PAST MASTERS 161

Sheridan Le Fanu
Rafael Sabatini
E. F. Benson
C. S. Montanye
Bertram Atkey
J. S. Fletcher
J. Allan Dunn
William Merriam Rouse

and more

PAST MASTERS 161

Produced and Edited by Terry Walker from short stories in magazines, newspapers and other sources, and all in the Life + 70 years public domain.

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1: The Bus-Conductor

E. F. Benson

1867-1940

The Pall Mall Magazine, Dec 1906

MY friend, Hugh Grainger, and I had just returned from a two days' visit in the country, where we had been staying in a house of sinister repute which was supposed to be haunted by ghosts of a peculiarly fearsome and truculent sort. The house itself was all that such a house should be, Jacobean and oak-panelled, with long dark passages and high vaulted rooms. It stood, also, very remote, and was encompassed by a wood of sombre pines that muttered and whispered in the dark, and all the time that we were there a south-westerly gale with torrents of scolding rain had prevailed, so that by day and night weird voices moaned and fluted in the chimneys, a company of uneasy spirits held colloquy among the trees, and sudden tattoes and tappings beckoned from the window-panes. But in spite of these surroundings, which were sufficient in themselves, one would almost say, to spontaneously generate occult phenomena, nothing of any description had occurred. I am bound to add, also, that my own state of mind was peculiarly well adapted to receive or even to invent the sights and sounds we had gone to seek, for I was, I confess, during the whole time that we were there, in a state of abject apprehension, and lay awake both nights through hours of terrified unrest, afraid of the dark, yet more afraid of what a lighted candle might show me.

Hugh Grainger, on the evening after our return to town, had dined with me, and after dinner our conversation, as was natural, soon came back to these entrancing topics.

"But why you go ghost-seeking I cannot imagine," he said, "because your teeth were chattering and your eyes starting out of your head all the time you were there, from sheer fright. Or do you like being frightened?"

Hugh, though generally intelligent, is dense in certain ways; this is one of them.

"Why, of course, I like being frightened," I said. "I want to be made to creep and creep and creep. Fear is the most absorbing and luxurious of emotions. One forgets all else if one is afraid."

"Well, the fact that neither of us saw anything," he said, "confirms what I have always believed."

"And what have you always believed?"

"That these phenomena are purely objective, not subjective, and that one's state of mind has nothing to do with the perception that perceives them, nor have circumstances or surroundings anything to do with them either. Look at Osburton. It has had the reputation of being a haunted house for years, and

it certainly has all the accessories of one. Look at yourself, too, with all your nerves on edge, afraid to look round or light a candle for fear of seeing something! Surely there was the right man in the right place then, if ghosts are subjective."

He got up and lit a cigarette, and looking at him— Hugh is about six feet high, and as broad as he is long— I felt a retort on my lips, for I could not help my mind going back to a certain period in his life, when, from some cause which, as far as I knew, he had never told anybody, he had become a mere quivering mass of disordered nerves. Oddly enough, at the same moment and for the first time, he began, to speak of it himself.

"You may reply that it was not worth my while to go either," he said, "because I was so clearly the wrong man in the wrong place. But I wasn't. You for all your apprehensions and expectancy have never seen a ghost. But I have, though I am the last person in the world you would have thought likely to do so, and, though my nerves are steady enough again now, it knocked me all to bits."

He sat down again in his chair.

"No doubt you remember my going to bits," he said, "and since I believe that I am sound again now, I should rather like to tell you about it. But before I couldn't; I couldn't speak of it at all to anybody. Yet there ought to have been nothing frightening about it; what I saw was certainly a most useful and friendly ghost. But it came from the shaded side of things; it looked suddenly out of the night and the mystery with which life is surrounded."

"I want first to tell you quite shortly my theory about ghost-seeing," he continued, "and I can explain it best by a simile, an image. Imagine then that you and I and everybody in the world are like people whose eye is directly opposite a little tiny hole in a sheet of cardboard which is continually shifting and revolving and moving about. Back to back with that sheet of cardboard is another, which also, by laws of its own, is in perpetual but independent motion. In it too there is another hole, and when, fortuitously it would seem, these two holes, the one through which we are always looking, and the other in the spiritual plane, come opposite one another, we see through, and then only do the sights and sounds of the spiritual world become visible or audible to us. With most people these holes never come opposite each other during their life. But at the hour of death they do, and then they remain stationary. That, I fancy, is how we 'pass over.'

"Now, in some natures, these holes are comparatively large, and are constantly coming into opposition. Clairvoyants, mediums are like that. But, as far as I knew, I had no clairvoyant or mediumistic powers at all. I therefore am the sort of person who long ago made up his mind that he never would see a

ghost. It was, so to speak, an incalculable chance that my minute spy-hole should come into opposition with the other. But it did: and it knocked me out of time."

I had heard some such theory before, and though Hugh put it rather picturesquely, there was nothing in the least convincing or practical about it. It might be so, or again it might not.

"I hope your ghost was more original than your theory," said I, in order to bring him to the point.

"Yes, I think it was. You shall judge."

I put on more coal and poked up the fire. Hugh has got, so I have always considered, a great talent for telling stories, and that sense of drama which is so necessary for the narrator. Indeed before now, I have suggested to him that he should take this up as a profession, sit by the fountain in Piccadilly Circus, when times are, as usual, bad, and tell stories to the passers-by in the street, Arabian fashion, for reward. The most part of mankind, I am aware, do not like long stories, but to the few, among whom I number myself, who really like to listen to lengthy accounts of experiences, Hugh is an ideal narrator. I do not care for his theories, or for his similes, but when it comes to facts, to things that happened, I like him to be lengthy.

"Go on, please, and slowly," I said. "Brevity may be the soul of wit, but it is the ruin of storytelling. I want to hear when and where and how it all was, and what you had for lunch and where you had dined and what—"

Hugh began:

"It was the 24th of June, just eighteen months ago," he said. "I had let my flat, you may remember, and came up from the country to stay with you for a week. We had dined alone here—"

I could not help interrupting.

"Did you see the ghost here?" I asked. "In this square little box of a house in a modern street?"

"I was in the house when I saw it."

I hugged myself in silence.

"We had dined alone here in Graeme Street," he said, "and after dinner I went out to some party, and you stopped at home. At dinner your man did not wait, and when I asked where he was, you told me he was ill, and, I thought, changed the subject rather abruptly. You gave me your latch-key when I went out, and on coming back, I found you had gone to bed. There were, however, several letters for me, which required answers. I wrote them there and then, and posted them at the pillar-box opposite. So I suppose it was rather late when I went upstairs.

"You had put me in the front room, on the third floor, overlooking the street, a room which I thought you generally occupied yourself. It was a very hot night, and though there had been a moon when I started to my party, on my return the whole sky was cloud-covered, and it both looked and felt as if we might have a thunderstorm before morning. I was feeling very sleepy and heavy, and it was not till after I had got into bed that I noticed by the shadows of the window-frames on the blind that only one of the windows was open. But it did not seem worth while to get out of bed in order to open it, though I felt rather airless and uncomfortable, and I went to sleep.

"What time it was when I awoke I do not know, but it was certainly not yet dawn, and I never remember being conscious of such an extraordinary stillness as prevailed. There was no sound either of foot-passengers or wheeled traffic; the music of life appeared to be absolutely mute. But now instead of being sleepy and heavy, I felt, though I must have slept an hour or two at most, since it was not yet dawn, perfectly fresh and wide-awake, and the effort which had seemed not worth making before, that of getting out of bed and opening the other window, was quite easy now, and I pulled up the blind, threw it wide open, and leaned out, for somehow I parched and pined for air. Even outside the oppression was very noticeable, and though, as you know, I am not easily given to feel the mental effects of climate, I was aware of an awful creepiness coming over me. I tried to analyse it away, but without success; the past day had been pleasant, I looked forward to another pleasant day to-morrow, and yet I was full of some nameless apprehension. I felt, too, dreadfully lonely in this stillness before the dawn.

"Then I heard suddenly and not very far away the sound of some approaching vehicle; I could distinguish the tread of two horses walking at a slow foot's pace. They were, though yet invisible, coming up the street, and yet this indication of life did not abate that dreadful sense of loneliness which I have spoken of. Also in some dim unformulated way that which was coming seemed to me to have something to do with the cause of my oppression.

"Then the vehicle came into sight. At first I could not distinguish what it was. Then I saw that the horses were black and had long tails, and that what they dragged was made of glass, but had a black frame. It was a hearse. Empty.

"It was moving up this side of the street. It stopped at your door.

"Then the obvious solution struck me. You had said at dinner that your man was ill, and you were, I thought, unwilling to speak more about his illness. No doubt, so I imagined now, he was dead, and for some reason, perhaps because you did not want me to know anything about it, you were having the body removed at night. This, I must tell you, passed through my mind quite

instantaneously, and it did not occur to me how unlikely it really was, before the next thing happened.

"I was still leaning out of the window, and I remember also wondering, yet only momentarily, how odd it was that I saw things— or rather the one thing I was looking at— so very distinctly. Of course, there was a moon behind the clouds, but it was curious how every detail of the hearse and the horses was visible. There was only one man, the driver, with it, and the street was otherwise absolutely empty. It was at him I was looking now. I could see every detail of his clothes, but from where I was, so high above him, I could not see his face. He had on grey trousers, brown boots, a black coat buttoned all the way up, and a straw hat. Over his shoulder there was a strap, which seemed to support some sort of little bag. He looked exactly like— well, from my description what did he look exactly like?"

"Why— a bus-conductor," I said instantly.

"So I thought, and even while I was thinking this, he looked up at me. He had a rather long thin face, and on his left cheek there was a mole with a growth of dark hair on it. All this was as distinct as if it had been noonday, and as if I was within a yard of him. But— so instantaneous was all that takes so long in the telling— I had not time to think it strange that the driver of a hearse should be so unfunereally dressed.

"Then he touched his hat to me, and jerked his thumb over his shoulder."

"'Just room for one inside, sir,' he said.

"There was something so odious, so coarse, so unfeeling about this that I instantly drew my head in, pulled the blind down again, and then, for what reason I do not know, turned on the electric light in order to see what time it was. The hands of my watch pointed to half-past eleven.

"It was then for the first time, I think, that a doubt crossed my mind as to the nature of what I had just seen. But I put out the light again, got into bed, and began to think. We had dined; I had gone to a party, I had come back and written letters, had gone to bed and had slept. So how could it be half-past eleven?... Or— *what* half-past eleven was it?

"Then another easy solution struck me; my watch must have stopped. But it had not; I could hear it ticking.

"There was stillness and silence again. I expected every moment to hear muffled footsteps on the stairs, footsteps moving slowly and smally under the weight of a heavy burden, but from inside the house there was no sound whatever. Outside, too, there was the same dead silence, while the hearse waited at the door. And the minutes ticked on and ticked on, and at length I began to see a difference in the light in the room, and knew that the dawn was beginning to break outside. But how had it happened then that if the corpse

was to be removed at night it had not gone, and that the hearse still waited, when morning was already coming?

"Presently I got out of bed again, and with the sense of strong physical shrinking I went to the window and pulled back the blind. The dawn was coming fast; the whole street was lit by that silver hueless light of morning. But there was no hearse there.

"Once again I looked at my watch. It was just a quarter-past four. But I would swear that not half an hour had passed since it had told me that it was half-past eleven.

"Then a curious double sense, as if I was living in the present and at the same moment had been living in some other time, came over me. It was dawn on June 25th, and the street, as natural, was empty. But a little while ago the driver of a hearse had spoken to me, and it was half-past eleven. What was that driver, to what plane did he belong? And again *what* half-past eleven was it that I had seen recorded on the dial of my watch?

"And then I told myself that the whole thing had been a dream. But if you ask me whether I believed what I told myself, I must confess that I did not.

"Your man did not appear at breakfast next morning, nor did I see him again before I left that afternoon. I think if I had, I should have told you about all this, but it was still possible, you see, that what I had seen was a real hearse, driven by a real driver, for all the ghastly gaiety of the face that had looked up to mine, and the levity of his pointing hand. I might possibly have fallen asleep soon after seeing him, and slumbered through the removal of the body and the departure of the hearse. So I did not speak of it to you."

THERE was something wonderfully straightforward and prosaic in all this; here were no Jacobean houses oak-panelled and surrounded by weeping pine-trees, and somehow the very absence of suitable surroundings made the story more impressive. But for a moment a doubt assailed me.

"Don't tell me it was all a dream," I said.

"I don't know whether it was or not. I can only say that I believe myself to have been wide awake. In any case the rest of the story is— odd."

"I went out of town again that afternoon," he continued, "and I may say that I don't think that even for a moment did I get the haunting sense of what I had seen or dreamed that night out of my mind. It was present to me always as some vision unfulfilled. It was as if some clock had struck the four quarters, and I was still waiting to hear what the hour would be.

"Exactly a month afterwards I was in London again, but only for the day. I arrived at Victoria about eleven, and took the underground to Sloane Square in order to see if you were in town and would give me lunch. It was a baking hot

morning, and I intended to take a bus from the King's Road as far as Graeme Street. There was one standing at the corner just as I came out of the station, but I saw that the top was full, and the inside appeared to be full also. Just as I came up to it the conductor who, I suppose, had been inside, collecting fares or what not, came out on to the step within a few feet of me. He wore grey trousers, brown boots, a black coat buttoned, a straw hat, and over his shoulder was a strap on which hung his little machine for punching tickets. I saw his face, too; it was the face of the driver of the hearse, with a mole on the left cheek. Then he spoke to me, jerking his thumb over his shoulder.

"'Just room for one inside, sir,' he said.

"At that a sort of panic-terror took possession of me, and I knew I gesticulated wildly with my arms, and cried, 'No, no!' But at that moment I was living not in the hour that was then passing, but in that hour which had passed a month ago, when I leaned from the window of your bedroom here just before the dawn broke. At this moment too I knew that my spy-hole had been opposite the spy-hole into the spiritual world. What I had seen there had some significance, now being fulfilled, beyond the significance of the trivial happenings of to-day and to-morrow. The Powers of which we know so little were visibly working before me. And I stood there on the pavement shaking and trembling.

"I was opposite the post-office at the corner, and just as the bus started my eye fell on the clock in the window there. I need not tell you what the time was.

"Perhaps I need not tell you the rest, for you probably conjecture it, since you will not have forgotten what happened at the corner of Sloane Square at the end of July, the summer before last. The bus pulled out from the pavement into the street in order to get round a van that was standing in front of it. At the moment there came down the King's Road a big motor going at a hideously dangerous pace. It crashed full into the bus, burrowing into it as a gimlet burrows into a board."

He paused.

"And that's my story," he said.

2: An Emperor Unawares

Louis Joseph Vance

1879-1933

The Popular Magazine May 1906

American author of magazine series such as "The Lone Wolf" and "The Adventures of O'Rourke."

ALTHOUGH it was broad daylight, though the hour was no later than three o'clock of a peaceful summer's afternoon— and the more peaceful since it was likewise a Sunday— Mr. Faraday Bobbs, fully clothed save for his shoes, lay stretched at length upon the spotless counterpane of his bed in the Hotel Royal Hungaria, sleeping the sleep of the justly travel-weary.

A twenty-four-hour jaunt, uninterrupted, across the Continent; in coaches such as.it had: pleased an inscrutable Providence to provide for the accommodation of the traveler whose need was urgent, and who might not wait for better, had worn upon Mr. Bobbs; and the need for sleep had grown so strong upon him that the bell-boy had no more than closed the door behind him than Bobbs, regardless, had thrown himself down to rest, and promptly slipped off into blissful unconsciousness.

Through the open window floated a vague murmur, a distant hum of sound from the boulevards, where Budapest paraded afoot and in carriages, and from the *rakparts,* the miles of quays, where it sunned itself around small iron tables and drank lager and consunfed ices with a disregard for its internal economy truly German, however high might flame the jealous spirit of Magyar patriotism.

Through the window, too, came a gentle breeze to cool the flushed, tanned cheeks of the sleeper, and to stir, as with unseen fingers, the reddish-brown hair which was his abomination— since, he complained, it was neither the one thing nor the other, although the all-wise head of the passport bureau at Washington had decided that it was an unqualified red, and had so described it in his passport, which made a fellow feel something guilty, as if traveling under false pretenses, disguised, incognito.

But now Mr. Bobbs slept, careless of his hair's color; and the lines that fatigue had graven in his square-jawed, open, and honest countenance smoothed themselves away and vanished altogether, and there remained only the network of fine wrinkles that humor had creased beneath his eyes.

The drowsy, heated hours dragged, the sun. declining, a touch of evening coolness stealing into the air; and still Mr. Bobbs did not stir, but lay as a log, inert, breathing deeply.

Left to himself, he would have slept the round of the clock; but the breeze that, as has been indicated, found itself burdened with so many other things that afternoon, presently bore to the sleeper's ears the sound of one singing— or, at least, it is charitable so to put it—a full, round, husky voice, that rose and fell and drawled and wailed and whooped in a tender ecstasy of sentiment:

"*Teesin', teee-sin', I wuz oooonly teceeeesin' you-oo-oo.*" .

And now Mr. Bobbs stirred restlessly, and moaned in his sleep.

"*Teeesin', teesin'—*"

The sleeper groaned again; an expression of acute suffering crossed his face—as the shadow of a cloud sweeps over a sunlit meadow.

"*Of cawss yeou-oo knew-oo—*"

Mr. Bobbs' lips opened and closed convulsively, his hands twitched, his lashes fluttered rebelliously, heavy with sleep.

"*I wuz oh-oooh-nly teeeesin' yeou— oo—OO*!"

Mr. Bobbs sat up on the side of his bed and yawned stupendously, digging his clenched fists into eyes reluctant to open. As he did so, again the voice took up the tender declaration; and— "Great Scott!" said Mr. Bobbs, in the accents of one startled out of a year's growth. "Lord bless the man! what in thunder is he trying to do with that fog-horn?"

He arose and went to the window, leaning out with his weight upon both hands on the sill, and stared across the courtyard. "Where is he?" grumbled Faraday. "Show him to me, and I'll eat him alive! That voice," he asserted with conviction, "hasn't been off the Bowery three months."

Be that as it might— whether or no— the voice continued, flinging abroad to the world the burden of its owner's passion; and presently the interested Mr. Bobbs discovered the singer himself— a moon-faced, heavily mustached, swart, and stalwart person, with protruding eyes and a fixed expression of absolute inanity— perched, with elephantine grace, upon the sill of a window across the court, and some distance toward the rear of the building.

Bobbs shook his fist at the fellow openly; but his protest went unnoticed, for the love-lorn one had eyes for nothing, it seemed, beyond a window over

across from him, whereat Mr. Bobbs sagaciously divined the serenader glimpsed the form of his beloved.

And, there being nothing else to do about it, Bobbs, with a grin, and mentally promising himself the pleasure of the singer's acquaintance— were they not fellow-countrymen, after all?— turned back into his room and, now to the refrain of "Louisiana Lou," washed, changed his linen, and brushed up, preparatory to descending to the table d'hôte.

As he opened his door, another was banged farther down the corridor. Inasmuch as it was quite a feminine, thoroughly ladylike bang, and was followed by the swish of skirts and the tapping of heels, Mr. Bobbs surmised that, in all probability, he was to be ravished with the vision of the other American's *inamorata*. And when the woman swept past him, with her head up, her cheeks aflame, her eyes blazing— why, then Bobbs was very sure that he had been correct in his deduction.

Not that alone, but he was otherwise moved. The woman in the case was distinctly pretty, and carried herself with an air not only of indignation, but also of culture and breeding, and even in the brief glimpse that he had of her, Bobbs was convinced that whatever the pretensions of his infatuated compatriot, they were misplaced and doomed to „ultimate and complete disappointment. More, he was prepared to do his part, uninvited, toward bringing about that consummation so lamentable, if, as he gathered, the other American's attentions were unwelcome and were persisted in.

But it was with a smile— for he knew the type well— that he locked his door and followed the woman down-stairs to the dining-hall.

When Bobbs entered the hall the girl was already seated at a distant table— with the length of the floor between herself and the doorway. And in this maneuver the American discerned design— even as he gathered its cause from the frequent apprehensive glances which she sent toward the door, upon the appearance of one or another of the table d'hôte's patrons, and her consequent sighs— subdued, inaudible— of relief when she realized that not yet was her persecutor come.

And, watching her with covert interest and admiration— which he did not fear to do, since she had no eyes for aught save her plate and the doorway— Bobbs was again struck with the fine and. splendid quality of her looks, the refinement and modesty of her carriage; and he wondered not alone that she should be unaccompanied by female companion or male protector, but that the eyes of her admirer should have looked so high. It must be patent to all others that the woman of his choice was beyond and above him in every essential particular,

Her nationality was a matter for conjecture— conjecture unrewarded, unless he chose to adopt the phrase-monger's mot, that a beautiful woman is the property of no one people, but the world's delight. If anything, he would have thought her French, though the soft and tender sweetness of her beauty was something English, and at war with the subdued, seductive smartness of dress and bearing so entirely Parisienne.

She ate sparingly and hastily, with, as has been said, a fearful eye to the door; and Bobbs, watching her, had no need to watch for her tormentor; her eventual, quickly repressed start was a sufficient signal to the American.

He looked up, half turning in his chair. The charmed one ambled in bulkily, fat cheeks red and beaming with recent application of soap and water, bold features contorted into a smirk of complacency and calflike adoration. The expansive proportions were encased in a serge suit of a glaring blue, relieved by a waistcoat of brilliantly figured silk— red and green predominating. A wisp of linen collar— no more— confined a neck of massive modeling, and held down a cravat of vivid scarlet, which had been pushed aside not to dim or hide the luster of a diamond—"Or a near-diamond ?" Bobbs carped— as large and as blue as a robin's egg.

Shoes that shone like the sun, with soles half an inch thick, topped with pearl-buttoned, yellow spats, added the finishing touch to the costume— and completed the classification. Though, to tell the truth, it had needed only one full glance at that swarthy, red face, with its jet-black, waxed, and perfumed mustache, its coarse nose, popping eyes, and oily hair, to assure Bobbs that the resemblance he had noted was not accidental. And the photographer-errant went gallantly to the rescue of the shrinking, lonely figure at the far table.

He arose, pushing back his chair and extending a cordial hand. "Why, Captain Schmitt!" he cried. "Who would have expected to run across you here? Surely"— as the man paused unwillingly, reluctant eyes wavering— "I can't be mistaken— surely this is Captain Schmitt of the Tenderloin Station, in the old days. You haven't forgotten Bobbs— Stumpy Bobbs, the boys called me— who used to do the police courts for the *Sun*?"

The countenance of the burly ex-czar of the Tenderloin lit up with pleasure. After all, Bobbs considered, it was not a bad face— stripped of its coarseness, its overweening conceit, its abnormal vanity, there were discernible indications of humor, easy-going tolerance, and a sort of faithfulness.

"Well, I guess not!" returned the expolice-captain, enfolding Bobbs' hand in a fist like a ham. "How are you, boy, and how does the world use you?"

"Sit down— sit down!" Bobbs protested' violently. "We'll have a talk about old times. My, but it's like a whiff of old Broadway to see you, captain! Sit

down and tell me all about it. What brings you here? And what are you drinking ?"

Schmitt's eyes glistened. He could not refuse. With a final look of piteous appeal to the girl whose unconsciousness of his existence was stupendous, he yielded. After all, a talk with an old acquaintance was better than a problematical snubbing. He was beginning to be a prey to suspicions that his ardent advances were the least trifle unwelcome to their object—though it was monstrously incredible that this should be so, to one of his irresistible personal charms.

"Well, I don't mind if I do," he assented graciously. "But the wine's on me. Not a word, not a word"— impressively— "I'm on my vacation, you know, and nothing but money to spend— on my friends." And he glanced significantly toward a certain quarter.

But the girl had risen and was leaving the room. His face lengthened with disappointment as she passed their table without acknowledging his existence by so much as the flicker of an eyelash. "Sa-ay," he whispered hoarsely, bending toward Bobbs, his eyes on the retreating figure of her; "'sa-ay, did you ever see a prettier stepper 'n that? Saay, I'm a goner on her, and that's a fact.'

"And the lady?" Bobbs smiled encouragingly.

"Aw, give her time, give her time!" retorted the captain waggishly. "I never seen her before I come here day before yestiddy. But she's a winner, all right, and it's me for her— to the limit, boy. She can have anything she wants, if she'll only be Mrs. Schmitt."

"Aren't you looking far ahead?"

"Aw, I don't know. Me, I'm Schmitt— when I wants anything, I generally gets it— see?"

He prattled on childishly— and drank. In an hour— for Bobbs could invent no serviceable pretext to escape— he was Bobbs' lifelong friend, and going to show him the time of his life. An American, Bowery-born and raised, of German parentage, he had been touring the old country, visiting relatives ; and now was off "on his lonely," as he had it, making an unofficial inspection of the police arrangements of the great cities of the Old World.

"And, say," he concluded, with a . heavy wink, "I can put you next to some good stuff in your line, boy. I'm right in with the bunch that's makin' the trouble here— whatchercall 'em?— the Separatists. Students, you know, and the rest of that gang— army officers, and the whole bunch. I'll introduce you as me friend, and there won't be nothing too good for you. You can go anywhere you please and get all the stuff you can use. That's straight!"

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JUST beyond the shadow of the northernmost bastion, where the sunlight fell strong and clear, yet bland, the girl paused. For a moment she stood looking down from the heights, as if admiring the view; then, with hasty glances to the right and left and rear, she assured herself that she was unobserved, and sat down in a little, grassy hollow of the counterscarp.

Behind her rose the bastions of the northern enciente, frowning protectingly down upon loyal Buda. Before, in the immediate foreground, the ditch lay, rank-grown with weeds and lush grasses; she could have dropped her pencil to its bed. Beyond, the scarp, the glacis sloped, a long, smooth, green, and treacherous declivity, to the street far below.

But beyond these a glorious prospect unrolled itself in the clear golden light of the flawless afternoon— Buda and Pest, a sea of roofs riven by the intense blue ribbon of the Danube, with its bordering miles of magnificent quays. To the northwest, behind the minarets of the mosque— Sheik Gu Baba's tomb— that flaunts the crescent of the infidel in the face of a Christian people, beyond the truly imperial bulk of the imperial baths on the Budai Rakpart, Margaret Island divided the river's waters, like an emerald on a strip of bluest velvet.

The girl sat for a moment, as if in silent ecstasy, contemplating this splendor— herself more fair than anything in all the picture, for the sunlight was not more golden than her hair, nor the Danube more intensely yet softly blue than her eyes; and the wine in the air— and maybe something else in the way of an emotion— had put a rare color in her cheeks. Garbed soberly, all in black, yet with a billowy flounce of violet petticoat framing her small feet, she made a strange and sweetly serious figure in the shadow of the grim fortress.

Then, presently, and as if abstractedly, she slowly stripped off her long gloves and unsnapped the band around her sketching-pad. Arranging the parasol to shield the paper, she set to work— swinging in the long lines of the landscape with an assured touch, blocking in masses of shadow with a skilful pencil; and working very swiftly. From time to time she glanced to this side or that, with the air of one who would not welcome interruption; but saw no one, and continued her work.

Only, if one had been near enough to observe, he would have seen that, after the first crude beginnings of her ambitious sketch were pinned to paper, she pushed the sheet aside, and now confined herself to a rapid sketch of something which she could not see— despite the fact that she paused now and again to glance off toward the Danube, as though continuing her former drawing.

She had passed through the fortress itself ere seeking this secluded nook, sauntering idly here and there, and looking with naive eyes at this or that point of interest, murmuring vaguely ingenuous replies to the courteous explanations of the artillery captain who, at first sight, had detailed himself for her guide, and who, to be sure, was regretful enough to receive her final, formal bow and see her pass out of his sphere of influence.

And now the quick, sure strokes of her pencil were reproducing, with remarkable accuracy, the essential details of the inner fortifications— bastion, *enciente*, the disposition of the heavy guns, and what-not. It appeared that the young lady possessed a retentive memory, together with an observant, penetrating eye. She spared her sketches few details of moment.

The shadows lengthened as she sat there, and the sun fell behind the western battlements; and so she was spared the anxiety which she would have felt had the shadow of Mr. Bobbs fallen athwart her pad.

He had approached along.the parapet and discovered her without any noticeable emotion—save that the ghost of a smile curled the corners of his firm, straight lips. But at sight of her he stopped, and, with his head a bit to one side, appeared to admire the scenery, although in reality looking directly down upon her and wondering how he might best introduce himself. For he had a word to say to her for her own good.

A breeze came— a slight, languid breath from the west, that grew and blew in fitful puffs: Before the girl could safeguard against it, it had whipped two rough plans from beneath her hands and sent them whirling down into the moat.

She rose with a little gasp of dismay, took a step after them, and drew back fearfully, with the sheer declivity of the counterscarp yawning at her feet; and stood there, brows thoughtfully ruffed, and a finger pressed to her lips, debating how she should go about it to recover the drawings.

For recover them she must— she must— or all was lost! In fancy she saw the dungeons of the fortress gaping for her, and horror quickened the beating of her heart and blanched her cheek as she tried to picture herself dragging out the balance of her days in the living tomb of a military prison, or in the more terrible confinement of a penal settlement.

But she was here, and they—the papers—there, full twenty feet away; but as good as a mile, for the twenty feet were vertical; and once at the bottom of the ditch and the papers concealed or destroyed, how was she, encumbered by her skirts, handicapped by her frail strength, to win back to the top?

And the evidence was damning,! damning! If another found the sketches, she was sure to be connected with their manufacture; she had even shown the artillery captain her sketchbook, making the light and apparently thoughtless

statement that she wished to try her novice skill upon the view from beneath the ramparts. And then—

"Mademoiselle?"

She turned with a start— and she herself only knows with what a wrenching of her nerves and violent fluttering of her heart— and recognized the man who had approached, his footfalls made noiseless by the long grass, and now stood at her elbow, hat courteously raised, and keen, gray eyes searching her own. He was her benefactor of the evening before, by whose. intervention alone, she felt, she had been saved the disagreeable necessity of snubbing and rebuffing in a public place the odious American who had of late made himself her shadow.

Bobbs smiled at her reassuringly. "If you'll permit me ?" he suggested; and then, before she could remonstrate, he was already scrambling down the counterscarp, and an instant later had the drawings in his-hand.

It was all accomplished so swiftly that she had hardly time to think. The single expedient of flight that presented itself to her mind she had scarcely time to weigh and reject ere the papers were in Bobbs' possession—with her peace of mind—and he was looking up at her with a smile.

And then the light came back to her eyes, and her heart began to beat more deliberately; for, without looking, Bobbs had folded the two sheets and placed them in his pocket. And perhaps— there was the chance— she might— get them from him, after all, without his having the opportunity to examine and to recognize their nature. Already he was ascending— with some difficulty, it is true, but still with remarkable address and agility.

It was a chance; she grasped at it as a drowning man at a straw. When at length he stood. again beside her, laughing and breathless, she put forth her hand with an eagerness almost too apparent. "Oh, thank you, thank you!" she cried— in French, the language that he had used. "You are very good! My poor little sketches— I would not have lost them nor— nor have had anybody see them for the world!"

"So I— ah— surmised," drawled Bobbs. And he smiled again provokingly, stepping a pace back as he whipped the drawings from his pocket and, an inch out of her fingers' reach, deliberately looked them over.

"So I surmised, mademoiselle! And that is why"— still good-humored, in the face of her outraged and furious glare "—why I take the liberty of inspecting them!"

"How— how dare—"

"Why"— in unaffected surprise that she should ask such an obvious question— "I wanted to be sure, Mademoiselle Jervary!" And he tendered her them with a bow.

White-lipped with fright and fury, she took them, her blazing eyes still on his. Twice her lips moved without sound ere she managed to enunciate: "You— know— me, monsieur?"

"I took the trouble to make inquiries at the hotel, mademoiselle. That was easy. Anda then, from one thing or another, I put two and two together and guessed the nature of your business in Budapest. For instance, I happened to be looking when you thought that no one was, last night, on the Franz Josef Quay, when, you know, you passed that note to old Bestheim— Bestheim"— with a quiet laugh— "who is known to every journalist on the Continent for the emperor's confidential agent. Permit me to censure you, mademoiselle," Bobbs continued gaily, "for blundering."

She was quick to compose herself, quick to steel herself to meet the situation; Bobbs admired her immensely for it. The resourcefulness of woman was always a wonder to him— particularly of such a woman as this: one of that sisterhood who, beautiful, brilliant, and cynosures of admiration, move yet in underground and devious ways on affairs of weight and state, learning and keeping secrets that, disclosed, would send half the thrones in Christendom tottering to their fall.

"And what do you want?" she demanded crisply. "What is your price?"

"Your cooperation," announced Bobbs. "Don't let us misunderstand one another, mademoiselle. With your permission, let us sit down here and talk it over."

"Cooperation?" she repeated, somewhat surprised to find herself acceding to his request. "How do you mean? And who"— with a directness that he liked— "are you?"

"I've a business card," he said; and handed her a pasteboard neatly inscribed:

MR. FARADAY BOBBS
Staff-photographer
Bannister's Weekly
New York

"Oh!" The relief in her eyes was unquenchable. She turned to him, sparkling. "You are an American?"

He bowed: "And you, mademoiselle ?"

"An Austrian."

"Austria is famed for its beautiful women," he observed gravely.

"And America for its— enterprising journalists!" she countered.

"I'm glad you didn't say handsome," he commented plaintively. "However, this is not business. I need your-assistance, and I think you need mine."

"In what manner?"— archly. It was evident that she did not believe him, yet that he did not displease her. Indeed, she would have been gracious to almost any one— even that insufferable person, the American police-captain— in her then mood of gratitude and relief. For intuitively she understood that Bobbs would never betray her.

"Just this way: It is my business to get photographs— as you have gathered. To-morrow night there is to be a big Separatist meeting in a certain hall in Pest— ostensibly a student's meeting; in reality, the speeches to be made are expected to bring the movement to a crisis. Now, I wish to take a flash-light picture of that meeting."

He paused, eying her significantly ; but she showed no signs of comprehension, and from this he knew that he was in possession of information a secret to the government and its spies.

"And how does that concern me?" she asked wonderingly.

"Because I depend upon you to get me into the hall. An introduction is necessary; Captain Schmitt will give it to me— he is hand in glove with these fellows—on conditions."

"Captain Schmitt?"

"Your ardent admirer."

"That dreadful person!"

"Exactly. Let me tell you. He was once a police-captain in New York City. Now he is a fugitive from justice, under indictment in his former home on several counts. He dare not return. But he is rich; graft— if you know the meaning of the word, mademoiselle— has made him wealthy. He has fallen in with these students and Magyar army officers, and they are bleeding him to their hearts' content— meanwhile making much of him. So he contemplates settling down here to a career of ward politics almost as exciting as he enjoyed in little old New York."

Bobbs laughed again. "So there we stand. Schmitt confessed all this to me last night. He is mad to meet you, and trusts me to bring it about. I would have refused to attempt it— certainly, mademoiselle!— but that I saw the chance to use him, to our mutual benefit." `

Again she frowned in perplexity. "But how? To our mutual benefit— but how? I do not follow—"

"Perhaps 'because mademoiselle was born to lead. But I would give you a copy of the photograph."

"And still I am at a loss, monsieur."

"I fear that I am very stupid in explaining. Yet in some instances it is best not to be too explicit. But I am sure that his majesty, Franz Josef, Emperor of

Austria and King of Hungary, would be glad to have a photograph of the gentleman scheduled for the principal speech to-morrow night."

"Ah!" said Mademoiselle Jervary thoughtfully.

"A very great gentleman, mademoiselle, who is traveling a long distance from his home to espouse and set the seal of his approval upon the Separatist movement— a gentleman who would have cause to welcome the dismemberment of the dual monarchy for— let us say— domestic reasons."

The girl did not reply. The eyes that sought the Danube were deeply meditative. They sat for some moments in silence. And then Bobbs:

"A gentleman of such rank and station in life, mademoiselle, that he will travel, appear, and speak incognito. Would not you like to take a portrait of him, in his disguise, to your emperor?"

"And it involves just what, monsieur?"

"The unpleasant necessity of meeting and tolerating Captain Schmitt. It will be only for an evening, mademoiselle— for by midnight, the picture taken, we must both be out of Budapest."

"That is very true," she agreed. "Monsieur Bobbs"— turning and offering her hand to seal the compact, with a gesture, an air of *camaraderie* absolutely charming— "I think I am very fortunate in having met you!"

"Mademoiselle!" murmured Bobbs, bending over the hand. "And now'— rising—'"I fancy we had best get back to the hotel and the table d'hote."

iii

IN A LITTLE green chair, with a little green table before him, Mr. Bobbs bared his forehead to the breeze and regretfully lighted a cigarette— regretfully because he was thinking longingly of the corn-cob pipe in his room at the Hotel Magyar Királyi. Cigarettes are little satisfaction to the tongue seasoned to a corn-cob; yet if one finds it necessary, or expedient, or even pleasurable, to sit in the open air, one must regard the prejudices of one's neighbors. And unless one is a student, one will smoke either a cigar or a cigarette; to the student the porcelain pipe builded on the plan of a stunted Dutch-oven is permissible.

But the cigars of the German and the Hungarian are an abomination and a stench in the nostrils of civilization; so, after all, Mr. Bobbs had chosen wisely.

It was quite dark, but not a starless 'night—a faint and even pallid glow suffused the skies, against which the huge, crouching shape of Blocksberg, with its worn-out citadel across the river, loomed like a monster of the night, silently overlooking the brilliant city.

Before Bobbs the asphaltum of the quay was set with little trees in tubs, all very neatly and precisely arranged; and beneath them were other little iron tables, painted green, with little green chairs identically like his own. Buda had come across the river, and Pest was already there,.taking the air and eating queer-colored ices and listening to the little tinkling fountains, Waiters, bearing trays, threaded the mass of promenaders and dispensed steins and the ubiquitous ices with prodigious skill and amiability.

The cool of night was in the air, and peace— the peaceful atmosphere of good and moderate living and subdued gaiety that marks Budapest and sets it distinctively apart from other Continental cities. Even the boisterous parties of students, who, arm-in-arm, marched up and down, rudely jostling the townspeople and ogling the townspeople's daughters, seemed not out of place, nor too boisterous.

Yet Bobbs noted in their demeanor a heightened note of recklessness, something beyond the ordinary; even as he noted a swagger in, the bearing of the. army officers, whose swords, rather than being caught up at their sides, as usual, trailed bravely over the pavement and clanked a martial accompaniment to their owners' footsteps. And there seemed to be a feeling, electric in quality, of suspense in the air, affecting all classes of society— so that even the most staid of citizens behaved as if keyed to a higher tension of expectancy. Great things were in the air. Tomorrow or to-morrow's morrow— who knew?— Hungary might be striking the shackles of Austrian, or Hapsburg, domination from its wrists and be girding up its loins, preparing to fare forth on an independent national way of its own.

To-morrow there might be war, red war, grinning upon the horizon. But what of that? To-day is to-day; and it is well to have peace while one may; well to cluster around little green tables and watch the promenaders and the dark waters streaking past the coping —the black Danube now, mirroring in its polished surface the high, aloof stars, together with the prismatic lights, like pearls on a string, that outline the long spans of the five municipal bridges.

Presently Mr. Bobbs sat upright, impatient, in his chair, threw his cigarette from him, and said distinctly and with some heat: "The devil!" It appeared that he was not pleased, that he was waiting— waiting for a certain thing to take place; and that to no end. "I'll lay a dollar to a doughnut," offered Mr. Bobbs softly, "that the ass has gone off and got good and soused."

And a moment later, without visible signs of disappointment that he had lost his bet— "Well," he said, as a heavy hand fell upon his shoulder, "where the deuce have you been keeping yourself?"

Captain Schmitt, with a ponderous sigh, dropped into a convenient chair— which fortunately was constructed of stout iron— and preened himself with

visible satisfaction. He was in evening clothes, with improvements original with himself—such as three tremendous diamond shirt-studs and a neat and genteel red bow-tie—and Bobbs admitted mentally that Solomon in all his glory would have been left at the post by the ex-ruler of the Tenderloin.

"Said I'd be here, didn't I?" demanded the captain with some asperity. "And I'm here, ain't I, boy? That's me, Schmitt— always there with the goods. I hope," he continued, with unconcealed eagerness, "that you can say as much for yourself, beau."

"Oh, I don't know," replied Bobbs languidly. "If you mean Miss Jervary— why, she is going along with us tonight, all right. Now are you happy?"

"Happy? Happy? Boy," said the captain solemnly, "you can have anything in the world that Schmitty can buy you. Say, on the level, now?"

"She's waiting for us at the hotel. Why, captain, you lucky dog, she fairly jumped at the chance to meet you."

"Honest? But"— distrustfully— "how did you work it, beau?"

"Oh, I met her yesterday afternoon, while you were off gallivanting with your colonel of infantry in his red devil wagon, captain. If you had only shown up last night, now— what have you been doing with yourself?"

The captain sighed. "Lending the colonel money— mostly," he replied. "Fe got into me for three hundred, altogether. But, say, it was worth it, all right. I've had the time of my life, boy, and don't =

He bent forward over the table, bubbling with particulars of his twentyfour-hour debauch; and a gust of his sodden breath hit Bobbs squarely in the face. In some haste, and turning away toeconceal his emotion, the younger man arose. "But come along," he insisted. "Miss Jervary will be getting impatient. It's after eight now, and— didn't you say your meeting was scheduled to open up at nine?"

"Sure— but, look here, beau. How's this about taking her along? What for?" And the captain hung back distrustfully.

"She wants to go— that ought to be enough for you," Bobbs parried lightly. "But you're to be congratulated on winning a prize, all right, captain; she's what you call a high-stepper, and"— pausing impressively— "education! Why, man, she's a writer. That's why she wants to go to see the students— local color for her stories. How's that?"

"No! Is that right?' The captain whistled long and low. "Say, that's great. And"— ambling excitedly after Bobbs— "she likes my style, hey? Wait a minute, beau. How do you think she'll take to me in this get-up? All right, hey?"

"Fine, captain, fine— but come along. You don't want to waste any time, you know."

iv

WHEN the cab stopped, Bobbs jumped out and turned, offering his hand to Mademoiselle Jervary. But the burly captain was not to be deprived of any of his privileges; and-he stumbled out, brushed Bobbs from his way, turned with an air, and pawed at the young lady. An instant later Bobbs saw the back of the captain's neck flush crimson, even in the dim light from the street-lamp; and knew that the woman had accepted her gallant's arm. On the sidewalk she clung timidly— consummate little actress that she was!— nestling closely to the captain in apparent alarm.

Well, indeed, she might; for the entrance to the hall was dense-packed with a struggling, swaying, cursing mob— men for the most part— madly fighting for foothold in the building, that already must have been crowded to suffocation.

Even Schmitt, inured as he was by long experience to the sight of men *en masse*, was a little appalled. "Say," he muttered, '"where's them Johns Darms, anyway? I'd give a farm to have Grogan and Doolan and Hartz here with their nightsticks. Say, they wouldn't do a thing to this mob— not a thing!"

But his former wardsmen were not available, and after an instant's doubtful pondering, for it was apparent that to gain entrance to the *halle* by the front door would involve risk of life and limb, the captain's face cleared.

"Say, I got to leave you a minute," he announced. "I'll toddle round to the stage door. I guess I'll find some of my friends there, and they'll fix it up for us all right."

"Very well," Bobbs assented amiably; "if you will trust mademoiselle with me for so long."

"Aw, g'wan!" laughed the infatuated man roguishly; and waddled off.

Bobbs stepped back to the cab and paid the fare. "And, here"— he detained the driver— "do you want to earn one hundred kronen to-night?"

"Excellency!" said the man reproachfully. Such a question!

"Then, after we have entered the halle, drive around to the stage door and wait. When we come, whip up the minute we are in the cab and drive like the devil to the West Railway Station. Don't stop for anything. Do you understand? Here are ten kronen to bind the bargain."

He turned away just in time. Schmitt was returning, wearing an air of chastened triumph. "Here, what you doin'?" he demanded suspiciously.

"Settling with the cabby."

"Say, now," with a glance at the girl, "you hadn't ought to do nothing like that. After this"— playfully— "just remember that Schmitty he pays the freight. But come along— I got it all fixed. Were going to have a stage box." He took

possession of the girl's hand, drawing it through his arm. Bobbs fell in on her other side.

"And say," remarked the captain in an audible aside to the young man; "you wouldn't think it cost me another hundred to fix it up for me friends with the boys, would you? But that's all right. Hang the expense! That's me— Schmitt." l

Bobbs permitted himself a smile into the darkness. "It seems a shame," he mused, "to play him so. And yet—"

After all, he felt called upon to feel little compunction on the captain's account. Schmitt was a man without shame or morals or remorse himself; and the money that he scattered so freely had been foully gained.

A score of yards brought them to the stage door; they passed into the murky, stifling atmosphere of a theater, behind the scenes, threaded a tortuous corridor, and were abruptly introduced into the full glare of footlights striking up into the stage box. Bobbs frowned. This was not well for his plans; the publicity, the fierce light, were more than he had counted upon.

Still, he felt that it was for the best, perhaps; had they been compelled to occupy seats on the floor of the house, he would have reluctantly admitted the necessity of relinquishing his scheme. For the innumerable round tables were wedged tight in a howling mass of Magyar patriots, from which- escape would have been a flat impossibility. While in the box, besides the captain's party, there were but three others— men, apparently, of dignity and weight in the land; men hardly so excitable as those in the mob.

The low-ceiled, heavily raftered room, paneled in dark wood, rang with the shouts and groans of the audience, and now and again with laughter, and a long and thunderous roll, like the beating of some tremendous kettledrum, caused by the pounding of hundreds of steins upon the wooden tables— a mark of approval evoked by some telling point in the speaker's discourse. Ill-ventilated, the air hung thick with smoke— motionless, dense, stale with the exhalations of thousands of excited men.

Upon the stage, standing by the table in the center of a semicircle of revolutionary ringleaders, the speaker, young Kossuth, swayed the audience to his will, not alone by the magic of his name and the magnetism of his personality, but by soaring flights of matchless oratory. When he had ceased and retired, the spellbound mob raised a ten minutes' pandemonium, and was only stilled by the announcement of the next speaker, the fiery Magyar Deak.

Him they permitted to go, not without a demonstration, but with more willingness; it was plain that they awaited, and with some impatience, one greater than even Deak. A pause ensued— a pause of strained expectancy.

Then, quietly, a man appeared at the rear of the stage— a commanding figure, of rather more than middle height, curiously attired. A rusty and ill-fitting frock coat, obviously not designed for its present wearer, seemed to contribute to his apparent discomfort. His gray-striped trousers were very old, and very baggy at the knees. A cheap and flaming tie lightened the almost funeral gloom of his waistcoat— black, like the coat, and if anything more shabby. Disreputable spats, shoes run down at the heel and cracked across the uppers, and a worn and shiny derby completed a costume as incongruous to the man as could have been designed by the most fantastic imagination.

For, beneath the husk of clothes, he was obviously sleek, well-cared for, well-fed. The full, round, smooth cheeks, with their high color, the too thick and sensual lips, the clear blue eyes beneath the reddish brows, the white, immaculate, plump hands— these testified that the stranger moved in a walk of life immeasurably higher than that whose livery he wore.

And Bobbs was faintly amused by the thoroughness with which the disguise had been wrought. Even the hair, parted in the middle and falling in a bang on either temple, seemed rebellious; and the heavily waved mustache drooped only by persuasion; it seemed ever on the watch for an opportunity to curl martially at the ends.

In a dead silence, without introduction, the man moved down to the edge of the platform. His eyes roved over the assemblage, he pulled nervously at his mustache, and began to speak in a tone so low as to be almost inaudible.

In a moment, however, enchanted by the sound of his own voice— as always— he forgot his incognito. His words rang in sonorous periods. His stooped shoulders— obviously held so by will— straightened. He stood erect, smiling down at his hearers, In a pause, filled by riotous howls of approval— for he was advocating without condition the instant dissolution of the Dual Monarchy— a thoughtless hand swept across his brows, pushing aside the bang, and, as carelessly, as if by custom, his thumb and forefinger caught the ends of the mustache and twirled them upward.

Bobbs leaned toward the girl. Their eyes met— his from the front of the box hers from her station near its door, at the captain's side.

Imperceptibly the young man nodded. With a movement almost too quick for the eye to follow, he produced a small black, leather-covered box from his pocket, pressed a spring, and opened it with a sharp click—which fortunately passed without notice in a burst of applause. An instant later he stood upright, training the camera upon the speaker. And—

"*Now*!" he cried clearly.

The interruption brought the speaker to an outraged stop. He turned, facing the box squarely. Instantaneously a sheet of white, vivid flame leaped from behind Bobbs.

There was an instant's pause of stupefied amazement. Bobbs turned, snapping the camera shut and dropping it into his pocket. The corner of his eye caught the flutter of skirts through the dense cloud of gray smoke that still swirled from the pan of the flash-pistol which the woman had dropped to the floor.

She, then, was escaping; and he had not a breath's space to lose.

He took a step forward, brushing past one of the petrified auditors in the box, and put his fist squarely in the mouth of another, who, with outstretched hands, was on the point of rising to detain him.

The man went back like a log, falling upon and knocking Schmitt against the partition. Bobbs struck down another pair of hands, and dashed out through the door.

A furious, incoherent howl signalized his escape. The mob was on its feet now, knocking down tables, chairs, smashing steins and heads, stampeding madly for the stage. The momentary pause of stunned surprise, upon which, Bobbs had calculated, had saved him. He gained the stage door, bucking, with all the fervor of his American football days, through a mass of men not yet recovered or aware of what had happened,

The cab stood at the curb; and Mademoiselle Jervary was on the point of entering. Bobbs gave her an arm and 'climbed in after her. "Drive!" he yelled to the cabby. "Drive like— blazes !"

And— "Bless the intelligent fellow!" he murmured, mopping his face with a handkerchief. "This will be worth more than a hundred kronen to me!"

The girl sank back upon the cushions and gave way to hysterical bursts of laughter. Bobbs glanced at her, grinned, and produced his watch.

"Eleven-forty," he said. "We've just time to catch' the express for Vienna."

She calmed somewhat under the seriousness of his tone. "Will we make it, do you think?"she gasped apprehensively.

"Oh, beyond doubt," assented Bobbs. "The cabby is a jewel, mademoiselle, and you— you have been invaluable!"

"You have succeeded, then— you are sure?"

"Certain sure. I caught him in the very act. Our train reaches Vienna by five, at the latest. By the time you have taken a little nap, mademoiselle, I will have your copy ready for you to take to the emperor."

"It is wonderful— wonderful!" she cried. "Who but you, monsieur, would have had the audacity to plan and execute such a coup?"

"I give it up,' Bobbs told her gravely. "But I'm afraid that it circumscribes my sphere of activity for awhile, at least. If Bill of Germany ever finds out who snapped him in the act of advising a Magyar audience to break with Austria— and, by the way, I don't think he'll ever do it again— playing Harounal-Raschid in another monarch's domains is risky business, he'll find

"But, as I was saying, if he ever fixes this *lese-majesty* upon me, Faraday Bobbs, I guess I had better take my blue dishes and play quite some distance from Berlin for a few years."

He laughed soberly. The girl sat forward, abruptly, and put a hand upon his arm. And she looked deep into his clear, straightforward, gray eyes.

"Monsieur," she declared fervently, "you are— splendid!"— too warmly for Bobbs' mental comfort.

Nevertheless— "Mademoiselle," he protested, "you are adorable! But here is the station, and we are barely in time! I must ask you to hurry."

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3: Glorified Golf

C. S. Montanye

1892-1948

Popular Magazine, 7 April 1924

BACK an odd century or two some noted wit or half-wit in the ordinary course of the afternoon's conversation happened to drop the astounding information that there is a reason for *everything*, and immediately the remark was ushered into the textbooks to become as permanent as relatives or a broken nose. There's a reason generally for this, a reason for that and a reason for the popular Master Ottie Scandrel, an egg for the centuries, going into golf which, once you taste it, is the real reason for this snappy narrative.

To begin at the beginning— which is a good place to start.

One afternoon no longer than three years or less than three months ago, Scandrel and myself lunched six dollars' worth in the main dining room of a Longacre chop house. We had just cleaned the menu and were listening to the music of a radio, the table tools and the Crockery Chorus from the kitchen when Ottie, glancing at the front doorway, threw away his toothpick and smirked.

"Look what an ill breeze blew in, Joe, will you? That Pitz parsley, or misery hates company. Honest, everywhere I'm at so is he. I suppose the only place you won't run into him will be heaven. And even at that he might horn in!"

Pitz, one of Scandrel's elderly and friendly enemies and a box-fighting manager who had more ups and downs than an elevator operator, tottered over to give us the cream of the afternoon. Pitz, who had known a few better days, was shabby as the bread line. Not being able to squander the pennies, Looie could only afford to have his shoes shined one at a time.

He handed us both what passed for a smile.

"So it's you," Ottie said. "Really, Looie, you look so low that you'd have to reach up to touch bottom."

"We've just finished eating," I put in.

Pitz glanced at our empty plates and licked his lips.

"Everything comes to them what's got. Listen. I'm hot on the trail of a promising welter who looks as big to me as the Woolworth Building does to a midget. Stick an ear over and I['ll tell you about him. His name is Fish and—"

"I don't care if his name is Bismarck and he's a herring," Ottie interrupted coldly. "Speaking of tailors— time is pressing. Me and Joe here are slipping out to do a little car shopping. The last hack I had got chewed up in a fight with a twelve-ton truck up the Hudson. Never again on them seven-thousand-dollar carts for me."

The statement, for some reason, put a sparkle in each of Looie Pitz's eyes.

"So yow're looking for another car? This is certainly luck all around and no error there. I suppose the two of you know who 'Centipede' Balzoff, the rassler who invented the toe hold, is. Well, Balzoff is going back to Belfast to see the old folks and his car goes under the hammer an hour from now in Harry Perley's Auction Parlor. I wouldn't be surprised if a thousand even took it. Secondhand cars and opium are the same things nowadays— drugs on the market."

Scandrel turned to me.

"Listen to Zero, Joe. I should buy a car that's going under the hammer? Get back in line, Stupid!" he hissed at Pitz. "I'm running up to Canada Thursday and I'm looking for a car— not a ruin."

Pitz took a watch chain out of his pocket with nothing on it and looked at a clock across the room.

"It ain't nothing to me what you buy. I'm only telling you you can pick up a twenty-grand job for next door to nothing if you've got the cash with you and let the credit go. They only make six of these cars I'm speaking of a year and if you offered the manufacturers all of Brooklyn and half of Coney Island they couldn't give you a spark off the plugs. An opportunity like this comes once in a lifetime. Pass it up. I'll enjoy seeing you stepping past a bonafide bargain. You always knew twice as much as anybody else, anyway!"

Ottie rubbed his twisted beak, a thoughtful expression creeping across a pan that would have given any beauty doctor life work.

"If you feel that way about it I'll buy this boiler and fool you. Put on your hat, hide them cuffs and we'll look in on this gyp joint. Come on, Joe. He's got me red headed."

Harry Perley's Auction Parlor, once we reached it, proved to be located on the banks of the East River. The waterway end of it might have been explained by the number of wrecks we saw once we got inside. Honest and truly, Athens had nothing on the floor space for ruins and there were as many antiques present as absinth bottles in Paris. If the first car ever made wasn't there, the second was. Ottie took one look around the paradise of junk and began to laugh. Then he scowled.

