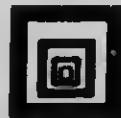


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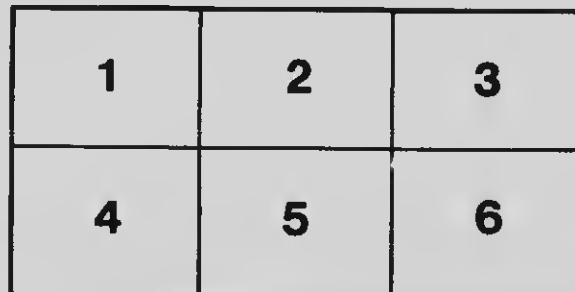
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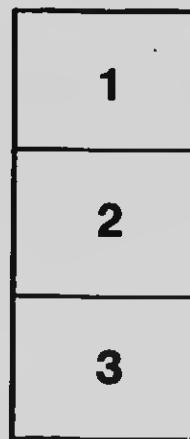
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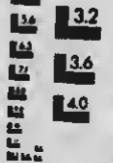
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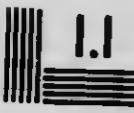
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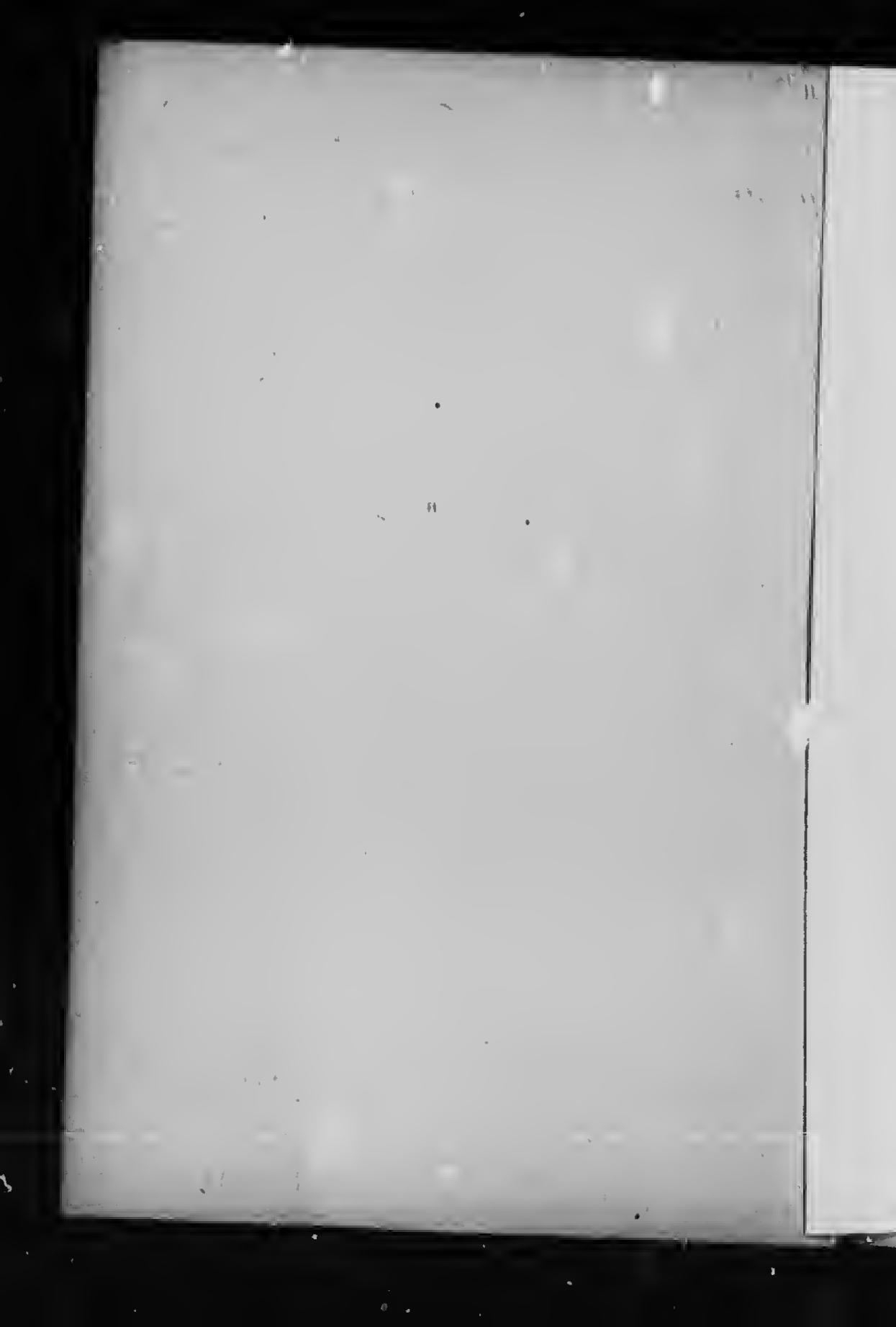


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"LOVE IS THE GREATEST OF ALL, DAN."—*Page 428.*

THE RUGGED WAY

BY

HAROLD MORTON KRAMER

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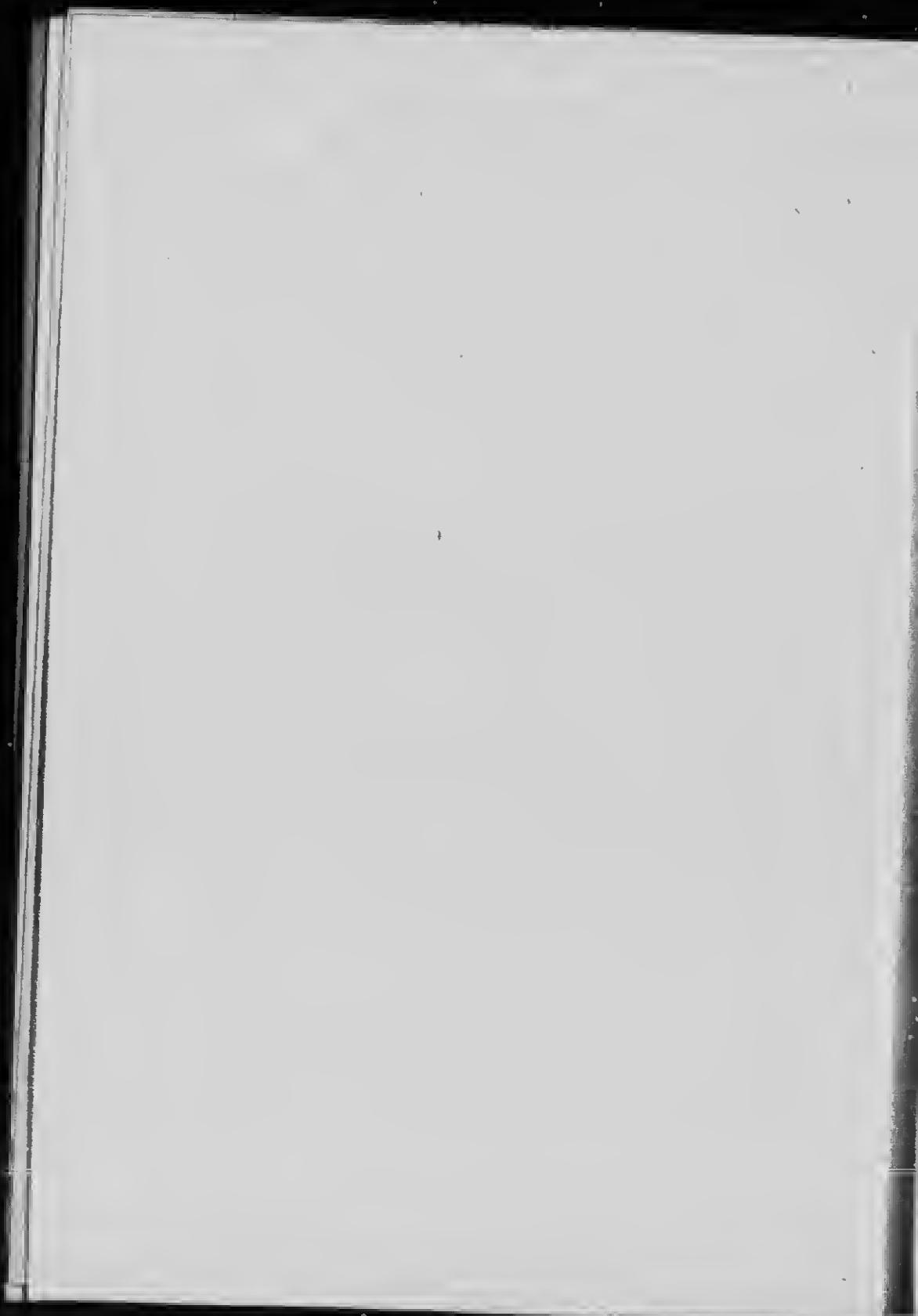
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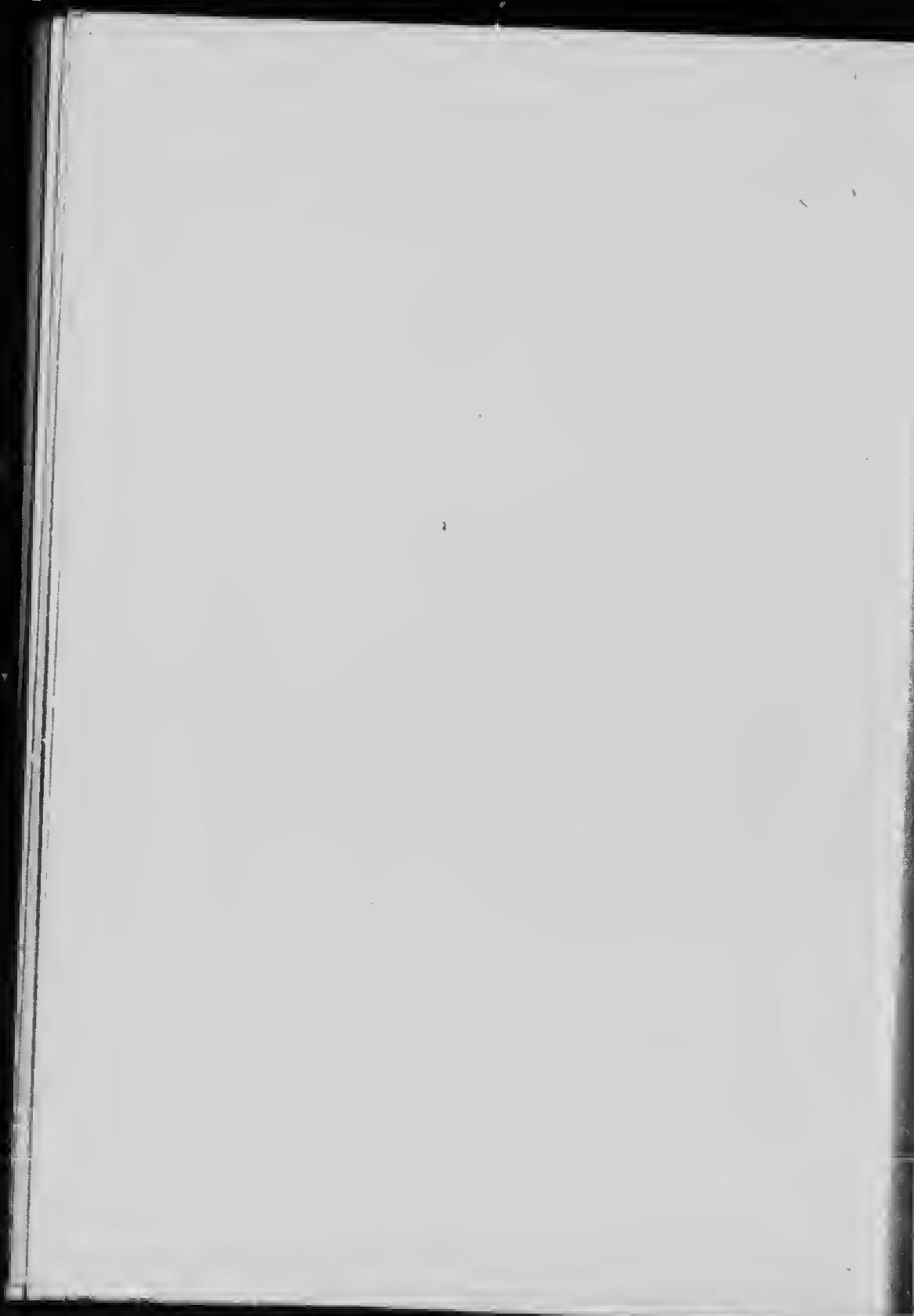
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"Badness, look you, you may choose easily in a heap; level is the path, and right near it dwells. But before Virtue the immortal gods have put the sweat of man's brow; and long and steep is the way to it, and rugged at the first."—HESIOD: *Works and Days.*



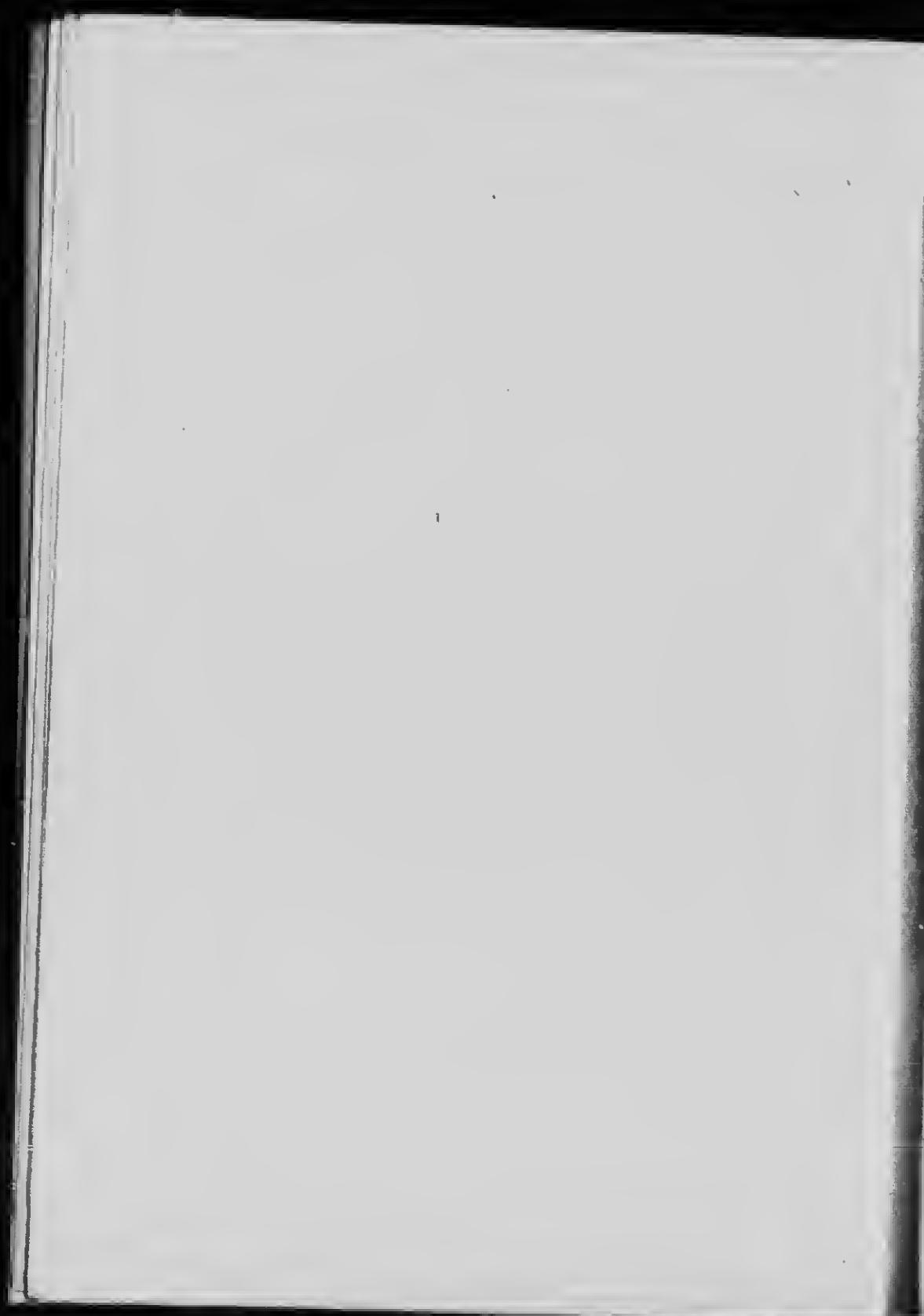
CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGE
I. RAINBOW TINTS	I
II. "HIS BONNET'S SAXON GREEN"	16
III. "THE SENATE NEXT"	30
IV. INTO THE PIT	51
V. A ROYAL HUSSAR	74
VI. THE ULTIMATUM	92
VII. THE WAY OF THE WORLD	108
VIII. LEARNING THE TRUTH	119
IX. "HE'S MY BROTHER"	137
X. ENTER DAN GRAHAM	154
XI. NOTIONS AND DAGGERS	165
XII. A HINT OF REVOLUTION	177
XIII. A QUESTION OF QUEENS	201
XIV. THE BANQUET	220
XV. THE WITCHES' GORGE	237
XVI. BENEATH THE CRAGS	252
XVII. TUTORING A SENATOR	265
XVIII. A NEW HORIZON	287
XIX. THE QUICKENING	301
XX. THE PLAY BEGINS	314
XXI. THE PLAY ENDS	332
XXII. A NEW SENTINEL	348
XXIII. A MIDNIGHT AFFAIR	362
XXIV. ON THE LAKE	377
XXV. A CRIMSON PORTENT	389
XXVI. "NOTHING COUNTS"	404
XXVII. "INTO THE NEW LIFE"	418



ILLUSTRATIONS

"Love is the greatest of all, Dan" (page 428)	<i>Frontispiece</i>
"Father!" he gasped, "Father!"	PACING PAGE 72
"I saw the face—of the dead!"	244
"You'll have time to think before you can load it again"	312



THE RUGGED WAY

CHAPTER I

RAINBOW TINTS

THE music of the orchestra seemed a part of the sweetness and glory of the June night. Rising in crescendo, fading into softest, faintest strains, the melody found its way into every rose-bowered nook of the McLeedy grounds, and, again, there were moments when it blended in a bewitching way with the plashing of the fountains of the lily pond. Myriads of Japanese lanterns that concealed electric lights illumined in a gay but softened manner the promenades, and gave their charm to the recesses among the trees.

Throngs of men and women in evening dress had been arriving in chugging, brilliant-eyed auto cars, and in noiseless-wheeled carriages drawn by thoroughbreds seemingly proud of

the silver-tipped harnesses that flashed in the cluster of lights at the great, arched gateway guarded by two stalwart servants in the McLeedy livery. And then up the broad, palm-bordered walk the arrivals passed to the quaint old mansion that had been the home of the McLeedys since the great-grandfather of Andrew McLeedy, the present master of the estate, had erected it a century before when he came from Scotland and chose the site as his first home in the new America.

On the great veranda that protected the front of the house the guests were greeted by Andrew McLeedy, his wife, and his daughter, Miss Ethel McLeedy, and then, after the customary few moments of commonplaces, the newcomers would be swallowed up in the gay throngs beneath the trees, while others passed the sentinels at the gateway and came hurrying up the palm-way to give their hands to the receiving party.

And through it all, above the ripples of laughter, the bursts of song, the music from a rose-screened balcony on the second floor of the mansion challenged, whispered, and pleaded.

Suddenly a hush came over the group surrounding the McLeedys, and then there was a

ripple of whispers and an unsuccessfully concealed craning of bejeweled and high-collared necks as a tall, broad-shouldered young man came on the veranda and made his way to the trio through a lane that opened before him and closed behind him as though he were the bearer of some strange talisman whose potency none questioned. A bit of a flush showed in his cheeks, but if it marked embarrassment it did not further betray itself and gave no hindrance to the careless grace of his movements as he made his way to the McLeedys, whose eyes were upon him from the moment he left the shelter of the palms and ascended the broad steps.

Andrew McLeedy took a step forward with outstretched hand. He was a man of fifty years, with iron-gray hair that was somewhat scant, but that added something of dignity to the rather hard features of the face beneath, a face showing no trace of the finer sensibilities, but which had, plainly stamped upon it, arrogance, iron will, and a cold selfishness. As much of a smile as he ever permitted himself now lighted up his face in a measure.

"Welcome, Dan!" he exclaimed.

The handclasp was hearty enough, but there

was that in his eyes which did not add warmth to the greeting.

"I am late, I know," responded the newcomer, turning to bow over the hand of Mrs. McLeedy, "but business—"

"It is long after nine," suggested Mrs. McLeedy, with a smile as cold as the diamonds she wore.

"But business will not be denied even on such evenings as this," continued the young man. "I know you will forgive me, Ethel, will you not?" he asked, taking the girl's hand in both of his as he reached her side.

"Am I always to be forgiving you, Dan Bevis?" she asked, with mock severity. Her words had a petulant note that did not escape him, familiar as he was with her whims and ways. "I feared that it was to be the old mockery of 'Hamlet without Hamlet.' The guests have been inquiring for you."

He laughed gayly.

"Did you tell them I was busy trying to earn a living for my bride-to-be?"

"Earn a living!" exclaimed Mrs. McLeedy, fumbling her jeweled lorgnette. "Really, Mr. Bevis, your humor is beyond my grasp."

"Was that humor?" he asked, laughing. "It

RAINBOW TINTS

5

isn't often that one finds humor in earning a living, my dear Mrs. McLeedy."

"Dan!" Ethel spoke crisply.

"Pardon me again," he said, bowing to Mrs. McLeedy. "Let me be foolish, though, just for to-night, will you not? To-night the world is to know of my honor, that you and Mr. McLeedy have given to me your daughter, and—"

"You're hurting my fingers. They'll be frightfully red the rest of the evening."

He looked down at the small hand, white as an apple blossom, that he was gripping.

"Poor little girl," he murmured. "A man is always a fool on an occasion like this, and if I'm a greater fool than the others it's because I have won a greater prize than they have. At what hour is the announcement to be made? Can't we hurry it up?"

"Please don't make a scene, Dan."

But there was a pleased light in the girl's eyes as she spoke this time, and the habitual hauteur of her manner softened as she let her gaze take in the athletic manhood that was standing before her in a glorious strength, praising her and rejoicing that she was to be his wife. His was a vigor and a strength

which not even the ridiculous clothes that tyrant Fashion prescribes for evening could disguise. And into Ethel McLeedy's consciousness there came the remembrance that in that great city, where Dan Bevis was the head of one of the greatest banking concerns in the State, any one of a hundred maidens whose wealth and family equaled and whose beauty undoubtedly excelled hers, would have counted herself fortunate had Dan Bevis paid court to her.

Sometimes she asked herself if this fact were not the principal reason for her answer when he had asked her to become his wife. Not that she loved any one else, but rather because she was not likely ever to love any one, except in a perfunctory, formal fashion. But now as he stood before her, his face glowing, his eyes showing the smoldering flames of his perfect health and strength, with the soft lights, the gay faces about her, and the measured cadences of the music wooing her, there was a quickening of her pulse, and an unusual tint of color came into her cheeks, and something whispered in her soul; a new voice was crying its message throughout her being.

"Make a scene?" he echoed. "I'm going

RAINBOW TINTS

7

right up to the balcony this moment and make the proclamation."

The music swelled into crescendo, and the violins could be heard sobbing the "Ave Maria" from "Cavalleria Rusticana." The gay ripple of voices from the lawn stilled for a moment under the chastening melody of the intermezzo. Then out under the trees a girl's voice was heard singing with the orchestra, and almost instantly a score of others caught up the words:

"Life, ah! it is so dreary,
My heart it is so weary,
Ah, leave me not alone!"

The south wind freshened for a moment and the gayly-colored lanterns danced fantastically under its caress, and with the breeze came the fragrance of roses and the breath of the great geranium beds.

"O Mother, hear me where thou art,
And guard and guide my aching heart,
My aching heart!"

Andrew McLeedy frowned and signaled a passing servant.

"Go to the leader and tell him to cut that

out!" he commanded. "These people will be saying prayers in a few minutes."

Dan Bevis turned to join a group of men who came forward to greet him.

"Tut, tut! Don't dare even whisper anything in the way of congratulations yet," he laughed, as one put an arm on his shoulder and began to refer to the purpose of the party. "It's supposed to be a profound secret until the climax of to-night's affair—and ladies don't relish having their secrets interfered with, you know."

"No, that's half of a girl's fun in being engaged—the privilege of thinking that she has a sweet secret which she wishes to divulge in her own way."

The speaker reached for Bevis's hand and shook it warmly. He was a man of sixty years, with mustache and closely cropped beard snow white; a trifle above medium height, he carried himself with soldierly erectness, and there was that in his face and manner that inspired confidence.

"Why, Colonel Jordan! I am surprised to see you here. I thought you were still in Berlin!"

A slight shadow swept across the other's face.

"Business, Dan—business. A cablegram brought me home a few weeks sooner than I had planned for. Hilda had expected to return with me, but she could not come at this time. She has been asked to play in the midsummer recital the Conservatory is to give soon, and a music student cannot afford to ignore the honor—pardon my pride—the honor of such an invitation."

"Hilda? Oh, yes—your daughter. I never have met her, and I forgot for the moment that she had been studying abroad."

The little group of men had gradually drifted to one of the nooks of the veranda. The Colonel nodded and for a few breaths stood staring at the glowing coal on his cigar.

"Of course—of course," he responded, slowly. "One can't know everybody, and when a young man like you suddenly has thrust upon him the direction of a great financial institution, as you have had, one cannot always be remembering such incidents as a girl's music studies—even if I have mentioned it to you whenever we have met." There was a general laugh at this acknowledgment of an old man's hobby of pride. "I hadn't seen her for a year, myself," he added. "And how like her mother

she has become! I suppose she always has been so—but I never noticed it so much before. She is fair, like her mother, and it warmed my old heart to see that she is a Virginian, sir, in every instinct."

He drew himself up proudly, and Bevis humored him in what he knew to be the Colonel's greatest weakness, his pride of birth.

"Your native State, I believe," he suggested. The Colonel bowed.

"And Hilda's, too," he added. "She's game, sir,—game to the last drop of her blood. Why, she has been my staff since her mother died five years ago." He turned and looked out over the grounds, but those beside him knew that he saw nothing of the McLeedy estate, and they stood silent, respecting that which for the moment was mastering him. Then he faced the group again. "Dan," he said, abruptly. "We have inveigled you away from Ethel's side for a political conference."

"What is it? The same thing that was proposed before?"

Dan thrust his hands deep into his pockets and looked from one to the other. Half unconsciously the men glanced toward one of their number, a small, shrewd-faced man who

wore eyeglasses perched far down on his nose, and who looked over them oftener than through them. He was bald and had a curious habit of gently rubbing one palm over the bald spot when deeply in earnest. This was Sant Reagan, the State chairman, and a recognized power in politics.

"Yes, the same thing—Congress," answered Reagan, taking the cue that the time had come for him to act as spokesman. "Now, wait a moment—" as Bevis was about to speak—"we need a Moses up here in this district, and there's no one else in the bulrushes." He smiled dryly.

"I thought that I had answered the question for all time," said Bevis.

"Some questions refuse to stay answered." Colonel Jordan put his arm on the young man's shoulder. "The Governor expected to be present at this happy affair to-night. He was detained, but—"

"I know—Mr. McLeedy showed me the telegram this afternoon," replied Bevis.

"But he may get here on a late train even yet," continued the Colonel. "And he's coming especially to try to make you see your duty in this matter."

Bevis hesitated a moment and then motioned to chairs.

"I don't deny that it is an honor," he said, seating himself, "and you know I like politics—because there's so much of chance in it, I suppose." He smiled a little, but no one caught the significance of his words. "At the same time, my business—"

"There's the keynote of this campaign!" exclaimed Reagan. "Business! This country needs men of business sense in Congress now as never before. Sentiment and pipe dreams have played the devil with things until the business of the country is threatened with paralysis. You know that!"

He paused and looked at Bevis, who nodded.
"Yes—that's true," Dan admitted.

"And the country knows it's true," said the State chairman. "And especially does this State know that it's true. We've had control of this State for a good many years, but our hold is slipping mighty fast, I can tell you. We've got to make good with our ticket all over the State in the next campaign or we lose. It's no time to try to hand something to the pie-men—it's time to deliver the goods to the voters!"

There was a suppressed chorus of "That's right!" "That's the truth!" and Reagan rubbed his palm over his head as he paused to let his words have their effect. Bevis toyed with an unlighted cigar a moment in silence.

"And you fellows think—." He hesitated.

"That Dan Bevis is 'the goods' in this district—yes!"

Another moment of toying with the unlighted cigar. A straight line between Bevis's brows told its story. More than half inclined to yield to the alluring plea, he was inwardly considering some other phases of the problem.

"I don't know," he said. "I don't know. It doesn't seem to me that this is just the occasion for the discussion of such a matter." He laughed with the blitheness that was one of the secrets of his popularity, and flung up his arms toward the moon that now was visible above the treetops. "I am not supposed to be of the earth earthy to-night, you know."

"I appreciate your sentiments, sir," replied Colonel Jordan. "On an occasion of this kind a mortal becomes a—a—" he hesitated, at a loss for a word—"a fairy, sir," he finished, lamely, while Reagan parted his lips in his mechanical

sort of way and gave a chuckle as dry as the rattle of bones.

"Even if he is five feet eleven and weighs a hundred and eighty." Bevis stretched out his long legs and surveyed his athletic frame whimsically.

"Height, weight, and years do not count when Cupid waves the fairy's wand," protested the Colonel.

Reagan's flash of mirth had spent itself and he was again rubbing his crown with his palm.

"I know it doesn't seem just right, Bevis," he said. "But the ox is in the pit. You're a better churchman than I am and you know more about that than I do. But it's a devilishly serious situation we're facing, and we can't wait."

"Well, the evening has just begun. I'll have—"

"Mr. Bevis!" A servant approached.
"Mrs. McLeedy wishes to speak to you, sir."

"Tell her I'll be there in a few moments." He turned to Reagan and Colonel Jordan. "I'll meet you in the library at eleven-thirty. Maybe I can give you an answer then." He arose to his feet. "You heard the summons and will excuse me, I know."

"Mr. Reagan! Mr. R-e-a-g-a-n!" a servant called. "Telegram for Mr. Reagan!"

"Here!" called the chairman. And then to Bevis: "Wait a moment."

He took the message and tore open the envelope. A hasty glance at the slip of paper and the dry, unemotional smile came again to his lips.

"It's from the Governor!" he exclaimed. "He's coming, after all. Listen. He says: 'Will be there on the ten-thirty train. Look for me.'" Reagan turned to Dan. "You see, the State is calling you!"

Bevis took the message the chairman held out to him and read it again. Then he handed it back.

"At eleven-thirty o'clock, gentlemen, in the library!" he said.

CHAPTER II

"HIS BONNET'S SAXON GREEN"

No one ever denied that the formal announcement of the betrothal of Ethel McLeedy and Dan Bevis was an unique success. This climax of the lawn fête was generally supposed to have been planned by Miss McLeedy herself, as it was known that she had a decided fondness for private theatricals.

The affair took place in the spacious summer house beside the lily pond. A heavy velvet curtain had been hung across one corner of this delight' ful place, and all the evening those who had rested or flirted or held business conferences within its inviting borders had wondered what mystery lay beyond that curtain.

Half an hour after Dan Bevis left Colonel Peter Jordan and Sant Reagan, the State chairman, there was a lull in the music that had been floating out from the balcony, and presently there was a flourish of trumpets from

"HIS BONNET'S SAXON GREEN" 17

the summer house, followed by the droning wail of bagpipes, and in a few moments the guests were crowding in and about the new scene of interest.

Seated on a small stage that had been concealed by the curtain were the bagpipers in the costume of Scottish Highlanders. A medley of Scottish airs entertained the guests for a few minutes and then came a series of tableaux, with the pipers and orchestra alternating in playing airs that gave such explanations as were necessary for the interpretation of the posed pictures and pantomimes. Finally the pipers struck up "Annie Laurie," and as they played it softly Mr. Willis Gordon and his beautiful wife, who, only a few months before, was the capricious Margaret Landingham, pet of society and leader in its private theatricals, came upon the stage in Scottish costume and gave "The Wooing" in pantomime, ending with the maid giving her hand to her lover, and as they turned to leave the stage they were confronted by the maid's parents. There was a moment of apparent mutual surprise, and some embarrassment on the part of the young couple, and then the lover, by expressive pantomime, sought the parental consent. An in-

stant of hesitation followed, during which the parents looked into each other's eyes and made slight gestures as though consulting, and then they smiled and the father motioned the maid forward and placed her hand in that of the young man, and the mother kissed her and gave her hand to the lover, who raised it to his lips. Then the father turned and beckoned and a secretary came, seated himself and wrote as the father pretended to dictate. This done, the secretary signaled the pipers, who ceased playing, and two of them arose and sounded a flourish on golden trumpets, after which the secretary advanced to the front of the stage and, as though reading from the parchment upon which he had written, announced that Andrew and Mrs. McLeedy wished to make public the betrothal of their daughter, Miss Ethel Harriet McLeedy, to Mr. Daniel Graham Bevis. As the final word was spoken a shower of roses, released by attendants in the "flies" of the improvised stage, fell about those who had taken part in the pantomime, and the velvet curtain was drawn by invisible hands.

There was a storm of hand-clapping, a chorus of approval, and the guests pressed forward to greet Dan Bevis and his fiancée, who, with Mr.

"HIS BONNET'S SAXON GREEN" 19

and Mrs. McLeedy, arose from seats directly in front of the stage and turned to receive the congratulations of the shouting, happy throng. Andrew McLeedy was immensely pleased at the tribute to his Scotch ancestry, and it is probable that the compliments the guests bestowed upon the pantomime made a deeper impression upon him than did the congratulations concerning his future son-in-law.

"I am glad the Governor got here in time to hear those pipers and see the splendid pantomimic sketch," said Reagan with unusual effusiveness as he shook hands with Andrew McLeedy. As he spoke, the chairman turned and nodded toward the smoothly-shaven, square-jawed man at his elbow. "Governor, didn't I understand you to say that the Scots were favorites of yours?"

Sant Reagan was a political power because he was always studying men. He rarely failed to locate the most vulnerable part of whomever he sought to reach, and he had the very rare faculty of being able to voice a statement that was perfectly obvious in its flattery in such a way that the flattered one ignored that feature and cherished only the spoken words. Andrew McLeedy was wealthy and rapidly growing

richer, and Andrew McLeedy's future son-in-law was reckoned as one of the shrewdest financiers in the State in spite of the fact that he was but thirty-three—and, again, Andrew McLeedy's future son-in-law without doubt would be the party's nominee for Congress from that district, and those things, combined, meant much in practical politics. And so State Chairman Reagan was one of the first to reach the McLeedy group, and these same considerations had brought the Governor away from the State capital at a late hour. The Governor was governor because he knew the political game thoroughly. And the Governor was smiling most affably now as he paid his respects to the group.

"It was worth my journey to hear those pipers and to witness the clever and unique announcement," he declared, and bowed to Mrs. McLeedy and Ethel. "If I were you," he said to the girl, "I should plan to enjoy my honeymoon among the Scottish heather."

After a moment of quip and jest the Governor and Reagan turned away to permit others to offer their felicitations, and also to respond to the signals of Colonel Peter Jordan, near one of the exits. And for the next fifteen min-

"HIS BONNET'S SAXON GREEN" 27

utes the Governor held a little levee, superintended by Colonel Jordan.

When the opportunity offered, Bevis smuggled Ethel out of the crowd, and, laughing like children, they ran hand in hand down one of the paths that led to the far side of the little lake, or lily pond, as it was generally known. Then they paused, and he looked down into her face. It was radiant in the dim light of the lanterns.

"Isn't it glorious?" he asked.

"Yes," she answered. "But now it's all over with."

"All over?" He looked at her in surprise. "Why, it's just commencing—life is just beginning."

She looked across the water to the gay scene beyond. The guests were promenading in little groups, discussing the events of the evening, and a great chatter of voices about the summer house proclaimed the fact that the principal attention of the crowd still clung to this vine-covered, lattice-walled place.

"But now we're just 'engaged folks,' you know, and the fun of the announcement is over. Sometimes I'm afraid to get married, Dan."

He stared at her. A red rose nestled in her

dark hair, and as he bent low to study her face the fragrance of the flower stole to him. A rope of pearls about her throat caught the glint of the lanterns in rippling flashes. He felt something gripping at his heart as he stood thus for a moment, and he imagined that her hand had turned cold. He covered the hand with both his palms in the old way as he spoke:

"Afraid to get married? Why—you don't mean that you are regretting our betrothal?"

She shook her head.

"Our betrothal? No. It has been great fun, hasn't it, Dan?" She glanced up at him, but the wind waved the branches of the trees, and her face was in the shadow. "But now comes, 'As long as ye both shall live.' Isn't that enough to frighten one?"

"And don't you love me, after all?" he asked, slowly.

Across the pond the voices of men were raised in shouts.

"Bevis!" "Bevis!"

"Where's Dan Bevis hidden himself?"

"And he has carried off his lady love!"

These and other cries came to them with the accompaniment of merry bursts of laughter, and in the more brilliantly-lighted portions of the

"HIS BONNET'S SAXON GREEN" 23

grounds they could see squads of men marching to and fro as they pursued a mock search, and kept shouting, "Bevis! Bevis!" The pipers caught the spirit of the moment and began playing "The Blue Bells of Scotland," while amid a great hand-clapping the crowd sang:

"Oh, where, and oh, where is your Highland laddie gone?"

Ethel McLeedy flung up her head with a suppressed ripple of laughter.

"Love you? Of course, you dear old giant. Forgive my make-believe. You know my love for theatricals."

She reached up and placed her dainty hands against his cheeks, and his heart bounded.

"I'm just foolish, that's all," he said. "And I thought—"

"Oh, I know what you thought. Listen, sir, while I read your mind!" She waved one hand before his face as though casting some spell upon him, and continued: "Sir Daniel Bevis, you were thinking that Ethel McLeedy was a brilliant, heartless flirt—"

"No, no," he objected. "Not that!"

"Sh-h-h-h!" she warned. "You'll break the

spell and I'll not be able to finish the reading. You thought me a flirt who dallied with you and loved another—a mysterious stranger from over the seas, and that I had been sitting at my window on moonlight nights wondering when he would come for me. But I'll never—"

His arms were about her now and he smothered the speech in the manner that lovers from earliest ages have considered to be their right.

"Let me finish," she said, almost in a whisper. "I'll never love another man more than I love you at this moment, Dan—never!"

Still there came across the water the shouts for Bevis, and still the squads marched back and forth, singing:

"His bonnet's Saxon green and his waistcoat of the plaid,
And it's oh, in my heart that I love my Highland lad."

"And the wedding shall take place soon, shall it not?" he asked, eagerly. "Living at the club doesn't bring out the best in a man, Ethel, and I'm longing for the time when you will be with me, and I can plan for your happiness—"

"And we'll visit Scotland, just as the Governor suggested, will we not, Dan?" She looked up eagerly. "You know I have not

"HIS BONNET'S SAXON GREEN" 25

been there for two years. And then Paris—and Venice! We'll have a happy ramble, Dan."

A shadow crept into his eyes, and for a moment he forgot the carnival of happiness that was reigning about the summer house and mansion, and the faintest foreboding again crept into his heart.

"Of course, dear," he answered. "I never have been abroad, and I'm glad now that I haven't. It will be so much nicer to make my first trip with you."

"What a glorious honeymoon!" She clapped her hands. "We can sail right after the wedding!"

His arms had slipped from about her, and now he stood rather nervously tearing into bits a leaf that had fluttered down.

"Perhaps not right after the wedding," he replied, haltingly. "I have heavy business responsibilities that cannot easily be shifted for so long a time just now. We can take a little time to plan it, you know, and next year, probably—"

He saw her look up at him, and noted the flash of hauteur that shone in her face at his words, but his speech never was finished. A

scream of terror came from one of the upper windows of the McLeedy mansion, and there was a sudden hush of the pipers' music and the babel of voices about the summer house.

"Help! Quick! Help!" A woman was screaming. "Robbery!"

Looking across the pond, they saw the upturned faces of the crowd as all eyes were turned to the woman, who now could be seen framed in the light of an upper window as she leaned across the casing and sent her cries out into the night. Then the throng surged toward the house.

"Quick!" exclaimed Bevis. "Let's get back!"

He clasped her hand and they turned to run back up the pathway, but the girl's foot caught; she stumbled and fell. Dan stooped and raised her to her feet.

"Are you hurt?" he asked.

She took a step and sank to her knees with a moan of pain.

"My ankle!" she exclaimed. "It's sprained! I can't walk!"

A medley of cries from excited men and frightened women came to him. He raised her in his arms.

"HIS BONNET'S SAXON GREEN" 27

"I can't leave you here!" he said. "I must —God!"

A pistol shot rang out spitefully; there was a chorus of screams and cries.

"He's shot the Governor!"

A dozen voices shouted the words.

"The Governor shot!" groaned Bevis, and Ethel gasped out an exclamation.

Across the little lake could be seen a confused crowd rushing to and fro and shouting to each other directions that no one heeded. Dan started on a run, carrying the injured girl in his arms. He had gone but a short distance when he suddenly stopped, stepped into the shadow of a tree and looked intently across. The figure of a man could be seen darting from tree to tree not far from the southern shore of the pond.

"Tear the lanterns off those lights!"

It was the voice of Colonel Jordan rising in command, and instantly the wisdom of his words presented itself to the crowd, and two hundred men dashed in among the trees and began to snatch off the gayly-colored paper that had subdued the light, and the effect was magical. Bevis saw the solitary figure that had attracted his attention rise from beside a tree,

where he had crouched for a moment, as a group of men neared him. The man started on a run back into the grove, but he was too late. The cool head of Peter Jordan had directed the formation of a line of "skirmishers," as the old soldier called them, and this line had flung itself in a circle which rapidly was enclosing that portion of the grounds and shutting off escape in all directions save that section which Dan and Ethel had chosen for their retreat in the happy excitement of the first moments following the announcement of the betrothal.

"What is it?" The girl knelt at the base of the tree, where Dan had carefully placed her when he stopped. She saw that he was crouched, peering intently at something.

"What do you see?"

"I see—." He paused. Then he turned to her. "I see—him!" he exclaimed.

There was a startled cry from the girl, but he slipped his hand over her mouth.

"Please don't make a sound!" he said.

The figure he had seen had now turned toward the little lake, and as the uncovered lights were more and more brilliantly illuminating the grounds, the man, without pausing, slipped into the water, and Bevis now could see him

"HIS BONNET'S SAXON GREEN" 29

swimming for the bank where he stood. Noiselessly the dark object came forward, only the head of the man showing above the water. Farther and farther the encircling line of Colonel Jordan's skirmishers was making its way, and Dan calculated that by the time the swimmer reached the bank the circle of searchers would be complete. In the meantime to set up a shout of discovery might in some manner enable the fellow to escape. If the prowler were captured he must do it. Inwardly he rejoiced that a man of Jordan's coolness and quickness of mind had been present to cut off the fellow's escape.

"You must be game, Ethel!" he whispered, and then smiled as he remembered that he was using the Colonel's word. "Lie perfectly quiet and I'll get him!"

CHAPTER lii

"THE SENATE NEXT"

TAKE me away from here at once! Take me away!" she demanded. "Let those other men catch him! Where are the police?" She was growing hysterical as the blot of black moved steadily toward them across the shimmering surface of the lily pond.

"The other men will miss him! Please—." He did not finish. The object out there on the little lake no longer moved. Within twenty feet of the shore the swimmer had stopped, just inside of the shadows cast by the trees. Bevis knew that at that point a medium-sized man could touch bottom with his feet and have his head above water. The man evidently had done this and was standing perfectly still, either for the purpose of resting before venturing ashore or because he was considering the advisability of trusting to the shadowed water as a hiding place. Ethel be-

gan struggling to her feet and a stick snapped beneath her weight. Dan saw the man out in the water move.

"Please, Ethel!" he repeated in a whisper, trying gently to force her back to the ground. "He's shot the Governor—"

"And now he'll murder both of us!" she exclaimed, her voice coming in hoarse, smothered tones through his fingers as he clapped his hand a bit roughly over her mouth. "I'll not—I'll not—." She gasped the words, clawing at the hand over her mouth. Again he begged in a whisper, but to no avail. She jerked her head free and scream after scream rang out.

Instantly the man in the water made a dash for the shore, taking a course that would land him some distance from where Bevis now struggled to free himself from the clutch of the girl, who clung to him desperately while she screamed.

The man had almost reached the shore before Dan could break the grasp. Then without heeding the sobs of Ethel McLeedy, he sprang toward the fugitive, who now was splashing through the water near the sloping bank, but Dan had lost valuable time in his first efforts to be gentle with the girl, and the other man

gained the shore ten feet in advance of the pursuer and dashed into the woods, and for a minute both men plunged at their best speed through the labyrinth of maples. But it was an unequal race.

The fleeing fellow quickly realized that escape in this way was impossible, and, whirling suddenly, he dropped almost to his knees and threw himself forward with outstretched arms to grasp the legs of his pursuer, but Bevis had eluded too many tackles in his university days to be caught by any such football tactics, and he nimbly sprang aside, barely in time to escape the clutch that would have thrown him headlong. When he wheeled to face the fugitive he found the man on his feet, and for an instant both paused for breath. The shouts of Colonel Jordan's skirmishers could be heard as the line made its way down through the woods, closing in on the spot where the skirmishers had heard Ethel McLeedy's screams.

"I've got to kill you, too, have I?"

The words came in a hoarse rasp from the fugitive, and, as he spoke, he sprang at Dan, and a knife flashed in the moonlight that penetrated the wood. Bevis's athletic frame plunged forward at the same instant, and with

all his strength he struck with clenched fist at the wrist of his opponent, hoping to knock the knife from the murderous hand. But in the darkness his aim was not true, and his fist barely touched the top of the wrist, and their arms locked as the knife went over his shoulder.

Then began a peculiar and desperate struggle. Their right arms were interlocked and neither dared attempt to disengage. As they fought thus, they were unable to face each other, and the battle became a whirling struggle, each fighting to trip the other or to reach the other's back with his free arm. The marauder's right forearm was on Bevis's shoulder and the knife, still clutched in the fellow's hand, was useless for a time.

The shouts of the skirmishers were close at hand now, and the two men, fighting desperately in the darkness, threw every ounce of their strength into the struggle. Dan had succeeded in getting his free hand across his opponent's back and clutched his left side with a tenacious grip. Then, leaning far over to the left, with his right leg stretched out to the right, he gradually drew the man to the left until the stranger, in spite of his desperate ef-

forts to thwart the plan, found himself forced into a leaning posture over Bevis's right thigh.

For a fleeting instant they stood thus, their heavy breathing showing the terrific strain both were undergoing, and then Dan, summoning all of his reserve strength, released the lock he had on his opponent's knife hand, and with a movement as swift as a lightning flash, he swept his right hand to the other's left shoulder, there was a twist, a stiffening of the body, the stranger's feet were jerked from under him, and he was flipped forward across Bevis's thigh and went to the ground.

But Dan's victory was not without its cost, for the instant the prowler had felt the release of his right arm he made a sweeping blow with the knife, intending to reach his opponent's neck, but Dan's sudden twitch saved him and the blade ripped through his coat and gashed the shoulder beneath.

As the stranger crashed to earth Bevis sprang upon him, there was another brief struggle, and the battle was over. Face downward, the marauder lay; Dan's knees were in the small of his back, and the hand that held the knife was twisted behind the fellow and

held in an iron grip. And thus they were found, laboring for breath, a minute later by Jordan's skirmishers.

The knife was easily wrenched from the hand that held it, and, with half a dozen strong hands holding his arms, the stranger was raised to his feet, where he stood in sullen silence, refusing to answer any of the questions hurled at him. A hasty search showed that he had no weapon save the knife. He had either thrown away the revolver in a fit of panic after firing the one shot, or had dropped it while swimming across the lily pond.

"Take him to the house," said Bevis. "I must look after Miss McLeedy."

He turned and started back to where he had left the girl and where he could now hear her speaking excitedly to some one. He became conscious that his shoulder was paining him, but he handled his arm without difficulty, so he was certain that the wound was trifling.

Colonel Jordan was standing beside Ethel, and with him were several other members of the skirmish line. The girl was telling them how she and Dan had run away from the crowd in a capricious moment, expecting to rejoin the guests in a few minutes, and how

they had seen the prowler take to the little lake in his efforts to escape.

"Well?"

The old soldier reached out his hand to Bevis as the latter joined the group. The question was plain, and Dan half turned and nodded back toward the wood.

"They're bringing him now," he answered, and turned to Ethel. "I hope you will not suffer seriously from the experience," he said.

She flouted him, and with a toss of her head turned to Peter Jordan.

"The pain is leaving my ankle, and with your assistance, Colonel, I believe I can walk to the house."

The squad of men coming out of the woods with the prisoner at that moment had called the attention of the others of the group, and none heard her words save Jordan and Bevis.

