When at length the door closed on his amiable countenance, Miss Walker, looking rather flustered for one of her evident capability, stole a look at Lorimer and then turned to her desk.

"Then—then you are going to manage the Invincibles?" she asked.

"It looks that way," replied Lorimer dryly. "I'm starting in on the deadwood—and here comes the principal piece," he finished, in an undertone, as the door opened and Mr. Jellibond blew in, in his usual breezy manner.

Mr. Jellibond, on receipt of the startling news, gaped and almost swallowed his post-breakfast cigar. Three facts amazed him: that Lorimer had decided to keep and manage the property; that he, Jellibond, had to vacate promptly; that Lorimer was suddenly proving to be an uncomfortably different sort of character than report had heralded. Indeed, he was most unfairly declining to act like the traditional prodigal of song and legend.

"Why—why," began Mr. Jellibond, swelling visibly, "this is most unexpected, sir! Most unexpected! The folly of retaining the property I'll pass over. Argument would be merely a waste of words; in short, I see your mind is made up, sir. As your uncle's nearest and dearest friend, I gave you my disinterested advice on the matter, and you have chosen to ignore it. I consider you haven't been fair with me, sir. You kept me in the dark. You pretended to listen to my advice while knowing from the first you intended to take this step——"

"On the contrary, Mr. Jellibond, I didn't reach this decision until long after my talk with you."

The other showed his utter disbelief of this statement. His breeziness had grown somewhat cyclonic, and he paced the floor, the tails of the tight frock coat considerably agitated. His manner had become hectoring, abusive.

"Am I to understand, sir, I am also to be deprived at a moment's notice of my vested rights? I speak, sir, of my meager occupancy of this office."

"I think one could hardly call it meager, Mr. Jellibond. Nor are you being dispossessed at a moment's notice. Nor is occupancy on sufferance a vested right——"

"Sufferance, sir? Sufferance? Why—why, sir, you are insulting! Grossly insulting and impertinent——"

"Now, see here, Mr. Jellibond," interrupted Lorimer, suddenly developing the look and manner with which he had greeted Mr. Clark, "you have gone quite far enough, and I don't propose to listen to any of your abuse. You've been treated most generously, and any fair-minded man would appreciate such past benefits as you've enjoyed instead of adopting such an attitude. For your own sake, I don't wish to go into your management of the property, and I had hoped to avoid any unpleasantness. I will not, however, be bullied nor imposed upon——"

"Sir!" thundered the other, with uplifted brows. "Imposed upon! Do you insinuate I ever imposed upon any one during my life? Is this the thanks I get for all I've done? In a moment of weakness, sir, I obliged your uncle——"

"Your moment of weakness," said Lorimer, "netted you in salary alone over five thousand dollars while you've been here. You got the services of a stenographer, office boy, and office room absolutely free. It wouldn't require many moments of weakness like yours, Mr. Jellibond, to make a man rich. You've opened this subject, and now let me say that I think you took an unfair advantage of your friendship with

my uncle and his evident incapacity due to ill health. Whether he ever allowed you to use this office and its employees is open to question; but, at all events, your 'meager occupancy' ends right here."

"Gladly, sir, gladly!" exclaimed Mr. Jellibond, waving his short arms. "I would scorn to remain a moment under the same roof with such a character as you have proved yourself to be. My few poor effects shall be removed at once. A man, open as the day like myself, is at a serious disadvantage with a person of your stamp, sir; but I won't tolerate for a moment any public utterance of the base insinuations you've voiced here! Solely for the sake of the friendship I bore your uncle, I will condescend to overlook them. I also condescend to take into account your youth, ignorance, and evident lack of breeding. Good day, sir!

"And good day to you, Miss Walker," he finished, glaring wrathfully at the stenographer. "I can thank you, I dare say, for instigating this highly dishonorable action of your new employer. You realized I would have discharged you for thorough incompetency had I condescended to retain the management, and so, at the price of truth and honor, you have not hesitated to ingratiate yourself behind my back with the new régime. Such conduct I can only liken to that of a snake in the grass. A snake in the grass, madam!"

As the door slammed, Lorimer and Miss Walker eyed each other; then both suddenly laughed. Her eyes were glowing, her cheeks flushed.

"Well," he grinned, "the next thing on the program is the second mortgage. I'll have to scout around——"

"Don't you think it might be best to place it, say, in Albany? With some one who has no connection or interest here?"

"Why?"

"Well, Mr. Lorimer, I'm beginning to think that several people in Palestine would like to see you sell out. I was brought up in a small town, and I know how its people pull together. No doubt you'll consider me an alarmist, but I really think it might be better to place it with some concern that would have no ulterior motive in causing you trouble by calling it in suddenly or foreclosing if you wanted an extension——"

"Oh," laughed Lorimer, "there won't be anything like that! You may be sure I won't place it with any connection of Mr. Jellibond's."

"Well, here comes Mr. Delaney," said the girl, glancing through the window, "so you'll have to attend to him before doing anything else."

Mr. Peter Delaney, known locally as "Smiling Pete," presented himself with the facial disturbance that had earned him his nickname. He looked like a prosperous undertaker, and might have been taken for anything but what he was.

"Well," said he, with his bubbling laugh, after introducing himself, "thought I'd drop in, Mr. Lorimer, as I was passing, and hand you this myself." He pulled a check from his pocket and tossed it carelessly over the desk.

Lorimer looked fixedly at the six-thousand-dollar scrap of paper. "What's this for?" he asked.

"Why," laughed Delaney, "for the franchise and Lorimer Park. I guess you know you're lucky, Mr. Lorimer, to get such a cash figure, but I never was one to split hairs or play with small potatoes. And then, knowing your representative, Mr. Conyers, counted for something."

Lorimer shook his head and returned the check. "The property isn't for sale, Mr. Delaney. I'm sorry, but surely you knew that?"

The Delaney astonishment was magnificent. "Knew it? But it's sold! I closed the deal last night with your rep-

resentative, Mr. Conyers. I'd have sent this check last night with him if I'd had one handy."

"And I would have returned it, Mr. Delaney. I made up my mind last night not to sell."

"I'm sorry, Mr. Lorimer, but you know business is business. The deal was closed last night, and here are the papers signed by Mr. Conyers."

Lorimer eyed them indifferently. "Of course, you know those are worthless, Mr. Delaney. Mr. Conyers hadn't the authority to sign anything; his services were purely voluntary and temporary. I've given no one power of attorney, and I'm quite able to attend to business in person."

"You've got your price, Mr. Lorimer; what more do you want? Do you want to fight this through the courts?"

"You've no case to take into court," replied Lorimer. "As for my price, I haven't got it. I told Conyers to ask for seven and hang out for sixty-five—and I've a witness to that conversation. You know as well as I that agreement isn't worth the paper it's written on."

"Not legally," admitted Delaney unwillingly. "Not if you repudiate Conyers' signature." His facial disturbance had not stopped, but he was eying Lorimer closely and shrewdly, for, like Mr. Jellibond, he was finding this prodigal disappointing.

"I've nothing to show in writing—nor has Conyers, I guess—that you gave him power to act for you," he continued. "It's merely a question of honor, Mr. Lorimer. I know Conyers; know he's a clean sport all the way through, and therefore treated him as a friend without thinking it necessary to have my lawyer negotiate the deal. Conyers said you wanted six thousand, and I gave it. I never doubted his authority to act for you, nor did he. He acted in perfectly good faith, and so did I. Legally, it seems, you have the advantage; but I know you're not the kind to use it, Mr. Lorimer. I know you're the sort who rightly regards a word-of-mouth agreement as even more binding, if possible, than a written one. I know you aren't going to repudiate that signature."

"That's exactly what I'm going to do, Mr. Delaney. I guess my sporting instinct is as good as your own, but it doesn't run to idiocy—at least not this morning. That sort of appeal might have worked me last week, but not now. Conyers had absolutely no authority from me to close the deal; he's not deaf nor a fool, and he knows plain English. He knows what my last words to him were. I'm not bound by honor nor anything else to stick to whatever agreement he made with you. The property isn't for sale, and that settles it."

Delaney shifted his cigar, pocketed the check, and arose leisurely. He was far too experienced to permit his face to betray his thoughts, and the old smile was still in excellent working order.

"Well," he said carelessly, with an amused laugh, "there's no need to get excited, sonny. Nobody's going to sandbag you and take away the franchise by main force. I guess it ain't so valuable as all that. You just set over it for a spell and see what you can hatch out. I thought I was doing business with a man, not a kid. You wanted to sell; I put up the cash; and now you put up a holler and welsh on the play. Well, it serves me right for letting friendship get the best of business. I've had a dirty deal, but we'll let it go at that. This kid's game of playing with your fingers crossed ain't in my line." And, with a cool nod and another amused, contemptuous laugh, he sauntered out.

The words stung as it was meant they should, and they brought an angry light to Lorimer's eyes.

"There goes another enemy, I suppose," he remarked, with forced light-

ness, to Miss Walker. "That's three to start with—not a bad day's work."

"It's easy enough to make them if one refuses to do what certain people wish," replied the stenographer. "It's rather strange that your friend, Mr. Conyers, thought himself vested with such sweeping authority. Did he tell you last night he had gone so far?"

"He said he had closed the deal, but he didn't say he had put his name to anything."

"Do you think Mr. Delaney was sincere? I—I mean——"

"I know what you mean," said Lorimer grimly, "but I'm not guessing aloud."

The first mortgage on Lorimer Park was held by an individual called Jepson doing a general mortgage and loan business under the name of the Palestine Guaranty & Loan Co. Him Lorimer interviewed and found he had no insuperable objection to advancing an additional two thousand on the property. Mr. Jepson had a mild, religious look about him, and also, presumably, ample resources, for on conclusion of the negotiations Lorimer left with a check on the Palestine & Empire Bank.

His next step was to visit this institution and open a running account, also incidentally making the acquaintance of Mr. Jonas Wishart, the president. In this individual he found another agreeable gentleman who, like Mr. Jepson, spoke quite feelingly of the late Silas Q. Lorimer and the pleasure he experienced in meeting the nephew. He was delighted at the latter's determination to take hold of things with the "firm touch of youth" and give the town the sort of ball team it used to have. He appreciated the opening of such an account, and promised all the accommodation in his power.

So Lorimer returned to the office feeling he had made a real start and that he had accomplished a good day's work; certainly the most he had done in that line for two years.

In the office a tall, dark girl was talking to Miss Walker, and she arose leisurely as he entered.

"I am Miss Sands," she said simply. "You are Mr. Lorimer?"

He bowed, feeling rather awkward and embarrassed.

CHAPTER VII.

THE ANCIENT STORY OF A WOMAN'S INFLUENCE.

"Well," said Miss Sands composedly, "don't you think, Mr. Lorimer, it is about time we knew each other? I understand you have decided to manage the Invincibles, and, as I have also decided to make Palestine my home, we couldn't very well avoid each other for all time, could we? It's too bad your uncle put such a distressing clause in his will, but we'll have to make the best of it. So long as fate has brought us to the same town, and we were bound to meet sooner or later in any case—especially as your stenographer happens to be an old college friend of mine—why, I thought it better to take the bull by the horns and have it over and done with. So I hope you will understand and pardon the alfresco proceedings."

Her matter-of-factness and the amused, direct manner in which she had spoken of the "distressing clause" put Lorimer entirely at ease.

"I'm very glad, Miss Sands, you decided to take the bull by the horns," he said, with a laugh. "Indeed I thank you. Of course, it was my place to do so, for, aside from all else, I felt I should introduce myself, seeing the relationship you bore toward my uncle and how much he thought of you. But, to tell you the honest truth, that 'distressing clause' stopped me."

"You thought I might attempt to carry it into effect by main force?" she laughed.

"Hardly, Miss Sands. I thought you might credit me with the intention. You see, to be quite frank—though, I imagine, it's no secret—I've no money, and you would have been perfectly justified in thinking me a miserable fortune hunter——"

"And now, perhaps, you'll think me one," sighed Miss Sands, a twinkle in her dark eyes. "Yes, it's a most distressing clause, Mr. Lorimer. However, we can circumvent it by promising faithfully to ignore it. So I hereby pledge you my solemn word, sir, never to marry you. *Never,* under any circumstances!"

He laughed and bowed over the proffered hand. "I return the same guarantee, madam."

"Then we are friends, sir?"

"If you will so far honor me."

"And you really forgive me for having been your uncle's ward?"

"As you forgive me for having been his nephew."

"Agreed!" laughed Miss Sands, striking her hand into his. "Here endeth the embarrassing situation."

"Thanks to your graciousness and common sense," added Lorimer.

"Oh," said she, "I really cannot accept the compliment, for it was Miss Walker who advised me to do the common-sense thing. Perhaps you've noticed, Mr. Lorimer, what a very common-sense sort of person she is."

"Then, if I may be permitted to live up to such a reputation," said Miss Walker, turning from her desk, "don't you think it's time you acquainted Mr. Lorimer with the other, and perhaps no less important, object of this visit?"

"Right, my dear, as usual!" replied Miss Sands airily. "I always forget you're a business woman, Virginia, and that I mustn't waste business people's time. So, if you don't mind, Mr. Lorimer, let us proceed to business. I want to buy two thousand dollars' worth of the Palestine Baseball Club——"

"W-what!" stammered Lorimer.

"Miss Sands suggests that you form a limited company and that she buy that amount of stock," put in Miss Walker. "You're looking for capital, Mr. Lorimer, and Miss Sands is looking for a good investment, so why not get together——"

"And I'm to take your money and stake it on this gambler's chance—for that's all it is," exclaimed Lorimer, addressing Miss Sands. "Not much! It's ten to one the stock would never pay a dividend——"

"Now there's no use talking like that, Mr. Lorimer, for I know better," interrupted Miss Sands. "I know what the property used to pay and what it should again. If I hadn't faith in it and your management, you may be quite sure the suggestion wouldn't have been made."

"Your faith in my ability is extremely flattering," replied Lorimer. He spoke lightly, but he was profoundly moved by this totally unexpected evidence of trust and confidence on the part of a virtual stranger. "No, I thank you, Miss Sands, but it's quite impossible. It's all right to gamble with what's one's own, but entirely a different matter when the stakes belong to some one else. I will not risk your money on this gamble, and that is final."

"So be it," she sighed. "I'm awfully disappointed, of course, but still I thank you for your friendly advice."

At this point, Stuveysant and Wate entered; and Lorimer, making the introductions all round, thus gave Stuveysant's and Miss Sands' chance acquaintance the sanction of convention.

Wate and Lorimer had a long business talk with Miss Walker before the reporter left for New York, while Stuveysant, on hearing that Miss Sands had some shopping to do, suddenly discovered that business would take him in the same general direction. What this particular business was he omitted to mention, and Miss Sands politely re-

fraining from questioning the legitimacy of the excuse, they left the office together.

Lorimer had not seen Conyers since the previous evening, and he went home that night with the intention of making up their difference. As Wate had said, he was loyal in his friendships, and, thinking over what had passed, he felt he might have been too hasty and failed to take into consideration that no doubt Conyers had been influenced by drink. The awkward situation the other had placed him in with Delaney he would pass over and say nothing about.

At the Empire House, however, he heard surprising and unpleasant news from Stuveysant.

"Well," greeted that gentleman, "the triumvirate has bust up with a bang. Conyers has quit cold; taken all his stuff and gone where the woodbine twineth."

"What? Left town?"

"No; gone to a hashery down the street."

"What's got into him that he acts in this kid way?" asked Lorimer, looking troubled. "Surely he isn't sore about what passed last night? We both lost our tempers and said more than we meant. I'll go look him up——"

"Don't!" said Stuveysant laconically. "He wasn't so drunk last night as you seem to think, and meant every word he said. He repeated it to me this evening; said you'd given him full authority to close the deal and that you had ditched Delaney and himself. Of course I told him in so many words he was a liar and we had a bit of a row; hence this cleaner atmosphere. He said he was going to leave, anyway."

"Is he crazy?" asked Lorimer angrily, getting up. "I'll go over right now and see what he has to say about this——"

"Sit down! That's just what he wants—the chance to make a grandstand play. Don't you see the game? He's bled you dry, and now that there's nothing more to be got out of you he's thrown you over and made solid with Delaney. He must stick to the lie to save his face and give him the excuse for breaking away. He takes the interesting rôle of martyr—the trusting friend shamefully betrayed. Bless you, we haven't the chance to repudiate *him,* for he has repudiated *us!* He can't stomach the dishonorable way in which you've treated the confiding and immaculate Delaney."

"I can't believe it!" exclaimed Lorimer. "Why—why, I treated Mort Conyers like a brother; you know I did, Fatty. So long as I was able, he never had anything but the best from me."

"Sure I know. But the more you do for people, the more enemies you end up with," said Mr. Stuveysant, with unexpected philosophy. "This conduct of Conyers hasn't taken me so awfully much by surprise; I sort of smelled it coming. I never trusted him nor liked him, for that matter, but he was your friend and I didn't like to say anything —nor would it have done any good, I guess. I heard the other day he was touting for Sontag's——"

"You heard that from Billy Wate, I suppose?"

"No, I didn't. It was from a hanger-on at Sontag's. He said Conyers and Sontag had a row of some sort and bust up—that would explain why he wants to work in with Delaney."

"Why—does Delaney run a game?"

"Sure; not here, but in Albany. That's only one of the things he does —so my friend, the barkeep, says."

Lorimer suddenly remembered that Miss Walker had said there were people in Palestine who would not wish to see the Invincibles owned by Delaney because of the undesirable element he would bring into the league.

"It was always a mystery to me how Conyers got a living," pursued Stuveysant, "but this touting game would

explain it. I'm afraid he was taking you round to Sontag's to be robbed while pretending to be your friend."

Lorimer was silent. He was no fool, no raw, inexperienced youth, and such a possibility had occurred to him more than once in the past; but he had liked Conyers, even against his better judgment, and had ceased to expect in friends and acquaintances that standard he once demanded.

Stuveysant, seeing the other was averse to pursuing the matter, changed the subject by inquiring what he thought of Miss Sands.

"She's all right," replied Lorimer heartily. "And, even allowing for your juvenile enthusiasm, I'll have to admit there's a whole lot of the Egyptian-princess stuff about her."

For some reason, Mr. Stuveysant failed to receive this unqualified approval with all the pleasure and pride it merited. Instead, he looked rather gloomy.

"You've become pretty good friends with her, haven't you?" he asked, eying the other sharply.

"As much as I can, I suppose, on a first acquaintance."

"Huh!" grunted Mr. Stuveysant. "That little Miss Walker's some looker, too," he added, with a sidelong glance. "Funny you hadn't noticed it. Of course she can't compare with Miss Sands, though."

"Oh, no!" replied Lorimer absently.

"Huh!" said Mr. Stuveysant. "Say, look here," he added, pulling at his tight collar and manifesting signs of embarrassment. "I've—I've been sort of thinking over what you said last night—you know, all that fine pulpit stuff about toiling in the vineyard and hitting the straight and narrow. I thought you were crazy, and I asked you to put the soft pedal on it, but I've been mulling it over, and—and I'm beginning to think there may be something in this working game, after all. I'm getting tired of carrying this around"—eying his imposing façade—"and some work might help me to lose it, huh?"

"Are you insinuating gracefully that you actually want to go to work?" asked Lorimer incredulously.

"Now you're shouting!" said Mr. Stuveysant. "Say, can't you give me a job? No kidding. Look here, I know a whole lot about the game; I captained my sophomore team in the days before I developed this Anna Held silhouette with the reverse English. You need a ticket seller, don't you? Well, I'm the best little ticket seller you ever saw. You need an office boy, gatekeeper, private police force, general cleaner-up, peanut vender, adviser-in-ordinary, scoreboard marker, bat boy, mascot; well, I'm all that and then some! And all for fifteen bucks per. I'll make it ten!"

"*You* and a ten-a-week job!" exclaimed Lorimer. "And what about your future? Are you going to remain a bat boy and mascot forever? Do you think princely salaries are floating about in the Palestine Baseball Club?"

"See here," said Stuveysant seriously. "My governor owns a business that's worth a million if it's worth a cent. He gave me the Sacred Order of the Boot because, in plain English, I've been a confirmed loafer. I preferred to fiddle around and play the fool instead of going into the office and doing a day's work. You had a good job and knew how to hold it before you decided to jump the rails, but I never earned my salt since the day I was born. That's the truth, Lorimer, and I've suddenly become properly ashamed of it. I don't know why," he finished ingenuously. "It must be in the air up here."

"It must be," agreed Lorimer soberly.

"Well," pursued Stuveysant, "I've got to show the governor that I can and will work. So don't worry about my future, for it's there waiting for me

in the governor's office whenever I've shown myself worthy of it. Of course," he added hastily, "I don't want to impose on you for a minute, and if you don't think I'll make good, or if you can't see your way——"

"Far be it from me, my boy, to put any obstacle in the way of a man's laudable ambition to labor," said Lorimer. "Go to it, old scout!"

"You mean you'll try me?" asked Stuveysant eagerly.

"Surest thing you know. If the old Palestine Baseball Club never does another thing but blow up," added Lorimer soberly, "it has been at least the means of making you and me take a tumble to ourselves. And that's something I was beginning to think impossible."

"You're right," said Stuveysant, as soberly.

But was it the Palestine Baseball Club, or was it merely the old, yet ever new, story of a woman's influence? Both Lorimer and Stuveysant were conscious of the question.

CHAPTER VIII.

CONCERNING AN OLD ZULU PROVERB.

The new field manager of the Invincibles appeared in the person of Mr. Bud Magee, erstwhile star backstop of the long-defunct Vespers. This move of Lorimer's astonished Stuveysant and caused him sincere emotion.

"For the love of Mike!" he exclaimed, recollecting the gentleman with the round, black, cannon-ball head who had smelled reminiscently of a brewery. "You can't mean that fellow? Why, he's a dead beat——"

"There's a difference between being dead broke and being a dead beat," said Lorimer. "I'm going to give Magee his chance, the one he's been waiting for. I've an idea he's just the man for the job, and I've had him in mind. He's had a bunch of trouble, and that game leg put him out of the only kind of job he knew. Granted that he may not have met hard luck like a hero, but neither did I, for that matter. I guess this hero business isn't so all-fired easy as it seems in storybooks. Anyway, I've faith in Bud Magee; he has played all round the bushes, and knows the game from soup to nuts. What's more, I know he won't throw me and will do his level best."

"Well," said Stuveysant, looking distressed, "of course I don't know anything about him while you evidently do. And I'd be the last to try and put a crimp in any man's chance to make good. But I wouldn't bank on his making good through gratitude, if I were you; you know how Conyers acted after all you did for him. And if Bud Magee is a drinker and not dependable for——"

"All the drinking he did was at free lunches," interrupted Lorimer. "And he'll be dependable when he has something to be dependable for. I know I was all wrong about Conyers, but you wait and see if I haven't sized Magee up right."

And so, against Stuveysant's sincere and open opposition, the wire was sent.

Mr. Magee reported that same day. Contrary to his former habit, he had evidently formed a recent and intimate acquaintance with soap and water; while, though Lorimer had wired generous traveling expenses, neither the odor of the brewery nor distillery was disseminated from the Magee person. "He must be holding his breath," thought Stuveysant, still highly skeptical. "Funny I can't even smell cloves."

When the proposition—which the telegram had merely hinted at—was fully outlined to him, Magee's eagerness was almost pathetic. Nor did he seem quite able to believe in his sudden good fortune.

"I'll pay twenty-five a week," said

Lorimer, "starting from to-day. That's fifteen less than Clark got, but it's all I can afford, and it depends on the team how long I can even pay that; the money's got to be earned before you get a raise, Magee. I'll put the situation right up to you: I haven't any money nor any backing, and all I can expect is one crack at this game, for if I don't make good this coming season the property will go under the hammer. I've put up all I've got, and I'll be in debt before we're well started. I'm staking all, you understand, on a single throw.

"Now, I don't expect you to do the impossible, and I don't want you to save money where it should be spent. You know as well as I that a cheap team is the dearest in the long run. You've got to weed out the present material, keep the good, fire the bad, and go after new men and pay them their price. You know what's in the bushes far better than I, and I don't think you're any slouch when it comes to swapping. I don't expect us to walk off with the pennant, but I do expect a team that will give the public a run for its money.

"I don't mean to teach you your business, and there'll be no strings on you. I just want you to understand, however, that your meal ticket and mine is represented by the Invincibles, and that it's up to us to get it out of them. If they make good, your salary goes up; if they don't, you and I will have to hunt another job at the end of the season."

Mr. Magee had listened, a hand on either knee, and his mud-colored eyes concentrated on his feet, while at regular intervals he nodded the cannonball head. Now he gave a final nod and arose.

"I get you, Mr. Lorimer," he said briefly, in his foghorn voice. "Say, I ain't much on this talk stuff, but you've treated me white all through, and, say, I want you to know I ain't forgettin' it. If I don't make good—well, you won't have to fire me, see? For if I can't manage a county-league team, then I'll go lay down an' die. If there was nothin' to it but spendin' coin, you could hire the New York Nationals, but I'll guarantee to round up the best bunch of material we can get before June and hammer 'em into line or my name ain't Magee."

"That's the idea," said Lorimer. "It won't be any walk-over, but you and I, Magee, are going to put even more than our best into this thing, and when that happens something's got to crack—and it won't be us. We've got a fine reputation behind the club—I'm not speaking of the past few years—and there's no reason on earth why it should stick in the cellar. Of course, somebody must take to the cellar, but it doesn't have to be us. It isn't that the other fellows are so awfully good, but that the Invincibles became so awfully rotten."

Under the old régime, the players' contracts called for them to report in mid-May, this giving them but two weeks' practice before the opening game. More time was not needed, for, under the active management of Silas Q. Lorimer, the team had become a well-oiled machine, being composed of men who had played together season after season, and who only needed to run the winter's kinks out of their systems preparatory to hearing the seasonal command of "Play ball!" All this, however, had changed, necessarily and unnecessarily, after Silas Lorimer relinquished the helm; the once capable machine slowly disintegrated and fell to pieces, time being responsible for the shelving of some players, while the Clark-Jellibond management had accounted for others.

McCulley, the captain—who followed the trade of house painter eight months of the year whenever he could find a job—was now explaining something of all this during his first interview with the laconic Magee.

"The Old Man," he said, referring to the late Mr. Lorimer, "kept thinkin' he'd be as good as ever, and he told us all the time he'd soon be back on the job. The boys thought the world of him, and he could get more out of 'em in two weeks than you could in two months——"

"We'll see about that," put in Magee, addressing his feet.

"Well," continued McCulley, "we stalled along, hopin' for the best and thinkin' the Old Man would be back any day, never believin' he'd gone away to make a die of it. Then Ryan, the manager, quit after a run-in with this Jellibond article, and this guy Clark was put in. Well, Clark soon got himself disliked by the way he began bawling us out when there was no call for it; he was always lookin' for trouble, and pretty near findin' it every time. Some of the boys quit one after the other, and the rest got fightin' among themselves. You know what that means to a team. Between you and me, Clark run the team like a drunk switchman at a junction—him and Jellibond together. If they'd wanted to put it on the scrap heap, they couldn't have done it sooner or better.

"What's the new boss like?" he finished. "I hear he's a waster——"

"Don't believe all you hear," said Magee, still apparently addressing his conspicuous feet. "Never you mind what he's like, though I guess you'll find out mighty soon. Your orders are to round up the bunch and report to-morrow, ten sharp. And the man that's late gets docked, see?"

McCulley gasped. "But, say, we don't start practice till the middle of May——"

"Don't we? We start the weedin' out to-morrow."

"But, say, we ain't paid only from the fifteenth of May to the twentieth of September. That's all we're supposed to work for what we're draggin' down, and the rest of the time's our own. During the past four years this two weeks' practice became a painful joke, but that's all we got and all we was paid for. You won't get nobody to put in two months' hard work for nothin'——"

"Say, was you tryin' to learn me something?" asked Mr. Magee, with real anxiety. "Who's askin' you to work for nothing? I ain't askin' you to work at all unless you show me you're better than any other guy I can get for the same figure. And that goes all down the line, see? The boss ain't in this thing for his health, and he's goin' to get somethin' more out of it than that or know the reason why. The bunch I sign on for the season goes on the pay roll right off, but gettin' there ain't goin' to be no cinch, let me tell you. I've got to be shown and shown hard, see? My motto is two for one every time—if I can get it."

"Well," said McCulley, taking a long breath, "that's something like! That's the kind of talk I've been wantin' to hear these four years back when we ain't been drawin' even flies. There's a lot of deadwood you can pass up right off, and what's worth keepin' will be glad to hear that the new boss means business."

"That's his middle name," said Magee laconically. "You're goin' to hear somethin' drop around here pretty soon."

The two months' training and practice, without which nothing could be expected from a revamped team, would mean to Lorimer in salaries alone something like three thousand dollars; and Magee's, Miss Walker's, and Stuveysant's salaries would add over four hundred more. For he meant first thing to raise the stenographer's an additional five per week. Putting his own living expenses at the minimum of ten dollars a week would mean another eighty. Then there would be the necessary "in-

cidentals." Allowing a fair margin, he would need, say, four thousand before receiving the first return on the investment. Half of this he had already in hand, but the other two thousand had yet to be raised. Lorimer Park was pledged for all it would carry, for, according to Mr. Jepson, it was a question if it would bring ten thousand in the open market. Lorimer had no reason to doubt this statement, as he had seen the place for himself and knew something of local realty values. The property was situated necessarily on the outskirts, and in the present stage of Palestine's development useless for anything but its present purpose. A new traction project, however, was mooted, which, if carried through, would raise materially realty values in that section, and the measure would soon be brought up in council.

Like everything else, Lorimer found the grounds in a neglected condition, the itinerant field keeper, "Pop" Stryker, being only hired a few months or so. The clubhouse and fence surrounding the place, the grand stand and bleachers had been left virtually to the tender mercies of the elements and the village urchin during the off seasons.

"It ain't my fault," said Pop Stryker defensively. "I done the best I could, but I couldn't get nothin' out of Mr. Jellibond. It would ha' took dynamite to make him part with a cent. He kept sayin' he hadn't no money to spend, while Clark says not to worry for the club was goin' plumb to Jericho anyway, an' nothin' mattered. The dressin' room under the grand stand looks like a sieve, an' most of them seats is so rotten they ain't worth fixin'. There ain't been a pint of paint spent on th' whole business since two years before th' Old Man—I mean your uncle, sir—quit."

"The wonder to me is," said Lorimer grimly, addressing Stuveysant, who accompanied him on this tour of inspection, "not that the gate was so small, but that anybody came at all. This place isn't fit for a dog fight. We've got to have new and bigger stands for the opening game. It would cost almost as much in the long run to patch up these old ones, anyway. If I could afford it, I'd put up a stadium of concrete——"

"Better wait first and see if you can fill it," advised Stuveysant. "If I were you I'd patch up the old ones, and the cheapest way you know how. Then, if things break right, you can spread yourself next season. There's no sense risking——"

"I'm risking everything as it is," interrupted Lorimer, with finality. "No, this cheeseparing game won't do. It isn't the time for cautiousness, either. Everything depends on this season, and if we don't put our best foot foremost there won't *be* any next season so far as I'm concerned, and you can bank on that. You can't draw money unless you've got a winning club, and a winning club isn't framed in a dump like this. I'm going to give Palestine the very best I can, and if it doesn't reciprocate it won't be my fault. I'll go broke knowing I did my level best. I'm in up to the neck, anyway, and one more header won't matter."

"But you haven't the money," protested the other.

"I'll have it by the time I foot the bill," replied Lorimer cheerfully. "Either that or I'll be in jail. The party that wants the job will have to give me ninety days."

"Well," said Stuveysant, "I guess maybe you're right. Your argument sounds logical, but I'd hate being the one to back it. I certainly admire your nerve."

"You should," laughed Lorimer, "for I bought it at Sontag's, and it cost fifty thousand."

One difficulty Lorimer had not foreseen was encountered that Saturday evening when Miss Walker absolutely

refused the addition to her salary. "No, Mr. Lorimer," she said, flushing, "it's very kind of you, but I really couldn't. It's quite impossible, thank you."

It was his turn to color. "I know it's not what you're worth, Miss Walker, but it's all I can pay just at present. The minute there's any income your salary is fixed at twenty-five. In the meantime——"

"In the meantime, Mr. Lorimer, it remains where it is, thank you. I can get along on ten dollars a week quite as well as Mr. Stuveysant or yourself —better, I imagine——"

"That isn't the point. You're worth more, and economy doesn't have to start with you. It would make me feel more comfortable if you'd accept this until I am in a position to pay what you're worth."

The little stenographer looked distressed. "I wish you wouldn't talk that way, if you don't mind. You know I'd feel very uncomfortable if I took it. We're working on borrowed capital, and every little bit helps. You'll find me quite mercenary enough when once something's coming in and it isn't all going out. And it would look as if by advising you not to sell I had planned to profit——"

"Nonsense! I know Jellibond was mean enough to suggest that, but you know not to mind what he says. As for the rest, that's also nonsense. You don't have to worry where the money comes from; that's up to me——"

"But I do, all the same; I can't help it," interrupted Miss Walker, shaking the amber curls. "I can't help feeling that it's up to me, too. I—I don't feel just like an ordinary employee, Mr. Lorimer, and my interest in the business isn't represented merely by what it pays me——"

"That goes without saying," laughed Lorimer. "I'd hate to lose your services, Miss Walker, but still, in all fairness, I can't help saying I only wonder you ever took such a position as this. Your proper place is New York——"

"Where I might starve," added the girl dryly. "Positions aren't so easy to find, Mr. Lorimer, as you no doubt know, especially for a beginner——"

"Beginner?"

"Yes, I was only graduated this year, in the same class with Miss Sands; and when she learned of the stenographer getting married and suggested my applying for the position, I jumped at the chance. In saying I did not feel like an ordinary employee I meant that I can't forget it was mainly through me you decided not to sell."

"Entirely through you, Miss Walker —and that's something no mere raise in salary can repay. I'd have taken Delaney's best offer if you hadn't sent that note, for my one idea was to sell out as soon as possible."

"And if the whole thing should turn out a gigantic failure?" exclaimed the girl, biting her lip. "Then you'd have nobody to thank but me. You'd have lost the six thousand you might have had, and you'd end up in debt. That's why I can't consider myself just an ordinary employee; I'm responsible, and there are times when, thinking it all over, I get horribly frightened. To-night, even though believing you took the right course, I could almost side with Mr. Stuveysant against building the new stands and putting your head in——"

"Now, see here," said Lorimer sternly, "you've got to stop thinking those things or advising anything of the kind. I'm in this thing with both feet, and there's no going back. Just remember the old Zulu proverb: 'To go forward is to die. To go backward is to die. Let us go forward.' Well, we're going forward, but there won't be any dying about it, and any worrying that must be done *I'll* do, understand? You're responsible for nothing but opening my eyes in several ways and

leaving me hopelessly in your debt, Miss Walker."

The girl turned away and busied herself with the filing cabinet as if to hide the sudden rush of color that flooded her face.

"It's—it's very nice of you to say that, Mr. Lorimer," she remarked at length, in a low voice. "I—I don't feel cowardly any more."

CHAPTER IX.

SOME INSIDE INFORMATION.

The breach between Lorimer and Conyers had opened into an abyss, for it was not in the former's nature to lie down meekly under the slur cast upon him by the other. He sought Conyers out, but hoping to the last that the other had spoken to Stuveysant hastily and perhaps under provocation. He was willing even now to heal the breach, to give Conyers the benefit of the doubt, to believe him other than the renegade friend facts seemingly proved. The meeting took place in Conyers' new quarters, and in no sense did Lorimer bring to it an antagonistic or bitter spirit; rather that of conciliation.

"Well, what's all this about, anyway?" he began. "I heard from Stuveysant, of course, that you lit out because you were sore at me. And I understand you repeated to him that I'd ditched Delaney and yourself. Now you know that's nonsense, Conyers. I feel there must have been a misunderstanding or that you said what you didn't mean——"

"Did I?" broke in the other. "Well, you've got another think coming. I'm *through* with both Stuveysant and you, understand? And you needn't be coming around here trying to smooth things over. You gave me a rotten deal, Lorimer——"

"You are stating a deliberate lie, Conyers, and you know it! You never believed for a moment you'd the authority to close the deal. You simply couldn't do——"

"I could and did!" shouted the other. "There was no written agreement, but you gave me a distinct and emphatic verbal one——"

"I did nothing of the kind! Stuveysant was there at the time, and he knows——"

"Stuveysant!" sneered Conyers. "That bloated lickspittle! Yes, of course, he'll say whatever you want him to. He'll say anything if you pay him enough. Talk as much as you like, but you sold the club and you meant to sell it; and now, after putting me in wrong, you're crawling out because I can't show a written agreement."

Lorimer picked up his hat and arose. "We needn't pursue this further," he said. "You've been quite an eye opener to me, Mr. Conyers. I didn't want to believe you a liar and a blackguard, but now let me tell you that you're both."

The other was instantly on his feet. "You say I'm a liar——"

"A most infernal one," nodded Lorimer. "And a blackguard, Mr. Conyers. You sold me out to Delaney as, I dare say, you sold me to Sontag. Oh, yes, you needn't take up that virtuous, outraged attitude; it may go down with those who don't know you, but it doesn't impose on me. I know quite well why you suddenly discovered that Stuveysant and I were no longer fit associates; we were all right so long as our money lasted. If I'd sold to Delaney, you'd have got your split and I'd have had six thousand for you to help me spend. You threw me over for Delaney, the man with the full purse. Well, make the most of it. I wish him joy of such a friend as you."

Conyers' heavy face had become colorless, while the malice and hatred that glared from his eyes was positively demoniac. Almost unconsciously, as if his twitching fingers craved something on which to spend their restless energy,

his hairy hand had sought and found the heavy poker from the old-fashioned fireplace. And now as he sat and stared unwinkingly at Lorimer, the impromptu weapon gripped so that his knuckles showed white, his lip curled back over his large, strong teeth, the big head sunk between the heavy shoulders, he was startlingly suggestive of a gorilla at bay —the king of the forest, waiting, club in hand, to strike. So startling was the sudden resemblance, so menacing the picture, that Lorimer instinctively backed a step toward the door.

At length Conyers spoke, his voice thick and unnatural, with long pauses between the words: "You're a brave man—or a fool—Mr. Lorimer, to come into my rooms and say what you have. A very brave man or a very great fool. I think perhaps neither of us have really known each other. I always knew you were a fool, but never until recently such a thoroughly dishonorable and unprincipled little beggar——" Here he seemed to become aware of the poker for the first time, and he returned it to the fireplace, his movements stealthy and animallike. The action, almost surreptitious, seemed to restore his self-command, for he got up leisurely, the old, cynical smile again in evidence.

"You've been quite entertaining, Mr. Lorimer," he laughed, "but don't presume too far on my good nature. Run along now before you get hurt. We know what we think of each other—or what you pretend to think of me—so there won't be any necessity of further visits of this sort."

"No," said Lorimer, "there won't." The momentary alarm produced by the other's startlingly menacing attitude had vanished before the resurgence of his native courage, and he looked at Conyers, a new light in his now metallic eyes. "I want you to understand," he finished, "that I meant every word I said, and that I'll continue saying it whether your nature's good or bad. And it's not what I pretend to think, but what, by your own dishonorable actions, you've made me think. And, as a final word, I don't scare worth a cent, Mr. Conyers—not even for pokers."

Conyers had grown colorless again, but he made no reply, and, after a final protracted stare, Lorimer turned leisurely on his heel and passed from the room.

The interview had indeed proved an eye opener; it was not so much, thought Lorimer, that he had proved the immediate falsity of his so-called friend, but that Conyers had shown such malice and hatred from the start. He would never forget how the other had looked at him while he sat gripping the poker; such unutterable venom, such deep and abiding hatred had glared from those eyes as seemed out of all proportion to the cause. It seemed immeasurably more than that which should be induced by hearing the unflattering truth. Indeed, Conyers' whole conduct was entirely incomprehensible. He could almost believe that the other's mind had become deranged through various excesses.

Although lacking concrete proof, Lorimer now felt satisfied that a sustained and deliberate effort had been made by Delaney to secure Lorimer Park and the Palestine club. From what he learned from McCulley and other sources, it seemed clear that Clark —known locally by the delectable name of "Biff"—had done his best to make the property worthless so that he—Lorimer—would be only too glad to find a purchaser. Mr. Jellibond had ably abetted the scheme, consciously or unconsciously; for whether he was merely grossly incompetent and none too honest, or thoroughly unprincipled all the way through, was still susceptible of proof. At all events, like Clark, he was on intimate terms with Delaney; the

more so since being despoiled of his "vested rights."

It was from Sammy Brown, of the Palestine *Journal*—whom Lorimer had met through Wate—that he learned something further of the enemies he had made.

"Delaney's had his eye on Lorimer Park for some time," said Brown. "You know, of course, that he and a few others are the men behind Brand & Co., the biggest realty and development concern in the county?"

"No, that's news," said Lorimer, feeling he was going to hear some inside facts worth listening to.

"This fellow Brand," added Brown, "is only a dummy, and the men behind the show are Delaney, Jepson, and Wishart——"

"Not Jepson, of the Guaranty & Title Co., and Wishart, of the bank?"

"Sure," nodded Brown. "Those three always pull together. Of course you'd have a hard time proving Wishart's active interest, for he's not supposed to have any outside the bank. You'll find that the Palestine & Empire Bank has a good deal to say in this town, and that it has a lively finger in everything that pays. Delaney, Jepson, and Wishart own four-fifths of the stock. You've heard, too, of this new traction project?"

Lorimer nodded. "I've been sort of banking on it. They say it will raise property values out that way fifty per cent——"

"If the bill goes through—which it won't."

"Why not? I understood there was every prospect of it."

"Up to the time there was every prospect of you selling out," grinned the reporter. "Delaney, Jepson, and Wishart can get about anything they want from the council, if they only want it hard enough, and they fathered the bill—through a dummy, of course, and with the usual hot air about progress, benefiting the public, and all that. By the time the bill would be passed they had every reason to expect that Brand & Co. would own Lorimer Park. Then, when the new trolley went through, and the railway people had been convinced it was just the place to have their new station, the building boom would be on for fair and Lorimer Park would be cut up into lots and sold piecemeal. You see, Brand & Co. own quite a bit out that way; they bought and foreclosed on mortgages, knowing they'd put through this development scheme some day. And the situation of Lorimer Park—as you can see by the map—makes it the tenderloin in the steak; they own all round it, and they don't intend you or anybody else to walk off with the choicest morsel—made choice by their efforts. It's necessary to them, anyway, for the cutting through of streets and avenues. Lorimer Park, as it stands to-day, isn't worth much; but Lorimer Park, plus Brand & Co., plus the trolley and railway—well, you know what Main Street realty is fetching a square foot."

"I see," nodded Lorimer. "Then Delaney told nothing but the truth when he said he only wanted Lorimer Park, not the franchise?"

Brown grinned again. "It was one of those half truths that do the business of a lie. He wanted *both*. He intended using other property that he owns for the ball grounds, property over on the west side that's hopeless and always will be because of the colored settlement. He knew he could make the club pay, and he aimed to kill two birds with the one brick.

"Of course," finished Brown, "you'll keep all this quiet, and, for that matter, perhaps I shouldn't say it, for I've no concrete proof. But it's pretty generally believed that Delaney had his eye on the Invincibles even in your uncle's time, and I honestly think Clark had his orders to put the team on the bum;

no doubt, if not actual orders, there was some understanding and an agreement as to his permanent management of the club when Delaney bought it. Clark is no farmer, and he knows darn well how to run a ball team if he only wants to."

"I know you're right," nodded Lorimer. "I remember Clark's last words to me were that he'd be running the Invincibles when I was panhandling on Broadway. He seemed absolutely certain of it——"

"Sure. Delaney thought he had a ripe thing in you. The word came in that all you wanted was money, that you were a waster, and all the rest of it. There's no doubt, too, that this fellow Conyers sold you out cold first crack; evidently he told Delaney you were hard up and couldn't afford to hold on no matter how you might bluff. I wouldn't be surprised if they cooked up this written-agreement game in the hope of scaring you out by threats of a lawsuit if you couldn't be jollied out. They thought you were an easy mark and didn't know enough to keep yourself warm."

"Well, they know better now," grinned Lorimer.

"Yes," said Brown, "you've given them a jolt all right. But they know from Conyers what your resources are, and they think you'll have to quit. Believe me, you have the whole bunch against you, and that traction bill will never go through while you own Lorimer Park; you can make your mind up right now to that. Aside from all else, they aren't aiming to increase the borrowing capacity of your collateral. They hope you've bitten off more than you can chew, and you'll find that things won't be made any too pleasant for you in this town. I don't mean to say, understand, that any one of them is a crook, but all the same it's funny how much dirty work can be done in the name of business even by men who pride themselves on being models of all the virtues. So long as they don't do it actually themselves, why, they go to it with an easy conscience. It's certain that bunch doesn't want to see you make a success of the club, and the sooner you have to sell out and quit the town the better they'll like it."

"Well," said Lorimer, "I certainly hate to disoblige anybody, but they'll have to make the best of it, for here I am, and here I propose to remain."

Lorimer knew that the *Journal,* owned by Sammy's father, was an inexorable political opponent of Delaney, who held a prominent position in the town council; but whether Brown's confidence had been prompted by friendship for himself or enmity toward the "bunch" made little difference; the main thing was its trustworthiness, and he meant to profit by it without loss of time. He had meant to pledge the franchise with Jepson or Wishart toward the deficit in his capital for running expenses, but now he would take no chances.

"You were right," he said to Miss Walker, recounting all Brown had said. "The ramifications of this town go deeper than I thought, for I'd no idea Jepson, Wishart, and Delaney were virtually the one person so far as business is concerned."

"Nor I," she replied. "You can't find these things out except from the inside, but it's what I was afraid of."

"Of course," said Lorimer, "I may be shying at a windmill; but, all the same, I'm not going to take any chances; the fact remains that Jepson is Brand & Co., and that means Delaney and Wishart, too. If I failed they could get Lorimer Park for a song, and sing it themselves. As you said at the start, it's just as well for somebody to hold the mortgages who would have no interest in giving me trouble. It's becoming increasingly clear, Miss Walker," he finished, with a laugh,

"that your advice is worth following. It would have saved me time and money if I had taken it in this instance at the start."

Miss Walker's only reply was a flush. Indeed, it was rather remarkable how, of late, she colored up whenever Lorimer said anything of a complimentary or personal nature. This fact, however, he had quite failed to observe; or, if he had, he would have thought merely that she had been working too hard and was perhaps overnervous. For he had never made a study of the sex, and believed, like others equally ignorant, that the subject was very complex and quite beyond the understanding of the average male.

CHAPTER X.

A MONTH'S PROGRESS.

A month had passed, and an Albany firm now held the mortgages on Lorimer Park and the pledged franchise, while an Albany bank looked after the Lorimer finances, such as they were. Whatever Delaney, Jepson, and Wishart thought of this unexpected move they kept it to themselves, but it may be presumed their thoughts were not of the pleasantest. Indeed, Mr. Jepson lost something of his mild, religious look during the transaction, and spoke quite peevishly, while Mr. Wishart found occasion to remark on the brief existence of the bank's new account.

"I'm sorry, Mr. Lorimer," he said pointedly, "that we seem unable to accommodate you here in Palestine. What seems to be the trouble?"

"Why, there isn't any," replied Lorimer. "None in the world, Mr. Wishart." And more he would not say.

It was from Gabriel Owen that Lorimer sought and obtained the introduction to the Albany firm, the old lawyer thawing perceptibly when he found that no more than an introduction was asked. For he had a suspicion that Lorimer might want him to go on a note.

"So you've decided to manage the property yourself?" he asked, eying the other curiously. "How are you getting on?"

"First rate, thanks."

"Well, work seems to agree with you," observed Mr. Owen. "You're looking much better than when I first saw you. By the way, I understand that Miss Sands has taken up her residence in Palestine. I suppose you have met her?"

"Oh, yes. Miss Sands and I have become quite good friends."

"I've had the pleasure of meeting her," pursued Mr. Owen. "A very fine young woman, sir."

"Very fine, indeed," agreed Lorimer.

The old lawyer chuckled. "And the terms of your uncle's bequest? How are they getting on, may I ask?"

"They're exactly where they were at our first interview, Mr. Owen," smiled Lorimer. "And they'll still be there at the end of the five years. Miss Sands and I reached an immediate understanding about that."

Mr. Owen had a tussle with the harried whiskers. "It's a pity so much money should go to a charity that doesn't need it," he remarked. "You could do a lot with it, I dare say, at the present moment."

"I could, Mr. Owen. I could also do a lot if somebody elected me President of the United States. One is just as likely to happen as the other."

"Five years is a long time, and you never can tell, Mr. Lorimer. You have met Miss Sands, and your uncle seemed confident of the rest. I hope, anyway, you're going to make a success of the Palestine club. I hear you've been attempting great things. Personally, I wish your uncle had seen his way to leave you some working capital—but then you must remember that he believed you wealthy."

"Yes," said Lorimer soberly, "and if he'd only known the real state of my affairs I wouldn't have figured anywhere in his will. I'm quite sure about that. I can't help feeling sometimes that I got my inheritance under false pretenses."

"Don't let that worry you," replied the old lawyer, with the nearest approach to cordiality which his cautious and unemotional nature could evince. "You pretended to nothing, Mr. Lorimer. Your uncle's ignorance of your affairs is explained by the fact that he spent the last year of his life in a sanitarium and was forbidden to read the newspapers. Besides, from all accounts," he finished, with a chuckle, "your inheritance is nothing to brag about. If it ever amounts to anything you can thank yourself, I imagine, and not your uncle. Four thousand isn't much of a working capital, my boy, and all borrowed money at that. You're taking a big risk."

"Oh, well," said Lorimer, "I can only lose the four thousand once, and there's nothing like trying."

As on the occasion of their first interview, Mr. Owen remained for some time staring at the door after Lorimer had gone. "I like that boy," he confessed at length to his whiskers. "Upon my word, I do. I think he'll come mighty near making a success of things; he deserves to, anyway. And so he has become quite good friends with Miss Sands" Here something seemed to tickle Mr. Gabriel Owen exceedingly, for he lay back and laughed until the tears came to his eyes.

Meanwhile the Invincibles were experiencing an arduous revamping, a process which extended to Lorimer Park itself and everything connected with the club. The new stands were in process of erection, Lorimer on a small first payment being given ninety days by a local firm; this meant that he needn't meet the bill until the first week in July, by which time, if the enterprise was to succeed at all, he would be in an ample position to do so.

Magee, contrary to Stuveysant's belief, was proving an agreeable disappointment, and there was a sustained quality in his work that could not be accounted for wholly by self-interest or the bait of increased salary. He was a dry file, a hard-bitten individual in many ways, but gratitude was not one of the qualities lacking in his composition. Added to this was the pride of an ex-star of the Inter-State League.

Hard work can do much, but it was the spirit of Lorimer that actuated the whole machine, acting indeed as a mainspring, for, as Magee had predicted, McCulley and the rest were not long left in doubt concerning the character of the "new boss." He never interfered with Magee, but he was present every day at the grounds with a keen and critical eye for the workmen engaged on the new stands and the players themselves.

It was about this time, too, that Lorimer, as his intimacy with Phyllis Sands increased, began to come in for several sly digs from Miss Walker. It was a subject of which she never seemed to tire, and, being a privileged employee, she said more or less what she pleased.

"It's too bad," she began abruptly one night as Lorimer and she were working alone, "that your uncle's stupid will should keep you and Miss Sands apart."

"Why," laughed Lorimer, "I don't believe it's keeping us very much apart. We see each other 'most every day, you know."

"No, I don't know."

"Well, we do."

"Oh, do you?" There had been a sudden drop in the temperature, but Lorimer was sublimely unconscious of it.

"Yes," he continued, "I even had the

privilege last night of dining at the Lorimer Homestead."

"Indeed!" said Miss Walker, without enthusiasm. "It must have been quite nice to find yourself in the house where your uncle was born. Was Mr. Stuveysant there, too? I'm sure if Miss Sands had happened to mention to me that she had invited some one else besides my poor self I'd have made a special effort to go."

"Why, I suppose she took it for granted you knew, Miss Walker; that I'd tell you I was going——"

"That wouldn't have made any difference, Mr. Lorimer. You going wouldn't have been any inducement."

"Bless me, no!" laughed Lorimer. "We see quite enough of each other without going to Miss Sands' house."

"Oh, quite," she agreed, biting her lip. "Perhaps too much if it comes to that."

He eyed her sharply, and then turned to his desk. "Don't you feel quite well?" he asked at length, with real solicitude.

"Perfectly, thank you. Why?"

"I—I don't know. I thought perhaps you were working too hard. Somehow you—you seem quite snappish this evening."

"Thank you," she said sweetly.

"I didn't mean that," he added hastily. "I meant you were overnervous, overtired. You must take a vacation."

Miss Walker committed a violent and unprovoked assault on the inoffensive typewriter, as if to demonstrate her entire physical fitness. When she came to the end of the paragraph, she said very distinctly: "I shall *not* take a vacation."

Then, to his surprise, she suddenly dimpled.

"I *am* snappish, Mr. Lorimer, but please ignore my bad temper," she said humbly. "I may as well confess that I am in a bad temper because I wasn't at Miss Sands last night while—while——" She faltered, and stopped short.

"While I was?" finished Lorimer.

Up went Miss Walker's brows, while she laughed unaffectedly.

"*You?* Oh, dear, no! Why you, Mr. Lorimer? Don't we see quite enough of each other here?"

He stared at her, feeling quite foolish, uncomfortable, and embarrassed. "The—the only other guest there was Mr. Stuveysant," he stammered.

Miss Walker turned away, covered with blushes, and in obvious maidenly confusion.

He stared at the back of her white neck, where it showed between the turndown collar and the riot of amber curls. He took his pipe mechanically from the desk and paused with it halfway to his mouth, while the match burned down to his fingers and was finally flung aside. He had become very quiet; he sat motionless, his eyes concentrated in an absent stare.

For some unaccountable reason all Miss Walker's "snappishness" had vanished, and she was even humming blithely one of the latest Broadway successes, while, to all intents and purposes, her interest was concentrated on the morrow's pay roll.

At length Lorimer shook himself like one who has experienced an unexpected and uncomfortable shock. "Would you mind stopping that singing?" he asked abruptly. "I can't hear myself think."

The humility and sweetness with which Miss Walker received this uncomplimentary remark was worthy an early Christian martyr. "Oh, I'm so sorry! I didn't know you were thinking. It's an atrocious bad habit of mine, but I never knew you objected to it."

"Well, I don't as a rule," he admitted grudgingly, now rather ashamed of his rudeness. "But—but somehow it gets on my nerves to-night."

Miss Walker nodded the amber curls,

and eyed him solicitously. "You're overnervous, overworked, Mr. Lorimer; that's what's the matter. You must take a vacation."

He eyed her suspiciously.

"So, you see," she added anxiously, "it's not I but *you* who are overworked and who needs the vacation."

"I don't need anything of the kind," he retorted indignantly. "It's not my nerves at all, but that silly song you were humming." He turned abruptly to his desk, but in another moment jumped up and reached for his hat.

"I've—I've a business engagement I've just remembered. I won't be back. Do you mind staying alone? If so, leave that work till the morning."

"Oh, I'm not afraid," said Miss Walker meekly. "Why should I?"

"I don't know. I thought perhaps you might. Anyway, Mr. Stuveysant, I dare say, will drop in later and see you home." This was said quite viciously.

The little stenographer flushed becomingly again and manifested all the former symptoms of maidenly confusion. "Oh, I—I couldn't think of troubling Mr. Stuveysant," she murmured, with shy, downcast eyes.

"Huh!" mumbled Lorimer, stalking to the door.

She waited until his quick, nervous steps died away, then jumped up, clapped her hands, and began a very dainty and graceful little dance about the room.

In the midst of this the door opened, and the new office boy, otherwise Mr. Stuveysant, entered.

CHAPTER XI.

MR. STUVEYSANT DECIDES THAT EVERYBODY IS CRAZY BUT HIMSELF.

"Where's Rummy?"

"Who? I don't know any person by that name. If you mean Mr. Lorimer, he's just gone home."

"You don't fancy the name Rummy?"

"I do not," said Miss Walker emphatically. "Just as I don't fancy the name Fatty. I should think Mr. Lorimer and you could find nicer names to call each other than those. They may have been appropriate once, but certainly not now."

"Why, do you think I'm getting any thinner?" asked Mr. Stuveysant eagerly. "Honestly now, Miss Walker? Take a good look." And he revolved slowly like a football on its axis.

"Well," she said critically, "certainly you are not getting any fatter."

This was the strict truth, Mr. Stuveysant having long since passed the superlative stage.

"But surely you weren't born with the name Fatty?" she added. "Surely you have another name, Mr. Stuveysant."

"Well," said the office boy doubtfully, "I've a dim recollection of being called Horace in the days of my innocent young childhood."

"Horace is a nice name," pronounced the stenographer decidedly. "It's ever so much nicer than Fatty. And, by the way, it's the name of Miss Sands' favorite poet."

"Honestly?" asked Mr. Stuveysant, brightening perceptibly. "Miss Sands is awfully strong on this highbrow stuff, isn't she? And yet she isn't a bit stuck up or pedantic. She's just as nice as she can be."

"She is," agreed Miss Walker. "I'm awfully fond of her."

"So'm I," blurted out Stuveysant. "I mean—er—I mean—hum—I mean I know you're awfully fond of each other, Miss Walker. That's it. That's what I meant," he finished, perspiring freely.

Miss Walker had turned to her desk, and seemed quite oblivious of the slip, a fact which Mr. Stuveysant duly appreciated. "Well," he added, breathing easier, "I'll dodge along now, seeing

Rummy—I mean Mr. Lorimer—won't be back."

"Why, have you an engagement?"

"N-no, not exactly." Stuveysant shifted his weight to the other foot. "But I was sort of figuring on stopping in at the Lorimer Homestead——"

"And I'm figuring on you staying here till I'm finished," interrupted the stenographer calmly.

"But—but I virtually promised Miss Sands—— You see, she's awfully keen on roses, and that's one thing I *do* happen to know something about. We're planning a dandy flower bed——"

"The dandy flower bed can wait," said Miss Walker inexorably. "Do you think I'm going to stay here alone? You know very well I'm afraid——"

"Bless me! Of what? This town's as good as a church; it wouldn't know how to be bad if it wanted to."

"I don't care. I'm afraid of the dark and the trees and the strange noises. You don't know how many creepy noises there are when one's working here alone. Lots of times I think some one's creeping round the house and trying to peep in the window. Ugh! It makes me shiver when I think of it. I'm afraid of that man Clark, too, for he blames me for his being discharged. I'm afraid of Mr. Jellibond——"

"Of old Jellybags? Fiddlesticks!" said Stuveysant. "You know you're talking nonsense. I'd like to see the person or thing that you're afraid of. You're trying to kid me, Miss Walker. You know very well Rummy—Mr. Lorimer—wouldn't have left you here alone if you were afraid or if there was anything to be afraid of."

"Mr. Lorimer had to leave because he wasn't feeling well; and he wouldn't care in the least whether I was afraid or not," said Miss Walker plaintively. "I only consented to stay here because he said you would be here to see me home."

"See—see you home?"

"Yes, Mr. Stuveysant—see me home. So, you see, the dandy flower bed will have to wait. You can't, by flattering my courage, humor me into letting you off, and, if my maidenly fears fail to appeal to your masculine chivalry, then I must tell you that part of an office boy's duties consist in seeing home the stenographer whenever she has to work late. Oh, yes, that's so; any regular office boy will tell you that. However, they are not my orders, but Mr. Lorimer's, so you'll have to make the best of it."

"Well," grinned Stuveysant, "if it's the boss' orders that settles it and I yield with characteristic grace and sweetness. But how long do you figure on being here?" he finished anxiously.

"Why, that all depends on yourself, Mr. Stuveysant. The more entertaining you are, the faster and better I can work. And if you are *very* entertaining it's quite possible I may be through in time for you to have a go at the plans of the dandy flower bed."

"I'm the best little entertainer you ever saw, Miss Walker; that's part of my protean rôle," said Stuveysant briskly. "What shall it be?"

"Why, just talk to me."

"But how can you work if I talk?"

"Excellently. That's one of my many peculiarities which Mr. Lorimer can't understand. I value the infrequent opportunity of indulging in it."

"And what shall I talk about?"

"Oh, anything; it doesn't matter in the least. Suppose—well, suppose you tell me how you and Mr. Lorimer met."

"Why," said Stuveysant, "there isn't anything to tell; we just met."

"That isn't very entertaining; you'll have to do better than that if you are to see the plans of the dandy flower bed to-night," remarked Miss Walker over her shoulder, while she frowned at a column of figures above which her pencil was hovering. "How did you meet? Did you know Mr. Lorimer—seven and

six are thirteen and nine are twenty-two—did you know him before you both went into the prodigal business?"

"No," said Stuveysant. "You see, I was sort of born into the prodigal business, but Lorimer wasn't. I guess a lot of people have wondered at the way he took hold of things here, the way he developed all of a sudden into a first-class business man. I wondered myself until I found out that up till two years ago he was traveler for a big New York dry-goods house—in fact, one of the best men, young as he was, they had. He was a whale of a success. Then, you see, he's a Yale man, too, and managed the varsity baseball team in his senior year—and a rattling good team it was, too; walked off with about everything in sight that season. I was at Harvard then, so I remember. But I didn't know Lorimer at that time, didn't remember the name until he told me about managing the Yale varsity. We didn't really know each other until we met in a New York club last year."

"Seven and eight are fifteen," murmured the stenographer, nibbling the end of the hovering pencil. "But you haven't told me why Mr. Lorimer stopped being a 'whale of a success' and became a prodigal."

"Why, just after his father died he had a bunch of trouble. His——" Stuveysant stopped abruptly. "I can't tell you, Miss Walker; at least, I feel I shouldn't. Lorimer told me all about it one night, but in confidence, you might say, and I've no business to pass it on."

"No?" said Miss Walker absently and indifferently, though she looked acutely disappointed. "Why, now you really make me inquisitive, Mr. Stuveysant. I want to know. I really think I could finish this work out of hand if you told me. Come now, remember the dandy flower bed."

"Impossible!" sighed Stuveysant.

"I can't bribe you?"

"Not a little bit, Miss Walker, much as I would like to oblige you. I don't pretend to any virtue, you know, but this is something that it's none of my business to repeat to any one, and that settles it."

"I'm sure you would tell this wonderful mystery to Miss Sands," said Miss Walker plaintively. "You know you would."

"I would not. And there's no mystery about it. It's merely Lorimer's private affair, which, if he wants it known and discussed up here, he'll tell himself."

Miss Walker pouted becomingly, and then swung round in her chair. From the first Stuveysant and she had got on very well, meeting on the common ground of badinage and flippancy, underneath which was a mutual liking and respect. For, as in Lorimer's case, she had penetrated the mask of the fool in motley, glimpsing something of the real man beneath. And now, instead of showing anger at this uncompromising failure of her deftly executed attempt at pumping Mr. Stuveysant, she regarded him with frank liking and approval. "I can congratulate Mr. Lorimer on at least one of his friends," she said quite gravely, with a little bow. "You have treated my impertinent curiosity as to Mr. Lorimer's private affairs exactly as it deserved."

Stuveysant was considerably perplexed by this sudden change of front. He never quite knew when Miss Walker was serious or making elaborate fun of him—a state of mind by no means unknown to Lorimer himself. "You're not mad—honestly?" he asked.

"Not a bit of it," she laughed. "To prove it, my work is finished and I'm going to let you escape the arduous duty of escorting me home—just because you've been so entertaining. Run along now and attend to the dandy flower bed; you'll be in ample time."

"No," said Stuveysant, "I'll see you home. I meant to, anyway, you know."

"I couldn't think of accepting the sacrifice, Mr. Stuveysant. I'd much rather you wouldn't. It's quite unnecessary, and it was all nonsense what I said about being frightened——"

A slight noise, which seemed to come from the direction of the door, arrested her, and, mechanically, she followed Stuveysant's pointing finger. The door handle was turning slowly, almost noiselessly. But, being fastened by a patent catch, the door could only be opened from without by a key if the catch were not rendered inoperative.

Stuveysant, signaling her to be silent, tiptoed across the room, but for all his elaborate caution the boards protested loudly under his vast weight. He moved with surprising celerity for one of his bulk; but, quick though he was, when he flung open the door there was nothing to greet him but the dark, empty vestibule giving on the street. He went out and looked up and down the sidewalk, but there was no one in sight, nothing to excite his suspicion.

"Who do you suppose that was?" he asked, returning to the office.

Miss Walker shrugged. "Oh, some one to see Mr. Lorimer on business, I suppose. No doubt they happened to be passing, and, seeing the light——"

"Then why didn't they wait and give a fellow a chance to open the door? Why didn't they knock? Why did they hike off like that? And I don't like the way that handle turned—too darned quiet and secretive if you should ask me. Supposing that catch hadn't happened to be down and you'd been here alone?"

Miss Walker laughed gayly as she pinned on her hat; but a close observer would have seen that her hand shook slightly. "And if I had been alone? Why, you know this town is as good as a church and wouldn't know how to be bad if it wanted to. That's not sarcasm, Mr. Stuveysant. What is there to be afraid of? Who would break in here?"

"Certainly not for money," he grinned, eying the old-fashioned safe in the corner. "We'd give 'em half of all they could find and pay a bonus to boot. Let's hope there may be something worth stealing in that safe some day if not now."

"There's exactly five hundred in it at this present moment," said the stenographer dryly. "You forget this is Friday."

"Holy mackerel, yes!" exclaimed Stuveysant. "I was forgetting that."

For every Friday Lorimer made the thirty-mile trip to Albany for the weekly pay roll, and thus for one night in the week, Friday, the old safe emphatically held something worth the taking.

"That's one of the disadvantages of not banking in the town," said Miss Walker lightly. "But of course nobody but you, Mr. Lorimer, and myself know there is ever such a sum there."

"You never can tell how these things may get about," remarked Stuveysant, shaking his head. "They know Lorimer withdrew his account from the Palestine & Empire and that it's the only bank in town. They know he goes to Albany every Friday, and they can add two and two together."

"And who are 'they'?" laughed the stenographer. She was kneeling by the safe, her back to him, replacing some papers she had been consulting in her work.

Stuveysant shrugged. "This town may be as good as a church, but it has its undesirable citizens like any other. I've noticed quite a few about. And you know as well as I that we've made enemies; there's no use fooling ourselves about that."

"Fie! Surely you're not suggesting that eminent citizens like Mr. Delaney,

Jepson, Wishart, and Jellibond—not to mention your old and immaculate friend Mr. Conyers—would stoop to burglary?"

He echoed her laugh. "All the same," he said, with a troubled look, "I don't half like the idea of five hundred dollars staying here even for one night, even if no outsider does know about it. When you come right down to it that safe is nothing but an old sardine box, and any regular cracksman could do the trick with a can opener."

"Well," said the girl indifferently, closing and locking the safe, "I confess that some such idea occurred to me, and last week I suggested to Mr. Lorimer that he rent a deposit box in the Palestine & Empire, where he could keep the pay roll overnight, but he couldn't see it that way at all. He laughed at me, said this wasn't New York, and that I had too vivid an imagination. And, of course, he's right," she finished, arising and brushing her skirt, "so we needn't say anything more about it."

Miss Walker still insisted that Stuveysant should not escort her home, adding that on no account would she wish him to be late for his engagement with Miss Sands. Her protests and arguments, however, were of no avail, and thus it was almost nine o'clock when Stuveysant at length presented himself at the Lorimer Homestead, as it was still called in Palestine.

There was a decidedly chilly look in Miss Sands' dark eyes, though she smiled sweetly. "Oh, is it you, Mr. Stuveysant?" she asked, with evident surprise. "Really I wasn't expecting you."

"Why—why, you know this was the night we were to go over the plans of the flower bed," protested Stuveysant. "You said Friday——"

"Did I?" she asked ingenuously. "Oh, yes; so I did. And I think I also said eight o'clock, didn't I? It is now nine, Mr. Stuveysant."

"I'm awfully sorry, Miss Sands. You see, I had to stop in at the office to see Lorimer, but he'd left. And then I saw Miss Walker home; she was working late, you know——"

"No, I don't know," said Miss Sands sweetly but emphatically. "And I suppose it is one of your many arduous duties, Mr. Stuveysant, to keep Miss Walker company when she's working late, and then to see her home?"

"Oh, yes, that's one of the duties of any regular office boy," he laughed.

"How interesting!" she murmured, stifling a yawn.

A long and almost harrowing silence followed, during which Mr. Stuveysant contrived to look quite miserable. Then a happy thought struck him. "Miss Walker didn't want me to see her home," he explained, anxious to clear up the situation and do full justice to all concerned. "It isn't her fault that I'm late. She said she didn't want me to be late——"

"How thoughtful of her," laughed Miss Sands, with the utmost good humor. "As if it really mattered in the least."

Another silence followed, the thermometer had fallen to zero, while the visitor vainly racked his brains for some enlivening subject of conversation. Finally Miss Sands yawned prodigiously and shamelessly.

"I'm so sleepy," she apologized, eying the clock.

It was here that for the first time Mr. Stuveysant was assailed with a vague suspicion that perhaps he should take his leave. "About the plans of the flower bed," he began desperately. "Shall we——"

"Oh," said she sweetly, "they'll keep. Some night when you don't have to work so hard, Mr. Stuveysant. You must be very tired."

"But I'm not; not in the least——"

"Oh, yes, you are—and so am I," said Miss Sands emphatically.

And so Stuveysant presently found himself walking homeward, wondering what exactly had happened to make Miss Sands act so strangely. "She certainly was out of sorts," he reflected gloomily, "but *I* haven't done anything, and she shouldn't take it out of *me*."

Even the Empire House, modest though it was, had proved too expensive for the curtailed financial program of Lorimer and Stuveysant, and long since they had moved to a boarding house quite as humble as that patronized by little Miss Walker. Here they shared a single room and practiced assiduously all forms of mean economies, for even in Palestine it was no easy matter to live on ten dollars a week, especially for ex-prodigals. Often Lorimer writhed inwardly when he thought of the "auspicious occasion," his climax of asininity; when every cent now loomed as big as a wagon wheel, what would he not have given for that last remnant of his fortune which he had squandered in one final reckless burst of stupid folly!

Stuveysant now found his friend busily engaged on one form of their mutual economies; with the assistance of a little gas stove, a smuggled iron, and an improvised board, he was pressing his trousers, while various articles of the night's "wash" decorated the room. This was the secret of the immaculate appearance Stuveysant and he always managed to present to Palestine.

"After you on the iron, my dear Alphonse," greeted Stuveysant, preparing to imitate the other's state of negligee. "How are you feeling, old man?"

"Same as usual. Why?"

"Miss Walker was saying you had to quit because you weren't feeling well."

Here Lorimer probably burned his fingers, for he swore fluently. "That's merely Miss Walker's vivid imagination," he snapped. "Do I look as if I were dodging the undertaker? I left the office because I wanted to, that's all."

"Sick him, Fritz, he bit your mother!" quoted Stuveysant, with a grin. "Everybody's got a grouch to-night. What's up, anyway?"

"Butter and eggs, I suppose," replied Lorimer shortly. "So you stopped in at the office?"

"Uh-huh. At the Lorimer Homestead, too, for a moment after seeing Miss Walker home."

Lorimer glared at the inoffensive trousers, and gave them a resounding thump.