"So this is where you can get a twenty-thousand-dollar runabout for a song and dance? Honest, by every right I ought to give you a punch in the ear, Looie. This is the same kind of an insult as if you had picked my pocket. Hello and good-by!"

"One minute, you big stiff!" Pitz yelped seizing both his arms. "You can't judge the bargains by looking at this place no more than you can tell what's going on in Russia by a slant at a geography. These here breakdowns ain't sold."

"You don't have to tell me that!" the rajah of court jesters sneered. "Leave go of my sleeves or I'll twist you so far around that you'd bring fifty cents as a corkscrew. If there's a twenty-thousand-smacker gas eater concealed around here it's in a photograph. You must be running to the dust!"

"Here, here!" I put in. "Stop this brawling. You're worse than a couple of rival laundries arguing about a pillowcase. Why don't you stick around?" I said to my boy friend. "It isn't costing you anything just to see what's what."

Before Scandrel could answer the auctioneer pulled himself up into the stand and picked up a gavel. He was short and round and wore a silk shirt whose pattern was a disgrace to the industry. One peek at him was enough to make anybody put their loose change in an inside pocket.

"Come to order!" he bawled at the six or eight clients of the shop who looked like ex-convicts. "Now, fellers, we'll start off to-day's raffle by offering some genuwine bargains— each guaranteed to be as is. The first is an 1893 Road Hawk, one of the finest vehicles ever put on the street. Wheel her out, Gus!"

A mechanic with a fortune in grease on his hands and face threw open a door in the rear of the inclosure. There was a short runway there and down this runway he rolled an example of the automotive art that passed as a motor car through its absence of shafts.

While Scandrel tried to get his eyes back in place, the buggy became an object of brisk bidding and was finally knocked down to a boy in a black coat for seventeen dollars even.

"What do you call that— if it ain't a bargain?" Looie Pitz chuckled.

"A shame!" Scandrel growled. "I hope they send that car we come for out soon. I'll be in tears in another twenty minutes."

The auctioneer looked at his catalogue and used the hammer again.

"Send in that foreign car, Gus."

"Now you'll see something!" Pitz promised in a whisper.

"If I don't, you'll feel something!" Ottie shot back.

The machine that Gus drove in under its own power a few minutes later stood out from the other trash like a flagpole at a mass meeting of snails. It was a block long; a low, rakish touring car, painted a rich maroon, with disk wheels, axles, and a radiator as bright as a chorus girl's eyes.

A single glance was enough for the buffoon of the universe. Scandrel loved it!

"One of the rarest machines that ever come out of Europe!" the auctioneer hollered. "Gents, this is a Rumanian Hesperus that's only gone nine hundred miles by the clock. This here car has fourteen cylinders and guaranteed upholstery. It formerly belonged to a rassler who only put it on the market on

account of family troubles. It's better to-day than it was when it was new. Who'll start at a thousand dollars?"

"Five hundred!" Scandrel yelled.

The auctioneer brought the hammer down with a crash.

"Sold to the gentleman on my right! Roll in the next, Gus!"

Twenty minutes later Ottie put his autograph on a check, papers were signed and we found that Looie Pitz was no longer with us.

"Where did he go?" Scandrel mumbled. "I was just ready to buy Looie a suit of clothes for putting me next to this."

Gus, the mechanic, laughed.

"Pitz aired fast. He always blows once he cops a come-on and puts over his sale. He's working here on a ninety-per-cent commission and the sucker money ought to rin high from now on. Take this car you two boys just bought. Honest, we made a wonderful job out of it. When they pulled it out of the river two years ago last May there weren't nobody who ever thought we could get a thin dime for it!"

O sole mio!

A WEEK later, after Ottie had a couple of experts tune the Hesperus so it would turn corners, found us en route toward Canada. We made Boston in nine days even with only the loss of the magneto, the crank case and my companion's temper. Eighty dollars' worth of repairs put us on the road again and in another week we were giving Vermont a tumble. By this time the fixing bills had run well into three figures and Ottie had been toasted to a cinder.

Twice he offered to sell the Hesperus for what the repairs cost and twice each prospective victim threatened to sue him for libel. Oh, it was all very ludicrous for every one except Scandrel.

Then, when it seemed a fair bet that we were destined to positively reach Quebec before the following summer, the big bus developed engine trouble again and we coasted down three hills and up to the front door of a hotel that was more Ritz than the Ritz-Carlton itself.

"It couldn't have done that better if it had been trained!" Ottie barked, throwing away a piece of the steering wheel before giving the lay a look. 'The class and no mistake, Joe. I wonder if we can get a wreath here."

"What for?"

"The car, sap. It's absolutely dead now!"

As he finished speaking a quartet of bell hops in uniforms tore down the front stairs, snatched our baggage out of the back seat and sprang away with it before Scandrel could make the broken lock on the front door work.

They had hardly disappeared before the doorman of the establishment approached and looked the motor over with a sniff and a shrug.

"Where are we, admiral?" Ottie asked.

"This is the Hotel Cosmo Arms and this is Greenwald, Vermont, sir. The mecca of the true golfer, sir. If you'll pardon my boldness may I praise your automobile, sir? It is most remarkable."

"You must have known somebody who had one," Scandrel grinned. "Listen, I like your looks, bo. And when I like anybody's looks I try and be nice to them. You admire the car. I don't want it— you take it!"

The doorman smiled. "Yes, sir. Certainly, sir. Shall I have your motor housed in the garage?"

"What are you talking to me for?" Scandrel roared. "I said the car's yours and when I say it's yours I mean it's *yours*! And this might help you to get over the idea I'm fooling!"

With that he stuck over a right hook that dropped the doorman, uniform and all, under the front wheels.

The minute we got inside it became evident that it was fashion's hour at the Hotel Cosmo Arms. The lobby of the hostelry, an outright steal from a Fraudway musical comedy, contained an assortment of boys and girls wearing golf clubs and sports clothes, elderly ladies dolled to the brow, whose chins were going into third editions. Tired Business Men and a smartly groomed crowd hung around tables where bridge, Mah-Jongg and Mah Jong were in progress.

One look and Scandrel was coughing like a cold in the chest.

"This is surprising, to say the least. I hear music but I don't see the chorus. I guess the curtain is up!"

"What now?" I inquired.

"The clerk and a time-table to see how soon we can get out of here."

This good intention was, however, nipped in the bud.

Ottie had taken only a step in the direction of the desk when something thrown out in a cutaway coat, gray trousers and patent-leather shoes and hair romped over and got in the way. -

"I must beg your pardon," he began in a voice that matched his faultless complexion, "but allow me to introduce myself. I am L. Rodman Phelps, you know."

"I didn't and I don't want to!" Ottie snapped. "Hey, listen. What's the big idea of pulling this nutty on me— an innocent stranger?"

The other glanced at me, colored daintily and fingered a cravat that could have taught cream puffs a thing or two.

"My word! I fear I have made a grave mistake. Are you or are you not Walton Waterbury, the amateur golf champion of Los Angeles?"

This was coffee and cakes to Ottie's conceit.

"So I've been mistook for a champ, have I? That's not bad for a start. The name is Waterbury, you say? What is he— a clock-golf player?"

L. Rodman Phelps got back his breath and his balance at the same time.

"An unpardonable error on my part," he continued. "You see, we've been expecting Waterbury all week. As every one here is a rabid golf enthusiast they've been keyed up to a fever of anticipation. And because my fiancée-to-be is as bad as the rest, I thought to win her approval by getting friendly with Waterbury on sight and possibly arranging matters so he can teach her a thing or two about the bally game."

He appeared on the point of adding more particulars when a stout lady with a rope of pearls around her neck large enough to tow a scow loomed up and touched his elbow.

"We're waiting for you to finish the rubber, Rodman," this number purred like a Pekingese. 'Don't tell me that you've deserted us."

"Oh, decidedly not!" Phelps made haste to reply. 'May I escort you back to our table?"

They ducked, leaving Ottie to get his mouth shut.

" 'May I escort you back to our table?' I'd like to hit him in the neck with one. The idiotic cake eater. If I stayed here over two days they'd be a murder in this joint. Let's get the dope on the steam locomotives with the utmost rapidity."

We did.

A charming clerk with more waves in his hair than a flag let us in on the secret that the next train out of Greenwald was the first train the following morning.

"Fortunately," he stated, "I have just two rooms left unreserved. The rates are twenty dollars apiece. Will you be kind enough to affix your signatures to the register?"

"I'll be unkind enough to affix my fist to the end of your smeller!" Scandrel hollered indignantly. "Who are you— a jockey to ride me? The only difference between you and Captain Kidd is that the Kidd had a sailboat!"

"But this is the only hotel in the vicinity, isn't it?" I asked.

"Try and find another one," the clerk smiled, as unperturbed by Scandrel's rave as a fireman at the sight of a burning match.

Ottie finally came out of it and we were escorted to the twenty-dollar chambers under the eaves, where our baggage was already stored.

There it took him fifteen minutes to decide on the scenery he'd wear down for dinner. He tossed up a nickel to decide between full dress and a frock coat and decided eventually on a dinner jacket, ruby studs, a chamois waistcoat and his clothtopped kicks.

"How do I look, O'Grady?" he asked, taking the chance of seven years' worth of tough luck by slanting at himself in the mirror.

"You'd never be mistaken for a waiter, that's a cinch."

Undecided as to whether he had been flattered or insulted, he put on his wrist watch and we took an elevator to the dining room of the Cosmo Arms.

My dear!

IF the lobby looked like musical comedy the chew chamber was the Ziegfeld "Follies" for the scenery and characters. 'The room was filled with mirrors, music, soft lights and hard waiters. Each table had its own crowd and each crowd was dressed to assassinate. The boys bulged where gentlemen should, the girls divided their time between three-foot-long cigarette holders and the dance floor, and the others sat, looked and listened.

The instant we tied napkins on Ottie gave me the point of his elbow and a look. Both were more significant than the loaded revolver of a gangster. Just across the aisle from where we sat we recognized L. Rodman Phelps, the stout lady with the pearl hawser, what was evidently her husband, and a beauty who was one of Venus' few rivals. A waiter took Ottie for a dollar and broke the news that besides Phelps the party consisted of Mr. and Mrs. Cyrus van Alden and Miss Patricia van Alden from New York.

"The big Wall Street broker, sir, and his family," the tray tipper explained.

"Sweet music!' Ottie mumbled. 'That little gal don't attract no more attention with me than a bottle of rum at a prayer meeting. Eh— maybe we're a little hasty about checking out of here so soon, Joe. The doctor I went to last year about my fallen arches said I ought to fall for this golf thing."

While he talked I looked at Patricia van Alden. She was worth looking at. A fairly tall, healthy-looking girl. she had hair the same color as a two-dollar-and-a-half gold piece, thrilling eyes, a demure mouth and a nose that wouldn't have been shorter if it had been chopped off with a knife. She had on more bracelets than a felon, earrings as long as the Erie Canal and the same sport haberdashery that seemed to be the rule rather than the exception.

The meal over, we made the lobby where the first thing Ottie discovered was a florist's stand manipulated by a brunette as striking in a dark way as Miss van Alden was in a light. One stare and Ottie had exchanged a Dublin cart wheel for a rose that went to his buttonhole.

"Sweetie," he began, resting a familiar elbow on the counter, "you and the Times Building are two things I'd recognize *anywhere*. If you ain't Wanda Gay who used to handle the coatroom at that kafe on Forty-ninth Street I'll give two bones to charity— both my ankles!"

"Recognized!" the brunette cooed, getting rid of a demure little smile. "And you're Ottie Scandrel or I'm unable to distinguish a pansy from a chrysanthemum. Oh, dear! You must be the millionaire from New York who arrived this afternoon in an intoxicated condition— the one they're all talking about."

"What do you mean— not sober? For all I know a Bronx cocktail is a glass of water with garlic in it."

"Then you *mustn't* be the one," Wanda Gay giggled. "Horatio, the doorman here, was telling us at dinner how some souse drove up and wanted to give him his automobile. We all had a good laugh."

Scandrel swallowed nothing twice, looked at me, and coughed.

"Er— never mind the tanks. Hand us the low-down on this place and every morning you can send me violets, Cunning. Eh— how about this here party who staggers around under the name of L. Rodman Phelps? Give us him first."

Miss Gay did, with the result that we learned young Thelps was a confirmed chicken chaser, he-flirt and masculine vamp— also that Madame van Alden was trying her best to arrange a match between the fair Patricia and the youth himself. From that point the conversation turned to the Van Alden family and Wanda Gay had to laugh.

"Say, did you pipe the old gent at dinner? He's quite a sketch, being up here on account of his health and not his wealth. He has water on the knee, gas in his stomach and electricity in the hair. What would you say that made him— an invalid?"

"No— a power house!" was Scandrel's answer. "But never mind him. Tell me everything you know about Phelps and the gal. You're in the florist business. Does it look like orange blossoms to you?"

Wanda Gay poured a glass of water over some nasturtiums that were gasping for breath.

"As far as I know they haven't signed yet for the altar walk. Ain't Phelps a cry for help though? Old man Van Alden likes him the same as a thumb in his soup plate. Personally, I don't believe Phelps has a chance. The reason is that he don't play golf any more than I do this Chinese bricklaying game. The boy that wins Goldilocks is the boy who plays golf, because Miss van Alden does everything on a course but sleep there. How are you with the links?"

"Which kind— sausages or the ones that keep your cuffs together? If you mean golf I've played it once or twice and I certainly drive 'em nasty. Why?"

The brunette arranged some carnations in a vase.

"When you play be sure and engage Maxie Shine as your caddie. He's as clever as Edison and the only thing he don't know about golf is why it's so popular. Max will help you brush up your game."

"I've got a broom of my own," Ottie retorted. 'What comes under the head of pleasure now?"

"Dawncing on the west veranda," Wanda Gay said.

When we reached it we found and heard a Rialto orchestra throttling a piece of jazz while the blue-hosiery guests of the tavern either danced or glanced. Near the railing, Phelps and the blond Patricia van Alden lurked together in the shade of a honeysuckle bush.

The fact was sufficient for the clown king.

"I thought that was you, Phelps," Ottie said, joining them on the spot. "And Miss van Alden too. I'm certainly infatuated to meet you. Probably you've heard of me. If you haven't— guess?"'

I expected the young lady to either faint or call for the manager but she did nothing of the kind. Allowing a laugh to escape her that was as silvery as the moonlight she gave Ottie a run for his comedy.

"I suppose you're Harold Lloyd, aren't you?"

The big buffoon snickered.

"No; and I'm not his brother Celluloid neither. If you look at the ticket close you'll find the title is Scandrel. Do I have the next shuffle?"

"Thank you, I believe I'd like to dance it with you, Mr. Scandrel."

The answer brought L. Rodman Phelps out of his coma.

"Oh, I say!" he gasped indignantly. "This is most unusual, you know! It strikes me that you're a bit of a bounder, old top! I really must demand an apology and—"

"Drop everything!" Ottie snarled. "And be careful how you 'bounder' and 'old top' me or for the next twelve years of your life you'll be picking your front teeth out of your back throat. They're turning on the music, Miss van Alden— if you've no objection I'll call you Pat and save time. Shall we do the tripping?"

That was exactly what he did.

Scandrel was light on both his feet and her feet. Using the charming heiress as a battering-ram he nonchalantly hurled aside a few couples who were in his way, gave the rubber heel to some one in a pink evening gown and was out of sight before she had picked herself up.

When the number ended he returned, perspiring and perplexed.

"Why won't you give me the next one, Patricia? I thought you told me you could die dancing."

"I did," the girl admitted, "but I didn't say anything about being trampled to death. Rodman, dear," she went on to Phelps, "you needn't wait for me. Mr. Scandrel is walking over to the Arbor with me. So you run along and call on some of your girl friends."

The last sentence was delivered in a significant voice before she took the lucky Ottie's arm and went down the front steps, leaving L. Rodman Phelps to tear a perfumed silk handkerchief to pieces and hurl it away.

It was all in fun.

THE FOLLOWING morning the awaited Walton Waterbury arrived with golf clubs sufficient to give him more strokes than apoplexy. Waterbury was small and dark with a hatchet face and gimlet eyes. He made a speech in the lobby, went directly to his suite and then followed by every one except "Baby Bunting" set off immediately for the golf greens.

"Look at him," Ottie sneered when the parade was out of sight. "The Barrymore boys and Congress wouldn't get half this attention. And all because he can sock a pill with a cane. And that reminds me. I shared a little chatter this morning with the professional here— a Jock MacNibb who looks like Harry Lauder talks. He's one of them Scotchmen who are always looking for a reasonable post office and he's going to fix me up sweet on this golf stuff. I'm going to get private lessons off him in the mornings before anybody gets up at twenty bills a hole and until I'm as good as I ought to be I'm going to pass the news that I've got a couple of damaged fingers. Foxy, eh? If Patricia likes golf she'll get it in quantities. I'll tell her how good I am and keep stalling until I *have* to play!"

A day later Ottie broke out with two fingers in splints, his plus-five knickers and a fancy sweater the Prince of Wales would have claimed had he ever seen it. The damaged fingers were a good enough excuse for Miss van Alden, who allowed him to walk around with her, and, from what I gathered, he got rid of a line of guff Jones and Sarazen together couldn't have equaled.

It made scant difference to Ottie that he thought a tee was something you went to at four o'clock or that for all he knew a stance was used for the removal of ink stains. By picking up a lot of MacNibb's chatter, which he had jotted down on his cuff, and looking twice as wise as Moses he managed to give the blond Miss van Alden the impression he could do a battle of bunker and hill as cleverly as the best of them.

"Already," he admitted the same night at dinner, "I've got this little queen eating out of my hand. She says my advice has helped her game a lot. I'll show these pastry pirates here a thing or two yet, I positively will."

In another two days the wealthy Patricia appeared to have completely forgotten there was such a person as L. Rodman Phelps in the vicinity of Greenwald. The daughter of the house of Van Alden gave her mornings to Scandrel and her afternoons to Walton Waterbury who hung around like a panhandler looking for a cup of coffee. It was a cinch to see that Phelps welcomed the two rivals the same as a broken arm. More than once, especially when Cyrus van Alden and Ottie smoked cigars together on the veranda, the well-bred young man did a little teeth gnashing readily observed by any bystander who was in the know. The only thing the affair hadn't corrected was his philandering among the weaker sex.

From dawn to yawn with Phelps it was a case of one gal after another.

"Ain't we got comicals?" Ottie guffawed once I brought up the fact of his growing friendship. "I've put that Phelps gimick in the ice box and now I'm going to hang crape on this Waterbury stiff. He's as annoying as a rash but I'll toss him overboard yet. It's the golf stuff that puts him over and it's the golf stuff that's going to put him under. Paste *that* in your derby!"

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that Waterbury might be the Statue of Liberty when it comes to running around and clouting the pill— but remember this: A rolling ball gathers no hole. I'll sink him like a putt and slice him into the rough if he tops any of my drives. Come on, let's look up this Max Shine baby that cute Wanda Gay was telling us about the first night we fell in here. I hear he's as crooked as a rainbow and I'm going to have use for him soon."

We left the veranda and started for the locker house.

"You talk a lot but you don't say much. What's on your mind besides that comico-pera cap of yours?"

Ottie looked at the wrappings around his fingers and sighed.

"To stunt a long story I understand Waterbury is making cracks about my fingers behind my back. Honest, you'd have to have them amputated before you could satisfy some people. Not only this, but that goofy Phelps flirt is making a few wise remarks and, to throw in some dramatic interest, Patricia asked me this morning when the two of us can go around together. It's all leading to one thing— I've got to say my hand is better and do a twosome with her."

"Good night!" I murmured.

Scandrel curled a lip.

"Yeah? Well, you're going to get fooled, Joe. If I do say so I've learned to play a pretty round of golf. Jock MacNibb said he'd take off his hat to me if he wasn't afraid of getting a cold in the head and yesterday morning by the dawn's early light I did the sixth and fourteenth holes in par. Equal that if

you're able. Still, why shouldn't I? Any one who's an athlete like me ain't going to run to a nervous breakdown on account of a little white ball I could knock from here to Cuba!"

We reached the locker house and found a group of African-ivory experts hard at work. Ottie pushed aside a few of them before we got attention.

"One side, fellers! I'm looking for some bootblack named Shine. Is he present?"

At the question, a small, dark youth well supplied with nose and hair and who looked something like a jockey, picked up the pot, slipped the dice in his pocket and shuffled forward.

"I'm Max, mister. You want, mebbe, you should book a game? First, I'm telling you now, I usually charge four dollars an hour but you can have me at three-fifty."

"Get in order before I slap a piece off that ridiculous nose of yours!" Ottie bawled. "Wanda Gay up at the lily counter in the hotel told me not to pay you more than two fish and a sardine an hour if you promised to go out and steal for me. You're hired. Be on hand at half past ten to-morrow morning and clean the mud off my sticks. That's all. So long."

He was turning away when Max Shine took his arm.

"You should wait! Miss Gay has got it wrong. Last week I charged two-fifty but this week I pushed it more up. A feller has got to live, ain't he?"

"Gyp me and then try to?" Scandrel snarled. "Two-fifty is two-fifty and that's what I pay."

"Not me!" Shine wailed. 'Two seventyfive an hour and I'll throw in five extra minutes if you don't swear at me!"'

So that was all arranged.

Back in the gilded lobby of the Cosmo Arms, Walton Waterbury and Patricia van Alden were camped in an alcove, having tea all by themselves. Ottie promptly made the company of two three and a crowd.

"Well, well!" he yelped, shaking hands with the girl and slapping Waterbury on the back. "This is certainly cozy. If you've got a chair for Joe O'Grady we'll make it a foursome. I can stand the lemons in my Ceylon but no clovers. How is the world treating you, kid?" he added to the golf champion.

"Rough!" Waterbury coughed, getting rid of a look that made a dagger as dull as a sponge.

"Walton," Patricia van Alden murmured, "has been telling me about some of the match tournaments he has played. You have no idea how many cups he has won. You should play against him, Mr. Scandrel. I'm sure it would be a thrilling contest."

"I'd love it!" Ottie nodded. "But them fingers of mine. If I had a package under my left arm and seen half a dollar in the gutter I'd leave it lay, I would for a fact. Like restaurant steak, it's tough!"

From Waterbury's expression I gathered some faint idea of what was destined to follow. Looking Scandrel directly in the eye, the Californian drew his lips back over his teeth.

"You're a faker!" he said deliberately. "My caddie has seen you playing— or trying to play— at six o'clock on two separate mornings. You're a four-flusher, a mountebank and a hypocrite. Here and now I challenge you to an eighteen-hole match at any time, any place you select. And to show you up further Ill bet you a thousand dollars cash I beat you."

Woof!

"You talk like an imbecile!" Ottie yelled, red about the ears and scalp. "I'll play you golf, I'll play you piano, I'll dance against you, I'll crawl against you and I'll swim against you and not for no one grand but for two grand! A four-flusher, am I? A mountain bank, you say? If there wasn't a lady present I'd knock you for a twist. You're wood alcohol— that's the worst name I can call you just now!"

"Bah!" Waterbury grated, snapping his fingers. "Blah!" Ottie hissed, doing the same thing. "I'll play you Monday morning. Be a worm and crawl out of it at your peril!"

That was fixed up and by dusk the hotel was gossiping about it.

Worry over the impending conflict to Ottie was like rainfall on the back of a waterfowl. Throwing away the bandage that had helped him over a lot of blunders and with quite a gallery on hand to witness his turf digging he stalled, clowned and kidded away nine holes of golf the following afternoon. Half the customers didn't know whether he was good enough to burlesque his playing or so rotten that he *had* to. I could see that both Miss van Alden and Walton Waterbury wore puzzled expressions. In fact, L. Rodman Phelps with something on his arm that might have worked for the Shubert brothers appeared to be the only one who was skeptical.

"The uncouth ruffian deceives me not at all," he said to the girl. "This jesting is only to throw the unsuspicious off the track. A low exhibition!"

Miss Good Looking watched Ottie ruin two clubs before he got on the green.

"He's fascinating. I never saw any one with a face like his outside of a museum," she purred.

On the green Scandrel got a lucky break and put the ball where it belonged.

"How many strokes did I do that in, Maxie?"' he barked at the caddie.

Shine flung a midiron back in the bag and grinned.

"You should ask me. I'm a caddie— not an adding machine. Phooie! Leave us get back to the clubhouse quick so I can come out and hunt them balls you lost in the rough!"

"Not so good," I said the minute we were alone. "It looks like you've let yourself in for the laugh and not the lady. You'll make a spectacle out of yourself!"

He made a careless gesture and sneered.

"Yeah? You're on a busy wire, Joe. You don't notice any tears streaming down my face, do you? Rumania wasn't built in a day. I'll come in like a breeze!"

Apparently with not a worry in the world he could call his own, Ottie took whatever time Patricia van Alden allowed him, wore white duck to please the chicken and discontinued morning classes with "Hoot Mon" Jock MacNibb. While Father Time got in his fine work, the gilded Phelps began to make a handbook on the impending match, suddenly ceased playing Romeo to the hotel Juliets and kept pretty much to himself. Waterbury buzzed around the heiress but had little to say concerning the Monday affair and Scandrel, when time hung heavy on his hands, gave Wanda Gay a whirl around the neighborhood in a hired hack.

He was so carefree and untroubled that I finally called him aside and, like a fisherman or a correspondent, dropped him a line.

"Listen. You're either a Napolzon for strategy or cement for the thickness. What have you got up your sleeve beside the freckle on your arm? Come clean and come clean quick. Are you thinking of blowing the joint before your bluff is called?"

His answer was to stick out his jaw and growl.

"By rights I ought to slap you one for that, Joe. What do you mean— bluff? You talk as if I was the Palisades. I'll win and I'll laugh Waterbury out of the hotel and here's the way I'll do it. Maxie Shine put me next the other day. All is fair in love and golf— eat onions and don't breathe a word of this to a soul. Shine has got a dozen brand-new loaded golf balls. I'm paying him important money for the use of them Monday. Get it now? I cinch it from here to Madrid with hardly a struggle. Ain't life lovely?"

"Loaded balls? I never heard of such a thing!"

Ottie grinned.

"Yeah— and you never heard of Columbus until you went to school, either. Well, loaded golf balls and loaded dice are closely related and as modern as four-wheel brakes and baboon tires. Maxie is attending to all the rough work and he'll do the switching at the proper minutes. What could be nicer? So Waterbury has won thousands of cups, has he? Well, it's nickels to nothing

that all the cups together won't be able to hold his tears— once he takes my punishment!"

If possible, approach that one!

With every one present except the bell hops at the Cosmo Arms, the much-discussed grudge-match tournament got under way the following Monday at eleven o'clock to the instant with Ottie pulling a lucky drive from the first tee that put him within striking distance of the green.

"Tie that one, feller!" he sneered at Waterbury with a side look in the direction of the blond Patricia parked in the gallery.

With Shine well in advance of the procession Ottie dubbed about a bit, finally playing a crisp iron to within ten feet of the pin. The champ from the land of the movie studios brassied up and gave the green a hasty look.

"That my ball over there?" he snapped at his own caddie.

"Positively— ain't you got eyesight?" Shine cut in quickly.

"Speak when you're spoken to!' Waterbury said angrily as Ottie dropped his putt and marked a fair seven.

"My mistake," Shine apologized. "Such a hasty temper I got— you can't imagine. That's the way I am— they say this and they say that, I'm always getting hollered at and it don't pay to have manners—"

"I'll report you to the committee if you don't cease that confounded chatter!" Waterbury raved, calming a little when he caught the Van Alden girl's eye. "Eh— Patricia, observe the method with which I play this down. Just a slight wrist tap and then—"

He delivered the slight wrist tap and the ball shot off at an angle of eighty degrees and rolled around in a circle! The spin to it created a wave of merriment.

"Ha-ha!" Ottie roared. "A wrist tap! This is certainly comical!"

Waterbury grimly went after it and with the slight expenditure of ninesgmnecessary strokes finally put it in the can.

"This is a new one on me. I can't understand it," he moaned. "If I didn't know the popular brand of ball I play with I'd think it was bewitched!"

Going out the game was a travesty but coming in it was a tragedy.

With the perspiring Scandrel topping his drives and landing in every trap along the way, splintering his clubs and cutting up the course, he blundered and blahed up to the greens where the fine hand of Shine did its duty and Walton Waterbury more than equaled Ottie's strokes when it came to putting. The seventeenth hole was played and the drive from the last tee made— the railbirds wise to the conclusion.

For all of his dubbing and his antics it looked like Ottie's match by a possible trio of gift strokes. He made the eighteenth green in twelve, allowing

Waterbury to reach it in three, threw a look at Max Shine who had gone on in advance, snickered at the audience and rubbed his hands.

"I hear them tell how I'm five strikes to the good. I'll play this one wicked just for fun. Hand me the regular club and we'll end it in a hurry."

Shine handed over the iron, Ottie threw out his chest, squinted at the pin and tapped.

Immediately the ball zigzagged off in an angle of eighty degrees!

"Ha-ha!" laughed Walton Waterbury "So your ball has got it too! Now we'll see who wins!"

A look at the face of Signor Shine was sufficient to explain that Scandrel, disregarding a tip off, had selected the planted ball. Mumbling under his breath and dashing a pint of perspiration from his brow he went after it with the iron but with no more chance of winning the game than a pig has of being turned loose in a parlor.

He eventually made the hole, the exile from Los Angeles demonstrated the slight wrist tap and it was all over for keeps.

The next thing on the bill of fare was L. Rodman Phelps' merry peal of laughter.

"Exactly what I imagined would happen! You cannot make a gentleman out of an ordinary roughneck or a golfer from a goof. This is worth all that I won and—"

Breaking his putter in half, Scandrel stopped only to drop the amazed Maxie Shine with a hook to the jaw and then walked over and caught Phelps before he could escape.

"Here's where I make a cold sketch out of a hot one!" he hissed venomously, swinging a fast one to the precise point of the wealthy youth's jaw. "Laugh that off!"

Phelps took the turf and Ottie swung around and picked out Miss Patricia van Alden. But before he could speak a word she had confronted him, her face flaming and her hands made over into little fists.

"Oh, how could you!" she cried. "How could you do such an unspeakably beastly trick! And how dare you strike my husband?"

Cyrus van Alden pushed a way out of the ranks of the startled spectators.

"What's that, Pat?" he thundered.

With Scandrel's mouth open wide enough to accommodate a moving van and some one passing the sniff salts to Mrs. van Alden, the beautiful blondie, on her knees beside Phelps and taking as much notice of Waterbury as if he had been on the outskirts of Turkey, lifted her head and looked at her father.

"Yes, my husband! We were married three months ago— secretly. Roddie was angry because I wanted to win you over, dad, before I made it public, and

he thought to retaliate by flirting outrageously. I endeavored to do a little of the same thing on my own hook and the day before yesterday we came to an agreement. We had decided to break the news at dinner to-night."

Twenty minutes later Ottie, packing hastily in his room at the Cosmo Arms, was interrupted by a knock on the door. Two seconds after that Max Shine walked in, grinning sheepishly.

"Listen, Mr. Scandrel. A punch in the eye is one thing and a bargain is another. Could I help it you should make a mistake of picking out the wrong ball? And does that make it a difference? Eh— now— you owe me two hundred and fifty dollars like you promised. If you ain't got change I'll go and get it for you."

Fore!

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4: The Beautiful Ostrich

Bertram Atkey

1880-1952

Blue Book, Aug 1922

THE Honorable John Brass put down the letter from the income-tax expert whom the sharp-set attentions of the revenue representatives had driven him and his partner Colonel Clumber to employ, and gloomily poured himself another glass of liqueur brandy.

"This country is going to the garbage-hounds— if it hasn't already gone," he said. "This income-tax sharp says we can't get out of it with less, and hints that if it hadn't have been for him, it would have been a whole lot more. In fact, things have got into such a state in this country under this Government that even an expert can't get you out of having to pay your income tax. That's it, squire— we've got to pay up and look pleasant."

The Colonel hunched his shoulders, like a walrus imitating a Frenchman.

"I'll do my half of the paying— because I've got to," he growled. "But I'm damned if I try to look pleasant!"

"That's all right. I'll look pleasant for both of us," said John with a blood-freezing glance at the letter.

The Colonel eyed his partner with a species of morose interest.

"Well, all I can say is that if that's what you call looking pleasant, you are no Apollinaris— no Greek god, no, by Gad!" he stated with a rather surly chuckle. "You look about as pleasant as a pawnbroker at a bazaar, ha-ha!"

But the Honorable John had no intention of allowing his partner to work off his grouch upon him.

"That's all right, squire," he said. "It's what I expected. No man who takes a hand in this income-tax game can bank on drawing anything better than a busted flush— if that. Better men than us have had the hides scraped off 'em by these revenue operators once they got their skinning-knives geared up for business!"

He stared dourly at the fatal letter.

"I'm thinking whether we can't get this good money back some way or other."

HE strolled across to the window, staring out at the drizzle-veiled park in which the mansion was set. Viewed in sunlight the place would have been charming, but studied from a comfortable room, after lunch, it was not very inviting.

"The owner of this shooting was no bad judge when he drew down our good money and beat it to winter in California," grumbled the Honorable John. "We've been here two days, and it's rained all the time. A man wants to be some kind of frog or water-lizard to enjoy shooting in this climate. And— who might this be!"

"Hey?"

"Somebody coming up the drive. Goodish car. Visitors. Looks like a lady inside. Better see her, I suppose. Can't very well turn down a dame making a neighborly call, hey? On the young side, too— if my eyes don't tell me a lie."

"Hey, what's that? Young lady calling! Let me have a look. May be some friend of mine." The Colonel came to the window, as a very good-looking car ran to a standstill before the doorway.

"Good car— late model, six-cylinder Slyder four-seater," murmured John.

The eyes of the partners were on the door of the car. A dainty foot incased in patent leather shoes, followed by an even daintier ankle, made itself apparent. The partners nodded approval.

"Very neat— very pretty," said John absently. "Now, that's my idea of an afternoon caller."

"Some queen, certainly," admitted the Colonel, smoothing his hand over his harsh, wiry and perfectly unsmoothable hair.

Duly announced by Parcher, the crimson-visaged butler rented with the establishment, she proved to be a very tall, shapely brunette, extremely well got up, still young (though much too old for boarding-school), very self-possessed, slightly worldly. Upon her card were engraved the words "Madame Undine de Nil"— her name, evidently, though the Honorable John blinked slightly at it.

"French name— meaning literally 'Undone by nothing'— whatever that means, if anything. Confident sort of name— 'Defeated by nobody,' in English, eh? Well, who wants to defeat her. This is an afternoon call, not a war."

Certainly Madame de Nil did not belie John's extraordinarily free rendering of her name. She was confident— and charming, also English, in spite of her name.

"Oh no, this is not a neighborly afternoon call," she exclaimed smilingly, after the two old rascals had made her comfortable. "It would be so nice to be neighbors— but I have come all the way from Southampton to see you."

She caused her wonderful eyes to shine upon them, threw back her furs and favored them with a glimpse of a beautifully molded neck and throat. "It is a business call— though it seems almost wrong to introduce business after so charming a reception as you have given me." (Parcher was even then placing wine, fruit, sweets, liqueurs, cakes, everything that the Honorable John's far-

flung experience and the resources of the establishment could produce to please and fortify a beautiful lady after a long motor run on a wet day.)

"Well, why bother to introduce it, Madame Undine?" said the Colonel, smiling like an old bear who had just found a nest of wild honey.

"Alas, I must," declared Madame anxiously, as she accepted a glass of green Chartreuse from John— to sustain her, he advised, until tea was ready. "For, you see, I have come to ask a very great favor."

The partners smiled noncommittally.

"Well, then, suppose we get the business part over," suggested the Honorable John in fatherly fashion. "It oughtn't to take us very long to make up our minds to do you a favor, my dear child."

The dear child's eyes danced.

"I hoped you would talk like that," she said. "I will explain."

The Honorable John stayed her just long enough to give butler Parcher instructions to Sing that Madame's chauffeur was to be given tea, and treated thoroughly well— even as though he were Sing's own favorite son. Then they settled down to listen to the striking Undine's tale.

IT WAS quite short, and the request she had come to make was extremely simple. Her husband desired to sublease Harrowall House and the shooting from the partners. Indeed, it was only because of a mistake in the addressing of an envelope that Monsieur de Nil had not taken the shooting before the partners had decided upon it and booked it. She explained that both she and her husband loved that part. of the country and had looked forward all the year to coming there. It was not entirely for the shooting that they wished to come. As proof of that, Madame offered to exchange the shooting they had actually taken— a much better one than the Harrowall shooting— and pay a fair sum in addition for the exchange.

The lady explained all this at some length and with considerable eloquence, even fervor. She excused the fervor by stating that her husband was ill, and being a highly strung man, would fret himself worse if he were disappointed.

"It is, I know, very much— too much— to ask," she declared, permitting a slight tremor to afflict her voice. "And I should not dream of asking you to give up your shooting if I were not able to offer you the Highdown— a very much better shooting— in exchange. You agree that the Highdown shoot is better than this, don't you? And the district is not so remote and lonely as this!"

The partners— who knew the Highdown shoot— agreed readily that it was like exchanging a bushel of decomposed Russian roubles for one good United States dollar or thereabouts, and this fact, coupled with the beautiful Undine's

undeniable charm, seemed to settle the matter as far as the gallant Colonel was concerned— or so his expression seemed to say.

But oddly enough, there was apparent upon the Honorable John's good-humored visage no indication of any frantic haste to comply with the lovely lady's request. He was, like his partner, a very susceptible man where fair ladies were concerned— but he was also prone to blink at any offer of something for nothing. The lady was offering a very fine, even famous, shoot in exchange for a moderately good one. Why?

In his very varied experience few strangers had ever traveled a considerable distance on a wet day to offer him a handsome present. It was not a habit of strangers— or of friends. He didn't do that sort of thing himself— and he didn't expect other people to do it for him. No, pretty, worldly women like Undine de Nil did not need to give something for nothing— they .were more accustomed to giving nothing for something, and John was well aware of the fact. He was not comfortable in his mind about this offer— he smelled (as he expressed himself later to his partner) a large and odoriferous rodent lurking somewhere; he felt that there was a string tied to this generous offer of the lovely Undine, that an Ethiopian was carefully concealing within the wood-pile.

So he broke it to her gently— taking a half-hour at least to do so— that he and his partner would think the matter over and write to her within the course of the next two days.

He did it so kindly that the gracious Undine apparently took it for granted that, when they had inspected the Highdown shooting, for which purpose she presumed they stipulated the two days' grace, her point was practically gained. So, diffusing much sweetness and speeding up her output of charm to really remarkable proportions, she thanked them, and leaving her address, departed.

"WELL, you didn't exactly hurl yourself at her with an acceptance, did you? We deserve to lose the Highdown shoot," grumbled the Colonel.

"We shall never have it, squire," said John.

"What d'you mean? D'you mean you're going to refuse the offer?"

"Unless I can find out within a couple of days why they want to live here for the next month or so, I do."

"Why, she told you, didn't she? Her husband's got a fancy for this place— and he ain't well and he's worrying. That's plain enough, isn't it?" growled the Colonel. But the Honorable John smiled dreamily.

"Did you ever know a pretty, dashing young lady like Undine have a husband who didn't worry— and mostly felt not quite well? I guess Pd worry if she was my wife, yes sir.... Besides, I've got a hunch that there's something

smooth in this business. I'm going to worry it, like the dog did the cat in the house that little Jack Horner built."

"Oh, as you wish— as long as you don't worry me with it," said the Colonel who had learned to respect those queer sudden inspirations which his partner commonly referred to as hunches.

"Meantime," he continued, pressing the bell, "Parcher can clear all this ladies' stuff away— fancy eating sugar cakes at this hour of the day! Beautiful ostriches; that's what women are— beautiful ostriches. We'll have a couple to clear our heads. I've got some pretty solid thinking before me, thanks to that— beautiful ostrich. Besides, we haven't discussed dinner with Sing yet.... Parcher, send Sing up, and we'll have an understanding about the partridges à la Pompadour for dinner tonight. I can see this is going to be a busy afternoon for me, squire," he concluded; and taking a cigar, he poured himself a brimmer, and settled back in his armchair to work.

THE movements and methods of the Honorable John Brass, when under the influence of a hunch, were usually mysterious, apparently meaningless and extremely hard to follow. Indeed, during the rainy week which succeeded the visit of Madame de Nil, his partner the Colonel made no effort at all to follow the devious workings of the good-humored pirate's mind. They inspected the Highdown shoot, near Winchester, and saw that it was good, but there Colonel Clumber's interest ceased, and it was entirely without curiosity that he saw John send Sing the Chink, mounted upon a big motorcycle, to Southampton, and other places, and it was with no emotion except deep sullenness that he acquiesced in the sending of a letter to the fair Undine containing a, polite but unmistakable refusal to sublet Harrowall House and its shooting.

Rather to the Colonel's surprise, the De Nils made no further attempt to persuade them to agree to the exchange. Neither the "beautiful ostrich" nor her husband answered the Honorable John's letter.

"Huh, they soon gave up," he said, over the breakfast-table a few days later.

Before replying, the Honorable John, his eyes solemnly fixed on his partner, carefully concluded the mastication of a generous mouthful of sole à la Salisbury— a fascinating compound involving the use of lobster-shells, which same are filled with lobster and sole forcemeat and a rich veloute sauce, with a folded fillet of sole on each, the whole dressed on a border of rice and generously garnished with little mushrooms.

"That's all right, squire," he said. "They've given up nothing, believe me."

"No— it's us that have given up something— one of the best mixed shoots in the south," agreed the Colonel sardonically.

"Well, well, maybe we have. Maybe the old man has made a mistake this time," said John with an insincere humility, "and maybe he hasn't."

The Colonel missed the insincerity, and placated a little by the humility, let his partner down lightly— for him.

"Oh, well— every man has got a right to make a damn fool of himself occasionally," he conceded. "I've come near doing it myself in my time— many years ago."

John chuckled, ignoring all the obvious repartees.

"You seem very well satisfied about it!" observed his partner rather stiffly.

"Squire," returned the Honorable John, Fill me that cup, Sing, my lad. Your sole Salisbury was fair to middling. Just let me have a look— only a glance, son— at that game-pie, will you?"

IT was not till some hours later when the partners were returning from a casual stroll with their guns, that the Honorable John asked his partner if he had heard the airplane buzzing about in the night.

"Airplane?" snorted the Colonel. "I heard no airplane— and I'm a light sleeper, too."

"There was one," said John.

The Colonel laughed.

"If there was, I should have heard it," he said. "What does it matter? What's an airplane, anyway?"

John beckoned a farmhand who, probably having been awakened by the sound of their voices, appeared to be doing something to a gate close by.

"Did you hear an airplane in the night, old man?" he asked.

The rustic had— and said so.

"Sounded to me as how he pitched somewhere handy. My missus heard um too, and tould me to get up and go and see if I could see um. But, 'No fear,' I says to her, 'I got summat better to do than to go sloppin? and dodgerin' about the fields huntin' for flyin' machines this time o' night,' I says. But there sartainly was one of um flyin' about— pitched on the ground somewhere nigh-abouts, seemingly."

The man was right.

A little farther on they met another laborer, actively employed in looking at a rabbit-hole, who informed them that an airplane had "pitched" in the long meadow down by the railway arch.

"We've got to pass the arch on our way back," said John. "We'll have a look at his tracks."

THIS they did. They found the tracks easily enough in the softish surface of a long, flat pasture bounded by the railway which cut through the estate.

"Hum! He chose the best landing-place on the estate," said John. "Had no trouble at all."

The Honorable John was studying the track of the wheels—a long track where the airman had landed, a short bend, and the track where he had taken off again— like a narrow staple or U.

Close by was the railway arch where the line crossed a farm road. John moved about studying the tracks of the airplane, certain footprints, and a petrol- soaked patch of turf. Following his studies, he moved farther and farther away from the impatient Colonel until he came to a stop under the arch, where he paused, staring at the ground thoughtfully.

"Yes, it's an ordinary every-day farm road covered with ordinary everyday mud," said the Colonel. "Come on along to lunch."

"Certainly—certainly," agreed the Honorable John, but made no move.

"What are you staring at? It's only mud —ordinary mud."

John looked at his partner, his greenish-gray eyes blank with thought.

"What d'you make of those tracks— and footprints, squire?" he asked, pointing to certain motor-tire tracks under the arch.

"Nothing," said the Colonel promptly. "Nothing— before lunch. After lunch I could write you a novel about 'em—perhaps," he added jocularly. "For the Lord's sake, man, cut out this Sherlock stuff on an empty stomach and come to your victuals."

"All right— you go on I'll catch you up."

HE kept his word. The Colonel only beat him to the lunch-table by a second— for the Honorable John Brass was a man to whom greyhounds could give nothing away in a straight sprint to lunch. He put up a thoroughly good battle with what Sing had devised for the midday repast, but he was absent-minded throughout, and disappeared shortly afterward.

He turned up an hour later, with the greenish glint in his eyes rather intensified, and while the Colonel dozed, he spent the rest of the afternoon in drawing and studying the following rough map— together with the brass cap of a petrol can.

Next John conned a railway map, nodded with an increasing satisfaction on his face, studied the mail-boat announcements in that day's *Times*, chuckled, rose and put everything away, except the petrol can cap.

He commanded refreshment to be set before him— old liqueur variety— and woke his partner

"Rested after your lunch, squire?" he asked with gentle irony. "I mean, are you rested enough to give your brains a little exercise?"

The Colonel stared.

"I guess my brains can grapple with any problem you can set 'em, old man," he avowed. "What is it?"

John passed him the petrol-can cap.

"Well, what d'you make of that?" he inquired.

The Colonel glanced at him suspiciously.

"Where did you get it?"

"Picked it up in the meadow by the railway arch," said the Honorable John airily. "Does it convey anything to you?"

The Colonel pondered.

"Well, it's been dropped by somebody; that's clear," he said slowly, "— probably by that airman who landed last night. That's it. The chap ran short of petrol and landed to put in a can or two. In the bad light he dropped this. That's it."

"That all?" asked John blandly. "Putting two and two together and taking one thing with another is that all it tells you? "What the devil else is there for it to tell me?" snapped the Colonel with a certain irritation. "It's just an ordinary brass cap, isn't it— like forty-five hundred million more. It isn't a gramophone. It can't tell you or anybody more than one thing, can it? You picked it up, didn't you? Well, the only real information anybody can get out of that is that somebody dropped it. What does it tell you?"

The Honorable John smiled.

"Nothing much, true," he replied dryly. "All it tells me is that tomorrow night at about one o'clock certain folk at Southampton are going to find themselves badly short in their accounts— thousands, perhaps tens of thousands, of pounds short."

He stared at the dirty brass cap as though it were a crystal ball and he a crystal-sharp

"It doesn't tell me much," he continued ironically. "But what it does tell me is that I'm going to do as I said about that income tax. I'm going to get it back from the Government, squire— and a double handful for luck."

THE Colonel gazed at his-partner with a reluctant admiration in his eyes.

"Yes, you can admire me," said the Honorable John equably, "I've earned it— at least, my natural genius has. [I'll admit freely that I've got a wonderful talent for building up on trifles and noticing things. As I've told you before! It's where I'm different from the ordinary damfool, squire. Take you, for instance: you saw everything that I saw down by the railway arch yesterday— but it told

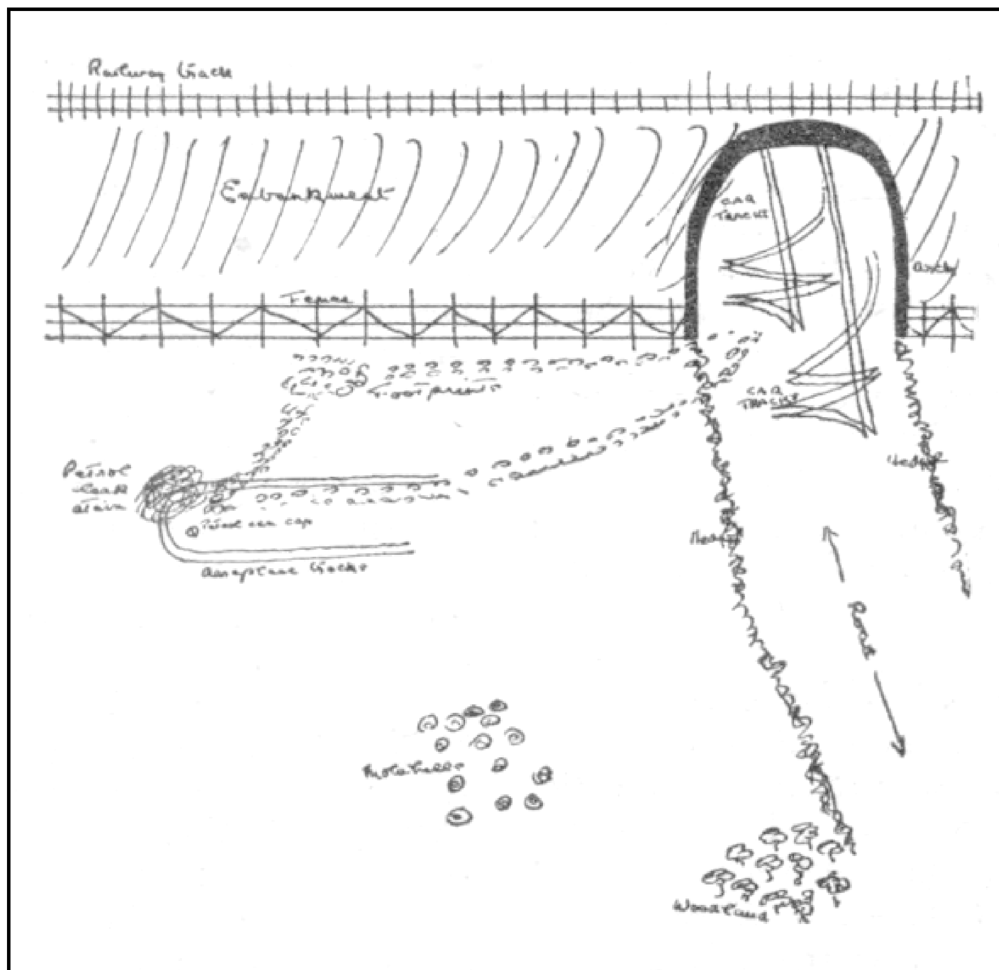
you nothing. You stared at it, and your mind didn't move half an inch— your brains were kind of sluggish— heavy, like cold rice pudding. But mine— my brains were boiling up like— like—"

"Hot glue," suggested the Colonel.

"Well, it's a poor way of putting it," said the Honorable John, "a very poor way; but it'll do. I saw so much down there, owing to this great gift of mine for noticing details that don't draw a single spark out of any average brains, that I had to jot it down on paper to remember its?

He produced his rough plan. "Take a look at that," he said.

The Colonel did so— stared at it for a moment, turning it about. Then he returned it.



"Looks like a picture of the Crystal Palace going to be struck by lightning," he commented. "Does it mean anything?"

John settled down in his chair.

"It gives among a lot of other things the reason why Undine wanted to exchange shootings," he said. "Now, listen to me and I'll explain: There's a bit

of guesswork about it— but it's a good idea to guess while the guessing's good. Pass the brandy; get your brains revolving; and listen to the old man!"

ANY person sufficiently foolish to leave a comfortable bed at about eleven o'clock of the following evening and take a little prowl through the misty, dimly moonlit night to the meadow and railway arch on the Harrowall estate might very possibly have observed that he was not the only prowler in that remote neighborhood.

As the Honorable John had very truly remarked, there had been quite a lot of guessing in the fabric which he had built up on the details he had observed on the previous day, but— the guessing had been good.

At eleven o'clock the spot was apparently as deserted as any one of many similar spots in the countryside. Save for a barn-owl fanning himself about on silent wings, a few rabbits feeding, and a fox watching the rabbits from a clump of bushes, the place was deserted

But at five minutes past eleven a little group of shadows made its appearance at the edge of the woodland on the side of the meadow farthest from the railway line. The four figures comprising this group moved very silently, and in the curious shifting light might have been no more than dense wisps of mist. But the fox watching the rabbits knew better. One swift glance over his shoulder as he left, assured him that the newcomers were one burly man of yellowish complexion (Sing the Chink), one burlier man (this was Bloom, the Colonel's valet) and two burliest -men, namely the Honorable John and his partner.

They halted in the right angle formed where the woodland joined the hedge of the farm road, and John took a long and careful scrutiny of the meadow. It lay still and empty under the mist.

"Nobody here yet," said he, glancing at the illuminated dial of his 'wrist-watch. "But we'd better get busy."

He turned to his partner

"You and Bloom get down to the railway arch, old man. Keep well in the shadows. I expect a motor to come up there before long. You know what to do. Disable it temporarily—to take out the distributor-brush will do—then creep back up to us under the hedge. All clear? Good."

Two of the shadows moved swiftly down the farm road in the direction of the arch. They were lost to sight in the mist almost immediately.

The Honorable John scanned the meadow again.

"I think that patch of molehills out there will make good enough cover for us in this mist and this light, Sing. Come on. Curl up small— compress yourself a bit, in fact —when you get there, and then just lie quiet, wait for orders, and

pray to Confuschis that an airplane doesn't land on you. Got your wire-cutters and things?

Come on, then. And don't forget that one or two of these folk have got to be caught at all costs! And two or more must escape!."

They moved out to the meadow silently, toward a spot where a number of big molehills showed dimly. Here, among these, they curled up.

Silence settled down again. Five— ten— fifteen minutes passed. Then suddenly John, hunched up among the molehills, stirred slightly.

"Listen, Sing! Hear anything, hey?"

A very faint, low, remote humming had made itself apparent.

"Here he comes, Sing— quiet now. Don't crane up like that— you can't see him. Lie still and double up.... Ha! Here are his pals!"

Sliding very silently, with its electric lamps dimmed, a motorcar came stealing along the lonely farm road. It stopped under the arch, and its lights went out.

The Honorable John, straining his eyes, fancied he saw two figures enter the meadow by the arch and go gliding soundlessly along by the fence at the foot of the embankment.

The deep hum of the invisible airplane was very plain now. It seemed to be heading upon a course which would take it straight overhead.

The watchers waited silently.

Two ghostly rays appeared in the meadow somewhere near the old tracks of the airplane— a green and a red. These came from two powerful masked electric torches and were pointed straight up to the sky by the people who had come in the car.

Then abruptly the engine note of the machine overhead died out, yielding to the dry whistle of the air through the wires— and the Honorable John stiffened as a huge shape, like some monstrous and formidable flying-beast of the night, loomed into view gliding down to the meadow. Beautifully driven, it took the ground almost without a jar, taxied along a little and came to rest some distance from the watchers. It looked huge in the curious shifting light.

NOW voices sounded for an instant through the mist, then died out toward the embankment. The Chinaman, crouching low, and his owner, crouching as low as his figure permitted him, crept forward toward the machine, peering through the mist, listening tensely at every step.

"All right— they're all at the embankment— get busy— quick, quick, you heathen!" whispered John as they stole under the wide wings of the machine.

Followed a series of very soft sounds— as it might be the noise of one who slowly, with infinite caution, cuts copper petrol pipes and high-tension cables with a pair of wire-cutters.

Presently, within a space of minutes, the two figures stole back to the mole-heaps, and from thence to the angle of the hedge and the woodland.

The Colonel and Bloom were already there.

"All right," murmured the ex-peer.

"Good, good! Now wait."

The Honorable John peered at his watch.

"The mail is due through at eleven fifty-two," he said. "She probably slows here for the section that's being repaired a quarter-mile on round the bend. She's due in a minute— and she's on time, too! Hark!"