"I have no doubt that Dan and I can get you to the house all right," said the Colonel, quickly, trying to save an awkward situation.

A chill had crept about Bevis's heart, and then a flash of resentment at her unreasonable behavior swept over him, but he mastered it, and his tone was perfectly even when he spoke.

"You will permit me to assist, will you not, Ethel?"

He stood before her, tall and straight, and again she was conscious of that warm glow in her soul, and her impulse was to yield herself to him unreservedly, to tell him that she had been silly, and to find contentment in the strength of his arms, and the love she knew she should prize. But it never had been the McLeedy way to act on impulse. She had been piqued, and she felt that he should come in contrition, so she turned to Colonel Jordan and leaned on his arm as she answered:

"If you are quite sure that your duties as a policeman no longer overshadow those you owe to your fiancée, Mr. Bevis, you may take my arm."

He bowed, and, without a word, took her arm and the three started slowly toward the house. The squad in charge of the prisoner saw them going up the pathway and halted for a few minutes in order that Ethel might not be distressed by a sight of the evil-looking fellow they were guarding, and who now presented a sorry spectacle, his water-soaked clothing being covered with dirt and bits of leaves gathered in the fight with Bevis. Colonel Jordan

was of a mind to rebuke the girl mildly for her treatment of Dan, who he knew had behaved with splendid judgment and courage, but the old soldier was somewhat versed in the worse than uselessness of pursuing such a course with one of Ethel McLeedy's temperament, so he drew his lips into a straight line and walked on in silence.

Dan was the first to speak, and they were nearing the summer house, where, but such a short time before, all had been music and mirth and joyousness. Now there came no sound of pipes or violins; the gay lanterns had been torn away, and the electric lights were flooding the lawn with their cold, dazzling brilliancy.

"I forgot to inquire about the row," he said. "I heard some one cry that the Governor was shot. Is—is it serious?" It had suddenly occurred to him that he had been extremely selfish in thinking only of his own distresses of body and mind, for the shoulder was paining him greatly now, when other had suffered, probably more seriously. "It was very thoughtless of me—but—Colonel—it has been an exciting quarter of an hour for me."

For the first time, Jordan glimpsed Bevis's right shoulder.

"By the eternal, Dan, you're wounded, yourself!" he exclaimed, dropping the girl's arm and springing around to face the other. "Your coat is blood-soaked, man!"

Ethel looked up with a startled cry.

"Why didn't you say—why didn't you tell us?" she asked.

The loss of blood and the events subsequent to his struggle had stolen the ruddiness from Dan's cheeks, but the faintest bit of glow returned to them as she spoke and he saw her eyes looking so anxiously into his.

"You didn't seem—I mean, there didn't seem to be any—any special moment for the information. It isn't ~~bad~~, anyway; just a gash across the shoulder. But the Governor, is he—Colonel, is he—"

"No, thank the good Lord," answered Jordan, interpreting the hesitancy, and busying himself with a hasty examination of the injured shoulder as well as he could without removing the coat. "The Governor's not hurt a bit. The fellow was discovered in an upper room by one of the maids after he had gathered in the jewels laid aside by some of the ladies who assisted in the tableaux. The maid was struck down as the fellow ran, but she got to a window

and gave the alarm. Then—" He had gotten his hand under the coat, and ceased speaking as he gently felt of the wound beneath. "Ethel, please hold this coat away—so—while I get a handkerchief up there for a temporary bandage."

The blood was continuing to trickle down in ugly little red veins across the white waistcoat. She reached forward, and then drew back.

"The blood! I'll get it on my hands—and—I—wouldn't it be best to let the surgeon attend to that?" she asked.

The veteran glanced at her, and there was that in his eyes which was not kindness. He was holding the coat away from the wound with both hands.

"Maybe you can help, Dan," he said, ignoring her words. "Slip your left hand into my pocket and get my handkerchief. Now stuff it up under this coat—you can reach the spot, I reckon. So!" He gently adjusted the coat over the pad. "That will help until the doctor gets to it."

"Feels better, anyway," admitted Bevis. "But about the Governor?"

"He saw the robber run out of the house,

"THE SENATE NEXT"

41

and ran to head him off. The fellow drew a gun, but the Governor made for him, but stumbled and fell just as the gun flashed, and the bullet zipped close enough to his ear for him to hear it. He struck one of the benches as he fell, and was stunned for a moment. This caused some fellow to yell out something about his being shot."

A throng of men with a few of the more courageous ladies came hastening forward to greet the returning party, and there was a babel of questions and answers and "Ohs" and "Ahs," and then the triumphal march to the mansion was resumed.

In an upper chamber Mrs. McLeedy, attended by a physician and two or three maids, was giving herself over to a bit of "nerves," and when Ethel limped into the room, assisted by one of the servants, the physician was shown how easily all of his skill could be set at naught when Society expected something in the way of tears and tremblings from two of its devotees. On the broad veranda Andrew McLeedy and the Governor, surrounded by a group of men famous in the business world, stood waiting to greet captors and prisoner. The master of the mansion had

kissed his daughter and sent her on up to her mother while he and the Governor besieged Bevis with questions and showered praises upon him, after which the surgeon took charge of the injured man.

A detail of police had arrived in an auto patrol in time to see the party coming back to the house, and close in the rear of the patrol had come the reporters for the morning papers, eager for the stirring story they knew would be theirs. But the sergeant in charge of the police detail was tactful. He had had much experience in the foibles of Society, and so when he learned that the prowler had been caught he did not rush his men down to take charge of the prisoner. Instead, he drew them up close to the veranda and waited while the dress-coated men of the city's most exclusive social set had duly received their wreaths as daring and relentless pursuers of a murderous criminal, and then when different ones gave evidence of no longer caring to grip the arms of the silent prisoner the officer quietly stepped forward and took charge of him. Instantly his men closed about him, and presently the sergeant saluted the Governor and Andrew McLeedy and turned over to the latter a small

handful of jewels his search had located in a pouch sewed in the prisoner's shirt.

"I trust that nothing more is missing, sir," he said, civilly. Then he nodded to his men and they hurried the captive into the patrol and a few moments later they were whirring away to the city prison.

The great clock in the corner of the library announced the midnight hour in subdued chimes as Bevis, carrying his right arm a bit stiffly, entered the room. From one of the men whose home adjoined the McLeedy place he had secured a change of clothing that fitted him very well, and now as he came into the library there was nothing save a pallor and a slight stiffness of his right arm to indicate that he had but an hour before battled desperately in the darkness of the woods with a would-be assassin.

The Governor, Colonel Jordan, Sant Reagan, and Andrew McLeedy were already there, assembled about the great mahogany table, and with one accord they arose to greet him.

"Sorry to be late, gentlemen," he said, "but it takes quite a while for a fastidious surgeon to get his needlework just to suit him. Or, at

least, it seems a long time to the fellow who is being sewed," he added, with a light laugh. "And you must excuse me from any handshaking, too—unless you take my left."

There were several minutes of badinage and comment on the exciting affair that had marked the close of the fête, and then there came an awkward silence of a few breaths. Andrew McLeedy took the plunge.

"Well, Dan, it's all settled!" he said, rising again to his feet and regarding the young man with a smile, but with a marked nervousness of manner that betokened the fact that the speaker was not really sure, after all, that it was settled.

"Settled?" Bevis glanced about at the members of the party. "And—just what is the decision, pray?"

"You are the nominee, Dan!" exclaimed the Governor, leaning across the table, while the others nodded, and Reagan rubbed his palm over his crown. Then they waited for him to speak.

The cry of a night bird was heard down in the wood, and through the open window came the soft breath of June with its fragrance of roses.

"Who nominated me?"

"You did it yourself, my boy," said Colonel Jordan.

"Sure!" assented Reagan. "That was the convention—that affair you held over on the other side of the lily pond. Not much rougher than some I've seen, at that," he added, with his dry grin.

"You're just the man this district—and the State, too,—needs in the next campaign," declared the Governor. "And your plucky deed of to-night will make you a popular hero. The reporters—"

"Yes—they've deviled me half to death with their questions," said Bevis. "They have the story, I know."

"The reporters were here," continued the Governor, "but I talked with the night editors myself over the 'phone. Reagan gave them a tip that they might get an interview from me." He winked solemnly at Dan. "And you didn't suffer in the interview."

"But what has capturing a thief got to do with a political convention?"

"Oh, I've seen greater differences," said the State chairman, and there was a general laugh. "It may not have anything to do with your

fitness for the place—though I feel that it has, for we want a man of nerve to represent the business interests of this district—but it will help you wonderfully with the masses."

"The business interests of the country have been hounded and abused almost beyond endurance, and if things are to be saved from going clear to hell we must get some men of our own kind—men who are not fanatics—in Congress." Andrew McLeedy had sat down, but now he hitched his chair around close to Bevis. "You've had experience in the political game, Dan, and can easily afford, financially, to take the nomination. Besides, your friends want you to take it—I want you to—Ethel wants you to."

Bevis struck a match and lighted his cigar and blew a cloud of smoke.

"I am sorry you put it that way," he said. "You can't understand, I suppose—I know you can't—why I wish this hadn't come up in this way. It isn't that I'm stubborn—I—but I have reasons—the best in the world." He arose and paced the room, his face strangely drawn, and his voice arose in passionate vehemence. "Two years from now—the next time—two years from now—wouldn't that do? Wouldn't

"THE SENATE NEXT"

47

it?" His voice was eager. "I'll promise to take it two years from now!"

The Governor shook his head, while McLeedy scowled.

"No," answered the Governor. "We want you now. Two years from now we can get another ready for the race, and we can send you to the Senate!" Suddenly he leaned across the table again. "We'll send you to the Senate two years from now!"

"Then he'll take the nomination!"

Ethel McLeedy knew of the political conference to be held in the library, and she had crept down the stairs, determined to listen. When she heard the arguments that were being pressed on Bevis her ambitions began to paint exaggerated pictures of the honors she would share as his wife, and when the Governor declared that Dan should go to the Senate if he accepted this, she was fairly intoxicated by the alluring prospects, and stepped into the room.

"Yes, I eavesdropped," she said, as they looked up in surprise. "I admit it—and papa can scold me for it to-morrow." She turned to Dan. "But I want to beg you to take this nomination. I was—foolish—to-night, and treated you badly. You will forgive that, I

know, and you can prove this to me by taking the nomination! You will take it, will you not—for me, Dan—for me?"

A chasm seemed yawning before Dan Bevis's feet, a chasm none but he knew aught of, and, struggle as he would, circumstances seemed conspiring to force him over the brink. He hesitated as he stood there with the eyes of the group upon him in anxious silence. He looked at the Governor, but the eager light he saw on the executive's face could not blind him to the chasm that lay before him. His head drooped, as with a gesture of despairing protest he turned to the girl who was to be his wife. An unusual warmth was showing in her cheeks, and the small hand she had half extended in entreaty seemed drawing him closer and closer to the chasm. Then the stern resolution faded from his face, his jaws no longer clenched, his eyes softened. Perhaps, after all, he could leap the abyss! Slowly his left hand went out and caught hers in a clasp that caused her to wince. His breath came with a quick, gasping sigh as he looked up.

"I'll take the nomination!" he said.

There was a shout of approval and pleasure,

"THE SENATE NEXT"

49

and Reagan hopped up on the table in his eagerness to reach Bevis's hand.

"And now a really and truly good night!" laughed Ethel, gayly. "You shall have your reward from me—later!" And she ran from the room, forgetful of the lame ankle.

"It will be a walk-away!" exclaimed the Governor, delightedly. "The district is red hot for a man of your kind. Joe Hartley came in on the same train with me to night, and—"

"Joe Hartley!" Bevis stared at the Governor. "Not—"

"Yes, the bank examiner, you know. He's some politician, too, I can tell you. He's been all over this district recently, and when I mentioned your name he said—"

"Yes, yes—what did Hartley say, then?" Bevis had sunk into a chair, a gray pallor showing in his cheeks.

"Said you had a cinch," replied the Governor. "Oh, I believe he said, 'If nothing unexpected occurs.' But the whole state machine will be ready to see that nothing unexpected occurs. We've got to go before the people with a man without taint, Dan, and you're the chap!"

"And the Senate next!" exclaimed Colonel Jordan.

"The Senate next!" echoed the Governor.
Dan nodded slowly.

"The Senate next!" he repeated. And then again: "Of course—the Senate next!"

CHAPTER IV

INTO THE PIT

“PAPER! ‘Morning Herald’! All about ‘tempted ‘sassination o’ the Gov’nor! Paper!’”

The dawn came cloudless, bringing with it the promise of an extremely warm day. Dan Bevis watched its coming. For an hour or two he had dozed fitfully, awakening each time with a feeling that an iron hand was gripping him. Finally he gave up the attempt to sleep, and, putting on his slippers, he sat in the great chair by his east window and watched the dark fade into a dull gray in which buildings were dimly outlined. Then a tint of orange crept along the eastern horizon and arose higher and higher, and the tall spire of a distant church suddenly flashed with the brilliancy of burnished gold; from the eaves and nooks of nearby buildings the sparrows began their chirping and quarreling. A rosy glow spread over all

the sky, and down on the streets a truck rattled noisily over the cobblestone pavement.

"Well, it's—to-day—at last!" he muttered, rising and standing close to the window. "How beautiful the world is!"

The faint hum of an early trolley car came to him, other wagons clattered over the cobblestones, and the strident voice of the newsboy on the corner shrilled its announcement with persistent regularity.

"Paper! 'Morning Herald'! All about 'tempted 'sassination o' the Gov'nor! Paper!"

Bevis became conscious that his right shoulder was stiff and sore. He walked over to a mirror and surveyed the haggard, gray face he saw therein. Lines had crept across his forehead, and heavy, dark circles were under his eyes.

"Paper! . . . 'tempted 'sassination o' the Gov'nor!"

The monotonous cry came to him again and again. He went back to the window.

"If I had been just a little slower that knife would have reached my jugular," he mused. "And to-day wouldn't have been—to-day—for me!"

He dressed and went down to the corner and bought a paper, and then returned to his chair by the window. On the first page were three pictures, the Governor's, Ethel McLeedy's, and his own, while double-column headlines topped the story of the robbery, the Governor's narrow escape from death, and his own desperate battle with the marauder. Ethel McLeedy's conduct throughout the struggle was described as heroic, and the fertile-minded writer had graphically described how, after the fight was ended, the girl had staunched the blood flowing from the victor's wound, unmindful of the fact that she herself was suffering great pain from a sprained ankle, sustained when she attempted to give her frail strength to the struggle with the would-be assassin.

A wraith of a smile flickered for a moment about his gray lips and then died. He tossed the paper from him and went to a small steel safe in one corner of the room, and, kneeling before it, he quickly turned the combination, opened the door and from a drawer he unlocked he drew forth a small package of papers marked "Mortgage Securities." He went back to his seat by the window and spread the papers on

his knees. For perhaps five minutes he sat moodily inspecting them. Then he slowly shook his head.

"It's no use!" he muttered. "It's no use! Hartley must suspect!" A sudden tremor shook his breast and his head dropped into his hand. "God!" The word came moaningly, as though wrenched from the depths of his soul. "If only—one more week! If—!" He turned his eyes again to the papers, and then slowly crumpled them in his clenching hands. "No use! No use! It's bound to come! The price! God, the price! I must pay it—I!"

"Paper! . . . 'sassination . . . Gov'nor!"

Fragments of the call came to his whirling senses, and his burning eyes again rested on the newspaper he had dropped on the floor. The bold headlines and the pictures of Ethel McLeedy, the Governor, and himself were there, and he knew that the awakening city would be murmuring his praises within another hour. This morning he stood upon the heights, amid the laurel. Life never before had offered to him so much; life never before had placed to his lips so sweet a cup. He sprang to his feet

and flung up his arms, unmindful of the pain of his shoulder.

"Oh, I can't pay this price! Christ—you Man of the Cross—you know the agony! I can't do it—Oh, I can't, I say, I can't!" Broken and trembling, he sank into the chair again and sat there staring with eyes that saw nothing mortal. His hands clenched tighter and tighter; a drop of perspiration traced its way slowly down his furrowed brow and splashed onto the newspaper; his lips drew into a thin, straight line, and about his jaws the muscles gradually brought themselves into view as the man, despite his despairing protestations, sat there in the fresh glow of the sunrise, slowly dragging his quivering, shrieking self through a Gethsemane onward to a crucifixion. "Yes," he whispered, still staring with unseeing eyes. "Yes—I must! The debt—the debt—" An instant of pause. "No matter. I must pay! Oh, God, I must pay!"

On the stroke of nine that morning, Bevis entered the Empire State Bank, spoke the usual cheery greetings to the clerks and passed on into his private office in the rear, pausing only to make proper acknowledgment of the con-

gratulations the bank employés pressed upon him. The dark circles still showed under his eyes, and the pallor was in his cheeks, but those who noted these things told each other that it was nowise strange that a man who had fought as he had and had suffered a wound should have the appearance of illness.

Once the cashier approached the door of the private office intending to urge his chief to remain at home until he had more fully recovered his strength, but the official paused as he was about to tap on the door. From beyond he could faintly hear the banker's voice, evidently in a telephonic conversation.

"Yes, I must have it by the middle of the afternoon—a hundred thousand!" A moment of silence. "I know it's a lot of money, but I can secure you, and—"

The cashier tiptoed away from the door and went back to his post, his face very grave.

At ten o'clock a sharp-featured man with keen eyes peering out from under bushy eyebrows entered the bank and sent his card to Bevis. He puffed very deliberately at a black cigar while waiting for the office boy's signal, and then he entered the private office with the air of one perfectly familiar with the premises.

"Good morning, Mr. Hartley."

The examiner took the banker's hand in cordial greeting.

"I'll be easy with your shoulder," he said.
"I've read the morning papers."

Bevis motioned Hartley to a chair and sat down, himself.

"Social call or—business?" he asked.

"Business." Hartley flicked the ashes from his cigar. "I hate to bother you fellows so much, but—"

"Oh, of course—I know—the law,—and all that. But isn't this call a little—well, just a little sooner than usual?"

The examiner nodded.

"I'll confess that it is, but it's the policy of the department—" He hesitated a few seconds. "You're comparatively a new man, you know. Your father's sudden death placed great responsibilities on young shoulders, and—the department thinks we ought to help you youngsters all we can, you know."

"Quite right, too. You knew my father quite well, didn't you, Mr. Hartley?"

"I did that." Hartley ran his fingers through his grizzled hair as he contemplated a portrait of the elder Bevis, who had founded

the Empire State Bank. "A man among men, he was."

For an instant a faint flush shone in the young man's cheeks.

"Thank you. I like to hear men say those things. They—"

"You ought to like it, boy! Pardon me, Dan—I'm old enough to be your father, and I knew him for years. And I know that he worshiped three things—God, your mother, and you. He used to tell me about you when you were in college. Some of his investments went wrong, and he was in some tight places, I know, but he never squealed, and all one had to do to brighten him was to brag a little on his boy—you, Dan!"

Bevis tapped the table with his fingers, and his head sank a little lower.

"His was a great love—I know," he said in a strained voice. "I ought—what ought one to do for a love like that, Mr. Hartley?"

The keen eyes beneath the bushy brows softened as the examiner rested his elbows on the table and looked across at the son of his old friend.

"Do? Well, it's too late to do anything now, Dan—but if it were not too late a man ought to

walk into the eternal pit for it, and laugh because he had the chance to serve that love. But it's too late now. I think grief over your mother's death brought on the stroke that stilled his great heart."

"It may have been." The young man arose wearily from his chair. "Pardon my reference to these personal affairs. You may take charge and begin your work at your pleasure."

For half an hour Bevis slowly paced the length of his private office, his face drawn as it had been at sunrise. Occasionally he would pause and drop into a chair and sit with his arms outstretched on the table, his hands clenched, while his brain throbbed as he tried desperately but vainly to think out some plan which he had not already thought of and discarded. Then he would arise and walk again, back and forth, back and forth.

"Into the pit!" he exclaimed in a hoarse whisper time after time. "Into the pit—for such a love!"

The telephone whirred, but he gave it no heed. Presently it rang again, and then again. He looked at the instrument as though dazed. Then he sat down and took up the receiver.

"Hello! . . . This is he! . . . Of

course, I know your voice, Ethel. . . . But I don't see how I can leave now. . . . Called to New York—to-night!" A bit of light shone in his eyes as he listened to the hurried words coming over the wire. "Well—" he glanced at his watch—"at eleven-thirty, then." He hung up the receiver. "Once more it is to be eleven-thirty.. And only twelve hours from the other one."

The cashier came for some instructions, a committee from the Chamber of Commerce called to enlist the Empire State Bank's support of a project, and before they left the boy brought in Colonel Jordan's card.

"Of course you've read the 'Herald.'" Jordan threw a copy of the paper down on the table. "But you don't look at all well, Dan. You ought to be in your room to-day. You came near collapsing in the library last night."

"I had to be here to-day," was the reply. "Hartley—you know, the examiner—is going through things to-day, and, of course—"

"Of course you have to be here to help unwind a lot of red tape," said Jordan. "But I suppose it can't be helped, even if you tumble over. By the way—!" He drew his chair around closer to Bevis, and then paused.

"Dan," he said, "I'm afraid I'm going to have to sell my stock in the Empire Bank."

Bevis looked up at him quickly. Jordan caught the look and raised his hand.

"I didn't come here to say this, and we'll not say another word about it now." He smiled in his genial way, pushed back his chair and pointed to the 'Herald.' "I came to praise Cæsar," he added.

"But let's talk about your stock," insisted Bevis, eagerly. "Why are you thinking of selling, may I ask?"

A troubled look came into the Colonel's eyes. He folded the newspaper with a care plainly indicating that he was not thinking of the paper at all.

"I need the money—desperately," he said, facing the banker after a moment's silence. "You know times have been rather dull, and lots of fellows are feeling the pinch. My mills are independent, and that means that the trust is always dogging me. I'm hoping that after the next election things will be better."

Dan drew a pencil from his pocket and began jotting down some figures.

"And you need the money to save your business," he suggested, studying the figures.

"I'm afraid I'll have to do it," responded Jordan. "But we'll talk that over some other time. Maybe it will not be necessary. I'm trying to squeeze through, but my obligations right now are pretty heavy. And then, there is Hilda. Of course—"

"It takes a great deal of money to keep up her studies, and all that, in Europe."

The Colonel sighed, and one hand stroked the snow-white beard.

"Yes, it does," he admitted. "I have already been forced to put a mortgage on my home. Of course, I am sure that I can take care of that in another year, but it is the other obligations that worry me. I'm going now." He arose. "We'll talk it over some other day."

"No, don't go yet, Colonel. Sit down a moment." Dan looked up from his figures and then opened a drawer and took out a small memorandum book. "At par your stock is worth twenty thousand dollars."

The veteran nodded, and sat down again.

"But at the close of business last evening your stock was worth twenty-five thousand. That right?"

"I believe so. But, really, I don't care to—"

"Twenty-five thousand," said Bevis, writing

down the figures, as though considering the matter. "No doubt that would make the Jordan mills a sound proposition."

"Yes, if I finally decide to sell my stock I can win the other fight."

"Or if the stock should be wiped out—so!" He rubbed the eraser over the figures. "It—"

"Would hopelessly bankrupt me!" Colonel Jordan half rose from his chair and his voice quivered. "What—." Then he settled back, mopped his perspiring face with his handkerchief, and laughed in his old, happy way. "You young rascal, you oughtn't to draw such pictures for an old man to look at!"

"I want to buy your stock, Colonel!"

Jordan dropped his handkerchief onto the table and stared at the other.

"I mean it. Make over the stock to me now—right now—" Dan's voice arose with a note of eagerness—"I'll pay you twenty-five thousand cash for it this minute. You can cash my check before you leave the bank."

For a moment the two men sat looking into each other's eyes. The faint flush had again crept into Bevis's cheeks. He reached out and drew a check book toward him, but Jordan snatched it away.

"So, you want the stock, do you? Well, it's not for sale to-day!"

He arose and turned toward the door, but Dan sprang before him.

"Listen to me. You think that I am not well to-day, and not fit for business, but I am. I can see your situation—very clearly—believe me! You'll have to sell this stock soon, and you can't hope to get more than I am offering you. Let's close the deal now!"

"I tell you I'll not do it!" Peter Jordan's tone was crisp. "I don't understand—"

"You don't need to understand! You know what the stock is worth, and I want you to cash my check before you leave! Isn't that enough Colonel—believe me, I am trying to help you!"

"Maybe so—maybe! But I tell you again that I'll not sell—not to-day. I'll look into this, and—"

"Not quarreling, gentlemen?" Ethel McLeedy stood in the doorway. "No, I wasn't eavesdropping again," she said, with a merry laugh. "I grew tired of waiting for you, sir," shaking her finger at Bevis. "And so I came in, ignoring the office boy, and brought these

flowers for your desk. You are five minutes late, Sir Laggard!"

She was quite radiant this morning, and her simple costume of white with a jaunty motor-ing cap became her exceedingly. In her hands she carried a great bunch of roses.

"Dan and I simply were discussing some business matters," replied the Colonel, bowing. "I'm going now."

"And you decline my proposition?" Dan's arms had fallen to his sides, and there was a note of regret in his voice.

"Absolutely, at this time. A week from now I may discuss it with you. Good morn-ing."

Peter Jordan again bowed to Ethel and turned to leave, but at the door the voice of Bevis stopped him.

"Just one moment." Dan went up to him and placed one hand on his shoulder. "If you ever have cause to regret this, do me the kindness to remember my efforts for you. Good morning, Colonel."

Bevis turned slowly toward his fiancée, who was tapping the table with her dainty fan, im-patient that he should neglect her for a business

discussion that could as well be held some other time. Jordan wavered, a look of mystification showing in his eyes.

"Good morning," he repeated, and strode down the tiled corridor.

Dan's step was a bit unsteady, and the faint flush no longer showed in his cheeks as he crossed the room and took down his hat.

"You are going to New York?" he asked, impassively.

"Yes—this evening." She picked up the "Herald," where Jordan had left it. "Aren't the papers splendid this morning?"

"The papers?" He glanced at the one she held. "Oh, yes. I had forgotten. You leave this evening?"

"Forgotten? You seem very indifferent this morning!" she exclaimed, petulantly. "Papa was called to New York by a telegram, and mamma and I are going with him. We'll do some shopping for my trousseau while we are there. Are you ready at last?"

He nodded, and followed her to the door. At a near-by desk the examiner was engrossed in a pile of papers and a number of books.

"I'm going out, Mr. Hartley," said Bevis. "I'll be in my office again at one-thirty."

Hartley glanced up and nodded, and again turned to the books and papers. As Bevis and Ethel went down the corridor past the different departments of the bank, the clerks bending over their desks glanced out from under their eyeshades with secret admiration for the vivacious and radiant Miss McLeedy, and then came a wave of sympathy for the pale-faced man who walked beside her, and who seemed to have aged so greatly since yesterday. His had, indeed, been a terrible battle in the darkness, they told themselves.

Five minutes later the two were spinning through the streets in the McLeedy electric brougham. The sky was cloudless, and rays of heat were dancing above the dirty pavement, but the speeding brougham brought a gentle breeze to the banker's aching brow. He listened with what interest he could command to the girl's recital of the hastily-arranged plans for the New York visit. Occasionally he ventured some suggestion, but for the most part he sat silent, his mind following the progress of that keen-eyed, bushy-browed man who smoked black cigars while he methodically checked off paper after paper and page after page of the bank's affairs.

The noonday chimes were sounding in the vine-clad tower of St. Anthony's as they passed the churchyard where a regiment of Cornwallis's soldiers once had encamped. On past a monument erected by a grateful people in memory of heroes who had given their lives in a recent war with a foreign nation; past the city and county prison, with its flower-dotted lawn, and with children romping and singing in the shade of the rambling structure, unthinking of the darkened lives just beyond those stone walls; across the cement arch bridge spanning the little river that flashed in the noonday sun as it wound its lazy way through the green valley; and then out into quieter streets and by broader lawns surrounding houses of more imposing architecture the brougham whirred, and at last turned into the broad avenue that led to the McLeedy estate.

Luncheon was not served until one. Dan Bevis had laughed quite freely in response to Mrs. McLeedy's dignified attempts at jest, and had entered with apparent enthusiasm into the conversation regarding the New York trip. At last it was over with, he had bidden them good-by and was hurrying back to the bank,

with orders to the taxicab driver to put on all speed.

For more than two hours he had worn the mask and played his part in the drama, and now it was close to three as he entered the bank and made his way as bravely as possible to his office. Hartley was there. In his mouth was an unlighted cigar that bobbed spasmodically as the examiner bit at it. Bevis hung up his hat and sank wearily into his chair.

"I was beginning to wonder—." Hartley paused and bit at the cigar again. "I expected you before this."

"I know." The words came low. "My fiancée is leaving for New York. I could not get here sooner."

"She goes—."

"This evening at five-thirty, thank God!"

Hartley looked at him without speaking. Then his eyes wandered to the portrait of the young man's father, and a furrow deepened in his forehead. He took the cigar from his mouth and wiped his lips, although they were strangely dry. He took up some papers and fingered them a moment.

"There are some things—." Again he

paused. "The books—." The cigar went back to his mouth. "I think I have made a mistake. Let's go over a few things here together."

Bevis reached out a tremblin' hand to take the papers Hartley held, and then he shoved them back and his head dropped onto his arms on the table, and a gasping, convulsive sob shook his shoulders. For a moment there was silence. Hartley stared at the portrait on the wall. Then he arose and closed the door and locked it. Bevis raised his head. His face was bloodless.

"How much—is it—Hartley?" he asked, brokenly.

The examiner stood by the table, his eyes still on the portrait.

"One hundred and fifty thousand!" he said in a low tone. Then he looked down at the man before him. Bevis sat limply in the chair, motionless, voiceless.

"Dan!" The name was spoken softly, and Hartley's voice was vibrant with pity. "Dan!" The man in the chair did not speak. "Perhaps I've made a mistake. Let's—"

"No!" The voice was hoarse. "It's no use, Hartley!" The colorless face was slowly

raised. "*It's gone—it's gone!*" The words trailed off into a whisper.

"There were some mortgage securities when I was here before," suggested Hartley. "I think I have overlooked them."

"No." Again came the denial. "You know they are—are—fictitious. You know it, else you would not remember them. That's why you came back so soon! You suspected the fraud!"

"Good God, Dan, don't say these things!" Hartley went around and put his hand on the banker's shoulder. "Make a fight, man! Fight! Call in your attorneys! Don't say these things to me!"

The man in the chair shook his head.

"I tell you it's no use!" he said, in a dull tone. "I tried this morning to get help to tide me over this. I couldn't." He ceased speaking and stared at the table. Then he continued. "There is nothing for a lawyer to do. It's hopeless! I know! It's utterly hopeless!"

Hartley took up the books and papers and began checking over his summaries, occasionally pausing to question Bevis, and the replies were always the same. Four o'clock came and the examiner gave a sigh of relief as he looked

out and saw the doors of the great vault swinging shut.

"Mr. Bevis has hurt his wounded shoulder," he said to the cashier. "I'll take him home presently, when he is feeling stronger."

The attachés were leaving. The custodian of the building locked the front doors and began his preparations for sweeping. The Empire State Bank had closed, never to open.

Hartley went back and sat down. Bevis's chin was on his breast, his hands folded listlessly in his lap.

"You refuse to call your attorneys?"

"Yes. It is useless."

He did not look up. There was a long interval of silence. Hartley arose and paced the room. Finally he paused.

"Dan, you—." He hesitated. "It's terrible—but you—you know—my duty!"

There was a quick clenching of the hands. Then Bevis slowly arose to his feet and looked squarely into the eyes of the examiner.

"I do—the sheriff! Call in the sheriff!"

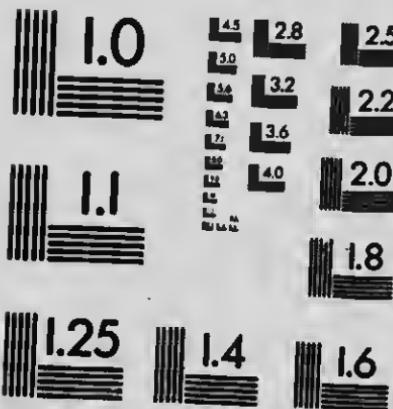
He turned from Hartley and looked up at the portrait on the wall.



"FATHER!" HE GASPED, "FATHER!"—*Page 73.*

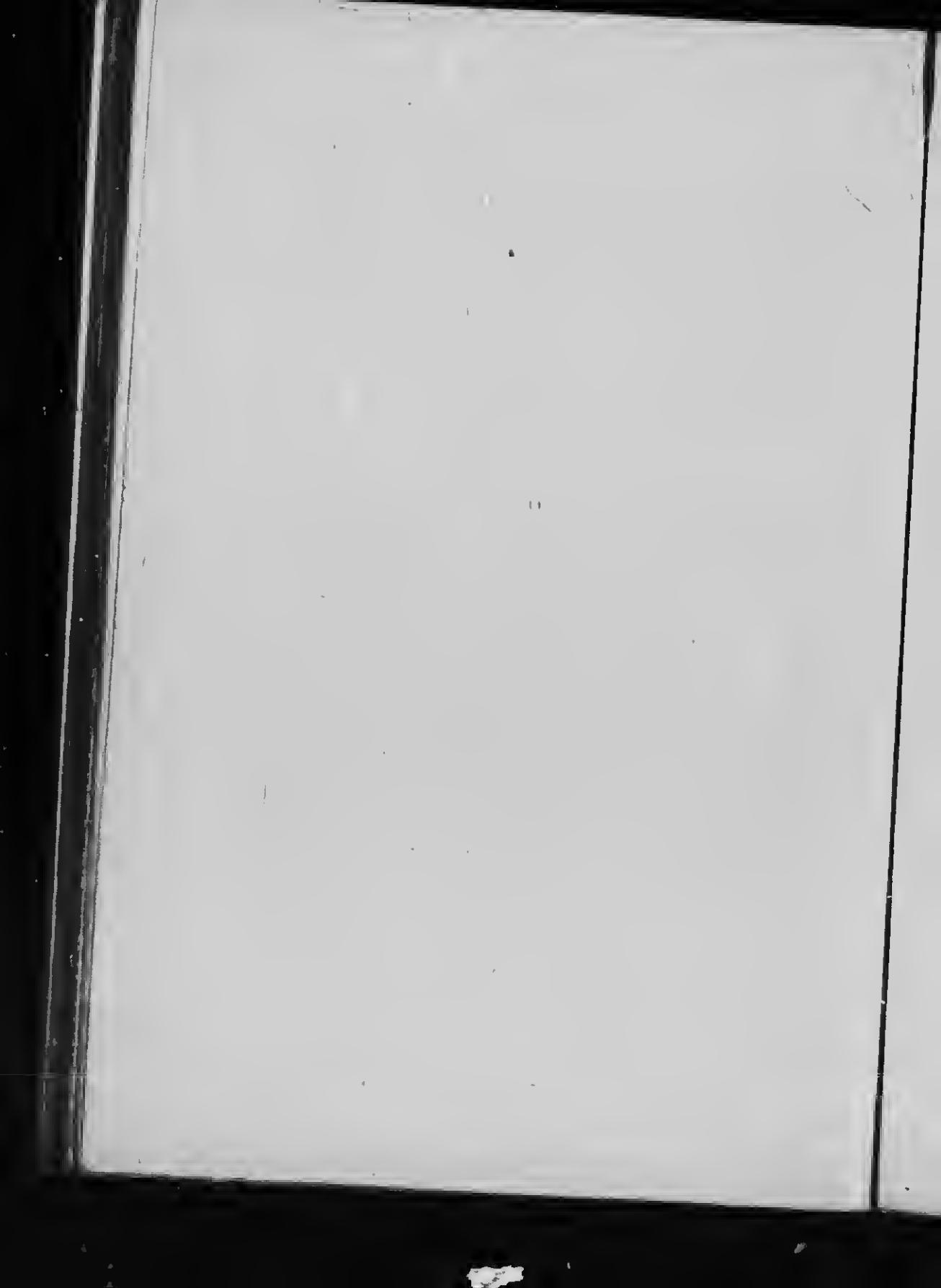


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"Father!" he gasped, taking a step toward it. "Father!"

He swayed unsteadily, and Hartley sprang forward in time to catch him as he crumpled to the floor.

CHAPTER V

A ROYAL HUSSAR

FLORENCE is always beautiful, but Florence in May, when the fascination and perfume of late spring are over all, is enchanting. In the afternoons and evenings a military band plays in the Cascine, the great public park that has been aptly compared to the Parisian Bois de Boulogne, and here the gay and fashionable life of the city promenades and drives and flirts and gossips—and intrigues.

The shadows of a May evening were deepening about the Casino when two men strolled into the place and sat down at one of the small tables. That both were English no one who had mingled much with cosmopolitan crowds could for a moment doubt. Even the manner of wearing their eyeglasses betokened the Briton.

"You quite astonish me," remarked the younger of the two, after the affable waiter

had been dismissed. He lighted a cigarette and blew a cloud of perfumed smoke from between his lips. "It's a tidy sum, Clarkson."

The other man nodded, and satisfaction showed in his eyes.

"One hundred thousand pounds sterling!" He rolled the words on his tongue, musingly, as though enjoying each syllable. "Your lordship will pardon me, of course, as it is my business to advise you on the condition of affairs relating to the estate, and—"

"Damn it, man, don't go over all that again! You've said it an even dozen times this afternoon." He scowled. "I know all that, and the rest—'And your lordship is beastly hard-pushed for money.' I know it. You've written it to me once a week for three months, when I've been trying to forget it!"

He was a stockily-built man of thirty-five, square of shoulders, and with a face that betrayed dissipation, in spite of the deep color bequeathed to his cheeks by exposure to the sun of tropical lands.

"It was my duty as one of your solicitors," was the simple reply, showing not the slightest trace of resentment at his companion's outburst. "And I have come from London to seek

your lordship and acquaint you with this matter, which is simply a business proposition."

Again the scowl came to the young man's face.

"You've chased me from Vienna to Rome, Rome to Naples, and then you ran me down here. Am I not to enjoy anything of my leave?"

"I tried to reach your lordship when your regiment arrived from Singapore, but the ship reached London a day earlier than was expected, and you broke for Vienna immediately. Of course, I know why, and I'm not fault-finding. She is quite charming. But something must be done soon. There are those who are growing—er—insistent—for the satisfaction of the—the—"

"Mortgages. Say it. Mortgages. A lawyer ought not to gag at the word." There was a moment of silence, during which neither looked at the other but sat apparently interested in the gay scene about them. The soldier turned abruptly and faced his companion. "If this syndicate secures the concession from Austria—." He hesitated, and his gaze shifted.

"The syndicate recognizes that there are

certain legitimate expenses connected with the enterprise. You simply become, for the time being, an advocate for the syndicate."

A slow nodding of the head.

"And I need not be known in the matter?"

"Most certainly not. Herr VonKampf, your brother-in-law, is a leader of the German wing of the upper house of the Reichsrath; his wife's influence over him is tremendous—and she devotedly loves her brother, your lordship, and would delight to advance your interests. It is not so difficult as it might seem."

"And what of the after effects on Herr VonKampf? Clarkson, I'm a soldier, and don't pretend to know what would be the result were the Austrian government to vote the concession to this group of Americans. I believe you said they were Americans?"

"As to the first question, Herr VonKampf will never have cause to find fault with his decision should he throw his influence in favor of this great project. We may despise the Americans for whatever reason we choose, your lordship, but they are wonder-workers. That we must admit. Their enterprise and genius are doing much for European progress, and Austria will undoubtedly

be benefited by the stupendous work this syndicate will do if given the opportunity. But Austria is inclined to cling to traditions and not welcome new world ideas. Hence the syndicate's representative is in Europe quietly seeking a method of obtaining the necessary lever to move the honorable body that must decide the question."

The listener surveyed Clarkson with something very near to admiration.

"What beats me," he said, "is how the deuce you learned so much of this."

The solicitor removed his eyeglasses and smiled enigmatically.

"It would be too long a tale for this occasion," he answered. "But I know what I know, and I know that your lordship is the one man to handle the affair. And, further, I know that the representative of the syndicate is here in Florence at this very time and stopping at the same hotel with your lordship."

Clarkson looked at his companion in triumph.
"Hang me if you haven't been busy since reaching town this morning!" The reply voiced surprise as well as increasing admiration.

"I've been exceedingly busy ever since the

American reached London. I learned—no matter how, just now—of his mission, and in a flash I saw our—I mean, your—opportunity, and it then became necessary that I should keep close trace of him while I searched for you. By a fortunate chance I find you both in Florence."

"And who is this chap—lawyer?"

Clarkson smiled.

"No, the vice-president of the syndicate, Mr. Andrew McLeedy."

The other pondered a moment, and then he looked up.

"McLeedy? Yes—his wife and daughter are here, too. Devilish snippish girl, the daughter!"

"To plain John Osborne, probably. But to John Wilmoth Osborne Cranston, Earl of Heathercote and Major in His Majesty's Royal Hussars, I have no doubt that she would be most gracious."

"Hang the title! I'm having a better time as plain John Osborne."

Clarkson again indulged in that queer, enigmatic smile.

"No doubt, sir. No doubt. And when one has been in India two years one can appreciate

the beauty of the charming Mademoiselle, who is quite the rage now throughout European theatrical circles—.” The solicitor suddenly leaned across the table and finished in a low, earnest tone. “But, your lordship, surely it is but a fancy, a—ah—well, your lordship must contemplate taking a wife some time. Tut! tut!” he exclaimed, as the other broke forth in remonstrance. “Wives are very convenient for social purposes—and the Earl of Heathercote must not forget that he owes something to society. And if Lady Heathercote’s dowery were ample—well—.” He paused and looked squarely into his companion’s eyes. Then he settled back in his chair and lighted another cigarette. “The band is playing Italian favorites this evening. Listen to those voices joining in ‘Funicula Funicula.’ ”

Lord Heathercote smoked half of his cigarette in silence. Then he arose.

“I’m going for a stroll,” he said.

Clarkson watched him as he went out into the park, and then the lawyer chuckled softly to himself. The band had ceased playing, and he could hear the storm of hand-clapping that gave evidence of the Florentine appreciation of the popular number. A moment later the

strains of "Santa Lucia" were heard, and, before he realized it, Clarkson was humming the familiar song.

The McLeedys had been in Florence a fortnight. That is, Mrs. McLeedy and Ethel had. Mr. McLeedy had joined them three days before Clarkson found Lord Heathercote at their hotel. Much of the last ten months the mother and daughter had spent abroad, fleeing from the unpleasant manner in which the names of McLeedy and Bevis had been associated in a deluge of newspaper comments on the wreck of the Empire State Bank and the imprisonment of Dan Bevis. From time to time the husband and father would join them for a few weeks but his business cares had increased amazingly as the result of his journey to New York on that June evening when Bevis had collapsed in the private office of the bank after telling Hartley, the examiner, to summon the sheriff.

During the ten days that Andrew McLeedy spent in New York on that occasion he became one of the most prominent figures in the organization of a syndicate that already was making its power felt on two continents. He was

made vice-president of the company, and when some one was needed to find the way to secure rich concessions in Austria he was chosen by the astute financiers to accomplish the mission.

It is possible that had he been at home he would have placed his wealth and resources at the command of the Empire State Bank in order to save his family the notoriety that was inevitable upon the closing of the bank. But he was absent, and could not have been called back in time to save the bank from ruin had Bevis so attempted, and the banker, realizing this, had declined to send the message. On that morning when Bevis had sat in his window watching the birth of dawn and staring into the face of ruin he had considered an appeal to McLeedy, but had shrunk from the step, and had decided to pay the penalty with such fortitude as he could command.

Each afternoon Mrs. McLeedy and Ethel drove through the Cascine, and occasionally out into the vine-clad hills that form a natural amphitheatre for the city, returning in time for dinner in the hotel, where the wealth and fashion of the world assemble while in Florence. This evening they drove past the Casino on their way back to the hotel just as the band had

finished playing "Santa Lucia," and Clarkson, who had started to walk to his modest hotel, was seized with a sudden idea as he saw them pass. Well knowing that it was improbable that they would get out of the park without pausing several times for gossip with friends, he made all haste to reach their hotel, and was gratified to see them just alighting as he arrived. Watching his opportunity, he signalled the driver, and a gold piece soon secured from the man certain information that greatly pleased the wily solicitor.

When Ethel McLeedy entered her apartments her maid handed her a letter postmarked "U. S. A." Glancing at the address, she tossed it aside with an exclamation of annoyance.

"What is it, my dear?" inquired her mother, who had followed her into the room.

The girl picked up the letter and handed it to her mother.

"Again!" she said.

"From Dan Bevis." The mother sighed as she laid the letter on the table. "From a prison cell!"

Ethel walked over to a window. The Arno, dividing the city into equal parts, was visible

from this point, and now its waters flashed golden under the last rays of the setting sun, its western banks shadowed by the huge granite walls. On the hills she could see the evening's gloom enshrouding the cypress and ilex trees, and to her mind came a flash of remembrance of the night when she had seen Dan Bevis spring forward among the trees of the McLeedy estate to battle with the robber. And now he was in prison, a convict! It had been a tremendous blow to her pride. Her heart had suffered but little. But now as she stood watching the color fade from the sky, and the shadows weaving their veil about the hills and the river, there was something in the memory that succeeded in arousing a faint tinge of soul sadness. She turned and sank into a chair, her arms outstretched on the table before her, and for a few moments she sat silent in the rapidly deepening twilight. Her mother touched a pearl-tipped button and the room was light.

"And has he never had the manhood to give you release?"

The mother gazed a bit anxiously at her daughter. It was a new mood that was on the

girl this evening. Ethel reached over and took up the letter.

"No," she answered in a low voice. "He always writes with the air of an innocent man."

"Innocent?" Mrs. McLeedy raised her hands in a manner expressive of ridicule. "Why, child, he confessed without a trial." Ethel nodded slowly, and tore open the envelope. "And you know of the exposures that followed—that he had been plunging on the stock market, and that—"

"That Mr. Hartley told papa that Dan had forged some mortgage securities to deceive him as to the true condition at the previous examination?" She again arose and went to the window and looked out on the darkening hills. "Yes, I remember all of that."

There was that in her voice which caused the mother to eye her daughter sharply.

"And yet he says he is innocent?"

"No, he doesn't say that. But there is an air of innocence about his letters—something, I don't know just what—something he doesn't say, but which he makes one feel he wants to say."

"Something he wants you to believe—of course. He should release you from the betrothal."

The girl came back to the table and sat down.

"I don't believe I ever asked him to," she said, simply. "Nor do I consider it necessary. It is quite impossible that our engagement should be considered as still in effect. He has forfeited that right." She drew the letter from the envelope and read it. "The same declarations—always the same—that when he leaves the prison he intends going back to his old home to try to justify the faith his friends once had in him."

Mrs. McLeedy arose.

"It is time we dressed for dinner," she said.

The perfume from the flower gardens stole into the room. A group of strolling musicians paused in the street below, and violin and flute sobbed the "Ave Maria." Tearing the letter into bits, the girl tossed it aside and summoned her maid.

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"Clarkson," said Lord Heathercote as he sat in the lawyer's room that night, "is this Miss McLeedy very wealthy?"

"She will be within two years," replied the solicitor. "Andrew McLeedy will become one of the great men in American finance." He arose and locked the door. "Your lordship, I have a plan," he said, in a low voice, again taking his seat.

It was late when his lordship returned to his own apartments, and then he sat for quite a long time with the brandy and soda at his elbow, smoking and looking out at the moonlight, in which the cathedrals and palaces of the city were gleaming white.

Lord Heathercote was reputed one of the best horsemen in His Majesty's Royal Hussars, but since obtaining his leave after the regiment had returned from India he had not been in the saddle. However, early the next morning he appeared booted and in riding breeches, and a half-hour later was galloping along the Lung' Arno, and then, turning aside from the great river with its many bridges, he made his way into the hills, with their white-walled castles and countless villas. The roadway was bordered by the green of cypress and olive trees, and the hill slopes were gay with a carpet of lilies, violets, tulips, and crocuses, and in the yards of the villas were a profusion of roses.

cariations, and hyacinths. When he had reached the open country and had found a secluded bit of road he indulged in various feats of horsemanship, but had there been an observer it would easily have been noted that his lordship was not going through these maneuvers for the purpose of testing his skill in riding, but for the purpose of testing his mount and noting the animal's degree of response to various pressures of the bridle rein or the prick of a spur.

He did not return to the hotel for lunch, but refreshed himself at an obscure little restaurant in the outskirts of the city. And in the afternoon he cantered through the Cascine. It came about that he was thus enjoying himself when the McLeedys came for their regular afternoon drive in the park.

Just how it all happened none of the participants in the thrilling affair ever were able to clearly state, but a great touring car coming up behind the McLeedy carriage suddenly made a tremendous racket, there was a clatter of cogs and ratchets as the chauffeur jerked this or that lever, and all of it combined caused the thoroughbreds pulling the carriage to spring forward in fright.