"Say," added Stuveysant, "somebody tried the door when we were in the office to-night. Do you think it's safe to leave the pay roll there? And I don't like the idea of Miss Walker working there late alone——"

"Oh, don't you? Well, there's nothing to stop you mounting guard over her, is there?"

"Gee, but you've a grouch!" protested Stuveysant. "Everybody's crazy to-night. Guess I'll go out in the garden and eat a worm."

CHAPTER XII.

LORIMER'S PAST.

On the way to the office early the following morning, the first person Lorimer met was Peter Delaney. Since their memorable interview they had met often, as was inevitable in so small a town as Palestine; but, whereas, Mr. Jellibond now crossed the street if he saw Lorimer, though pretending no such person existed, Delaney always went out of his way to give Lorimer a nod, a passing word, and one of his famous facial disturbances. Apparently, so far as he was concerned, the unhappy incident promoted by Mortimer Conyers was dead and buried, and

he treasured no animus; apparently no one more than Mr. Delaney watched with greater interest the proceedings at Lorimer Park and wished the rejuvenated Palestine ball club greater success. Whether he was sincere in these friendly overtures was quite another matter, but Lorimer, whatever his thoughts, met him on the same footing and returned smile for smile.

"Morning," greeted Delaney, pausing in his waddle and looking almost startling without his perpetual smile. "Well, it's tough luck, Mr. Lorimer. Hope you didn't lose much. Why, ain't you heard the news?" he added in apparent astonishment. "Sorry, then, I happened to be first on the wire. Why, I hear your office was broken into last night and the safe blown. The police or nobody knew nothing about it until your stenographer, Miss What's-her-name, opened the place this morning."

For a moment, Lorimer felt physically sick, as if he had been dealt a blow in the pit of the stomach. Five hundred dollars gone! One-eighth of his initial working capital! One-quarter of what remained of that capital after financing the enterprise for a month! Five hundred at one clip, at a time when every penny counted! Instinctively he felt the Delaney hard gray eye upon him as if the other were waiting and watching for some tangible sign proving the magnitude of the catastrophe so that he might gloat over it and examine it at leisure.

"Lose much?" asked Delaney solicitously.

Lorimer laughed, lighted a cigarette, and looked the other in the eye. It was evident Miss Walker had said nothing of the amount of their loss, and he blessed her mentally for her circumspection, for at all events their enemies need never know how the blow had crippled them. His was the instinct of the born fighter to keep from an opponent the extent of his punishment. So he grinned and blew smoke, saying: "The joke's not on me, Mr. Delaney, but on them, whoever they are. There never was anything in that safe but a bunch of papers they couldn't raise a cent on."

Delaney looked his astonishment. "Well, that's good news," he said at length. "You certainly got off mighty lucky. The safe was a bloomer, eh? You're a pretty foxy bird, Mr. Lorimer." And he moved on, laughing.

Five hundred dollars! The words kept hammering in Lorimer's brain as he pursued his way to the office. He had no surplus, and it meant that somehow, in some way, he must raise that amount to meet current expenses before the opening day of the season. This was a blow he had not reckoned on during his elaborate calculations, just as he had been compelled, for the sake of economy, to forego all forms of insurance. If he had only taken Miss Walker's advice in this instance, too, acted on her suggestion as to the deposit box in the Palestine & Empire! But the thought of burglars in such a quiet, humdrum little town had seemed absurd. How had it become known that he was in the habit of leaving such an amount at the office? It could hardly be mere coincidence that the burglars had selected Friday, the one night of the week when the safe wasn't what cracksmen call a "bloomer."

Lorimer found Miss Walker and Stuveysant in the office, talking with the local chief of police, a superannuated, harmless old gentleman with a goatlike beard. The chief pointed out how the safe had been "souped," pronounced it the work of yeggmen, and ended by congratulating Lorimer on the trifling extent of the damage.

Meanwhile, by various telegraphic signs, quite unobserved by the superannuated gentleman, Miss Walker and Stuveysant had managed to convey to Lorimer the fact that they hadn't told

the extent of their loss, while he, on his part, by the same telegraphic signs, let them know that he fully understood how matters stood and approved of their reticence.

"Well," groaned Stuveysant, when at length the three of them were alone, "this is a fine, hefty kick in the solar plexus. It was Miss Walker's idea to say that the safe was nothing but a bloomer—and luckily she had a chance to put me wise before I gave the show away."

"I thought," put in the stenographer apologetically, "it was nobody's business but our own; that it was for you, and you only, Mr. Lorimer, to state the amount of your loss—if you wanted to."

"You did the right thing," nodded Lorimer. "On my way here I heard the cheerful news from Delaney, and I told him there was nothing in the safe but papers. I may be wrong, of course, but it seemed to me he wouldn't have dropped dead with grief if I'd told him we'd lost a quarter of our remaining capital; so I wasn't aiming to give him any satisfaction. We've got to come up smiling, no matter how it hurts, and pretend that the joke isn't on us."

"Which, after all, is nothing more than the truth," nodded Miss Walker, opening her desk and taking out a flat package of bills encircled with the conventional strip of paper. "There's the pay roll, Mr. Lorimer."

"For the love of Mike!" gasped Stuveysant, while Lorimer could do nothing but stare. "Then—then it wasn't in the safe at all?"

"Certainly not. Do you think I would have told a downright lie to such a worthy old gentleman as the chief of police?" asked the stenographer, with a great assumption of virtue. "I took the pay roll out of the safe last night when I was replacing those papers—you may remember my back was to you, Mr. Stuveysant. The idea just occurred to me after the turning of that door handle."

"And it was in your desk all the time, and they never thought to look there!" exclaimed Stuveysant. "Well, I'm jiggered! The joke's on them all right—and on me, too, for that matter."

"Same here," said Lorimer slowly. "I needn't try to thank you, Miss Walker, for your quick wit. You know what this means to me, especially at such a time. It places me in your debt more than ever."

The stenographer made the now stereotyped reply that it was nothing, no more than what she was paid for doing; but from the expression in her eyes it was evident that Lorimer's words were payment enough.

That afternoon, Lorimer pocketed his pride, and rented a deposit box in the Palestine & Empire Bank, a proceeding which Mr. Jonas Wishart attended to in person and with some secret amusement. "Happy if we can prove of service to you, after all, Mr. Lorimer," he said, with customary courtesy and a sly twinkle in his keen eyes. "We always like to oblige old customers. But don't you think it's a bit like locking the stable door after the horse has been stolen?"

"Not a bit, Mr. Wishart. You forget the horse hasn't been stolen yet—and with the help of your excellent institution I don't intend it to be, either."

"I'm glad you've discovered the institution's excellence," replied the other politely. "It's an ill wind that blows nobody good. In this instance your loss is our gain."

"I guess there's more truth than poetry in that," thought Lorimer. "And it isn't confined to this instance, either."

A certain definite suspicion had entered Lorimer's mind when Miss Walker was explaining about the pay roll; and that evening, on returning

from his daily grind at the ball grounds, and finding her alone in the office, the opportunity of voicing it was presented.

"Mr. Stuveysant was saying last night," he began casually, "that he didn't like the idea of you working here late alone. This attempted burglary has proved him right. Have you ever had cause to be afraid, and, if so, why didn't you mention it to me, Miss Walker? Not, of course," he finished, apparently as an afterthought, "that I can hope to share the same state of confidence evidently enjoyed by Mr. Stuveysant, but I think you might have told me, merely as employee to employer."

"But there was nothing to tell," she protested, apparently quite forgetting her initial confession of fright to Mr. Stuveysant the previous evening. "I've never been afraid. There never was anything to be afraid of."

Lorimer eyed her hard, but she returned his scrutiny with innocent composure.

"Then the turning of that door handle last night was merely an isolated occurrence?" he asked.

"Certainly."

"Nothing ever happened to make you think the office might be broken into?"

"Of course not, Mr. Lorimer."

"And you haven't been annoyed by that man Clark or any one else?"

"No," replied Miss Walker, concentrating her attention on her notebook.

"H'm," said Lorimer, turning to his desk.

A minute passed in silence, and then he swung round again. "Of course," he said matter of factly, "the pay roll wasn't in your desk last night. Mr. Stuveysant said so, but I noticed you didn't. If you didn't think the safe *was* safe you wouldn't have put the money in your desk, where it could be found for the mere looking. Come, Miss Walker, I want the truth. Where was it?"

The little stenographer had colored up, and was showing some signs of agitation for all her elaborate efforts at concealment. "Why—why," she began, "you saw me take it from my desk, Mr. Lorimer——"

"I want the truth, Miss Walker. You took it home with you, didn't you?"

There was no avoiding the question or his eyes. "Y-yes," she said meekly. "I—I put it here," tapping the bosom of her dress, "when Mr. Stuveysant wasn't looking. I—I didn't want him or—or any one to know; he would have thought my caution silly——"

"You mean *I* would," said Lorimer grimly. "And how long have you been taking home the pay roll, Miss Walker?"

"How long?" opening big, innocent eyes. "Why, I—you know it was last night——"

"Yes, and I know it was many another night, too. Come, wasn't it every Friday for the past month?"

"Y-yes," said Miss Walker in a very small voice, while she nervously rubbed her diminutive hands. "I—I know you've a perfect right to be awfully angry, Mr. Lorimer. I know the action was very irregular to say the least, and that I—I deceived you. But I knew the money wasn't safe here—I mean——"

"You mean you knew it wasn't safe here," said Lorimer inexorably, "and that because I laughed at your suggestion of renting a deposit box you provided one of your own. Now we're getting down to brass tacks. In other words, you *were* afraid and had reason to be so, though you've tried to make me believe otherwise. And the turning of that door handle last night *wasn't* an isolated incident."

"Really it was, Mr. Lorimer," she protested. "But once or twice I

thought I heard some one outside—oh, I can't explain it; it was just the idea that somebody was prowling round trying to peep in the windows. Then some nights I've thought I was being followed home——"

"By whom?"

"I—I don't know. I never saw anybody. I put it down to my imagination, which, of course, it must have been. And I didn't want to say anything to you; it seemed so silly. Anyhow, I thought it best to take home the pay roll every Friday night, and—and now I'm quite ready to be scolded." She folded her hands meekly, and looked at him.

"And so you should be—within an inch of your life," declared Lorimer sternly. "Do you realize the risk you were running? If those crooks, whoever they are, had suspected for a moment you were carrying five hundred dollars they'd have knocked you on the head and never thought twice about it——"

"But, you see, they didn't," she interrupted humbly.

"No, but they might have. It makes me feel quite—quite upset to think that, thanks to my stupidity or whatever you like to call it, you've been running such a risk for the past month. I admire your devotion to duty, and of course I can't thank you enough, Miss Walker, but all the same you aren't paid to accept such responsibility and risk——"

"Must one always be paid?" she asked slowly, looking down and tracing imaginary circles on her notebook. "Mayn't one be allowed to do something for—for—I mean," hastily, "you know, I'm not just an ordinary employee, Mr. Lorimer. For that matter, Miss Sands and I, Mr. Stuveysant and Mr. Magee—all of us have the interest and welfare of the club very much at heart. Unlike Miss Sands, I haven't any money to offer as an investment, so I allow myself the privilege of looking after what we have got."

"You've a quaint way of putting things," laughed Lorimer. "You know, I think it was awfully nice of Miss Sands to make that offer, and I can't forget it. I feel that it wasn't with any idea of investing it, but solely a way of offering me the loan of two thousand, though why she should do so to a virtual stranger, as I then was, is quite beyond me. Are you sure, Miss Walker, you didn't put the idea into her head? Ask her to do it?"

"I?" said the stenographer in evident surprise. "What an absurd question! Why should I?"

"Well," grinned Lorimer, "it seems to me you'd stop at nothing to help along the business. And you told her it was a good investment, you know."

"And I still think so. At all events, Mr. Lorimer, it was very honorable of you to refuse the money so long as you had any doubts concerning the quality of the investment. I'm sure it was a sore temptation, for we needed all the capital we could get—and still need it, by the way. I know your refusal made a very favorable impression on Miss Sands."

"Simply because I exhibited the common garden variety of honesty?" he laughed. "She must have had an idea I was a precious sort of rascal."

"Well, you must remember she had nothing but report to go by—and report wasn't very flattering. However, I think you've proved an agreeable surprise to her in many ways. Oh, she says many nice things about you; really and truly, Mr. Lorimer. To open an old subject, if you and she would only find it mutually agreeable to fulfill the 'most distressing' clause in your uncle's will it wouldn't prove so very distressing for us—I mean the business. It would solve all our financial difficulties. Have you ever thought of that, Mr. Lorimer?"

"Often," he replied laconically. "But I'm not quite prepared to sacrifice everything on the altar of the business."

"But what would you be sacrificing?"

"Miss Sands for one thing," he laughed.

"Per-perhaps it wouldn't be a sacrifice, after all," murmured Miss Walker, still tracing imaginary circles on the notebook. "You couldn't marry her, you know, unless she wanted you to. Let us agree, if only for the sake of argument, that Barkis—or, rather, Peggotty in this instance—is willin'. What other sacrifice would there be?"

"Principle. Do you think it a very fine thing, Miss Walker, for one to marry merely to help his business?"

"But if one loved!" she protested ingenuously.

"You seem awfully anxious to get me married," exclaimed Lorimer quite peevishly. "Even for the sake of argument, Miss Sands wouldn't have me if I was the last man on earth, so let us stop talking nonsense."

"I was only thinking of the business," said the little stenographer meekly. "It certainly would be fine for the business, Mr. Lorimer. And how do you know Miss Sands wouldn't have you if you haven't asked her?"

He slammed down his desk, and, getting up, paced the room. "There's one thing in all this, Miss Walker," he said grimly at length, "which you and my uncle and Mr. Owen seem never to have taken into account. For instance, has it ever occurred to you that I might be married already?"

Miss Walker suddenly leaned over her typewriter and began to turn the ribbon, as if conscious of some vital defect which demanded instant attention. She had lost color, and her exertions, negligible as they were, seemed to cause distressed breathing. "Why," she said at length, with a gay little laugh, "I admit that the possibility never occurred to me. Somehow you don't look and act like a married man."

"I'm not," said Lorimer.

"Oh," said Miss Walker, the color as quickly flooding her face. She bit her vivid lip, and her eyes snapped resentfully. "Were you trying to be funny, Mr. Lorimer? I don't think marriage is a subject to joke about."

"It isn't," he agreed soberly. "I've been married, you see."

"Oh," said Miss Walker again, but now with quite a different inflection. Her face had softened wonderfully. "Your wife—died?"

"No," said Lorimer quite simply. "I wish she had."

"Oh!" said Miss Walker for the third time.

He was pacing the room with quick, nervous steps, and he began to talk as if for the mere sake of talking. "We were married less than three months. She never loved me, of course, but I thought she did—which amounts to the same thing. I was the sort of ass that measures another's love by his own. It was quite enough for me that *I* was in love.

"At that time I was doing rather well in business, but my position took me away from New York several months in the year. Well, when I returned from my trip that spring succeeding our marriage, it was to find my wife gone. She very thoughtfully left a letter, explaining that there was a gentleman in Pittsburgh—much my superior in every way—for whom she had always cared far more than for me. She added that it would be a mere waste of time and money to follow them——" He paused, looking at Miss Walker with grave, apologetic eyes. "I really don't know why I should be telling you all this."

"Perhaps because I'm interested, Mr. Lorimer," said Miss Walker simply. "I like to listen—if you don't mind."

"Well, anyhow, that's the end of the

harrowing story," he added, with a short laugh. "You see, it's by no means new or original; in fact, quite an everyday sort of yarn. The most harrowing part, you might say, was the way it showed up the glaring deficiencies in my character, for instead of playing the man I played the fool. Instead of following my wife's sound advice and wasting neither time nor money——"

"And what happened to the man in the case?"

"The man? Oh, what usually happens—he got off scot-free. I suppose he's walking the earth safe and sound to this day. I never knew anything about him except his name, which was Carstairs. I never met him, you know. I'm glad now I didn't, otherwise a sensational murder trial would have figured among my unlovely escapades. For I most certainly would have done my best to kill him in those days, and even now—well, I wouldn't care to meet him. Old wounds are easy to reopen."

"Then—then you can't forget the former Mrs. Lorimer?"

"If you mean do I still love her—no," replied Lorimer slowly. "I can't pretend to the interesting rôle of martyr—at least I've somehow outgrown it of late. For two years I did everything; I tried everything, from the heights of religion to the depths of dissipation, to make me forget, but I couldn't. I saw her face, heard her voice wherever I went; she was with me sleeping or waking. At that time, if anybody had suggested that some day I could calmly discuss like this the whole wretched matter, that I could hear her name mentioned with indifference, I would have been outraged. Yet it's a fact that during the last month I've been able to look back on the whole affair almost with indifference. It would seem that just as soon as I stopped trying to forget, forgetfulness came of itself."

"Time can work wonders," said the girl slowly.

"Or perhaps I've been so busy I've no longer had time to cultivate my wounds," added Lorimer. "You were right; hard work's not only the best cure for boredom, but a good many other things. At least I've found it so."

"It's a wonder to me," remarked Miss Walker at length, "that you don't hate all women; that's the worst of such an experience if it happens when one is young. I don't wonder marriage is a painful subject with you, and that you wouldn't want to try it again under any circumstances."

"Oh, it isn't that," he said awkwardly. "But—but I sometimes feel I've had my chance and bungled it, and that I've no right to another——"

"What an absurd idea! It wasn't you who failed——"

"Oh, yes, I did in a sense. I failed to make my wife happy—and perhaps that's the biggest failure of all. I'm able to look back on this thing with some philosophy, charity, and insight. I can see now the girl simply married me because her parents urged on her the advantages of my wealth and social position—not that they were anything to speak of except in comparison with her folks'. She loved this fellow Carstairs all the time, and if I hadn't been selfishly wrapped up in my own 'grande passion' I would have seen it."

"Why, did she ever tell you she cared for somebody else?"

"No, of course not. But I should have guessed it."

"How, may I ask? I think you've a quixotic way of looking at things. The girl certainly didn't have to marry you, no matter what her parents urged; but, having done so, she should have been true to her salt. She deceived and betrayed you shamefully, and I can find no excuse for her. There isn't any excuse for that sort of thing and you know it."

"Yes," he replied slowly, "I know it.

At the same time, I feel that things might have turned out all right if Carstairs had only let her alone, and I place the greater blame on him. It was he who came to New York and looked her up after I'd left; I heard all that from the neighbors, of course. I feel we might have made a success of our marriage if we'd been given a chance. The Lord knows if I'd ever suspected she cared for somebody else I'd never have asked her to marry me. At any rate, I don't feel bitter or vengeful against her any more, and I only hope she has managed to find the happiness she couldn't find with me. We were divorced, of course, and the whole thing kept quiet."

"And did she marry Mr. Carstairs?"

"I suppose so. I haven't heard anything about them from that day to this—and I don't want to, either."

CHAPTER XIII.

AN UNDERSTANDING BETWEEN FRIENDS.

Another week had passed, and, as Sammy Brown predicted, the new traction bill had failed to pass the council; for, the strong subterranean props which had supported it being withdrawn, the enterprising measure collapsed automatically. In other words, it was shelved until a more fitting occasion, the "City Fathers" being suddenly convinced that Palestine would be better able to meet the expenditure in, say, the fall. Further translated, Lorimer saw that this meant an extension of the rope by which it was confidently hoped he would successfully hang himself; by fall, he imagined, it was expected in certain quarters that not only would he be a corpse, together with his defunct club, but resting metaphorically in some cemetery remote from Palestine.

The week had seen no progress toward the detection of those responsible for the abortive burglary, though it was true the chief of police wagged his goat's beard and whispered significantly that he was still conducting a vigorous investigation. His and the general opinion seemed to be that it was the work of yeggmen who had long since left town, by a "side-door Pullman," as they had entered it. Another explanation had naturally occurred to Lorimer, Stuveysant, and Miss Walker; that perhaps the "bunch" knew why Friday night had been selected for the attempt.

"Delaney and the rest may have put somebody up to it," said Stuveysant. "We mustn't forget that every dollar we lose is their gain."

Lorimer nodded. "Still I'd hate to think that Delaney or any of them would stoop to a thing like that. It may have been yeggmen; you can't tell."

"Well, we'll give Delaney the benefit of the doubt and meanwhile keep our powder dry," grinned Stuveysant, holding up a revolver about a foot long. "Here's a young cannon that henceforth reposes in your desk, Miss Walker; we'll put it there because that's where they won't expect one. Mind, it's loaded. I believe you said once you weren't afraid of such things."

"I'm not," said Miss Walker, picking up the heavy revolver and expertly swinging out the cylinder. "My father taught me how to handle firearms. But this is entirely unnecessary, Mr. Stuveysant; one would think we were expecting to be raided by Indians."

"Stick it in your desk all the same," urged Stuveysant. "Isn't that right, Harry?"

"Sure," laughed Lorimer. "I'd have brought my own, but unfortunately it fell into a New York ash barrel."

Of Conyers Lorimer had seen little since the interview in the other's rooms, for Conyers now made his home in Albany, where, it was said, Delaney em-

ployed him in his gambling house. This seemed to bear out Lorimer's suspicion that Delaney and Conyers had reached an understanding from the first, and that the former was wholly insincere in claiming he believed the other had possessed full authority for closing the deal. Now and then Conyers paid a visit to Palestine, but either he kept out of Lorimer's way intentionally, or their paths did not happen to cross; at all events, they only saw each other occasionally and at a distance.

His other enemy—Mr. Clark—Lorimer had not been permitted to forget, for the ex-manager had tried to cause trouble; he had tried, by various methods, to influence the members of the ball team, even presenting himself at Lorimer Park during their practice. Here he struck an unexpected snag in the person of Magee, who could use his hands much better than his tongue, and Clark retired from the brief interview with a badly discolored eye and several minor casualties. This brief interview convinced Clark that any hope of fomenting trouble or breeding internecine strife in the Invincibles was foredoomed to failure; that Magee was a dog that knew how to guard his flock, and one whose bite was to be feared.

And a most promising flock it was that Magee had rounded up and was daily hammering into shape. The money at his command had been spent judiciously, and whereas the salaries still averaged about the same as under the old régime, the distribution was vastly different; for instance, fifty dollars a week was being paid for one slab artist, with a corresponding reduction in a less vital part of the machine.

Magee had stiffened up the infield, got a brace of hitting outfielders and a young backstop from the bushes who looked like a comer. In fact, there was a winning team in process of formation at Lorimer Park, a team that should not only finish well up in the first division, but perhaps walk off with the "rag."

Be it remembered there was nothing remarkable in all this; rather, indeed, would it have been remarkable if failure had waited on all the efforts expended, for it may be safely said that no team in the County League had ever worked harder, more intelligently, or as long in preparation for the opening game of the season.

The Invincibles were not only working in the hope of evolving a winning team for the mere financial gain which that would mean, but they were bringing to the fight something their opponents lacked—a pride in the old club and the determination to rid themselves of the incubus, the humiliation which had been theirs for the past four years. They meant to wipe out the stigma of the "Cellar Champions."

In Lorimer they had found one whom daily they were learning to look upon as they had looked upon the Old Man in his palmiest days, while in Bud Magee they had a field manager far and away the best in the County League.

Though Lorimer knew in his heart that the success for which they had all worked so hard and earnestly was looming in sight, still as it drew on to the opening of the season he was assailed by numerous doubts and fears. The tension was beginning to tell, and there were moments when his confidence dropped to zero, his heart turned to water, and he wondered if the team was really half as good as Magee and he fondly imagined. Had they hypnotized themselves into thinking it a world beater, and were they, after all, only a bunch of sand-lotters? The opening game would prove the crucial test, for it was to be played at Lorimer Park with the "Maroons," last year's champions, and a team that had always figured in the race. If the Invincibles could even make a fight of it, hold

them to a fairly even score, he would be more than satisfied; this though he hoped in his secret heart the Maroons would go down to defeat in one of the biggest surprises of their life; this though Magee predicted that with a fairly even break in the luck the Invincibles could figure on at least a tie game.

"We're goin' to catch that bunch fast asleep and hand it to 'em before they wake up." said Magee confidently. "They're goin' to find that a lemon can taste mighty sour if you bite into it hard enough. Why, not one of 'em believes we've got anythin' but the usual bunch of swill, and that we're only throwin' a tall bluff. I've been all down the line, an' I seen nothin' we need be so leery of. They think I've been takin' your money and have kidded you along—and I ain't been sayin' diff'rent, see? They've still got you down for a rummy that don't know nothin' about the game or what he's up against. These wise guys have got to be shown."

There remained, however, the disturbing truth that the "wise guys" had to put in an appearance in order to be shown. The finest team in the world is useless without patronage. Lorimer had done his best, but if Palestine's hostility went to the length of refusing to support even a winning team, then he would have failed as completely as if the Invincibles were still the sandlotters he had found them.

Such were some of the doubts and fears which harassed him as it drew on toward the opening of the season.

These days saw also a slight coolness and restraint develop between Phyllis Sands and Miss Walker, perhaps due on one side to Mr. Stuveysant, on a certain occasion, being flagrantly late for his appointment with the plans of the dandy flower bed; perhaps due, on the other side, to Miss Sands' oversight in not stating, on another certain occasion, that her invitation to tea embraced guests other than Miss Walker.

A similar coolness had sprung up between Lorimer and Stuveysant; or, rather, Lorimer's "grouchiness," first displayed toward his friend on the night of the abortive burglary, had now become chronic. At first Stuveysant pretended to be oblivious to it, to ignore it; he knew the tension under which the other was working, the unremitting labor he had put in, the responsibilities he was shouldering, and he attributed this new reticence, this sudden aversion to the old, familiar chats they formerly enjoyed, this new desire to keep to himself—all this he attributed to a very natural reaction and attendant depression due to overwork. Miss Walker had said Lorimer wasn't feeling well, and his actions certainly showed it. It was not long, however, before he discovered that this explanation, however plausible, was a failure; for Lorimer seemed his old, optimistic, cheerful self with Magee, Miss Sands, or Miss Walker—in fact, with any and every person but him, Horace Stuveysant. This discovery distressed him; and, not being given to mental subtleties or dissembling, he soon sought an explanation from the other.

"Say," he blurted out one night when they were alone in their room, "what's eating you, anyway?"

Lorimer paused in his mean economies—he was pressing his trousers again—long enough to look surprised. "What do you mean?"

"You know very well," retorted Stuveysant, warming up to the subject. "Something's wrong somewhere along the line. You don't act natural. You've got something against me, and I've seen it for the past week. Look here," he finished anxiously, "is it my work? Haven't I made good——"

"You've made good right through," declared Lorimer hastily. "You've been practically invaluable, and you know it. I'm more than satisfied. You and Ma-

gee and Miss Walker—well, you aren't paid for all you do; not by a jugful."

This was not flattery, for Stuveysant had filled his protean position capably; nor was he simply the office boy which he liked to call himself. He had worked hard and faithfully, representing Lorimer efficiently in matters which the other was unable to attend to in person through lack of time or more pressing affairs. Thanks to Lorimer's tutelage and his own endeavors, he was developing into a capable business man, and had sloughed all his former inertia with some of his superfluous flesh. For it was a fact that Horace Stuveysant had actually lost weight; and, moreover, was doing so daily, thanks to unwonted, unremitting activity, physical and mental, coupled with the boarding-house menu. Getting fat on ten dollars a week is well-nigh impossible.

"Well, then, what is it?" pursued Stuveysant. "If I've done anything or failed to do something, let me hear about it. Talk right off your chest. I care too darn much for our friendship to have it spoiled this way."

Lorimer put down the iron and eyed his friend shamefacedly. "You're right," he said, coloring hotly. "I've been acting like a cad, and I apologize. You're one of the best, and—hang it all! I'm glad it's you, seeing it—it can't be me. Congratulations! Here's luck, old scout, and all the joy in the world." His eyes had cleared, and he smiled as he offered the other his hand.

"Well, for the love of Mike!" said Stuyvesant, pumping Lorimer's hand up and down in a dazed, mechanical fashion. "Very kind of you, I'm sure, but what's it all about?"

"You know blamed well, you old hypocrite!" said Lorimer, making a successful attempt to still speak cheerfully.

Stuveysant's innocence was bland and unassuming. "Search me! Cross my heart," he declared fervently. "The only time I've been congratulated and addressed with such veneration is when somebody wanted to borrow money. What have I done now?"

"Made some misguided girl fall in love with you, you fat Romeo!"

"Oh, well," said the other, inflating his ample chest and complacently eying the flowing lines of his figure, "after all, can you blame 'em? But let me tell you, Juliet's got to have a ladder—preferably made by Krupp—if she expects me to do any second-story work. I'm not built for balcony scenes." He laughed and thumped the other on the back. "You can't kid me, you old fake."

"It's straight goods," said Lorimer soberly. "I thought you knew, of course."

Mr. Stuveysant, after a searching glance, grew quite pale and agitated. "Honest, Harry? Say—say, is it—can it be Miss—Miss Sands?"

"Miss Sands? Good Lord, no! I only wish it was."

"So do I," breathed Stuveysant, sinking into a chair. "Nobody else matters." He made feeble signs of distress. "You've given me an awful turn, Harry, my boy; pray reach me my smelling salts. I feel quite weak after this sudden rise and collapse of all my hopes."

"Stop your nonsense! This is serious," said Lorimer, staring heavily at his friend. "Do you mean it's Miss Sands you care for?"

The other was now serious enough. "Of course. You know how it was with me from the first. Who else could it be? I know now I was only trying to deceive myself when I said it must be the air up here that made me want to go to work and quit being a condemned fool. I know now it was Miss Sands all the time—nothing she said, mind, but just the way she affected me all through. I felt it the first day I spoke to her. Of course you aren't able to understand, Harry——"

"Oh, am I not?" asked Lorimer grimly. "Perhaps I've been affected the same way."

Stuveysant lost color, rubbed his chin, and looked away. "Yes," he said slowly, "of course Miss Sands was your uncle's ward, and then there's that clause in his will; so you've sort of got the inside track. But I was sort of banking on what you said—what you both said—about never marrying—though that wouldn't figure at all if you learned to care for each other——"

"Enough of this despairing soliloquy!" broke in Lorimer. "Miss Sands and I will never be more than good friends. I don't care for her the other way—and lucky for me I don't, for she'd never care for me the other way, either."

"I don't know about that," said Stuveysant, shaking his head. "But it's a great load off my mind to learn you haven't aspirations in that quarter. You were the one I was afraid of—and I'm afraid of you yet."

"You needn't be. To be frank with you, I care a whole lot for Miss Walker and——"

"I thought as much. When did you find it out?"

"The night I found out that she cared for you. That's why I went home sick. That's why I've treated you so shabbily for the past week. Now you know the truth."

"But Miss Walker doesn't care for me," said Stuveysant. "We're good friends and nothing more."

"Perhaps—where you're concerned," replied Lorimer gloomily. "Anyway, we've cleared up the atmosphere, and you know how we stand. It isn't your fault if Miss Walker cares for you a lot——"

"Nor yours if Miss Sands cares for you."

"If we only could get them twisted round right!"

"Yes," sighed Mr. Stuveysant. "But Miss Sands has sort of turned me down of late, and it will take a powerful lot of missionary work to put me in right again."

CHAPTER XIV.

SUCCESS.

The great day had arrived at last—the day which Lorimer longed for and dreaded at one and the same time. A few hours more, and he would know if he had labored in vain, evolving a winning team, a paying proposition, or registered a gigantic failure, which would leave him a beggar head over heels in debt. It was only a county-league team, yet it may be safely said that no owner or manager of a big-league club looked forward to the opening game of a world's series with more anxiety or nervous expectation. And perhaps no world's series could mean more than this opening game meant to Lorimer.

The champion Maroons came down for the annual slaughter, confident and easy-going, for their games with the Invincibles always partook of the nature of a festival—for them, at least. They never condescended to put their full strength in the field, but welcomed the Palestine club as a trial horse upon which they could experiment with raw material. Indeed, the poor old "Cellar Champions" were regarded throughout the league almost with affection, a good, soft pillow on which to recline and recuperate after the rough-and-tumble with hardy rivals.

"Well," remarked Mr. Burney, the Maroons' tight-faced manager, looking round Lorimer Park and addressing its owner in his patronizing way, "you've certainly made a good job here. Why, this would do for a champion team!"

"Yes, that's what I meant it for," said Lorimer simply.

Burney laughed. "Do you think you've got one?"

"Why, I'll tell you that at the end of the season."

Mr. Burney laughed again. "I'll tell you one thing," he vouchsafed out of his great experience, "it will take a winning team to fill them stands. You must have spent a good bit of money here. Pity you ain't got a regular team to back you up." He turned and eyed Lorimer keenly, wondering for the first time if the other were the inexperienced and moneyed young fool report had said and which Magee had never denied.

The Invincibles were out on the field warming up, and, after watching them critically for some time in silence, Mr. Burney decided to switch his battery. He had intended originally to pitch a new recruit who was in need of a good trying-out; but now he passed the word for a reliable old port-sider who, though no Rube Marquard, had always taken the Invincibles' scalps with cheerful regularity. Of course, thought Burney, the game would prove the usual walk-over; but, all the same, baseball was full of surprises, even in lowly county leagues, and it didn't pay to take unnecessary chances. There might be truth in the occasional glowing reports he had heard concerning the revamped Invincibles. At all events, the new recruit might just as well wait until the massacre was an assured fact; then he could go in and read the funeral oration.

Meanwhile, the stands were filling slowly, and there was every prospect of a big attendance. The Maroons were always a good drawing card, bringing their own rooters by the hundred, while Palestine's curiosity and love for the game had triumphed over any hostility Lorimer had feared it might entertain for him.

Perhaps not one believed the Invincibles were in for anything but the usual stereotyped assassination, but they were anxious to see for themselves just what Lorimer had accomplished, if anything. Also it was an excuse for a holiday; and at the beginning of the season one must see some kind of a ball game, however rotten. So they came in their hundreds, Billy and Betty, Reuben and Cynthia, John Henry and Mary Jane; came by motor, trolley, and farm wagon, not to mention old reliable shanks' mare; came for twenty miles round, having set aside the day and marked it in the calendar.

And almost among the last came Billy Wate, presenting himself at the window where Stuveysant was selling tickets.

"Handed myself a holiday and blew up for the big show," greeted Wate. "Wouldn't miss it for a farm. How's the gate?"

"Blooming!" exclaimed Stuveysant, in high glee, while he eyed lovingly the harvest of quarters and halves. "Follow us, and you'll wear diamonds, my boy. I haven't seen so much money all at once in a dog's age. It's a darn good thing for Lorimer that I was born honest and incorruptible. Pass on, O Deadhead; you're blocking the line and preventing these good people from spending their hard-earned cash."

"Deadhead yourself!" grinned Wate. "Here's a brand-new half I've been keeping in the tin bank at home; been saving up for a year. Gimme the best seat on the field."

"Nothing doing. We scorn to take your money; that's the kind of people we are. Lorimer's given the word to pass all his friends——"

"Not much!" said Wate. "It's my inalienable right to contribute to this auspicious occasion, and I'd like to see anybody take it away from me. And, mind, no holding out and putting my savings in your pants. I've my own private opinion of your incorruptibility."

So Stuveysant shamelessly tried a good set of teeth on the new half dollar, expressed openly his opinion that it was counterfeit, and ended by giving the other admission to a box, adding: "You've paid for the privilege of sitting with Miss Sands and Miss Walker,

supplying them with peanuts and explaining the essential difference between the umpire and the shortstop, together with all the other fine points of the game. And see that you behave yourself, for I'm chief bouncer of this show. There goes Heinie Hozenmuller's Band, the pride of Palestine; they're starting the parade on the field, so you'd better beat it. See you later."

So Billy Wate entered to the enlivening strains of "See, the Conquering Hero Comes," a delicate tribute which, meant for the Maroons, he took to himself and acknowledged fittingly by removing his hat and bowing condescendingly right and left, thereby causing a great deal of unnecessary emotion and conjecture. To this day there are Reubens who believe it was John McGraw or Connie Mack scouting in person for likely material.

There is no need to relate the great game in detail, for a certain scribe named Sammy Brown has done so most worthily, a fact which one may prove for himself by consulting the back files of the Palestine *Journal*. Suffice that Palestine history was made that day, and Sammy, having unlimited space, spread himself in a manner denied the present recorder.

Magee had predicted that they would catch the Maroons fast asleep—a prediction that was amply fulfilled. Mr. Burney did not awaken thoroughly until the despised Cellar Champions, in their first session at the bat, fell on the old reliable southpaw and whaled him out of the box.

Mr. Burney was having almost a private hemorrhage. He had been caught asleep at the switch, and he knew it; moreover, he had no one to blame but himself. The vicious stickwork of the Invincibles in itself was a ghastly revelation, and they seemed to be playing, not for money, but blood.

Fundamentally Mr. Burney was a cautious gentleman, for all his pomposity and confidence, and he always made it a point to travel well heeled; thus he was now able to replace the exploded port-sider with a first-string man, and this slab artist soon stopped the harrowing batting rally—for a time. But the damage was done, the Invincibles closing the session with the comfortable margin of five runs plus. It was a slaughter, but hardly the kind confidently expected by the Maroons.

The rest of the game was a hammer-and-tongs, dingdong affair. The Maroons now had their full strength in the field, and were putting up the best brand of ball of which they were capable. One of the runs against them they had managed to get back, but the other four remained where they were; it was too big a handicap even for a champion team, for they were playing a club to which they could afford to give away little or nothing. That the Invincibles had come back with a vengeance, after four long, weary years in the cellar, and were there to stay, was a fact which became increasingly clear as the game wore on. It was no flash in the pan, and even this Peter Delaney at last grudgingly admitted.

"Well," he remarked to Wishart and Jepson, expert "fans" like himself, "there's no use talkin'; he's turned the trick, all right, and blamed if I thought he would. Believe me, that's some ball team out there."

"It is," nodded the president of the Palestine & Empire. "All young blood, too, you might say. I doubt if Silas Lorimer had ever the makings of a better. If they can hold their present form, those boys should make a good bid for the championship."

"It's all due to this fellow Magee," put in Jepson, looking more than usually religious and subdued. "He's a wonder, from all accounts; far too good for this league. All the credit is his, not Lorimer's."

"I don't know about that," said De-

laney slowly, while he chewed reflectively on his cigar. "I guess next to being able to do a thing yourself is the ability to pick the right man to do it for you. Lorimer has the knack of makin' others work for him and gettin' the best out of 'em. I've noticed that. He don't seem to drive 'em, either."

"I've observed that, too," nodded Wishart. "That team didn't grow in a night, and we've got to give him credit for hard and intelligent work. Let me say that in the capacity of a private citizen of Palestine, and a ball fan, I've enjoyed every minute of this game and the handsome trimming handed to the Maroons. It's been coming to them for a long time."

"As a ball fan, I echo the sentiment," said Jepson dryly. "But a winning team for Palestine won't put any money in *our* pockets."

"No," added Delaney, "it won't. A daily attendance like this here would soon put our friend on Easy Street, and he could afford to hang onto Lorimer Park till the cows come home. But one game don't make a winnin' team by a long shot, and they got the jump on the Maroons in this one; also it's a long way to the end of the season, and a lot can happen before that. Lorimer's bank roll's eaten up, and he's got to meet expenses out of the gate. And these stands have got to be paid for by the first of next month. We'll see what we'll see. Time enough to think of offerin' him a price for Lorimer Park when we can't help it."

So the memorable game ended with the final score of seven to three in favor of the Invincibles, and Mr. Burney accepted the amazing defeat with at least outward philosophy and fortitude. He was still smiling when he congratulated Lorimer, but there was a wicked gleam in his pale eyes.

"Well, you've certainly called the turn and put one over on us," he finished, "but let me tell you the same gag don't go twice. We'll be waiting for you next time, my boy, and you'll get yours, all right."

"Maybe," replied Lorimer. "We'll take a lot of beating, Mr. Burney. You've got to show us that we haven't a winning team. That's what we're here for."

CHAPTER XV.

THE PRICE OF SUCCESS.

It was in the middle of June, and the Invincibles were running second in the league, the Maroons leading by an insignificant percentage. For, as Mr. Burney had predicted, his club, making heroic efforts, had taken the next game and drawn the third. It was too early in the season to make safe predictions, yet it seemed the fight for first place must rest solely between the Maroons and Invincibles. No dark horse had as yet loomed up; no other club had approached the form of these two.

In other words, the Invincibles were an assured success, and had turned out better than Lorimer or Magee had dared hope. They were a younger team than the champions, and it was said in certain expert quarters that the latter would go stale and cave in under the grueling contest, while the Invincibles, drawing on their youth, seemed to speed up and get better with every game.

Lorimer's heart was not set on winning the pennant, for that was something which had entered but remotely into his calculations; he had striven to turn out a team that would finish well up in the first division, be a credit to Palestine rather than a disgrace, and, as a natural consequence, become a paying proposition. All this he had virtually accomplished, and if incidentally the Invincibles happened to walk off with the pennant, so much the better; if not, his heart would not be broken, the main thing being that the team was making money instead of losing it, and

that there was every promise of a big return on his investment. If the attendance averaged for the season anything approaching the past fortnight, the first of September should see him clear of debt and with a handsome balance to meet the succeeding season. He had touched the high-water mark of success, and the future stretched before him, rosy and golden.

That section of Palestine—the severely respectable, church-going element—which had known and honored Silas Q. Lorimer, yet which had circumspectly held aloof from the nephew, fearful of the rumors that preceded him, now discovered him to be a very estimable and hard-working young man whom report had basely calumniated. Severely respectable houses were suddenly opened to him, and invitations flowed in, while he was given the opportunity of meeting the marriageable progeny of severely respectable matrons. Even Delaney, Wishart, and Jepson seemed anxious to cultivate his neglected acquaintance and bury the hatchet—if such an article had existed. For indeed Lorimer began to wonder if he had misjudged this triumvirate, being led astray by Sammy Brown's animosity and his own fears which might have bred unworthy suspicion and excess caution. In short, Harry Lorimer suddenly found himself popular, due, perhaps, to the simple reason that unqualified success is always popular. He was pointed out as the individual who had revived Palestine's baseball glory and spoken of as the young Napoleon of the game; while others, more material, said he should be a rich man before he was thirty.

These were happy days. Things seemed to be going right at last, and all doubt and misgiving—those dark hours of despondency and ceaseless self-examination and anxiety—were buried in the past. He even seemed to be making some headway with Miss Walker, thanks, perhaps, to the understanding, he had reached with Stuveysant.

Lorimer, it may be seen, was not without intellect, but man generally appears at his stupidest in matters of the heart if a woman's yes or no means all the world to him. At times Lorimer could think of many things Miss Walker had done and said—things which pointed to an interest which could not be born of mere friendship. On the other hand, at all times he could think of just as many which pointed to the contrary. Nor could he rid himself of the fear that her real interest was for Horace Stuveysant. That the latter seemingly did not reciprocate, that he was once more in the good graces of Phyllis Sands, failed to help matters in the least.

On the whole, however, notwithstanding this suspense and doubt, the sudden raising of his hopes one day only to have them dashed the next, the lying awake at night ceaselessly revolving the situation and experiencing all the conventional pangs of the lover who is afraid to put fortune to the test—in spite of all this, these golden days of June were happy ones. Even Mr. Clark had ceased from troubling, and was rarely, if ever, seen. If any understanding existed between Peter Delaney and him, it must have terminated suddenly, for Mr. Clark was looking very seedy and far from thriving. Either he had made no effort to secure employment or had been unable to find it; he could always be located in the lowest saloons, frequented by the toughest citizens, and he was absorbing more strong waters than was good for him or anybody else, a fact borne out by the frequent drunken brawls in which he figured and his spending several days in the town jail together with several boon companions. Indeed, it seemed as if Mr. Clark's prediction concerning panhandling had come home to roost, and

that he was developing quickly into that type of citizen who is given so many hours' notice to remove himself to another county where he may be less unfavorably known.

Nor had matters prospered with Mortimer Conyers. Lorimer heard it from Stuveysant, who had picked it up via Delaney from a town gossip.

"I hear Conyers has been fired," said Stuveysant. "Delaney and he fell out last week."

"What was the trouble?" asked Lorimer.

"Can't say rightly, but you know Conyers' beastly temper. I heard, though, that Delaney accuses him of holding out on the bank—he was in charge of one of the tables, I suppose. I don't like to believe it."

"Nor I," said Lorimer. "I've no use for him, but, all the same, I don't think he'd stoop to that."

"Well," said Stuveysant philosophically, "when you come right down to it, what he did to you—and there must have been many others—was just stealing under another name. There's no virtue in this touting game. Evidently Delaney gave him a straight job—if you can find anything straight in a gambling joint—and he even ditched him in the end. I don't know where he's gone or what's become of him. No doubt he'll bob up all serene and try to touch you for a 'loan.' He must have heard of your success."

Lorimer shook his head. "I don't think he'll come near me, no matter how hard up he is. Conyers and I had one heart-to-heart talk during which he was itching to open my head with the poker. I don't want anything to do with him, but, all the same, I'm good for a touch any time he wants to make it."

"You always were a forgiving disciple," grunted the other. "Of course I'm sorry for him, in a way, but, all the same, the only kind of touch he deserves from you is a good, healthy swat in the slats."

Lorimer laughed. "Oh, well, I can afford to forgive my worst enemies these days. There's nothing like success to fill one full of the milk of human kindness. I'm just running over with it."

It was on a Friday morning, the second week of the season, that Miss Walker asked for her first holiday, which was readily granted. The Invincibles were to play out of town—against a team which had preëmpted the other's old place in the cellar—and this easy series had served to relax the general tension.

Miss Walker stated that she had to go to Albany to do some shopping.

"Why," said Lorimer, with well-concealed delight, "I'll be going there myself later in the day. This hiking to Albany every Friday for the pay roll is a nuisance, and there's no sense in it, so I'm going to retransfer the account to the Palestine & Empire. I needn't have withdrawn it in the first instance. You know, I think I've been all wrong about Delaney, Wishart, and Jepson. Anyhow, the account will be just as safe in Palestine, and it will do away with the risk, such as it is, of carting the pay roll from Albany."

"But you needn't go to Albany to transfer the account," said Miss Walker. "Why not transfer it by check?"

"Why, it would take too long," he replied, "and I need the pay roll for to-morrow, anyway." He omitted to add that he had only decided on the trip after learning of her intention.

"Well," said Miss Walker, "of course you'll take a draft for the balance. You won't take it in cash?"

He laughed. "Oh, there's not so much over the pay roll—about fifteen hundred, all told——"

"Which is all we've got in the world. You talk as if fifteen hundred was a

mere bagatelle. Do you feel so rich as all that?"

Lorimer laughed again. He was feeling very happy and successful. "Oh, well, I'll take a draft for the balance," he said, just to humor what he sometimes jestingly called her sense of excess caution. "But really there's no risk. I've been carting home the pay roll for a month, remember. The fellows that blew this safe skipped the county long ago, and it was only a chance incident, anyway. I'm convinced of that."

"I suppose it was," she replied slowly. "But, all the same, you'll get the draft?"

"Oh, yes, certainly! And, by the way, can you meet me at the Ten Eyck for lunch?"

She looked embarrassed. "I'm sorry, but I won't have time. I've so much to do."

Lorimer concealed his acute disappointment. That part of his plan had miscarried. "Well, then, how about coming home together? Might as well, you know, seeing we'll both be there. Can you meet me at the station in time for the three-thirty? I can get into the bank here any time after five. And often Wishart stays till seven."

Miss Walker hesitated. "It would be much better—I would really prefer it—if you didn't wait for me, Mr. Lorimer. I'm not at all certain——"

"Oh, come, now!" he urged. "That will give you plenty of time for shopping."

"Well—well," she stammered, "I'll—I'll try. But if I'm not there for the three-thirty, please don't wait. Will you promise that?"

"Oh, certainly," he laughed. "But I know you will be there."

So Miss Walker left on an early-morning train, and Lorimer followed a few hours later, locking up the office for the day, as Stuveysant had gone with Magee and the Invincibles.

Lorimer dressed with more than ordinary care, for he meant that this day should see the end of his doubts and fears; he meant, on the way home, while he had the uninterrupted opportunity of being alone with Miss Walker, to propose marriage. It may be assumed that this momentous undertaking, no less than the confidence inspired by success, had a certain bearing on his subsequent actions, and that he was thinking rather more of how Miss Walker would receive his question than of the money he had undertaken to transfer.

On reaching the bank, Lorimer forgot his promise concerning the draft; or, rather, being in a hurry, grudged even the small time necessary for that detail. At all events, thought he, there was no risk; he had carried the pay roll half a dozen times without incident. For that matter, so far as risk was concerned, there was little difference between five and fifteen hundred. So he closed his account, took it in bills, stuffed them into his wallet, and rushed off to the station. There he had plenty of time to cool his impatience. Miss Walker failed to appear for the three-thirty.

Lorimer waited patiently, in more or less trepidation at the coming interview, but four and four-thirty passed and still no Miss Walker. His temper was now rising to blood heat. In all likelihood the Palestine bank would be closed on his return, but he had ceased to think of that, or care; he had made up his mind to propose, and propose he would, if he had to wait for her all night. So wait he did, grimly and stubbornly, until five o'clock struck and still there was no Miss Walker. Doubt began to assail him. Had he missed her? It was not impossible, though the station was small and he had scrutinized every female that bore the slightest resemblance to her.

Five-thirty, and no Miss Walker. Lorimer's mood suddenly changed, and, swearing inwardly, he boarded the last

car as the train pulled out. He was a fool to have waited for her even a minute. She had never meant to keep the appointment. He remembered her diffidence and embarrassment when he first made the suggestion. She could not be spending all that time in shopping, it was impossible even for a woman. If she had not meant to keep the appointment, why had she not said so? He certainly did not wish to force himself on anybody.

From these thoughts, it may be seen that Lorimer's temper had, for the moment, triumphed over his sense of justice, and that he conveniently ignored the fact that he had promised not to wait if Miss Walker found herself unable to keep the appointment. He was thoroughly upset at this wrecking of his plans. He was gloomy, depressed, and his hopes had sunk to zero. What chance had he got when she did not even care enough about keeping an appointment? Obviously none.

And so, when he left the train at Palestine and crossed the little park at Railroad Square, Lorimer was still thinking rather more of Miss Walker than of the hard-earned cash in his pocket. It was dark among the trees yet; off to the north, there stood a dull-red glow in the sky like the aftermath of an angry sunset. Yet the sun has never been known to set in the north.

He was puzzling apathetically over this phenomenon when a stealthy movement at his back caused him to turn in time to receive a blow that sent him to his knees.

He staggered to his feet to find himself surrounded by three men, one of whom, despite the darkness, he had no difficulty in recognizing as the erstwhile manager of the Invincibles.

"So it's you, Clark!" he called out, and, with the words, instantly rushed the other.

Evidently Mr. Clark was taken aback by this sudden onslaught; evident, also, that he was surprised and none too well pleased at his identity being known. He had counted on the first blow from ambush stretching Lorimer unconscious, ignorant of what had hit him; but that blow had not fallen as calculated, and he had reckoned without his victim's fighting spirit.

They fought silently, viciously, as animals fight, rolling over and over, thrashing through the undergrowth, using fists, teeth, and nails. And Lorimer was gaining the upper hand when the other two men, who meanwhile had been dancing about impotently, looking for an opening, seized upon him, tore him from Clark's prostrate form, and, with several hurricane blows, stretched him apparently lifeless.

Lorimer was conscious, however, as one is conscious in a dream delirium during which he can move neither hand nor foot, that brutal, hasty fingers were searching his pockets; conscious, while unable to voice a protest, that his wallet, representing virtually all his earthly possessions, had been pounced upon.

Then, after bestowing on Lorimer several contemptuous kicks, the trio stole off and left him lying among the trees.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE FINAL BLOW.

How long he lay there in the little and, at that hour, unfrequented park, Lorimer did not know; he had lost all sense of time. What seemed hours was in reality minutes, for youth and a good constitution soon asserted themselves, and, though he had been knocked about badly, there were no bones broken.

Dazed and weak, he staggered to his feet while all about him was a great noise of people shouting and the clanging of bells which he had thought part of his dream delirium. The lurid glow in the northern sky was leaping and

throbbing, while the night air carried the taint of smoke. An engine and tender of the volunteer department went clattering by, throwing a trail of sparks, and as Lorimer emerged from the park he blundered into the flying Sammy Brown.

"Where's the fire?" asked Lorimer.

"Ball grounds. Whole thing gone up," panted Brown, and rushed on without realizing to whom he had been speaking.

Lorimer plunged after him, hardly knowing what he was doing. Main Street was choked with people streaming north. The trolleys, swamped to the footboards, were running by fits and starts. One could almost make as good time on foot, so Lorimer continued mechanically in the wake of the surging crowd. This second and greater blow made him forget the recent assault and robbery, the loss of every available cent he owned.

When at length he reached Lorimer Park, it was to find his worst fears realized. The whole place was simply a roaring caldron of flame; everything had "gone up" which fire could burn, not only the grand stand, bleachers, and clubhouse, but the fence surrounding the grounds. There had been no rain for two weeks, and the June sun had baked the new wood to the consistency of tinder. There was nothing that human agency could do in the way of salvage; nothing to do but let it burn itself out while keeping the flying sparks from starting another conflagration. Luckily for Palestine, a town of wooden dwellings and boasting only a volunteer fire department, there was no building of consequence within half a mile of the ball grounds.

Lorimer, seeing that absolutely nothing could be done, stood apart from the crowd, which for the most part, with the thoughtlessness of all multitudes, could only see in this, Palestine's biggest fire, not a tragedy for one individual but a magnificent pyrotechnic display, a welcome break in the monotony of daily existence; excitement, something to talk about for weeks to come, something from which to date local events.

Lorimer wished no expressions of sympathy; he was hit too hard for that, and so he stood apart and sought to hide himself as might a leper from the curious. He watched with hard, unwinking eyes as the crater of flame swallowed up the stands which must be paid for in two weeks and on which there was not one dollar of insurance nor one penny in the bank with which to meet the debt, or, for that matter, the morrow's pay roll. His total reserve, thanks to his stupidity and overconfidence, had vanished in one sweep as completely as everything which once stood within Lorimer Park.

He turned wearily and trudged back to Palestine, alone with his thoughts. He was down, but not out. One thought alone possessed him—to fight on. Somehow, in some way, he must find the means of building anew; how this was to be accomplished he did not know, but he must find a way or make one. He must begin all over again; he must call on any reserve of character he possessed, rally all his forces to meet this overwhelming double disaster. He must not let it down him. So he set his teeth and gave defiance to fate.

It was in this spirit that he entered his boarding house, greeting the landlady's perfunctory expressions of sympathy with thanks and a cheerful laugh. He wanted to be alone, to think; later, he must talk it all over with Stuveysant and Miss Walker. On the latter, at least, he could rely for some helpful and stimulating suggestion, for she had proved equal to every emergency, and he had come to rely on her perhaps more than he realized even as yet.

There was a letter lying on the table, and he picked it up mechanically, recognizing, to his surprise, Stuveysant's

sprawling hand. He opened it and began to read. It was dated that morning from Albany, and ran as follows:

DEAR HARRY: You know I'm not much of an ink slinger, but I'll try to break the news gently, so here goes—when this reaches you Miss Walker and I will be married.

I was lying when I told you I cared for Miss Sands, for it was Miss Walker all the time; but I was afraid you were taken the same way, and I wanted to find out just what, if anything, was between you, and what chance I had. I'm sorry, old man, but you know that a woman can come between the best of friends, and that in such cases every man has to fight for his own hand.

I know that you'll come to look at this in the proper spirit. It isn't as if she ever cared for you or could care for you, and, after all, I'm only taking what's my own. I ask you to remember this, and not to think harshly of us.

You know the governor's been thinking pretty well of me since he found I was actually working, so we'll end the honeymoon in New York and be taken back into the fold. Now that you've made such a howling success, I feel easier about leaving in this abrupt fashion, which, after all, we think is best. I know I can be easily replaced.

I haven't forgotten your many kindnesses, and I hope I may always subscribe myself, your old pal, HORACE STUVEYSANT.

Lorimer read the letter through a second time, as if to make sure that his eyes were not deceiving him; then he folded it and placed it in his pocket.

He sat down, passive, immobile, and stared at nothing in particular. So the third, last, and greatest blow of all had fallen! For after this nothing mattered and he could jeer at fate, daring it to do its worst.

Meanwhile, the Invincibles had returned to find their home a heap of glowing ruins; and Magee, after a futile hunt for Lorimer about the town, ended at the other's boarding house. Here, amid all the excitement, he found Lorimer sitting calmly pulling at an empty pipe as if nothing had happened. So stolid and apathetic was he that Magee was forced to believe he knew nothing of what, by this time, almost the whole county was discussing. But Lorimer soon undeceived him.

"Well," exclaimed Magee grimly, "I admire your nerve. You certainly take it mighty easy. Have you heard any talk of it bein' a fixed job?"

"No, I wasn't talking with any one."

"Well, I have. The fire was started in half a dozen places, and oil used. Pop Stryker left about six to do some buying in the town, and the fire bug must have watched his chance. It was a carefully planned job, all right; they took the day we was playing out of town and when you was in Albany."

Lorimer made no comment, and the other eyed him sharply. "Say, what's the matter with you?" he asked anxiously.

Here Lorimer happened to shift his position so that the lamplight fell full upon his face, and Magee exclaimed: "Say, you're all bunged up! Was you hurt in the fire?"

Lorimer shook his head. He spoke apathetically: "I was held up in the park by Clark and two other men and robbed of every cent——"

"What!" yelled Magee, springing from his chair.

"Yes, it's a fact. The bank was shut when I got here. I loafed away the time in Albany—— No, I haven't been drinking, Magee; I was perfectly sober. I only wish I had been drinking; there's some excuse for a fellow making a cursed fool of himself. You see, I should have taken the balance in a draft. I needn't have lost more than the pay roll—— And I should have returned here before dark, before the bank shut. It's all my own fault. Oh, yes, it's all my own fault—everything!"

"And did Clark make his get-away?" demanded Magee.

"Oh, yes. I put up the best fight I knew how, but they were too much for me. It happened about a couple of hours ago, I guess. I don't know how

long I lay in the park. I wasn't expecting anything of the kind."

"Now ain't you done nothin'? Ain't you even told th' cops?"

Lorimer shook his head wearily. "I meant to, of course, but the fire put it out of my head. Anyway, it's too late, and they won't be able to do anything; they never can."

The other stared at him, and then looked away. "These are a couple of awful wallops; one of 'em would have been a plenty. An' just when we was comin' along so fine. It smells to me like a rotten fixed job all through. They must have known you was bringin' the coin from Albany, and they must have laid for you; it can't have been no accident. I'll lay a bet Delaney and his bunch had a hand in it; we was comin' along too fine to suit 'em. Burnin' you out and takin' your bank roll at the same time——" He swore and walked up and down the room.

Lorimer shrugged. "Yes, it was a fixed job, I suppose, but if Delaney had a hand in it—and I'm not saying he had—we'll never be able to prove it."

"Won't we?" asked Magee through his teeth. "We'll see. He could have got that guy Clark to turn both tricks. But we should be doin' something instead of chewin' the sock. What are you goin' to do?"

"Do? Why, nothing."

"Nothing!" shouted the other, amazed. "Are you goin' to lay down an' take this? Not if I know you you ain't!"

"What can I do?"

"Fight!" said Magee viciously. "Fight their bloody heads off! We'll muddle through somehow. You can't mean you're goin' to cave in and sell out after puttin' up the fight we done?"

"Look here," replied Lorimer patiently and in the same tired voice. "You don't seem to realize how we stand. I'm cleaned out; I haven't a cent. There's a pay roll due to-morrow, and in two weeks I have to pay a couple of thousand on the stands. I haven't the money to rent another field—even if I could find one suitable—while we're fixing up the old one. And I haven't the credit to fix up the old one——"

"Stop right there!" interrupted Magee. "Ain't you got a winnin' team back of you? Ain't that worth somethin'? This town ain't the only one on the map, and Wishart an' his bunch ain't the only guys with money. You've got a payin' proposition, and, though I ain't no Wall Street shark, I'll bet you can get the loan of all the coin you want. All you got to do is scout round for it. Anybody's ready to back a payin' proposition——"

"At a price," interrupted Lorimer. These arguments of Magee's had been precisely his own not so long ago; he had told himself all this and believed it. But now everything was changed, and the words seemed futile, empty, blatant. "At a price," he repeated grimly. "The price that capital always demands. They'll grab control, and I'll be working for a dead horse. No, I bit off more than I could chew, that's about the size of it. I hadn't enough capital to swing the thing. I hadn't enough to pay even for insurance, and when I had I tried to save money the wrong way by letting the insurance slide, I took a chance and lost out."

"Aw, you ain't talkin' natural," protested Magee, distressed. "What's happened to your nerve? You ain't lost out at all. You made a big success, and you know it. You've run up against a cold deck an' a rotten deal which ain't your fault. That's somethin' that can happen to anybody. Look here, kid," he continued earnestly, adopting unconsciously the familiar, affectionate title of the sporting world, "you don't want to let this down you. Don't you worry none about the pay roll; the boys are awful strong for you, an' they'll wait for their money. There ain't one of

'em but what will get up behind you an' see this thing out to the finish. It's you who put 'em where they are to-day, an' they know it. Why, kid," he continued eagerly, "we'll breeze through with bells on, for we've got a winnin' team an' they'll stick——"

"It's no use, Magee." Lorimer looked at the other with tired eyes and an air of utter weariness. "It's good of you and the boys; I know you'll stick and make all the sacrifices necessary, and, believe me, I appreciate it. But it's no use. I know I could raise the money somehow if I set out to do it. I know I could get out of this hole, deep as it is, if I had the will power. But I haven't, Magee. I haven't it in me. I've made my fight, the best I was capable of, and I haven't another in me. I'm —I'm ashamed to confess it, but it's so. I'm *through*. I want to get away from Palestine and—and forget there was ever such a place." He turned away abruptly with clenched hands and twitching lips.

"Aw, say," expostulated Magee, pausing and scratching the cannon-ball head, at loss for words. "Say, I guess that beatin' up you got has knocked you off your base, all right," he added, brightening up as this explanation occurred to him. "We won't say nothin' more about this, kid, for you ain't natural and you can't see it right. You'll feel different in the mornin'. What you want to do is to take a hot bath an' a good rubdown an' then hit the hay an' forget it. I know you ain't a quitter. You leave this to me for to-night. I'll scout round an' see about rentin' a field or findin' some kind of a place. Th' fans will turn out to see the team play even if it was on a dump heap, an' don't you forget it. Th' boys are right behind you, kid, so don't you do no worryin'. You'll feel all right in th' mornin', see if you don't. You'll be there with all th' old pep."

And so, because Lorimer felt the futility of further argument, because he could not bring himself to explain his true ailment—that of the spirit and not the body—because he felt too tired to talk, he made no effort to correct the other's erroneous belief; and Magee, after these crude but none the less sincere expressions of sympathy, took his leave.

Alone, Lorimer smiled grimly at the idea of his feeling better in the morning; though there was no doubt that the vicious assault in the park, coupled with reaction from the day's excitement, was taking its toll of his mental and physical stamina. But the real wound, the only one that really counted, went immeasurably deeper, and it was neither temporary nor superficial. He saw clearly that Miss Walker had been the focus of all his endeavors, and that with her out of the picture forever he lacked the heart and will to tackle anew the uphill fight. He must learn to forget before he was of any use to himself or the world. It was all right to talk of courage and the never-say-die spirit, but to-night he was absolutely barren of both. He doubted if he would ever know them again.

It was here, while he sat brooding, that temptation, born of his wounds and desperation, came upon Harry Lorimer. Why not marry Phyllis Sands? The question leaped into his numbed brain unheralded, unasked. After all, why not, indeed? Love was an elusive quantity he need no longer look for nor expect in marriage. He had sought for it in vain. Marriage with Phyllis Sands would solve all his financial difficulties, and it would be some consolation to show Delaney and his crowd—even though he did not believe them responsible for the robbery or fire—that he would win out, after all. What could he not do with one hundred and fifty thousand—his half of the inheritance? It would be a sop to his wounded pride to show Miss Walker—or, rather, Mrs.

Horace Stuveysant—and her husband that their hasty and secret marriage meant less than nothing to him. Temptation urged many specious arguments. He would be doing what his uncle wished. Phyllis Sands was an admirable and lovely girl in all respects, a girl any man would be proud to call his wife. It was not improbable that she cared for him; enough, at all events, to promise success if he threw his heart and soul into her conquest and professed a passion he could never feel for her. For love begets love. It was here that Lorimer revolted. No, the whole thing was utterly impossible, and, aside from any question of fair play toward Phyllis Sands, whose friendship he esteemed, he could not act a lie, and he would not sell himself, whatever the price or his necessity. It was impossible. And so he put aside the question forever.

The entrance of the landlady at this moment obviated further thought. "There's a man downstairs, Mr. Lorimer, who wants to see you."

Visions of tedious newspaper interviews, expressions of sympathy from local gossips whose real object was to worm out inside information they could hawk about the town, suggested themselves inevitably to Lorimer, and he grew irritable. "I don't want to see any one, no matter who it is. You know that. Tell him I'm—I'm taking a bath. Say I've gone to bed or New York—anything."

"It's no use, Mr. Lorimer; really it ain't. I says you didn't want to see anybody, but he insists. He says he's a detective, and that he won't keep you more'n a minute. I couldn't get rid of him."

Remembering what Magee had said about the talk of it being the work of an incendiary, Lorimer believed this visit connected with the fire at Lorimer Park. "All right," he said wearily, "show him up. I suppose he's a local man?"

"I'm sure I don't know," replied the landlady. "I never seen him before."

CHAPTER XVII.

DISCOVERIES.

The visitor proved to be a large, unbuttoned gentleman, and the manipulation of a frayed toothpick seemed necessary to the accomplishment of his by no means agile mental processes; for, during the entire interview, the said article never left his stubby fingers. He intimated that his name was Steincamp and that he belonged to Albany headquarters, while it soon became evident that he had no interest whatever in the recent fire at Lorimer Park.

Indeed, Mr. Steincamp appeared interested solely in photography, for, after a perfunctory greeting, he produced the reproduction of a cabinet photo and handed it to Lorimer with the laconic query: "Know him?"

Lorimer looked and hesitated. The picture was that of a dark, handsome man with a Vandyke beard; and the eyes, if nothing else, seemed familiar.

"I don't know," he replied, puzzled. "I feel I should know him."

"Mebbe this'll help you out," said Mr. Steincamp, in his offhand way, shoving another picture under Lorimer's nose.

It was a picture of Mortimer Conyers, Conyers minus the beard; Conyers as he had always known him.

"Them chin creepers make a world o' difference," remarked Mr. Steincamp, with professional admiration. "Never seen such a difference in anybody I can remember. Friend of yours, ain't he?"

"He was. His name is Conyers."

"His alias, you mean. His right name is Carstairs. Did you know him in Pittsburgh?"

Carstairs! Pittsburgh!

"Perhaps we'll get on much faster, Mr. Steincamp, if you'll state your busi-

ness," said Lorimer, his voice a trifle unsteady.

"Sure!" nodded the other. "Well, the Pittsburgh police want Carstairs; they've wanted him for over a year. They found that, after going West, he'd come to New York and was living under the name of Conyers, the shaving of his chin creepers making him mighty hard to identify. Last month they located him in Albany and asked us to put the nippers on him; but it was too late, for he'd left town. I've been looking for him ever since, hearing of him here and losing him there. You see, he's wearing the chin creepers again, and that makes it hard because folks that ought to know him don't. They ain't looking for whiskers, see?"

Mr. Steincamp paused long enough to transfer the toothpick to the other side of his wide mouth.

"Well," he continued, "to-day I'd pretty good reason to believe our friend was heading up the line, so I comes over. I seen the chief here, and he tells me he ain't heard nothing, but that if any one should know anything about Carstairs it's yourself, for that you and him was pals in New York. That right?"

Lorimer nodded. "I met Conyers in New York—I didn't know his right name was Carstairs—a little over a year ago. I never knew he was wanted by the police."

"Yes?" commented Mr. Steincamp, never removing his stolid gaze from the other. His deductions were slow, but, as a rule, accurate.

"Conyers—or Carstairs—and I quarreled about two months ago," added Lorimer, "and I haven't seen him since. What is he wanted for?"

"Oh, a small enough business—grand larceny. There's an assault against him on the books, too. He's one of these fellows that keep shaving the law till some day, when they ain't careful, they stack up against it and bust wide open. He run off with another man's wife from New York, too—all that kind of stuff. I've got his record here," slapping his pocket. "You're sure you ain't seen him round? Couldn't gimme a line where to find him, eh?"

"I could not. I haven't heard anything about him. You see——" Lorimer paused, then added calmly: "You see, I happen to be the man whose wife Carstairs went off with. I've just found that out from you. So I'm not trying to shield him."

Mr. Steincamp failed to look surprised. Nothing ever surprised him.

"That so?" he merely remarked. "Never knew he was the fellow, eh?"

"No; he was a chance acquaintance, that's all. I'd never seen him before, and, of course, thought his name was Conyers. All that you've told me is news. Is—is he married?"

"No. I understand there was a woman, though. Let me see, her name was Nina—Nina——"

"Farrington?"

"That's it!" nodded the detective. "He traveled with her until she threw him over. She was a bad egg, too."

Lorimer turned away.

"Well, I'll be dodging along," announced Mr. Steincamp, methodically wiping the toothpick and placing it behind his ear. "If you happen to hear anything about our friend, just pass it on. He's around here somewheres, and I guess I'll have the nippers on him before long. He ain't going to travel much farther."

He accepted a cigar, nodded in his offhand style, and said good night.

How small the world was, after all, reflected Lorimer. Conyers was Carstairs, and he had never known. Had Carstairs known? From the beginning the name "Lorimer" must have suggested inevitably something to him. What a jest of fate for them to meet in such a manner! And he had treated Carstairs like a brother. And Nina

Farrington! So the divorce had not benefited her and she had resumed her maiden name. "A bad egg, too," was how the detective had callously described her. It was impossible to think of her fate without emotion, even though her name no longer had power to stir anything but his compassion. He had sought to find excuses for her, he had sought to defend her before Miss Walker, but, after all was said and done—well, it seemed she had not even proved loyal to Carstairs. Had the entire fault been Carstairs', as he, Lorimer, always believed? Strange he should hear of these two now, at the moment when his own life lay for the second time in ruins. What a mess all three of them had made of their lives!

Somewhere a clock struck, and Lorimer roused himself with an effort. It seemed ages since he was parading up and down the Albany station waiting for the present Mrs. Horace Stuyvesant; ages since the fight in the park and the fire; yet the night was young, and he had work to do. He must go down to the office and wind up his shattered affairs. Lorimer Park must be sold at public auction or taken over by the mortgagees, and his small surviving interest would be enough to meet the morrow's pay roll and a few minor debts. The contracting firm that built the stands and otherwise improved the ball grounds must wait for their balance. Yes, there was work to do, work he would much rather shirk.

He took a devious way to the office in order to avoid publicity; but nevertheless, near such an out-of-the-way neighborhood as the freight depot, came face to face with none other than Mr. Peter Delaney. And for the moment Mr. Delaney's famous facial disturbance failed to work.

"Why, hello, Lorimer!" he exclaimed at length. "Sort of startled me, you did. What are you doing down here?"

"On my way to the office," said Lorimer apathetically. "I don't want to be stopped and sympathized with every few yards."