The distant roar of an express came to them through the night as they listened, increasing swiftly. A dull glare swung into view, sweeping along the track —the mist-dimmed light of the many windows.

Even as the Honorable John had prophesied, the express slowed as she ran parallel with the meadow. But in less than two minutes she was past, and the noise of her was dying out southward.

The watchers craned forward like bloodhounds, but the Honorable John restrained them—mainly with whispered insults.

"Give 'em time— time!" was the burden of his low-voiced exhortations.

The minutes stole past— five— ten, then a little thud sounded from the direction of the arch— a soft padding of running footsteps— more thuds from the airplane— and a muttering of voices.

"Wait— I say— wait," hissed John.

Then, quite suddenly, a bitter imprecation shot through the mist.

"She'll never start— something's wrong— leaking badly— put the stuff all in the car— quick!" came a voice with a French accent.

More footsteps thudded softly, dying out toward the car under the arch. Almost immediately the rushing sound of a self-starter surged through the mist. But it was not followed by any engine sound,

"Now, my sons," said the Honorable John, and galloped furiously down toward the arch, followed by his band. "Mind, we must get one of 'em, more if we can."

They came upon four startled people by the motor like a quartet of thunderbolts.

"Here they are, my lads," shouted John, and hurled himself at the nearest. It proved to be none other than the fair Undine, dressed in breeches and riding coat. Without an instant's hesitation she clawed the Honorable John down the

plump cheeks like a wildcat. Startled, John loosened his grip for a second— and Undine squirmed eelishly away from him and vanished in the mist.

"The— long-clawed ostrich!" he ejaculated, turning to the others.

They had had better luck.

Bloom had lost his man, and had narrowly escaped a dislocated Adam's apple; but Sing and the Colonel had rushed their prisoners well away and out of sight of the car and were sitting comfortably astride of them. |

"Got 'em? Good work! Tie their wrists and run 'em up to the house," commanded the Honorable John. "You and Bloom, Sing."

And this they did.

Even as the prisoners disappeared with their escort, the Honorable John was peering into the back of the car, what time the Colonel replaced the distributor brush, by the removal of which he had temporarily crippled the engine.

"Well, here they are, old man," he said softly. "It was a good big grab..... Six boxes. Gold— their confederate in that train must have been as strong as a horse and as quick as a cat to have shot those boxes out in the time the train took to run past the meadow. Nip in! Good!"

The Honorable John started the engine and slung the car round with a jerk. He switched on his lamps, and they started— in the alleged pursuit of the two missing people.

But they did not find them.

IT was considerably more than an hour later when the partners returned to Harrowall House. And oddly enough, they came not in the Slyder car which they had captured, but in their own touring-car, with Sing at the wheel,

Even as nobody had seen or heard Sing go out to meet them, so nobody saw or heard them return, for with the exception of butler Parcher (very sleepy) and Mr. Bloom, guarding the prisoners, the rest of the servants were deeply asleep (thanks, no doubt, to the effects of what Sing, who had attended to that matter on the previous evening, naively called "dopee— make sleepee'').

Nor did any save the partners and Sing ever know that with the trio there came into the house four heavy boxes of bullion— good gold, which was safely bestowed away before they had been in the house ten minutes.

Then, and not till then, did the Honorable John (being, he claimed, a law-abiding man) send for the police— who came from the nearest town, with great speed, for already the telephone had been busy.

A mail-train, carrying a very large consignment of gold for America, for shipping aboard the *Adriania*, had arrived at Southampton precisely six boxes

of bullion short. These boxes, together with one of its guardians, had mysteriously disappeared *en route* from London.

He was a very quick, very shrewd and experienced man, the Inspector in charge of the bevy of police, and he complimented the Honorable John three times on his smartness in working out the planned robbery from such slender clues. He might have complimented him some more, but time was limited. He interviewed the prisoners, two capable-looking but hard-faced gentlemen of middle age who stated they could not speak a word of any language but French, and who, in that tongue, volubly swore that they knew nothing of any planned robbery, but were simply employed as chauffeur and mechanic by M. de Nil— an enthusiastic amateur aviator— and his wife, a keen motorist.

The Inspector forwarded them to Salisbury for safe custody while he set off to trail the De Nils.

He did not find them. But he found their car, half in, half out of the river, a mile or so from Harrowall House, and from its position he easily and fluently reconstructed what had happened.

"See?" he said to the Honorable John and Colonel Clumber. "The two De Nils made off from under the railway arch in their car, while you were tackling the other two—"

"Yes, that's right," nodded John.

"With the boxes of gold behind. They probably traveled very fast, overran the road at this bend and skidded into the river. They grabbed all the gold they could carry— or perhaps buried all they had time to—and disappeared, leaving what they couldn't take."

He was rummaging in the tilted back of the car.

"Yes," he said, "I'm right. There are two boxes here left in the car..... That's what happened."

"You make it as plain as print, Inspector," said the Honorable John.

"Well, that's my job," explained the Inspector. "Now we've got to catch these De Nils. When we get them, we get the rest of the gold."

"Yes, yes," said John, wagging his head, "surely so— surely so."

BUT neither the Inspector nor anyone else ever got the beautiful ostrich or her husband. And it follows that the gold was never discovered—at least not until some time later, when the shooting tenancy expired and the Brass-Clumber combine discovered it where they had hidden it, and carted it back to London, there to be judiciously disposed of.

But it was only with great difficulty that the Colonel could bring himself to believe that it was by anything but sheer luck that his partner had got wise to the De Nils' intended exploit.

AND it was wholly in vain that the Honorable John, adopting the methods of Sherlock Holmes (of whom he was a great admirer) explained in detail how he had worked it out— thus:

"The airplane tracks, the petrol stain, the petrol cap and the double track and double marks where the car had reversed twice told me that the car and airplane had been there at the same time and that the car had fetched petrol for the 'plane. I found out that De Nil had knocked 'em up at Smith's garage in the village at midnight and bought twenty gallons. Smith described them as a good-looking woman and a man with a pointed red beard. Sing had seen De Nils at Southampton when I sent him there for that purpose, and recognized the description— and I recognized her. The footprints along the embankment fence told me that they were interested in some way in the railway line. I knew already they wanted the run of the place and were willing to give Highdown for it. I inspected Highdown and found it was bounded by the same line— but was not so lonely as this place. Also, the train does not slow down past Highdown. It was while I was wondering what they were driving at that I saw a paragraph in the paper saying that a big instalment of gold off the American debt was being shipped by the *Adriania*— and *that* did the trick. I looked up a few timetables and things, and I wormed it out that their idea was to get the loot well away by airplane, probably across the Channel, by dawn, having the car in support— you may say, in case of accident. The visit to the meadow the first night was a sort of rehearsal— to see if the airplane could maneuver well enough in the meadow. That," concluded the Honorable John impressively, "was where they made their little error. They thought that the tracks would not be noticed— or if they were, that they would tell nothing. They weren't far wrong, either— if they had had to deal with ordinary people. But they had to deal with a man with a gift— me, in fact. Why, squire, I don't mind saying that I read those tracks like an open book of poetry. The De Nils reckoned the tracks were details— but they didn't know that I eat details alive. No, squire— you can take it from me that it was a bit of good work— by me, the old man. And don't forget that whenever you come across a detail, be sure to draw my attention to it— in case it's valuable. Pass the brandy."

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5: Death Watch

William Merriam Rouse

1884-1937

Dime Mystery, Aug 1934

THE smell of the house was that of old things, long neglected. The ancient stairs creaked as William Delano mounted them. Ahead of him waddled the old woman, whose felt slippers slapped softly against the mahogany treads. The banisters rattled under the pull of her knotted hand. The hand went sliding up the rail. Delano watched it, fascinated. It stood out whitely in the gloom of the stair well.

As they climbed up and up the dark-clothed body of the woman became invisible, and only the sliding hand and the flap of the slippers proved that there was a presence ahead.

Young Delano felt as though he were being catapulted onward through the years to old age. Or was it a sinking backward, decade by decade, into the grim past of this house where his ancestors had passed from flourishing strength to decay and death?

It seemed a long, long time before the old woman paused in the twilight of the upper hall and looked back at him. He thought he saw a toothless grin. His feet lagged in a kind of hypnosis.

"In there!" she croaked.

The hand he had watched lifted and pointed toward a strip of yellow lamplight, painted down the darkness at the front of the hall. Delano heard a clucking sound as he passed the woman, a sound which might have been a muttered curse or a grotesque chuckle. He stepped cautiously, feeling his way. The floor-boards groaned. Then he reached the vertical bar of light and pushed a door slowly open.

High on the pillows of a draped four-poster a bony, powerful face, with deep-set eyes, looked up at him. That wide jaw and pointed chin were like his own, he knew, and the dark eyes would no doubt be as blue as his in a better light. Not snow-white hair, not age and illness, could change the likeness of a Delano to his kin. Jonathan Delano at the end of life was as plainly of the blood as he had been in his long distant youth.

He spoke no word as the young man crossed the wide chamber, over a threadbare Brussels carpet, and came to a halt beside the mounded feather bed. The imminence of death lay like a veil upon his gray face, and yet William Delano could not quite make himself believe that his uncle whom he had never before seen needs must inevitably die.

"Shut the door!" came in a strong whisper from the bed. "That hellcat will listen!"

Any formality of greeting which William Delano might have had in mind was instantly swept away. He closed the door upon the dark hall and pulled a shaky chair up to the bed. The old man drew a deep and rattling breath, He was gathering strength for an effort. It seemed utter folly to tell this strong-willed man, already on the edge of eternity, to be careful of himself.

"You sent for me, Uncle Jonathan," said Delano. "I'll do anything I can for you."

The old man nodded, as though he already knew it. His bloodless, clean-shaven lips parted.

"You're made of stronger stuff than your father," he said, slowly. "I can see that. Edward was a damned scholar. Will you fight for a fortune?"

THE question thrust at Bill Delano like a pistol shot. He had expected anything but this from the brief telegram that had brought him from New York to the snowbound Adirondacks. He had come with no thought except that he might be of some use to his only remaining relative. From his father he had long since learned that there was nothing left of the Delano fortune but acres of rocky mountain and pasture land, and a decaying house with a fierce old man in it.

"I will fight for anything I want," he replied, carefully, "if it's mine by right."

"A preacher's conscience and a Viking eye!" sneered old Jonathan. "Well, take it or leave it, and be damned to you! You're the last of the blood, and fifty thousand dollars is yours if you've got the gumption to fight for it!"

Jonathan Delano breathed hard. His eyes traveled to a little marble-top table at the head of the bed. Bill reached for a glass there, tentatively.

"Smell of it!" commanded his uncle. "I don't want that cursed medicine old Kate gives me! If it's water, all right!"

It was water. A touch of color came to the old man's face as he drank.

"Not much strength," he panted. "Or time! Got to make it short. Forty years ago your grandfather, Hiram, bought a half dozen farms from a youngster about my age, Joel Whalley. Passed his word, mind you, and gathered in all his cash. Joel Whalley came here the night they agreed on with the deeds and took the money. He says he didn't, but, I know he did.

"That night your grandfather was murdered and the deeds were stolen. Whalley said the trade was postponed that night because of a disagreement about taxes for the current year. He had the deeds and said he'd never seen the money.

"Do you understand, young man? He had Hiram Delano's fifty thousand dollars and still owned the land that he holds now, curse him!

"But there was one thing that he didn't count on. At the bank in Valeboro they'd made a list of the big bills they'd given your grandfather that day. Whalley found it out. He's never dared to use that money.

"He knows I've got a list of plate numbers and he's waiting for me to die. He thinks that when old Jonathan's under the sod there'll be nobody to remember! Just one bill, young man, will be enough to convict him! I want you to go and get it!"

The sick man rested, gasping for breath, but his eyes pleaded with this nephew whom he had never seen before. Drops glistened on his forehead. Bill Delano wiped them away, mechanically, with whirling thoughts. His father had never told him anything of this, He understood why. His father had been a man of peace.

"The law—" he began.

"The law!" sneered Jonathan. "The law can't touch him! There's no proof! They didn't have fingerprints in those days! And Joel Whalley is a man harder than the stones of his house!"

"But you must have tried, yourself!" objected Bill.

The old man made a futile effort to lift

"Pull my nightshirt down from the left shoulder!" he commanded,

The will of Jonathan Delano held sway in that room. Bill drew the coarse garment away as gently as he could. The long cicatrix of a horrible wound was revealed. It looked as though it had healed without medical attention. In lumps and ridges the white scar reached from the collar-bone outward and upward to the peak of once powerful shoulder muscles.

"Whalley did that with a five-tined pitchfork. I could show you worse than that. But he didn't dare to kill me! He's guarded, William. You'll have to fight!"

"I'll go," promised Bill.

JONATHAN DELANO relaxed against the pillows. A great peace settled upon his face. "I never could get inside," he whispered. "Just one bank-note will be enough to prove him guilty! The list of numbers is in my wallet, under my head. Take it. I'm tired!"

"We'll talk more later," said Bill. "Now I'm going to get a nurse in here for you."

The fire in Jonathan's eyes flared up again.

"You'll go now!" he panted. "Tonight! It's got to be done while I'm alive to be a witness! He'll know you're here! Take him when he thinks you'll be here waiting for me to go over the last jump! His house is just across the valley. And I'll have no nurses here, fussing with temperatures and open windows! I'm master in my own house yet!"

William Delano realized that the kindest thing he could do was to go at once upon this strange errand. It was night, and bitterly cold. He would drive back to the hotel at Valeboro for his supper, and plan his undertaking there,

But in a last effort to do something for his uncle, he said: "That woman who let me in is no person to take care of you."

"Kate? She's good enough. The devil gave her a reprieve so I wouldn't be left alone. No one else would stay here. Damn it! Get on with the work!"

Bill Delano shrugged resignedly, nodded agreement. He found a yellowed, creased paper in the time-blackened wallet. It bore the bank-note numbers. The grip of Jonathan's hand was surprisingly strong.

"Good night, sir," said Bill, "I'll do what I can and come back as soon as I can."

Jonathan Delano did not reply in words; but his hawk eyes seemed to challenge the young man, and to mock him, as he turned away.

Bill Delano stepped out of the room into the dark and silent hallway. A faint glow of light came from below stairs, He felt his way downward over the complaining treads.

Old Kate was waiting for him in the lower hall, and under a hanging lamp of fluted glass he saw her with a degree of clarity. She was a bundle of fusty clothing, tied about the middle with an apron string. Black, button-like eyes were the only life in her parchment face.

"You want to eat something?" she asked. "I brung a cup of coffee."

One of the clawlike hands which had fascinated Bill darted out from the voluminous folds of her skirt. It reached for a cup that was on a table in the shadows. Mechanically Delano put his lips to the dark liquid there. It was unpleasantly bitter and he did no more than to wet his mouth.

"I'll be coming back later," he said. "Perhaps sometime in the night, Meanwhile see if you can't get some broth and wine for Mr. Delano."

"He'll get what he needs!" She nodded, and made that indefinable clucking sound which Bill had heard in the ghostly upper hall. He found himself disliking the old woman intensely.

THE high valley lay white in the grip of winter, and the night was brittle and cold. In the light of a full moon each tree and fence corner was fantastically , revealed. Bill Delano stopped his car a few hundred yards from the rambling stone house of Joel Whalley and approached the front door on foot.

The car would be there for retreat in case of trouble. This was the only concession that he made to the warnings of Jonathan. In the cheerful, warm dining room of the hotel at Valeboro the potency of that half hour in Delano House had weakened. '

Granting that everything which Jonathan Delano had said was true, Bill did not want to begin his quest by breaking and entering at night. He might get himself into jail, Whalley must be rich and powerful, and he was on his own ground.

There must be two sides to this story— and so Delano put his hand to the old-fashioned bell pull beside Whalley's door, with every intention of walking only on firm ground. He heard the jangle of the bell inside, but no other sound until the door swung slowly inward.

Bill Delano gasped, with slack jaw muscles. Unconsciously he had been prepared for another such servant as he had seen at Delano House. Instead, he found himself staring up at a slim girl who looked like an apparition from another and less troubled world.

The candle which she held framed her head in an aura of misty light. Her hair gleamed softly golden. Her face had the kindly beauty which the young so seldom have. She smiled.

"I'd like to speak to Mr. Joel Whalley, if I may," said Bill, "I am William Delano."

It was as though his name were a sound to inspire terror. The girl gave a little cry and the candlestick tipped in her grasp. She flung a glance over her shoulder.

"You are the nephew?" she asked, in a low tone, "You—"

A strong voice boomed down the hallway. "Who is it, Lucia?"

"Someone— to see— you."

A heavy tread sounded. Delano, alert for danger now, stepped up into the doorway beside the girl. He saw a vigorous old man, as old as his uncle, with high square shoulders and a long cold face. Eyes and mouth were expressionless, framed in iron gray hair which emphasized the grim line of the mouth and the pale quality of the steady gaze.

"Mr. Joel Whalley?" asked Bill.

"And you don't need to tell me that you're a Delano! William, son of Edward and nephew of Jonathan. We country people remember families, and names." Whalley turned to the girl. "Miss Lucia Brooke, my housekeeper."

She inclined her head, staring at Bill with wide gray eyes which had appeared black at the first glance, so enlarged were the pupils.

Delano bowed, and tried to draw his mind back from that charming, frightened face to the business in hand. Whalley made a wide gesture of welcome.

"Come into my office," he said. "Lucia, I'd like to have you with us."

Bill followed the massive, slightly stooped figure into a severe room of black walnut furniture and dark-toned wallpaper. A brisk fire burned in a low box stove. The windows were thick with frost.

"Take Mr. Delano's coat," said Whalley. "Draw up a chair, young man. It's a good many years since a member of your family has called here."

"It was at the request of my Uncle Jonathan that I came," replied Bill, slowly. He thought he caught a flicker of surprise in the rocklike face of Whalley.

"He is not dead yet?"

"No, and with proper care I think it's possible that he may recover."

Now Bill was certain that a change of expression came into the pale eyes, like the shadow of a cloud upon cold waters.

"It has been very sad about Jonathan," murmured Whalley. "It would not have happened, perhaps, if he had chosen a more friendly mode of living."

"You mean?" asked Delano, puzzled.

"His mind," replied Whalley. "You must know he has been deranged for years?"

"No!" Bill stared. "I had heard nothing of that. Tonight he seemed eccentric, but not insane."

"It's less brutal to call him eccentric." Whalley spread large hands upon his knees, and nodded slowly. "He has had delusions for a very long time. One of them is that I murdered your grandfather, Hiram Delano."

JOEL WHALLEY had met Bill at the door with a shotgun he would have been surprised, but not overcome by astonishment. But these few words stunned him. He suddenly found himself fighting windmills. He was left flat and foolish.

"He has even caused us considerable trouble by coming here at times in a belligerent mood," continued the older man, in an even voice. "But because he was a neighbor no complaint has been made."

Delano rallied. He was now doubly glad that he had felt his way in this affair.

"I think it's best to be frank," he said. "I came here on account of what he has told me, although I didn't fully credit it. His mind appeared to be clear, but he was not only of the belief that you killed my grandfather— he thought that you'd robbed him as well."

"He has accused me of something like that." Whalley cleared his throat. "I'm not quite certain what his idea is, but as a matter of fact the sale of my land to your grandfather wasn't completed. I returned home with the deeds. That night your grandfather was killed, and presumably robbed. I had hoped for the sale. I was forced to place some mortgages because it fell through."

It was all perfectly reasonable, Delano thought. He looked at the girl, sitting in silence with downcast eyes. Her nervousness was easily accounted for by fear of the family feud. Whalley had not wanted to risk talking to a stranger alone about this matter. Bill did not know why he himself persisted in his inquiry, but he did.

"But it would have been extremely clever," he said, smiling nevertheless, "to make the sale and then go back and get the deeds, which could not have been recorded that night."

The face of the girl looked waxen in the uncertain light of the oil lamp. Whalley's big fingers beat a tattoo upon his knees.

"I suppose so," he said at length. "But I haven't enjoyed the fruits of this alleged crime."

Was it a devil, Delano wondered, that was making him go on with this conversation? It was beginning to approach rudeness. "My uncle insists," he said, "that a list was made of the plate numbers of the missing bills."

Joel Whalley stood up, with the manner of a man who has come to a decision.

"I see I'll have to convince you of your error," he announced, evenly. "Wait here a moment, please."

He was gone out of the room before Delano could utter the apology which had started to his lips. Bill had no chance to speak at all, for the instant that the door closed behind Whalley the girl was on her feet, with a hand lifted for silence. She had come miraculously to life. With a swift movement she bent her head to the crack of the door and listened. Then she turned fear-stricken eyes upon Delano.

"Go away from here!" she exclaimed, "Go at once, before he comes back!"

"What do you mean?" demanded Bill confusedly. He got to his feet.

She seized him by the arm with surprisingly strong fingers, tried to push him toward the door. "If I try to explain you'll argue, and it will be too late! Your life is in danger! Do you understand what I'm saying?"

Delano was nettled. She was too urgent. He was not a child.

He answered, a little haughtily, "My life has been in danger before now."

"How stupid you are!" she all but wailed. "Whalley will kill you!"

"Are you mad? Why, he's treated me with consideration!" Yet Bill was impressed in spite of himself.

"But you've persisted!" She flung out her hands in a helpless gesture. The door began to open behind her, and at the first faint sound she whirled and faced Joel Whalley.

"Lucia," he said, "I must speak with you."

The soft blue of her gown melted past Whalley and left him framed there in the doorway like a figure of doom. His expression had not changed, yet somehow he carried with him the promise of finality. Without a word more he vanished. The door clicked shut.

BILL DELANO looked about the gloomy little chamber. Instinct told him to smash that frosted window with a chair and leap out into the night. Instead he moved the stout poker so that he could reach it easily, and took a position with the stove between him and the door.

Whalley came back into the room, with his soft, deliberate tread. Behind him the doorway filled again, this time with a form which might have walked out of a brutal nightmare. A splay-footed giant, inches more than six feet tall, stood looking down upon the two men in the office.

A soiled flannel shirt and stained overalls encased his muscle-ridged limbs and body. A pointed head topped the long slope of his shoulders. And the features of the face upon that head seemed to melt into each other as though they had been molded of putty. Dull, inhuman eyes regarded Bill Delano.

"I understand from Miss Brooke," said Whalley, "that you intend to persist in your inquiry."

Rather than hear this Bill would have given up a fortune. He realized this abruptly, and his heart sank. So the girl had been acting, to find out what she could! She must be in this place willingly. Twice or thrice a fool, coming here in peace, believing Whalley, believing the girl!

"It looks now," said Bill slowly, "as though I had reason to persist. Why this person in the doorway? Are you afraid of me?"

Joel Whalley barked a laugh that was like the crackling of dry brush.

"This is my man Tim," he replied. "He is going to do some work for me, and he'll do it as well as he did the fall butchering."

"You want me to stick him, Mr. Whalley?" asked Tim in a thick voice.

"Don't put a mark on him yourself!" commanded Whalley harshly. "I'll tell you what to do."

"Uh-huh!" grunted Tim. "You say what."

Delano shuddered. He saw the long, powerful hand of Whalley extended toward him.

"Have you the list of numbers?" he asked. "If you think not, Tim will search you to make sure your memory is correct."

Thought of instant battle came to Bill's mind, but he decided against it. He would yield long enough to make them careless. He took out the yellowed slip of paper which his uncle had given him, and handed it to Whalley.

The smooth mask of Joel Whalley's face did not change as he glanced at the paper. He tore it into fine pieces, lighted a match, and watched it burn on an ashtray.

"The bank will have forgotten, after forty years," he murmured, "I could have taken that from Jonathan but the time wasn't ripe. He was too vigorous to die. A man is a fool who leaves a single straw to show which way the wind blows!"

"It seems to me," said Bill, "that you're leaving a good many straws!"

Whalley's upper lip drew back until the tips of the canine teeth were revealed.

"After tonight," he snarled, "there will be no Delano left alive! Tim! Listen to me!"

"Uh-huh!" answered the giant, and he balanced as though to take a forward step.

"Be careful not to hurt this man. Carry him out and throw him into the bull-pen. Then let Moloch loose in there. Do you understand?"

"Uh-huh! Now?"

"Yes!"

The poker was in Delano's hand with the first movement of the brute in the doorway. He turned and thrust at Whalley's face, feinting, and drew Tim that way. Then he sprang backward, cleared the stove at a leap, and delivered a swinging blow at the domelike head as he rushed for the door.

Bill had felt the crack of the blow as it landed and glimpsed Tim reeling against Whalley. He was in the doorway. He thought he was free.

Then he stopped as though the very air had frozen around him, holding him viselike.

A mighty hand had gripped the slack of his coat. He braced himself against that pull. Cloth ripped. His feet slid on the carpet. He twisted, working his shoulders free from the coat. His arms went behind him in the effort. The terrible grip shifted to a wrist and he knew that he was lost.

Bill was drawn back into the office. For the moment he gave up all resistance against the giant's grip. With but a little added pressure, the calloused, muscle-padded hands which held him could snap the very bones of his arms.

A little ribbon of blood ran down the receding forehead of the unmoved executioner. Perhaps it would have been less horrible if he had been a normal man. But his face was like that of a weathered stone image, vague and without understanding.

"The coat must be found on the body, Tim," said Whalley. "Put it back on him. The rips won't matter; there'll be more before he's finished. Take him out now. He's given trouble enough."

Bill struggled free, sent a hard uppercut against the granite jaw above him. It did no good, Tim merely shook his head and went on with the business of clothing his prisoner in the torn coat. His corded arms encircled Delano, lifted him clear of the floor,

Bill went out of the room kicking like a helpless child. He was borne toward the rear of the house. Tim opened a door, and abruptly they were plunged into the biting cold of the night. :

The moon made a world of black and silver. Tim's heavy feet crunched on frozen snow. Delano saw a high fence, with buttressed posts. He was swung backward, and tossed into the air, His body rose over the fence, and landed with a breath-taking thump on snow-covered ground.

There was a moment when Bill, breathless, could not move. Then he gasped, rolled over, and came up to his feet like a cat. He looked right and left for something to fight. There was no moving object near him. The moonlight was still and cold, with an ominous stillness. Trampled snow surrounded him.

Before him the face of a low building was in impenetrable shadow. That shadow formed one side of a rectangle which was fenced by planks set on end, and edge to edge so that a solid wooden wall surrounded the enclosure. In the center of the fenced space the earth dipped sharply in a bowl-like depression. At the bottom of the depression there was the gleam of freshly formed ice.

Perhaps it was the sight of the ice that brought home to Delano consciousness, of the intense cold. There was no breath of air stirring. It was one of those; mountain nights when the limbs of great trees crack in the grip of the frost. In that air bare flesh would sear at the touch of metal.

Bill buttoned his torn coat and advanced to the fence. The planks offered no hold for his fingers. He could not teach the top. He turned toward the building; and then he heard the first sound that had come to him since he had been hurled into the air.

From the darkness came a rage-saturated roar in a voice which he knew or that of Whalley's henchman. A blow thudded somewhere behind that curtain of shadow. Then a bellow of monstrous, primitive wrath shook the night.

Somewhere in there a board splintered. A great shape came plunging out into the pen. This, then, was the Moloch that was to do Joel Whalley's work for him. An intruder might easily fall into the bull-pen, to be trampled and gored to death without blame to the owner of the bull.

Bill was revealed on the edge of the depression. Moloch charged straight for him, as he would have charged in his stupid rage at any living thing that he

saw. Bill took a backward step, and shot downward with lightning speed. He came to rest on the ice at the bottom of the bowl.

INSTINCT had halted the bull. Slowly he circled the depression. Finally it penetrated his dull brain that he could not get at the object of his wrath. With a snort like the sound of tearing cloth, he turned away.

Two black figures appeared on top of the fence, walking briskly as though on a runway. Whalley and his man halted and looked down upon Delano and Moloch.

"Want me jounce a rock on him?" asked the thick voice of Tim.

"No, you fool!" growled Whalley. "It would show that Moloch had help. You stay here and wait till he's finished. He'll freeze if he doesn't get out of that waterhole, and if he does Moloch will get him. I want to make sure, that's all. You watch, Tim!"

Bill Delano stood shivering, with his arms huddled around his ribs, and said nothing. He knew that he might as well talk to Moloch as to that cold, gray man on the fence. In silence he watched Whalley walk along the fence and disappear in the direction of the house.

Tim, mittened and capped and wrapped in a big jacket, was like an enormous toad against the skyline. He sat comfortably on the edge of the planks. He could wait an hour, two hours. It would be over long before his tough hide felt the touch of the icy night.

Delano took a step with a foot which had become like a block of wood. He had bought rubbers that day in Valeboro. The corrugated bottoms gripped the ice for a few steps up the side of the depression. Then his feet shot out from under him, and he found himself sitting on the spot from which he had started. The death watch on the fence gurgled and heaved with laughter.

With clumsy aching hands Bill Delano fished out his pocket knife. His fingers had become like talons. They were no longer capable of bending at the joints, but he managed to get the knife open with his nails.

He knelt and began to hack at the enameled surface of ice and frozen snow. The knife slipped from his grasp. Painfully he recovered it, and with one hand bent the fingers of the other over the handle so that it was held firmly against his palm.

Bill went to work again, to the accompaniment of diabolical mirth from the fence. He summoned all the force of his will and hacked desperately until there was a niche into which his stiff hand would hook. He reached up and cut another. The work warmed him somewhat. Pain came back to his hands and feet, and he welcomed it.

At last he was at the lip of the bowl. He raised his head, drew himself over the edge, and stood erect. Moloch was at the end of the enclosure, nosing and pawing the snow. Tim had risen to his feet, leaning forward to watch the comedy of life and death which had given him such amusement. One great foot rested on top of the fence.

This was the moment. Bill dashed straight at the planking under Tim. He leaped into the air, with arms upstretched. His hands grasped the foot on the fence top. He held on with the grip of the drowning, swung all his weight upon the thick ankle.

A yell rose from the toppling giant. Bill braced himself against the planks and heaved backward with a wordless prayer for strength Tim shot downward, to land on head and shoulders in the snow.

AGAIN Delano leaped, disregarding what might be happening behind him. He hooked his fingers over the fence and flung himself sidewise, like a pendulum. Back and forth, a little higher each time.

At last a leg swung over the edge of the planks, and held there. He worked the rest of his body over— and gasping, exhausted, rolled on his stomach. Safe! He looked down into the bull-pen.

Tim and Moloch faced each other across a stretch of trampled snow. The bull lowered his head and a low rumble came from the deep chest. The man answered with a weird, inhuman challenge.

The two monsters launched themselves at the same time. They met at the edge of the depression, and melted into one dark shape. The bull stumbled, tossed his head. The man rose into the air and fell back upon him. Then they slipped sidewise together, and went gliding down to the bottom of the bowl....

Bill Delano wanted to see no more. Breath had come back to him and he dropped to the ground from the runway along the fence. He knew that the sensible thing for him to do was to go back to his car, but he had no intention of doing the sensible thing.

He walked cautiously up to the house and tried the door through which he had been brought out. It yielded. He stepped into the dim hallway. A monotonous drone of voices came from the office, and the door of that room was open. From the shadows. of the corridor Bill peered in,

Joel Whalley sat at his desk, in the act of pouring whisky from a bottle into two water tumblers. A gnarled hand reached eagerly from a humped figure beside the stove. It was a woman who straightened up and revealed her face in the lamplight. Old Kate, of Delano House, was here, drinking with the deadly enemy of her employer !

"You put too much into the coffee," Whalley was saying. "That's why he wouldn't drink it. I'd rather have dealt with both of them there than here. But it's all right. Young Delano has been taken care of."

"You fixed him good?" The old woman's mouth stretched in a gaping grin. She drank, and smacked her lips, and held out her glass for more, Whalley, who had not touched his whisky, measured a smaller second drink for Kate.

"Not too much of this tonight!" he said, warningly. "And don't ask questions! Go back there and give Jonathan enough to finish him. Get up late in the morning. Make sure he's dead. And then call a doctor. Be sure to leave the bottle beside the bed, in plain sight. He took it himself, remember!"

Kate's head bobbed vigorously up and down. She sipped at her whisky.

"You got to give me some more of that stuff, Joel. What I had's all gone."

"What's that?" exclaimed Whalley. "You haven't used all that chloral since you were here?"

"I kept him under when he was raving about coming after you," she whined, "You said if I finished him off the young feller wouldn't come, An' I spilt quite a lot into the coffee. And I— I kind of tipped over the bottle, Joel."

"Why didn't you say so in the first place, you old fool!" He rose and went to a cupboard, turning his back upon the room. "I'll give you some more."

INSTANTLY Kate gulped her whisky and leaned forward toward the desk. Her shawl hooded her movements, but Bill Delano saw a shaking hand grip the neck of the bottle and slop out whisky. She began to talk, rapidly.

"My nerves ain't what they was forty year ago, Joel! You remember, Joel? Forty year ago! Nor my looks ain't what they was, neither! You used to think I was good looking, didn't ye?"

"Shut up!" said Whalley, closing the cupboard. He handed her a small bottle. "Take this and get out! And if you make a mistake you know what'll happen to you!"

"Kate ain't no fool!" she chuckled. "You give me some of that money you took off'n old Hiram. I got to help you afore I dast to spend it, anyhow....

"Get out!" growled Whalley. "And if the doctor asks you any questions remember that the Delanos hated me, and that you hate me!"

"I remember!" she grinned, as she got stiffly to her feet. "I'll remember everything!"

"You old rip," said Whalley, in a voice of terrible restraint. "If you make a mistake I'll send Tim after you!"

"I wasn't an old rip forty year' ago, when you come a-coaxin' and a-courtin' for me to onlatch that winder so's you could get at Hiram!"

She slipped toward the doorway as Whalley made a movement toward her. Delano stepped hastily far back into the shadows to let her pass. She went clucking down the hallway and out at the front door. Bill glanced again into the office. Joel Whalley lifted his full glass and took the whisky at a gulp. He shuddered, and filled the glass again.

Bill jumped at a light touch on his hand, and almost betrayed himself to the man he was watching. Although he could not see clearly he knew that it was Lucia Brooke who was beside him there in the shadows, and that the mere touch of her fingers against his flesh was melting away all the bitterness of resentment which he had held against her.

"I heard them," she whispered. "Come quickly!"

He followed her out through the rear doorway. No sound came from the bullpen. Delano halted and faced the girl in the moonlight.

"You... what did you say to Whalley?" he asked confusedly.

"He listened in the room behind the office," she replied, in a gentle voice. "There's a stovepipe hole in the wall. He knew I warned you, and that decided him to make an end of you here. He locked me in my room until after Tim had taken you out. I saw the dreadful thing from my window."

"I'm sorry!" Bill was drawing her away from the house. "I've got a car near here... We must get to my uncle before that old woman does!"

"It will be all right," Lucia assured him, from a calm as strong and serene as the night. "I know."

"But that woman tried to poison me!" exclaimed Bill, as they climbed into the car. "She has poison for my uncle!"

"My father and Joel Whalley and your uncle Jonathan all loved my mother," said the girl, and for an instant Bill thought that she had not understood what he said. "When my father and mother died, Whalley came posing as a friend and induced me to come here, I've been a prisoner.

He thought ne was going to marry me. But I knew!"

"You knew what?" asked Bill. "Did you know that I was coming to Delano House?"

The strange girl turned in her seat and faced him, and smiled. "There is a law that cannot be broken," she said. "Evil must destroy itself."

THE lonely light in the chamber of the sick man was the only sign of life in Delano House. Bill and Lucia Brooke climbed up through the whispering stillness of the stair well, and fear that old Kate had somehow arrived before them lay heavy upon the young man.

But the piercing gaze of Jonathan Delano met them undimmed as they stepped over the threshold of his room. Miraculously his eyes filled with

wonder and with happiness. An arm moved against the quilts. His head stirred upon the pillows.

"Lucia!" he exclaimed in a whisper that seemed to fill the room.

Then they were beside the bed, bending over him. Slowly the look of one who saw a vision faded from his face. The grimness of the stricken warrior settled about him again.

"It's Lucia's daughter," said the girl. "I've come to help you!"

"It's the boy there who can help me," replied Jonathan. "William, did you get the proof against Whalley?"

"He'll be ready to give up today," said Bill. "He's beaten at last."

"The money is under his bed in an iron box," murmured Lucia. "I have seen it."

The floor-boards in the hall creaked. Bill Delano sprang to his feet. A shape grew in the doorway, and old Kate stood blinking at them with red-rimmed eyes. She steadied herself against the casing.

"You're too late," Bill said sternly. "I heard all you and Whalley said to each other. I want the bottle that he gave you."

The expression of the wrinkled, toothless face remained unchanged. A clawlike hand came out from the folds of the old woman's skirt. She held out a small bottle. Abruptly she gave a mirthless, clucking chuckle.

"You heard me,' she said, "but you didn't see me when I put the pizen into his likker! Nor he didn't, neither! I hid outside. I see you folks go. And when I see through a winder that he'd fell out of his chair I went in and drug him out into the snow. It's cold enough to freeze the hair off a dog and he ought to be a goner by this time!"

For an instant a vast astonishment held Bill Delano silent. Then he found his wits and his voice. .

"But you tried to poison me!" he cried. "You gave chloral to my uncle!"

"I give him enough to keep him from going up there in his nightshirt!" She nodded toward the bed. "And I was afeered Tim would kill you, if you went. What's more, I wanted to finish Joel myself. I knowed I'd get a chance sometime. If it hadn't been for him I wouldn't be the old rip he called me."

A sigh of great content came from Jonathan Delano, a quick intake of breath from Lucia. Old Kate was swaying gently in the doorway now. Bill took the bottle from her limp hand. It was empty.

"I drunk what he give me the last time," she said, faintly. "My work's done, and I calculate to take a rest."

6: Reprieve

Erle Cox

1873-1950

The Lone Hand, 1 Feb 1908

AT first it appeared to me nothing more than a nuisance that, after reading for a few hours, my eyes became dim, and the print blurred disagreeably. But, as time went on, I found myself facing the necessity of spectacles.

One evening, having nothing better to do, I strolled across to see my old school-mate, Jack Burton, who had raised himself to the dignity of wearing several letters after his name, and a brass-plate on his front gate. Burton greeted me with jeers when I told him I was a patient, thinking I was having a mild joke at his expense.

“Eyes,” he said, when I told him the trouble. “Liver, perhaps. Let’s have a look.”

He made me read the alphabet from cards, on which the letters showed in unsober order and tricky juxtaposition, and grunted in a dissatisfied manner at the result. “No, my boy, that’s not liver, that’s eyes,” he said from behind my chair.

Subsequently I stared blankly into a glare infernal he produced from a tube. And it was a moment after, while I was still blinking from the light, that I caught a glimpse of his face. If ever a man knew fear, I knew it then. There was no need for him to speak. I read the sentence in his expression as though he had shouted it at me. He swung quickly to a sideboard, and I heard the clink of glasses. Then, without speaking, he handed me a nip of brandy, almost neat, and of appalling dimensions. I swallowed it without a word, and Jack stood twirling his watch-chain in his fingers, and staring at the pattern on the carpet.

“Well?” It was a struggle to drag even the one word from my lips.

“Old man,” he said, slowly, “it’s bad— bad as can be.”

“How long, Jack ? Don’t hide anything!”

“Perhaps six months. Certainly not more.”

“Totally?”

"Absolutely.”

It seemed a strange voice— unlike mine— when I asked was there any hope.

“No, old fellow. There are some things we can do, but there are limits, and this is one of them. I can’t fool you over a case like this. Go and see Mackinnon to-morrow. He’s the best man; but don’t hope. Where’s your wife?”

"Holiday!”

"Glad to hear it. You must tell her; it’s no use keeping it back. I’ll see you home, I think.”

All through that night I lay still in the darkness, trying to realise what it meant. Only 30— and perhaps 40 more years to live in that horrible shadow. Had I been alone it might not matter, but then there was Marion and the boy.

Towards midnight I switched on my light, and opened a drawer in the dressing-table, and, taking from it a small polished box, made my way to the garden, and after infinite trouble raised the stone that covered an underground tank, and dropped the box in. I knew it was not well to let my mind dwell on the .44 revolver it held. That were better out of reach for a while at least.

At half-past 10 next morning I was in Dr. Mackinnon’s waiting-room, and after a dreary hour’s wait a trim nurse ushered me into his presence. Small he was, and neat, and alert in every movement, and his dark, keen eyes seemed to make a comprehensive survey of me at one glance.

He fired a fusillade of searching questions, mostly monosyllabic, and then again came the ordeal of the night before. Then he returned to his table, and commenced to speak. I remember very little of what he said, only that Burton was right except on one point. “You haven’t six months left. Three possibly— no more.”

“Good God, Doctor! Can’t you do anything?”

"I wish I could, my dear fellow, but I fear it is hopeless. If it’s any consolation, I’ll ask Martin and Carfax to meet you here this afternoon. Shall I arrange it?”

"Very well.”

"All right; come back at three.” And he shook my hand kindly as I left the room.

UNTIL the appointed hour I wandered about the streets, with just one word ringing through my head: "Blind! blind! blind!” I knew the verdict would be final, for the men I was to meet formed the highest court of appeal, but there was something in Mackinnon’s voice that was sufficient.

Again the examination (conducted with infinite kindness) by three grave men, and then I waited for what seemed like hours, listening to the murmur of their voices in the next room. Then I heard their curt good-byes, and Mackinnon came back to me. I waited for him to speak, but his whole manner, as he dropped into the chair, was eloquent.

"They agree with me in every detail. Three months at the outside!”

I buried my face in my hands. I did not know he had moved till I felt his hand on my shoulder.

"My boy! I can’t give you hope; but would you sacrifice those three months for a chance, however slight?”

I was on my feet in a second. "A chance!"

"Don't misunderstand me." He spoke very slowly, as if he weighed every word. "The chance is so slight that I cannot counsel you to take it. It's not a thousand to one. But—"

"Go on, go on!"

"There is an operation, very unusual, that we might try, and if we fail—and I tell you Martin and Carfax are both against it— you will be blind immediately afterwards. If we should by a miracle succeed, your sight will be as good as any man's."

He raised his hand to stop me as I was about to speak

"They will help, if you agree. But I won't take an answer now. Go and think it over, and come back in an hour. If you decide for it, it must be done to-morrow. You must stay in my hospital."

It was a perfect day, and as I wandered about the gardens, wrestling with the problem, it was awful to know that perhaps after 24 hours the light would be closed for ever, by my own choice. Twenty-four hours against three months. But the chance—

The doctor was awaiting my return, and heard my decision with grave approval. I knew well that all that skill and science could do would be done. The rest was on the knees of the gods.

"Well done, man. Always remember the chance. Three sharp to-morrow, and we will be ready for you."

AT THE appointed hour I kept my tryst with Fate. A business-like nurse received me, and passed me on to another, after taking my bag. My second keeper (a jolly girl, and a good friend as I learned after) piloted me into a small room, that differed from a well-furnished sitting-room in only a few particulars, but the high table-like couch, with iron legs, proclaimed its real purpose, as did the fixed basins and taps on the walls. Another white-capped nurse, busy with some sponges, glanced curiously at me over her shoulder, and a dark, youngish man, who was manipulating what appeared to be the interior of a football at a side table, turned on our entrance.

"This is the patient, doctor," said my guide. "Dr. Denton will administer the ether."

The stranger explained that he was there by Mackinnon's arrangement, and apologised for his absence, saying that he and the others would be in presently, and went on to say that he was aware of the nature of my case, and congratulated me on my decision. He closed his fingers round my wrist for a moment, and then looked up smiling, with the remark that I kept myself well in hand.

My glance wandered to a small iron table at the head of the couch, covered with a white cloth, one corner of which was turned back; and my eye was held by the glitter of rows of evil little knives. In spite of myself I shuddered. The nurse caught the direction of my glance, and swept the cloth down at a nod from the doctor. At that moment the door opened, and let in Mackinnon, followed by Martin and Carfax, and they were still laughing at some joke as they entered. I remember I thought it a curious time for jokes.

They shook hands, and Mackinnon turned to the nurse near me: “Now, nurse!” As the nurse relieved me of coat and vest, collar and tie, Carfax and Martin were discussing the chance of some horse for the Caulfield Cup. The nurse stooped down to unlace my boots, and Denton said, sharply, “You don’t want his boots off.”

“Oh yes! I do, Dr. Denton. Remember I’m at the kicking end and you are not,” The others laughed, and even Mackinnon’s face relaxed a little.

“Will you please lie on the table now?” said the nurse.

I would have given anything to bolt at that moment. It all seemed so cold-

blooded, but there was nothing for it now but obedience.' Everything seemed strangely quiet, but somewhere in the street I heard the clang of a tram gong. Denton leant over me with a stethoscope pressed to my chest, listening intently. “Sound as a bell,” he commented, briefly. The others were talking together in low tones as he approached me with the rubber contrivance in his hands.

“Now, breathe deeply, and let yourself sleep. Don’t resist more than you can help.”

At the moment it struck me that I had seen the last of the light as he placed a funnel-shaped mask over mouth and nose. Choking, pungent, and suffocating, the gas seized me as I struggled for breath. There was a roaring of torrents in my ears, and blinding flashes of gold in my eyes, and then oblivion. The last thing I remember was a frantic grab at a hand that touched me, and I heard afterwards it took two of them to release my grip from the girl’s fingers.

After thousands of years, I heard voices from miles away; and then, with a rush, the thought came: “It is over! What has happened?” There was a sickly perfume of eau-de-cologne (how I hate it now!), and I felt I was being fanned. The voices had ceased, and I realised I was in bed; but there was no light. I raised my hands to feel my face, that ached terribly across the eyes, but a gentle touch stopped me.

“Keep still; your eyes are closely bandaged.”

“Nurse, did they do it?”

“Don’t talk, please. Dr. Mackinnon will be here in a moment; the others are gone.”

Then, my senses grown acute, I heard the doctor enter.

"Well, nurse?"

"He's conscious now, Doctor."

"Good ! Well, my friend, how do you feel?"

"Tell me the verdict, Doctor?" I asked.

"First class. We can't tell yet, though; in fact, not for a week. Still, as far as I can see, you have a good chance— better than I expected. But you must have patience and pluck. Don't worry, or you'll spoil our work. Oh, yes; she's here. You can speak to her for five minutes, no longer. I can't let the boy in."

I got consolation then, of the best, and new courage for the ordeal of waiting.

For seven days and nights I lay in that outer darkness, most of the time, I fancy, drugged into semi-unconsciousness; for I hardly think a normal nerve could have stood the strain without help. The only breaks were the brief visits from the one who had to bear her waiting without aid. We don't talk much of those days now.

Then on a morning they all came together—Mackinnon, Martin, and Carfax. The Doctor sat in the chair beside me, and, taking one of my hands, spoke slowly:

"Now, my dear sir, time's up, and we'll know what's what. You know as well as I do the risk we took, and you know we've done all that was possible. I hope for success, but if we've failed, then don't be too disappointed. Now, I'll just raise these bandages an inch, and show a light— the room is quite dark. If you see the light you are safe."

I don't think I breathed while his hand worked on the cloth. I felt them lift. There was the crackle of a match, and for one brief moment I saw three intent faces bent over me.

"The light! Thank God! The light!" I cried out.

I felt my hands gripped and shaken heartily, and heard Mackinnon's crisp comments to the others. But I cared for nothing, and found myself lying there sobbing like a baby. Do you wonder?

"Steady lad, steady! I've sent for your wife. She's downstairs waiting. Pull yourself together."

It took an effort, but I managed it. Those men must have feelings somewhere, for they fled like school boys when she tried to thank them.

That is four years ago now, and although the recovery was slow, it has been certain. Do you know that not one of those doctors appears to be proud of himself? And how can one thank them?

7: Devil's Cargo

Stephen Hopkins Orcutt

(Clarence Herbert New, 1862-1933)

Blue Book, April 1927

THE streets of Sourabaya in eastern Java, with their overarching trees, are nearly always comfortable even under a blazing tropic sun— and the town is considered healthier for residential purposes than Batavia. But Sourabaya Road, where the large steamers anchor, or moor alongside the stone quays of the rivermouth to discharge cargo, is one of the hottest areas of flat, oily water on the face of the globe. The big white Brock liner, having no cargo to discharge and as yet none "fixed" to take aboard, was anchored on the edge of the fairway half a mile inside from the hospital on the end of the jetty—her decks and bridge sheltered by khaki awnings, the air in her mess-saloon and inside gangways kept stirring by electric fans. At the starboard end of the bridge her mate and doctor, in spotless white uniforms with nothing underneath, leaned upon the rail, smoking their pipes and watching a launch which was coming down-river between the stone quays from the business and residential quarters of the city a mile or so farther up. Coffin focused his glasses upon a group under the launch's awning.

"Looks like the old man, up there in the bow. I don't think he'll have any news about cargo, or Jack Fowler would have gotten it by radio—the operators at the Government station are pretty decent about switching on the agents' telephonewire if they've anything important to say, but we'd have gotten it ourselves from Hongkong direct if Eversley Brock had fixed anything for us. From the gang aboard that launch, I'd say we're picking up a few passengers, anyhow."

"When we've no idea where were going next? Guess not!"

"M-well— that's not as definite a conclusion as you think, Bob. There are two sorts of people who take passage on a limited accommodation cargo-boat like the *Argentine Liberator*— partly for the sake of the lower fare on first-class accommodation, partly because such boats may be the only ones available for two or three weeks. Where the destination is known, any tourists or commercials would book with us for those two reasons; on the other hand, when we don't know where were going, there's a class of tourists with independent means who'll often take a chance because they like a comfortable cruise most anywhere on a good-sized, well-found ship and know they can make steamer-connections wherever we happen to take them. Some of the most delightful acquaintances we ever make come in that class."

"Yes, we've got a couple of girls aboard now who rate pretty high. They'll stick with us until we make London again— mebbe longer—money to burn and

nothing to hinder. At least, Katharine Lee has— since she inherited that uncle's fortune in Rio. Marjorie Banton has the best head of the two—from what Katharine hinted, she's been drawing a six-thousand-dollar salary from a big engineering concern and saving more than half of it for years. If she takes nine or ten months off to rest up, her job will be waiting for her when she gets back. I'd like to make myself as indispensable as that. Psst! Get onto the dame with the Pekingese and the lorgnette! Somehow she doesn't look so good to me— seems to be doing most of the talking, down there in the launch. Hope she's not going to wish herself on us in the saloon!"

"By Jove— she is, though! Look at the mess of hand-luggage stacked around her— even to that yaller-green parrot in the big cage! Fortunately Connyngsby isn't the sort of an ass that Ludd was when he left that Bradley-Fyssher dame pretty nearly run the ship— but the old man is always courteous— he'll let a bossy woman-passenger go pretty far before he sits on her. Hmph! Looks like it wont be altogether a dull voyage, no matter where we go! Here's hoping we get a few level-headed ones like the Cartersons to even up. Eh?"

AS the launch approached the grating at the foot of the accommodation-ladder, they leaned a little farther over the bridgerail to watch the people coming aboard— hearing quite distinctly the complimentary remarks which were being passed. upon the steamer's clean and shipshape appearance. Stepping out of the launch first, Connyngsby gave a hand to each of the others. Mrs. Bollingford went a little too far in attempting to hand him the Pekingese and the parrot— probably failing to realize the quiet snub when he said that one of the stewards would come down after them, presently. As she came puffing up the steamer's side, stepping aboard into the main-deck gangway, her manner was proprietory— it was to be seen that she approved of the ship, with perhaps a few minor alterations which would occur to her later. Coming up to the boat-deck upon which her room was situated, she stepped out through the companion for a look along the deck-space abaft the "house," and wished to know which side she was on. Connyngsby pointed to her two gangway-ports and was about to look after some of the other passengers, but she detained him.

"Why— that is on the sunny side, Captain! I distinctly stipulated, when I booked at the agents', that my room must be on the shady side! The sun would be intolerable in this frightful heat, and Toto's eyes are very sensitive!"

"You have stateroom B, madam— one of our two best cabins, with private bath adjoining— but I fear you'll not be able to keep Toto or the bird in it.

Possibly we might let him stay with your maid in one of the smaller rooms, right-away aft—"

"Toto is a lady-dog, Captain, and it is quite necessary that she have the best 'of care. I'm not sure it would be wise to permit Celeste—"

"Oh, we must give Celeste a chance, you know. The parrot, of course, will have to go for'ard with the Lascars. As for your room bein' on the sunny side, the tide will change that in a few hours, temporarily— though the deck-awnings will keep it as cool as any of the rooms while we're in tropic waters. Of course the agents couldn't possibly book you upon any shady side, d'ye see, because it's not known as yet which way the boat is goin' from here. If we get cargo for one of the American ports, to be sure, you'd be on the shady side all the way across the Pacific—but if she's fixed for London or Liverpool, you know, the sun would be on your side all the way."

"I think it's very poor management— not knowing where you expect to go from here, when they said you might leave at any hour!"

"Faith, we'd not object to knowin' that ourselves, Mrs. Bollingford— upon that point, we're quite in accord with you. But, d'ye see, a boat must pay her way— she must go where cargo is moving an' ocean freights are sufficient to cover her expenses. Now— if you'll permit me— I'll show you into your room an' then take your maid along to hers with the beastie. I dare say we can make them quite comfortable. What?"

Giving her no time to insist upon accompanying them to satisfy herself upon this point, he beckoned the silent maid after him, and when she was in the room assigned to her, explained in very good French how she could arrange a nest for the Pekingese upon the transom, with a bunkboard to keep her from sliding to the floor in heavy weather. Celeste didn't say much, but what there was of it savored more of the Place de la Bastille than of the Faubourg St. Germain— with just a hint of vaguely familiar accent in it.

"My word, Celeste! Have they raised the Tricolor over Limerick?"

"Faith, an' they've not, Cap'n dear— but I do be gettin' a hoondr' an' twinty goold dollars the month f'r bein' Frinch! Oi'm not lettin' a matther of changin' me name stand in the way of me job. There'll be what I could say in Gaelic, ye moind— about that little baste— as would blisther the hair off her head. But 'twould be too ixpensive ontil Oi've saved a bit!"

Connyngsby shook with silent laughter. "I fancy we understand each other perfectly, Celeste. Er— you might caution the lady if you can do it safely, against getting the impression that she's the guest of honor aboard. The average passenger doesn't fancy that attitude greatly, you know— an' we much prefer a harmonious saloon."

SAILING regulations being partly suspended in port, Miss Lee and Miss Banton had climbed to the bridge to chat with the two officers— giving them an account of their doings ashore— regretting that it had been necessary for the mate and doctor to remain aboard.

"What price this Mrs. Bollingford, Neddie?"

"Not even a lead florin! We've got our fingers crossed! She may be amusing enough, Marjorie— but that sort of passenger is likely to be annoying at just the wrong time. No real trouble in smooth weather, you understand— when she's fair game to be guyed a bit. But in heavy going— or any sort of emergency— good night! Any more like her booked with us?"

"I think not. Guess it's too much of a gamble for the average passenger— who wants to know exactly where he's going and in exactly how many hours. But there are four or five who look as though they may turn out rather nice. Mr. and Mrs. Evanston seem to be real fòlks, from the little I talked with them in the launch. He made a fortune in rubber and has practically retired at forty— both well educated and well-liked in the Government set at Singapore. Doctor said she ought to keep at sea for three or four months to rest up from the Peninsula— they're both crazy about the water. Miss Graham and Miss Farwell are school-teachers— on the sort of vacation they've been several years planning and saving for. They get farther for their money on the Argentine, firstclass, than they can on any of the liners. Then there's a Mr. Hoesen— Dutch, I suppose, though he speaks very good English. Dark enough to have a tinge of Malay blood in him, if it's not tan. Quite civil and all that— but his eyes are too near together to suit me. He looks around out of the corners, sometimes, the way a stray cur does just before he bites."