The driver was taken unawares and the lines were jerked from his hands as the automobile gave another rattle and a loud report as the engine came to a standstill. The horses, now thoroughly frightened, dashed ahead with wild plunges, but almost at the same instant that Ethel McLeedy's scream rang out Lord Heathcote, who was cantering close behind, pressed his spurs into the flanks of his mount, and the animal broke into a furious gallop.

It was a splendid feat of horsemanship he exhibited as he reached the heads of the runaways and, leaning suddenly to one side, gripped the bridle and brought them to a halt at the monument of the Maharaja of Kolhapur, but not before one wheel of the carriage had been badly damaged by colliding with the fence enclosing the monument.

Instantly his lordship was out of the saddle and standing at the heads of the trembling animals, at the same time speaking reassuring words to the occupants of the carriage. The driver was profuse in his explanations of how he chanced to lose control, but Mrs. McLeedy vehemently declared that he should not drive for them again. The automobile that had caused all of the trouble came gliding up at

this moment as noiselessly and smoothly as a shadow, and the man in the tonneau sprang out and offered his apologies to the ladies for the carelessness of the chauffeur who had permitted the machine to behave so badly. It was Clarkson, the solicitor.

"It was a gallant bit of work that your lordship performed," he said, turning and bowing to the nobleman, who smiled and expressed his pleasure that the ladies were uninjured.

"And as I can do no more, with your permission I will continue my ride," said his lordship, looking at Mrs. McLeedy.

"But we must have further opportunity to express to you our thanks for—"

"It is quite unnecessary," he answered, springing into the saddle. "Good afternoon." He raised his hat and cantered away without looking back.

The McLeedys, perforce, accepted Clarkson's invitation to return to the hotel in his touring car. The crowd that had been drawn by the affair dispersed as the auto slowly moved forward, circled about the monument and then sped swiftly toward the hotel.

"Certainly he was a skillful horseman," said Ethel. "His face seemed familiar."

"He is a guest at your hotel," replied the lawyer. "He is registered as John Osborne."

The girl raised her brows slightly.

"John Osborne? I thought you addressed him as 'your lordship'?"

The solicitor smiled benignly.

"These noblemen frequently prefer to remain incognito, for various reasons. The gentleman who caught your runaways is John Wilmoth Osborne Cranston, Earl of Heathercote, and Major in His Majesty's Royal Hussars."

And then the solicitor smiled once more.

CHAPTER VI

THE ULTIMATUM

COLONEL PETER JORDAN aged rapidly in the months following the wreck of the bank. His shoulders drooped, his face was gray, and when he walked his step was uncertain, and he leaned much upon his cane. But he faced the world without a plea for its indulgence. After that one dramatic moment when he stood before Dan Bevis in the court room and with trembling, upraised hand called for the curse of God to rest upon the man who had persisted in pleading guilty in spite of the earnest endeavors of attorneys to induce him to fight for liberty upon technicalities, Peter Jordan never was heard to speak Bevis's name in public.

He refrained from writing to Hilda of the affair, but it is not easy to keep one from learning of such events, even though seas roll between, and so a knowledge of it all reached her in Berlin a couple of weeks before she was to

play in the midsummer recital. Quickly divining the cause of her father's silence concerning the bank affair, she abandoned the plans she had made for the gown she was to wear on that occasion, and when she appeared before the brilliant assembly that evening she wore the simplest of white creations, but when she began to play the supercilious smiles faded from the aristocratic lips before her, an unusual hush came over the boxes, and her teachers leaned forward, eagerly following every ripple and whisper of the violin, but the girl was forgetful of it all.

She had been strangely quiet all the evening, but not because of nervousness or diffidence, as those in charge of the program had supposed, but because that day she had received a letter from home, from "Daddy," and in his brave words she read the pathos of a struggle he was making against the wolves of finance in far-away America.

And now as she played she was playing to him, and, somehow, she felt that he knew, for the tenderness of his great heart crept into the voice of the violin and hushed the audience with a power that held its silence until she had slowly lowered the bow, inclined her head, and

walked from the platform. Then the famous old structure shook with an ovation that would not be stilled.

"Respond! Respond!" cried the director, hurrying to her side as she gave no heed to the applause.

"What is it?" she asked, as though dazed. "Oh," and she caught her breath suddenly, "are they pleased?"

Still that storm was sweeping back and forth across the crowd in front.

"Pleased?" The director seized her by the arm and forced her toward the platform. "Respond!" he exclaimed again, joyously. "Play anything!"

And there on the occasion of Berlin's greatest music fête Hilda Jordan played "Home, Sweet Home," and when she had smiled and bowed her way from the stage she sank into an easy chair and sobbed.

The *Wilhelm Meister* sailed for New York two days later, and Hilda Jordan stood well aft, the morning sunlight showing a glint as of dull copper where it touched her hair. She watched the shore line grow dim, and then with a sigh she turned her back to it and faced

the new world and a life that she knew would contain grim struggle.

Her coming brought renewed stimulus to Peter Jordan, and for some days the droop was gone from his shoulders and his hand rested but lightly on the cane. Hilda dismissed the servants that had had the care of the old home, the tones of the violin were heard but seldom, and she took upon herself the entire task of housekeeping.

The summer waned, and the girl saw the look of anxiety and care again deepening on her father's face. Once more his shoulders drooped, and the color that had come back to his cheeks when she had surprised him by her early return from Berlin faded. That the trust was relentlessly endeavoring to crush the Jordan mills she well knew, and now she also discovered that dissatisfaction was growing among the employés, though her father always treated the matter lightly when she endeavored to learn the truth.

"There are always agitators among mill men," he would reply in answer to her queries. "Wilson can handle that phase all right."

And so the battle went on, month after

month. The winter and another summer passed, and then one December day Wilson, the general superintendent, entered Jordan's private office looking extremely grave.

"It's coming sure, Colonel!" he exclaimed, ignoring Jordan's customary invitation to be seated.

Jordan sank farther back into his chair, his face rather paler than usual.

"Coming?" He looked up at his superintendent. "You mean—" He paused.

"The strike—the shut-down—the end!" Wilson sighed heavily as he spoke the words.

Jordan's hands clenched. His lips grew dry, and he moistened them with his tongue.

"When?"

Jordan spoke but the one word. The superintendent sat down and glanced toward the open letters on Jordan's desk. He knew the stationery, and he knew that the letters were repetitions of demands that certain heavy creditors at the dictation of the trust influence were making upon the head of the mills, and in his heart he felt that the fight was a hopeless one; that the mills were doomed.

Peter Jordan had incurred the enmity of the trust two years before by refusing to join in

the "articles of agreement" the powers had entered into, which articles of agreement had for their design the laying of heavy burdens upon the public, and after a stormy scene the old Virginian had withdrawn from the meeting, swearing by the eternal that he would not be a party to any robbery under the name of business, and since that day the fight had been a bitter one.

On one or two occasions the Consolidated Companies had made overtures to him, the tenor of which was that if he were ready to acknowledge defeat and the justness of his chastisement the warfare would cease upon his joining in the agreement. But each time he had sworn to the suave emissary of the powers that his honor knew no compromise or surrender. He would fight to his last breath, he vowed.

And so the struggle went on. And the Jordan mills had known the least bit of victory. Standing between the greed of the trust and the helpless public, they had by the force of Peter Jordan's personality and executive powers compelled the Consolidated Companies to abandon its first campaign, which had for its plan the ignoring of the independent mills, and

had forced the powers to keep within bounds in their lust for pillage.

And then the plan of campaign was changed, and Peter Jordan was forced to meet a ruinous competition. But still he had fought on, and the stacks of the Jordan mills poured forth their smoke day after day without hint that the master of the mills was being driven to his last resources in order to keep those great furnaces aglow. Then it had become necessary to add new and greatly-improved machinery for the purpose of meeting the competition, and to do this Peter Jordan had placed a heavy mortgage on his home. He had considered his stock in the Empire State Bank to be his reserve ammunition. The year had not opened auspiciously in a business way, but as midsummer came he had been cheered by the indications of ultimate success in his battle for business independence, and he felt that if he should be forced to dispose of his bank holdings it would, nevertheless, be the means of his achieving what he had struggled for so many months.

Then had come that day when the banking institution that had been considered solid and

strong crumpled into a chaos of ruin. And upon the heels of this disaster came the wolves to snarl at the proud old master of the Jordan mills.

Grimly he battled, but the pack was sure of its prey, now, and day by day it closed in upon him, watching for a chance to bring him down. Friends, seeing the situation, urged him to take advantage of the bankruptcy laws and save something from the inevitable crash. But he shook his head.

"I'll never live to see the sun rise on that disgrace!" he said. And all of their persuasions were inadequate to present bankruptcy to him in any light other than that of disgrace.

Now he sat facing the last complication in the long struggle. He knew it was to be the last. The only uncertainty was as to the time.

"When?" he repeated, as Wilson hesitated.

"The first of the year—January first, to be exact."

"The men have presented their declaration?"

The superintendent nodded.

"An ultimatum. The committee just left me."

"What is the demand?"

"Ten per cent. increase in wages, and shorter hours. The Consolidated people have given their men these."

Peter Jordan turned to the desk and carefully folded the letters lying there. Then he slowly faced Wilson again.

"I know it. The Consolidated did it to incite trouble here. Well—." He paused and there were a few minutes of silence.

The superintendent gave one glance at the old man who sat before him, his chin sunk upon his chest, his hands resting listlessly upon the arms of his chair, and then Wilson arose and walked to the window. He was standing in the presence of a pathetic defeat. It was as though a gladiator had fallen and the powers were sitting merciless, with thumbs down, demanding the fatal stroke.

"Well—?" The superintendent half turned toward the man in the chair, and his voice was vibrant with sympathy.

"It's the end, Wilson; you know it." Peter Jordan had looked up, but now as he paused once more, his head slowly drooped forward again and his hands clasped each other limply in his lap. "I can't meet those demands." His voice was almost inaudible. "You know

THE ULTIMATUM

101

I can not. And if the strike comes—it finishes the ~~light~~!"

Wilson looked out at the dreary December day. Evening was coming on, and in the gray twilight snowflakes were seen riding on the gusts of wind that moaned about the building. From where he stood he could see the furnace fires in the mills sending their glow out into the gathering gloom.

"My race is run, Wilson, and for myself I have no complaint to make." The old man was speaking again in calm, even, dry tones. "I am content. I have fought for a principle and have lost, but the principle is not lost." Another pause. The superintendent could think of no word of reply. "But—Hilda! Hilda!" The name was but little more than a choking sob. "She will be a pauper. My Hilda will—"

Wilson turned now, a glow in his face, and in a few quick steps he stood beside the master of the mills.

"Hilda will—I will care for Hilda!" he exclaimed. "You know," he added eagerly, as the gray-faced man looked up with a gesture of protest, "that you consented for me to win her if I could."

"Yes, yes, I did. That was a year ago. You are a gentleman, Wilson, and worthy. Were things different I would give her to you with my blessing. But now she would see in it—charity."

"No—not that—not that!" Wilson placed his hand on the old man's shoulder and looked down into his eyes. "It is already arranged. Hilda is to be my wife. I had intended telling you to-day, but—"

"But your loyalty to my interests put them first." Colonel Jordan arose and clasped Wilson's hand. "I appreciate your loyalty and unselfishness." A wraith of a smile came to his lips. "The mills may close and Peter Jordan may fall in the fight, but Hilda will be happy. My life is finished—and now it can close in peace." He turned away and put on his overcoat and hat, unheeding the flood of words that came from the superintendent's lips. "I am going home, now. To-morrow we will further discuss the mill situation."

The tap of his cane sounded heavily as he walked into the outer office, and after bidding the customary good night to the clerks passed out into the deepening darkness of the December evening.

Outside the office building he paused and let his eyes rest with a sort of tenderness on the buildings that constituted the Jordan plant. The hum of wheels and the harsh clank of ponderous machinery came to him, while from half a dozen cupolas the flames were leaping up into the night. Then he turned and gazed long and steadily toward a ruddy glow in the southern sky, a glow he knew to be caused by the great furnaces of the Consolidated Companies' plant a mile away. Slowly he raised his cane and pointed toward that flushed sky.

"You may murder a man and call it business, but you cannot reach his honor nor his soul!" he exclaimed.

Peter Jordan's home was a bit old-fashioned. In constructing it he clung to the Virginian idea of restfulness, a fact that impressed itself upon one from the moment one stepped upon the broad, column-studded veranda, or "gallery," as the Colonel persisted in calling it, until one sat peacefully before the great fireplace that the Virginian had insisted on having in his drawing room. Before this fireplace he sat each evening to smoke and plan for the future or dream of the past, and here, in these later days, Hilda always sought him, to play

for him, to cuddle him, or to offer to counsel with him. And here she found him this evening after their modest dinner. There was something in his face this evening that caused her to place her hand gently on his brow and then smooth back the snow-white hair. He put his arm about her and drew her down beside his knee, and looked into the blue eyes that were studying his face so anxiously.

"Hilda," he asked, softly, "do you love Oscar Wilson very, very much?"

The red deepened in her cheeks, and she suddenly dropped her head until it rested on his shoulder.

"I have promised to marry him," she answered, her voice low.

There was something in her tone that caused him to stare thoughtfully into the fire for a moment, a troubled look on his face.

"So he told me to-day," he answered. "And you think you will be very happy? Do you, Hilda?"

A note of wistfulness betrayed itself and she flung her arms about his neck with a merry laugh.

"Very, very happy, Daddy," she replied. "It—meets—with your wishes, doesn't it?"

"Indeed, yes." His brow cleared and he smiled contentedly. "He is a splendid gentleman, and will win success. I am getting old, and I have wanted to see my little girl cared for. When is it to be?"

She looked at him in a startled way.

"Be?" She hesitated. "I—don't know. Not soon—but—Oh, just some time." She laughed again. "I want just you, Daddy, for —well, a long time."

"I know, dear—I know. But I am anxious! The end of the fight is at hand, Hilda—the end of the fight!"

Then he told her of the threatened strike, and all that it meant, and very gently he explained to her all of the details of the desperate plight into which he had been plunged by the wreck of the bank.

"We will be paupers, Hilda—think of it, paupers—because of that man, that thief, who used our money to gamble on the stock market! May God's—"

"Don't, Daddy—please!" The girl placed her fingers on his lips. "Don't say that awful thing!" He had half risen, his hands clenched, but now he dropped back into the chair with a moan as of anguish. "Maybe we can win

yet. There must be some way! There must be!"

"There is no way," he said, "no way. But there has been something greater than the mills crushing me, Hilda—you. But now I can face the—the close—without flinching, because you have promised to be Oscar Wilson's wife. You will not be alone!"

"Alone?" A mist of tears showed in her eyes. "You are tired out to-night. Why, I have you, and I have promised—to be—his wife." She smiled a 'ittle through the tears.

"And a Jordan never breaks a promise." He patted her on the head. "We'll say no more about it to-night. I want you to play for me now."

When she brought her violin he turned out the lights, a fancy of his, and she played for him there in the ruddy glow from the fireplace while he watched the shadows dance about them, and saw the burning logs build castles of coals and then dash them into the gray ashes. She laid aside the violin after a time, and he arose and kissed her.

"Good night," he said, and went slowly from the room.

For a long time the girl sat alone before the

THE ULTIMATUM

107

dying fire, its flickering gleams now and then calling forth the coppery glint from the loosened masses of her hair.

"A Jordan never breaks a promise," she mused. "Dear old Daddy! Dear, dear old Daddy!"

CHAPTER VII

THE WAY OF THE WORLD

IT was spring again, the second since the wreck of the Empire State Bank, and though that affair had ceased to be the subject of discussion in the clubs and on the cars, here and there were to be seen mute reminders of the financial tragedy. The stacks of the Jordan mills gave forth no smoke, and no sound of industry came from within the gloomy-looking walls. Small boys with slings had broken many panes of glass in the windows, a recent wind-storm had ripped off a portion of the office building roof and the loosened tin of the eaves still flapped, creaking and complaining, in the passing breezes. On dead walls about the city could still be seen faded bills advertising bankruptcy sales of various kinds, all of which, had they been traced to their source, could have told pathetic tales of ruin attendant upon the closing of the bank.

The McLeedys were spending the summer at

THE WAY OF THE WORLD 109

home, even Switzerland and the Alps having palled on them after the many months they had spent out of the last two years in rambling through foreign countries. Andrew McLeedy had reached the age where he had once told himself he would retire from business, but, on the contrary, he found himself more deeply than ever immersed in it. Before, he had been a man of comfortable income, but upon the occasion of his journey to New York two years before, the real lust for millions was born in his heart, and henceforth until Nature claimed its toll he was to know no contentment so far as wealth was concerned. The syndicate of which he became vice-president at that time had made no false moves, had known no failures, and month by month its coffers grew heavier.

Throughout the afternoon the clouds had been banking heavily in the west, with low murmurings of thunder that made themselves heard above the rattle and confusion of traffic in the city, and by evening rain was falling. The storm grew in violence as the evening advanced, so that those who drove up to the Hudson Club were compelled to scamper lively from the curb to the entrance, for even

umbrellas gave but scant protection from the rain that was driven violently by a strong wind.

Ensconced in one corner of a quiet room Sant Reagan, still the State chairman by the grace of the party bosses and the success he had achieved in the last election, sat with his feet on a chair, pages and sections of a dissected newspaper scattered about him and a blue haze of cigar smoke everywhere. Occasionally he paused in his reading to gaze reflectively at the numerous dress-coated arrivals passing the little room he had chosen in the secluded corner of the club quarters.

The years had brought no change to Reagan. The skin still stretched taut over his angular face, his eyes still held their look of shrewdness, and the glasses still perched far down on his lean nose. He had become a still greater power in the politics of the State, and it was to Reagan, probably more than to any other man, that the Governor owed his re-election. All of which had strengthened the chairman's grasp on state politics.

"Gordon!" he called, suddenly, as a dapper young man sauntered into the view commanded by the doorway. Gordon looked

THE WAY OF THE WORLD 111

a round, and Reagan beckoned him. "What in the deuce is going on here to-night?" he asked, shoving aside his papers and shaking hands with the other.

Gordon sat down and lighted a cigarette.

"Where have you been, Reagan?" he asked in a bantering tone. "This is the night of McLeedy's dinner."

"McLeedy's dinner!" exclaimed the chairman. "I've been out of town for two weeks—in Washington—just got back this afternoon. Tell me about it."

"There must be an invitation for you sticking around some place," answered Gordon, ignoring the point of Reagan's query. "You and McLeedy are friendly, aren't you?"

The chairman smiled a little.

"Well, so-so—just so-so! We're not sleeping together," he answered. "I'm not hurt because I failed to get an invitation, Willis. I simply wondered what had brought the old man away from his money bags sufficiently to do something social."

"Nobility, Reagan—nobility." Gordon blew a cloud of smoke. "John Wilmoth Osborne Cranston, Earl of Heathercote, Major in His Majesty's Royal Hussars, is to dazzle us poor

plebeians this evening. I suppose we'll learn something new in the handling of soup spoons and—”

“The emptying of wine glasses,” interrupted Reagan. “Is the dinner for this Englishman?”

Gordon nodded.

“His lordship is supposed to have followed Miss Ethel across the Atlantic. They met some months ago—in Florence, I believe. I don’t know the story, but it seems that His Majesty’s hussar did some sort of a daring feat in behalf of Miss McLeedy and her mother, and they afterward became quite friendly.”

Reagan rubbed the crown of his head in the old way.

“I’m not much in touch with society affairs, Gordon,” he said. “Just what do you mean by ‘quite friendly’?”

Gordon drew three or four times on the cork tip of his cigarette before he replied.

“Hanged if I know just what I do mean—or, rather, to be perfectly frank, I don’t like to think that I know what I mean.” He studied the coal on the tiny roll between his fingers. “That doesn’t sound like sense, I

THE WAY OF THE WORLD 113

know, but—" (another cloud of smoke floated upward)—"I don't believe I understand Ethel McLeedy."

"The auction block once more, eh?" Reagan dropped his feet to the floor. "Another American girl willing to become the mistress of a nobleman for a title! I wonder—"

"Hush!" Gordon's hand fell on the chairman's arm. "Those are harsh words. I don't know for sure that Ethel McLeedy contemplates becoming Lady Heathercote, but if so she will be Lord Heathercote's wife, not his —his—"

Reagan smiled sarcastically.

"It's an ugly word, isn't it?" he asked, as the other hesitated. "But you wouldn't hesitate to use it if the parties were residents of Scarlet Street."

"But you forget—the marriage ceremony!" Gordon looked at his companion in astonishment. "You forget this," he repeated.

"No, I don't forget that, either," responded Reagan, half-savagely. "But what does a marriage ceremony amount to in a case of this kind? It's bargain and sale, ceremony or no ceremony. I'm a politician, Gordon, and not much bothered with ethics, as a general propo-

sition, but I have a few old-fashioned notions left, and one of them is that it takes more than the reciting of certain specified words—by courtesy called a ceremony—to make a woman a wife, or a man a husband."

"Doesn't it strike you that you are attacking some of our American homes, also?"

"'And pity 'tis 'tis true,'" quoted Reagan. "Bargain and sale, bargain and sale—and bargain and sale never made a marriage." He paused, and for a moment neither spoke. "McLeedy has made a cool million in the last two years, they tell me."

"That Austrian concession his syndicate secured will make him one of the wealthiest men in America in ten years," said Gordon, a note of awe sounding in his voice.

"His lordship must be far-sighted," was the chairman's ironical reply. "I wonder how Bevis will take this?"

"Bevis?" queried Gordon in surprise. "I had supposed that Dan Bevis was—well, not to be considered. He'll not be out for a few years yet, at best."

"Wrong." Reagan turned and looked into his companion's face. "Dan Bevis is in town now."

THE WAY OF THE WORLD 115

Gordon arose quickly to his feet and leaned forward excitedly.

"Dan Bevis in town!" he exclaimed. "I don't see how—"

Reagan smiled and motioned to the chair.

"Birthday present from the Governor," he responded. "Better sit down, Willis. Yesterday was the Governor's anniversary and he wanted to celebrate it by paroling some one. He told me this a month ago, and I suggested poor Dan Bevis. The Governor always liked the man for his gallant act that night—you know, out at McLeedy's. I saw Dan in town this evening."

A dash of rain came against the window, and the heavy roll of thunder was heard. Gordon threw aside his cigarette and sat mutely staring at Reagan.

"I didn't suppose he'd come back here," he said, at last. "The feeling is bitter."

"That's true," assented Reagan. "I like the fellow—I don't care what he has done. I like him, and I've done a little private investigating to see what kind of a chance he will have here for a new start in life." He shook his head slowly. "It's no use, Gordon. He'll get nothing but kicks here."

"I always liked Bevis, myself," admitted Gordon. "But when one remembers all—members of the good fellows who were ruined by the wreck of that bank; when one thinks of poor old Jordan, dead by his own hand the morning he would have been declared a bankrupt—when one remembers all of these things, Reagan, it isn't strange that Dan Bevis can find no welcome in this city."

"It's the way of the world, I know—but a shame, nevertheless!" said the State chairman, vehemently. "Poor old Jordan's case was a shock to me, but I know that Dan Bevis tried to save the Colonel. Jordan admitted it to me, himself. But that Southern pride got in the way, and the Colonel was a victim. He fought to the last, though, and it was the Consolidated Companies, not Dan Bevis, that murdered him. It was their schemes and money lust that did it. He could have cheated them out of something, but he wouldn't. It was his Virginian idea of honor to sacrifice everything—his home and all—to meet his obligations." Reagan got up and paced across the room. Finally he stopped in front of his companion. "Gordon," he snapped, "I'm damned glad I'm not a Virginian!"

THE WAY OF THE WORLD 117

"That may all be true, but you know whom our people blame for these tragedies. Besides —." He paused and stared down the hallway visible from the little room. "Look yonder!"

A tall figure was moving slowly down the hallway, hesitation evident in every movement. Reagan peered over his glasses and then snatched them off his nose.

"Dan Bevis!" he exclaimed.

There was no doubt about it. Dan Bevis had entered the exclusive Hudson Club, of which he had once been an honored member, and of which he still considered himself a member. Aside from the slight hesitancy that betrayed the battle taking place in his mind, he walked with the same easy grace that had been his in the old days. To-night there was not much of color in his cheeks, and his hair showed a sprinkle of gray that had not been there when last he trod those floors. The courage he had summoned as he stood for a moment without the grim entrance of this famous old club had all but left him by the time he had gained the interior, and he found himself avoiding direct contact with men he had known in the other days.

Many were there who were strangers to him,

and he lost himself as much as possible in the midst of these groups. Later in the evening, he told himself, he would meet those who had been his friends once, but for the present he excused his shrinking on the plea that it was all so new to him—these old scenes. He wanted just a little time to become accustomed to the chatter of gentlemen.

"Wilson, I want you to meet Lord Heathercote." Bevis gave an involuntary start at the sound of the voice. "Wilson is one of the Consolidated Companies' superintendents, your lordship."

CHAPTER VIII

LEARNING THE TRUTH

THE shifting crowd soon drew a thin veil of humanity between Bevis and the speaker, and then he glanced around and saw Andrew McLeedy with his arm in an affectionate manner looped with that of a stockily-built, square-shouldered man who Dan knew must be the one referred to as Lord Heathercote.

Andrew McLeedy had changed but little in the two years. Time had but chiseled the deeper upon his face the lines of selfishness and arrogance, and his scant hair had become, possibly, a bit whiter. Bevis recognized Wilson as a man who once had been general superintendent of the Jordan mills, and the name brought back to him the meager accounts he had heard of the closing of the Jordan mills and the suicide of Colonel Jordan. This had been one of the heaviest blows he had suffered in connection with his disgrace and imprisonment, for he knew full well that Colonel Jor-

dan held him responsible for the ruin that had come upon the mills, in spite of the fact that he had implored Jordan on that last day to sell the bank stock, and in spite of the fact that practically every dollar he had had been turned over to those who had charge of the settling of the Empire State Bank's affairs.

These recollections came upon him like a flood as he saw McLeedy and Wilson together, and with a sudden sickening sensation he turned away and made his way with bowed head into the unfrequented nooks of the club rooms.

He had summoned all of his courage to enter the club that night, and now he regretted that he had done so. The weight of his disgrace was forcing itself upon his consciousness relentlessly.

During the weary months that had dragged their measures with a snail's pace through his prison cell Dan Bevis had fought many battles with self, and had comforted himself with many delusions, the chief of which was that sometime the gates would open for him and he could return to his home city and redeem the past by the sincerity of his endeavors for the future.

He had been in the city but half a day now, and already he was learning that in the solitude which is so much one's portion beyond those grim walls he had so lately passed, one is apt to paint with false colors that picture of the future which is encompassed in the word liberty. He had thought that his coming back to this city would be recognized as a manly, honorable, courageous step by those of the world in which he formerly had lived; in the few hours he had been in the city he had made the discovery that his coming back here was regarded as being brazen in the extreme, as an amazing bit of effrontery.

Then, after much hesitation, he had sought the club, where he had once been a favorite, and then while he still was shrinking and struggling to hold himself to his determination to face the friends of other days Andrew McLeedy's words and the sight of Wilson had brought back with crushing force a knowledge of the bitterness with which he was regarded in this city. He wanted to escape from the place, to get out into the night and storm, to go anywhere to avoid meeting those who would stare at him with sneer or reproach.

The front entrance was impossible. The

rooms were filling rapidly now, and to attempt to leave by the front doors would mean facing a battery of astonished eyes and braving the whispered taunts of numberless tongues. Down this hallway he could gain the modest side-entrance usually used by the club servants only. As he began to retreat he was seized with something akin to panic, and he felt an impulse to run, to go plunging through the assemblage, heedless of who might recognize him or what might be said, and the conquering of this impulse was responsible for his doing exactly the opposite. So with a firm grip on the emotions surging so wildly through his being, he made his way slowly down the hallway after successfully avoiding groups wherein he recognized many who would have known his face had he not contrived to shield it from their view.

"You must excuse me, Reagan," said Gordon, after a moment of silence, as they watched Dan Bevis slowly approaching. "The club's board of governors is to extend a welcome to Lord Heathercote, and I am a member of the board, you know."

Without waiting for a reply he hurried from

the room, and the chairman smiled ironically as he saw him dodge into an alcove in time to avoid meeting the man who was coming toward them.

"Bevis!"

Dan started as though the word had stung him, and his hands clenched spasmodically as he looked up. Sant Reagan was standing in the doorway of the little room, holding out his hand.

"Come in, Dan," said Reagan, quietly. "Let's have a cigar together."

Bevis hesitated and then stepped into the room and sank into a chair as though weak from a long illness. The hand with which he took the cigar from Reagan trembled, and his lips twitched slightly.

"I—was leaving," he said, simply.

"Side-door, eh?" Reagan rubbed his head reflectively. "I suppose it is a bit trying—the first plunge back into—into—old scenes, you know."

"I thought my courage was sufficient, but something happened, and I was almost in a stampede." He stopped speaking, and the chairman was silent. The lightning flared in

at the window and the rain beat against the pane with greater force than ever. "I've pictured this thing—this coming back—to myself, Reagan, hundreds of times—in the long nights when a fellow is alone—with God—. Do you believe there is a God, Reagan?"

"There may be." The chairman drew on his cigar. "There may be, Dan, but He ain't foolin' around the Hudson Club to-night."

"I don't know. So many things don't seem just as they did while I was—away. Some nights something that I thought was God seemed to come close to me, and it made it possible for me to go through the next day. And I pictured this thing—this coming back—as I said, and I thought that I could face it like a man, and that I would be given a chance, but I already have found that I was mistaken." His head sank a little lower. "I have found that I was wrong," he said in a voice that was but little more than a whisper.

"There's no use of my lying to you, Dan," replied Reagan. "I thought you could do it, too—but you can't." He looked with softening eyes upon the abject man before him. "They'll not give you a chance here. You'd better make your fight in some other place."

LEARNING THE TRUTH 125

"I'll not give up just yet. I haven't seen—her—yet, and if—"

"You mean Ethel McLeedy?" Reagan took the cigar out of his mouth and very carefully knocked the ashes from it.

"Yes. I haven't seen her yet. If she says for me to stay and fight it out here I'll stick. I haven't heard from her for a year—she was in Florence then. Her father never liked me very well—nor her mother, either, for that matter—and of course they have prevented her writing me."

"Possibly." Reagan blew a couple of smoke clouds. "Andrew McLeedy doesn't care for anything except money. And Mrs. McLeedy is quite—well, unemotional. Perhaps Miss Ethel has been prevented from doing what she wishes to do. By the way, you know that McLeedy is giving a dinner here to-night for some titled Englishman?" There was a question in his voice.

Bevis tapped the arm of his chair in a nervous manner.

"I learned it after coming up," he said. "And I heard—something—out there among that crowd of jabbering monkeys a few minutes ago." He paused, and Reagan,

readily divining the course of his thoughts, did not speak. "Do you know anything about this English lord and the McLeedys?"

"Not much. I understand he did some kind of a rescue stunt when their horses ran away."

From some distant point in the club quarters an orchestra could be heard, and presently a baritone voice began singing "Danny Deever." Bevis arose.

"I think I'll go," he said. "To-morrow I'll settle some questions." He held out his hand to the chairman, and Reagan arose and grasped it in a warm grip. "I want you to know that I appreciate your kindness," added Bevis, and turned away.

Reagan huddled down in the leather chair once more, but he did not read, and the cigar he held between his teeth went out as he sat there looking at the play of the lightning.

"God, what a price he is paying!" he muttered, at last, and then repeated: "What a price!"

He heard some one enter the room, and, turning, saw Willis Gordon.

"Where's Bevis?" asked Gordon, and looked relieved when told that he had gone. "I'm glad of it," he said.

LEARNING THE TRUTH 127

Reagan said nothing, but looked up at him in an expressive way.

"Have you forgotten that more than a year ago the board of governors of the club expelled Bevis?" asked Gordon.

"Yes, I had forgotten it. I remember now. Strange that Dan should have ignorcd it."

"It was my fault, I confess," said Gordon. "As secretary of the board I was directed to notify him, and—"

"And you did not," interposed Reagan.

"No, I did not. I did not believe he ever would return here, and I did not send the letter. It must be done now, I suppose."

The chairman sat with a scowl on his face.

"It must, of course. Another splash of mud on his picture." He kicked the newspaper as he arose. "I don't think I'll stay for the dinner," he said. "Good night, Gordon."

The storm passed with the night, and early in the morning the sun peeped through the broken masses of clouds and by noon the sky was clear once more. Dan Bevis did not settle the questions that day that he had determined to settle. The society columns of the morning paper told him that the McLeedys and Lord Heathercote would leave at noon for the

mountains to spend a week as guests in the summer home of a certain United States Senator, and the president of the road over which they were to make the journey had placed his private car at their disposal.

The week was extended to a fortnight before the party returned, and in that time Dan Bevis had tasted of the bitterest draughts life could place to his lips. Day after day he was rebuffed, sometimes with a show of politeness, and at other times with coarse rudeness and insults. He was branded as a thief, as a wrecker of fortunes and lives. The letter from the governors of the Hudson Club made but little impression upon him. His pride had ceased to shrink at the blows. He no longer met old acquaintances with an air of uncertainty, but coldly returned stare for stare and went his way with the chill creeping deeper and deeper into his heart, and the shadows gradually dragging into their gloomy caverns all that was best in his soul.

But with it all he kept a close watch on the society columns of the papers and listened quietly to the fragments of gossip he heard here and there concerning the visit Lord Heathercote was paying to America.

When the McLeedys returned home, Bevis knew of it within two hours after the private car had rolled into the depot sheds. The next afternoon he drove out to the McLeedy place unannounced.

As he passed the gloomy old city prison he saw the vines clambering up its stone walls, and flowers were blooming in the prison yard, just as they were that June day two years before. He crossed the river and was whirled through streets lined with homes of imposing architecture, and then they turned into the broad, quiet avenue leading to the McLeedy place.

He passed through the great, arched entrance and strode up the palm-bordered walk, but paused a moment to look about him at the familiar scene, and a sudden struggle in his soul brought a weary sigh to his lips. Yonder was the summer house where the pipers had played so merrily and a multitude of friends had laughed and shouted their congratulations amid the shower of roses. The sunlight glinted on the lily pond, and just beyond it he could see the grove where he had battled in the darkness with the robber. He had occupied a cell in the same institution that held the man he had captured. His lips

twitched a little as the thought flashed through his mind, but the impression did not remain long. He had become too calloused for that sort of thing.

Down yonder a gardener was working among the flowers, while a boy was driving the mammoth mower across the lawn that lay like green velvet before him. Bevis started on again, and a line showed in his forehead as he noticed a groom bringing two saddle horses from the stable. Dan quickened his pace, and just as he reached the broad steps leading to the spacious veranda Ethel McLeedy and Lord Heathercote appeared in the doorway, dressed for the saddle. The girl was looking into the nobleman's face and laughing gayly at some quip by his lordship. She did not observe the tall figure ascending the steps until she had stepped out onto the veranda, and then she looked up with a start, which was quickly followed by a gasping, inarticulate exclamation.

"Why—when—?" She paused in confusion, the color fading from her cheeks.

"About two weeks ago," he responded in even tones, holding out his hand to her. "Am I welcome?"

She looked up into his face. The glint of

LEARNING THE TRUTH 131

steel was in his eyes. She hesitated, and he saw her dart a glance at the astonished nobleman at her side.

"It is unexpected," she answered, giving no sign that she saw the outstretched hand.

"That your fiancé should call upon you at the earliest opportunity?" He laughed harshly. "Am I not to be presented to his lordship?" He glanced inquiringly from the girl to the Englishman, who adjusted his eyeglasses and stared from one to the other.

"This seems most extraordinary, 'pon my soul, it does!" exclaimed the Briton. "I say, my man," he added, turnin' his sta ~~e~~ from Ethel to Bevis, "you're . . . ying the lady."

"She doesn't seem overly delighted to see me, does she?" Bevis's tone was as cold as stone. "And yet she would have been my wife before this, only I was sent to prison."

He smiled maliciously as he noted the look the girl sent toward the nobleman. Lord Heathercote caught his breath with a gasp.

"Whoever you are, you're a confounded cad to behave in this way!" He stepped toward Dan. "If the lady were not here I'd lay my riding crop across your face!"

Something flashed in Bevis's eyes as he looked into the Englishman's face.

"Don't try that," he said. Then with a slight gesture, he added: "I believe you're right. I am a cad. Maybe it is strange that I should change from what I once was—and maybe it isn't. I have no quarrel with you. Will you be good enough to withdraw for a few minutes?"

The hussar looked at Ethel, and she nodded. "I will join you in a few minutes," she said, and with a bow he turned and sauntered down the walk. Then she looked into the face of Dan Bevis. He spoke no word, but stood with folded arms. "Well?" she asked.

"The Englishman was right when he called me a cad," he said. "I ought to be caned for speaking as I did. I know that. But I've been kicked and insulted until the beast has gotten the better of me, and I wanted to see some one else suffer something of humiliation."

"How dare you come here?" she flashed, with the old hauteur. "Have you not caused us disgrace enough?"

A shadow seemed to come over his face for an instant, and then it passed, leaving the same cold smile on his lips.

"I dared because I was determined to know the truth—not to surmise it, but to know it. I know it now. For a year I endured the hell of that prison believing that although I received no word from you it was because of the influence of your parents. I told myself that although you never had expressed sympathy for me in my trouble and had written only of the humiliation you felt, I would find you true-hearted and ready to welcome me and what I might say to you concerning the bank affair, that which I would say to no one but—my wife."

There was a slight catch in his voice, and the lines of his face drew themselves deeper. His words brought a gesture of disdain by a gauntleted hand.

"I cannot think of anything more I would care to hear concerning your crime." He winced slightly, and his lips drew into a straight line. "You confessed quite freely."

"Your decision to dismiss me was of your own accord?"

She had turned and was walking down the veranda.

"Assuredly," she replied, without ending her walk. "Is not this interview near its close?"

For an instant his gaze wandered once more to the old scenes, the vines on the summer house, the little lake lying placid and lily-dotted in the spring sunshine. The old gardener was still trimming among the flowers, and the whistle of the boy driving the mower came to him in its fresh cheerfulness. And down the walk, sauntering along the palm-way, swinging his crop with carelessness, was Lord Heathercote. Bevis looked at the girl, trim and jaunty in her riding habit, a rose tucked in among the dark hair, but the dainty picture brought no thrill as of old. Something had snapped in his soul, and that which once had lain warm in his heart had become ashes.

"It is," he replied to her question, as she turned at the end of the veranda and came toward him again. "I told you that I came in order that I might know. Now I know. Good-by."

He turned and walked away, passing the nobleman on the walk, but neither man spoke. The groom had been leading the horses back and forth while awaiting the pleasure of the riders, and as Bevis whirled away from the McLeedy place he looked back and saw Lord Heathercote lift the girl into the saddle. A

moment later and the hussar was mounted, and they went galloping away down the pebbly driveway that led across the rear of the estate into the hills beyond. And as he watched them a cold smile came again to the lips of Dan Bevis.

At two o'clock in the morning he arose from a card table and walked out of a gambling resort into the night, with his winnings. As he made his way back to his room he recalled that first night after his return, and the words that Reagan had spoken to him in the club came to him: "You'd better make your fight in some other place."

By the time he had reached his room he had decided. He had won enough money to enable him to go away, and after he had reached new scenes he would decide as to his plans for the future. The fever of gambling was in his veins. It always had been there, an heritage that had kept him constantly on his guard during all of his life. Lately he had yielded to it, and the comfortable roll of bills in his pocket told him that he had the skill and cool judgment of the successful gambler. But he would go away, and then decide.

In his room he sat down and thought it all

over once more. But he clung to the decision to go—where, it probably did not matter. Certainly he did not care. Tearing a sheet of paper into several slips, he wrote upon each the name of a city, placed the names in his hat, shut his eyes, and drew one out.

"Spokane!" he said, looking at the slip.

CHAPTER IX

"HE'S MY BROTHER"

BEVIS did not require much time for preparation for his departure. He had no business or financial interests of any kind to arrange. Everything he had had that was capable of being turned into money he had given over to those who took charge of the wrecked bank's affairs two years ago, and when he came back to the city that had been his home for so many years he had but little more than the clothes he wore. Nevertheless, he delayed his departure for a day or two.

The next day after he had decided to leave he drove out to a cemetery and placed upon two graves the basket of roses he had brought with him. His hands were steady and his eyes were dry as he deposited the flowers and then stood mechanically reading the inscriptions on the monuments. Here the roar and din of the city's struggle could be heard but faintly; a cloud of smoke hanging above the

city told its story of commercial battle, and the occasional shrill of a locomotive whistle came to his ears, but he gave these things no heed.

He sat down on an iron bench and thought it all over, and he vaguely found himself wondering why no ache came to his heart, why his head did not throb with the stress of what he had gone through. He thought of Ethel McLeedy, and a sner came to his lips; he took from his pocket the letter he had received from the board of governors of the Hudson Club, and after reading it again he tore it into small bits and tossed it to the breezes; he ran over the incidents of the last two weeks, of the insults he had received from those he had expected to give him a warm hand-clasp and words of encouragement, and he spat upon the ground as their names crept to his tongue. But no ache came to his heart; the chill of the tragedy had clutched his soul in its icy grasp.

Finally he arose and stood at the head of one of the mounds he had strewn with flowers.

"Mother," he whispered, "you know all—all—or else you know nothing. Maybe the grave ends it. It's all right either way. Maybe I'll never stand here again, but if the

grave isn't the end you will know that I came." He stepped to the other mound and stood silent a moment. "Into the pit—for such a love!" he exclaimed softly. "Into the pit!" For the first time, his hands clenched suddenly. "Father—father—I paid the price!" he said, brokenly.

Only an instant did the spasm of emotion touch him. Then his eyes cleared, and when he turned and walked away from the graves there was no pain in his heart and no warmth in his soul.

A few days later he sat in the smoking room of a Pullman on the "Overland Limited," idly gazing at the rugged mountains through which the long transcontinental train was toiling, with two engines puffing laboriously at its head.

It was a new West into which he was going, and all along the way he was receiving evidences of it. When he had made a journey into the West for pleasure ten years before, Indian tepees had dotted the landscape after he had crossed the Missouri river, and at nearly every station after the Bad Lands had been entered Indians were to be seen in numbers, while cowboys in sombreros and leathern chaps

had galloped beside the train as it entered or left the stations and had sent the tourists on their way with shrill "yip-yip-y-i-i-ps."

But all this had changed. The hand of time had been very busy here in this great West. The tepees no longer dotted the hillsides, and the chaps of the cowboys had disappeared. At Helena one lone Indian stood on the station platform selling post cards, but he shuffled away when a newsboy cursed him for interfering with the white man's business. Certainly it was a new West into which Dan Bevis found himself being carried.

Evening came on, and in the twilight he saw a pair of elk horns on a post bearing the inscription, "Idaho State Line," and from passengers who boarded the train he learned that the political bosses were much worried about the forthcoming election because the women of the State were privileged to vote. No one could foretell just what their influence would mean in the State election.

The dusk of evening deepened. One of the engines had been detached, and the train was now speeding along on a general down-grade with the power of one locomotive ample to pull it. It was very monotonous, and Bevis dozed,

being awakened by a man's voice singing out in the narrow passageway:

"I'm an exile from Erin,
In America I roam,
But when Ireland is free, mother,
Your Barney will come home."

D
Dan looked up to see a man standing in the doorway of the smoking room. He was a man of forty, probably, dark hair and eyes and a complexion that showed an acquaintance with the suns of southern climes. There was that in his face which told that he had spent much of his life in good society. He looked at Bevis.

"Beg pardon, sir, I didn't mean to spoil a nap. You are rubbing your eyes and yawning as though I had spoiled one."

"Oh, it's all right," said Dan, laughing. "I was a little drowsy, but it's nothing. By the way, don't you think it will be some time before Barney gets home?"

The man came in and sat down.

"You mean if he waits until Ireland is free? I'm afraid you're right and that Barney is going to be absent a long time." He smiled genially, but his eyes were studying the man be-

fore him. "That's a foolish little ballad, but sometimes it fits my mood." The smile had died from his lips. He took out a cigar and lighted it, offering one to Dan. "Sometimes I have a lot of sympathy for Barney," he added. "It's rather tough to think of being an exile."

There was a peculiar note in the stranger's voice that caused Bevis to glance up at him quickly. The faintest bit of red was showing in the man's cheeks.

"And yet this wonderful West is full of exiles," remarked Dan.

"They're making a great country out of it, too," was the reply. "I don't know but it's the logical thing to expect. The exile usually is a fellow who has red blood in his veins—a man who is full of vim and fight. When he turns those qualities and powers into the right channel something is bound to happen."

"Yes, conservatives and weaklings never made this country what it is to-day. They—"

"They're coming in now and trying to throttle it," interposed the man. "They've given votes to Idaho women. Thank the Lord, we're close to the Washington line. But the women will get Washington next, see if they don't. I've been in the West long enough to

see some changes I don't like. You can't make a country vigorous with skirts and pink tea."

The stranger's tone carried with it a hint of bitterness, and Dan looked at him curiously.

"You don't seem to enthuse over women," he remarked.

"Well, that's according." The stranger looked thoughtfully at the end of his cigar. "They're all right for mothers and sisters, and delicious as sweethearts—sometimes—but for lawmakers—*cultus!*"

"*Cultus?* I don't think I—"

"Bad—no good. It's a Chinook word, but it ought to be in the dictionary. Never knew a word that came nearer meaning what it sounds like than that word, '*cultus*.' You're from the East?"

There was a query in the words, and Bevis nodded.

"Yes—Metropolis."

The stranger sprang to his feet.

"Metropolis?" he exclaimed, staring at Dan, who sat regarding him in surprise. "I used to live there! Tell me something about the old town."

"I haven't been there very much for a couple

ot years," replied Bevis, calmly. He could see no reason why his companion should be startled by the fact that he had come from a great city where the other once had lived. "I don't know anything to tell you."

"Of course not. I acted like an idiot, didn't I? But I'm nervous. Did you ever hear of the Jordan mills?"

The question caused Bevis to stare in surprise at the other. The closing of these mills had been the heaviest blow he had suffered in connection with the wreck of the bank.

"The Jordan mills?" he asked, his voice hoarse. "Yes—I knew of them."

"And Colonel Jordan—"

"Dead."

The word was but little more than a whisper. The cigar fell from the stranger's fingers, and one hand, shaking as though with palsy, went hesitatingly, uncertainly to Dan's arm.

'Dead?' he exclaimed, softly. "Dead!" His gaze dropped for a moment, and then he looked up, a strange fire shining in his dark eyes. "When—and how?" he asked.

"January first. Suicide." Bevis had withdrawn his gaze from his companion, and was staring moodily into space. The long, wail-

ing scream of the locomotive whistle floated back to him and he shuddered as he found himself distorting it into the despairing cry of a tortured being. There was a moment or two of silence, and then he turned to see the stranger sitting with drops of perspiration standing out on his forehead.

"I knew Peter Jordan—well," said the stranger. "I—I—was a foreman in his mills for a while." He paused. Bevis did not speak. "Do you know why?" he asked.

"Failure of business," was the brief reply.

"Bankruptcy?"

Bevis nodded.

"I have heard him say he never would live to face such a disgrace. Do you know what became of his daughter?"

The stranger's eyes were burning, as though with fever.

"She was in Europe studying music the last I heard of her. Hilda was her name, wasn't it?"

"Hilda! Yes—yes—Hilda! Do you know anything concerning the failure and Jordan's death?"

Bevis drew a handkerchief from his pocket and wiped the perspiration from his own brow.

Somehow, the eyes of this stranger seemed searching his soul.

"I think I know all about it," he answered.
"If it had not been for his stubborn will—"

"He was a Virginian, with extreme notions—that is, as I remember him," said the stranger, finishing his speech rather hastily.

"He would have been saved from the wreck of the bank had he—"

The sentence was not finished. There was a sudden shock, a crashing of wood and glass, one end of the car seemed to rise high into the air and then plunged downward with awful force, and Dan Bevis felt his grasp torn from the seat he had clutched at the first instant of danger; he was conscious of a shout from his companion, and then came oblivion.

The stranger experienced about the same sensations. When he again regained consciousness he found himself lying across a huge soft roll, and with a feeling of sickening horror his clearing senses realized that the roll beneath him was the body of a man. The lights had gone out and utter darkness prevailed, but with some difficulty he succeeded in crawling to one side, so that his weight was not resting upon the body of the man who had been in the

act of telling him the story of Colonel Peter Jordan's ruin and suicide when the crash came.

The smoking room was filled with dust, but a breeze blew in at the broken window and he gasped it into his lungs and felt its reviving power. His head ached terribly and one ankle pained him much, but he had the use of his arms, and his brain was becoming clear. From some place—he could not tell the exact location—he heard sobs and moans of pain; men were shouting excitedly some place out there in the dark, and he heard a great roar of steam escaping from broken pipes. A lantern went bobbing by in that great void of darkness, and he shouted, but the lantern went on. There was no sound from that roll lying on the floor.

He began crawling toward the window, but he slipped on the floor of the car, now at a great slant, and as he fell he felt the body beneath him again, and a sudden terror clutched him.

"Help! Help! For God's sake, get me out of here!" he shouted, with a panic developed by the belief that he was penned in with death.