Mr. Delaney wagged his head and looked solemn. "It's tough; mighty hard luck, when you were coming along so well." He spoke with some sympathy, but there was not a spark of that commodity in his hard, gray eye. "Them stands will cost something to replace. You hadn't even settled for 'em, had you?"

"No," said Lorimer. He laughed suddenly, mirthlessly. "I guess I'm through with the baseball proposition."

"You're wise," said Delaney. "There ain't the money in it people think, and you can't do anythin' without capital. I guess you've seen that. Accidents like this fire to-night are always croppin' up, and you've got to be ready for 'em, otherwise you don't figure nowhere."

Lorimer said nothing.

"Look here," added Delaney, "if you're goin' to sell, I'll give you a better price for your interest than you'll get at a sale or from the mortgagees." He had become quite genial. "There shouldn't be any hard feelings between you and me, Lorimer. I guess mebbe you thought my deal with Conyers was a frame-up; well, it wasn't, and I give you my word for it. I acted in perfectly good faith, and I didn't find out till later the sort of crook he was."

Still Lorimer said nothing.

"So," pursued Delaney briskly, "I'll make you a fairer offer than you'll get anywhere else. If you don't feel like talkin' business now, suppose I come round an' see you in the morning?"

"All right," replied Lorimer absently. "Of course, I'll need all the money I can get, and it may as well be from you, Mr. Delaney, as any one else."

He stood for perhaps a minute staring after the Delaney figure as, with a genial word of farewell, the other waddled off into the night. His was not a

suspicious nature, yet at the first there had been something strange about the Delaney manner; his excuse about being startled seemed lame, for by no means was he a person easily startled by unexpectedly meeting any one in the dark. And what had brought him down at that hour to the now closed and deserted freight depot? Yet not deserted, for he heard the slow clanging of a bell, and presently a slow-moving string of "flats" cut dimly across his vision.

To reach the office by this roundabout route, Lorimer must cross the railroad, and now he waited patiently, his thoughts still on Delaney. Evidently the passing train was a fast freight—he knew there was one due at that hour—and had stopped for water at the Palestine tanks, for it was gathering momentum every second; and soon the red tail light of the caboose whisked into view, vanishing in a cloud of cindery dust.

He started across, when suddenly there came the sound of flying feet, and up the tracks from the direction of the water tanks came a shadowy figure at top speed. Here an arc light near the freight depot shed its violet rays so that Lorimer could see the runner and, in turn, be seen.

As he paused, wondering what had happened, a voice boomed out from the runner's back:

"Hey! Nail that guy!"

It was Magee's foghorn voice, and Lorimer, waiting for nothing further, started forward on the jump. The man tried to dodge, but was brought crashing to the rails by a flying tackle that knocked the last ounce of breath from him.

"Good enough, kid!" panted Magee, hopping up out of the darkness and recognizing Lorimer. "That was somethin' like! Thought you was home in bed, and here you are with all the old pep. Let's have a slant at our friend."

"Clark!" exclaimed Lorimer, turning the face of the but half-conscious prisoner to the light.

"Sure!" nodded Magee, expectorating freely and using his sleeve to wipe away the blood from a cut over one of his countersunk eyes. "Spotted him just as he was hoppin' that side-door Pullman. His pals walloped me an' got away. Thanks to my game leg, this bird would have, too, if you hadn't happened to be right where you was. I guess luck's breakin' our way, kid."

"But how did you find him? How did you happen to be down here?"

"Why, I happened here on purpose," replied Mr. Magee, as if it were the most natural thing in the world. "How does a guy like that always pull foot after a dirty job? Why, by a side-door Pullman, of course. The only way he could hop th' town was by freight. He knew you'd recognized him and that he'd have to make a long jump. Of course there was the chance that he'd gone already, but I figgered on him waitin' for the fast through freight; I knew when she was due, and that they always water here. So did he and his pals, you bet. Then there was a fourth guy who left 'em just before the freight pulled in; I couldn't see him plain, but, say, he walked like Pete Delaney—you know, like a duck in a thunderstorm."

"It was Delaney," said Lorimer. "I'm sure of it." And he told of meeting the other.

Magee cackled hoarsely, and so well pleased was he that almost unconsciously he fetched Mr. Clark a resounding kick in that convenient part of the anatomy where the boot is usually applied.

"Get up, you heap of misery!" he ordered peremptorily, and Mr. Clark staggered to dazed, unwilling feet. Then Magee, taking him by the collar, ran him across the tracks and stood him up against the wall of the freight station, where he was exposed to the pitiless glare of the arc light.

"Say, go easy, will you?" wailed Mr. Clark at this rough handling. "Me wing's broke. Honest. It doubled up under me when I was throwed." And he looked accusingly at Lorimer.

"Mebbe it ain't the only thing about you that will be broke before I'm done with you," said Magee unsympathetically. "Come across with the coin you swiped—every case note!"

Lorimer stood by, saying nothing, for it was quite evident Mr. Magee was capable of handling the situation himself; evident also that Biff Clark, tough gentleman though he was, entertained a lively respect for the other.

"I ain't got it; not a cent of it," he protested earnestly. "We didn't make a split, and one of the other two fellows has it. That's straight. Go through me and see."

"You bet I will!" said Magee darkly, and proceeded to search the other from head to foot. But Mr. Clark's person yielded no spoils. Then Magee, holding him by the collar, raised a menacing fist.

"You didn't cache it, eh? Talk straight, now." The hamlike fist completed the threat, and Clark wilted visibly, breaking forth into a storm of whining protestations.

"I believe he's speaking the truth," put in Lorimer.

Magee nodded. "What's the names of these two friends of yours? What do they look like? No lying, now! Mr. Lorimer will know if you're talking straight, for he seen them in the park when he seen you."

This was taking liberties with the truth; but, assisted by the threat of that menacing fist, the bluff worked, Clark replying with evident sincerity if unwillingness.

"I know them as Simpson and O'Keefe," he said sullenly. "I don't know if those are their right names. They're a couple of bums I met in Diamond Jerry's saloon. Simpson is the one with the swag." Then he gave a fairly illuminative description of the gentleman in question.

"And where was you booked?" pursued Magee inexorably. "New York?"

"Yes; but of course, since they know they've been spotted, they'll leave somewhere along the line."

"The best we can do," put in Lorimer, "is wire Albany and New York. Now look here, Clark, I'm not after the small fry; I want the man higher up. I want the name of the man back of you in this thing."

The other did his best to look astonished. "There wasn't none. You seen the three of us—Simpson, O'Keefe and——"

"There's no use lying, Clark. There was more back of it than mere highway robbery. Mr. Magee saw Delaney with you here to-night, and I saw him myself——"

"I don't know what you're talking about," said Clark sullenly. "There wasn't any other but us three."

"Leave this to me, kid," spoke up Magee grimly, addressing Lorimer. "Just take a walk down the platform, for this thing ain't in your line; when you return you'll find our friend willin' to talk all over himself. I'm one of the best can openers you ever seen. Leave it to me."

At this the sweat broke out on the ex-manager, and he glanced fearfully at Magee's bulldog face.

"Well, I'm—I'm willing to tell all I know," he said jerkily, "but it ain't much."

"That's better," nodded Magee, softly rubbing his huge hands. "Spit her out clean. It was Delaney, huh?"

"Yes; but don't expect me to prove it. I only know that this fellow Simpson was the leader and that he comes from Albany. It was Simpson that Delaney met to-night near the freight depot, and O'Keefe and I wasn't allowed to hear what passed. Simpson was boss, and he told us to keep down by the water

tanks; I only seen Delaney a long ways off, but I knew him by his walk—though I won't take my oath to it in court. I didn't know for sure until you said he'd been here."

"You knew there was some one back of Simpson, the leader, but didn't know it was Delaney?" This from Lorimer.

"That's right," replied Clark, with apparent sincerity. "Of course I thought of Delaney, for I knew how he wanted Lorimer Park. But he didn't trust me, I guess, or thought it better to have an outsider like Simpson pull off this game. Mebbe Simpson and O'Keefe are old henchmen of his, or he has a hold over 'em. I don't know the rights of it, for they didn't tell me nothing.

"Anyway, I was hard up. I had it in for you, and when Simpson sounded me about the job, I fell for it. He said there was big money for all of us, and no risk; that he knew a fellow with a pull who would see everything went smooth and who could get us out of any trouble. Simpson knew all about you going to Albany for the pay roll, and I guess mebbe he could tell you something about the first robbery when the safe turned out to be a bloomer. I'd no hand in that, for I didn't know Simpson then. And, understand, I don't know positive he did it; it's only a guess.

"Well," he concluded, "the rest you know. Simpson was to make the split in New York, and if you land him you'll get the money and the rights of the whole business—if he'll talk."

Lorimer nodded. "Magee, I'll see the chief and attend to the wiring of Albany and New York. Then I have to go to the office for a while. For the present I intend to say nothing of Clark's part in this business—not even to the police. I want it kept a strict secret. I want you to take him by a roundabout way to your home and keep him there; let no one see him. I'll be with you later."

"I get you," said Magee briefly. "Hey, you, shake a leg!" And, a muscular arm entwined securely around that of the cowed and dispirted prisoner, a massive hand twisted unobtrusively in the other's cuff, he marched off, whistling.

Lorimer had an interview with the chief of police, mentioning nothing concerning the ex-manager of the Invincibles; and then went to the office, where, to his surprise, he found the door slightly open.

He entered quietly. The place was in darkness, yet not so dark as to hide a kneeling figure before the safe which had replaced the one put out of commission during the abortive burglary. The kneeling figure was that of a man, who sprang to his feet on Lorimer's almost silent entrance. Something gleamed in his hand.

Lorimer laughed with unaffected amusement.

"My friend," he said, "you're just a little bit late. For my own sake I hope you'll find some money in that safe. Don't mind me; go to it, and may fortune reward you. Perhaps you'll do better with some light."

He switched on the wall electric near which he happened to be standing, and confronted Mortimer Conyers—or, to give him his right name, Carstairs. Carstairs plus the chin creepers Mr. Steincamp had so admiringly described; Carstairs plus a revolver.

CHAPTER XVIII.

HOW A CERTAIN GENTLEMAN ARRIVED TOO LATE.

They stared heavily at each other for a long moment. Carstairs' beard was no longer the trim Vandyke of the photo, but ragged and unkempt; his clothes were shabby, his eyes bloodshot, his face and hands stained black with grime. All the potential and brutal qualities of the man had now gained physical expression, and he looked at

Lorimer as he had looked when grasping the poker during their last memorable interview.

He raised the revolver. "You start a racket, and I'll——" The accompanying gesture completed the threat.

Lorimer's thoughts, if not his eyes, strayed momentarily to Miss Walker's desk; he wondered if Stuveysant's "young cannon" were still there. Very likely not. He had no idea of attempting to defend his property—for there was virtually none to defend—but instinct told him he was facing a greater danger, for Carstairs seemed capable of anything; his actions were evidently prompted by an abiding hatred, the cause of which he, Lorimer, had begun to perceive dimly. At another time the situation would have proved much more stimulating than it now was, for he had come through so much in a few short hours that his nerves failed to respond to this new shock. He was genuinely unaffected, almost bored. What did even life itself matter when he had lost all that made life worth the living?

So he sat down and smiled as Carstairs went over and locked the door. It was late, the shades were down, and it seemed highly improbable that any one would appear to interrupt them.

"Well," began Carstairs, with his old, sneering smile, "I wasn't exactly expecting you, Mr. Lorimer; but now that you're here it's just as well; it'll save me the trouble of cracking that safe."

"There's nothing in it. It's not worth opening."

The other smiled. "No? And yet this is Friday, isn't it? It sticks in my mind you always brought the pay roll on Friday. Jump!" he finished, with a sudden change of tone. "Open it!"

Lorimer shrugged. "Oh, very well; nothing like being shown, I suppose."

He arose negligently, set the combination, and swung back the door. "Help yourself," he yawned.

Carstairs, weapon in hand, kept a wary eye on him while he conducted the search. But this was needless, for Lorimer had returned to his seat, where he sat passively, a look of utter indifference in his tired eyes.

"You're only wasting time," he said, with a faint smile. "You've been beaten to it long ago. I was held up and robbed to-night of not only the pay roll but every cent I owned. I suppose you won't believe me, but it doesn't matter whether you do or don't."

The other stared. There was that in Lorimer's face, in his words and manner, which compelled belief. Slowly he closed the safe door and approached, a savage joy in his somber eyes.

"So some one got back at you, eh?" he said. "Well, I'm glad. I don't mind losing the money, so long as *you've* lost it."

Lorimer made no reply, and the other added: "That was a mighty nice little fire you had up at the ball grounds." He leaned forward, sneering. "Would you like to know who to thank for it?"

Lorimer looked at him with mild interest.

"I'm not much of a detective," he said, "but from your appearance and the faint smell of smoke off you, and gasoline, also from the general good will you seem to bear me, I should say you knew something about it."

"I know a whole lot about it," replied Carstairs. "I set it and lit it—that's how much I know. You can thank no one but me." He leaned back as if to contemplate the effect of his words.

There was none. Lorimer showed neither emotion nor interest.

"Do you hear?" pursued Carstairs, raising his voice. "It was *I* who burned you out. And now it seems you've lost your last cent, too. That is better than I expected, for at the most I only hoped to deprive you of the pay roll. I take off my hat to whoever held you up; I didn't expect such help."

Still Lorimer said nothing.

"So then we may say that you're ruined, eh?" pursued Carstairs. "You were always so confident, Lorimer; so cocksure of your own great abilities." He lay back and laughed. "You were going to do so much; yes, you were going to do so much—and this is the result. Burned out and robbed of your last cent! You must pardon me if I seem rather festive over it; it isn't often in this world that one's dearest hopes and wishes are realized so fully."

Lorimer offered no reply, and the old, menacing look returned to the other's eyes. "You take it mighty coolly, don't you?" he sneered. "Always prided yourself on your nerve, eh? Well, we'll see what your nerve's worth before I'm done with you. You'll be interested enough before the finish. My little debt is by no means settled. Have you an idea what it is?"

"You talk like the tragedian of a Bowery theater," said Lorimer, with a faint, amused smile. "But you always were strong on heroics, Carstairs."

Carstairs started at mention of the name; his face flushed darkly, and the veins stood out on his thick neck like whipcord.

"Oh, yes," added Lorimer, "you see I know your right name. I know you're the person whom I've to thank for my necessary divorce."

"I am!" replied Carstairs fiercely. "What are you going to do about it?"

"Why, nothing." Lorimer lighted his pipe and looked calmly at the other. "The time for doing anything is passed. If I'd succeeded in locating you, say, two years ago, I suppose I'd have done my best to kill you. But I've got over that. The affair has ceased to interest me."

"Oh, has it? And you think it has ceased to interest *me?*" demanded Carstairs, with an oath. He put his face down close to the other's. "It's you who made me what I've become, and now you're getting the benefit of it. I knew Nina Farrington long before you ever did. I was engaged to her; she was mine before you and your filthy money stole her away——"

"That's nonsense. There was no stealing about it. I never knew she was engaged to you—if she was. I never heard your name mentioned——"

"You lie! You knew all about it, but you got round her parents, you and your filthy money! You didn't care for any one, think of any one but your beastly self. Well, you married her—and I got her away from you. But you and your filthy money had ruined her; she was no longer the woman I had known—nor was I the same man. You'd given her a taste of luxuries—luxuries I couldn't supply; and to supply them I had to turn thief. Yes, thief! Then she left me. And it's *you* I can thank for it all! You ruined her as you ruined me!"

"Really? This is certainly a surprise," remarked Lorimer, with his faint, bitter smile. "Rather than being the injured party, as I've always imagined, I suddenly find myself a villain responsible for the wrecking of two innocent lives. I think no wronged ex-husband ever found himself in such a unique situation. You're ingenious, Carstairs, but I wonder you'd bother about mutilating the truth. Your hatred for me is the hatred of the person who has injured another who never injured him. In reality it's not me you hate, but your own abominable actions."

Carstairs made a fierce, menacing gesture. "What I've said is the truth, and you know it! I hated you before I ever saw you, and I had reason if ever a man had. You drove me into all forms of dishonor. Do you think our meeting that night in the Hoffman House bar was accidental? Not much! I'd found out all about you. Do you think it was solely for profit that I introduced you to Sontag's? I meant to leave you a drunken beggar in the gut-

ter—*that's* what your filthy money would have done for you—and I'd have succeeded if your uncle hadn't died and left you this property. Even then I would have succeeded only for this interfering fool of a stenographer, Miss Walker. But I've succeeded all the same. You've lost your last cent. You're ruined! You're a pauper!"

Lorimer knocked out his pipe. "Yes, I'm all that," he said calmly. "You, and others, have succeeded in everything but making me a drunkard—and perhaps that may even happen if I live long enough," eying indifferently the weapon in the other's hand. "I don't know if what you've said is the truth; if so, then you and I have both been the victims of an unfortunate type of woman, for she never told me she loved you, and I never even knew your name until she mentioned it in the farewell letter she left. Whether or not you believe this is immaterial. At all events the past is past so far as I'm concerned, and I can't get excited about it any more, for I've no longer anger or interest." The faint, amused smile returned to his lips as he concluded: "Among all the other things you say I've made you become I don't want to add that of murderer."

Carstairs looked at the weapon he held as if for the first time in doubt what use to make of it. From potential tragedy the situation was threatening to develop into farce. What can one do if the prospective victim refuses to be frightened or even interested over his threatened demise? To shoot a man down in cold blood is not so easy as it reads. Besides, everything Lorimer had said bore the indelible stamp of truth.

"You see," continued Lorimer, a smile of iron in his tired eyes, "the fact of the matter is, Carstairs, that it's not in your power to hurt me. You've come too late for your revenge. Nothing you could devise could be half as bad as what's happened to me already. Frankly, I haven't the interest to care what you do. There's a loaded revolver in this desk," he added, pointing to the article near which he was seated, "and I could have managed to get it out long ago if I'd thought it worth while. Now, if you've decided to shoot, fire away; if not, you'll excuse me, for I've work to do. And, by the way, whatever you decide to do I'd do it in a hurry if I were you, for there's a detective in town looking for you. Oh, yes, there is; it was from him I learned your right name and several other things. His name is Steincamp, and you'll know him by the toothpick he wears. I suppose, as a law-abiding citizen, it's very reprehensible of me to tip you off—and I really don't know why I've done it. Perhaps because to-night I haven't even the ambition to have any hard feelings. But it's a straight tip, and I advise you to go while the going's good." He leaned back, folded his arms, and looked placidly at the other.

Carstairs hesitated a long moment, staring fixedly at Lorimer, then slipped the revolver into his pocket, and strode to the door. He turned and gave a short laugh. "I guess you're right," he said slowly. "You're not worth shooting."

He opened the door, and turned again for a final look at Lorimer, who had not moved, but still sat passively, the same air of utter indifference stamped in every line of his slack figure. "I'll tell you one thing," said Carstairs grimly. "Your nerve has saved your life to-night." He closed the door, and stepped into the vestibule.

Instantly Lorimer heard an oath and the sound of a fierce scuffle, followed by a pistol shot. The sound galvanized him to action, and, kicking over his chair, he tore open the door and ran out on the sidewalk. There his suspicions were verified, for Mr. Steincamp, the blood running down his stolid face from a bul-

let which had furrowed his scalp, but with the toothpick triumphantly in its place behind his ear, was grappling with Carstairs. And even as Lorimer appeared the burly detective snapped the "nippers" on the other's wrists. "Been laying for you, young feller," he said matter of factly. "Now come along quietly or I'll beat your head off!"

Late as it was an excited crowd had gathered, and the last Lorimer saw of Carstairs he was being piloted through it by the capable and by no means gentle hand of Mr. Steincamp. Then Lorimer turned to reënter the office and came face to face with the former Miss Walker.

CHAPTER XIX.

EXPLANATIONS.

She was breathless, white-faced.

"Oh, Mr. Lorimer!" she exclaimed almost tearfully. "What has happened? I've just heard about the—the fire——" Her words trailed off, and she looked at him piteously, at his haggard, impassive face and hard, hard eyes.

They had entered the office to escape from the crowd, and Lorimer now closed the door mechanically, the familiar action lending him some composure. For to suddenly find her, whom he believed far away, close at hand was a shock that momentarily unnerved him. This meeting was something for which he had not bargained, and it brought home his loss with redoubled force. Against his will, and despite his fierce self-contempt, his hungry eyes feasted greedily on her every but too well-remembered features—the vivid lips, the amber curls, the speaking eyes which he had thought fatuously held so much promise for him. With an effort he mastered his emotion, steeling himself to meet those eyes calmly.

"Why," he said, with a forced laugh, "nothing very much has happened, Mrs. Stuveysant——"

"Mrs.—Mrs. What?" She had colored hotly, and was eying him, amazed.

"Mrs. Stuveysant," he repeated, looking his own astonishment at her surprise.

"Why—why—how dare you call me that!" she exclaimed. Her lips began to quiver, her eyes to fill. "I—I think it a very poor time for joking—and I think it a very poor sort of joke in any case——"

"But—but you were married to Mr. Stuveysant this morning! You know you were."

"I know nothing of the kind!" she cried, stamping her foot. "I think *I* should know whether I'm married or not! Are you insane, Mr. Lorimer, or —or am I?"

"But your marriage—it's all here in the letter——"

"What letter?"

"The letter Stuveysant sent me today." Lorimer, with wildly beating heart, fumbled in his pocket. His fingers were shaking as if with palsy, his breath choking, and he seemed to be acting like one in a dream. "The letter," he repeated. "Here it is—see, there it is in black and white."

Wondering, she came close to him, so close that a vagrant strand of hair brushed his lips, every fiber of his being thrilling to the contact. She read the letter slowly, and once or twice the shadow of a smile flickered in her dark eyes. At length she glanced up, the picture of outraged innocence.

"Why, Mr. Lorimer, this must be one of Mr. Stuveysant's jokes! You know his idea of humor——"

"Do you mean you're not married?" cried Lorimer hoarsely.

"Dear me, no; not to my knowledge," she replied in a very small voice, folding her diminutive hands and eying him meekly. "It isn't leap year, so—so I'm still waiting to be—to be asked."

The words ended in a little gasp, for Lorimer had suddenly pounced on her,

picking her up bodily and crushing her to him as if to hold her against the world. "Sweetheart!" was all he could say, and this very brokenly.

Be it recorded that, rather than manifesting the proper degree of conventional maidenly surprise and indignation at this startling behavior, Miss Walker's two arms, with all the pleasure and boldness in the world, went about Lorimer's neck, and she pulled down his lips to hers. She was half crying, half laughing. "Dear, is it really true? I thought—I thought I would have to do the proposing, after all!"

Strangely enough at this point a hiatus occurred in the dialogue, and when at length Miss Walker was permitted to use the vivid lips for the very necessary and useful purpose of articulation, the amber curls were in scandalous disorder, her cheeks crimson, and her eyes brilliant as twin diamonds.

"You're a very small person, after all, to cause such fearful havoc," declared Lorimer. And he picked her up and deposited her carefully on the top of her own desk.

"True, there's not much of me," replied Miss Walker humbly, "but what there is I can recommend—to you."

Of course it was only a variation of the same old love story which the patient world has been listening to for ages, yet it was very new and wonderful to them, and this most logical, inevitable happening seemed marvelous and beyond belief. It was positively incredible, staggering credulity that of the earth's teeming millions they two should have met and loved.

At length Miss Walker began to ask innumerable questions, nor would she agree to answer any of Lorimer's till he had told her all about the robbery, the fire, and the visit of Carstairs. And now he laughed as he recited his woes. How trivial, inconsequential they seemed!

"So we're ruined," he concluded cheerfully, "but only for the time being. Nothing matters, and I feel I could move mountains so long as I've got you. I'll manage to get money somehow, and Magee and the boys will stick." His eyes fell on Stuveysant's letter, and he laughed again; now he could even perceive some humor in it.

"Well, I'll get square with that gentleman some day, you see if I don't," he exclaimed. "It was a mighty tragic joke for me while it lasted, I can tell you. I wonder what on earth ever put it into his head."

"Why—why, don't you see, Harry?"

"Don't I see what, my dear?"

Miss Walker dropped her eyes, and began to play with the topmost button of his coat. "Surely—surely you understand! Surely you must have guessed it by this time."

"Bless me! Guessed what?"

"Why—why, don't you see that Mr. Stuveysant wrote nothing but the truth in that letter? Don't you see that he *has* married Miss Walker, and—and that *I* am Phyllis Sands?"

"Eh?" Lorimer stared, open-mouthed. "What? What's that? *You* are Phyllis—Phyllis Sands——"

"Of course," she nodded calmly, as if the elaborate deception she had practiced were the most natural thing in the world. "So, you see, you'll have to learn to call me Phyllis instead of Virginia. In short, as Mr. Jellibond would say, I am the late Silas Q. Lorimer's ward, the identical person whom he wished you to marry and whom you cruelly rejected." She folded her hands in characteristic fashion and looked at him meekly.

"Great glory!" said Lorimer, and mopped his brow. "You—you must give this time to soak in. I dare say I'm as stupid as they make them, for I've never suspected this for a moment. And so *you* are Phyllis Sands! You rank little fraud and hypocrite!" He took her by the shoulders and shook

her. "After *this* how am I to believe anything you say? A fine, promising outlook for a prospective husband, I must say!"

Phyllis Sands, in all humbleness and contrition, hung her golden head. "But then, you see, I didn't know you were going to be—be my prospective husband, and so I considered the deception perfectly legitimate."

"Legitimate! How? What put the idea into your head?"

"Why, I suppose the 'distressing clause' in my guardian's will. I didn't want to be married, or marry anybody merely for money any more than you did. I suppose that was my privilege, wasn't it?"

"Oh, certainly."

"Well, then, you see, Mr. Lorimer had often spoken about you, pointing out your many admirable qualities, and I knew it was his dearest wish that we should marry. I heard so much about you that I came to hate your very name."

"I can quite understand that," said Lorimer. "Of course my uncle didn't know how I'd panned out, but did you?"

"Not until that night in Augerot's. You see, I was at college when Mr. Lorimer died, and I'd been there for four years. I never knew how ill he really was, for he kept it from me—if he himself realized it—and said that a rest in the sanitarium was all he required. You've wondered, I suppose, how I happened to be so familiar with your uncle's affairs——"

"Yes, you said Miss Sands told you—Miss Sands being yourself?"

"Of course," she laughed. "So, you see, it wasn't an untruth at all. Well, that night in the restaurant I was on my way to Albany, having just heard of Mr. Lorimer's death. You know that Virginia Walker was my roommate at Bryn Mawr, and that we're as thick as thieves. Well, she accompanied me—though you didn't see her—and it was her father I was dining with—though you didn't see him, either."

"Then it was Mr. Walker who gave me such a rousing send-off?" laughed Lorimer. "Did you know I was your late guardian's nephew?"

"Yes, for Mr. Walker said enough to make me believe that you must be. But I said nothing to him of what I thought. I knew it was inevitable that you and I would meet eventually, during the winding up of Mr. Lorimer's affairs, and so I hit on the idea of changing names with Miss Walker. Let us say I wanted the opportunity of finding out for myself the *real* you, and that I did so——"

"Or, which may be nearer the truth, that you didn't want me pestering you with offers of marriage, you having good reason to believe me a fortune hunter and prodigal."

"Perhaps," she said demurely. "At all events, I had no difficulty in persuading Virginia Walker to agree to the scheme. You see, it presented no obstacles, for Palestine didn't know either of us, and you had never seen Miss Sands. Mr. Owen, the lawyer, was the only other person that knew——"

"Why, the old hypocrite!" exclaimed Lorimer. "He never even as much as hinted it to me!"

"Certainly not, after giving me his solemn promise not to. He would have heard from me if he had, I can tell you. You see, I've known him for—oh, ever so long—and I can make him do just whatever I like. Indeed I can. You remember he was your uncle's lawyer. It was he whom I was seeing to-day; that's why I could not accept your invitation to lunch——"

"You never meant to meet me at the station, either," accused Lorimer.

"No, I didn't, for I knew I wouldn't be through in time for that train, and, of course, I didn't want to let you know

who I was with. You would have thought it strange, to say the least, to find your stenographer lunching intimately with your late uncle's lawyer. All the same, you need not try to insinuate that I was indirectly responsible for the robbery—oh, yes, I know what's in your mind—for, in the first place, you promised solemnly to take the balance in a draft, and, in the second, you promised with equal solemnity not to wait for me. You know you promised that."

"Did I?" asked Lorimer ingenuously. "You see, I wasn't in a condition to remember anything. For you must know that I meant to propose to you on the way home."

"Really? I don't believe anything of the kind. Why, if you'd only been thoughtful enough to drop a hint I would have broken my appointment with Mr. Owen."

"And about this affair of Stuveysant's? Did you know? Come, now!"

"No, really!" she protested. "It was as much a surprise to me as to you, though, of course, I knew it would only be a question of time with them. It wasn't planned, I'm sure, for Virginia would have said something about it, told me she could no longer keep up the deception. For of course she would have to tell Mr. Stuveysant all about it. I'm sure the whole thing was spontaneous and that there's a letter or telegram from Virginia waiting for me at home. Then, when Mr. Stuveysant learned of the deception, I suppose the idea occurred to him of writing you such a letter, for he would have no reason to think you would believe it for a moment. He did not know that I had gone to Albany also; he thought I would be here in the office and that you would then see that I must be Phyllis Sands and not Miss Walker. Circumstances just happened to give that letter a corroboration which Mr. Stuveysant couldn't have foreseen or expected."

"It's all very simple now," remarked Lorimer, "and I suppose there was no excuse for me thinking what I did. All the same, when a man's in love he can think and believe *anything*."

"Men haven't any monopoly on that," remarked Phyllis Sands. "There was a time when I thought my deception was going to prove a frightful boomerang. It promised to succeed only too well. You—you were becoming entirely too good friends with 'Miss Sands' for my comfort. Oh, yes, you were, and Virginia and I—well, our friendship was only saved by my discovering that her real interest was for Mr. Stuveysant; and by her discovering that I—that I didn't exactly hate you."

"A condition not unknown to Stuveysant and myself," said Lorimer. "We had some little understanding of our own, which, you see, didn't do me any good when it came to the pinch. But here's another thing I want to know; that two thousand which the psuedo 'Miss Sands' wished to invest in the business—it was *yours* all the time?"

"How clever you are to have guessed it!" She looked at him, the love light breaking in her eyes. "You dear stupid! You said you believed I would stop at nothing to advance the interests of the business. You insisted on thinking my one and only thought was for the business. Don't you see that—that the business meant *you?*"

CHAPTER XX.

LORIMER TALKS BUSINESS.

Early the next morning the following telegram arrived from Stuveysant:

Returning to-night. Have just heard of the fire. Buck up. Have received the parental blessing, and we can get from the governor all money necessary.

Lorimer, at the office, had just finished reading it when Mr. Delaney and his famous facial disturbance presented themselves.

"Say, you're certainly playing in hard luck," he began, his cold gray eye again failing to show the sympathy his words were apparently meant to convey. "Have just heard about you being held up and robbed last night. Saw it in the mornin' paper. Why didn't you tell me about it last night?"

Lorimer shrugged. "The fire put it out of my mind. I had too many other things to think about."

Thanks to his understanding with the old chief of police, a very restricted account of the affair had appeared in the press, the names of Simpson and O'Keefe not being mentioned. He had learned that they left the freight train at some point between Albany and New York and thus far no trace had been found of them. It was a question if they would ever be captured.

"Certainly hard luck," reiterated Mr. Delaney. "Never knew what hit you, eh? And they got away before you come round?"

"Yes," replied Lorimer.

"Too bad," murmured the other. "I always said there was a lot of tough characters round here that ought to be run out of town, but what can you expect with such a chief of police? You lost fifteen hundred, eh? It must have cleaned you out."

"It did."

"Too bad," murmured Mr. Delaney again. Then his manner changed, and he added briskly: "Well, are you ready to talk business?"

Lorimer nodded. "I'm sorry to disappoint you a second time," he said slowly, "but I've decided not to sell the franchise, after all. As for Lorimer Park, however, I've no objection to letting it go, now that the whole place needs rebuilding. I can find less valuable property for a ball ground, and so I'm willing to sell. I'll take ten thousand for it."

"You'll what?" shouted Delaney, removing his cigar and staring at the other. "Ten thousand! I guess you will take ten thousand for it—if you get it. Ten thousand! Ha, ha, that's good!"

"Well," said Lorimer mildly, "that's my price, and you might tell Brand & Co.—if you happen to know that firm —that it won't go for a cent less. I dare say it will be worth all of ten thousand some day, when the town decides to make these improvements——"

"There's nothing to that," interrupted Delaney. "I guess it won't be in your time, anyway, Mr. Lorimer. It ain't a question of what it may be worth some day, but what you can get for it now. I'm here to talk business, to offer you a fair price which you can take or leave, just as you please, for I can bid it in——"

"No," interrupted Lorimer, "it won't be in the market, Mr. Delaney. You tell Brand & Co., if you know the firm, that ten thousand is my price and that if they want Lorimer Park at that figure they will have to close with it today, for on Monday I start rebuilding."

"Yes, you do—not," said Delaney, with a laugh. "Take that bull out and shoot it. It's no use bluffing. I know how you're fixed."

"I'm afraid you don't, Mr. Delaney; you only think you do. You see, a whole lot has happened since our talk last night. In the first place, you'll be glad to hear that I can afford now to do what I like with Lorimer Park —even build a Carnegie library on it. The fact is I've just come into one hundred and fifty thousand under my late uncle's will; also, I've found an investor with an equal sum at her disposal. So the Palestine Baseball Club is ready to resume business at the old stand and there will be three hundred thousand dollars—not cents—back of it.

We are going to form a company, with Mr. Stuveysant and Mr. Magee as shareholders."

Delaney said nothing; he could find nothing to say. He was a good judge of men and words, and something told him Lorimer was speaking the truth. And as he sat silent, the cigar poised irresolutely, the door opened and Magee entered, looking more prosperous and jovial than Delaney had ever seen him. For a beaten team these two—Lorimer and Magee—certainly failed to look the part.

"Mornin'," said the manager, nodding carelessly at Delaney. Then he turned to Lorimer. "Say, boss, Clark's ready any time you want him."

Veteran though he was, the cigar in Delaney's hand trembled so that its ash spilled all down the front of his vest. He coughed and lost color. It was his first intimation that Clark was not safely hidden in New York.

Lorimer adopted a confidential tone. "You see, Mr. Delaney, I recognized Clark as one of the thugs, and I also know the names of the other two—Simpson and O'Keefe. We caught Clark last night as he was attempting to leave on the fast freight, and we have him under lock and key. I've kept it quiet so far because if Clark goes to trial he will seriously compromise a leading citizen of this town—and Albany."

Mr. Delaney made a heroic effort to light his cigar, but the nonchalant attempt was a failure. He had lost the last vestige of color.

"Ain't lookin' very well this mornin', Mr. Delaney," remarked Magee, with evident sympathy. "Don't you feel real good? Mebbe you caught cold down to the freight station last night. I was there and felt a bit chilly myself."

The other looked as if, the undertaking being physically possible, he would like to make Mr. Magee very warm.

"We have a good description of Simpson and O'Keefe," pursued Lorimer in the same confidential tone, "and, I dare say, they'll be caught in the long run; if not, Mr. Clark knows enough to give this leading citizen that I've mentioned very serious trouble. You see, the real motive behind the robbery was to get rid of me; this leading citizen, whose name I won't even mention to you, Mr. Delaney, wished to put me out of business. He didn't want me here in Palestine. He didn't want me to make a success of things. Naturally I feel resentful over the underhand methods he used, and yet this morning, owing to my recent good fortune, I'm in a magnanimous frame of mind. So here's what I've decided to do; I'm going to let Mr. Clark off—he was only a tool, didn't profit by the robbery and hasn't escaped punishment of a sort—and I'm going to let the leading citizen off—providing I sell Lorimer Park this morning for ten thousand dollars. I want to sell it. It is worth, perhaps, eighty-five hundred, but the other fifteen hundred will repay me for the fifteen hundred stolen from me and now in the possession of Simpson and O'Keefe. That's why my price is ten thousand, Mr. Delancy, and not a cent less. Otherwise, only for this unfortunate robbery, my price would have been eighty-five hundred."

Lorimer looked very directly at Mr. Peter Delaney as he said all this, but the other's eyes had sought the floor. A slow grin had enveloped Magee's wide mouth.

"So that's all the business I have to discuss," said Lorimer, "and I hope I've made myself plain. Ten thousand, and the papers signed this morning; otherwise Mr. Clark goes to trial and tells all he knows. I know, Mr. Delaney, that, like myself, you have the good fame of Palestine at heart and don't want to see this leading citizen in trouble. However, don't let anything I've

said influence you. But I know you've always wanted Lorimer Park, and so here's your chance to get it and at the same time do a good turn to Mr. Clark and a leading citizen whose name I prefer not to mention."

For a moment, as Delaney looked Lorimer in the eye, the ghost of a smile hovered about his mouth as if, despite himself, he appreciated the humor of the situation.

"I'll take your offer, Mr. Lorimer," he said coolly. "After all, I do want Lorimer Park, and it won't be long before it's worth what you ask. If you can make some sacrifice for Palestine and a leading citizen—whose identity I haven't the least idea of—why, I guess, I can." He hesitated, then added slowly: "Maybe this leading citiezn you speak of has come to be ashamed of his dirty work and has found out that you're a pretty fine sort of citizen yourself, Mr. Lorimer."

He turned and waddled out.

"I told you luck was breakin' our way and that we'd fight their bloody heads off," said Mr. Magee, turning to Lorimer and holding out a horny hand. "Slip it there, kid!"

WALL STREET AND NUMBER THIRTEEN

YOUR Wall Street broker simply can't get a customer to trade in an office that is situated on the thirteenth floor. That floor is the bugaboo of the renting agent in the financial district, and, odd as it may seem, there are many buildings in Wall Street from which the ill-omened numerals are banished.

It is not unusual to overhear the following dialogue in an express elevator in the district:

"Here, boy, you took me past my floor!"

"Where did you want to get off, boss?"

"I told you when we started, the thirteenth floor."

The elevator boy grins. "You're in the wrong building, mister. We ain't got a thirteenth floor."

There is the Atlantic Building, at the southwest corner of William and Wall Streets, an imposing skyscraper, in a conspicuous location, sheltering great banking institutions and law corporations, and yet it recognizes the thirteen superstition.

A structure with a white marble front, at No. 52 William Street, a few doors north of Wall, the home of the second largest banking house in the Street, has no thirteenth floor, or, at least, a floor numbered thirteen is nonexistent.

Many a building originally designed as a home for Stock Exchange houses omits the number thirteen from its elevator floor dial. No. 42 Broadway, which was constructed especially with the idea of attracting commission houses, has the thirteenth floor eliminated from its make-up.

But it has become the custom for the ultramodern buildings to defy the superstition. Among these are the twin buildings of the Hudson Terminal, the Singer Building, the City Investing Building, and, finally, the Woolworth Building, the peer of all, in which the thirteenth floor was preserved. It must be taken into consideration, however, that these later buildings have moved away from the limits of the old financial quarter, and are leaving its traditions and predilections behind them. Still, stock-commission houses will never be found on the thirteenth floor, and their feeling on the subject seems to be shared by bond and mining houses and financial corporations.

The Coup

By W. Douglas Newton

Here is a pen plied with the deadly precision of a machine gun by a writer of arresting power. It is the story of an aviator in war time, and you won't envy him his job, swinging through the strings of shrapnel smoke, his plane flecked and gashed with shell fragments. But glory awaited him—him and the "observer" with his chart and his colored pencils. Mr. Newton doesn't tell us which of the armies was to be aided by the coup of the aviators. Being neutral, you won't quarrel with the omission. You appreciate, as we do, stirring deeds, whether done by Frenchmen or Germans or British.

THE aviator regretted the military proscription that forbade him cigarettes on active service. This aviator used cigarettes as an actor-manager used limelight—that is, to accent the value of dramatic moments. And just now he was experiencing such a moment. He had flown in a number of contests and under all manner of splendid conditions, and he had used his cigarette with such effect that even newspaper men had made epigrams about it. He had, however, never started to fly under conditions so dramatically spectacular as on this occasion when he must fly without a cigarette, and he felt that he was not obtaining the most savor out of life.

There was a royal personage and an assortment of generals to see him start, and every one of them had a name that was going to appear in the history they were now making. Behind each of them trailed a penumbra of officers who appeared to have made their costumes deliberately gaudy so that on a future day a historian might be able to write of any one of the generals that "his simple and plain-cut uniform was in sharp contrast to the brightness and glitter of his staff." It was curious how one got this effect, though every man on the field was garbed in a field uniform that looked like a color scheme made up of snuff and chalk. There was a peppering of officers about the big clearing, too, a sick biplane in the throes of misfiring, and a string of portable hangars with planes folded inside them. The place was germed with soldiers. They stood in ranks under the trees, they spilled themselves over the clearing doing many things with wooden gestures. Now and then a squad would cut across the muddy grass, their legs going all together like the beat of a metronome. The trees cut off the field from the world like a curtain. The sky was flat and gray, and it seemed that it had been cut so that the trees might be inlaid upon it. Beyond the trees, and even, it seemed, beyond the sky, there was an eternal and frightful uproar of great guns. The aviator knew by the mad incoherence and the huge and utter senselessness of the sound that a great battle was in progress. He knew he was going to fly over that mon-

strous battle. He felt that it was not at all improbable he would be the means of winning it. He had been deliberately chosen for this great moment and this great end. That was why he wanted the cigarette. It was the most important and dramatic moment of his career.

The royal personage and the generals had spoken to him, remembered his past achievements, and impressed upon him the gravity and wonder of this flight he was about to make. Thanks to them, he quite understood that a nation was depending solely on him. Now royalty and the generals were impressing the importance of the occasion on the observer. The aviator was a little contemptuous of observers, mainly because they were usually cavalry officers, and because they were unable to fly a machine as he flew one; but mostly because they were able to make military sense out of the jumble of lozenges and dots and blobs that form the aviator's eye view of a battle area, and he was utterly incapable of doing so. They were necessities whose importance was a trifle exaggerated, and thus he was nettled to note that the generals were in danger of making the observer imagine that a nation depended solely on him, too. He began to wish that he had taken a stiff course in military topography and scouting, so that he could go up alone, earn his laurels without division.

He busied himself in the padded luxury of his seat in an ostentatious preparation for his flight. He touched the buttons of the nest of drawers under the steel dashboard. He knew everything was ready, but it gave him a sense of efficiency to look again. The vacuum flask with its hot drink was in its holders; the chocolate cubes in their tinfoil were easy to the reach; the petrol-saturated sponge for cleansing the goggles was inevitably to hand; the tiny flask of brandy, the first-aid packet, even the half lemon to stay the thirst, were all as they should be. Against the luxurious upholstering that extended from the club-chair seat along the sides of the limousine the revolver swung from its holster, eager to the fingers.

At the observer's post behind all was in readiness, too. The flask, chocolate, and the rest were all in their places. The large-scale ordnance map, on its rollers with the pad beneath it to give firmness to the recording pencil, could be swiveled over the observer's lap at a touch; even the sharpened pencils of various colors that were to mark the map with the various positions of hostile troops swung from their strings, ready for immediate use. The bombs on their drum were poised for the pressure of the foot lever that would set them free—all was ready.

Still the generals endangered the modesty of the observer. Still they seemed determined to make him think that a mere passenger who could perceive, at so many hundred feet up, that a worm with kinks in it was a battery moving into action, was more important than the man who drove the machine and who couldn't tell the difference between a flanking force and a convalescent camp.

But the aviator was soon able to show them their mistake. In a minute the observer had saluted with a perfection that made the aviator sneer, had marched to the machine and climbed into his seat behind. That was the flyer's chance. Without parade, he got his engine going. He let the huge and exquisite thing race for a moment, in spite of the silencers, his attuned ear sensing its growth of power. Then, on the high beat of speed, he started the propeller, and, with a swinging rush, lifted the "bus" sheer off the ground. He hoped the medal-spotted generals would appreciate the skill of that, for it was a fine feat; his wheels could not have touched ground for more than a

few yards. Then up he went, up in a vivid spiral, climbing the sky in a ladder of flight, in seven minutes his dials showed seven thousand feet; and after that he steadied, went shooting like a star across the trees into the noise of the battle.

As the trees were topped, the huge sound of fighting blew into their faces like a gale. It flung itself at them, strove to exterminate them by mere force of incredible uproar. Monstrosities of slaughter must be going on just beyond the trees, was the first thought. Beyond the trees the ground was bare, and a dreary swing of flat land slipped toward a drab horizon smoldering in haze. In its giant stride, the hundred-horse-power engine swept the machine across the plain, leaped at the haze. And the haze was war.

The observer suddenly called out, and for a moment the aviator wrenched his eyes from the multiplicity of gauges and controls to look earthward. Even over the telephone he had heard the note of elated satisfaction in the observer's voice. The plane had passed the steaming line of the enemy's battle front now, and was working down to scouting level as it turned and swept the area behind that line from end to end. The aviator looked downward, steadily probing the surface of the earth to find out what had made the observer so happy. He saw what he had seen on many a battlefield—clusters of mushroom men, worms of men, all set on the green and dun array of lozenges that were the fields of the battle area. The clusters and worms looked like every one of the clusters and worms he had ever seen, just as futile and as uninspiring as ever. He frowned. He would have given half his skill to wrench some meaning out of that huddled array. He frowned again; he was wondering what was lacking in his intellectual make-up that prevented his making sense out of the military array mottling the earth beneath. He called into the free end of his telephone:

"What's doing? Anything going forward?"

"Anything!" called the thin, excited voice. *"Anything!* Man, it's everything. Those big pots were right. It's big, man! The biggest thing of this war. Big! Lord, it's too big for the world."

The aviator cursed him for an excited and indefinite enthusiast.

"Yes," he shouted back, his voice fighting the back draft of the propeller. "Yes, I can guess all that from your chuckles, but what does it mean?"

"Mean! What does it mean? But, man, surely *you* can see that!" "The feller's an infernal prig," considered the aviator.

"It's written across the whole world," chuckled the observer, "like a large-size advertisement for soap. Why—why—it just jumps up at you. The biggest, greatest, most magnificent thing, most magnificent coup for the Flying Arm in this war. And *we're* in it. It's ours. Man, it's ours, and all its glory."

"Idiot!" snarled the aviator's mind. "If you must talk, why not talk facts?"

"Majors, crowns, and medals, and mention in the dispatches, pensions, big talk in all the newspapers, heroics no end—that's what it means. We'll be great national celebrities. We're going to win this battle where we might be beaten; we're going to win this war. The whole bloomin' hope of the nation is now with us."

"Triple idiot," thought the aviator, but he began to glow, began to get excited. He was out for all these glorious things; he began to see them coming on him in a shower. But he wished the fool would tell him something definite.

"Yes!" he snapped again across the telephone. He wished he could see the

man and wrench something from him face to face. "Yes, but what does it mean, how does it effect our force, what are these chaps about to do, and what ought our men do while they are doing it?"

"'Ware, 'Archibald,'" yelled the voice across the phone. "They're going to kill us dead if they can. And I don't blame 'em. We just kill them if they don't."

Somewhere ahead of the swooping plane there broke out the thin scream of an upsoaring shell. Four hundred yards away, well off the line of flight, too, the air abruptly shattered; a vivid spark like the flash of magnesium burst from nothing, and a dull green coronal of smoke gushed out from its edges. The eyes of the aviator came back to his work again. He banked his machine with a delicate and superb skill, flew by the smoke in a great double "S." Even as the gout of green fume hung in the air six more of the anti-aircraft shrapnels flicked upward by "Archibald," burst in the precise places where the aëroplane was not. With the grace of a Russian dancer the machine flitted, pirouetting, among the hanging clouds of the shell smoke.

"Good man!" snapped the voice of the observer. "Now turn, go back straight for a mile, then turn, and do the ground again. I've got to get this thing as precise and certain as a blue print. And for the Lord's sake be careful. They're going to do their best to stop us. They've got to. It means the end of them if we get this news off and safe—the end of them if we make our scoop, the annihilation of our army if they wing us. They're going to try hard. Look out for 'em."

In a long curve of delight the plane came about, flowed round, swooped forward again on its return journey. But the aviator was not pleased with the sweet working of his machine. He was scowling; his excitement at the huge meaning behind his movements, his burning desire to know just what great thing they were doing, just what honors and glories he was even now piling up for himself chafed his spirit and made him angry. Why should this barrack-room observer act like a minor sphinx? Why shouldn't he know what was going on? Why should he be baffled in this way? He would have spoken his mind savagely, but events were keeping him busy.

They were flying low on a scouting level, and the enemy beneath were making it hot. Anti-aircraft guns from a dozen positions were pumping shell after shell at them, all the infantry in the lines seemed to have taken fire, and the atmosphere became lethal with the perpetual upspouting of bullets—and it is riflemen in mass that form the terror of the flyer. An "Archibald" on a bumping motor lorry was trying to follow them along a tortured road. In a minute there would be planes up from the enemy's drome, probably mounted with a spitting mitrailleuse for their destruction. The course of events was lively. The aviator had uses for every fiber of his wits.

"Back now!" came the tantalizing voice of the observer over the phone. "It's great; it's vast! Our names are in history, man, after this. We'll get government grants. We'll have made the greatest victory of modern time possible; saved the greatest debâcle. Oh, you can't tell how vast it is. And I've got it all right, I think, but go over the ground just once. Must be sure of it. *Must!*"

"Sure of what!" snarled the aviator. "Sure of what—what is it?"

Two rifle bullets, one after the other, went through the rubberoid skin of the planes with a double "zug." Somewhere close up to them a shrapnel went off like the smashing of a hundred plates; the aviator never saw the explosion, but an acrid whiff of cordite

stung the back of his throat, and he heard the soft bullets smacking on the steel plates of the fusilage; hot specks of brass from a struck cable strainer whipped his cheek, too. The steel of the fusilage roared again as the spate of a mitrailleuse caught it for a fraction. Then the plane was rushing onward again in the smooth waters of the air, not at all damaged.

The great plane kicked a little against his wrists as the air punch from the exploding shell hit the machine, but the aviator's wrists were those of a jockey, and he eased the bus steady, as a jockey masters a nervous horse. The shells, with their sparkling come and go of core, hung in air about him, but he swung his course consummately and escaped. He was thrilled. The excitement, the knowledge of the "big" thing he was accomplishing, the hope of the "big" and glorious rewards made his blood race.

"How goes it?" he shouted into the phone. "How goes it?"

"Oh, fine!" answered the voice in a muffled accent, and the aviator knew the meaning of that; could see the observer hanging over his powerful glasses, hanging over the map on the rollers, could see the swift play of the colored pencils as corps, batteries, brigades, regiments, and squadrons were ranked on the ordinance surface. "Oh, fine!" cried the thick voice. "I'm dotting my 'i's.' But I've got it all safe. No mistake. We've made our scoop."

"How do we scoop?" cried the excited pilot.

"One minute," answered the observer. "I must get it all down, sure. Turn home at that village. And get up, too, man. The place is a measles of guns."

As the plane went up and round, the atmosphere began to quiver with explosion. The air all about them flowered with the sinister blooms of shrapnel smoke. The air was tingling with the whistling upshoot of nickeled bullets. The steel sides of the plane began to sound like a galvanized roof in a hailstorm. There was the "cluck" and ring of bullets on the whirling propeller. A cable stung and parted, and as it curled up it snatched a strip out of the aviator's leather helmet and drew blood from his head. But he was round, mounting, flying home.

He was exultant, though he knew he was not yet safe. It was not shrapnel alone that the enemy used. Every now and then his ear caught above the rush of the wind the thick and clogged detonation of a high-power shell. Once he scudded through the tail of their thick and greasy smoke, and it nearly choked him to unconsciousness. But he was exultant. They had made the scoop of the war; they were henceforth to be creatures of fabulous glory and fabulous reward.

Now and then the beggars came close. A big shell smashed, with almost stunning effect, right overhead. The plane swung and dived under the air disturbance, but his jockeyship soon righted that; the cables sang and thrilled with the vibration; the plane surface was flecked and gashed with shell fragments, and the plates on the body clanged. But the aviator managed his machine like a great general. He handled her superbly; he swung her easy, and brought her clear.

And he knew he could, and would, bring her through. Giant success was speeding them forward. They could not fail now; they could not make mistakes; they could not be beaten. They swam at swift gait through the thinning strings of shrapnel smoke; the whistling of the bullets died; the heavy thudding of the great shells sagged behind. They were away and safe. They were taking the greatest news of the war to headquarters safely. They were planing straight to splendor and to glory. Not Castor and Pollux riding the wind to the victory of Regillus could have

made progress so intense with vast purpose and immortal honor as their progress back to headquarters with the greatest news of the war, with all the means and chances of great victory.

Down, down in one long volplane that sang through space like a chord of undying music they passed over the plain; they leaped the trees. The flying ground burst to life as they rushed earthward. Officers and men ran about in the manner of excited ants. The generals were running, the royal personage was running. The news was certainly vast. It was news of victory or annihilation, as the observer had said. The movements of the generals proved that.

The mind and heart of the aviator went wild with joy. He knew Fame stood ready with her laurels, he knew that Fortune was unclasping her purse, he knew that the immortal pen of History was entering his name on the scroll of transcendental and valorous events. He reached the ground, stopped his machine, sprang to his feet, waved the scampering generals on with a joyous arm.

"A coup!" he yelled. "A coup! The greatest news of the war."

There was cheering all over the flying ground. The generals ran forward, some smiling, some endeavoring to be dignified and to scowl down this theatrical, Robert Browning method of gloating over success. The aviator yelled his joy again. Then he stopped. All the generals had stopped. They were looking, with startled eyes, at the aëroplane, at the observer's seat. A hand of ice caught at the aviator's heart. He swung about, glared at the observer.

The observer was lying back in his seat; the jerk of landing must have flung him back. His neck was stretched upward in a dreadful manner. Practically all of his face, certainly all his forehead, had been carried away by a shell fragment. The aviator remembered the big shell that had burst above them, remembered that the observer was the only one who ***knew*** what was going on behind the enemy's line. He gulped; and then gulped again. After all—after all, there was the map.

He almost flung himself across to the observer's perch to get hold of the map—the map that would tell the tale of the great coup.

Where the map had been a few ragged strips of printed, linen-backed paper fluttered in the wind. There was no map. The shell fragment that had slain the observer had torn the map away, dashed it in strips across the heavens. Nothing remained.

HIS (X) MARK

SCIENTIFIC progress has caused the passing of another good, two-century-old custom. From the early days, when writing was a rarity, to the present time, it was customary to regard the X mark of an illiterate person on legal or financial documents as entirely valid.

But the X mark has passed away forever. Wall Street banks, and now more especially savings banks, have adopted the finger-print system, first introduced by the detective bureaus, for the identification of their illiterate depositors. On making his original deposit, the illiterate must first dab his thumb or forefinger on a pad containing printer's ink, and affix the characteristic lines of his cuticle to the depositor's identification card. In drawing money, his finger print is compared with the one on file. Bank cashiers consider the finger print more accurate than a signature, for the signature alters during the course of years, whereas the cuticle of an adult person remains unchanged throughout a lifetime.

McHenry and Dillingham: Angels

By Holworthy Hall

Author of "Pepper," "The Terrible Freshman," Etc.

In which James P. McHenry begins his career as a theatrical promoter. Once in a hundred times there is money in the "angel" business. It looked to "Pepper" McHenry that this was the hundredth time

SEATED at the window of their new office on Fifth Avenue, both officers of the Cambridge Company were so deeply absorbed in contemplation of the traffic that at first they paid no attention to the stenographer, who was trying to announce a client.

"Fives full of fours!" said Dillingham, noting the license number of an expensive automobile. "That's another for me!"

"You wait a while. The bus is mine. Four sevens! It's 71777!"

"Only limousines count, Pepper," his partner reminded him. "A bus isn't a limousine!"

"Why isn't it? Don't you call it a closed car?"

"But look here! Suppose a truck came along with the sides boarded up. Would that be a limousine?"

"Sure it would. I guess you saw it coming, didn't you?"

They peered eagerly for the number of the approaching truck.

"Well, I don't think *I'd* call it one," said Dillingham. The number was 1605.

"Decision stands—you've got six high. Mine—mine's 98576—a straight! That's four dollars and a half you owe me."

"Mr. Westervelt to see you," repeated the stenographer for the third time. The partners turned simultaneously and made for their desks.

"Send him in!" commanded McHenry, grabbing a fountain pen and setting himself to write furiously on a memorandum pad. Dillingham, less energetic, contented himself with opening half a dozen volumes of the business library, and spreading them out on his blotter. Mr. Westervelt, entering briskly from the tiny reception room, naturally gathered the impression that they were busy young men with not much time to spare.

Mr. Westervelt sat down, carefully arranged his trousers to prevent bagging at the knees, crossed his neatly spatted ankles, threw open his coat to display an angora waistcoat of vigorous pattern, and introduced himself.

"I'm H. Payson Westervelt," he said. "You've probably seen me play."

"Oh, certainly," agreed McHenry hospitably. "Hundreds of times."

Dillingham scribbled hastily on a scrap of paper, and held up to the president's scrutiny the question: "Baseball, piano, or movies?" but Pepper heeded him not.

"Well," continued the client, "somebody told me you're looking for investments, so I thought I'd come in and hand you a tip. First off, am I right? Are you in the market?"

"That's our business—what's the idea?"

"The idea is this." He hitched his chair nearer McHenry, and began to tap him affectionately on the arm. "I've

got an option on the theater in Middleburgh, Connecticut, for ten weeks, beginning February. Stock, you know. Now stock's always been a flivver in Middleburgh, because they tried to play twenty weeks. The people got tired of it. Ten weeks is just about right. I can pick my company in half an hour after I get the backing, and I've got a schedule of expenses right here." He laid it on the desk, bowed to it, and to McHenry. "Rent five thousand, company a thousand a week, royalties and scenery fifteen hundred, advertising a thousand, incidentals one thousand. Eighteen five total—call it twenty. That's twenty thousand dollars for a ten weeks' season, or two thousand a week. The house seats about fifteen hundred, and is worth about eight hundred dollars, at regular prices.

"That's eight hundred, if we play to capacity in the evening, and half price for matinée every day makes twelve hundred a day, or seventy-two hundred a week. Which is to say, that we make money *if only one seat out of three* is taken! What do you think of it?"

"If it didn't cost anything, it would be a wonder," said McHenry. "But what's the rest of the narrative?"

H. Payson Westervelt hitched still nearer, and tapped McHenry over the lungs.

"You put up five thousand in cash," he said, "and we'll split! Five thousand would carry us nearly three weeks if we didn't take in a cent. If we play to a *third* of the house, we'll make four hundred a week, two hundred apiece, and that would give you forty per cent for a ten weeks' investment, which is at the rate of two hundred per cent a year. But we'll do better than that. We ought to clear nine or ten thousand apiece, easy! Why, think what other producers have done! Look at the money there is in it! If you get the crowd coming—why, it's a cinch!"

"The scheme is for us to put up five thousand? What do you put up?"

"Character," said Mr. Westervelt, tapping his own chest as a diversion. "Individuality; prestige; experience; acquaintance. I manage, and play heavy parts. I draw only a nominal salary. I'll gamble with you. Do you think I'd stake my professional reputation in *stock* if I wasn't sure of it?"

"It's rather out of our line," observed Pepper thoughtfully. "To tell the truth—well, what do *you* think of it, Pierce?"

"I'm not keen on it," said Dillingham promptly.

Mr. Westervelt turned his head, and offered the secretary of the Cambridge Company a glance of mingled pain and solicitude. Then, beginning slowly, but throwing in the high speed as soon as he was under good headway, he hitched his chair across to Dillingham's desk.

"You claim to be promoters," he remarked blandly. "Every time you promote anything you take a chance, don't you? Well, unless you take all your capital and bet it on the ponies, can you get any quicker action than this? Ten weeks, and it's all over. You lose five, or you make ten. You haven't had any experience in this game, so you don't think it's on the square. Well, I'll tell you just what I'll do with you. I'll take a salary of twenty-five—just enough to live on. I'll gamble the whole way with you."

"The salary isn't important——"

"You bet it is! And I know what you were thinking; you were thinking that I'd probably draw down a couple of hundred a week, whether the company makes any money or not. Weren't you?"

Dillingham flushed.

"The point," interposed McHenry, "isn't whether this particular scheme is any good; it's whether we want to get

mixed up in *any* theatrical scheme. Ordinarily, Mr. Westervelt, we like to know what we're getting into."

The client retreated from his intrenchment in front of Dillingham to a similarly strategic position in front of Pepper.

"I don't want you to put up a nickel without getting a receipt for it," he stated. "I don't want you to make up your minds until you've talked it over with somebody—anybody. Find out about Middleburgh—look over the population, and see what business the theater had last year. Ask about me—but don't ask an agent! Ask anybody else. And if you want to come through with five of 'em, you can have your own lawyer draw up a contract, and I'll sign it. Before we go any farther why don't you look me up? I'll give you three days, and then if you don't want to sit in the game, I'll talk to somebody else. That's reasonable, isn't it?" He rose, and put on his crushed velvet hat. "You scout around, and find out if you think there's a possibility in it; so when I come back on Thursday, you can say yes or no—or listen to some more details. Is that all right?"

"That sounds fair enough," agreed McHenry. "We'll expect to see you Thursday, then?"

"Thursday is right. Good afternoon, gentlemen!"

Dillingham waited until he heard the outer door close.

"Look here, Pep!" he said. "Why didn't you turn him down now? What's the use of waiting for three days? We don't want to get tangled up in a stock company in Middleburgh, or any other place!"

"Take your time, old top!" soothed McHenry. "Once in a hundred times there's money in the angel business. I thought I'd call up a real actor I know, and quiz him about the general scheme. If he says it's logical, *then* we'll get busy and get a report on this Westervelt man."

"You're not going out now, are you?"

"I am," said Pepper. "It's four o'clock, and I can estimate within ten feet of where I can find this lad. To save your breath, I'll tell you that it's only ten feet between the bar and the opposite wall. Wait for me, will you?"

Dillingham promised to wait; and he was pleasantly astonished when his partner returned within the hour.

"Well," he demanded, "what's the story?"

"Westervelt left his name, didn't he? Let's call him, and have dinner together somewhere."

"Your friend said it's all right?"

"He as much as told me that it's the best scheme he ever heard in his life."

"Did he *actually* say that?"

"Why, no," admitted McHenry. "But he said the same thing. He said enough to convince that we're going to it hook, line, and sinker. If I'm any good as a mind reader, we're going to clean up a fortune. My friend the actor says it's rotten!"

II.

They were to open on Saturday afternoon. On Thursday, Dillingham left his partner to consummate a little deal in real estate, and journeyed over to Middleburgh to look over the ground and calculate the profits. On Friday, he wired McHenry to take the first available train, and McHenry took it. It brought him to Middleburgh at seven o'clock in the evening. Dillingham was waiting at the station.

"What's the matter?" he demanded. "Why didn't you come sooner?"

"I did," said Pepper. "That is, I came sooner than I thought I could. What's eating you?"

"Nothing at all," said Dillingham bitterly. "This is a fine proposition, this is. If we only had an animal act and a

few bags of peanuts we could hire a vacant lot and call it a circus! Why—your young friend Westervelt had a party this afternoon with a couple of reporters, and bought 'em a glass or two of beer. Then he got to figuring how much money we'd make, and switched to high balls. Then he got to figuring how much we *might* make, and the reporters made him see the logic of setting up the champagne. That accounts for Westervelt."

"You don't mean he's passed out!" gasped Pepper.

"Not a bit of it. I wish he had. He's bright and happy and full of bubbles of friendship, and he's out calling on the community."

"Is that all?"

"Nearly all," said Dillingham, with some caution. "The leading lady says she won't play in the same company with him for a million dollars a minute."

"Gosh!" said McHenry.

"And the juvenile lead says Westervelt promised him sixty a week, and he'll take the six-forty-two to-morrow morning if we don't write him a new contract."

"Fine! How about the sceneshifters?"

"They went out on strike yesterday afternoon. It's national. And the mayor has had a row with the owner of the theater, and to get even he says he's going to close up our show on the grounds that it's immoral—even if it's 'Uncle Tom's Cabin'!"

"Altogether," said McHenry placidly, "it begins to look like a gilt-edged investment."

"Don't waste any time fooling, Pep; what are we going to *do?*"

"That's simple; the first thing is to get the crowd together. I'll try to tame this Westervelt person, and you take charge of the leading lady——"

"A lot of good that'll do! Don't you get it? We haven't a theater, Pep, and we haven't any scenery, and we haven't anybody to handle it!"

"Well, even if we had we couldn't give a show without the actors," said Pepper. "You can melt the heart of the lady, can't you?"

"I'm not so sure about that."

"I am. You pretend you're an idiotic freshman, and she's senior president at Wellesley. I'll bet you a hat she falls for it!"

"Well, of course she does think I'm a pretty regular scout——"

"That's enough. Go to it! Er—kiss her if you have to! Offer to buy her a yacht, and a rope of pearls—or I'll tell you something better yet! Offer to get out some new posters with her name a foot higher. For the love of Pete, Pierce, I can't do *everything!*"

Dillingham halted, and pointed to the street.

"If you think you're so blamed clever," he said dispassionately, "see what you can do with *that!*"

McHenry looked. He saw a dilapidated barouche, drawn by two rheumatic horses, and driven by an aged pirate with flowing black whiskers. In the barouche sat Westervelt, nonchalantly bowing right and left to the populace.

"Leave him to me!" said McHenry grimly.

"With pleasure," said Dillingham.

"On, Stanley, on!" intoned Westervelt to the general public. "Loose the fiery and untamed steeds! My kingdom for a horse! Two kingdoms for two horses! Three kingdoms for three —*why, there's the angel!*"

"You rush ahead to the hotel and calm the lady," said Pepper hastily. "Here—take my bag with you!" And to the great edification of the bystanders, he sallied forth into the street, and climbed up beside his manager.

"I bid you welcome in the name of the king," greeted Mr. Westervelt. "In the name of the Continental Congress!

In the name of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts!"

"Hello, old top!" said Pepper cheerfully. "Don't you want to go home now?"

"Home? There is no place like home to me—that's why I stay away. I care not whith-her I goest, as long as I goest with thou—thee. Driver, let go their heads!"

"Come on, Westervelt—let's go home and have something to eat. This open-air stuff gives me a fearful appetite."

"Say not so," returned the manager briskly. "I fain would linger. Linger longer, Lucy. Let the droschke proceed!"

"All right. Let it!"

Here a motor truck curved around the corner, and gave warning of its presence by a croupy cough from the horn.

"Curse them!" ejaculated the actor. "They're hooting me!"

"I can't drive no farther with them horses," protested the charioteer. "They ain't been fed yet."

"Await me, await me!" said Westervelt, preparing to disembark. "Never shall it be said that I, Hostetter P. Westervelt, countenance the suffering of damn animals—I mean dumb animals! Await me!"

"Hold on, there!" cried Pepper.

He was too late. Westervelt had dodged through a procession of motors and delivery wagons, and disappeared through the swinging doors of the nearest café. When McHenry caught him, he had completed his arrangements for the refreshment of the horses. He had bought two buckets of seltzer and a package of shredded wheat biscuit.

"Now, look here, old top——"

"Avaunt!" said Mr. Westervelt. "Begone! Beyond the Alps lies—lie a couple of hungry Pomeranian Percherons thirsting. Mr. Bartender, will you take the banquet to the horses, or shall I bring the horses to the banquet?"

"Look out, old man—you'll be pinched!"

"Pinched! *Pinched!* By who? By whom? By yon fell captain, strict in his arrest? Nay, nay—Mr. McHenry—I—I'm sorry, but I think I'm going to die in the house!"

"I'll take care of him," said Pepper to the amazed bartender. "All I want is a closed hack, or a taxicab. Can't you scare up one for me?"

"Sure," agreed the man. "Say, I'll take back that there shredded wheat, but the seltzer's no good now——"

"L-let *me* pay," stammered Mr. Westervelt. "Only—only I'm afraid—I'm *afraid* I'll have to b-borrow the money from somebody—all I've g-got is sixteen cents and—and a cigar certificate——"

Five minutes later, McHenry escorted his manager to a taxicab, and propped him carefully in one corner. The Thespian, somewhat revived by spirits of ammonia, kindly volunteered a free reading, which went about like this:

Friends, Romans, countrymen; lend me your ears—
I shall return them next Saturday.
The evil that men do lives after them—
In the shape of progeny to reap the benefit
Of their life insurance. So let it be
With the deceased.
I come to bury Cæsar, not to praise him;
Brutus hath told you that Cæsar was ambitious,
But this is none of Brutus' funeral—
Would that it were!
Cæsar hath brought many captives home to Rome,
Who broke rock on the streets until their ransoms did the general coffers fill;
When the poor have cried, Cæsar hath wept,
Because it didn't cost anything, and made him
Solid with the masses. Ambition should be made of sterner stuff.
You all did see that on the Lupercal
I thrice presented him a kingly crown,
Which thrice he did refuse—because it didn't fit him;
Yet Brutus says he was ambitious!
Brutus is a horse thief of the deepest dye.
If you have tears, prepare to shed them now——

He paused, and after a moment prodded McHenry solidly in the ribs.

"P-pick up your cues!" he commanded aggrievedly. "When I say—*tears*—cry!"

And in this manner James P. McHenry passed the evening before the beginning of his career as a theatrical promoter.

III.

Yet in spite of all the difficulties, they opened on Saturday afternoon. In the meantime, all that McHenry had done was to interview the stage hands and break the strike by the simple expedient of raising wages five dollars a week; to locate an excellent lawyer and obtain a temporary injunction to restrain the mayor from stopping the performance; to groom his manager into presentable shape, and to complete Dillingham's negotiations with the leading lady. It wasn't until past noon that he was certain that there would be a matinée at all; and it wasn't until a quarter to two that he was fairly confident of staging it without a riot. Nevertheless, they opened according to schedule; and they played to an enthusiastic audience. The audience numbered a hundred and sixty-one, mostly in the balcony.

Slightly disconcerted, but still trusting in the future, they repeated the same piece that evening. This time the audience was even more enthusiastic, and even larger. Fully two hundred people dotted the orchestra; and two parties adorned the boxes. One was managed by the chief of police; and the other consisted of the staff of a local newspaper; and both came in as guests of the promoters.

McHenry and Dillingham talked it over at great length after breakfast on Sunday. Each had a dozen reasons why the first day shouldn't be profitable; but neither would concede that the other's reasons had a basis of common sense. Then they summoned Westervelt, and heard his own reasons; and then they all disagreed violently.

"Anyway," said Pepper philosophically, "there's nothing to do till to-morrow. Let's wait and see what sort of houses we get after the criticisms."

All three drew some consolation from the fact that the criticisms were very good; and none of them observed that they were almost too good. Having read in cold type the statement that the company was the best seen in Middleburgh in a decade, and that Westervelt ought to be compared with Booth; and that the leading lady was more beautiful than Lillian Russell, and more talented than Sarah Bernhardt, they naturally expected to find the general public forming in line at the box office several hours before the curtain. To their horrified amazement, a line was formed only when some one stopped to count his change, and the man behind him had to wait.

They played on Monday to nearly two hundred dollars. Westervelt said it was because McHenry hadn't advertised properly; and the leading lady said it was because Westervelt was a poor actor; and Dillingham said it was because the girls of Middleburgh were jealous of the leading lady's looks; and McHenry said it was because they'd chosen a poor play; and the papers said that it was a great triumph, and that every one received a tremendous ovation, and that seats were selling six weeks in advance.