"Old man say anything about cargo?"

"Not a word. I don't think he's heard anything. Here he comes now! Want us off the bridge, Captain?"

"My word— no! Not until the anchor's up, at all events! It's a relief to let down a bit with you ladies after what I've had the last hour or so."

"Any word about cargo, Captain? I told Ned I thought not— or you'd have dropped a hint to me."

"Nothin' definite, Miss Marjorie. We can get full up in Frisco any time the next sixty days— but that's much too long a trip in ballast. The coals would more than eat up all the profit we got there. The agents had word of a native-sultan in Celebes who'll load us with coir an' copra if we'll take it across the Pacific— payin' a bit over what the coal would cost us— aye, a possible thousand to the good. One of their Dutch clerks— tryin' to be a bit overofficious, d'ye see— cabled Eversley Brock, in Hongkong, about it. I told him Brock wouldn't consider the stuff unless at rates considerably more than

it's worth. Copra's not so bad unless the oil oozes out of it from the heat of the hold— an' coir's well enough if ye can dampen it a bit— but put 'em together, an' I don't fancy 'em as cargo. Peculiar stuff— coir. It rots in fresh water an' snaps short when frozen with it— but the more it soaks in salt water, the tougher the fiber gets, an' it makes a hawser that'll always float. The Yankees have put it to other uses, recently— some sort of cold-storage insulation, I believe. Likely enough this Celebes sultan has sold a few small lots that he sent across to Frisco in Island schooners— an' now has been strippin' an' stackin' it until there's a few thousand tons to ship."

"Who is representing him here? Dutch Government?"

"Rather not! They've no boats of their own runnin' across to Frisco— an' they'll not encourage outsiders gettin' any of the native trade if they can help it. But, d'ye see, the Malay sultans in the interior of all these islands are independent rulers, with merely a Dutch resident stayin' with 'em Officially to look out for Governm'nt int'rests— an' if they interfere too much with a sultan's private business, they're likely to have an uprisin' on their hands. Much better to look the other way in a case of this sort. This chap Hoesen, who came aboard with us, is representin' the sultan, an' he's asked the agents to treat the matter confidentially. Can't say I'm strong for him on his general appearance— I fancy he'll not be Dutch, either— but his passagemoney is good as the next one's, an' he'll go as far as Celebes at least if the owners take him up— which isn't likely. Though, as a matter of fact— if we're to lie about these waters runnin' up port charges—it might save money to do it."

NEITHER Connyngsby nor his officers had any idea that Mr. Eversley Brock would accept that sort of cargo for one of the finest boats in his fleet, but it just so happened that one of those occasional combinations of circumstances which it is always difficult to guard against settled the matter before the chief owners had an opportunity to pass upon it. The agent's clerk in Sourabaya was an ambitious young chap, anxious to demonstrate his value, and consequently showing initiative where the machinery would have been better for his not meddling with it. He had cabled the Hongkong office in sufficient detail to make the proposition appear better than it actually was. Eversley Brock, at the time, was elephant-hunting in Siam as a guest of the King—where he couldn't be reached for a week or more. In his absence the assistant manager— always looking for business— received the proposition, and had to pass upon it. From an all-round point of view, as Connyngsby had said, it was possibly better than having a big cargo-boat eating up her profits in port-charges while waiting for something better. He talked it over with the port captain— who damned that

sort of cargo, but admitted that it might be good business to take it. So Connyngsby got this radio in the morning:

CONNYNGSBY, MASTER. Str. Argentine Liberator. Sourabaya, N. I. Think advisable accept Celebes cargo, Frisco— full load waiting there. Brock & Co., Hongkong.

Not knowing of Eversley Brock's absence, the Captain was considerably surprised at the message— but never dreamed of going over his head with a cable to the head office in Liverpool. He cleared his boat in three hours, and went steaming off down the Java Sea for Macassar at a comfortable fourteen knots, to save coal. That afternoon the passenger Hoesen— in a private interview— told him the sultan had arranged to ship the cargo in a way that would avoid friction all round. The boat was to anchor for an hour or two in Macassar Road "for orders," which would be fetched aboard by a local agent who would proceed with them. Then they were to go around the Minahassa into the Gulf of Tomini to a point twenty miles west of Gorontalo, where there was a narrow fiord three miles in length with precipitous mountains on both sides. At the inner end of this the sultan's coir and copra were stacked under a long nipa shed waiting for them— and unless a Dutch survey-boat happened along unexpectedly, the Government would know nothing at all about the shipment, as none of the Koninklijke packets go into the western half of the Gulf, anywhere.

Hoesen also mentioned a couple of Australian miners who had struck a rich vein of platinum-matrix and by rudimentary methods of reduction, on the spot, had obtained half a dozen cases of crude platinum which they were anxious to have assayed in San Francisco, rather than send it down to Sydney and risk a "rush" of prospectors coming up to make trouble. If Connyngsby would deliver the stuff in San Francisco without permitting any talk concerning it, the miners were willing to pay a freight-rate in proportion to the value— and Hoesen pointed out that this should be a welcome boost over the other freights. On the face of it, the Captain agreed with him— said he would take the cases and stow them carefully with the bales of coir. He was no miner, himself.

The story seemed plausible enough to make any suspicion ridiculous.

While Connyngsby was clearing the ship at Sourabaya— after showing Coffin and Fowler the message from the Hongkong office— it struck the mate as plain horse-sense to risk a little of his own money against a contingency which seemed very remote at the time. Getting the agents to cash his draft on the owners, he purchased from a chemical house twenty small casks of sodabicarbonate and had them delivered on board before the anchor was up— stowing the casks in a 'tween-deck space over the Number One Hold used

upon occasions for Asiatic steerage. He told the Captain it was a little private venture of his own— but said nothing about what he proposed doing with it.

While they were shipping the coir in the little landlocked fiord, hidden from any passing boat outside, the two mining engineers came down from their mountain camp on burros and showed the mate where half a dozen teakwood cases were hidden in the jungle growth under nipa thatch— cautioning him about handling them as carefully as possible to prevent the crude residuum from crumbling in transit. Coffin was no mineralogist, either. In a general way he knew that platinum was one of the heavy metals, but had no idea how heavy. In lifting one of the cases, it felt weighty enough to prevent his giving that point another thought. They told him that with a second-hand dynamo, an old petrolmotor and some blue clay— with plenty of rusty barbed-wire— they had constructed a rudimentary electric furnace in which they had reduced the matrix until there was little remaining but the platinum, with small percentages of iron, copper, osmium and iridium which the assayers would easily separate, and send them a report on the stuff. It sounded all right enough. He told the Malays who were putting the cases aboard to be careful about not dropping or jarring any of them and had his own Lascars stow them temporarily in the 'tweendeck space— telling the miners that before putting on the hatches he would stow the cases with the upper tier of coir-bales in order that they might have something to cushion against in heavy weather. This seemed entirely satisfactory to the shippers and to Hoesen, who went back up into the mountains with them until a launch from Gorontalo came after him to catch the next Koninklijke boat. An hour later the big freighter slipped quietly out of the little fiord and headed out toward the end of the Minahassa.

BEFORE they were clear of the land, the hatches were on and everything safely stowed for the long reach across to San Francisco. The course lay directly through the Caroline Islands, which they would reach in about three days— then the Marshall and Hawaiian groups. Of the ship's officers, Coffin was the only one who now gave another thought to the cargo— to the rest of them the shipment was'safely on board and the course laid for their destination, and so they turned their attention to other matters. About the time they were clearing the easterly point of the Minahassa, however, the second mate—who also acted as radio-operator—came to Ned Coffin with a message relayed. from the Lloyd's office in London.

COFFIN, MATE. Str. Argentine Liberator. Molucca Sea. Insurance Frisco cargo £90,000. Chiefly on six cases platinum. If metal 70% pure, not excessive with full load coir and copra. Otherwise—overinsured. What information have you? FERNSHAW.

AFTER handing the mate his message and leaving him reading it on the bridge, Fowler had back to his radio-cabin at the after end of the boat-deck. The more Coffin reread the radiogram and thought it over, the more he didn't like several things it might suggest under varying conditions. Philip Fernshaw— a confidential agent for Lloyd's— had made the round trip with them on the previous voyage out from London and back again—and had won the liking of everyone on board, finding Ned Coffin the most congenial of the lot.

Later, in the matter of Katharine Lee's Rio inheritance, the mate had put Fernshaw under considerable personal obligation in addition to what they had assisted each other to do for Lloyd's. So this message from him was both a cautious inquiry concerning the business of the greatest underwriting concern in the world, and a friendly tip that Coffin would do well not to accept too much for granted. Calling Dunham, a quartermaster who was boning up on navigation for a third mate's ticket, he turned over the bridge to him and stepped along to the master's cabin abaft the wheelhouse— where he showed Connyngsby the radiogram.

"Well— you examined those cases, didn't you, Ned? I looked at the coir an' copra rather closely as it came aboard. Copra a bit greasy, but not more than it usually is in the Island schooners—"

"In more or less open holds, sir—little but matting over it— less chance to get worse from heat in a confined place. I lifted one of those cases a few inches— seemed about as heavy as it should be for half-reduced platinum, from what I've heard of the stuff— it took a couple of husky Malays to get each case aboard. Of course I didn't open any of them. No excuse for it— might have caused the crumbling those mining engineers were anxious to avoid. Now I think of it, 'crumbling' seems a bit queer in reference to any solid metal— but I suppose it might have been reduced far enough to be in somewhat loose crystalline form, though I don't know the first thing about the chemistry of such minerals."

"Oh— aye! Fancy I'd not question the statem'nts of scientific Johnnies like those two, you know. Well— then— you'd say to Fernshaw that everything appears to be quite right, would ye not?"

"Until I got this message, I would— probably. But now— I'm not so sure."

"Why— what d'ye mean, Ned? What could be wrong about any of the stuff— that'll not show as it comes aboard?"

"Well— those are pretty strong teak cases, securely nailed up— or— no, by Jove!— screwed fast. They could be filled with scrap-iron or stones and still be about the right weight for platinum."

"Aye— quite so. They could. But ye'll not be forgettin' the stiff freights they paid over to me in drafts on the Hongkong & Shanghai Bank at the same time Hoesen gave me similar drafts for the coir. Orders were, ye know, that we'd not load the stuff without freights in advance. Well, d'ye see— they'd pay no such amount on stones an' scrap-iron!"

"Not with any certainty of the stuff reaching destination— no."

"An' what bee have ye in your head about that? Why shouldn't they reach destination? It's not hurricane season in the Pacific."

"H-m-m— if it just happened that the Argentine turned up missing, those stiff freights on the platinum wouldn't be a fleabite on the ninety thousand pounds they're carrying on the cargo— would they? If I could make ninety thousand, sterling, on a net investment of six or eight thousand, I'd call it a fairly good business proposition."

"Oh, nons'nse, man— nons'nse! Ye'll be gettin' on my nerves, presently, with that sort of talk— an' that's no proper condition for a shipmaster to be in!"

"Well— I'd rather make you nervous now, sir, than risk seeing you lose life or ticket between here and Frisco. Just humor me a bit, will you, until I put the case as it easily might be— and see how it looks? Eh? Within the next twenty-four hours we'll be within short steaming distance of Banda Neira or Zamboanga, on Mindanao. In sixty hours we'll be not so far from Yap in the Carolines. But afterward there'll be a week during which we'll be pretty far from any sort of assistance until we reach Hawaiian waters. We've fourteen passengers, with eight women, and a pretty good-sized crew— that's a lot of folks to be adrift on the Pacific in open boats even if they all get safely into them. Now, if those platinum-cases are fakes, the whole cargo is a fake— because Hoesen was managing the whole shipment. If the cargo is a fake, the consignees in Frisco are fakes— we'll have the stuff on our hands and all sorts of complications with it before we can load and get away again. If we find out any actual facts of that sort, I'm betting that Eversley Brock will order us up to Hongkong or Manila, auction off this stuff we're carrying, for anything it'll fetch— and pick up a better cargo for us with some other destination. What I'm getting at is this: It seems to me that we can't know what is actually in those platinum-cases any too soon!"

"My word! There'll be-a good deal in what ye say, Coffin. But we can't be meddlin' with shippers' property, ye know— committin' what amounts to breakin' an' enterin' on it, especially when we've been warned to handle with extra care to avoid lessenin' its value. Eh?"

"According to maritime law, sir, a shipmaster may jettison his entire cargo if he finds it dangerous to the ship— or if he has proof it was shipped with intent to defraud."

"Aye— an' risk havin' his ship libeled in a civil suit by the shippers at the first port, for the full value of what he's jettisoned!"

"But— isn't he frequently obliged to take that risk, sir, to save life and owners' property?"

"Aye— he is so. But he's to be sure of what he's about, first."

"Well— it's a fairly dark night, just drizzle enough to keep the passengers below. Nobody'll see what's going on in the for'ard well. Will you let me have up one of those cases and overhaul it— very carefully?"

"H-m-m— I fancy ye'll not do so much damage to anything in the way o' metal by havin' a look-see at it. Aye— go ahead! Ill take the responsibility."

THE more Coffin thought of the supposed miners' anxiety about having the cases handled without jolting or dropping them, the more apprehensive he became over what might prove to be inside of them. Having the covers of the fore-hatch quietly taken off, and tackle from one of the sampson-posts lowered into the hold, he first shifted half a dozen bales of coir which had been stowed on top of the teak cases and then had one of them hauled very carefully up to the deck. Laying his ear flat upon the top planking, he could detect no sound whatever inside. With a brace and screw-driver bit, he took out enough of the screws to remove the top planks. Inside, the contents were wrapped in two thicknesses of sheet-lead which just about doubled the weight of the case—and when the flaps of this lead were slowly pulled up, he saw two rows of long candles with dark paper wrapped around two-thirds of their length— packed in sawdust. On some of these paper wrappings were printed: "DYNAMITE 80%." Sending for Connyngsby and MacTavish, the chief engineer, Coffin showed them what the case contained. Then— swinging the thing over the side with a tripblock— he lowered it into the water and tripped the hook so that it freed itself from the sling and let the cask sink.

There was no further argument about meddling with the shipment. Each case was carefully hoisted out of the hold, opened— and dropped overboard. Three of them contained sand inside the sheet-lead instead of dynamite— and when Coffin laid his ear upon the outside of the last one, he heard a faint clicking as if from clockwork of some sort. Without opening this one, he had it lowered overboard as quickly as possible— much to the master's and chief's astonishment.

"An' for why did ye no' open yon box, mon— tae see what micht be inside?"

Coffin held up his hand with a warning gesture of a person listening for something— and in a few seconds it came. A mound of water higher than the rail boiled up alongside, drenching the deck and everything on it, while a perceptible jar shook the ship. As they were wringing the water out of their clothes, he said:

"That case must have been fifty or sixty fathoms down before it let go— air-compression, inside, set it off when the teak and lead split from the pressure. They expected the clockwork in that one case to explode it and set the others off at the same time— but they probably figured it for our third or fourth day at sea, when we'd have been pretty well out into the Pacific. Get those hatch-covers on and the tarpaulins lashed over 'em, men! The bilgepumps will take out the water that went down into the hold. We don't give a damn whether it injures the coir or not! Gad! There was about a minute, there, when I felt as if something was crawling down my back! No certainty as to what second that infernal stuff was going off! Well— we're rid of that danger, sir!"

"My word! I'm a bit in doubt as to how we'd best proceed! This puts a difPrent complexion upon the whole cargo— not? What would ye suggest, Coffin?"

"Radio Fernshaw to cancel the cargoinsurance. Report to Eversley Brock, in Hongkong, and ask for instructions. Meanwhile slow down to half-speed. Those are merely suggestions, sir. You'll have your own ideas about proceeding to Frisco in the circumstances— of course."

"Tell Fernshaw— aye. Report to Brock? That'll take more consideration. Looks like I might be incompetent to handle my ship an' went runnin' to owners with every problem comin' up! Why not proceed Frisco an' say nothin'? We know we'll get full cargo, there. I fancy there'll be no question as to our returnin' any of the freights— those bounders would never dare ask it! We have the freights— enough to more than cover expenses across—"

"In drafts signed by Hoesen and those fake miners on the Hongkong and Shanghai after the stuff was all aboard and we were just leaving. Suppose they have no accounts with that bank? Suppose they were devilish enough to conceal a clockwork fuse in one of those coir-bales— just to make sure? Firing them when we're halfway across the Pacific?"

"Oh— I say! Those points had not occurred to me! At least, not yet. Fancy that settles it! Eh, Mac?"

"Coffin's recht. Ye'd best radio Hongkong, sir, I'm thinkin'," agreed MacTavish.

IT was now nine days since they had left Sourabaya. Eversley Brock had returned to Bangkok and then come down the Peninsula by rail to Singapore, where the message was relayed to him. He was very much exasperated at the order which had been sent from Hongkong to accept that class of cargo for one of their finest ships— but sent no orders until he had inquired about the drafts upon the Hongkong & Shanghai Banking Corporation. This took another day, inasmuch as the head office in Hongkong had to request information from its Batavia and Sourabaya branches. They reported that while the sultan in question had an account with them, the man Hoesen was merely an overseer and selling-agent with no authority whatever for signing bank-drafts. As for the two miners, the branches had never even heard of them. The Brocks, of course, would have been legally justified in selling the cargo at auction to cover the freights they had been swindled out of— provided that cargo had been the property of the swindlers. If, as now seemed likely, it had belonged to the sultan or some one else, and had been shipped without his knowledge, there was a perfectly valid claim against the ship for the stolen goods— though any Admiralty court probably would have ordered sale by auction to defray the freights and turned over the balance, if any, to the original owner. Taken all around, it was a most annoying situation—one which Brock decided had best be untangled under his personal supervision. So, thirty-six hours after Connyngsby's message reached him, he ordered the course changed for Hongkong. The *Argentine* was then N.E. of Gilolo, just leaving East Indian waters— so that the Captain put her about almost due N.W., heading across Celebes Sea for the Sulu Passage off Zamboanga in the Philippines.

The course was changed about the middle of the afternoon. Mrs. Bollingford presently noticed that the sun's reflection from the water was throwing a few dazzling beams through the ports upon the ceiling of her stateroom, though the awnings kept the temperature from being noticeably higher— and she hunted up the Captain with an emphatic protest.

"You will please remember, Captain, that I insisted upon the shady side when booking my cabin. So far, it has been as satisfactory as one could expect upon a boat of this type— but you've now turned your ship around until I'm getting that frightfully hot sun through my little windows. I simply won't stand it. Why was it done?"

"Because we would lose too much time running the boat stern-first, madam— that's the only way I could keep you on the shady side. Owners' orders, you know. You might take it up with them if you wish. Send a radio that you object to the change of course. I fancy it'll be doubtful as to their considerin' it— but no other way occurs to me just now. It's like this, d'ye see: Every passenger aboard of us booked as far as the next port or beyond at a flat

passage-rate per day— wherever the boat went. They'd no more knowledge of where that might be than yourself. We were starting for San Francisco— but we're now ordered up to Hongkong."

"And may be ordered elsewhere before you reach it, I suppose! Your ship reminds me very much of the *Flying Dutchman*! It doesn't seem to be getting anywhere! And I'm very much disgusted with such a lack of system! I've social engagements at home which can't be postponed indefinitely! So you will please go into the nearest port where there are civilized hotels, and leave me there!"

"H-m-m— that would be either Manila or Hongkong, madam. We may be ordered into Manila for another cargo, on the way up, though I fancy that's doubtful. Otherwise it'll be Hongkong. So possibly you'd best forget the matter for the present."

"And if I refuse? If I insist?"

"I should regret it, madam— because we prefer having our passengers comfortable and do our best to make them so. Primarily, of course, the business of a cargo-boat is ocean-freights— not passengers."

"But— but— my poor little Toto! She's so sensitive to the heat!"

"You may have as many electric fans as you wish to blow on her, madam. If she succumbs to the climate, we'll bury her very decently over the side. But— I fancy you're unnecessarily apprehensive. Celeste will do everything that is humanly possible—I am certain of that."

COFFIN had been chatting with Katharine Lee, Marjorie Banton and the Cartersons, near enough to catch every word— and the five of them were convulsed. When the lady had gone below and the Captain had disappeared upon his own affairs, they fairly shouted.

"What price Connyngsby, girls! Isn't he a bird! Not a single uncivil word, you noticed! Solicitous— that's what he was! And that dame never tumbled to his guying the life out of her! I've known P. & O. masters who'd have told her to go to hell, after she'd rubbed it in about so long. But not the old man— oh, no! He's a gentleman!"

Coffin had said nothing to anybody about his subconscious impression that the dynamite wasn't, possibly, the end of their troubles— but he couldn't shake off the vague apprehension. Presently he went below to the Doctor's room on the maindeck gangway. Closing the door, he asked Thayer's opinion concerning the way the fourteen passengers would stack up in an emergency.

"I don't know just why you're asking that at this moment, Ned— but I've been thinking over the point myself. The girls, we know, are pretty good sports who wont get dangerously rattled over anything. The Cartersons and the

Evanstons are much the same type— in good physical condition— not overstimulated. Celeste, as you may have noticed, is a diplomat— that Limerick girl has herself pretty well in hand all the time. Porthick and his wife are the young married type— about thirty, I'd say— who have no mental equipment whatever. He knows enough to get along in his business and keep track of cricket scores. Both of them would probably go to pieces under pressure. The school-teachers might stand up pretty well— probably would. Mrs. Bollingford, I suppose, would have to be locked into her room or go in the brig, What's on your mind, Ned?"

"Well— those skunks didn't intend to have this boat reach port. What precautions in that line they may have taken besides the dynamite, I don't know— but they seemed to be a fairly thorough bunch. They had the copra stacked at the edge of the beach under a nipa shed which let the sun get in on it all the afternoon, so that it was unusually dry and oily. Part of the long heap was against the coir-bales— on top of a dozen or more which had absorbed a good deal of the coconut-oil. I stowed the copra in the lower holds with green palm-fronds over it, and the coir on top—but the coir is drier than any I ever saw before. Were it not for possible complications about the ownership, I'd jettison the whole cargo as fast as I could get it out. In fact, I think it would be money in the owners' pockets if I did it anyway. Of course we've ventilators from all the holds and bunkers— but conditions in the tropics are considerably different from the hold of an Island schooner, which that sort of stuff is usually shipped in. Do you know, I believe I'll go down through the manhole in the tool-closet on the other side of the gangway, with a flashlight— and see if I can smell anything out of the way in the Number Two Hold."

GOING around to his own room at the end of the port gangway, Coffin changed to a pair of denim trousers and an undershirt— then went down into the hold with an electric torch, followed by the doctor. Climbing over the bales of coir in the 'tween-deck space, they got under the hatch where the teak-cases had been taken out— and down on the bales under the 'tween-deck. In spite of the ventilators the air was frightfully close, with a temperature over 100°— the musty smell of the coir blending with the strong, rancid odor from the copra underneath. They could detect nothing that indicated smoke, and were about to return when Thayer, who had worked his way over against the sideplating of the ship, called to his companion. When Coffin joined 'him and sniffed for a minute, they were both quite sure they detected a smell of something smoldering— not the smell of active flame, but that of glowing sparks, eating into something. With the torch shut off, they could see no particle of reflection anywhere, but the scorching odor was there

unmistakably— and they made their way back to the main-deck, making sure that the cover was fast over the man-hole in the tool-closet.

In Thayer's room they talked a moment.

"We'll get a length of hose along this gangway— down through that man-hole, with a tarpaulin over it— and then over against the port side where we smelled those sparks! By thoroughly soaking the coir for ten feet away from the plates, the water will drip through and get at the fire, wherever it is."

"Think it's too much of a risk to have a section of the hatch-cover off and go down direct?"

"You'd have flame down there in a few minutes if you did— from the draught. Can't open the hatch except as a last resort!"

"I say, Ned! It's just a fool coincidence, of course— but before we left Tilbury, this trip, I'd been reading up on asphyxiation of all sorts— ammonia-fumes, smoke, carbon monoxide— all that sort of thing. Struck me that a physician might save lives occasionally if he were equipped to go into any space filled with such stuff and fetch out anyone he found there. More I thought of it, the more it seemed that even a ship's doctor ought to have some such equipment— so I bought a couple of the latest gas-masks on the market. They're much better than what we had in France— I tested 'em thoroughly. So— just bear 'em in mind if we've any serious fire ahead of us. May come in handy!"

"By thunder, Bob! Those things may be a lot of help in the next day or two. But just now, we want that hose down there as soon as we can lay it!"

None of the passengers— even Connyngsby himself— dreamed that night of what was going on below them. After soaking the coir with water on that side for two hours, Coffin and MacTavish could detect no more of the burning smell and were satisfied that the immediate danger was over. But one of the officers went down into the hold every hour until after daylight to see if the smoldering had started again. During the morning there was no indication of anything wrong. But after tiffin one of the passengers jokingly asked the assistant engineer, who happened to be on deck if the engine-room gang were inveterate smokers— pointing to a ventilator just aft of where the boat-deck stopped, and supposing that it came up from the engine-room. Jennings cocked an eye upon it, noticed an occasional wisp of smoke rather darker than tobacco makes— and grinned in an unconcerned way.

"Sometimes a bunch of oily cotton-waste gets to burning in one of the refuse-cans, Mr. Porthick. In fact, we get rid of it that way, occasionally— and of course the ventilators suck it up."

IN a moment or two, when Jennings had refilled his pipe and lighted it, he strolled along forward and went up on the bridge, where the mate was on duty— saying, in a low tone:

"Don't look aft, sir. There's fire in the Number Three Hold. Not so much, yet— but she's beginning to blaze a bit."

"Get below as quick as you can— but quietly. Tell Mac! Turn out all of the engine-room crew! Get two lengths of hose through the man-hole in the engineroom bulkhead, packed with tarpaulin to stop any draft and soak any blaze or smoke you see with water! I'll send below for Fowler to relieve me, and come down as soon as I can!"

The ventilator cowls had been turned forward to catch all the breeze there was stirring with the ship's motion, but Coffin sent a Lascar aft to turn two of them the other way and stuff them with anything handy. He knew there would be echoes of voices coming up both ventilators from the Number Three in a few minutes— knew they would make passengers on deck uneasy, if they weren't actually scared into panic.

This little blaze proved considefably more stubborn than the former smoldering. The engine-room gang and several of the Lascars fought it all day in a suffocating atmosphere, somewhat relieved from time to time as the stuffing was removed from the ventilators and the men cautioned to keep from shouting. At dinner-time, when all of them were pretty well exhausted, the fire appeared to be out, and the coir thoroughly soaked. But Coffin and MacTavish knew what they were up against by this time— and went up to the Captain' s room for a conference.

"That stuff has got to come out, sir! As far as we can tell, there's no fire in the Number Two and Number Three just now. As soon. as the passengers have gone below for the night, we can drop a tarpaulin over the stateroom parts looking down into the for'ard well— get the hatches off, and jettison that stuff as fast as we can. Once out, we've got the engine and boiler compartments protected even if fire starts in Number One and Number Four— as it undoubtedly will. And we'll then be in better shape to handle it."

"I'd agree to that at once, Ned, but, d'ye see, there'll be complications if an innocent owner, like the sultan, for example, libels the boat for value of cargo destroyed!"

"He couldn't, now, if he wanted to, sir! It's a fire loss— and you're protected by the standard clause on all bills-of-lading— 'subject to peril by fire, perils of the sea, and acts of Providence." The stuff has been on fire— is damaged by water in consequence— must be jettisoned to save the ship and the human lives on board. If the underwriters couldn't prove a charge of criminal conspiracy on our testimony, they'd have to pay on the coir and copra

at least. It seems to me, sir, that jettisoning is much the easiest solution for the owners. The cargo will be gone— nobody can sue them, or libel the *Argentine* for unquestionable fire-loss!"'

"Faith— I believe ye're right! If I know anything of maritime law— they really can't. So yell just get at it as soon as may be done quietly, Coffin. Aye!"

BY daylight every scrap of the copra and coir was out of the holds adjoining the boiler and engine compartments— but the crew were nearly done up. In the middle of the afternoon, after most of them had gotten a few hours' sleep, the ventilators on the No. 1 began to spit occasional wisps of smoke, This was gotten at through the 'tween-deck space reserved for Asiatic steerage— two lines of hose being led down through the fo'c'stle from the pumps in the for'ard well-deck. The blaze had gotten more headway than in the other two holds, however— before they could make much impression upon it, the atmosphere below was so suffocating that the four men with the hose-lines had to be dragged out, leaving the streams of water still soaking down the bales, but not at the points where they were the most needed. Just then Coffin remembered the Doctor's gas-masks-and ran up to get them. With these adjusted, he and Thayer went into the hold and remained there for two hours— getting the fire under control, but by no means putting it out. Jennings and Fowler took their places— the assistant engineer having used similar masks in France and knowing how to adjust them—while the mate and doctor dropped on their bunks for a few hours of sleep. After dinner Fowler reported that the fire seemed to be out. Connyngsby sent for the mate and told him to clear out that hold after the passengers had gone below for the night— but Coffin shook his head.

"We don't dare wait that long, sir! There's smoldering fire, yet, down there in the copra— if it once spreads far enough up into the coir, we may have to beach the boat and flood the holds before we can get it out. Only thing I see to do is open that hatch and get the stuff overboard while we can!"

"There'll be draft enough to start up the blaze again if you do!"

"No question about it! But if-most of the coir is over the side before the fire's very bad, we can then get water directly on the copra— and I've another remedy I can try besides. Mac has shut his bilgecocks for that hold— what we pump down is sloshing around in the bilges. If it puts the boat down by the head a little, so much the better— then we can siphon water in as well as squirt it through the hose."

"But— with the passengers on deck, this evening, you'll not be able to keep it from them any longer! We'll have panic on our hands as-well as the fire!"

"Well— we can handle fourteen passengers— can't we?"

"Oh— aye. But panic spreads, d'ye see. We'll have stewards an' stokers goin' crazy in a little while, besides!"

"Shucks! Were up against it anyway— no matter what we do! And the fire is the worst problem, aint it?"

"Faith— you're right as to that, Ned! Very well— you handle the fire an' I'll look after the deck!"

COFFIN and his Lascars worked fast, desperately fast, up to just about the limit of their strength— with the tackle from two sampson-posts hoisting out the bales at the same time. When all but half a dozen of them were over the side, flamgs began to lick up through the copra— in five minutes, there was a roaring column of it shooting up through the hatch. But Coffin had anticipated this and ordered half of the soda-bicarbonate casks broached in the *tween-deck. As the flame roared up, he had four Lascars shoveling the soda down into the lower hold so that it scattered pretty evenly over the copra. In three minutes the flames choked down and were succeeded by a dense column of oily smoke— there still being perhaps a quarter of the loose soda in reserve.

On the boat-deck the column of fire paralyzed the passengers into stunned silence for a few seconds, then there were screams of alarm— several of them began running aft and started climbing down into the after well-deck. But Connyngsby was in their way— smoking his pipe— apparently unconcerned.

"Back! All of you! There's nothing to be alarmed over, as yet! When there's any real danger, I'll let you know! We've had fire aboard for the last forty-eight hours and have managed to keep it under control. We can make Zamboanga if necess' ry— or beach the boat on the Mindanao coast. Now get hold of yourselves an' stop this nons'nse— at once!"

This was satisfactory enough to half of them— the cooler half, who had kept control of themselves— but it didn't make much impression upon Mrs. Bollingford, Porthick or some of the others. There were panicky exclamations about "the boats!"— the lady leading.

"I should have been told about this at once, Captain! It's perfectly inexcusable! Why— why— I might have been burned to death in my berth!"

"Not unless I happened to be roasted first, madam. I'm supposed to be looking after the safety of all my passengers."

"Then why don't you do it? Why don't you do something— instead of standing there like a grinning fool!"

"Oh, come, madam— come! That's not clubby, you know! I really didn't expect it of you. Rotton bad form!"

"Lower the boats at once and get us into them, you crazy idiot! Can't you feel the heat from that fire? We'll be roasted where we stand in a minute or

two!" Her voice had risen to a shrill scream— and there were frightened shouts of agreement with her. "My poor Toto— she'll be scared to death!" she cried.

Connyngsby deliberately filled his pipe and lighted it, as the flames began to be choked down.

"Do you know— I was just thinking about Toto, madam. The native medicine-men in these waters have a ceremony of offering burnt sacrifices to their big idols, you know. An' I was wondering if, possibly, anything of this sort happened to Toto, it might be considered atonement for the rest of us— eh? What? Now, mark me, Mrs. Bollingford! We've the bad luck to be in tempor'ry diffic'lties just at the moment— an' must all make the best of whatever inconvenience it may cause us. The sort of talk you've been indulgin' yourself in is dangerous— can't be permitted. If you'll not control yourself an' your nerves, I'll be obliged most regretfully to lock you in your stateroom or the brig— whichever you prefer. An' then, d'ye see— should it become necess'ry to leave in the boats— you might be forgotten— which would be still more regrettable. I trust I make myself quite clear? What?"

The touch of comedy— with Connyngsby's sudden change from good-humored banter to cold, deadly seriousness— did more to calm the apprehensiveness than anything else which might have happened, especially as he went on with a quiet explanation of the situation.

"We've had fire in three of the four holds, but have managed to get all of the cargo out of those next the engines an' boilers— jettisoning it over the side— a big loss to somebody, but unavoidable. I've not the slightest doubt that we'll be able to handle this blaze in the forehold and anything which may start in the after one. But if it gets out of control an' there's any real danger, you'll all be carefully looked after. Make up bundles of your most necess'ry belongings— no larger than you can handle without assistance. Then— if you hear a long blast on the siren— come up here, an' we'll lower you away in the boats. Unless you hear that whistle, you may eat an' sleep with no anxiety whatever— an' if you keep your heads, there'll be no danger then. You can tear yourselves to pieces from panic in an open field, if you give way to it— or you can get out of most any bad mess by keepin' your heads. Don't forget that!"

WHEN the steamer's bow was four feet down below the load-line— with water sloshing over the top of the copra— MacTavish started his bilge-pumps and began sucking it out through the limbers, taking with it a good deal of the oil which had oozed from the dried coconut-meat. Then the Lascars went down into the hold and shoveled the copra into a big crate which was hoisted up

through the hatch and dumped over the side. After the hold was entirely empty and all the water pumped out of it, they took the remaining ten casks of soda aft and started jettisoning the coir in the Number Four Hold— getting a flare-up from the copra as the last bale was removed from the tier over it.

This was at four in the morning— bringing several terrified passengers and stewards on deck in their pajamas. But it also fetched Marjorie Banton with an automatic in her hand— having an uneasy hunch that some of the nervous ones might go to pieces. In a moment, five of the panicky stewards broke for one of the boats and began frenziedly casting loose the tackle— but the girl beat them to it— stood leaning against the boat with leveled pistol.

Thinking she wouldn't dare to shoot, they started to rush her, but she dropped one man with a ball through his leg— took a finger off the hand of another one— and shot a third through the arm— all before they had gotten within six feet of her. They broke— slunk below shouting for the doctor—the nervous passengers after them, feeling that they were between a she-devil and the deep sea. As Marjorie sank back against the boat, weak from the reaction of what she had been forced to do, Ned Coffin came up over the after rail to see what the shooting was about— his face blackened, his undershirt and trousers scorched through in spots— and took her in his arms.

"Good girl! I'll see that the Brocks hear about this! That gang were not as amenable to reason as the old man's party last night— and they were getting out of hand. Nothing else to do but shoot! I— I guess— we're almost out— of the woods— now. I'm just about—all in! Kiss me, and I'll— go to sleep right here— on the deck! Hello! Here's Celeste— and the pup! How's Toto, Celeste? Too warm— or too cold— or just nervous? Eh?"

"Faith, she do be feelin' foine, sorr— an' that hoongry she could ate the hand off me— the little baste! Yappin' ontil Oi had to fetch her on deck so's she'd not be kapin' anybody awake! *Vraiment*!"

"And what'll you be— doing with her, now— Celeste?"

"What would Oi be doin', d'ye s'pose? Walkin' the dog— av coorse!"

8: The Man With the Mole

J. Allan Dunn

1872-1941

Detective Story, 10 Dec 1918

In the world of American pulp magazines, this is a "complete novel", although it is just 24,000 words. In the rest of the publishing world it is a novelette; anything less than around 45-50,000 words is too short to be a novel.

1: Forgery

DAZEDLY JACK SPERRY stared at the pink slip in his hand. He turned it from the front, where his stepfather's clear signature— Simeon Cairns— appeared as drafter of a check for ten thousand dollars, to the back, where showed the endorsement of John J. Sperry in handwriting so like his own that it staggered him. The check was payable to the same John J. Sperry.

The three men grouped on the side of the desk opposite to him gazed at him uncompromisingly. The one in the central chair, Simeon Cairns himself, spoke.

"That is your signature on the back of the check, is it not?"

The aggressiveness of the tone brought Sperry a little to his senses.

"It looks very much like my writing, sir. But it cannot be. I have not endorsed any check of yours for any such amount ; none at all since the last payment of my allowance."

"Indeed? This is a check bearing my name, bearing a number considerably in advance of the last issued by me. I find it has been torn from the back pages of my check book, kept by me in the drawer of this desk, as you are well aware. You know this gentleman, Mr. Hilliard, president of the Agricultural National, of Longfield, and Mr. Burnside, cashier of the same institution." The speaker looked expectantly at the bank president.

"This check," said Hilliard in a dry, commercial voice," was presented to our junior paying teller, Mr. Remington, yesterday morning by this young man. He is well known to Remington and to the rest of us, as your stepson. No question was raised of identity, or of the authenticity of your signature, or of the amount of the check. Your stepson intimated to Remington that he was going into business on his own account, and that this sum had been advanced, or presented to him, as his working capital. A majority portion of it was to go toward a partnership, I understand."

Sperry gasped and then broke into expostulation. Cairns interrupted him.

"You shall have your say in a moment. Go on, Mr. Hillard."

"There is little more to say. The cash was paid out, as desired. Ordinarily the irregularity would not have been noticed for another twenty-four hours had you not requested the exact amount of your balance early this afternoon, Mr. Cairns. Upon your declaration that this check must be a forgery, we came up to see you immediately after closing hours. I understand you do repudiate this signature?"

"It is cleverly done, but it is not mine," said Cairns.

"Naturally the bank does not feel inclined to sustain this loss. We are compelled to protect ourselves, to guard ourselves against such attacks. We are, however, inclined to view the matter with an leniency equal to your own, Mr. Cairns, providing, of course, the money is restored."

"Do you hear that, Jack?" demanded his stepfather. "Restore this money, and, for your mother's sake, as well as for your own "

"But I did not cash that check," said Sperry. "I—"

The cashier's voice struck in, coldly metallic.

"You did cash a check in the bank yesterday?"

"I did. But it was one of my own. I have a balance of two hundred and fifty odd. Wait." He produced his own pocket check book while the others looked on cynically. "My balance is two hundred and sixty-three dollars. I drew a check for twenty-five dollars. There is the stub. Remington gave me two tens and a five. Look for yourselves." He flung the check book on the big library desk. No attempt was made to pick it up.

Burnside went on:

"Your balance is exactly two hundred and eighty-eight dollars. Remington states that you presented only the one check, this signed by Mr. Cairns, and took the money in five one-thousand dollar bills and ten five-hundred dollar bills. I am sorry for you, Sperry, but the evidence is overwhelmingly against you."

Sperry's eyes flashed and he pounded the desk with his fist.

"Do you mean to insinuate that I forged the name of Simeon Cairns and tried to appropriate ten- thousand dollars? Why, there is a hundred thousand dollars held for me in trust by my mother under my father's will."

"And not available until you are thirty, five years from now. Unless, in the meantime, your mother and her advisers become convinced that you are capable of successfully applying the sum to business methods," spoke up Cairns. "And, unfortunately, she is not so convinced. You have been sowing wild oats. Jack, and this is the harvest, my lad. Why didn't you come to me frankly and own up to your entanglement?"

"All that is a lie," cried Sperry. "I am in no entanglement. You have attempted to prejudice my mother against me. You have magnified little things

into wild escapades. And you would have been the last person for me to apply to for aid."

"There is no use talking that way, Jack," said Cairns with a shrug of his shoulders. "I am glad your mother is away for the present. The issue is, are you going to restore that money? If so, I will say nothing more of it. Mr. Hilliard has expressed his will toward leniency. If you will not do the honest, repentant thing " He shrugged his shoulders once again.

"I haven't got it!" exclaimed Jack. "I never had it!"

Hilliard got up, Burnside with him.

"We cannot waste time in this matter," said the president. "We are still willing to give twenty-four hours for the return of the ten thousand dollars. If not, we shall be compelled to adopt the usual course. One way or another, the penalty must be paid. Aside from the financial loss we have no real right to countenance crime."

Jack Sperry, feeling like an aniipal that has suddenly found itself in a trap, looked at the three men. They were utterly aloof from him, unsympathetic. It was evident they believed him guilty, that he was in peril of arrest.

"For the sake of Mrs. Cairns, the unhappy boy's mother," Cairns said, "I will make good the loss to the bank. I do not wish a prosecution. If other means fail, I shall send you my check the first thing in the morning."

"Very well," said Hilliard coldly. "That closes the incident. Remington, of course, has been discharged. He should have detected the forgery."

"That hardly seems fair," said Cairns. "It is excellently done. But I suppose discipline must be maintained. I shall see what I can do for the young man. He should not suffer from another's crime."

Hillard and Burnside took their leave formally, Cairns seeing them to the door of his library, while Sperry, boiling with resentment, awaited his return to the desk.

The Cairn's household was a divided one. Jack Sperry's mother had remarried, and Jack had not approved the match, though he did not voice his opinion openly, understanding somewhat -of his mother's nature, essentially feminine, demanding some one upon whqm to lean. He had tried his best to get along with his new relation, but he resented the dominant aggressiveness of Simeon Cairns, disbelieved in his easily assumed suavity, and objected to his assumption of parental authority, his complete reorganization of the household.

Jack Sperry was twenty-five, and his own master; or he would be when fairly launched on his own career. After college he had taken up civil engineering in earnest, serving an apprenticeship with such success that he had been offered a partnership. The capital for this he had looked to, under

the terms of his father's will, as mentioned by Hilliard, from his mother. The hundred thousand dollars was his rightful heritage, leaving ample for his mother during her lifetime; an equal sum, in fact, that would supposedly revert to Sperry on her death, being meanwhile excellently invested.

Since Mrs. Sperry had married Cairns, the latter's masterful ways had, by devious methods, blocked Jack's ambitions, or so the latter fully believed. Cairns affected to treat him as a headstrong boy, using a bonhomie that Jack merely believed a cover to his true personality. And his mother, somewhat an invalid of late, seemed more and more inclined to accept as infallible her second husband's wisdom.

More, Cairns had made the most of certain affairs, particularly one in which Jack had aided a fraternity brother to get out of a serious scrape. He had managed to imbue Mrs. Cairns with the idea that her son was still unsuited for the responsibilities of business and the handling of capital. All in all, the two rubbed together no more smoothly than do a coarse file and a rough casting. Jack's mother was wintering in Florida, and the friction between the two had been more open of late. Now had come this astounding accusation, leaving Jack gasping, like a fish in a net, at the meshes of evidence surrounding him.

Cairns came back to the desk with a frown on his face.

"Don't be obstinate, Jack," he said. "If you can't get the money, if you've applied it elsewhere, confess it to me and I'll advance it temporarily."

"You've always hated me," said Sperry. "You have tried to estrange me from my mother ; you have tried to run my affairs as well as hers. This thing is a lie, a trick, and you know it. Somewhere or other you are back of this infernal business!"

"Are you accusing the president and cashier of the Agricultural Bank, together with the paying teller, who has been forced to give up his position ; together with myself, of trying to fasten a crime upon you that will, I sadly fear, break your mother's heart if not jeopardize her health?"

"You leave her name out of it," said Sperry fiercely.

"You forget that she is my wife, the woman I love," said Cairns with a certain dignity. "She cannot be left out of it. If you persist in your denial of this thing I shall restore the money but, after that, I shall wash my hands of it. It is not to be expected that this young— er— Remington will accept his forced loss of a job quietly. There will undoubtedly be publicity. I shall see your mother immediately in order to break the news to her as softly as possible."

"I shall see her first," broke in Sperry.

"I think not," said Cairns softly. "I had a letter from her this morning. She has left the Royal Poinciana and gone— elsewhere. Under the circumstances I do not feel justified in letting you know where that is. I shall wire her tonight of

my departure, and I shall see," he went on blandly, "that whatever mail comes for you from her is, temporarily at least, withheld. Since you are resolved to stay hardened, I also remind you that your presence in this house, from this moment, is not to be tolerated."

Sperry glared at him. He believed that his stepfather's eyes were full of mockery and malice.

"You have no right," he cried hotly, "no right to hold my mail! You have no right to throw me out of my mother's house !"

"I think I should not be considered an usurper," answered Cairns. "As for yourself, you have no rights. A felon forfeits such things. Your appeal to the law might prove unfortunate. This is my house. Your mother has made it over to me in exchange for other matters."

A glaring light seemed to break through Sperry's brain, still confused from the charges, the crushing evidence against him.

"And you seek to have me disinherited," he said. "I am on to your crafty game now. It is you who are a criminal, a sneaking—"

Simeon Cairn's usually pallid face flamed crimson. He struck Sperry with his open hand, a resounding blow that left the mark of livid fingers on the latter's cheek.

Beside himself, reeling back, Sperry clutched a heavy inkstand of glass and hurled it at his stepfather. He saw it strike, saw the ink cover Cairn's face and, as the latter fell to the rug, saw crimson well out and mingle with the black of the ink. Cairns lay prone, his eyes staring. Sperry heard footsteps in the hall and realized that their voices had mounted in the rapidly culminating quarrel. "*Felon*!" The word surged in his brain. Now he was fairly in the mesh of circumstances.

He sprang to the door and encountered Peters, the butler with whom Cairns had supplanted the former functionary, as he had all the original servants. Peters, heavy, inclined to stoutness, grasped for Sperry and the latter drove home a blow with all his weight to the butler's stomach and floored him, breathless, agonized. Snatching his hat and coat from the rack,' Sperry raced out into the gloom of the early evening.

2: Flight

THE Sperry house was in the Berkshires. They had an apartment in New York also, but the Berkshire place, at Swiftbrook Bowl, was kept open usually until Christmas, though Mrs. Cairns had gone South with the first approach of fall. A street railway connected with the manufacturing town of Longfield, which was four hours from New York by the express trains.

As Sperry sped through the dusk, out of the grounds and down the road toward the car line, he saw, dear through the almost naked trees, the headlight of an approaching trolley, and raced to make connection with it, barely accomplishing his end.

In his pocket was the slim remnant of the twenty-five dollars he had drawn from the bank, some six dollars in all. His first intention of seeking his mother and attempting to establish with her his innocence, died away in hopelessness. He could raise a little money on the jewelry he wore, but not nearly enough, even if he knew where she was. His balance in the bank would undoubtedly be appropriated ; at any rate checks would not be honored, and, if he dared to go where he could cash a check, he was in no mind to have them returned "No Funds." It would only add to his apparent dishonesty. Also, it would help them to trace him. By now the butler would have roused the police at Longfield; they would be on the alert, stations would be watched, the very trolley he was on would be searched as soon as the telephones got working!

To-morrow the threatened publicity would contain the additional news that he had murdered his stepfather. He was an outcast, a fugitive. There would be a reward on his head. One faint hope lingered, that he had not killed Cairns. He would know that by the papers. And, if that crime was spared him, he was not going to be caught, already condemned, and be put away without an attempt to establish his innocence.

Remington, the paying teller, had lied. To what end? He had been discharged. And how could he prove the man a liar, how discredit the rest of the damning evidence? Sperry burned to find Remington, to choke the truth out of him. That would mean his own immediate arrest. But there were others back of Remington. Hilliard and Burnside had been takefi in by the evidence. It was Cairns who was at the bottom of all this! Yet Cairns had, undeniably, plenty of money. His balance at the bank was large. Sperry was helpless—practically penniless. And he was an outlaw.

Sperry groaned. Some one, a man he knew, leaned over from the seat back of him and asked him if he was ill.

This would not do. He forced a smile. "Ulcerated tooth," he said. "Got to have it fixed to-morrow."

The man said something commiserating and sat back again.

Sperry forced his wits to work coherently, dispassionately. The attack on Cairns, the forgery, his mother's attitude— he could not help those for the time. He had to get away or he would be irretrievably condemned, branded. If he had only taken his own roadster! But there would not have been time for that. They could have cut him off or traced him.

Swiftbrook Bowl, that fashionable resort, lay closer to New York than Longfield. And there was another station between the Bowl and Longfield.

A plan formed itself.

He swung off at a corner, about a quarter of a mile from this station, Langley Dale, and struck up an unlit side road as the trolley sped away. In half a mile he hit the railroad near a siding and dodged into a thicket. Night had practically fallen and he was safe for the present. Twenty minutes later the express for New York, ignoring Langley Dale, roared past him. Thirty minutes after that a local chugged through, bound in the opposite direction. It reached the station and stayed there for what seemed to Sperry a long time as he watched from his concealment the red tail light.

Perhaps they were searching it for him? Then the red light began to back toward him with much snorting of the engine. He crouched low, shivering. The train came to a standstill opposite him and he could see the people through the lighted windows, carefree, save for their delay, eager to get home. And he was homeless! A sense of despair seemed to numb him and he shook it off.

There was the sound of a train panting up the grade the other side of the Dale. No other passenger was due for two hours. This must be the freight he had hoped for. Probably a long line of empties going back to New York, great coal trucks, a car or two. Hope revived. It would come in between him and the local that had been backed on to the siding to let it pass.

He lay low till the searching headlight lifted over the crest of the grade, flared down the right of way, and passed him. The freight was gathering speed now but Sperry would have tried for it had it been going twice as fast.

Better to trip, to fall and be mangled, than caught, arrested, prosecuted, and condemned— a swift sequence that would inevitably follow.

Steel coal trucks were passing him, punt-shaped. The train seemed slowing down a little. He jumped and found a footing and a grip for his hands on the cold rim of a truck as he flung himself upward. In a moment he had scuttled over the edge and slid down the sloping end into a rubble of coal dust.

For the present he was safe. Hobos at this time were rarities. There would be no search of the train as it lumbered on through the darkness. Somewhere in the yards of upper Manhattan he could get off, round about midnight. He would find a subway and get far downtown in New York. There his plans ceased, save that vaguely he resolved on smothering his identity, and— if Cairns was only still alive— somehow hanging on until, by hook or crook— for surely fortune must turn some time— he could reinstate himself. If Cairns were dead? He would wait till morning for that, he tried to tell himself, huddled in the empty truck, jolted unmercifully, bruised, flung headlong with the changing motions of the train, grimed, cold, and, as the night wore on, hungry.

The vision of Cairns lying in the rug with the crimson and the ink streaking the pale face in fantastic patterns, would not leave him.

At two in the morning he found himself far downtown in Manhattan. He had bought himself two drinks of whisky and two sandwiches in a saloon on the East Side, near the river, and stopped the numbness that had begun to turn to a poignant ache between his shoulders. He could not afford to risk pneumonia from exposure. That meant a hospital and recognition, when the dirt had been cleansed from him. As soon as he could find a cheap lodging house and get some sleep, he realized that he must change his clothes. Filthy as they were from his trip, their cut and the quality of their cloth had already made him an object of suspicion. In this neighborhood they were shrewd of eye, and Sperry already felt that he had been sized up for what he was, a defaulter from his caste, a gentleman gone wrong; not a master crook, but an amateur, one to whom a reward might be attached. He managed to get some of the muck from his face and hands in the lavatory of the saloon, thankful for the sanitary paper towel. Then he went out into the streets to look for a bed.

It was bitterly cold. The searching wind blew off the river, and Sperry was glad now of the good texture of his clothes. But he ached intolerably- and he longed for some shelter where he could rest and think'. His thoughts would not co-ordinate. They were a jumble of what had happened, and wild conjectures as to what had led up to his entanglement. Silent, furtive figures slunk by him, slid into nauseous alleys or into such side-doors of protected saloons as he had found his own way. Some of them staggered into the uninviting doorway of rooming houses advertising "Beds for Men Only. 25c and up."

Fastidious, more from habit than present consciousness, Sperry hesitated to enter these caravanseries of the poor. His imagination, far too vivid to ease his present plight, conjured up horrors abovestairs. Further, he could not shake off the idea that he was being trailed.

"It's absurd," he told himself again and again. "If they had managed in some manner to spread the net so far already, they would not hesitate to draw in the folds." But he was out of place here, a palpable misfit, and therefore to be suspected, to be watched, to be exploited for what there might be in it. To hide successfully in such a neighborhood he must be one of those who dwelt here and dodged the law and defied it, knowing the manners and the codes of the underworld. Yet he must have some place to hide away, to sleep, to wait the coming of the morning and the announcement of the newspapers.

A vicious gust of wind, flung down a side street, pierced him as a spear might have stabbed him to the vitals. He suddenly felt sick in mind and body. "What's the use?" he asked himself bitterly, his overstrung nerves reacting. Then came the rebound. He must brace up, put on a bold front, and accept the

conditions of his surroundings ; he must assume a toughness and demand a bed with a swagger and a tone that would deceive any one who might want to pry into his identity. He still had most of his six dollars, and he could pay for a room to himself. Another drink would bolster his courage. The reek of it on his breath would give him, as it were, a local color.

Down an alley he saw a figure come out from a door near a distant corner, a door above which a light burned dimly. Another entered. Here was traffic, a saloon. He hurried down the alley. Close to the door was piled a clutter of empty boxes, an array of refuse and ash cans. Some one was groping among these as Sperry passed, but that person did not look at him.

"Some penniless devil looking for cast-off food," thought Sperry, and the impulse came to ask the man in for a drink and some food. But he could not do that, he told himself. He must look out for his own safety first. The man might be inquisitive. As he reached the door a burly figure came out, lurching a little as if intoxicated. Sperry saw the face under the lamp.

The upper part was shaded with the brim of a derby hat. The lower showed a firm chin and a thin-lipped mouth under a prominent nose. To the right of the lips was a prominent mole, almost black in that light, curiously, distinctively shaped. Sperry stood aside as the man passed in the direction he himself had come. Casually he watched him as he went, wondering idly if he would safely avoid the cans and boxes. The man with the mole almost brushed Sperry, and Jack was aware of a shaded glitter of searching eyes upon him, that, somehow, did not accord with the drunken gait.

Then a figure leaped from the medley of ash and refuse containers, leaped swiftly, and silently, just as the burly man went by. And, by the lamp, Sperry saw the hand of the bum he had thought of inviting to a drink, shift to a hip pocket, saw a glint of nickel, and, in sheer instinct, he flung himself upon the would-be killer, gripping the wrist of the hand that was freeing the pistol, and cruelly twisting it as he flung his forearm round the man's neck, forcing back his chin.

The gun clattered to the cobbles of the alley. The burly man with the mole had turned with a swift precision that belied intoxication and instantly shot a short, hard punch to the projecting jaw. The killer crumpled in Sperry's grasp and slid to the ground. The other coolly picked up the gun and put it into his pocket, nodding to Sperry.

"Thanks," he said. "I owe you something for that, pal."

3: Baldy Brown.