A glare of light flamed up close at hand, and horror again caused him to shriek out in the belief that the train was burning, but a moment

later he saw his mistake. Huge bonfires were being lighted to assist in the work of rescue. By its flickering light he saw that escape by the window was impossible, as some of the broken timbers had been forced across the opening. The shouts on the outside continued, and now he saw figures moving back and forth in the light of the bonfires, and this same wavering, uncertain light as it came in at the broken window revealed to him the form of a man huddled down in one corner. A lantern appeared at the window, and behind the lantern he could see the face of a trainman peering into the dust and débris.

"Anybody in there?" asked a hoarse voice.

"Yes!" he shouted frantically as the lantern was lowered as though the man were leaving. "Yes—two of us!"

The lantern came to the window again.

"Take it easy," came the admonition. "You can't get out this way, and the doors are jammed shut. We'll break them in as soon as we can get axes."

Once more the lantern disappeared, leaving the man with a nameless dread. If only that huddled form would moan or move! He reached out to seek the pulse, but jerked his

hand back the moment he touched the wrist of the silent one. It was too ghastly. If the one lying there still lived it were useless to feel his pulse. He was powerless to do aught for him at this time. Would they never come to release them from that pen?

By the dim light of the fires he looked upward to the door of the little room. It seemed far above him. He stretched out his arms in an effort to grasp something by which he could pull himself upward, but he found nothing. Besides, he might slip again and roll back onto that bundle of flesh lying there by the window.

The sound of blows in the direction of the front door sent a thrill of rejoicing through him. Crash! Crash! A moment of silence, and then he saw a tiny ray of light dance along the upper side of the car. Then there were voices, and the next instant the lantern shone in at the door of the smoking room, above him, and behind it he could see two men peering down at him. Then he fainted.

Ten minutes later he was revived by some one throwing water in his face, and he found himself lying on the grass beside the railroad track.

"He's coming out of it all right," said a

voice, as he opened his eyes. "I'm not sure of this other one."

He turned his head and by the fire light and lantern light he saw lying beside him the man from the East. With an effort he raised himself on his elbow.

"Is he dead?" he asked, weakly.

A little group had surrounded them, and two men were bending over Bevis.

"No, he's not dead, but he is suffering from severe concussion. He has a nasty cut on the head. You're all right, aren't you?"

"I think so. Reckon I got foolish and fainted. It—it—was hell to be penned in there!"

"Well, just lie still and you'll be all right soon. The relief train will be out from Spokane in an hour."

He tried to rise to his feet, but found himself suffering from a sudden weakness that caused him to drop back and stretch out on the grass, where he lay for some time staring straight up at the stars and listening to the excited comments of those who passed by. From these comments he gathered a fragment of the story of a broken rail that had wrecked the train, injured a number of people, and dashed half a

dozen souls into eternity. Finally he raised himself once more and sat looking down at the white face of the man who had occupied the smoking room with him.

Heavy banks of clouds had come into the sky, deepening the darkness of the night, and the bonfires blazing here and there beside the track made a weird scene of the wreck. A lineman who had been on the train was climbing the telegraph poles and hurriedly repairing the broken wires. With a pocket instrument he had connected with one of the broken wires and sent a report of the accident into Spokane, with the result that a relief train was now speeding to the scene, bearing physicians and nurses.

He leaned over and placed his ear close to the lips of the silent one beside him and felt a wave of relief when he detected that the unconscious man was still breathing. A group of men passed, bearing an inanimate form, and he watched them deposit it on the grass. He felt that he was playing the part of a weakling in sitting there thus, and unsteadily he arose to his feet. His knees felt strangely weak, and his ankle pained him, but he fought off the weakness and stood erect. But, fearing that

he might be called upon to leave the man whom he had met in the car, he sat down again, determined that they should not be separated.

Physicians who were on the train, assisted by those sturdy souls always to be found on occasions of such tragedies, worked heroically with limited means to relieve the suffering of the severely injured, and the man sitting there in his strange vigil beside the silent form of a man he had never heard of an hour or two before heard the sobs and moans of the injured.

Then he suddenly raised himself on his elbow again and listened. Far away he heard a faint sound, as of the wind complaining among the trees on the hillsides that reared themselves on either side of the pathway the "Overland Limited" had chosen. He listened intently. Again it came, and now he was sure that he had made no mistake. It was the whistle of the relief train, rushing to the scene with all the speed that steam could command. Again and again it sounded, nearer, nearer, and a shout of joy arose from the distressed groups huddled along the railroad.

Closer and closer came the sound of the whistle, and he heard the train rumble across a bridge not far away; then two sharp blasts

"HE'S MY BROTHER" 153

of the whistle as the flagman's signal was answered, and he found himself on his feet cheering weakly as the train stopped close to the wrecked engine, and he saw men leaping from the cars and hurrying forward to the work of relief.

Litter bearers were soon at their work of conveying the injured and dead to the relief train, and when Dan Bevis was tenderly placed upon a stretcher the stranger arose and staggered along by the side of the stretcher.

"He's my brother," he said, lying glibly to those in charge. "I'll see that he's cared for when we get to Spokane."

CHAPTER X

ENTER DAN GRAHAM

IT seemed to Dan Bevis that he was in the midst of a terrible confusion. A thousand bells were ringing all about him, the roar of countless Niagaras sounded in his ears, and he tried to see what was the cause of it all, but his eyes remained shut. But as he made the effort he became aware that the confusion stilled in considerable measure, only to be renewed when he failed in the effort to open his eyes. This flash of returning thought stirred him to greater efforts, and slowly the heavily-weighted lids were raised from his eyes. On the instant the tumult was hushed, and he looked about him.

Everything was strange. He was lying on a bed—a splendid bit of furniture it was, too, his wondering eyes told him; the room was electric lighted, a painting hung on one wall, and standing near a window were two men, one the stranger who had been with him in the

smoking room of the "Overland Limited" when something happened—just what he was not certain—and the other he never had seen before. They saw his eyes flutter and open, and both stepped forward quickly, the stranger placing a finger on his pulse.

"I don't want to say anything—foolish," said Bevis, looking at them wonderingly, "but—I don't quite understand."

His tongue seemed strangely unruly, and it was with difficulty that he could frame the sentences he desired. He was also conscious that considerable effort was required to keep his eyes from going shut.

"Time enough for explanations later," remarked his smoking room companion. "Just now the thing for you to do is to get over that crack on the head." He turned to the other. "He's doing it, too, isn't he, Doctor?"

The physician released the wrist he had been holding and nodded his head.

"Yes, he's coming all right. Pulse still rapid, but rest and quiet will remedy that, I think. I'll go now. Follow the directions I gave you and your brother probably will be much better by morning."

"Brother?"

The word broke from Dan's lips in surprise. His companion glanced uneasily at him.

"Yes. Of course, you're a bit confused yet, but you're in your brother's home now, so don't worry, but take a good sleep."

The physician smiled reassuringly, and the dark-eyed man standing by the bed smiled, also, and nodded.

"Yes, just take a good sleep now, and don't worry."

He took the doctor's arm and the two turned to leave the room, the physician making inquiries concerning the wreck.

"But I am not—"

"You mustn't worry, but sleep!" exclaimed the young man, interrupting Bevis's protest. "We'll leave you alone now."

The two withdrew, and Dan lay there staring about him at the handsomely-furnished room and trying to find some solution of the puzzling problem. Why he was here he had not the faintest idea. And who was this strange man who referred to him as "brother"? He was confused, it was true, but his mind was clear enough for him to know that he had no brother.

Possibly it was a case of mistaken identity.

He had heard of such things. But were this the case why had not the stranger claimed him as his brother when they met on the train? It was all a tangle, and his efforts to find some explanation resulted only in a still greater hurting of his aching head. There must have been a wreck, he told himself. Vaguely he remembered of a terrific crash, but further than that he had no recollection until his eyes opened and he found himself in this room.

For some minutes he wrestled with the snarl. He had lifted his hands and found himself very weak, so that he was quite content to lie still. Wherever he was and whatever the explanation might be, it was evident that he was in good hands and was being well cared for. So he quickly abandoned a fretful impulse to get out of the bed. His lids did not seem so heavy as when he first had raised them to view this strange place, and he was open-eyed when the stranger came noiselessly to the door and looked in. Finding that Dan was not asleep, he paused at the doorway in momentary indecision.

"I had hoped to find you sleeping when I returned," he said.

"If you want me to sleep relieve my mind re-

garding some things," replied Bevis. "Tell me who you are, to begin with."

"My name? I am called Lawrence Ross. This is my home in Spokane. The 'Overland Limited' was wrecked near Spokane at eight o'clock last evening. The relief train brought you into the city; I claimed you as my brother in order that I might have you brought here." He glanced at his watch. "It is now two o'clock in the morning. There is the story in a nutshell."

Bevis lay silent for a moment. His brain was not working with its normal clearness and he struggled desperately to grasp all that Ross had told him.

"It may be in a nutshell—in fact, I think it is," he said, slowly. "And it's a pretty thick shell."

Ross smiled.

"It's against the doctor's orders to keep you talking," he replied, studying Dan's face, "but I suppose you will not rest until I explain some things." He paused, and Bevis lay silent, his eyes on the other's face in the same questioning manner. "You want to know why a stranger should take such a sudden interest in you. Well—?"

Again there was a pause, the meaning of which could not be misconstrued.

"Dan—you may call me Dan Graham," he responded, acting on a sudden impulse.

"All right, Mr. Graham it is, then. You can not understand my sudden interest in you."

"I can not. We never saw each other until we met on that train, did we?"

"Not to my knowledge. But, really, it is very simple. It amounts to nothing more than curiosity. When the crash came you were on the point of telling me about—Colonel Peter Jordan. I told you that I knew something about him, and I am exceedingly anxious to know the story—the story of his death. That is all." He turned and walked over to the little dresser and stood for a moment with his back to the bed, pretending to examine some of the medicines left by the physician. When he again faced Bevis the latter thought he detected the trace of a mist in the dark eyes. "I was afraid that if I let them take you elsewhere I would not be able to get into communication with you again. So I lied and had you brought here."

"I have no complaint to make," said Dan. "I am being well cared for."

"You are generous to forgive me so easily. I expected you to curse me for a meddler. But you must sleep now and not worry. In the morning, I will ask you for the story concerning Colonel Jordan, and then I will see that your friends are notified of your whereabouts."

"You will be spared that trouble. There is no one to notify."

A curious light flashed in the dark eyes.

"No one?" he asked.

"No one." Bevis laughed, and a harsh note sounded in his voice. "You have gathered up a piece of driftwood."

"Very well. You are welcome, just the same. And now, good night. You may touch that bell if you need anything. I shall hear you."

His dark eyes rested for a moment on the face of the man on the bed, and then he turned and left the room. Dan's lids were heavy. He felt a great desire to sleep, and yet there was an air of mystery about his present surroundings that tantalized him and kept him awake for a time. It was difficult to understand why a former foreman in the Jordan mills should evince such a deep interest in the death of Colonel Jordan.

After struggling with the problem for some time he yielded to the exhaustion and fell asleep, and when he awoke it was daylight. He raised his hand, and realized that he was stronger, but his lips were strangely parched, and when he placed his palm to his forehead he found that his head was very hot and his skin dry.

The window was raised, and the snowy curtain swayed in the gentle breeze he felt coming in from the great world that lay just beyond. He tried to piece together the bits of memory that came straggling to him. It was very much confused. He was in the home of the stranger who had occupied the smoking room with him on the train. Yes, he recalled this fact. But there was a haunting vision of a woman; it must have been a dream, because as he grasped at the bits of memory he could find no place where he really had seen a woman in connection with his injuries. But he certainly had dreamed of seeing a woman standing near him. And had it been only a dream that he had felt a touch of a soft hand on his brow?

He closed his eyes and his thoughts flashed to other scenes. He heard the pipers in the summer house; he stood beneath the trees and

saw the moonlight kissing the lily pond, and then there came a dark spot moving across the surface of the little lake, steadily nearer, and he felt his muscles growing taut; but memory had quite enough of that night, and now its pranks had to do with prison walls; then he was striding up the palm-way and watching a groom leading two saddled horses around to a great veranda. "Lord Heathercote!" he muttered. "Lord Heathercote!" He laughed and opened his eyes. The laugh died on his lips, for, standing in the doorway, watching him very curiously, was a young woman in a dainty morning dress.

"It wasn't a dream, then, after all?" he asked, haltingly.

She smiled and he glimpsed her even white teeth.

"I don't know," she answered. "You were muttering something when I came to the door. I supposed you were dreaming."

She came forward and gently touched his forehead with her hand, and he was conscious of a curious sensation of satisfaction.

"Of course, you don't understand what I meant. I had an indistinct idea that I had seen a woman—such a woman as you are—and that

she touched my head. But I could not fix the recollection, and so—”

“You decided that you had dreamed it.” She paused and glanced at him, and he saw that her lashes were long and dark, and that a glow of red showed beneath her olive cheeks. “I came in early this morning. Your face was flushed, and I touched your brow. I know something of fever. You are burning with it now.”

“I am afraid you are right,” he said. “I’m afraid—you—.” He caught himself. “I am afraid Mr. Ross will find that he has assumed something of a burden by bringing me here. The hospital—”

She flung up one hand.

“Is not for you!” she exclaimed. “You are welcome here. I will call the doctor.”

She turned away, but he called to her.

“No need for hurry about the doctor,” he said. “Let me speak to Mr. Ross first.”

“When he returns. Mr. Ross had to leave quite early and cannot reach home before noon, I fear.”

“Leaving an almost helpless hulk like me to be cared for by a mite like you?”

Again the smile played about her lips, and he

found himself studying her face and watching the play of color in her cheeks and the droop of the long lashes.

"Not exactly," she answered. "There is the servant. Jose will attend to your needs. I thought merely to peep in and note your condition. I will go now and send him, and also summon the doctor."

CHAPTER XI

NOTIONS AND DAGGERS

HE would have detained her, but she waved her hand with a gesture of authority and left the room. He watched the swaying of the curtain once more and tried to analyze certain emotions that had come to him, but he was conscious that his head ached more furiously than ever, and as he involuntarily raised one hand to his temples a moan escaped through his clenched teeth.

"Is there anything the señor wishes?"

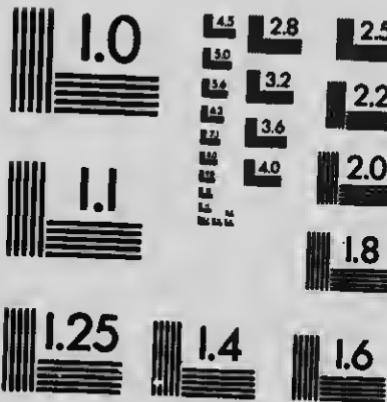
He turned his head and found a young man, seemingly scarcely more than a youth, standing beside the bed. He had entered noiselessly, and Bevis stared at him a moment in surprise.

"No, I don't think—yes, I do, too. Water. I'm burning up. Did you ever burn?"

He asked the question half whimsically and half seriously. The youth hurried across the room, moving with a cat-like tread that gave no



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sound of footfall, and in a moment was raising the sufferer's head and holding a glass of water to his lips.

"Burn? *Si, señor*,—once when I got a knife thrust—here—" (pointing to his side)—"down on the Rio Grande. *Santa Maria!* The thirst of a fever is bad!"

Bevis drank eagerly, and then he watched the youth curiously as he crossed the room with the glass. He moved with a lithe grace that suggested the panther, and his black hair and tawny eyes told the story of his nationality.

"You are a Mexican?"

The youth nodded.

"But I have lived much in Spokane," he said. "It is a very wonderful city."

"You speak splendid English. Did you attend school here?"

Jose smiled and Dan thought he saw his eyes soften.

"*Si*—I mean, yes—*Señor* Seb Layton was very kind to me." He turned suddenly to the man on the bed. "You know *Señor* Layton?" he asked.

"Layton?" Bevis studied a moment. "No. I think not. Who is he?"

"He is now Judge Layton—but I knew him

NOTIONS AND DAGGERS 167

when he was not that." The youth was deftly arranging the pillows as he spoke. "They say he will be United States Senator soon—that it will be the Senate next! Señor, did I hurt you?"

A half-suppressed moan had struggled to Bevis's lips at the Mexican's words, for vividly there came to him the memory of that night in the McLeedy library when the Governor had declared that the Senate should be next.

"No, no. You are very gentle, Jose. I suppose you are Jose?"

"Yes, I am Jose. The señora told you?"

"She said Jose would look after my wants. Thanks for that cold cloth on my head. You must have had experience in nursing."

The Mexican laughed softly.

"On the Rio Grande life is made up of hurts. *Santa Maria*, I have seen some things, señor!"

Bevis watched him moving lightly about the room, deftly bringing order out of the confusion the doctor and Ross had left after getting him into the bed. There was something peculiarly fascinating about the youth, something indefinable that seemed to fit very snugly into the strangeness of this home to which Dan had been brought because of the seeming whim of

a man who once had known a man whom he had known.

"And this Layton is aspiring to the Senate, you say? Let's see, Granville Garrison is the man he'll have to beat, isn't he?"

Again Jose laughed in his subdued way, and turned to look at the man on the bed.

"Senator Garrison—yes. Senator Garrison and Señor Seb—I mean Judge Layton—they are not friendly. Politics in the United States means much hatred."

"And how about politics beyond the Rio Grande—in your Mexico? What does it mean there?"

"Blood and war!" The Mexican placed another cold cloth on the fevered brow and at the same time his eyes were studying the face of the patient. "You know something of Mexican politics, of course, señor?"

There was a vague hint of something in the words that caused Bevis to remain silent a moment as he mentally groped for an analysis of the hint, but it eluded him. He looked up suddenly and saw the youth's gaze shift as quickly as the shadow, but he could not overcome the feeling that Jose had not spoken idly.

NOTIONS AND DAGGERS 169

"Not much," he replied. "It's too lively a subject for me."

"Lively?" Jose looked at him, uncertainty revealed on his face.

"Yes. Too many revolutions—too many presidents."

"The people must rule, señor. If the president is not fair, if he—if he—what is that strange word?—intrigue—is that it?—yes, if he becomes intrigue with certain rich men and will not be fair to other men—say Americanos—well—what then, señor? What then?"

The Mexican leaned suddenly toward Dan and his black eyes looked eagerly into the fever-lighted ones of the American.

"Oh, a revolution, I suppose. In this country we swear at Wall Street and buy enough votes to elect another man."

"But if your president used your army to force his election, then what?"

"Well, I suppose that would be different, but—"

"*Si, señor,* very different. President Diaz has had power for many years, but a revolution will end his power. He has too many favorite rich men, señor, and—"

"Jose!"

The Mexican, who was leaning over Bevis and speaking excitedly, sprang back from the bed and whirled toward the door, where Mrs. Ross was standing, regarding him with a frown on her beautiful face. To the surprise of Bevis, she spoke to him rapidly in Spanish, and he replied briefly. Then she gave a slight gesture and Jose turned and left the room without a glance toward Bevis.

"Has Jose been annoying you with his foolish Mexican ideas of politics?" she asked, going to the side of the bed.

"Not at all. I think I encouraged him. He is rather refreshing—on this side of the Rio Grande. Beyond—well, were I interested in the government I would watch the scamp!"

There was a glimpse of her white teeth once more as the red lips parted in the faintest bit of a smile.

"You are right," she said, and he saw her wonderful eyes resting on him in a manner that caused a sudden leap of the pulse and sent the blood to his throbbing temples. "He is interesting—here—" (she waved one hand in a suggestive way)—"but he has notions—and a dagger." She shuddered slightly. "Santa—!" She stopped abruptly, evidently

in confusion, and the red in her cheeks deepened. "You remember when he tried to kill Warren Nelson, of course."

"No. I never heard of Warren Nelson, either. Is he—"

"Oh, surely, Mr. Graham, you know Warren Nelson, of the Falls City Bank." Her tone was insistent.

"You forget that I am a total stranger to Spokane, and to the entire Northwest, for that matter."

"Forgot? Oh, no. I did not know it. You had not told me. Possibly you told Mr. Ross. I would have taken you for—." Again she paused as though vexed at her impulsive words.

"For what, please?"

"For a Western man." The white teeth peeped from between the two red lines of her lips. "I should not say it, but you are so strong—like the men of the West."

He glanced up at her, but the long, dark lashes were veiling her eyes, so he could read nothing there, but something was whispering to him, and the message ran through his veins. A month ago he would have yawned and gone to sleep. But Dan Bevis had changed much

since that night when he had entered the Hudson Club. In the days that had followed he had seen his faith in man and in God crumble, and with a great bitterness in his heart he had kicked aside the fragments and gone his way, bowing to idols that before had appeared hideous.

The world and mankind had cursed him and scourged him. The world and mankind should pay its toll in such balm as reckoned not of Faith and Faith's kindred.

"I was strong—until the train found that broken rail," he answered, looking at her. "But now, well, I need cold bandages on my aching head, and this one has warmed."

She reached out to take it, and as she did so he touched her hand, and he noted that a glow quickly showed in the olive cheeks. She cooled the cloth and then replaced it while he lay watching her in silence, his hands clasped tightly across his chest.

"I notice that you speak Spanish—fluently, I imagine, though I know but little of the language. And, pardon me, there is that about you which suggests the probability of a strain of blood other than American."

"My mother was a Texan, though her name was somewhat known in your Washington."

"In our Washington?" He glanced up quickly. "Is it not your Washington, too?"

She caught her nether lip with her teeth, and a shadow of vexation flitted across her face.

"Of course," she replied, the shadow disappearing as a smile came, as though she were amused at her own remark. "I suppose I spoke as I did because I have lived much in Mexico City. My father was a Mexican, and was minister of war under President—." There was a quick wave of the hand. "No matter. He headed a revolution."

She turned her face toward the window, and for a moment there was silence.

"Unsuccessful?"

Somehow he felt the tragedy that lay behind her brief statement and that was implied in his one word.

"Yes!" She turned toward him again, and the long lashes no longer drooped, but in the dark eyes he saw the flashing of flames. "He died at Monterey, facing a government firing squad!"

She stood erect, her small hands clenched, her lips a straight line of red, with the muscles drawn at the corners of her mouth. Defiance was stamped on every line of her face, and, oddly enough, Dan Bevis found himself fancying a dagger clutched in that clenched right hand.

"Pardon me," he said, at a loss how best to respond to the words she had so passionately spoken. "I did not mean to touch upon a painful topic."

"Painful?" She shook her head slowly. "No—not painful. It simply renews my devotions at an altar before which my soul is always kneeling!"

She spoke in a tense voice, but her tone was low and even; her hands were slightly flung out from her sides, and her chin tiptilted until her gaze passed high above the American and rested on nothing tangible.

"An altar? You mean—"

"*Si, si, señor*—an altar. Some would call the altar hate, but I call it love! An altar of love!" The hands came together in front of her and then dropped limply at her side as her gaze came back to Bevis. "But I forget myself, Mr. Graham. You must not heed my

outbursts. I suppose it is my Lat' blood—and, therefore, you cannot understand. There! That must be the physician, at last."

Somewhere out in another room a bell had whirred softly. She left the room, and in a few moments came back, followed by the physician and Ross. The doctor found Dan's temperature alarmingly high, and there were other developments that caused him to give the case his closest attention.

"I suppose you wish to know the facts," he said, at last, leaning back in his chair and studying the face of his patient. "I am afraid you will be in bed some time."

Dan looked at him in surprise.

"Just from that bump on the head?" he asked.

"I am afraid of brain fever, to tell you the truth," was the reply. "It doesn't seem probable that that injury would cause it, but the symptoms are strongly developed. Possibly you have been under a severe mental strain, and the present injury to the brain comes as the climax."

Bevis made no reply. He lay staring at the curtain swaying in the gentle breeze coming in at the window, and a riot of thoughts was in his

mind. He was aware that the physician was giving directions for his care, and then he saw him bow himself from the room, but he gave these things no heed. Finally he turned his head and saw Ross sitting by the bed, and in the doorway was the woman.

"I have been trying to plan for myself," said Bevis, rather wearily, "but it is a bit difficult. I think, though, you had better call up a hospital at once."

"Oh, no," replied Ross, gently. "That isn't our way." He turned toward the doorway. "Is it, Teresa?"

"No, no! Señor Graham will remain with us."

A protest came to Bevis's lips, but he caught the droop of her long lashes, and then he again turned his face toward the window, and his protest was not voiced.

CHAPTER XII

A HINT OF REVOLUTION

IT was three weeks before Dan Bevis sat by the window and looked out at a world that seemed wonderfully fair and beautiful. There had been days when he babbled in a delirium, and there were intervals when he was conscious of his surroundings, and in these intervals he was aware that beside him sat either Jose or one of the Rosses. Then came the day when he was able, with the support of Jose, to totter across the room and sit where he could look out past that white curtain that he so often watched swaying in the pine-scented breezes that swept down from the mountains he now could see rearing themselves to the eastward.

Up to this time he had not given thought to the immediate surroundings beyond that room in which he had found himself after the wreck of the "Overland Limited," but now as he sat looking out into the material world he found that he was in a house placed far back in a

large plat of ground with huge rocks cropping out here and there around the borders of the yard. The residence, evidently one of considerable proportions, seemed to occupy the crest of one of the numerous hills surrounding the city, for below him he could see the city spread out in a panorama that was pleasing to look upon.

He heard the sound of a piano and a woman's voice softly singing, but the words were in Spanish and he could grasp only the plaintive music of the song. Often during these later days he had heard the piano and these Spanish songs.

Now the piano ceased, but the song continued, and he became aware that the singer was coming up the stairway. Presently he could see her in the conservatory, moving among the flowers, still with that plaintive song on her lips. Then she glanced up and saw him watching her. Instantly she smiled and changed the song to English. Then she came to his side.

"It is good to see you at the window," she said, simply.

"But it all seems so strange," he replied, turning from her and looking out into the

great yard, where the gardener was busying himself among the flowers. "Out there is the world—the world—and it seems strange, as though it were something I once had known and had forgotten—or lost. And now it is to be mine again." He leaned his elbows on the window and his eager eyes drank in the view. "The world," he murmured, and then suddenly faced her again. "Did you ever lose the world and then find it again?"

She had stood by his side, laughing softly at his delight, but as he looked up into her face and voiced the question the laugh was stilled, and he saw a dark shadow leap into her eyes, and the lips came together quickly.

"Lose the world?" she asked, "Si—I mean, yes—I lost the world once—and it was a very long time before I found it again. Ah, yes, señor, a very long time." He saw one hand go to her throat as though she were laboring for breath, and then she flung out her arms and let them bathe a moment in the sunlight. "It is splendid, is it not, to feel the sunlight and to breathe the fresh air? The world is wonderful after one has once lost it."

Months afterward he remembered her words and wondered why he had not understood more

than he did on this day, but he had just crept out of the deep shadows and as yet was giving little heed to analyses.

He gained strength rapidly, and in a day or two could walk about the house unaided, and when he was able to sit at dinner with the Rosses he was considerably surprised to find that Jose was the only servant in this great house. The Mexican youth served with skill, moving in and out of the dining room with the same soft tread at which Bevis had so often marveled.

Since the day when Dan had related to Ross the full story of the tragedy that had ended the life of Colonel Jordan, the Eastern city they both had known so well had not been referred to in any way by either of them, and as Dan remembered it now as they sat at dinner it occurred to him that Ross had asked the questions and he had made all of the explanations, omitting, of course, reference to the wreck of the bank.

Now he could not help wondering how a man who had been foreman in the mills could have acquired not only the wealth necessary to maintain such a luxurious home as this but also the niceties of deportment and speech and the

multitude of trivialities that seemingly indicated a lifelong familiarity with such surroundings. He had found Ross to be an accomplished linguist. He himself had enjoyed exercising his German with him and had found him entirely at ease with the language, and then he had on more than one occasion heard him conversing in Spanish with Mrs. Ross, although both were too careful of good form to use in his presence this language with which they knew he was not familiar.

One evening when Dan came in from a long spin with Ross in the touring car which he had often seen the latter driving, he found sitting on the veranda a man whom Ross introduced as Senator Granville Garrison and who evidently was there on invitation, for Ross offered a word of apology for having failed to reach the house at the appointed time.

"It may not be flattering, but really you have not been missed," replied Garrison. "The view from your veranda is charming—I never tire of looking at those tumbled masses of mountains over yonder—and Mrs. Ross has been generous enough to suggest that I smoke." He blew a cloud of smoke from between his lips and glanced at Dan.

"The fault must be mine if our return has been tardy," suggested Bevis. "The world seems wonderfully beautiful to me since I have been permitted to return to it. I have been shut in for a long time," he added.

"Freedom—I mean, sickness,—teaches us many lessons." Garrison drew quickly on his cigar, and Dan fancied that a flash of vexation came to his face.

"I have no doubt that you, too, Senator, find these hills and the scent of the pines very delightful after your winter in Washington." Teresa Ross spoke up very quickly, and, somehow, Dan felt that she was trying to cover an error, though at that moment he was unable to name the weak point she was endeavoring to protect. "It will be full moon to-night, and I will have the coffee served out here after dinner, and you may enjoy your cigar and the magnificence of the evening at the same time."

And this was done. Jose brought them their coffee and they sipped it and enjoyed their cigars as the moon rose, full-orbed, over the Coeur d'Alenes, completing a picture that was entrancing. At a suggestion Jose brought his guitar, and, standing at the far end of the veranda, with his face toward the moonlit

mountains, he sang with fetching plaintiveness:

"Mi memoria en ti se ocupa,
No te olvida un solo instante,
Y mi mente delirante en ti piensa,
En ti piensa sin cesar."

He laughed when they clapped their hands, and sang again for them. Finally he came forward and spoke to Mrs. Ross, in Spanish, and in response she nodded and waved her hand.

"*Buenos noches,*" he said, and entered the house.

Senator Granville Garrison was a man not far from seventy years of age, but athletic-looking despite his years. His entire life had been spent in the West. In his youth he had ridden the range and known all of the hardships of those early days in a country then given over to cattle and sheep raising, and it was his vigorous years on the cattle ranches that gave him a strength of body which made it possible for him to withstand the strain of many political campaigns in later years and to pursue without ceasing the ambitions he had conceived while lying by the camp-fires listening to the lonesome wails of the coyotes.

In those days he had determined to make himself a power in politics, and nothing had ever sufficed to swerve him. His methods were not always without stain, but his success had been practically unbroken. There had been times when those who longed for an era of cleaner politics had organized insurrections against his power, but always he had succeeded in crushing the opposition and in returning to the United States Senate in triumph more or less soiled, but to the Senate, nevertheless.

There had been a time when he had dreamed of the Presidency, but his early moves toward that goal had been thwarted by Warren Nelson, head of the Falls City Bank, and in the desperate game of intrigue that followed, Seb Layton, then a young lawyer a few years out of Yale, had become entangled, first allying himself with Garrison in the latter's efforts to wreck the Falls City Bank and ruin Nelson, and then at the critical moment forsaking his cherished desire for revenge on Nelson, in order that the hundreds of innocent depositors of the bank might be saved. To do this, Layton had been forced to defy Garrison at the last and finally had compelled him to abandon his scheme for ruining Nelson.

Layton had become master of the situation and had agreed not to interfere with Garrison's return to the Senate if Garrison ceased his fight on the bank, and the Senator, seeing that utter defeat was probable if he did not yield, surrendered to Layton, who kept his promise and did not oppose him in his effort to be reelected that year.

Those events constituted one of the most stirring chapters of Spokane's history and won for Layton his wife, who was Tess Barr when they first met, and the same events had also engendered in Senator Granville Garrison a most bitter hatred for Layton, who, after his marriage, had entered still more actively into the political affairs of his State.

Always had Layton found Garrison and his machine opposing him bitterly, but by force of his splendid personality he had overcome the influence of the Garrison machine, which was slowly losing its power as the younger and cleaner element in politics rallied to the Layton banner, and the election of Seb Layton to the bench had been a triumph that left the Garrison forces badly disrupted and broken. But Granville Garrison was tireless and his ambition unwaning, so he smiled in his grim way,

and carefully, methodically, and with infinite patience began the work of rebuilding his once powerful political machine.

When it became known that Judge Seb Layton probably would be the opposing candidate when the time again came for a Senator to be chosen by the Washington Legislature, Granville Garrison for the time being lost his calm, and those of his political lieutenants who were called into his offices for consultation found the Senator in a storming rage of passion. Then had come the days of cool-headed reflection, days in which Senator Granville Garrison found it very necessary to admit to himself—though not to others—that his was a tottering throne; that it was alarmingly weak in many ways, not the least important of which was the question of finance. It requires vast sums of money to conduct such campaigns as he had been compelled to conduct, and this fact, together with some unfortunate investments, had left Garrison in desperate financial plight and in no fighting condition for such a battle as he well knew he would be compelled to make to defeat Judge Layton for the Senate.

This fact was known to the leaders of the Layton faction, and when, a few months later,

Senator Garrison opened headquarters of unrivaled magnificence and made the initial moves that indicated that he intended carrying on a campaign whose extravagance would far exceed any of his previous operations, the Layton forces were astounded. Where had these financial resources come from? The closest investigation convinced Layton's followers that Garrison was not receiving assistance from those trusts and syndicates that are usually supposed to supply funds for corrupt political campaigns. There were many reasons for the assurance that these organizations were not backing him in the present fight.

Garrison had been in desperate straits before and had realized enormous sums by playing one syndicate against another, but the time had come when those great corporations had acquired wisdom in regard to this proceeding, and when that wisdom had come an almost total cessation of their tribute to Garrison had come, also. In vain had he intrigued and promised and threatened. All of this was an open book in the Layton camp, and when Senator Garrison made his unexpected opening move in the present campaign there was much of dismay among the Judge's fighters, for

Layton was a man of very modest fortune and those who knew him knew that he would not accept aid from any of the great corporations. His candidacy was in direct opposition to graft and corruption. It was altogether unlikely that Garrison would receive any support from the trusts and syndicates, for he had been false to all of them, and even a Senator chosen on a reform wave could not be more dangerous to their interests than had been this greedy, selfish, treacherous member of the Senate.

And so the Layton men knew that the gigantic financial organizations would help neither Garrison nor Layton, but would calmly stand aside and watch with more or less interest the fight that was certain to come. And yet, in spite of all this comforting knowledge, there remained the fact that Garrison had suddenly demonstrated that he had apparently unlimited means at his command, and against this fact was the other fact that Judge Seb Layton was without means, and the further fact that money was a powerful factor in such a campaign as seemed likely to result.

That Senator Garrison well knew the consternation his move had caused the Layton forces was not to be doubted. There are al-

A HINT OF REVOLUTION 189

ways ways of learning such interesting facts. That he thoroughly enjoyed the dismay of his enemies was also a certainty.

This evening as the Senator sat on the veranda of the Ross home he seemed in high spirits, and after Jose had bidden them good night the conversation was along frivolous lines for some time. Bevis, rejoicing at his return to the world, enjoyed the woman's play of wit, and, later, when the topics gradually turned to political questions, he was amazed at the depth of her understanding of those things which generally are considered as belonging mainly to man's sphere, and her grasp of the significance of the policies of the nations of the world caused him to marvel. The strength and the weakness of an ex-president just home from an African hunting expedition she analyzed in a way that carried conviction, and her information regarding the various influences that were striving to control a president, noted for his jollity and good nature and his judicial mind rather than for his discerning statesmanship, was exhaustive.

"The administration means well, but it blunders terribly," said Ross, and Garrison nodded.

"And in that fact lies danger," insisted Teresa. "One can know what to expect from one who is frankly hostile to a project, but what protection can one take against blunders?"

"You must not forget that in the United States the mighty will of the people prevails," replied Garrison, sarcastically, and this brought a gesture of disdain from the woman.

"Senator, I would laugh were it not such a really serious matter!" she exclaimed. "But how can I laugh when I know that the greatest danger we have to fear is the blunders of this government? The people? The Gluggersheims will dictate when the time comes, I fear!"

Bevis turned quickly and regarded her with considerable amazement. She had risen and stepped close to Senator Garrison, and her words were spoken with marked intensity.

"You must pardon me," said Dan, again leaning back in his chair, "but you speak as though you feared this government were apt to meddle with some of your dearest interests."

He laughed as he spoke, for after his first amazement had passed he was amused at this

dainty woman's vehement arraignment of the United States. She turned toward him, hesitated as she glanced quickly and inquiringly from Ross to Senator Garrison, and then sat down.

"I have told you that my father was a Mexican official and died facing a government firing squad," she answered. "The meddling of your government was largely responsible for the failure of that revolution and the resulting death of my father. If revolution comes again—and, mark you, it will come—I say that it will," she added in a harsh voice as Ross raised a warning hand and glanced rather uneasily toward Bevis. "The señor is not a baby! He is a man!" Her dark eyes rested on Dan's athletic frame. "Ah, he is a man! He has—I make the guess, señor—he has suffered! And if—"

"Sh-h-h-h! Teresa!"

Ross leaned quickly toward her and placed his hand on her arm, but she flung him aside.

"And if revolution comes in Mexico this blundering president may be a tool in the hands of the Gluggersheims and the others. And that will mean other firing squads for the patriots after your 'Uncle Sam' has bowed to the

dollar mark and interfered!" She turned and rested both arms on the side of her chair, and in the moonlight Dan could see that she was gazing straight into his eyes. "Señor, they think you will have no sympathy for the people who will fight for their rights against the tyrants of Mexico and the Gluggersheims of the United States."

"No sympathy?" He stretched out his arms, as though to test their returning strength. "They are wrong. Were I a Mexican I might—." He paused, and no one spoke. He drew on his cigar, and a cloud of smoke floated lazily from between his lips. "The moon is very beautiful to-night," he said, at last.

"Just such a moon as used to inspire me when I used my saddle for a pillow and planned my political career," said Garrison. "I think we had better change from politics to astronomy."

"And as I am still considerable of an invalid I will ask permission to return to my room," said Bevis. "I am very tired."

A few minutes later he had thrown himself across his bed, wearied with the activities of the day. And as he lay there many questions

stole unbidden into his mind. This daughter of a Mexican revolutionist—what tormenting problems she suggested. She said she had lost the world once, and that it was a very long time before she found it again. It was rather an odd speech, but Teresa Ross had many oddities, he had learned. Possibly—but he caught his breath quickly, for another remembrance had flashed to his mind and quite obliterated thoughts of the woman's words. There was Senator Garrison. Had there been aught but chance that caused Garrison to use the word, "freedom," in his reference to the teaching of "many lessons"? Why had Teresa Ross come so quickly to his aid and endeavored to cover the Senator's momentary confusion?

Ross came to the door and looked in.

"I thought I would see how you were feeling," he said. "Is there anything I can do for you?"

"Not a thing," replied Dan. Ross was turning away when a sudden thought came to Bevis. "Wait a moment," he called. "I want to ask you a question."

Ross came into the room and stood by the bed. Sprawled out flat on his back Dan Bevis

looked his companion full in the face a moment before speaking, and Ross shifted uneasily.

"Well?" he asked, as the silence continued.

"I hardly know how to ask it," was the response. "Did I—say things—delirious things, you know—while I was sick?"

"Yes—you did."

"Would you be kind enough to tell me some of the things I said?"

"You spoke rather incoherently of a girl and a fight in the woods, and then you would say, 'I came to find out, and I have found out.' This you said many times, and often you would laugh after you had said it."

Ross paused, but Bevis's gaze did not leave his face.

"And what else did I say?"

"Something about a bank, and always when you spoke of the bank you would say something about love and a pit, and then—"

Again Ross paused, but that inquiring gaze never wavered.

"And then?"

"You were very delirious and said some very foolish things—some things about a—prison."

Then Dan turned his face away, and a sigh came to his lips.

"That is all," he said. "Thank you. I thought I must have said something of the kind. Strange, but I never thought of it until—"

"Until what?" asked Ross, when Bevis did not finish the remark.

"Until Senator Garrison said something this evening about freedom. I suppose you told him."

"Senator Garrison stood by your bedside on more than one occasion during your fever," was the reply. "But I am sure that he gave no more heed than did we to the ravings of a delirium."

Bevis smiled in a wan way.

"No, I suppose not. Probably no more," he said. "Good night."

After Ross had left the room, Bevis arose and sat by the window. His head throbbed a bit, and there was a riot of emotion in his brain. He was certain now that the Rosses and Senator Garrison knew, or, at least, entertained no doubt, of that dark period in his life. And he could not help wondering what interest it was that drew this Senator to the Rosses.

Teresa Ross was the type of woman for

whom men would do many lawless things did she but smile and will it, but there was something more than a woman's smile and the allurements of coral lips behind Senator Garrison's presence under this roof. Of that Dan Bevis felt certain. As to what that something might be he would have given no heed had he not felt that in some way he himself was to be concerned before the final card had been played in whatever game was now opening.

He turned out the light and then returned to the window, looking out at the pictures the magic of the moonlight was strewing before his eyes. Down yonder the city was winking and blinking a thousand eyes at him; here and there solitary pines were silhouetted against the moonlit sky, and occasionally the cry of a night bird came to him from out in that unreal world. He rejoiced in his returning strength and was eager to enter into this strong life of the new Northwest, to match his coolness and brains against that of other men. The longing to smoke came to him, but he had no cigar. Then he remembered of seeing Ross place a box of cigars on the table in the library that evening. He could slip

A HINT OF REVOLUTION 197

down there very quietly and get a cigar without disturbing the trio on the veranda, and then he could return to his room and enjoy half an hour before sleep.

He put on his coat and stepped out into the hall. The house was very still, and a light at the far end of the hallway, near where the small stairway led to the servant's quarters on the third floor, was the only one burning above stairs. He went down the stairs, pausing at the bottom to listen for the sound of voices from the veranda, but he heard nothing. He started on toward the library, which he saw was lighted, but had taken only a few steps when he stopped, listening intently. An indistinct murmur had come to his ears, but not from the veranda. Again he heard the murmur, this time more distinctly than before, and he knew that it was the voice of Teresa Ross, vibrant with the passion of her Latin blood. Acting on impulse, he tiptoed toward the open door of the library.

A slight twinge of conscience manifested itself, but Dan Bevis had felt the sear of many burns, and he wasted no time in arguing with himself concerning eavesdropping. He wanted

to know what was taking place between this trio, and the possible opportunity lay before him.

With his back to the wall, he edged closer to the open door and stood there.

He heard the rustle as of parchment, and he longed to see within, but this was impossible, so he stood there, his ears straining to catch the next words, but they were spoken in such a low tone that he was unable to understand more than the fact that Senator Garrison and the two Rosses were intently discussing some question. Then he heard Ross speaking.

"Here," he said, raising his voice slightly, "you will notice that the mines are designated in red ink—here and here and here—while the railroad follows this line marked with the arrow—over here is Mexico City."

There were a few moments more of confused murmurs in lowered voices, but the listener caught the word, "Chihuahua," and then Teresa exclaimed, evidently in reply to some remark made by Garrison:

"You may depend upon Madero when the moment comes. It is Washington that needs be feared, I tell you."

"Washington? Poof!" It was the voice of

Senator Garrison that replied. "The administration shrinks from shadows—and I can manipulate the shadows sufficiently to keep the troops on this side of the Rio Grande."

"Then there will be no more failures," said Ross, and a note of relief was evident in his voice. "Those red marks show where I have spent years of my life, Senator, and I know that the next time the signal sounds, the result will be victory—if the Rio Grande is wide enough."

"Very well. This copy is for me, I believe. The other you had better keep in the safe. I am glad that you have received it. Now, let's return to the veranda. Such nights are not intended to be spent indoors."

As Garrison spoke, Bevis heard them moving across the room, and, with a flash of dismay, he realized that it would be impossible for him to reach the top of the stairs before the trio came out of the room. There was but one chance to escape discovery, and that was to gain the music room.

This room adjoined and was connected with the library by sliding doors, and he had on several occasions observed Ross while sitting in the library arise and slide back these noise-

less doors in order that he might the better enjoy Teresa's music as she sat at the piano.

This room was in darkness, but the entrance was several feet behind where he stood. However, it offered the only hope, and he turned and darted for the doorway. As he gained the entrance he glanced back and saw that Garrison had already stepped out into the hall, but the Senator's broad back was toward Bevis, and Dan felt certain that he had not been observed. Then came the Rosses, but as they strolled toward the front of the house the woman stopped and half turned.

"I'll join you in a moment," she said. "I think I had better get my mantilla. I left it lying on the piano."

CHAPTER XIII

A QUESTION OF QUEENS

HE turned back, and Bevis felt his heart thump violently. There was no possible way of avoiding detection, and no plausible explanation could he make regarding his presence there in that dark room. He glanced toward the sliding doors and saw that they were open just the least bit, for a faint streak of light shone through. It would not be possible to slip through into the library, for he instantly realized that should he open the doors sufficiently to permit of his passing through, a flood of light would come from the library and plainly manifest itself to the woman who now was close to the door.

He could hear her humming a merry air, and now as he stood there in the darkness, uncertain how to act, he could see her coming down the hallway, and even in that moment he could read the light of triumph that was shining in her face and eyes. She had reached the door, and Bevis parted his lips to speak, de-

per-
ing upon inspiration to weave some sort of a story that might be acceptable in explanation of his presence. Then his teeth came together so quickly that he fancied she must have heard them click.

"Teresa!"

Ross had called to her from the front entrance at the instant that Dan had formed the word on his tongue. Standing in the doorway of the music room, she hesitated and then looked back to where her husband had halted.

"Yes?" she answered.

"Would you mind bringing the box of cigarettes you will find on the sideboard in the dining room? The Senator is partial to your brand."

There was a moment of hesitation, during which Bevis stood there in the darkness scarcely daring to draw a full breath lest she should catch the sound, and then she turned and went on down the hallway and he heard her voice raised in a gay lilt of song. But what should he do now? In a moment she would return and would come there for the mantilla. Possibly he could gain the stairway before she returned.

He moved to the doorway and peered out.

A QUESTION OF QUEENS 203

No one was in sight, but he could hear the woman as she moved about the dining room. The stairway was twenty feet away, but it was his only hope and he was just stepping out into the hallway when a sound behind him startled him and caused him to spring back into the room, listening intently.

But not the slightest sound now broke the silence. For a breath he stood straining his eyes, trying to penetrate the darkness of the room, but it was useless. Possibly, after all, his overwrought nerves, due to his illness, had begun playing tricks on him. He went to the door and peeped out again, but that moment of listening had been sufficient to defeat any chance he might have had for escape.

Teresa Ross was just coming out of the dining room, and between her teeth she was holding a lighted cigarette. But it was not the cigarette that claimed his attention. It was a dainty lace mantilla she had placed about her shoulders. He shrank farther back as she approached, and then with a trembling hand he wiped from his forehead the perspiration that had gathered there. A few more pulse beats and she had passed, leaving behind a trail of aromatic smoke.

"I found the mantilla in the dining room instead of the music room," he heard her call, gayly, to those on the veranda, and then she passed out of the house, and Bevis knew that they were ensconced in the wide, curving nook of the veranda some distance from the doorway.

He hesitated a moment, peering about him in the darkness, uncertain as to whether he really had heard a noise there or whether it was his fancy. He reached out and laid his finger against the button controlling the lights, but hesitated. Would the lights show through the windows in such manner as to be seen by those on the veranda? He dropped his hand, and then, with sudden impulse, he determined to take the risk, and an instant later the lights flashed on.

As they did so he exclaimed with surprise, for stretched out on the divan was Jose, apparently asleep. With a few quick steps Bevis was by the side of the couch, and for a moment he bent close over the Mexican, his eyes on those of the servant, his ears noting the steady sound of his breathing. Then he laid his hand on the youth's shoulder.

"Jose!" he exclaimed, softly. "Jose!"

A QUESTION OF QUEENS 205

The servant moved, and then slowly opened his eyes and lay staring stupidly at Dan. In an instant surprise seemed to leap into his eyes.

"Señor—I have slept! Is it near morning?"

"Morning? No. What are you doing here?"

Jose sat up and gazed about the room.

"I lay down here where it was dark and pleasant—and I must have slept. It was very wrong for me to sleep here. The señora will be very angry if she finds out." He looked up into Bevis's face. "If she finds out," he repeated.

Dan turned out the lights.

"You had better go to your room," he said. "The señora will not find out—this time."

The Mexican's eyes beamed as he sprang to his feet.

"You are kind!" he whispered. "I will go to my room."

He stole out of the room, and Bevis watched him as he darted up the stairway, leaving no sound of footfalls. Glancing back into the music room, Dan noticed the streak of light marking the slight opening between the sliding doors. An idea came to his mind, and, step-

ping over to the doors, he found that by placing his eye to the opening he could command a fair view of the library. He could see the table and the chairs where the Rosses and Garrison evidently had been sitting. One could place his ear to the opening and readily hear all that might be spoken in the room beyond.

Forgetting the cigars of which he had come in search, Dan went back to the doorway, peered out into the hallway, and, assured that he could do so unobserved, he hurried to the stairway and soon was at his window once more.

And out there the city still winked its countless eyes at him, and the magic of the moonlight still was busy, but Dan Bevis gave these things no heed now. He was thinking of the conference in the library, and of the sleepy Jose and a streak of light between two sliding doors.