"Now," said McHenry, "it looks easier. You might as well run back to New York, Pierce, and hold down the office, and see if you can't scare up enough business to pay my board bill. I'm going to stay here and try to break even."

"What's the use?" mourned Dillingham. "Let's forget it and swallow the loss, and not waste any more time."

"I am going to break even," declared

Pepper, "if it takes a leg! We've got to advertise."

"The free advertising the papers gave us did a lot of good, didn't it?"

"It was too rich for their blood—a different sort might put it over for us."

"As, for instance?" queried his partner.

"Well, we thought this was a classy town, and it isn't. We can't be highbrowish about it. The scheme's to get the crowd in any way, but get it in. I've been scouting around the shops—this is a great place for bargains. Everything you see on Main Street is a bargain sale, or some cut-price arrangement. Well, we'll meet the competition."

"Yes—seats for nineteen cents, marked down from a quarter," scoffed Dillingham.

"Worse than that—much worse. I think we'll give a free seat any day this week to any person named Smith."

Dillingham stared for a moment, and then laughed.

"Fine—fine! In other words, open the doors and let 'em *all* in!"

"But," said Pepper, "in order for any Smith to get a free seat, he—or she—must be accompanied by a Jones, who pays cash. Two seats for the price of one—get it?"

"I get it, all right. I think it's rotten!"

"I don't. Think it over a minute. It's a real bargain. Now two women can get together and——"

"Had you thought," asked Dillingham sardonically, "that there wouldn't be any way of proving whether their names were really Smith or Jones?"

"I hope they aren't—the worse liars they are, the better they'll please me. A couple waltzes up to the box office, claims to be one Smith and one Jones; the Jones buys a ticket, and the Smith gets one right next to it for nothing. Then next week we'll let the Joneses in free with the Smiths buying tickets."

"It's a fine stunt—then, instead of getting real money for the few people who *would* pay to get in, we land just half as much!"

"Not a bit of it—we'll draw hundreds of people who aren't coming now, and if they fill half the house, we'll make money. If you can think of any better idea, let's have it. Don't be so tight with your brilliant stunts."

"A few years ago, the mystery scheme used to work," mused Dillingham. "I wonder if these microbes would fall for it? Run a photograph of a man in the papers—the first fifty people who stop him on the street and call him by some funny name get a free ticket. It might stir up interest."

"That isn't bad," admitted McHenry. "Well, then, we might as well get in with both feet. We'll offer prizes for the best criticisms of the shows. Come in, see the show for half a dollar, and have a chance to make twenty-five by writing a criticism."

"Then you want to have a voting contest for the most popular member of the company——"

"The more I think of the bargain idea, the better I think it is. Pierce, we'll have a mark-down sale! Specials every day! Wednesday matinée we'll sell the fifty-cent seats for thirty-nine cents! Thursday we'll sell the first ten rows in the orchestra for fifty-three cents, marked down from seventy-five! We've got to get the *women* coming—it's the women that pay the rent bill!"

"All this depends on Westervelt——"

"No——"

"Why, of course it does! If he has another one of those special professional public appearances, we'll be queered for good!"

"Mr. H. Payson Westervelt," said Pepper, "will be one of the modelest young men in Middleburgh for the next ten weeks—nine weeks and four days, to be exact. I've got it on him. Of course, he does have a reputation for

carrying around the healthiest capacity ever known to the metropolitan stage, but I'll bet you a pair of shoe strings that if you nail him now and ask him what he'll have, he'll name a pleasant and familiar little decoction of two parts of hydrogen and one of oxygen. Call it a bet?"

"I'll bet I know where he is this minute. At the bar!"

"Right—drinking seltzer."

"That man," said Dillingham heatedly, "*invented* alcohol! That's why, even with the advertising ideas, I'm not sold on the idea of wasting any more time with him. Let's cut it out and go home."

"I'll tell you what I'll do—we'll go down and find him. If you can make him take a drink on any pretext whatsoever, I'll quit and go home, and pay you twenty-five perfectly good seeds—and if you can't, you pay me twenty-five and go home yourself, and let me run this thing to a finish."

Dillingham reached for his hat.

"That's one bright spot," he said happily. "That means that you lose twenty-five more than I do! Come on!"

Accordingly they found Westervelt in the grill.

"Greetings, manager!" said Dillingham. "What's yours?"

"French vichy," said Westervelt promptly.

Dillingham looked hard at McHenry.

"I'll bet you ten dollars," he continued, "that you can't drink a Scotch high ball with a spoon while I'm eating a soda cracker."

"I'll do it with vichy," agreed Mr. Westervelt.

"No—Scotch. I'll make it twenty."

"It can't be done."

"Twenty-four dollars and seventy-five cents," said Dillingham, in desperation. McHenry chuckled.

"Hasn't he told you?" inquired Westervelt.

"Told me? What?"

"Well, if he hasn't, I'm hanged if I will! You *said* you wouldn't until it's over," he added accusingly to McHenry.

"I haven't told him—— Here, waiter! You'll have just time," he advised his partner, "to join us in a fudge sundae or something strong like that before your train leaves. What's yours, H. Payson?"

"French vichy," said the actor stolidly.

IV

But, after all, the first shot of the new campaign was aimed not at future prospects but at present clients. As the curtain fell at the close of the Tuesday matinée, James P. McHenry appeared before the audience and granted that the leading man had a cold, the comedian was suffering from hay fever, and that the heavy hadn't had time to learn his part. Under the circumstances, he said, there was nothing to do but to announce a rebate. Any one who was dissatisfied with the performance could get half his money back by applying at the box office.

"These are the days," he said, in conclusion, "when all advertising is guaranteed. All right—when you come to a comedy in this theater, and don't laugh, you get your money back. To-night you can send all your friends. They'll either have a good time at the low price of fifty cents, seventy-five, or a dollar, or I'll give 'em free seats for a tragedy next week. Ladies and gentlemen, I thank you."

Chiefly to test his good intentions, a few dozen of that audience actually did halt at the box office; and they found a young man waiting for them with coin of the realm at hand. The plan struck most of them as clever rather than businesslike; but they were sufficiently affected by the logic of it to give McHenry a little gratuitous publicity that night. The newspapers ran the story on the first page; directly above the an-

nouncement that the Smiths were finally coming into their own. The inevitable result was that the company played to good houses that day, and it was soon known that the Smiths weren't obliged to prove their right to the patronymic.

Before Middleburgh had recovered from the first two novelties, it was informed that on Fridays and Mondays any person with four children over the age of sixteen could get family tickets for two dollars, no matter whether the offspring numbered the minimum of four or a maximum of forty.

"Some of these folks may do a little quiet borrowing from the neighbors for the occasion," said McHenry sagely, "but the more the merrier! Now we'll get ready for the big bang!"

"What's that?" demanded Westervelt.

"During the last week of this run," explained the promoter, "the evening shows will be given by the regular company, but the matinées will be pulled off by local talent from the high school. They'll eat it alive! We'd better pick the show and begin rehearsing 'em, hadn't we?"

"Now, look here, if you try anything like that, you'll be sorry. I've seen those things work out. The youngsters you pick will be tickled to death, and so will their parents—but the candidates you reject will be sore as pups, and so will *their* parents. And you lose out in the ratio of about six to one!"

"Guess again," said McHenry. "I'm going to have an entirely different cast for every matinée! Every stage-struck girl in the whole high school will be on the boards! There won't be any soreheads, and we'll have the whole town coming every day—to see their own friends, and then to see how much better they are than the other people's friends."

"We're picking up right along—I don't know that we'll need anything as drastic as that."

"We need every new twist we can think up."

"All right—but we're getting respectable houses, old man."

"We're breaking even—why not make a little money?"

"I never refuse," conceded the actor. "If you think we can saparate any more of these hardware syndicates from their money by giving parts to the kindergarten pupils, I'm perfectly willing to buy a bib and begin rehearsals."

So McHenry visited the high school and addressed the pupils in a speech which sent more girls to their mirrors than any event since rice powder was invented. Subsequently he had the leading lady give a tea on the stage and invite all the girls who thought they would like to be actresses. They came in droves—the entire four classes of the school, a score of graduates, eleven clerks from local department stores, and the girl from the news stand at the railroad station. The leading lady was impossibly sweet to them; promised them all the benefit of her coaching—McHenry had to raise her salary for it—and suggested that they had better go in training by attending as many professional performances as possible during the next two months.

It was at about this period of the world's history that the spectators found themselves within speaking distance of each other. No longer could a timid person attend one of McHenry and Dillingham's mammoth productions and feel lonely and unprotected. The dead line flowed down from the fifty-cent seats to the seventy-five, down to the first ten rows at a dollar, and finally, during the fifth week, into the boxes. It never happened that the company actually played to capacity, but they did have some splendidly profitable houses; and the sight of real money enraged McHenry as the official color of his Alma Mater is supposed to enrage the bull.

Promptly he instituted special performances, with a proportion of the receipts designed for local charities. The rival factions of Middleburgh rose to the bait like hungry trout; and for the sake of the two hundred dollars McHenry offered to a hospital, the hardware section spent six hundred for reserved seats; and for the hundred and fifty he considered appropriate to the boys' club, the mill division bought out the entire house.

On Saturdays, Dillingham ran over from New York; and invariably he was staggered by the improvement in the balance sheet. From an out-and-out loss of thirteen hundred dollars the first week, the venture had progressed to solvency by the sixth, and made a handsome profit in the seventh and eighth.

The stage hands shifted scenery with sober precision; the mayor cut McHenry on the street and went to the movies; the leading lady found herself the pet of feminine society; and Westervelt consumed in two months more vichy and seltzer than the majority of men ever see in action.

This last was the only outcome which seemed to Dillingham unbelievable. From personal experience he knew that Pepper was capable of selling almost anything, tangible or intangible; but from what he knew of Westervelt, he couldn't comprehend how even Pepper could have tamed him overnight. Whenever he inquired about it, which wasn't seldom, McHenry assumed his most virtuous air and merely said that it was his well-known personal magnetism, coupled with his high principles and inherent righteousness, which had brought about the change. Dillingham didn't believe it, but that was one of the worst points about McHenry—you didn't believe half he said, but you could never tell which half to believe.

During the ninth week, they played on velvet; and the tenth—if the ninth was on velvet, the tenth was on radium. Six separate casts of high-school aspirants graced the boards of the theater during those afternoons. Their families and friends held every seat under the roof and stood ten deep in the rear. At night every one who had played that afternoon came to compare their own rendition with that of the professionals; and they fought for places with the cast which was to play to-morrow afternoon, and wanted to pick up a few last pointers.

It was Wednesday morning before McHenry conceived the idea of selecting from all these amateurs a representative group, composed of those who had done best, and giving them the grand climax Saturday night, the last event of the season. This didn't occur to him until Wednesday morning at eleven o'clock, but it wasn't ten seconds later that it occurred to him to double the prices for that evening.

Twenty minutes afterward he thought of presenting to each one of that final group an embossed certificate, signed by himself, Dillingham, Westervelt, and the leading lady, to certify to the world that the recipient was almost as good as a regular actor.

At half past eleven he decided to have a special program, with much advertising at ruinous rates; and at quarter of twelve he had hired four solicitors and set them to work.

The solicitors were hardly out of the door before he remembered that there was a street drop in the second act; so he hired another solicitor and sent him out to get advertising for signs on the stage buildings and on a hastily conceived billboard. At one-twenty-five he settled on refreshments and began telephoning for bids for the concession; and as he went in to lunch he determined that since the program was special, he might as well charge a quarter for it.

And so, in the early hours of the

morning after that last smashing success, McHenry and Dillingham and Westervelt sat in Pepper's room in the hotel, writing long lines of figures on hotel stationery. At length their arithmetic proved sound, and McHenry, as treasurer, stated the findings:

"Leaving out the thousand we'll give the athletic association of the high school—I've just thought of that; it'll make a wild hit, and we may come back here next season, you know—the expenses were a trifle over nineteen thousand, and the profits are a trifle over thirty. It's about sixty-five hundred apiece."

"Sixty-five hundred!" said Dillingham.

"Sixty-five hundred!" said Westervelt hungrily. He looked at McHenry and at the figures. "When do I get mine?"

"I'll write you a check in the morning——"

Westervelt got up and leaned over the back of his chair.

"Well," he said, "now that it's over, I'll tell you what *I* think of it. You said something about wanting to do it again next year. In the first place, I've got the option on the theater all by myself; and in the second place, I wouldn't play with a couple of bloodhounds like you again for the whole thirty thousand! Of all the inane, idiotic, asinine seasons I've ever seen, this was the limit! It may have been good business, but it wasn't art. I'm an actor; I'm not a cut-rate druggist, or a soda-fountain proprietor! I'm through with you! I've lived through ten solid weeks of unadulterated by and by! I've drunk so much charged water that I dream I'm a siphon! Money! What's money? Nothing compared with peace of mind! And I haven't had any—there won't be another season for this partnership, Mr. McHenry! You can't get out of our second contract, thank Heaven! I can say what I like now. And I say right to your face, you—you—you——" He bubbled impotently.

"I wouldn't care where you said that," said McHenry.

"*Second* contract?" puzzled Dillingham.

"On consideration that our manager wouldn't drink anything stronger than fizz for ten weeks," said McHenry, "I made another contract to let him out of the first one at the end of 'em. You see, Pierce, our lawyer in New York made a mistake——"

"Yes, a *mistake,*" said Westervelt bitterly. "If you'll excuse me, gentlemen, I'm going downstairs."

"They closed an hour ago," explained Pepper imperturbably. "You see, Pierce, as I was saying, this lawyer made a mistake. When I came to look over that contract the first night I was here, I found that Mr. Westervelt had agreed to work for us for ten *years* at twenty-five dollars a week! So we made this second agreement——" He perceived the expression on Westervelt's face and pitied him. "Oh, come on," he said, "it didn't do you any harm, and it helped us a lot. I'll tell you what I'll do. I've got a little private stock here in a closet——"

Mr. Westervelt sat down as quickly as he conveniently could.

"Bring it on," he said, "and I'll forgive you. Is it any good?"

"It's the best in the world for the present purpose——"

"You can't be too sudden about it, then. Why, you two young idiots have taken a year out of my life! Got any ice?"

"It's cold enough now," said Pepper. "I'll mix it up for you in the bathroom."

He was busily engaged with the mixing when Dillingham came to him and spoke soberly.

"Say, Pepper," he said, "don't you think it's pretty unreasonable to do anything like this——"

"This?" McHenry indicated his ma-

terials. "It's nothing but French vichy and lemon juice."

"But, Pepper—it's a sort of joke, of course, but he'll be sore as a hound. Is it worth it?"

McHenry squeezed the juice of the last lemon into a glass.

"It's been worth sixty-five hundred apiece," he said finally. "Besides, it's up to us to be strictly moral. In fact, moraler than that." He poured the vichy on the lemon juice. "You know what we are, don't you?"

"Promoters?" guessed his partner.

"Good Lord, no!" said McHenry. "Angels!"

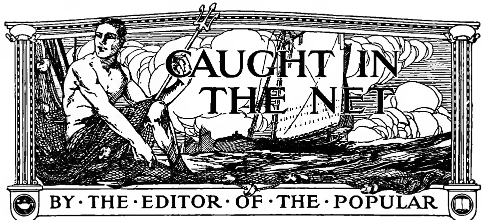
The Worker's Prayer

By Berton Braley

I COME to You asking no favors,
  No extra good luck in the race,
I pray You for nothing that savors
  Of profit or power or place;
I'll face both success and disaster,
  No fate that is mine will I shirk,
But whether I'm workman or master,
  Dear Lord, keep me true to my work!

From risking things "almost" and "nearly,"
  From rushing through "any old way,"
From jobs that are done insincerely
  Deliver me, Master, I pray;
Let "botching it" fill me with terror,
  Release me from perils that lurk
In bungling and "scamping" and error,
  Dear Lord, keep me true to my work!

I ask for no more than my neighbor,
  I'll take every chance with the rest,
But give me, Great Boss of All Labor,
  The strength to be true to my Best,
For then, when I knock at Your portal,
  I trust You will let in the shade
Of one rather commonplace mortal
  Who tried to make good at his trade!



THRIFTY AMERICA

SOME persons have been maligning the people of the United States. The average American has been held up to the gaze of all Americans as a wasteful, unprovident person who ought to pattern after the thrifty Frenchman, the plodding German, or the canny Scot, and put a penny away now and then for a rainy day. Such careless, spendthrift habits as the people of the United States had contracted, it was pointed out, would develop into a great national weakness if not corrected soon.

Just about the time the preaching along this line was becoming popular among persons who like to utter awful warnings, some indiscreet individual down in Washington gave out the figures showing that the savings-bank deposits in the United States aggregate $4,727,403,950.

This sum is larger than the total not only of any other one nation, but bigger than the combined deposits of the French, British, Austrians, Italians, and Japanese in their communal, private, postal, corporate, and trustee savings banks.

There are several savings banks in New York City that have deposits in excess of one hundred million dollars. The total number of savings banks in the country is one thousand nine hundred and seventy-eight, the average account is $439.07, and the depositors make up an army of 10,766,936 persons.

Thrift! Why, the savings-banks deposits of the United States would pay the cost of the European war for nearly one hundred days!

SOCIAL AND INDIVIDUAL EFFICIENCY

LAWRENCE F. ABBOTT says Americans are the most inefficient socially and the most efficient individually of any people on the face of the earth. To illustrate, he says that if you put twelve farmers in a field with a great, imbedded bowlder, the twelve will spend the day theorizing and discussing ways and means of getting the rock out; but if you send eleven away and leave the most energetic of the dozen there with a good yoke of oxen, he will snake out that bowlder within an hour.

We talk a lot about teamwork, he says, but are opposed to its principle. We make the greatest fire apparatus in the world, and possess the greatest individual firemen, and we burn up more millions of property in a year than any other two civilized nations combined. Our fire apparatus and our excellent firemen are not equal to the handicap of our opposition to restrictions and precautionary measures necessary to prevent fires.

The trouble is, he says, that we do not care to work together for the good of all, and are opposed to doing what we are told unless it suits our convenience. "What is there in it for me?" is of more potent appeal to the American than "What is there in it for all the people?"

We have ordinances that would promote the general health and the general good if lived up to by everybody, but there are free-born Americans who like to show their absolute independence by breaking such regulations when and where it suits their pleasure and convenience.

We are great people for making laws, but prefer that other persons live up to them. We have a sneaking admiration for some forms of lawbreaking, and not infrequently help in the lawbreaking simply because we like to show our individual spirit as opposed to the edict of the community at large.

All that Mr. Abbott says is true. It also is true that social efficiency comes only through system and regulation long continued. System blunts individuality. Maybe with all our crudities we are not much worse than we would be as a mass socially efficient but lacking in what now is our greatest asset—initiative.

OLD-ESTABLISHED BUSINESS

AGE is venerated abroad. The things that are old, be they castles, customs, churches, or families, are revered because they have known so much of time. The critical foreigner is likely to scoff at America because things here have a newness that is garish.

As a matter of fact, our newness, especially in our business institutions, is more apparent than real. There are scores of establishments that have been in one family or on one site for more than a century. With each succeeding generation they broaden and flower and grow greater.

In the iron and steel industry two of the most prosperous of the companies outside the United States Steel Corporation are more than one hundred and twenty-five years old. They are the mammoth plants of the Worthy Bros., and the Lukens Iron & Steel Co. at Coatesville, Pennsylvania. One of them started before the Revolutionary War, and has been owned all this time by the descendants of the founder. In the more than one hundred and forty years this business has been conducted, the heads of the house, who are Quakers, have refused to make any implements to be used in warfare. No government contract has ever been accepted except the product has been for use in the pursuits of peace.

Until a few years ago the Revere Copper Company, founded by Paul Revere, the messenger of the Revolution, was in business.

The oldest bank in the Western World—the Bank of North America, of Philadelphia—stands to-day on the same ground in Chestnut Street where it stood when Robert Morris, the banker of the Revolution, opened its doors for

business in the days when the Continental Congress was in session across the street.

The Bank of New York—the next oldest American bank, occupies to-day the same site it did when it came into being through the charter which was drafted for it by Alexander Hamilton.

Near by and on the same ground which has been its site for more than a century is the Bank of the Manhattan Company, which Aaron Burr started as a rival to the Bank of New York.

The honor of being the oldest private bank in the Western Hemisphere may go either to Maitland, Coppell & Co., of New York, or Alex. Brown & Sons, of Baltimore, as you desire. Maitland, Coppell & Co. trace back farther, but there is no descendant of Maitland, the founder, now in the firm, while the bank of Alex. Brown & Sons has passed down from one generation of the family to another, and now, under various names, including the original and those of Brown Bros., Brown, Shipley & Co., plays an important part in international finance.

The oldest soap concern in America has seen nearly one hundred and twenty-five years of life, and now is managed by five brothers who are the great-great-grandsons of a man who started with one little soap kettle in one small room of one small house in Dutch Street, New York.

In Adams, Massachusetts, there is the Adams South Village Cotton & Woolen Manufacturing Co. mill, that was started more than one hundred years ago with 708 spindles and 26 looms, and to-day, with its offspring, it boasts of 370,000 spindles and 8,000 looms. Various generations of the Plunkett family have owned the mill, and to supply a small portion of the cotton for their spindles the Plunketts of to-day have an 11,000-acre plantation in the Yazoo Delta in Mississippi.

In customs Americans may not have the reverence for the old that the English display, but they are none the less proud of age as a hall mark of worth, of distinction, and of virtue.

THE PITTSBURGH OF AFRICA

IN the heart of darkest Africa a great industrial center is being developed. Within the next decade or two, steel and zinc, copper, tin, and a multitude of other products of its mills will be sold in competition with the output of America and Europe.

The Pittsburgh of Africa probably will have the name of Katanga. The state or district of that name in the eastern part of Belgian Kongo has vast mineral deposits, and the coal fields are almost inexhaustible. To the north, near Lake Tanganyika, is a section practically as rich as that of Katanga. Lake Tanganyika is part of the dividing line between Belgian Kongo and German East Africa.

At present most of the development in Katanga has been devoted to copper.

Three furnaces have been erected at the works, each having capacity to treat a charge of about three hundred tons of ore a day. Four other furnaces have been ordered. The foundations for these new furnaces have been commenced, and it is expected that the plants will be working about the middle of 1915.

At the Star of Kongo, Kambove, and Luushia Mines, the three properties

which the Etoile du Kongo Company was working in 1914, an output of eighty-one thousand tons of smelting ore was used, producing seven thousand two hundred and forty-five tons of bars containing ninety-five to ninety-six per cent of copper. Two batteries of twenty-two ovens each have been working since March, 1914, and have produced three thousand tons a month of good metallurgical coke from the coal supplied by the Wankie Collieries (Limited), near Victoria Falls.

Since the commencement of operations, fifteen thousand tons of copper have been produced.

On these properties, three thousand hands are employed. In the near future, several thousand more will be required, owing to the rapid completion of coke furnaces, the opening of new mines, and the extension of railways. It is estimated that when the present works are completed and the whole number of industrial undertakings now projected are under way, at least eighteen thousand laborers will be required, a number that it will be impossible to supply from the district itself. Arrangements have been made with the Portuguese government giving the Tanganyika Concessions Company the right to recruit a considerable amount of labor in Angola, along the line of the Benguella Railway, but it may be necessary to seek still further to obtain an adequate supply, and the contracting of Chinese labor has been proposed.

America is furnishing most of the machinery imported into Katanga, and it is of the latest and most improved character.

The European war may delay the development of Katanga somewhat, but it is destined to play an important part in industrial affairs within the next quarter of a century. The region is so rich that the Kongo country may come to be known more for its minerals than its rubber.

Various railroad projects, ambitious enough to satisfy even an American promoter, are discussed to connect the Katanga country with Leopoldville, far down the Kongo River, and there even is talk of lines north, south, and east, the eastern one to connect Katanga with the Cape-to-Cairo railroad.

THE USES OF ADVERSITY

THERE is a one-legged man on the vaudeville boards who has surprising agility. He uses a crutch as the substitute for his right leg. He travels across the stage at high speed. He leaps upon tables, falls off chairs, turns somersaults, and displays a muscle control which delights his audience for the fifteen minutes of his turn; and he does it all with a good humor which keeps the act free from morbidity. He is plainly enjoying himself. It is as if he said: "The loss of a leg is nothing. You see for yourself that I am lively and full of spirit. There are plenty of things which a one-legged man can do. Until we come to the end of those things we won't grieve very much for what we don't possess. In fact, is it any advantage to have two legs? Don't two legs keep you rather tied down? You're so sure you have them that you don't do much with them."

Inside the Lines

By Earl Derr Biggers and Robert Welles Ritchie

SYNOPSIS OF FIRST PART

While in Paris buying gowns for Hildebrand's New York department store, Jane Gerson becomes acquainted with a man calling himself Captain Woodhouse, of his majesty's signal service, Egypt. Taking unusual interest in the girl, Woodhouse warns her to leave Paris—Europe—before war breaks out. Telling her he is bound for the region of the Nile, the mysterious captain takes a train for Berlin, where he has secret negotiations with one, Louisa, connected with the Wilhelmstrasse, the German secret service office. She puts him in possession of certain plans in which he is to be prime mover. War is declared and Jane Gerson is unable to cash her letter of credit or get a steamer home. She is advised to go to Gibraltar. Thither she goes. On the Rock are other Americans: H. J. Sherman and family from Kewanee, Illinois. also stranded in Europe. To the Hotel Splendide, where the Americans are staying, comes Captain Woodhouse and Billy Capper, the latter a discredited spy who professes to recognize Woodhouse. Woodhouse disowns the acquaintance, and Almer proprietor of the hotel, throws Capper out.

(In Three Parts—Part Two)

CHAPTER VIII.

THE CHAFF OF WAR.

DINNER that evening in the faded dining room of the Hotel Splendide was in the way of being a doleful affair for the folk from Kewanee, aside from Captain Woodhouse, the only persons at table there. Woodhouse, true to the continental tradition of exclusiveness, had isolated himself against possible approach by sitting at the table farthest from the Shermans; his back presented an uncompromising denial of fraternity. As for Mrs. Sherman, the afternoon's visit to the bazaars had been anything but a solace, emphasizing, as it did, their grievous poverty in the midst of a plenty contemptuous of a mere letter of credit. Henry J. was wallowing in the lowest depths of nostalgia; he tortured himself with the reflection that this was lodge night in Kewanee and he would not be sitting in his chair. Miss Kitty contemplated with melancholy the distress of her parents.

A tall, slender youth with tired eyes and affecting the blasé slouch of the boulevards appeared in the door and cast about for a choice of tables. Him Mr. Sherman impaled with a glance of disapproval which suddenly changed to wondering recognition. He dropped his fork and jumped to his feet.

"Bless me, mother, if it isn't Willy Kimball from old Kewanee!" Sherman waved his napkin at the young man, summoning him in the name of Kewanee to come and meet the home folks. The tired eyes lighted perceptibly, and a lukewarm smile played about Mr. Kimball's effeminate mouth as he stepped up to the table.

"Why, Mrs. Sherman—and Kitty! And you, Mr. Sherman—charmed!" He accepted the proffered seat by the side of Kitty, receiving their hearty hails with languid politeness. With the sureness of English restraint, Mr. Willy Kimball refused to become excited. He was of the type of exotic Americans who try to forget grandpa's corn-fed hogs and grandma's hand-churned butter. His speech was of Rotten Row and his clothes Piccadilly.

"Terrible business, this!" The youth fluttered his hands feebly. "All this harrying about and peeping at passports by every silly officer one meets. I'm afraid I'll have to go over to America until it's all over—on my way now, in fact."

"Afraid!" Sherman sniffed loudly, and appraised Mr. Kimball's tailoring with a disapproving eye. "Well, Willy, it would be too bad if you had to go back to Kewanee after your many years in Paris, France; now, wouldn't it?"

Kimball turned to the women for sympathy. "Reserved a compartment to come down from Paris. Beastly treatment. Held up at every city—other people crowded in my apartment, though I'd paid to have it alone, of course—soldier chap comes along and seizes my valet and makes him join the colors and all that sort——"

"Huh! Your father managed to worry along without a val-lay, and he was respected in Kewanee." This in disgust from Henry J.

Kitty flashed a reproving glance at her father and deftly turned the expatriate into a recounting of his adventures. Under her unaffected lead the youth who shuddered inwardly at the appellation of Willy thawed considerably, and soon there was an animated swapping of reminiscences of the Great Terror—hours on end before the banks and express offices, dodging of police impositions, scrambling for steamer accommodations—all that went to compose the refugee Americans' great epic of August, 1914.

Sherman took pride in his superior adventures: "Five times arrested between Berlin and Gibraltar, and what I said to that Dutchman on the Swiss frontier was enough to make his hair curl."

"Tell you what, Willy: you come on back to Kewanee with us, and mother and you'll lecture before the Thursday Afternoon Ladies' Literary Club," Sherman boomed, with a hearty blow of the hand between Willy's shoulder blades. "I'll have Ed Porter announce it in advance in the *Daily Enterprise*, and we'll have the whole town there to listen. 'Ezra Kimball's Boy Tells Thrilling Tale of War's Alarms.' That's the way the headlines'll read in the *Enterprise* next week."

The expatriate shivered and tried to smile.

"We'll let mother do the lecturing," Kitty came to his rescue. " 'How to live in Europe on a letter of discredit.' That will have all the gossips of Kewanee buzzing, mother."

The meal drew to a close happily in contrast to its beginning. Mrs. Sherman and her daughter rose to pass out into the reception room. Sherman and Kimball lingered.

"Ah-h, Willy——"

"Mr. Sherman——"

Both began in unison, each somewhat furtive and shamefaced.

"Have you any money?" The queries were voiced as one. For an instant confusion; then the older man looked up into the younger's face—a bit flushed it was—and guffawed.

"Not a postage stamp, Willy! I guess we're both beggars, and if mother and Kitty didn't have five trunks between them this Swiss holdup man who says he's proprietor of this way-station hotel wouldn't trust us for a fried egg."

"Same here," admitted Kimball. "I'm badly bent."

"They can't keep us down—us Americans!" Sherman cheered, taking the youth's arm and piloting him out into the reception room. "We'll find a way out if we have to cable for a warship to come and get us."

Just as Sherman and Kimball emerged from the dining room, there was a diversion out beyond the glass doors on Waterport Street. A small cart drew up; from its seat jumped a

young woman in a duster and with a heavy automobile veil swathed under her chin. To the Arab porter who had bounded out to the street she gave directions for the removal from the cart of her baggage, two heavy suit cases and two ponderous osier baskets. These latter she was particularly tender of, following them into the hotel's reception room and directing where they should be put before the desk.

The newcomer was Jane Gerson, Hildebrand's buyer, at the end of her gasoline flight from Paris. Cool, capable, self-reliant as on the night she saw the bastions of the capital's outer forts fade under the white spikes of the searchlights, Jane strode up to the desk to face the smiling Almer.

"Is this a fortress or a hotel?" she challenged.

"A hotel, lady, a hotel," Almer purred. "A nice room—yes. Will the lady be with us long?"

"Heaven forbid! The lady is going to be on the first ship leaving for New York. And if there are no ships, I'll look over the stock of coal barges you have in your harbor." She seized a pen and dashed her signature on the register. The Shermans had pricked up their ears at the newcomer's first words. Now Henry J. pressed forward, his face glowing welcome.

"An American—a simon-pure citizen of the United States—I thought so. Welcome to the little old Rock!" He took both the girl's hands impulsively and pumped them. Mrs. Sherman, Kitty, and Willy Kimball crowded around, and the clatter of voices was instantaneous: "By auto from Paris; goodness me!" "Not a thing to eat for three days but rye bread!" "From Strassburg to Luneville in a farmer's wagon!" Each tried to match the other's story of hardship in a whirlwind of ejaculation.

The front doors opened again, and the sergeant and guard who had earlier carried off Fritz, the barber, entered. Again gun butts thumped ominously. Jane looked over her shoulder at the khaki-coated men, and confided in the Shermans:

"I think that man's been following me ever since I landed from the ferry."

"I have," answered the sergeant, stepping briskly forward and saluting. "You are a stranger on the Rock. You come here from——"

"From Paris, by motor, to the town across the bay; then over here on the ferry," the girl answered promptly. "What about it?"

"Your name?"

"Jane Gerson. Yes, yes, it sounds German, I know. But that's not my fault. I'm an American—a red-hot American, too, for the past two weeks."

The sergeant's face was wooden.

"Where are you going?"

"To New York, on the *Saxonia,* just as soon as I can. And the British army can't stop me."

"Indeed!" The sergeant permitted himself a fleeting smile. "From Paris by motor, eh? Your passports, please."

"I haven't any," Jane retorted, with a shade of defiance. "They were taken from me in Spain, just over the French border, and were not returned."

The sergeant raised his eyebrows in surprise not unmixed with irony. He pointed to the two big osier baskets, demanding to know what they contained.

"Gowns—the last gowns made in Paris before the crash. Fashion's last gasp. I am a buyer of gowns for Hildebrand's store in New York."

Ecstatic gurgles of pleasure from Mrs. Sherman and her daughter greeted this announcement. They pressed about the baskets and regarded them lovingly.

The sergeant pushed them away and tried to throw back the covers.

"Open your baggage—all of it!" he commanded snappishly.

Jane, explaining over her shoulder to

the women, stooped to fumble with the hasps.

"Seventy of the darlingest gowns—the very last Paul Poiret and Paquin and Worth made before they closed shop and marched away with their regiments. You shall see every one of them."

"Hurry, please, my time's limited!" the sergeant barked.

"I should think it would be—you're so charming," Jane flung back over her shoulder, and she raised the tops of the baskets. The other women pushed forward with subdued coos.

The sergeant plunged his hand under a mass of colored fluffiness, groped for a minute, and brought forth a long roll of heavy paper. With a fierce mien, he began to unroll the bundle.

"And these?"

"Plans," Hildebrand's buyer answered.

"Plans of what?" The sergeant glared.

"Of gowns, silly! Here—you're looking at that one upside down! This way! Now isn't that a perfect dear of an afternoon gown? Poiret didn't have time to finish it, poor man! See that lovely basque effect? Everything's *moyen age* this season, you know."

Jane, with a shrewd, sidelong glance at the flustered sergeant, rattled on, bringing gown after gown from the baskets and displaying them to the chorus of smothered screams of delight from the feminine part of her audience. One she draped coquettishly from her shoulders and did an exaggerated step before the smoky mirror over the mantelpiece to note the effect.

"Isn't it too bad this soldier person isn't married, so he could appreciate these beauties?" She flicked a mischievous eye his way. "Of course he can't be married, or he'd recognize the plan of a gown. Clean hands, there, Mister Sergeant, if you're going to touch any of these dreams! Here, let me! Now look at that *musquetaire* sleeve—the effect of the war—military, you know."

The sergeant was thoroughly angry by this time, and he forced the situation suddenly near tragedy. Under his fingers a delicate girdle crackled suspiciously.

"Here—your knife! Rip this open; there's papers of some sort hidden here." He started to pass the gown to one of his soldiers. Jane choked back a scream.

"No, no! That's crinoline, stupid! No papers——" She stretched out her arms appealingly. The sergeant humped his shoulders and put out his hand to take the opened clasp knife.

A plump, doll-faced woman who possessed an afterglow of prettiness and a bustling, nervous manner flounced through the doors at this juncture and burst suddenly into the midst of the group caught in the imminence of disaster.

"What's this—what's this?" She caught sight of the filmy creation draped from the sergeant's arm. "Oh, the beauty!" This in a whisper of admiration.

"The last one made by Worth," Jane was quick to explain, noting the sergeant's confusion in the presence of the stranger, "and this officer is going to rip it open in a search for concealed papers. He takes me for a spy."

Surprised blue eyes were turned from Jane to the sergeant. The latter shamefacedly tried to slip the open knife into his blouse, mumbling an excuse. The blue eyes bored him through.

"I call that very stupid, sergeant," reproved the angel of rescue. Then to Jane——

"Where are you taking all these wonderful gowns?"

"To New York. I'm buyer for Hildebrand's, and——"

"But, Lady Crandall, this young

woman has no passports—nothing," the sergeant interposed. "My duty——"

"Bother your duty! Don't you know a Worth gown when you see it? Now go away! I'll be responsible for this young woman from now on. Tell your commanding officer Lady Crandall has taken your duty out of your hands." She finished with a quiet assurance and turned to gloat once more over the gowns. The sergeant led his command away with evident relief.

Lady Crandall turned to include all the refugees in a general introduction of herself.

"I am Lady Crandall, the wife of the governor general of Gibraltar," she said, with a warming smile. "I just came down to see what I could do for you poor stranded Americans. In these times——"

"An American yourself, or I'm a turkey!" Sherman pushed his way between the littered baskets and seized Lady Crandall's hands. "Knew it by the cut of your jib—and—and your way of doing things. I'm Henry J. Sherman, from Kewanee, Illynoy—my wife and daughter Kitty."

"And I'm from Iowa—the red hills of ole Ioway," the governor's wife chanted, with an orator's flourish of the hands. "Welcome to the Rock, home folks!"

Hands all around and an impromptu old home week right then and there. Lady Crandall's attention could not be long away from the gowns, however. She turned back to them eagerly. With Jane Gerson as her aid, she passed them in rapturous review, Mrs. Sherman and Kitty playing an enthusiastic chorus.

A pursy litle man with an air of supreme importance—Henry Reynolds he was, United States consul at Gibraltar —catapulted in from the street while the gown chatter was at its noisiest. He threw his hands above his head in a mock attitude of submissiveness before a highwayman.

" 'S all fixed, ladies and gentlemen," he cried, with a showman's eloquence. "Here's Lady Crandall come to tell you about it, and she's so busy riding her hobby—gowns and millinery and such —she has forgotten. I'll bet dollars to doughnuts."

"Credit to whom credit is due, Mister Consul," she rallied. "I'm not stealing anybody's official thunder." The consul wagged a forefinger at her reprovingly. With impatience, the refugees waited to hear the news.

"Well, it's this way," Reynolds began. "I've got so tired having all you people sitting on my doorstep I just had to make arrangements to ship you on the *Saxonia* in self-defense. *Saxonia's* due here from Naples Thursday—day after to-morrow; sails for New York at dawn Friday morning. Lady Crandall, here—a better American never wore a bonnet—has agreed to go bond for your passage money; all your letters of credit and checks will be cashed by treasury agents before you leave the dock at New York, and you can settle with the steamship people right there.

"No, no; don't thank me! There's the person responsible for your getting home." The consul waved toward the governor's lady, who blushed rosily under the tumultuous blessings showered on her. Reynolds ducked out the door to save his face. The Shermans made their good nights, and, with Kimball, started toward the stairs.

"Thursday night, before you sail," Lady Crandall called to them, "you all have an engagement—a regular American dinner with me at Government House. Remember!"

"If you have hash—plain hash—and don't call it a rag-owt, we'll eat you out of house and home," Sherman shouted as addendum to the others' thanks.

"And you, my dear"—Lady Crandall beamed upon Jane—"you're coming right home with me to wait for the

Saxonia's sailing. Oh, no, don't be too ready with your thanks. This is pure selfishness on my part. I want you to help plan my fall clothes. There, the secret's out! But with all those beautiful gowns, surely Hildebrand will not object if you leave the pattern of one of them in an out-of-the-way little place like this. Come on, now, I'll not take no for an answer. We'll pack up all these beauties and have you off in no time."

Jane's thanks were ignored by the capable packer who smoothed and straightened the confections of silk and satin in the osier hampers. Lady Crandall summoned the porter to lift the precious freight to the back of her dog-cart, waiting outside. Almer, perturbed at the kidnaping of his guest, came from behind the desk.

"You will go to your room now?" he queried anxiously.

"Not going to take it now," Jane answered. "Have an invitation from Lady Crandall to visit the State House, or whatever you call it."

"But, pardon me. The room—it was rented, and I fear one night's lodging is due. Twenty shillings."

Jane elevated her eyebrows, but handed over a bill.

"Ah, no, lady. French paper—it is worthless to me. Only English gold, if the lady pleases." Almer's smile was leonine.

"But it's all I've got; just came from France, and——"

"Then, though it gives me the greatest sorrow, I must hold your luggage until you have the money changed. Excuse——"

Captain Woodhouse, who had dallied long over his dinner for lack of something else to do, came out of the dining room just then, saw a woman in difficulties with the landlord, and instinctively stepped forward to offer his services.

"Beg pardon, but can I be of any help?"

Jane turned. The captain's heart gave a great leap and then went cold. Frank pleasure followed the first surprise in the girl's eyes.

"Why, Captain Woodhouse—how jolly!—to see you again after——"

She put out her hand with a free gesture of comradeship.

Captain Woodhouse did not see the girl's hand. He was looking into her eyes coldly, aloofly.

"I beg your pardon, but aren't you mistaken?"

"Mistaken?" The girl was staring at him, mystified.

"I'm afraid I have not had the pleasure of meeting you," he continued evenly. "But if I can be of service—now——"

She shrugged her shoulders and turned away from him.

"A small matter. I owe this man twenty shillings, and he will not accept French paper. It's all I have."

Woodhouse took the note from her. "I'll take it gladly—perfectly good." He took some money from his pocket and looked at it. Then, to Almer: "I say, can you split a crown?"

"Change for you in a minute, sir—the tobacco shop down the street." Almer pocketed the gold piece and dodged out of the door.

Jane turned and found the deep-set gray eyes of Captain Woodhouse fixed upon her. They craved pardon—toleration of the incident just passed.

CHAPTER IX.

THE IMPORTANCE OF ROOM D.

Woodhouse hurried to Jane Gerson's side and began to speak swiftly and earnestly:

"You are from the States?"

A shrug was her answer. The girl's face was averted, and in the defiant set of her shoulders Woodhouse found

little promise of pardon for the incident of the minute before. He persisted:

"This war means nothing to you—one side or the other?"

"I have equal pity for them both," she answered in a low voice.

"We are living in dangerous times," he continued earnestly. "I tell you frankly, were the fact that you and I had met before to become known here on the Rock the consequences would be most—inconvenient—for me." Jane turned and looked searchingly into his face. Something in the tone rather than the words roused her quick sympathy. Woodhouse kept on:

"I am sorry I had to deny that former meeting just now—that meeting which has been with me in such vivid memory. I regret that were you to allude to it again I would have to deny it still more emphatically."

"I'm sure I shan't mention it again," the girl broke in shortly.

"Perhaps since it means so much to me and so little to you—your silence—perhaps you will do me that favor, Miss Gerson."

"Certainly." Woodhouse could see that anger still tinged her speech.

"May I go further—and ask you to—promise?" A shadow of annoyance creased her brows but she nodded.

"That is very good of you," he thanked her. "Shall you be long on the Rock?"

"No longer than I have to. I'm sailing on the first boat for the States," she answered.

"Then I am in luck—to-night." Woodhouse tried to speak easily, though Jane Gerson's attitude was distant. "Meeting you again—that's luck."

"To judge by what you have just said it must be instead a great misfortune," she retorted, with a slow smile.

"That is not fair. You know what I mean. Don't imagine I've really forgotten our first meeting under happier conditions than these. I know I'm not clever—I can't make it sound as I would—but I've thought a great deal of you, Miss Gerson—wondering how you were making it in this great war. Perhaps——"

Almer returned at this juncture with the change, which he handed to Woodhouse. He was followed in by Lady Crandall, who assured Jane her hampers were securely strapped to the dogcart. Jane attempted an introduction.

"This gentleman has just done me a service, Lady Crandall. May I present——"

"So sorry. You don't know my name. My clumsiness. Captain Woodhouse." The man bridged the dangerous gap hurriedly. Lady Crandall acknowledged the introduction with a gracious smile.

"Your husband is Sir George——" he began.

"Yes, Sir George Crandall, governor general of the Rock. And you——"

"Quite a recent comer. Transferred from Nile country here. Report tomorrow."

"All of the new officers have to report to the governor's wife as well," Lady Crandall rallied, with a glance at Jane. "You must come and see me—and Miss Gerson, who will be with me until her boat sails."

Woodhouse caught his breath. Jane Gerson, who knew him, at the governor's home! But he mastered himself in a second and bowed his thanks. Lady Crandall was moving toward the door. Her ward turned and held out a hand to Woodhouse.

"So good of you to have straightened out my finances," she said, with a smile in which the man hoped he read full forgiveness for his denial of a few minutes before. "If you're ever in America I hope——" He looked up quickly. "I hope somebody will be as nice to you. Good night."

Woodhouse and Almer were alone in the mongrel reception room. The hour was late. Almer began sliding folding wooden shutters across the back of the street windows. Woodhouse lingered over the excuse of a final cigarette, knowing the moment for his rapprochement with his fellow Wilhelmstrasse spy was at hand. He was more distraught than he cared to admit even to himself. The day's developments had been startling. First the stunning encounter with Capper there on the very Rock which was to be the scene of his delicate operations—Capper, whom he had thought sunk in the oblivion of some Alexandrian wine shop, but who had followed him on the *Princess Mary*. The fellow had deliberately cast himself into his notice, Woodhouse reflected; there had been menace and insolent hint of a power to harm in his sneering objurgation that Woodhouse should remember his name against a second meeting. "Capper—never heard the name in Alexandria, eh?" What could he mean by that if not that somehow the little ferret had learned of his visit to the home of Doctor Koch? And that meant—why, Capper in Gibraltar was as dangerous as a coiled cobra!

Then the unexpected meeting with Jane Gerson, the little American he had mourned as lost in the fury of the war. Ah, that was a joy not unmixed with regrets! What did she think of him? First he had been forced coldly to deny the acquaintance which had meant much to him in moments of recollection; then he had attempted a lame explanation, which explained nothing and must have left her more mystified than before. In fact, he had frankly thrown himself on the mercy of a girl upon whom he had not the shadow of claim beyond the poor equity of a chance friendship—an incident she might consider as merely one of a day's travel so far as he could know. He had stood before her caught in a deceit, for on the occasion of that never-to-be-forgotten ride from Calais to Paris he had represented himself as hurrying back to Egypt, and here she found him still out of uniform and in a hotel in Gibraltar.

Beyond all this, Jane Gerson was going to the governor's house as a guest. She whom he had forced, ever so cavalierly, into a promise to keep secret her half knowledge of the double game he was playing was going to be on the intimate ground of association with the one man in Gibraltar who by a crook of his finger could end suspicion by a firing squad. This breezy little baggage from New York carried his life balanced on the rosy tip of her tongue. She could be careless or she could be indifferent; in either case it would be bandaged eyes and the click of shells going home for him.

It was Almer who interrupted Woodhouse's troubled train of thought.

"Captain Woodhouse will report for signal duty on the Rock to-morrow, I suppose?" he insinuated, coming down to where Woodhouse was standing before the fireplace. He made a show of tidying up the scattered magazines and folders on the table.

"Report for signal duty?" the other echoed coldly. "How did you know I was to report for signal duty here?"

"In the press a few weeks ago," the hotel keeper hastily explained. "Your transfer from the Nile country was announced. We poor people here in Gibraltar, we have so little to think about, even such small details of news——"

"Ah, yes. Quite so." Woodhouse tapped back a yawn.

"Your journey here from your station on the Nile—it was without incident?" Almer eyed his guest closely. The latter permitted his eyes to rest on Almer's for a minute before replying.

"Quite." Woodhouse threw his cig-

arette in the fireplace and started for the stairs.

"Ah, most unusual—such a long journey without incident of any kind in this time of universal war, with all Europe gone mad." Almer was twiddling the combination of a small safe set in the wall by the fireplace, and his chatter seemed only incidental to the absorbing work he had at hand. "How will the madness end, Captain Woodhouse? What will be the boundary lines of Europe's nations in—say, 1932?"

Almer rose as he said this and turned to look squarely into the other's face. Woodhouse met his gaze steadily and without betraying the slightest emotion.

"In 1932—I wonder," he mused, and into his speech unconsciously appeared that throaty intonation of the Teutonic tongue.

"Don't go yet, Captain Woodhouse. Before you retire I want you to sample some of this brandy." He brought out of the safe a short, squat bottle and glasses. "See, I keep it in the safe, so precious it is. Drink with me, captain, to the monarch you have come to Gibraltar to serve—to his majesty, King George the Fifth!"

Almer lifted his glass, but Woodhouse appeared wrapped in thought; his hand did not go up.

"I see you do not drink to that toast, captain."

"No—I was thinking—of 1932."

"So?" Quick as a flash Almer caught him up. "Then perhaps I had better say, drink to the greatest monarch in Europe."

"To the greatest monarch in Europe!" Woodhouse lifted his glass and drained it.

Almer leaned suddenly across the table and spoke tensely: "You have—something maybe—I would like to see. Some little relic of Alexandria, let us say."

Woodhouse swept a quick glance around, then reached for the pin in his tie.

"A scarab; that's all."

In the space of a breath Almer had seen what lay in the back of the stone beetle. He gripped Woodhouse's hand fervently.

"Yes—yes, 1932! They have told me of your coming. A cablegram from Koch only this afternoon said you would be on the *Princess Mary*. The other—the real Woodhouse—there will be no slips; he will not——"

"He is as good as a dead man for many months," Woodhouse interrupted. "Not a chance of a mistake." He slipped easily into German. "Everything depends on us now, Herr Almer."

"Perhaps the fate of our fatherland," Almer replied, cleaving to English. Woodhouse stepped suddenly away from the side of the table, against which he had been leaning, and his right hand jerked back to a concealed holster on his hip. His eyes were hot with suspicion.

"You do not answer in German; why not? Answer me in German or by——"

"Ach! What need to become excited?" Almer drew back hastily, and his tongue speedily switched to German. "German is dangerous here on the Rock, captain. Only yesterday they shot a man against a wall because he spoke German too well. Do you wonder I try to forget our native tongue?"

Woodhouse was mollified, and he smiled apologetically. Almer forgave him out of admiration for his discretion.

"No need to suspect me—Almer. They will tell you in Berlin how for twenty years I have served the Wilhelmstrasse. But never before such an opportunity—such an opportunity. Stupendous!" Woodhouse nodded enthusiastic affirmation. "But to business, 1932. This Captain Woodhouse some

seven years ago was stationed here on the Rock for just three months."

"So I know."

"You, as Woodhouse, will be expected to have some knowledge of the signal tower, to which you will have access." Almer climbed a chair on the opposite side of the room, threw open the face of the old Dutch clock there, and removed from its interior a thin roll of blue drafting paper. He put it in Woodhouse's hands. "Here are a few plans of the interior of the signal tower—the best I could get. You will study them to-night; but give me your word to burn them before you sleep."

"Very good." Woodhouse slipped the roll into the breast pocket of his coat. Almer leaned forward in a gust of excitement, and, bringing his mouth close to the other's ear, whispered hoarsely:

"England's Mediterranean fleet—twenty-two dreadnaughts, with cruisers and destroyers—nearly a half of Britain's navy, will be here any day, hurrying back to guard the Channel. They will anchor in the straits. Our big moment—it will be here then! Listen! Room D in the signal tower—that is the room. All the switches are there. From Room D every mine in the harbor can be exploded in ten seconds."

"Yes, but how to get to Room D?" Woodhouse queried.

"Simple. Two doors to Room D, captain; an outer door like any other; an inner door of steel, protected by a combination lock like a vault's door. Two men on the Rock have that combination: Major Bishop, chief signal officer, he has it in his head; the governor general of the Rock, he has it in his safe."

"We can get it out of the safe easier than from Major Bishop's head," Woodhouse put in, with a smile.

"Right. We have a friend—in the governor's own house—a man with a number from the Wilhelmstrasse like you and me. At any moment in the past two months he could have laid a hand on that combination. But we thought it better to wait until necessity came. When the fleet arrives you will have that combination; you will go with it to Room D, and after that——"

"The deluge," the other finished.

"Yes—yes! Our country master of the sea at last, and by the work of the Wilhelmstrasse—despised spies who are shot like dogs when they're caught, but die heroes' deaths." The hotel proprietor checked himself in the midst of his rhapsody, and came back to more practical details:

"But this afternoon—that man from Alexandria who called you by name. That looked bad—very bad. He knows something?"

Woodhouse, who had been expecting the question, and who preferred not to share an anxiety he felt himself best fitted to cope with alone, turned the other's question aside:

"Never met him before in my life to my best recollection. My name he picked up on the *Princess Mary,* of course; I won a pool one day, and he may have heard some one mention it. Simply a drunken brawler who didn't know what he was doing."

Almer seemed satisfied, but raised another point:

"But the girl who has just left here; am I to have no explanation of her?"

"What explanation do you want?" the captain demanded curtly.

"She recognized you. Who is she? What is she?"

"Devilish unfortunate," Woodhouse admitted. "We met a few weeks ago on a train, while I was on my way to Egypt, you know. Chatted together—oh, very informally. She is a capable young woman from the States—a 'buyer' she calls herself. But I don't think we need fear complications from

that score; she's bent only on getting home."

"The situation is dangerous," urged Almer, wagging his head. "She is stopping at the governor's house; any reference she might make about meeting you on a train on the Continent when you were supposed to be at Wady Halfa on the Nile——"

"I have her promise she will not mention that meeting to anybody."

"Ach! A woman's promise!" Almer's eyes invoked Heaven to witness a futile thing. "She seemed rather glad to see you again; I——"

"Really?" Woodhouse's eyes lighted. The Splendide's proprietor was pacing the floor as fast as his fat legs would let him. "Something must be done," he muttered over and again. He halted abruptly before Woodhouse, and launched a thick forefinger at him like a torpedo.

"You must make love to that girl, Woodhouse, to keep her on our side," was his ultimatum.

Woodhouse regarded him quizzically, leaned forward, and whispered significantly.

"I'm already doing it," he said.

CHAPTER X.

MR. CAPPER VISITS A LADY.

Turning to consider the never-stale fortunes of one of fate's bean bags——

Mr. Billy Capper, ejected from the Hotel Splendide, took little umbrage at such treatment; it was not an uncommon experience, and, besides, a quiet triumph which would not be dampened by trifles filled his soul. Cheerfully he pushed through the motley crowd on Waterport Street down to the lower levels of the city by the Line Wall, where the roosts of sailors and warrens of quondam adventurers off all the seven seas made for more congenial atmosphere than that of the Splendide's hollow pretense. He chose a hostelry more commensurate with his slender purse than Almer's, though as a matter of fact the question of paying a hotel bill was farthest from Billy Capper's thoughts; such formal transactions he avoided whenever feasible. The proprietor of the San Roc, where Capper took a room, had such an evil eye that his new guest made a mental note that perhaps he might have to leave his bag behind when he decamped. Capper abhorred violence—to his own person.

Alone over a glass of thin wine—the champagne days, alas! had been too fleeting—Capper took stock of his situation and conned the developments he hoped to be the instrument for starting. To begin with, finances were wretchedly bad, and that was a circumstance so near the ordinary for Capper that he shuddered as he pulled a gold guinea and a few silver bits from his pocket, and mechanically counted them over. Of the three hundred marks Louisa—pretty snake!—had given him in the Café Riche and the expense money he had received from her the following day to cover his expedition to Alexandria for the Wilhelmstrasse naught but this paltry residue! That second-cabin ticket on the *Princess Mary* had taken the last big bite from his hoard, and here he was in this black-and-tan town with a quid and little more between himself and the old starved-dog life.

But—and Capper narrowed his eyes and sagely wagged his head—there'd be something fat coming. When he got knee to knee with the governor general of the Rock, and told him what he, Billy Capper, knew about the identity of Captain Woodhouse, newly transferred to the signal service at Gibraltar, why, if there wasn't a cool fifty pounds or a matter of that as honorarium from a generous government Billy Capper had missed his guess; that's all.

"I say, governor, of course this is

very handsome of you, but I didn't come to tell what I know for gold. I'm a loyal Englishman, and I've done what I have for the good of the old flag."

"Quite right, Mr. Capper; quite right. But you will please accept this little gift as an inadequate recognition of your loyalty. Your name shall be mentioned in my dispatches home."

Capper rehearsed this hypothetical dialogue with relish. He could even catch the involuntary gasp of astonishment from the governor when that responsible officer in his majesty's service heard the words Capper would whisper to him; could see the commander of the Rock open a drawer in his desk and take therefrom a thick white sheaf of bank notes—count them! Then—ah, then—the first train for Paris and the delights of Paris at wartime prices.

The little spy anticipated no difficulty in gaining audience with the governor. Before he had been fifteen minutes off the *Princess Mary* he had heard the name of the present incumbent of Government House. Crandall—Sir George Crandall; the same who had been in command of the forts at Rangoon back in '99. Oh, yes, Capper knew him, and he made no doubt that, if properly reminded of a certain bit of work Billy Capper had done back in the Burmese city, Sir George would recall him—and with every reason for gratefulness. Tomorrow—yes, before ever Sir George had had his morning's peg, Capper would present himself at Government House and tell about that house on Queen's Terrace at Ramleh; about the unconscious British officer who was carried there and hurried thence by night, and the tall, well-knit man in conference with Doctor Koch who was now come to be a part of the garrison of the Rock under the stolen name of Woodhouse.

Capper had his dinner, then strolled around the town to see the sights and hear what he could hear. Listening was a passion with him.

For the color and the exotic savor of Gibraltar on a hot August night Capper had no eye. The knife edge of a moon slicing the battlements of the old Moorish Castle up on the heights; the minor tinkle of a guitar sounding from a vine-curtained balcony; a Riffian muleteer's singsong review of his fractious beast's degraded ancestry—not for these incidentals did the practical mind under the battered Capper bowler have room. Rather the scraps of information and gossip passed from one blue-coated artilleryman, off duty, to another over a mug of ale, or the confidence of a sloe-eyed dancer to the guitar player in a tavern; this was meat for Capper. Carefully he husbanded his gold piece, and judiciously he spent his silver for drink. He enjoyed himself in the ascetic spirit of a monk in a fast, believing that the morrow would bring champagne in place of the thin wine his pitiful silver could command.

Then, of a sudden, he caught a glimpse of Louisa—Louisa of the Wilhelmstrasse. Capper's heart skipped, and an involuntary impulse crooked his fingers into claws.

The girl was just coming out of a café—the only café aspiring to Parisian smartness Gibraltar boasts. Her head was bare. Under an arm she had tucked a stack of cigar boxes. Had it not been that a steady light from an overhead arc cut her features out of the soft shadow with the fineness of a diamond-pointed tool, Capper would have sworn his eyes were playing him tricks. But Louisa's features were unmistakable, whether in the Lucullan surroundings of a Berlin summer garden or here on a street in Gibraltar. Capper had instinctively crushed himself against the nearest wall on seeing the girl; the crowd had come

between himself and her, and she had not seen him.

All the weasel instinct of the man came instantly to the fore that second of recognition, and the glint in his eyes and baring of his teeth were flashed from brute instinct—the instinct of the night-prowling meat hunter. All the vicious hate which the soul of Billy Capper could distill flooded to his eyes and made them venomous. Slinking, dodging, covering, he followed the girl with the cigar boxes. She entered several dance halls, offered her wares at the door of a cheap hotel. For more than an hour Capper shadowed her through the twisting streets of the old Spanish town. Finally she turned into a narrow lane, climbed flagstone steps, set the width of the lane, to a house under the scarp of a cliff, and let herself in at the street door. Capper, following to the door as quickly as he dared, found it locked.

The little spy was choking with a lust to kill; his whole body trembled under the pulse of a murderous passion. He had found Louisa—the girl who had sold him out—and for her private ends, Capper made no doubt of that. Some day he had hoped to run her down, and with his fingers about her soft throat to tell her how dangerous it was to trick Billy Capper. But to have her flung across his path this way when anger was still at white heat in him—this was luck! He'd see this Louisa and have a litle powwow with her even if he had to break his way into the house.

Capper felt the doorknob again; the door wouldn't yield. He drew back a bit and looked up at the front of the house. Just a dingy black wall with three unlighted windows set in it irregularly. The roof projected over the gabled attic like the visor of a cap. Beyond the farther corner of the house was ten feet of garden space, and then the bold rock of the cliff springing upward. A low wall bounded the garden; over its top nodded the pale ghosts of moonflowers and oleanders.

Capper was over the wall in a bound, and, crouching amid flower clusters, listening for possible alarm. None came, and he became bolder. Skirting a tiny arbor, he skulked to a position in the rear of the house; there a broad patch of illumination stretched across the garden, coming from two French windows on the lower floor. They stood half open; through the thin white stuff hanging behind them Capper could see vaguely the figure of a girl seated before a dressing mirror with her hands busy over two heavy ropes of hair. Nothing to do but step up on the little half balcony outside the windows, push through into the room, and—have a little powwow with Louisa.

An unwonted boldness had a grip on the little spy. Never a person to force a face-to-face issue when the trick could be turned behind somebody's back, he was, nevertheless, driven irresistibly by a furious anger which took no heed of consequences.

With the light foot of a cat, Capper straddled the low rail of the balcony, pushed back one of the partly opened windows, and stepped into Louisa's room. His eyes registered mechanically the details—a heavy canopied bed, a massive highboy of some dark wood, chairs supporting carelessly flung bits of wearing apparel. But he noted especially that just as he emerged from behind one of the loose curtains a white arm remained poised over a brown head.

"Stop where you are, Billy Capper!" The girl's low-spoken order was as cold and tense as drawn wire. No trace of shock or surprise was in her voice. She did not turn her head. Capper was brought up short, as if he felt a noose about his neck.

Slowly the figure seated before the dressing mirror turned to face him.

Tumbling hair framed the girl's face, partly veiling the yellow-brown eyes which seemed two spots of metal coming to incandescence under heat. Her hands, one still holding a comb, lay supinely in her lap.

"I admit this is a surprise, Capper," Louisa said, letting each word fall sharply, but without emphasis. "However, it is like you to be—unconventional. May I ask what you want this time—besides money, of course?"

Capper wet his lips and smiled wryly. He had jumped so swiftly to impulse that he had not prepared himself beforehand against the moment when he should be face to face with the girl from the Wilhelmstrasse. Moreover, he had expected to be closer to her—very close indeed—before the time for words should come.

"I—I saw you to-night and followed you—here," he began lamely.

"Flattering!" She laughed shortly.

"Oh, you needn't try to come it over me with words!" Capper's teeth showed in a nasty grin as his rage flared back from the first suppression of surprise. "I've come here to have a settlement for a little affair between you and me."

"Blackmail? Why, Billy Capper, how true to form you run!" The yellow-brown eyes were alight and burning now. "Have you determined the sum you want or are you in the open market?"

Capper grinned again, and shifted his weight, inadvertently advancing one foot a little nearer the seated girl as he did so.

"Pretty quick with the tongue—as always," he sneered. "But this time it don't go, Louisa. You pay differently this time—pay for selling me out. Understand!" Again one foot shifted forward a few inches by the accident of some slight body movement on the man's part. Louisa still sat before her dressing mirror, hands carelessly crossed on her lap.

"Selling you out?" she repeated evenly. "Oh! So you finally did discover that you were elected to be the goat? Brilliant Capper! How long before you made up your mind you had a grievance?"

The girl's cool admission goaded the little man's fury to frenzy. His mind craved for action—for the leap and the tightening of fingers around that taunting throat; but somehow his body, strangely detached from the fiat of volition as if it were another's body, lagged to the command. Violence had never been its mission; muscles were slow to accept this new conception of the mind. But the man's feet followed their crafty intelligence; by fractions of inches they moved forward stealthily.

"You wouldn't be here now," Louisa coldly went on, "if you weren't fortune's bright-eyed boy. You were slated to be taken off the boat at Malta and shot; the boat didn't stop at Malta through no fault of ours, and so you arrived at Alexandria—and became a nuisance." One of the girl's hands lifted from her lap and lazily played along the edge of the rosewood standard which supported the mirror on the dressing table. It stopped at a curiously carved rosette in the rococo scrollwork. Capper's suspicious eye noted the movement. He sparred for time—the time needed by those stealthy feet to shorten the distance between themselves and the girl.

"Why," he hissed, "why did you give me a number with the Wilhelmstrasse and send me to Alexandria if I was to be caught and shot at Malta? That's what I'm here to find out."

"Excellent Capper!" Her fingers were playing with the convolutions of the carved rosette. "Intelligent Capper! He comes to a lady's room at night to find the answer to a simple question. He shall have it. He evi-

dently does not know the method of the Wilhelmstrasse, which is to choose two men for every task to be accomplished. One—the 'target,' we call him—goes first; our friends whose secrets we seek are allowed to become suspicious of him—we even give them a hint to help them in their suspicion. They seize the 'target,' and in time of war he becomes a real target for a firing squad, as you should have been, Capper, at Malta. Then when our friends believe they have nipped our move in the bud follows the second man—who turns the trick."

Capper was still wrestling with that baffling stubbornness of the body. Each word the girl uttered was like vitriol on his writhing soul. His mind willed murder—willed it with all the strength of hate; but still the springs of his body were cramped—by what? Not cowardice, for he was beyond reckoning results. Certainly not compassion or any saving virtue of chivalry. Why did his eyes constantly stray to that white hand lifted to allow the fingers to play with the filigree of wood on the mirror support?

"Then you engineered the stealing of my number—from the hollow under the handle of my cane—some time between Paris and Alexandria?" he challenged in a whisper, his face thrust forward between hunched shoulders.

"No, indeed. It was necessary for you to have—the evidence of your profession when the English searched you at Malta. But the loss of your number is not news; Koch, in Alexandria, has reported, of course."

The girl saw Capper's foot steal forward again. He was not six feet from her now. His wiry body settled itself ever so slightly for a spring. Louisa rose from her chair, one hand still resting on the wooden rosette of the mirror standard. She began to speak in a voice drained of all emotion:

"You followed me here to-night, Billy Capper, imagining in your poor little soul that you were going to do something desperate—something really human and brutal. You came in my window all primed for murder. But your poor little soul all went to water the instant we faced each other. You couldn't nerve yourself to leap upon a woman even. You can't now."

She smiled upon him—a woman's flaying smile of pity. Capper writhed, and his features twisted themselves in a paroxysm of hate.

"I have my finger on a bell button here, Capper. If I press it men will come in here and kill you without asking a question. Now you'd better go."

Capper's eyes jumped to focus on a round white nib under one of the girl's fingers there on the mirror's standard. The little ivory button was alive—a sentient thing suddenly allied against him. That inanimate object rather than Louisa's words sent fingers of cold fear to grip his heart. A little ivory button waiting there to trap him! He tried to cover his vanished resolution with bluster, sputtering out in a tense whisper:

"You're a devil—a devil from hell, Louisa! But I'll get you. They shoot women in war time! Sir George Crandall—I know him—I did a little service for him once in Rangoon. He'll hear of you and your Wilhelmstrasse tricks, and you'll have your pretty back against a wall with guns at your heart before to-morrow night. Remember—before to-morrow night!"

Capper was backing toward the open window behind him. The girl still stood by the mirror, her hand lightly resting where the ivory nib was. She laughed.

"Very well, Billy Capper. It will be a firing party for two—you and me together. I'll make a frank confession—tell all the information Billy Capper sold to me for three hundred marks one night in the Café Riche—the story

of the Anglo-Belgian defense arrangements. The same Billy Capper, I'll say, who sold the Lord Fisher letters to the kaiser—a cable to Downing Street will confirm that identification inside of two hours. And then——"

"And your Captain Woodhouse—your cute little Wilhelmstrasse captain," Capper flung back from the window, pretending not to heed the girl's potent threat; "I know all about him, and the governor'll know, too—same time he hears about you!"

"Good night, Billy Capper," Louisa answered, with a piquant smile. "And au revoir until we meet with our backs against that wall."

Capper's head dropped from view over the balcony edge; there was a sound of running feet amid the close-ranked plants in the garden, then silence.

The girl from the Wilhelmstrasse, alone in the house save for the bent old housekeeper asleep in her attic, turned and laid her head—a bit weakly—against the carved standard, where in a florid rosette showed the ivory tip of the hinge for the cheval glass.

CHAPTER XI.

A SPY IN THE SIGNAL TOWER!

Government House, one of the Baedeker points of Gibraltar, stands amid its gardens on a shelf of the Rock about midway between the Alameda and the signal tower, perched on the very spine of the lion's back above it. Its windows look out upon the blue bay and over to the red roofs of Algeciras across the water on Spanish territory. Tourists gather to peek from a respectful distance at the mossy front and quaint, ecclesiastic gables of Government House, which has a distinction quite apart from its use as the home of the governor general. Once, back in the dim ages of Spain's glory, it was a monastery, one of the oldest in the southern tip of the peninsula. When the English came their practical sense took no heed of the protesting ghosts of the monks, but converted the monastery into a home for the military head of the fortress—a little dreary, a shade more melancholy than the accustomed manor hall at home, but adequate and livable.

Thither, on the morning after his arrival, Captain Woodhouse went to report for duty to Major General Sir George Crandall, governor general. Captain Woodhouse was in uniform—neat service khaki and pith helmet, which became him mightily. He appeared to have been molded into the short-skirted, olive-gray jacket; it set on his shoulders with snug ease. Perhaps, if anything, the uniform gave to his features a shade more than their wonted sternness, to his body just the least addition of an indefinable alertness, of nervous acuteness. It was nine o'clock, and Captain Woodhouse knew it was necessary for him to pay his duty call upon Sir George before the eleven o'clock assembly.

As the captain emerged from the straggling end of Waterport Street, and strode through the flowered paths of the Alameda, he did not happen to see a figure which dodged behind a chevaux-de-frise of Spanish bayonet upon his approach. Billy Capper, who had been pacing the gardens for more than an hour, fear battling with the predatory impulse which urged him to Government House, watched Captain Woodhouse pass, and his eyes narrowed into a queer twinkle of oblique humor. So Captain Woodhouse had begun to play the game—going to report to the governor, eh? The pale soul of Mr. Capper glowed with a faint flicker of admiration for this cool bravery far beyond its capacity to practice. Capper waited a safe time, then followed, chose a position outside Government House

from which he could see the main entrance, and waited.

A tall, thin East Indian with a narrow, ascetic face under his closely wound white turban, and wearing a native livery of the same spotless white, answered the captain's summons on the heavy knocker. He accepted the visitor's card; showed him into a dim hallway hung with faded arras and coats of chain mail. The Indian, Jaimihr Khan, gave Captain Woodhouse a start when he returned to say the governor would receive him in his office. The man had a tread like a cat's, absolutely noiseless; he moved through the half light of the hall like a white wraith. His English was spoken precisely and with a curious, mechanical intonation.

Jaimihr Khan threw back heavy double doors and announced, "Cap-tain Wood-house." He had the doors shut noiselessly almost before the visitor was through them.

A tall, heavy-set man with graying hair and mustache rose from a broad desk at the right of a large room and advanced with hand outstretched in cordial welcome.

"Captain Woodhouse, of the signal service. Welcome to the Rock, captain. Need you here. Glad you've come."

Woodhouse studied the face of his superior in a swift glance as he shook hands. A broad, full face it was; kindly, intelligent, perhaps not as alert as to the set of eyes and mouth as it had been in younger days when the stripes of service were still to be won. General Sir George Crandall gave the impression of a man content to rest on his honors, though scrupulously attentive to the routine of his position. He motioned the younger man to draw a chair up to the desk.

"In yesterday on the *Princess Mary,* I presume, captain?"

"Yes, general. Didn't report to you upon arrival because I thought it would be quite tea time and I didn't want to disturb——"

"Right!" General Crandall tipped back in his swivel chair and appraised his new officer with satisfaction. "Everything quiet on the upper Nile? Germans not tinkering with the mullah yet to start insurrection or anything like that?"

"Right as a trivet, sir," Woodhouse answered promptly. "Of course we're anticipating some such move by the enemy—agents working in from Erythrea—holy war of a sort, perhaps, but I think our people have things well in hand."