THE killer had fallen face downward on the slimy stones. The man with the mole turned him over with one foot and a hand and surveyed him keenly. The killer showed faint signs of returning consciousness, and the other picked him up easily, much as if he was a half-stuffed sack of bran, and jammed him into a sitting posture on top of one of the ash cans, propped against the wall of the saloon. To Sperry he said nothing until he had completed this process unaided, and had satisfactorily balanced his late opponent. Then he turned to Sperry, surveying him with a comprehensive glance.

"What were you doing in this dumping ground at this time of night?" he asked. His voice was gruff but friendly, and there was a compelling quality in it that somehow gave Sperry a hazy impression that, even if he had not grasped the killer's wrist, the burly one would have found a means to take care of himself.

"I was going to get a drink," he said. "Then I was going to find a bed somewhere."

"A shot and a flop?" said the other. "We'll fix that. Hello, you!"

The killer was coming sullenly, viciously out of his trance, glaring at the man he would have shot in the back. Then Sperry saw the hate in his eyes change to uncertainty. The man with the mole had taken off his hat, displaying a skull practically bald, and he was grinning at the killer. Front teeth liberally filled with gold shone under the lamp.

"Just why were you tryin' to bump me off, pal?" he was saying. "What's the reason? Who -did you take me for, a dick ? An' who're you ? I'll know you next time, but I'll swear this is the first."

The perplexity in the little rat eyes of the killer deepened. He mumbled uncertainly and tried to get down from the ash can. The man with the mole set him back with a firm hand.

"What's your moniker, pard?" he persisted. "An', if there's any reason why I shouldn't bash your dial in and send you to the slab, you'd better come across with it— now!'' he cried, with a sudden ferocity and a snarl of his goldfilled teeth that made the killer shrink in terror.

"I'm Curly," the latter managed to articulate. "Curly Luke Conklin. I— say, I was in wrong, cull. I just got out of stir, see? The dick who sent me up was Jim Farrell, the low-livered crook. I swore I'd get him w'en I come down the river, an' I see you in at Dumpy's there takin' a drink, an' "

"You thought I was what's-his-name Farrell, a dick, did you? You must be full of hop. I never met the flat-foot. I'm Baldy Brown of Chi', and I struck town three weeks ago. I ain't met with your dick pals— yet. And I don't xonsider it over and above easy bein' taken for one, either. Sit up, you, and take a good look at me. Do you think I look like a dick? Do you?"

His face was so venomous that even Sperry, disinterested in the controversy, drew back, but Baldy Brown suddenly put out an arm and held him with a grip of steel. Curly Conklin stuttered a denial, an absolute disclaimer.

"If I'd seen you wit your dicer off," he said; "or, if I'd piped that beauty mark "

"Never mind the beauty spot," gruffly put in Baldy. "I ain't stuck on it. Some day I'm goin' to get needled. You didn't take a good look, and, but for my young pal here, you'd have bumped me off. I've got a good mind to—" He broke into a hearty laugh and shoved out a hand for Curly to grasp. "It's a good one on me after all," he said. "I'll tell the boys. Took me for a dick ! Oh, Lord! We'll call it off, Curly, if you promise to wear glasses. And I'll buy three drinks of Dumpy's best right now. Come on in, both of you."

Still held by the arm, Sperry followed, willy-nilly, into the unsavory drinking shop. Perhaps a dozen men were there, at tables or at the bar. Baldly advanced to the latter between the two.

"Drinks for the house on me," he said. "No rotgut, Dumpy; open a bottle of case goods. Drinks on me. Here's Curly Conklin, just out of stir, and takes me for a dick! Oh, Lord ! He was goin' to bump me off with a gat when my pal here jumps him."

The little audience, Dumpy included, roared at the jest. Evidently Baldy was popular. Curly wisely said nothing. A blear-eyed individual shuffled up close to Sperry, and the latter recognized him as one of those at the first saloon he had gone into, a man who had openly appraised him.

"This guy your pal, Baldy?" he asked.

"I said so, didn't I?" asked Baldy coldly. "And a good one. Gentleman Manning, known back in Chi as The Duke. That right, Manning?"

Sperry nodded, playing up to the role. He had to change his name. Manning was as good as any. Something told him that Baldy was a good man to tie to, a bad one to cross. The blear-eyed man undoubtedly was of that opinion. He wilted.

"Just in from Chi, pal?" he queried ingratiatingly. "I seen youse over at The Badger's, an' I knew youse was new to the Village. Couldn't size you ?"

"I was looking for Baldy," said Sperry. The man with the mole— it was shaped like a dumb-bell, Sperry noticed in the light, and it had several hairs growing from it— flashed him a look of appreciation. Sperry realized how apt was the moniker that Baldy had given him. As The Duke, his manners, his accent, would all pass unchallenged. Already what had happened that afternoon seemed far off as if in another life. Now he was Gentleman Manning of Chicago, an accepted consort of crooks, hobnobbing with them in a boozing

ken. And he had shown himself a good man by defending Baldy, whom they all looked up to.

The round was soon finished and Sperry felt in his pockets to buy another, but Baldy jogged his elbow.

"That's enough," he said. "I want a talk with you, Duke. Dumpy, is the back room empty?"

"If it ain't, I'll clear it," said Dumpy with alacrity.

When they were seated and the door shut, Baldy looked quizzically at Sperry. Sperry felt the glance summing up mercilessly every line of his drawn face. He knew it was drawn and haggard. He could feel almost the hollows under his eyes. The glance took in his hands, his tie, every detail.

"Well," said Baldy at last, "what was it? Robbery or murder? Or both?" A light from his gray eyes seemed to illumine every secret of Sperry's brain. He tried to speak, to lick his lips. To his relief his inquisitor nodded and smiled.

"Tell me about it to-morrow, pal," he said. "You've had your drink, now I'll give you a bed. Better one than you would have found. And a bath. I said I owed you something."

"But," objected Sperry, "I haven't told you. You don't know— I won't know till morning just what—"

"Then we won't worry about it till morning. I don't care what you've done. You're safe with me. And we'll talk it over after we chew in the morning. Will you come?" He held out his hand and Sperry, lost for words, gripped it and found something emanating from the grip, a magnetic, inspiring something that gave him heart to say "Thank you."

They walked out together, west and north for several blocks. Then Baldy picked up a night-hawk of a taxicab, disreputable enough in paint and cushions, but with a good engine, a roving pirate of those purlieus where speed was often necessary and well paid for.

Uptown they sped until Prince Street and Broadway was reached. Then Baldy paid and tipped his man and once more they went west, to Macdougal Street, north to Washington Square, across it, and so to one of a row of brick houses in a quiet part of Greenwich Village. Baldy let himself in with a latch-key and Sperry followed, obeying his host's gesture for silence. On the next floor Baldy opened the door of a cosy bedroom and motioned to Sperry to enter, leaving him.

Within the minute he was back again with a big towel and a suit of pajamas.

"You can make out with these," he said. "Bath is next room, to your right. Plenty of hot water. Sleep as late as you like. I'll tip you off when to get up. And

don't worry, pal. It don't do a bit of good, and half the time you worry over nothing. You get a souse in hot water and turn in."

Sperry obeyed orders willingly, and, his nerves and weary body relaxed by the hot water of the bath, he subsided between the sheets upon a springy, yielding mattress and fell asleep. Nightmares assailed him, but he slept on for half a dozen restful hours. When he awoke, the wintry sun was streaming through the window of his room. For a few moments his brain remained sluggish and he lay inert, conscious of the odors of coffee and of bacon and, somewhere, a girl's fresh voice singing cheerily and sweetly in an undertone, as a girl will when she sings at her work.

Sperry listened and smelled with languid delight— and then in a flash the whole phantasmagoria of what had happened came rushing over him, the forged check; his stepfather lying on the floor; the escape in the freight train; Baldy whom he had saved from the killer. He was in Baldy's house, guest of a notorious crook to whom the underworld looked up. Sperry had heard of honor among thieves. Could it be possible that gratitude was so strong a virtue among criminals? He had seen little sidelights of Baldy's character the night before— earlier that morning, rather— that spoke of a man callous and desperate. Why should Baldy have taken him into his own house, have given him a moniker, have proclaimed him a pal from Chicago?

Wide awake now, he sat up in bed and prepared to dress. His clothes were gone ! Nothing that he had worn the day before remained, not even his socks or his underwear. He was as completely a prisoner as if he had been manacled. Baldy had asked him whether it had been robbery or murder or both ? The master crook had appraised him inside and out and now— now what? Holding him for a reward? Holding him to turn over to the police and so curry favor for himself?

The door opened and Baldy came in, a pile of clothing over his arm that he put down on a chair while he grinned at Sperry with his gold-filled teeth.

"Didn't think you'd be awake so soon," he said. "Your stomach was the alarm clock, I guess. Bess tells me breakfast is close to ready, so you'd better slide into these togs. I've got you a complete outfit; traded off the old stuff after it was brushed up a bit, and I swapped it for this and four dollars to boot. Nearly broke Uncle David's heart, but he came through. Here it is with five-thirty-five you had, and here's your studs and links and the rest of your junk. If I was you I wouldn't wear any of it, 'cept the collar buttons."

Sperry gathered up his links, pin, tie-clip, watch, and chain and the little litter of bills in amazement, not daring to look up at the host he had so misjudged, aware that Baldy's grin held something quizzical. He slipped swiftly into his new clothes— a tweed suit of fair quality and of a fair fit, tan shoes

instead of his black ones; and, coming back from the bathroom where he had found a brush and comb, announced himself to Baldy who still sat upon his bed.

"I want to thank you," he began.

"Nix on that stuff," answered Baldy. "If you owe me anything I'll give you a chance to square up later."

"You've been out this morning," said Sperry. "Did you get a paper?"

"Son," said Baldy, "outside of going in swimming, always tackle a job on a full stomach. First we eat."

There was rough kindliness in his words, but nevertheless they constituted a command; Sperry followed Baldy to the dining-room. This communicated with the kitchen whence came the fragrance of the food for which, despite his mental anxiety, Sperry's digestive system clamored.

The door opened between the two rooms and the trim figure of a girl came in, a girl so fresh, so utterly at variance with the pro'ession and occupation of Baldy Brown, that Sperry forgot his manners. This girl, with golden hair and blue eyes, with a rounded figure lithe in fresh calico, with a merry yet tender mouth, this girlwoman of eighteen or nineteen, seemed to have walked straight out of some inspired play or operetta where she was cast for the role of a sublimated shepherdness or dairy maid. Only, the divine freshness of her complexion was all her own.

Sperry did not know why Elizabeth suggested the open country, apple blossoms, hay fields, an old-fashioned garden, and a church spire back of clustering elms. But she did, she invested that little New York room with all the atmosphere of the fields and orchards, all their fragrance, with a touch of sanctity. And it all fitted in with her voice, that Sperry had heard singing and now heard talking. This girl a crook's daughter? As she slipped a slim cool hand into his when he rose to the introduction, he was conscious of Baldy's eyes twinkling genially, proudly.

"Are you hungry?" asked the girl. "I am ravenous," and she showed a row of pearly teeth in a mouth pink as a kitten's. There was surely some magic about her, for Sperry ate and forgot his troubles while the girl passed him food, simple enough, but cooked in a way that he had not tasted for many a day, for all the craft of Cairn's chef. She said little, neither did her father talk much ; and so, with the meal ended at last, they sat silent for a little while, until the girl started to clear the table!

"Can't I help?" Sperry asked, but she shook her head at him merrily and Baldy spoke.

"Bess can handle it," he said. "You and me'll have a little talk."

Instantly the atmosphere changed as if a malicious wizard had dissipated a fairy spell. Sperry's troubles crowded upon him, and the sunshine left the room as Baldy took some newspapers from a drawer in the sideboard.

"It wasn't very hard for me to pick you out, son," he said to Sperry. "John J. Sperry ?" He nodded as his eyes told him he had hit the mark. "All right; it's Manning now. There ain't such a lot about you in the news, you may be a bit disappointed," he added, with a slight grin, tossing the papers across to Sperry.

And, by some quirk, Sperry was conscious of a faint disappointment. It took him a minute to find the item. It was captioned, but far from being headlined. He knew with sudden relief that he was not a murderer. Evidently some correspondent from Longfield had covered the case for nearly all the New York press and the Associated News, for the items were practically identical. The heads included: "Commits Forgery and Attempts Murder. Scion of Well-known Family Presents False Check and Tries to Kill Stepfather." The article read:

Longfield, Massachusetts.

John J. Sperry, of Swiftbrook Bowl, the aristocratic resort of the Berkshire Hills, made a desperate attempt to take the life of hii stepfather, Simeon Cairns, the millionaire who recently married Mrs. Caroline' Sperry, mother of the wayward young man who bears the same name as his late father, a well-known one in exclusive Berkshire circles.

It is alleged by the officers of the Agricultural National Bank of Longfield that young Sperry presented a check for ten thousand dollars, made out to and indorsed by himself, and purporting to be signed by Simeon Cairns. This check was taken from the back pages of Mr. Cairns' private check book, and the signature declared a forgery by Mr. Cairns to President Hilliard and Cashier Burnside, of the bank, in an interview at which young Sperry was present.

A quarrel ensued between Sperry and his stepfather. The Cairns' butler heard high words in the library, and, attempting to enter, was struck down by Sperry. Recovering from the blow, the butler entered the room, to find Mr. Cairns unconscious with a deep cut in his .temple from am inkstand that Sperry had flung; at him before escaping from the house.

Late this evening Mr. Cairns made a brief statement in which he said that he regretted the publicity necessary, as Mrs. Cairns, who was wintering in Florida, was in delicate health. As soon as he is able to travel, he will break the news to her personally of her son's derelictions.

"It is the reaping of the wild oats," said Mr. Cairns. "I agreed to make the money good to the bank, but this deliberate attack upon my life removes from me any false pity. I have placed the matter in the hands of the police. I believe

that such viciousness should be corrected by the methods of the law." Up to a late hour no trace of Sperry has been discovered.

As Sperry set down the papers, Baldy produced another from his coat pocket.

"You see, this isn't strictly a New York matter," he said. "They ain't apt to worry about the troubles of another State until they are requested to by that State's police. But they've played you up in Boston, and also, I imagine, in your local paper, though of course I didn't know what that was when I was buying these this morning, and I probably couldn't have got one, anyway. But here's the *Boston Nation*, with all the publicity any one could hope for even Baldy Brown of Chicago," he ended, with a laugh.

The story was played clear across the front of the Nation, with pictures of Sperry's mother, of Cairns, and two of Sperry himself. He, with all due caution for fear of possible libel, was excoriated unmercifully. A reward was out for him. The Massachusetts State Detectives were scouring the countryside to arrest him. He had last been seen leaving the trolley close to Langley Dale, and it was supposed he had boarded a train, though so far no direct clew had been unearthed. But the police were confident of finding him, said the article. Supposedly he had much of the ten thousand dollars with him, and undoubtedly he would try to leave the State by land or sea. If he did, he would find his journey abruptly checked. Descriptions of him were being sent broadcast. The bank was joining in the prosecution. There was the usual flub-dub about society in general, and the many friends of Mrs. Cairns being shocked, and the fears for the effect the news of her son's crime might have upon the mother.

Interviews with President Hilliard and Cairns and Peters, the butler, were lengthened out, and the general opinion disseminated that the events were not a sudden outbreak, but the result of a constantly growing depravity.

Sperry put down the paper with a hardened face. How rottenly unfair it was, he thought. Not a friend to speak for him ! None to offset the lying insinuations of his criminal intentions, his sowing of wild oats! Well, they hadn't got him, and they shouldn't.

"Papers," broke in Baldy's voice, "slam at you, and you've got no comeback unless it's a libel suit ; and that's hard shooting. Suppose you tell me your end of it?"

"What's the use?" asked Sperry sullenly. Baldy must believe him a criminal; he had helped him out because he thought so. He might have nothing more to do with him if he convinced him differently. And how could he convince anyone?

"A whole lot of use just to get it off your chest to some one," said Baidy. "I'll tell you this much; I savvied last night this was your first job. It's a cinch you plugged this stepfather of yours. It's a cinch they've got a reward out for you. If he's a millionaire and got it in for you, he'll have New York all stirred m inside of twenty-four hours, soon as they know things are really doing. You'll have to stay Manning. And you're new to the game, they may nab you. Tell me the whole mess, and I can give you some expert advice, anyway."

Sperry hesitated and then plunged into the whole yarn. Baldy listened non-committally.

"To a jury that would sound fishy," he caid. "You've got to own up to that."

"I do," said Sperry.

"I know you ain't brought along ten thousand dollars. Whether you pulled that check or not, you've still got ninety thousand in the pot if you can ever get a chance to sit back in the game. Right now you're in wrong, in like a burglar, as they say. You're fairly safe in New York, as you are, for a day or two. I'll make a proposition to you. You can help me, as it happens. If you'll do it, I'll do what I can for you. I ain't promising you much, mind you, but I'll keep you clear of the bulls, reward or no reward. What do you say?"

Sperry hung between thoughts. He did not want to get himself deeper into the clutches of the law by joining forces with Baldy on the shady side. He did want to prove his innocence. But that seemed impossible. He was bound by ties of hospitality and friendship to Baldy. What if the latter did want some repayment? He had promised to keep him free of the police, and that was vital. And Sperry was desperate. The world had turned against him. He was helpless, save for this new friend. The sound of the girl's voice humming as she washed the last of the dishes came to him. She was an enigma. Girls could mean little in his life, yet he wanted to see more of this one, miserable as his plight was. Though he did not realize it, youth, that had been accused but not besmirched, called to youth. And the girl, after all, decided him.

"If I can do anything to help you out," he said to Baldy, "just tell me what it is."

"Good. There's something I want you to do this morning. I can't let you into everything at once. Safer for you not to know it all. By the way, can you drive a car?"

"Almost any kind on the market."

"Know the Berkshires pretty well, I suppose?"

"Yes," answered Sperry wonderingly. "From Longfield south, very well."

Baldy only nodded. Sperry had noticed that Baldy's speech held variations. When he oonversed with Sperry, it was fairly grammatical and well chosen. At times it was exceedingly so. Very different from his talk at Dumpy's. Baldy was

evidently no ordinary crook. All things pointed to this. The game he was engaged in would be no minor play. He was a big man, determined, clever, resourceful. There would be thrills in any enterprise he tackled. Sperry wondered what his daughter thought of him. Such a girl could not consider her father a criminal. Yet Baldy had not warned him against any special trend of talk.

"I am going to the corner to do some telephoning," said Baldy. "I'll be back in ten minutes. Then we'll go out together."

Left alone, Sperry reread the papers. Presently the girl came in and he rose. She smiled at him and told him to sit down again.

"You mustn't treat me like a girl in a play," she said. "I'm not used to it, even if I like it. Go on with your papers."

"I'm through with them," said Sperry moodily.

Infinitely milder, there was yet some of her father's penetrating quality in the glance of her blue eyes. She seemed to hesitate a moment, then spoke softly, sympathetically.

"Daddy said something to me about your trouble," she said. "We don't have any secrets between us. I heard something of what you told him just now. I couldn't help it," she added with a rising color, "though I sang. And— and I want to tell you that I believe in you."

Sperry stared at the slender fingers before he took them. She and her father had few secrets, and she believed him innocent ! What sort of contradiction, what kind of paradox was she? Her flush held as he kept possession of her hand, and her eyelids drooped over her eyes. Here surely was virtue and innocence! Sperry read the riddle. Baldy was shrewd enough to let his daughter think she shared his secrets, but, hardened as he might be, the father in him wished to keep the girl in ignorance of the crimes he committed, the risks he ran. With a man of Baldy's caliber, that would not be difficult. And he had trusted to Sperry's breeding not to give him away. Though, after all, Sperry knew nothing, and the girl would not believe hearsay or even proof. She was no weakling.

"Thank you," he said. "Thank you. That helps."

She raised her eyes again.

"I am glad," she said. "And you must believe in my Daddy, too. Sometimes he does things that seem strange, but I believe in him. I know him, you see, and you don't, so I am telling you beforehand."

Sperry's chivalry couched its lance. If he could help to keep the girl's belief in her father, he would do so.

"Why wouldn't I believe in him?" he asked. "He has been very good to me." And the entrance of the man with the mole spared him any more direct statement as to his lurking belief in the latter's irregularities.

They took the subway and went downtown again. But not this time into the crime belt. First they went into a well-known cafe and sat in a leatherpadded recess while Baldy gave his instructions.

"We are going to walk past a big jeweler's," he said. "I'll nudge you when we pass it. Then you are to saunter back, go in to the third counter on the right, and ask the clerk to look at some tie-clips. If the red-headed clerk is not on duty and does not attend to you, do not buy anything. If he is busy, try to gauge it so he can wait on you without making it too obvious. You can say you are expecting some one. If it goes all right, look over six clips, pick up six and handle them, no more no less. Then ask to look again at the third one. Say to him, 'I think I like the one you showed me third the best. How much is it?' He will put it in a box which you will bring back to me here. Here is money for the clip. Now repeat my directions."

All this was said in a way that smacked of big business behind the purchase of the clip. The roll that Baldy peeled a ten from was of considerable magnitude. Sperry went over his instructions.

They strolled along for some time, until they passed a jeweler's. At the corner they parted company, and Sperry sauntered back again. It was a large place with four aisles made up by lengthy display cases of plate glass. At the back was a mezzanine gallery on which some desks showed and glass doors apparently opening back to the offices. Not many people were purchasing. The third counter was vacant in front. Back of it a red-haired clerk was arranging a tray of small jewelry. His heart beating a trifle fast, Sperry walked up the aisle toward the redhaired clerk. And then he felt a premonition. Some one was watching him.

He had believed implicitly in Baldy's assurance that he was safe in New York for a day or so; it was impossible not to have confidence in what the man with the mole did say. But now panic siezed him. He tried to master it, to force himself to look up. At last he did. Standing by the rail of the mezzanine gallery and staring down at him, a little uncertainly, was Remington, the paying teller of the bank at Longfield; the man who had said he paid him ten thousand dollars, the man who had been discharged for doing so.

Fury surged over Sperry. He saw that recognition was not yet mutual on account of his clothes and their style, but soon it would become definite. He longed to rush up to the gallery and confront Remington. But that would mean arrest. What was Remington doing here? He had been discharged, but how had he obtained this position so soon?

Then he became conscious that others were staring at him, that he was standing in a defiant attitude, glaring at Remington. He saw the spark of recognition come into Remington's eyes, a smile of triumph begin to come on his face. The ex-paying teller leaned forward.

Sperry whirled abruptly and made for the entrance. He heard Remington saying something as the doors swung behind him, knew there was a stir in the shop; and then he threaded his way swiftly through the crowd, shuttling hurriedly to a subway entrance down which he raced, just managing to catch an express. It was a close shave. Rem ington held all the cards. In another moment he would have been held, and Remington would have got the reward.

For one moment the thought of treachery mastered him. Could Baldy have deliberately trapped him? But that was impossible. It did not hold water. And he was ashamed of himself for the suspicion. He got out at the next stop and made his way to the cafe, not without some fear of being tapped on the shoulder. He was no longer safe in New York. Whatever was back of Remington's lying about the check and the money was a powerful force, and he had no defence, save a vague feeling that Baldy mght aid him. But he got to the padded recess and told his tale. The man with the mole listened seriously.

"Never mind about the tie-clip," he said. "We'll manage that some other way. It is a good thing this Remington chap spotted you as soon as he did. I wouldn't have wanted them to find that box on you, or on any one. Your stepfather said he was going to get this young chap a job, didn't he? He doesn't seem to have wasted any time about it. But you must change your description if you are going to be useful to me. I am going to send you home in a taxi. Get out at Washington Square and walk over. Stay there till I come."

Sperry waited two hours before Baldy appeared. The face of the man with the mole was serious. He brought in some small packages.

"Where is Bess ?" he asked.

"She went out shopping," said Sperry. "Said she'd be back soon." He had spent a delightful hour with the girl. She was surprisingly well informed, he found, and of a rare intelligence and gracious instinct. Baldy had seen to her education. When she went on her marketing tour, Sperry continued his wonderment of her in such surroundings, and then his thoughts centered on what Baldy had said about the box.

"I shouldn't have wanted them to find that box on you, or on any one." Evidently the red-haired clerk was to have put something in it beside tne tieclip. What? Information of some kind? Perhaps the numbers of a safe combination? Was Baldy planning to rob the jeweler's?

But Baldy evinced no desire to give him information. The incident of the tie-clip was closed. From his packages he produced what looked like dried

leaves and some dark crystals that Sperry recognized as permanganate of potash.

"Lucky your eyes are hazel," said Baldy. "I am going to change your hair-cut and then dye it— also your complexion. I am going to make a brunet out of you, young man, as soon as Bess comes in. She'll be the barber."

An hour later, after applications to his face, hands, and forearms of a solution of permanganate, after dippings of his clipped and trimmed hair into a bath of henna, with careful dabbings of the borders, Sperry looked at himself with amazement. His light brown hair was almost black, with a suggestion of dull red. And it formed a pompadour. His face was a weird purplish tint.

The girl laughed at him.

"That'll tone down to a nice even brown," said Baldy. "And it'll stand washing for a while. Now then, remember you are. Gentleman Manning of Chicago, The Duke. A swell-mob worker, specialty, ladies' jewelry. Tonight I am going to introduce you to some of the gang. They'll use you as outside man."

Sperry heard, amazed, looking at the still laughing face of the girl. Yet her eyes held the same appeal as when she had asked him to believe in her father. How could she be innocent? She must be an accomplice to listen to this talk of the underworld, to help transform him to The Duke, "swell-mob worker."

But one thing was certain, paramount. He was entirely in the power of Baldy Brown.

"Let me look at your hands," said Baldy. Sperry held them out for inspection. Baldy laid his forefinger on the corresponding digit of Sperry's left hand. The first joint was distorted, out of place.

"Baseball finger?" queried Baldy. "You had better wear gloves all you can. When you're driving, for instance. That's a give-away I can't remedy. Got to be covered up. Outside of that you are pretty well camouflaged."

The accent of the French word was excellent. Certain links between the refinement of Elizabeth and her father were apparent. Sperry wondered what the history of Baldy Brown contained, what sordid chapters had led up to his present capacity. That his name was Brown he hardly believed. But, if he had changed it for frequent aliases, the girl must have acquiesced, must have acknowledged them. It was a riddle that Sperry had to put aside. Meanwhile, at Elizabeth's suggestion— she seemed to take an artistic pride in his disguise— he applied himself with materials she provided to cleanse his nails of the telltale stain that had tinged them too darkly for nature.

All three went to a moving-picture show that afternoon. Baldy laughed heartily at the pictured triumph of a detective. Sperry went back with them.

"You'll stay with us for the present," said Baldy, "until the big job is through. It's a good cover, and Bess has taken a fancy to you."

The last sentence Sperry appreciated, but he wondered what the big job was, and what part he would take in it. Perhaps he would find out when he met the gang.

4: The Duke Meets The Gang.

SOME day New York will be purged of the huddled-up buildings, the hidden alleys, the cellars, and the underground ways that make up the warren of the underworld. And many things will be revealed, perhaps, that no one has suspected. As long as drugs are peddled and liquor can be distilled, with or without the sanction of the government, so long will these things last, so long will they be populated by the dregs of humanity, twisted in mind and body alike, dominated by some master minds that defy the law.

It was by devious ways that Baldy and Sperry reached the rendezvous that evening. Sperry knew that he could never retrace the route. As it was, he did not penetrate to the actual meeting. As "outside-man," he remained outside the council. They passed through a fence of boards, a portion of which swung horizontally on a pivot to Baldy's touch; they traversed deep cellars, littered with debris that exuded all kinds of musty odors, lit dimly by some light to which Baldy always found a hidden switch. Once, Sperry felt certain, they passed underneath a street, slanting deep down an earthy tunnel propped by beams, traversing a level section where the smell of sewerage was abominable, then up and through another cellar to brick stairs, at the head of which a stout door showed a peephole of light in response to certain knockings of Baldy, checked by other knocks within.

On the other side squatted a man without legs, the type of cripple that infests the streets and captures from sympathetic workers more in a day than they could hard-earn in ten. He worked the opening of the door with a leather strap. Round his stumped body was a belt holstered with two automatics. He challenged the appearance of Sperry, now Manning.

"I don't know this guy," he said, in guttural tones.

"I'm vouching for him," said Baldy. "He's with me."

The dwarf hesitated, shifting a holster to the front. Baldy boiled over with sudden ferocity.

"You cut that gun bluff out with me, Squatty," he said. "Get me? I gave the signals an' you answered them. That's where you quit."

Squatty visibly cowered, yet dared to touch a button back of him. Three faint rings sounded.

"I'll have a talk with you later," said Baldy. But he stayed where he was until the figure of a man appeared coming down the passage.

"What's up?" said the newcomer, a man with beetle brows, his repellant countenance stained from cheek-bones to jaw on the left side with a port-wine mark.

"I come here with a pal," said Baldy, his voice quietly ominous, "and this remnant holds us up after I've vouched for him. This sort of stuff don't go with me, Blackberry; it don't go!"

The newcomer spread out deprecating hands.

"Chief's orders, Baldy," he said. "Any new guy's got to be passed on reg'lar."

"I'm gettin' tired of this 'Chief' stuff," said Baldy. "If we're good enough to pull stuff for a man, we're good enough to see him. This game is too much under cover to suit me. My dope was straight enough to suit the gang, wasn't it? Then, when I bring in a pal that I vouch for, the very man we're needing, I'm not goin' to have him held up when it's touch and go whether we can hold him at all. What you got to say about it, Duke?" He turned to Sperry.

"I'm not over interested in this business," said Sperry, playing up. "I don't know what there is in it for me, and I don't like working for any mysterious chiefs. I'd just as soon quit right now." In which statement he spoke the truth. But he knew he had served Baldy's purpose.

"And if he quits, I quit with him," said Baldy. "That's where I stand, chief or no chief! And, anyway, I don't go no further in the dark. I want to know where I get off. I'm goin' to have a pow-wow with the chief before I run my neck into trouble any deeper. You heard me, Blackberry."

The man with the stain whirled on the cripple.

"What Baldy says is straight, Squatty!" he exclaimed. "You got to use some discretion. Get me?"

"I will when you tell me what that word means," said Squatty.

"It means common sense, that's what. Don't you touch that push button without good reason, or you'll get the grand razzoo! Come on, gents."

Up the passage and into a room, barren of furniture and walled with rough planks, they went at last; it showed no door, no means of egress. One dingy electric, the bulb spotted with flies, barely showed the dimensions of the place. But Blackberry, at the far end, trod on a plank, and a section of the walling rose, through which they passed on, up a flight of stairs, and so to what was evidently the back room of the basement floor of a tenement house. Sperry glimpsed a cemented furnace room through the opening door by which Blackberry disappeared.

"Let me do the talking," said Baldy, and Sperry was content.

The place was furnished with a pallet bed covered with greasy blankets, a table, and three broken-down chairs. Soon they heard footsteps returning.

Blackberry came back again with a black-mustached, stout, prosperouslooking man. The latter went to the point.

"Who's the new guy, Baldy?" he asked; "and what's this kick about the chief?"

"The last can wait," said Baldy. "You know my kick, and I ain't the only one kicking. I'll take that up inside. This is The Duke, Gentleman Manning of Chi. He's a chauffeur, and a good one. I'm vouching for him. Chi ain't healthy for him just now, on account of the wind off the lake front and him having weak lungs."

The other grinned and surveyed Sperry.

"You'll find New York a healthy coop for a lively bird," he said. "Ever live here?"

"He ran a car for a family up in Lenox," said Baldy. "They missed some ice and accused him of hiding it in the gasoline tank. He didn't. Point is, he knows the Berkshires. Savvy? Blake's got pinched, as you told me. Well, this lad can take his place."

"I guess it's all right I'll take your word for it. You'll get a five per cent divvy, Duke, of what stacks up from tonight. Does that go?"

Sperry, borne on the tide of events, nodded.

"Then come on, Baldy," said the man. "We're waiting to hear your spiel. Did you pull it off? You wait here, Duke."

They left him, and Sperry lit a cigarette and then another, wondering to what he was committed. He didn't much care. His own case seemed helpless, and he was conscious of a growing exhilaration in the dark enterprise on hand. And, holding his promise to the girl, he tried to believe in Baldy as she would have him believe. Only, not quite certain of what she did wish him to subscribe to, he made hard work of it.

He had no watch with him, and it seemed hours before Baldy came back, alone. What happened beyond the furnace room remained a mystery to Sperry.

"Come on," said Baldy. They retraced their tortuous way, by the watchful Squatty, who still sulked from his calling-down, and presently they were seated in another padded niche in a cafe, not the same one they had been in before.

"It's for to-morrow night," said Baldy. "The car's Speedwell. Know it?"

"Yes," answered Sperry truthfully.

"We'll see," said Baldy. "Taking no chances. Come along."

This time they took the subway far uptown, and walked to a garage where Baldy seemed to be well known. The Speedwell was in, and, at Baldy's suggestion, they took it out and Sperry drove into the Park. He demonstrated that he knew its mechanism as well as a Swiss watchmaker might understand

the interior economy of a dollar pocket timepiece. Baldy stated himself satisfied.

"Put on those two new rear tires, Tom," he said to the attendant. "My friend will be here to take the car out to-morrow night, about nine."

"The tires seem perfectly good," said Sperry as they left the garage.

"Taking no chances," reiterated Baldy. "Come on, we'll get a snack somewhere. Bess will have gone to bed."

Not till they were back in Greenwich Village did Baldy give him further instructions.

"Get the car there at nine to-morrow," he said, "pick me up in Washington Square, where the buses stop, at ten sharp. Be driving slowly along. I'll be there. I'll not be home to-morrow. You take Bess out to Bronx Park. She wants to see the animals. Crazy about them. I've promised to take her, and haven't had time, though I'm fond of poking round there myself."

To-morrow would be a day well spent, decided Sperry— up till nine o'clock in the evening, at all events. After that, he committed himself to the unknown, and to Baldy. He felt pretty confident of Baldy's being able to protect himself and any protege.

"By the way," said Baldy, yawning, "what does this Remington look like?"

Sperry described him as best he could. "Why?" he asked when he concluded.

"Thought I saw him to-day," said Baldy. "I was in the jeweler's."

With that he went to bed and left Sperry to follow his example. Sleep did not come easily. Why did Baldy want to change two perfectly good tires for new ones? What kind of man was he who loved animals, who trusted his daughter to a new acquaintance, who consorted with the worst types of criminals, and who, Sperry was assured, was going to join in some big robbery the next night, in which affair he, Sperry, was bound by many ties of recklessness and obligation? And what about Remington? Baldy, he had found out by this time, asked no questions idly. And who was "the chief?"

He went to sleep to dream that he and Baldy were cracking a giant safe, with Elizabeth holding a hair-clipper that, somehow, served as a brilliant electric torch. And, when the safe was opened, Cairns stepped out of the shadows and arrested all three of them.

5: The Family Vault

SPERRY had a brief chat with Baldy in the morning before the latter went away on his own business, and Sperry and Elizabeth, with a lunch packed for themselves, and ano'ther for certain special friends of the girl's at the zoo, took

the subway for Bronx Park. There were not many visitors on this chilly day, but they had a rare time. Elizabeth appeared to know the keepers well, and they were given certain privileges such as standing inside the rail when the big cats were fed, and scratching the warty back of the blind hippopotamus. Sperry seemed to be living in another world of strange happenings, and he pledged himself to the present. His own trouble-time seemed very hazy, and the haze was permeated with a rosy glow born of the happenings of the moment. He and the girl became very chummy, and he told her all about his own thwarted ambitions. He told her of the exploits of his chosen profession ; how they could bridge vast chasms and make trails over great ranges; how they could dam waters that would make deserts blossom like the rose, and advance the cause of progress.

"It's a fine profession," she said enthusiastically. "If I were a man that's what I'd like to be. Pioneers of progress, that's what you are."

"Do you think you'd like the life?" asked Sperry. He knew he was talking nonsense, speaking like this to the daughter of a master crook, himself a fugitive from justice, or at least from the law; disinherited, disgraced, about to plunge further into lawlessness. But all things seemed but the figments of a pleasant dream, and he was in no mind to wake up when he had this girl as dream-mate, this enthusiastic girl that was so wonderful a pal. He had never dreamed a girl could be like this ; never met a girl who could so understand a chap, so enter into his thoughts, have the same ideas, the same hopes.

They had come to the cage of the bears and he halted.

"I wish," he said, and stopped. The bears doubtless had their dreams. And the bars were the limit of their reality. Caged!

"What?" she asked, a little shyly.

"Nothing," answered Sperry. "I was just getting broody over my luck, that's all."

"Don't do that," she said. "You trust to daddy. He— he likes you. I know it."

Sperry flung his bitter mood aside.

"Why?" he challenged her with a direct glance. She did not evade it, though her face changed slowly to the transparent hue of the petals of an American Beauty rose.

"He let you take me out to-day," she said slowly. "He has never let any other man do that." Sperry wanted to take her in his arms. There was no one in sight but the gobbling bears, busy over the buns they had brought them. The girl knew it, and he saw her eyes thank him as he refrained and kept the faith that Baldy Brown of Chi, master crook, had reposed in him. But the want remained.

"Daddy is going to help you," she said. "Perhaps it will come true, after all, your building dams and bridges."

"I hope it will all come true," said Sperry. And he saw her cheeks bloom again.

It was all wild nonsense they were talking. He realized that as they wept homeward. To-night he was to play chauffeur to a band of desperadoes. And she, was she juggling, too? Playing at make-believe, despite her surroundings, her fate, as a crippled child may pretend that it has wings?

The strangeness of the whole affair was emphasized in the preparation of dinner. Baldy himself took a hand, mashing the potatoes while Sperry concocted the salad dressing and Elizabeth broiled the thick steak and handled the rest of the concomitants. It was like a picnic, Sperry felt; the informal meals that attend great happenings. At eight o'clock they were through.

"You know my motto, son," said Baldy. "Nothing like a full meal." And, while Elizabeth was clearing and cleaning up, he gave Sperry final instructions.

"We'll pick up a man on Bleecker Street," he said. "I'll show you where. He's an outside man, like you. But not an active one. Now, when we arrive, I'll show you where to park. You hang on there till some one comes up and says: 'All right Duke.' You come back with, 'Duke Who?' If he says 'Manning,' it's all right. If any one comes up with a broken line of talk, you beat it. If a bull comes by and asks you what you are hanging around for you tell him you are chaffeur for Mr. Gamwell of the Marine Insurance Association, and you point right across the road to the fifth floor of the opposite building. Gamwell won't be there, but the lights will be on in his suite. And there'll be some one there to answer if the bull gets fresh. It'll all go straight enough."

Sperry did not doubt the smoothness of the operations from the care with which the preliminaries had been arranged. And he could, in some measure, understand the joy of the outlaw, the pitting of brain against brain, the risk, the thrill of it all.

"You take your orders from whoever gets on the front seat," said Baldy. "There'll likely be two men, perhaps three; depends on the load. I won't be with you. When you are through with the job, beat it back to the garage and make the trip home by subway and walking. Here's a key to the door."

As the cool steel met his palm, Sperry felt assured of his position with Baldy. He was surely trusted.

"You can depend on me," he said. Elizabeth came in at the moment, through with the dishes, and the talk switched. Baldy left, and presently Sperry departed for the garage. The new tires were on, he noticed, before he sped downtown.

At Washington Square, on the south side, he picked up Baldy, and on Bleecker, the second man. At tenthirty they parked the car on a street well downtown in the financial district. Sperry recognized the locality, strange as it was at this deserted time. The car had stopped around the corner from the jeweler's shop where he had seen Remington. There both Baldy and the other outside man got out. The latter walked up the street, but Baldy stayed to point out the lights in the fifth floor of a tall building across from where the Speedwell stood beside the curb. Then he, too, left, melted mysteriously in the shadows.

Sperry had always associated robberies with the small hours, but now he recognized that downtown life practically ceased after six-thirty. The "gang" was now at work, and he had no longer any doubt that their object was the pilfering of the vaults of the jewelry store, or that the red-haired clerk was involved as he was, in a minor capacity. He pondered over what he was to do. Baldy had asked him if he knew the Berkshires. Was he to drive the loot to some treasure-trove in the hills, there to await the disposition of the chief? He filled in the time with cigarettes and conjectures, and finally, warm in his coat and the fur robe with which the Speedwell was provided, leaned back half drowsily. No policeman broke his reverie, though one passed twice. He heard Old Trinity chime the quarters and knew that it was close to midnight before a figure came to the side of the car.

"All right, Duke?"

The voice seemed dimly familiar, though he could not place it. The man's face was muffled both with a beard and the high collar of his coat upturned, and a scarf which circled his neck. A soft-brimmed hat was pulled low down over his brows.

"Duke Who?" parried Sperry.

"Manning," replied the man and clambered to the front seat without further ado. "Round the block," he said, "slowly."

Sperry obeyed orders, conscious that the bearded man kept a sharp lookout. They met no one. Three quarters around he got the word to halt, close to an alley dividing the big block. A shadow drifted along in the obscurity of the other side of the street. The bearded man noted it.

"It's all right," he whispered. "That's our lookout. If he whistles, beat it, and stop at the corner of Broadway and Chambers."

The speaker slipped out and down and disappeared in the murky alley. He was back again in an instant. Following him came a procession of dim shapes, each bearing a heavy package that they stowed quickly in the tonneau of the car. At last two men climbed in after the bundles and pulled a rug over the loot and themselves. The bearded man got in again beside Sperry.

"Slick and quick!" he said, with a chuckle. "North, and go it."

North they went and still north, climbing up where reservoirs- gleamed among the pines, quickening their pace, plunging, lunging on to the urging of the man at Sperry's side, until, above Lake Mahopac, a front tire exploded and nearly threw them into a ditch.

No one helped him. The two men in the tonneau stood about with the third until Sperry ordered one of them to hold an electric torch on his repairing. The bearded man did as requested, throwing the ray where Sperry ordered. Once he delayed to shift it, and Sperry, sweating with his work, despite the crisp night, spoke to him sharply. The man looked at him queerly, but said nothing. At last the job was finished, and Sperry put on his gloves and started the car once more. The going was hard and the roads here and there marked for detours, so that it was after five by the clock in the front of the car before they began to climb hills with which Sperry was familiar, the hills on the other side of the ridge from Swiftbrook Bowl. But it was still dark, still far from sunrise. He had been brusquely asked if he knew the way to Galton, and had answered in the affirmative. Now they were approaching that town.

"Straight through," said the bearded man in his husky voice. "Don't turn off to Ironton. Keep on up the mountain."

Sperry obeyed. They struck a bad road, deep-rutted, slippery with mud, and the car made slow progress? One of the men behind spoke for the first time.

"Open her up, can't you? We got to get through before daylight." They passed by sleepy hamlets and hit the windy ridge at the watershed, then pitched down between wooded ravines. A clearing came, a suggestion of highland meadow strips, the sound of a foaming torrent, the outline of a steeple against a blackish sky.

"Is this Darlington?" asked the bearded man. "Then the first road to the left past the village."

They made it as the first hint of dawn showed. There was a faint difference in the quality of the light. Trees began to separate themselves. On a slope irregular ranks of tombstones developed, gray and ghastly.

The guide put a hand on Sperry's arm.

"Into the graveyard," he said.

There were no gates, only a gravel road, crisp under the tires. To the right rose a high bank in which tombs had been dug like caves, and sealed with iron doors. Their tops were rounded and turfed above the level of the bank. Here they halted. The two men got out and one of them busied himself with a skeleton key, while the second held the electric torch.

Sperry read in its arc the graven lettering in the stonework about the iron doors: "Family Tomb of Alvin Allen. 1843."

The ghouls were going to deposit the loot in the ancient monument. Doubtless all the Allens were dead, their crumbled remnants in the vault.

"Come on," said the bearded man from the ground, "lend a hand here. It's lightening strong. Want us to get nipped?"

The three of them were bearing in their packages with frantic haste. Daylight was coming. There was no time to spare lest some chore-seeking villager might see them and give an alarm. Sperry lent a hand, bearing a heavy parcel into the musty burial plade, and coming out gratefully into the fresh air for another. At last they were through. He started to mount the car.

"Confound it!" said the bearded man. "We've left the keys back there. Duke, you've got the torch. Go get them, will you, while I light up? And hurry."

Sperry went back into the charnelhouse reluctantly, but loath to suggest that he was not willing to do his share. He had held a feeling ever since they left New York that he was on probation with his passengers, that they sensed somehow that he was not an accepted and qualified member of their craft, but was tolerated only on Baldy's say-so. He could not see the keys and threw about the circle of his light. Suddenly he felt quick fanning of the close air, heard a grating sound, then the noise of the outer bar swinging into place with a dull clang, followed by the click of locks.

The ray of his lamp shone on the closed doors of the vault. He flung himself at them, pounding, kicking, without result, with hardly noise enough to reach to the road. He could barely hear the explosion of the engine as it broke into life and left him there, deliberately abandoned among the loot and the coffins of the moldering dead !

6: Skeletons and Jewels.

AFTER the first rage and sense of horror had passed, Sperry forced himself to sum up the situation calmly. He deliberately shut off the light of the electric lamp, knowing he might need it badly later. The place seemed to fill with phantoms, indignant at this outrage of their last rest.' It was cold and damp. Somewhere water percolated through and dropped on the rough cement of the floor, like the tick of a clock counting his last minutes.

For he could not last very long, deliberately abandoned as he had been without hope of rescue. The air was limited, and, if any came through the door cracks or an unseen crevice, it was only enough to prolong life a short time. The place seemed to put a coating on his tongue, to choke his laboring lungs.

In the absolute silence, save for the "tock-tock" of the dripping water, Sperry could hear his heart beating as he strove for control. His burial had been preconceived by the bearded man whose voice was dimly familiar, though he had seen little of the man's face, muffled as it had been by the collar of his coat, a slouch hat, and a woolen scarf. Was it just a general suspicion based on some slip he had made that showed him up plainly as not one of them— as a possible spy?

If the voice of the bearded man had been dimly familiar to him, why, in like degree, in stronger degree, for he had pot attempted any disguise of it, his own might have been familiar to this man. And he had shown his baseball finger while working on the blowout. Had he been recognized? Would they come back for him or send some one to make his arrest and claim the reward?

That was not likely, since they had left all the loot with him. He had been deliberately left to die of hunger, thirst, and lack of air.

Once more he switched on his torch and flashed it about his jail. It was bricked, the roof in the shape of a low arch, above which he had, noticed, outside, that earth, turfed at the top, was piled thick. The ray faltered and he noticed, to his horror, that the battery was fast losing strength. And, to his imagination, perhaps, but none the less real, the air seemed heavier, more vitiated. He swept the place for some tool with which to attack the bricks and dig through the dirt, at least to air, if not to freedom. He wondered whether the packages they had brought might not hold some safe-breakers' tools. While the light rapidly waned in the torch, he opened them. Most were cases made of heavy fiber, such as travelers use, strapped. Two were grips. These he handled first. One of them was full of smaller cases, which presumably contained articles of jewelry. These he did not touch. The second held a mass of gold chains and watches stripped from trays.

The battery gave only a flickering glimmer now as he attacked the sample cases. The first was a jumble of velvetcovered boxes, many of which had been opened and uncertainly closed. Among them strings of jewels, brooches, necklaces, and rings shot out streaks of many-colored light. And then the torch failed utterly. By sense of touch he went through the rest of the loot and found no tools. Mechanically he restrapped the sample cases as his mind sought some way out.

A coffin handle?

Stumbling across the boxes, he groped his way to the stone slabs on which the caskets rested. He reached up and felt along the side of one of the grim receptacles, his fingers clutching a handle that felt as if it were made of iron, though it was pitted with rust. Apparently it had been wrought in the early days when the trappings of the dead were less elaborate in these hillside

communities. It might make a good weapon with which to pick a way through the bricks and mortar if he could only get it free from the wood. That he might do with his pocket-knife.

Something moved in the mausoleum, something that sounded like the pat of a naked foot. Sperry's hair bristled, though his reasoning told him it must be made by a material thing. What was it? He listened, holding to the handle of the casket. It came again and halted. He cautiously shifted a foot and touched something, small, yielding, alive. Instantly the truth flashed upon him. It was a toad. He moved again in his relief and set his foot fair upon the creature. He slipped, clinging to the iron handle. The wood, set there almost a century ago, perhaps, exposed to damp from without and within, gave way with a soft, shuddering crash under Sperry's weight. One end of the handle still clung for a moment and then, before he could recover his balance, the whole hideous thing was upon him, rotted wood and shreds of something that once had been quick and human. Dust and crumbling shreds of cerements, blinding, choking, appalling, descended on him with a soft rush as if intent upon a smothering vengeance!

Sperry fell, half paralyzed by the horror of it, and his head struck upon some dull edge. Light flashed before his inner sight, and then— oblivion!

When he came to, his head was aching dully but persistently. There was a great weight upon his chest and he could barely breathe. He could only move his extremities feebly. How long he had been there he knew not, but his returning consciousness told him that the air was nearly exhausted and that lack of it, with the blow, with want of food and a frightful, torturing thirst, had chained him too effectually for him to think of another attempt to break through the chamber that held the long dead and the barely living. How long he had been there he had no way of telling. This was the end, or very close to it.

Tock, tock! The drip on the floor sounded on his sensitive nerves and brain cells, congested by blood sluggish and poisoned for lack of oxygen, like

the blows of a sledge upon some mighty brazen gong, tolling off his last seconds. A swift vision came to him of the figures on Trinity's clock in New York, pounding the hours.

The weight on his chest turned to a pain within, an agony at each laboring breath. He was breathing carbonic gases and he longed for their complete anesthesia. He no longer wished for life nor thought coherently.

The pains ceased and a blessed ease encompassed him. He had passed the Rubicon. Light was in his eyes, a brilliant, dazzling light! Sweet air greeted his lungs. Vaguely he felt himself moving, slowly— slowly! Something was between his lips, something that burned and choked him, but trickled down his

throat and started a fire of life within him. He looked up and saw the stars. Then they were obscured by a shape and he heard a voice calling his name—his own name "Jack! Jack!''

He tried to meet the summons, sounding like the hail of some one far down a tunnel, some one he loved. The stars again! More of that life-giving fluid ! And then came the light, not so dazzling. And, above it, radiant, imploring, anxious, was the face of Elizabeth.

Youth and hope and love now brought him swiftly back to life. A strong arm was about him and he sat up. Another voice blended with the girl's in low tones. It was Baldy's.

"Give him some of the coup, Bess. Here's the thermos. We'll get him into the car. I'll close up this place."

He supped the broth and tried to get to his feet. Baldy's strength supporting him on one side, the girl's hand under one elbow, he climbed up into the tonneau of a car and sank on its padded cushions with the girl beside him, rapidly recovering. Baldy was closing the tomb once more. But this time, thank Heaven, he was on the outside.

"How did you find me?" he asked.

"Don't talk until we get out of this," said Baldy. "Bess, you'll have to back out of here. I'm not an expert on these machines. Here, Jack, put away this sandwich and take another drink."

Sperry took the bread and meat and the flask and obeyed orders as the girl left him and took the front seat, her father edging over. The car reversed down the little ascent to the tomb, through the entrance of the cemetery to the main road, sped along it for perhaps a quarter of a mile, and turned into a steep lane up which it plugged through stiff mud to the hill top, turned in between the remnants of a gate, and struggled through what had once been a farmway to a standstill beside a crudely constructed cabin. A broken chimney jagged on the skyline; the windows were boarded, the door still intact.

The man with the mole got out and worked on the closed door. Sperry, almost himself again, got into the front seat with Elizabeth.

"How did you ever find me?" he asked.

"Daddy will tell you. I told you to believe in him, you know."

Seeing that her father was implicated with him in the deliberate robbery of a jewelry establishment, Sperry made no audible answer. But he took the girl's hand and pressed it. They exchanged a glance, a look that ignored all circumstance and set them on a bridge of their own, a mutual platform of appreciation and sincerity. And Sperry found himself glowing with an added resolve to protect this pure-eyed girl from all knowledge of her father's crookedness, a renewal of his desire to prove his own integrity. Something

passed between them, as of a current between two wires that touch in a magnetic field, and Sperry felt a tingle that mounted to his heart and stayed there. Just then it was Elizabeth whom he credited with his rescue. Her father did not count.

Baldy came back from the open door of the shack, got a lantern from the car, and a roll of blankets, asking Sperry to bring a box packed full with papered parcels, if he was able. The girl followed them inside the cabin that held some inexpensive furniture, including a rough bed and a rusty stove.

"Sperry," said the man with the mole, "I want you to camp out here for a day or two. Here is enough to make you fairly comfortable. There is wood outside, but I would rather you did not light any fire unless you must have it. This place is just above the cemetery. I want you to watch for the man or men who come to remove the loot, and to follow them. It is barely possible you may recognize one of them. But follow them, somewhere, to where they take the stuff. Then come back to New York and let me know as fast as you can travel. Here is money."

Sperry took it somewhat confusedly. Was Baldy seeking to double cross the others? But in that case he would simply have taken the loot.

"Won't they suspect something when they find I am not there?" he asked.

"There is nothing to suspect. We are not going to interfere with the removal of the stuff. It will not be the crowd that you brought here and who left you inside. In any event, the men who come would not be astonished to find you there dead, or taken away. They do not bother themselves about any details other than those laid out for them to handle. The chief attends to the finer points and all the links. The point is, Jack, the gang is getting a bit tired of working in the dark. They want to get in touch with the chief. I am at the head of that idea. I want to have a straight talk with him myself. Hitherto he issued all orders through Blackberry and one or two others. I am no cat's-paw, and the rest follow; me. I believe this stuff in the tomb will go direct to the chief. I want to trace it. The tomb has been used before for a receiving house for the stuff. It is none of it sold to fences. The chief finances the whole proposition, and bides his time in disposing of the loot through channels known only to himself. He gets more for it that way, but the rest of us don't— not enough of the difference. Now, if they won't let me see the chief, I'm going to find out for myself who he is, and get to him. And you can help me. Will you?"

He spoke in a low voice. The girl was trying to make the shack less comfortless. Sperry gave her a glance and then answered Baldy.

"Considering you have just literally picked me out of the jaws of death, I should be worse than ungrateful not to help you. I owe you a lot."

"We'll come to a just settlement, some day, my son," said Baldy. "You'll have to sleep days and watch nights. They'll come some time after dark. I wouldn't be surprised if they bring a team of horses, as being less noticeable. I've a notion they won't go very far. That will make it all the easier for you. The gang is uneasy. There are hints that the police are closing in and they think, with me, it is time for a final divvy. Of course, I haven't so much coming as some of them, but I am, in a way, the leader in this. As it stands, if anything breaks, the chief has got the goods and we stand for the conviction. He is too well covered.

"He is a bit uneasy, too, I think. Anyway, he has ordered one last haul— I'll tell you about that when you come back to town— and then we may all split up. But there is going to be a personal talk and a regular accounting first, with the chief in person. I don't think you'll have to stick round here long. Sorry for the accommodations, but it wouldn't do for you to be seen. Now we've got to be off."

"Won't you tell me how you found me?" asked Sperry.

Baldy smiled. "I wanted to find out where this cache was. I like to have two strings to my bow. You were one of them. The other? You remember my having those two tires changed at the garage? Well, I supplied the car, and I also supplied two tires that are so marked as to make a very plain trail in the mud for any one used to following them. When the car came back without you— they left it at a downtown garage and let me know in the regular way— when they came back with a yarn about you having got cold feet and given them the slip, I suspected that they had figured you out wrong in some way. They didn't like my bringing you in the way. I did, and I imagined a grudge— and perhaps something else. Anyhow, I knew the destination was somewhere in the Berkshires. On the main road I picked up the tire marks, and I didn't lose them. Now tell me just how it all happened."