During the long summer that followed, Dan gave much thought to those two incidents, Jose on the divan, and the slightest bit of opening showing between the sliding doors, and he wondered if there was any connection between the Mexican's presence there and the fact that one could place one's self close to those doors

A QUESTION OF QUEENS 207

and see and hear whatever might take place in the room beyond.

So long as he remained a member of the Ross household he kept a close watch on Jose, but at no instant did he detect the youth in anything unbecoming a devoted, painstaking servant. Very adroitly Bevis had discussed the Mexican with Teresa Ross, and learned that his loyalty and faithfulness were unquestioned. He had come to them by reason of certain circumstances that made them very glad to secure his services. Most of the señora's life had, naturally, been spent in Mexico, and her husband had also spent many years there as a superintendent of mines, and these facts made Jose especially welcome to them. True, they admitted, Jose was not as meek and gentle-natured as he appeared, but this in no-wise detracted from his value to them.

The Mexican was not in good favor with the Spokane police, they knew, because a few years before he had made a vicious attack on Warren Neison, the banker, and only the timely interference of Seb Layton had kept the Mexican's dagger from avenging the wrong the banker had worked upon the youth by obtaining his entire savings in exchange for

worthless mining stock, and since that day the police had listed the Mexican as a dangerous character whom it were well to watch very carefully.

All of these facts Bevis learned bit by bit, and he also gathered that the servant was known to be possessed of intense revolutionary tendencies, and had, on more than one occasion, hinted that he longed to cross the Rio Grande and join the forces that were now becoming active in opposition to the rule of President Diaz.

But in spite of all this information, Bevis could not overcome the doubts that were born in his mind the night he had found Jose on the divan.

By the close of April, Dan had established bachelor quarters in an uptown apartment house, though he was a frequent guest at the Ross home. From an Eastern paper he learned that the McLeedys would spend the heated season in the Catskills, where the great financier had recently established a summer home, and the same social gossip stated that Lord Heathercote would accompany them to the mountains, the royal hussar having obtained an extension of the leave of absence

A QUESTION OF QUEENS 209

from his regiment, which probably would be ordered back to India some time during the coming winter, after enjoying its two years of home service.

And in the far-away Northwest the exile smiled coldly as he read, and from his window he looked down on a silvery thread that marked the winding of the beautiful Spokane river. He flung the paper to the floor.

"I wonder how I ever hypnotized myself sufficiently to endure all of that make-believe!" he exclaimed. "If there is a God He must hate such farces!" He picked up a deck of cards and idly spread them on the table before him, and smiled when the queen of hearts came out of the pack at the deciding moment. "That's just the difference," he said. "Here the queen of hearts—back yonder the queen of diamonds. One is warmth and life—the other cold and artificial. Yes, whatever God there is must hate the queen of diamonds—and if He doesn't like the queen of hearts He surely has a lot of sympathy for the fellow who does!"

He tossed the soiled deck into a waste basket and surveyed the room. The rugs were streaked with ashes, while brass trays placed here and there were piled with cigar stubs.

On a sideboard were a number of empty bottles. These he gathered up and disposed of, and then he paused for a moment before the carved figure of a Mexican toreador in whose outstretched hand a dainty cigarette had cleverly been fixed.

"Hanged if I don't believe Garrison was a bit suspicious of that," he mused. "He knows her cigarettes, and Garrison is a shrewd devil—but he's a dunce at cards." Again he laughed in a cynical manner as he went to a small safe and unlocked it, taking out a roll of bills, which he carefully counted. "He thinks he can play, though—and may he keep on thinking so." He took a bank book from the safe and put the book and money in his pocket, but as he turned away, his gaze again rested on the toreador with the cigarette. "I never thought of his getting suspicious of the cigarette, but he said I had told him I did not smoke them. And so, 'why, etc., etc.' Damn women, anyway!" he exclaimed half savagely as he stood with his hands in his pockets looking at the toreador. "I can't afford to split with Garrison. Women are too plentiful!"

He walked over to the window and sat down again, leaning back in the leather chair and

A QUESTION OF QUEENS 211

enjoying the delights of the summer morning. He whistled softly for a moment, and then his gaze came back to the bull-fighter.

"They're plentiful, but Teresa's kind are not. She's quite delicious, with those long lashes, and those midnight eyes—but she's like all the rest when it comes to being a fool. Whew! Supposing she had come here last night, as she threatened because I wouldn't go out there!" He shook his head slowly. "No one but a woman would be such an unreasonable idiot. Good Lord! The things she said about my liking cards better than her society!" Something of a smile came back to his lips. "Confound it, I couldn't tell her how badly I needed the money!"

He put on his hat and went down to the street, and for awhile stood watching the flow of the human current along Riverside Avenue. Only a few years before fire had swept away the village that pioneers had located on the banks of this splendid river tumbling down from the Coeur d'Alenes to fling itself in majestic falls and then go hurrying on to become a part of the Columbia, but from the ashes of that village a magnificent city had arisen to become the marvel of the great

Northwest and the gateway to the enticing East.

The cowboy with his fringed chaps was rarely seen, now, but on the broad thoroughfares, where once he had ridden in all his picturesque recklessness, touring cars were gliding and luxurious carriages driven by liveried servants rolled by with my lady on her shopping or pleasure trips.

At a distance of some blocks one of the most imposing office buildings west of the Mississippi River was in course of construction, while through neighboring streets the cars of the local system were followed by trains of mammoth interurban cars with clanging bells as they made their way to or from the rich valley of the Palouse or the more rugged country to the eastward, where irrigation was reclaiming a vast territory only a few years ago the Mecca of the hunter, the angler, and the camper who sought surcease in solitude.

It had lost its novelty for Dan Bevis, yet the marvel of it all never failed to interest him when he left his apartments, where, for hours, a narrow, sordid life would jog its way before his eyes as he glanced sharply at the set, expressionless faces about the card table and

A QUESTION OF QUEENS 213

heard the muttered curses of men as they arose and with set jaws strode out into the night, victims of a fever which held others in those rooms until dawn sent them, feverish and hollow-eyed, to an hour or two of rest, and then, overwrought and nervous, back to counting rooms and corporation executive offices, only to return a few nights later refreshed by a bit of rest and with the devilish fever burning high within their souls.

While the drama—the human tragedy—was being enacted in those apartments Dan Bevis was always the same steady-nerved being whose mirthless smile changed not a whit, did the cards smile or did they frown upon him, though it was common knowledge that the occasions were few when the dawn peeped in upon his defeat, and it seemed to him in the lethargy of his stunned soul that it all was as it should be, that here men were their natural selves and gave battle as they should, grim and relentless, asking no quarter and giving none, and recognizing but one law, the survival of the fittest. It was God's law, Bevis was fond of declaring, though he admitted that he had but a hazy notion of what he meant by "God."

But, somehow, when he came down to the

street and stood watching the sweep of commerce there was something about it—something fresh and new and clean, something with an inspiration—that for a moment shamed him. But always it was but fleeting, this stirring of a dormant conscience, and then he told himself that he was right when he declared that in the rooms above men were natural, and that if he conquered them by reason of his skill, his iron nerve and his daring, he owed no apology to society. Besides, he cared not the snap of his finger whether the world approved or disapproved. The world had struck at him. He had a right to strike back.

And so, after standing for a few minutes with the same old questions racing through his mind, and arriving at the same old decision, he swung off down the street with his mind quite at rest. And when he had seen the roll of bills carefully counted at the bank and the amount entered in his book, he came forth viewing life serenely.

A few evenings later he dined with the Rosses, and after Teresa had played for them and had sung her plaintive Spanish ballads they sat on the veranda and discussed the revolution that was spreading through Mexico, and

A QUESTION OF QUEENS 215

Teresa smoked her dainty cigarettes as she cursed the aged Diaz.

"And to-morrow night Spokane will banquet one of the tyrant's cabinet, Señor Sanchez La Cruz Arguelle!" she exclaimed, stamping her foot in a passion of anger. "And the gringoes will not heed the blood on his guilty hands, but will smile and fawn and cheer, and Washington will have one of its army officers with him as a mark of Washington's gracious esteem! Holy Virgin!"

"Yes, I have been honored, through Senator Garrison, by receiving an invitation to the affair," said Bevis. "I think I shall attend."

Ross had risen and was pacing back and forth on the veranda, his hands clasped behind his back, and when the light from the windows fell upon his face Dan saw that the shadow of a great anxiety was there.

"And so, too, must we go," said Ross, pausing. "It would cause unpleasant comment were we to absent ourselves when this countryman—"

"God curse him!" exclaimed the woman.

"When this countryman of Teresa's is being honored," continued Ross, looking moodily at his wife.

Jose came out, bringing a tray with wine, and the discussion was shifted to other topics. But that night as Dan Bevis lay sleepless in his bed he shuddered as he recalled the voice and the face of Teresa Ross as she had uttered the curse against the Mexican diplomat.

Señor Sanchez La Cruz Arguelle arrived in the city soon after noon. Spokane received him with surpassing hospitality, and there were sufficient points of genuine interest to keep the Mexican engaged until sundown. In fact, the program for the afternoon had not been completed when Arguelle expressed the wish that he might return to his apartments in the hotel, pleading illness as the cause for this curtailment of the touring.

That the plea of illness was voiced in sincerity no one could doubt after looking into his face. A physician who came in haste in response to the summons from the hotel looked very grave as he proceeded with his examination, and then another, a renowned specialist, was called, and he advised that the distinguished foreigner remain abed instead of attending the banquet that night. But the Mexican was obdurate. He had endured many hardships in the field and bore the scars of the

A QUESTION OF QUEENS 217

wounds he had felt and conquered; a hurting in the side, no matter how severe, should not cause him to forget his obligations to this people who had received him so cordially and generously. He would attend the banquet and the evening's program should not be marred by a mere lump that had manifested itself on his right side. The specialist protested and plainly told of the probabilities. It was without avail. A diplomat must not be remiss in the social affairs of a friendly nation.

Thousands massed themselves near Davenport's that night hours before Señor Arguelle and his party reached the famous café. Mounted police formed a cordon about the huge touring car as it slowly made its way to a designated point opposite the entrance. The colonel of cavalry, under orders from Washington to serve as escort for the Mexican dignitary, was gorgeous in the gold cordings and epaulettes of the dress uniform of the United States army, and was in marked contrast with the silk-hatted guest of honor, whose face showed gray under the brilliant glow of innumerable electric lights.

Davenport's was a place of rare beauty that night, the flowers, the sparkle of the glass, the

flash of silver, the radiance of woman's beauty adorned in costly gowns, the quiet black of the men's attire, relieved by the spotless white of their waistcoats, and with it all the subdued melody of the orchestra organized especially for this occasion and made up of artists known throughout the music circles of the Pacific Northwest—all of these combined to create a scene of gayety and charm seldom exceeded.

The formalities of the occasion were deftly disguised as informalities, and Señor Arguelle, bowing and smiling wanly, with ashy lips declared to those who greeted him in the reception room that it was quite the most delightful evening of his life. Dan Bevis, standing close by, watched with interest the progress of the reception. He saw the Rosses approach. Senator Garrison, standing beside Arguelle, presented Teresa to her countryman, and Dan saw that her husband stood close to her side, his eyes never leaving her hands, as she spoke a few commonplaces to the foreigner. Then she turned away, but, quick as a flash, she whirled, thrust her lips close to the ear of the guest, and, as Dan leaned forward, he heard her speak in a low tone a few quick words in Spanish. Then she stepped aside and in a moment

A QUESTION OF QUEENS 219

was lost in the multitude that crowded about the receiving group, but Bevis heard her laugh ringing out above the chatter of the crowd, and he fancied that the laugh bore a tone of mockery.

CHAPTER XIV

THE BANQUET

AT the low-spoken words the Mexican had thrown up his right arm as though to guard, and the pallor of his face faded to a chalky hue. But in that instant the woman had disappeared; and Arguelle, noting the surprised look on the faces of those of his party, again called the smile to his lips.

"Ah, one of my countrywomen," he said to the colonel of cavalry, who had pressed close to his side at the unusual proceeding he had witnessed. "The lady has a ready play of wit."

And the distinguished gentlemen of the receiving group laughed their enjoyment of what they took to be a sparkling joke. But Dan Bevis knew that Teresa Ross had not voiced a witticism for the delectation of the man from Mexico. Had he had no other cause for knowing this, what he read in the faces of Senator Granville Garrison and Lawrence Ross on the

instant that she had made the unexpected move would have convinced him.

He made his way through the crowd and sought a quiet spot in an adjoining room. It would be some time before the signal announced the beginning of the banquet, and he was tired. Strength had not returned to him as readily as he had hoped after his illness, and the heat of the early summer had already begun to claim its toll from his vitality. He was not unaware that his own dissipations had added to this failure to regain his old strength. Some distance from where the diplomat was bowing and shaking hands in response to the ridiculous American custom, Dan found a fairly quiet spot, but beside a tall palm near a far window he was surprised to discover Teresa Ross, sitting alone. Quickly he reached her side.

"Where is Lawrence?" he asked, familiarly.

She looked up, startled, and then a sudden glow came to her olive cheeks.

"Why, Dan, you almost frightened me!" she exclaimed. "Sit here beside me!"

"But Lawrence?"

Her lip curled disdainfully, and there was an expressive gesture by the dainty hands.

"I told him that I was warm and thirsty and wished an ice. I sent him for it—anything to be rid of him for a time. Bah! He is a weak fool!"

Again that feeling of uneasiness came to Dan Bevis as he sat there beside this beautiful woman who had revealed to him that in the twinkling of an eye she could be transformed into a tigress.

"I saw you speak to Señor Arguelle," he said.

"And did you see the fear leap into the eyes of the hound of hell?" she exclaimed. "Sainted Virgin! It was very funny!"

"Teresa! For heaven's sake, be calm!" He glanced about apprehensively. "What did you say to him?"

"Say? Oh—that the evening was pleasant and I hoped he was well." Her laugh rang with a bubbling merriment. "Is it not what you gringoes say?"

Inwardly Bevis muttered a curse, and he caught his lip to prevent the curse becoming audible, but the keen eyes of Teresa Ross noted the frown that gathered on his brow, and instantly her mood changed.

"Please do not frown," she said, and her

voice was almost a purr in its softness. "You cannot understand my Latin blood, my Americano, but I like you best with the light instead of the shadows in your eyes. Ah—sol!" She glanced up at him; he saw the slumbering flames beneath her drooping lashes, and the throb of his temples dispelled the cloud that had come to his eyes. "You have neglected—us—lately, Dan, and so I have been full of unhappiness. Now say to me that you do not care as much for the cards as you do for me!"

And he bent low and whispered that which caused her to clap her hands in the fetching, childish way she had found so alluring to this broad-shouldered gringo.

"*Bueno! Bueno!*" she exclaimed, softly. "Now I will be very calm and—silly—no, no, I mean good—all evening. And I will smile and applaud when Señor Arguelle—God curse him!—speaks."

He arose and murmured an excuse.

"Lawrence is coming yonder," he said. "And you will not be alone. I promised Senator Garrison to be where he could find me when the reception ended."

He turned away, but she called to him.

"Dan!" she called, softly. "My Americano will come soon to see—us?"

He turned and looked at her as she sat with her face uplifted toward him.

"Yes," he said.

And Teresa Ross kept her word and was quite calm and smiling throughout the serving of the banquet and the various accompanying events that custom demanded on such an occasion. She smiled and chatted gayly and was not a laggard in applause when Judge Layton, acting on behalf of the absent mayor, welcomed to Spokane the representative of the neighboring republic. When Arguelle arose to reply there was a salvo of good American cheers, and Bevis, suddenly looking across the table, saw the fury of hate gathering on the face of Teresa. Her husband, staring at the Mexican, was giving her no heed, but Dan saw her hand clutch one of the knives beside her plate as the storm swept into her eyes. Then she glanced across and saw him watching her. Her lips tightened, and then with a careless motion she tossed aside the knife and turned with smiling face toward the guest of honor, who spoke but briefly in appreciation of the honors accorded him. The

morning papers explained that he had wished to speak at length to the people, but that the illness against which he was battling had rendered it impossible for him to do more than make the barest and briefest acknowledgment of his obligations.

The orchestra played the Mexican national air, and then in an interval of the oratory that the committee felt needs must be loosed on this occasion the notes of a violin were heard. It was not unusual. Throughout the evening the violins had been heard in obligatos, but the vast throng gradually became aware that this was different.

Bevis looked up and saw the player, a young woman, standing at the front of the platform. Tall and slender, she drew the bow with wondrous grace, and as he looked into her face he saw that one soft cheek caressed the box of the instrument in a manner suggesting infinite love, while the eyes of the player were seeing nothing of that brilliant assemblage, but were looking only into the soul of things unseen; her simple black gown was cut just low enough to reveal a glimpse of snowy shoulder and a faultless throat, and it became her exceedingly, proving an excellent foil for the warmly-tinted

hair that showed the glint of dull copper as she swayed slightly.

Some one at his side spoke to him, but Bevis returned no answer. It is doubtful if he heard anything but the voice of the violin as it breathed of the song of birds and the sigh of winds at eventide; and then it whispered a strain of a lullaby he had heard in the long ago. He saw her look up for a moment; he saw her eyes sweeping the faces of those before her, and he was aware that those who had been seated with their backs toward the platform were turning in their seats to drink in this draught of melody, and then he saw her eyes suddenly dilate, and the exquisite arm faltered in its stroke with the bow, and the color fled from her cheeks.

A hush fell upon the throng. Bevis saw the director glance up in consternation as the voice of the violin broke, and the next instant the instrument fell to her side, as with an inarticulate, gasping cry the girl sank fainting into the arms of the director, who sprang to save her as he noted the nerveless arm.

As she crumpled unconscious, there was a long, gasping sigh of pitying sympathy from

THE BANQUET

227

the vast assemblage, and some moved instinctively toward where the little drama had been enacted, but the director, a man of cool head, waved them back, and then spoke quickly to the musicians, with the result that in a moment the merry strains of a popular melody were diverting the distressed thoughts of those who had witnessed the incident.

Lawrence Ross had half turned in his chair when the voice of the violin had first begun to sway the crowd, but he paused to hear what Teresa was saying to him. Then he had heard the notes falter, followed by the gasp from the crowd, and he had looked up in time to see the director making his way to the rear of the platform, supporting an unconscious woman whose violin and bow lay at her feet amid roses from an overturned vase.

In spite of the prompt action of the orchestra director, considerable confusion reigned in the room. The banquet was at an end, with the exception of another speech or two, and the crowd was in no haste to quiet down for the purpose of hearing these. Men and women had risen from their chairs and were excitedly discussing the affair, and the toast-

master hesitated to rap for order, preferring to permit the confusion to subside of its own accord. Ross glanced at his watch.

"I must take the three-thirty train for Portland this morning," he said to Dan, who had made his way to them. "It is twelve now, and we will not have a better opportunity to escape."

He and his wife arose, and, bidding Bevis good night, made their way from the room.

It was more than an hour later when Sanchez Arguelle, leaning heavily on the arm of the colonel of the cavalry, was helped into the car waiting at the curb, and in an instant the automobile whirred away at high speed, ignoring the mounted officers drawn up in the street before the café, and who were expecting to escort the city's guest to his hotel.

In the Mexican's room physicians were awaiting his arrival, having been directed there by telephone a quarter of an hour before the party had found it possible to leave the banquet hall. Through the remainder of the night the lights burned in these apartments, and the colonel of cavalry and members of the reception committee sat sleepy-eyed and with grave faces, discussing the unfortunate sit-

uation. A few minutes before noon of that day Sanchez Arguelle was on the operating table of a hospital and telegrams were being rushed to Mexico City.

Some of these things Dan Bevis read in the papers, and others he learned from other sources, but there was one thing he read in the papers that caused him to sink back into his chair, his face pale and his hands trembling.

"Good God!" he muttered, weakly.

Then he again took up the paper, which had slipped from his nerveless hands, and once more he read it. The perspiration which had burst out on his forehead disappeared as his head grew hot and his lips grew dry.

For some minutes he sat staring at the floor. Then he arose and went to the telephone, but with his hand on the instrument he hesitated. Finally he took down the receiver.

"Main 2214," he called.

He moistened his lips with his tongue as he waited.

"Senator Garrison?" he asked. "This is Dan Bev—I mean Graham." Again he moistened his lips and swallowed once or twice as he fought to regain his composure. "I say

that this is Dan Graham," he repeated as a sharp query came over the wire. "Can you tell me who directed the orchestra at the banquet last night? Good!" He snatched a pencil from his pocket and jotted down a name and address. "Thank you."

He hung up the receiver and took his hat from the little wardrobe, but at the door he paused again in indecision. He turned, and for several minutes he nervously paced the room, occasionally pausing to glance at the paper he had caught up. Finally he threw aside his hat and went back to his favorite seat by the window.

"No," he muttered. "No—it's best not. No good could come from it. Let the ships pass in the night—without speaking!"

And for a long time he sat there, moodily staring out at the lowering clouds the June storm had swept into the sky. There came a vivid flash of lightning and a heavy roll of thunder, but he gave it scant heed beyond being dimly aware that he was glad it was storming. Somehow, he wanted it to storm. He wanted the rain to come and the wind to dip down from heavy clouds and to roar across the city. A calm or a glint of sunshine would

have sent him striding up and down the room in desperate battle with his wrenched nerves, but the storm was soothing, and he welcomed it.

It was the end of the week before Ross returned from Portland and Olympia, and when Bevis sat with him on the veranda of the house on the hill the banquet was discussed only in a general way. Ross had not seen the Spokane papers containing an account of the affair, and Dan brought the discussion up to the present evening by giving the latest bulletin from the hospital in regard to Arguelle's condition.

"The physicians say that he is gaining strength rapidly," he added.

"He is an old man," replied Ross. "I doubted his recovery when I learned through the press dispatches that he had undergone the operation."

"His time has not come," said Teresa. "The Mexicans have a saying, 'Whom the devil protects, mortals cannot injure.' The devil has protected him for many years, but in good time Arguelle will pay the price!"

As the days passed, Dan became aware that he was steadily failing in strength. Now in the dawns when the feverish-eyed men went

forth from his apartments to grapple, with impaired faculties, with the duties of the new day, his feet would drag as he made his way to the bed, and then he would throw himself on it and lie sleepless for weary hours. The same cynical smile rested on his lips while the cards were in play, except at such times as there might be a momentary discussion of that incident at the banquet when many of those now pitting their skill against his had seen a young woman fall fainting as she played. At such moments the smile fled from his lips, and if he spoke at all his voice was unnaturally harsh.

The summer was one of the hottest Spokane had ever experienced. The rains had been infrequent and the river, which ordinarily came dashing along so noisily, had lost its vigor, and where the falls usually dashed sheets of rainbow-tinted spray high into the air, the bare, dry rocks now lifted themselves above the water.

The people whose circumstances permitted it were seeking the comfort of the mountains.

"Why don't you go, too?" asked the physician whom Dan had consulted. "Jump over to Hayden Lake—over in Idaho. You'll build

up—and you ought to make a living there as well as here." He smiled knowingly. "It's a great place for people with money," he added.

And when the sun set on the following evening Dan was sitting on the lower veranda of the comfortable hotel erected on the very edge of a lake bluff.

Forty miles east of Spokane, Hayden Lake nestles in the embrace of the Coeur d'Alenes. A decade ago it was occasionally visited by hunters and anglers, who made their slow way into the rugged region by means of wagons; to-day an electric railway takes one from Spokane to the doors of the hotel on the western shore, in a few hours' time. The hotel, or "tavern," as it is styled, is a very spacious and modern affair, and the management has adopted the unique plan of placing about a dozen log cabins, clustered near the hotel, at the disposal of those who prefer that form of exclusiveness. Forests of pine cover the mountains that rise on three sides of the hotel, while on the east the waters of the lake roll in gentle waves against its foundations. Across the lake the home of a well-known millionaire is located.

Dan Bevis soon found that his physician

was right in the statement that he could make a living there quite as well as in the city. The hotel management has a code entirely commendable, but the management of a mountain tavern cannot stand guard nor serve as father confessor to all who seek rest and recreation there.

And so it was that the guest registered on the hotel's books as "Dan Graham" found it convenient to spend many of his mornings abed and as many of his nights in the company of sundry gentlemen who smoked expensive cigars and were vain of their judgment in matters of chance.

But with it all he felt the quickening of a new life within his veins.

The daily papers from Spokane were always at hand, and he found a new interest in reading of the happenings in the city.

The political situation was rapidly growing tense, in spite of the warm weather, and the papers freely predicted that the fight for control of the next general assembly would become very bitter between the Garrison and Layton forces. Desultory fighting was reported between the Mexican federal forces and the insurrectos in the mountains of Chi-

huahua, and in the same column was a statement that Sanchez La Cruz Arguelle, who had hoped to be able to continue his journey to Washington, had suffered a relapse due to his insistence on leaving his bed too soon, over the protests of the physicians, and was now in a serious condition.

The diplomat had given out an interview in which he discussed the ~~insurrection~~ in his republic and had admitted that his visit to this country was for the purpose of conferring with the President and Secretary of State relative to the aid he declared was being extended to the revolutionists by American financiers who had failed to obtain extravagant concessions from President Diaz. Editorially, the papers commented at length on this very remarkable and quite undiplomatic statement of the Mexican dignitary, but it was generally conceded that even a diplomat was human, and that in the grasp of fever one's discretion and cool judgment are apt to falter—especially if a trained interviewer be assailing that judgment and discretion with all of his arts.

The mountains, whose slopes came to the doors of the hotel, invited exploration, and

there were always horses at hand for those who had a fondness for riding. Dan had found new exhilaration in the saddle. A gallop through the ravines, and then a slow ascent of the steeps, up which his horse plodded with sure-footed care, sent the blood leaping through his veins and gave a sparkle to his eyes, while something within his soul stirred anew as he came more and more to feel himself a part of this untrammeled freedom.

CHAPTER XV

THE WITCHES' GORGE

DAN was taking his usual afternoon ride, galloping away to the northward along the road that led deep into the ruggedest of the region. The day was excessively warm, even at that altitude, and the bunchgrass was brown and dead from the sun's rays. Beyond the distant peaks there was a rim of dark clouds, but he gave them no heed. The resinous breath of the pines was carrying its vitalizing forces into his veins, and he was glad when the way grew so rough that nothing more than a plod was possible.

Where the rocks or the pines gave protection by their shade brilliant-hued wild flowers were growing, and as the way became more broken and the shadows more frequent he became aware that a breeze was beginning to stir the wild berry bushes that brushed his canvas leggings as he passed, and when the

road became level once more for a short distance he touched his horse with his quirt and reveled in the long, swinging gallop that soon brought him to the Witches' Gorge, through which a mountain stream, fed by some underground lake far back in the solitudes, came tumbling in its noisy journey that led ultimately to the shadowy St. Joe.

A midsummer forest fire, probably resulting from some camper's carelessness, had swept the neighboring hillside, leaving blackened stumps of trees here and there, and following the dried grass until it had reached the log bridge which had connected the banks of the Gorge. The pine timbers had burned rapidly, and when the few residents of that community had scented the danger and rallied to fight it there were but a few smoldering timbers left of the bridge. But the waters were low, and it was easily possible for one to reach a fording place either in a vehicle or in the saddle. The banks were steep, but what mattered that to those who had come to scorn such obstacles?

Dan's horse carefully made its way down into the Gorge, and, pausing a moment to drink from the turbulent stream, splashed through

to the opposite bank and then made the sharp ascent. The clouds crept higher into the sky, but the horseman rode on, singing an old cowboy ballad he had heard on Garrison's lips while the Senator had related tales of the early days.

"When once in my saddle I used to ride dashing,
When once in my saddle I used to be gay;
I first took to drinking and then to card playing,
Got shot in the breast and must now pass away."

Something in the song jarred on his nerves and he cut his mount sharply with the triple-thonged quirt.

"Cheerful lot of songs those fellows had," he muttered.

"Then beat the drum slowly and play the fife lowly,
And play the dead march as they bear me along;
Take me to the churchyard and place the sod o'er me,
For I'm a young cowboy and I know I've done wrong."

"As a chorus that's a funereal success," he added, "but—hello!"

Around a turn in the road a riderless horse came galloping, and a moment later he saw that it bore a sidesaddle. The animal slowed to a trot and then stopped. Riding cautiously

forward, Dan attempted to grasp the bridle reins hanging loosely about the animal's neck, but the beast snorted and shied. Dismounting, he spent some time in the vexing effort to catch the reins, but always the animal backed away just before he could reach them. Again mounting, he tried to drive the beast into a corner, but each time it eluded him, and, finally, making a quick dash past him, it went thundering down the mountain road toward the hotel.

He wiped the perspiration from his brow and cursed the fleeing animal. Then he rode on, unheeding the fact that the sun no longer was visible. Suddenly a roll of thunder caused him to look up, and then he saw that the sky was overcast with heavy, yellow tinted clouds, which, even as he looked, were rent by a flash of lightning that blinded him. A splash of rain fell on his upturned face, and as he wheeled his horse to race back to the hotel a fury of wind swept across the mountains, bringing with it a deluge of rain.

The hotel was several miles away and he must find other shelter. He could think of no place he had passed that might offer protection, so, resolving to trust to what might lie ahead, he struck the horse with the quirt and

rode forward at a sharp gallop. In a few minutes he was drenched with the rain, but ahead he could see what promised something in the way of protection, a number of overhanging cliffs far up on the mountain side, and with what appeared to be some broad, flat rocks beneath.

A pathway led to it, and, finding a spot where his horse was fairly well sheltered, he sprang from the saddle, tied the bridle reins about a scrub pine, and went scrambling up the pebbly pathway to the cliffs.

Reaching the flat rocks, he drew himself up and found that there was something of a cave before him, but, as he stepped back under the cliff and shook his dripping hat, he uttered an exclamation of surprise, for his eyes, growing accustomed to the gloom of the cavern, had detected a form huddled back in the depths, and as he stepped closer he saw that it was a woman.

"Pardon my intrusion of your castle," he called, still staring at her. "The storm drove me here."

A silvery laugh came from the shadows of the cavern.

"And I am here because my horse deserted

me while I was gathering flowers, and left me at the storm's mercy."

"Your horse? Oh, yes, I chased the brute for twenty minutes. You should have dropped the reins. He would have stood, then." He glanced back toward her. She had remained standing deep in the gloom. "If I may suggest it, I think you will find it much pleasanter out here—on the piazza." He heard something, and thought she was laughing. "I am quite harmless," he added.

"I am very comfortable here," she replied. "Doubtless the storm will soon pass."

He glanced up at the sky and shook his head. The clouds were of that leaden hue which indicated torrential rains.

"It must have been a cloudburst," he said. "And I don't think—."

He paused, for the girl had come out into the light, and as he turned and looked into her face he felt as though the mountains were reeling about him. A wealth of copperish-tinted hair was tumbling in charming disorder about her face, and her small white hands were endeavoring to tuck it back under the wet straw sailor she wore for a riding hat. She met his gaze coldly and walked to the edge of the rocks

and peered out. The shadows were beginning to add their gloom to the storm, and the rain showed no signs of ceasing. At frequent intervals the thunder crashed its accompaniment to the sharp flashing of the lightning, and the wind caused the giant pines to sway in its grasp.

"Don't stare at me like that!" she exclaimed. "You are a man. You ought to know some way out of this predicament."

He colored at her sharp words.

"I didn't mean to be impertinent, though I suppose I did stare, because—." He paused.

"Because what? Because you found me here, huddled up under these rocky cliffs?"

He fancied that in the blue of her eyes he read scorn and contempt.

"Yes, that is just it—because I found *you* here."

The emphasis was not to be misunderstood, and she flushed as she turned from him.

"Why the emphasis?" she asked, coldly.

"Because I thought Hilda Jordan was in Spokane."

She sat down on a rock and regarded him curiously, much as she might have inspected an unusual piece of sculpture.

"I do not remember of ever meeting you," she answered. "Would you mind telling me how you know me to be Hilda Jordan?"

"Very simple. I saw you faint that night at the banquet, and the next morning I read that the violinist was Miss Hilda Jordan."

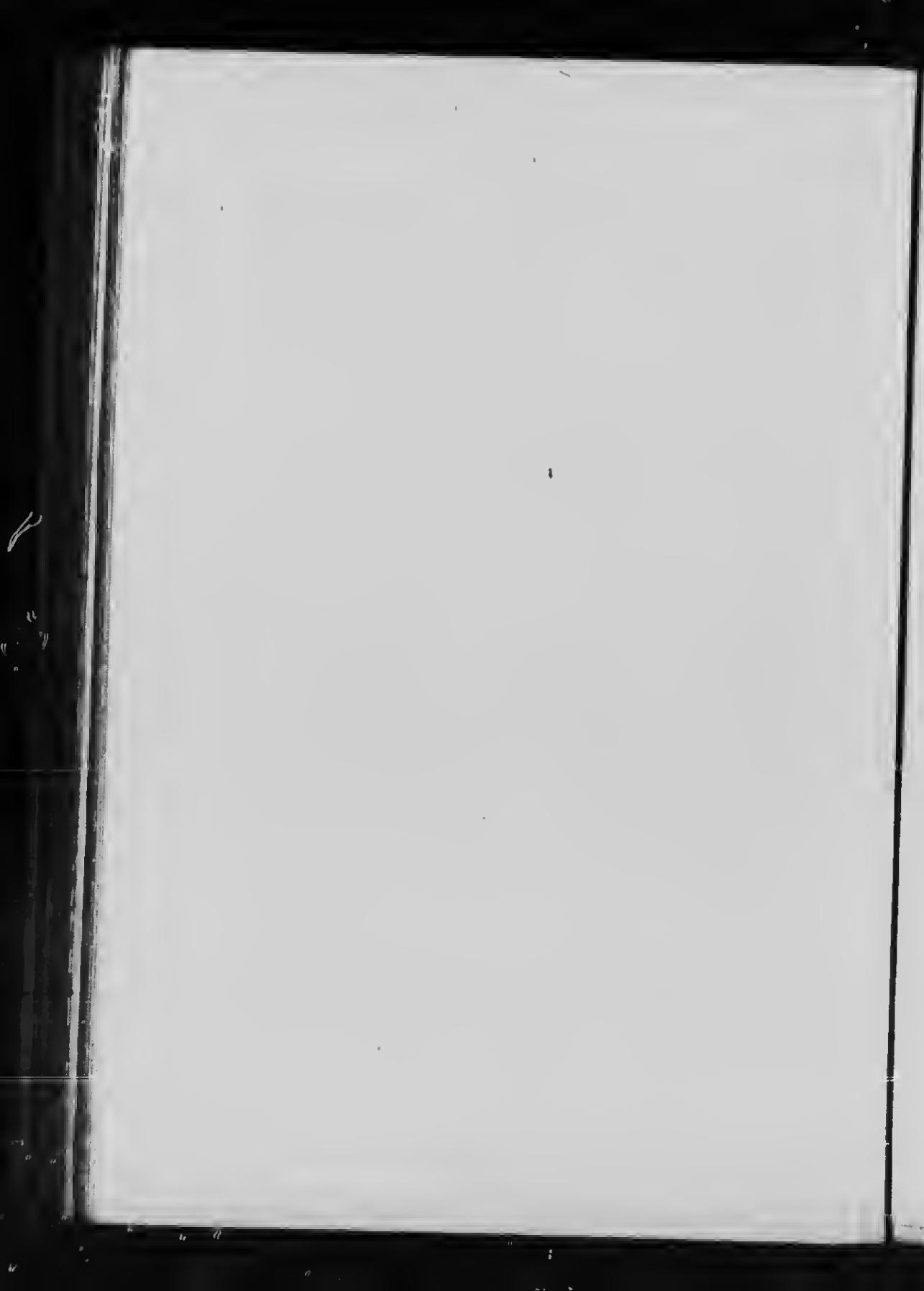
"It was very foolish of me, wasn't it?" She turned and looked out at the storm-swept mountains. "I haven't been very strong this summer, and I saw the face—of the dead!"

Her voice sank almost to a whisper and her hands were clasped tightly in her lap. He stood watching her in silence, wondering what could lie behind her words. She made a wonderfully pretty picture as she sat there, splashes of rain showing amid the masses of her disheveled hair, and her chin tiptilted just the slightest as her wistful gaze went out into the dreary mists that were veiling the slopes and peaks, her daintily curved lips slightly parted, as though a name were hovering there. The storm had lessened slightly, though the rain still fell. It was growing dusky down in the valleys.

"It will be dark soon," he said. "If you are stopping near here perhaps you had better permit me to escort you there. Possibly you



"I SAW THE FACE—OF THE DEAD!"—*Page 244.*



would prefer braving the rain rather than remain here with night coming on."

She sprang to her feet and looked anxiously about her at the deepening gloom.

"Yes—we—I must go!" she exclaimed. "The rain?" She tossed her head. "It is better than a mountain cave at night."

"You are stopping—?" He looked at her inquiringly.

"At the tavern."

He started in surprise.

"The tavern—the hotel? Why, I did not know—"

"Does that matter in the least?" Again he saw undisguised scorn in her eyes. "However, I might add that I have kept very close to my room. Beginning with next Monday I am to play there."

"A splendid place—"

"An opportunity to make a living," she interrupted. "And a thief drove me to that!"

The words came with the sting of a lash, and his face blanched.

"No—no—for God's sake, don't say that!" he stammered, thickly, and one hand went to his throat as though he were choking. "Maybe you—don't—perhaps—"

"Really, I do not understand why you should be so affected." She turned and began the descent. "Do you object to hearing a thief correctly named?"

"No—I don't. Not if he is a thief. But—maybe—."

She paused and looked back at him, her lips curled in disdain. Then she laughed.

"This thief confessed," she said. "And his thieving brought ruin to many—and death to one!"

Her words ended in a sob, and she ran recklessly down the pathway, heedless of the danger of her act.

"Wait!" he cried as she went stumbling away from him. "Let me help—."

He caught his breath sharply with a smothered cry as he saw her slip on one of the loose rocks and plunge forward. He heard her scream of pain as her head struck a tree. She was lying limp on the ground when he reached her side. Kneeling beside her, he raised her head and saw that her cheeks were like marble, while a faint vein of red was tracing its way from a cut on her forehead. Uncertain what course to pursue, he knelt there in the rain for awhile, making ineffectual efforts to

revive her, and then hesitatingly he took her up in his strong arms and carried her back up the rough pathway to the shelter of the cliff, where he placed her as gently as possible, and then, holding his hands under a place where a little rivulet of water was coming over the cliffs, he dashed handfuls of the water over her face, and in a few moments was rewarded by seeing her open her eyes wonderingly. Then she sat up and looked at him with horror showing in her eyes.

"What does it mean?" she demanded. "I—"

"You fell, and were unconscious," he replied. "Rest quietly a few minutes and you will be quite yourself."

She sprang to her feet, swaying unsteadily as she stood before him, a nameless terror written in her face.

"That was—" She paused and looked at the deepening gloom. "That was how long ago? I remember now—but it seems to have happened hours ago."

"But a few minutes," he replied. "I had to carry you here. Believe me, it was the only way!" he exclaimed as he noted the tightening of her lips and saw a faint shudder pass over her. "I could not leave you lying there

on those rocks. Here I could revive you. I tried to warn you of your danger."

She put one hand to her forehead and brushed away the drops of blood that were oozing from the cut.

"I know—but I was suffering, and I was foolish." She turned to him. "We had better go, now."

"Possibly it would be better for you to remain here and let me ride to the hotel and send a carriage for you."

"No, no!" She glanced about at the forbidding mountains, rapidly losing their form in the mists and shadows. "I cannot remain here. I prefer facing the storm."

He helped her down the pathway, steadyng her at critical moments, but otherwise refraining from touching her. Suddenly as they neared the place where his horse was pawing impatiently, she stopped.

"How—how are we to travel?" Her lips trembled. "Your horse—"

"Must carry two!"

He saw her stiffen, and her head tossed proudly.

"I can walk," she said, coldly. "You ride on and send help back."

He shook his head.

"It is a long distance," he said. "And I decline to leave you here in these mountains in the night." His brows knit a moment, and then he smiled cheerfully. "I am a splendid walker," he added. "With you in the saddle and I on foot we can make good time."

She shot a swift glance at him, and her eyes softened.

"It was wrong of me to speak as I did," she answered. "I am sure we both can ride."

He bowed, and went forward to the horse and led it out into the road. Then he turned again to her.

"Will you take the saddle?" he asked.

She shook her head, and the faintest bit of a smile showed itself about the corners of her mouth.

"I think the style of our grandfathers would be better," she said, and placing her foot in his hand, she sprang lightly up behind the saddle.

He looked up into her face and saw a tinge of red showing there, and a multitude of emotions suddenly rioted in his brain. But without a word, he adjusted the stirrup and swung into the saddle.

"Are you a good rider?" he asked.

"I was reared in Virginia," she replied, and she heard him laugh softly.

The horse showed a disposition to misbehave in consequence of its double burden, but in a few moments it yielded to the situation and broke into a long, swinging lope that covered ground very rapidly. Darkness was coming on and the rain was giving way to a heavy mist that enveloped the mountains in a gray mantle.

Dan Bevis was conscious of the light touch of two small hands as Hilda Jordan steadied herself behind the saddle, and the consciousness brought with it a renewal of the tumult within his mind. He had almost betrayed himself to her on two occasions while they were beneath the cliff. His thoughts ran back over the happenings of the last two years, and he remembered of the night—the night of the announcement of his betrothal—when Colonel Peter Jordan had told him about Hilda. Oddly enough, the words still clung to his memory: "She's game, sir—game to the last drop of her blood!"

And he was conscious that her hands were touching him occasionally as she kept her place on the galloping horse. Much of the

way was on a descending grade, and Bevis kept a taut bridle and a watchful eye lest their mount should stumble. They were dripping wet, but they no longer gave heed to the rain and the mists. The lightning had ceased to zigzag its way across the clouds, but out yonder, in the gray, dripping pall that was closing about them, the thunder occasionally muttered.

Perched behind the saddle, Hilda Jordan winked bravely to keep back the tears. Any ordinary situation she would have met "gamely," as Peter Jordan had so proudly declared, but there were elements in the present dilemma that wrenched her soul and almost conquered her courage. But she battled bravely and mastered herself, and within a mile she had become vaguely aware that the shoulders before her were of splendid proportions; she stole a glance at the poise of the rider's head, and then she looked away into the mists.

Presently Bevis drew rein, and the girl heard an exclamation of dismay.

"What is it?" she asked.

"The Witches' Gorge!" he exclaimed.
"Look!"

CHAPTER XVI

BENEATH THE CRAGS

HE swung himself from the saddle, and ahead of her the girl saw a roaring torrent that filled the waterway from bank to bank.

A cry of surprise broke from her lips.

"How has it occurred?" she asked.

"A cloudburst!" he replied, walking forward and surveying the turbulent flood gloomily.

She slipped to the ground and stood beside him, and gradually the significance of it rushed to her mind.

"Why—" she faltered, turning slowly toward him, her face paling. "Why—we can't cross it!"

He shook his head, and in the gloom she saw that he was scanning the stream very anxiously.

"No," he replied, at last. "We couldn't cross that with a boat." He faced her and

looked into her eyes. "And it's getting worse —rising," he added.

She spoke no word, and he was grateful. He had feared that she would become hysterical. Perhaps, after all, Peter Jordan had been justified in his pride.

"Maybe there are houses—somewhere back yonder." He waved his hand toward the rear.

"None," she replied, calmly. "I know something of this region. There are no houses in this section of the mountains, for miles and miles."

He had dropped the bridle reins to the ground when he sprang from the saddle, well aware that as long as those reins were dragging only most extraordinary conditions would cause the horse to move far, but it occurred to him that something might happen to stampede the animal, so he went back and gathered up the reins, and then he stood silent for some moments, endeavoring to determine the best course to pursue.

The gloom was deepening rapidly, and he could see only the dim outlines of Hilda Jordan as she stood on the bank of the Gorge, but there was something pathetic in the droop of her head, that touched a strange chord in his

soul, and into his heart came a great pity for this girl, fighting as bravely as she could her life's battle, and now flood-bound in a desolate, storm-swept mountain region. Well he knew the misgivings that must be torturing her mind, and, coupled with these misgivings, was the fact that they must spend hours together here in the wilds, a fact that she practically had proclaimed herself when she declared that there were no houses to be found for many miles on this side of the Witches' Gorge.

"It is growing dark," he said, at last.
"Have you any suggestions to make?"

"No," she answered, her voice so low that he scarcely could catch the word. She came toward him slowly, and he waited, unspeaking.
"I must depend upon you," she added.

He looked down at her troubled face, and mentally he cursed his powerlessness. As wet as though she had been dragged through the torrent before which they stood helpless, the water dripping from the once jaunty sailor hat, she still stood proudly erect, the momentary droop of her head as she stood alone on the bank of the stream having been the only evidence she had betrayed of a faltering spirit.

"And a man hates himself most at just such a time as this," he responded, trying to speak lightly. "One might do battle in behalf of a lady, but he cannot stem a mountain torrent."

She laughed softly. True, there was not much mirth in it, but it strengthened him.

"You are courageous," he said.

"I am utterly miserable," she answered.

"We can do nothing but wait," he said. "It seems hardly worth while to go back to the cliffs, for there ought to be some sort of shelter close here where we can watch events—feel the Witches' pulse from time to time, so to speak. If you will hold the horse I will detail myself for scouting duty."

Without waiting for a reply, he handed her the reins and strode away into the veil of mist. In a moment he was lost to sight, and she found herself alone in this wilderness of dreariness. Several minutes passed as she stood there battling with a dread that defied analysis. The horse poked its warm muzzle against her arm as though claiming companionship in her distress, and she laid her cheek against his head.

But the waiting and the silence were laying their fears heavier and heavier upon her mind. Suppose—and many ideas which she instantly

knew to be unreasonable came crowding in to parade their grotesque forms through her mind. And then she heard his voice, somewhere up yonder where she knew the side of the mountain must be—up yonder in that ghostly, dripping world of dull gray. And instantly she answered him, calling joyously as her heart bounded with a flood of happy relief. Again he called, this time closer, and she laughed in the reaction of joy.

"All quiet along the—Witches' Gorge!" she called, gayly.

There was another moment of waiting, and then she saw his tall form coming toward her from the gloom.

"I've found a place that will give us something in the way of shelter," he said. "I'll lead the horse and you can follow."

Now that he had come back and the fears arising from solitude had vanished she became silent again, but as he took the reins and started away without further words she followed closely.

"We'll have to leave the horse here," he said, stopping and tying the reins to a tree. "We'll take the saddle and blanket up to our camp."

Her hands clenched, and could he have seen

her cheeks he would have found them bloodless, but she said nothing, and when he had removed the saddle and thrown it and the blanket over his shoulder he turned and walked away, and after hesitating for the space of a breath she choked back the sob that now fought for expression and followed him as he toiled up the rough slope. Faintly outlined, she could see the mountain walls rising abruptly close at hand, she no longer felt the sweep of the wind, and she knew that they must be close to the chosen spot; and so it proved, for presently he halted and lowered the saddle.

"If you could look up you would see that there is some great rock projecting out over this spot," he said. "And there are rocky masses on either side of it, with the mountain at the back—not a cave, but just a sheltered nook that the rain hasn't reached." He spread the saddle blanket on the ground and placed the saddle at one edge. "You may sit in some comfort, using the blanket and saddle as best pleases you."

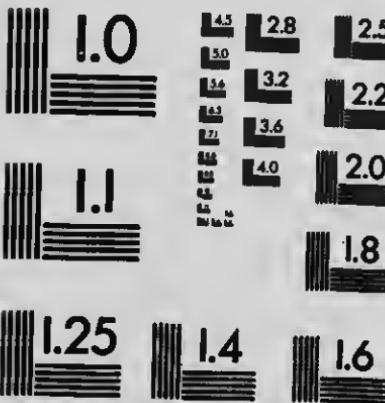
"Have you any idea how long we will have to remain here?" she inquired.

"I am not skilled in the eccentricities of mountain streams, but that Gorge filled up in



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an hour's time, and as it has a very heavy fall, it seems to me the flood should pass by midnight."

She went over to the blanket and sat down timidly, resting her shoulders against the heavy saddle. He was stooping over in a far recess of the nook.

"I think we'll have a fire in a minute," he said, cheerily. And presently she saw the tiny flame of a match spring up. "I found some dry sticks back in here when I was exploring a while ago."

A wisp of paper caught the blaze from the match, and a number of dry leaves and twigs soon were burning. Small sticks were carefully fed to the growing flame with the result that in a very few minutes the mountain retreat was ablaze with light. And then he stood up, and as the firelight threw its glow upon his face Hilda Jordan found an opportunity to look at him, and what she saw in his face caused her to stretch her feet out toward the blaze and to make herself more comfortable with the saddle and blanket.

"It's just like a story, isn't it?" she asked.

"Not exactly. In a story that match would have flickered—flickered—flickered—and gone

out, and the man and the maid would have been in despair until the—the man succeeded in finding a match a cowboy had left tucked somewhere about the saddle. That match spoiled the whole thing by starting the fire without trouble." He laughed in an easy way. "Besides," he added, "I have a whole pocketful of matches."