"And at Wady Halfa, your former commander——" The general hesitated.

"Major Bronson-Webb, sir," Woodhouse was quick to supply, but not without a sharp glance at the older man.

"Yes—yes; Bronson-Webb—knew him in Rangoon in the late nineties—mighty decent chap and a good executive. He's standing the sun, I warrant."

Captain Woodhouse accepted the cigarette from the general's extended case.

"No complaint from him at least, General Crandall. We all get pretty well baked at Wady, I take it."

The governor laughed, and tapped a bell on his desk. Jaimihr Khan was instantly materialized between the double doors.

"My orderly, Jaimihr," General Crandall ordered, and the doors were shut once more. The general stretched a hand across the desk.

"Your papers please, captain. I'll receipt your order of transfer and you'll be a member of our garrison forthwith."

Captain Woodhouse brought a thin sheaf of folded papers from his breast pocket and passed it to his superior. He kept his eyes steadily on the general's face as he scanned them.

"C. G. Woodhouse—Chief Signal

Officer—Ninth Grenadiers—Wady Halfa——" General Crandall conned the transfer aloud, running his eyes rapidly down the lines of the form. "Right. Now, captain, when my orderly comes——"

A subaltern entered and saluted.

"This is Captain Woodhouse." General Crandall indicated Woodhouse, who had risen. "Kindly conduct him to Major Bishop, who will assign him to quarters. Captain Woodhouse, we —Lady Crandall and I—will expect you at Government House soon to make your bow over the teacup. One of Lady Crandall's inflexible rules for new recruits, you know. Good day, sir."

Woodhouse, out in the free air again, drew in a long breath and braced back his shoulders. He accompanied the subaltern over the trails on the Rock to the quarters of Major Bishop, chief signal officer, under whom he was to be junior in command. But one regret marked his first visit to Government House—he had not caught even a glimpse of the little person calling herself Jane Gerson, buyer.

But he had missed by a narrow margin. Piloted by Lady Crandall, Jane had left the vaulted breakfast room for the larger and lighter library room, which Sir George had converted to the purpose of an office. This room was a sort of holy of holies with Lady Crandall, to be invaded if the presiding genius could be caught napping or lulled to complaisance. This morning she had the important necessity of unobstructed light—not a general commodity about Government House—to urge in defense of profanation. For her guest carried under her arm a sheaf of plans—by such sterling architects of women's fancies as Worth and Doeuillet, and the imp of envy would not allow the governor's wife to have peace until she had devoured every pattern. She paused in mock horror at the threshold of her husband's sanctum.

"But, George, dear, you should be out by this time, you know," Lady Crandall expostulated. "Miss Gerson and I have something—oh, tremendously important to do here." She made a sly gesture of concealing the bundle of stiff drawing paper she carried. General Crandall, who had risen at the arrival of the two invaders, made a show at capturing the plans his wife held behind her back. Jane bubbled laughter at the spectacle of so exalted a military lion at play. The general possessed himself of the roll, drew a curled scroll from it, and gravely studied it.

"Miss Gerson," he said, with deliberation, "this looks to me like a plan of Battery B. I am surprised that you should violate the hospitality of Government House by doing spy work from its bedroom windows."

"Foolish! You've got that upside down for one thing," Lady Crandall chided. "And beside it's only a chart of what the lady of Government House hopes soon to wear if she can get the goods from Holbein's, on Regent Street."

"You see, General Crandall, I'm attacking Government House at its weakest point," Jane laughed. "Been here less than twelve hours, and already the most important member of the garrison has surrendered."

"The American sahib, Reynolds," chanted Jaimihr Khan from the double doors, and almost at once the breezy consul burst into the room. He saluted all three with an expansive gesture of the hands.

"Morning, governor—morning, Lady Crandall, and same to you, Miss Gerson. Dear, dear; this is going to be a bad day for me, and it's just started." The little man was wound up like a sidewalk toy, and he ran on without stopping:

"General Sherman might have got some real force into his remark about war if he'd had a job like mine. Miss

Gerson—news! Heard from the *Saxonia*. Be in harbor some time to-morrow and leave at six sharp following morning." Jane clapped her hands. "I've wired for accommodations for all of you—just got the answer. Rotten accommodations, but—thank Heaven—I won't be able to hear what you say about me when you're at sea."

"Anything will do," Jane broke in. "I'm not particular. I want to sail—that's all."

The consul looked flustered.

"Um—that's what I came to see you about, General Crandall." He jerked his head around toward the governor with a birdlike pertness. "What are you going to do with this young lady, sir?" Jane waited the answer breathlessly.

"Why—um—really, as far as we're concerned," Sir George answered slowly, "we'd be glad to have her stop here indefinitely. Don't you agree, Helen?"

"Of course; but——"

"It's this way," the consul interrupted Lady Crandall. "I've arranged to get Miss Gerson aboard, provided, of course, you approve."

"You haven't got a cable through regarding her?" the general asked. "Her passports—lost—lot of red tape, of course."

"Not a line from Paris even," Reynolds answered. "Miss Gerson says the ambassador could vouch for her, and——"

"Indeed he could!" Jane started impulsively toward the general. "It was his wife arranged my motor for me and advanced me money."

General Crandall looked down into her eager face indulgently.

"You really are very anxious to sail, Miss Gerson?"

"General Crandall, I'm not very good at these please-spare-my-lover speeches," the girl began, her lips tremulous. "But it means a lot to me—to go; my job, my career. I've fought my way this far, and here I am—and there's the sea out there. If I can't step aboard the *Saxonia* Friday morning it—it will break my heart."

Gibraltar's master honed his chin thoughtfully for a minute.

"Um—I'm sure I don't want to break anybody's heart—not at my age, miss. I see no good reason why I should not let you go if nothing happens meanwhile to make me change my mind." He beamed good humor on her.

"Bless you, general," she cried. "Hildebrand's will mention you in its advertisements."

"Heaven forbid!" General Crandall cried in real perturbation.

Jane turned to Lady Crandall and took both her hands.

"Come to my room," she urged, with an air of mystery. "You know that Doeuillet evening gown—the one in blue? It's yours, Lady Crandall. I'd give another to the general if he'd wear it. Now one fitting and——" Her voice was drowned by Lady Crandall's: "You dear!"

"Be at the dock at five a. m., Friday, to see you and the others off, Miss Gerson," Reynolds called after her. "Must go now—morning crowd of busted citizens waiting at the consulate to be fed. Ta-ta!" Reynolds collided with Jaimihr Khan at the double doors.

"A young man who wishes to see you, general sahib. He will give no name, but he says a promise you made to see him—by telephone an hour ago."

"Show Mr. Reynolds out, Jaimihr!" the general ordered. "Then you may bring the young man in."

Mr. Billy Capper, who had, in truth, telephoned to Government House and secured the privilege of an interview even before the arrival of Woodhouse to report, and had paced the paths of the Alameda since, blowing hot and cold on his resolutions, followed the soft-footed Indian into the presence of Gen-

eral Crandall. The little spy was near a state of nervous breakdown. Following the surprising and unexpected collapse of his plan to do a murder, he had spent a wakeful and brandy-punctuated night, his brain on the rack. His desire to play informer, heightened now a hundredfold by the flaying tongue of Louisa, was almost balanced by his fears of resultant consequences. Cupidity, the old instinct for preying, drove him to impart to the governor general of Gibraltar information which, he hoped, would be worth its weight in gold; Louisa's promise of a party *à deux* before a firing squad, which he knew in his heart she would be capable of arranging in a desperate moment, halted him. After screwing up his courage to the point of telephoning for an appointment, Capper had wallowed in fear. He dared not stay away from Government House then for fear of arousing suspicion; equally he dared not involve the girl from the Wilhelmstrasse lest he find himself tangled in his own mesh.

At the desperate moment of his introduction to General Crandall, Capper determined to play it safe and see how the chips fell. His heart quailed as he heard the doors shut behind him.

"Awfully good of you to see me," he babbled as he stood before the desk, turning his hat brim through his fingers like a prayer wheel.

General Crandall bade him be seated. "I haven't forgotten you did me a service in Burma," he added.

"Oh, yes—of course," Capper managed to answer. "But that was my job. I got paid for that."

"You're not with the Brussels secret-service people any longer, then?"

The question hit Capper hard. His fingers fluttered to his lips.

"No, general. They—er—let me go. Suppose you heard that—and a lot of other things about me. That I was a rotter—that I drank——"

"What I heard was not altogether complimentary," the other answered judiciously. "I trust it was untrue."

Capper's embarrassment increased.

"Well, to tell the truth, General Crandall—ah—I did go to pieces for a time. I've been playing a pretty short string for the past two years. But"—he broke off his whine in a sudden accession of passion—"they can't keep me down much longer. I'm going to show 'em!"

General Crandall looked his surprise.

"General, I'm an Englishman. You know that. I may be down and out, and my old friends may not know me when we meet—but I'm English. And I'm loyal!" Capper was getting a grip on himself; he thought the patriotic line a safe one to play with the commander of a fortress.

"Yes—yes. I don't question that, I'm sure," the general grunted, and he began to riffle some papers on his desk petulantly.

Capper pressed home his point. "I just want you to keep that in mind, general, while I talk. Just remember I'm English—and loyal."

The governor nodded impatiently.

Capper leaned far over the desk, and began in an eager whisper:

"General, remember Cook—that chap in Rangoon—the polo player?" The other looked blank. "Haven't forgotten him, general? How he lived in Burma two years, mingling with the English, until one day somebody discovered his name was Koch and that he was a mighty unhealthy chap to have about the fortifications. Surely——"

"Yes, I remember him now. But what——"

"There was Hollister, too. You played billiards in your club with Hollister, I fancy. Thought him all right, too—until a couple of secret-service men walked into the club one day and clapped handcuffs on him. Remember that, general?"

The commander exclaimed snappishly that he could not see his visitor's drift.

"I'm just refreshing your memory, general," Capper hastened to reassure. "Just reminding you that there isn't much differencee between a German and an Englishman, after all—if the German wants to play the Englishman and knows his book. He can fool a lot of us."

"Granted. But I don't see what all this has to do with——"

"Listen, general!" Capper was trembling in his eagerness. "I'm just in from Alexandria—came on the *Princess Mary*. There was an Englishman aboard, bound for Gib. Name was Captain Woodhouse, of the signal service."

"Quite right. What of that?" General Crandall looked up suspiciously.

"Have you seen Captain Woodhouse, general?"

"Not a half hour ago. He called to report."

"Seemed all right to you—this Woodhouse?" Capper eyed the other's face narrowly.

"Of course. Why not?"

"Remember Cook, general! Remember Hollister!" Capper warned.

General Crandall exploded irritably: "What the devil do you mean? What are you driving at, man?"

The little spy leaped to his feet in his excitement and thrust his weasel face far across the desk.

"What do I mean? I mean this chap who calls himself Woodhouse isn't Woodhouse at all. He's a German spy —from the Wilhelmstrasse—with a number from the Wilhelmstrasse! He's on the Rock to do a spy's work!"

"Pshaw! Why did Brussels let you go?" General Crandall tipped back in his seat and cast an amused glance at the flushed face before him.

Capper shook his head doggedly. "I'm not drunk, General Crandall. I'm so broke I couldn't get drunk if I would. So help me, I'm telling God's truth. I got it straight——" Capper checked his tumult of words, and did some rapid thinking. How much did he dare reveal? "In Alexandria, general—got it there—from the inside, sir. Koch is the head of the Wilhelmstrasse crowd there—the same Cook you knew in Rangoon; he engineered the trick. The wildest dreams of the Wilhelmstrasse have come true. They've got a man in your signal tower, general—in your signal tower!"

General Crandall, in whom incredulity was beginning to give way to the first faint glimmerings of conviction as to the possibility of truth in the informer's tale, rallied himself nevertheless to combat an aspersion cast upon a British officer.

"Suppose the Germans have a spy in my signal tower or anywhere here," he began argumentatively. "Suppose they learn every nook and corner of the Rock—have the caliber and range of every gun in our defense; they couldn't capture Gibraltar in a thousand years."

"I don't know what they want," Capper returned, with the injured air of a man whose worth fails of recognition. "I only came here to warn you that your Captain Woodhouse is taking orders from Berlin."

"Come—come, man! Give me some proof to back up this cock-and-bull story," General Crandall snapped. He had risen, and was pacing nervously back and forward.

Capper was secretly elated at this sign that his story had struck home. He stilled the fluttering of his hands by an effort, and tried to bring his voice to the normal.

"Here it is, general—all I've got of the story. The real Woodhouse comes down from somewhere up the Nile—I don't know where—and puts up for the night in Alexandria to wait for the *Princess Mary*. No friends in the town, you know; nowhere to visit.

Three Wilhelmstrasse men in Alexandria, headed by that clever devil Cook, or Koch, who calls himself a doctor now. Somehow they get hold of the real Woodhouse and do for him—what I don't know—probably kill the poor devil.

"General, I saw with my own eyes an unconscious British officer being carried away from Koch's house in Ramleh in an automobile—two men with him." Capper fixed the governor with a lean index finger dramatically. "And I saw the man you just this morning received as Captain Woodhouse leave Doctor Koch's house five minutes after that poor devil—the real Woodhouse—had been carried off. That's the reason I took the same boat with him to Gibraltar, General Crandall—because I'm loyal and it was my duty to warn you."

"Incredible!"

"One thing more, general." Capper was sorely tempted, but for the minute his wholesome fear of consequences curbed his tongue. "Woodhouse isn't working alone on the Rock; you can be sure of that. He's got friends to help him turn whatever trick he's after—maybe in this very house. They're clever people, you can mark that down on your slate!"

"Ridiculous!" The keeper of the Rock was fighting not to believe now. "Why, I tell you if they had a hundred of their spies inside the lines—if they knew the Rock as well as I do they could never take it.'

Capper rose wearily, the air of a misunderstood man on him.

"Perhaps they aren't trying to capture it. I know nothing about that. Well—I've done my duty—as one Englishman to another. I hope I've told you in time. I'll be going now."

General Crandall swung on him sharply. "Where are you going?" he demanded.

Capper shrugged his shoulders hopelessly. Now was the minute he'd been counting on—the peeling of crackling notes from a fat bundle, the handsome words of appreciation. Surely General Crandall was ripe.

"Well, general, frankly—I'm broke. Haven't a shilling to bless myself with. I thought perhaps——" Capper shot a keen glance at the older man's face, which was partly turned from him. The general appeared to be pondering. He turned abruptly on the spy.

"A few drinks and you might talk," he challenged.

Capper grinned deprecatively. "I don't know, general—I might," he murmured. "I've been away from the drink so long that——"

"Where do you want to go?" General Crandall cut him off. "Of course, you don't want to stay here indefinitely."

"Well—if I had a bit of money—they tell me everybody's broke in Paris. Millionaires—and everybody, you know. You can get a room at the Ritz for the asking. That would be heaven for me—if I had something in my pocket."

"You want to go to Paris, eh?" General Crandall stepped closer to Capper, and his eyes narrowed in scorn.

"If it could be arranged, yes, general." Capper was spinning the brim of his bowler between nervous fingers. He did not dare meet the other's glance.

"Demmit, Capper! You come here to blackmail me! I've met your kind before. I know how to deal with your ilk."

"So help me, general, I came here to tell you the truth. I want to go to Paris—or anywhere away from here; I'll admit that. But that had nothing to do with my coming all the way here from Alexandria—spending my last guinea on a steamer ticket—to warn you of your danger. I'm an Englishman and—loyal!" Capper was pleading now. All hope of reward had sped, and the vision of a cell with subsequent investigations into his own record ap-

palled him. General Crandall sat down at his desk and began to write.

"I don't know—at any rate, I can't have you talking around here. You're going to Paris."

Capper dropped his hat. At a tap of the bell, Jaimihr Khan appeared at the doors, so suddenly that one might have said he was right behind them all the time. General Crandall directed that his orderly be summoned. When the subaltern appeared, the general handed him a sealed note.

"Orderly, turn this gentleman over to Sergeant Crosby at once," he commanded, "and give the sergeant this note." Then to Capper: "You will cross to Algeciras, where you will be put on a train for Madrid. You will have a ticket for Paris and twenty shillings for expense en route. You will be allowed to talk to no one alone before you leave Gibraltar, and under no circumstances will you be allowed to return—not while I am governor general, at least."

Capper, his face alight with newfound joy, turned to pass out with the orderly. He paused at the doorway to frame a speech of thanks, but General Crandall's back was toward him. "Paris!" he sighed in rapture, and the doors closed behind him.

CHAPTER XII.

A NEUTRAL ASSERTS HER RIGHTS.

"Do you know, my dear, Cynthia Maxwell is simply going to die with envy when she sees me in this!"

The plump little mistress of Government House, standing before a full-length mirror in her boudoir, surveyed herself with intense satisfaction. Her arms and neck burst startlingly from the clinging sheath of the incomparable Doeuillet gown which was Jane Gerson's douceur for official protection; in the flood of morning light pouring through the mullioned windows Lady Crandall seemed a pink and white—and somewhat florid—lily in bloom out of time. Hildebrand's buyer, on her knees and with deft fingers busy with the soft folds of the skirt, answered through a mouthful of pins:

"Poor Cynthia; my heart goes out to her."

"Oh, it needn't!" Lady Crandall answered, with a tilting of her strictly Iowa style nose. "The Maxwell person has made me bleed more than once here on the Rock with the gowns a fond mamma sends her from Paris. But, honestly, isn't this a bit low for a staid, middle-aged person like myself? I'm afraid I'll have trouble getting my precious Doeuillet past the censor." Lady Crandall plumed herself with secret joy.

Jane looked up, puzzled.

"Oh, that's old Lady Porter—a perfect dragon," the general's wife rattled on. "Poor old dear; she thinks the Lord put her on the Rock for a purpose. Her own collars get higher and higher. I believe if she ever was presented at court she'd emulate the old Scotch lady who followed the law of décolleté, but preserved her self-respect by wearing a red flannel chest protector. You must meet her."

"I'm afraid I won't have time to get a look at your dragon," Jane returned, with a little laugh, all happiness. "Now that Sir George has promised me I can sail on the *Saxonia* Friday——"

"You really must——" The envious eyes of Lady Crandall fell upon the pile of plans—potent Delphic mysteries to charm the heart of woman—which lay scattered about on the floor.

Jane sat back on her heels and surveyed the melting folds of satin with an artist's eye.

"If you only knew—what it means to me to get back with my baskets full of French beauties! Why, when I screwed up my courage two months ago to go to old Hildebrand and ask him

to send me abroad as his buyer—I'd been studying drawing and French at nights for three years in preparation, you see—he roared like the dear old lion he is and said I was too young. But I cooed and pleaded, and at last he said I could come—on trial, and so——"

"He'll pur like a pussycat when you get back," Lady Crandall put in, with a pat on the brown head at her knees.

"Maybe. If I can slip into New York with my little baskets while all the other buyers are still over here, cabling tearfully for money to get home or asking their firms to send a warship to fetch them—why, I guess the pennant's mine all right."

The eternal feminine, so strong in Iowa's transplanted stock, prompted a mischievous question:

"Then you won't be leaving somebody behind when you sail—somebody who seemed awfully nice and—*foreigny* and all that? All our American girls find the moonlight over on this side infectious. Witness me—a 'finishing trip' abroad after school days—and see where I've finished—on a Rock!" Lady Crandall bubbled laughter. A shrewd downward sweep of her eye was just in time to catch a flush mounting to Jane's cheeks.

"Well, a Mysterious Stranger has crossed my path," Jane admitted. "He was very nice, but mysterious."

"Oh!" A delighted gurgle from the older woman. "Tell me all about it—a secret for these ancient walls to hear."

Jane was about to reply when second thought checked her tongue. Before her flashed that strange meeting with Captain Woodhouse the night before—his denial of their former meeting, followed by his curious insistence upon her keeping faith with him by not revealing the fact of their acquaintance. She had promised—why she had promised she could no more divine than the reason for his asking; but a promise it was that she would not betray his confidence. More than once since that minute in the reception room of the Hotel Splendide Jane Gerson had reviewed the whole baffling circumstance in her mind and a growing resentment at this stranger's demand, as well as at her own compliance in agreeing to it, was rising in her heart. Still, this Captain Woodhouse was "different," and—this Jane sensed without effort to analyze—the mystery which he threw about himself but served to set him apart from the common run of men. She evaded Lady Crandall's probing with a shrug of the shoulders.

"It's a secret which I myself do not know, Lady Crandall—and never will."

Back to the o'erweening lure of the gown the flitting fancy of the general's lady betook itself.

"You—don't think this is a shade too young for me, Miss Gerson?" Anxiety pleaded to be quashed.

"Nonsense!" Jane laughed.

"But I'm no chicken, my dear. If you would look me up in our family Bible back in Davenport you'd find——"

"People don't believe everything they read in the Bible any more," Jane assured her. "Your record and Jonah's would both be open to doubt."

"You're very comforting," Lady Crandall beamed. Her maid knocked and entered upon the lady's crisp: "Come!"

"The general wishes to see you, Lady Crandall, in the library."

"Tell the general I'm in the midst of trying on——" Lady Crandall began, then thought better of her excuse. She dropped the shimmering gown from her shoulders and slipped into a kimono.

"Some stuffy plan for entertaining somebody or other, my dear"—this to Jane. "The real burden of being governor general of the Rock falls on the general's wife. Just slip into your bonnet, and when I'm back we'll take that little stroll through the Alameda I've

promised you for this morning." She clutched her kimono about her and whisked out of the room.

General Crandall, just rid of the dubious pleasure of Billy Capper's company, was pacing the floor of the library office thoughtfully. He looked up with a smile at his wife's entrance.

"Helen, I want you to do something for me," he said.

"Certainly, dear." Lady Crandall was not an unpleasing picture of ripe beauty to look upon, in the soft drape of the Japanese robe. Even in his worry, General Crandall found himself intrigued for the minute.

"There's a new chap in the signal service—just in from Egypt—name's Woodhouse. I wish you would invite him to tea, my dear."

"Of course; any day."

"This afternoon, if you please, Helen," the general followed.

His wife looked slightly puzzled.

"This afternoon? But, George, dear, isn't that—aren't you—ah—rushing this young man to have him up to Government House so soon after his arrival?" She suddenly remembered something which caused her to reverse herself. "Besides, I've asked him to dinner—the dinner I'm to give the Americans to-morrow night before they sail."

General Crandall looked his surprise.

"You didn't tell me that. I didn't know you had met him."

"Just happened to," Lady Crandall cut in hastily. "Met him at the Hotel Splendide last night when I brought Miss Gerson home with me."

"What was Woodhouse doing at the Splendide?" the general asked suspiciously.

"Why, spending the night, you foolish boy. Just off the *Princess Mary,* he was. I believe he did Miss Gerson some sort of a service—and I met him in that way—quite informally."

"Did Miss Gerson—a service—hum!"

"Oh, a trifling thing! It seemed she had only French money, and that cautious Almer fellow wouldn't accept it. Captain Woodhouse gave her English gold for it—to pay her bill. But why——"

"Has Miss Gerson seen him since?" General Crandall asked sharply.

"Why, George, dear, how could she? We haven't been up from the breakfast table an hour."

"Woodhouse was here less than an hour ago to pay his duty call and report," he explained. "I thought perhaps he might have met our guest somewhere in the garden as he was coming or going."

"He did send her some lovely roses." Lady Crandall brightened at this, to her, patent inception of a romance; she doted on romances. "They were in Miss Gerson's room before she was down to breakfast."

"Roses, eh? And they met informally at the Splendide only last night." Suspicion was weighting the general's words. "Isn't that a bit sudden? I say, do you think Miss Gerson and this Captain Woodhouse had met somewhere before last night?"

"I hardly think so—she on her first trip to the Continent and he coming from Egypt. But——"

"No matter. I want him here to tea this afternoon." The general dismissed the subject and turned to his desk. His lady's curiosity would not be so lightly turned away.

"All these questions—aren't they rather absurd? Is anything wrong?" She ran up to him and laid her hands on his shoulders.

"Of course not, dear." He kissed her lightly on the brow. "Now run along and play with that new gown Miss Gerson gave you. I imagine that's the most important thing on the Rock to-day."

Lady Crandall gave her soldier husband a peck on each cheek, and skipped

back to her room. When he was alone again, General Crandall resumed his restless pacing. Resolution suddenly crystallized, and he stepped to the desk phone. He called a number.

"That you, Bishop? . . . General Crandall speaking. . . . Bishop, you were here on the Rock seven years ago? . . . Good! . . . Pretty good memory for names and faces, eh? . . . Right! . . . I want you to come to Government House for tea at five this afternoon. . . . But run over for a little talk with me some time earlier—an hour from now, say. Rather important. . . . You'll be here. . . . Thank you."

General Crandall sat at his desk and tried to bring himself down to the routine crying from accumulated papers there. But the canker Billy Capper had implanted in his mind would not give him peace. Major General Crandall was a man cast in the stolid British mold; years of army discipline and tradition of the service had given to his conservatism a hard grain. In common with most of those in high command, he held to the belief that nothing existed—nothing could exist—which was not down in the regulations of the war office, made and provided. For upward of twenty-five years he had played the hard game of the service—in Egypt, in Burma, on the broiling rocks of Aden, and here, at last, on the key to the Mediterranean. During all those years he had faithfully pursued his duty, had stowed away in his mind the wisdom disseminated in blue-bound books by that corporate paragon of knowledge at home, the war office. But never had he read in anything but fluffy fiction of a place or a thing called the Wilhelmstrasse, reputed by the scriveners to be the darkest closet and the most potent of all the secret chambers of diplomacy. The regulations made no mention of a Wilhelmstrasse, even though they provided the brand of pipe clay which should brighten men's pith helmets and stipulated to the ounce an emergency ration. Therefore, to the official military mind at least, the Wilhelmstrasse was nonexistent.

But here comes a beach comber, a miserable jackal from the back alleys of society, and warns the govenor general of the Rock that he has a man from the Wilhelmstrasse—a spy bent on some unfathomable mission—in his very forces on the Rock. He says that an agent of the enemy has dared masquerade as a British officer in order to gain admission inside the lines of Europe's most impregnable fortress, England's precious stronghold, there to do mischief!

General Crandall's tremendous responsibility would not permit him to ignore such a warning, coming even from so low a source. Yet the man found himself groping blindly in the dark before the dilemma presented; he had no foot rule of precept or experience to guide him.

His fruitless searching for a prop in emergency was broken by the appearance of Jane Gerson in the door opening from Lady Crandall's rooms to the right of the library. The girl was dressed for the out-of-doors; in her arms was a fragrant bunch of blood-red roses, spraying out from the top of a bronze bowl. The girl hesitated and drew back in confusion at seeing the room occupied; she seemed eager to escape undetected. But General Crandall smilingly checked her flight.

"I—I thought you would be out," Jane stammered, "and——"

"And the posies——" the general interrupted.

"Were for you to enjoy when you should come back." She smiled easily into the man's eyes. "They'll look so much prettier here than in my room."

"Very good of you, I'm sure." General Crandall stepped up to the rich cluster of buds and sniffed critically. Without looking at the girl, he con-

tinued: "It appears to me as though you had already made a conquest on the Rock. One doesn't pick these from the cliffs, you know."

"I should hardly call it a conquest," Jane answered, with a sprightly toss of her head.

"But a young man sent you these flowers. Come—confess!" The general's tone was bantering, but his eyes did not leave the piquant face under the chic summer straw hat that shaded it.

"Surely. One of your own men—Captain Woodhouse, of the signal service." Jane was rearranging the stems in the bowl, apparently ready to accept what was on the surface of the general's rallying.

"Woodhouse, eh?" You've known him for a long time, I take it."

"Since last night, general. And yet some people say Englishmen are slow." She laughed gayly and turned to face him. His voice took on a subtle quality of polite insistence:

"Surely you met him somewhere before Gibraltar."

"How could I, when this is the first time Captain Woodhouse has been out of Egypt for years?"

"Who told you that?" The general was quick to catch her up. The girl felt a swift stab of fear. On the instant she realized that here was somebody attempting to drive into the mystery which she herself could not understand, but which she had pledged herself to keep inviolate. Her voice fluttered in her throat as she answered:

"Why, he did himself, general."

"He did, eh? Gave you a bit of his history on first meeting. Confiding chap, what! But you, Miss Gerson—you've been to Egypt, you say?"

"No, general."

Jane was beginning to find this cross-examination distinctly painful. She felt that already her pledge, so glibly given at Captain Woodhouse's insistence, was involving her in a situation the significance of which might prove menacing to herself—and one other. She could sense the beginnings of a strain between herself and this genial elderly gentleman, her host.

"Do you know, Miss Gerson"—he was speaking slowly and soberly now—"I believe you and Captain Woodhouse have met before."

"You're at liberty to think anything you like, general—the truth or otherwise." Her answer, though given smilingly, had a sting behind it.

"I'm not going to think much longer. I'm going to *know!*" He clapped his lips shut over the last word with a smack of authority.

"Are you really, General Crandall?" The girl's eyes hardened just perceptibly. He took a turn of the room and paused, facing her. The situation pleased him no more than it did his breezy guest, but he knew his duty and doggedly pursued it.

"Come—come, Miss Gerson! I believe you're straightforward and sincere or I wouldn't be wasting my time this way. I'll be the same with you. This is a time of war; you understand all that implies, I hope. A serious question concerning Captain Woodhouse's position here has arisen. If you have met him before—as I think you have—it will be to your advantage to tell me where and when. I am in command of the Rock, you know."

He finished with an odd tensing of tone which conveyed assurance of his authority even more than did the sense of his words. His guest, her back to the table on which the roses rested and her hands bracing her by their tense grip on the table edge, sought his eyes boldly.

"General Crandall," she began, "my training in Hildebrand's store hasn't made me much of a diplomat. All this war and intrigue makes me dizzy. But I know one thing: this isn't my war,

or my country's, and I'm going to follow my country's example and keep out of it."

General Crandall shrugged his shoulders and smiled at the girl's defiance.

"Maybe your country may not be able to do that," he declared, with a touch of solemnity. "I pray God it may. But I'm afraid your resolution will not hold, Miss Gerson."

"I'm going to try to make it, anyway," she answered.

Gibraltar's commander, baffled thus by a neutral—a neutral fair to look upon, in the bargain—tried another tack. He assumed the fatherly air.

"Lady Crandall and I have tried to show you we were friends—tried to help you get home," he began.

"You've been very good to me," Jane broke in feelingly.

"What I say now is spoken as a friend, not as governor of the Rock. If it is true that you have met Woodhouse before—and our conversation here verifies my suspicion—that very fact makes his word worthless and releases you from any promise you may have made not to reveal this and that you may know about him. Also it should put you on your guard—his motives in any attentions he may pay you cannot be above suspicion."

"I think that is a personal matter I am perfectly capable of handling." Jane's resentment sent the flags to her cheeks.

General Crandall was quick to back water: "Yes, yes! Don't misunderstand me. What I mean to say is——"

He was interrupted by his wife's voice, calling for Jane from the nearby room. Anticipating her interruption, he hurried on:

"For the present, Miss Gerson, we'll drop this matter. I said a few minutes ago I intended shortly to—*know*. I hope I won't have to carry out that—threat."

Jane was withdrawing one of the buds from the jar. At his last word, she dropped it with a little gasp.

"Threat, general?"

"I hope not. Truly I hope not. But, young woman——"

She stooped, picked up the flower, and was setting it in his buttonhole before he could remonstrate.

"This one was for you, general," she said, and the truce was sealed. That minute, Lady Crandall was wafted into the room on the breeze of her own staccato interruption.

"What's this—what's this! Flirting with poor old George—pinning a rose on my revered husband when my back's turned? Brazen miss! I'm here to take you off to the gardens at once, where you can find somebody younger—and not near so dear—to captivate with your tricks. At once, now!"

She had her arm through Jane's and was marching her off. An exchange of glances between the governor and Hildebrand's young diplomat of the dollar said that what had passed between them was a confidence.

Jaimihr Khan announced Major Bishop to the general a short time later. The major, a rotund, pink-faced man of forty, who had the appearance of being ever tubbed and groomed to the pink of parade perfection, saluted his superior informally, accepted a cigarette, and crossed his plump legs in an easy-chair near the general's desk. General Crandall crossed his arms on his desk and went direct to his subject:

"Major, you were here on the Rock seven years ago, you say?"

"Here ten years, general. Regular rock scorpion—old-timer."

"Do you happen to recall this chap Woodhouse whom I sent to you to report for duty in the signal tower today? Has transfer papers from Wady Halfa."

"Haven't met him yet, though Captain Carson tells me he reported at my office a little more than an hour ago—

see him after parade. Woodhouse—Woodhouse——" The major propped his chin on his fingers in thought.

"His papers—army record and all that—say he was here on the Rock for three months in the spring of nineteen-seven," General Crandall urged, to refresh the other's memory.

Major Bishop stroked his round cheeks, tugged at one ear, but found recollection difficult.

"When I see the chap—so many coming and going, you know. Three months—bless me! That's a thin slice out of ten years."

"Major, I'm going to take you into my confidence," the senior officer began; then he related the incident of Capper's visit and repeated the charge he had made. Bishop sat aghast at the word "spy."

"Woodhouse will be here to tea this afternoon," continued Crandall. "While you and I ask him a few leading questions, I'll have Jaimihr, my Indian, search his room in barracks. I trust Jaimihr implicitly, and he can do the job smoothly. Now, Bishop, what do you remember about nineteen-seven—something we can lead up to in conversation, you know?"

The younger man knuckled his brow for a minute, then looked up brightly.

"I say, general, Craigen was governor then. But—um—aren't you a bit—mild; this asking of a suspected spy to tea?"

"What can I do?" the other replied, somewhat testily. "I can't clap an officer of his majesty's army into prison on the mere say-so of a drunken outcast who has no proof to offer. I must go slowly, major. Watch for a slip from this Woodhouse. One bad move on his part, and he starts on his way to face a firing squad."

Bishop had risen and was slowly pacing the room, his eyes on the walls, hung with many portraits in oils.

"Well, you can't help admiring the nerve of the chap," he muttered, half to himself. "Forcing his way onto the Rock—why, he might as well put his head in a cannon's mouth."

"I haven't time to admire," the general said shortly. "Thing to do is to act."

"Quite right. Nineteen-seven, eh? Um——" He paused before the portrait of a young woman in a Gainsborough hat and with a sparkling, piquant face. "By George, general, why not try him on Lady Evelyn? There's a fair test for you, now!"

"You mean Craigen's wife?" The general looked up at the portrait quizzically. "Skeleton's bones, Bishop."

"Right; but no man who ever saw her could forget. I know I never can. Poor Craigen!"

"Good idea, though," the older man acquiesced. "We'll trip him on Lady Evelyn."

Jaimihr Khan appeared at the double doors. "The general sahib's orderly," he announced. The young subaltern entered and saluted.

"That young man, General Crandall, the one Sergeant Crosby was to escort out of the lines to Algeciras——"

"Well, what of him? He's gone, I hope."

"First train to Madrid, general; but he left a message for you, sir, to be delivered after he'd gone, he said."

"A message?" General Crandall was perplexed.

"As Sergeant Crosby had it and gave it to me to repeat to you, sir, it was, 'Arrest the cigar girl calling herself Josefa. She is one of the cleverest spies of the Wilhelmstrasse.'"

CHAPTER XIII.

ENTER, A CIGARETTE.

Mr. Joseph Almer, proprietor of the Hotel Splendide, on Waterport Street, was absorbed, heart and soul, in a curious task. He was emptying the pow-

der from two-grain quinine capsules onto a sheet of white letter paper on his desk.

It was noon of Wednesday, the day following the arrival of Captain Woodhouse. Almer was alone in the hotel's reception room and office behind the dingy glass partially inclosing his desk. His alpaca-covered shoulders were close to his ears; and his bald head, with its stripes of plastered hair running like thick lines of latitude on a polished globe, was held far forward so as to bring his eyes on the work in hand. Like some plump magpie he appeared, turning over bits of china in a treasure hole.

A round box of the gelatine cocoons lay at his left hand; it had just been delivered by an Arab boy, quick to pick up the street commission for a tuppence. Very methodically Almer picked the capsules from the box one by one, opened them, and spilled the quinine in a little heap under his nose. He grunted peevishly when the sixth shell had been emptied. The seventh capsule brought an eager whistle to his lips. When he had jerked the concentric halves apart, very little powder fell out. Instead, the thin, folded edges of a pellet of rice paper protruded from one of the containers. This Almer had extracted in an instant. He spread it against the black back of a ledger and read the very fine script written thereon. This was the message:

Danger. An informer from Alexandria has denounced our two friends to Crandall. You must warn; I cannot.

The spy's heart was suddenly drained, and the wisp of paper in his hand trembled so that it scattered the quinine about in a thin cloud. Once more he read the note, then held a match to it and scuffled its feathery ash into the rug beneath his stool with his feet. The fortitude which had held Joseph Almer to the Rock in the never-failing hope that some day would bring him the opportunity to do a great service for the fatherland came near crumbling that minute. He groaned.

"Our friends," he whispered, "Woodhouse and Louisa—trapped!"

The warning in the note left nothing open to ambiguity for Almer; there were but four of them—"friends" under the Wilhelmstrasse fellowship of danger—there in Gibraltar: Louisa, the man who passed as Woodhouse, and whose hand was to execute the great coup when the right moment came, himself, and that other one whose place was in Government House itself. From this latter the note of warning had come. How desperate the necessity for it Almer could guess when he took into reckoning the dangers which beset any attempt at communication on the writer's part. So narrow the margin of safety for this "friend" that he must look at each setting sun as being reasonably the last for him.

Almer did not attempt to go behind the note and guess who was the informer that had lodged information with the governor general. He had forgotten, in fact, the incident of the night before, when the blustering Capper called the newly arrived Woodhouse by name. The flash of suspicion which attached responsibility to the American girl named Gerson was dissipated as quickly as it came; she had arrived by motor from Paris, not on the boat from Alexandria. His was now the imperative duty to carry warning to the two suspected, not to waste time in idle speculation as to the identity of the betrayer. There was but one ray of hope in this sudden pall of gloom, and that Almer grasped eagerly. He knew the character of General Crandall—the phlegmatic conservatism of the man, which would not easily be jarred out of an accustomed line of thought and action. The general would be slow to leap at an accusation brought against one wearing the stripes of service; and,

though he might reasonably attempt to test Captain Woodhouse, one such as Woodhouse, chosen by the Wilhelmstrasse to accomplish so great a mission, would surely have the wit to parry suspicion.

Yes, he must be put on his guard. As for Louisa—well, it would be too bad if the girl should have to put her back against a wall; but she could be spared; she was not essential. After he had succeeded in getting word of his danger to Woodhouse, Almer would consider saving Louisa from a firing squad. The nimble mind of Herr Almer shook itself free from the incubus of dread and leaped to the exigency of the moment. Calling his head waiter to keep warm the chair behind the desk, Almer retired to his room, and there was exceedingly busy for half an hour.

The hour of parade during war time on Gibraltar was one o'clock. At that time, six days a week, the half of the garrison not actually in fighting position behind the great guns of the defense marched to the parade grounds down by the race track and there went through the grilling regimen which meant perfection and the maintenance of a hair-trigger state of efficiency. Down from the rocky eminences where the barracks stood marched this day block after block of olive-drab fighting units—artillerymen for the most part, equipped with the rifle and pack of infantrymen. No blare of brass music gave the measure to their step; bandsmen in this time of reality paced two by two, stretchers carried between them. All the curl and snap of silken banners which make the parade a moving spectacle in ordinary times was absent; flags do not figure in the grim modern business of warfare. Just those solid blocks of men trained to kill, sweeping down onto the level grounds and massing, rank on rank, for inspection and the trip-hammer pound-pound-pound of evolutions to follow. Silent integers of power, flexing their muscles for the supreme test which any morning's sun might bring.

Mr. Henry J. Sherman stood with his wife, Kitty, and Willy Kimball—Kimball had developed a surprising interest in one of these home folks, at least—under the shade of the row of plane trees fringing the parade grounds. They tried to persuade themselves that they were seeing something worth while. This pleasing fiction wore thin with Mr. Sherman before fifteen minutes had passed.

"Shucks, mother! The boys at the national-guard encampment down to Galesburg fair last year made a better showing than this." He pursed out his lips and regarded a passing battalion with a critical eye.

"Looked more like soldiers, anyway," mother admitted. "Those floppy, broad-brimmed hats our boys wear make them look more—more romantic, I'd say."

"But, my dear Mrs. Sherman"—Willy Kimball flicked his handkerchief from his cuff and fluttered it across his coat sleeve, where dust had fallen—"the guards back in the States are play soldiers, you know; these chaps, here—well, they are the real thing. They don't dress up like picture-book soldiers and show off——"

"Play soldiers—huh!" Henry J. had fire in his eye, and the pearl buttons on his white linen waistcoat creaked with the swelling of a patriot's pride. "You've been a long time from home, Willy. Perhaps you've forgotten that your own father was at Corinth. Guess you've overlooked that soldiers' monument in Courthouse Square back in little old Kewanee. They were 'play soldiers,' eh?—those boys who marched away with your dad in sixty-one. Gimme a regiment of those old boys in blue, and they could lick this whole bunch of——"

"Father!" Kitty had flipped her hand over her parent's mouth, her eyes round

with real fear. "You'll get arrested again, talking that way here where everybody can hear you. Remember what that hotel man said last night about careless remarks about military things on the Rock? Be good, father."

"There, there!" Sherman removed the monitory hand and patted it reassuringly. "I forgot. But when I get aboard the *Saxonia* and well out to sea, I'm going to just *bust* information about what I think of things in general over here in this Europe place—their Bottycelly pictures and their broken-down churches and—and—— Why, bless my soul! The little store buyer and that Iowa girl who's married to the governor here!"

The patriot stopped short in his review of the Continent's delinquencies to wave his hat at Lady Crandall and Jane Gerson, who were trundling down under the avenue of planes in a smart dogcart. Lady Crandall answered his hail with a flourish of her whip, turned her horse off the road, and brought her conveyance to a stop by the group of exiles. Hearty greetings passed around. The governor's wife showed her unaffected pleasure at the meeting.

"I thought you wouldn't miss the parade," she called down from her high seat. "Only thing that moves on the Rock—these daily reviews. Brought Miss Gerson down here so when she gets back to New York she can say she's seen the defenders of Gibraltar, if not in action, at least doing their hard training for it."

"Well, I don't mind tellin' you," Sherman began defiantly, "I think the national guard of Illynoy can run circles around these Englishmen when it comes to puttin' up a show. Now, Kitty, don't you try to drive a plug in your dad's sentiments again; Mrs. Crandall's all right—one of us." A shocked look from his daughter. "Oh, there I go again, forgettin'. Lady Crandall, I mean. Excuse me, ma'am."

"Don't you dare apologize," the governor's wife playfully threatened Mr. Sherman with her whip. "I love the sound of good, old-fashioned 'Missis.' Just imagine—married five years, and nobody has called me 'Mrs. Crandall' until you did just now. 'Wedded, but not a Missis'; wouldn't that be a perfectly gorgeous title for a Laura Jean novel? Miss Gerson, let's hop out and join these home folks; they're my kind."

The burst of laughter that greeted Lady Crandall's sally was not over before she had leaped nimbly from her high perch, Henry J. gallantly assisting. Jane followed, and the coachman from his little bob seat in the back drove the dogcart over to the road to wait his mistress' pleasure. The scattered blocks of olive-gray on the field had coalesced into a solid regiment now, and the long double rank of men was sweeping forward like the cutting arm of a giant mower. They joined the sparse crowd of spectators at the edge of the field, the better to see. Jane Gerson found herself chatting with Willy Kimball and Kitty Sherman a little apart from the others. A light touch fell on her elbow. She turned to find Almer, the hotel keeper, smiling deferentially.

"Pardon—a thousand pardons for the intrusion, lady. I am Almer, of the Hotel Splendide."

"You haven't remembered something more I owe you," Jane challenged brusquely.

"Oh, no, lady!" Almer spread out his hands. "I happened to see you here watching the parade, and I remembered a trivial duty I have which, if I may be so bold as to ask, you may discharge much more quickly than I—if you will."

"I discharge a duty—for you?" The girl did not conceal her puzzlement. Almer's hand fumbled in a pocket of his flapping alpaca coat and produced a plain silver cigarette case, unmonogrammed. She looked at it wonderingly.

"Captain Woodhouse—you met him at my hotel last night, lady. He left this lying on his dresser when he quit his room to go to barracks to-day. For me it is difficult to send a messenger with it to the barracks—war time, lady—many restrictions inside the lines. I came here hoping perhaps to see the captain after the parade. But you——"

"You wish me to give this to Captain Woodhouse?" Jane finished, a flicker of annoyance crossing her face. "Why me?"

"You are at Government House, lady. Captain Woodhouse comes to tea—all newcomers to the garrison do that. If you would be so good——"

Jane took the cigarette case from Almer's outstretched hand. Lady Crandall had told her the captain would be in for tea that afternoon. It was a small matter, this accommodation, so long as Almer did not insinuate—as he had not done—any impertinence; imply any overeagerness on her part to perform so minor a service for the officer. Almer bowed his thanks and lost himself in the crowd. Jane turned again to where Kitty and Kimball were chatting.

"A dun for extra service the landlord forgot last night, I'll wager," the youth greeted her.

"Oh, no, just a little present," Jane laughed back at him, holding up the silver case. "With Almer's compliments to Captain Woodhouse, who forgot it when he gave up his room to-day. I've promised to turn it over to the captain and save the hotel man a lot of trouble and red tape getting a messenger through to the captain's quarters."

"By Jove!" Kimball's tired eyes lighted up with a quick flash of smoker's yearning. "A life-saver! Came away from my room without my pet Egyptians—Mr. Sherman yelling at me to hurry or we'd miss this slow show and all that. I'm going to play the panhandler and beg one of your captain friend's smokes. He must be a good sort or you wouldn't be doing little favors for him, Miss Gerson. Come, now; in your capacity as temporary executrix will you invest one of the captain's cigarettes in a demand of real charity?"

Keen desire was scarcely veiled under Kimball's fiction of light patter. Smilingly the girl extended the case to him.

"Just to make it businesslike, the executrix demands your note for—um—sixty days, say. 'For one cigarette received, I promise to pay——' "

"Given!" He pulled a gold pencil from his pocket and made a pretense of writing the form on his cuff. Then he lit his borrowed cigarette and inhaled gratefully.

"Your captain friend's straight from Egypt; I don't have to be told that," Willy Kimball murmured, in polite ecstasy. "At Shepard's, in Cairo, you'll get such a cigarette as this, and nowhere else in a barren world. The breath of the acanthus blossom—if they really have a breath—never heard."

"Back in Kewanee the Ladies' Aid Society will have you arrested," Kitty put in mischievously. "They're terribly wrought up over cigarettes—for minors."

Kimball cast her a glance of deep reproach. As he lifted the cigarette to his lips for a second puff, Jane's eyes mechanically followed the movement. Something caught and held them, wonder-filled.

On the side of the white paper cylinder nearest her a curious brown streak appeared—by the merest freak of chance her glance fell on it. As she looked, the thin stain grew darker nearest the fresh ash. The farther end of the faint tracing moved—yes, moved, like a threadworm groping its way along a stick.

"Now what are they all doing out

there?" Kitty Sherman was asking. "All those men running top speed with their guns carried up so high."

"Bayonet charge," Kimball answered. "Nothing like the real thing, of course."

Jane Gerson was watching the twisting and writhing of that filament of brown against the white. An invisible hand was writing in brown ink on the side of the cigarette—writing backward and away from the burning tip. The script was fine and delicate, but legible. It lengthened by seconds:

—and Louisa to Crandall.

So the letters of silver nitrate formed themselves under her eyes. Kimball took the cigarette from his lips and held it by his side for a minute. He and Kitty were busy with one another's company for the time, ignoring Jane. She burned with curiosity and with excitement mounting like the fire of wine to her brain. Would he never put that cigarette to his lips again, so she could follow the invisible pen! So fleeting, so evanescent that worm track on the paper, wrought by fire and by fire to be consumed. A mystery vanishing even as it was aborning! After ages, the unconscious Kimball set the cigarette again in his lips.

—nformer has denounced you and Louisa-t-—play your game and he will be slow to——

Again the cigarette came away in Kimball's hand. Acting on impulse she did not stop to question, Jane struck it from the young man's hand and set her foot on it as it fell in the dust.

"Oh, I'm clumsy!" She fell lightly against Kimball's shoulder and caught herself in well-simulated confusion. "Standing tiptoe to see what that man on a horse is going to do—lost my balance. And—and your precious cigarette—gone!"

The anguish in Jane Gerson's voice was not play. It was real—terribly real.

TO BE CONCLUDED.

BAD NEWS FROM THE FRONT

GREEN B. MORRIS, one of the most famous characters on American race tracks, once had the distinction of being burned out during a meet at New Orleans. His horses, other property, three-fourths of his stable building, and all his wearing apparel were destroyed. He stuck his head out of a window of what was left of the stable, yelled to somebody to bring him some clothes, and eventually made his escape.

He has a second distinction. He cannot read.

"Father" Bill Daly, also a great figure on the race tracks, could not read.

One day, as Morris was coming out of the paddock at the Bennings track, a messenger boy handed him a telegram. Morris opened it, examined it intently, and passed it to Father Daly, with the comment:

"Isn't that awful?"

Father Daly was equal to the occasion. He also examined the yellow piece of paper, and, without cracking a smile, agreed with Morris:

"Ain't that awful?"

Later they got somebody to read the message to them, and found out that one of their horses had won on another track.

In This Corner—

THE INSIDE STORY OF A UNIQUE RING FIGHT TOLD BY THE MANAGER

By H. C. Witwer

INSIDE stuff?—sure! Why, there's an inside story to everything big. Take a ball game, box fight, crap game, or horse race that breaks the way you don't want it to—they all got their inside stories. Go back to the Bible, history, or the Sportin' Annual, an' you'll find this the right dope.

Now, I don't say the battle of Waterloo was a frame-up, or that the Southern army quit cold—but, say! I'll bet the real dope would show somethin' that don't appear in the box score. I ain't what you guys call a cynic, but I've knocked around some and seen a few shows from the fly galleries, and whenever I sees where some big guy gets trimmed by a little one, or Siwash beats Harvard 60 to 0, I don't think of suckers and form reversals, I just wonder how much them losers got—and if they didn't get it in money, you can bet they got it in somethin' just as good, or better—to them!

I guess you didn't see the Kid Doyle—Tony Harvey fight. No? I knows you sport writers don't keep tabs on all the bums a lightweight champion fights, after he's copped the title—but, say! if it hadn't been for a skirt you'd 'a' wrote a column about that scrap, and the champion's name would 'a' been Harvey instead a Doyle. This ain't no alibi—don't get me wrong—Tony was knocked cold in two rounds—but I wants to give you a sample of that inside-story thing.

Tony Harvey—his real name was Antonio Angelletti—come from Crescent City—that's out in Iowa—it was my town, too. Tony always was a hard guy. When we was kids in school t'gether, Tony was the white hope of the town. He trimmed 'em all, big an' little, an' never got enough. There was no more yellah in Tony than there is in stove polish. He was a good guy to have around any time if somethin' started—get me?

Well, Tony grows up on them principles. After he blew school, he holds half a dozen jobs fer a few days apiece. He never stays long on the pay roll because he's too fast with his hands an' too slow with his head. Bein' a fighter, Tony spent a lotta time aroun' the fight club, an' pretty soon he gets so good he can't get a fight there. The club figgers there's nothin' excitin' in seein' Tony knock some bum cold with a punch, collect his bean money, an' blow, all before some of the fans can find out who's fightin'.

I was workin' in a meat store—that's rich, ain't it?—kin yuh make me dealin' out steaks an' chops, eh? Well, between what th' boss slips me on Saturday night an' what I knocks down, I'm makin' a pretty fair livin'. Knowin' that some day this beef rastler's goin' to dope out my system fer beatin' th' till, I'd bin savin' it up—and, say, I was some sore on that job! I got so sick of steaks an' chops layin' aroun' raw an' everything, that I couldn't eat 'em, let alone sell 'em. If a skirt comes in an' says: "Well, what you got nice today, eh?" I'd say: "Search me!" an' go on readin' the *Police Gazette*. This always got the boss' goat. Tony, who'd

always palled aroun' with me, comes in onct in a while an' I'd slip him a piece of beef to put on a bum eye or somethin'.

Well, one Saturday night the boss calls me over after dopin' out how much he's got in the till, an' what a game like his oughta pull in, an' he says:

"Jake, you're too swift fer me, boy. I can't dope your stuff out, so I gotta lose yuh. Here's your bit, though I guess you gotta bigger cut than I did to-day."

Well, I soon figgers Crescent City's on the wrong circuit fer me, an' I decides to blow. I was always crazy to give Chicago a whirl, an' I figgers I'll never get no better chance, so I goes to the bank an' draws out the roll—I'd been nursin' it along, an' it was good an' healthy—I squares myself up an' goes down to the station. While I'm waitin' fer the train, Tony blows in. I hadn't saw him fer a week, an' I feels kinda wrong when I thinks how I'd nearly blew the town without sayin' so long to him. On the level, I was so charged up over what I'm goin' to do when I hits the big town, I'd forgot all about him.

Tony looks about as happy as a guy who's got a ticket on the fourth horse at the finish. He'd bin foot-loose for a week, an', as usual, is clean as a whistle. Of course, he wants me to slip him, but while he's pourin' out his hard-luck story, I'm givin' him the up an' down. He was a fine-lookin' kid, Tony was—he had one of them "I use Holyoke Massage Cream" faces, an' could 'a' held a job posin' for underwear ads any time. He didn't smoke, an' drank nothin' more excitin' than ice-cream soda, on the level—add that to his wallop an' yearnin' to use it, an' Tony checks up pretty well.

I always was a quick thinker—I don't say a good one, but a quick one—an' by the time Tony gets to "I'll slip it to yuh next week" I got my cards all sorted.

"Do you wanna go to Chicago with me, Tony?" I says.

"Stop 'at stuff, an' slip me, will you!" says Tony, gettin' sore.

I takes him over in a corner an' spills chatter at him for twenty minnits. When I starts, he hunches himself up like he always did before he turned loose his left, an' when I stops—say, his eyes is poppin' out an' his mouth's wide open as a New Orleans crap game.

When the train blows outa Crescent City, me an' Tony's on it.

You see, I dopes it out like this: I don't know just what play I'll make when I hits the big town. I knowed I'd get by, but I ain't figgered out just how. I got a bank roll an' Tony's there with a wallop—I figgers that a fair combination—some pretty big pots have been copped with lessen 'at. So I decides to take Tony to Chi, sink a little money in him, an' make a champ outa him. Good-sized contract, eh? Well, listen: Tony's broke—he's got no fr'en's in the burg but me—he'd beaten all the other voters up at one time or another. Besides, Tony's game for anythin'—always was.

On the ride into Chi, Tony asks me more questions than a cat's got hairs. He wants to know when he'd get a crack at Kid Doyle, who was the lightweight champeen then; if I'd stake him to green tights, what his bit would be; an' a lotta bunk stuff like that. I tells him I'll get him the tights an' that I'll also attend to his bit, but when I says that if he's lucky an' don't get trimmed too offen, he might meet Doyle in a year, say, he wants to jump off the train! I quiets him down finally, an' right then an' there I decides to call him Tony Harvey. I can't see that Angelletti thing. I could hear the announcer sayin': "In this corner, Tony Spaghetti, of Crescent City!" So I

cans the wop moniker, but I didn't tell Tony.

Well, we gets into Chi at night. I takes Tony to a joint on State Street, an', after seein' he gets a shower, makes him hit the hay. I figgers I might as well start right in as manager then. He kicks a lot at first—he wants to see the town—but when I tells him I'll leave him flat in Chicago if he don't shut up, he turns over an' goes to sleep.

The next mornin' I has Tony gone over by a regular barber an' a tailor. My roll's gettin' dented, but every time I breaks a twenty I looks at that left of Tony's an' takes the clutch off. After I has him lookin' like a regular guy, I starts fer the newspaper offices.

Say, I've seen a chef take a coupla eggs an' some dough an' turn out a dish fit fer a king, but I never seen nothin' before like what them few bones I blew did for Tony. He looks so good in them store togs an' that Michigan Boulevard hair cut, I hadda hear him talk to believe he was Tony. He looks as good as any of them shippin' clerks we passes on the boulevard, an' better than some. Every third skirt we passes gives him the eye, an' them in between says "Hello, dearie!" He looks like ready money, an' I keeps figgerin' he will be pretty soon.

Well, I takes Tony to the *Blast* an' the *Comet* an' all the rest of them sheets, an' I gets a hearin' at nearly all of them. When them sportin' writers sees me an' Tony comin' with our swell scenery an' all, I guess they figgers we was some champs they couldn't quite place, an' then, before they'd get set, I'd start my spiel about Tony.

A guy named Cole was sportin' editor of the *Blast*. He was a regular fellah. He welcomes me like I'm the ace of hearts an' he's got four red cards. He says:

"Go ahead, partner—tell me lots about this bird. I got two columns of nice white space to fill to-morrow, an' you may be a life-saver—let it go!"

Well, I figgers this a chance of a lifetime, so I let it go for your life. I tells that sport writer things about Tony that if he'd ever done 'em he wouldn't 'a' let me live in the same ward with him. I tells him how Tony's cleaned up everythin' in Iowa—I mighta took in a coupla precincts that Tony never seen, maybe—I said the only thing wrong with Tony's wallop was that if he ever let it go all the way he'd kill the other boy, an' that guys had made a rep stayin' a round with him in Iowa. Well, this sportin' guy eats it up, an' as fer Tony, he just sits there lookin' at me with his tongue hangin' out. I was afraid any minnit he'd pull some bone an' queer me, but he never says a word.

When I stops fer a new deal, the sportin' writer holds up his hand.

"Enough;" he says. "From what you say, your boy must be the original Peruvian man-eater. The only difference between him an' the average scrapper is that between an air rifle an' a forty-two-centimeter gun. After hearin' your stuff—which no manager of fighters has told me yet this mornin'—I'm satisfied that murder will be the result of this bird's first start here. However, you can think I fell for it—so can everybody else, because I'm goin' to print it to-morrow. If he stays a round with some of these preliminary bums around here, I'll stop smokin' for six months. Take him upstairs an' have him photographed!"

Well, I takes Tony upstairs, an' he poses in citizen's clothes, an' then he strips, while I goes out an' buys him a pair of tights. Green? Sure! When I come back he puts 'em on an' poses for some more pitcher guys. "Shootin' Over the Deadly Left" an' "Harvey's Famous Uppercut"—you know the old stuff. I had some little trouble with him at first, because Tony's idea of jabs, crosses, an' uppercuts is slightly differ-

ent from them generally held. Tony never was a boxer, know what I mean? —just plain *ruin* was what Tony meant to these other guys. He knowed as much about boxin' as Jess Willard does about bridge whist—but fightin'? Say, them clever guys never got no chance to make Tony look foolish by peckin' at him an' dancin' aroun'.

Tony generally come on about as slow as the Twentieth Century Limited, an' he was just about as nasty, too. Them there "remarkable defensive fighters" you guys write about did their brain work from the floor as soon as Tony shoots that left. He never missed 'em, no matter where they hid.

Well, the nex' mornin' I goes out early an' gets the papers. Two of them give us a line, one didn't notice us at all, but the *Blast* makes theirs the Tony Harvey number. Tony's all over the sport page. That writin' guy had taken the hop I gives him about Tony, an' with only that to work on he wallops the dictionary till it's hangin' on the ropes. Say, it looks so good I almost fell for it myself! Tony, as I says before, is a good looker, an' strips nice, an' he sure looks like the real stuff in them fightin' poses that goes with the layout. I hustles back to the hotel an' wakes Tony up.

"Give that the once over!" I says, passin' the paper to him.

Tony blinks, opens his eyes, an' grabs the paper.

"Gee! That's me, ain't it?" he says. "But who's dis Harvey guy, where do they get that stuff?"

I forgot I ain't told him I'd rechristened him when I decides to make a champ outa him, so I says:

"Why, you big boob, that's *you!*"

"Whatta ya mean it's me!" he says, gettin' outa bed. "Can't them guys spell down there?"

Say, it took me the best part of an hour to get Tony where he'd believe he could punch as hard by the name of Harvey as he could as Antonio Angelletti.

Well, after breakfast, I scouts aroun' gettin' a place fer Tony to train. I didn't have much trouble, for after the *Blast* had been on the street a while the phone in Room 36 rang long an' often. I steers off the managers of the cheap ham-an'-bean clubs an' other what nots, as they says, an', after sizin' up things a little, I picks a place in South Chicago. I didn't wanna get too close to the big town, where them sport writers could run out an' see Tony work, an' then go back an' laff themselves sick thinkin' of funny names to call him an' the *Blast* guy in print. I takes Tony out there an' hires a coupla bums fer him to work with. I wasn't unduly careless about that, either, for I didn't want none of them guys to slip one over on Tony in the camp. Not that I figgers anybody can do it, understand, but this was no time, accordin' to my dope, to take any chances lessen a thousand to one, for Tony's a long ways from havin' arrived yet.

Well, Tony gets down to business, an' does his road an' gym work like a major. Pretty soon the newspaper boys come out an' gives Tony the up an' down, an' none of them laffed outright. Tony would beat the bag an' the bums to a fare-you-well, throw the medicine ball, rastle the sack, an' skip rope like an' ol'-timer. Once I caught a guy from the *Examiner* grinnin'. I walks over to him an' says:

"Some kid, eh? That boy's got an awful wallop, if he lands it!"

"Yes," says this guy, lightin' a cigarette. "Yes, an' the La Salle street station would kick up a terrible fuss —if it ever fell down!"

Tony's sparrin' one of them husky bums at the time, an' I claps my hands. Tony shoots his left, an' the bum goes cold. To make it good, the poor bum is out for five minnits, an' the *Examiner* guy gets so excited over bein' called

to the inquest or somethin', maybe, that he slips me a cigarette—an' beats it!

Two weeks after we lan's in Chi I gets Tony his first fight. It went one round. I got a guy called Knock-out Moore—I picked him by his name. Them "One-round" an' "Knock-out" guys makes good on their moniker about as offen as Rockefeller loses a dollar. Of course, that fight didn't do Tony no harm, an' when he repeats four or five times in the nex' few weeks an' finally gets a newspaper decision over Kid Goodman, who was touted as the nex' champ, well, me an' Tony owns the town! I had more money than a herrin' has bones, an' I'm figgerin' rents on apartment houses along the lake shore, in me mind.

About six months after this, Tony's got a string of knock-outs after his name that fills a page in the Annual. He ain't fightin' nothin' but good ones, an' every time Tony pulls on a glove he gets anywhere from two hundred bucks up! Nice money, eh? Well, you'd think so if you'd done a few years' time in a hick town for ten bucks per. Me? I'm his manager, ain't I? Never mind what my bit was, *I* never had no moan comin', an' neither did Tony, so let it go at that!

Around this time it begins to be hard to get a fight. Tony's as big a card as Sarah Bernhardt, but the other guys is leary of him. They didn't want none of his game! An' as for Kid Doyle, the lightweight champ, *he* wouldn't touch Tony with a stick! We couldn't even get him in the same State! Well, the papers begin roastin' the champ, an' Tony kept challengin' him from the ringside of all the fights we got to, until right before Christmas the Kid agrees to meet Tony in a twenty-round mill for the title.

We gotta make concessions to that Doyle guy that should 'a' put him in jail. He wants all the gate money, the pitcher money, tickets for his camp an' some friends both ways—an', say, that guy even wants the bout called *his* if it goes the limit! Kin ya beat it?

We're so tickled to get a fight with this guy that Tony would 'a' fought him fer the excitement, on the level! "Give him anything he wants!" Tony whispers to me while they're drawin' up the articles. "That bum won't stay a round with me—I can beat him at marbles, casino, or scrappin'—just sign him up!" Every time the champ would kick over a penny or a pound, I'd moan a little, to make it look good, an' then I'd give in, lookin' like I thought Doyle's gettin' away with murder. I'm careful not to make it too strong for fear I'll crab it, an' the bout'll be called off.

Now, here's where the skirt comes in! No fighter oughta get married till he's ready to quit the game! One kinda battlin's enough! No guy that wants to get anywhere can get in a ring with another guy that's got the same reason for bein' there that he has, when he's got baby's teeth an' wifie's hat an' "where's th' rent comin' from if I lose this one?" on his mind, because just about when he's figgerin' will the butcher stan' for another hang-up, the other guy, who ain't got nothin' to worry about but to get his one-two over, shoots it—an' nearly always it's all over!

I thought I'd watched Tony pretty close, because I was always worryin' that some queen would grab him off, what with his looks an' his roll an' all that. Of course, while Tony was still a fine-lookin' kid, he had a coupla things that he didn't bring with him from Crescent City. His nose was a little outa gear an' one of his ears didn't check up to what it should, because, as I says before, Tony wasn't no boxer; he was a *fighter!* An', well, a coupla guys had got to him before he stopped 'em!

It ain't more'n a week after I signs

Tony to meet Kid Doyle for the title that the fatal thing happens, as they says. Tony gets married! He puts it over on me when I ain't lookin'. I'd went to New York to sign him up for a fight at the Garden with Young Jacobs, an' when I comes back to Chi, Tony's signed up with some skirt for a finish bout! Of course, it's too late to make a holler then. I figgers it'll only put me in dutch with Mrs. Tony, an' that's just what I didn't want to happen. So I pats Tony on the back instida wallopin' him in the nose when he slips me the big news, an' then I blows twenty on one of them cut-glass fruit bowls or somethin', that the women puts a doily under an' sticks on the center table so little Willie won't knock it over.

Tony took me out to a nice little flat, an' Mrs. Tony warms right up to me. She's a nice little kid, too, such as you might call neat, but not gaudy, an' when she goes in the kitchen to bring out the lemonade, Tony gets up an' slaps me on the back. "A pip! Eh, Jake?" he says. Well, they got a piano an' Mrs. Tony plays it, an' everything goes O. K. Tony's havin' the time of his young life, an' takes no pains to hide it. When I finally left them that night I takes a new deal, an' figgers maybe Tony's gettin' married ain't such a bone play, after all. But with all that I still had a hunch that I couldn't shake that Tony should 'a' stayed single till after he beat Doyle, anyways.

Tony had one fight on before he meets Doyle. I didn't pick no hard one for him because—— You never kin tell! If I'd only saw a fortune teller or somethin' I wouldn't 'a' let him fight a shadow till the big show—but how was I gonna dope out what was gonna happen? Look here, bo, I kin figger the ponies, a crap game, booze, or anything like that, but when it comes to the well-known fair sex—I'm off 'em! They're too swift for me—I can't make 'em, an' never could—an', what's more, I never met up with any guy yet that had any better line on 'em than that, either!

This bird that Tony fights is called Dave Smith. He's got eight poun's on Tony, an' he certainly is a willin' boy! He stands up to Tony an' gives him wallop for wallop for three rounds—then Tony finds the spot, an' the crowd goes home. Tony knowed he'd bin to the fight, though—one eye is closed tight, an' his lips er thicker than Jack Johnson's fer a week after. He had a bad cut at the top of his nose, too. I fixes him up some, an' sends him home.

It ain't till a few days later, at the trainin' camp, that I gets the first flash on what's comin'. Even then I didn't get how serious it is. I'm gettin' outa my car—sure, I had one then!—when I hears some laffin. It's the kinda laff the comedian gets when he falls over the rope in the acrobatic act—got me? I pushes through the gang of handlers an' hicks that hangs aroun' every day watchin' Tony work—an', say, if I hadn't been so sore, I'd 'a' done some laffin myself! This comin' champ of mine is dancin' aroun' like a chorus girl, doin' fancy little steps, pawin' the air, jerkin' his head up an' down—say, ever seen them vaudeville acts?—burlesque boxin' or somethin' like that, they calls 'em—well, Tony would 'a' brought down any house with half the stuff he was pullin' there. His face is as serious as the landlady's when you fail to send in, an' he's workin' with some new guy I never seen before. This bird is about as fast as Joe Grimm, but he's swift enough for Tony! This big bum who couldn't 'a' stayed a round with a one-armed blind man is hittin' Tony wherever he wants—an' here's a crowd of hicks watchin' all this, an' laffin themselves sick!

I shoves some of 'em away, an' grabs this new sparrin' partner by the shoulder.

"Outside for yours!" I says. "Back to the ice wagon—it's seven o'clock!"

But Tony butts in.

"Wait a minnit, Jake, wait a minnit!" he says. "What's the matter with this guy? Let him alone, I hired him!"

"Oh, you hired him, did you?" I says. "What circus is he with, an' when do you join? What kinda stuff is this?" I says. "You bonehead, d'ye know what the sport writers'll do when they get this? Whadda ya tryin' to do, kid me?"

"Slow up, Jake," says Tony, easy-like. "This stuff is on the level. It's new to me, but I'll get it pretty soon!"

"What is it, a dance?" I asks him. "You'll get it pretty soon, all right! Where do you want it?" I says. "I suppose you an' Kid Doyle are gonna fox trot all over the ring nex' month, eh?"

"Don't you see what I'm gettin' at?" says Tony.

"No!" I says, sore as a stubbed toe.

Tony gives this new guy, who's takin' it all in, a look that says: "Don't mind the poor boob, he don't know nothin'!" Then he says to me:

"Well, stupid, then I'll wise you up: I'm gonna mix a little of this scientific stuff with my wallop the nex' time I start. Nix on the roughneck stuff—I'm gonna box Kid Doyle into so many knots that he'll kill himself gettin' untangled!"

"You mean he'll laff himself to death if you pull any of that stuff on him!" I says, tryin' to control myself. I'm good an' sore then. All my time an' dough wasted on a guy like that! Why, Tony couldn't win a fight from the worst hick on earth if he tried to *box* him. He simply wasn't born a boxer! He was a fighter from the feet up. A tearin', maulin', man-eatin' scrapper! They never seen him comin', he come so fast, an' when he hit 'em—they fell down an' stayed there! That's the stuff that put him where he was. But a boxer? Nothin' doin'! An' here just before he's gonna fight the scrap of his life he wants to learn some "scientific stuff." An' he hires some tramp that couldn't do a hundred yards in nine hours to make him fast! This hick's name, by the way, is Cyclone Reddy. *Cyclone,* ha, ha! Ain't it rich the names them guys pick out? Cyclone! Tony dug him up down in the Loop somewhere. I think he must 'a' been champeen booze fighter of the world, from his breath an' general get-up.

"Go sit down, bo!" I says finally to the Cyclone. "Take a load off your feet. Your speed dazzles me! I wanna rest my eyes—an' while I'm doin' it I'll interview your friend Tony, there."

With that, I takes Tony to one side.

"Tony," I says, "I took you outa Crescent City an' put you where you are in lessena year. Where would ya be now if it wasn't for me? Back in Crescent City sleepin' in stables, wouldn't ya? I took a chance on you, an' then made you good! Now you gotta chance to be lightweight champeen. You knows what that means if you cop! Thirty weeks with some show, a few more knockin' out bums, an' more dough than you ever heard of in your life before. You *fight* this guy Doyle, an' the title's yours—try to *box* him, an' you'll never get close enough to him to be sure of his color. He'll make you the laffinstock of Chicago, an' they wouldn't let you in another fight club with a ticket! Who steered you on this boxin' stuff, anyway?"