He and the girl listened while Sperry summed up the incidents briefly.

"It was the chap with the beard who did it, then?" asked Baldy. "I didn't see much of him. I was inside, and he showed only once. But we'll attend to him later. You had better lay low for a bit with the gang. And now we must be going."

He went outside to the car. Sperry looked at the girl. He seemed fairly launched in criminality, and yet this girl, daughter of Baldy Brown, appeared a thing apart from such affairs, mixed up in them as she undoubtedly was. She held out both her hands and he took them. Again the thrill mounted and took possession of him. She seemed to sway a little toward him, and the next instant her lips had met his.

They stepped apart as Baldy returned. How much he had seen, Sperry could not guess, did not think of until the car had left and he was preparing to go on watch. But he was very fully conscious of a strange, a welcome exhilaration that not al his troubles, all his desperation could modify. Elizabeth and he were living in a world apart, and that world was lit by the unquenchable hope of love.

Baldy had left him an automatic pistol, and he slipped it into his pocket, before, fortified with food and drink, braced still by the touch of the girl's lips, he put out his lantern, closed the door, and crept down the hill through leafless brush and a little grove of spectral white birches in the verge of which he crouched, amid the dried ferns, just above the mound of the vault, keeping his lonely vigil.

7: Temptation

FOR the balance of that night and for the two nights following, Sperry watched in the birch grove above the tomb, eating and sleeping by day, holed up in the deserted farm cabin. They were long vigils with the shortening days, thirteen hours at a stretch in the darkness, with one night continual rain that forced him to light a fire the next morning and dry out his sodden clothes. But he stuck to it and was confident that no one had approached the Cemetery as no one came near his cabin. What he suffered from most was the fact that he dared not smoke while on guard, and found the lonely hours drag interminably. His great consolation was that, long before this, he would have become one of the silent occupants of the tomb, uncoffined and unepitaphed, but most effectually out of the world. And he was very far from wishing to have done with worldly affairs. His love of Elizabeth undoubtedly did much to give him a sane grip on events and furnish him. with hope of ultimate rehabilitation.

Time and time again he went over everything and tried to patch things together into some kind of sequence that he could trace back, in order to discover some clew, some loophole he might use as the commencement of his own vindication. Remington! Everything came back to Remington! He was the one who had deliberately lied about the check's presentation. Cairns had stated that it was torn from the back of his check book, and Sperry suspected Cairns of furnishing this bit of the evidence. This pointed inevitably to collusion between Cairns and Remington. Moreover, Cairns had interested himself in getting Remington a fresh situation. And the bank's funds had been depleted ten thousand dollars, which Cairns had at first promised to restore with

altogether too much equanimity, Sperry concluded, reviewing his stepfather's demeanor.

Supposing that Remington had shared that ten thousand. Five thousand would not be much for Cairns to pay as the price of getting Sperry out of grace with his mother, of accomplishing his final disinheritance, and giving Cairns full control of it, if not ultimate possession. But there might be a third man, the one who had so wonderfully imitated the signatures. Who was he?

Out in the blackness he revolved these thoughts, his mind like a squirrel in its turning-cage, and arrived at but one resolution, to seek Baldy's help to run down Remington, and, trapping him, if that were necessary, force the facts from him.

He thought of his mother, none too strong, and of what insidious poison against him Cairns by this time had succeeded in implanting in her confiding nature. There, too, he was powerless; he did not even know her address. So his heart grew bitter and hard against his transgressors. The girl was his only leaven of sweetness, and she was not of his own world, as society apportioned it. She dwelt in the tents of the wicked, and, if crime had not besmirched her, it was because she was of pure gold that may be hidden, but remains intrinsically perfect.

Baldy, too, was a man who had his qualities. Environment might have forced him into his career, as indeed it had forced Sperry. The man was one who would have made good in any surroundings, have stood out head and shoulders above his fellows. His strength was misapplied, but his virtues were still unspoiled. As friend or enemy, he would go on to the end, and Sperry felt that Baldy was his friend.

SO the nights passed, and the days, and the fourth night brought action.

There was a sharp frost, the temperature dropping with the sun, until, at midnight, nested in the blankets he had been forced to bring from the cabin, Sperry was hard put to it to keep warm. He was about to get up and walk about on patrol to restore his congealing circulation, when certain noises arrested him. They were not loud— the clink of a horse's hoofs on frosty road metal, the squeak of an axle. A team was coming on toward the cemetery. This was not the main road; all the farmers of the vicinity were long ago abed.

Excitement gripped him as the sounds grew closer and turned in to the cemetery enclosure. Sperry had wriggled forward until he lay prone on the top of the curving mound that formed the roof of the tomb. The wagon stopped and two dim shapes got down. There was no moon, but the sky was clear with the frost, and the steely stars gave sufficient light to observe movement. The two men, without a word, advanced to the doors and opened them. Then the

light from an electric torch sprayed out, and they went into the vault. For fifteen minutes they worked, taking out the cases and grips, and stowing them carefully in the light farm wagon. They worked in silence. If they had expected to find a recently dead body inside, they made no comment at the lack of it.

Sperry wondered why the bearded man and his two helpers had not said something about their attempt to dispose of him, or had not themselves tried to remove the supposed corpse. Was it true, as Baldy had hinted, that the type of men entrusted by the mysterious chief to handle his loot were surprised at nothing, asked no questions beyond the scope of their own directions ?

While these conjectures ran through his mind, he had other things to do; to see if he could recognize these men— as Baldy had suggested he might — and to trail the wagon to its destination.

They wielded their torch skillfully and sparsely. Sperry was unable to get a glimpse of their features. One thing he noticed with satisfaction: they had a big tarpaulin in the wagon-bed which they threw over their load. It wqs plain that one of them, at least, knew the locality, for he led the horses up the cemetery road to where he could swing them around a loop, not wishing to attempt to back them or turn them in the narrow space, for fear of noise or mishap in the gloom. Sperry swiftly tucked away his blankets among the bracken and slipped like a lizard from the top of the tomb, gliding down to the road, and, hidden behind a big elm, waited the coming out of the wagon.

It went cautiously on down the steep pitch, the brakes set. Behind it, at a safe distance, strode Sperry. At the bottom of the hill the wagon turned north across the valley on a fairly level road, the horses put to a jog-trot. Sperry changed his pace and kept fifty yards behind without difficulty. Thus for a mile they went, and then came the long climb up the northern ridge. Sperry knew the country well, and knew that the team would be stopped for necessary breathing half-way up the hill. He slowly closed in, and, when the wagon halted on the midway bench of the ascent, he was less than ten yards away.

He saw the striking of a match, the passing of it from one man to the other, the glow of a cigar and a pipe, and caught the scent of tobacco. He saw more— the face of one of the men, and the ruddy outline caused him to stop with a little gasp. He had not seen enough to be sure of identity, but the suggestion put his brain in a turmoil.

The two men were talking in low tones; the heavy breathing of the winded horses was plain on the cold night air. Foot by foot, bent double, Sperry crept up to the wagon. He meant to climb over its tail board, cover himself with the tarpaulin, and get a ride to wherever it was going. This he must do, he decided, at the moment of starting up, so that whatever he might make of noise or

disturbance would be covered by the natural noise of the horses and wagon in getting into action.

The driver released his foot brake, and Sperry, with a little jump, glided over the tail-board and pulled the edge of the tarpaulin over himself without attracting attention. The wagon went on up the hill and down the other side. Once again the horses broke into a trot which they kept up for mile after mile with little slackenings on minor hills. Sperry no longer felt the cold; he was tingling with excitement. He was beginning to see a way out of his troubles—not an easy path, but a possible one.

The team slowed up and turned off the main road to a smoother one. Sperry stuck his head out from the tarpaulin. They were now in the private grounds of a well-kept estate, driving between lawns set with shrubs and groups of trees. A house showed, gray-white, no lights visible, a country place of wealth. The wagon drove on round to the back, and Sperry, his eyes constantly on the driver and his companion, got clear of the tarpaulin and edged over the tail board. Despite his care, his feet scuffed the gravel of the drive, and he instantly darted for the nearest cover, a clump of evergreens, crackly with the frost. The driver, pulling up his horses at the moment, paid no attention, but the other man swung about in his seat.

"What was that?" he demanded.

"What?"

"Something in the bushes back there!" As he spoke the man flung the ray of the torch upon the laurels. Sperry lay *perdu* like a rabbit, fearful that the shaking boughs would give him away. Just then a door opened, ruddy in the light.

"You've got the jumps," said the driver. "There's the boss, waiting for us. Get down and help out with the stuff."

The other obeyed, though he walked over to the evergreens and deliberately examined them. But Sperry had writhed out on the other side and chosen a fresh hiding place. The distraction of the opening door had given time for the stiff branches to cease their motion, and the man gave up his idea and proceeded to help the driver with the packages.

Sperry dodged around to one side ol the big house. It was dark, save for a narrow strip of orange light where a blind had not been pulled completely down. Shrubbery grew close to the wall. The frost in the ground was hard enough to bear him without telltale footprints, he decided, and he badly wanted to have a look inside that room. He made his trip in safety, and, gripping the stone sill of the telltale window drew himself up until his eyes were on a level with the crack. The window faced a door that was just opening. A man appeared and advanced toward a massive center table. Behind him

appeared the driver and his fellow, carrying the packages which they set on the table at the indication of the first man, who started to unstrap the packages as the two others turned toward the doors.

Sperry was forced to lower himself to ease the pull on his muscles. He had seen enough, yet he wanted to see more. There was plenty of time ahead of him before he could get the early train to New York. The cabin door was closed properly; the blankets well hidden, and he did not intend to go back to the cemetery.

Six times, at intervals, he hoisted himself and peered through the inch of vision space at the foot of the blind. He saw the man finally dismiss the others, heard the wagon rattle off to some stable, saw the principal open the packages, and gloat for a while over the contents. These he separated entirely from their velvet covered boxes, and placed them within a big safe that was not at first sight apparent, being covered with sliding panels made to conform with the woodwork of the walls. Then he touched a bell and the driver once again appeared, devoid of his outer clothes, addressing the first man with respect, and starting to take away the now emptied cases, grips, and jeweler's boxes.

Now Sperry was through. He could imagine the bulky stuff being burned in a furnace, but he knew where the jewels were stored, and he knew now the mysterious chief's identity. For the man who had put the loot in his safe was his stepfather, Cairns ; the driver was Peters, and the helper a footman.

Here was cause for elation, yet how was he to make use of it? He himself was still an outlaw, and must act through others. Baldy was his only friend, and he was bound to Baldy by many ties. But for the Chicago crook he would be dead in the vault.

His mind, spurred by what he had seen, worked clearly now. The halffamiliar voice of the bearded man was plainly recognizable in the light of all events. It had been Remington. His -own voice and his injured finger, displayed when he had fixed the tires, had given him away, despite his disguise. Just why Remington had not later removed his body he could not figure, but he did not bother with it. Evidently neither Peters nor Cairns had known of his joining the gang of which Cairns was chief. That, too, he set aside for the time.

Other parts of the pattern were forming swiftly. Cairns was a master crook, greater even than Baldy Brown, controller of a band, few of whom knew his identity. Cairns planned the robberies. His own case had been but a side issue in Cairns' campaign, though the fortune the man hoped to control was worth having. Aside from that had been the mutual dislike between Sperry and his stepfather, and the objection of the latter to having any one close to him who might suspect or clog his operations.

Remington, dismissed from the bank, had been placed in the jeweler's with a view to the robbery. The red-haired clerk was in it, too. Remington may -have furnished the combination which was to have been put by the redhead into the box containing the tie-clip. That was why Remington had been on the balcony that morning— to watch for the man who would buy the tie-clip. Doubtless Remington, for his own reasons, wanted to link up all he could of Cairns' chain of operatives. Naturally he had become suspicious of Sperry's appearance in the store. Once started, he had been on the watch, and had recognized him as the driver of the Speedwell car.

That would link him up with Baldy, who had furnished the car and vouched for Sperry with the gang.

Baldy must know all this. Sperry found himself in a quandary. If he accomplished the arrest of Cairns, if he could find some one who would listen to him and act, it meant the arrest of Baldy, or at least his pursuit, and Baldy would know that Sperry, whom he had befriended, had double crossed him. He had a good excuse, his own vindication, but— he had eaten Baldy's salt ! More, he was himself mixed up with the gang.

Baldy's friendship might have been only the ruse to use him as a tool, to procure the driver they needed, to act as outside man — a mere matter of business. But it would not have been necessary for the man with the mole to have taken him into his own house, to have brought him into close contact with his daughter. He knew what Sperry was charged with ; that was whip enough, had he wanted to use it.

Instead, he had left Sperry alone with Elizabeth, had sent them off on a jaunt.

Walking along the lonely roads, Sperry thrashed it out, and found himself at last between two questions, both concerning a woman. There was his mother to be considered, to be rescued from Cairns, to have her faith in her own son restored. And there was Elizabeth, whom he loved— a crook's daughter, but infinitely sweet. How could the two situations be reconciled?

He did not attain the solution until he boarded the early train to New York, at a station ten miles from his own home, trusting to his disguise, keeping his baseball finger well gloved.

He was going to tell Baldy everything that occurred. Crook though he was, the man was square, and he would see both sides of the case. That Baldy would double cross Cairns, having once entered his gang, he could not imagine. Baldy, sore at not meeting his principal, at being used as a cat's-paw, and Baldy playing traitor, were two very different things. But he felt sure that Baldy would find some way to help him out of his dilemma, and he was very certain that his present duty was to warn Baldy, who might be even now

proclaimed as traitor to the gang by Remington. If they had not hesitated to leave him in the tomb, what might they not do to Baldy? And to Baldy's daughter? He remembered that they had merely told Baldy that he, Sperry, had given them the slip with cold feet. Were they giving the man with the mole the benefit of the doubt until the last job was pulled, needing his aid? Remington, recognizing Sperry, knew that Baldy lied when he called him Gentleman Manning, the Duke, from Chi.

There were a lot of tangles in the skein that all his cogitation failed to unravel ; it failed to anything but merge them into a greater snarl. Arrived at New York in midmorning, he hurried to the house in Greenwich Village, taking especial care to break the direct journey, fearful that something had gone wrong.

Elizabeth met him, smiling. Her daddy, she said, would be back at noon.

"You look worried," said the girl, "and you look— have you seen yourself in a mirror lately? You need repairs."

Sperry regarded himself. The nights in the open had made his false complexion patchy ; the dye in his hair was blotched, and a suggestion of blondness showed plainly at the 'toots.

"You also look hungry," said Elizabeth. "When did you eat last?"

It had been many hours since Sperry had tasted warm food, and he had forgotten breakfast in his hurry. The girl soon remedied that, and presently she was sitting across from him while he devoured ham and eggs and wonderful coffee, with still more wonderful biscuits

What a paradox she was, he thought; fresh with that indescribable suggestion of the open country. How could it be possible that Baldy was her father? A happy solution presented itself. Like himself, she might have only a step-father. But he hesitated to talk to her about it.

As he finished his meal she brought him a box of her father's cigars and an envelope addressed to him.

"Daddy said to give you these if you got back while he was away," she said, and left him to open the communication while she went humming off to get rid of the dishes.

Inside the envelope were two clippings from newspapers, one long, one short. Sperry took the latter first. It read :

> Mrs. Simeon Cairns is now staying at the Isle of Pines, and is reported much improved in health. In connection with recent unfortunate family events, Mrs. Cairns stated to our correspondent that she had every reason to believe that these would terminate satisfactorily, particularly with regard to the status of her son, John J. Sperry, though she declared that she had no knowledge of his whereabouts, nor had he personally communicated with her.

Mr. Cairns is not expected to join her this winter. The capitalist is at present in the Berkshires at the family residence.

Here was more bewilderment! What miracle had happened to stiffen his mother's mental backbone in behalf of her son? Had nature proven more powerful than Cairns' suggestions, and had the mother risen in defense of her own flesh and blood? It seemed so. And Sperry thought he could read between the lines of the diplomatic correspondent the prophesy of a disagreement between Mr. and Mrs. Cairns, already brewing. It was good news and it heartened him. The other was not so reassuring. It was a semi-editorial from a New York daily. It waS:

It has long been evident that the series of robberies that the police have been so singularly unable to prevent or follow up are being committed by the same operatives. Each crime bears the distinct marks of inside work, coupled to skillful burglary. The police can find no trace of any endeavor to dispose of the valuables acquired, much less any clew as to who may be the criminals.

They hint vaguely at a master mind, at a powerful organization run upon strictly business principles, if crime may be styled business or allowed any principles. There, having established a hypothesis that bears some claim to being logical, they stop.

It is high time that this reign of terror be ended. Our merchants are not to be left thus unprotected. It must be admitted that some one with a fine mind for details has planned these depredations so successfully carried out. The robbery of Marshall & Co., the jewelers, is a case in point. But four days have passed, and the police acknowledge themselves helpless by their inactivity.

The *Comet* has before this taken a conspicuous hand in the unraveling of mysteries, as its readers will well remember. We have no desire to usurp the duties of the police, but, if they are unable to secure the services of competent detectives, the *Comet* stands ready, as heretofore, to volunteer the aid of their own representatives, who have already performed notably in the running down of crime.

The police have no information to give out— or will give none— which is tantamount to admitting that they lack even the clews they so often mention. To convince the public, if they need such conviction, that the *Comet* is zealous only for the common weal, and is not acting on unadvised impulse, we will state information that has already been unearthed by us to this effect. At least a part of this band of criminals has recently been recruited from Chicago, and it should not be supremely difficult for the commissioner to make inquiries along these lines. If the police department breaks into action that gives promise of success or, at least, of progress, the *Comet* will gladly remain in its preferred position as recorder of events. Otherwise its readers may expect in its columns the news of a vigorous campaign to uncover the identity of this gang of arch criminals, and bring them to justice. What further information the *Comet* now has, held back for obvious reasons, is at the service of the commissioner, if he wants it. If not, we will act upon it and— there will be speedy developments.

Sperry felt enmeshed in puzzles. What did this leader in the Comet mean? Baldy had seen it, of course, since he had clipped it. It looked like more danger for the man with the mole and for himself. He also was supposed to be from Chicago. Was it a subtle plan of Remington to get rid of Baldy?

That hardly seemed plausible. The *Comet*, Sperry, knew, had boosted its circulation enormously by previous brilliant detective work. If it gave out such clews that, as Sperry knew, were true ones, how much more did it have up the managerial sleeves?

When Baldy arrived, he did not do much to enlighten him.

"I thought you would like to see that news about your mother," he said. "So did Bess. She found the item. As for the other, don't worry about it. I don't. Now give me your news."

To Sperry's chagrin, his information did not seem to impress Baldy overwhelmingly. He laid stress only upon one part of the discovery, that Sperry had seen the jewels stowed in the safe that Cairns had installed in the library since he had assumed mastership at Swiftbrook Bowl.

"Your affairs and mine seem to run together, son," he said whimsically. "And we'll straighten out the whole mix before we get through with it, take it from me. Meantime, don't worry about Remington. I've looked out for that. You are back just in time. This trip you will be an inside man. The last job is to be pulled to-night. It is the Agricultural Bank at Longfield, and, of course, your esteemed stepfather and Remington worked out the details of this some time ago, in all probability. Also, Chief Cairns announces this as the final wind-up. He has undoubtedly seen the *Comet*, and read the writing on the wall. He has agreed to see certain of us as a committee after the job is done. We are to go over from Longfield to Swiftbrook Bowl by motor. You will be with the committee, and maybe you'll have a chance to tell your stepfather what you think of him, and come to some agreement."

"But I'm mixed up in this," said Sperry. "Look at this disguise."

"It needs fixing," said Baldy. "Bess will do it. Remember, there are more ways than one of killing a goose and of cooking it. I'm leaving for Longfield on the one-thirty train. You come on the three-thirty. That brings you there well after dark. You know the Olympic Theater?"

"Of course. But it's closed."

"For alterations and repairs. Those repairs are being pushed just now. Night work, decorators and stage carpenters from New York. Get the idea?"

"No," said Sperry; "I'm afraid I don't."

"The Olympic Theater is five doors from the bank. Its opening runs between two stores. These have been closed out under the new lease. I fancy your stepfather is back of that lease, cleverly covered. The repairs give a fine

opportunity for what has been going on; a tunnel, starting underneath the stage, runs up and under the main vault of the bank."

"But that vault is at the end of the safety-deposit department," said Sperry. "There is only a heavy rail across, and the bank is lighted at night so that any one passing can see clear down to the end of the vault."

Baldy smiled.

"Wait and see," he said. "Everything is timed for to-night. There is a grip in your room with painters' tools inside of it. Just a precaution. But you take that along and breeze right up to the theater. There's a watchman on there, one of the gang. He'll ask you 'Why didn't you show up at six o'clock?' When you answer, 'I mislaid my card and lost the train,' he'll let you through. Go up back of the stage. The curtain'll be down. There'll be a man or so working on the stage. You stick around ; they won't bother you. If they do, tell 'em you are waiting for Blackberry. When they go under the stage, you go with 'em. That'll be to bring out the stuff. It'll be shipped through the back door. But— here is your job. Don't be the last man out of the vaults or up on the stage. As soon as there is any indication of the truck being outside, and before they open the stage doors at the back— the double scenery doors— you send up that curtain. It's automatic-hydraulic; works on the right-hand side of the stage. There's a labeled button."

He looked at Sperry keenly.

"Don't bother yourself as to why I'm asking you to do this. It's vital to my affairs and yours. I've picked you for the job. I won't put it on the grounds of gratitude for what I've done. I'm asking you to do it because no one else can handle this. It's a favor to me. If you don't believe in me, call it off right now. There may be a chance of danger in it. But if you do it nicely, that's minimized. I'll be there. Will you do it?"

With the eyes of the man with the mole boring into him, Sperry tried to retain some self judgment, and at the same time to be fair to Baldy. He came to the conclusion that Baldy smelled a trap set for him at the last instant after his usefulness was ended in connection with the job. And Elizabeth's request was plain in his ears.

"I believe in you. Won't you believe in my daddy?" Baldy was his only friend, save the girl. And gratitude did enter into it.

"I'll do it," he said. They gripped hands.

8: The End of Baldy

SPERRY swung down the main street of Longfield at nine o'clock, bag in hand, his disguise retouched, and enlarged upon, so that he felt confident of

not being recognized. He passed the bank and glanced in. Back of the main floor he could see the wide corridor behind the bronze grating where the safety-deposit boxes and the door of the great vault were clearly visible night and day. All looked as usual. He passed the watchman and went back to the stage'. Two men were pottering about with saw and hammer, making a noise but doing nothing definite. One of them challenged him. ft was Curly Conklin, the killer who had tried to pistol Baldy. He did not recognize Sperry, and was satisfied with his answers.

"They're prit' nigh ready for us," he said. "They was right under the floor last night. Truck's to be here at eleven sharp. And, let me tell you, it'll be some haul. They say this is the last trick for a while, and it'll be a good one."

Sperry wondered how they could expect to get away with the loot inside of two hours, with no present signs of disturbance in the bank's interior.

"Are they going through the vault floor?" he asked Curly.

"Not much. It's a foot of steel and concrete. Couldn't make a hole big enough to work through there without giving the snap away. They're coming up in front of the door and torching that. Didn't you twig the picture? Say, that's some job of painting, I'll say. The guy that did it used to be wit' a high-class opery company. You could stand a foot in front of it an' not git wise. These hicks'll stare when they git on termorrer."

Sperry nodded.

"Good work," he said. He knew now what it was. A canvas screen, painted to represent the perspective of the last few feet of the deposit box corridor and an exact representation of the vault door, was set a few feet in advance of the vault, and gave the safecrackers ample room to work undisturbed while the occasional patrol passed and peered in,, sure that all was well. There was no premises watchman in the bank. The utter publicity was relied on. And there had been inside work again to place the screen in position, he supposed.

He leaned up against the side of the curtain, smoking, till Curly admonished him to make some noise.

"Some guys might be rubberin' an' wonderin' why they couldn't hear nuttin'," said the crook. "I'm tellin' you this gang works down to the fine points. It's a shame to bust it up. But the cops is gettin' hep, they tell me."

Presently a man appeared at the open trap in the stage and beckoned to them. Sperry followed the others down wooden steps, and then a ladder, to an earthen tunnel shored with timber, and so on up into the bank and back of the canvas screen, unpainted on that side, deftly fitted to the space. There was a smell of gas, acrid and choking, and Sperry smothered a cough. There was no sign of Baldy or of Remington, with or without his beard. The vault door was swung back, and he had no time to look for signs of the work of the oxy-

acetylene torches that had been used. Some one gave a crisp command in a low whisper, and they began to carry out bags of coin and packages of bills.

Up on the stage two men started to place these in old lime barrels, stuffing the tops with excelsior. These were to be placed in the truck, Sperry gathered, together with odds and ends of scenery. There was a clock on the proscenium wall. The hands marked fifteen minutes of eleven.

Sperry looked at the great curtain, blank, unresponsive. What lay behind it? As he started for his second trip to the bank, a man stopped him.

"You ain't needed," he said. "It's all on the way, Duke. Help with them barrels. The truck'll be here any minute."

Sperry fussed around with excelsior, watching the hands of the clock creep to ten and then to five minutes of the hour. There was a sound of wheels outside.' He slipped over to the proscenium and touched the button.

Up went the big canvas silently.

Some one shouted at him. "Here, what're you doin'?" Then the voice died away.

In the stage boxes were men, covering the gang with revolvers; more in the orchestra, the muzzles of their guns showing in the border lights of the stage. A man was walking down the center aisle, a big man, with authority in his manner and in the two guns he aimed.

"Up with your hands, the lot of you!" he said. "Up with them, boys! No use trying the back door. There's a truck there, but not the kind you were expecting."

More men were behind him. They swarmed over the footlights and herded up the safe-crackers, taking charge of the barrels. The backdoors were opened and more detectives stood revealed, also a patrol wagon.

"Lord!" said the snarling voice of Curly Conkling, as he glared at the big man who was in charge of the raid. "It's Jim Farrell."

Sperry gave a second look at the detective who had once sent Curly up the river, and whom Curly had mistaken Baldy for, on that night in the alley. Farrell nodded at him curtly.

"You come with us," he said.

Sperry found himself set on one side with two others. The rest were packed into the patrol wagon. The money was being taken back into the bank. Where was Baldy? What had gone wrong at the last moment?

One thing was certain. Sperry himself was in custody. To his surprise no one handcuffed him, though they wristmanacled the two others, who, with him, were placed in two motor cars with the big man and his assistants. A third car, filled with plain-clothes men, followed .them as they sped through

Longfield out into the country. Sperry recognized the direction, and was soon sure that they were on the way to Swiftbrook Bowl.

They were going to apprehend Cairns! He felt a vicious delight in the thought. Why was he taken along? The others were doubtless members of the committee Baldy had spoken of. They must know his identity, and they wanted to use him in connection with his stepfather's arrest! To that he was willing to subscribe, but he worried about Baldy, principally about Elizabeth.

The third car with the plain-clothes men went ahead of them as they reached the Cairns' house, and the officers jumped from the vehicle and spread themselves about the residence. The big man got out at the front door with two other prisoners and two detectives. Those in Sperry's car joined the group. Farrell spoke.

"I'm going to take off the cuffs, Slim, and off you, Jerry. But don't try any monkey business. When Peters answers the door, you tell him everything's O.K., and that you're the committee, see? Once the door's open, we'll do the rest." He turned to Sperry and caught him by the arm, pressing him out of sight. The detectives stood in the shadows as Slim rang the bell, conscious of automatics covering him, and gave his message to Peters, attired as a butler.

Then there was a swift rush, with Peters knocked down as he tried to pull a gun, a glimpse of Cairns stepping haughtily into the hall and turning ghastly pale under the electrics as Farrell called on him to throw up his hands. Sperry went with the rest into the library.

"The jig's up, Cairns," said Farrell. "We've got the goods on you. If you'll slide back those wall panels so we can get the stuff from Marshall's out of your safe, with a lot of other loot you've got there, you'll save trouble for us all. Don't lower your hands. We want you, not your corpse. Just tell us the combination; that'll do."

Cairns obeyed, trembling, but with rage. He wheeled on Slim and Jerry, his eyes blazing.

"You dirty stool pigeons!" he cried. "I'll get you yet for this."

"They are not the stool pigeons, Cairns," said Farrell. "I'm the only original stool pigeon in this case, if you want to call me one— although your pal Remington was pretty nearly ready to squeal last night. We've had him tucked away safe for a few days, with Gallagher and Martin."

He suddenly took off his hat, and with it came a wig of grayish hair, smiling as he did so. Sperry looked at him open-mouthed. Farrell's head was nearly bald. But the teeth were dazzlingly white, and there was no mole. And yet?

Farrell smiled directly at him.

"I'm Baldy Brown, all right," he said. "Cairns, let me introduce you to your stepson, Jack Sperry. He's been on your payroll lately as Gentleman Manning, of Chi, also called The Duke."

9: Jim Farrell

"I HAD to keep you out of the know, Sperry," said Farrell later, now thoroughly identified as the head of a famous agency. "You might have tipped the thing off. As for the disguise— or the camouflage, that was easy, though Curly would have bumped me on general resemblance if you hadn't been Johnny on the spot. I've got a bald head, which, is handy for wigs fitting properly. As Farrell I wear one. My front teeth are bad, and when I had one bridge made, long ago, I had some others finished up in various style. The mole was easy, letting the whiskers sprout to make it more natural.

"You've helped a lot without knowing it. Of course Bess was wise. We have few secrets between us." He grinned knowingly at Sperry.

"Now everything will be straightened out. I don't think your stepfather damaged your mother's property, and as for her, I took occasion to let her know by way of headquarters that her boy was no rascal, if her second husband was. Also I had the *Comet* tipped off to smooth matters for the climax. I fancy, from the reports, that your mother was rather relieved to have Cairns uncovered. She wants you to go to her, though I'm afraid your appearance will startle her. But I suppose you'll not wait for a little thing like that to stop you."

"I'm glad she knows about things," said Sperry. "I want to see her badly, but there's some one else I'd like to see first, if you don't mind."

"Who's that?" asked Farrell, no longer the Man with the Mole, lighting a cigar.

"You're not such a good detective, after all," said Sperry. "It's Elizabeth."

"Lord bless my soul, you don't say so?" There was a twinkle in Farrell's eyes. "I rather fancy she's expecting both of us to dinner. You can't go to the Isle of Pines by railroad, Sperry, and the next steamer doesn't sail for a couple of days. I've got some details to attend to. Perhaps you had better go ahead. No need to take anything but short cuts this trip, my boy."

But Sperry was gone and Farrell laid down his cigar with a laugh.

"Not such a good detective after, all!" he said softly. "Does he think I'm blind?"

9: A Man's Weak Points
Raymond S. Spears
1876-1950
Popular Magazine 19 Nov 1927

EAST Texas is a great pine wilderness, interspersed with clearings and old choppings. Where trails and roads lead through this there is exposed a thin, gray layer of humus and red, brick-red clay. Where streams wash down the valleys, the caving banks are red. The very rivers flow in bright red hues, with green reflections amid royal-purple shadows when the days are clear, the sunshine crystalline.

And it was to this country that Captain Jeff Rusk of the Rangers was called to investigate some killings in the Rio Muerto Basin. Captain Rusk had heard about the east Texas country. He had been down in the nearly tropical jungles of the lower Rio Grande, and he was a mesquite-country cowboy in origin, so he knew something about thick and middling open-country work. The governor, state attorney, and President Rufus J. Dickwer of the Pine Belts Products, Inc., talked to the Ranger as man to man. The situation in the Rio Muerto Basin was very serious.

Dickwer stated the proposition rather briefly, but to the point. "Captain," he said, "we've been clearing up our cutovers down the valley and on the adjacent levels. The land is rich. Cotton, grapes, corn, sorgum, sweet potatoes, watermelons and other fruits, vegetables— everything'll grow there. Cattle and hogs feed themselves, and if you salt-lick them, they come in any time. It's just naturally a garden, a pasture, a farm— and good standing forest. Unfortunately, difficulties do occur there. You understand how that is. Independent, high-spirited, naturally sensitive men are reluctant in the face of insult or opposition, to leave the matter to officials and courts. I'm frank to say that I myself hesitated a long time before coming here to Austin to ask for outside interference. But lately conditions have pretty much outgrown the influence of the respectable element. "About three years ago my brother, Culby Dickwer, had trouble with a foreman in our upper mill. The fellow was a hard man— had to be, understand, to manage the sawyer and yard crew. His name was Basco— Dubious Basco. He picked up an ax and showed his violent streak. Of course, Culby just had to shoot him, but he did it easy in the left shoulder, disabling him. Basco had been drinking. Afterward he came around and apologized, and as soon as he healed he went to work again, perfectly friendly. But Dubious had a brother by the name of Kirby. Kirby never was reconciled; at the same time, as long as Dubious was satisfied, Kirby minded his own business. One night Culby was riding down the trace from the upper

mill when somebody opened on him from one side, but shot over, missing him. Then one day, Kirby was impudent to me, and I killed him.

"Since then, you know, a man's life hasn't been safe. Culby was killed, finally, a year ago last winter, the time of the rains. Our timekeeper, at the upper mill, had trouble with one of the yard hands who cut him all to pieces. Now perhaps that was just an ordinary killing, understand. At the same time, maybe it wasn't. I just don't know. Anyhow, now it's as much as a man's life is worth to go along any of those roads and traces around the upper mill. Besides Culby, three of our men have been bushwhacked, murdered. Several have been wounded, and many reputable citizens have been shot at— I don't know if by mistake or not. Two were killed, and I feel quite sure the expectation was to get me, on at least one of these occasions. I'd stopped to cut a watermelon with a lady friend, about half a mile back, and heard the shooting. And I found the victim, a Mr. Darling, a good farmer, and peaceable.

"Now, that's just a general account. Course, I'm prejudiced. At the same time, I want to be fair. You see," he sighed, "never knowing when somebody's going to unload a double-barreled shotgun with buckshot into your back, or when somebody's going to draw on you and shoot you down with a .45, unexpectedly, gets on your nerves. You get jumpy. I thought that if a Ranger'd go up there and investigate, we could somehow pacify whoever or whatever's wrong. I don't accuse anybody; I don't blame any one in particular. But, you see, I just don't know what else to do. There's been other killings, besides. I'm just remarking on things relating to me— us, personally."

Captain Rusk glanced around at the other listeners. His chief in command nodded. The matter seemed to be of Ranger importance. Nothing had been said about the local sheriff and deputies, but apparently the situation was 'beyond local control.

"Course," Rush said, as a man of few words, "I'll go look over the country."

An hour later he loaded his saddle and war bag on a baggage car, to take passage with an open mind and lively curiosity into the pine belt. He obtained a good, acclimated horse at Duel, the tap-line fork leading into the domain of the Pine Belts Products, Inc., and for the first time headed out on the red-rut roadway in the shadow of an east Texas pine-timber canopy. It was raining a heavy drizzle. There was little wind. His eyes were accustomed to the bright, gem-like flashes of the sunlit deserts out in the Davis Mountains and Guadaloupes. Under those spreading green branches, the drip falling noisily, now and then a wandering zephyr shook showers of falling streaks all around him. The native horse was a singlefooter in the squashy red mud— lifting one foot at a time with methodical reaching ahead, the sounds those of splash and suck.

"Good thing I brought my oilskin," Rusk grumbled.

But presently he ceased his profane commentaries as the "Rangers' warning" came.

Rusk had been for twenty years in the service. Hate of outlawry— cattle thieves had killed his father— made a policeman of an unusually high-minded, sensitive-spirited man. Good schooling had trained a keen, practical brain. When he had crossed the railroad-clearing ribbon of farms and entered the forest a quickening of his perceptions surpassed the ordinary metes and bounds of sight, sound, touch, smell and the taste of the pine in the air. A sixth, inexplicable sensation, of which great and successful Rangers know— but generally refuse to admit, let alone discuss— came like a chilly breath through the dense timber stand, affecting him like raw wisps of creeping fog.

Time had been, in the impulsive agnosticism of youth, when he would have dismissed his mystic emotion. Now he pulled out under a specially thick treetop, to one side of the roadway, and stopped his horse. Within five minutes another horseman came plowing along, a hunchback with a ghastly yellow, grimacing face, his bulging brown eyes staring sharply ahead from under a loppy, wide-brimmed black hat. In his teeth he held a message or note of some kind. Rusk had watched too many trailers, been too often a tracker himself, not to recognize the cripple's anxiety. Falling in behind the fellow, Rusk slipped along after him, much easier in his thoughts than when he did not know what his sixth sense was agitated about. He reckoned that this time his ears had detected sounds too light for his normal aural sense to recognize.

Five miles farther on the hunchback darted straight ahead to where the roadway made a right bend— a short cut, Rusk guessed, following. The Ranger noted that the man could not read the age of tracks in the muck of his own terrain. Shimmering reflections from the sky made all the prints of horse, cattle, hog and human look alike. But the upstanding mud, the cloudiness of the water, the freshness or the rainwash, all indicated how many minutes, hours, even days, old the tracks were. In half an hour the Ranger could read pine-belt sign. He tracked the dark, fresh tracks of the hunchback's horse straight through the thick timber and saved himself a six-mile circuit around a steep-banked wash gully by going only a mile. He heard the hunchback's horse galloping in the roadway ahead. Rusk drove swiftly, too, but only for about three miles.

Here and there were turn-outs, roads to off-side clearings in the forests. He passed through two forty or fifty-acre abandoned openings, where shacks were sagging into swift decay among uprising growths of weeds, shrubs and young, scrawny pines. He heard a drove of hogs snuffling along, but did not see them. When he pulled out again to think things over, he found himself

suddenly looking over a steaming herd of branded cattle. The animals were dwarfed and gaunt, big-eyed, long-horned, with wide nostrils and sunken cheeks— strange, deerlike and runty, in contrast to the curly rumps, the big white faces, the tall, red, bredup pedigrees of the open or mesquite ranges, The wild fire in the purple eyes gave the tintber-belt cows a demented look, as they uneasily spread their fore hoofs apart, swaying from side to side, circling their tails around. That look of maniacal and suspicious cunning was known to Rusk— in humans. He did not ride in the roadway any more. Instead, he kept along thirty yards or so to one side, just in sight of the pale streak of light which marked the highway course.

When he came to a little clearing, he rode around in the edge of the woods. When he reached a deep, ugly-looking bayou, he did not cross the bridge but swam his horse across, out of sight around the bend. Word had gone ahead that a stranger was coming. Possibly it had been recognized that at last a Ranger had arrived. People all over Texas knew that if there was enough mussing and fussing, trouble and misery, presently would come a Ranger, who was unafraid, who would be friendly, who would ask questions, who would be persistent— who would learn the truth. The basin of the Rio Muerto must by this time be in an expectant mood.

Captain Rusk presently arrived on the edge of a new chopping. Here a forest had been cut away, leaving stumps. Across the opening the road led to the north, into a valley nearly a mile wide, down which flowed the Muerto River, coiling and eddying along. A sawmill was on a bench, with a well-stocked lumber yard around the end of the tap-line rails. On the slope up from the mill were long piles of pine logs. The wilderness silences were broken by the shrieking of saws and the rumbling tumult of heavy machinery. Some scores of shacks and cabins, several well-built cottages and the company commissary were huddled in groups amid the stumps. This was the upper mill, sure enough.

The horse that the hunchback had ridden was in front of one of the bungalows. Almost immediately, while the Ranger gazed on the gray, wet scene, the crippled rider came out, bobbed up into the saddle like a monkey and rode trotting along the roadway, heading back toward Duel, the railroad village. As he passed by the fellow was grinning a fantastic, death's-head kind of smile. As he reached the edge of the clearing, another man left the bungalow and ran at a trot up a path across the chopping toward the woods. This fellow was a gaunt, small-headed, long-bodied woodsman. He had an arm in a sling, but when he reached the edge of the clearing, he jerked the arm out of the cloth which held it, impatiently, and hurried in and out along the roadway, keeping just within the edge of the pine trees,

Rusk naturally wondered what he was going to do, so he followed after in the manner of a Ranger whose curiosity is aroused. He saw the fellow circle around into the tops of a windfall, where several treetops had fallen in a clump. In this heap he sat down on one of the logs and leveled his double-barreled shotgun in a fork which had been made by tying two limbs of pine together. His back was toward Duel, and the gun was aimed along the road toward the upper mill settlement. A horseman would thus present his back to those evil tubes of death.

"You son of a gun!" Rusk said in his throat. "You wa'n't even going to let me get to town, was you, Dubious Basco?"

Long after his wound had fully healed, Basco had continued to pretend his arm was still crippled. As superintendent of the upper mill, he had kept things running with excellent judgment— had been too good a man to remove from his job. Cunningly, he had engaged spies to keep him informed. He had never been able to kill President Rufus J. Dickwer, but he or his fellow conspirators— if any— had been making inroads on the particular favorites of Dickwer and had killed his brother, of course. It just hadn't come right, yet, to kill the president of the company. Of course, if Rangers were allowed in that country, there was no telling what those persistent, relentless scoundrels would do. Better scotch the first one, right away!

Rusk worked in close. He, too, chose a comfortable seat. To his delight, Basco was talking to himself, telling in a sibilant, audible, distinct whispering about killing Culby Dickwer and nagging one of the boys into picking a row with the timekeeper. Then he talked about two or three other killings— what a good job he and Truller had made of one fellow whom they had thought was a spy and traitor. Presently he took out a sheet of paper, the message the hunchback had delivered. Rusk was close enough to read:

Captain Rusk of the Rangers came in on train and started on bay horse for upper mill. Sent in special when Dickwer asked for investigation. Riding in now on the Duel trace, so you better look out for him. Cc. D. M.

Someone was coming along the roadway and Basco dropped the paper. With a long stick he had picked up, Rusk speared the paper, while Basco was eagerly peering to see who was coming. The bushwhacker grunted angrily. It was just an old darky on a gray mule plodding by, moaning and wailing a song of religion and misery. Then Basco felt for the message again. He began to look around.

Thus his glance came in contact with the red-clay-stained boots of the other man. With dropped jaw and bulging, pitiless cat eyes of greenish pink,

Basco jerked up his head like a startled panther, and froze in amazed fury at the look of imperturbable interest in the Ranger's eyes.

He was bad, that treacherous killer. From surprise he changed to shrewd, calculating estimate of chances. Rusk watched him gather and shift, change and decide. Bold, perhaps insane— no one would ever be sure— Basco edged and made slow, almost invisible turns and moves. He was caught; the pen at Huntsville waited for him; years of imprisonment loomed before him, if not hanging itself. On his left side, butt forward, was a big .45 Colt. His hand went for it like the open jaws of a cottonmouth snake, pale on the inside, fretted brown over the back— almost invisible in the dusky gloom.

It was close— Basco was fast-trained, but Rusk beat him. The killer- from-behind could, if cornered, also face a good man. But he died right there. The Ranger then went into the upper mill and telephoned to the proper officials. They all rode out on the following day, examined the scene and took notes of the evidence, heard Captain Rusk's account, and accepted it without reserve. He was absolved of murder on the ground of having obviously done his exact duty.

President Dickwer could hardly find terms sufficient to praise the efficiency, certitude, and promptness with which the case had been taken up, inwestigated and closed.

"At the same time, you know," Mr. Dickwer sighed, "I was sorry to lose that man. Of course, under the circumstances, he just had to be killed. I never did really trust him absolutely, myself. He wasn't the kind you could. Still, he's going to be mighty hard to replace— yes, sir. To tell the truth, I don't know where I'm going to find any one able to keep logs rolling, saws turning and cut lumber moving like Dubious Basco— that's a fact. Did you ever notice, cap'n, that you always find even good workers have their weak points?"

10: The Spy

Hamilton Marston

fl 1907-08

The Live Wire, Aug 1908

I can find nothing about this author other than a handful of stories published in 1907-8

IN the principal room of a rude cottage on the outskirts of the city of Moscow, seven men sat around a table. Though the one wretched candle flickered and flared, there was, nevertheless, sufficient light to reveal their faces.

For the most part, they were wretchedly dressed in the ordinary garb of Russian peasants, and their hair and beards were long and unkempt. There was nothing about them to indicate to the casual observer the possession of any unusual amount of intelligence, and yet the doings of that little band held an entire government in terror.

Safe behind his palace gates, the mighty Czar of All the Russias turned pale at the mention of their names, and trembled at the very thought of them. These men were the head of the Terrorist Revolutionary Party of Russia.

For a long time they had sat in silence about the table, steadily staring at the candle in the center. No one, indeed, seemed aware of another's presence, and it was not until their leader spoke that any of them made the least movement.

He was a slight, boyish little man, this leader, with a face fair as a girl's and a voice as gentle as a woman. It seemed impossible to believe that it was this boy who had inspired a hundred assassinations and who had spread throughout official Russia a terror such as was never known before.

"We might as well face the truth," he remarked in his gentle voice. "Somewhere there is a spy among us. Somewhere there is a traitor who knows our secrets and betrays them to the government.

"That is why we have persistently failed: That is why our efforts are always forestalled. Had it not been for this one man, long ago the Russian Republic would have been a fact. Some day I hope to learn his name."

He did not raise his voice. It was as gentle as ever, yet at the final statement every person at the table shuddered. It was strange to see the burly, stalwart men tremble before this slender boy with the tender voice and melancholy eye.

"We are now," he continued, "in the last ditch. To-morrow we must play our last card. The Czar arrives from St. Petersburg at noon, and on his way to the palace— from the railroad station he must die.

"Beaten though we have been, we shall be beaten no longer. To-morrow sees the dawn of hope for Russia."

The words had scarcely left his lips, when the one door of the room was thrown violently open and a white-faced man leaped in among them.

"The police!" he exclaimed hoarsely. "They are upon us.'

Not a soul spoke. A tense silence greeted the man's announcement, though every one in the room leaped to their feet and stood staring at their comrades with wide eyes and faces white with fear. All knew that escape was impossible. They were caught like rats in a trap.

Only the leader: retained his composure. With the utmost calmness he rolled and lighted cigarette and then stood waiting.

It was not for long. Almost upon the heels of the man who brought the evil tidings, there came from outside the tramp of feet and the rattle of swords. Then the door was once more thrown open and there appeared a man dressed in the uniform of a lieutenant of police.

"You are under arrest,' he announced crisply, " in the name of the Czar."

The room seemed fairly filled with his men.

There were at least twenty of them, many armed with rifles. In silence that was deadly, they took the prisoners with the calm precision of a well-ordered plan and lined them against the mud wall of the bare room. Then the lieutenant turned to the men with the rifles.

"Get ready," he ordered.

Without a word, his subordinates took up their position on the other side of the room. Then for the first time since the arrival of the police, the leader of the prisoners spoke:

"Is it permitted to ask," he inquired gently, "what is the meaning of this extraordinary procedure?

The officer in charge of the men turned on him roughly.

"It means that I'm going to have you all shot, here and now."

To this the leader made no reply. Shrugging his shoulders, he went on smoking his cigarette placidly.

The officer turned to his men.

"Prepare to shoot," he ordered. "Aim!"

Slowly the policemen raised their rifles until each covered the heart of one of the helpless men facing them. Then followed a terrible pause. How long it was, no man who lived through it could ever say, but not one of those in the room that night ever thought of it again without a shudder.

"Fi—" the fatal word was about to drop from the lieutenant's lips, when a cry, shrill and terrible, rang through the room. It came from the mouth of one of the conspirators against the wall, a tall, broad-shouldered man with a heavily-bearded face.

"Wait!" he cried. " Wait!"

As he uttered the words, he sprang forward and caught the lieutenant by the arm.

"You must not let them shoot me!" he screamed, falling on his knees. "You must not! I am Zubeloff of the third section. It is I who have kept you informed of these men's movements. It is I who gave information of their attempt upon the Czar's life to-morrow and advised arresting them to-night, For Heaven's sake, don't shoot me!"

"At last!"

It was the leader of the Terrorists who spoke, and though the words were uttered scarcely above a whisper, they rang through the room more clearly than the other's scream of terror.

"At last," he purred, "we have found out who the spy is."

Before the astonished spy could speak or move, he found himself set upon by the men he had believed his allies, bound and gagged. He had been caught at last by a trick so simple that it would scarcely have deceived a child.

Even in his blind terror, as he watched the pseudo-police following the directions of the leader of the Terrorists, he realized this, and his heart grew hot with hate. Securely bound, he was thrown at last in a corner. Then the leader came and stood over him.

"As you have informed us," he murmured, "that the police are soon to pay us a visit, we cannot remain to keep you company, but in order-that you may not feel lonely, we are going to leave something to amuse you.'

As he spoke he produced a bomb, attached to which was a fuse. This he placed on the floor directly in front of the helpless man's eye and, taking from the table the candle, touched it to the fuse.

"It will burn for ten minutes," he explained gently. "If your friends come within that time, you are saved. If not, well, you will be an example for the rest of the police of the advantages of obeying orders promptly."

Without another word he turned and motioned his men from the room. In silence they went out, the leader following.

For a time the sheer terror of his position overwhelmed the unfortunate man. He could neither think nor realize his peril. Blind with fright, he lay waiting with closed eyes and clenched hands, the perspiration rolling from his body.

Suddenly he nerved himself and opened his eyes. The room was absolutely dark except for one tiny spark that crept nearer and nearer and nearer the deadly bomb. He saw that the fuse was half burned and that he had but five minutes to live.

Less than five minutes. Four minutes. Less than that. Would they come? Oh, Heaven! would help come in time?

The seconds were flying by with astonishing speed. There were less than three minutes of the fuse left now, less than three minutes of life.

He watched the spark, his face green with terror, his eyes starting from his head. The fuse had almost gone. There was scarcely a minute and a half more of it to burn, and then death.

With an effort that was almost superhuman, he closed his eyes. Like a flash, an incredible number of memories swept over him. The picture of his home far away upon the Volga suddenly rose before his mind in its minutest detail.

His father was sitting in the door, smoking after his day's work. Another picture crowded it away. It was that of a dancing-girl in a theater in Odessa. He had seen her but once, he had not thought of her for years.

He thought of his boyhood, of his mother. His early ambitions long cast aside and forgotten, and then he opened his eyes once more. The minute and a half had passed. It was but ten seconds more before the fuse would reach the bomb.

FIFTEEN MINUTES later the police arrived. They found a dead man whose face was so distorted that it was impossible to recognize him, lying beside an empty bomb, to which was attached a burnt-out fuse.

The police surgeon bent over him.

"Dead," he said. " Dead from fear."

11: The Fifty-Fifty Basis

J. S. Fletcher

1863-1935

In: *The Massingham Butterfly*, 1926

"AND YOU MEAN to tell me," said the younger of two men who were sitting over their coffee in a quiet corner of the club smoking-room, "you really mean to tell me— seriously— that you don't know who she is? Come—come!"

"I mean to tell you," answered the elder man, carelessly defiant of the implied unbelief, "and as seriously as you like, that I know no more of who she is, in reality, than I know of the exact identity of the man who made this cigar in some Cuban factory! And that's that!"

"Yet you've published three of her novels!"

"Three of her novels, as you say. All she's ever written."

"And they sell like hot cakes."

"They sell like hot cakes!"

"And her public increases?"

The elder man smiled, and pulling towards him a copy of a leading literary journal that lay on the table at which he and his companion were sitting, turned to an advertisement, and put his finger on a part of it, printed in bold, staring type.

"You see what we say here?" he remarked, "about this last thing of hers. Fortieth thousand! That advertisement was drawn up a week ago. Since then we've sold another five thousand. Yes, each book goes better than its predecessor. The first, *The Moth and the Star*, sold, roughly speaking, 20,000. The second, *The Night and the Morrow*, 30,000. I daresay this thing will go up to 60,000."

The younger man laughed, cynically, and taking the paper from the other man's hand, read out the advertisement. 40,000 copies already sold. Further Large Edition Printing. *The Flower that Once Has Blown* By Cynthia Vandelys.

"H'm!" he muttered. "Of course, I've reviewed all these, as you know. Said what I thought about 'em, too— plainly! Mawk!— sheer mawk! But they—"

"Sell!" said the publisher, quietly. "Mawk or no mawk, they sell! The young lady has hit the target right in the middle of the bull's eye."

"Ah— ah!" remarked the critic, with a sly smile. "You know that much, then, Collison? That she is a young lady?"

"No objection to telling you, Straddle, what I do know— in strict confidence, of course. You're not the sort to rush off and shove it all into print for the sake of a few guineas! I'll tell you the whole story— it's interesting. It's a little over two years ago that I was called upon one morning by a little, insignificant, three-for-a-penny sort of chap who announced himself as Mr.

Simpson Jones, solicitor, of Essex Street. He had a flat but somewhat bulky parcel under his arm. When he'd sufficiently got over his first nervousness at encountering a real live publisher in the flesh, and had found out that I was actually very much like all other tradesmen, he informed me that he was charged with a mission. He was, he said, the trustee of a young lady in the far North of England who was an orphan, not very well off, and who, to eke out her slender means, had, since the death of her mother— her father having been dead some years—occupied herself in discharging the duties of a daily governess in a clergyman's family. And lately, in her spare time, she had written a novel, and, not knowing what to do with it, had sent it to him, Mr. Jones, to see if he could dispose of it for her. Here it was, he continued, in his parcel— a nice, neat typescript of it: he had had it typed himself, having heard from somebody or other that the thing would have more chance that way. Would I look at it? Being, as you're aware, a very polite man, Straddle, I said I should be very pleased indeed to look at it, and thereupon Mr. Jones, who at that moment reminded me of a monthly nurse exhibiting a newly-born infant, stripped off the coverings, and laid on my desk a bundle of some four hundred typed pages, on the first of which was inscribed The Moth and the Star by Cynthia Vandelys."

"Good— good!" chuckled the critic. "Excellent! I mean— hearing about it."

"I inquired if I was to understand that this was the real name of the authoress— Cynthia Vandelys? Mr. Jones replied, hesitatingly, that it was not: it was the name by which the authoress desired to be known. Then I asked if Mr. Jones would tell me his own opinion of the story— if he had read it? Mr. Jones had read it, all of it: it was his opinion that the story would be agreeable to lady readers. Thereupon I told him to come again in a fortnight. When he had withdrawn, I sent the thing to a man in whose judgment as a fiction-taster I have sufficient confidence to base a final decision upon, and asked him to let me have a report within ten days. I got his report in a week, and I can repeat it to you. He said: 'Dear Collison— This is the most sickly-sweet sentimental tosh I ever read, and it will sell like hot cross buns on a Good Friday.' So—I sent a note round for Mr. Jones."

"Go on," said the critic, with a cynical smile. "The story's improving with every sentence."

"Mr. Jones arrived," continued the publisher. "Of course, I didn't tell him what my reader's opinion was. Instead, I told him the usual story about the danger and doubtfulness of publishing a book by an utterly unknown author— "

"Cut that out," interrupted the critic. "We know all that."

"Then I said that I thought I might risk a little on this story, and inquired if he was fully empowered to deal on behalf of its author? He was, and we proceeded to business— at which I found him rather sharper of wit and purpose than I had anticipated. To cut matters short, I agreed to pay a progressive royalty on the sales of the book, and I got the option, on terms to be agreed, of the lady's next two books. And then, of course, I got the book out— and it sold. Sold from the very start. I had the pleasure of handing Mr. Jones a very substantial cheque at our first settlement, and I have handed him still more substantial cheques at six-monthly intervals ever since. Miss Cynthia Vandelys has had a lot of money from me, through Mr. Jones— rather!"

"And she's still in the background?"