His good humor was infectious, and she smiled as she watched him moving about, gathering other sticks and placing them beside the fire to dry. He was busy for several minutes, and when he looked at her he saw that her hands were tightly clasped, and he knew that she was fighting to retain her composure. With a sudden impulse he turned toward her, and his hat was clutched in his hands.

"Miss Jordan," he said, slowly. "I beg that you do not permit yourself to suffer any alarm. You are quite safe here, and I am sure that we can cross the Gorge and reach the hotel soon after midnight."

"Probably," she replied, and she did not look up. "But what—then? What will it mean—to them?"

He saw a flood of red slowly rising and suffusing her cheeks, and he looked away.

"It will mean that you were caught out here, and were under the protection of—"

"Dan—Graham!"

There was a world of sarcasm in her voice, and he felt the sting of her implication.

"Well, maybe it isn't a spotless name," he said, unsteadily, "but I don't think that any of that rabble at the tavern will care to whisper anything about Dan Graham's friends." Something hard was sounding in his voice as he closed, and she saw his lips tighten. "But I am wondering how it is that you know me."

"Know you—the most notor—."

She checked the speech, and, as she glanced up at him, standing there before the fire, she saw that on his lips was a cold, cynical smile.

"Finish it," he said, coldly. "The most notorious gambler in Spokane. Still, I am surprised that Hilda Jordan should know such a character."

"I owe you an apology for such hasty words. I am not unmindful that this evening you are a gentleman, no matter what you may be at other times."

He stood silent for a moment, looking out into the sea of dripping fog. Somewhere out there they could hear the torrent flinging itself

riotously down the mountain side, and the sharp cry of some bewildered bird came to their ears.

"It's true," he said, finally, still looking out into the gloom. "I am a gambler—but I think they will tell you that I always play the game fair."

"I have been told that you never cheat."

"I have cheated but one man in all of my life."

"But one?"

"Yes—myself."

She raised her head and stared at him, but he had turned his back and was placing more fuel on the fire. She choked back the flood of words that came to her lips, and turned her face away from him and listened to the voice of the flood, and her heart was cheered by the assurance that the waters must be subsiding, for the roar of the cataract was less audible than it had been. She glanced toward the fire again, and saw that the man had stretched himself beside it, his head propped up on one hand. His face was from her, and for some minutes she watched him, conscious of a curious conflict of emotions.

Finally she yawned, guardedly. She was

quite worn out, and there was something strangely soothing about the whisper of the winds among the pines and the monotonous purr of the flood. Her eyes closed, but she opened them and saw that the man still lay beside the fire. . . . She opened her eyes again and sat up with a start, staring about her. The fire still burned, though not so brightly, but she was alone in the sheltered nook. With a gasping sob, she sprang to her feet and looked about her. She had fallen asleep—and what had happened while she slept?

She called, but the call died on her lips, throttled by a vague fear that was clutching her and forbidding her to make an outcry. She listened, but no sound came to her ears. The sudden realization of this brought a flood of joy to her heart.

The torrent was silent. But where was he? The fog still hung its dripping pall about the little retreat and nothing was visible beyond a distance of a very few feet. Hark! What was that? A peculiar sound came to her from somewhere below, and she crept to the outer edge of the little nook and listened. Again it came—and again. And then she raised her

voice and called out into the night, for she knew that it was his footsteps she had heard coming up the slope.

"Coming!" he replied.

She stood there, unmindful that she had left the shelter and was exposed to the mists once more, and when she saw his form moving upward like a spectre she ran back to the fire and threw on more fuel.

"You have been scouting while I slept," she exclaimed, as he came into the firelight.

"The torrent has passed," he responded.
"We can cross the Gorge now!"

A cry of joy came from her lips, and she sprang forward to pick up the blanket.

"What time is it?" she asked.

"Not quite midnight. We can reach the hotel in a little more than an hour."

He took up the saddle and they went down the slope. Saddling the horse, they continued to where the road dipped down into the Gorge, and on foot they made their way down to the water's edge. Then he turned to her, held out his hand, and she placed her foot in it and sprang up behind the saddle. Before mounting he took another look at the stream.

"Is it safe?" she asked.

"Almost normal," he answered, as he slid into the saddle and gathered up the reins.

Nevertheless; it was not without some misgivings that he urged the horse into the rapid stream, for he knew the power of such a torrent and recognized the possibility of the channel having been greatly changed during the last few hours. But the crossing was made in safety, and when they had reached the opposite bank they again dismounted and ascended the bank on foot.

"Now for the finish!" he exclaimed, gayly, as they galloped away to the south.

They spoke but little during that ride, but, finally, the outlines of the hotel became visible through the lifting fog; Bevis drew the horse down to a walk.

"I've been thinking," he said, "that you can slip into the place without being noticed. There are no theater parties coming in to disturb things in this hotel, and the young clerk who is technically on duty at nights is always asleep on a cot behind the office counter long before this."

CHAPTER XVII

TUTORING A SENATOR

ON a certain July morning Senator Granville Garrison found it expedient to direct his office boy to deny admittance to all callers before noon.

"Send them in to Johnson," he said, nodding toward an adjoining room, where one of his campaign managers was dictating circular letters to a stenographer. "Tell them I'll not be in until one-thirty," he added.

"Yes, sir," replied the boy. And then with a shrewdness born of long service with the Senator: "That means all—everybody—both ladies and gentlemen?"

"Of course—everybody."

Then Garrison returned to the private office, quite removed from the luxurious apartments where the leeches and the cranks with brilliant ideas elbowed each other throughout the long days in their efforts to gain the ear

of the man who had dominated political affairs in that section for years.

This morning the usual calm of the Senator's manner was lacking, and the members of the office force knew that back there in that dead-walled room something was occurring that was not in harmony with his humor. But, for that matter, these inharmonious days were becoming more and more frequent as the summer wore on, for the evidences were becoming pronounced that Garrison was in the midst of the hardest fight of his long political career, and these evidences were decidedly disturbing to the even temper he had been noted for maintaining under all circumstances, a self-control that had served him well in many close places from his cowboy days until his present campaign.

If Garrison lost this fight it meant oblivion—and, perhaps, an investigation that would be ruinous in many ways. If he won he was certain that it would be many years before the opposition could again gather sufficient force to seriously menace him. The Layton forces realized this as thoroughly as did Garrison.

They were making this the supreme effort, staking all on the success or the defeat

that might come to them in the present campaign.

When Garrison returned to his private office after giving directions to the office boy he scowled heavily at the back of the man he had left there, and who now sat reading the newspaper, an operation he did not discontinue even after he had glanced up and noted the Senator's return.

"I am at your service, Mr. McLeedy," said Garrison, taking a chair opposite his caller.

"No special hurry," was the brusque reply. "I haven't read the papers this morning."

Garrison bit his lip at the cool impertinence of the other, but he leaned back in his chair and said nothing. Finally the paper was thrown aside and the caller took a pair of eyeglasses from his nose and twirled them by the silk cord as he turned his gaze to Garrison. For a moment neither spoke.

"It is needless for me to say that I was surprised to see you," suggested Garrison when the pause became awkward.

"I suppose so." The eyeglasses were adjusted again, and they seemed to add to the arrogance of the visitor's face. "Garrison, you've been loafing on the job!"

The Senator half arose from his chair in a burst of surprise and anger, but the man before him gave not the slightest indication that he was aware of any demonstration on the part of the politician. Garrison slowly sat back, and there was an air of helplessness apparent in his manner.

"I don't understand your meaning," he said, his eyes shifting under the steady stare of the other.

"Oh, yes, you do. You've been neglecting the work you are paid to do. That ought to be plain."

"Yes, that's brutally plain. I'm not used to being talked to in that way!"

The faintest indication of a smile showed on the thin lips of Andrew McLeedy, and then it disappeared as though fully aware that those lips were forbidden grounds for smiles.

"Aren't you?" The bony hands clasped as he leaned comfortably on one arm of the massive chair. "Then your training has been neglected and it's time you were receiving your lesson. Sit down!"

Garrison had sprung from his chair with a snarl of rage.

"I'm not a schoolboy!" rasped the Senator.

TUTORING A SENATOR 269

"I'm a member of the United States Senate and a member of the committee that can burst your damned air bubbles with half a dozen strokes of the pen! And you come here—"

"Sit down, Garrison, and don't try dramatics on me, for it won't do. I'm afraid I'll be tempted to laugh when I remember your declaration about your committee." He leaned forward and rested his arms on the table. "That committee will hear from us soon, I don't mind telling you," he said, his voice as cold as steel. "There will be a new committee in the next Congress if there isn't some evidence of appreciation on behalf of that committee pretty soon! Swear if it pleases you." Garrison's face had become livid. "That won't affect the situation in the least. And, besides, I didn't come three thousand miles to talk about that committee. I came to talk about another committee, of which you are chairman."

Garrison paced the room a couple of times, but the other man sat quietly watching him.

"If some of those other corporations had taught you your lesson when you first went into the Senate and began to improve your business opportunities this unpleasant interview would not have been necessary," said Mc-

270 THE RUGGED WAY

Leedy, as the Senator continued to tramp back and forth.

Garrison paused, glared at the man before him, who regarded him with serenity, and then he sat down.

"Well, what's wrong?" he asked.

"What's wrong?" For the first time a note of excitement betrayed itself in the visitor's voice. "What's *wrong*? Confound it, everything is wrong!" He struck the table with his clenched fist. "The troops are preparing for service, while you hobnob with peanut politicians here" (he waved his arm) "here in these pink-tea office rooms we are paying for! And now you ask me what is wrong!"

The Senator raised his eyes defiantly and stared stonily into the face before him, but it was for only a moment. The other was the master, and both knew it.

"The troops?" Garrison's surprise was genuine. "I was not aware—"

"Of course you aren't. You are not aware of anything but the fact that some hinky-pinky judge out here is trying to beat you for re-election, and then when your bills come due we pay them." He snatched the eyeglasses off. "Let me tell you, Senator Granville Gar-

TUTORING A SENATOR 271

rison, that we're not running an alms institution. We're not contributing to a fund for the return of useless senators! We're paying for value received—and up to the present the entries are principally on one side of the ledger! But—”

“I've been living up to my agreement!” snapped Garrison. “Who was it had those cruisers pulled away from the vicinity of Vera Cruz so that filibustering sloop could get to the chosen spot up the coast? Who did that?”

“You claimed to—but we have since found that those orders were issued before you undertook to have the shift made. You reported that your influence had secured this very important bit of work.” A dull red showed in Garrison's cheeks, but the speaker was merciless. “Maybe you would have succeeded had not the order been issued beforehand—an order that exactly suited us—and I'm perfectly willing to give you credit for good intentions in that matter—and maybe I don't blame you a great deal for making capital out of a move the government had already decided upon—but I want you to understand that you can't bamboozle us very long.”

The red had faded from Garrison's cheeks,

and the white that comes with an intense anger had replaced it, but he controlled himself. His impulse had been to spring at the man and strike him for the verbal lashing, but his better judgment had prevailed. Not that Granville Garrison knew anything of personal fear. There were other and more potent reasons. Whatever could be charged against him, Garrison was not a physical coward, and there are aged cowmen now in the Northwest who sit by their fires on winter evenings and occasionally tell of the daring exploits of Granville Garrison when he wore the chaps and spurs of the range rider. He had looked into pistol muzzles without flinching; he had braved the knife thrusts of half-breeds, with a laugh. It was not physical cowardice that kept his hands from the man who was so impudently flaying him. It was the fact that McLeedy had spoken the truth when he waved his hand toward the suite of offices and said, "When your bills come due we pay them."

"You don't seem to realize that I am facing a desperate political situation here in my own State," said Garrison, speaking in the even-measured accents of a man who is keeping a firm grip on his passions lest they sweep away

the barriers he has raised. "This 'hinky-pinky judge,' as you call him, will be fighting you as a member of the United States Senate one of these days if I make any errors in this campaign."

"Campaigns are not usually very active in midsummer."

"Not usually, no. But this is not one of the usual kind. I've played in this political game for a good many years, but I never saw the cards running against me as strongly as they are now. You're the first man that I've admitted this truth to—but it is the truth. The 'hinky-pinky judge' is liable to beat me."

He looked across at the other as though he expected some expression of surprise or concern from him. But if he was looking for this he was disappointed, for McLeedy simply gave a gesture of impatience.

"That's nothing to us. Of course, if I had time, I'd be sorry for you. But I haven't time. Business hasn't time for maudlin sympathy. It has time for business only. This may sound very cold to you, but you have been in politics and public affairs long enough to know it." The cold eyes were unwavering. "Now, who is Granville Garrison, so far as we are

concerned? Simply a pawn—or, let us say a knight, for the sake of politeness—on the chessboard. The men on that board are there to serve the interests of those who are playing the game. Possibly it is true that you are in danger of defeat, but that doesn't concern us in the least—not in the least. By the time your opponent takes his seat, if he defeats you, we will be in a position where we can snap our fingers at any muckraking he may decide to indulge in. So much for him! On the other hand, you will be in office a sufficient length of time to see this other matter through and to serve the men who are paying you to serve them. After that—'Alas, poor Yorick!'—it is not our affair. We are not paying for anything beyond the period covered by the remainder of your term."

During this analysis of a corporation's attitude toward individuals, Senator Garrison sat watching his visitor with something of curiosity showing in his face.

"You ought to have been a surgeon," he replied, sarcastically. "Vivisection would be rare fun for you."

"Vivisection has its purposes and serves those purposes well."

"And the same might be said of murder."

Again that faint suggestion of a smile came to the firm lips of McLeedy.

"Granville Garrison moralizing?" He was looking steadily into the Senator's eyes. "Another proof of your thorough selfishness. No one ever knew of your doing such a thing when you were driving home your claims and demanding your pound of flesh. That's what it is, of course—a demand for the pound of flesh. It's—"

"You are not at all diplomatic in your reference to your dealings, and it seems—"

"I was just saying, when you interrupted me, that it is always best to look one's own self squarely in the face and take an honest accounting of stock, and then one will not be trying to keep a mental image dressed up all the time for his own amusement. No, no, my dear Senator," and his tone was surcharged with mockery, "you were ne^{ver} known to moralize when you were furthering your own interests, but now—'When the de'il got sick the de'il a monk would be'!"

Garrison arose and walked to the window. He was inwardly raging. But he had no defense to offer. He knew that he was being

told the truth by one who cared not a snap for his good or bad opinion. He longed to drive his clenched fist into those cold, arrogant features and then to pick up the fallen tormentor and throw him into the hallway. But his hands were heavy with the other man's money.

Up to the present the chains had been velvet padded, though there had been some correspondence that was acrid, but now this man, whom he had thought to be thousands of miles away, had brutally torn away all of the padding and had deliberately clanked the bare, rough, unsightly chains. And no slave was ever more completely in the power of master than was he, a member of one of the proudest and most dignified bodies in the entire world, under the domination of this man and the great corporation he represented. He turned and came back to the table.

"What are your wishes?" he asked, much as his office boy would have asked the same question in addressing him.

"Our wishes are that you quit loafing on your job." The tone was sharp, and Garrison felt his hands clenching again, but he stood

TUTORING A SENATOR 277

silent. "You know what you are to do under the agreement, don't you?"

"Yes."

"Well—get busy!"

The Senator gripped the back of a chair for a moment, and then he sat down.

"You say the troops are preparing for service?"

"Yes—that is, the war department is making preparations that will enable the government to make a swoop down there when that other crowd says the word."

"Who told you this?"

"No matter. It is true. The question is, what are you going to do about it?"

Garrison leaned forward and looked the other in the eyes, and when he spoke his tone had again assumed an even calm.

"I'm going to pull some strings that will stop it, if that is what the Department is preparing to do. Now, that is what I am going to do." His chin went forward in the old attitude he always assumed when he had reached a fighting mood. "What I would like to do would be to tell you and your whole damned crowd to go to hell!"

For a moment the two men sat looking into each other's eyes, and then McLeedy's lips again betrayed a fleeting smile.

"Well, why don't you?"

"Because I can't. I'm drowning, McLeedy, and your crowd is holding out a plank for me." He raised his head and glanced around the office. "Because your bunch is paying the bills for my fight with Seb Layton —the man you called a 'hinky-pinky judge.' That's why I don't."

McLeedy nodded approvingly.

"Good! Now I'm beginning to understand what made you senator. You really have the ability to take the clothes off the mental image and see what he is made of. I think we'll get along better from now on."

"All right. We understand each other pretty well, I think. Now, what else do you desire? You didn't make this trip clear out here just for the sake of this row."

"No, Mrs. McLeedy needed a change of climate just now—the papers told all about how the physicians had urged a Western trip. It chances that I have an old friend and former business associate who has a summer home

TUTORING A SENATOR 279

near here in the mountains. That helped along. And so we all came."

"All?"

"Yes, my wife and daughter—and Lord Heathercote, an Englishman we met in Florence, and who has been spending a couple of months with us. He decided to take the trip, too, expecting, of course, to hear a few Indian warwhoops and to see some scalps lifted."

Garrison laughed. The reaction from his white-hot anger had come, and he showed his enjoyment of the magnate's lighter mood.

"I trust the change of air will benefit Mrs. McLeedy—and that your Englishman may not lose his scalp. But you have not explained—simply mystified me more than ever."

"Well, I had to have an excuse for coming. Wall Street knows more about that revolution down there than the Mexicans do themselves, and the other fellows are watching us like hawks. I've had detectives at my heels for three months, and I have no doubt that there is one out in your public office this moment trying to figure out a way to get in here. I knew I couldn't shake the man-trailers off the track and disappear, and so I didn't try it. I adver-

tised my departure—and the fact that it was only at the most urgent solicitation of the physicians that I came, for business affairs were making my presence in New York almost imperative at this time." The hint of a sarcastic smile showed again. "So Mrs. McLeedy succeeded in making herself look very droopy, and we all came to cheer her up. In her highly nervous condition she could not be induced to undertake the trip without me. The detectives came along, as I knew they would, but they'll have hard work to fathom the game before we play the best card."

Garrison turned a troubled face toward McLeedy, and for a moment his fingers beat a rat-a-tat on the table as he pondered on the matter.

"I don't like what you say on the detective question," he admitted, finally. "I can't afford to become involved in anything that would bring me into the courts."

McLeedy drew a cigar from his pocket and lighted it.

"That for the detectives!" he exclaimed, blowing a cloud of smoke into the air. "These detectives are not worrying about the courts and law and all that sort of foolishness. You

could stick a knife in a man's ribs and walk off with his purse while they were watching you and they wouldn't make trouble. They're not paid for that, and they don't do anything they're not paid for. What they are paid for is to watch me and to report every move I make in this Mexican revolution game."

The Senator drew a sigh of relief, and his face brightened noticeably.

"That's better. I didn't know, but—well, even a senator is human, and he has some personal affairs that he doesn't care to have come under the eyes of detectives." He leaned back in his chair and smiled confidentially. "Especially if the detectives were dragged into the affairs on account of someone else," he added.

McLeedy leaned forward on the table and spoke in a low tone.

"How's Arguelle?"

"Up and around his room in the hospital. Why?"

"Because he's one of the reasons I am in Spokane. We've got to get him!"

Garrison looked across at his companion in a startled way, and his hand trembled the least bit as he wiped the perspiration from his forehead.

"Get him?" he asked, uneasily. "You don't mean—." He paused and stared into the cold eyes before him.

"No, no—no harm to him," replied McLeedy, noting the other's agitation. "I mean that we must capture him—kidnap him!"

Garrison arose from the table and walked across to the door, which he opened quickly and then glanced out into the narrow passageway leading to the main offices, as though he half expected to see some one crouching there. He closed the door, turned the key, and then came back to McLeedy.

"Kidnap the Mexican diplomat?" he asked in surprise, and again he wiped the perspiration from his brow. "That isn't an easy proposition—"

"We're not looking for snaps. We're seeking results!" broke in McLeedy.

"And it would raise a merry row between Mexico and the United States if the scheme succeeded. That would mean a certainty that the War Department would have to get busy. Then your whole game would be ruined."

"Oh, no, it wouldn't." McLeedy drew meditatively on the cigar. "I know it looks that way at first glance—and that will help

divert suspicion from us—but we have studied the matter pretty carefully. It will cause a row, certainly, and the Mexican Government will make demands upon Washington. Of course, Washington will get busy, etc., etc., but if Washington should get into a serious fuss with any one it would be with the Mexican Government, not with the revolutionists. Dear me, no. The gentlemen down there who are making it hot for Diaz would not hold many indignation meetings if Señor Sanchez La Cruz Arguelle were to disappear! And if Washington and Mexico City get to fighting each other—well, Madero will not suffer."

Garrison shook his head decisively.

"I refuse to have anything to do with it," he vowed. "I told you I wouldn't take chances on courts."

"All right, Senator. We'll not insist on your joining us in this little joke on the Mexican. I'll arrange the details for it myself. That's one reason I'm out here."

"But why engage in such a desperate undertaking as this? It is mighty serious business, McLeedy."

"I know it is serious on the face of it, but it will smooth out all right. When it come

to the pinch—if we get into a pinch—Diaz will not dare to press the thing too far, because we're going to get this old chap for the sole purpose of playing even with Diaz and the crowd of Americans that are trying to hog things down there with Diaz's permission. You see—.”

There was a tap on the door, and Garrison sprang to his feet. He turned and saw McLeedy looking at him with something of alarm showing on his face. The next instant the Senator laughed, and then he unlocked the door and opened it.

“Teiegram, sir,” said one of his clerks, handing him the yellow envelope.

Garrison closed the door again and locked it, and then he glanced at McLeedy before opening the message. “Guess we were both rather on edge,” he suggested. “I thought it was a regiment of infantry opening fire.” He laughed again with an exuberance that of itself betrayed his nervousness. He read the telegram, and then tossed it aside. “An invitation to speak at a soldiers’ reunion,” he said. “Why do you want Arguelle?”

“In brief, as a hostage. They've gobbled up one of our fellows down there, and the interests

have persuaded Diaz that our man was guilty of treason, or something of the kind, and they're trying to force the president to make an example of him. If we can get Arguelle into our hands we'll send Diaz a note that will interest him."

Again Garrison shook his head.

"Count me out of that," he said.

"Very well—but it will not be criminal if you should put me in touch with certain parties who are making Spokane their headquarters just now."

Garrison drummed the table again.

"You mean the junta?"

McLeedy nodded.

"No, I suppose I can do that," said Garrison. "I'll not be entangled if you are not around here when the kidnaping takes place."

The dry smile came to McLeedy's lips.

"I'm not such a blunderer," he said. "They'll not be able to trace anything to me—and therefore you'll not be tainted because of my being with you."

Senator Garrison saw no need of engaging in such an affair as was being suggested, and he was determined not to permit himself to be caught 'n any way in those meshes. The

chains the syndicate had forged about him did not render it necessary for him to aid or abet kidnaping. Still, he could see no way in which the fair could result in trouble to himself, and if disaster came to the others—well, he was heartily tired of dabbling in revolutionary affairs, and perhaps it would free him from some entangling alliances and difficult work without killing the goose that was laying the golden eggs for him. If the Rosses were to become involved seriously it would not be his fault. They need not enter into the conspiracy unless they chose to. But he knew that they would choose to. That is, Teresa would choose to, and her husband would acquiesce. Had Teresa been less whimsical Garrison might have hesitated longer about suggesting her to this representative of a soulless syndicate, but of late she had been decidedly perverse in certain matters and had shown a pronounced interest in Dan Graham, the gambler.

"I see no reason why I should not help you," he said, at last, breaking a long silence, during which McLeedy had watched him closely.

"Then you will put me in communication with the man I want?"

"Yes—and the woman, too."

CHAPTER XVIII

A NEW HORIZON

THE newspapers made much of the arrival of the McLeedy party in Spokane.

The magnate affected great surprise when the reporters flocked about him as he sat deeply engrossed in a magazine in the lobby of his hotel—where he had been waiting quite two hours to be surprised by them after they had received the tip that was to be given out from Senator Garrison's office.

Mrs. McLeedy was too greatly fatigued by the journey to appear, he explained to the reporters, but he felt confident that in a few days she would be much stronger. How long would they remain? Indeed, that was a question he could not answer. As a man of business, he was greatly interested in Spokane and its marvelous development, but he had sunk all thoughts of business in the anxiety to coax health back to Mrs. McLeedy, and it might be that they would hasten on to the ocean soon.

The presence of Lord Heathercote was the occasion of a generous portion of the story concerning the distinguished party's arrival, and the exploits of the Royal Hussar in India were set forth with dramatic effect. Further, it was announced that if Mrs. McLeedy's health permitted, the party expected to spend several days with Mr. McLeedy's old friend, Major Thomas Crailey, at Pine Slope, the Crailey summer home on the eastern shore of Hayden Lake.

All of this Dan Bevis duly read, and when he had read it and had recovered from his surprise he hastened to the telegraph office in the tiny station a stone's throw from the hotel and wired the Rosses that he must cancel his acceptance of their invitation to the dinner they were giving the next day, explaining that he had been exposed to smallpox and had been placed in quarantine by the authorities.

Then he made hurried arrangements for a hunting expedition back into the wildest part of the mountains, but, once these preparations were made, he delayed his departure and idled about the tavern, but always keeping a close watch on the arrival of the electric trains from Spokane.

A few weeks in a mountain hotel do wonders in sweeping aside social bars, that again become insurmountable the moment the beings assembled there pass beyond the borders of its bohemianism and return to the realm of conventionality, where masks are donned and obsequious homage is paid at the shrine of the unreal.

Hilda Jordan, with the dignity and precepts of many Virginian generations crying out in protest, had noted the rapid obliteration of the pharasaism that she had been taught to reverence without questioning, and she came to realize that something new was entering into her life, that the horizon had broadened, and that beyond the line where that horizon once had bounded her life there were blue skies and flowers, and the song of birds, and the play of pleasant fountains instead of the ugly cloud mass, the barren sands, and the bleaching skulls she once had thought must greet the one who journeyed beyond where her mother and her mother's mother and her mother's mother's mother had placed a barrier—a dainty, gossamery barrier spun of lavender and rose, but a barrier to be strictly respected, nevertheless.

When she had seen a stranger scrambling up the pathway leading to the mountain cave, while the storm roared about her, she had shrunk back into the cavern in the hope that her presence would not be detected. When she had seen the man standing before her and had realized that it was Dan Graham, a gambler who had become a familiar figure about Spokane, all of the dignity and the icy reserve of the long line of Jordans swept into battle array to defend her from contamination by this person, whose exploits had come to be discussed even in the fashionable drawing rooms where she had given her recitals, and where the whispers had reached her ears, ears that had scorned to heed but that could not be deaf. And then there had come the time when a whisperer had pointed out this handsome rake, whom Scandal had endowed with many vices.

But that night at the Witches' Gorge she had taken a sly peep beyond that horizon handed down to her by generations who had lived in a world quite different from the world of to-day and who had trodden their narrow pathway in peace and then been laid amid the dust of others who had been bone of their bone and blood of their blood, maidens and motherly dames whose

brief spans had been spent securely sheltered from aught that savored of struggle or temptation or soul tragedy. And when the morning's sun had risen she had sat looking out over the lake, from where the mists were slowly rising, and, pondering over it all, she became dimly aware that life held problems and depths of which she had not dreamed.

There had followed days when she was extremely gracious to Dan Graham, the gambler, and always she had found in him that which gave the lie to numberless whisperings her unwilling ears had heard during the intermissions in the drawing rooms. The bohemianism of a mountain hotel had given her a glimpse of new possibilities, and when she stood alone in her room and confronted the accusing specters of sleeping ancestors she turned to them a smiling, radiant face and held up to them her soft, white hands.

"See!" she would exclaim, softly. "They are unstained!"

Dan Bevis, was, as usual, lounging on a rustic bench under the shade of the pines, where he could note the arrivals at the little station below, when Hilda Jordan came down the steps of the hotel, swinging her hat carelessly in one

hand while the morning breeze ruffled her copper-tinted hair and gave an added sparkle to her eyes. She smiled and nodded her greeting and was passing on, a lilt of song on her lips, when he arose.

"Where away this morning, may I inquire?" he asked.

"As usual, up yonder to gather flowers," she replied, nodding toward the shady slopes beyond. "I am learning to love the mountains," she added.

"Is it the mountains or the spirit of the West one comes to love?" he asked. "Back yonder" (he waved his hand toward the East) "it sounds like speaking of a new world to refer to the country beyond the Rocky Mountains, but I cannot understand how one could know this country and ever long to go back there."

She laughed merrily, the music of a happy heart sounding in her voice.

"I did not know you came from the East," she said. "And yet—"

She paused, and the faintest bit of color was added to the glow in her cheeks. He looked down into her face and then quickly turned his eyes away.

"And yet—what?" he asked.

"I don't know, exactly," she confessed. "I fear I am becoming impulsive—and that is very indecorous in a young woman. So say the governesses and chaperons."

Again his gaze slipped to her face and he saw the laughter dancing in her eyes, though her expression was quite demure.

"But you thought I was from the East?"
The question in his tone was evident.

"Yes." Then as if fearing that she had admitted something forbidden, she hastily turned away, saying: "However, I really have not been considering you at all, Mr. Graham, save as we have met occasionally since that day of the cloudburst. But there is something—your accent, I think—that suggested the East."

"And do you ever long to go back?" he asked.

She turned quickly and looked up at him.

"I do not remember of telling you that I ever lived there," she replied. "Why do you ask the question?"

"Your memory is at fault," he answered.
"The day of the storm you told me you had been reared in Virginia."

The shadow that had rested for a moment in

her eyes disappeared, and the hauteur was no longer showing in her manner.

"Of course," she said. "I had forgotten almost everything about that day—except that the Gorge was impassable." She saw his lips tighten, but she gave it no thought. "Oh," she exclaimed, "let's not talk about the Gorge. We were speaking of the East, and that reminds me that some of my old friends are coming."

"Coming? Here?" he asked, simulating surprise.

"No, no, to Major Crailey's—across the lake, you know." She sat down on the rustic and swung her hat gayly. "The McLeedys—did you read about them a few days ago?—are old friends of mine, or, rather, they and my father were great friends for several years, though there came a time when—." She hesitated. "I suppose business does not recognize friendships," she added, reflectively. "No matter. I shall be glad to see them. I was away a great deal, but I am quite well acquainted with them."

"I remember of reading something about them," he replied. "The papers stated that they expected to visit at Pine Slope soon."

"I received a letter this morning from Spokane friends saying the McLeedy party would be out here to-morrow, and—"

"To-morrow?" he asked, surprised.

"Yes—to-morrow. And the British nobleman is coming with them."

"Lord Heathercote, of the Royal Hussars."

He drew himself up and saluted. She glanced up at him again, surprise showing in her eyes.

"Oh, of course, you know about him," she said. "The papers were full of him, weren't they? I suppose Ethel McLeedy is contemplating becoming Lady Heathercote."

He dropped down on the grass and sat with his hands clasped about one knee.

"Lady Heathercote, to be sure!" he laughed. "Why, it is quite romantic, you know—his thrilling rescue of her and her mother that time in Florence. What else could you—"

"How did you know that?" she asked, interrupting him. "Those things were not in the Spokane papers."

Inwardly he berated himself for his unguarded tongue, but if anything of vexation revealed itself in his face it was only fleeting.

"The Eastern papers—I get them occasion-

ally—were full of the romance when his lordship first landed in America. I remembered it when I read of the McLeedys being in Spokane."

"Oh," she said, simply, and for a moment there was silence between them.

"The mountains are becoming very dry," he remarked, striving vainly to think of something to say with the ring of sincerity and interest in it. "It will be forest fires next, if the rains do not come soon."

He was not looking at her, but his gaze was straying across the tumbled masses of peaks and pines, but as he turned suddenly toward her again he trapped her eyes studying his face. She looked away, but in an instant turned to him again.

"I know it was impertinent for me to stare at you as I was doing," she confessed, "but sometimes I wonder—." She hesitated, and he waited for her to go on, but she was silent for a full minute. Then she looked up and saw that he was watching her. "I am very foolish, of course," she said, "but sometimes it seems that I have met you—somewhere back yonder."

He shook his head.

"I am quite sure that I never saw you until

that night at the banquet in Spokane," he answered.

"Your picture, perhaps, in the papers?"

Again he shook his head.

"I do not believe Dan Graham's picture ever was printed," he declared.

"It will be quite romantic and interesting to have an English nobleman on the lake," she suggested, after another moment of silence and by way of dismissing the former question. "I remember that Ethel was betrothed to a young banker, but—"

"I suppose she jilted him when the titled suitor appeared."

"No, I don't think that was it, exactly," she replied, slowly. "The banker was—a thief."

He felt the blood slowly leaving his face, and the hands clasped about his knee tightened their grip. Then he reached over and took up a long blade of grass and pulled it to pieces.

"A thief!" he exclaimed. And then repeated: "A thief?"

"Yes—he wrecked the bank and then confessed his embezzlements. I heard that he had been released from prison and had disappeared."

He held the bits of grass in the hollow of his

hand a moment and then flung them into the air and watched the wind blow them this way and that.

"No wonder the girl broke with the rascal," he said. He looked straight into her eyes as he added: "If your fiancé were sent to prison, Miss Jordan, would you not cast him off, also?"

A smile came to her lips, but gradually it faded as she sat with her hands resting idly in her lap, the hat having fallen to the ground beside her.

"Possibly," she answered. "But I am afraid I would not."

"Afraid?"

"Yes. Afraid, because I believe that love should be sacrificial. It should be willing to go into the shadows—"

"Into the pit?" he asked.

His voice sounded strange and unnatural, and she wondered at it and at the lines that seemed to have come into his face so quickly.

"I don't know exactly what you mean," she answered, meditatively, "but in a general way I will answer, yes. It is the lesson of the Cross. I suppose the world would be horrified, and the

drawing rooms would buzz—as I have heard them buzz—.” She shot a swift glance to his white, drawn face. “But I am confident that when the prison doors swung outward I would be waiting there for him, believing that the love I had given was not a thing to be withdrawn because the world frowned.” She suddenly laughed and sprang to her feet. “Such a solemn discussion for so bright a morning!” she exclaimed. “But now you know why I used the word ‘afraid.’ ”

“No—I suppose I am a dullard, but I have not fathomed your reasons for using that word.” He arose and stood before her, his arms folded, and with the color slowly returning to his face. “It seems to me that you have shown that you would be quite unafraid.”

“Of myself, yes; of the man—what is the answer?”

For an instant their eyes met, and then she stooped and caught up the hat she had dropped.

“The man?” he asked. “You are right. You would fear that he might be weak.”

“Yes. Love could condone a mistake and give its strength in the atonement. It could not but despise weakness. I hold that there is

a difference between a mistake and weakness—at least, there is in the sense in which I use the terms now."

There was something in her words that seemed to lash him, and his arms dropped to his side. She turned away, the song once more on her lips, but he raised one hand with a gesture of appeal.

"May I ask you to give your definition of weakness?" he asked.

For an instant her eyes flashed to his, and his gaze faltered before the accusation he read there.

"Definitions are quite unnecessary," she replied, coldly.

CHAPTER XIX

THE QUICKENING

HE watched her as she went away, the cool, light morning gown outlining a dainty picture amid the somber pines of the slopes, and he was conscious that his pulse was beating faster as he leaned back in the rustic and let his eyes follow her. But it was not the leap of his blood that mystified him; it was the consciousness that the throb of his pulse had brought with it something new, something that never before had been a part of his life.

He turned away and watched a car creeping around the curve; he heard a shout of laughter and saw a group of young men in flannels, and bare-armed young ladies with wind-tossed hair, running down toward the tennis court; a bee droned by and he idly followed it with his eyes as it zigzagged its way through the sunshine; the swaying branches of the pines cast grotesque shadows at his feet, and he found a pe-

culiar fascination in watching the play of the light and shade; and strange fancies came to his mind.

Ethel McLeedy would be at the lake on the morrow. What was his last memory of her? He studied a moment, struggling to bring it clearly to mind. Oh, yes. It was of her galloping down a pebbly driveway with the nobleman by her side. She was quite trim and correct—not drabbled and perched behind a saddle, steadyng herself by clinging to another drabbled creature. . . . He smiled.

. . . He could see her up there among the trees, piling her hat full of the flowers that carpeted the slopes with a riot of color—and then it suddenly occurred to him that the picture of Ethel McLeedy had faded and that his eyes and thoughts were following Hilda Jordan.

"She said love would go into the pit," he mused. "One did—and remained to dance with the shadows. I wonder if another love would dare to smile into that pit?" His glance stole up the slope again, but Hilda Jordan was no longer in sight. He pulled another blade of grass, and, with his elbows on his knees, he gave it bit by bit to the wind. "I wonder if it would?" he mused.

"Did you let her get away from you, Graham?"

He whirled and saw one of the young men in flannels standing regarding him with a leering smile on his lips.

"Get away?" asked Bevis.

"Yes. I'd think you'd be up there weaving your web instead of loafing here alone."

Dan looked at him a moment in silence. "Sometimes I enjoy being alone far better than having the company of any one with whom I am acquainted," he replied, significantly.

"Oh, sure. I feel that way myself, sometimes," was the reply. "But I don't generally feel that way when there's a live one like her around. Not on your life."

"I think we had better change the subject."

"Sure, if you say so. But I'd like devilish well to get acquainted with her. She's turned me down cold twice when I've tried to be pleasant to her after she had quit playing in the evenings."

"Oh, she did!" And Bevis was conscious of a sudden thrill of satisfaction.

"Froze me stiff. I've tried to show her that I'm a spender, but she won't thaw." He pulled a tiny book of rice paper and a package

of tobacco from his pocket and rolled and lighted a cigarette. "Of course, if she's your ..."

"Damn your impudence, she's not!" There was a sudden play of flames in the gambler's eyes. "And she's not—well, anything that you know much about!"

The leering smile faded from the other's lips as he caught the ring of steel in the speaker's voice.

"I beg your pardon," he said. "No harm done, I hope. You see, I didn't know her, except that she was playing here at the tavern. Of course, I know you, and I thought—that is—it occurred to me, from what I'd heard, that maybe you'd do the right thing by me."

"Well, I'll not, because—"

"All right. We'll change the subject. No use getting sore about a girl."

"Because the right thing would be to kick you out of these grounds!" continued Bevis, harshly. "Now, shut up and get away!"

A scowl settled over the other's face and he turned with a snarl toward the gambler.

"You never kicked a man in your life, I'll bet! You're a damned short-card bluff! I've seen your kind before. You don't—"

"Shut up! She's coming!"

The flood of abuse died on the lips that were uttering it, and both men turned to see Hilda Jordan coming back toward the hotel, her arms filled with the flowers.

"It's a glorious morning!" she cried, nodding to Bevis as she passed.

"A wonderful morning!" he echoed.

He saw the tinge of color showing in the delicately rounded cheek, and there was a subtle grace of movement bespeaking a glowing health. She went on, and Bevis turned again to the man at his side.

"You were just leaving," he suggested.

The man arose, tennis racquet in hand.

"All right," he said. "But I think you're a cheap sport. Some fellow will get your goat right one of these times." A grin came to his lips. "Maybe it'll be me," he added, with a confident chuckle.

He turned and started toward the hotel.

"Wait! This direction!" Dan pointed down toward the tennis court.

There was a moment of hesitation, and then as the gambler slowly arose and stood facing him, the fellow swept a hasty glance at the broad shoulders and firm chin.

"Oh, well, all right," he assented. "I wasn't going to bother her, but there's no use fussing about it."

He swaggered off, twirling his tennis racquet, and Dan, after standing uncertain for a moment, sat down, and a grim smile flickered for a moment about his lips. Then he drew a long breath.

"Dan Graham, gambler—and Dan Bevis, idiot!" he exclaimed, softly. Then he smiled again. "It's the law of harmony," he said.

There was no use in watching the little station any longer. The McLeedys would not arrive until the morrow. So he arose and went around to the boat landing, and a few minutes later he was sending a skiff leaping through the water. The lake was dotted with craft of various kinds this morning, and as he passed launches and skiffs and canoes there was an occasional flutter of a handkerchief, and a merry hail.

After luncheon he idled on the veranda overlooking the lake, but his mind was on serious subjects. Late in the afternoon a fussy little launch spluttered up to the landing, and half a dozen ladies came laughing and chatting onto

the veranda. Hilda Jordan paused for a moment beside him.

"We've been across to Major Crailey's," she said. "They're making great preparations over there for the McLeedys—and the nobleman." She laughed merrily. "It must be no end of fun to be so important."

"Yes, we are to see courtship on parade—the drama—possibly the tragedy—of the dollar marks."

The laugh died away, and as he glanced up at her he saw that she was standing with her hands idly folded in front of her, looking out across the lake, and in her manner was a hint of pathos.

"The tragedy of dollars!" she exclaimed, her words scarcely audible. "It is all very odd." She turned again toward Bevis and her face brightened. "We hear so much concerning the marriage of American girls—heiresses—with noblemen, but I hope that Ethel McLeedy will be very happy."

"I have read something about this earl, and I think he really is a fairly decent sort. His army record is splendid, the papers say—but I suspect that he is short of cash."

"And the McLeedys have that."

"Oodles of it," he laughed. "The papers say that Andrew McLeedy has prospered amazingly in the last few years."

"So I have heard." He saw her lips tighten. "He has prospered by crushing competition. Still, he is but a part of the great machine that has done this, so I suppose that one ought not lay all of the blame upon him. It would be a greater tragedy were his money to bring unhappiness to his daughter by this marriage."

"I don't believe I would worry about that. Love is represented by so many different things to so many different people. To some it is represented by dollar marks—"

"To the earl," she laughed.

"To others by titles, and—"

"Ethel," she said, softly.

"And to others—by a readiness to go into the pit."

He saw her half turn toward him, a sudden light in her face, and then she checked herself and leaned carelessly against a post of the veranda.

"Who are the others?" she asked.

"They?" He arose and stood beside her, his hands tightly clasped behind his back.

"They are the ones who have plumbed the depths, who have known a soul's Gethsemane,—and, perhaps, those who came forth from that garden reeling, blinded, and moaning for lethe."

The shadows of the cliffs were lengthening on the water, and the note of a dove sounded mournfully from out in the forest. The declining sun caught the slanting sails of a small boat far out on the lake and they flashed with a silvery sheen. For a full minute the girl stood silent. Then she turned away without a glance at the man standing close to her side.

"Your analysis is vivid," she said.

He stood watching her as she entered the hotel, and through the window he could see her moving slowly toward the stairway, and he fancied that about her was an air of weariness. Then he sat down and watched the light die out of the world, and the mountains and the lake and the valleys lose themselves in the gloom.

That night when the cards were dealt in his room the old smile was missing, but there was no faltering of the skill nor the cool nerve. At midnight he turned to a young man whose pale face and twitching lips were telling their own story.

"I didn't want you to come here," he said. "I thought that after—this morning—you would let meie."

The other attempted a laugh, which became little more than a hoarse croak.

"I came to get even," he said. "That row about a girl—" He looked across the table and smothered the word. "That row about another affair don't cut any figure. This is business!"

Bevis studied the young man's face a moment.

"I think you had better go to bed," he said.

"Go, hell!" was the snarling response. "Sit down there! You sha'n't jump the game on me now!"

There was a moment of hesitation, but as Bevis glanced into the faces of the others of the little party he saw only scowls, and only murmurs of approval of the youth's words came to him.

"The boy's right, Graham. Give him a chance to play even."

Dan shrugged his shoulders and sat down.

"Anything to please you, gentlemen," he said, and the smile came back to his lips.

The darkness of the night gave way to a dull

gray, and gradually the mountains across the lake showed their dim outlines; then the tall pines appeared, like pencil marks on a huge, drab canvas. Somewhere out in the corridors of the hotel a soft-toned clock struck the hour of three. The youth shoved aside the cards when they were dealt to him.

"No—no hand for me," he said, his voice as dull as the clash of lead against lead. "I'm done for—all in—every blessed dollar!"

"I wanted you to quit and go to bed."

The young man looked up at Bevis and stared at him dazedly.

"It wasn't my money," he said, speaking mechanically, as though unaware that there were listeners. "It was the firm's—I collected the note and thought I could beat the game! I got you mad on purpose—to get your goat, as the fighters say." His hands clenched and then relaxed. "I collected—and now—and now."

He arose unsteadily to his feet and walked over and looked out to where the coming dawn was working its miracle on the world. Long banners of orange and gold were being raised above the mountains, and the waters of the lake were changing from black to silver. His hand stole toward his pocket, but in that instant Dan

Bevis sprang toward him and pinioned the wrist in his strong grasp. He slipped his free hand into the pocket and drew forth a revolver. Releasing the wrist, Dan stepped back and flipped the cartridges from the chamber of the weapon. Then he handed it back.

"You'll have time to think before you can load it again," he said.

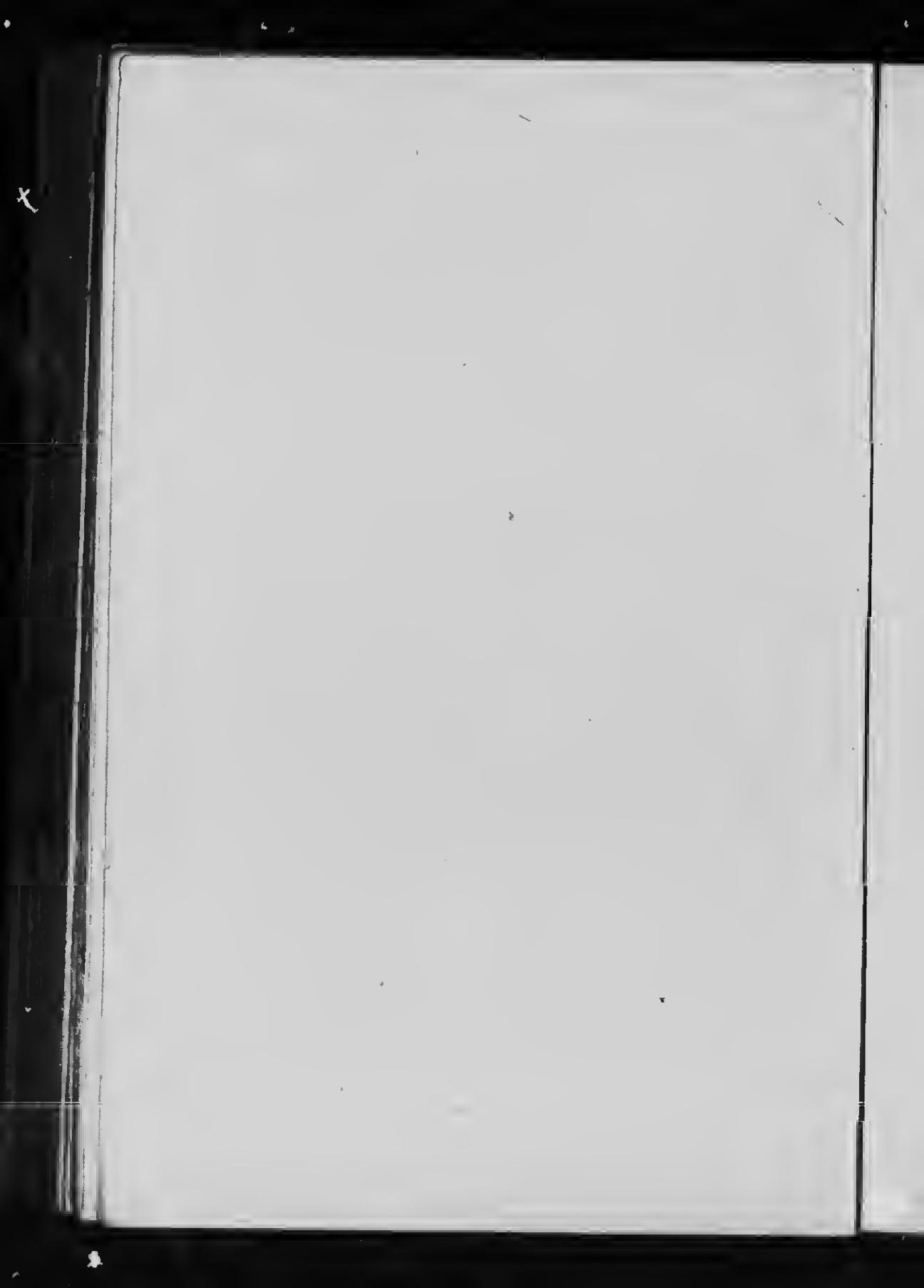
The others of the party had sat speechless, clutching the cards as they realized how near they were to a tragedy. The young man stood irresolute, looking at the empty weapon Bevis had thrust into his hand. Suddenly he whirled and with a quick motion sent the revolver hurtling through the window into the lake.

"I meant it for myself—not you," he said, turning to Bevis, and, sinking into a chair, he burst into sobs.

"I know you did," was the reply. "Maybe that's why I stopped you. I knew a man who—well, I didn't want two on my mind. Here." He took some money from his pocket and counted out a pile of gold, the usual currency of the Northwest. "Five hundred, wasn't it?" He placed the money on the table. "It isn't much for a man to kill himself for—but men are different. There it is. You had better go,



"YOU'LL HAVE TIME TO THINK BEFORE YOU CAN LOAD IT AGAIN."
Page 312.



now, and I hope you'll not forget this night!"