Tony keeps quiet for a minnit, an' then he says:

"Jake, it's like you say. You bin a good guy to me, an' I guess I owes you a lot—that's the reason I'm gonna tell you this, an' I wants you to keep it under your hat. You knows I got pretty well used up in that last scrap. I had a big ear an' a bum lamp, an' me lips is sore yet. Well, when I left you an' went home after the fight that night,

it was pretty late—so I lets meself in the flat kinda quiet so I don't wake the missis. But she's sittin' up for me. When she hears me she comes runnin' out in the hall, an' when she gets close to me she gives a little yell an' caves in! She's out cold, Jake!—I runs out in the kitchen an' gets a glass of water—after while she comes to—she sits up an' looks at me, an' then she puts her hands over her face an' starts to beller. I keeps pattin' her head an' askin' her what's the joke—I'm getting real worried when she points to me face. I runs for a lookin'-glass an' pikes a coupla times—an' then, kinda slow, I gets it!

"You know that Smith guy certainly pounded me up some, Jake. I guess the wife thought I'd been boxin' a street car! Well, I goes back an' pats her on the head some more an' salves her up some, but she don't come around. Everyonct in a while she gets a flash at me face an' then she goes off bellerin' again. I finally gets her quicted down, an' she puts a lotta cold cream an' stuff like that on me an' goes to bed. But all night I hears her cryin' when she thinks I'm asleep—I ain't doin' no sleepin', Jake. I'm layin' there figgerin' out some way to fight so me face'll look human when I gets outa the ring. Along about five a. m. I dopes out that I'm gonna *box* 'em from now on an' keep 'em away!"

Tony stops then an' looks at me as much as to say, "I'm a pretty clever kid, eh?" Well, all this stuffs hits me in a heap. I lets it sink in for a minnit —deep. I'm doin' some thinkin', too.

"Tony," I says, "you got my sympathy, an' so has the missis. Gettin' married has done what none of them fighters has been able to do to you! I ain't sayin' nothin' against the missis—but you ain't gettin' paid for yer looks, Tony, an' you *are* gettin' big money for scrappin'. You gotta *expect* to get beat up now an' then—you ain't playin' tennis, you're a fighter—an' you ain't, never was, or never will be a *boxer*. Them guys are born that way!"

"How 'bout Mike Gibbons an' Packey McFarlan'?" puts in Tony.

"Why, you poor bum!" I says, "them guys have spent a lifetime learnin' how to duck wallops. All *you* ever found out is how to deliver 'em—which is just as good, an' better for you. Maybe, in a coupla years, you might learn how to stop 'em with your hands instid a your face, but in the time you got before you meets Doyle, all you can figger on is to learn this comic act you're rehearsin' now! Kid Doyle's the greatest box fighter that ever pulled on a glove—*boxin'* 'em is where he wins out! The only chance you got to beat him is to tear in from the bell. You'll have to take about ninety wallops, maybe, before you gets yours over—but when you do, an' I'm bettin' it all that you will—the fight'll be over. *That* way you beat him, but box him? *You?* Say, don't make me laff!—you *can't* make a boxer outa a natural slugger, Tony, an' I can show you a million guys that's tried it. All you can do is spoil him. The crowd don't think he's tryin' to box—they figgers he's yellah, an' won't fight!"

D'y'e think that stopped Tony?—say, *you* didn't know that bird!

"You may be right!" he says, gettin' up, "but I figger I'll surprise you. I got some fast boys comin' out here to-day to show me somethin'—I'm gonna take on two of 'em at once for speed! I'll make Kid Doyle travel like he never did before! After I outpoints him, Jake, I'm gonna stop him—watch me!"

"Yes," I says, "I'll watch you! I ain't got nothin' else to do now. I thought I could make somethin' outa you, but a bum's a bum, I guess!"

Just then a kid comes runnin' into the gym an' hands Tony a book. It's about boxin', an' was got out by Jim Corbett. Tony shows it to me an' says:

"I guess I'm pretty well heeled now, eh, Jake?"

What could ya do with a guy like that?

I quits cold! The newspaper boys come out to see Tony's final work-out. It was rich! Tony spars with two kids that never got near enough to him to touch him with a stick. Tony looks awful good—to them! The kids are afraid he'd shoot his left, an' they keeps away. The newspaper bunch goes back an' says that besides Tony's terrible left, he's developed amazin' cleverness! I never could figger out since if they was kiddin' him or not!

Well, as the time for the big fight gets near, Tony keeps gettin' stronger for this boxin' thing. Instid a gettin' discouraged when even his own handlers laffs at him, he keeps right on, shadow boxin' an' skippin' rope an' sparrin' with these hams. The day before the fight he admitted he was the greatest boxer in the game!

The fight was put on in Milwaukee. Wilson couldn't 'a' bought his way into the club after seven o'clock. Say, they're hangin' on the paint! Tony an' me had made a lotta friends in Chicago, an' they're all there, with bells on! Kid Doyle was fav'rite in the bettin', an' Tony's friends grabbed up every nickel of Doyle money they could get. Me?—I laid off it! Say, if they knowed what I did, they wouldn't 'a' risked a transfer on their friend Tony. But they didn't—an' I couldn't help figgerin' what they'd do when they seen Tony fight—an' after!

Tony's as cool as Medicine Hat when we gets to the club. He kept tellin' me how good his footwork is.

"I hopes so!" I says, "because you'll have to do a piece of runnin', Tony, when this fight's over!"

"You're a swell guy to have aroun'!" Tony says. "You shoulda been an undertaker, for you're the greatest little crape hanger I ever seen. I suppose *you* think this bum's got a chance with me, eh?"

He was grinnin' when he said it. He'd got to where he *knowed* he was goin' to win. He actually *knowed* it!—ever seen them kind a guys?

While we're workin' on him in the dressin' room I tries to get to him once more.

"Tony," I says, "listen to me, boy!—fergit this boxin' stuff an' go to this guy! That funny stuff's all right for the camp, but *can* it here! This is the big night! Tear after this guy an' get him!—you kin do it, you got it in you—but you gotta do it quick!"

Tony just laffs.

"Them roughneck days is over, Jake," he says; "watch me!"

Well, I goes out an' climbs into a chair by the ringside. I hadda sit half on some guy's lap, they're packed so tight. All aroun' me I seen the sport writers, an' they seen me, an' I guess I musta looked the way I was feelin', because they all kidded me. Finally Kid Doyle comes out an' climbs into the ring. The crowd yelled some, but the roof didn't shake from the noise. Doyle was a champeen, all right, but he got his title by *duckin'* wallops, not *landin'* 'em, an' that kind of a champ will get kidded where a roughneck that don't know nothin' but how to dump 'em over will get a hand, like Billy Sunday.

But when Tony comes outa the dressin' room—say, I can shut me eyes an' hear 'em now! They yells an' pounds on the floor an' whistles, an' some guys have brung horns along—well, it keeps up for five minnits easy. It rattles me, an' it woulda rattled *you*—did it rattle Tony?—well, not to any large extent, as they says. He bows an' scrapes like an' actor, an' then gives a little run down the aisle an' *boosts* himself over the ropes.

"Some speed!" says the guy I'm sittin' on.

Well, the noise keeps up, more or less, till Doyle looks over Tony's bandages an' Tony sees Doyle's. The announcer climbs outa the ring, an' in another minnit they rung the bell.

Tony hops off his chair an' starts at Doyle like a cabaret dancer. Doyle backs away kind a puzzled—he's read some a Tony's press notices, an' he ain't riskin' nothin'. They stalls aroun' like that, an' the crowd gets nervous.

"Shoot it! Shoot it, Tony!" I yells —I seen eighty openin's!

That wakes 'em all up! The advice that Tony an' this Doyle guy gets from about two thousand wild-eyed, fight-crazy fans would 'a' won fifty fights—if any of it was any good! Tony keeps dancin' aroun', an' Doyle keeps dancin' after him, an' finally Tony tried to jab Doyle with his right. Doyle just jerks his head a little to one side, an' Tony falls on the floor!

"Grab his legs an' throw him, Tony!" yells somebody.

Tony jumps right up, an' Doyle meets him with a punch that sends his head back like it was on a hinge. Instid a comin' back, Tony keeps both han's in fronta his face an' backs away. Then the crowd comes to life!

"What are they, roommates?" "Fake! Fake!" "Take him away!" "Oh, what a bum!" "Make 'em fight!"

That's about the mildest that come cuttin' through the smoke to Tony. Doyle don't mind. He just keeps slidin' aroun' Tony an' jabbin' his way to another decision. Tony keeps his face covered an' his body wide open—now an' then he shoots his left—the same left that got him the chance he's throwin' away!—an' he misses Doyle by a city block! Once he nearly goes through the ropes with a wild swing!

I was the gladdest man in the club when the bell rings for the end of the round.

"I'm showin' 'em somethin', ain't I, old scout?" says Tony, while his seconds are workin' over him.

"Yes, *you're* showin' 'em somethin'," I says. "Do you hear them yellin'?"

"Why, that ain't for me!" says Tony. "That's for Doyle!"

I begs him again to cut the comedy an' fight. No use!

"I got him buffaloed!" he says. "Watch me this time!"

Well, he dances up again for the second round—an' here's where the funny part comes in. I didn't do no laffin' then, though! This Doyle, who never stood up to nobody in his life before, tears in to Tony like a wild locomotive! He's stealin' Tony's stuff! Here's where Tony wakes up, I says to meself, an' then good night, Mr. Doyle! But Tony slips aroun' like one a them Russian dancers an' keeps hidin' his face an' swingin' like a gate!—Doyle backs Tony into his own corner—Tony sees what's comin' an' tries to do an' extry-fancy step—Doyle feints for Tony's jaw, an' both a Tony's hands go up to save that pretty face—his body's as open as a game a Old Maid!—I shuts me eyes—the crowd's jumpin' off the seats!——

"Is he out?" I says to the guy beside me.

"Out!" he says. "The poor bum's dead!"

"Yes!" says the *Examiner* guy. "And the papers'll bury him in the mornin'!"

Tony's hunched in a pile by Doyle's corner, as cold as zero! The crowd's passin' out—an' *you* knows what they was sayin'! The referee an' Doyle had left the ring, an' Tony's seconds are tryin' to figger where they work next week. I climbs in the ring an' walks over to Tony just about the time he opens his eyes. He gets up an' sinks down in his chair. I hadda lotta things to say to that bird, believe me! But I felt sorry for him—we'd bin more pals than manager an' fighter. Tony sees me an' kind a grins.

"How d'ya feel now, Corbett?" I says.

"Fine!" says Tony. "How long did it go? That guy's *there,* ain't he!"

I didn't say nothin'. I couldn't think a no comeback—I just stands there an' looks at him.

"Get me overcoat, will you, Jake?" he says next.

I sends one a the handlers for it.

"Well, are ya goin' to sleep here?" I says.

"Wait a minnit. There's no hurry now, is there, Jake?"

The kid comes back with the coat Tony takes it an' fumbles aroun' in the pockets. Finally he pulls out one a them dinky little mirrors. He looks in it a minnit an' then says, kinda to himself:

"Only that little red spot over me eye."

"Whadda ya ravin' about?" I says.

Tony laffs an' gets up.

"They ain't no marks on me face tonight, is there, Jake?" he says.

HILL, THE FISHERMAN

JAMES J. HILL, the builder of the Great Northern, has a strong touch of the savage huntsman in his blood. In early summer, wherever he may be, whether in New York, at his farm in St. Paul, in Seattle, or in the farthest Northwest, this love for the wilds asserts itself, and instinctively the railroad pioneer can "sense" that the "salmon are running" far over in the distant St. Lawrence, past his old hunting camp on St. John's River.

So keen is this natural instinct of Mr. Hill's that he can tell almost to the day when the game fish suddenly leave their grounds in the unknown depths of the ocean to start "running" up into the fresh water of the rivers of Labrador to spawn.

In Mr. Hill's camp, on the coast of Saguenay, a watcher is stationed, on the lookout for the first signs of salmon. The news of its approach is rushed to New York, St. Paul, or other points, as the case may be, but Mr. Hill, guided by instinct, very often has started on his trip before the message has reached him.

From the opening day of the sport, Mr. Hill goes after the wild game of the river with all the energy, skill, and craftiness that he once devoted to outwitting his rivals of the rail. For three weeks he thinks of nothing else, and no human event can come between him and his sport. In fact, his orders are positive that he must not be disturbed during this period by any letters, messages, or corporation developments, however important, imperative, or critical they may be.

In his canoe, on the wild river in Saguenay, provided only with a light pole and line, Mr. Hill finds the fishing an exciting diversion.

The big fish are tired out on the line, and the guide stands ready to gaff them as they are hauled in over the side of the boat. Mr. Hill has an average daily record of sixteen fish, and they are big fellows, too.

When his steam yacht, the *Wacouta,* begins her trip to New York City from the fishing camp, she is loaded down, as a rule, with at least three hundred fish, packed in refrigerators. It is Mr. Hill's custom to wire his friends, in whatever part of the country they may be: "Where shall I send your fish?" Each big salmon, frozen solid and packed in sawdust, is placed in an air-tight box, fully three inches thick, and sent to its destination. And all the friends of the great railroad builder—and there is a long list of them—are regaled with a surfeit of delicious salmon steaks.

The Probation of P. D.

By George Washington Ogden

Author of "Unlucky Men," Etc.

In "Unlucky Men" Ogden gave us the story of Oil. Now he tells the story of Sheep. A notable novel, realistic and fascinating. You will follow with increasing interest the experiences of "P. D."—such the two black letters on his suit case proclaimed him—who, graduating from college with a reputation as an agronomist, goes West with his hopes in his hand to make his fortune out of sheep. Other things interest him beside sheep: notably the song of an unknown singer—the song of a spirit, he is told, who had been singing for a thousand years!

(In Two Parts—Part One)

CHAPTER I.

THE LAND OF SHEEP.

IT seemed a land of rigor and of waste. There was the sunlight of May, tenderly assertive of the rights of the season, but the wind of March appeared to have come back to comb its rough fingers through the shivering willows.

Drifts of snow still gleamed in the indentures of the hills, like tenacious teeth fastened upon the brown land, each drift with its trickling rivulet speeding to swell some ribald stream. In the poor shelter of banks and willow clumps, where they had drifted blindly with the icy winds to perish in unuttered agony, now half hidden by the torrents rushing past; and on bleak knolls, where they had dropped when the giddy pangs of starvation filmed their eyes, the thin carcasses of range cattle lay in scores. On station platforms were heaped great stacks of fresh sheep hides, all bearing testimony on the severity of the winter then passing.

The little train had been wearing its way northward since early morning, heading into the land of sheep. The smoking car, which looked as if it had worn out its usefulness carrying New Jersey commuters, and then had gone West with the same hope of rejuvenation as impels men to face that way, was carrying a band of disputatious shearers, bound for the big sheds along the Northwestern.

They were cursing the cold with unanimous voice, for they found it bitter, coming into it unprepared as they had come, from the warmth of Arizona, reeking rancidly with the grease of countless fleeces shorn since they began the season, away down in Sonora.

Few of them wore overcoats, several had not even outside shirts, their brown necks showing, oily as whalers', above the grimy limits of undergarments. For it is a shearer's way to buy and wear out, never to wash, the few and simple garments which his untidy trade allows. There had been much smoking, with passing of twists, plugs, and pouches up and down, and some drink-

ing from broad-shouldered bottles which several of them had tucked away in their scant gear.

All of them carried shears, all but the one called the Dutchman. Some had them sticking points upward out of the breast pockets of their coats, some stowed them under the straps of meager bundles and flat-bellied grips. But all that the Dutchman had to show for the cleaning-up they had given him in Cheyenne was a scythe stone, black and greasy, which he guarded in the inner pocket of his short, hike-tailed coat.

The Dutchman was a little man, hard-lumped at the cheek bones, gaunt of the neck, white-eyebrowed, white-mustached—that sweated-out kind of white which has no tint of age in it, no matter how old, nor of youth, no matter how young. He was a scorched and dry-looking man, rimmed red around the eyelids like a thresher. It made one thirsty just to look at the Dutchman's neck.

But there was a great amount of excellence in that peculiar black whetstone which he carried, according to his talk. In the early part of the day he had diverted his companions of chance by telling stories of which the stone was the heart and the bone. Later, when the liquor began to claw inside of their otherwise empty stomachs and set them on quarrelsome edge, the Dutchman employed it as a wand of peace.

More than once, when greasy fists were flourished, and combats seemed imminent, the Dutchman had spraddled between them, along the cluttered aisle of the rocking car, and brought the talismanic stone from his pocket. Holding it tenderly in his palm, and stroking it with affection in his red-bordered eyes, he would cunningly draw the disputants' attention to certain marvelous qualities with which the black cube in the sacred Kabah itself could not compare.

He had such an entirely extraneous way of coming into disputes, like smoke blowing, or dust whipping up, that he always succeeded in drawing one or both parties to the threatened combat off before it came to blows. His cunning seemed to win him little credit among his fellows, but it had come, early in the day, to be admired by one who sat apart in a back corner of the car.

This was a young man with smooth, scholarly face, who wore his long, light hair combed back like the crest of a cockatoo. Shiny bright glasses rode upon his large, hard-backed nose, and his clear blue eyes looked through them with humorous gleam. One might have thought, looking at him grinning over the Dutchman's labors of pacification, that he had just stepped out for a day of diversion, and that to-morrow would see him back in the classrooms with his books.

Not so, however. P. D.—such the two black letters on the end of his good leather suit case proclaimed him—was what the college world from which he lately had emerged considered a finished man. P. D. held some such notion himself, perhaps, as a man should, for self-esteem and self-confidence are more than half the battle. Not that he was long in ethics, broad in philosophy, deep in languages and literature, unmatched in polemics. Far from it. P. D. would have told you, if you had been on that little Wyoming train that day and put the question, that he was an agronomist.

He would have called it "scientific farmer," only he never had farmed. Back in the agricultural college which he had quitted but a little while gone, they laid stress on the rashness of claiming to be a scientific farmer before one had farmed. One could be an agronomist with safety in any company, but scientific farmers are getting to be so common that one must be pre-

pared to defend the title before he assumes it. He is likely to bump into one of them in a Pullman car, taking him for a banker, you know.

And so P. D. was a plain agronomist, who had specialized for three years in animal husbandry. He could do more than talk wisely of man's helpful creatures, having had intimate association with seventeen sheep on the college farm.

P. D. was coming into the West to realize on his knowledge. He had headed for Wyoming after reading a story in a magazine about the sheepherder who landed from Ireland with fifty-five dollars, fifty of which he put down before a ticket agent, saying: "Give me a ticket as far West as that'll take me." The story was newer then than now, and had not been credited to so many heroes in so many favored States by so many strong-armed writers from everywhere.

He had a little capital which he proposed to invest, and sectional maps from the United States Land Office, showing all the public lands within the State wherein he had planned to plant his feet and make his fortune. He was coming into the atmosphere of his expectations now, and he was glad to be in that smoky little car with those smelling shearers, and listen to their talk and their tales. Already he felt that he had a part in the life that they lived.

P. D. sat back in his corner seat, next the window, his suit case upended to make room for the baggage of another who might occupy the untenanted half. All day his seat had been a sort of catchall for short-trip passengers who piled in with gunny sacks and baskets, but now that class of travelers had fallen off. The stations were miles upon miles distant from each other, and houses by the way were exceedingly rare. The shearers and himself were the only occupants of the car now, and the day was blending off into the gray of evening.

The car's water tank was opposite him, and P. D. fell under the scrutiny of every thirsty shearer who came to drink. Some looked at him with interest, some with lofty indifference, some with humor, some with scorn. One sinewy young man of about his own age, with long black hair standing out like cold bristles under his little cloth cap, had passed unsympathetic remarks on his glasses and his gear several times as he spraddled before the place where P. D. sat, and now he came swaggering back again, with more liquor than was good for his years, and drew heavily on the dented water tank.

"P. D.," said he, wiping his mouth with one black finger, reading the initials on the upended baggage. "That might stand for Pearl Daisy, or it might be Purty Dear."

"Yes, it might," admitted P. D., reddening up considerably. "Don't you like it?"

"No, I don't, and I don't like you, and I don't like the country where you come from, and I ain't got no use for the place you're a-goin' to," said the young shearer, calling it off in loud voice.

"I'm sorry," said P. D., calm enough, the red drawing out of his cheeks as if his face had sprung a leak, "but I don't see how I'm to help you any."

P. D. took a little flat case out of his vest pocket and put his glasses away in it. He pushed the suit case with its offending letters a little farther over against the wall of the car, and got to his feet, undoubling quite a respectable length of limb and back.

The shearer eyed him up and down, weaving on his legs like a spider.

"I double up fellers like you and snap my fingers at 'em!" said he.

Then the Dutchman came. He sat

down on the arm of P. D.'s seat, the black whetrock in his hand.

"Well, sir, the time I had up the bet with old man Horner down in Val Verdes County," said he in colloquial tone, without a quaver of excitement, not a shade too high nor too low, "I had seven pair of shears I sharpened on this rock. I ever tell you about that, Budge?"

Budge was the shearer who had such a deep dislike for the place of P. D.'s origin, and scorn for his destination. He looked at the Dutchman with a sour face.

"No, I never heard about that bet, and I don't never want to hear," he said, turning away.

Budge went back to his place, and P. D. sat down, sliding over to give the Dutchman room. The Dutchman put the stone away in his pocket with a weary little sigh, which he turned into a laugh before it fairly got a start.

"Budge he's a funny feller," he said. "What you sellin'?"

"I'm not selling anything," said P. D.

"Oh," said the Dutchman, "I thought you might be. A good many Jew fellers come through here this time of the year with shears and watches and things, you know. But you ain't no Jew."

"Not likely," grinned P. D.

"No," said the Dutchman positively, "I don't see where you'd make a Jew name out of them two letters. They might stand for what Budge said," he reflected as if to himself.

"Yes, they might, but they don't," P. D. told him. "In this case they stand for Peter Doster. That's my name."

"That's a good, sound name," the Dutchman approved, with a heartiness which seemed relief from the fear that it was going to turn out something denatured. "Peter's a good name; it always makes me think of rye bread."

"How's that?" Peter wanted to know.

"I don't know, but it does. Well, I'll be leavin' you at the next station."

"That's the end of your journey, is it?" asked Peter affably, feeling under a certain obligation to the Dutchman.

"No, I'm goin' on to the shearin' sheds twelve miles ahead, but that's the end of my ride. Peter, heh? And you'd fight, too, dang if you wouldn't, and I guess you'd claw out some hair, even if you do look a little white and soft."

"Maybe," allowed Peter, with becoming modesty.

"Well, she's slowin' up for the depot, and I guess I'll have to drop off and leave you. Maybe you'd better go back to the other car, for that feller Budge he may pick trouble with you after I'm gone, and even if you did wind him up, all the rest of 'em's likely to pile on, just because you don't look the same as them."

"Did you say you were heading for Vesper—that's the next station, isn't it?"

"Double yes," said the Dutchman, buttoning his thin coat. "I'll hit the ties the rest of the way. Well, so long."

"I'm headed for Vesper, and that's the end of the trail for me, too," said Peter. "Why don't you stay on—do you mean that——"

"My money wouldn't quite stretch it," the Dutchman said. "None of them fellers ain't got it to lend me—nobody but that Scotchman with that fuzzy coat on him, and I ain't got no government bond to give him for security."

"How much is it?"

"Sixty cents," the Dutchman said.

"If you'd let a stranger advance it——" hesitated Peter.

"Sure," said the Dutchman, settling down in the seat again with no trouble now in hail. "I'll hand it back to you if we ever meet. Sure, Peter, I will accept, as the maiden said."

The Dutchman's companions seemed unconcerned whether he left the train

or stayed on. With the exception of the Scot in the fur coat and woolen cap, they were bunched together over what remained in the last bottle, noisy and full of words. When the train started again, the Scot turned to see what had become of the man who had no security for a loan of sixty cents. When he saw the Dutchman complacently seated beside the stranger, he got up and made the water tank his excuse for eying the soft one over.

"So ye're r-r-riadin', are ye?" said he.

"I am, thank you for the kindness of askin' me, MacKeigan," the Dutchman replied.

"No thanks ye owe me, not even so much," said the Scot. "Ye'd whussel in y'r fingers a long time before ye'd fiddle a loan out o' me."

"Thank you for refusin' me, then, MacKeigan," the cheery Dutchman said.

He went on with his talk to Peter, leaving MacKeigan growling to himself.

"So you're comin' in to try your hand at sheep?" said the Dutchman, having found that out, which was no matter for concealment on the part of Peter, indeed. "Well, well, may luck go with you! You're goin' to a good spot for findin' out about the business, too. Vesper's the center of it in this part of the State, and the one man for you to git next to, above all others, is old Dan Sweeney. He'll be around here, hot and heavy, with no less than thirty thousand sheep to shear."

"That's a comfortable bunch," allowed Peter.

"It is," said the Dutchman, with finality, "and Dan he made it from nothing, you might say. When Dan landed in New York he had fifty-five dollars. He put fifty of it down in the ticket-office winder and he said to the feller: 'Gimme a ticket as fur West as that'll take me, in a straight line,' says Dan. It carried him to Vesper, and he had five dollars to start with when he stepped off of the train."

Peter's version of it was centered around a man with quite another name, and his ranch was in the Red Desert, some three or four hundred miles distant from his present location, and the scene of Dan Sweeney's triumphs. He said nothing about it, not wishing to start an argument. The Dutchman appeared to believe he had the right of it.

"Well, we're there," said the Dutchman, peering out of the window into the dark, specked here and there by a yellow light, "we're right up to the gate of your promised land. If I ever see you ag'in, Peter, I'll hand you back that sixty cents."

CHAPTER II.

THE VOICE IN THE WIND.

At that time, Vesper was nearer to what a town should be, for the purposes of picturesque fiction, than any town in the West is to-day. It lay in a broad plateau valley, hills far away on one hand, mountains farther away on the other, and a yellow river came winding down in low banks past its door.

It was a place of low-built houses, which seemed lower because there was nothing to measure them against but the far-reaching, hollow sky. There were no trees in Vesper, and no grass; nothing but the gray soil, cut to dust by hoofs and heels. One street led away from the railway station and ended at the river bank, and beside and across this thoroughfare other indefinite avenues ran. They counted for little, for people only lived in them, and had their homes, their wives, and their children there. It was the main street that was on the map at Vesper.

There were saloons along it, shouldered side by side, with liquor enough in them, it seemed, to lave all the hot

tongues for a thousand miles on every side. There were gaming tables in all of them, and in some of them there was music and singing at night.

There were a few large business houses, selling the substantial merchandise such as a rough-riding land required, and a bank, and a milliner, as there are banks and milliners everywhere that money accumulates and vanity lives. The business of Vesper amounted to millions in a year, for it was the wool market of the Northwest, and much of the money that came into it through labor and long watches leaked out of it like water upon its thirsty soil through the saloons and gambling lairs.

By day it was a somnolent place, when respectability came in to buy wagons and hats, and put its money in the bank. But come nightfall, and there was a moving change. It was as if day Vesper had been rolled up on a curtain, and night Vesper let down, all yellow-splotched with lights, noisy with fiddles and harps of the Italian musicians; pierced with the febrile laughter of women, jarred by the hoarse whoops of brawling men. Here galloping riders came arriving, sweeping around the corners like wild winds, and there others mounted and sped away.

Night long they screeched and fiddled and sent their piercing laughter out of their husks of hearts, and at dawn the night picture faded out again to the gray commonplace of business, milliners, bankers, and those who labored that the wastrels of the night might live.

Into this place, then, came Peter Doster, agronomist, with his hopes in his hand, to make his fortune out of sheep.

Peter was cautious about venturing out to try the mysteries of Vesper that night. From the door of the hotel there appeared to be too many vague stretches of darkness between the gleaming fronts of saloons, where respectability had put out its lamps and gone home with the key in its pocket. All the illumination of Vesper came through its windowpanes, and a stranger must lift the feet high, and put them down with care.

"They're taking money away from them with both hands to-night, and holding the sack with their teeth," said some one behind him.

Peter turned, to note that a benevolent-looking man in gray, who had drawn his attention in the hotel office a little while before, had come out, and stood near him in the recess of the bevel-mouthed entrance. He seemed to have made the observation to himself, for his eyes were on the bright fronts across the way, and his fresh cigar pointed toward them resolutely, like an accusing finger.

"Yes, sir, they seem to be pretty busy," said Peter, feeling that the usages of that informal country demanded something in return.

"Stranger here, I believe?" said the large man, who looked larger for his bulky clothing, tall fur cap, almost as large as a drum major's shako.

"Yes, sir; I came in on the evening train."

"Aim to stay long, if it's any of a stranger's business?"

"Well, I came here with a view to settling down," said Peter.

So one word brought on another, as words will do, even between strangers, and soon Peter was inside the hotel office, with his feet in the window and his chair tilted back, just as much at home as if he carried harness samples, or had come there to buy wool. The man in the tall cap sat beside him, in full possession of Peter's little story.

"Well, if you'll take the advice of a man old enough to be your father, and a good wide margin of years to lap over besides, you'll take a job as herder before you plunge into the business on

your own hook," he said. "The time was when you could have come here with seven hundred dollars"—Peter had given him the sum total of his capital in hand—"and set up in the sheep business, but you can't do it now. The first thing you've got to make sure of is living water within easy reach—I mean not more than three days' drive at the most—and the water's about all leased up, bought up, or occupied in some way.

"Take my own case, for example. I came out here twenty years ago and taught school right here in Vesper, and worked politics and grafted around as honest as I could, till I got a strip of river front up above here about fifty miles. I started little, and I own five miles of water front now. I suppose I've froze out many a young feller like you, but it all goes in the big grab game of life. Now, if you want to go in for sheep, come up to the ranch with me, take a job as herder, and learn the game from the smallest move up. You'll want to spend a winter on the range, anyhow, before you'll know whether you can stick—don't put a cent into it till you've gone through one winter at least."

The clerk told Peter, when he called at the desk for his key, that he could consider himself favored by fortune to be taken up that way by Gomer Carter, one of the biggest sheepmen in the State.

"Carter's a Virginian," said the clerk, "and he's a gentleman down to the tacks. I've heard them say that he started from Richmond with fifty-five dollars to his name. He walked into the ticket office and put fifty of it down in the window, and he said: 'Give me a ticket as far West as that'll take me.' It brought him to Vesper, and he put the five dollars left over to work. Look what he is to-day!"

So there was the old story again, but in a different coat. Peter wondered whether the verities of that country all measured according to its similitude, and, if so, what chance he would have in it with his seven hundred dollars. One thing was past dispute. That hoarded treasure did not look as big to him as it did when he boarded the train two days before. He had a feeling now that he ought to apologize for it, and hide it away like a shame.

But it was through that meeting, by the medium of a casual remark, with Gomer Carter, that Peter found himself out among the hills with a thousand sheep under the care of his hand and eye. Three thousand would be his allotment, Carter told him, when he had learned the trick, but it looked to Peter as if he had a million already. Two thousand more, he was sure, would fill the world to the horizon.

But it is a long way to the horizon in the sheep lands, and Peter was lonesomely aware of that before three days had filled above his head. Spring vegetation was scarcely showing yet, and Peter's flock, already shorn, and shivering in the raw winds, was feeding on the dry herbage of last summer's growth, conserved by the prudent flockmaster for this tiding over until the green should show.

The feeding was sparse, and the sheep were pitifully hungry and thin. Peter ranged them over a wide territory daily, and back again on tired legs at evening to the bedding ground below his wagon. A few days' familiarity with his flock, and the immensity in which they grazed, dispelled the first notion that three thousand sheep would spread out over half the State. When he looked down on the thousand under his care, as he rested in the sun on a hill crest, his alert dog by his side, they seemed no more than a handful of dust.

One day Peter believed that he was going to take to that life like a calf to bran mash; the next he found himself leaning with strong inclination, which

amounted almost to yearning, for forty acres of Kansas land. His barometer was unsettled, as falls the case of nearly everybody in a strange land, and he was still balancing on the matter of going or staying when he first heard the voice in the wind.

At that time, Peter had been in the hills more than a week. He had not seen a human being since the day the camp mover stationed his wagon on the top of a long ridge and drove away, leaving him alone with the sheep. Save for himself, indeed, the world seemed empty of humankind. He could not see even the wagon of another herder from the hilltops, and he had strained his eyes in vain for the smoke of their camp fires.

On this day of his adventure the wind set in from the south, with a pleading gentleness of touch on the cheek, as if it had come before its hour and begged to be permitted to remain. Peter imagined that it carried to him the scent of fresh-turned furrows, and the spice of burning stalks and grasses from his native fields. He had just about convinced himself that forty acres, with the neighbors' houses in sight, was about the patch of land for him, sitting there on the hillside with his cudgel leaning against his knee.

> "But me and my true love
> Will never meet again,
> On the bonny, bonny banks
> O' Loch Lomond."

The song came wavering to him, as if the singer had begun the chorus before mounting the hill, where the wind could catch her melody and bear it from her lips. For it was a woman's voice, far away and faint, yet strangely wild and sweet.

Peter started as if some one had spoken in his ear, believing that he had fallen asleep and dreamed. But the dog had lifted his head; his ears erect, listening.

> "'Twas there that we parted,
> In yon shady glen——"

Fainter the song now, as if the singer were passing on her way, wherever it might lead among those unkind hills. Peter scrambled to the top of his hill in the hope that his eye might be gladdened by the sight of her.

There was nobody in sight, yet one might be near and yet unseen, for the hills lay in confusion, like storm-beaten water, on every side. Shoulder-high sage and the scrub growths of fire-stunted timber covered them. Even a rider would be lost in a moment from the sight among them.

Peter stood panting after his quick run up the slope, turning his eager face this way and that. His dog had come with him. It stood a rod or two in advance of him, as curiously mystified as himself.

Now the song came again, rising and falling and growing dim, the sweetly tuneful voice dwelling long upon the closing words of the chorus. Presently it faded from his hearing.

Peter felt that he should not permit his curiosity to run into impertinence. Doubtless the singer was some rancher's daughter, familiar with the country, riding past on a social or business errand. The incident seemed to lift the shadow of loneliness from the land. It must have its pleasant places, and its refinements, to breed a voice such as hers, said he, returning to his sheep cheered and comforted. Perhaps, after trying it out duly, he might stay there, after all.

Peter hummed the old tune of "Loch Lomond" that evening as he warmed canned beans over his fire. There seemed to be excellencies in the melody hitherto undiscovered. He tried it in full voice, smiling as the echo gave it back to him from the cliffs beyond.

Next day he ranged the sheep in a new pasture, on the side of his camp opposite the scene of his pleasant sur-

prise of the preceding day. The wind had shifted to the northwest, bearing charges of snow now and then. There was a gray sky, and the wide horizon of yesterday seemed to have drawn in upon him. The sheep kept close against the lee of the hill, bleating their lament for the thick coats which the shearers had stripped so unseasonably from their backs.

Peter was thinking that one must go a long way to find a hearth with a blaze on it from the place where he leaned his back against a splintered rock that dun mid-afternoon. And in the train of this comfortless reflection there came again the air of "Loch Lomond," sweetly, faintly, as before. It seemed to temper the boisterous wind, and Peter smiled before he wondered, starting from his reverie.

The singer seemed far off, for the words of her song were lost. Only the melody came to him, rising now, as if she approached.

Peter felt that he must see her. But from the top of the hill the gray landscape was empty, as on the day before. Still her voice came down the wind, with the diminuendo breaks as of one walking or riding fast, and passing through hollows and over hills. Strange that he could not see her, for the spot where he stood commanded a full view of the country beyond the range of the human voice. Yet she was not in sight, and her song came still, trailing and plaintive on the wind.

Peter stood for a little while in the mist of his mystification. Then his head cleared, and the thought of wraiths and bogies went out of it with a smile for his momentary silliness. She had done half her errand, whatever it had been, and now she was going back home. That was a country of distances such as women would have considered insuperable back home. Of course. She had ridden on over the hills, out of sight, and her voice carried far in the silences. He went back to the sheep.

But that did not account for the voice in the wind next day, at about the same hour. The wind was westerly then, and shifting again toward the south. Investigation was as fruitless as before. He seemed to have the hills to himself.

Peter began to get into a sweat over it. The thing troubled his sleep, and the music had gone out of the song. He drove his flock out in another direction the next morning, and the sun was bright over the hills, with a south wind rising in promise of warmth and green herbage.

If somebody was trying to play a joke on him, thought Peter, it was about time that he should get to the bottom of the trick. Let that voice strike up again to-day, and he'd rack out after it, and run it down if he had to chase it clear across Wyoming. Peter didn't want any such mystery hanging in the wind to harrow up his peace.

At half past three Peter stood expectantly, his watch in his hand. That was the hour for his unseen serenader to strike up her melody. Still, there in the sunshine of that spring day, there seemed little in that fact that the general pleading of coincidence would not cover. It had just happened so, said Peter, bold as a man is with the sunlight on his back. To-day she would not sing. The hands of the watch were moving past the minute of mystery; to-day she——

> "Oh, ye'll tak' the high road
> And I'll tak' the low road,
> And I'll be in Scotland afore ye——"

There it was, almost in his ear, it seemed, such a breathing, sweet voice, redundant of youth and the heart of love itself.

Peter was up and away, his heart knocking his ribs, his glasses firm-clamped upon his nose. His dog sprang out and bounded ahead of him, but he

commanded him back sternly. He wanted no such herald to run to her with the tidings of his coming.

Peter had waited that day on the hilltop to be ready. It was a long ridge, running due north and south, covered with the scrubby growth of bush and bramble, after the general character of that favored grazing land, with wide patches of open here and there between. One fleet of foot could dodge and hide there, Peter knew, and play a cunning game.

After a dash into the wind to the first barrier of low-growing shrubs, Peter checked himself to consider his precipitate act. It would be disconcerting, perhaps startling to a very unpleasant degree, to burst out from cover upon a young lady that way. Perhaps she was altogether unaware of his presence in that locality; maybe she was a shepherdess, over the hill there with her flock. It might be well to proceed slowly and cautiously.

Accordingly, Peter kept to cover, and went forward without noise, his dog behind him, but prickling with eagerness to shoot off ahead and solve the mystery for himself, as his erect bristles and forward-set ears attested.

The song broke and swelled by turns, as on the past days, giving the impression that the singer was riding fast over furze and barren knoll, hill, hollow, and open. But Peter seemed always as far away from it as at the beginning, although he forgot his resolution to be cautious more than once, and dashed like a hunter from cover to cover, the sweat streaming from his unseasoned skin.

The pursuit of that elusive voice was exasperating, and doubly so to Peter now that he had arrived at the conclusion that it was a trick which somebody, apprised of his greenness to that country and its customs, was trying to play him. He resolved to run the singer from her shelter if it took all day, and to that end he set aside all reserve of nicety and gave the dog permission to explore on his own account.

The song reached him now with longer intervals of silence. Peter pulled up, panting and hot, he did not know how far from his starting place, and looked after the dog, which bounded away into the bushes and disappeared. Peter was setting out after him when the bushes beside him parted with a crackle and a rasping over tough clothing, and a man burst out into the little open.

He was a lank, tall fellow, with staring eyes and hairy face, dressed in greasy khaki, with a cap made from the end of a blanket. Fragments of grass and twigs clung to his coat, as if he had been wallowing on the ground.

"Hah, it's a mortal, it's a mortal!" said he, flinging his outstretched hands to his sides in gesture of disappointment.

"Who was that singing?" asked Peter severely, believing the herder was one in the game.

"Sh-h-h!" said the fellow, cupping his dirty hand to his dirtier ear, leaning on the wind and listening.

But the song was still. It swelled no more.

"Who was it?" demanded Peter, stepping out as if he meant to lay hands on the herder and shake the truth out of him.

"A spirit," said the man. He drew nearer, leaned over, and whispered: "She's been singing here for a thousand years! It's the voice of my lost love!"

He lifted his head like a startled beast, his hair-fringed lips open, a wild gleam in his bright, vacant eyes; bent forward then, like a racer, and dashed away into the bushes.

Scarcely crediting the reality of the situation, Peter pulled out his watch and looked at the dial in dazed stare. Half past four. He had been gone an

hour from the flock, chasing that phantom thing that fled before men, and wrenched their reason out of socket, leaving them staring and incoherent, like yon driveling fellow.

Well, the solution of it must be left to another day; it was time now to be getting back to the sheep and turning them toward the bedding ground on the hillside below his camp. But which way lay the long ridge where he had left the sheep? Peter was then in a little valley, and in his recollection there lay many hills which he had forged up and dashed down in that mad pursuit.

It was with a stirring of panic in his breast that he mounted the nearest hill to get his bearings. It seemed hopeless to identify his ridge from there. Many lay before him, any one of which might be his. He recalled, in a cool moment, that he had run into the wind. Going with it, then, and following the trail that he had made, when possible, would lead him back. He laid hold of his reason firmly, and set out.

But it was dusk when he found the flock. The dog was there ahead of him, doubtless wondering, in his sagacious, sheep-dog way, why his master did not come to drive the sheep to their temporary home. The sheep seemed to have gone through a fright, from their manner of drawing together and huddling in groups, but Peter laid it to nervousness, due to the absence of the commanding human force.

To-morrow—what of to-morrow? If the voice should come again, and the day after, and always, always, on the slanting wind? What if he should never be able to outdistance it, never overtake it, never silence its cadence in his ears again?

To-morrow, he remembered, he must drive the sheep to the river for water. What if the voice should follow, trailing after him in the sighing wind of mid-afternoon; what if it should haunt him, and set him seeking ever and ever, and drive him, in the end, to madness and despair!

CHAPTER III.

LOST SHEEP.

Peter was abroad at dawn next morning, haggard, unrefreshed, after a night of phantom-plagued dreams. The camp mover came before he had gone far on his easy-grazing way toward the river, with the news that the boss—meaning Carter—had given the word that the herders were to remove their flocks to the mountains for the summer grazing within a few days.

He moved Peter's wagon to another ridge, two or three miles distant from its first location, and went on his way. That day there was no song in the wind, nor the next. Peter felt, back in camp among the hills, that he had been the victim of somebody's trick. Doubtless they were having their laugh over his bewilderment and frantic hunt, and he should hear more of it, to his confusion, in time.

It was the third day of peace after his adventure with the voice that Carter came riding over the hills with his daughter, after the wolfhounds. They swept along the ridge toward Peter, the lank, great dogs loping ahead, their horses dodging in and out and leaping over the clumped growths of brushwood and sage.

The young woman was mounted on a long-necked chestnut horse, almost as delicate as herself in the lines of its pure breeding. Carter waved his hand in signal for Peter to come forward.

"This is the young man that's come out here to put a kink of his own in the sheep business," said he in a bantering way. "This is Miss Carter, but your name's escaped me."

Peter supplied it, with blushes, feeling the incongruity of nose glasses and sheep-herder's raiment. He saw that she was smiling to him, rather than at

him, and offering her hand with ingenuous frankness, so he gave over trying to smuggle his glasses into his pocket, and shook hands with her in Western cordiality.

"I hope you'll like it, Mr. Doster, and I'm sure you'll succeed," she said.

"I think I'll like it—I'm beginning to like it," said Peter, noting that her hair was light as hemp fiber, and that it was blowing in very pretty confusion over her cheeks and ears.

"It must be lonesome for you out here on the range, just coming from civilization, although we think we're as much civilized as anybody if it comes to that," said she.

"I'm sure you are," Peter agreed warmly, admiring the pliant grace of her strong young body, reposing in the saddle with the ease of long schooling.

Carter had been running his eye over the grazing flock below meantime. Now he spoke up sharply:

"Where's the rest of them?"

"Sir?" said Peter, not understanding him in the least.

"What have you divided the band for? Don't you know they're sure to stray off and fall to the wolves if you don't keep them all together under your eyes?"

"Why, I haven't divided them; they're all there," protested the astonished Peter.

"No, they're not all there," said Carter. "You started out with a thousand, and you must be a third short. What's the matter with your eyes and your judgment; haven't you noticed it?"

"Why, no," replied Peter slowly, his heart sinking with the foreboding of trouble and disgrace, "but I don't see what could have become of them. I haven't——"

He checked himself in time to save stumbling over the precipice of one gigantic fib. He was about to say that he hadn't left them to themselves since taking charge.

"Well, run 'em through that gap down there; I want to count 'em," said Carter, riding down to the lip of the hill and taking a stand at the mouth of the little valley in which the sheep were feeding. They streamed past him slowly as Peter and the dog turned them, and the flockmaster counted, with the quick eye of experience.

"You're two hundred and seventy-four short," announced Carter, turning in his saddle and looking at Peter severely. "That means about fifteen hundred dollars the way ewes stand in the market to-day."

"Oh, that's too bad!"

In his heart Peter thanked Miss Carter for her feeling words, for her accent told that it was not the lost sheep for which she felt, but the losing shepherd. The big wolfhounds had thrown themselves down on the ground at her horse's feet, where they lay panting and unconcerned, seeming to express by their attitude a lofty indifference for the sharp-faced collie which snarled at them from Peter's side.

"Well, what are you going to do about it?" Carter wanted to know.

Peter bent his head in reflection. What, indeed? He felt trouble under Carter's words as plainly as he felt sympathy in the fair blue eyes of the brown-clad girl beside him, with her cowboy hat and leggings, and her tailored riding suit.

"I don't see what you were about to let that many get away from you," censured Carter. "I've lost sheep before, but I never lost 'em in gobs like this."

"I think they went astray three days ago," said Peter, meeting his employer's angry eyes frankly. "I got turned around and separated from them one afternoon for about three hours, and when I found my way back I noticed that they seemed disturbed and uneasy."

"Well, I expect a pack of wolves scattered 'em," said Carter, "and we'll

have to hustle out and find 'em before they're all killed. Where did that happen?"

Peter gave him the location as well as he could, and Carter directed his daughter to ride in one direction while he took another, with the view of covering the territory into which the sheep had strayed.

"If you don't find any of 'em, ride back here to Peter's wagon and wait for me," he instrueted, riding off with part of the hounds.

Miss Carter assembled the rest of the dogs around her, and took the opposite direction, as confident of herself, it seemed to Peter, as if she were riding out on some simple social visit.

Peter felt that he had eut a rather lame figure in the matter. It was plain that Carter blamed him severely, and held him to be an ineompetent, silly greenhorn, if not a hopeless ease entirely. He kept asking himself what could have happened to the sheep. Three hundred, or almost three hundred, had dropped out of sight as suddenly and completely as if the ground had gaped and enveloped them. What relation could there have been between their disappearance and the song that lured him into that mad run across the hills?

Perhaps no relation at all, but it was a humiliating circumstanee to recall. He decided that it would be best to say nothing about the voice in the wind; that would only place him in a worse light in his employer's eyes, perhaps bring his sanity under suspicion.

Peter gloomed the morning through, with anxious mind, and anxious eyes sweeping the great, gray country around him. It seemed as empty as if Carter and his handsome daughter never had ridden into it. They had disappeared as completely as the sheep.

It was past the turn of the day when the young woman eame back, her mount limping, the dogs trailing after her wearily. The horse had turned its foot in a hole, Miss Carter said.

"I was afraid I'd have to leave him and walk back," she said, examining the animal's swollen hock with concern. "He'll never be able to carry me back to the ranch to-day, and the sprain will be worse to-morrow. I'll have to take father's horse when he comes and send somebody over after him."

"Did you see anything of the sheep?" Peter asked her.

"Not a trace," she replied. "It beats all how so many could sink out of sight that way."

"Well, it's my fault, and you've ruined a good horse on top of the loss of the sheep. I'm afraid it never will be able to carry you home or anywhere."

Peter lifted the injured leg and examined it.

"Oh, do you know horses? Why, I thought you were a college man," said she.

"Not the kind you have in mind," said Peter. "How far is it to the ranch?"

"It must be nine or ten miles," she told him. "Mother will be worried to death—we just came up from our winter home in Cheyenne yesterday, you know, and I was so anxious to get out with the hounds I hardly slept last night."

Peter unsaddled the horse and turned it loose, standing burdened with the saddle and bridle while he watched it hobble away to graze with concerned face.

"It will have a stiff joint; the cartilage is hurt and the tendon torn," said he.

"Well, just to think that you know about horses!" said she, her surprise outweighing her pity for the beast.

"I was about to throw some dinner together when you came in sight," he told her. "Will you open a can of beans with me?"

"Will I? Well, you watch me!" she

returned avidly. "You make the fire and I'll do the rest. Why, it'll be like coming home to me."

"You seem accustomed to the range," said Peter.

"I've wandered over it and camped on it every summer since I was seven, and I'll leave you to guess how long that's been," she laughed.

"I expect I could come nearer to it than you think," said Peter.

"Yes, I'll bet you!" she said, with a little tilt of defiance.

Peter was too wise to accept the challenge, no matter what his own private opinion of his guessing powers was. He kindled a little fire, and she made the coffee, and they lunched very comfortably, chattily, and on the easiest terms imaginable on the sunny side of the wagon.

But her concern began to grow when the shadows drew out toward evening and Carter did not return.

"I hope he hasn't forgotten about meeting me here and gone off home," she said. "And it's clouding up, too; I believe it's going to rain."

Peter made inquiry in regard to their neighbors, how near the closest one was, and whether he couldn't run across and borrow a horse for her.

"Our ranch house is the nearest, by several miles," she said. "MacKinnon's ranch is north of here, about fifteen or twenty miles. MacKinnon and father lease this land between them from Uncle Sam, you know—and Frisbie brothers are over southwest of here somewhere, I don't know just where. They're small growers, the funniest bunch of whiskerinos you ever saw."

She laughed merrily over the Frisbie peculiarities, so merrily and so lightly unrestrained that Peter must have bitten his tongue to keep out of it.

"They're shearers," she said, "and two of them go away every spring to follow the shearing, leaving the oldest—and he's no duckling, either—to take care of the place. One of them's called Budge, and he's the drollest-looking genius you ever saw."

Peter started at the mention of the name.

"Tall," said he, "and lanky like me, with long black hair that sticks out straight behind him?"

"Yes, and greasy eyes," she nodded. "Do you know Budge?"

"I met the gentleman on the train coming up to Vesper," said Peter. "I'm afraid he doesn't approve of me; in fact, he told me he didn't."

"Oh, what a calamity!" she said, laughter in her eyes. "Poor Budge, he asked me to marry him once."

"That fellow, that bristled barbarian?" said Peter feelingly.

"Sh-h-h! You mustn't be jealous!" she said, holding up an admonishing hand.

The rain came upon them in sharp assault as they sat there and grew friendly. Peter turned his snug wagon over to his guest, stowed her saddle out of the rain beneath it, and put on his glaring new slicker and sou'wester hat. Considered in conjunction with those high-riding, scholarly nose glasses, it was something of a rig, indeed. But it fended against the driving rain, which was so cold and fierce as to send Miss Carter's disabled horse shivering to the lee of the covered wagon, where it turned tail to the wind and waited.

Peter got out with the sheep, and worked them around to the shelter of the hill, so the wind would blow over them when they lay down for the night. It was thick dusk when he had them quietly settled, and returned to the wagon.

Carter had arrived. Peter found him waiting at the tail of the wagon, dressed in the slicker which a ranchman never leaves behind him, but carries in sun and shine in a roll behind the cantle of his saddle. If he had shown displeasure with Peter on departing that

morning to hunt the lost sheep, he was radiating suspicion in addition to it now.

"It wasn't wolves, young man, and you know it," said he sternly. "I don't know what kind of a game I'm up against right now, but it looks to me like somebody run them sheep off. Maybe you don't know anything about it, and maybe you do."

"Oh, pa, I'm sure Mr. Doster isn't to blame, not in the least!" said a sweet voice—sweet, at least, to Peter's ears in that troubled moment—from the little door in the wagon end.

"Children should be seen, and not heard, Miss Marian, if you please," said her father reprovingly. "Let Mr. Doster do his own talking, if he's got anything to say."

"I've only got this to say, right now: I don't like your intimations, Mr. Carter," said Peter mildly.

"Well, you can like it or lump it, like a dog does cold dumplin's, young feller," returned Carter hotly. "I said it, and it goes. You came out here to this country to make your start, you said. Well, it looks to me like you're tryin' to make it too dam' sudden."

"The circumstances may look suspicious," admitted Peter, "and even if I didn't steal your sheep, I was to blame for allowing them to run away."

"That don't mend matters," said Carter gloomily. "What I want to know is, what do you propose to do about it? You said you came out here to make good. Well, I don't call this makin' good, nor even a start in the right way. Make good? Huh, you'll never make good! It ain't in you to make good—in a man's country!"

Peter never quibbled long over yes or no. In the small part that he had carried thus far of life's battle, he had been generally prepared and equipped. In school, on the college farm, in the bank where he had worked for the five years between times, Peter Doster was regarded as a young chap who pretty well knew.

Now he put his hand into the inside pocket of his coat and brought out a little sheaf of papers with a rubber band about them. Miss Carter had lit the lantern and hung it out to pilot him back to the wagon. Peter turned his back to the wind and the light, separated a paper from among his bundle, and wrote his name across the back of it with his fountain pen.

"Here is a certificate of deposit for seven hundred dollars," said he, offering it to Carter, "on the First National Bank of Vesper. It's all the money I've got right now, and it only covers about half your loss on the sheep, according to your count and figures. Hold it as security, as far as it goes, till I come back with the sheep or the equivalent."

Peter heard a little clapping of hands above the slashing of rain against the canvas wagon top, and he chalked up a wide score of gratitude in favor of Miss Marian Carter on the wall of his heart.

"Well, all right, Peter," said Carter, considerably mollified by the swift turn of affairs.

He took the proffered collateral and put it in his wallet, but Peter said no more. Even while Carter was tugging at the stiff buttons of his slicker to put the wallet away in his pocket, Peter turned up the collar of his bright new yellow coat, down which the rain in rivulets glistened in the lantern light, turned his back on Carter and the wagon and the blue-eyed friend within it, and walked away into the storm and the night.

CHAPTER IV.

TAKING OUT THE BRAND.

Peter was not aware of his melodramatic exit, for it was far from his intention to lend that color to it. He was in sober earnest about finding Carter's lost sheep. Big as the country was, it

could not have absorbed them, hide and wool, in three days.

The night was thick, the rain incessant, but Peter was in such a turmoil of mind that he tramped up hill and down dale with his face turned toward the storm unfeelingly. Carter's charge that he had a hand in the disappearance of the sheep troubled him, and the blunt declaration of the flockmaster that he, Peter Doster, agronomist, never would make good in a man's country made his slow blood hot.

But Peter reached the sane conclusion, after beating into the storm he knew not how many hours, that there was nothing to be gained by groping about that way in the dark. Better to get his back against a dry ledge somewhere—and there were plenty of them—make a fire, and settle down to wait for dawn. Done accordingly. Already Peter was becoming handy in the range craft of making a fire out of unpromising materials, and the warmth and light of his blaze were welcome in that raw, wet night.

Since the day of his adventure in pursuit of the mysterious voice, Peter had been sharpening his eyes in the matter of landmarks. He had settled in his own determination that he never would go astray on that range again. Now, after a slow, drowsing, and weary wait, when the dawn broke like muddy water, he found himself by the marks which he had set in his mind upon the hills.

He was not far from the spot where the wild shepherd had broken from the brush that day of the mad run after the voice. Again the question rose before him. What connection could there have been between the singer and the sheep; what magic was there in that sound that could whisk away two hundred and seventy-four animals as completely as if they had dissolved?

Perhaps no relation at all, said he. And the daft shepherd; was he what he seemed, or one of a band of thieves who had worked damage to his flock while he had been lured away? It seemed impossible to Peter that this could have been so. The man bore all the marks of madness. Yet there was something in the circumstance of the singing and the segregation of his flock that could not be put aside.

The wind had blown from the south that day, Peter recalled, a point, perhaps, to the west. The singer's voice had faded out into the source of the wind. Let his first investigation lead in that direction, and see what might develop.

The rain had ceased, and a west wind was moving, rolling up the dun cloud curtain from a sky as blue and warm as somebody's eyes, remembered with what quick leaping of the heart Peter blushed to own. For it would not do to capitulate weakly to the first pair of lively eyes that came along. A man might consider it after he had made good, but at that hour of the May morning, with his affairs all in the wind like hay in a storm-swept meadow, it would not be the thing to admit into his life.

Whatever chance of tracking the lost animals there had existed before the storm was now lost. Besides that, Marian—how easily the name came on the tongue of his thoughts, and how sweet!—had told him that MacKinnon's flocks grazed that range in common with her father's. Tracking, in that case, would be a useless thing. He must forge ahead, and flounder more or less, explore the country thoroughly, and as quickly as might be. He believed that he could go into a band of sheep and pick out his missing animals anywhere, even though the crude "C," branded from a wooden die in black paint upon their shorn coats, had been sheared away.

He held his course a little west of south, and went forward, with many pauses on hilltops to explore the country lying around him, and a few fruit-

less excursions to one side and another after the false lure of white rocks among the gray sage. The day had turned when he came, with abruptness almost startling, upon a small ranch at the peak of a snug little valley, already greening over with fresh grass.

There was the vigor of summer in the sun. Long since it had persuaded the slicker from Peter's back, and it was hot now, and drawing out a smell of linseed oil on the seaman-looking sou'wester which sat as tight as a crow on its nest to the crown of his head. Peter stopped and looked down on the sheep corral, made of close-woven willow wattles, the thatched fold and log house. A bleached elk skull, mounted by tall antlers, rode the end of the house ridgepole. The thick brown thatch of the long, low dwelling came down close to the ground.

There were sheep in the corral, which was cross-fenced and cut curiously into pens, Peter thought, for a drover's fold yard, but about the place there seemed to be no human presence. Peter felt that he might go down and claim the hospitality of the ranch, after the free and friendly custom which he had heard —by reading magazines back East— prevailed in that land.

No smoke came from the short, mud-daubed chimney to cheer his hope of a meal; no sound save the shuffling of the feet of the sheep in the pens rose around the quiet place. A collie came bristling around the corner of the sheep sheds suddenly, as Peter advanced. He spoke to it, and it came cautiously to meet him, sniffing the friendly smell of sheep which he bore. Its bristling hair lay smooth with that identification of a fellow craftsman, and the dog fell in behind him, with friendly signals of its bur-matted tail.

Under foot, the ground was soft, together with the rain of last night and the cutting of sheep's hoofs, and Peter turned the corner of the corral and sheds silently. There he stopped, his breath hanging in his throat like smoke in a chimney checked by a quick down-draft.

The pens were filled with sheep, many of which bore the Carter brand, and others a queer, crude monogram of the letters M. and K. A giant-statured man, whose black beard and long hair were sprinkled with gray, was working among them in one of the sheds. His blue flannel shirt was open at the neck and rolled up from his thick, hairy arms, and he was so intent on the task ahead of him that he did not even notice the shrinking and drawing away from the fence among the sheep as Peter drew near.

Peter approached cautiously now, and stood at the fence, not a rod distant from the busy drover. The big man opened the gate of the small pen at his hand, laid hold of a sheep, and pulled it out. Peter saw that it was one of Carter's, the brand being fresh and clear after the washing in the rain.

The drover sat the animal upon its haunches between his knees, like a shearer, while he dipped a big sponge in a bucket on a bench near at hand. This he rubbed upon the brand, which, to Peter's astonished gaze, faded out like a chalk mark from a board. Then the fellow dried the wool with a cloth, and struck another brand, a big "F," where the Carter "C" had stood. This done, he took up a handful of dust and threw it over the white spot in the short fleece which his brand-removing mixture had made, and turned a Carter sheep into a perfectly good Frisbie one —as Peter suspected—in less than two minutes' time.

Peter's astonishment was like a bit in his mouth. He never had heard of a thing like that, and his surprise was too great to permit speech offhand. He stood and watched the man at his scoundrelly job, the friendly collie sniffing his leg on terms of perfect equality.

There were but a few sheep left in the corral waiting the obliteration of their brands, most of them having been treated; but the brown-legged Southdowns belonging to Carter were easily picked out in spite of their changed marks. The big sheepman reached into the pen and pulled out another ewe. Peter ran his eye over the remainder which bore their original brands, and counted seven of Carter's only. Soon the last evidence that could stand in law would be removed.

Peter moved quietly along the fence until he reached a point from where he could almost lean over and touch the brand remover in the bucket by the sheepman's side.

"That's an interesting process," said he.

The sheepman whirled round, the dripping sponge in his clutch; and the ewe, released from the clamp of his big knees, scrambled to her feet and away. Peter saw the fellow's whiskered, scowling visage, noted his dark, greasy skin, his flat, twisted nose, with heavy eyebrows meeting above it, and thought he looked fit for the job.

"I'll trouble you to cut out those two hundred and seventy-four Southdowns of Carter's and run them out here to me; I've come after them," said Peter, unmoved by the surprised ferocity in the man's ugly face.

Quick as thought, the sheepman stooped, and came up with a fence stake in his hand. Instinctively Peter cowered from the blow, shrinking behind the flimsy fence; for the man moved with bewildering rapidity, allowing no time for leaping back or aside. Peter was conscious of that one weak effort on his part to shield his defenseless head against the blow; that and no more.

"But me and my true love
Will never meet again,
On the bonny, bon-ny banks
O' Loch Lomond."

Peter heard the words dimly, without the ability to account for either them or himself. He was put to a struggle, even, to move his eyelids, which seemed weighted with shot, and the summons from brain to muscle for the lifting of his hand resulted in no more than a vague, half-felt straining of tendons. His mind persisted in placing him on the range, back in the afternoon of his blind run after that same melody, against reason and his own sense of fitness.

Subconsciously his faculties seemed to work, out of his control entirely, although a weak protest struggled within him against such surrender. Dimly he knew that this time was not that other day, and this place not the range where Carter's sheep fed. Now he became conscious of a swelling pain in his head, which welled and eased, welled and eased, like the beating of a heart. It seemed that his head must be divided, and that the two parts advanced and receded in a vain effort to reunite. Out of this thought the fantastic idea came to him that each side was thinking for itself, and that he had lost control of the center and had become nothing more than a silent third party.

He seemed to be in darkness. There was no consciousness of light, such as one feels through closed eyelids, and the singing voice seemed far away. It was immaterial, anyway, thought Peter, in his third-party capacity. Let the tangle run its length; in due time illumination would come; but if the two halves of his head could be brought together and bound about with an iron band such as blacksmiths shrink upon wagon hubs, thought he, it would be a very comfortable arrangement.

His weak mind ran off on that thought of the iron ring from a wagon hub, and the desirability of having one, persisting in it to troublesome and unreasonable length. He could not put the strange notion aside, although it wor-

ried him, like the droning of an insect in a sleepless night.

His arm obeyed the summons to move at last. His weak explorations discovered that on one side of him was a wall, near which he lay; sheepskins beneath him, blankets over him. But time seemed to have stopped for him on the afternoon that he set out to overtake the singing voice, and to have resumed again with the impression of a divided head. All that had gone between, if there had been anything between, indeed, was lost.

That mattered very little, thought Peter. The one thing to be thought of now was the iron ring, made broad, with a bevel for the forehead, to prevent chafing. He wished that he could get up from there, and go out in the sun to think it over, out of the reach of that singing voice which persisted in his ears:

"But me and my true love
Will nev-er-r meet a-gain——"

There it was, as lonely sounding as the wind at night, as low yearning as a widow's wail. And there was no light where Peter lay—nothing to tell him whether it was day or night.

A door opened. Peter could not command the machinery which turned his head; it would not answer. But there was a sense of light with the sound of the opening door. Imaginary, perhaps, said Peter, ready to take himself up on trifles and argue it out to the last excuse.

Some one had entered and seemed to be listening near the door. Now a cool hand was on his forehead, stroking back his hair. Peter opened his heavy lids, but there was murkiness around him; he could not see the owner of the hand.

"Oh, you're awake, are you?" said a voice close by his side.

Peter was clearing out of the fog now, and he was surprised to hear himself reply weakly and request a drink of water.

Almost immediately a spoon was placed between his lips. He drank, sipping eagerly. In wavering outline he could see his nurse when she passed across the beam of light which fell in from the room beyond. The notion of the iron ring still possessed him, but she never could help him to it, he told himself. Nobody but a blacksmith could do it properly. But she might be able to alleviate his suffering and unrest in another way.

"If you could bind the two together with a band of cloth, or maybe a strap," he suggested, in weak appeal.

"What did you say, honey?" she asked, coming quickly to his pallet of sheepskins, kneeling at his side, her cool, refreshing hand on his forehead again.

"I thought maybe it would help—maybe a towel or something would do," said he.

"Do for what, honey?" she asked, with gentle eagerness.

"To bind the two pieces together, I mean—— No, no, it can't be that; I'm raving!"

"If I knew what it was you wanted, I'd do anything to get it for you," said she.

"I imagined in my sleep a little while ago that my head was split in two," said Peter, his scattered senses converging like jackstraws to a magnet, "and I think I was trying to ask you to tie something around it to hold it together."

"Poor lad!" said she, a shake in her voice, as if tears were not far distant.

She hurried away, returning almost at once, it seemed to Peter, with a cold towel, which she bound around his beating head. The relief was great, almost immeasurable. He thanked her, wondering what made his pain, yet lacking the force of initiative to inquire about it now.

"Here's some broth—it's made out of marrowbones," she said, putting the spoon to his lips again. "I knew you'd

need it when you got clear again, so I put it on early. It's the best thing in the world to make strength, and you must take it down, no matter if you do feel a little squirmy in the insides of you."

Peter noticed something strange about her, in accent and manner, which set him thinking that she must be a foreigner. How was it, he puzzled, that he came to be in a foreign place, never, to his recollection, having gone abroad?

"Where am I, and what's the matter with me?" he asked her, struggling to lift himself to his elbow.

She pushed him back to his bed gently. He could see her quite plainly now. She shook her head, admonishing quiet.

"Keep your strength for to-morrow, lad; you'll need it—we'll both need it then," said she.

CHAPTER V.

A WINSOME ROGUE.

Whether through the virtue of the marrowbone broth, or his own powers of recuperation, Peter woke refreshed. The phantoms of his first awakening had vanished; the throbbing pains were gone out of his head. Only there was a heaviness in him which lay upon every limb, and on the side of his head above his left ear there was a sore lump where the sheepman's club had found its aim.

Lying there on his pallet, Peter recalled the circumstances of his disablement. It was only unexplained to him now why the thieving ruffian had not made away with him entirely. As it was, he seemed to be shut in a small room underground. It was stone-walled, cement-floored, and light and ventilation were provided by one little window set in an embrasure in the thick wall. It was not more than eighteen inches in height, six inches wide, and blocked in addition by a vertical iron bar.

The little window was hinged, and it stood open, but too far above his head to give him even a glimpse of the outer surroundings. Light enough came through the little slit to show him that the compartment which he occupied was used for storing potatoes and boxes of canned goods and miscellaneous articles such as lanterns and hoes, a scythe depending from a spike in the sill overhead and sheep shears swinging by it on a thick string.

Peter tried sitting up, wondering what had become of his nurse. There was more strength in him than he had hoped to find; even his legs bore him without faltering, although he seemed, by reason of the bruise on his head, to be at least a foot taller than his usual stature.

The door which had stood open last night while the young woman gave him water and broth was closed now. Peter tapped on it; there followed a quick sound, as of some one rising, beyond; a quick step, and she stood before him.

She was a young woman, slender, small. Her face was sadly sweet, as from longings and hardships; her large, gray eyes were serious and grave. She was soberly garbed in a gray woolen dress, with a white something, like a neckerchief, tucked into her bosom. Her hair lay thick upon her white forehead, black as a night cloud, rippled like wave-marked sand.

"I was sitting as tight as a mouse," said she, with no gleam of a smile on lips or eyes, "for I wanted you to have your sleep out and rise strong. How do you feel by now?"

"Better, almost right again, thanks to your kind nursing," said Peter, steadying himself by laying a hand against the jamb.

"No, you're not very strong yet; it was a fearful blow he laid on you, lad—a fearful, cowardly, cruel blow!"

Her eyes kindled with angry flash, her voice shook with emotion as she denounced the cowardly attack.

"Who is he—where is he now?" asked Peter.

"Angus Frisbie he is, the woman-killer! He's gone away to sell the sheep that he stole from you and others with my help, sorrow to my day!"

"Is this his house?" asked Peter, then, not giving her time to reply. "Of course there's no other. I must go after him —I can't allow him to get away with the sheep—and you don't want him to, either, I know."

"No; but you can't go, I can't go. We're locked in this walled cellar, and there's no gettin' out."

"Well, I don't understand it—not yet," said Peter, in bewilderment.

"It's thought that maybe you're dead," said she, "or, if alive, safe, and silent, to put out of the way by and by. It was the first time that he was ever caught, said Angus, and it would be the last. He blames me for it. I was on watch, and failed to see you pass. He killed the dog for failin' to warn him, and maybe he'll kill me when he comes home. I don't know—it's in him to do it."

She spoke bitterly but withal hopelessly, as if it mattered little whether Angus Frisbie should spend his wrath upon her when he returned. She went, in her quick, sudden, starting way, to a gasoline stove where a kettle was boiling, and turned down the flame.

"Come in, and we'll have some breakfast, and then you can rest the morning out and we'll see if anything can be done. It will be four days before Angus comes back."

"And so you are the one that sang?" said he.

"It was a sore day for me when I began it," said she, shaking her head gravely. "In the beginnin' I didn't know it was thievin', and when I found that it was, Angus wouldn't let me stop. I was as deep in the mud, he said, as he was—and Budge and James—in the mire. I've been a rogue against my will, honey. But who is there to believe that of me now?"

She poured coffee for him, and turned an egg into the pan.

"Tell me about it," he requested, gravely amused by her manner of treating him as if he were a child.

She went to the cupboard and came back with his eyeglasses between finger and thumb, holding them with conspicuous care.

"They were clingin' to you, still hooked behind your ear by the little gold chain, when Angus carried you in and threw you there," said she, nodding toward the inner room.

"It's a marvel how they escaped!" said he.

"It is," she nodded. "Marvelous, like many frail things that meet the perils of this world and come out at last shaken but whole."

Peter lifted his serious, young face and looked across the table at her, where she had seated herself, her bare arms crossed before her on the cloth. There was a world of unspoken meaning in her words, which her grave face and lonely eyes made plainer.

"But why did you sing that way?" he asked her, feeling that sympathy must be reserved.

"Angus Frisbie is my mother's husband, not my father," said she, "to begin at the beginning. He brought us over from Scotland when I was a lass of fifteen; and five years of life under the hard hand, and the harder heart, of Angus sent her to the grave. Her heavy burden came down to me; it has made me old before my day.

"The Frisbie men are all rascals, and have been always, and Angus is the greatest rogue of them all. The stealing of sheep has been going on a long time; even before we came they had been at it, taking them by twos, fives, tens—lambs mainly, at the beginning—from their neighbors' flocks. So few never were missed. I came to help An-

gus at his trade in innocence, not knowing what I was about.

"In summer, when James and Budge are off in the north, following the shearing into Canada, I help Angus with the sheep on the range. Such times I used to sing to break the loneliness. One day Angus came to me, his face black with anger, and told me that MacKinnon's men had been stealing our sheep. Just across the hill, said he, Daft John, as we call him, a broken-minded man who once worked for Angus, was running a band with our stolen beasts among them.

"Angus had promised me long to give me the passage money back to Glasgow, and now he said the very sheep that he was counting on to provide it had been stolen out of our hands. I was furious against thieves—as I believed them then to be—and said I would go myself and drive our beasts away.

"No, it was no work for a woman, Angus said. Leave it to him. But I could help him if I would but stay on the hilltop above Daft John's flock and sing the song 'Loch Lomond.'