"Still in the wilds of Northumbria! But I doubt if she'll be able to stick there. This last novel is being dramatised. The second one is being filmed. And people are perpetually pestering me with questions about her. Not a post comes in that doesn't bring requests for information and demands for photographs. Women journalists come and plague me about her— I can't tell them anything."

"Literally—nothing?" asked Straddle.

"Literally! I've never seen her—never even seen her handwriting—don't know how old she is— what she's like— or anything about her. Every six months Mr. Jones receives her royalties; every nine months he presents himself with her new novel. But Miss Cynthia Vandelys remains in her original obscurity."

"Famous—yet unknown," remarked the critic. "Ah, well, Collison, there's a lot of consolation to be found in a fat cheque. Still, I think somebody will unearth Miss Cynthia, sooner or later."

ii

THAT AFTERNOON Collison had business in Fleet Street; returning westward after he had finished it, he passed Essex Street, and catching its name at the corner, he suddenly turned down the slope, with an equally sudden idea of calling on Mr. Jones in his office. The conversation with Straddle was still in his mind, and he had a notion about Miss Cynthia Vandelys which he wished to put before Mr. Simpson Jones as her accredited representative.

Mr. Jones's office proved to be almost at the top of the back regions of one of the oldest houses in Essex Street, and Collison, once inside it, was surprised at its shabbiness. It consisted of two small rooms; that into which the publisher first stepped was occupied by a mere boy, who looked as if he had little to do,

and was obviously surprised to see a caller; there were a few old law books on a shelf, a few sale bills and legal documents on the walls, a chair and table for the boy, another chair for waiting visitors, and little else. And when Collison was shown into the inner room he found it equally mean and shabby, and Mr. Simpson Jones obviously as surprised to see him as the office boy had been, and not only surprised, but palpably disturbed that the publisher should be there at all.

"I happened to be passing, so I thought I'd drop in," said Collison, taking the only available chair. "I wanted to have a talk with you about Miss Vandelys. I really think, Mr. Jones, that she should be brought into the open."

Mr. Jones's pale face flushed, and he moved uncomfortably in his seat. He was a little, undersized man, of very ordinary appearance, meanly dressed and badly groomed; there was a queer air of something very like poverty about him. But when he replied to the publisher's direct suggestion, his voice, though timid, had a certain distinct note of resolution.

"Oh no, no!" he said. "No, Mr. Collison, that's not at all possible. It's not according to the agreement, sir!"

"I don't remember any agreement that relates to it," answered Collison. "What agreement do you refer to?"

Mr. Jones moved still more uncomfortably, regarding his caller with eyes in which there was an expression of strong distaste for the situation.

"Well, an understanding, then!" he said. "A— a faint understanding, we'll say. That Miss Vandelys's privacy was to be respected. It— it is her strong desire."

Collison remained silent for a moment. "Look here," he said suddenly. "I dare say that Miss Vandelys, like everybody else, is not averse to making money, by which I mean that, substantial as her earnings are now, they'd be increased by a little publicity. People are beginning to inquire about her, you know. They want to be informed. Who is she? Where does she live? What is she like? All that sort of thing. Now— a little judicious entry into the limelight— eh, Mr. Jones?"

"No, sir," said Mr. Jones, firmly. "No! That is not at all in accordance with my client's wishes. Miss Vandelys—"

"Of course, that's not her real name!" interrupted Collison.

"It's the name, Mr. Collison, by which my client desires to be known as a writer, and wishes to be used in any transactions relating to her writings," replied Mr. Jones, pointedly. "I was about to observe— Miss Vandelys is, by nature, a lady of a retiring nature, a recluse. She has no wish to come into what you call the limelight. She would be horrified if I suggested to her that she should allow herself to be interviewed by these newspaper people, and as to

having her picture put in one of the cheap illustrated journals— sir, I dare not mention such a thing to her."

"Sounds very Victorian, Mr. Jones," said Collison. "Mid-Victorian, perhaps. Or goes back still farther— I believe that eighteenth century people of condition were somewhat ashamed of literary notoriety. Perhaps Miss Vandelys is a throw-back to those times."

Mr. Jones fingered the papers on his desk.

"Miss Vandelys, sir, is— what she is," he said. "Her desire is for anonymity. She is quite satisfied with things as they are."

"Good reason to be, in one way!" muttered Collison.

"Precisely so, sir! Miss Vandelys is quite content in the way to which I think you allude. She has earned money by her pen— during the time which has elapsed since I carried her first book to you— in a fashion which has exceeded her anticipations, and she is, as I say, satisfied."

He paused a moment, and then looked at his visitor with a sudden smile of confidence.

"The truth is, Mr. Collison," he continued, "there are only two people in the world who know that Miss Vandelys does write! I am— one of them."

"And who's the other?" asked Collison.

Mr. Jones smiled again— a queer smile that had something of mockery in it.

"Herself," he answered. "Just that! And— she doesn't intend to reveal her secret to... anyone."

Collison got up from the rickety chair on which he had perched himself.

"All the same," he said, "I think she might reveal herself to her publisher! Why, I've never so much as had a letter from her! Odd, isn't it, now?"

Mr. Jones picked up a pen. "Miss Vandelys's wishes must be respected, Mr. Collison," he said. "She— er, reposes implicit confidence in me as her— shall we say channel? Yes, the channel by which the stream of her genius flows to the public."

"H'm!" remarked Collison, drily. "I should scarcely call Miss Vandelys a genius, I think. From my point of view, however, she's something more comfortable than that— a best seller! This last book is going immensely, Mr. Jones. I suppose she's aware of it?"

Mr. Jones had begun to write, and he scarcely turned his head. But he spoke.

"Miss Vandelys is fully posted up in all business affairs, Mr. Collison," he answered. "She's quite aware. Your advertisements are excellent!"

iii

COLLISON WENT AWAY from that interview feeling that Mr. Simpson Jones had more in him than appeared likely. He was evidently not to be drawn, cajoled, or forced. Whether it was really because Miss Cynthia Vandelys desired secrecy and privacy, however, Collison felt uncertain; there was something about Jones that made him doubtful and suspicious. He began to wonder about Jones's business relations with the young lady whom Jones had grandiloquently styled a genius. Jones was acting as her sole agent; was Jones charging her the usual ten per cent?

Now Collison was very well aware of the amount of money he had paid Jones on behalf of Miss Cynthia Vandelys; ten per cent. on that gross amount would be a considerable sum. Yet Jones looked as if he had no money and never had had money!— there was an atmosphere of sordid poverty about him and his office.

And Collison was getting curious, and when, a few days later, he chanced across a legal friend of his who had an extensive acquaintance amongst limbs of the law and asked him if he knew anything of one Simpson Jones, and was told in reply that Simpson Jones was a poor, ineffective fellow who just scraped along, he began to get more curious than ever. But the worst of his form of curiosity was that he had no clear idea as to what it was that he was curious about. The curiosity, or, as one should say, inquisitiveness, of other people about Miss Cynthia Vandelys increased as the sales of her last book heightened in number.

Collison had been a true prophet when he said to Straddle that he anticipated a sale of 60,000 copies for *The Flower that Once Has Blown*. The sixtieth thousand had been passed within a month of that talk in the club smoking-room, and still the book went on selling. And Collison began to get sick of inquiries about its author. His desk was littered every morning with letters addressed to Miss Cynthia Vandelys, care of James Collison, Esq., not a day passed without some newspaper person, male or female, dropping in to make some inquiry about her; a fourth of Collison's own correspondence was made up of letters begging him to procure her autograph or her photograph or begging— sometimes hysterically— for her address. Collison used to bundle all these things together once a day and send them round to Mr. Simpson Jones, with his compliments; Jones, a model of precision and punctuality, used to return a formal letter next morning stating his receipt of documents relating to Miss C. V., contents of which were duly noted.

In his heart of hearts Collison, who, in spite of the fact that he was a publisher, and had some taste in literature, was not sure that he didn't hate Miss Cynthia Vandelys as much as he loathed her novels (or, to be exact, as he

loathed the two or three pages in each which he had forced himself to glance at) simply because of the daily annoyance she caused him. But after all, there was no getting away from the fact that he was making big money out of her. Still— why couldn't she be sensible, and come out into the open, and relieve him of all this correspondence and inquiry?

One morning, when Collison had been unusually exasperated by the number of letters addressed to Miss Vandelys, and by the quantity of inquiries about her sent to himself, there got into his office, by some ingenious means, a bright and pushful young thing who promptly told him that she was Miss Sadie Van Dresler, of the *Women's Own Particular Paper*, come over from New York to interview the leading English lady novelists, and that she wanted, right there, the address of Miss Cynthia Vandelys.

Collison put down his pen, and sitting back in his chair, took a good look at Miss Sadie Van Dresler. She was undeniably pretty. But she was more— it didn't take him more than a second to see that she had brains, and wit, and perseverance, and determination. She was All There! And Collison clutched at her mentality as a drowning man is said to clutch at a straw— only, she was far from being a straw.

"My dear young lady," he said solemnly, "will you listen to me for a moment? I don't know the address of Miss Cynthia Vandelys! I never have known it— I never shall know it! I don't know who Miss Cynthia Vandelys is! This is the million and one'th time I've been asked what you've just asked, and if I'm asked a million times more I can only give the same answer. There!"

Miss Sadie Van Dresler showed a perfect set of teeth, and a couple of real natural dimples.

"Say!" she said. "Is that the real stuff, or is it just—"

"It's the real stuff, all through," interrupted Collison. "Genuine! I don't know anything about her except that her sweet and sickly sentimental stories are brought to me to publish, that I do publish them, and that the public loves them! There is only one man in the world who can give you the information you want, and he's the man who acts as her agent— Mr. Simpson Jones, solicitor, 563A Essex Street."

Miss Van Dresler got to her feet. "That's business," she observed. "Thank you! I'll go and see this Mr. Jones right now."

"Do!" exclaimed Collison. "And Heaven bless you! Come and tell me if you have any luck."

Miss Van Dresler smiled again and departed. She did not return, but about an hour after she had taken her April freshness out of Collison's room, Mr. Simpson Jones was shown into it. And for a man of such meek and shabby appearance, Mr. Jones was strangely and surprisingly angry and vehement.

"Mr. Collison!" he began, before the publisher could say how-d'ye-do. "Mr. Collison! you have taken an unwarrantable liberty! You have sent a young and pertinacious American female to my office without permission from me! I had the utmost difficulty, sir, in dismissing her. Sir, you will please to understand that amicable as our relations have been so far, any recurrence of this intrusion on my privacy, and any attempt to invade Miss Vandelys's privacy, will be followed, Mr. Collison, by a discontinuance of those relations and a transfer of my client's work to another publishing house."

Before Collison could retort, or expostulate, Mr. Jones had vanished, and, for so small a man, he made a great deal of noise in going out. Collison wished that Miss Van Dresler would re-appear, then he would have asked her to lunch, and heard all about it.

Two evenings later, however, he met her at a dinner-party.

"Get anything out of Mr. Simpson Jones?" he inquired when he found a chance.

Miss Van Dresler made a grimace.

"Mr. Jones was one of my very few failures," she answered. "I never talk about my failures. And I'm not sure that I'll have time to get even with him while I'm across here. But say now! do you think there really is such a person as Cynthia Vandelys?"

iv

COLLISON had never thought of that. He thought of it now, however, though he only laughed at Miss Van Dresler's suggestion. And he thought of it still more next day— indeed, he was thinking of it rather seriously in the middle of the afternoon when a clerk entered his room with a telegram.

Collison had to read that telegram over two or three times before he grasped its full significance. When he at last saw what it really meant, he also saw that in all probability he was on the verge of some further revelations.

Collison, Publisher, St. Martin's Lane, London.

Very serious accident to Mr. Simpson Jones please come at once to his house Summerstay Lodge, near Dorking.

Dr. H. C. Marsland.

It had never occurred to Collison until then that Jones had a house; if he had thought of Jones in that way at all, he would have pictured him as a lodger in some surrounding as shabby and dismal as the office in Essex Street. The address given in the telegram had a ring in it— Summerstay Lodge sounded consequential. But— the present job was to get there. And without any delay

Collison hurriedly left his office, and regardless of expense and only anxious to get to Jones's side as quickly as possible, chartered a car from the nearest garage and bade its driver make all speed to Dorking.

Summerstay Lodge proved to be a smart modern house standing in well-kept grounds a little way out of the town. Everything about it suggested well-to-do-ness, if not absolute wealth, on the part of its owner, and Collison began to feel staggered at what he saw: the trim gardens, smooth, velvety lawns, fine old trees, spick-and-span walks, did not somehow fit in at all with what he knew of Simpson Jones: the house itself, when he reached its door, looked far too fine to be the home of the man whose professional work was carried on in that mean office in London. There was mystery here, decided Collison— but he refrained from speculating on its nature, for his sole desire was to see Jones. Jones, he felt assured, had something to tell him.

A middle-aged woman, obviously the housekeeper, opened the front door before Collison could knock or ring, and motioned him to enter.

"Mr. Collison, sir?" she asked expectantly. "Please to come in."

"How is Mr. Jones?" inquired Collison. The woman shook her head and sank her voice to a whisper.

"Very bad, sir, I fear," she replied. "There's Dr. Marsland, and another doctor, and a nurse with him, and his brother has come, too, and has just gone upstairs. But he's unconscious, sir— or was, the last I heard. In fact, he's only regained consciousness just once, for a few minutes, since he was brought in, and then he asked for you— had just strength to mention your name and address, sir, to Dr. Marsland. Then— went off again."

"What was the accident?" asked Collison.

"Motor accident, sir! He was crossing the road just there at the end of the drive, and a big car came round the corner and ran him down. They carried him in here quite unconscious, and I sent for his brother, from Epsom, at once, and for the doctor. One o'clock it was when it happened, sir. But please to sit down, and I'll let the doctors know you're here."

She opened the door of a room at the end of the hall, and Collison walked into what he conceived to be Jones's study.

And once more he was conscious of the extraordinary difference between Jones's office in Essex Street and Jones's home surroundings at Summerstay Lodge. For here was luxury— a wealth of choicely bound books, fine pictures, period furniture, evidences of a rare taste. It was all in beautiful order, too, and Collison contrasted it with the shabby little room in which Jones sat when in town. He turned quickly to the housekeeper.

"Is— is there a Mrs. Jones?" he inquired. "I only know Mr. Jones slightly."

"Oh no, sir!" replied the woman. "Mr. Jones isn't a married gentleman. There's just me and a couple of maidservants. Mr. Jones has only been here about fifteen months, sir— no, it's a bachelor establishment. I don't think Mr. Jones has any relations except the brother upstairs— Mr. Walton Jones. He lives at Epsom— in the grocery line, sir."

She went away then, and Collison waited, looking around. He was beginning to get an idea, vague, formless, but there. Perhaps it wasn't an idea, perhaps it was a growing suspicion. But before it took more definite shape he was aware of sounds in the hitherto quiet house. Doors opened and closed; hushed voices sounded on the stairs and in the hall, and suddenly there walked into the room a man whom Collison saw at once to be a doctor.

"I am sorry to say you are too late, Mr. Collison," he said quietly. "Mr. Jones is dead!"

"I came away within five minutes of getting your wire," answered Collison.

"Just so— I'm sure you would," said the doctor. "I feared it was of little use to send the wire— there was no hope from the very first. He had only one interval of consciousness, and during that he managed to mention your name— Collison— publisher— St. Martin's Lane— send for him. Then he became unconscious again, and continued so till his death, a few minutes ago."

Collison remained silent, wondering.

"I suppose you knew Mr. Jones?" suggested the doctor, after a pause.

"I have had business dealings with him," replied Collison. "They were of a somewhat unusual and curious nature. I think he must have wanted to speak to me about them. However— that's over! But I understand his brother is in the house?"

"Yes, he knows you're here, and he'll be down presently," said the doctor. "He'd only just arrived when you came."

Mr. Walton Jones entered the room as the doctor left it. Except that he was rather older, rather more substantial, much more presentable and far better dressed and groomed, he was very like the dead man. And he was collected and matter-of-fact.

"Of course, I haven't the remotest idea as to why Simpson asked for you, Mr. Collison," he said, after a few preliminary words. "I suppose you have?"

"I think I had better explain matters," replied Collison, and proceeded to tell the whole story of his relations with Simpson Jones. "I imagine he wanted to tell me something about all this— probably to give me the real name of Miss Cynthia Vandelys, and her address. Do you know anything of the lady?"

The grocer slapped his hands on his knees and shook his head.

"Never heard of her, sir!" he declared. "I've no time for novel-reading, and Simpson never mentioned her to me. He was a close man, Simpson, and I can't

say that I've seen much of him of late years, though to be sure, since he came to live here I've seen a bit more. No— I know nothing, nothing whatever, of these transactions you tell me of, Mr. Collison. But you say you've paid Simpson large sums of money on this lady's account?— money earned by the sale of her books?"

"Large sums," replied Collison. "Very considerable sums. They were paid to him as her agent."

"Just so," said Mr. Walton Jones. "H'm! Of course, I don't know anything about the book trade— didn't even know these tale-writers could make any money at their job. Now, between ourselves, what do you call very considerable sums?"

"I have paid Mr. Simpson Jones several thousands of pounds on account of Miss Vandelys," answered Collison.

The grocer's mouth opened and his eyebrows arched themselves. "Bless my soul!" he exclaimed. "What! all that to a mere tale-writer! Extraordinary! But— would Simpson get any of that, now?"

"I don't know anything about your brother's business arrangements with Miss Vandelys," said Collison. "Ordinarily, an agent gets a commission of ten per cent."

"Indeed!" said Mr. Walton Jones. "Ten per cent., eh? That's to say that if the sum due to the young lady was, we'll say, ten thousand pounds, Simpson, if he took the ordinary ten per cent. would get one thousand? Was the amount as much as ten thousand, sir?"

"I'm not quite at liberty to say what the exact amount paid to Mr. Simpson Jones as agent for Miss Vandelys is— at present," replied Collison. "But you may take it that it is what I have called it— very considerable."

"Just so, sir! H'm! Ah! To tell you the truth, Mr. Collison," said Mr. Walton Jones in a sudden burst of confidence. "I've been a bit puzzled about poor Simpson. He never did much at his lawyering— scraped along, you know, just scraped along. And I was amazed when, about eighteen months since, he suddenly set up this establishment. Nice place, sir— all up to the mark, as you see. I've never known what he did it on. A close man, Simpson—if he liked."

"Mr. Jones," said Collison, "I must find out who Miss Vandelys really is! Your brother is dead. But he'll have left papers. I must ask you to help me. It's not a question of mere curiosity— it's a question of a valuable literary property— of money! You understand the seriousness of it?"

"Anything to do with money, sir, is always serious!" assented the grocer. "What do you propose, Mr. Collison?"

Collison proposed that as soon as Mr. Simpson Jones had been decently interred, he and Mr. Walton Jones should examine his books and papers at Summerstay Lodge and at Essex Street.

"I'm with you, sir," assented Mr. Jones. "Then we'll say the day after the funeral here, and the next day at Essex Street. Of course, I quite see that you must find out who this young lady is, and where she hangs out. I never heard of her from Simpson, never! But Simpson, poor chap, was close, sir, close! However, there'll be papers, no doubt."

But there were no papers relating to Miss Cynthia Vandelys, anywhere. There was nothing at Summerstay Lodge; nothing in the dingy office in Essex Street. No letters— no manuscripts— no memoranda— no receipts— nothing. There were entries in the late Simpson Jones's passbook recording his receipt of big money from Collison, but no records of his having paid any to Miss Vandelys. And the office boy knew nothing of Miss Vandelys. The only lady who had ever come there since he'd known it, he said, was the lady what came to clean up once a week.

"Tell you what it is, Mr. Collison, sir," said Mr. Walton Jones, when the search had come to a definite end, with no result. "It's this! There ain't such a person as Miss Cynthia Vandelys! Never was! Those tales, sir, which you sell in such quantities, was written by Simpson Jones— deceased!"

12: The Two Twilights

C. L. Antrobus

Clara Louise Antrobus, 1846-1919

Temple Bar, Aug 1899

JEMMY OTWAY went down to the Lancashire coast for a month. His friends said he was going for a holiday; he himself stated that he was in search of subjects. He was an artist. Sometimes his pictures sold, more often they did not; but as he was young and not entirely dependent on his art, this lack of appreciation did not as yet greatly trouble him.

He went in June, passing from the heat of town to a cool liquid air, a wide sandy shore, a sea grey, flashing white, with shadows of lucent emerald— the Irish sea with its breath of life.

Visitors are rare in the midsummer month. Otway seemed to be the only stranger in the little place as he strolled along the beach that evening after dinner, watching the changing opal of sea and sky in the lingering sunset, till the weltering plain was dim silver, with a vivid gleam of steel-blue light where the day had passed to the underworld.

"The Raven's Twilight," he murmured. " Yes, the old Rabbis named it well. I have half a mind to get up to-morrow and see their Dove's Twilight, the dawn. There are good effects here."

Later, as he turned in at the gate of his lodgings, where a tall white poplar shook its downy leaves, he looked back at the darkening sea, still lit westward by that narrow bluish gleam as though a sword lay along the waves.

"Don't know which twilight I like best," he said aloud; "extraordinary effects here! Anything— Corrievrecken's Mermaid— might come out of that Haven's Twilight!"

When the first grey feather of the Dove's Twilight streaked the east, Otway walked out into the dawn, pausing a moment at the door to note the harmony of the white poplar with the pallor of sea and sky. A little morning breeze ruffled the leaves, turning their under-surface to the faint light, so that they fluttered like pale moths against the soft grey crinkled background of the sleeping sea. Flights of birds passed restlessly to and fro, gulls and others. A dusky cat played hide-and-seek in the laurel bushes in the garden. Far off, dim headlands loomed through the morning mists. The light grew, clear soft white light, with the diaphanous shadows of dawn. The sea, a vast grey pearl, lay gently heaving; a narrow line of foam visible away on the sand. Here and there along that line of foam dark silhouettes moved slowly, seeming scarcely larger than the gulls. They were shrimpers, gathering their harvest from the receding tide.

Suddenly on the horizon, where cloud mingled with sea, broke a ring of red-gold light. Other glittering streaks appeared higher, streaks of paler gold. The cloud separated into many clouds, with rifts of blue that spread as the gold light spread, till all the east was bright while yet the sea was dusky pearl. Otway sat down on a boulder and awaited the sunrising. This Dove's Twilight was long and lingering as the Eaven's.

" 'The orange light of widening morn,' " he said, throwing a green pebble into a tide-pool. "Now, if I could get something that would look well against it, something—"

He stopped, for there on the left, dark against the vapourous gold of the dawn, coming over the sand with naked silent feet, was a figure fantastic as a dream.

"How picturesque — how extraordinarily picturesque!" he muttered. "Is it a bat? A woman? Or a shadow? What in the world—?" Then with sudden compassion, " Poor old girl!"

She was one of the shrimpers and was going home, her shrimping-net carried over her shoulder in such wise that it had the effect of wings, spectral, bat-like. Her tattered garments, sea-stained and brown, the colour of the wrack that lay in shrivelled heaps upon the beach, clung about her heavy with sea-water, dripping at every step she took. Over her head was tied a woollen kerchief of the same sombre colour, and from under it her eyes looked out, dark, sunken, yet still bright; a brightness that startled, for the face was wrinkled as the sand— the face of an old, old woman. Perhaps she looked older than she was; the scanty locks that fell about her forehead were grey, not white. Yet as she passed noiselessly by, so withered was her face, so toil-worn her hands, so thin her bare feet, so gaunt and strange her aspect, she was most truly a shadow— bat-like, grotesque, pathetic; the shadow of life, old age.

Otway sprang up and hurried after her.

"Here," he cried, "stop a minute, mother! Just half a second! "

She turned, and the sun rose and glittered over the sea and across the sand and lit the forlorn figure in its dripping rags.

"I want to make a drawing of you," the artist went on eagerly. "I want to paint you just as you are, with that shrimping-net, standing out here on the beach. I'll give you a shilling an hour, three hours at a time. That's three shillings a day for as long as I shall be over the drawing; can't tell how long yet. Will you come? Come after breakfast, about nine o'clock. I'll be ready here."

As vague shapes of seaweed rise dimly to sight in the wave, so rose in the old woman's face an indescribable expression that changed the withered mask to life. Then the look sank as the seaweed sinks in deep water.

"Ay, I'll come," she said slowly, and the young man observed her with increasing interest. "When mun I come?"

"To-day— this morning, if you can. Come at -nine. I'll be here."

"Ay," she repeated with a nod, "I'll come."

"That's all right," responded Otway cheerfully, watching her walk away up the beach, her garments flapping against her thin ankles, clinging to her shrivelled figure, the sharpness of her shoulder-blades clearly defined under the wet brown rags, the shrimping-net spread outward and upward pinion-like beyond her head and shoulders.

"Jove!" he muttered, "she is like a bat— she is a bat! A human bat! I'll make a good thing of it. Poor old girl!"

Feeling greatly elated, he walked to the nearest headland, two miles away, had a swim from a fisherman's boat there, and came back to breakfast.

When he returned to the beach at nine o'clock with his tools, the bat-like apparition stood there motionless, awaiting him; her shadow, fantastic as herself, thrown before her on the pebbles.

"You are punctual, mother," said Otway, setting up his easel. "Yes, stand just as you are now. That's it. Capital!"

He worked on steadily for an hour, transferring that figure, dark against the sheen of the sea, to his canvas. The day was fair and blue, and all round them was rejoicing life. The song of the salt breeze, the rhythmic laughter of the waves as the tide swung in over the sands, azure butterflies fluttering in the sunshine by the tufts of yarrow that grew between the stones just above high-water mark, gulls wheeling far out over the dazzle of tumbling water. And amidst all this brightness stood that weird shape, silent, almost phantasmal, beside Otway's easel; a thing apart from light and life.

Another hour passed.

"I'll tell you what, mother," said the young man suddenly, "you must be tired, and I am getting hungry. Sit down, and we'll have something to eat."

The old woman sat down, while Otway opened a basket beside him.

" 'Tis long sin' I touched one o' these," she said, breaking silence for the first time during the sitting. At the sound of her voice he looked up. She was turning a tube of rose madder round and round in her claw-like fingers and the expression he had noticed in the dawn had again risen in her face. "I've seen 'em in th' shop windows," she went on dreamily, her eyes fixed on the tube in her hand, "but I hannot touched 'em."

As she spoke, a horrid dread shot through his mind. Had some other fellow discovered and painted this wonderful old bat? He put the question. "Ay, I wur painted once," she answered still dreamily. " 'Tis long ago; nigh forty year."

"Oh, I see," greatly relieved. " Here you are!" handing her a plate. "And here's a glass of Burgundy. You try it. It's good stuff. Warms one's heart!"

The old woman laid down the colour and took the things he gave her, eating slowly as in reverie, though good food must have been strange to her, and wine impossible.

"It's like feeding a mummy," thought Otway. "I wonder what she was like forty years ago." Then, perceiving that her spirit had flown back over those forty years, he said gently, "Drink your wine, mother."

She obeyed mechanically. "I forgot I wur keeping yo' waiting."

"Oh, I did not mean that!" he cried. "Not a bit! I am in no hurry. I doubt whether I shall do any more to-day."

Looking at his sketch, he decided to leave it as it was for the present; and giving the old woman three shillings, asked her if she could come early next morning.

"Before breakfast," he explained. "At five o'clock. I want to paint you in the dawn. I've got the rough sketch in now. From five to eight would just do, and then we will have breakfast together. Will those hours suit you?"

She nodded. "I'll come." Then she looked at the money in her wrinkled palm. "Yo've given o'er much. I hannot stood three hour."

"It's all right. It will be three shillings a time, whether I keep you the three hours or not."

She murmured her thanks and went away, leaving Otway regarding his canvas with satisfaction.

"Good!" he ejaculated. "Very good! Wonder who painted her forty years ago. I'll bet my picture beats his, whoever he was!"

Then he took his drawing indoors.

The next dawn saw him sitting before his easel on the beach, noting the pearliness of the light, and trying tints. So absorbed was he that the old shrimper's voice startled him, speaking close to his shoulder.

"I amna late, ami?"

"Oh no, it is barely five. I was studying all that," with a comprehensive wave of his hand towards the sea. She took up her position silently, and Otway selected his brushes and went to work, striving, with the exhilaration of the dawn in his veins, to place upon his canvas that figure, less a living being than a shadow on the sunlit beach; the pitiful shadow of human old age in the daily renewal of the youth of the world.

"Have you lived here all your life, mother?" he presently inquired.

"Ever sin' I wur born."

"Ah," searching among bis colours for the one he wanted. " 'In Argolis beside the echoing sea.' "

He glanced at his model as he lazily quoted the line, and saw a faint tremor pass over the old woman's face.

"I know yon poetry," she said suddenly.

"Do you?" in astonishment.

"Ay, I know it well. Argolis," she pronounced the name clearly, easily; north-country folk have an aptitude for remembering names,— "is a place o'er in Greece, wheer they paint pictures an' cut stones. That's wheer Argolis is, beside th' sea loike this. Ay, I know yon poetry. But I hannot heard it fur forty year!"

There are some men and women who attract confidences. Jemmy Otway was one. Intuitively people felt he would understand whatever tale might be poured into his ears, and they talked accordingly.

"It wur when I wur painted," she went on, gazing over the sea, "forty year ago. That's when I heard it. He wur here three month, an' th' place wur different then. It wurna cluttered up wi' houses loike as now.

"We wur both on us young i' those days."

" 'We!' " thought Otway.

"But I m unnot weary yo' w i' talk o' forty year ago," she said, rousing herself and looking at him.

"I am never tired of listening, mother."

Her glance fell on the colours he was sorting. "It wnr seeing them an' hearing yo' speak o' Argolis as made me talk on't."

"I like to hear you. I am interested."

Which was true. Otway was interested, not so much in the old woman's story as in the old woman herself. She said no more, however, and the hours passed till eight o'clock. Otway jumped up.

"Wait here," he told her, "while I see about breakfast."

The gate with the white poplar was not more than thirty yards away, and reflecting that his landlady might possibly object to wait on his shrimper, the young man carried out the breakfasttray himself. He observed that his model made no demur about accepting his hospitality, but seemed to take the situation as perfectly natural, like a tame creature offered food by man; and this silent acquiescence without protest or question, made the odd companionship easy and pleasant to both.

So day by day, as the Twilight of the Dove broke over the sea, that gaunt shape, in its Raven's Twilight of life, stood by Otway's easel, while the shadow

of it grew upon the canvas; then shared his breakfast and departed on bare silent feet, to return with the dawn.

The young man felt the piteousness of that forlorn figure in its "looped and windowed raggednees," standing patiently that its very poverty and age might bring it bread. And she had been young! She did not speak again of that time forty years ago; indeed, she seldom uttered a word; but there was a sense of friendship between the two that rendered speech unnecessary. Otway made other studies too, in the long June days; fisher-folk and their children, the boats, the lights of sunset and sunrise with their subtle changes. In short, he worked hard, and was well content with the results of his sojourn.

For the month was drawing to a close, and the picture of the shrimper approaching completion. He said as much to the old woman one shimmering morning. She nodded gravely, and, for the first time, came up and looked over his shoulder at the painting. The young man felt slightly uncomfortable. There are, it is true, some men and women whom old age and poverty drug into a sort of enjoyment of their miseries. They have never felt much; they feel still less. But this bat-like creature was not one of these. She was a distinct personality; of that Otway had been vaguely aware all along, and he mentally stigmatised himself as a brute when those black eyes gazed steadily at the shadowy presentment on the canvas.

Yet the painting of those poor rags, those barely covered bones, that withered face, had been gain to her— given her money that she needed. He had but done as most do. One expects some return for one's outlay. Few are the givers who do not exact some reasonable reward, if only in the form of deference.

"All these will I give thee if thou wilt fall down and worship me."

Besides, the arrangement was best for the old woman's self-respect. So much money for the permission to exhibit her wretchedness, that he might gain glory thereby and perhaps gold also. It was fair enough,— of course it was fair enough. Yet he wished she had not been so shrivelled and skinny, so ragged and silent, and had not that memory of Argolis.

"Well, mother?" he said interrogatively, but with unusual meekness in his tone.

"Ay, 'tis me sure enow! 'Tis me," came slowly from the sunken old mouth. Then the black eyes looked wistfully into his grey ones. "I'd loike yo' to see th' picture o' me forty year ago. I've gotten it safe."

"Have you? I should like to see it very much."

She nodded. "I'll bring it. He wur going to take it away wi' him, but he wur sent for i' a hurry one day to th' Castle,— o'er th' headland. I reckon you've seen it?"

"Yes."

"An' he left it wi' me, fur it wurna dry an' his landlady wur meddlesome. He said he'd fetch it on his way hack to Lunnon, but he didna come back. He went to Lunnon wi' th' Castle people, forty year ago."

"Will you show it to me now, mother?"

"Ay, I con fetch it i' a minute. He wur a great painter. Yo' con see his name i' th' corner. I've seen it i' th' papers many a toime. I con read," this with a touch of pride. "Th' great folk set a power o' store by him."

She turned and walked away, an eagerness in the bare old feet, and Otway sat contemplating his own handiwork, wondering who could be the painter of forty years ago who had lingered three months "in Argolis beside the echoing sea."

In about ten minutes the old woman returned, carrying the picture wrapped in a ragged green tablecloth. Slipping the cloth off the canvas she set it up. For an instant Otway's astonishment held him dumb.

"Aureole!" he cried. Oh, there was no need to look at the name in the corner! Who but Aureole could paint with that powdery touch, as though he had dipped his brush in the down of a butterfly's wing and so laid on the colour? And such colour! The glowing bloom of the girl, black-eyed, black-haired, against a translucent evening sky and opal sea.

Otway placed the picture upon his easel, removing his own.

"You were a very handsome young woman, mother."

"Ay, I wur that! " with subdued triumph; "an' he wur a great painter."

"Yes, all the world acknowledges it."

"I know," with a nod. "When he died awhile back, I see it on th' placards at th' station. Th' papers wur full on him! I bowt three o' them Lunnon papers an' read a' about the funeral an' th' great folks at it. It wur a grand funeral!"

"I was there," said Otway, "though I am not one of the great folks. I went because he was a great painter."

"Did yo'?" the black eyes surveyed him with increased interest. He looked again at tho signature.

"This picture is worth a lot of money, mother. Enough to make you comfortable."

"Ay, I know, fur I wur offered a sight o' brass fur it by a gentleman long sin', but I wouldna sell it. Theer's my name on th' neck o' th' dress. It looks loike embroidery, but it isna. He said it wur my name i' Greek letters. I mind that well, fur he said Argolis wur Greek an' they wrote loike that i' Argolis. My name is Rhoda."

Otway bent closer and perceived that the seeming embroidery was what she said. The name suited the glowing beauty of the portrait; the county

produced that type now and then, he knew, Iihoda! And Aureole had painted her in her Dove's Twilight of youth against the sunsetting. Strange that he himself— Jemmy Otway— should have reversed the twilights, painting her in her Raven's Twilight against the dawn. But he hardly thought of his own picture beside the great painter's work with its marvellous brilliancy as of jewels, yet with that indescribable powderiness— that bloom of the ripe peach, which was Aureole's sign manual.

"How on earth did he do it?" muttered Otway.

"He wur a great painter!" reiterated the figure at his elbow, its rags fluttering in the soft sea-breeze.

The young man drew a long breath and stood up.

"Well, mother, if ever you wish to sell this portrait of yourself, write to me and I'll see you get its value. I will give you my address. It is a splendid painting. I am not rich enough to buy it myself, but I can find those who are. Remember that you could live comfortably all your life on the money it would bring."

"It mout pay for my burying," she said thoughtfully. "I dunnot loike parish burying."

"It would give you enough to live on and pay for that as well," replied Otway. "Think over it. You can get the parson to write to me if you like, you know."

"Nay, I'll write mysen. It'll nobbut be fur my burying."

"Well, give me a day or two's time when you do, because I might be away from home and the letter would have to follow me. I will not fail you."

"Thank yo'," she answered in simple faith, and her confidence was quite justified; Otway was trustworthy.

He returned to the contemplation of the portrait.

"It is splendid," he said with a sigh of admiration and regret, "splendid! I am glad I bave seen it, mother. You were a handsome girl."

The old woman's eyes lit as the spirit glowed for an instant through its mask of toil-worn clay.

"Ay, I wur a good-looking lass. Ay, I war!" Then she picked up the ragged tablecloth. Otway took it from her.

"One moment," he said. " I will wrap it up for you."

He stood, cloth in hand, regarding the portrait for perhaps five minutes. "A wonderful painting!" he murmured. Then aloud, "Shall I carry it home for you?"

She hesitated, and thinking that possibly she did not wish him to see her home, he folded the cloth round the picture and gave it to her, saying: "I shall always think of you as Aureole painted you. Not as I have done."

Again the glow came into the old face.

"Ay, I wanted yo' to see it. He wur a great painter, an' I wur a handsome lass— forty year ago!"

She went away with the portrait, and Otway took his tools indoors. There he set his picture on the easel and looked at it.

"Oh, my! Oh, my!" he cried. " It's Villon! It's *la belle Heaulmière*!" He clutched his hair tragically. "Yes, that's what it is! "

He paced the room once or twice, then sat down in front of his picture. It was good— very good. That poverty-stricken old age in pitiful contrast to the pale glory of the Dove's Twilight; a figure hooded, mysterious; the far-gleaming sea visible through the reticulations of the shrimping-net rising wing-like behind her, its pole and cross-bar sable against the sunrise. A figure pathetic in its scanty ragged garments, black-brown like the seatang and the wrack ; its thin hands and feet, its wrinkled face— there against the misty gold of the dawn, the sparkle of the sea.

"*La belle Heaulmière*!" repeated Otway. "Poor old girl! It seems a shame somehow."

He sighed impatiently, got up, pocketed his sketch-book and went ont, telling his landlady he should not be back till dinner. At six he returned, and again contemplated his picture.

"Poor old girl! " he said. Then he paused. "I am a sentimental fool! And Aureole was no great shakes apart from his art. Two more days would finish it."

Yet the figure seemed to appeal to him in its forlornness. To have been that! To be this! Her Haven's Twilight not passing into soft veiling of darkness and light of stars; but held up for all men to see.

Otway rose, and taking his brushes, swept any— every colour this way and that over the painting, completely obliterating the picture. This done, he proceeded to pack his other drawings. After all, he would have left in three days— might as well go now. There was an evening train that would just suit him.

He had dinner, sent his luggage to the station, and strolled out along the beach to seek the old woman. The tide was running out, and he knew she would be among the shrimpers. There was no hurry; his train was not due till nearly ten. He watched the sunset die in rose and crimson, and the wonderful west fade to orange, to primrose, then to crystalline green— clear— shining ; while far out over the sands the glimmering sea filled the air with a soft murmur.

"The sea of the Sagas," said Otway aloud, "and it sings runes. I must come here again. I could do something with that song in my ears."

Then he saw the line of shrimpers coming slowly up to the beach in the green twilight; his model was last.

"Here, mother," he said, "is the money for the next two sittings, and here are envelopes with my address on them— two in case you lose one. I am going away to-night."

"Eh, but I'm sorry."

"So am I. But I shall come back next year, perhaps sooner."

"Kay, yo'll noan do that. Yo' painters ne'er come back."

Otway was silent a moment, perceiving that her thoughts had gone backward over forty years. Forty years! and here was the Raven's Twilight as beautiful as when Aureole painted it behind the head of the girl called Rhoda. And here stood Rhoda in her Haven's Twilight.

"I wished to tell you, mother," said the young man lightly after that moment's pause, "that since seeing that portrait of you to-day, I have thought it hardly fair to paint you now, so I have rubbed out my picture."

"Yo've rubbed it out? A' your painting?"

"Yes, all of it."

"An' yo've gotten nowt fur a' th' brass yo' paid me! Here, I conna take this!"

She held out a claw-like hand with the money he had just given her.

"Oh, you must. I agreed for two more sittings. And I have learnt a deal by painting that picture of you. It was good practice for me. So the only portrait of you now is that one of forty years ago." Another minute's silence; then the old woman— more bat-like than ever against the clear green of the western sky— said slowly: "I couldna ha' believed it, but I'm glad on't. Ay, I'm glad on't! I wish yo' luck. 'Tis main good o' yo'."

"It's nothing," he replied. "I am glad you are pleased. Shake hands, mother, my train is about due. And I shall come back next year. For once you will be wrong, I shall come back."

He grasped the skinny fingers, then ran up the beach to the station, where his train was just slowing. As it bore him away, he looked out and saw the familiar figure standing on the beach in the green of the Raven's Twilight. Yet oddly enough, he seemed to see her— not old, bat-like— but as the girl Rhoda forty years ago.

13: In Destiny's Clutch
Rafael Sabatini
1875-1950
Top-Notch Magazine, 15 May 1921

1. Corsair of the Seas

ORDINARILY Dragut-Reis— who was dubbed by the Faithful "The Drawn Sword of Islam"— loved Christians as the fox loves geese. But in that fateful summer of 1550 his feelings toward them acquired a far deeper malignancy; they developed into a direct and personal hatred that for intensity was second only to the hatred which the Christians bore Dragut. The allied Christian forces under the direction of their emperor had smoked him out of his stronghold at Mehedia; they had seized that splendid city and were in the act of razing it to the ground as the neighboring Carthage had been razed of old.

Dragut reckoned up his losses with a gloomy and vengeful mind. He had lost his city, and from the eminence of a budding Basha in the act of founding a kingdom and perhaps a dynasty, he had been cast down once more to be a wanderer upon the seas. He had lost three thousand men, and among them the very flower of his redoubtable corsairs; he had lost some twelve thousand Christian slaves, the fruit of many a desperate raid; he had lost his lieutenant and nephew Hisar, who was even now a captive in the hands of his inveterate enemy, Andrea Doria. All this had he lost, and he was naturally embittered.

Yet Dragut was not the man to waste his days in brooding over what was done. Yesterday and today are but pledges in the hands of destiny. He returned thanks to Allah the Compassionate, the So-Merciful, that he was still alive and free upon the seas with three galleases, twelve galleys, and five brigantines, wherewith to set about making good his losses, and he bent his energetic, resourceful knavish mind to the matter of ways and means.

Meanwhile he had been warned by the Sultan of Constantinople that the Emperor Charles, not content with the mischief he had already done him, had, in letters to the Grand Signior, avowed his intent to pursue to the death "the pirate Dragut, a corsair odious to both God and man." He knew, moreover, that the emperor had intrusted this task to the greatest seaman of the day, to the terrible admiral of Genoa, Andrea Doria, and the Genoese was already at sea upon his quest.

Now once already had Dragut been captured by the navy of Genoa, and for four years, which he cared but little to remember, he had toiled at an oar on board the galley of Giannetino Doria, the admiral's nephew. He had known exposure to cold and heat; he had been broiled by the sun and frozen by the rain; he had known aching muscles, hunger, and thirst, and the sores begotten

of the oarsman's bench, and his shoulders were still a crisscross of scars where the bos'n's whip had lashed him to revive his flagging energies.

All this had he known, and he was not minded to renew the acquaintance. It behooved him therefore to make ready fittingly to receive the admiral when he should appear. And by way of replenishing his coffers at once, venting a little of his vengeful heat, and marking his contempt for Christian pursuers, he had made a sudden swoop upon the southwestern coast of Sicily.

Beginning at Gergenti, Dragut carried his raid as far north as Marsala, leaving ruin and desolation behind him. At the end of a week he stood off to sea again, with the spoils of six townships and some three thousand picked captives of both sexes. He would teach the infidel Christian emperor to allude to him as "the pirate Dragut, a corsair odious to both God and man"— he would so, by the beard of the Prophet!

He put the captives aboard one of the galleys in charge of his lieutenant, Othmani, and dispatched them straight to Algeria to be sold there in the slave market. With the proceeds Othmani was to lay down fresh keels. Until these should be ready to reenforce his little fleet, Dragut judged it well to avoid encounters with the Genoese admiral, and with this intent he steered a southward course along the coast toward Tripoli.

Toward evening of the day on which Othmani's galley set out alone for Algiers, a fresh breeze sprang up from the north, and blew into the corsair's range of vision a tiny brown-sailed felucca as it might have blown a leaf of autumn. It was hawk-eyed Dragut himself, who, lounging on the high deck of his galley, first sighted this tiny craft. He pointed it out to Biretta, the renegade Calabrian gunner who was near him.

"In the name of Allah," quoth Dragut, "what walnut shell is this that comes so furiously after us?"

Biretta, a massive, sallow fellow, laughed.

"The fury is not hers, but of the wind," said he. "She goes where'er it bloweth her. She'll be an Italian craft."

"Then the wind that blows her is the wind of destiny. Haply she'll have news of Italy."

Dragut turned on his heel, and gave an order to a turbaned officer on the gangway below. Instantly the brazen note of a trumpet rang out clear above the creak and dip of oars. As instantly the rowers came to rest, and from the side of each galley six and twenty massive yellow oars stood out, their wet blades glistening in the evening sunlight.

Thus the Moslem fleet waited, rocking gently on the little swell that had arisen, its quality advertised by the red and white ensign displaying a blue crescent that floated from the masthead of Dragut's own galley.

2. Winds of Destiny.

ON came the tiny brown-sailed felucca, helplessly driven by what Dragut accounted the winds of destiny. At closer quarters they saw indications of the desperate effort that was being made aboard her to put her about. But they were lubberly fellows who had charge of her, and Dragut was content to wait. At last, when she was in danger of being blown past them, he crossed to meet her. As the long prow ran alongside of her grappling hooks were deftly flung to seize her at mast and gunwale, and but for these she must have been swept away by the oars of the galley.

From the prow Dragut himself, a tall and handsome figure in his gold-embroidered scarlet surcoat that descended to his knees, his snowwhite turban heightening the swarthiness of his hawk face with its square-cut black beard, stood to challenge the crew of the felucca.

There were aboard of her six scared knaves, something between lackeys and seamen, whom the corsair's black eyes passed contemptuously over. He addressed himself to a couple who were seated in the stern sheets— a tall and very elegant young gentleman, obviously Italian, and a girl upon whose white, golden-headed loveliness the corsair's bold eyes glowed pleasurably.

"Who are you?" he demanded haughtily in Italian.

The young man answered for the twain, very composedly, as though it were a matter of everyday life with him to be held in the grappling hooks of a Barbary pirate.

"My name is Ottavio Brancaleone. I am from Genoa on my way to Spain."

"To Spain?" quoth Dragut, and laughed. "You steer an odd course for Spain, or do you look to find it in Egypt?"

"We have lost our rudder," the gentleman explained, "and were at the mercy of the wind."

"I hope you find it has been merciful," said Dragut, leering at the girl, who shrank nearer to her companion, fear staring out of her blue eyes. "And your companion, sir, who is she?"

"My— my sister."

"Had you told me different you had been the first Christian I ever knew to speak the truth," said Dragut amiably. "Well, well, it's plain you're not to be trusted to sail a boat of your own. Best come aboard and see if you and your fellows can do better at an oar."

"I'll not trespass on your hospitality," said Brancaleone, with that amazing coolness of his.

"You shall earn it, I promise you," the corsair reassured him. "So come aboard. I am DragutReis."

It pleased his vanity to notice that his name was not without disconcerting effect upon that smooth young gentleman. In the end there was a short, sharp tussle. Dragut flung a half score of his corsairs into the felucca to capture her voyagers, and one of them was stabbed by Brancaleone ere they overpowered him.

The prize proved far less insignificant than at first the corsair had imagined. For in addition to the slaves he had acquired, and the girl, who was fit to grace a sultan's harem, he found a great chest of newly minted ducats that it took six men to heave aboard the galley, and a beautifully chiseled gold coffer, full of gems of price. He found something more. On the inside of this coffer's lid was engraved its owner's name— Amelia Francesca Doria. Dragut snapped down the lid with a prayer of thanks to Allah the One, and strode into the cabin where the girl was confined.

"Madonna Amelia," said he.

She looked up instantly. Obviously it was her name, and the casket was her own.

"Will you tell me what is your kinship with the admiral?" Dragut asked.

"I am his granddaughter, sir," she answered, "and be sure that he will avenge terribly upon you any wrong that is done to me."

Dragut smiled. "We are old friends, the admiral and I," said he, and went out again. A mighty Nubian bearing a torch— for night had now descended— lighted him to the galley's waist, where about her mainmast lay huddled the seven pinioned prisoners. With the curved toe of his scarlet slipper the corsair touched Messer Brancaleone.

"Tell me, dog," Dragut commanded, "all that you know of Messer Andrea Doria."

"That is soon told," answered Brancaleone. "I know nothing, nor want to."

"You lie, as was to be expected," said Dragut. "For one thing, you know his granddaughter."

Brancaleone blinked and recovered. "True, and several others of his family. But I conceived your question to concern his movements. I know that he is upon the seas, that he is seeking you, that he has sworn to take you alive, and that when he does— as I pray he will— he will so deal with you that you shall implore them of their Christian charity to hang you."

"And that is all you know?" quoth Dragut, entirely unruffled. "You did not peradventure sight his fleet as you were sailing?"

"I did not."

"Do you think that with a match between your fingers you might remember?"

"I might invent," replied the Italian; "but I doubt it. I have told you the truth, Messer Dragut. Torture could but gain you falsehood."

Dragut looked searchingly into that comely young face, then turned away as if satisfied. But as he was departing Messer Brancaleone called him back. And when he spoke now the Italian's tone and manner were entirely changed. His imperturbability, real or assumed, had all departed. Anxiety amounting almost to terror sounded in his voice.

"What fate do you reserve for Madonna Amelia?" he asked.

Dragut looked down at the man's pale face, and smiled a little. He had no particular rancor against his prisoner. On the whole he was inclining to admiration for the fellow's almost philosophic courage. At the same time there was no room for sentiment in the heart of the corsair. He was quite pitiless.

"Our lord the sublime Suleyman," said he, entirely without malice, "is as keen a judge of beauty as any man living. I account the girl to be a worthy gift even to the exalted of Allah; so I shall keep her safe against my next voyage to Constantinople."

And then Brancaleone's little lingering selfpossession left him utterly. From his writhing lips came a stream of vituperation, which continued even after the Nubian had struck him a blow upon the mouth and Dragut had taken his departure.

3. When The Galleys Came.

NEXT day a slave on Dragut's galley having been taken ill at his oar, the wretch was unshackled and heaved overboard, and Brancaleone, stripped to the skin, was chained in the fellow's empty place. There were seven men to each oar, and Brancaleon's six companions were all Christians and all white—or had been before exposure had tanned them to the color of mahogany. Of these, three were Italians, two Spaniards, and one Frenchman. All were grimy and unkempt, and it was with a shudder that the delicately nurtured Genoese gentleman wondered if he were destined to become as they.

Up and down the gangway between the rowers' benches walked two Moslem bos'ns, armed with long whips of bullock hide, and it was not long ere one of them, considering that Brancaleone was not putting his share of effort into his task, sent that cruel lash to raise a burning wheal upon his tender flesh.

He was sparingly fed with his half-brutalized companions upon dried dates and figs, and he was given a little tepid water to drink when he thirsted. He slept in his shackles on the rowers' bench, which was but some four feet wide,

and despite the sheepskins with which the bench was padded it was not long before the friction of his movements began to chafe and blister his flesh.

In the scorching noontide of the second day he collapsed fainting upon his oar. He was unshackled and dragged out upon the gangway. There a bucket of water was flung over him. It revived him, and the too-swift-healing action of the salt upon his seared flesh was a burning agony to him. He was put back to his oar again with a warning that if he permitted himself the luxury of swooning a second time he would be given the entire ocean in which to revive.

On the third day they sighted land, and toward evening the galleys threaded their way one by one through the shoals of the Boca de Cantara into the spacious lagoon on the northeast side of the Island of Jerbah, and there came to rest. It was Dragut's intent to lie snug in that remote retreat until Othmani should be ready with the reenforcements that were to enable the corsair to take the seas once more against the admiral of Genoa.

But it would seem that already the admiral was closer upon his heels than he had supposed, and that trackless as are the ocean ways, yet Andrea Doria had by some mysterious means contrived to gather information as he came that had kept him upon the invisible spoor of his quarry.

There was not a doubt that the folk on that ravaged Sicilian seaboard would be eager to inform the redoubtable admiral of the direction in which the Moslem galleys had faded out of sight. Perhaps even that empty felucca left tossing upon the tideless sea had served as an index to the way the corsairs had taken, and perhaps from the mainland, from Monastir, or one of the other cities now in Christian hands, a glimpse of Dragut's fleet had been caught, and Doria had been warned.

Be that as it may, not a week had Dragut been moored at Terbah when one fine morning brought a group of friendly islanders with the astounding news that a fleet of galleys was descending upon the island from the north.

The news took Dragut ashore in a hurry with a group of officers and from the narrow spur of land at the mouth of the harbor he surveyed the advancing ships. What already he had more than suspected became absolute certainty. Two and twenty royal galleys were steering straight for the Boca de Cantara, the foremost flying Andrea Doria's own ensign.

Back to his fleet went Dragut for cannon and slaves, and so feverishly did they toil under the lash of his venomous tongue and of his bos'ns' whips, that within an hour he had erected a battery at the harbor mouth and fired a salute straight into the Genoese as they were in the very act of dropping anchor. Thereupon the galleys of Doria stood off out of range, and hung there, well content to wait, knowing that the fox was trapped, that the sword of Islam was

likely to be sheathed at last, and that all that was now required on their part was patience.

Forthwith the jubilant Doria sent word to the emperor that he held Dragut fast, and he dispatched messengers to the viceroys of Sicily and Naples asking for reinforcements with which, if necessary, to force the issue. He meant this time to leave nothing to chance.

Dragut on his side employed the time in fortifying the Boca de Cantara. A fort arose there, growing visibly under the eyes of the Genoese, and provoking the amusement of that fierce veteran Doria. Sooner or later Dragut must decide to come forth from his bottle-necked refuge, and the longer he deferred it the more overwhelming would be the numbers assembled to destroy him.

4. "Betide What May."

NEVER since Giannetino Doria had surprised him on the road of Goialatta off the coast of Corsica, on that famous occasion when he was made prisoner, had Dragut found himself in so desperately tight a corner. He sat on the deck of his galley, muttering imprecations against the Genoese with that astounding and far-reaching fluency in which the Moslem is without rival upon earth. He pronounced authoritatively upon the shamelessness of Doria's mother, and the inevitably shameful destiny of his daughters. He called perfervidly upon Allah to rot the bones and destroy the house of his arch-enemy, and he foretold how dogs would of a certainty desecrate the admiral's grave. Then, seeing that Allah remained disdainfully aloof, he rose up one day in a mighty passion, and summoned his officers.

"This skulking here will not avail us," he blazed at them, as if it were by their contriving that he was trapped. "By delay we but increase our peril. What is written is written. Allah has bound the fate of each man about his neck. Betide what may, tonight we take to the open sea."

"And by morning you'll have found the bottom of it," drawled a voice from one of the oars.

Dragut, who was standing on the gangway between the rowers' benches, whipped around with a snarl upon the speaker. He found himself gazing into the languid eyes of Messer Brancaleone. The rest of the last few days had restored the Italian's vigor, and certain thoughts that he had lately been indulging had restored his courage.

"Are you weary of life?" wondered the corsair. "Shall I have you hanged before we go to meet your friends out yonder?"

"To do one or the other," said Brancaleone, "would be to render absolute the conviction which has been growing upon me during this week past."

"And what may that be?"

"That you're a dull fellow when all is said, Messer Dragut. Hang me, and you hang the only man in all your fleet who can show you the way out of this trap."

Dragut stared between anger and amazement. "You can show me a way out of this trap?" he echoed. "What way may that be?"