He stood with folded arms, the cynical smile gone, and he but dimly heard the incoherent words poured out as the money was gathered up. The others arose and took up their hats, but the man standing there with folded arms spoke no word to them, and in silence they left him.

The breeze swept in from the lake and seemed to chill him, for he shivered slightly. Going to the door, he locked it, and again sat down and counted his winnings, and as he glanced up his eyes rested on the broken window pane, through which the revolver had crashed. He arose and pulled the shade down to hide it, but the wind came in through the jagged hole and caused the shade to tap, tap, tap insistently against the casing.

Muttering an exclamation, he picked up a towel and stuffed it into the hole in the window.

CHAPTER XX

THE PLAY BEGINS

TEN days later Dan Bevis rode down the trail leading from the wildest portions of the mountains. Ahead of him rode the guide, leading the pack horse that had borne their burdens during the hunting expedition. The hotel grounds seemed strangely deserted. Usually there were groups scattered here and there, promenading, flirting, armuing, in this delightful hour of the evening, and the cabins would be aglow with light, but as he rode forward now in the deepening dusk he heard no voices, saw no strollers, and there were but few lights to be seen in the cabins.

Dismounting in front of the tavern, he gave his horse in charge of the guide and looked in through the windows. The office was vacant, save for the hotel clerk, deeply interested in a magazine; he peeped into the dining-room and saw that not more than half a dozen were at table.

The thought that had been uppermost in his

mind during all of this tedious journey across the mountains was of the Craileys. He had ridden away in the early morning of that day when the McLeedys were announced to arrive at Pine Slope, and now he was curious to know what had transpired over there during his absence. Going around the hotel, he looked across the lake, and was surprised to see a myriad of lights flashing through the gloom. Standing on the veranda, he stared across the waters with considerable misgiving.

"So, you finally came!"

At the words he turned quickly, and he felt the blood surging through his face as he saw Hilda Jordan standing before him. She wore the black gown he had noticed the night of the banquet; about her shoulders was a shawl of white silk, and she held her violin box in one hand. As he turned he heard an exclamation fall from her lips.

"Yes—finally," he said. "The hunting was excellent."

"Oh, I beg you to believe that I blundered!" she cried. "I did not recognize you, Mr. Graham. I thought it was the boatman—and I am afraid my vexation at his tardiness showed in my words."

He swept a glance at his corduroys and leggings, and laughed easily.

"The mistake was natural," he answered. "And, after all, why not?" he asked. "I am a good hand at the oars."

"It's a long pull across the lake—"

"To Crailey's?" He looked across at the lights twinkling on the eastern shore.

"Yes—a *soirée* for the McLeedys and Lord Heathercote. I am to play, and—"

"The McLeedys still there?" he asked in surprise. "I had hoped—I mean, I thought they were to remain but a few days."

He saw her look at him questioningly as he stammered, but it was for only an instant.

"Something detained them. They go tomorrow, I believe. The boatman who was to come for me has failed to do so."

"Will you accept me as a substitute?" he asked. "I will be glad to be of service." She hesitated, but he turned and hurried down to the landing. "I can have a boat ready in five minutes," he called.

She yielded, and permitted him to help her into the skiff. Then he took up the oars and the boat shot out into the lake. A southerly breeze was slightly roughing the surface, and

the young moon, just rising above the bold headlands, gave a faint shimmer to the lake and softly outlined the girl reclining in the stern of the boat. A vagrant wisp of hair was caught by the breeze and drooped across her face, and he saw her hand brush it back and tuck it among the treasures from which it had strayed. His thirsty eyes drank in the delicious picture, and he felt his lungs laboring slightly with something not born of the rowing.

"You are not rowing. It is very hard work I know."

Then he realized that the oars were resting idly in his hands, the blades barely flicking spray from the water.

"Hard work?" He laughed, bending and sending the little craft dancing through the water. "I don't think you mean that."

She noted the splendid play of the sinewy arms, the easy freedom of movement, and to herself she admitted that she did not mean it.

"Perhaps not," she confessed. "I spoke on impulse."

He dropped one oar and touched his forelock with an air of servility.

"The boatman asks pardon, Miss, for forget-

ting to row. He was wondering about the landing. This is my first trip to the Crailey place."

There was a low laugh from the stern of the boat, and he found his pulse dancing to the music of it.

"Don't forget yourself again, sir, and I will reward you by—by—." She paused.

"By what?" he asked.

"By—letting you gaze upon a nobleman!" she exclaimed, with sudden inspiration.

"Has it been a giddy whirl?" he asked, after a few moments of silence.

"Not exactly. The McLeedys and the Royal Hussar have dined at the tavern a few times; there have been auto parties and boating carnivals, and—"

"A very quiet ten days, I should say," he remarked, dryly.

"It does sound a bit strenuous when one compiles the happenings, doesn't it? But I have not suffered."

"A woman can endure many things in the name of society." He ceased rowing again. "If the moonlight tells me the truth you are quite fresh and radiant."

"I think you had better resume rowing," she

answered, impassively. "If you mean that I am not fatigued, you are quite right. The whirl—if such it was—did not much agitate my little world."

"Your little world?" Surprise showed in his voice, and the oars were motionless for an instant. He saw her glance toward them, and instantly the blades flashed again and plunged into the water. "Yes, Miss, the boatman is trying to remember not to forget. But I don't understand what you mean by the whirl not agitating your little world."

She laughed happily and without hint of bitterness.

"Social distinctions may not be sharply drawn at a summer hotel—but when one is entertaining royalty it is different. I am an employé of the hotel, you know—paid to play. And so—you see."

She could not know that his lip curled disdainfully as he grasped the snobbery of the McLeedys, but she became aware that some mood was causing him to send the boat through the water in leaps.

"Then to-night you are not a guest?"

"No, I am hired. It is an unexpected chance for me to add to my income," she said.

"I could not leave the hotel until the dinner hour was practically over, and then I was in despair when the boatman failed me. There were only a few guests left at the hotel, but Señor Arguelle, the Mexican diplomat, arrived this afternoon for a short stay, and it would never do to permit the señor to dine without music. And so I had to stay and play while he minced over the tidbits the physicians permit him." Again there was a ripple of mirth. "It was very droll," she added.

"Sanchez Arguelle!" he exclaimed. "Is he attending the affair at Crailey's?"

"No. He was not feeling equal to it. And so after he had wearied of my violin he toddled to his cabin with a colonel of cavalry stalking beside him, quite dignified and resplendent."

As they neared the shore he looked over his shoulder and saw the grounds ablaze with electricity, but there were no colored lanterns softening the lights as there had been at a certain affair one June night in the long ago. At least, it seemed very long ago as the remembrance came to him now.

The landing place was brilliant with the glare of many incandescents, and about the lit-

tle dock were crowded rowboats, naptha launches, small sailing sloops, and a few long, slender canoes. Beyond, two score or more of automobiles were parked under the trees, a large number of guests having motored out from Spokane. The grounds were gay with the gorgeousness of evening gowns and the echo of laughter and merry shouts of those who could in ten minutes time make their way from this scene of modern social splendor into the depths of mountain forests.

With a final pull of the oars, Bevis brought the little boat alongside the pier. Springing ashore, he held the craft steady with a boat-hook he found lying at hand, and then he held out his hand to Hilda. Something danced in his veins as she laid her soft, white hand in his palm. As she stepped to the platform the boat shot to one side, and, with a little cry, she lurched forward against him. Instantly he steadied her and then drew back.

"Thank you for an ideal boatman, Mr. Graham," she said, with a smile. And as he bowed she caught up the train of her evening gown and turned away. The gauzy silk about her shoulder had slipped down slightly and he glimpsed her snowy shoulders sloping away

from her slender throat in softly rounded curves. A flunkey came hurrying to receive her, and Bevis saw the servant take her violin and lead the way toward the house, into which she disappeared.

He stepped back into the boat and took up the oars, but let them rest idly in the locks as he watched the scene ashore. Somewhere up in that throng was Ethel McLeedy, the girl who he once had thought would be his wife. Heigho! What changes time brings. Acting on an impulse, he swung the boat close to shore and stepped out.

As he sauntered along the outskirts of the scene he attracted no attention, as there were chauffeurs and boatmen and stablemen in plenty hovering about the assemblage. A little group was pressing about some one over yonder, and he heard a shout, "Long live the Hussar!" Perhaps—. Unconsciously he drew closer to the group, and then, remembering, he turned and was hurrying back toward the landing when a tall, gray-haired man suddenly stepped out of another group and confronted him.

"Graham!" he exclaimed.

"Caught, Senator," replied Bevis. "I had

no business so far away from the pier in this garb."

Garrison stepped to him and locked arms with him.

"Come up to the house. I want to have a talk with you."

"No, no. You can see me in the morning—or I can run in to the city and see you, but—"

"I'm going back to Spokane to-night, and must leave for Washington on an early train."

"But—these clothes!"

"Never mind. I can slip you in at the side. Besides, I think I can borrow a dress suit from Crailey for you, and you can join in the whirl. Why not?"

"Because—."

Dan paused. After all, why not? He could easily avoid the McLeedys—but even if they met, what mattered it? Properly dressed he would be free to come and go as he chose, unnoticed in that great throng. From the open windows he heard the sound of a violin, rising, fading, rippling, sobbing, and then swelling with the throbbing of a joyous message.

"The evening is just beginning," urged Garrison. "Come on."

And with the voice of that violin in his ears, Dan Bevis smiled a bit grimly and yielded to the pressure on his arm. They made their way carefully to the house, turning aside now and then to avoid certain groups, and finally they gained entrance and reached a rear stairway, which they mounted. But at the head of the stairs Dan quickly stepped aside into an alcove. Teresa Ross was coming toward them, and even as he stepped aside he saw her face light up, and he feared that he had been recognized.

Garrison had been called aside by a political lieutenant, and Dan stood alone in the room, his face to the window, hoping that Teresa Ross had not observed him.

"Señor!"

He heard the low voice from the doorway, but did not turn.

"Señor!" She was in the room now, and he turned and looked into her face. "Ah, I was sure!" she exclaimed. "My Americano!" Her voice was but little more than a purr, and the dark eyes looking out beneath the long lashes were lustrous. "You did not seek to avoid me?" she asked.

"Avoid you?" He shook his head. "Oh,

certainly not. But, you see—.” He raised his arms from his side and glanced at his corduroys. “I am just back from the mountains and did not expect to come here.”

“And the smallpox?”

He looked at her blankly.

“The—what?” Then he remembered his message. “Oh, yes, the smallpox. Well, that was a mistake of the physicians—they make mistakes occasionally, you know. It wasn’t smallpox at all, and I was released in a day or two. I wrote you I was going for a hunt.”

“Yes, you wrote. You have been gone a very long time. But you have grown so strong!”

Again the purring note as of a caress sounded in her voice, and he let his eyes have their will. Teresa Ross was beautiful, intoxicatingly so, and she was gowned quite daringly this night, the long rope of pearls about her throat falling in double strands unimpeded to where the blood-red roses nestled in her corsage.

“Ah, Teresa!” Garrison hurried into the alcove. “This is fortunate,” he said. “I am in demand for a few minutes. Will you stay

with Graham until I return? I have some important business with him." He glanced significantly at the woman as he spoke.

"I am so surprised to see you," she said, softly, sinking into a chair as Garrison left them.

"And if I hadn't obeyed a foolish whim I would be out on the lake now," he answered.

And then it suddenly occurred to him that he had not asked Hilda Jordan if he were to be permitted to row her back to the hotel. But even as the thought came he realized how utterly foolish it was. Hilda Jordan might be an "employé," as she had casually remarked, but he was certain that she would not deliberately choose to cross the lake with Dan Graham, the gambler, at the oars. His services had been accepted in an emergency. That emergency had passed.

"Your cheeks are reddening, Dan," remarked the woman, whose eyes were on his face. "Is it too warm? We would stroll in the grounds if—." She glanced at his clothing and smiled.

"What a nicely-mated pair we would appear," he laughed. "My cheeks red? I think

it must be because I am embarrassed to be here in this garb. I came to please Garrison. He said he had business of importance."

A shadow crept into the woman's eyes, and he saw her hands tighten.

"*Si, si!*" she exclaimed, resorting to her native tongue, as she so often did when deeply moved. "It is important! I know about it!"

"You?"

She nodded quickly.

"Yes, I know." She leaned forward a little, and her voice was lowered. "He wants you to go to Mexico, to bear a message to Madero and to help get some arms and ammunition across the border!"

Bevis sat down, and the look he turned on her was one of blank amazement.

"Get arms and ammunition across the border!" he repeated. "I haven't understood the game, and I don't now. I know you are interested in the revolution, and that Garrison is, too, in some way, but—."

She glanced about quickly.

"It is simple, my Americano," she said, in a low tone. "I am in the game, as you call it, because—because I hate Diaz and some others;

my husband" (she shrugged her shoulders) "he is a superintendent of mines that have much to do with the revolution, because—"

"Yes, but Garrison?"

Again she glanced about the room before she spoke.

"The great syndicate that owns the mines and wants some concessions which Diaz has refused, is helping with money and arms, and other things. Senator Garrison—." She smiled and spread her hands before her. "Senator Garrison has many responsibilities in Washington, for this government is being urged by the others—the syndicates that are being favored by Diaz—to show its displeasure at the revolution. They are urging that American interests will suffer if Washington does not use American troops to frighten the men who are fighting for a new era in Mexico."

He sat silent for a moment, running the problem over in his mind. A number of things were becoming clear to him. That the Rosses were connected with the revolution, he well knew, and had known for some time. In just what way he had not known, and, after giving it careful thought, had studiously avoided discovering. It is not always well for one to be

in possession of facts that might become embarrassing to either himself or his friends. That Senator Garrison was also in touch with the revolutionists in some way he had known since the night he discovered Jose in the music room. Jose, himself, had presented a problem that Bevis never had solved to his entire satisfaction, but he had included the Mexican youth in his general determination to avoid learning that which was no concern of his.

From below stairs he heard the voice of the violin.

"Garrison wants to get a message to Madero—and arms and ammunition across the border?" he asked.

"I do not mean that, exactly," she replied. "The great syndicate wants that—and Senator Garrison is the very good friend of the syndicate. Oh, there is a great game to be played. Señor McLeedy is not here because the señora is ill. Poof! He is here because his syndicate—."

An exclamation broke from Bevis's lips.

"McLeedy's syndicate! Well, by—. And McLeedy wants me—me—to go to Mexico for him!" He stared a moment at the woman, and then he threw back his head and laughed, a

laugh that had the ring of genuine mirth. "He wants me to carry a message to Madero—and to get arms and ammunition across the Rio Grande!"

Again his laugh rang out, and the woman regarded him in bewilderment.

"I don't understand," she said, hesitatingly. "The spies are watching in the East, and the syndicate thought it would be easier to work from Spokane." She knitted her brows as the man again chuckled. "Senator Garrison suggested to Mr. McLeedy that you—"

"That Dan Graham," he interposed.

"Yes, that you would be just the man, for it will take courage, judgment, strength. *Si*, it is so!"

The violin was silent. A generous hand-clapping had marked the close of the number.

"Pardon my laughter," said Dan. "But really the situation is so amusing that—."

The sentence was not finished, for Senator Granville Garrison stepped into the room, closely followed by Andrew McLeedy. Bevis arose slowly to his feet, and as their eyes met, Mr. McLeedy stopped, staring in startled amazement.

"Mr. McLeedy, this is the gentleman to whom I referred. I want—"

"Dan Bevis!"

The words came from McLeedy's lips in a gasping exclamation, and they were echoed by a sharp cry.

Dan's gaze had passed beyond Andrew McLeedy, for he had seen Hilda Jordan pause, uncertainly, in the doorway. As the cry escaped her he saw her shoot a swift glance to him and then, her face like marble, she clutched the casting to steady herself.

CHAPTER XXI

THE PLAY ENDS

FOR a few breaths there was a strained silence in the alcove. Dan Bevis felt a chill creeping about his heart. He saw Senator Garrison turn in bewilderment from Andrew McLeedy to him and then to the girl in the doorway. Teresa Ross had half risen to her feet, and then had sunk back into the chair, her eyes darting to the white-faced one who had uttered that cry, and then coming back to fix themselves in a burning gaze on the face of the man who stood there with set jaws, the center of the drama. McLeedy had given but a momentary glance at the girl behind him, and then had turned again to Bevis.

"You will pardon me, gentlemen—I thought Miss McLeedy was here."

As Hilda Jordan spoke, Dan looked into her white face, a mute appeal in his eyes, but she was addressing herself to McLeedy and Garrison. Her hand no longer rested against the

door-casing, but she stood quite still, her head slightly thrown back with an air of cold disdain.

Andrew McLeedy turned and bowed to her.

"You are not intruding at all, Miss Hilda," he said, adding with a malicious irony that could not be disguised: "I was quite surprised to meet an old—ah—acquaintance—here. Possibly you may know—"

"I have met Mr. Bevis," she said. "It is quite unnecessary that there should be any explanations."

With the slightest inclination of her head she turned away, Andrew McLeedy stepping to the doorway and glancing after her as she passed down the broad hall.

"Well," he said, coming back into the alcove, "for some reason she seemed as greatly surprised as I am." Garrison had crossed the room to where Teresa sat, and McLeedy looked at Dan as he spoke. "But she said you two had met."

"Yes," Bevis answered, and he was conscious that his voice sounded rather dull. "We have met. That need not concern you in the least."

"And you gentlemen have met, also?" Garrison looked from one to the other.

"We have." Dan clasped his hands behind his back and nodded, the familiar cold smile coming to his lips. "We know each other very well, indeed."

"Well, I'm blessed—"

"But Señor McLeedy said—'Bevis,'" exclaimed Teresa, interrupting Garrison's perplexed speech.

"So he did." Bevis looked down at her as she sat studying his face eagerly, her arms on the table. "Had he spoken my name as the baptismal records show it he would have said, 'Daniel Graham Bevis.'"

There was a quick catch of her breath, and she nodded her head slowly.

"It is very simple, isn't it?" She looked up at the Senator as she spoke. "You gentlemen have important business. I will have the pleasure of seeing you later in the evening."

As she spoke she arose, and, with a graceful obeisance, left them, pausing at the doorway to let her eyes rest for the briefest instant on the face of Dan Bevis, and as she did so he saw her white teeth show between her smiling lips.

"This is most extraordinary!" exclaimed McLeedy.

"Most," remarked Garrison.

Dan walked across and sat down by the table.

"Suppose we take up the business matter," he suggested. "Or has Mr. McLeedy changed his mind since entering the room?"

"Mr. McLeedy is of the opinion that he had better reflect upon the unexpected complications before proceeding further," responded the magnate with the mannerism that usually domineered the conferences in which he participated.

"Wisely spoken," Bevis smiled sarcastically into the arrogant, selfish face of the financier. "Reflection—." He paused, as though something had changed the current of his thoughts. His gaze slipped from McLeedy's face and an air of abstraction was manifest as he resumed in a low voice: "Yes—reflection sometimes changes the current of a life."

Garrison lighted a cigar and noted the verbal fencing that he knew was taking place.

"That violinist was startled, for some reason," he said. "Let's see, wasn't she the one who played at the banquet for Arguelle?"

"Yes."

"I remember that you telephoned me the next morning to know the address of the orchestra director." His face lighted. "Oh, I begin—."

Bevis turned to him, the frost showing in his eyes.

"That's not your affair, Garrison!" he said, crisply. "This is between McLeedy and me."

"Certainly—certainly," replied the Senator, suavely. "I appreciate that fact. A gentleman naturally resents having a lady's name drawn into unpleasant affairs."

"I had quite forgotten that Miss Jordan was in this section until I met her a few days ago," said McLeedy, lolling in his chair. "I remember now that Wilson told me some months ago that she was in Spokane."

Dan looked up at him quickly.

"Wilson?" he asked. "Wilson—who was formerly with the Jordan mills?"

"Yes. Remember Wilson, do you? He and Hilda are to be married this fall."

Dan wiped the perspiration from his brow, and his hand trembled slightly, but the cool nerve that he had so often commanded came to his aid now, and as he tucked the handkerchief back into his pocket he was master of himself.

"Rather odd," he replied, with apparent carelessness. "I wonder what her father—"

"I thought you were averse to having Miss Jordan discussed here?" McLeedy spoke

sharply as he straightened up in his chair. "However, I may state that I have every assurance that Colonel Jordan favored Wilson as a suitor—."

"While he was superintendent of the Jordan mills" Dan interrupted, smiling quizzically at the magnate. "Possibly he would view it differently could he know that Wilson had—."

He paused and let his gaze rest on the face before him, where anger was beginning to show.

"Had what?" rasped McLeedy.

"Had joined the enemy," replied Bevis, tranquilly.

McLeedy arose to his feet with an angry retort upon his lips, but at that moment a servant appeared in the doorway.

"Senator Garrison," said the servant, respectfully, "Major Crailey said I was to direct your friend to a room and to assist him."

Garrison turned toward Dan, and hesitated.

"Possibly you do not care—"

"Oh, yes," replied Bevis. "Now that I am here I think that I shall enjoy the evening. Do you think the Major's clothes will fit me?" he asked, addressing the servant.

"Very probably, sir." The man's eyes

quickly took a comprehensive survey of the one in corduroys. "Major Crailey is tall and broad of shoulders, sir."

"If the interview is ended I will go," said Dan, turning to his companions. "Thank you, Senator, for making this pleasant evening possible to me." He laughed lightly as he noted the scowl on the face of Andrew McLeedy.

The servant ushered him into a room where clothes had been laid out for him, and as Bevis slipped the coat on and surveyed himself in the glass he nodded approvingly.

"It will do very well," he said.

"Shall I shave you, sir?"

Dan's hand went to his chin.

"Yes. By George, I had forgotten that I needed it. I shaved up in the mountains this morning, but a razor will help amazingly."

The valet was dexterous, and in a brief while Bevis stood before him, immaculate. He drew a deep breath, and a sigh of contentment fell from his lips.

"It's like old wine—or a new glimpse of an old picture," he said, laughing. "That's considerably mixed, but I'm talking to myself, any way."

"Yes, sir," replied the man. "I hope you will enjoy the evening. You look well, if I may say it, sir."

"And these corduroys—will I find them here when the time comes for me to change?"

"Yes, sir. And if you will ring I will be glad to assist you, sir."

Dan nodded, slipped a generous coin into the man's hand and went out into the hall. The violin was sounding again, and he tiptoed down the stairs lest he should lose a note of that marvelous melody.

Below he stood in a sheltered nook where he could see the player and watch the sweep of her arm, the light play of her fingers darting from string to string. The warmth of color still was missing from her cheeks, but there was no faltering of the touch. Fascinated, he feasted on the picture, and then he realized that it was the old intermezzo she was playing, and near him a voice was softly singing:

"Life, ah! it is so dreary;
My heart it is so weary,
Ah, leave me not alone!"

Something came to him across the years and brought to his eyes a shadow. What a

wretched mess he had made of his life since that night when he had heard the guests singing the "Ave Maria" under the trees in the McLeedy grounds. He remembered that night in the McLeedy library when the Governor had vowed to him that in two years they would send him to the United States Senate, and Ethel McLeedy had eavesdropped until this promise sent her bounding into the room, her cheeks afame with ambition.

Ambition! Always ambition! He knew it now. There had been times when he dimly suspected it then, but he had blinded himself to it then. After all, had his imprisonment ruined his life, or had it saved him—and her—from a hideous error? Somewhere about the house or grounds she was delighting her ambition by hearing unguarded tongues whispering her name in connection with a peerage.

He tried to fit another—a girl with a mass of copper-tinted hair—into the position Ethel McLeedy had occupied, and he wondered what would have been the result? Would she have shrunk from him and refused to grant any opportunity for such defense as he might have offered, as the other had done? This girl he was trying to fit into the tragedy of lives had

said that love was sacrificial, let the drawing rooms buzz as they might; it should be willing to go into the shadows—yes, into the pit.

Something was crying in his soul, and he became aware that his breathing was labored. The violin had stilled. He made his way out of the house. As he passed a group of ladies he heard a voice that caused him to turn, and as the group slowly dissolved he found himself standing before Ethel McLeedy.

"Dan!" she exclaimed.

Those near her turned at the cry, and as she saw the curious glances she dissembled and held out her hand with the laugh on which she had prided herself in the private theatricals of the old days.

"I don't understand it at all," she said.

"It isn't at all necessary that you should." He smiled, and there was something of mockery in it. "I did not seek you. Believe me, the meeting is quite accidental."

"Indeed!" She caught her under lip with her teeth. "I suppose you are enjoying the fact that I dare not cut you here in the presence of these people."

"Oh, not at all," he replied. "You may smile now and hurry away, and I will bow quite

deferentially." She looked up at him, and the faintest bit of warmth showed in her eyes. "Well," he smiled, "are you still afraid of the gossip?"

A mental struggle revealed itself in her face. Then she laid her hand on his arm.

"They say the lake is beautiful to-night," she said. "And—we will be surrounded in a moment."

They followed the broad walk down to the pier, neither speaking. The moon had risen until its magic was spreading rare beauty over the dimpled waters.

"Where is Lord Heathercote?" he asked, as they stood there, the girl's face strangely grave.

"Flirting, I presume," she responded. "It seems to be his favorite diversion."

He looked at her in surprise. Gowned exquisitely; at her throat and in her hair sparkled gems of enormous price; did she but will it and to-morrow—nay, to-night—she might start on a journey around the world, every moment of which would be spent in daintiest luxury; a private car awaited her on the railroads; on the seas a yacht would bear her wherever her fancy might dictate; beyond the ocean she was being mentioned in court circles; and yet as Dan

Bevis looked into her face there on that pier on the shores of a mountain lake he knew that already she was tasting of the lees in the cup.

"You appear quite tired to-night," he said, after another silence.

"I am," she answered, a touch of weariness in her voice. "I am weary of baubles."

"Then why not go back—and forget the baubles?"

She looked up into his face, and there was something pathetic in the wraith of a smile that played about her lips as she answered:

"Because I can't. Oh, don't look at me so! Sometimes I am sensible—and something in this rugged life of the Northwest has touched a strange chord. And to-night—just now—I am sensible. But to-morrow—." He saw her shrug her shoulders as she laughed softly. "To-morrow I will be clapping my hands at the glitter of the baubles, and berating myself for to-night. And that new chord will be stilled." She shook her head and stared out at the sheen of the waters.

"Hadn't we better return to the crowd? I am tempted to expect a man to come swimming across the lake—as we once saw a man do."

She looked up quickly, and a bit of warmth shone in the haughty face.

"Yes, we had better return." Then after a short silence: "Have you been—banking out here?"

"Oh, no—gambling."

She turned a startled face toward him.

"Gam—." She checked herself. "I'll not use the word."

"I said I *had* been gambling. To-night I am a boatman."

He saw her studying his face.

"You are mystifying," she said. "When are you coming—home—Dan?"

"Home?" He asked in surprise. "I think I am at home. I am finding that in this country a man 'always may be what he might have been.' "

"And you have—no desire—"

"Not the slightest," he interrupted. "I have a good position as boatman," he laughed softly. "But yonder is Lord Heathercote."

The Englishman caught sight of them and came hurrying forward.

"Been looking for you everywhere," he declared to the girl. Then he surveyed Bevis

calmly. "I say, old chap, I've met you this evening, haven't I? But I'm blessed if I can recall your name."

"Not this evening, your lordship," laughed Bevis. "We met some time ago—back East. Never mind the name."

"By Jove, names are a deuced bore, aren't they? Why, every blessed one of these bouders here thinks I should know his name. I am jolly tired of the thing."

"So am I," responded Bevis. "I think I'll become a boatman again."

Ethel McLeedy stood silent, meditatively tapping her jeweled fan. The nobleman stared at Dan blankly. Then he laughed uncertainly.

"Become a boatman! That's good, old chap! My word, but it is! You mean—you mean—"

"Oh, never mind. Your friends are anxious to have you with them. *Auf wiedersehen!*"

He bowed and turned away, his ears drinking in the whispers of a violin. He stopped near the house and stood under the pines, listening. And when the music had ceased he went in and slowly made his way toward the stairs. But he caught his breath sharply as he came face to face with Hilda Jordan. He

noted that the violin was tucked under her arm.

"The last number?" he asked, ending an awkward pause.

"The last," she replied. "My part of the drama is ended."

He saw her eyes on him, but in them he could read nothing.

"I am on my way to lay aside this borrowed clothing," he said, smiling with a brave show of calm. "In a few minutes I will be the boatman once more." She made no reply. "Will you honor me by becoming a passenger?" he asked.

"Thank you," was the answer in a quiet, even tone. "I have arranged to return in one of the launches."

At the top of the stairs she bade him good-night in quite the same tone she would have used to the butler, and he murmured something, he never could clearly recall just what, as he bowed to her.

He found his corduroys laid out for him, but an easy chair tempted him, and he dropped into it.

"The play is ended!" he mused. "And such a play—comedy, tragedy, everything rolled to-

gether!" He felt in a pocket of his corduroys and drew out a pipe and filled it. "And last night" (puff, puff) "I slept" (puff, puff) "by a campfire!"

CHAPTER XXII

A NEW SENTINEL

HE pulled slowly across the lake, occasionally letting the oars trail idly in the water as he kept the coal glowing in the bowl of his pipe and gave himself over to reverie. Now and then a launch sput-sput-sputted by, leaving a foaming pathway, and one or two sails were dimly seen creeping like sluggish specters before the gentle breeze, and now and then bursts of song came faintly out of the night. Masses of clouds were showing in the sky, now plunging the lake into deep darkness and then breaking suddenly and permitting a flood of light to dance on the white-flecked waves.

It was some time after midnight when he secured the boat at the tavern landing, but after a moment's hesitation he turned from the hotel and strolled along the path leading back among the whispering pines. . . . "When are you coming—home—Dan?" . . . The coal

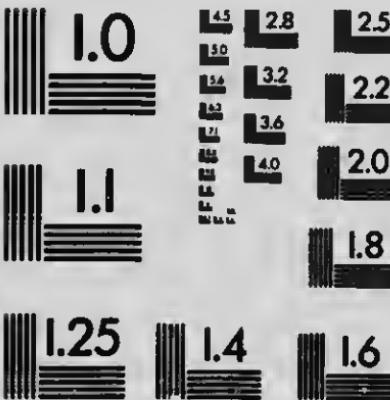
flashed into new life and winked brightly once, twice, thrice, and then the gray ashes gave it sepulcher as the man walked on, hands in his jacket pockets, forgetful of the pipe. His thoughts had flashed again to that night when the pipers had played so merrily and a shower of roses had fallen upon those who had taken part in a pantomimic betrothal in the summer house. . . . "When are you coming—home—Dan?" . . . There was no doubting the inference.

"No," he muttered. "It was a ghastly mistake."

He went up the slope to where Hilda Jordan had gathered the flowers ten days—or was it months?—ago. Below him he could see the hotel, darkly outlined and with a few lights burning; beyond was the lake, but a jutting headland lay between him and the Crailey place. He turned and walked on and on, taking this path and that until he saw that he was coming back to the hotel. Around him were the cabins of those who chose exclusiveness in their outing. He dropped down beneath a tree and drew again on the pipe, but the coal was dead. He reached for a match, and then changed his mind and emptied the bowl and tucked the pipe



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back in his pocket. . . . "When the prison doors swung outward I would be waiting there for him!" and again: "Love could not but despise weakness!" . . . He stretched out on the slope and watched the kaleidoscopic pictures made by the clouds as seen through the tree tops.

He heard voices, and sat up, listening. They were somewhere below him, beyond a mask of trees. He arose and made his way toward them, and then paused when he saw an electric light burning under the tiny awning of one of the most pretentious cabins. He was about to turn away, when he saw the light flash on the uniform of an army officer, and a second look revealed that it was the colonel of cavalry who had risen to his feet.

"The others have been in bed some time, Señor," he was saying. "I confess that I, too, am sleepy, and will beg to be excused."

So, this was the cabin of the Mexican diplomat and his party! Dan stood there amid the trees and saw the aged Arguelle rise and stand beside the colonel.

"*Buenos noches,*" he said. "In my country we keep late hours, Colonel. The night is fine,

and I will enjoy another cigarette before sleeping."

The army officer shook hands and went to a near-by cabin, and the man among the trees saw the Mexican light his cigarette and then turn off the light. But down there in the darkness the coal on the cigarette glowed intermittently. Dan turned to leave, when he suddenly caught his breath and drew closer to the tree.

A shadowy form was stealing through the trees a short distance off to the left.

A moment's watching convinced Bevis that he had not been seen, and, determined to discover the meaning of the unusual occurrence, he crept along in pursuit. Ahead of him he could dimly see the figure clinging closely to the deepest shadows and darting from tree to tree as noiselessly as a passing cloud.

The unknown one detoured, but finally Bevis began to realize that the shadow was coming up in the rear of Arguelle's cabin. Once as the unknown darted across a narrow strip of moonlight Dan saw that it was a slight, boyish figure he was pursuing. Finally the figure paused, crouched in the deep shadows close to

the rear of the Mexican's cabin. The little structure was almost hidden in the darkness, but the perfume of a cigarette, and an occasional light cough, told that the Mexican still sat in front.

The prowler in front raised and stepped out from the trees, and then Dan saw the figure slowly sinking. For a moment he was puzzled, but, crouching close to the ground, he could dimly see that the one in front was on hands and knees, creeping steadily across a little clearing toward the cabin.

His heart pounded as he grasped the probability that an assassin was stealing toward Arguelle, who was sitting, probably half asleep, in front of his cabin. There was no time for deliberation, no time for planning; if a crime were to be prevented he must act instantly. Even as these thoughts raced through his mind he had risen to his feet and moved swiftly to the timber line, and then, with a spring, he threw himself at that crouching figure now close to the cabin.

He heard a gasping, smothered cry and saw the figure rise from the ground, but to his surprise the form gave way readily before the shock of his attack, and the arm he had

clutched as he saw it upraised was as soft as velvet. As he recovered himself after the brief struggle he heard a low moan of pain, and a dagger fell from the wrist he had wrenched.

"Great God!" he exclaimed beneath his breath as a sudden suspicion shot to his mind.

Not a sound was uttered by the other save that slight moan, but he knew that the form he was holding was that of a woman. He snatched up the dagger and put it in his pocket, and then he dragged his captive back toward the trees. As he did so there was a break in the clouds and the moonlight fell full on the face of his prisoner.

"Teresa!" he gasped, releasing his clutch.

"Mother of God! Dan—my Americano!" she exclaimed.

In that moment he had seen that she wore a cap and was dressed in some manly garb, while a mask hung loosely about her neck, where it had fallen in the slight struggle. The perfume of Arguelle's cigarette still scented the air.

"Come away!" he said, as he heard a nervous cough from the front of the cabin.

She made no response, but followed him as he turned into the forest. He was intent only

on gaining some point where their voices would not be heard, but in a moment she touched him on the arm, and he looked back.

"That is our cabin, yonder," she whispered. "It will be best."

He hesitated, and then nodded, and she glided away as noiselessly as he had seen her make her way through the trees in approaching Arguelle's cabin.

The silence was unbroken except for the occasional call of a nightbird and the rustling of the branches in the rising breeze. A dog came toward them, and after sniffing about for a moment trotted on down the pathway. Teresa opened the door of a cabin standing slightly isolated, and he followed her into the Stygian darkness of the interior.

"Wait," she said, in a low tone, and he heard her moving about, drawing the blinds. She turned on a light, and he saw that she had shaded it with a handkerchief. Then she turned slowly and stood before him, her dark eyes burning into his with wordless questions.

"Sainted Virgin!" she exclaimed, softly. Then she added, with a slight lowering of the head: "Denounce me, my Americano! *Me doy por vencido!* You know the truth!"

For a moment he stood looking at her in the shaded light. The cap she had taken from her head and was holding in her hand, but the cambric mask—such a one as might be worn at a fancy dress ball—still hung about her neck by the cord, which had slipped down. She wore silk pajamas, and on her feet were Indian moccasins. Her hair had tumbled about her face, but it only added to the pleasing picture she presented.

"No, no," he answered. "Not that—but is there not something in the way of explanation?" He drew the dagger from his pocket and held it up. "Its blade is keen," he said.

"Si,—and thirsty!" she flashed, and as she raised her head quickly he saw the flames in her eyes.

"God!" He felt the perspiration start on his brow. "God!"

She reached out her hand toward the dagger. "It is mine, Dan—mine! You will return it?"

His eyes met hers again, and then he slowly extended his hand.

"Take it," he said. "It's a hellish thing!"

With a soft cry, she snatched the dagger

from his hand and pressed the blade to her lips.

"Hellish?" She pressed the blade to her lips again, and a low laugh sounded in her throat. "Ah, my beauty! My beauty!"

"You meant it for—him?" he asked, looking at her in astonishment.

There was the briefest instant of hesitation, and then she raised her head defiantly.

"Yes—for the heart of Arguelle! God curse him, I have sworn—."

He stopped her with a gesture.

"Then swear to me," he said. "Swear to me that as long as Arguelle remains here you will not molest him!"

She looked at him, and hesitated. He stepped toward her and caught her wrist.

"Swear!" he exclaimed, harshly. "Swear, or I'll take the dagger and denounce you!"

"Not molest him?" she asked, uncertainly. "You mean that I shall not—use this—or seek his life?"

"Yes. You must swear it!"

She raised the dagger and its blade flashed in the dim light.

"I swear by this blade!" she said. He dropped her wrist, and a faint smile showed on

her lips. "You said, 'As long as he remains here.' What of after that?"

He paced across the little cabin once or twice before replying.

"I don't know," he said, at last, stopping before her. "I suppose I ought to protect him in some way. I can't stand for murder!" He shuddered. "I can't hand you over—and you wouldn't respect a promise beyond the time I have set." He saw her smile. "You will keep your oath not to molest him here, and after that—." He paced the room again. "After that he must look out for himself. But I will see that he receives a warning—without names."

Again that strange laugh sounded in her throat, and, turning, she tossed the dagger through the draperies onto the bed he could see beyond. Then she sat down and lighted a cigarette she took from the table.

"Very good! Send him the warning. Poof!" She suddenly turned and leaned toward Bevis. "He has received warnings by the score!"

He walked over to a chair and sat down.

"He has been warned?" he asked, mystified.
"Si, si! It is one of my amusements!" She

laughed and daintily blew a cloud of perfumed smoke toward the ceiling. He sat in silence, and as she lowered her head and looked into his face once more she nodded as though confirming her statement. "Yes, it is great sport to see the fear come into his eyes!"

He half raised from his chair as a sudden remembrance came to him, and then he settled back.

"At the banquet—," he said, but she interrupted.

"Yes. I whispered, 'The cross of blood'!" She smiled and nodded as if in self-approval. "Santa Maria! It was good to see the fear leap into his eyes!"

Dan took out his handkerchief and again wiped the perspiration from his forehead.

"Teresa!" he exclaimed, hoarsely. "Teresa—are you a she-devil come to earth?"

"A devil?" she asked, and the smile disappeared. "I don't know,—maybe so!" She dropped the cigarette and sprang to her feet. "If I am, Sanchez Arguelle made me such!"

He would have spoken, but she held up her hand and came close to him.

"Listen!" she cried in a tense voice. "Sanchez Arguelle was responsible for my father

facing that firing squad! Arguelle swaggered into our home—into my mother's sleeping room,—and when she fired at him and drove him out at the pistol's muzzle he caused us to be thrown into prison. My mother died there, a victim of Sanchez Arguelle, and I spent—a very long time—there. And I might have been there yet had it not been for—the Americano you know as Lawrence Ross! It is too long a story to tell here, but we escaped—”

“Then he, too, was a prisoner?”

A frown of vexation showed itself for a moment.

“It was a slip of my tongue,” she said. “But it is true. He had—but that is another matter. We escaped, and I sent Arguelle a note signed with a cross of blood, telling him that a dagger was thirsty for the blood of his heart!” She paused and looked at Bevis, the flames no longer showing in her eyes, but a note of pathos sounding in her voice. “Tell me, am I a she-devil?”

There was a moment of silence. She went slowly back and sat down again, and he saw her head droop slightly as her arms were outstretched before her on the table. He arose and stood before her.

"No—you are Nemesis!" he said.

She looked up with a laugh.

"*Gracias!* Understanding makes a difference," she said. Then she glanced down at her attire and a bit of red showed in her cheeks. "I forgot that I was—thus." She looked up from under her long lashes. "I could not wear skirts on that mission."

"Where is your husband?"

"He returned to Spokane with Senator Garrison. They drove back in the Senator's car. Where are you going?"

He had turned toward the door.

"To the hotel—to bed," he replied. He faced her once more. "You will keep your oath?" he asked.

"I will. But—" She paused and he felt the warmth of her eyes upon him. "You do not always go to bed so early. Why to-night? *Quien sabe?*" She arose and he noted the lithe movement of her slender body as she came to his side. "The world is asleep. Well—am I so displeasing, Dan?"

Her voice was a caress, and he felt his pulse beating a tattoo in his wrists as all the lawlessness of his blood clamored at his brain. But something else came with its challenge, and

as he harked to this call of the new sentinel that had come on guard he knew that his soul was triumphant.

"Displeasing? No, Teresa, you are intoxicating. But—good night!"

He heard a word of ex postulation as he turned away, but without looking back he closed the door behind him and strode away into the night. The clouds had passed from the sky, and the glory of the moonlight interlaced the pine limbs. He passed Arguelle's cabin and saw that it was dark and quiet; he stopped a moment beside the lake and looked out across the silvered waters toward the dark line marking the eastern shore, but no lights shone at the Crailey place. He went up to his room, and, filling his pipe, smoked until all of the tobacco in the bowl had turned to ashes.

"She said love despised weakness," he mused.

The signs of dawn were showing in the East. He laid aside his pipe and prepared for bed. . . . "Despised weakness," . . . For a long time he lay watching the light stealing back to the world. Then something came awkwardly to his lips, and presently he slept.

CHAPTER XXIII

A MIDNIGHT AFFAIR

THE morning came with a renewed promise of rain, but by noon the clouds lightened, and were gone by evening, though a peculiar, odorous haze was manifest. The breeze died away during the day and the heat became oppressive. About the tavern grounds the guests discussed the unusual conditions, and men versed in mountain and forest lore scanned the horizon with forebodings.

Hilda Jordan played, as usual, in the dining room of the tavern, but, save at those times, Dan Bevis saw nothing of her, though for hours he sat on the veranda or lounged in the shade of the pines near the hotel. Lawrence Ross returned from Spokane, but he and Teresa remained much in seclusion, and only occasionally did Dan meet them. Once he saw them sauntering through the grounds and turn suddenly into a by-path as Arguelle approached, his hands behind his back, his head bowed, as was his habit.

During those few days Dan wrote many letters, and toward the close of the week he received a telegram that brought cheer to his heart and put a merry whistle on his lips that afternoon as he mounted and galloped away into the mountains.

The haze was deepening, and the sun shone as a blood-red ball. The press dispatches said that fires were sweeping Oregon forests and had also broken out in the Cascades in Washington. In Idaho the rangers were apprehensive, small fires having already appeared here and there, and the heedlessness of a government that permitted its possibilities to be stunted by partisan politicians placed these rangers on their own resources almost entirely in their battles with the fires.

However, Dan gave these things scant heed as he rode into the wilderness. It was to be his last gallop, for to-morrow he intended returning to Spokane, and then to Portland to give the best that was in him to the struggle for worthy achievement. But to-day was to-day, and the haze, the crimson sun, the hawk floating on motionless wing above a distant peak, the faint splash of a waterfall now feebly continuing its course, all combined to awaken

a responsive chord in the bosom of this man into whose soul had come a strength in harmony with the rugged grandeur that surrounded him.

He crossed the Witches' Gorge and paused for a moment on the other side to look up to an overhanging cliff where he could see the blackened remains of a campfire. He smiled as he viewed the spot, and then he galloped on. Here was where he had vainly tried to catch a riderless horse, and beneath those cliffs yonder he had found a girl crouching while a storm swept across the mountains.

He rode through the little canyon, sprang from the saddle and tied the horse a short distance back from the road, but as he began the climb to the broad rocks above he was surprised to hear the whinny of another horse, and then he saw the animal, tied to a scrub pine, but there was a flood of warmth through his veins, for he had observed that the horse bore a side-saddle.

He cast a hasty glance upward, and in that moment a woman moved to the edge of the table rock and stood looking down upon him, her figure silhouetted against the drab of the mountains. Something shouted in his heart; he

went hurrying up the trail, and in a few minutes stood beside her, his face glowing, looking into the eyes of Hilda Jordan. She was the first to speak.

"I was not aware that you saw me leave the hotel," she said, significantly.

The glow in his cheeks became a dull red and the smile died out of his eyes.

"It was accidental—I did not dream that you were here." She tapped her skirt with her riding crop. "I want you to believe me," he added, his voice steady and earnest.

"It is of no consequence, anyway," she said, her tone indifferent. "I was riding, and came up here because the view is so pleasing."

He looked about him. From the nook where they stood but little was visible save a tumbled mass of rock and scrub pine across the gulch before them, while the mountains rose precipitously at the rear and on either side. A smile struggled to reach his lips, but failed.

"Yes." He nodded, appreciatively. "The view is magnificent."

He saw her dart a swift glance to his face, but his gravity remained undisturbed.

"I am going now," she said. "I trust I shall not stumble—as I once did."

Her hauteur had vanished for a moment, and a merry smile dimpled her cheeks.

"I wish you would remain a while," he said, as she turned away. "I haven't had an opportunity to speak to you since—."

The smile vanished, and there was nothing of warmth in her manner as she paused and faced toward him again.

"I passed you twice yesterday as you sat in the tavern office, and—"

"Twice yesterday?"

"Yes. You had a strange look on your face. I thought perhaps you were ill—"

"No. Quite strong." (Then she had given him her notice.)

"Or had been gambling again," she finished, disdainfully.

"Gambling again?" He glanced away from her for a moment, perplexed whether to tell her the truth or to remain silent. "No—I haven't been gambling—not since—well, no matter. Yesterday I sat alone in the tavern office and played—solitaire."

A cold smile came to her lips.

"Then you must have lost, Mr.—Bevis."

He caught the contempt her tone conveyed, and his face pa'ed slightly.

"Oh, no," he answered, and he did not look at her. "It was the greatest game of my life—and I won."

For a moment there was silence, and when he again looked at her he saw that she was standing very straight and still, her riding crop in both hands, gazing down into the canyon.

"I knew I had seen your picture," she said, at last, irrelevantly.

"And I was studying how best to tell you that I was Dan Bevis."

"Tell me?" Her tone was filled with surprise. "Why should you contemplate telling—me?"

"Because—" He hesitated and stepped closer to her, looking down into her face. "Because I wanted you to know Dan Bevis—and not Dan Graham. Because I wanted to tell you about—about a convict!"

The color swept into her face, and then slowly receded, leaving her cheeks like marble.

"It is quite superfluous," she said. "I read all of the papers after I reached home from Berlin."

"Of course," he said, dully. "Of course. They told you about the confession of a thief!"

There was a sharp struggle in his bosom as

he stood there, the lines deepening in his face, and then he turned away, his chin sinking toward his chest, and an inarticulate sound in his throat.

A warmth stole into her eyes as she watched him, and, with sudden impulse, she went to him and touched his arm.

"I am very sorry," she said, softly, as he turned to her, and she read a mute suffering in his eyes. "Indeed, I am sorry, Mr. Bevis."

"I know." His voice was husky and his lips were bloodless. "I suppose that it is better as it is. You read all of the papers. All right. I think that there is nothing to be said—except that there was a price, and I paid it!"

She stood irresolute a moment, and then turned toward the trail.

"Good afternoon, Mr. Bevis," she said, stepping from the rock.

"I think that it is farewell," he responded, his voice uneven, and she looked back quickly. "I leave the tavern in the morning—not to gamble, but to take the other path, a way that some one has called rugged."

He heard her say something in reply, but his mind did not grasp her words. The mountains were closing about him as he saw her go down

the trail; something gripped his heart, and with a gasping, half audible sob, he clenched his hands and watched her spring lightly into the saddle and ride away. He fancied that she turned her head just the slightest and cast a backward glance toward where he stood, but she gave no other sign, and in a few moments the beat of her horse's hoofs had died away.

He sank down on a ledge of the rocks, and there he fought anew a battle that already had become old. For a long time he sat there, and then in the late afternoon he arose and stumbled down the rough trail to where his horse stood beneath the trees. He mounted heavily, as a man sodden with drink, and the horse, without touch of the rein, turned toward the hotel and jogged along the road where the shadows were beginning to deepen. He crossed the Gorge, but as his horse paused to drink from the little stream, Dan gave no glance toward that spot where the charred remains of a campfire were visible. Then he rode on, the reins hanging loosely on the horse's neck.

The hotel cabins were just ahead, and presently he raised his head and through the trees he saw the Rosses sitting in front of a tiny cottage. Teresa fluttered her handkerchief to-

ward him, and he raised his hat and rode on. In front of the hotel he dismounted and signaled a stable boy, and then went into the tavern, unheeding the groups of guests idling and gossiping about the verandas, office, and grounds, though many glances followed his stalwart figure.