" 'When you sing that song,' said Angus, 'Daft John goes mooning up the hill to lie in the bush and listen. I have seen him at it more than once.' So Angus proposed to me that I go near Daft John's flock and sing, and when he left the sheep to listen, lead him away by skipping from bush to bush, from hill to hill. Then he could go in freely and drive home our sheep without interference from Daft John, and I should have my passage money home. So the thing was done, and I laughed over it, and was light at heart in the hope of going home, away from this bleak land forever. It was sport to lure on poor Daft Johnny, for I am nimble on the foot as a hare, and from bush to bush I can go like a shadow, keeping out of sight."

"So you can," said Peter, giving her full credit for her cunning.

"But once you almost found me," said she. "On that last day it was, when you came with the dog. The collie caught me; and you would have, too, if you had followed him. But I must tell you how I was led on to become a thief. It was almost three years ago that we played that trick on Daft John, and Angus stole almost a hundred sheep from under his eyes. When Angus told me that we had robbed MacKinnon, I fell sad, and was ashamed. I said he must give back the sheep, but he laughed in my face and said it was only the beginning. I was smirched now, and if found out I would go to prison with him. I must help him play the same trick on other dull shepherds, and in the fall I should have my passage money home. There was no other hope of having it, he said.

"I refused him a long time, and then the home hunger drove me to help him lure away one of Carter's men who was herding above three thousand sheep. He was a raw, green lad like you, only not bright as you are, and he was afraid when he heard me singing above him on the hill and ran the other way. But not far enough for Angus. So on the next day we tried again, with success. Angus drove away thirty from the flock. The loss was not discovered, but the herder fell sick from the fright, and another came in his place, a wise one, too sharp for Angus to try to deceive.

"Next summer after that, we played the same game twice on Daft John, and brought away ninety all told. Then nothing more was done until you came. Between you and Daft John, this time, Angus came away with nearly four hundred sheep. You saw how he took the brands out of the wool and put on our own. He has mixed them with five hundred ewes of our own, and is on the way to Vesper now, to load them in cars and ship them to Omaha."

"So that was the way you worked it," said Peter, feeling very small indeed in

the face of this ingenuous revelation. "Well, Angus is a bold one to go driving them to Vesper to load!"

"He is a bold one, and always was, and in his boldness is his safety," said she. "Nobody would suspect that he had stolen half the sheep—maybe more—that he is driving so openly to market. That is not the way of a thief."

"No, it isn't the usual way," said Peter.

"Budge and James are at Vesper, shearing in Delfinder's sheds," she said. "They will have the cars ordered and waiting, and one of them will go on to Omaha with the sheep. Angus will come home to put you out of the way—bury you if he finds you dead, kill you if he finds you living. That is what he told me when he left. He threw you here, being in a hurry to leave with the sheep, for he was a day late already and had no time to make a grave."

"Well, he'll not make a grave for me just yet," declared Peter resolutely, rising from the table. He felt much strengthened by his meal, and the sickness which he took for indication of a fractured skull was gone. Only that sense of being abnormally tall remained, and it was exceedingly awkward.

"The walls are stone, and the windows no bigger than a hand," said she. "Over our heads there is a trapdoor of two-inch oak, locked with two padlocks. The scythe hanging yonder is the heaviest tool in the cellar, and I wonder that Angus overlooked it. But you can't cut your way out with it."

"Do you think he'll be gone four days—who's looking after the sheep that he left behind?" he asked.

"Angus tramped the ricks full of hay and shut them in the corral," she said. "They'll not want till he comes."

Peter did not feel that there was any reason to distrust her, after her friendly services. If she had wished him harm, she could have wrought it while he lay helpless.

"What will he do with you?" he asked.

"It's in the man to kill me, but he'll hardly do that—he's saving me for worse," said she bitterly. "He wants to marry me," she explained, in answer to his startled look. "He's been pressin' me to marry him these four years and more."

"I see," nodded Peter, considering many things.

"And James does likewise," said she. "Between the two wolves, I have been safe, for each of them has watched the other. But for that——"

She shuddered; her sad young face grew pale. No, there was no room for distrusting her. Peter knew that now beyond the farthest doubt.

"I'll get you out of here, away from the wolves," said he.

She came around the table to him, in her impetuous way of moving, even to do little things, and laid her hand on his arm.

"What is your name?" she asked.

He told her. She repeated it, as if it carried a recollection.

"Peter Doster—it has a Scottish sound," she said.

"And Scottish affiliation," he told her. "You will not think less of me for that?"

For the first time, now, he saw her smile. It was so sadly sweet, revealing such unexpected charm in her melancholy face, that his heart quickened to her. Surely, thought Peter, a thing so beautiful must be bestowed only on favored ones, and then as rarely as solar eclipse.

"My name is Constance Reed. I was studying to become a teacher in the public schools at home when mother yielded to this man's call and came," said she. "It has been my hope to go back, and——"

Tears in her eyes finished what her faltering voice could not complete. The sadness of that long hope smote Peter

with a pang as keen almost as if it had been his own.

"You shall go back," said he. "It was foolish of that thieving scoundrel to think that he could pen two people up in a little old hole like this and come back at his pleasure and find them waiting him like the sheep in his corral."

But investigation proved to him that Angus Frisbie was not so foolish as might seem. The walls were solid masonry, the floor of the rooms above was oak. A straight, crude stairway, little more than a ladder, led down to the cellar, and above it lay the trapdoor which Constance had described. Besides the scythe, the sheep shears, the few table knives and forks, there was no tool nor implement at hand. These seemed alike worthless against the walls and heavy planks.

It appeared, indeed, that Angus had planned and built against that day. Doubtless the man and his wild brothers had other secrets hidden in that thick-walled place; or, if not so, they had prepared it for the sequestration of mysteries and unlawful deeds.

If he could tear the stairs apart and use one of the heavy side planks for a battering-ram against the floor, thought Peter, he might spring it and at length make a hole. But that was out of consideration. The upper ends of the planks were nailed against a sill; the lower set into the cement of the floor. Even if he had a crowbar, he still wanted the strength to wield it, anyhow. So Peter turned his eyes and his thoughts to other things.

"Can you think of no way out, Peter?" she asked, as he stood in cogitative pose, after turning over everything in the place. There was a note of anxious appeal in her voice, as if she had placed everything in his hands, and looked to him now to work for both of them.

"Yes, one way, and one only," said he. "Are you ready to risk a great deal—everything—on the chance?"

"My life," said she quietly, raising her cool, gray eyes to his.

"It may come to that," he told her. "We must burn a hole in the floor big enough for you to get through—it will not take nearly as big a one as it would for me—and then you can break the locks off the trapdoor with an ax and let me out."

"It sounds very simple; I wonder why I didn't think of it?" she said.

"Still, not so simple as it may sound. First we must have a hole in the floor for a draft, or the smoke will smother us in this close place. We couldn't burn a hole in that oak floor in a day without a vent, anyhow. But I've got that figured out. The point's this: the fire may set something in the room overhead and run to the roof. In that case, we'd roast long before we could burn our hole big enough to get through. There's where the risk lies. Do you want to take it?"

"It's no greater than the risk of meeting Angus when he comes," said she. "He never intends that you shall leave here alive, knowing what you know."

"It will make a fearful smoke—suppose that Angus sees it and rides back?"

"He'll not be able to leave the sheep—he's alone," said she.

"All right; we'll get to work. Light your gasoline stove."

Peter brought the sheep shears from the inner room where he had lain, and thrust them into the hot, blue flame of the little stove.

"Now show me a place where there's no bed, no other furniture or rug on the floor," he requested.

"There are no rugs; only a sheepskin here and there on the floor; and right about here is the middle of the big room, not a thing in reach," she said, pointing out the spot.

Peter stood on a box, the red-hot shears in hand, and began the slow and

laborious task of burning a venthole through the floor. It was fully two hours before Peter, by boring and twisting with his heated primitive tool, had a hole an inch and a half in diameter through the thick boards.

"Now we'll soak them with coal oil and touch them off and stand by with a bucket of water to put it out when it's gone far enough," said he. "If all goes well, we'll be out of here in a little while."

TO BE CONCLUDED.

The second and concluding part of this novel will be published two weeks hence in the POPULAR, on sale August 7th.

LEAVING OUT A LUXURY

A GREEN congressman, elected to frame the laws and help control the destinies of this nation, arrived in Washington several weeks ago to engage an apartment for the session beginning next December. He was bluff, blunt, and a bachelor, and he was searching for a small apartment, so that he might save money out of his salary.

After visiting many hotels and apartment houses without finding the price he desired, he struck a swell place on Connecticut Avenue.

"These apartments are small enough," he told the manager, who was showing him through the house, "but they cost too much."

"I have a smaller one and cheaper one on the top floor," the manager explained, making one more attempt to hook the customer.

They adjourned to the smaller and cheaper.

"The only trouble is," the manager said hesitantly, "that there is no bath in this apartment."

"Oh," commented the green congressman carelessly, "that makes no difference to me. I'm going to be here only four months."

A LONG CAREER

SIXTY-ONE years in the railroad business is the record of Edward T. Jeffery, who has the reputation of being the hardest-working man in Wall Street. He is seventy-two years old, and has never been known to take a vacation. For years he has worked in the Gould offices, even on holidays. In fact, he loves work as another man loves pleasures.

The railroad once known as a "streak of rust through a desert," the Denver & Rio Grande, was developed by Mr. Jeffery into a great property. The man's career is remarkable. As an office boy in the Illinois Central, in 1854, beginning with the duty of blacking the boots of the superintendent of machinery, Mr. Jeffery gradually rose to the presidency of the Gould railway, and is now chairman of the board of the Denver road.

Mr. Jeffery is George J. Gould's closest financial associate and chief adviser. There is probably no other man in the world for whom Mr. Gould has a deeper affection, or in whom he places greater confidence.

It *Can* Be Done

By Foxhall Williams

Author of "When Greek Meets Greek," "The Politician," Etc.

Some baseball, with a hint of tragedy and a little farce-comedy. The spotlight is on a good-at-times pitcher who, though bounced from the Big League, passionately pronounced his disbelief in the adage: "It can't be done; they never come back"

WHEN the Turks got Megrue he was, beyond all question, the best pitcher in his league. He had everything any pitcher ever had. His technical equipment was complete in every detail. He had a hop on his fast ball that had made him the terror of batsmen throughout the circuit. His curves broke exactly as he wanted them to. And his control was something that made every man who had ever caught him rejoice. His catchers didn't get sore hands. They didn't strain themselves leaping for the occasional wild ones that any pitcher has a right to deliver. For Megrue put every ball exactly where the signal called for it.

Yet every manager in the league shook his head wisely when Dan Fetherston, who was serving his first year as a manager, refused to waive on Megrue. They were sorry for him. And there was a reason for this, of course. Three of those same managers had tried to handle Megrue. Lloyd, of the Brewers, had kept him a full year. And when he gave up it seemed certain that Megrue, for all his skill, was bound for the bottom of the baseball ladder.

The explanation? Simple enough; tragically simple, in fact. Megrue loved baseball. He lived for it. But he loved something else even better. Something that he poured from a bottle. Every one knew it. Dan Fetherston had been warned. But he had smiled, and said he was willing to take a chance. So Larry Megrue, a little frightened, because he knew how near he had come to dropping out of the big leagues altogether, came to the Turks and reported to Fetherston.

"Hello, Larry," said Dan in the clubhouse. "You look fine! Feel like pitching some real ball for us?"

"Sure," said Larry, with an uneasy defiance. He was twenty-two years old at this time. His skin was like a baby's; his eyes were clear. If one had not known his weakness one would never have suspected it. He could still throw off the effects of a bout with John Barleycorn, of course, and in the intervals of his drinking he showed none of the marks that would come later.

"Good enough," said Dan. "You know what you're up against, don't you? The Turks won't give you the sort of hitting you had with the Brewers behind you. And we haven't got their fielding, either. Not yet. But I'm hoping we'll have a team before I get through."

"You've got a real pitcher now, anyhow," said Larry encouragingly.

It sounds rather ridiculous, but he really didn't say that boastfully. He knew how good he was, that's all. It would have been strange if he had not. It had been dinned into his ears often

enough for the last two and a half years.

"Yep," said Fetherston, without a smile. "That's why I wouldn't waive on you."

The color flamed red in Larry's cheeks at that. He couldn't get over the idea that waivers had actually been asked on him—and that only Dan Fetherston had refused to let him slip out of fast company. True, two teams before the Brewers had decided that even his pitching wasn't enough to offset his drinking. But each of them had used him in a trade that flattered his pride; they had obtained stars of recognized worth when they parted with him. This last affair, though, was humiliating in the extreme. None of the other teams had wanted him at any price—except the Turks.

"I got you, Dan," he said rather huskily. "I'll show them other suckers where they get off! Thinkin' I'm all in! The stiffs! I'll help you put the Turks up in the first division!"

He could do it, too—if—— But it was an awfully big if. He had the skill and the courage. In his right senses, with his foot on the mound and his arm right, he could have beaten the best ball club in the world with a high-school team behind him.

"That's what I'm expecting you to do, Larry," said his new manager soberly. "The rest of the managers think you're all in. They think you're through——"

"Just because I take a drink now an' then!" Megrue broke in. He looked at Fetherston, and saw the faintest shadow of a smile in the manager's eyes. His own eyes fell. "Well—maybe I don't stop at just one when I get started," he admitted.

Fetherston said nothing. Megrue was evidently expecting a sermon. He had listened to one when he joined his new team on both the previous occasions when he had been transferred. And each time he had promised to reform and be good, too. Fetherston's silence rather puzzled him. It was an altogether friendly face that he saw, but he saw something inscrutable in it, too, as if Fetherston was thinking many things he preferred to keep to himself.

"I can't help it!" Megrue broke out. "I've got to have the stuff when I get to feeling that way. I don't drink all the time—just once in a while. And it don't hurt me any! I'm as good as I ever was!"

"Sure you are. Don't feel it a bit, do you?"

"Not a little bit. That's what makes me sore. They tell me it'll hurt my pitching. But it never has. I'm better now than I was two years ago, before I started drinking at all."

"Well, you'll get all the chance there is to show me that," said Fetherston. "I'll expect you to work twice a week. I don't know that it's any of my business what you do when you're not in uniform."

This was rank heresy. Fetherston was betraying his managerial office. And it wasn't true, anyhow. Everything a ball player does, on or off the field, is of concern to his manager, because it all affects his playing sooner or later. But Fetherston was playing a deep game, and those of his rival managers who knew him well would not have judged him too hastily for that seemingly insane remark. They had seen him do things that looked foolish, but were exceedingly wise.

Certainly, in the beginning, it looked as if Fetherston had made a wise move when he refused to let Megrue go. Larry was on his very best behavior, and he played classy ball. He was an inspiration to the Turks. When he was in the box they were assured of good pitching, and that made them play rather better than their average, by arousing the spirit of emulation.

As for Larry, he was out for revenge. He wanted to make every manager who had waived claim to him realize his mistake. So for a month his passion for baseball absorbed him to the exclusion of his other passion.

Lloyd watched him shut the Brewers out with regretful eyes, and, after the game, spoke to Fetherston about it.

"The greatest pitcher I ever saw!" he said, with a sigh. "If he'd only let the stuff alone—the fool kid! But you're taking an awful chance, Dan. In the old days a boozing ball player could get by for a while. But not any more. It's a rotten bad example for the others."

"He hasn't taken a drink since he joined us," said Fetherston. As he spoke, he looked around for a piece of wood, and struck it sharply. "I've got my fingers crossed, too," he added, with a smile.

"You'll need more'n that to keep him straight," laughed Lloyd. "I figured he'd walk a chalk line for a while after you got him—the scare he got when he thought he was going to the minors sort of cinched that. And I suppose you talked to him like a Dutch uncle, too. Say, Dan—if I'd had another year of making speeches to that nut I'd be a better speaker than William Jennings Bryan!"

"I haven't said a word to him about it, though I listened some," said Fetherston truthfully. "Talking wouldn't do much good."

Lloyd looked at him sharply.

"I guess you're right," he admitted. "A Gatling gun would be more like it! But there's a sort of comfort in telling him what you think of him once in a while."

"I don't know. Maybe that's one reason he's gone so far. I wonder if he hasn't been talked to too much?"

To this, since there was obviously no answer that would not be offensive, Lloyd replied only with a whistle of astonishment. He had meant to give Dan Fetherston, who still had many things to learn about the fine art of managing a club, some friendly advice. Now he abandoned the idea, and offered his team a bonus of new suits if it beat Megrue in the last game of the series. He didn't have to hand out any orders for those suits, though. Megrue rose to the highest levels of baseball fame in that game: He shut the Brewers out without a run or a hit, and he didn't let a man reach first base.

After all, that was a pretty good excuse for a celebration. It seemed so to Megrue, and to certain foolish well-wishers, who knew his fondness for a drink. As usual, he didn't stop at one drink, or two, or three. And when he finally went home he didn't even know that Fetherston was walking on the opposite side of the street. He wouldn't have cared if he had known.

This was the beginning of the end. Larry proceeded to make up for his month of abstinence. Thinking that he had a manager at last who was reasonable, and would close his eyes to his celebration if only he were fit for duty on the days when he was likely to pitch, Larry grew careless. He didn't try to get up in time for morning practice on the days that succeeded his festive evenings. And Fetherston said not a word. Seemingly he ignored Larry's backsliding.

So it was not managerial reproaches that marked the beginning of the end of Megrue's stay with the Turks, as had been the case when he had begun to fall from grace with his other clubs. It was something infinitely worse. For suddenly, and without any cause that he himself could discern, his arm lost its cunning. He felt strong. His eye was clear; his complexion retained the ruddy glow of health. It seemed to him that he was putting as much stuff on the ball as he had ever done. And yet, in four consecutive games, he suffered

the keenest humiliation that had ever come to him. He was hit harder than he had ever been since he first faced professional batters in his first minor-league engagement. Teams he had always been able to beat with his glove and a prayer, as the saying goes, assailed him as if he had been the veriest tyro. Men who had been lucky to get half a dozen hits off him in a season drove home three or four blows in a single game.

In the fourth of these games came the worst blow of all. Con Martin, of the Reds, was at bat. Con was a great pitcher, but he was probably the feeblest batter that ever stood at the plate. When he got a hit it was first-page news. This season he had still, when he faced Larry, to make his first safe drive. And now he hit one of Larry's choicest curves into the right-field stand for a home run—the first, and the last, that he ever made! It broke Larry's heart, and after the game he went to his brother pitcher and spoke as man to man.

"Con," he said almost tearfully, "you're a grand pitcher! You're the only man in this league can come in my class. But you never got a hit off me before. Tell me how you straightened out that curve?"

"Why—uh—I d'know, Larry," faltered Con, appreciating his feelings. "Curve, you say? It wasn't a curve! She never broke at all! I just swung, and the first thing I knew she was in the stand. You wasn't a bit more surprised than I was."

Larry went away, shaking his head. It was the first time his curve hadn't broken. Something was dreadfully wrong. He needed consolation—and sought it in a bottle.

He kept on losing games. There were no physical signs of deterioration. He looked as well as ever. His pitching seemed to be as good as it had ever been. But weak batters still found it easy to hit, and, as for the sluggers, they simply murdered whatever Larry served to them.

Dan Fetherston had to speak at last, of course. Megrue wasn't an asset to the Turks any more. He was the heaviest sort of liability. And every one knew the reason.

"Well?" said Dan one evening after a particularly disastrous game. "What seems to be the trouble, Larry?"

"I dunno," said Megrue helplessly. "Honest, Dan—I'm pitching as well as I ever did. They've just got on to me—'s'all."

"Regan says your curve isn't breaking and there's no hop to your fast one, Larry."

Regan was Larry's regular catcher, and Regan had said these things to Larry himself pointedly more than once in the course of consultations on the diamond.

"They seem to know what's coming," Fetherston went on. "At least—they step out and hit as if they did. But, as far as I can see, your motion's as good as ever."

"Sure it is—and so'm I," said Larry, eagerly clutching at that straw. "Say—did you see what that big stiff Tanzer said about me in the *Star?* He as good as put in his paper that it was because I was drinkin' they'd started hittin'!"

"Did he?" said Fetherston. "Well?"

"Well, you don't think so, do you, Dan? Gee—I'd quit—but I can't now! But, shucks—that's not the reason!"

It was the cry of a frightened, puzzled boy that came from Larry Megrue then. And it was all Fetherston could do to refrain from breaking out; from talking, as Lloyd had put it, like a Dutch uncle. But others had tried that, and it had done no good. He was determined now to stick to his own plan. It seemed to him that it was beginning to work.

"You ought to know," was all he said.

"I guess it'd take a doctor to tell you that, Larry. I'm a baseball man, not a medico. And—well, you see how it is, Larry, yourself. You're not doing the team any good as it is."

Megrue stared at him, dead white of a sudden. But, boy though he was, and foolish, in the grip of something he had not the will to fight, much less control, he couldn't resent the implication in his manager's words.

"You—you mean you're going to let me out?" he asked.

"I don't see what else, Larry," said Fetherston. His voice was as kindly as ever. "Figure it out for yourself. The team isn't good enough to save you when they start hitting like that. What else can I do?"

"Nothin', I guess," said Megrue after a minute. He gulped. This was awful. It was worse than his dismissal from the other teams; far worse! Then he had the feeling that he was being abused to buoy him up. He had been traded or sold, not for failure on the ball field, for he had never failed before, but for breaches of a discipline he had always resented. But now he didn't have that to fall back on. The elementary sense of justice that was in him forced him to see that Fetherston was right; that he had had every chance and had failed himself. And, for the first time, a doubt of his own wisdom came to him. Could it be that, after all, the drinking did affect his pitching? He threw off the doubt. But it had found lodgment, and it would come back.

"I'll do the best I can for you, Larry," Fetherston was saying. "I'll try to land you with a good minor-league team. And if you work hard you ought to be able to come back better than ever."

Come back? Unhappy phrase! For it brought into Larry's mind the harsh proverb that has been proved true so often and so bitterly: "They never come back! It can't be done!" Still he braced up. He had to be game.

"Sure I'll come back!" he said, with a touch of his old defiance. "I'll show you, Dan. You—you've treated me white."

Fetherston turned away. He was a little nervous about meeting Megrue's eyes just then, for he knew what he knew. But, after all, it seemed to him that his idea was beginning to work out. This certainly was not the same Megrue who had joined the Turks. He had been chastened. He wasn't quite so sure of himself. This was good. For Dan Fetherston, be it understood, had no idea of seeing Larry Megrue forced out of organized baseball by his thirst.

To Megrue, however, it seemed that he had fallen through the very bottom of things when he had his next interview with his manager. For Fetherston, with a glum face, told him he was going to the Mayfield team.

"Mayfield?" said Larry. "Where's that, Dan? I never heard of any Mayfield team in a double A league."

"It's not in one of those leagues, Larry. They passed you up. You see—well, they've heard things about you. I guess they don't want to take a chance."

He let that sink in. He let Larry Megrue understand that the two big minor leagues had actually refused to make a place for him. And when Megrue had fully realized that astounding thing; when he comprehended that his pride had been stabbed to the quick with a dagger of contempt, then Dan Fetherston skillfully removed the dagger and finished the work with a harpoon.

"I couldn't place you where I wanted at all, Larry," he said regretfully. "This Mayfield team—well, it's in a Class D league, and it's a little town 'way out West you're going to. They were the only people seemed to want

you. The manager there's an old pal of mine—used to catch on the same team with me when I was breaking in. He—well, he sort of thinks he's doing me a favor, Larry."

Class D! Do you know what that means? There are the major leagues. Then come the AA circuits, the big minor leagues that are just below them. Then the Class A circuits, which are pretty good leagues, made up of towns of a hundred thousand or so population. By the time you have gone through B and C you can imagine what is left for Class D. County seats, little towns that have asterisks after them on the through time-tables—— "*Stops on signal only."

"I won't go there!" said Larry, turning a stricken face to Fetherston.

"Suit yourself, of course." The manager shrugged his shoulders. "But just what else do you figure you can do, boy? Got a profession waiting for you to step in? Been studying law on the side, or something like that? This is a job, you know. There's grub and cigarette money in it, anyhow."

Megrue went, of course. There wasn't anything else for him to do. He reached Mayfield in a mood that forbade approval. He hadn't been able to get a drink on the train; he had forgotten to supply himself at St. Louis. And the evenness of Mayfield, seen after dark for the first time, frightened him. There were no bright lights; there were few people in the streets. Moreover, he didn't like his new manager, Jud Morton.

Morton had been in Mayfield for two years. He was through as a big-league catcher, and he was in Mayfield getting managerial experience. He kept in touch with the big-league teams by scouting, and he had already sent up three promising recruits. In due time he would begin his climb upward to a real manager's job. He knew all about Megrue, too, and his manner showed it.

"Come along," he said. "I've got a room for you in the Lincoln House—that's where we live mostly. It's not a big-league hotel, but I guess you can stand it. The food's fair."

Larry trudged along in silence. His gloom was too deep for words to express.

"I'll hand you some good advice, son," said Morton. "Dan's written me about you, an' he says he likes you. I like him, so I'm standing for you. The thing you want to do first off is to forget all about the time when you were burning up the big league. That's all over and done with—see? You're playing ball for me now, and all you've got to do is to work your hardest to cinch a pennant for Mayfield. You can't get by for a minute on what you used to be. In this league most of the boys are thinking about to-morrow instead of yesterday. You want to paste that in your hat."

Larry looked about him furtively for a saloon. He wondered when Morton would begin to talk about his drinking. But Morton was through—and Larry, for some reason, couldn't see anything that looked like a barroom. He felt that he oughtn't to ask Morton for directions. Then he brightened. There would be a bar in the hotel, and, if not, the clerk could advise him. Disastrous as his recent experiences had been he had, even now, no inkling of the last and worst blow that awaited him.

A quick look around in the hotel lobby failed to reveal any bar. But he liked the looks of the clerk. He would probably be friendly. He registered, and got a key. Then Morton looked at his watch.

"Gee! Ten-thirty!" he said. "Guess I'll be turning in. Better hit the hay yourself, Megrue. I may use you to-morrow."

Larry yawned artistically. "All right," he said. But the idea that he might have to pitch didn't alter his fixed determination. Suppose he did have to go in? What could these bushers do against him? He could beat them with his left arm! So he went upstairs with Morton, who volunteered to show him his room. He took off his coat and said good night. And then, when Morton had gone, he put it on again, slipped downstairs, and leaned confidentially over the desk to address the clerk.

"Say, pal," he inquired. "Where can I go to get one fine big drink—and maybe two or six more to chase it down?"

The clerk stared at him. Then he whistled.

"What are you handing me?" he said. "Don't you know this State's dry? And it didn't have its fingers crossed when it voted prohibition, either! You can't get a drink here, my friend! They closed up a blind tiger about three months ago—and the chap who was running it is still in jail. I guess that sort of discouraged any one who wanted to start another. It's fine and jail for having any hard stuff in your possession!"

Megrue had to believe him. The clerk's manner was convincing. He turned and went upstairs with bowed shoulders. On top of all the rest this was too much! He had heard of prohibition States, of course. But he had never realized that you couldn't get a drink in one. His spirit was broken. He was about ready to quit.

He didn't make an auspicious start with his new team. He had done some pretty hard drinking after Fetherston had told him he was going to the minors. He had kept it up as far as St. Louis on the train, and the one night he had spent in the Missouri metropolis had been an eventful one. The sudden deprivation of alcohol upset his system now. His nerves began to go back on him, and the earnest young bushers who opposed him hit him pretty hard. His real pitching skill, of course, carried him through. But he wasn't the old Larry Megrue, and he knew it now as well as any one.

Entirely aside from his condition and his bad pitching, however, he wasn't happy. He missed the easy good-fellowship he had been used to with the big-league teams. Morton evidently rather despised him; he understood that the old catcher really did feel that he was doing a kindly thing in sheltering Fetherston's discard. And the rest of the team fought rather shy of him. He wasn't their sort. Between awe of his past triumphs and a disposition to follow Morton's lead, they left him pretty much to himself.

He was young yet, and his body stopped craving stimulation after a few days. He didn't need alcohol half as much as he thought he did, of course. His nerves adjusted themselves, and he began to feel better. Naturally his pitching improved. Before he had been in Mayfield three weeks he was toying with every team in that patchwork league. He had the class, and, now that he was giving himself a fair chance—though he wasn't doing that of his own volition—he pitched as well as ever. So he used up some of his first pay in sending a long telegram to Dan Fetherston, begging for another chance. Fetherston didn't wire back; he wrote:

> It's not up to me. The big boss says he doesn't believe you'd keep it up. He thinks you're a boozer, and that you'd start drinking again if you came back. Morton says the reason you're making good out there is that you can't get a drink. I'm not saying a word about that. You remember I always told you that was up to you. But you see how it is. I can't bring you back because the big boss thinks you'd start drinking again, and that you'd fall down hard as soon as you did.

He wanted to cry like a baby when

he got that letter. His body had stopped shrieking for alcohol, but he still wanted it. He wanted a drink; he wanted the taste of it rather than the result. But he didn't know enough about himself and things in general to know what a vast difference there is between the two sorts of desire. He was tempted to write back to Fetherston and promise never to drink again. But then his streak of native obstinacy stopped him.

"I'm going to find out," he said to himself. "I bet there's some way I can get the stuff. Then I'll know. I'm not going to quit just because some one tells me to!"

But it really wasn't easy for him to put his plan through. That State believed in prohibition. It had a good law, and it enforced it strictly. It took Larry some time to get into the confidence of a certain druggist. But he did it at last. He got a demijohn of the sort of whisky the third rail in the subway was named for. And he used it freely—with the inevitable result. He had meant to stay in his room in the hotel. But his exhilaration demanded space. He emerged and appeared in the main street. He was arrested five minutes later—and didn't care. But the next morning, in the town lockup, with eyes that smarted and a throbbing, aching head, he had changed his mind about a number of things. He was meekness itself when Morton came to see him; Morton, with a glum face.

"Fine business!" said the manager. He shook his head gloomily. "You poor fool—don't you know this ain't N'Yawk or Chicago?"

"I been an awful fool," said Larry. "Say, get me out of here, an' I'll be careful after this——"

"Get you out?" said Morton. "What do you think I am—the governor of the State? *I* can't get you out! I can't even give bail—they won't take it!"

Larry swallowed this astounding statement whole. It has been suggested before that his wisdom was almost entirely confined to the art of pitching.

"Aw, say!" he said, badly scared. "This ain't no State's prison offense! They can't do more'n fine me for getting tight!" Morton just looked at him. "Can they?" he asked, weakening a little.

"No," said Morton judicially. "Not for that they can't. But they searched your room and found that demijohn with a lot of stuff in it. Why didn't you pour it out the window? Now they've got you for having whisky in your possession without a license."

Larry remembered dimly what the hotel clerk had told him. His head ached too badly for him to reason very much. He looked at Morton with eyes that were bright with terror.

"I'll do what I can for you, boy," said Morton more kindly. "But you're in bad, let me tell you. Mighty bad. You'll be indicted sure, and I wouldn't wonder if you got a year in the pen, anyhow. Still, they may be a bit easier on you. I'll use what pull I've got."

You may guess that Larry Megrue, in his lonely cell, had food for thought. It was served with repentance sauce, too. This put drinking in an entirely new light. He hadn't enjoyed himself the night before, either. He was a mighty unhappy young man. And he couldn't blame a soul in the world but himself for what had happened, either.

Morton came to see him once in a while, but he wasn't a messenger of good cheer. The grand jury hadn't met yet, but when it did an indictment was certain. And, until his trial came up, there was nothing to be done. That was the burden of Morton's song. And then one day he had another visitor. He thought he was seeing things when Dan Fetherston appeared. But Dan was real. And he was cheerful, too.

"Too bad, Larry," he said. "Thought I'd come and see what I could do. Don't like to leave a pal when he gets in bad. Tell me about it."

Which Larry did—at great length.

"They had me right, Dan," he said in the end. "Lloyd and the rest of 'em. I was plumb crazy! It's the booze has done this to me. And if I ever get out of this I'll never touch another drop—believe me!"

"So!" said Dan thoughtfully. "You sound as if you meant that, Larry."

"You bet I mean it!" said Megrue. "Aw, say—I been a fool long enough, ain't I?"

Dan regarded him for several moments. Then he spoke—with a rash impulsiveness that was very convincing, in view of the fact that this moment was the culmination of the plan he had made when he bought Larry from the Brewers.

"I'll take a chance on you," he said. "Maybe the big boss'll fire me for it—but he won't if you back my play and make good. Listen—I've got a little private pull here. The judge in this town went to school with my father. He'll take bail for you if I promise you'll be here to stand trial. I—I sort of hate to throw him down, but I'll do it for you. Then you jump on the first eastbound train with me, and come back to the Turks. If you make good and stick to that about not going back to drinking——"

He was opening the gates of paradise to Larry.

"Will I!" said Megrue huskily. "Aw—say——"

They put that nefarious program through. When Dan Fetherston put up one hundred dollars in cash bail, Judge Barry smiled at him.

"It's about time," he said. "I don't know how much longer my conscience would have let me keep that poor kid in jail, even if it was for his own good and I was doing a favor to Jud Morton here. I guess this bail won't be forfeited if he doesn't turn up, either."

"Give it to charity, then," said Fetherston. "We can do more than that for Mayfield if this little farce comedy's made a real pitcher of Larry Megrue again."

"It's done that or I miss my guess," said Morton. "But what I want to know is how he went back so suddenly before you shipped him out here, Dan?"

"Easiest thing in the world," said Fetherston. "Only—don't let any one know I told you. Every team in the league was in on that little conspiracy. I had Regan—he was catching him—tip every batter off to just what was coming. Of course they could hit him then. You know what his control is—he never crossed the signs."

Morton whistled in admiring wonder.

"Going to tell him about it?"

"I guess so—on the train," said Fetherston thoughtfully. "He needs something to give him back his confidence. And I guess he's just about humble enough to listen to me, too."

It appeared that Fetherston was right. For in what was left of that season Larry Megrue pitched fourteen games—of which he won eleven!

In the next issue we will begin the publication of a four-part serial which you are going to read and talk about. It is a mining story. It's title: "The Man From the Bitter Roots." It's author: Caroline Lockhart, a writer of uncommon strength.

Puppets on a String

By William A. Magill

What happened to a packet of gold certificates, value $20,000. The events of thirty hours. They made history for Los Animose, in New Mexico, and for a girl in a bank there who sighed for the white lights of Broadway

THERE *was* a time, not so very many years ago, when girls who could take dictation and typewrite were *not* plentiful down in New Mexico. Those who could truly boast of these accomplishments and a passable face and figure required few further testimonials, for *home* was usually a long ways off, and aspiring employers could not afford to be capricious where demand so far exceeded supply. Even the most opulent, those who were able and willing to pay a fat salary for a secretary who could take reasonably fast dictation and transcribe it accurately in decently punctuated English were obliged to be thankful for indifferent service, or write their own letters.

No wonder, therefore, that the president of the Citizens' Bank in Los Animose was usually voted the luckiest kind of a "lucky devil" for engaging the services of Miss Claudia Hyde, though he was known to pay *well* for them. Claudia could have qualified for a first-class secretary in any community, being just about the right age, of good height, and slim, lithe figure, fair and "peachy." She combined with her other accomplishments a stock of sweet smiles and good words that made her practically irresistible.

Not only the men but most of the women fell quickly under Claudia's charm. Even her landlady doted on her; the minister's wife dubbed her "first lieutenant" in all matters social and charitable; the village wits spared her absolutely in the pursuit of their avocations.

Thus we find Claudia, at the beginning of this narrative, very comfortably seated in a deep-cushioned revolving chair on the outer edge of the president's office near the always open door. She was not too far away from the regular banking activities to exchange words now and then with Mr. Donnelly, the cashier; and when *his* back was turned, with young Jimmy Marcy, bookkeeper, messenger, and general assistant.

In this community, largely composed of rough men who neither respected nor acknowledged the conventionalities, Claudia was compelled to see and hear while affecting mute unconsciousness. To be sure, after the word had gone forth that she was strictly "on the level," men who at other times were never known to lower their voices or temper their profanities became in her presence more chary of their words and less lurid in their descriptions. At that, she heard much more than she liked.

Mr. Donnelly, the cashier—a high roller—who already had a wife somewhere, pestered her constantly to elope with him; and young Marcy begged her between times to go into partnership with *him* for the long journey. She turned both of them down regularly and often, but apparently without any

grudge, for she kept right on being friends with them just the same. There were others, too—but she kept her own counsel.

'Way down in the bottom of her maiden heart were protest, ennui, and loathing for Los Animose and most of New Mexico, male, female, and neuter. Nobody guessed her feelings; nobody sensed remotely that she rejected New Mexico and pined for the bright lights of the metropolis, which she was secretly planning to regain.

When her chance came, suddenly, unpremeditated, she rose instantly to the occasion and played the game. How she fared furnishes the meat of this narrative. The time consumed to the end of this chapter was less than thirty hours, but these made history for Claudia and annals for Los Animose.

The president of the Citizens' Bank started it. He dictated a brief note to the Grand Central Bank, of New York City, that he was sending twenty thousand dollars in currency by express to keep up their balance.

Claudia typed the letter and brought it to him for signature.

"Donnelly!" he called to the cashier. "Before you go away to-day on your vacation, attend to shipping this money. Send twenty thousand dollars in gold certificates. Claudia, you make out an express money package now for Mr. Donnelly."

Claudia had a supply of express-money packages for such occasions—large, heavy manilla envelopes, printed and furnished by the express company. She typed one with the address of both parties, contents, et cetera, paused a few seconds in thought—not longer—and typed another envelope exactly like the first. Into this one she thrust a number of second sheets which she first cut to the size of bank notes with her sharp eraser, moistened the flap with her red lip, and sealed it down tight.

She did all this very quickly, but absolutely without hurry. No one observing could have suspected that she was doing anything unusual, or that she was either nervous or excited. On the contrary, a complacent smile hovered on her face during the operation, as if her thoughts were altogether entertaining and agreeable.

It was the empty package that she handed to Mr. Donnelly. From his cage she sauntered leisurely over to where young Marcy was at work, on his high stool. She pressed so close to Jimmy that the tendrils from her golden hair brushed his face and intoxicated his senses.

"Listen, quick, Jimmy!" she whispered. "If you still want to marry me and aren't just bluffing, here is your chance. Will you do what I tell you?"

Jimmy stuttered.

"Does that stutter mean yes?" asked Claudia.

Jimmy nodded vigorously. He was a slow speaker and not a quick thinker.

"Then listen. The 'old man,'" said Claudia, whispering very softly but enunciating very carefully so that Jimmy could not miss a syllable, "told Donnelly to send twenty thousand dollars to New York by express before he leaves to-day on his vacation. Donnelly will send you to the express office with the package. Here is one like it. Get your old seal on it, and when Donnelly gives you the real one put *it* in your pocket and ship this one instead. Be quick; don't lose a moment. He'll send for you right away. Do you get me?"

Jimmy nodded and took the package mechanically.

Claudia wandered carelessly and gracefully back toward her chair. As she passed Donnelly's cage on her way back, he called to her rather huskily, she thought, to please tell Jimmy to come to him for the package for the express.

Now it is a fact, of which Claudia

had some suspicion, that Donnelly, as she turned toward Jimmy and went to deliver the message, took the twenty certificates out of the package he was apparently in the act of closing and filled it up again with pieces of blank paper he had been preparing for the purpose. He pasted the flap down and sealed the package in Jimmy's presence with three large piles of red sealing wax indented with the new seal. Jimmy was a little slow because he had to seal the dummy first with the old bank seal; but he got to the cashier's cage almost as soon as the cashier was ready for him.

Donnelly should have noticed that Jimmy was paler than usual and very jerky. He gave him the package and told him to take it over to the express office and hurry back, because he had a lot of matters to explain to him before he, the cashier, went away on his vacation. With less on his mind, he could not have failed to note Jimmy's very obvious trepidation.

Claudia saw it. She called Jimmy over to her desk as he was leaving the cashier.

"Don't lose your nerve, Jimmy," she whispered. "Remember, faint heart doesn't get you anywhere. Bring the package over to my room after closing."

Jimmy made the exchange on his way to the express office. He pushed the dummy through the window to the express agent, who sewed it thrice through and sealed it over with the knots with great heaps of blazing green sealing wax and the express company's big seal —all in Jimmy's presence, before he wrote the receipt, which the agitated Jimmy, walking away, left on the express counter.

A big, hulking man with long, drooping mustache, white felt hat, and eyes of the sort to penetrate the armor of a superdreadnaught picked up the receipt on the counter and read it through carefully before he ran after Jimmy to give it to him. He caught him on the steps of the bank, gave him the receipt, and watched him thoughtfully as he disappeared within; after which he pulled his hat down firmly on his head, went quickly back to the square, mounted his horse, and galloped out of town in a cloud of dust.

If Jimmy could have followed this individual, he would have traveled more than thirty miles that afternoon to a ranch at the foot of the mountains, where "Bill" loosed his horse in the corral and hurried to the house, carrying his saddle with him.

"Butch," said he to another mustached desperado like himself, who was eating his dinner, "we've got to hold up the south local before morning at the Lopez tank and get twenty thousand dollars in bills the bank sends east tonight."

But of course Jimmy couldn't follow him, and never thought of it. He went back to his work, nodding to Claudia that all was well and thrilling all over his big frame from the kiss Claudia blew him in reward. He had to stick around the bank, however, till late to get all of Donnelly's instructions, for Donnelly was to leave for his vacation on an early train the next morning. It was quite nine o'clock before they separated in front of the hotel, Donnelly to retire to his room upstairs on the second floor, Jimmy to seek the waiting, expectant Claudia.

She met him at the door, finger to her lips; led him to a chair; kissed him lightly as a zephyr on his manly brow, but eluded his attempt to embrace her.

"You're a nice boy," she said, "but not yet." And "There's no time. I've got to pack. Give me the package and run along and get your things together. We've got to get out of here in the morning."

"Oh, I can't go away like that, Claudia," said Jimmy. "What's the hurry?

Nobody can find out anything for a whole week. But here is the package, anyway," he added, taking it out of his pocket and handing it to her. She seized it with no apologies. With a hatpin she unceremoniously ripped it open, and with her right hand extracted the contents, to wit, a handful of yellow papers.

Apparently astounded and shocked, she stood perfectly motionless for a brief interval, as if fascinated. Jimmy, his mouth open, his jaw dropped, was incapable of any utterance.

"Why, you *fool,* you *silly* fool!" she breathed at last through clenched teeth. "You sent the wrong package. This is the dummy!"

During the next few minutes, Claudia, gentle but explicit, told Jimmy the history of his father, mother, and all his grandparents on both sides back to Adam, as explanatory and as confirming Jimmy's imbecility and general worthlessness, finishing in a burst of rage and hysterics, striking him with her hands and forcing him out of the house, without, however, making any great noise or disturbance.

Jimmy left, protesting and trembling like the "doddering idiot" she proclaimed him. After he had gone, she collapsed in a chair in a fit of hysterical laughter until the mood passed, when she literally sat up and got busy.

With great care she examined the package and its contents, noting the color of the sealing wax, the character of the seal, and particularly the slips of yellow paper. Her trained, acute intelligence brought light on the situation.

"Just as I feared," she muttered, with a wan smile. "But I'm glad for one thing: I might have had trouble losing Jimmy."

Up in his chamber in the hotel, behind locked door and drawn blinds, Donnelly took the bills out of his pocket and looked at them admiringly. He counted them—twenty one-thousand-dollar gold certificates! And he would "get away" with them, too, he thought egotistically, before any one had the least suspicion. Of course, nobody must see them or know he had so much money until he was safe over in Mexico. He took a long, strong, white envelope from a bunch on his desk, scattering the others, placed the bills in it, sealed it, and put it under his pillow with his gun on top of it. He packed what clothes he needed for immediate use in his hand bag; the rest in his trunk, which he intended to leave behind as a sort of "earnest" of his return. But he intended never to return to the New Mexican country again if he could help it.

When he had completed his packing, he turned out the light and got into bed, falling immediately into a heavy slumber, tired by the day's strain. The excitement he was undergoing brought dreams which kept him tossing till after dawn, but he never waked from his slumbers till the bell boy called him and told him to hurry or he would miss his train.

While he was sleeping, several things happened bearing upon his affairs.

Dramatically disguised, Bill and Butch tied their horses out of sight up the Lopez Road, and hid themselves near the water tank.

When the train stopped at the tank and filled up the boiler of the locomotive, Bill climbed into the cab and got the drop on the engineer. Butch slipped in the back door of the combination baggage and express car and caught the messenger napping. The south local, be it understood, was a poor excuse of a train that ran to the junction, sixty-odd miles away. The locomotive was a discard from the main line, the coaches also; the baggage car lacked a door lock, and the messenger was a pensioner who earned double his pension. It did not take Bill and Butch long to do the trick. Butch tied up the messenger, and Bill kicked the engineer off the train. A

little farther along, Bill and Butch jumped and left the locomotive and car to move under their own momentum on a slight down grade.

They quickly located their horses up the Lopez Road and dashed away at top speed. By making a detour, they entered Los Animose from the north side. Nobody saw them but Claudia, and she didn't tell. Bill was a regular boarder at the hotel. When they reached his room, dead tired, almost exhausted, they finished a quart bottle of Robinson County, pulled off their boots, and should have tumbled into bed. But curiosity prevailed and they first opened the package.

On learning the trick fate had played them, they first stared stupidly at the blank yellow contents, too stumped for ordinary articulation, but thoroughly alive to the temptation to break loose with yells of rage and disappointment and too wise to do it. The hold on their tongues gradually relaxed, however, and released a steady stream of hushed hyperbole which had better be imagined than described. When they had said everything they could think of and repeated some of it several times, without in the least having exhausted the topic, they put their weary heads on the pillows and slept, breathing great threats of horrible vengeance against the cashier and Jimmy.

Meanwhile Claudia had been up and doing.

Just before the first gray of dawn sought out the sand spots between the sagebushes, while Bill and Butch were spurring their tired horses in the last drive for Los Animose, Claudia, dressed in black and heavily veiled, slipped out of her boarding house and up the street into the hotel. In one pocket was a skeleton key, in the other an automatic, and she carried an electric torch to light the way. She knew the number of Donnelly's room—that it was on the second floor—and doubted not that she could find it. She crept silently across the hotel office and up the stairs. Not a board creaked. She found Donnelly's room, opened it with her skeleton key—got, who knows in what adventure?—entered cautiously, and turned her spotlight on the trunk in the corner on the bag near the door, on the envelopes scattered over the desk, and on Donnelly, snoring with his mouth open and head twisted. From under the pillow protruded the corner of the envelope and the handle of his gun.

Very gently, almost soothingly, Claudia withdrew the envelope and brought it over to the desk, where she noiselessly opened it. Her face took on an almost holy expression as she counted the twenty thousand dollars and hid the package in her dress. The corners of her mouth twitched humorously, and she suppressed a desire to giggle, as, with deft fingers, she filled one of the envelopes on the desk with the yellow papers she had with her, sealed it up tight, and shoved it far under Donnelly's pillow.

"He has cast his bread upon the waters," quoted Claudia, half aloud. And "A clever man keeps his money in the bank for fear of fires or robbers."

Leaving as silently as she came, she tiptoed downstairs, across the office, to the veranda. Gray-pink lights from the eastern range heralded the coming day. She heard sounds of approaching footsteps and hid herself behind the big porch chairs, just in time to miss being seen by Bill and Butch, returning from their holdup and dragging their weary bones to bed.

"My! What rough men!" thought Claudia.

Nobody saw Claudia as she slipped up the street and returned to her boarding house. She did not bother to wait around for leave-takings, but wrote a few notes breaking the sad news of her departure and promising soon to return. Then she got a man to take her trunk

to the station, ate a good, hearty breakfast at a "greaser" lunch counter, and reached the depot telegraph office ahead of Donnelly, whose train for the south was due to leave before hers for the north. Here she sent a long telegram to an address in San Francisco—a telegram which greatly "peeved" the operator because he could not make any sense out of it.

Oversleeping, Donnelly had to run for his train, carrying his heavy bag in one hand and his precious envelope tightly grasped in the other. He passed a radiant Claudia, who smiled on him so sweetly and gave him her hand so gayly that he regretted, as he stood on the back platform of the moving train, not having asked her again and "given her another chance."

But Claudia was headed for bright lights, city pavements, and Turkish baths. "Los Animose and New Mexico should know her no more."

Her one regret, she assured herself, as she sat in the train and watched the plains flash by, was that she couldn't see Donnelly's face when he next counted his money. But she cried a little very privately for some reason known only to herself.

And, back in Los Animose, at the bank, a disconsolate, forlorn Jimmy and an incomplete, profane president were both wondering if Claudia had eloped with the cashier, after all.

II.

The "great" detective heard about the holdup of the south local for twenty thousand dollars at Lopez tanks when he reached El Paso on his way home from Mexico, about four in the afternoon. Meanwhile, the news had traveled; all the evening papers from San Francisco to Chicago carrying big leaders and making the most of it. Being so near the spot, he concluded it was best for him to go on to Los Animose instead of sending one of his men.

Of course he had to change to the local at the junction, where he appeared unexpectedly in the express car and put the messenger through a cross-examination that left him mentally only a heap of dry bones. From the messenger and engineer he secured a complex description of the bandits—"two men about six feet tall, rough and vicious, disguised by red bandanna handkerchiefs put over their faces, with holes cut through for eyes and mouths; a "gang," most certainly, though two were all they saw. Such a description was enough to put any aspiring detective on his mettle; a "man's job," he thought, and decided to take it in his own hands.

After consulting over the wires with the big man in San Francisco, he issued posters offering a reward of one thousand dollars each for evidence that would arrest and convict these two men, and an additional reward of two thousand dollars for the return of the money.

Bill and Butch were good sleepers; they stayed abed all day and did not appear at the hotel office until evening. They awoke with a grim consciousness of their failure—not just a plain failure such as one must expect to meet with occasionally in the ordinary course of highwaying and train robbing, but a clean "do." In other words, they knew they had been made monkeys of by one or other or both of those "—— tenderfeet" at the bank.

After supper Bill strolled out into the town to get a line on the cashier, but returned soon in a frightful rage with the information that Donnelly had purchased a ticket for Benson and left town early in the morning, and was well on his way to join the "Dons."

The arrival of the great detective served timely notice on Bill and Butch that the worst was to come. The G. D. had a big reputation in New Mexico, and Bill and Butch would have "run for

it" like a pair of scared hares, only they hadn't the stuff to run with. When the posters came out offering rewards for their apprehension, they did some tall thinking.

Said Bill, after an hour's steady chewing: "We've got to skip or squeak. If the G. D. lands on us, it's up the road we'll go, for nobody'll believe we are just plain goats with nothing but our 'goatees' to show for it."

"W'at'll we do?" asked Butch.

"Squeak, I reckon," said Bill.

"W'at's the use?" said Butch.

"Don't you see, you blithering idiot," said Bill soothingly, "the G. D. will scorch our trail 'cause the express has got to pay up the twenty big bucks. That's what sets on the G. D."

Butch whistled.

"Yes," said Bill. "Now, if he just knew what we knows, that'd let the express out all right, and put it back on the bank good and straight. Maybe he'd give us a reward."

"Or send us up," said Butch.

"Course the other side, the bank, might pay us to keep quiet."

Butch nodded.

"There's no joker in the pack," continued Bill, "but what's the trump? That's what gets me goin'."

"Play 'em both," said Butch.

"Nope," said Bill. "On further thoughts, I'll trust the thief taker. There's honor, Butch, between thieves, but nix in high finance."

"You've got a great head for mixin', Bill. Go 's far as you like."

Bill lounged down the stairs, across the office, through the bar, and onto the veranda. Not finding the G. D., he sauntered with affected nonchalance on up the street toward the express office. On the way he met the G. D. The G. D. knew Bill. They had met before in business, and neither had very much on the other. Now they sensed a common thought, and, though they merely nodded in passing, they turned around almost simultaneously and faced each other.

"Spit it out, Bill," said the G. D.

"It's on the level," said Bill, "and very private."

"Say where, then," said the G. D.

"Let's take a walk," said Bill, "around the farm."

An hour later, the G. D. and Bill parted on the outskirts of the town.

"Go back!" said the former. "Stick to the hotel till you hear from me. Don't talk; no, not even to Butch. Tell him to hold his jaw. *Remember,* I'm just doing this for *you,* Bill, when you don't deserve it and ought to go to jail. Play me straight and follow orders, or I'll jail you off the bat."

"All right, cap," said Bill. "But remember, we want some of the reward when it's passed out."

"Drop that, Bill! There'll be no reward for either of you for robbing trains and growing goatees. But leave it to me. Maybe I can point out to you later where you and Butch can earn some money by working for it. Now march, you bushwhacker, *march!*"

In a quiet corner of the express office, out of sight of everybody, the G. D. held a conference with a bunch of long, black, moist stogies that had a kick in each puff. When he finished the last of them, he broke up the meeting, and, though it was late and he had missed his dinner, walked briskly up the street to the bank.

The bank was closed for the day, but, as there was a light burning in the president's office, he hammered at the door until the "old man" came and let him in. The president was called the "old man," not because he was really old, but because of his "old" ways and gallant bearing.

The G. D. introduced himself, and followed the president back into his office. The latter was not in his best humor, but punctiliously courteous. He

was worrying about Claudia. He missed her because he had had to write a long letter to the Grand Central Bank telling them what had happened and to assure them that the express company would probably settle the matter with no delay. To do him justice, that was the least of his reasons for "missing" Claudia. In a way he felt sorry for the express company—that sort of complacent, gratified "sorry" one feels for an enemy hoisted on his own petard. He felt no anxiety about the money, took it for granted the express would pay, never apprehended the least complication. He accepted the G. D.'s call as a preliminary apology to the bank for the remissness of the carrier. So he gave the G. D. a Henry Clay perfecto and a match, and saw him seat himself in Claudia's sacred chair—the only deep-cushioned one in the office—with somewhat mixed sensations.

The G. D. filled his lungs with the fragrant smoke, leaned back, and put his feet on the desk. "Fine evening," said he.

"Beautiful," answered the president, his mind wandering.

"Sad sort of thing, that holdup at Lopez," said the G. D.

"Very," said the president, and then politely: "Any clews?"

"Well, maybe," drawled the G. D. "According to the way you look at them. May I ask you a few questions in the way of increasing my information?"

"Fire away," said the president. "Consider me entirely at your service."

"Who made up the package?"

"Mr. Donnelly, our cashier."

"Where is he?"

"On his vacation. Oh, you mean what place? I think he went to Benson. Yes, I remember that is where he was going. He left the night or morning of the train robbery."

"Is this the package?" asked the G. D. suddenly, taking out of his pocket the packet Butch had stolen and handing it to the president.

His smile stiffening a little, the president looked the package over carefully, examined the seal of the bank and that of the express company—the former in green wax and the latter in red wax.

"Yes," he said finally, "I think this is the one."

"In that case," said the G. D., rising, "you have got your own again, and all ends happily. I have only now to take your receipt for the package and bid you good evening. Glad to see you in Frisco when you're up our way."

"Of course this is a glad surprise," said the president. "But, young man, permit me to remark that we shipped this package to the address on the face of it for delivery at that address, and expect your company to perform its part in the transaction. I'm glad you have the robbers. You really *have* them, eh? I think"—he paused, with his hand in the package, and withdrew it, at the same time taking out the blanks with their cords which the G. D. had put through them to make the package look natural—"why, what's this?" coloring with indignation—"not a practical joke, I hope?"

"Not at all," said the G. D. "The package you hold is the one our agent receipted for on the security of your bank seal, after sewing it and sealing it himself in the presence of your messenger. Observe that your bank seals and our express seals are intact. The package was stolen from the messenger by train robbers, and, when opened, contained only this blank paper, no money. In other words, it's a phony package."

Silence followed this speech. The G. D. wanted to let it sink in, and the bank president was thinking deeply.

"What would you suggest doing?" he asked. "No"—raising his hand—"don't say it's up to me. Perhaps it is. This is a sudden development, and I cannot

yet arrange my ideas. Tell me unofficially what you advise my doing about it. I don't want it to get around that the bank is involved in a theft of twenty thousand dollars—a heavy loss for our little bank. Morcover, Donnelly being away on his vacation and my private secretary also, and nobody here to do the work except Jimmy Marcy and the office boy, leaves me at a disadvantage."

"I'm ready to help you any way I may," said the G. D. "Of course, my first duty is to my company, but in a case like this I think I can offer my services. Who do you think took the money?"

"After all," said the president thoughtfully, "who could it have been except Donnelly?"

"Tell me the course of the transaction?"

"I dictated a letter to the Grand Central Bank stating that we would send them twenty thousand dollars in currency. Claudia wrote it and addressed the money package, which she gave to Donnelly, who presumably took the bills out of the safe, put them in the package, and sealed it before Jimmy Marcy. Jimmy took it to the express office, and brought back the receipt."

"That makes three people," said the G. D. "Claudia, I suppose, is your secretary? Is she also on her vacation?"

"Not exactly. She got angry about something, Jimmy says, and said she was going to leave the country. I don't connect her in any way with it."

"Could she have eloped with the cashier?"

"I could not possibly believe it."

"We can trace her later, if necessary," said the G. D. "There is no probability of her being a principal in the robbery. But about Donnelly. He has had time to hear about the train robbery. Has he telegraphed you or written?"

"Not a word. What do you make of that?"

"To sum up," said the G. D., "it looks like the cashier. Is there anything about the outside of the package or the contents to give you any clews? No? Well, then, I think I had best take the package into my keeping for the present. I'll start our machinery looking for Donnelly immediately. If you wish me to do so, I can send two men I have here who know Donnelly and have a grudge against him to follow him over into Mexico and seize the money. By this time he is probably across the border, and the best to be done is to secure the money, or what is left of it. Of course, we will have to locate him first. And then these men will have to receive money for their expenses and get a reward if they recover the money for you."

"Start up your machine, captain," said the president, "and I'll call my directors together in the morning and have them decide on further actions."

III.

The president had a great deal to think of that night. But the question, "Where is Claudia?" constantly obtruded itself, and there was no answer possible.

In the morning he had a hot session with his board of directors.

"I always thought you were making a mistake to trust Donnelly," growled the biggest stockholder.

"He was bonded," said the president, "in the Pan-American Surety Company."

"For how much?" snorted the biggest stockholder.

"Ten thousand," said the president.

"Ten thousand!" sneered the biggest stockholder. "And you'll have to *prove* it on Donnelly before you get even that. We are stung, all right, I reckon. Now that I think of it," he continued savagely, "didn't you tell me some time ago that the surety company wrote you that

Donnelly's habits were such that they felt compelled to warn us against him?"

"I've kept my eye on him," said the president.

"Kept your eye on him!" sneered the biggest stockholder. "Looks like it!"

There was a knock on the door, and the president answered it.

"Telegram for you, sir," said Jimmy. "Boy just brought it."

The president returned to the table with it in his hand, unopened. The biggest stockholder was still fuming.

"I tell you, Mason," he said to the president, "you are entirely too lax. There's that blond woman you hired at an outrageous salary. Where's she now? How do you know she's not mixed up in it? I always thought——"

"Cut that out!" retorted the president fiercely. Then quietly, "Wait a minute! I've just received a telegram. Permit me"—opening it—"it's from the surety company, and says:

"If possible come here immediately. There are important developments, in view of which your presence is necessary. Refuse all discussions."

"That sounds promising," said the biggest stockholder. "Better go to-day."

On the third day after this conference, the president of the Citizens', wearing a worried look and a large white Stetson that made him a marked man, sent in his card to the president of the Pan-American Surety Company, and was promptly ushered into that gentleman's most private office.

"This is sad business, Mr. Mason," said he. "Have you any clews?"

"Yes, we think it was Donnelly now," said Mason.

"What makes you think that?"

"The great detective thinks so," said Mason.

"The great detective? That means the express company will refuse to pay, eh, and put it up to us? Well, *you* should have taken more precautions about Donnelly, Mr. Mason. You must remember that we warned you about his habits. I am sure we ought to oppose any claim against us under our bond in view of the wording of our letter to you on this subject. In any event, should we succeed in recovering the money, or any portion of it, we should expect you to reimburse us for any great expense we are placed to in the matter."

"I'll pay it out of my own pocket," said Mr. Mason hastily, "any reasonable amount. My directors are much incensed about my indulgence of Donnelly, and this outcome of it does me personal injury."

"Well, well! We'll interview the culprit first, and then I'll let you talk the matters of reward and expenses over with the party most interested."

"What? Have you caught Donnelly?" exclaimed Mason in great surprise. "Where is he? How did you happen to catch him?"

"I think he is under guard in the next room. We were fortunate, Mr. Mason, in being promptly informed of his escape, and were thus able to secure him while on his way to Guaymas."

It was a dejected and very crestfallen Donnelly who was brought into the office under guard of a powerful surety officer.

"Do you identify this man?" asked the surety president.

"Oh, yes," said Mason. "He is our cashier, Mr. Donnelly."

"Well, Donnelly," said the surety president, "do you admit your identity?"

Donnelly nodded.

"Where's the money?" questioned the surety man fiercely. "We'll get you twenty years for this if there's a dollar missing. Where is it, I say?"

"Your men took it from me when they shanghaied me," said Donnelly.

"Have you got it, officer?" asked the surety man.

"We took a big envelope away from him when we took him," said the officer. "He said it was very valuable and to take good care of it, so I did not open it. We sealed it up in his presence. Here it is."

The surety man took the big white envelope. "With your permission, Mr. Mason, we will open the package and count the swag. But, look here now, Donnelly," he interjected threateningly, "no jokes. Is the money here?"

"Yes," growled Donnelly.

The surety man slit the envelope with a knife and took out the contents.

"What's this? What's this!" spreading out the yellow blanks. "Practical joke, eh? Mr. Donnelly"—shaking his forefinger in his face—"I thought you had more intelligence than to attempt any such humor with me! With *me,* Mr. Donnelly, who are on your bond for ten thousand dollars, and we can make an example of you."

Donnelly's eyes almost popped out of his head. "I swear," he said earnestly, when he found his voice, "that I put the money in that envelope." He gazed, fascinated by the blank papers.

"Gentlemen," he continued brokenly after a moment's thought, and almost whimpering, "there's magic at work here. I will make full confession. I put these yellow papers in the package I sent to the express office and the bills in my pocket—twenty one-thousand-dollar gold certificates. When I returned to my room in the hotel I put the bills in this envelope, sealed it with the mucilage, and it has not been out of my possession until your men shanghaied me. That's the whole truth, so help me."

"And you have the audacity—the impudence—to expect us to believe that story?" thundered the surety man.

"Officer, take him away. No words." Then to Donnelly, with a wave of his hand: "If the full amount of the money you stole is not repaid before to-morrow morning, or you do not instantly tell us where you have hidden it, up the road you go for twenty years. Remove him, officer, and keep him close till I send over a warrant.

"And now, Mr. Mason, that's finished," said the surety president, "and I suppose you are disappointed and wondering what to do next. So am I. But just now I have to run away to keep an appointment. What do you think about it?"

"I'm all up in the air," said Mason. "The great detective came to me with the original express package with a contents similar to these yellow blanks, and said his company would not pay the loss because Donnelly had delivered them a phony package. Everybody seems to know more about it than I do."

"Well, I've got to go," said the surety man. "Excuse me for a little while. Make yourself at home."

Mason, left to himself, soon found his thoughts wandering from the main points of the robbery. He had wanted to ask Donnelly if he knew where Claudia was, but could not bring himself to do so. Of course the money loss was heavy, but he was not a poor man and could pay it himself, if necessary, without any great hardship. What grieved him was that Claudia had deserted. He eould not and would not believe any wrong of her. What was more, he *wanted* her.

"To thunder with the money," he muttered. "Claudia is more important."

For a while he marched up and down and back and forth, intent upon his own thoughts, so that he did not at first hear a light knock on the door, which had to be repeated several times before he finally called: "Come in!"

To his complete surprise Claudia entered, and after quietly closing the door behind her held out her hand to him and smiled brilliantly.

"Why, Claudia!" he exclaimed, taking the proffered hand. "Why, Claudia, *Claudia*, I am so glad to see you."

"Where did you think I had gone?" she asked archly.

Mason looked pained.

"Did you think I had the twenty thousand dollars, Mr. Mason? And did you think I had gone away with Donnelly?" she asked simply.

"No, indeed, Claudia. On my life, no," Mason assured her earnestly. "I did not and never will believe anything but good of you."

"Oh, I'm not good, Mr. Mason; I'm really quite a sinner. And I did take the money, Mr. Mason, though I am giving it back to you now," said Claudia, taking a small roll out of her reticule and offering it to him. "Count it, Mr. Mason. Be sure it's real money, for there have been a lot of blanks drawn in these transactions."

Mason grasped her hand with the roll in it, and held it tight.

"Hang the money!" said he. "It's not money I want, Claudia; it's you."

"Even if I'm a thief?" asked Claudia.

"I know you're a thief," said Mason. "You stole my heart down in New Mexico, and now I want you to take the rest of me, all I am, all I have."

"Wait!" said Claudia, still smiling, but holding him off. "Wait, Mr. Mason. You don't know me at all. Why, you've never seen me." She took a step backward, raised her two hands, and, with a quick motion, stood revealed a different Claudia, minus blond wig, with short, dark curls clustering gracefully around her lovely brow.

"Now, you see," she said, "I'm somebody different that you didn't know."

"What can that matter, Claudia? It is you I love, not your disguise."

"And you ask no questions? Not even who I am or why or wherefore?"

"I ask you for yourself, Claudia; nothing else matters. Perhaps you do not know *me* either, but——"

"Oh, yes, I do," said Claudia. "I knew *you* all the time."

"Where's Claudia?" asked the surety man when he returned a little later and looked around the office. And when he saw how matters stood:

"Why, hang it, Mr. Mason! This isn't fair. You get back your twenty thousand dollars; then you *steal* my best detective that I sent down to Los Animose to keep tabs on Donnelly!

"There's no trusting you high financiers."

SOMETHING HE GOT FREE

NOW that "Uncle Joe" Cannon has reëntered public life and has been reelected to Congress, L. White Busbey, who used to be his private secretary, is telling some of the funny things that happened to Mr. Cannon when he was speaker of the House.

Here is one of them:

May Irwin, at one time in Washington playing a week's engagement, took a party of her friends to the capitol to call on Mr Cannon. "Uncle Joe," who always welcomed visitors with great cordiality, rushed out into the anteroom and indulged in a lot of interesting and entertaining conversation with Miss Irwin and her friends.

As they were leaving, he said:

"It has been a great pleasure, a great delight, Miss Irwin, to see you under such circumstances. Frequently, I have paid a dollar and a half for the privilege."

The Queer Place

By Frederick Niven

Author of "Hands Up," "Discretionary Powers," Etc.

The most stolid of men would turn with a shudder from the checkerboard in Flannigan's hotel. And yet it was the only amusement in sixty-two miles. That checkerboard and the "Queer Place" on the trail figure prominently in this eerie tale of the West

THE celebrated speech of Hamlet to Horatio, beginning "There are more things in heaven and earth," came into the mind of Bill Davies, of Ridge, Montana, when he got to the end of the sequence of events that circled round the Queer Place, on the road to Spring Lake.

From Ridge to Midway is easy going, as a rule, and at Midway the freighters camp. There are not always freighters there, of course; but since the Spring Lake mines opened up, to work steadily day and night, the chances are in favor of seeing, dotting the little pocket valley at Midway, the twinkling camp fires of the freighters outspanned for the night there. Sometimes the only light in the valley is the dropped yellow star of Buck Flannigan's "hotel"—the only one between Ridge and Spring Lake.

Buck built it when the placer miners were tearing out the gravel at Midway, thirty years ago. He stayed on after the creek bed had been torn out, the pocket desecrated, and the banks on either hand were left looking as if a mad giant with a rake had been at work there. Unshaven and bleary, he pottered about his paintless hotel, while year by year nature tried to cover over the signs of havoc, and the shacks of what was once Midway fell log by log. You could never say he had a jag on. He was just soaked, yet always coherent.

Flannigan's was thirty miles from Ridge, and two and thirty from Spring Lake, and it looked very lonely, and Flannigan was the split double of a dime-novel cover of Bad Man Plummer—and there, mark you, were the holes in the floor that told of dancing tenderfeet, and there was Flannigan, smiling, as the chink put down your plate of steak and onions, and Flannigan's voice huskily inquired: "What do you drink with it?"

Most of the freighters did not go near Flannigan's after they hauled into the meadow; just got the horses out, the nose bags on, the frying pan on the fire, the blankets spread. They might, in the morning, "have one" at Flannigan's, but that was about the extent of their visits; for Flannigan's depressed everybody. It wasn't a hotel; it was a relict. That checkerboard on the table in the corner of the barroom was the most tragic of checkerboards. The most stolid of men would turn, with a shudder, from the checkerboard. And yet it was the only amusement in sixty-two miles.

It used to haunt and fascinate Bill Davies on the infrequent occasions that loneliness, or drizzle, prompted him to go over to Flannigan's after having made camp. Perched on the high seat

of his wagon, waggling through the mountains, the impression of the lone barroom with the lone checkerboard on the corner table used to stay with him even more poignantly than the impression of Flannigan. When Flannigan was talking to him—when Flannigan's bulging, washed-out eyes made him look away, as one looks away from a cuttlefish—Bill used to look at that checkerboard; then back to Flannigan he would turn, to find Flannigan's eyes queerer still.

Something queer about that checkerboard. They didn't play checkers in the old days, when Flannigan's was open day and night. The cards slipped on the table then, the balls ran on the little horses, the dice rattled. In those days, if you wanted to shake for a drink with a friend at Flannigan's you could, by waggling your hand in air for a sign as you advanced to the bar, have the dicebox clapped down there for you. It used to stand on a shelf behind the bar, a dicebox big as a large pepper pot, with dice half an inch square. But it was hidden away when the gold seekers departed, and nature encroached again on Midway—and there was only the checkerboard.

"Queer!"

So thought Davies, haunted by the checkerboard as he waggled through the soundless, red-black woods on his high wagon perch. It was morning, dewy and fragrant in the mountains. Behind him, and below, lay the meadow—Midway Meadow—with its black marks of old fires, its torn river bed, its moldering shacks, and Flannigan's. The horses' hoofs fell muffled, the wheels rolled silently in the foot of dust that was the road. The only noise of his progress was the squeak of cargo rubbing, box against box, and an occasional clink of chains when the whiffle swung.

"Queer about that checkerboard!"

It suddenly struck him that there was, perhaps, a game a man could play by himself on a checkerboard.

"Oh, maybe Flannigan plays with the chink!" he considered, and smiled to himself.

No! Flannigan sat all day playing a solitary card game, staring at the cards, setting them out, rearranging them, now this way, now that way, while, outside, the trees stood bolt upright round the little bit of pocket of grass, and the shacks fell into decay, and nothing happened but morning, noon, night, and the crawling hours between—nothing sounded but the creek, the crackle of grasshoppers, the occasional howl of coyote, or scream of bald-headed eagle.

Davies dismissed the sense of queerness and depression, about the place where he usually did dismiss it—dismissed Flannigan's codfish eyes, the furtive, half-frightened-looking chink, and the memory of that barren interior with the checkerboard on the corner table. He dismissed Flannigan's on arrival at a spot where the horses always shied, or tried to bolt, or tried to wheel aside. The same thing always happened at this bend of the road, and he supposed that some former driver had beaten the animals here—overbeaten them, too. Somehow or other, it did not strike him to wonder if both horses had been beaten there, if they had been partners for years. He didn't delve as deep as that. But he knew that about two miles above Flannigan's, going toward Spring Lake, he never failed to have trouble with them.