"Strike off my fetters, restore me my garments, and give me proper food, and I will discuss it with you."

Dragut glowered at him.

"We have a shorter way to make men speak," he said.

Brancaleone smiled and shook his head. "You think so? Another of your delusions."

It was odd what a power of conviction dwelt in his imperturbable tones.

The corsair issued an order, and turned away.

A half hour later, Messer Brancaleone, nourished, washed, and clothed, looking once more like the elegant Italian gentleman who had first been hoisted aboard the galley, stepped on to the deck, where Dragut-Reis awaited him in some impatience. Seated cross-legged upon a gorgeous silken divan that was wrought in green and blue and gold, the handsome corsair combed his square black beard with fretful fingers. Behind him, stark-naked save for his white loin cloth, stood his gigantic Nubian, his body oiled until it shone like ebony, armed with a great curved scimitar.

"Now, sir," growled Dragut, "what is this precious plan of yours— briefly?" His tone was contemptuous.

"You begin where we should end," said the imperturbable Genoese. "I owe you no favors Messer Dragut, and I bear you no affection that I should make you a free gift of your life and liberty. My eyes have seen something to which yours are blind, and my brain has conceived something of which yours is quite incapable. These things, sir, are for sale. Before I part with them we must agree upon the price."

Dragut stared from under scowling brows. He could scarce believe that the world held so much impudence.

"And what price do you suggest?" he snarled, by way of humoring the Genoese. "Why, as to that, since I offer you life and liberty, it is but natural that I should claim my own life and liberty in return, and similarly the liberty of Madonna Amelia and of my servants whom you captured; also it is but natural that I should require the restoration of the money and jewels you have taken from us, and since you have deprived us of our felucca, it is no more than

proper that you should equip us with a vessel in which to pursue the journey which you interrupted.

"Considering the time we have lost in consequence of this interruption," Brancaleone went on, "it is but just that you should make this good as far as possible by presenting me with a craft that is capable of the utmost speed. I will accept a galley of six and twenty oars, manned by a proper complement of Christian slaves."

"And is that all?" roared Dragut.

"No," said Brancaleone quietly. "That is but the restitution due to me. We come now to the price of the service I am to render you. When you were Giannetino Doria's prisoner, Barbarossa paid for you, as all the world knows, a ransom of three thousand ducats. I will be more reasonable."

"Will you so?" snorted Dragut. "By the splendor of Allah, you'll need to be."

"I will accept one thousand ducats."

"May Allah blot thee out, thou impudent son of shame!" cried the corsair, filled with fury.

"You compel me to raise the price to fifteen hundred ducats," said Brancaleone smoothly. "I must be compensated for abuse since I cannot take satisfaction for it as between one Christian gentleman and another."

It was good for Dragut that his feelings suddenly soared to an intensity beyond expression, else might the price have been raised even beyond the famous ransom that Barbarossa had paid. Mutely he stood glowering, clenching and unclenching his hands; than he half turned to his Nubian swordsman.

"Ali—" he began.

Brancaleone once more cut in.

"Ah, wait," said he. "I pray you calm yourself. Remember how you stand, and that Andrea Doria holds you trapped. Do nothing that will destroy your only chance. Time enough to call in Ali and have my head hacked off when I have failed."

That speech arrested Dragut's anger in full flow. He wheeled upon the Genoese once more.

"You accept that alternative?"

Brancaleone smiled with almost pitying amusement. "Why not? I have no slightest fear of failure. I can show you how to win clear of this trap and make the admiral the laughingstock of the world."

"Speak, then; let me know your plan!" cried Dragut fiercely.

"If I do so before you have agreed to my terms, then I shall have nothing left to sell."

Angrily Dragut turned aside, and strode to the taffrail. He looked across the shimmering blue water to the fortifications at the harbor mouth; with the eyes of his imagination he looked beyond at the fleet of Genoa riding out yonder in patient conviction that it held its prey.

The price that Brancaleone asked was outrageous— a galley and some two hundred Christian slaves to row it and fifteen hundred ducats. In all it amounted to fully as much as the ransom that Barbarossa had paid for him, yet Dragut must pay it, or fall into the power of his Christian foes. He came to reflect that he would pay it gladly enough to be out of this tight corner.

He came about again. He spoke of torture once more, but in a half-hearted sort of way; for he did not himself believe that it would be effective with a man of Brancaleone's temper.

Brancaleone laughed at the threat, and shrugged his shoulders.

"You may as profitably hang me, Messer Dragut," he said, "for your infidel barbarities will but seal my lips for all time."

"We might torture the woman," said Dragut the ingenious.

Brancaleone, on the words, turned white to the lips; but it was the pallor of bitter, heartsearing resolve, not the pallor of such fear as Dragut had hoped to awaken. He advanced a step, his imperturbability all gone, and he sent his words into the face of the corsair with the fierceness of a cornered wild cat.

"Attempt it," said he, "and as God's my witness I leave you to your fate at the hands of Genoa— ay, though my heart should burst with the pain of my silence. I am a man, Messer Dragut; never doubt it."

"I do not," said Dragut, his piercing black eyes upon that set white face. "I agree to your terms. Show me a way out of Doria's clutches, and you shall have all that you have asked for."

5. Really Simple.

TREMBLING still from his recent emotion, Brancaleone hoarsely bade the corsair call up his officers and repeat his words before them.

"And you shall make oath upon this matter," he added. "Men say of you that you are a faithful Moslem. I mean to put it to the test."

Dragut, now all eagerness to know what plan was stirring in his prisoner's brain, unable to brook further suspense in this affair, called up his officers, and before them all, taking Allah to witness, he made oath upon the beard of the Prophet that if Brancaleone could show him deliverance, he on his side would recompense the Genoese to the extent demanded.

Thereafter Dragut and Brancaleone went ashore, with no other attendant but the Nubian swordsman. It was the Genoese who led the way, not toward

the fort, as Dragut had expected, but in the opposite direction. Arrived at the northernmost curve of that almost circular lagoon, where the ground was swampy. Brancaleone paused. He pointed across a strip of shallow land, that was no more than a half mile or so in width, to the blue-green sea beyond. Part of this territory was swamp, and part sand; vegetation there was of the scantiest; some clumps of reeds, an odd date palm, its crest rustling slightly in the breeze, and nothing else.

"It is really very simple," said the Italian. "Yonder lies your way."

As he spoke, a red-legged stork rose from the edge of the marsh, and went circling overhead.

Dragut's face was purple with rage. He deemed that this smooth fellow had brought him there to make mock of him.

"Are my galleys winged like that stork, thou fool?" he answered passionately. "Or are they wheeled like chariots that I can sail them over dry land."

Brancaleone looked at him in stupefaction.

"I protest," said he, "that for a man of your reputation for shrewdness, you fill me with amazement. I said you were a dull fellow. I little dreamed how dull. Nay, now, suppress your rage. Truth is a very healing draft, and you have need of it. I compute now that aboard your ships there will be, including slaves, some three thousand men. No doubt you could press another thousand from the island into your service. How long would it take four thousand men to dig a channel deep enough to float your shallow galleys through that strip of land?"

Dragut's fierce eyes flickered as though he had been menaced with a blow.

"By Allah!" he ejaculated, and gripped his beard. "By the splendor of Allah!"

"In a week the thing were easily done," Brancaleone resumed, "and meanwhile your fort will hold the admiral in play and mask your labors. Then, one dark night, you slip through this channel, and stand away to the south, so that by sunrise you shall have vanished beyond the sky line, leaving the admiral to guard an empty trap."

Dragut laughed aloud, in almost childlike glee, and otherwise signified his delight by the vehemence with which he testified to the unity of Allah. Suddenly he checked, and his eyes narrowed as they rested upon Brancaleone.

"'Tis a scurvy trick you play your lady's grandsire!" said he.

The Genoese shrugged and, smiled deprecatingly. "Every man for himself, Messer Dragut. We understand each other, I think. 'Tis not for love of you I do this thing."

"I would it were," said the corsair, with an odd sincerity, and thereafter, as they returned to the galleys, it was seen that Dragut's arm was about the shoulders of the infidel, and that he spoke with him as with a brother.

The fact is that Dragut, fired with admiration of Brancaleone's resourcefulness, was cast down at the thought that so fine a spirit should of necessity be destined to go down to the pit. He spoke to him now of the glories of Islam, and of the future that must await a gentleman of his endowments in the ranks of the Moslem; he had of a sudden conceived so great an affection for him that he was filled with the desire to convert him to the true faith. But this was a matter in which Brancaleone was politely obdurate, and Dragut had not the time to devote to the conversation, greatly as he desired it. There was the matter of that canal to engage him.

Brancaleone's instructions were diligently carried out. Daily the fort at the Boca de Cantara would belch forth shot at the Genoese navy, which stood well out of range. To the admiral this was but the barking of a dog that dared not come within biting reach, and the waste of ammunition roused his contempt of that pirate Dragut whom he held at his mercy.

There came a day, however, when the fort was silent; it was followed by another day of silence, in the evening of which one of the admiral's officers suggested that all might not be well. Doria agreed with him.

"All is not at all well with that dog Dragut." Andrea Doria laughed in his white beard. "He wants us within range of his guns. The ruse is a little too obvious."

And so the great Genoese fleet remained carefully out of range of the empty fort, what time Dragut himself was some scores of miles away, speeding as fast as his slaves could row for the archipelago and the safety of the Dardanelles. In the words of the Spanish historian, Marmol, who has chronicled the event— although many of the details here recorded escaped his knowledge— "Dragut left Messer Andrea Doria 'with the dog to hold.'"

Brancaleone accompanied the Moslem fleet at first, though now aboard the galley which Dragut had given him in accordance with their agreement, and with him sailed the lovely Amelia Francesca Doria, his chest of gold, the jewels, and the fifteen hundred ducats that Dragut, grimly stifling his reluctance, had paid the Genoese.

On the second day of their voyage, the corsair was able to replace the vessel granted to Brancaleone. They met a royal galley from Naples, manned by Spaniards, and rowed by Moslem slaves. She was speeding to Andrea Doria with news that the viceroy was sending reenforcements. There was a sharp, short fight, and Messer Dragut added her to his fleet, liberating the Moslem slaves, and replacing them by the Spaniards who had manned the vessel.

Some hours later, Messer Brancaleone and the corsair captain parted company with many expressions of mutual good will, and the Genoese put about and steered a northwesterly course for the coast of Spain.

6. That Impudent Genoese.

IT was some months ere Dragut learned the true inwardness of Messer Brancaleone's conduct. He had the story from a Genoese captive, captain of a carack which the corsair scuttled in the Straits of Messina. The fellow's name chanced to be Brancaleone, upon learning which Dragut inquired if he were kin to one Ottavio Brancaleone, who had gone to Spain with the admiral's granddaughter.

"He is my cousin," the man answered.

And Dragut now learned that in the teeth of the opposition of the whole Doria family, the irrepressible Brancaleone had carried off Madonna Amelia.

The admiral had news of it as he was putting to sea, and it was in pursuit not only of Dragut, but also of the runagates, that he had come south so far as Jerbah, having reason more than to suspect that they were aboard one of Dragut's galleys. The admiral had sworn to hang Brancaleone from his yardarm ere he returned to port, and his bitterness at the trick Dragut had played him was increased by the reflection that Brancaleone, too, had got clear away.

Dragut was very thoughtful when he heard that story.

"And to think," said he, "that I paid that unconscionable dog fifteen hundred ducats and gave him my best galley manned by two hundred Christian slaves for rendering himself as great a service as ever he was rendering me!"

He bore no malice, however. On the contrary, his admiration grew for that impudent Genoese, the only Christian who had ever bested Dragut in a bargain, and if he had a regret it was that so shrewd a spirit should abide in the body of an infidel.

"In the service of Islam," he was wont to say, "such a man as Brancaleone might have gone far indeed. But Allah is all-knowing."

14: The Bell

Arthur Stringer

(Arthur John Arbuthnott Stringer, 1874-1950)

The Popular Magazine, 20 Dec 1916

"DO you happen to know just why you're here?" asked Ryckman, as I stepped into the waiting motor car.

"Because you sent for me," was my deliberate retort. I stared about the lonely little station half buried in snow.

Ryckman cranked the car, shook the snow from the lap robe that had been covering his radiator, and crowded in beside me. We backed about, swung into the frozen road, and crawled southward across a country blue gray with wintry twilight.

"You've been wondering why I did send for you, of course," said Ryckman, as he pushed the lap robe over across my knees. "And, now you're here, I'll explain it. You see, you could never make it clear in a telegram."

"Why not?" I asked.

"Buchner," Ryckman said, after a silence, "do you remember what Thomas Bailey Aldrich once asked about certain situation for a story? What would happen if you knew you were the last human being alive in the world and you were sitting alone in your study, and suddenly your doorbell rang?"

I turned and stared at Ryckman as he bent over his wheel.

"Did you bring me all the way up here to answer that question?" I demanded.

"Yes," was his answer.

Ryckman had always been odd, but I had never thought of him as insane. That he was not without temperament had been made plain to me seven long years before, when I first became his attorney. We had then stopped by injunction one of his own plays because a Broadway manager had grabbed a third-act ending. And since then we had been through most of the small legal skirmishes which every successful author, I suppose, has to face.

Yet success had not greatly added to Ryckman's eccentricities. He had always loved solitude, I knew, when struggling with a new drama, and this was largely based on the fact that he composed viva voce, striding up and down his study and shouting his bigscene speeches to a waiting stenographer. So I had not been surprised when he wrote me that winter, saying he had snatched up a huge old country house on Lake Erie and was leaving the city to give three months of hard work to the new Frohman comedy.

But I was not willing to swallow four hundred miles in an overheated sleeper and accept a spoiled Christmas holiday as the negligible whim of a temperamental playmonger.

So I looked at the capped and mufflered Ryckman for some time, trying to sweep back the wave of anger which was inundating my weary body.

"So, I've been brought here on the matter of a doorbell?" I inquired, with ironic placidity.

"Precisely," said Ryckman.

"On the matter of your doorbell, which somebody has been making so bold as to ring?" I went on.

"Exactly," said the man at my side,

"But, my dear Ryckman," I retorted, exasperated by the theatricality of his attitude, "the situation seems rather without point in this case, because you do not happen to be the last human being alive in the world."

"That's where you're wrong," he quickly amended. "I am the only human being alive in the world!"

"Oh, are you?" I echoed, steeling myself for some confession of incipient paranoia. It was clear, I told myself, that the man had been overworking.

"I mean I'm the only human being left in this world of mine up here," explained Ryckman.

"How about Burke?" I asked.

Burke was Ryckman's stenographer, who had been with the playwright, I knew, for the last three years at least.

"Burke left three days after my housekeeper went. He couldn't stand it any more than the others could !"

"Stand what?" I demanded.

"The bell," was Ryckman's answer.

I tried to be as calm as possible.

"What did the bell do?" I finally inquired.

"It rang."

Ryckman had uttered this foolish answer in a quite matter-of-fact tone, but for some absurd reason I experienced a faint horripilation of the nerves. "Bells have a habit of doing that "

"No, they haven't," solemnly and decisively declared Ryckman. "Not without some human being first making them ring! Not without some earthly reason or cause!"

I could afford to laugh at his solemnity.

"And this is some super-rational bell that rings of its own sweet will and givs you goose flesh along your idiotic young legs just because a couple of wires have got crossed."

He turned to me with a quick and reproving side glance. I could see his face, thin and blue with tfie cold, in the shadowy half light of the snowmuffled dusk.

"There are no wires to get crossed," he declared. "It is just a plain bell that has to be pulled, pulled by some one's hand. The only wires that are getting crossed are the wires in my brain. I tell you, I can't stand this thing much longer. I've got to straighten it out in some way!"

I sat silent, momentarily disturbed by the rising note of protest in his voice. It was clear that the man was not himself.

"Been working hard?" I finally inquired.

"I can't work," he cried. "This thing has got on my nerves and knocked everything out of my head."

"Then why are you staying here?"

"I want to get to the bottom of it," was his answer. "I've got to understand it."

I thought things over. Then I went back to the question of the bell.

"You're sure it actually rings?" I asked.

"As sure of it as I know we're sitting in this car."

"And without reason?"

He nodded an affirmative.

"I even lamp-blacked the pull knob, hoping to get finger prints, something to work on. *But there was no sign that a human hand had touched it*."

Again I felt that small chill along the nerve ends. But I forced a laugh at the solemnity of his face.

"And the servants— Burke and others— what stampeded them?"

"They knew the bell rang."

"When would it ring?"

"At night."

"And how did they explain it?"

"They *couldn't* explain it. That's what stampeded them."

"But they must have talked about it."

"Burke told me they had passed a story on, from one to the other, about a woman being killed in the place and buried under the bricks in the cellar. Being lowbrows, they accepted the story— even Burke did, at last, and with the usual results."

"And you yourself?" I inquired.

Ryckman threw me another quick side glance.

"I'm not altogether foolish!" he replied. Then he added, without looking at me: "And the cellar floor isn't of bricks. It's solid cement."

"Any details about that woman?" I asked, feeling that the more Ryckman could externalize the thing, as the psychopathologists phrase it, the better it would be for him.

"Nothing authentic, naturally. Those yarns never are authentic. But as far as I can gather the house was built about thirty years ago by a retired Lake captain. He was in middle life then, and married a young wife. They had two children. The first, a boy, was delicate and afraid of the water. This used to anger the old captain, who took the boy out in a boat and threw him overboard to make him a swimmer. The shock, or the strain on the boy's throat when he screamed, ruptured the vocal chords. At any rate, according to the story, it left him a mute. And the boy's mother never forgave his father. They lived under the same roof, side by side, for two years without speaking. Then the captain disappeared. They said he went back to the Lakes, took up sailing again. Then he came back one winter and tried to make up with his wife. She still refused to speak to him. He was drunk, and turned her out in zero weather. Three times she came back and rang the bell. The third time, they say, he dragged her in and killed her. As a matter of fact, I suppose, she died of exposure, or probably was never even turned out of the house."

"And the boy with the ruptured vocal chords?"

"He went to Baltimore and had an operation on his throat and got his voice back. He and his younger sister turned the place— they called it Pine Brae— into a fruit farm. But "old Captain Hudson's family disputed the title and threw it on the market. That's how it came into my hands."

We had turned off the main road, and were winding down through a stretch of heavily wooded hills. We chugged and stuttered in past two huge stone gateposts, crawling on second speed through a spectral-looking orchard. Then we took a turn to the left and skirted a thick tangle of pine trees. Half hidden in the gloom of these pines I could make out the still gloomier pile of the house, without a light or a sign of life showing from any of its windows. As I sat in the car, while Ryckman got out to unlock his garage door, I could hear the sound of the lake booming desolately on the ice ridge along the shore.

"This is surely a sweet and homelike corner of the world you've bought yourself," I told him, with a candor born of much weariness of body and depression of mind.

"I don't believe I'll buy the place," he said, as he stood staring into the gloom of the pines.

"But you have bought it."

"Not altogether," he amended.

"There's a disputed title somewhere or other. That is one of the things you've got to look into for me at the county seat. I've been too busy, and I'm not much good at that work."

Again I detected a flaw in my young client's line of talk, but I did not draw his attention to it.

"Well, that's saner work than waiting for bells to ring," I told him, as I followed in his steps and circled the gloomy pile that huddled back among its gloomy pines. I stood beside him as he took out a key to unlock the forbidding oak door; I could see the faint glimmer of a polished brass knob. I reached out and touched it, feeling sure it was the hand knob of a pull bell. Then I let my gloved fingers close about it. The next moment I pulled promptly and deliberately on the knob.

From beyond that still unlocked door, from somewhere deep within the silent and tomblike house, I could hear the sudden, brazen clamor of the bell. I don't know whether it was the uttter desolation of the place or my own depressed spjrits or the ghostly nonsense which Ryckman had been dishing up to me, but as I heard those muffled sounds reverberating through the gloom which I could not decipher I felt a shiver speed up and down my backbone.

Ryckman swung about as though he had been shot.

"Was that you ?" he gasped, catching at my arm.

"Of course it was me," I retorted. But I could see that it had given him a bad turn.

Again I forced a laugh as I struck a match for him. He stood there until it burned out, before he turned again to unlock the door. Then I struck a second match. This time I held it close to the bell knob and looked it over. Then I stepped in through the opened door, at Ryckman's heels, following him into the silence of the unlighted house.

ii

I FOUND the interior of Ryckman's house much more comfortable than I had anticipated. And I made the further discovery that Ryckman himself was a much more practical-minded man than I had thought him. He soon had a wood fire roaring in the huge fireplace of the great high-ceilinged hall which ran the full length of the house. Then came a hot supper, of his own cooking, and coffee and cigars. And although the wind increased as the night advanced and the sound of it in the pine tops was no blither than the booming of the surf on the ice ridge below the lake cliffs, I found myself, what with the hot meal and the lighted lamps and the open fire and the easy-chairs, in a much more comfortable frame of mind.

The situation, as we smoked and talked, became a more matter-of-fact one, and when Ryckman carried a lamp to the rear end of the wide reception hall and pointed out the bell which was given to ringing without earthly reason or cause, I could even view that bell with half-amused disdain.

It was an old-fashioned and very ordinary-looking bell, swinging on the end of a curling steel band wire. When once set in motion, because of this wire, it would naturally oscillate for some length of time. I noticed that it stood high above the door tops, and could not be easily interfered with by any one crossing the back of the hall, which, Heaven knows, had doors enough standing on either ^ide of it. I made particular note of this, for the back end of the hall was in shadow, far beyond the radiance of our open fire and the large reading lamp which stood behind us; and the deeper the shadows, I knew, the better the chances for that trickery of the senses which is all too readily accepted as the supernatural.

So fortified, in fact, did I become in my skepticism that I determined to cut off all other chances of trickery. I first insisted on making sure we were alone in the house. And this we did by a most thorough and painstaking search of the place from attic to cellar. During that search, which was a dismal and bone-chilling experience, I stitmbled on nothing that could be made to serve as an elucidation of Ryckman's tuppeny little mystery. I discovered, though, that the house was even larger and drearier than I had first thought it. I also discovered that the cellar, in which Ryckman had made preparations for installing a hot-water furnace, was a solid-walled, well-floored place in no way suggestive of the abnormal. The only feature of that cellar which could be called in any way irregular was a door which opened into a passageway running under the terrace to the east of the house. But this passage, Ryckman explained, had originally connected with a frame building holding two huge cider presses, for when the orchards of Pine Brae were in their prime the earlier owner had thought to make a business of champagnizing and aging native cider for the city market.

I made it a point to see, however, that the door of this passage was securely locked, just as I made it a point to see that every door and window on the ground floor could not be tampered with by a possible intruder. And as for intruders, I knew that no one could approach the house without leaving in the freshly fallen snow unmistakable marks of that approach. Yet before we settled ourselves before the open fire again I obtained a hammer and wood chisel from the quietly condoning Ryckman. With these, after some difficulty, I removed an inner board from his frontdoor casement, and then a couple of the floor boards, to make sure, as I had expected, that the bell wire ran along to the back of the house under our feet, and not overhead. My first impulse was quietly to cut this wire. But, on second thoughts, I surreptitiously loosened the set screw which held the brass bell pull in place. Then stepping outside for a moment on the pretext of making sure there were no footprints in the freshly

driven snow, I drew the brass knob from its socket and slipped it into my pocket.

When I lighted a fresh cigar in front of Ryckman's open fire I was fortified with the knowledge that no one outside the house could ever interfere with my neurasthenic friend's bell. I nursed the even more comforting conviction that for one night at least this sleep-disturbing bell would remain quite normal. I had to struggle against a tendency, in fact, to doze off in the very face of Ryckman's spasmodic and thin-voiced talk. I even laughed a little, from the depths of my chair, when he showed me the Ross rifle he had brought into the hall and left leaning there in its corner, protesting that he always felt safer with the firearm at his elbow. Then I stretched myself and told him that I was tired and thought I'd turn in.

He stopped short at these words from me, and a look of trouble deepened on his thin and none-too-happy face.

"I'd rather you'd wait," he said.

"Wait for what?" I demanded.

He moved his head toward the hall end, where I knew the bell swung on its spring.

"But nothing's going to happen," I protested, as I sat watching him stare into the shadows at the back of the house. "Nothing *can* happen!"

"I want you to wait," he said, with a new and more wistful note in his voice. He was still watching the shadowy hall end, but I could see that his stare was not directed toward the bell itself.

"Ryckman," I suddenly asked him, "is there anything in this besides the mere ringing of that bell up there?"

"Yes," he replied, after a pause. But still he did not look at me. I became more conscious of a sense of reservation about the man and everything he had said to me.

"What's the other thing?" I inquired.

His right hand groped behind him, feeling for the chair arm. Having found it, he sank slowly down into its depths.

"It's a woman," he said. And I caught his vague look of abashment, his eye flash of mute protest against possible ridicule, as the strong side light picked out the shadows on his. lean and tragic face.

"You mean you see a woman?" I asked, struggling to make my tone a casual one.

"I tell you, Buchner, I've seen her, as plain as I see that reading lamp. God only knows where she comes from or where she goes! But every line of her face stands out as distinctly as though it had a stage spotlight on it!"

"And you want me to sit up for a thing like that?" I demanded, with a pretense at disgust.

"Yes," he replied quite simply.

iii

I HAD BEEN reading on and off for about an hour when Ryckman got up from his chair and crossed to the fireplace. He put on a fresh log, lighted a cigarette, and stood looking down at me.

"I guess it's no use," he said, with a sigh of weariness.

"Of course it's no use," I told him. "The combination, you see, is broken. According to the recipe, you have to be the last man left in the world—at least, in your world, as you put it. You have to be alone before you can get those things to happen— alone and all ready to let your sense be imposed upon."

He raised a hand and took the cigarette from between his lips. Then he lifted his head a little, as though to answer me. But he did not speak for a moment or two. Instead, he stood staring off into space.

"Oh, my God !" he said in a quick gasp. And, before I had quite realized that he had spoken, the quietness of the house was shattered by a sudden tumult of sound.

It was the bell!

There, on the wall before us, the bell had most unmistakably rung. It clamored out through the quietness with a suddenness that struck on the sense like a mallet blow. And with it it seemed to carry a note of desolation, of vague misery attempting to articulate itself, which sent a tingle arrowing up and down my startled body.

In a moment I was out of my chair, running toward the door. Instead of opening the door, as Ryckman expected me to do, I dropped on my knees before the torn-up floor boards. There I thrust my hand through the opening and firmly grasped the pull wire. I held it tight, so that it could not be moved. But even as I held it motionless the silence was again shattered by that unearthly brazen clamor.

"It will ring again," Ryckman was saying in a voice that sounded as thin as though it had come to me over a long-distance wire.

Neither of us spoke as the third signal sounded and died away. Then I ran to where Ryckman stood, with a scattering of high lights on his moistened forehead. I put my hand on his arm; I think I must have shaken him.

"Can you get me another lamp?" I asked him.

He did not answer me. But in the face staring over my shoulder I could see sudden terror. I could see the lips become flaccid and the eyes alter and widen.

And I knew that behind me was a Something which had entered his line of vision, a Something which it was my duty to face.

I turned slowly about, forlornly struggling to fortify myself for anything with which I might be confronted. Then I leaned forward, with one hand on the chair back, giving vent as I did so to a little challenging call that was as foolish and futile as the squeak of a frightened mouse.

For there, before our eyes, was a figure in white, moving across the shadowy end of the hall. The figure was that of a woman still young.

I stood staring at her face, which seemed rapt and luminous. I could see the delicately chiseled nose and the line of the white cheek that merged into the slender chin. I could see the mouth, with the lips slightly parted. And then I saw something else. It was a trivial thing, but it drove the cold chill out of my legs. That apparition which I had tried to tell myself had been conjured up by overtense nerves and too active imagination had moistened its lips.

Even as I stepped forward I heard Ryckman call out. The next moment the place was filled with the reverberations of a quick report. I saw the vague figure in white wheel halfway round, throw out an arm, and go down on the floor. It was only then that I realized that Ryckman had made use of his rifle, and it was only then that I had the intelligence to clear the space between my chair and the far end of the hall.

"Bring the lamp," I called, "for I rather think you've killed a woman!"

I was down on my knees before a tangle of white cotton drapery, padding foolishly about a warm body which seemed hopelessly enmeshed in its swathings. I was exploring and feeling frantically about, trying to find the bullet wound.

"It's there in her shoulder," said Ryckman, with a choke in his voice. I could hear the lamp shade rattle against its holder in his shaking hand.

I was clumsily but determinedly cutting away the wet sleeve with my pocketknife when the bluest eyes I have ever looked into opened and stared up at me and then suddenly closed again.

"It's here in the arm," I cried out as I got the wet sleeve away. "Fetch me something for a tourniquet, quick!"

He was back with enough linen and lint to outfit a Red Cross camp.

"I'm better at this than you are," he said, as he dropped on his knees and elbowed me aside. "I want you to get a doctor."

"How?" I demanded.

"Can you run a car?" He was busy tightening the tourniquet.

"No!"

"Then you'll have to telephone from the Tishburn Farm. There's a rural line there that connects with Egerton Corners. Take my fur motor coat. And follow the trail until you come to the main road where we turned in."

"And then what?" I asked, as I struggled into the coat.

"The Tishburns will tell you the rest," he said, without looking up, for he was busy making a pillow for the tumble-haired head so close beside him.

"But do you know who this woman is?" I demanded.

"Yes, I do," he retorted.

"Who is she?"

"She's the daughter of the man who built this house."

iv

IT WAS two hours later that the practicing physician of Egerton Corners drove up to the Tishburn farmhouse. He came in a "cutter" that looked about as big as a conch shell, and drove a team of spanking bays. He wore a coonskin hat and a greatcoat of the same outlandish fur, looking like a cross between a submarine monster and an Eskimo in spectacles.

So I duly said good-by to the Tishburns— who had all promptly arisen and dressed and joined me about, their sitting-room "base-burner," waiting, avideyed, for some inkling as to why a doctor should ' be called up at such unseemly hours— and climbed in beside that fur-smothefed practitioner, who further barricaded me beneath a ponderous buffalo robe.

He waved his whip to the cluster of faces peering from the lighted window, touched his bays on their steaming flanks, and chuckled audibly as we swung down into the Lake Road.

"Now I under stand why you gave me the message in Latin," he said from the depths of his furs, nodding back toward the crowded casement.

"It's the sort of thing one has to keep quiet," I explained.

"Naturally," he agreed. "But I'd like a few of the particulars, nevertheless."

I told him, as briefly as I could, what had happened that night. He took it all as a matter of course— that is, with the one exception of Ryckman.

"This man, Ryckman, is a bit eccentric, isn't he?"

I remembered how I had been elbowed aside and dumped out into the night, to say nothing of being brought four hundred miles to hear a bell ring.

"Most eccentric," I admitted, "for one so young."

"I've always thought as much," said the man at my side.

It was my turn to surrender to undue curiosity and put a question to him.

"Who in the world," I "casually inquired, "could that young woman be?"

The fur-clad figure tooled his team in through the broken-down stone gateposts of Pine Brae.

"Oh, that's old Captain Hudson's daughter. She and her brother live in the cottage just beyond the old orchard there."

But he would say nothing more. Ryckman himself, once we were back in the house, was equally reticent of speech. He already seemed to look on me as an outsider, an interloper. When I told him, a little wearily, that I thought I'd be going back with the doctor in the morning, he did not even demur. He merely said it was a nasty flesh wound, but that the patient was doing nicely and they would have a trained nurse there by noon.

"But how about that bell?" I inquired.

He was carrying towels and hot water upstairs to the doctor. He stopped only long enough to regard me with a cold and unsympathetic eye.

"How d'you expect me to talk about bells when I've got a sick woman to look after?" was his quite ungenerous and altogether unsatisfactory answer.

IT WAS NOT until the end of January that I heard from Ryckman. He had been busy, he said, installing his hot water heating system and finishing up his Frohman comedy.

"You will be glad to know," he continued, "that Catherine's arm is quite healed. She asked me to explain to you about the bell.

"They had told her that if the family could retain possession of Pine Brae until over the New Year, their legal claim, in the matter of that disputed title I told you about, would be unassailable. The bell kept ringing because she had a key to the passageway and could step into the cellar and pull the wire overhead when she felt it would do the most good. She's a wonderful girl, Buchner, even though she did try to frighten me out of a perfectly good home and into a psychopathic ward. And it seems only fair to confide to you, remembering the generous part you played in it all, that Catherine and I are to be married the second week in February."

15: Laura Silver Bell

Sheridan Le Fanu

1814-1873

The Belgravia Annual, Christmas 1871

IN THE FIVE Northumbrian counties you will scarcely find so bleak, ugly, and yet, in a savage way, so picturesque a moor as Dardale Moss. The moor itself spreads north, south, east, and west, a great undulating sea of black peat and heath.

What we may term its shores are wooded wildly with birch, hazel, and dwarf-oak. No towering mountains surround it, but here and there you have a rocky knoll rising among the trees, and many a wooded promontory of the same pretty, because utterly wild, forest, running out into its dark level.

Habitations are thinly scattered in this barren territory, and a full mile away from the meanest was the stone cottage of Mother Carke.

Let not my southern reader who associates ideas of comfort with the term 'cottage' mistake. This thing is built of shingle, with low walls. Its thatch is hollow; the peat-smoke curls stingily from its stunted chimney. It is worthy of its savage surroundings.

The primitive neighbours remark that no rowan-tree grows near, nor holly, nor bracken, and no horseshoe is nailed on the door.

Not far from the birches and hazels that straggle about the rude wall of the little enclosure, on the contrary, they say, you may discover the broom and the rag- wort, in which witches mysteriously delight. But this is perhaps a scandal. Mall Carke was for many a year the *sage femme* of this wild domain. She has renounced practice, however, for some years; and now, under the rose, she dabbles, it is thought, in the black art, in which she has always been secretly skilled, tells fortunes, practises charms, and in popular esteem is little better than a witch.

Mother Carke has been away to the town of Willarden, to sell knit stockings, and is returning to her rude dwelling by Dardale Moss. To her right, as far away as the eye can reach, the moor stretches. The narrow track she has followed here tops a gentle upland, and at her left a sort of jungle of dwarf-oak and brushwood approaches its edge. The sun is sinking blood-red in the west. His disk has touched the broad black level of the moor, and his parting beams glare athwart the gaunt figure of the old beldame, as she strides homeward stick in hand, and bring into relief the folds of her mantle, which gleam like the draperies of a bronze image in the light of a fire. For a few moments this light floods the air— tree, gorse, rock, and bracken glare; and then it is out, and gray twilight over everything.

All is still and sombre. At this hour the simple traffic of the thinly-peopled country is over, and nothing can be more solitary.

From this jungle, nevertheless, through which the mists of evening are already creeping, she sees a gigantic man approaching her.

In that poor and primitive country robbery is a crime unknown. She, therefore, has no fears for her pound of tea, and pint of gin, and sixteen shillings i in silver which she is bringing home in her pocket. But there is something that would have frighted another woman about this man.

He is gaunt, sombre, bony, dirty, and dressed in a black suit which a beggar would hardly care to pick out of the dust.

This ill-looking man nodded to her as he stepped on the road.

'I don't know you,' she said.

He nodded again.

'I never sid ye neyawheere,' she exclaimed sternly,

'Fine evening, Mother Carke,' he says, and holds his snuff-box toward her.

She widened the distance between them by a step or so, and said again sternly and pale,

'I hev nowt to say to thee, whoeer thou beest.'

'You know Laura Silver Bell?

'That's a by-neyam; the lass's neyam is Laura Lew,' she answered, looking straight before her.

'One name's as good as another for one that was never christened, mother.'

'How know ye that? she asked grimly; for it is a received opinion in that part of the world that the fairies have power over those who have never been baptised.

The stranger turned on her a malignant smile.

'There is a young lord in love with her,' the stranger says, 'and I'm that lord. Have her at your house to-morrow night at eight o'clock, and you must stick cross pins through the candle, as you have done for many a one before, to bring her lover thither by ten, and her fortune's made. And take this for your trouble.'

He extended his long finger and thumb toward her, with a guinea temptingly displayed.

'I have nowt to do wi' thee. I nivver sid thee afoore. Git thee awa'! J earned nea goold o' thee, and I'll tak' nane. Awa' wi' thee, or I'll find ane that will mak' thee!'

The old woman had stopped, and was quivering in every limb as she thus spoke.

He looked very angry. Sulkily he turned away at her words, and strode slowly toward the wood from which he had come; and as he approached it, he seemed to her to grow taller and taller, and stalked into it as high as a tree.

'I conceited there would come something o't,' she said to herself. 'Farmer Lew must git it done nesht Sunda', The a'ad awpy!?

Old Farmer Lew was one of that sect who insist that baptism shall be but once administered, and not until ithe Christian candidate had attained to adult years. The girl had indeed for some time been of an age not only, according to this theory, to be baptised, but if need be to be married.

Her story was a sad little romance. A lady some seventeen years before had come down and paid Farmer Lew for two rooms in his house. She told him that her husband would follow her in a fortnight, and that he was in the mean time delayed by business in Liverpool.

In ten days after her arrival her baby was born, Mall Carke acting as *sage femme* on the occasion; and on the evening of that day the poor young mother died. No husband came; no wedding-ring, they said, was on her finger. About fifty pounds was found in her desk, which Farmer Lew, who was a kind old fellow and had lost his two children, put in bank for the little girl, and resolved to keep her until a rightful owner should step forward to claim her.

They found half-a-dozen love-letters signed 'Francis,' and calling the dead woman 'Laura.'

So Farmer Lew called the little girl Laura; and her sobriquet of 'Silver Bell' was derived from a tiny silver bell, once gilt, which was found among her poor mother's little tregsures after her death, and which the child wore on a ribbon round her neck.

Thus, being very pretty and merry, she grew up as a North-country farmer's daughter; and the old man, as she needed more looking after, grew older and less able to take care of her; so she was, in fact, very nearly ther own mistress, and did pretty much in all things as she liked.

Old Mall Carke, by some caprice for which no one could account, cherished an affection for the girl, who saw her often, and paid her many a small fee in exchange for secret indications of the future.

It was too late when Mother 'Carke reached her home to look for a visit from Laura Silver Bell that day.

About three o'clock next afternoon, Mother Carke was sitting knitting, with her glasses on, outside her door on the stone bench, when she saw the pretty girl mount lightly to the top of the stile at her left under the birch, against the silver stem of which she leaned her slender hand, and called,

'Mall, Mall! Mother Carke, are ye alane all by yersel'?'

'Ay, Laura lass, we can be clooas enoo, if ye want a word wi' me,' says the old woman, rising, with a mysterious nod, and beckoning her stitily with her long fingers.

The girl was, assuredly, pretty enough for a 'lord' to fall in love with. Only look at her. A profusion of brown rippling hair, parted low in the middle of her forehead, almost touched her eyebrows, and made the pretty oval of her face, by the breadth of that rich line, more marked. What a pretty little nose ! what scarlet lips, aud large, dark, long-fringed eyes !

Her face is transparently tinged with those clear Murillo tints which appear in deeper dyes on her wrists and the backs of her hands. These are the beautiful gipsy-tints with which the sun dyes young skins so richly.

The old woman eyes all this, and her pretty figure, so round and slender, and her shapely little feet, eased in the thick shoes that can't hide their comely proportions, as she stands on the top of the stile. But it is with a dark and saturnine aspect.

'Come, lass, what stand ye for atoppa t' wall, whar folk may chance to see thee? I hev a thing to tell thee, lass.'

She beckoned her again.

'An' I hev a thing to tell thee, Mall.'

'Come hidder,' said the old woman peremptorily.

'But ye munna gie me the creepin's' (make me tremble). 'I winna look again into the glass o' water, mind ye.'

The old woman smiled grimly, and changed her tone.

'Now, hunny, git tha down, and let ma see thy canny feyace,' and she beckoned her again.

Laura Silver Bell did get down, and stepped lightly toward the door of the old woman's dwelling.

'Tak this,' said the girl, unfolding a piece of bacon from her apron, ' and Thev a silver sixpence to gie thee, when I'm gaen away heyam.'

They entered the dark kitchen o the cottage, and the old woman stood by the door, lest their conference should be lighted on by surprise.

'Afoore ye begin,' said Mother Carke (I soften her patois), 'I mun tell ye there's ill folk watchin' ye. What's auld Farmer Lew about, he doesna get t' sir' (the clergyman) 'to baptise thee? If he lets Sunda' next pass, I'm afeared ye'll never: be sprinkled nor signed wi' cross, while there's a sky aboon us.'

'Agoy!' exclaims the girl, 'who's lookin' after me?'

'A big black fella, as high as the kipples, came out o' the wood near Deadman's Grike, just after the sun gaed down yester e'en; I knew weel what he was, for his feet ne'er touched the road while he made as if he walked beside me. And he wanted to gie me snuff first, and I wouldna hev that; and

then he offered me a gowden guinea, but I was no sic awpy, and to bring you here to-night, and cross the candle wi' pins, to call your lover in. And he said he's a great lord, and in luve wi' thee.'

'And you refused him?'

'Well for thee I did, lass,' says Mother Carke.

'Why, it's every word true!' cries the girl vehemently, starting to her feet, for she had seated herself on the great oak chest.

'True, lass? Come, say what ye mean,' demanded Mall Carke, with a dark and searching gaze.

'Last night I was coming heyam from the wake, wi' auld farmer Dykes and his wife and his daughter Nell, and when we came to the stile, I bid them good-night, and we parted.'

'And ye came by the path alone in the night-time, did ye?' exclaimed old Mall Carke sternly.

'I wasna afeared, I don't know why; the path heyam leads down by the wa'as o' auld Hawarth Castle.'

'I knaa it weel, and a dowly path it is; ye'll keep indoors o' nights for a while, or ye'll rue it. What saw ye?

'No freetin, mother; nowt I was feared on.'

'Ye heard a voice callin' yer neyame?'

'I heard nowt that was dow, but the hullyhoo in the auld castle wa's,' answered the pretty girl, 'I heard nor sid nowt that's dow, but mickle that's conny and gladsome. I heard singin' and laughin' a long way off, I consaited; and I stopped a bit to listen. Then I walked on a step or two, and there, sure enough, in the Pie-Mag field, under the castle was, not twenty steps away, I sid a grand company; silks and satins, and men wi' velvet coats, wi' gowd-lace striped over them, and ladies wi' necklaces that would dazzle ye, and fans as big as griddles; and powdered footmen, like what the shirra hed behind his coach, only these was ten times as grand.'

'It was full moon last night,' said the old woman.

'Sa bright 'twould blind ye to look at it,' said the girl.

'Never an ill sight but the deaul finds a light,' quoth the old woman. 'There's a rinnin brook thar— you were at this side, and they at that; did they try to mak ye cross over?'

'Agoy! didn't they? Nowt but civility and kindness, though. But ye mun let me tell it my own way. They was talkin' and laughin', and eatin', and drinkin' out o' long glasses and goud cups, seated on the grass, and music was playin'; and I keekin' behind a bush at all the grand doin's; and up they gits to dance; and says a tall fella I didna see afoore, "Ye mun step across, and dance wi' a young lord that's faan in luv wi' thee, and that's mysel';" and sure enow I

keeked at him under my lashes, and a conny lad he is, to my teyaste, though he be dressed in black, wi' sword and sash, velvet twice as fine as they sells in the shop at Gouden Friars; and keekin' at me again fra the corners o' his een. And the same fella telt me he was mad in luv wi' me, and his fadder was there, and his sister, and they came all the way from Catstean Castle to see me that night; and that's t'other side o' Gouden Friars.'

'Come, lass, yer no mafflin; tell me true. What was he like? Was his feyace grimed wi' sut? a tall fella wi' wide shouthers, and lukt like an ill-thing, wi' black clothes amaist in rags?

'His feyace was long, but weel-faured, and darker nor a gipsy; and his clothes were black and grand, and made o' velvet, and he said he was the young lord himsel'; and he lukt like it.'

'That will be the same fella I sid at Deadman's Grike,' said Mall Carke, with an anxious frown.

'Hoot, mudder! how cud that be?' cried the lass, with a toss of her pretty head and a smile of scorn.

But the fortune-teller made no answer, and the girl went on with her story.

'When they began to dance,' continued Laura Silver Bell, 'he urged me again, but I wudna step o'er; 'twas partly pride, coz I wasna dressed fine enough, and partly contrairiness, or something, but gaa I wudna, not a fat. No but I more nor half wished it a' the time.'

'Weel for thee thou dudstna cross the brook.'

'Hoity-toity, why not?'

'Keep at heyame after nightfall, and don't ye be walking by yersel' by daylight or any light lang lonesome ways, till after ye're baptised,' said Mall Carke.

'I'm like to be married first.'

'Tak care that marriage won't hang i' the bell-ropes,' said Mother Carke.

'Leave me alane for that. The young lord said he was maist daft wi' luv o' me. He wanted to gie me a conny ring wi' a beautiful stone in it. But, drat it, I was sic an awpy I wudna tak it, and he a young lord!'

'Lord, indeed! are ye daft or dreamin'? Those fine folk, what were they? I'll tell ye. Dobies and fairies; and if ye don't du as yer bid, they'll tak ye, and ye'll never git out o' their hands again while grass grows,' said the old woman grimly.

"Od wite it!' replies the girl impatiently, 'who's daft or dreamin' noo? I'd a bin dead wi' fear, if 'twas any such thing. It cudna be; all was sa luvesome, and bonny, and shaply.'

' Weel, and what do ye want o' me, lass?' asked the old woman sharply.

'I want to know— here's t' sixpence— what I sud du,' said the young lass. ' 'Twud be a pity to lose such a marrow, hey?'

'Say yer prayers, lass; *I* can't help ye,' says the old woman darkly. 'If ye gaa wi' the people, ye'll never come back. Ye munna talk wi' them, nor eat wi' them, nor drink wi' them, nor tak a pin's-worth by way o' gift fra them— mark weel what I say— or ye're *lost!*' .

The girl looked down, plainly much vexed,

The old woman stared at her with a mysterious frown steadily, for a few seconds.

'Tell me, lass, and tell me true, are ye in luve wi' that lad?'

'What for sud I?' said the girl with a careless toss of her head, and blushing up to her very temples.

'I see how it is,' said the old woman, with a groan, and repeated the words, sadly thinking; and walked out of the door a step or two, and looked jealously round. 'The lass is witched, the lass is witched !'

'Did ye see him since?' asked Mother Carke, returning.

The girl was still embarrassed; and now she spoke in a lower tonv, and seemed subdued.

'I thought I sid him as I came here, walkin' beside me among the trees; but I consait it was only the trees themsels that lukt like rinnin' one behind another, as I walked on.'

'I can tell thee nowt, lass, but what I telt ye afoore,' answered the old woman peremptorily. 'Get ye heyame, and don't delay on the way; and say yer prayers as ye gaa; and let none but good thoughts come nigh ye; and put nayer foot autside the door-steyan again till ye gaa to be christened; and get that done a Sunda' next.'

And with this charge, given with grizzly earnestness, she saw her over the stile, and stood upon it watching her retreat, until the trees quite hid her and her path from view.

The sky grew cloudy and thunderous, and the air darkened rapidly, as the girl, a little frightened by Mall Carke's view of the case, walked homeward by the lonely path among the trees.

A black cat, which had walked close by her— for these creatures sometimes take a ramble in search of their prey among the woods and thickets— crept from under the hollow of an oak, and was again with her. It seemed to her to grow bigger and bigger as the darkness deepened, and its green eyes glared as large as halfpennies in her affrighted vision as the thunder came booming along the heights from the Willarden-road.

She tried to drive it away; but it growled and hissed awfully, and set up its back as if it would spring at her, and finally it skipped up into a tree, where

they grew thickest at each side of her path, and accompanied her, high over head, hopping from bough to bough as if meditating a pounce upon her shoulders. Her fancy being full of strange thoughts, she was frightened, and she fancied that it was haunting hersteps, and destined to undergo some hideous transformation, the moment she ceased to guard her path with prayers.

She was frightened for a while after she got home. The dark looks of Mother Carke were always before her eyes, and a secret dread prevented her passing the threshold of her home again that night.

Next day it was different. She had got rid of the awe with which Mother Carke had inspired her, She could not get the tall darkfeatured lord, in the black velvet dress, out of her head. He had 'taken her fancy ;' she was growing tolovehim. She could think of nothing else.

Bessie Hennock, a neighbour's daughter, came to see her that day, and proposed a walk toward the ruins of Hawarth Castle, to gather 'blaebirries.' So off the two girls went together.

In the thicket, along the slopes near the ivied walls of Hawarth Castle, the companions began to fill their baskets. Hours passed. The sun was sinking near the west, and Laura Silver Bell had not come home.

Over the hatch of the farm-house door the maids leant ever and anon with outstretched necks, watching for a sign of the girl's return, and wondering, as the shadows lengthened, what had become of her.

At last, just as the rosy sunset gilding began to overspread the landscape, Bessie Hennock, weeping into her apron, made her appearance without her companion.

Her account of thelr adventures was curious.

I will relate the substance of it more connectedly than her agitation would allow her to give it, and without the disguise of the rude Northumbrian dialect.

The girl said, that, as they got along together among the brambles that grow beside the brook that bounds the Pie-Mag field, she on. a sudden saw a very tall big-boned man, with an ill-favoured smirched face, and dressed in worn and rusty black, standing at the othet side of the little stream. She, was frightened; and while looking at this dirty, wicked, starved figure, Laura Silver Bell touched her, gazing at the same tall scarecrow, but with a countenance full of confusion and even rapture. She was peeping through the bush behind which she stood, and with a sigh she said:

'Is na that a conny lad? Agoy! See his bonny velvet clothes, his sword and sash; that's a lord, I can tell ye; and.weel I know who he follows, who he luves, and'who he'll wed.'

Bessie Hennock thought her companion daft.

'See how luvesome he luks!' whispered Laura.

Bessie looked again, and saw him gazing at her companion with a malignant smile, and at the same time. he beekoned her to approach.

'Darrat ta! gaa not near him! he'll wring thy neck!' gasped Bessie in great fear, as she saw Laura step forward, with a look of beautiful bashfulness and joy.

She took the hand he stretched across the stream, more for love of the hand than any need of help, and in a moment was across and by his side, and his long arm about her waist.

'Fares te weel, Bessie, I'm gain my ways,' she called, leaning her head to his shoulder; 'and tell gud-Fadder Lew I'm gain my ways to be happy, and may be, at lang last, I'll see him again.'

And with a farewell wave of her hand, she went away with her dismal partner; and Laura Silver Bell was never more seen at home, or among the 'coppies' and ' wickwoods,' the bonny fields and bosky hollows, by Dardale Moss.

Bessie Hennock followed them for a time.

She crossed the brook, and though they seemed to move slowly enough, she was obliged to run to keep them in view; and she all the time cried to her continually, 'Come back, come back, bonnie Laurie!' until, getting over a bank, she was met by a whitefaced old man, and so frightened was she, that she thought she fainted outright. At all events, she did not come to herself until the birds were singing their vespers in the amber light of sunset, and the day was over.

No trace of the direction of the girl's flight was ever discovered.

Weeks and months passed, and more than a year.

At the end of that time, one of Mall Carke's goats died, as she suspected, by the envious practices of a rival witch who lived at the far end of Dardale Moss.

All alone in her stone cabin the old woman had prepared her charm to ascertain the author of her misfortune.

The heart of the dead animal, stuck all over with pins, was burnt in the fire; the windows, doors, and every other aperture of the house being first carefully stopped. After the heart, thus prepared with suitable incantations, is consumed in the fire, the first person who comes to the door or passes it by is the offending magician.

Mother Carke completed these lonely rites at dead of night. It was a dark night, with the "glimmer of the stars only, and a melancholy night-wind was soughing through the scattered woods that spread around.

After a long and dead silence, there came a heavy thump at the door, and a deep voice called her by name.

She was startled, for she expected no man's voice; and peeping from the window, she saw, in the dim light, a coach and four horses, with goldlaced footmen, and coachman in wig and cocked hat, turned out as if for a state occasion.

She unbarred the door; and a tall gentleman, dressed in black, waiting at the threshold, entreated her, as the only *sage femme* within reach, to come in the coach and attend Lady Lairdale, who was about to give birth to a baby, promising her handsome payment.

Lady Lairdale! She had never heard of her.

'How far away is it?'

'Twelve miles on the old road to Golden Friars.'

Her avarice is roused, and she steps into the coach. The feotman claps-to the door; the glass jingles with the sound of a laugh. The tall dark-faced gentleman in black is seated opposite; they are driving at a furious pace; they have turned out of the road into a narrower one, dark with thicker and loftier forest than she was accustomed to. She grows anxious; for she kuows every road and by-path in the country round, and she has never seen this one.

He encourages her. The moon has risen above the edge of the horizon, and she sees a noble old castle. Its summit of tower, watch-tower and battlement, glimmers faintly in the moonlight. This is their destination.

She feels on a sudden all but overpowered by sleep; but although she nods, she is quite conscious of the continued motion, which has become even rougher.

She makes an effort, and rouses herself. What has become of the coach, the castle, the servants? Nothing but the strange forest remains the same.

She is jolting along on a rude hurdle, seated on rushes, and a tall, big-boned man, in rags, sits in front, kicking with his heel the ill-favoured beast that pulls them along, every bone of which sticks out, and holding the halter which serves for reins. They stop at the door of a miserable building of loose stone, with a thatch so sunk and rotten, that the rooftree and couples protrude in crooked corners, like the bones of the wretched horse, with enormous head and ears, that dragged them to the door.

The long gaunt man gets down, his sinister face grimed like his hands.

It was the same grimy giant who had accosted her on the lonely road near Deadman's Grike. But she feels that she 'must go through with it' now, and she follows him into the house.

Two rushlights were burning in the large and miserable room, and on a coarse ragged bed lay a woman groaning piteously,

'That's Lady Lairdale,' says the gaunt dark man, who then began to stride up and down the room, rolling his head, stamping furiously, and thumping one hand on the palm of the other, and talking and laughing in the corners, where there was no one visible to hear or to answer.

Old Mall Carke recognised in the faded half-starved creature who lay on the bed, as dark now and grimy as the man, and looking as if she had never in her life washed hands or face, the once blithe and pretty Laura Lew.

The hideous being who was her mate continued in the same odd fluctuations of fury, grief, and merriment ; and whenever she uttered a groan, he parodied it with another, as Mother Carke thought, in saturnine derision.

At length he strode into another room, and banged the door after him.

In due time the poor woman's pains were over, and a daughter was born.

Such an imp! with long pointed ears, flat nose, and enormous restless eyes and mouth. It instantly began to yell and talk in some unknown language, at the noise of which the father looked into the room, and told the *sage femme* that she should not go unrewarded.

The sick woman seized the moment of his absence to say in the ear of Mall Carke:

'If ye had not been at ill work tonight, he could not hev fetched ye. Tak no more now than your rightful fee, or he'll keep ye here.'

At this moment he returned with a bag of gold and silver coins, which he emptied on the table, and told her to help herself.

She took four shillings, which was her primitive fee, neither more nor less; and all his urgency could not prevail with her to take a farthing more. He looked so terrible at her refusal, that she rushed out of the house.

He ran after her.

'You'll take your money with you,' he roared, snatching up the bag, still half full, and flung it after her.

It lighted on her shoulder; and partly from the blow, partly from terror, she fell to the ground; and when she came to herself, it was morning, and she was lying across her own door-stone.

It is said that she never more told fortune or practised spell. And though all that happened sixty years ago and more, Laura Silver Bell, wise folk think, is still living, and will so continue till the day of doom among the fairies.