To-day, just after he passed that place, and got them sensible again, he saw ahead, coming toward him, two riders. They couldn't have come from Spring Lake, unless they had started after supper last night. It was still early in the day, and Bill had been up with the sunrise. Then he recognized them. One was Captain Moyes, of the Moyes Mines; the other, he believed, was a back-East engineer connected

with some syndicate—a man with a double-barreled name, he had heard. Thompson-Smith, he thought it was. Anyhow, this man Thompson-Smith—or Johnson-Smith, he wasn't sure which—was in the country looking at various prospects that the success of the Spring Lake vein was bringing before the gaze of the speculators again. So the boys said, at any rate. Davies gave them "How-do!" in passing, and, interested in horseflesh, as well as in the long, lean Easterner who looked as if he should have been a Westerner, he looked round after them.

"Can ride, all right!" he thought, as he observed a sudden trembling and side dancing and general cavorting of the young engineer's horse at the bend of the road. It seemed to upset Moyes' pony, but Bill knew that Moyes was a horseman, and merely watched the Easterner. He laughed as he saw that long, lean man dwindle down the road, "staying with it" excellently. Down the aisle in the wood—for thus the slit of wagon road seemed—a pennon of dust wavered after the riders had vanished round the bend.

A joggling of his wagon caused Bill to look ahead once more, and caution his horses with: "Steady, now; don't you know the road by this time?" But it was not fright with them again. Perhaps in turning round to see how the engineer fellow rode he had pulled a rein by accident.

"Steady, you! Steady!"

And they plodded on demurely in the steady and blameless plod into which they always settled soon after having passed that bend.

II.

About noon, Bill halted at Saskatoon Creek, hauling aside from the road, as was the usage with most who came there, whether others were expected or not. Some would not haul aside until they heard the squeak of harness, or joggle of load, that announced another team on trek; but Bill was not of those. He got out bits there, and nose bags on, ran a careful eye and a massaging hand over his big beasts, rinsed his hands in the creek, and sat down to enjoy his own lunch during the half-hour rest.

He had just got through the rinsing when from the direction of his travel came the intermittent squeaks that announce an advancing wagon. And here it was, waggling through the woods on the deep-rutted road, Jim Conyers drowsy on high, wrist on knee, lines in hand, humming some plaintive and catchy song. They waved forefinger and second finger of a hand to each other, grinned up, grinned down; and then Conyers reined in, throwing a leg negligently over the high seat, to chat at ease, punctuating his remarks with: "Steady, Molly!" "What you doin', Sorrel?" "Oh, stand still, Molly! Can't you flick a fly off without turning the rig over?"

"That syndicate fellow's still up in the hills with Moyes," he said, as a piece of chatter, reins over hooked elbow now, enjoying his noon snack. "They say Moyes is liable to sell him the Nellie Moyes prospect up on this here spur. More haulin' then, eh?" And he looked up the precipitous hill that sheered away with the trees standing at acute angles to it.

"That's where they've been, is it?" answered Bill. "I met them on the road a bit back, going toward Flannigan's. Wondered what they had been at to be so early on the road, and so far from Spring Lake.

"Did you? Moyes has an interest in some other location on the other side. I suppose they were crossing to it. If they ain't at Flannigan's when I get there, I guess that's where they'll be—up on the other side. They say that long fellow—I forget his name—something-Smith—represents enough dough

to open up all the claims in the country. He's seen the ore to Spring Lake in Moyes' office, and now he's looking where it comes from, so I guess he has intentions."

"Well, he's some rider!" said Bill. "His horse went bughouse as sudden as a knife, just after we met, and he gave an exhibition good enough to get honorable mention at Pendleton."

"Where was this?" asked Conyers, interested.

"Back some ways—you know that bend where there's the roots of a cedar?"

"Sure—kind of waggle up and down. About two miles this side of Flannigan's?"

"Sure!"

"Huh!" Conyers jerked a thumb at his horses. "They'll do the same at that bend—fierce. I never whale them for it; guess they were whaled there for something once. Goin' along light with them I sometimes wish I was carrying a jag on the wagon to stop a team of six, let alone two."

Bill merely nodded, but his face was full of thought.

"Sure," said Conyers. "I always begin a-talkin' comforting to them a bit ahaid. As a matter of fact, I don't like the place myself."

"Neither do I," answered Bill, and nodded again. For some reason, he seemed to see Flannigan again, and that drab barroom, with the mocking checkerboard in the corner, the disconsolate, rejected, dejected, inviting, and repellent checkerboard.

"Well, guess I'd better be pulling out," said Conyers—and did so, toward Midway, while Bill hauled onto the road once more and continued his joggle and swing to Spring Lake.

But what Conyers had said about his horses getting restive at that place two miles above Flannigan's stayed with Bill, and brought him back to the depression that he had generally left far behind by this time. It struck him that the whole way was oppressive—the quiet, hushed forest, the winding, muffled road, grim and terrible, as if something queer might happen anywhere. He was in a mood to quit the job and pull out for a brighter bit of country, more open, more colored; but anon the mood departed.

"Something at that bend, I guess, is unpleasant for horses," he thought.

He did not admit that it was particularly unpleasant for at least one human being—namely Bill Davies. An open-air man, he felt, without being consciously introspective.

III.

It happened that on his return trip from Spring Lake to Ridge he had occasion to walk that bit of road alone, not even in the company of horses. With the end of the sunset he had come to the place the horses did not like, wrestled with them, coaxed them, and had just sighted, from the hillside, the camping ground at Midway when he noticed that there had happened to him what had never happened before: his big sack of feed, from which he filled the nose bags of his hefty Montanas, had joggled off.

Back went his thoughts over the road, and he guessed he knew where it lay. It had fallen off when he wrestled with the animals at their place of fears and sweats. Well, he would drive down to the meadow and then return for it, for the load was heavy, the horses were tired, and the meadow was in sight. So down he drove to his wonted camp place, and there unhitched. The horses looked round for their nose bags, wondering what had come to their human partner of the road.

"All right," said Bill Davies. "I guess I dropped the grub. There! You stop there; I'll hike back and fetch it."

A plainsman would have spraddled over even a draft horse for that couple of miles' hike back on the road, but Bill, feeling stiff in the limbs after his day on the elevated seat, thought to stretch his legs. Away he went uphill again, the two beasts turning, puzzled, to look after him. He swung off stiffly, but soon fell into a plodding stride, and dissipated his exasperation at himself for having dropped the bag in the exercise of walking to find it.

Hints of night were all around. It would be here soon. At this place, on the hill up from Midway, there were generally many chipmunks disporting; now but one or two chirped and ran and again chirped thinly, knowing that night was near. On Bill trudged, enjoying his walk still, though to be sure he was pleased to hear the silver notes of a bobolink, as if addressed to him. They were antidote to the dark-red, dark-green infestivity of the slopes.

Up on the hillside, in the forest, he turned and looked down between the trees. He could still see the wagon, with the horses at the tail, waiting for their oats. They looked small from here, but he could even make out that they were still turned toward him—or turned in the direction in which he had departed—by the white of their foreheads. The meadow was going drab, the green fading. A shadow seemed to be drifting across it. The horses moved from the wagon to make shift on grass, as if they were unpampered cayuses instead of oat-suppered heavyweights. No light yet showed where Flannigan's stood to one side, backed by trees—but perhaps it was not yet time for lights. Away up on high a peak showed over the trees with a sullen glow still on it. In the woods, however, night was fast getting to business. Bushes merged in darkness, a drifting, subtle darkness; they did not stand forth—they merely bulked, deeper glooms.

And then, just before he reached the bend, something suddenly happened to Bill Davies in his inner parts; and there were little shivers came over him—for he felt that he was being looked at.

He pshawed aside this inexplicable feeling, told himself that night was falling a bit cold, and puckered his eyes more keenly to see where the dropped sack lay. These shivers he had not felt since childhood, in the dark of a little loft over a farm in Indiana, where he had been "raised." He told himself again that night was going to be chilly. He could still see ahead, though the cleared cut of the road had a very lonesome appearance now, with the woods so darkened.

Say! He must get over this queer feeling of being looked at! He was just at that bend where his horses had been walloped once by a former teamster. Somebody was looking at him! And, say, not only *his* horses were like that here! What was it Conyers had said to him about the place? He peered left and right as he walked. It occurred to him that it would be dark before he could get back to the meadow. He should have brought a lamp. A man might—well, a man might stub a toe, for instance.

Pshaw! There was nothing to stub a toe on. A man had only to keep walking in the deep dust of the road. He looked left and right, and hiked on. He was at the bend; some one *was* looking at him—and then his foot, in stepping out, impinged on something soft that yielded; and he leaped aside.

The breath jumped out of him. He thought it was a body he had blundered onto; but it was only what he had come for, the sack of horse feed! He took it up. He flung it over his shoulder. He started incontinently to hike back. He wanted to run, and, of course, would not; but he was being looked at—and from behind now.

Night had fallen, and up in the mountains a long howl wavered—a coyote sa-

luting the sure night. The shivers ran again in Bill Davies' spine, and he could explain them to himself this time—not with utter conviction, however—as being caused by that unwarned and dismal cry. Any fellow feels the melancholy unpleasantness of coyotes' howls, be he lean or fat, town bred or mountain bred.

He was being looked at! No, no, he was not! He told himself he was not—and believed that he was. Here was the meadow glimmering gray, and mighty glad he was to see it. He had never known two such unpleasant miles. There were a few stars beginning to show. Here was the meadow with a sense of openness, and here were the white faces of his horses; here was their whinnying greeting; and a little later there was the sound of their munching, the sound of the crackling camp fire, the sizzling bacon, and the appetizing odor of it.

Across the meadow, Flannigan's light now showed. Nearer, there was another wavering light coming into being. Evidently some other teamster had outspanned there, on the way to Spring Lake from Ridge. Bill wanted lots of dancing light that night, and he flung on much wood after supper. If all the teamsters in the Rockies outspanned in the meadow at Midway, each with his own fire, Bill Davies would welcome them. Soon he heard gentle whistling. Men advancing on another camp are wont to come with noise, a sneeze or a cough, a deliberate tramping on a fallen branch, a whistling or humming of a bar of song. Bill shaded his eyes from the firelight and stared into the darkness.

"Hello, Jim!" he cried.

Jim Conyers roamed into view.

"Well, it's you, Bill," he said. "I guessed it would be. How you makin' out? You look lonesome," and he filled his pipe.

Bill was lonesome. He had never been so glad of a companion at the Midway camp in all his journeying through the country. He put on another can of tea for hospitality's sake, and just as he was measuring out the leaves, a shot rang sharply in the night.

"What's that?" snapped Jim; and, leaping up, he peered in the direction of the little sparkle and twinkle that showed where his own camp lay across the pocket.

"It was at Flannigan's," said Bill, and wondered why his voice sounded thick. But though his voice was thick, he felt he must find out what the shot meant. Both men knew that a shot from Flannigan's at this time of night was not right.

"Better go over," said Bill.

"Maybe cleanin' gun and it loaded," said Jim. "Maybe shot himself."

"Better go over," said Bill again.

They hit across the meadow to the sparkle of light in the window, and then suddenly the door of Flannigan's flung back, and there was a dancing dervish of a figure in the light, waving its hands. It was before the days when chinks cut off their cues, and the cue of this figure let them know that it was Flannigan's chink, agitated, in the doorway. He seemed to be in flight, then spun round, halted, retreated back into the light; then the light was shut off abruptly; the door had closed again.

"Huh!" a perplexed grunt came from each of the men, and they strode smartly across the meadow. When they came to the old hotel they walked to the window of one accord, walked stealthily now, and looked in. What they saw was the chink wringing his hands on the hither side of the bar; and on the other side were two men stooping as if to lift something.

"It's a holdup!" cried Jim. "You ain't heeled by any chance, Billy?"

"No."

"Might run a bluff, if we do it properly, but——"

The two men who were lifting the burden were suddenly revealed as they rose, humped up.

"It's Captain Moyes!" Jim broke out.

"And the young engineer from the East that's looking at them prospects," said Bill.

They were lifting Flannigan. They raised him to the bar; they felt his heart, looked at him, looked at each other. The engineer, frowning, spoke a lot, as if hurriedly.

"We'll go in," said Bill.

They opened the door and entered—and the first thing that Bill noticed was the checkerboard lying on the floor face downward, and the men, black and white, scattered broadcast. The three living inmates swept round at their entrance. Flannigan's hotel seldom saw boys dropping in long after dark now. Twenty-five years ago it was different. Even Captain Moyes started.

"Hello, boys!" said he, recovering. "Pity you didn't come in sooner—for witnesses."

"Oh, it's clear enough," said the tall man. "Look at the way he grabbed his gun. And we have one witness in the Chinaman."

"It was the chink I was thinking of," replied Moyes in low tones. "He might swear you did it."

"What's the racket?" asked a voice. It was Bill's. He recognized it after it was out. He had a feeling that everything was going to be explained when he saw the checkerboard upside down at last, the squares hidden, the men scattered. He no longer felt that queer, haunting sense in the place.

Moyes turned to Thompson-Smith, as if expecting him to reply to Bill's question, and that gentleman said:

"It is only the end of a long job. There was a man came into this country over a year ago, and was lost sight of—my brother. I never thought we were like each other, but other people did——"

"*He* did," broke in Moyes meaningfully.

"How's that?" said Conyers.

"He says that because of what happened just now," answered Smith. "You see, my brother didn't show up again, and he had no reason, that I knew, for not showing up again. He wrote to me once or twice from Ridge. He was going up in the mountains prospecting. Then I never heard from him again. I came West a month or two ago to see if I could trace him. They knew of him at the assay office, in Ridge, and he had registered a claim on Palliser Creek, up there. Then I got hold of Captain Moyes. He had met my brother in the hills, and thought he could find me a place he had been doing some work in. We visited the registered claim. He hadn't been there for a long time. Then we hunted over the hills where Captain Moyes knew he had been working last year. We found his camp, all right, and a bit of a tunnel. It looked as if he had intended to come back to it. Of course, a man might have a reason for cutting off from his family, and all old friends, a reason that his own people didn't know; but when we saw that camp, Captain Moyes and I made sure that my brother had intended coming back to it. Of course, men do go into the hills, and never come back; men have accidents as——"

"Plenty men have," said Moyes; "but, all the same——"

"All the same," went on Smith, "we argued from that camp that he intended to come back to it. He hadn't run away from anything, I thought. That camp let me know that it was worth while making inquiries for him. Captain Moyes suggested that he got his supplies from Flannigan, not from Spring Lake. This is so much nearer, you see. His last camp was just up there," and Smith waved a hand. Bill noticed that he looked white and tired.

"Anyhow, we rode down here this evening. We didn't see Flannigan——"

"Sleeping off his tanglefoot," put in Moyes.

"We had supper, and as there was nothing to do but checkers, we sat down to play. Flannigan evidently thought fit to get up for the evening, then, just half an hour ago. He came in to the bar, and—— Well, I never saw anything like it!"

"How's that?" said Bill, in a strained voice.

"Oh," answered Moyes, "he just stared at Mr. Smith, here, and then went crazy. That man was sodden with tanglefoot, only needed a shock to put him off his balance. He just started cackling: 'What you doing there? What you doing there—when I not only shot you, but buried you!' Up jumps Mr. Smith at that. I thought he was done for. Yes, sir"—he turned to Smith—"I thought you were done for when he grabbed under the bar. I knew that meant gun!"

"What happened?" Bill heard Conyers ask.

Smith inclined his head toward Moyes.

"We both jumped at him. Captain Moyes grabbed at his wrist——"

"Shot himself?" said Conyers.

Smith nodded.

"That's what!" answered Captain Moyes. "But what I want to know is why and how he killed your brother? And what did he mean about burying him?"

The Chinaman, now calmed down, was thinking of his own skin. He came a little nearer to the group.

"I tell you," he said. "Misa Flannig' he shoot him one night because this man he kill come in and eat suppah. I give him suppah. Misa Flannig' say, 'What you dlink?' This man he kill look at him, and say nothing at all. He look at him alle same he think Misa Flannig' lude to him. Misa Flannig' say, 'What you dlink?' again one time moah, moah lude, and this man say, 'Dlink nothin',' he say, 'when you look at me like that.' Misa Flannig' him clazy. He come round and say he bleak this man head. This man say he guess not bleak, and he jump up—all same you did. They fight. This man knock Misa Flannig' back against ba'. Misa Flannig' reach over for gun, and shoot him."

The Chinaman paused, and Captain Moyes spoke hard and keen.

"Why in thunder didn't you tell the marshal?" he asked. "You've been in Melica long enough to know that, eh?"

"Oh, I scale—I scale. Misa Flannig' say if I tell he say I shoot the man. He say he shoot me. He say if I try to go away any time he follow me. He give me money every month. I wait for Misa Flannig' die—go back China, eh?" and he smiled a sickly and terrified smile.

"That's scare, all right—to the limit," said Moyes. "Where did he bury this man you tell me about?"

"Oh, I not know."

"Come, now! Guess you helped him. Guessed he scared you to help him, too."

"Yes, he scale me. He made me help cally him up on mountainside—some way along, and throw him back from wagon road. He say: 'Now, if bymby somebody catchum they think somebody hold him up on wagon road and shoot!"

"Where was this, then?"

"Up on hill west," answered the Chinaman. "You no allest me! You no allest me!"

Moyes and Smith looked at each other.

"If he shows us, that's all, now, I suppose," said Smith, in a heavy voice. "I expect he was terrified. Anyhow, he didn't do it."

"I show you—I show you now. I take lamp and show you—not far, two

mile up, off the road, and in a place all same gulch."

Bill Davies wet his lips, and then looked at Conyers. Conyers did not seem to associate his experiences two miles up with this story at all.

"We'll go up in the morning," said Captain Moyes.

"I'll show you—and you not have me allest?" whined the chink.

They turned from him, thoughtful.

"I don't want to sleep here to-night," said Moyes. "How about sleeping at you fellows' camp?"

"We ain't camped together," said Billy. "You come to my camp. You come over, too, Conyers. You go and fetch your blankets. We'll all camp together." There was a note of something like somber hilarity in his voice.

He was not "scaled," but this business was different from anything that had ever happened in his life. To Jim Conyers there might seem no association between that disposal of the murdered man and the funk of the horses up there; but to him there was. And he was further silenced over the way in which the whole thing had come out.

He was a quiet man that night, pondering two themes: First, the way the horses felt and the way he had felt up at the bend, that very night; second, the way that checkerboard has been mixed up in the affair. Had he, as well as a keen sense to the presence of that body up there, also the gift of second-sight? Did he, subconsciously, every time he saw that checkerboard, have a knowledge that through it would come the exposal? It was all too deep for him. But he felt, assuredly, that he had got mixed up not superficially, but deeply, with a side of things that could not be seen, touched, bumped into.

In the morning, he did not go up with Moyes and Smith to "look see" with the Chinaman. He waited at the meadow till they and Conyers returned. And then he did not need to ask. He read it on their faces. Only when he climbed to his seat to pull out for Ridge, and Conyers gathered his reins to pull out for Spring Lake, did Bill say to Jim: "Was it at the place where the horses get scared?"

"Yes," said Conyers. "Just off the road there. There's a kind of gulch back a few yards, a sudden drop. There was nothing left—the coyotes had seen to that. Yes, sir, I guess the horses are wise to that crack there. Horses have a sense we don't have about some things, I guess. They're scared of getting off the wagon road and down that bit of precipice we can't see for bush. Never knew it was there myself."

Though Bill thought Conyers' explanation very lame, compared with his own, he did not think that Conyers was exactly fruitful soil for his nebulous theory, so he left it unspoken. But he took special note that the next time he passed the bend the horses seemed hardly to know they had arrived at the spot of their terrors. They fidgeted a little, but went on easily; and on the way back, a day or two after still, they passed, unheeding, with no shivers, no veerings at all, no signs of funk.

OUT OF THE ROLLING MILL

AN employee of a rolling mill while on his vacation fell in love with a handsome German girl. Upon his return to work, he went to Mr. Carnegie and asked for some more time off to get married.

Mr. Carnegie seemed much interested. "Tell me about her," he said. "Is she short or is she tall, slender, willowy?"

"Well, Mr. Carnegie," was the answer, "all I can say is that if I'd had the rolling of her, I'd have given her two or three more passes."

A Venture in Private Preserves

By Raymond S. Spears

Author of "Bargain Day in the Cordova," "Meanness in the Mountains," Etc.

A tussle between the woodsmen and a graduate of Wall Street who was a combination of practical sentiment and opportunism. The Wall Street man's attorney insisted that the backwoodsmen needed a lesson—which may be true enough, but it doesn't do to handle them too roughly

THE best hunting and the best fishing in the Big Woods was up the creek from Seaberry Settlement on what is known as the Fiddlebutt Patent. This patent, or land grant, had been made by the State to a late comer at the wilderness crib, back in 1835 or thereabouts, but Timothy Butt had widely advertised his land grant as "agricultural lands," with the result that he had sold many thousands of the original sixty thousand acres. The price he received from the purchasers more than paid him for the time, trouble, and five hundred dollars which he had put into the task of persuading the State legislature and the governor to reward his political and financial sagacity and faithfulness by giving him the three score thousand acres of what were at that time virgin timberlands, and in the selling of which he had reserved spruce and pine rights.

Butt established a sawmill at the settlement where he cut up all the timber he could find up the creek, and in due course he moved down to the State capital, where his wealth, his beautiful daughter, and his political sagacity established his family so well in society that his son afterward became congressman and his grandson president of the light and power company of sixty years later.

In the meanwhile, the Fiddlebutt Patent, after many changes and adventures, finally fell, as cut-over lands, on account of unpaid taxes, into the hands of the State as part of the Mountain Park, and there it remained till James Cobbleman discovered Purling Stream and the Rippling Ponds, away up in the heart of the Big Woods, and far within Fiddlebutt Patent.

James Cobbleman had invested in Light and Power when he was an innocent grist miller's son, just arrived in the metropolis, with his fortune of twenty dollars in his leather wallet, and looking for a job in Wall Street. He had landed as messenger boy in a bucket shop on New Street, Wall Street's black-sheep brother, and there learned his business.

His knowledge of toll bins, yellow corn, buckwheat, and other commonplaces in a little ten-horse-power grist mill was to the great advantage of James Cobbleman, for he was adaptable within limits. For instance, he speculated in wheat, corn, and oats, and thus he obtained, while still a very callow youth in appearance, several thousand dollars. Then, with his knowledge of water power acquired while listening to the clink-clank of the big overshot wheel in his father's mill, he plunged on Light and Power when stock was selling all the way from three-eighths to three-fourths, and ac-

quired ten thousand shares of a par value of one hundred dollars, which even insiders regarded as the joke of the day.

But the election of Butt to the presidency of Light and Power was, in fact, a masterpiece of finance. No one had ever forgotten the tradition that Congressman Butt was a pretty shrewd politician. James Cobbleman saw his Light and Power go to eleven, and he sold out. Ten thousand shares dumped on the market all at once alarmed a number of people, and James Cobbleman bought in thirty thousand shares and had nearly two thousand dollars left for investment purposes.

There was a streak of poetry in the soul of James Cobbleman. He had loved the sound of the overshot and the whirring burs. Light and Power, meaning water power and electric light, had come to mean more than mere stock gambling to him. The problem of water power was for him a great joy, a great opportunity, and thus, before any one knew it, James Cobbleman owned fifty-three per cent of the outstanding stock of Light and Power.

That happened when the State legislature was listening to the pleas of Timothy Butt, third, who pictured the great future for industry in the State if the legislature would only see the great opportunity they had for developing the latent water powers.

Overnight the legislature dreamed a dream of lasting fame for commercial statesmanship, like that enjoyed by the signers of the Declaration, and James Cobbleman awakened to the discovery that his sentiment and speculation had become a pampered public enterprise of such proportions as he had not dreamed.

His first act was to purchase the mill which his father had run so many years, and over this mill he erected a magnificent concrete-and-glass structure to preserve the old overshot, the old, unpainted shingles and boards from the elements which had made them picturesque. He scraped out the old, muddy mill pond and lined it with concrete and planted concrete tubs on the bottom with Australian lily pads in them, and on the hill overlooking the scene he built a summer cottage, and his breakfast table on The Heights in Brooklyn was served with buckwheat pancakes all winter long, made of flour ground in the old mill, in the old, slow burs—the only toil they now ever had to perform, except for the slow grinding of a few bushels of yellow corn for johnnycake and fried cornmeal mush.

Thus James Cobbleman was a creature of practical sentiment and opportunism. When he had arrived at a junior partnership in the New Street bucket shop, known to his biographers as a "brokerage business," he came to Seaberry Settlement seeking a little modest woods sport. He came up into the Big Woods to catch brook trout, shoot deer from the bow of a skiff at night, and otherwise amuse himself during his vacation.

Year after year he came to Seaberry, and little by little he ventured deeper into the woods. At first he hired Lem Lawson as his guide, and then, prosperity increasing, he took Bill Borson into the woods with him. These two men were his faithful servitors. They took him where the fish were largest and the deer easiest to kill. They initiated him into the mysteries of the salt lick, the bale-wire snare, and the use of a young mouse as bait for a four-pound brook trout.

Lem Lawson was a long, lank woodsman, with a large nose, a freckled face, and a blue eye. He earned his three dollars and fifty cents a day guiding, and he trapped his five hundred dollars' worth of fur a winter. Once he accepted James Cobbleman's cordial invitation to come down to New York and visit him.

Lem went. Cobbleman, now the head

of a firm that rented a suite of thousand-dollar rooms from itself in the building that it owned, was sincerely glad to have Lem come down to visit him. He not only tried to give Lem the time of his life; he called in some of his friends to help entertain the simple-hearted backwoodsman.

Lem would never tell what he did or what happened, but his friends in the Settlement saw "a piece" in the weekly newspaper saying that a man named Lem Lawson, from the Big Woods, had gone on a spree in New York, and that four policemen and several prominent New York clubmen had hardly been able to restrain him.

There were pale yellow scars on Lem's face when he returned from New York, and he wore a new suit of clothes of such good quality that he wore them for more than five years, steady, every day, winter and summer. Lem admitted that the clothes had been made to order for him at Cobbleman's expense, but that was all he would admit beyond saying that New York was darned hard on a man's clothes.

Lem, from that time onward, always regarded James Cobbleman with covert but keen suspicion. Little by little Bill Borson became Cobbleman's favorite guide. Borson was not of Lawson's stalwart mental mold. The time came when Lawson, having been elected road commissioner and a member of the county board of supervisors, ceased going into the woods with Cobbleman. In other words, Lem had gone into politics.

Cobbleman year after year went up Purling Stream to Rippling Ponds, where he had Bill Borson build him a log camp and supply it with boats, utensils, spring cots, and other fixings. He was little disturbed by other woods roamers because the ponds and stream were so far back in the woods that other hunters and fishermen were satisfied with what they found nearer the clearings.

But one day, on his way out from Rippling Ponds, Cobbleman met a gang of men and a tote wagon heading up Purling Stream. He stopped casually to talk to the men and discovered that they were going to build a log camp up the stream at the first stillwater, and that they were going to "log the whole danged valley."

Cobbleman, long schooled in keeping his mouth shut, made no comment. Casually, an hour or two later, he asked Borson who owned that part of the country.

"Why, this is all State land up here," Borson answered. "That's old Dave Naben's gang. He's the biggest timber thief that ever walked up in this country."

"Then he doesn't own the woods up Purling Stream?"

"Own the timber up there! Huh! He doesn't even own the horses on that wagon. He dassent. If he did, some of them he owes would sure levy onto it. But he's in politics. That's why they leave him alone."

"I see," Cobbleman nodded. "This looks like a bear track here——"

"By ginger, it is, and an old whale, too! Come this fall, an' we'll set a trap fer him!" Borson exclaimed, forgetting the timber business.

Not so with Cobbleman. Three days later his power-rights attorney came up to Tisbits, the county seat, and selected Poul, Vetch & Kipe to do certain land business for a client in the metropolis. Poul, Vetch & Kipe had talked among themselves ever since they organized what they would do if a "big fellow" ever came along and gave them a case.

They were all ready for Cobbleman's business, and they knew exactly what to do. In three days they had located the owners of certain outstanding property rights in the Fiddlebutt Patent.

They bought them in. Then they ransacked the State tax-sale lists for sixty years and obtained in that way more rights and quitclaims and comptrollers' deeds of sale.

They located the old and neglected deeds which had been transferred by the original Butt to a sawmill owner, who had in turn sold them to a speculator, who had died and left them to his widow who had one daughter who sold the old paper for one hundred dollars because, as the shrewd attorneys assured her, it was worth no more, since the lands had long since been sold for taxes. It would be vain to tell how these bright young attorneys signed up scattered heirs from Boston to Liverpool, and from Düsseldorf to New South Wales.

In the State comptroller's office there was a man of convivial habits and expiring term of office. To him the young attorneys went and gave a supper. They gave him a farewell party, for this was on the last night but one before his term expired. During the course of the dinner, the comptroller signed a statement saying that all the State claims in the Fiddlebutt Patent were of no value, and that they were null and void, in view of the fact that certain heirs and assigns had proved to him in person that their claims were right and just, and that great harm would be done if the State continued to claim these properties which the State had been holding ever since 1870.

Poul carried the result of the legal firm's efforts to Cobbleman's office. Poul placed upon the great magnate's desk five folio volumes of papers, maps, and documents.

"There, Mr. Cobbleman," the attorney said, "are the papers in the matter of the Fiddlebutt Patent. With regard to Lots Nos. 6, 9, 11, 23, and 39 there is some question of hardly any import. We traced Robert Venner into Chilcoot Pass, where he unquestionably died in an avalanche, without heirs, which releases No. 6; in the matter of No. 23, there is some question as to whether the bones of a man beside the Borax Trail in Death Valley really belonged to the sole remaining heir of Lot No. 9——"

"How much?" Cobbleman asked abruptly.

"Nine cents an acre, for sixty thousand acres——"

"What! Nine cents?"

"Yes, exactly."

"But, good Lord——"

"It's worth five dollars an acre, of course; that's what the State is assessing those lands at, but the State comptroller——"

"Never mind! Never mind! I'm honest—I never did a crooked thing in my life! I don't want to know a danged thing about this!" Cobbleman hastened to exclaim. "I'll draw you a check. Make your fee large enough, for God's sake! I want men like you on my side."

The modest fee of the law firm amounted only to enough to make the cost of almost virgin Big Woods timber twelve cents an acre, or seven thousand two hundred dollars for sixty thousand acres of forest land. Before the attorney left the office on Wall Street, he had received his instructions, and within forty-eight hours thereafter, old Dave Naben came trembling into the office of Poul, Vetch & Kipe.

"I hope to die," he cried, "I thought all that land up Purling Stream was State land. You know, I ain't never bothered none to amount to anything with private lands. That ain't safe, an' I know it. Say, I've always been a friend of you fellers. Can't you make it right with Mr. Cobbleman? 'F I'd 'a' knowed he had any claim onto that land, I'd 'a' seen myself parb'iled in Hades 'fore I'd——"

"How many trees have you cut?" Kipe asked sharply.

"They ain't but eight thousand; you see, I hadn't got started rightly. I've

jest be'n cuttin' a road up through and gittin' ready for next year. Say, you'll put in a good word for me, won't you?"

"This stealing trees from the private park of a very wealthy man is exceedingly serious," Kipe answered gravely. "The facts will be placed before him, however. I believe that personally he is a very kindly man."

This was cold comfort, but after some weeks of anxiety old Dave was elated to learn that Cobbleman was inclined to be lenient. Then Cobbleman, on further consideration, decided not to press the charges against the logger, provided he cleared up the muss he had made and did not remove the logs.

Cobbleman's private park was a reality, and he thought of planning a fine "camp" for a site on the Rippling Ponds, and other little camps here and there through the woods.

"It'll cost five or six thousand to run it," he thought to himself, "but I guess I can stand the shot now."

Bill Borson had already been engaged as park superintendent, and he had hired four wardens to keep Fiddlebutt Patent clear of trespassers, and their first real capture was Lem Lawson, who had run a trap line up the creek, up Purling Stream, to Rippling Ponds. They caught Lem dead to rights, too, for when they arrived at the camp with a State game warden, Lem was cutting a slice off a frozen haunch of venison.

Very much elated, for he was long an enemy of Lem, Bill Borson took him right down to the county seat, where he was arraigned before Justice of Peace Kipe, Attorney Kipe's father, and fined one hundred dollars for killing a deer out of season, thirty-eight dollars for cutting trees on the land, and twenty-five dollars for trespass.

"I guess that's taught you a lesson," Borson remarked, in an undertone, as Lem started to leave the little courtroom; and fifteen minutes later Lem paid an additional fine of ten dollars for disturbing the peace and contempt of court.

"Those backwoodsmen need a lesson!" Attorney Poul remarked to the spectators. "They're ignorant, and you got to hit 'em hard."

"There's others beside woodsmen needs a lesson," a quiet young man suggested. "I know those woodsmen, and it don't do to handle them too rough."

"Poo-o!" Poul grunted, as he turned away.

There were two or three other arrests on the Fiddlebutt Patent down to the time of lake fishing, early in May, but by the time rift fishing came in those deep woods, in early June, there was hardly a footprint upon the old roads except where the park wardens made their way up and down the trails.

Thus, when James Cobbleman came up to enjoy his new purchase, he found the vast tract silent and deserted. He could look about him and feel assured that no one would break in upon his isolation and contented hermitage. Hunters, fishermen, campers would not come to disturb him in his retreat, and Borson kept himself and his wardens far in the background, so that the man could have the rest and enjoy the peace that he craved.

On his way out, as he came down to the clearing above Seaberry Settlement, Cobbleman met a surveyor and stake drivers. Lem Lawson stood beside the instrument, and when the preserve owner came along, Lem turned his head away, but Cobbleman would not stand for that.

"What's the matter with you, Lem? What's your grouch? Of course, I had you fined for trespass, killing deer, and cutting timber—but why shouldn't I, the way you've scowled around and played the baby act? Come, now, forget it! What are you doing?"

Lem hesitated for the fraction of a second. Lem was a politician, and

when he turned there was a smile on his face as he answered:

"We're surveying out a road up the creek a ways——"

"Is that so? Well, that's good! There ought to be a road up the creek; it'll save lots of work—lots of it! I'm a taxpayer here in this—this town——"

"Town?"

"That's it—town. Probably the heaviest taxpayer you've got. I'm glad to pay my share of the taxes—I am, indeed! We need roads."

"I'm sure glad you like the idea," Lem answered. "I didn't know——"

"Now, look here, Lem. I'm public-spirited. Go ahead with the road. And, say, come down to New York to see me when you get the road done, will you? I can't get up before next spring—got to go down to the Amazon River and look into the falls down there. May start a power plant down there. But you come down in February, eh?"

So Cobbleman parted from Lem in the best of spirits, and Lem looked after him till he was out of sight down the road. Lem, too, smiled.

"You heard what he said about being glad to have a road built up the creek and being glad to pay his share of the taxes?" Lem asked the surveyor.

"That I did," the man answered, jotting down a figure or two in his book. The surveyor was not a politician.

"Well, you go on with the line up the old road; I'll catch up with you."

Lem returned home, and arrived in Seaberry Settlement just as the dust of Cobbleman's rig was settling in the bend of the road below the dead and decaying old logging town. Lem spent a busy afternoon, writing letters on his printed stationery, and when he drove up after the surveyor that afternoon, late, he was tired with so much head-work.

However, Lem was contented. Within a week his mail had increased considerably in size, and two weeks later a telephone message came from Feltny, on the railroad twenty miles away that five carloads of road machinery had arrived there. Lem came down the following day with twenty-two teams of horses and one hundred and sixty-eight men, including a timekeeper and a clerk.

"Gee! Look at those hicks!" somebody exclaimed. "Must be the whole danged Seaberry Settlement crowd."

"The Seaberry Settlement crowd!" a bystander snorted. "That's all of Seaberry Settlement, Polunk, and Debresse, too! That's the whole town of Seaberry, if I know anything about that part of the woods!"

Lem was all business; a road roller was run down a trestle and the road-machinery expert fired its boiler. A big stone crusher, a stone screen, and a big crude-oil engine were run down to the level of the roads.

The strangest procession ever seen in the Big Woods headed up the creek, with the road roller towing the stone hopper, and horses snorting and straining at the tugs to haul their allotted loads toward the town of Seaberry, the joke of the backwoods towns.

"Progress has sure hit you fellers, Lem," suggested Town Clerk Balwick, of Dairy Town. "Next we know you'll have iron bridges up there, with concrete abutments."

"Eh?" Lem remarked, and stared at the town clerk, adding: "That's so! I hadn't thought a danged thing about bridges!"

He left his hauling gang in charge of the foreman he had appointed, and returned to Feltny. There he used the long-distance telephone.

It took four days for the gang to move the road machinery up to the little brook that marked the town line of Seaberry. There Lem called a halt. The road-machinery experts set up the stone crusher and showed the woods-

men how to use road scrapers and dynamite.

In a straight, purplish-brown line there appeared a gash through the scattered timber and mossy clearings of the town of Seaberry. It extended up the creek valley, with long sweeps over long ridges and great, beautiful curves around the foot of mountain and valley bend.

From six towns around came hundreds of loggers to swamp the timber out of the way, to uproot stumps, and to hoist glacial bowlders with shattering charges of dynamite.

Behind the swampers came the ditchers, and then the levelers, and after them came the great loads of blue-gray granite, sparkling with diamondlike gleams as the sunlight struck the mica flakes.

Only the far boom of the blasting reached the outside world. Now and then a road maker, coming down to the outer world, would tell about the work going on up in the town of Seaberry; but nobody believed the wild tales that were rumored around. The idea of Seaberry improving its roads was too good a joke even for those who saw carloads of cement, bridge iron, and road machinery that still came in to Feltny at frequent intervals, addressed to Lem Lawson, road commissioner.

Lem worked the machinery night and day, in eight-hour shifts. He had a little dynamo for lights brought up, and started it going by a splash-dam flume and mill wheel that would have delighted James Cobbleman for its primitive arrangement and effective simplicity.

They laid the road up into the woods at the rate of two miles a week. They sent one fork up Purling Stream Trail, and another up the creek. They built in all thirty miles of road, and when Lem and his clerk went through the bills and papers, he was proud to see that the books all balanced and all coincided. There wasn't a cent of graft in the whole business, and every man had done a day's labor, and every team had worked its full stint.

"Thar!" Lem said. "That job's done. Now for the board of supervisors!"

Lem grinned as he thought upon the subject. He had paid the men off as late as possible in the season. He had signed them up for season contracts for labor and for horses. Only six or seven thousand dollars in orders came down into the banks of the valley for discounting, and, as they were scattered through six or eight banks, there was no excitement in financial or political quarters, even though rumors had been running around.

Lem had signed contracts for the town of Seaberry for road machinery and bridge work and other articles necessary for repairs. They were payable upon presentation to the board of supervisors for warrants.

The board of supervisors met in Willet, the county seat, on December 8th. Two days before the board met, gentlemen of excellent appearance and garb began to put up at the hotel. They made inquiries as to the whereabouts of the board of supervisors' chambers. They met the supervisors as they came to town, when they learned of one anothers' presence on the scene. There were upward of twenty-six representatives of firms in various parts of the country crowded behind the rail on the day in the chambers, and every bank in the valley had a representative present to ask if the credit of the town of Seaberry would stand the strain.

"Why, yes," the supervisors snorted. "They've any quantity of wild lands up there to tax! Sure it's all right! What's Lem been up to now? I hear he's done a bit of road fixing up there."

"Yes, by gad, he has!" the banker muttered, wiping his forehead. "We've

got nine thousand in orders discounted on Seaberry."

"What!" a supervisor gasped. "Nine thousand! I hadn't——"

Being a politician, this supervisor passed the word around to the other supervisors not to do any talking. It was a warning sped just in time. The supervisors shut their mouths as tight as steel traps. Among themselves they whispered till the annual meeting was called to order. Lem was the only one who did no whispering. When the roll was called, he answered; and when the chairman began to read out the list of committee appointees, Lem begged to be excused from the committee on audits, but remarked that he would like to swap places with some member of the roads and bridge committee.

"I expect roads and bridges will be interesting," he added naïvely, as he took his seat.

Immediately after the committee appointments were announced, the board went into executive session, and all the spectators howled, but they had to leave the room nevertheless. Then Lem told the board that he had made some emergency road repairs, and that he had found it necessary to extend certain of his roads into the woods, in order to enable his constituents to enjoy the freedom of the wilderness.

Supervisors who had had experiences with private parks understood the situation exactly. On motion of one of the woods supervisors, Mr. Lem Lawson's books were immediately taken under consideration by the board, acting as a committee of audits as a whole.

"How much is them bills?" the supervisor from Dairy Town asked.

"Three hundred sixty-four thousand, seven hundred an' 'leven dollars an' forty-nine cents," Lem answered glibly.

"Jerusalem crickets!" three voices cried, and other supervisors seized their desks or chairs.

"It's more'n the dad-blasted town's assessed at!" somebody exclaimed.

"No, sir!" Lem remonstrated. "We got more'n that in wild lands—State an'—an' private preserves."

Several laughed cacklingly, and the supervisor from Dairy Town, as was his privilege, took the floor.

"I move the bills of the town of Seaberry be accepted, placed in audit, and assessed against the taxable property in that town. That's all the bills you got this year, ain't it, Lem?"

"We ain't done nothin' else up there," Lem replied. "We ain't got a single poor account in town."

"What'll the tax rate be?" some one asked.

"I figured it at 98.63729 per cent," Lem answered. "That's all right, too."

"Gosh!" several exploded. "You'll all be sold out for taxes next comptroller's sale," one added.

"I hope so," Lem answered sincerely.

"Lem plays great politics," some one muttered. "He'd make a dandy county sheriff."

The tax collector of the town of Seaberry, according to law and the request formally made by James Cobbleman, mailed to that property holder his customary tax notice, which read:

SEABERRY SETTLEMENT.
Office of Tax Collector,
Town of Seaberry.

Twenty days from the above date, town taxes as follow will fall due, and can be paid at my office without fee:

School tax	$11.33
Cemetery tax	1.18
Road tax	295,911.87
Valuation	$300,000

Please remit, and oblige,

William Borson, Junior.

James Cobbleman, in due course, saw the simple postal card on which the collector had presented the town bill for taxes. When he read it, he thought at first that he was a victim of an optical illusion; but, seeing the reality, he seized the telephone and demanded to

be connected with Poul, Vetch & Kipe, three hundred miles distant.

"What's that mean?" he asked his attorneys, and Vetch explained the situation.

"Supervisor Lawson, under the good-roads code, took advantage of a loophole in the law and repaired the roads in his town at the rate of about ten thousand dollars a mile," Vetch said.

"But I won't pay no such tax as that!" Cobbleman exploded.

"Then the property will be sold for taxes, according to the law," Vetch explained.

"Let 'em, and be dad-blasted to them!" Cobbleman swore. "What are you fellows doing up there, letting them pull that game off on me? How many times can they do that?"

"Well, according to the constitution of——"

"Oh, Hades! Say, you fellows send your bill—I've quit up there, see? I ain't going to feed all the grafters——"

"Sir!"

It was with great satisfaction that Supervisor Lem Lawson received from the comptroller the subsequent notice of tax sales for the tax periods of five years.

One line appeared in this document, following a long list of lots, sections, quarters, and other land designations, terminating with:

All of the town of Seaberry, sixty-seven thousand acres, excepting thirty-three thousand acres, State lands.

"Say, Lem," the postmaster hailed, after a deep silence, "I hear they wants you to be sheriff down below. What is there to it?"

"Oh, I'm satisfied," Lem answered carelessly. "If the boys leave me be supervisor and road commissioner, I ain't got no kick comin'!"

FREDERICK BECHDOLT'S new novel, telling the adventures of a man whose job is to "bring in an oil well" and who is opposed by a gang of men quick on the trigger and with a low moral code, will appear in the next issue. The story is entitled

"FORTY MILES FROM NOWHERE"

A long novel, but it will be published complete in the POPULAR on the stands two weeks hence, AUGUST 7th.

The Far and Lonely Hill

By H. H. Knibbs

OVER on the Panamint we rode the range together,
  Three as lively buckaroos as ever sat a hoss;
Playin' jokes and singin' songs, in every kind of weather,
  And anything we tackled, it sure had to come across.

"Sage a-blinkin' in the rain; sun just breakin' cover;
  Tail to wind, the ponies standin' thoughtfullike and still;
While across the evenin' comes the cheepin' of the plover
  Hidin' in the shadows of the far and lonely hill."

Funny, how we never saw that it was drawin' nearer;
  Edgin' closer every day—that lonely hill it came.
Wakin' in the sunshine, we could see it, big and clearer,
  But we kept a-ridin' and a-singin' just the same.

"Little owls a-lookin' back, solemnlike and blinkin';
  Sun just dancin' on the sand and burnin' out the grass.
Summer: 'round the water holes the crowdin' steers all drinkin',
  Just before we drift 'em to the range beyond the pass."

Seems we didn't sing so much—ropes they did the singin';
  Ponies' feet they played the tune; other riders told
All the yarns and played the jokes that set the laugh a-ringin'—
  Even then we didn't know that we was growin' old.

Mighty sudden then it came; each range knows the story—
  Millin' in a thunderstorm, hoss and rider down. . . .
White and still we found him where he took the trail to glory;
  Wondered if, for just plumb grit, they handed him his crown.

Two of us was left to ride the Panamint together;
  Settin' by the fire at night, thoughtfullike and still,
Gettin' so we noticed every little change of weather,
  And shiverin' in the shadow of that far and lonely hill.

Knew we had to climb it, knew the trail was mighty narrow,
  So we made a handshake on it that the next to go that way
Would kind of blaze the turns with our old brand, the Double Arrow,
  So the last one crossin' over wouldn't lose the trail, and stray.

Down below I see the herd, and dust a-rollin' nigher,
  In the morning, on the Panamint, where once we used to ride;
But my hoss is frettin' on the bit, we can't go any higher,
  So I reckon, if we got to go, it's down the other side.

"Sage a-blinkin' in the rain; sun just breakin' cover;
  All around, the ranges mighty peacefullike and still;
From the Other Valley comes the callin' of the plover,
  And I see the Double Arrow pointin' down the lonely hill."

The Girl From Nowhere

By George Woodruff Johnston

Author of "The Hidden Clew," Etc.

The clew to the mystery of the missing ruby lay in the answer to the question: Where was the Girl from Nowhere when the lights went out?

A HARD day at the hospital, followed by four acts of a tedious problem play, had made me very drowsy, and under the impression that the meek, white-faced man leaning over me was a patient who had entered my office unannounced, I came within an ace of shaking hands with him and offering him a chair. But luckily at this juncture by wife tapped my foot under the table, and, with a start, I reawoke to the fact that I was one of a large after-theater supper party at Mrs. Cartright's house in Washington Place, and discovered that the man I was preparing to greet so cordially was the butler, about to fill my glass with some of her famous Chambertin. I also became conscious that a woman was talking. It was Mrs. Letterby. I should have recognized that thin, high-pitched voice of hers anywhere—the voice of one who takes life hard and finds no humor in it:

"Yes, that's my daughter; that's Ethel, in blue, at the far end of the table, next to young Hapwood," she was saying proudly to all whom it might concern. "She came home last week—finished school, you know."

"Really! God bless my soul, how the kiddies do grow up!" This in a rumbling bass from John Limpet, a big man with a fat, impressive face, who was Mrs. Cartright's attorney, and, though a lion in the courtroom, was the most amiable of lambs in social life.

"Don't they!" sighed Mrs. Letterby. "I'm glad to have Ethel at home, of course; but"—lowering her tone a trifle—"she's brought a schoolmate with her who, I fear, is going to prove a great responsibility." At this she sighed again and glanced around in search of sympathy.

"Responsibility? Too bad! But none of us can shirk it, can we?" murmured Limpet consolingly, holding his glass of rich, red wine up to the light. "By the way," he added, "is the girl here—the one you speak of? I don't remember meeting her at the theater."

"Yes," Mrs. Letterby replied; "she's sitting on the other side of young Hapwood—the frail, dreamy-looking girl, with brown hair and eyes, dressed in white. Don't you think her rather pretty, Doctor Dannart?" she asked, turning to me.

"Very!" I was able to answer truthfully.

"Now, the curious thing about the girl is this," continued Mrs. Letterby, in a voice which traveled much farther than she thought it did: "When she was quite a child, a man, supposedly her father, brought her to Miss Ribbon's boarding school and left her there. That was in old Miss Lavinia Ribbon's day; her nieces have the school now. And the girl has been there ever since! She's never had any other home! She doesn't even know who she is or where she comes from!"

"You might call her The Girl from Nowhere, then," said Limpet good-humoredly.

"You might certainly," agreed Mrs. Letterby. "She calls herself Madge Carrick, however."

"What became of the man?" asked Bessington, who had become a father for the first time a month or two before, and was conscious of a rapidly awakening paternal instinct.

"Vanished!" exclaimed Mrs. Letterby melodramatically. "He kissed the child good-by, put on his hat, and walked out of the door into—oblivion!"

A subdued murmur of horror at thought of such unnatural conduct on the part of a male parent arose from among the mothers at our end of the table, which murmur gave way to lazy laughter when Tony Habersham said a bit too loudly to a neighbor: "What the deuce does a fellow want in oblivion with a hat, I should like to know?"

But Mrs. Letterby had her revenge. She immediately fixed Tony with her compelling eye, and incidentally our hostess, Mrs. Cartright, next to whom he sat.

"It's all Ethel's fault," she told them querulously; "I mean about asking the girl to stay with us and loading me with the responsibility of looking after her. That's the trouble with Ethel—she's *so* soft-hearted! It began with stray kittens and things she'd bring home, and now it's this stray girl. Why, I remember a blind beggar——"

But I had heard all this a hundred times before—the history of the plain and futile Ethel as recounted by her loving mother—and my attention wandered to Mrs. Cartright, who had temporarily detached herself from Mrs. Letterby, and, shivering slightly, was speaking over her shoulder to a footman.

Mrs. Cartright was a widow, wonderfully beautiful in an opulent, exotic way. Sleepy-eyed, indolent, and careless, she had a temper, all the same, which would flare up in spite of her at the most inopportune and unexpected moments. But her friends readily pardoned her and forgot; for they knew how kind, how forgiving, how absurdly generous she really was, and how the memory of these tropic outbursts mortified and distressed her.

She had finished with the footman now, and sat there listening indulgently to Mrs. Letterby's rigmarole, a great, pear-shaped ruby—the glorious "Sun of Ceylon"—hanging about her neck by a slender chain and burning on her breast.

"Did you hear, Doctor Dannart?" she asked, catching my eye and smiling slowly. "In a way there is something sad, almost tragic, in Mrs. Letterby's story of this girl."

"I should think so," the latter declared, motioning the butler not to fill her glass again. "The money that's been sent her twice a year from some unknown source answered well enough while she was at boarding school. But here comes the pinch: Madge Carrick has grown up with rich girls; she's learned their ways; but, now that she's done with school, she can't go on with the life they'll lead—not on the amount she's been getting heretofore. It's impossible!"

"Rather a bad fix Madge is in—not?" exclaimed Tony Habersham ingenuously. "Knew a girl like that once—went to the bowwows."

At this moment, Mrs. Cartright, with a nod, rose from the table. Those who had seen her signal followed her example; others who had not remained seated, and there was a brief period of confusion.

As I pushed back my chair, I observed that a maid had appeared from behind the screen in front of the pantry door, and—probably in response to an order given the footman—was approaching her mistress with the evident intent of laying about her shoulders a

silvery wisp of laee she carried in her hand.

And then, without an instant's warning, the lights went out and the room was plunged in total darkness.

"Look out, girls! We are going through a tunnel!" I heard some one say.

At this there was a general laugh, followed immediately by a shrill scream and a heavy fall.

II.

In a twinkling I awoke from the drowsy state in which I had just now found myself, and instinctively leaped to my feet and dragged aside the heavy eurtains of a tall French window a few steps back of my place. Thereupon the pallid sheen of the electric lamps in the street flooded the room and dimly illumined it. Turning quickly, I saw a blot of shadow on the floor, my fellow guests—some rising from the table, others clustered about it—and, farther off, a vague figure in rapid motion.

"Stop!" I cried. "Who are you, there? What are you after?"

The form halted, and a voice replied. "I'm the underfootman, sir. I was going to see what ails the lights."

"Stand still! I'll do it," said I. "Where is the switch?"

The lamps in brackets along the walls had not been burning—only the shaded electric candles on the table; but, following the man's directions, I soon found the buttons controlling each, and with two pushes the room was brilliantly illuminated.

"Hello!" ejaculated Bessington, leaning over the back of his chair. "Some one's hurt!"

I glanced down. It was the maid, stretched out flat on the floor and looking rather white. But as I stepped toward her, she sat up, arranged her skirts, and scrambled to her feet. I noticed that she still held the scarf which she had been about to lay on Mrs. Cartright's shoulders when the room went dark.

"Has anything happened, Doctor Dannatt?" eried Mrs. Letterby nervously.

For a moment we all gazed searchingly at one another, expecting to find we knew not what. Then some of the women began to chatter.

"Nothing's happened apparently," I reassured my questioner. "But some one screamed. Who was it?"

There was no reply.

"That's odd! I certainly heard a woman's shriek. Sure it wasn't you?" I asked the maid.

"Yes, sir—no, sir. I mean—I didn't scream," she answered confusedly.

"Not hurt?"

"No, sir."

"Did you trip in the dark? How did you come to be on the floor, anyhow?" I eyed the girl suspiciously.

"I fell, sir. It was like some one threw me down."

"I was probably responsible for that," young Hapwood explained. "When I heard the yell, I jumped up and knocked against somebody."

To me this seemed plausible. Hapwood had been sitting between Ethel Letterby and her friend, Madge Carrick, and when I first saw the maid she was lying directly behind his chair.

"That may be," I coneeded. "But how about the lamps? There was nothing wrong with the current. Some one switched them off. Who was it?"

As before, there was no answer to my question.

"Well," said I, annoyed, "it's plain the house is haunted. We hear a scream, but no one gave it; the lights are turned out, but no one did it."

As I finished speaking, I discovered that Mrs. Cartright, unobserved by the others, was beckoning to me. Her sleepy eyes were blazing now, and her indolent body was tense and quivering

with excitement as she stood alone by the great mantelpiece at the end of the room, one hand outstretched across her bosom.

"What's wrong?" I asked anxiously.

Without a word, she turned her back on the rest and let fall her hand.

The ruby was gone!

"Not that!" I exclaimed, amazed, horrified.

"Yes—an outrage—in my own house —at my own table!" she stammered, vainly trying to control herself. "None of the servants would have done this—they have been with me too long. And why rob me now by force? I am careless, forgetful; they have had, would have, a thousand better opportunities."

"By force? It was you, then, who screamed?" I queried.

"Yes. See this!"

Thereupon she unclasped her other hand, disclosing the chain by which the gem had hung; and I quickly noted that, fragile as they seemed, the links had held, and that it was the ring to which the ruby had been attached that had parted. Then she pointed to a red line at the back and left side of her neck where the chain, in response to the jerk upon it, had bruised the soft, white skin.

In a flash I turned about.

"Please stay where you are!" I begged. "Everybody, I mean! No one must leave the room! And kindly touch nothing, disturb nothing!" Then I called Limpet, and, while the rest looked on, puzzled, we three hurriedly discussed what was to be done.

At first Mrs. Cartright was wholly unmanageable. Her inflammable temper had got the best of her, and she would hear of nothing but the police. But finally our quieting influence prevailed, and, facing the others, who were still grouped about the table, I said calmly:

"I am sorry to say Mrs. Cartright has lost her ruby—'the Sun of Ceylon.' It disappeared when the lights went out. Now, this sort of thing is horribly awkward. It's embarrassing to her, to all of us. What shall we do about it?"

This statement of mine, as noncommittal as it was, effected an immediate change in the atmosphere of the room, and suspicion, like a blight, fell upon all within it. Mrs. Cartright's guests began to stare blankly about them and to draw ever so little away from one another. Mrs. Letterby sank into her chair, and, calling her daughter to her side, dampened a fine lace handkerchief with a few perfunctory tears. Tony Habersham, who knew—and was aware that every one else knew—what thin financial ice he was skating on and in what desperate need he stood of money in any form—lost some of his airy manner. Even the servants were influenced by the disclosure that had just been made. The butler, a pallid, middle-aged man, of meek and lowly look, was obviously unstrung, and fussed about, fumbling with wineglasses and rumpled napkins and other litter of the meal that still remained upon the table. The maid stood folding and unfolding Mrs. Cartright's scarf twenty times a minute as she kept an anxious eye fixed on the younger footman—he who had been so quick about the lights. Only the older of the two footmen retained a measure of his usual stolidity, yet seemed afraid to venture from the safe harbor he had found near the sideboard.

"Well? What's to be done?" I repeated. "It's getting late; or, rather, early, and we've got to clear this thing up somehow. What do you suggest, Bessington?"

"You can search me," replied the latter, with a shrug. "I haven't got the ruby."

"But not me," declared Mrs. Bessington, taking her husband literally. "I'd die before I'd submit to such an indignity!"

Mrs. Cartright frowned angrily and started to speak; but I broke in before

she had opportunity to make matters worse.

"Before we talk about searching anybody," I proposed, "let us give the person who took the gem a chance to return it. I'll switch off the lights, and hope, indeed, expect, that when I turn them on again, we'll find the ruby lying on the table. If we don't—well, it's Mrs. Cartright's property, and this is her house, and each of us, for his own sake and the sake of the rest, will have to do as she wishes—guests and servants alike."

After a moment's delay, I closed the window curtains, then pressed the two black electric buttons, and again the room was plunged in darkness. I slowly counted ten, and once more switched the current on.

There was no sign of the ruby!

Everybody was now collected about the table, peering down at it as if hypnotized. Only one person was seated—the girl, Madge Carrick. She occupied her former place; and, as my eyes roamed about to make quite sure whether or no the gem had been restored, I was immediately struck by her appearance. She sat leaning forward, staring in front of her, her head in her hands; and, as I watched, she shivered, started to go to Mrs. Letterby, changed her mind, and sank into her chair again, letting her arms fall hopelessly upon the table.

"A little pressure—just a *little* pressure, my dear young Miss from Nowhere!" I heard in a rumbling whisper over my shoulder; and, without turning around, I knew that Limpet, too, had seen the girl's discomfiture, and that with cold, immobile face and half-closed eyes he was regarding her as he did those witnesses whom he purposed presently to flay alive.

"Hold on, man!" I expostulated. "That may be fright, worry—anything on the poor young one's face—but it isn't guilt."

"If not guilt, it's guilty knowledge," he rejoined. "You can't fool me; I've seen too many of 'em. Where was she when the lights went out?"

"I give it up. I was pretty nearly asleep and hardly knew where I was myself."

"Hum! I'll find out, then."

Smiling in friendly fashion, he next spoke loud enough for all to hear.

"Doctor Dannart," said he, in an easy, natural voice, "predicted that this would turn out to be an embarrassing situation for all of us. And it would have proved so had it not been for Mrs. Cartright's good sense and her desire that none of her guests should be in the least annoyed by reason of her loss."

That was not according to the facts, but it got over; for now it was Limpet in his rôle of jury lawyer who was talking, one who could make you see black as white if he only tried hard enough.

"Happily the mystery of the missing ruby has been solved—or nearly solved," he continued affably. "But before we bid Mrs. Cartright good night, and she thanks you for all the patience and forbearance you have shown, I shall ask you to do one thing for me. Will each of you stand or sit in the place you occupied at the moment the room went dark? You would oblige me immensely by doing so."

III.

After some confusion and delay, the scene Limpet wished reënacted was set, and I observed that Mrs. Cartright, the central figure, having passed from the head almost to the foot of the table on her way to the door, had, at the moment indicated, reached a point opposite the place occupied by Ethel Letterby. She stood there now, the maid a little behind and a little to the right of her—directly back of young Hapwood's chair, it is true, but so far from it that he could not possibly have knocked

against her when she sprang up. Some of the guests had preceded Mrs. Cartright, others followed her, while most of them still hung about the table. Among the last was Mrs. Letterby; and behind her waited the butler, whose proffer of wine she had so recently declined. One footman hovered near the sideboard; his fellow, who had claimed, when I stopped him, to be on his way to the electric switch, could not remember exactly where he was when darkness overtook him.

"Remarkable thing!" said I to Limpet; "every one except the maid fights shy of the position at Mrs. Cartright's right hand, yet, to judge from the location of the bruises on her neck, the tug on the chain must have come from the right and a little in front of her."

Limpet paid no attention to my remark, and I saw that his eyes were still fixed on Madge Carrick. As I had already noted, whereas guests and servants alike had all shown more or less interest in the reproduction of the scene desired, she had sat there motionless in her place, nervous, brooding, obviously the prey of an ever-increasing distress of mind. Of course, the inevitable happened—her mere attitude made her conspicuous among the rest, and soon not only Limpet but all the others were regarding her dubiously. Conscious of this, she flushed, paled, and sprang up as if to rush from the room; but immediately sank back into her chair again.

If at this juncture some one had only moved, had only spoken, there is no telling what next she might have done. But the deadly silence and the spying of all those strange, unsympathetic eyes were too much for her, and she broke down. Limpet was getting help from every side in the "little pressure" he deemed so efficacious.

"Oh, why do you all stare at me like that?" she cried, in futile exasperation. "But I know. You think I took the ruby. I did not! I did *not!*" And then she covered her eyes and moaned helplessly.

Ethel Letterby pushed aside her mother's detaining hand and ran to the girl and put her arm about her; and this seemed to give her a little courage.

Then Limpet spoke. "My dear," he inquired suavely, "where were you when the lamps went out?"

"I was just getting up—getting up," she stammered, "to thank Mrs. Cartright. I had never been to the theater before. I had never been to a supper party before. I had never been away from school—anywhere! I was going to thank her—she had been so sweet—to ask me."

"That was very nice of you—very nice, indeed, my dear," he continued. "But it isn't too late now to show your appreciation. Just tell Mrs. Cartright where the ruby is. You couldn't thank her in any neater way. And you know where it is; I can read it in your face."

That face was twitching now, and tears filled the girl's eyes; but she neither moved nor spoke.

"Come! Won't you tell her?"

No answer.

"Why will you persist in being unkind to one who has been kind to you?" Limpet asked gently.

"It's because you would then suspect me all the more of having taken it," the tortured girl burst out. "Oh, is there no one who will help me?" she cried, looking wildly about her. "No! No! Except for Ethel, I haven't a friend here. I heard what was said of me just now—no father, no mother, left at a boarding school. 'The Girl from Nowhere,' you called me. Even Mrs. Letterby said I was a stray whom Ethel had picked up and brought into the house!"

The people, facing Madge Carrick in a wide-flung circle, were now growing restless and whispering together. Mrs. Cartright called Limpet to one side and seemed to remonstrate with him. But

he shook his head and returned to the table. It was clear that his fighting blood was up and that nothing could stop him.

"Miss Carrick," said he, "you have just stated that such and such things would happen *if* you disclosed where the jewel was. That proves my contention; for one cannot disclose what one does not know. And to hide an object that has been stolen is as bad——"

"Hold on, Limpet!" exclaimed young Hapwood, turning very red. "Don't you think you've badgered Miss Carrick enough? I do!"

"I am Mrs. Cartright's attorney, young man, and likewise her friend—the oldest here, perhaps," Limpet flashed back at him. "Just whom do you represent?"

"I don't represent anybody," the latter retorted hotly, squaring his broad shoulders and throwing up his handsome head; "but until Mrs. Cartright puts me out, there'll be no more of this underhand cross-examination!"

An awkward pause followed, and then Mrs. Letterby spoke.

"Oh, Madge," complained she petulantly, "do tell Mr. Limpet what he wants to know. I'm worn out. See, I believe it's daylight!"

Sure enough, when one of the menservants had pulled aside the curtains, dawn entered the room, looking doubly cold and gray against the yellow glow of the electric lights.

I glanced at the windows, then back toward the girl sitting at the table—and at that instant I saw the ruby!

At first I marveled how the jewel could have so long escaped detection with all those eyes gazing apparently directly at it. But then I realized how cleverly it had been concealed, and that my position in relation to the changed lighting of the room had alone made it visible to me.

At the same instant, also, I appreciated that Madge Carrick was right. In the beginning I had thought her attitude a foolish one; but now I understood that, whether guilty or not, silence was the only weapon she had wherewith to defend herself. For if she *had* stolen the ruby, to betray its whereabouts would be almost tantamount to a confession of her guilt; whereas, if she were innocent, the act of disclosure would merely serve to increase the suspicion and hostility already manifest toward herself, while it aided the actual thief to keep his or her identity hidden. There was no escape for her. She had been nailed fast to her place by the scrutiny of more than twenty pairs of eyes.

But now *I* was in a quandary. I alone shared her secret. What use should I make of it? I glanced at the girl, pale, haggard, desperate; at the futile Ethel trying to console her; at Hapwood, flaming, but helpless to aid her, and, last of all, at Limpet, preparing to take another twist with the thumbscrews; and, for good or ill, I set in action a plan which at that moment flashed into my mind.

"Mrs. Cartright," said I, with a decision and harshness which were purposely assumed, "don't you think this has gone far enough? Miss Carrick has had her opportunity and has turned it down. With your permission, I'll telephone for the police. They'll know how to handle her."

I crossed the room in the midst of a deathlike silence and took up the telephone instrument. But before I could unhook the receiver, I heard a voice—a feeble, shaking voice.

"Stop!" it quavered. "Don't telephone! I did it—I did it!"

I hugged myself at the quick success of my plan. If—as I had argued—Madge Carrick were guilty, my threat would merely end an intolerable situation. If innocent, the real thief would have the horror of her position so sharply brought home to him that

should but one spark of decency still burn within him, he would inevitably reveal himself. The last had happened. I dropped the telephone and turned to see who it was who spoke in tones so full of terror and remorse.

It was the butler!

"*You!*" cried Mrs. Cartright, amazed.

"Yes, madam; it was I, God help me!"

"But why? I don't understand. You have been with me for years. I always trusted you."

"I know, madam; but when I heard the lady and gentleman at table say——" He stopped and flung out his hands in despair. "No! No! Forget that, please! I shouldn't have said it. I would have bitten out my tongue before I said it."

The man was beside himself. His long, thin face was the color of chalk, and he clung to a chair for support.

"Do you dare tell me that you were led to attack and rob me through any remark made by my guests? That is absurd! It is worse; it is a falsehood!"

"Believe me, Mrs. Cartright, it's true. If you will grant me one last favor before they take me away—if you will only ask the ladies to step into the library—I will prove to you that it is true. I will confess everything—everything!"

But when all the others had gone from the room except Mrs. Cartright, Limpet, Hapwood, and myself, the butler stood there voiceless, a forlorn, dejected figure.

"Now out with your cock-and-bull story," commanded Limpet impatiently, "and let us have done with this thing for good and all!"

"I will—I will, sir!" the man whispered hoarsely, peering anxiously about him. "When I heard her say—when I heard Mrs. Letterby say that now that she had left school she could not keep up; and Mr. Habersham, he said—he told what often happens—what might happen to a young girl——"

"She? Had left school? Of whom are you talking?" demanded Mrs. Cartright.

"Of Madge Carrick, madam."

"*Miss* Madge Carrick, you mean. But what is she to you?"

"She is my daughter, Mrs. Cartright."

"*Your* daughter?"

"Yes. And I wanted her to be like her mother was who died when Madge was a little thing, not like me—sunk, sunk in the struggle of life to what I am. You will never believe me, but I was once—— Never mind; it's no odds what I once was. The world has been too much for me—that's all—too much! But for her sake I fought on. I have pinched myself to the bone for her. I hid myself from her, I changed my name that she might have her chance—that she might not be dragged down with me. I would gladly have died for her. And the thought that, after all, I had failed, that now she needed more than I could possibly give her, and the danger Mr. Habersham spoke of—it made me crazy, Mrs. Cartright; the temptation was too much for me, and I turned out the lights and snatched the ruby."

He stopped for a moment to wipe away the beaded sweat on his forehead, and then went on dejectedly:

"And now my hopes, my foolish hopes have all come to nothing. I am done for. But, whatever happens, I beg you, Mrs. Cartright, I implore all of you to keep my secret! Do that much, not for me, but for her! That is all I ask—let her have her chance—let her have her chance!"

"But the jewel? Where is it?" inquired Limpet.

With a shudder, the butler went to the table and out of a glass of the ruby-colored wine standing at his daughter's place—where the crossing of the lights

from lamps and windows had made it visible to her and to me—he lifted the gem, wiped it patiently upon a napkin, and handed it to his mistress. And then he set about clearing the table, quite automatically, the force of year-long habit surviving even the stunning blow he had received.

"When did you hide it there?" I asked him.

The man gazed at me dully. "When you turned out the lights, sir," said he, "and I suspected that we would all be searched, I was worse frightened than ever. Then suddenly I thought of the wine, and I dropped the ruby into a full glass which stood before my daughter. I had watched her—had seen that she drank nothing—and felt sure it would be safe there until I could take it out later on."

"And it was you who knocked the maid down?"

"Accidentally, sir. The room was dark; she stepped in my way."

"Do you hear that, Hapwood?"

The young man nodded and left the room.

"That'll do!" said Limpet. "Now, Dannart, you can call the police."

"No!" declared Mrs. Cartright impulsively. "This has been enough of a tragedy already!"

"What!" exclaimed Limpet. "You'd let the man off? Impossible!"

Mrs. Cartright flushed and her eyes gleamed.

"Remember," said she, "that *I* was the person injured, and the only one! My heart tells me to forgive. But if I punish, it shall be in a way that will affect this man alone. And all of us who have heard this pitiful story must do our utmost to forget it. Whatever may have happened—to-night or in the past—the girl *shall* have her chance!"

And then her expression changed. She smiled gently, and, laying one hand lightly on Limpet's arm and one on mine, she said: "But see! We need not trouble ourselves. It has already come to her."

She was right. In the hall beyond stood The Girl from Nowhere, and, helping her into her wrap, was young Hapwood, on whose handsome face there shone that look of youth and hope which laughs at difficulties and conventions—at everything, in fact, but love!

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"How do you plow so steep a field?" asked the author.

"Don't plow it," said the farmer. "When the spring thaws come, the rocks rolling down the hill tear up the soil so that we can plant corn."

"And how do you plant it?" asked Mr. Bacheller.

The farmer said he didn't plant it, really. He stood in his back door and shot the seed in with a shotgun.

"Is that the truth?" asked Bacheller.

"Shucks!" said the farmer, disgusted. "That's conversation."

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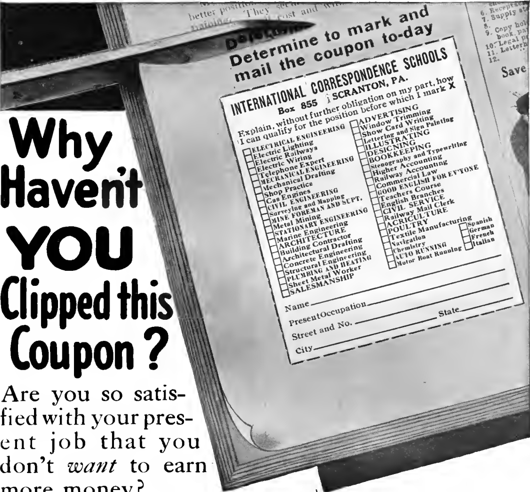

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