That evening he sat alone in his room, listening to the voice of a violin as it stole up from below. He lighted his pipe and watched the smoke as it curled upward and then, swaying in spectral forms, floated out of the open window. He dined late. At nine his baggage was packed and in the office, ready for the first car in the morning. At ten he came back into the hotel from a row on the lake, and sat down at the window. At twelve he still sat there, his room dark. At one he arose to prepare for bed, but turned again to the window and stood there looking out over the lake.

Suddenly he stepped closer and peered intently out into the night. The moon would not rise for half an hour, and the haze added to the darkness, but his eyes, which had grown accustomed to the darkness while he had sat there in reverie, had detected the faintest outlines of some object moving silently across the waters.

Surely he was not mistaken! No, there it was—and there was another, close by, creeping slowly toward the shore. Crouching there by the window, his straining eyes soon told him that two boats were coming in toward the tavern pier, though his ear, held close to the screen of the open window, could detect no sound of oars nor sput of engine. Neither was there sail above either boat, so that it was evident that the occupants were rowing with great caution. Closer and closer they came, until the veranda hid them from view, but presently to his listening ears came the faint clink of a chain, and he knew that the boats were being made fast.

He smiled there in the darkness as he turned away from the window, and told himself that should he prowl around in the hallways for a few minutes he would discover some of the gay set slipping cautiously to their rooms.

He was unknotting his tie when he was startled by the report of a pistol somewhere out in the grounds. In an instant a bedlam of shouts arose out there, and other pistols sounded. Snatching up his hat, he ran down the stairway and out of the hotel. Up yonder among the trees where the cabins were he heard

shouts and curses, and occasionally he saw the flash of a pistol as it spoke spitefully.

Astounded and not knowing the cause of the battle being fought out there under the trees, he stood uncertain whom to help or how to help them. The hotel flashed into life almost instantly, lights showing in every room, and a chorus of shrieks and questions pouring out into the night as the guests in various stages of *deshabille* came rushing upon the scene.

Bang!

A report, louder than the rest rang out, and Dan heard a bullet chug into the tavern close to him. Another chorus of shrieks arose from those who had huddled in front of the hotel, and then a heavy voice was heard from somewhere up there in the midst of those sharp flashes:

"Everybody back into the hotel!"

Dan recognized it as the voice of the colonel of cavalry, and he surmised that the heavy reports that sounded immediately afterward were from the colonel's cavalry pistol.

Instantly there was a rush on the part of the guests to gain the shelter of the tavern, and Bevis found himself standing alone in the dark-

ness. He recognized the good sense of the command shouted from the thick of the fight, but there was something fascinating about the spectacle, and he lingered a moment. He saw then that the battle was shifting ground, the shouts and firing coming from deeper in the forest, away from the hotel.

Some one came flying down the steps of the hotel, unheeding the cries of warning shouted by those who were huddling in the office and occasionally venturing to peer out through the doorway or a window.

"Maurice!"

Dan heard a woman cry the name as she sped up the slope toward where the fight was raging, and, with a gasp of horror, he knew that it was Hilda Jordan. With a spring he flung himself in front of her and caught her.

"You mustn't go up there!" he cried.
"Hear!"

There was a sudden fusillade from up on the slope, and bullets whined by overhead, cutting slender branches as they passed. The guests who abode in the cabins evidently preferred trusting to their shelter rather than to attempt to reach the hotel, for none of them appeared,

although now and then could be heard screams of women and the voices of men from the darkened cabins.

"Let me go!" panted Hilda, struggling to free herself. "Let me go! I must—"

"No, no—not up there! You shall not!"

"Oh, you don't understand!" Her voice was close to tears. "I know what it means! They are after him—and he needs me!"

The girl was bareheaded and her clothing sadly awry.

Farther and farther back into the mountains the fight was moving, and it was evident that the combatants had resorted to a guerrilla warfare and were firing as they dodged from tree to tree.

"I don't understand," he replied, still holding her, "but I know that you can do no good up there. It would mean—."

A form came plunging out of the darkness and staggered toward the hotel, and as the light from the windows fell upon him Bevis recognized the blood-stained, pallid features of Lawrence Ross.

"Maurice!"

Hilda Jordan broke from the clutch that had held her, and in a moment her arms were about

Ross, who had paused at the cry, and was swaying unsteadily as he turned toward her.

"Hilda!" he gasped. "Some one betrayed me!"

"Quick!" she cried, taking him by the arm. "Into a boat and you can escape!"

Instantly she turned and the two went running and staggering toward the pier. Amazed, Bevis followed and saw the man tumble weakly into the boat, while the girl struggled to cast off the chain. For a moment there was silence up in the forest, and then a few scattering shots were heard, but it was probable that the fight was near an end.

"I'm wounded, Hilda! I—can't row!" exclaimed Ross, sinking into the boat.

"I'll try to row!" she cried. Then with the chain in her hand she straightened up and saw Bevis by her side. "You?" She tossed the chain into the boat. "Go away!" she added.

"Tell me what it means!" he said hurriedly. "Who—?"

She sprang into the boat and caught up the heavy oars.

"My brother!" she exclaimed. "Go away! They're coming!"

Voices and the footsteps of men running

376 THE RUGGED WAY

were heard under the trees. The oars dipped into the water and the boat swung around. But as it did so Dan Bevis leaped into the skiff.

"Give me the oars!" he commanded.
"Quick!"

CHAPTER XXIV

ON THE LAKE

AS he spoke, Bevis shoved the girl to one side and seized the oars. In a twinkling the boat was shooting out into the lake, driven forward by all of the power of the man's muscles. He heard a smothered cry from Hilda.

"Hush!" he commanded. "Not a sound just yet!"

On shore they could hear the shouts of men and could see forms moving about in the light from the hotel, and then a voice that Dan recognized as the colonel's roared from the pier:

"The lake! He's taken to the lake!"

Desperately Bevis pulled at the oars, and the boat leaped into the darkness and haze enshrouding the water. A few more minutes and they would be safe for the time being, as it was not likely that the others could catch them on the lake unless the pursuers manned a number of boats and deployed much as skirmishers do in battle, but—

Bang!

The report of the heavy cavalry pistol crashed out into the night, and the ball singed by so close that the man at the oars involuntarily ducked his head. It was as he feared. The army officer had knelt and against the sky line thus obtained had caught a glimpse of the vanishing boat.

Again the pistol sent its echoes reverberating through the mountains, and this time the bullet raked the gunwale and sent a tiny shower of splinters over the oarsman. But there was no more outcry from the girl, and Dan, with jaws set hard, caused the foam to dash about the boat's prow as he rowed desperately, with long sweeps of the oars. A low moan came from the lips of the wounded man in the stern, and Bevis saw Hilda kneeling beside the stricken one, supporting him in her arms.

"Northeast!" exclaimed Ross, in a husky voice. "Pull for Eagle Cove! We'll find—horses—and—"

"Listen!" Hilda raised her head and Dan saw her turn and look back toward the shore.

He paused just an instant, with oars raised, and in that breath he heard an unmistakable sput-sput-sput that told its own story of the

pursuit, a method of pursuit that Dan had not reckoned on.

"A launch!" cried the girl, turning toward Bevis.

He made no reply, but bent to the oars once more, heading for Eagle Cove. Across the waters the chasm of the launch's engine now could be plainly heard, first in this quarter and now in that, and in a few moments the plan became evident to the fugitives.

"They're zigzagging in wide angles," Dan panted, straining every ounce of energy into what he was coming to believe to be a hopeless effort at escape. Nothing short of a miracle could prevent those in the launch discovering them in a very short time. The haze had thickened, and this was in their favor, and could they but escape that sputtering pursuer they might hope to gain the cove and land in some nook.

For several minutes not a word was spoken by either of the trio, while nearer and nearer came that devilish exhaust of a gasoline engine as the little craft swept back and forth in search of the prey.

"There it is!"

Hilda was crouching in the stern of the boat,

peering out into the darkness, and as she spoke Dan saw the dim outlines of something skimming across the water from the port quarter. The pursuer's course would take the launch diagonally across the wake of the skiff, but on the next tack discovery must result.

"Here's a gun," said Ross, weakly.

"Lie down!" commanded Bevis, letting the oars trail and throwing himself into the bottom of the boat, but as he did so he hesitatingly reached out and grasped the six-shooter Ross was holding. Hilda shrank down beside him, their hope being that the speeding launch would fail to see the skiff floating silently there in the darkness.

This hope was fulfilled, and they heard the speedy little craft pass about two hundred feet in their rear, though they dared not raise their heads above the gunwale to look. The pursuing boat passed so close that the voices of those on board could plainly be heard, and Bevis, listening intently, could distinguish the voices of two men. If there were a third he was silent. Dan slipped back to the seat and once more took up the oars, the pistol resting on the seat beside him. For a moment he pulled steadily, and then he dropped the oars as he

heard that sputtering change direction and come speeding back toward the skiff.

"They've got us!" exclaimed the wounded man, despairingly.

Something like a sob sounded in the girl's throat, and then she turned to the man at the oars.

"Fight!" she whispered in a tense voice.

Bevis sat silent, his hand clutching the six-shooter. He was of no mind to fire upon men whom he surmised to be officers of the law doing their duty. Neither could he bring himself to consider calmly permitting the capture of Hilda Jordan. For himself and the mysterious man huddled up in the stern of the boat he cared little. That he would have grave trouble in explaining his part in this flight he well knew. Courts and the law are skeptical concerning chivalry and sentiment. That their capture now would result in untold complications and heartaches for the girl, he fully realized. It was this knowledge that caused him to finger the pistol thoughtfully as he sat peering out into the darkness toward where he could hear the fussy launch approaching.

Suddenly, like the sweeping of a dark cloud, it appeared off on the port bow, racing along

on a course that if continued would take it across their own course and ahead of the skiff. For a moment hope rose in his heart, but it was for only an instant, for almost as the hope came he heard a shout from the launch and saw the craft suddenly change its course and bear down upon the skiff. A shot rang out across the water and the bullet whined over head.

Clutching the weapon, Bevis half rose from the seat, and then sat down and lowered the pistol.

"Quit firing," he called, a desperate plan forming itself in his mind. "You've got me!"

He used the word "me" purposely. The sput of the launch's engine stopped and the little boat came skimming along in silence. He heard an exclamation from the girl, but he raised his hand.

"Sh-h-h-h!" he warned.

"Ahoy!" came a hail from the launch. "Do you surrender?"

"Yes," he responded. Then he gripped the shoulder of Hilda Jordan as she struggled to her feet. "Sit down and keep quiet, please!" he whispered. Aloud he called: "My boat is sinking. Have you room for me?"

"Plenty," responded the voice. "We'll be alongside in a moment!"

Dan arose to his feet and watched the launch slipping toward them out of the haze. The pistol he had put into his pocket, and now he stood, feet braced, his muscles taut, as the other craft glided close to the side of the skiff. One man was standing in the little cockpit, and Dan saw the dull outline of a leveled pistol as the pursuer bumped gently against the skiff.

"Never mind the gun," said Bevis, struggling to keep his tone calm. "Help me get this woman on board. A shot—"

As he had hoped, the man turned his head toward where Hilda had half risen, and, quick as a flash, Dan's clenched fist shot to his jaw. The pistol swung wildly and was discharged, but the shot went astray as the man staggered and toppled overboard. Instantly Dan leaped on board the launch, and as the man at the tiller sprang to his feet he found the cold muzzle of a six shooter pressed against his side.

"Hands up!" was the sharp command, and with a muttered oath the man obeyed.

Dan's sudden spring had sent the skiff away from the launch, but Hilda snatched the oars and pulled alongside once more. The man

who had gone overboard rose to the surface and was calling lustily for help.

"In a moment. Just paddle around a while and I'll pick you up," called Bevis. Then he turned to Hilda. "Clamber over here and hold the gun while I tie this fellow," he said.

A few moments later the man was securely bound with a length of the launch's rope, and then Dan turned to the one struggling in the water.

"No gun play!" he warned, throwing a rope to him.

"I dropped my gun!" growled the man, as he was drawn to the prow of the launch. "That was a damned neat trick!"

Bevis helped him clamber aboard, and then poked the six-shooter under his nose in a suggestive way that caused the other's hands to go up instantly.

"Sorry to annoy you so, Colonel," said Dan, with a grim laugh. "I had to do it, you know."

"If I hadn't turned to look at the woman—"

"So hath man spoken since Eden," chaffed Bevis.

The colonel peered intently into his face.

"Why, you're not the man we're after!"

"Oh, that's all right. I'm the man you got,

Any more of your fellows out on the lake taking part in this man-hunt?"

"No. I thought we could manage it in the launch. And I've messed it like a raw recruit."

"Never mind. We're going to leave you here together after I doctor that engine a bit. You can float around peacefully until daylight, and then some one will pick you up."

The officer lay against the prow of the launch, his hands bound, muttering savagely as he saw Bevis go to the engine and begin tampering with it.

"But why not use the launch ourselves?" asked Hilda.

"Too noisy," he replied. "Our friends will have some trouble locating our landing point if we use the rowboat."

She saw the wisdom of the statement, and as he turned to the skiff, which had been lashed to the launch, she stepped aboard it while he held it steady. Then he followed and cast off the lashings.

"Good night, Colonel," he said, taking up the oars. "Maybe some day I can offer suitable explanation and apology."

There was a hoarse growl from the cavalryman, and the man at the oars laughed lightly

as he pulled away into the night. For a few minutes he rowed directly away from Eagle Cove, and then, when he was certain that they no longer could be seen from the launch, he turned and pulled sturdily on the true course.

"That was magnificent!" said Hilda, breaking the silence, and there was a note in her voice that caused the oarsman's pulse to beat faster.

The wounded man said something, but Bevis gave it no heed. Something was singing in his heart, and he was deaf to all but that music. He saw Hilda kneeling beside the man she had called her brother and occasionally dipping her hand into the water and laving his brow. Afar off he heard an occasional shout from the men in the launch, but these soon died away as he rowed steadily toward where the rugged mountains now were looming close at hand on either side of the cove into which he was pulling. On and on he rowed, the bluffs becoming more precipitous, and finally an exclamation from the wounded man caused Dan to pause and turn around in the boat.

"The signal!" said Ross.

"Where? I see nothing!" replied Bevis.

"In a moment it will come again." A bit of silence followed. "There!" he cried.

Some distance ahead on the right shore a light had flashed through the haze. It shone for a period of perhaps ten seconds and then disappeared. This was repeated at intervals, and Dan again took up the oars.

"Row to that light," said Ross. "Our friends are there."

Fifteen minutes later the boat touched on the rocky shore and Ross, placing his fingers to his lips, whistled twice, and then, after a brief pause, repeated the signal. Instantly there came a low whistle from somewhere up among the rocks, and then they saw two forms clambering down toward them.

Ross briefly explained about the fight and the incidents connected with his escape, and then, mastering their consternation somewhat, the men lifted him from the skiff and carried him up the rough slope to a ledge of rock. Then one of them returned to where Dan and Hilda were waiting on the shore. Placing the oars in the bottom of the boat, the man gave the boat a hard push that sent it well out from shore.

"There's something of a current out there,"

he said. "The boat will be in the middle of the lake by morning."

He turned and began the ascent once more, and Dan and Hilda followed. Reaching the spot where the wounded man had been placed, the two strangers lifted him and bore him as gently as possible as they threaded the labyrinth of rocks and scrub pine, the way steadily leading upward. The night was waning, and objects were becoming faintly outlined in the first hint of dawn. But little was said as they trudged onward, Ross speaking a few sentences to the men who were carrying him, and then lapsing into silence.

After half an hour of this laborious progress, they reached a point where a rough roadway wound among the trees and rocks, and near by were horses hitched to a light spring wagon, and also a couple of saddle horses.

The wounded man was placed in the wagon, his head resting in Hilda's lap as she sat in the bed of the vehicle; and with one man on the driver's seat and Dan and the other stranger riding the saddle horses, they moved slowly away in the drab of the new day.

CHAPTER XXV.

A CRIMSON PORTENT

IT was almost a week later when Dan Bevis sat on a bench in front of a small house built of rough lumber and watched a horseman coming up the mountain road winding its tortuous way from the canyon below.

Perched high up among the grim watch towers of the Coeur d'Alenes, the house, which was simply a three-room shack, commanded a view of miles and miles of tumbled masses of mountain and forest, though now they were half-hidden in smoke. A small brook fought its way down the rocky defiles, and here and there he could see its waters, cool looking and silvery through the haze.

The horseman was but little more than a moving speck far down in the canyon, but Bevis had been watching for that speck for some time, and he knew what it was. Over all was silence, not even the call of a bird coming to break the stillness of the afternoon.

The sun hung above the western peaks a duller red than before; the grass on the mountain sides was crisp, and the pine boughs crackled strangely when an occasional gust of wind came to stir them.

A sighing moan came to him through the open door of the shack, and he turned a troubled look in that direction for a moment, and then, slowly shaking his head, he once more gave his attention to that speck creeping up the canyon. Presently he arose and stood earnestly scanning the mountains in all directions as he sniffed the smoke, heavy with the odor of burning pine. Then he sat down again and stared meditatively into space.

"Is he in sight yet?"

At the words he turned and saw Hilda Jordan standing in the doorway. She was bare-headed and wore a simple dress, such as one might choose for housework. In her eyes was shadow, and the glow had disappeared from her cheeks, yet she carried herself in a manner that gave no hint of a faltering spirit.

"Yes," he answered. "He's down in the canyon now." He turned his gaze to the distant horseman. "That means close to half an hour yet, doesn't it?"

"About that." She came out of the house and stood beside him, watching the moving speck. Then she raised her head and studied the horizon. "Isn't the smoke becoming denser?"

He looked up at her quickly, but her face was turned from him.

"It seems so," he replied nonchalantly. There was a moment of pause, and then he asked: "How is he?"

Her gaze came back from the horizon, and she glanced down at the man sitting there so calmly that his attitude suggested apathy.

"Weaker," she answered. "You know that doctor said yesterday—."

She paused, her lips tightening. The man was not looking at her, but he understood.

"Yes, yes," he said, softly. "He said that the time was—near. I know."

"It seems terrible—up here in this wilderness. If only we could have reached a hospital!"

He shook his head.

"It would have been the same," he said. "The wound is mortal."

He heard a dry sob in her throat, but when he looked into her eyes he saw that they were

tearless, and again there came to him the words that Colonel Peter Jordan had spoken concerning her.

"I suppose so—but it seems so terrible—here in these mountains! And yet I am thankful that there will be no—officers—at his bedside when the moment comes!" She walked to and fro under the trees for a moment, her hands clasped. "Yes, I am thankful for that. And we owe it to you!" she added. Then she paused before him, and her eyes rested on his face. "I have never asked you. Why did you do it?"

He looked up quickly, and then his gaze shifted as he saw her regarding him so steadily, and the tan of his cheeks became a deeper red.

"Because," he answered, lamely, searching vainly for something that might carry with it at least a tinge of plausibility. "You mean, why did I jump into that boat?" He looked up again, battling for time, but in her eyes he read something that sent confusion to his tongue. "Because." He got up and walked out under the trees, and stood looking down into the canyon. "He's making good time up that road, don't you think?"

A quiet smile touched her lips as she studied the perturbed face of the man before her. Then she looked down at the approaching horseman.

"Splendid time," she said, a note of unexpected enthusiasm manifesting itself. "I think I had better return now."

"You have never told me when you learned about—him." He nodded toward the house.

"A day or two before the affair at Crailey's. While you were on that hunting trip."

"That night at Crailey's!" A suggestion of a smile came to his own lips. "My first engagement as your boatman." His face became grave again. "Had I known all that the evening would bring forth, possibly I would not have volunteered to row you. I had gone to the mountains to avoid the McLeedys—and then I blundered right into them."

"And yet there was a time when—." She checked the speech, and a bit of red came to her cheeks. "I beg your pardon. I did not mean to be impertinent."

He laughed, and in the laugh there was the ring of mirth.

"I do not misunderstand you," he replied.

"Yes, 'there was a time when'—etc., etc. 'A fool there was and he made his prayer.' You know the rest of it."

She turned toward the doorway.

"I did not mean to become personal," she said, simply.

"Wait," he said. "I want to tell you that after I met her that night at Crailey's I realized beyond question that it had been a mistake."

She looked at him in surprise.

"You met her at Crailey's?" she asked.

"Yes—and she asked me when I was coming home?"

"Oh."

"Yes." He walked back to the bench and sat down. "I told her I had a good position out here as boatman."

Again the wraith of a smile showed on her lips as she hesitated a moment, and then went into the house, without speaking.

He looked down into the canyon, but the horseman no longer was visible. Dan knew just where the turn of the road—a road scarcely more than a trail—had hidden horse and rider from sight. For some minutes he sat with his elbows on his knees, his hands

clasped, and then he arose and again scanned the mountains and horizon uneasily.

From some far-off quarter came a dull boom. At intervals throughout the day he had heard the same distant sound, and the look of anxiety deepened on his face as he glanced toward the house. After a time he returned to the bench and sat there until the horseman appeared around the near-by bluff and came jogging up to the house, foam dripping from the animal's flanks, and the rider grimy with dust and perspiration.

The rider flung himself from the saddle, dropped the bridle reins to the ground, and came toward Bevis with that peculiar rolling walk common to those who spend much of their time in the saddle. His fringed chaps were thickly coated with dust that rose in a stifling cloud as he smote the leather lightly with his quirt.

"It's gettin' to be hell!" he exclaimed, drawing one arm across his brow. "The whole damned world's goin' to burn up!"

"It doesn't look encouraging. Did you get a paper?"

The man drew a newspaper from the bosom of his shirt and tossed it to Dan.

"Tells all about it there," he said. "They hadn't heard nothin' of it down in the settlement."

Dan was hastily unfolding the paper, but he paused and looked up at the other.

"You are certain that doctor will keep a close mouth?"

"Mighty sure!" he replied, with a knowing grin. "He ain't sproutin' no wings, Doc ain't, and he knows I *sabe* him a heap!" He walked away a short distance and stood looking about at the thickening smoke. "It's plain idiotic to stick here!" he muttered, lashing his leg lightly with the quirt. "They're hikin' out o' the settlement," he added, turning to the man on the bench.

"That so?" Dan was eagerly devouring the story he saw boldly headlined on the first page of a Spokane paper a few days old.

"You bet! What they saw last night started them!" Again that dull boom sounded through the mountains. "The forest rangers are explodin' dynamite, tryin' to make it rain! The paper tells about it." He saw that the man on the bench was giving no heed, and he turned to the horse and led it to the shed that served as a stable. "Reckon a man's a plumb

idiot to stay!" he muttered again, looking about him uneasily.

Hilda Jordan came to the door again, and Dan held up the paper.

"Listen," he said, and read a paragraph:

"It is probable that the plan to kidnap Sanchez La Cruz Arguelle would have been successful had it not been for the intelligent work of Jose Carrasco, of the Mexican secret service, who has been working for some months as a servant in the Ross household, the hotbed of a political intrigue that seems to have had to do not only with the revolution now in progress in Mexico, but also with certain phases of our own state politics. This secret service agent is said to have also revealed to the authorities the name of a certain well-known syndicate that is aiding the revolutionists with arms and ammunition."

He lowered the paper a moment and glanced up at the girl.

"You remember that I told you about seeing Jose curled up in that music room. Mexican secret service, eh?"

He turned to the paper again.

"Ross, who escaped in some mysterious manner, is badly wanted in Mexico for the

killing of an official of a rival mining company—”

“He swears that it was self-defense!” she cried. “He says that circumstances indicated his guilt, but that he was attacked and it was the other man’s life or his.”

“He would speak the truth—now,” said Bevis.

“Yes, he knows—and he swears that he is speaking the truth.”

“Ross’s wife, whose father was a Mexican, was captured, and will be held on a charge of conspiracy.”

He handed her the paper.

“You can read it yourself,” he said. “It gives the whole story—of the finding of the colonel and his companion in the launch, floating around on the lake” (he laughed in a sudden burst of merriment) “and of the capture of all the kidnapers except—him. Only one other was wounded in all that shooting.”

From the house there came a weak call and a spasm of coughing. She took the paper and hurried into the house, while he resumed his pacing under the trees, now and then halting to scan the darkening mountains. The other man came back from the shed, and, filling a

wash-pan from a bucket, splashed the tepid water over his face, occasionally casting furtive glances toward the face of the man under the trees, as though searching for some sign. Neither spoke, and finally Bevis went into the house, leaving the mountaineer sitting on the bench, drawing clouds of malodorous smoke from a corncob pipe.

After supper the men attended to the kitchen work, while the girl went back to the bedside of the one on whose pallid brow the death damp was slowly gathering. A strange darkness settled over the world, and the coal-oil lamps in the shack shone gloomily through the murky atmosphere that distressed the lungs of the dying man and increased the frequency of his coughing.

Dan went outside, and found the mountaineer standing at the corner of the house, muttering his rising fears.

"We'd better *vamos* pretty damned quick!" exclaimed the man. "Look at that sky!"

A dull red was showing in the smoke-banked heavens, as though an ocean of blood were permeating a sky of sodden ashes. Occasionally a giant finger seemed to rise slowly to the zenith and then, tracing its crimson portent,

wavered a moment and gradually faded into the malignant mass from which it had appeared. The dull boom, heavier than before, again sounded from far across the mountains.

"The rangers are still at it!" Dan's face was hard set as he spoke, but he kept his tone even in an effort to calm the terror-stricken man at his side. "Maybe they will stop it."

The man turned quickly, and the fear of death was in his voice.

"Stop it? You can't stop hell with dynamite! I wish I had gone with Jake last night!"

"Bah! You're not such a coward, Bill!" Dan faced him suddenly with the lash he knew must prevent the panic if it were to be stopped. "Jake deserted us like a sneaking coward!"

For a moment the man stood there, looking at Bevis, and Dan knew the battle that was being fought in his mind. Then he scanned the sky once more, and Dan heard him mutter something under his breath.

"Maybe so," he replied, at last. "Damn a coward, mister—and damn an idiot, too!"

He turned and slouched away, and Dan, looking after him for a moment, sighed heavily and went back into the house. Hilda was sitting beside her brother, and he saw her look

about in the thickening smoke, and then turn her eyes inquiringly to him. But he evaded the glance and sat down by the bed, studying the face of the dying man.

"It's getting worse—out there?"

He did not look at her, but nodded his head. The man on the bed must have heard her low-spoken words, for he opened his eyes and looked steadily at Bevis.

"I know—what it is," he said, weakly and haltingly. "The forest fires! Jake ran away. I heard you say it." He paused, and his eyes closed in weakness. A fit of coughing seized him, and he lay exhausted, the pallor of death on his face. The girl sprang to her feet and leaned over him, but his eyes fluttered and opened again. "You had better—go—too—before it is too—late!" he whispered, faintly. "It's a question of—hours—for me! I know it! You can't—do any more! By the time—the fire reaches—me—I'll be gone!" He looked into Bevis's eyes, and the white hand lying on the sheet made a slight gesture toward Hilda. "Take her—and go!"

"No, no!" cried the girl. "I'll not leave you, Maurice! I'll not leave you!" Her words ended in a choking sob.

"The fire's far away," said Dan. "Maybe the rangers can stop it."

"You'd better—." Another spasm of coughing came, and then the stricken man lay still once more, but the fingers that caught his wrist felt the fluttering of his pulse.

An hour later, Hilda, sitting alone by the bedside, was startled by a pistol shot, and then another. Suppressing a scream, she went to the door and saw Dan Bevis run toward the corner of the house.

"Halt, damn you!" he shouted, hoarsely, and she saw flame spurt from his pistol again.

"Dan!" she cried, and he paused. "What is it?"

He hesitated a moment, and then slowly came back to her, a six-shooter clutched in his hand.

"Nothing much—after all!" he answered. "I thought I saw somebody sneaking around, and I fired." He laughed, but she was aware of the strained note in his voice. "I'm getting nervous, I guess."

She stood silent for a moment, looking into his face. Then she turned her eyes to the horizon and the heavens, and he heard her gasp.

"They'll never stop it!" she exclaimed, and turned to him once more. "He was right. You had better go at once!"

He dropped the revolver on the bench and stepped toward her.

"Go?" She saw his head thrown back, proudly. "Bill says that's hell coming! Maybe it is, but I'm going to stay with him" (he waved his hand toward the room where the dying man lay) "and with you!"

"I can't leave him, but—"

"Of course, you can't! And neither will I! Maybe when it is all over we can get away. If not—." He stooped and picked up the revolver and put it in the holster in his bosom. "If not—you'll not meet it alone!"

A great light flamed in her eyes, but, without a word, she turned and went back to her vigil.

CHAPTER XXVI

"NOTHING COUNTS"

AT an early hour in the morning, Bevis, sitting by the bedside of Maurice Jordan, saw an indefinable change come over the pallid face. Bending quickly above him, he placed his fingers on the wrist, and then, laying the hand back on the sheet, he turned to where the girl lay stretched on a pallet on the floor, asleep from exhaustion.

"Come," he said, gently, as she aroused at his touch. "The moment is here!"

She sprang to the bedside and sank to her knees, pressing the cold hand to her cheek. The man's eyes slowly opened, and as they rested on her his lips moved, but no sound came. A smile came to the ashy lips, the eyelids drooped, and he lay very still.

Bevis stood beside her for a moment, and then tiptoed from the room, leaving her alone with her grief.

After a while she came to the door and found him sitting on the bench. Since midnight the wind had freshened, and now a gale was sweeping across the mountains, bringing with it ashes and charred twigs, while now and then a blackened branch, still warm, fell near at hand. As she was framed in the uncertain light of the doorway he could read the alarm that flashed in her face.

"There is no time for grief. What must be done must be done at once," she said. "Where is Bill?"

He had risen, and was standing where the lamplight fell upon his face, and she saw that the lines were deepening across his forehead.

"Deserted!" he said. "He—"

"Deserted?" she echoed.

"Yes. Last night. I saw him and fired at him—but it was too late. He got away—with the horse."

"Was that the cause of those shots?"

"I didn't care for him," he answered. "I wanted the horse—for you!"

The wind that moaned through the forests was hot, and their lips grew dry. Dan went in and performed such simple offices as he could for the dead, and then while Hilda sat

beside the silent form, he worked in the smoke-clouded dawn to prepare a grave beneath the pines close by. There was no time to do more than to prepare a shallow sepulcher, and into this the blanket-wrapped body was laid; there were a few sobbing words of prayer from the girl's lips, to which the man, standing with folded arms and bowed head, murmured an Amen, and then Hilda turned away while, bare-headed and bare-armed, with the perspiration oozing from every pore of his body, the man worked to refill the grave and to roll heavy stones upon it as a protection.

Then he hurried to the house. Hilda Jordan met him at the door.

"I am ready," she said, simply.

He put a small tin cup in his pocket and turned away, but suddenly ran back into the house and snatched a blanket from a bed. Folding this, he threw it across his arm and hurried out to where the girl was kneeling beside the mound. Then they trudged away down the mountain road, side by side, while the smoke eddied and curled about them in the grasp of the rising gale, and the ashes and charred bits of sticks sifted into their eyes or stung their flushed faces.

"Why the blanket?" she asked, noting it for the first time.

"For protection," he responded. "It's not much—but it's something."

The sun was not visible, though Dan's watch told him that it was past eight o'clock. The peaks could no longer be seen, and down in the canyons and gulches the gloom as of a stormy twilight prevailed. For an hour they plodded onward, speaking but few words, each conscious that the last ounce of strength would be demanded of them before they were safe from the flames they knew were closing about them, if, indeed, they ever escaped.

The faint tinkle of a waterfall came to Dan's ears as they trudged along the road leading down into the valley, and, turning aside from the trail, he soon found a stream of water tumbling down over the rocks and splashing into a shallow pool close beside the trail. Evidently it had formerly been a torrent, roaring and hurling spray from the rocks as it dashed upon them with the strength of a goodly volume, but now it was scarcely larger than the wrist of the man who knelt by the pool and dipped up water to slake the thirst that had begun to force its demands upon this man.

and this woman who had refused to heed it. After drinking, they splashed the water over their faces, and again they resumed their flight.

"If we can reach the settlement perhaps we can obtain a horse," he said.

"How far is it from there to the railroad?"

"Ten miles," he answered.

Again there was a long silence. Not since midnight had they heard that dull boom that told of the battle being waged by the forest rangers, and Dan found himself wishing that it might sound again, not that he had faith in the efficacy of such explosions to produce rain, and not that he had the most remote hope of help from those intrepid men who, somewhere out yonder in the rugged fastnesses, were waging a fight that was destined to go down in history as one of the most heroic in the annals of the Northwest, but because in some inexplicable way he felt that the sounds which would tell that they were still there and fighting would cheer and stouten his heart for the desperate work he knew lay before him.

He knew that the jagged rocks must be cruelly wounding the feet of the girl who walked so bravely beside him without a word

of complaint. Occasionally he glanced at her, and the whiteness of her face, and the taut-drawn lips, almost wrung exclamations of pity from his own parching lips. But he walked on in silence, forcing her to a pace that would have been inhuman had it not been necessary.

"Look!" she gasped.

He saw her pointing upward, and as he raised his head a pine branch hurtled above them, and through the smoke he could see that it was glowing red in spots.

"It's coming fast!" he panted. "The mountains will be a furnace soon!"

They plunged on, the gale shrieking above them and the heat growing in intensity as they hurried through the canyon. They crossed a depression where he remembered having seen a brook the morning they had driven up the mountain to the shack on the summit, but now the rocks were dry and warm, and a lizard sprawled its hideous shape upon one of the boulders. But Bevis knew that the settlement lay in the little valley only a quarter of a mile ahead. Involuntarily they paused in the dry bed of the brook, and then they went on, though the girl staggered slightly now and then.

Coming out of the canyon, they saw the scat-

tered houses of the little mining settlement, but their hearts sank when they were unable to discover any signs of life, and when they reached the place they found that their fears had been realized. The people had fled for their lives, taking their horses with them, of course. But there was water to be had here, and they eased their parching throats and again splashed the water about their heads and faces.

There was no time to be lost, but Dan broke open a door and took a small bucket from a kitchen. This he filled with water to carry with them.

Close by was a little creek, but it offered no hope of safety against the time when the flames would come sweeping down into the valley. And so they went on, following the stage road that led to the railway. The way led upward again, and he heard the girl's breath coming in labored gasps, but the summit was reached at last, and she sank down, exhausted, beside the road. In a moment he was kneeling beside her, bathing her flushed face with the precious water, and speaking to her incoherently as the words struggled up from the agony of his soul.

The smoke was becoming more and more

dyed with red, and he knew that the flames were racing across the mountains with terrific speed, for nothing but dried prairie grass burns faster than pine sapped by a summer drought.

"Go on!" she gasped. "I can't! Maybe you—"

"Not without you!" he exclaimed. "Maybe I could escape without you—but I don't want to! Not without you, Hilda!"

She looked up into his face, and then she struggled to her feet once more, and they pressed on. The wind was carrying smoldering branches now, and presently one fell beside them and began to blaze. Springing toward it, the man stamped it furiously and then ran to the girl, who was tottering forward, unheeding his half-insane stamping of the firebrand.

He saw that her shoes were but little more than shreds of leather. He caught her by the arm, and they stumbled down a little slope. . . . He did not know how long it was before he looked back and saw flames leaping along a distant ridge. Hilda said something, but her tongue was thick with the heat and smoke, and he could not understand. . . .

The heat was almost unbearable, and the burning branches were too numerous now to be stamped out. Suddenly flames shot high into the air on a ridge ahead of them, and the wind roared like a blast from inferno. He flung up one arm to ward off a blazing branch hurtling by, and the girl stumbled and sank prostrate again.

There was a tinfoil of water left in the bucket, and he held this to her swollen lips. She drank awkwardly, and he poured a bit over her face, holding her shoulders and head on his knee as he knelt by her side. His own eyes were bloodshot, his face blackened, and his stiffened tongue but poorly framed the pleadings he tried to utter, begging her to make one more effort.

"The river!" he exclaimed, thickly. "The river—just yonder—I think! Perhaps—"

"No—no!" she answered, gasping as the black, hot smoke eddied about them. "I've done—my—best!" She raised her trembling hand and slowly swept it in a circle. "Everywhere—the fire!"

Again he pleaded incoherently, and she raised herself, only to stagger and sink to her knees again.

"I can't—stand!" she said, hoarsely as he stumbled to catch her. "It's—death—soon!"

"No—no!" he screamed. "You sha'n't die! You—sha'n't!" He dropped the bucket, to which he had been clinging, and snatched her up in his arms. "You sha'n't!" he repeated, and then he paused, and looked into her eyes. "I'll die—with you—anyway!" he gasped.

He picked her up again and staggered on through the smoke, the roar of flames in his ears. Ahead, the fire was leaping down the slope, and he turned to one side and plunged on and on. . . . He touched her cheek with his swollen lips. . . . Exhausted, he found himself lying on the ground, with the girl trying to raise his head. The mountains and trees danced wildly about him in a delirium of red. Then his brain cleared and he raised himself to his knees.

"Hilda," he said, peering into her face. "We've got to—die—here together—here with only—God—." Her lips moved, but he could not understand her words. "I love you!" He crept closer and gathered her in his arms as he knelt there. "I love—you—Hilda!"

"Don't say—it!" she whispered. "I have no right—."

"Yes, you have!" He drew her close to him and looked down into her face. "I know about Wilson! But that—doesn't count—now! Nothing counts—now—but truth—and love—and God!"

Weakly she drew herself from his arms.

"I have no right!" she repeated, thickly. "I—promised him—and my father—"

"But it's—love and death—and God—now!" he insisted. "I want to tell you—about—that bank! I didn't do it—Hilda. With God at —arm's reach—I swear!"

"Your confession!" she breathed.

"To save—my father's name! I went into —the pit—for his love!" A sound came to his ears, and he paused and looked about in the horror of smoke and flames that seemed to be welding mountains and sky into a fiery mass. "He speculated—and lost—and it killed him! I took his place—in the bank, and found—the shortage—his shortage! I tried to hide it until—I could make—it good! But—the inspector came—and I paid the price—for him—for my dead father! And I'm glad I did!"

His arms went about her again, and as he drew her face close to his, he heard her hoarse whisper.

"It was—magnificent!"

With a quick movement he stooped and pressed his swollen lips to hers and babbled the love that was in his heart. Then he raised his head again and listened. She fought herself free from his arms, and he struggled to his feet, and stood there, peering into the smoke and fire. Surely that was more than the shriek of the wind! Yes—

"A bugle!" he screamed in an unnatural voice. "A bugle!"

He pulled her to her feet, and she clung to his shoulders for support.

"Bugle?" she whispered through her parched lips. "Bugle?"

"Yes—soldiers—soldiers!"

There was no mistaking it. Again it came, that sound, the ringing notes of an army bugle, somewhere off to the left. Hope surged in his heart, and he felt his muscles responding once more to the goad of his will.

"Soldiers!" he mumbled, half sobbingly, as he caught the girl up in his arms again and went staggering away through the hell that was closing about them. He found that the blanket was still about his shoulders, and halting a moment, he drew this about the head

of the girl, and, burying his own face in its folds, he plunged through a fringe of flame that darted across his pathway. . . . And over there—somewhere—a bugle was singing!

At the summit of the little slope he stumbled and went to his knees again, but instantly he was on his feet and tottering forward.

"The river!" he wheezed. "Blessed God, the river!"

The flames were sweeping along the crest with the roar of many express trains, and the shrieking gale was flinging burning limbs about them in showers. One fell upon the blanket covering the girl, but he snatched the blazing thing and flung it from him. The water! Would he never reach it? Through his swollen, inflamed eyelids, he could see it,—seemingly now close, now far away—dancing like a will-o'-the-wisp! . . . He felt the water closing about him, and knew that he had plunged from the bank with Hilda in his arms.

He was bruised and bleeding from the stones in the shallow water, and he saw the girl rising to her feet, but he clasped her in his arms again and went splashing out into the deep water, falling, rising, but always plunging toward the saving depths.

"Are we safe?" she asked, clinging to his arm, with the water about her shoulders.

"I don't know. It's a chance," he answered, his tongue obeying his will as he drank from the river.

The flames were sweeping down the slope, and with the blanket soaked in water they huddled beneath it, their lips barely above the river's surface.

For hours they remained in the river, the iron will and strength of Dan Bevis alone sustaining them while the fire swept along the shore they had left and finally went roaring on, farther and farther back into the heart of the mountains. On the opposite side of the river the timber had already been burned, so that the flames were unable to find food close to that shore. Here, swimming and wading, Dan carried Hilda Jordan, and as they crawled, exhausted and fainting, up on the blackened shore, they heard the bugle singing once more, and saw a squad of soldiers, blackened and begrimed with smoke and ashes, running toward them.

The earth rose to meet the sky, and a man and a woman lay unconscious side by side.

CHAPTER XXVII

"INTO THE NEW LIFE"

THE afternoon of an early November day was drawing to a close as a man and a woman rode slowly across the rolling hills. It was such a day as autumn sometimes gives the world before winter spreads its blight.

The air was clear and soft, with just the faintest tang of approaching winter clinging to it; the leaves of the cottonwoods were strewn about in a profusion of yellow, while the leaves of the oaks had been kissed into brilliant hues by the early frosts, and presented a riot of color against the sober background of pines and firs.

For some minutes neither had spoken, but both had been busy with their own thoughts as the horses walked on at a pace of their own choosing.

"Our last ride," said the man, after a time, glancing toward the one at his side.

"Yes," she answered, her voice low.

He saw that she was not looking at him, but that her face was turned toward the hills. He caught the coppery glint of her hair as the sunlight touched it, and his eyes lingered there and on the soft contour of her cheek, where the tint of strength and health was showing after many days of absence.

A crane arose from a near-by creek and lazily winged its way southward; a jack-rabbit broke from its covert and scurried away with great leaps.

"It was good of you to ride with me." His voice was a bit uneven. "I was afraid you would stay in town instead of returning to the ranch last night."

"Oh, no," she answered, turning to him for an instant. "They have been so good to us since the soldiers carried us there! I wanted to thank them once more." She turned away. "And then—I had promised to come."

"Good to us?" He nodded. "Some of the ranch houses were morgues, but this one became—." He checked the speech, and she did not ask that it be finished. "Your trunks are at the station?"

"Yes. All I need to do is to make my few

changes at the hotel—and then take the train at eight."

She touched her horse with the whip, and it broke into a long, swinging gallop, with the other horse keeping pace with it. On the left the Coeur d'Alenes reared their fire-scarred slopes, but here in the foothills there was no sign of the tragedy that had swept the mountains some weeks before, claiming hundreds of victims. The stubble of harvested wheat spoke only of peace, while here and there in the valley or on the hillsides they could see the plowmen busily preparing for the next season. Finally he drew rein and sprang from the saddle.

"Just once more," he said, a plea in his tone as he waved his hand to a pine tree on the crest of the slope. "We have plenty of time. You remember when we first stood beneath that tree?"

"Of course—the day you looked down at the railway in the valley, and said" (there was a slight pause) "you wished there were no railways."

She sat looking at him for a moment as he held out his hand, and then, with a laugh, she slipped her foot from the stirrup, and he lifted

her to the ground. She clambered up the slope while he was tying the horses, and when he reached her side she was standing there on the summit, looking down into the valley, where a railway wound its way. He stood silent for a moment, and then sat down, his back to the valley.

"You're coming back—some time?" he asked.

Had he been looking he would have seen her tightly clutching her riding whip in both hands as she turned slowly and sank down on the boulder he had declared to be her throne, on those other occasions of their visits to this spot.

"Some day," she said. "I want to go back up there" (she waved her hands toward the Coeur d'Alenes) "up there to that wilderness where we left him."

"I was astonished when I learned—." He paused, a bit uncertainly.

"That he was my brother?" She flicked the grass with her riding whip. "But few knew of Maurice. He left home many years ago after—an escapade that was serious. He broke my mother's heart. Then we moved from Virginia. Afterward we received news of his death. Up there in the mountains he

told me that he had had that word sent. I saw his face that night at the banquet, and fainted."

"The banquet!" A smile came to his lips. "What a row Arguelle's coming created!" He leaned back on one elbow and looked up into her face. "It was tragic for you, but it gave you to me, Hilda, for an hour in the fire!"

A wave of red swept into her cheeks, and then it slowly faded.

"He is still in Washington, is he not?" she asked, refusing to meet his eyes.

"I think so." He stared moodily at the ground, and then taking up a handful of pebbles he threw them aimlessly. "The Spokane papers say that Garrison concedes his defeat by Judge Layton," he added, abstractedly.

"And you, Dan?" she asked, softly, her eyes coming to his face, after another silence. "What will you do?"

"Be a man, for one thing!" he replied quickly. "When you go it won't seem the same—somehow, you've made the world different, and it seems that I can't just grasp what it will be—after to-day—"

"Dan!"

He saw her standing now, very white, and in her eyes was a look he could not fathom.

"Forgive me!" he begged. "I know I promised not to say it again. But—yonder is the station, Hilda," he pointed down into the valley, "and this is the last!"

His face had become as white as her own, and he arose and stood before her, battling for the mastery of himself.

"You said, once, that you were going to Portland."

"I am," he answered. "I wrote the Governor asking if he could give me a letter. He telegraphed me while I was at the lake that he and Reagan were sending letters. I got them when I went back—after the fire." He walked away a short distance and then came back, his hands clasped behind his back. "They'll help me to get another foothold."

"And you'll not—make any mistakes, Dan?"

He saw her looking up at him anxiously, and his laugh echoed the pride of his soul.

"Mistakes? No. I fought that out after I left Crailey's!" He smiled. "That was my game of solitaire."

She sat down on the boulder again, and he stood before her and told of his plans, and she listened, with a baffling light in her eyes. . . . The sun was hanging low above the hills, and

the shadows were lengthening. He looked down into the valley and saw that the twilight was weaving its gloom about the village. She arose and went down the slope toward where the horses were tied, and he followed her, without speaking. He untied the horses, and as he held out his hand she placed her foot lightly in his palm and sprang into the saddle. He stood there, silent, in the deepening dusk.

"You had better mount," she said.

"I think I want to say good-by here," he answered, his voice husky. "You can ride on alone."

For a few breaths she made no reply. She saw his eyes on her face; leaning forward, she fumbled with the reins, and her hand was trembling.

"You were to return the horse to the ranch," she said.

"The hotel people will take him to the livery stable for you. I'll get him to-morrow." He stepped closer to her, leaving the reins of his own mount trailing on the ground. "Let me stay here, Hilda!" he said. "The village is just beyond—let me stay here! And when—." There was something in her face that caused him to falter for an instant. Then he added:

"And when your train pulls out of the valley, Hilda, I'll be up there—beneath the tree—watching it—taking you away!"

She made some reply, but he did not hear. She had leaned forward and given him her hand, and he was holding it in both of his, standing close beside her, mumbling over and over:

"I'll be waiting, Hilda—I'll be waiting there!"

And then he found himself standing there alone, watching her ride away into the deepening twilight, a sob in her throat in that last instant. He stood with arms hanging loosely at his sides, his head sinking to his chest as the hoofbeats of her horse died away, and then he slowly turned and walked unsteadily back to where his horse was browsing with trailing reins.

With that ache in his heart, he galloped madly across the hills, unheedingly. The dusk deepened and a star twinkled feebly in the east. She was gone—returning to the East to keep a promise she held to be inviolable, a promise to the dead and to the living. Up there in the fire she was his; now she was going to the marriage altar with another.

After the soldiers, who had been fighting the fires, had sent them down to the ranch house, there had been many days before she was fully recovered from the awful experience, and there had been days when he, too, lay exhausted and suffering, but then had come days when both had elected to remain here in this simple ranch house while certain complications were being adjusted. These things had been adjusted; Jose, the Mexican secret service agent, had absolved Bevis from complicity in the plot against Arguelle, and the day had come for Hilda Jordan to start East. While she lay ill, the ranchman and his wife had driven across to Hayden Lake and brought the girl's effects from the hotel, and she had decided to take the train at the little station a few miles from the ranch.

Those had been days when she had exacted from him a promise not to repeat the declarations he had made with the breath of the flames searing their faces. And he had promised, delighting in the present companionship and refusing to consider the hour that had now come.

Other stars were peeping from the evening sky, and he turned and rode back to where he had bidden her good-by. He went up the

slope and threw himself down on the ground beneath the tree.

Suddenly he raised his head and listened. From far off came the call of a whistle, and he knew that the "Overland Limited" was approaching. Something was hurting in his throat, and as he clenched his hands in the agony of his spirit he heard the shrill, yelping wail of coyotes from the surrounding hills. . . . He was standing now, watching with feverish eyes the long train as it left the little station and came puffing up the valley.

"O God!" he murmured, sinking to his knees and stretching out his arms toward the train. "O God!" The nails were cutting into the palms of his hands. "Give her happiness—happiness! Make her—very happy!"

It was passing now. He could see the light from the windows! The wail of the coyotes arose again. Then he heard a sound behind him, and as he arose slowly to his feet and looked around he swayed slightly and his hands were half raised as he saw Hilda Jordan coming up the slope toward him.

"Dan!" she cried, with a half sob. "Dan! I couldn't go! I couldn't go!"

There was a wordless moment when he held

her in his arms and felt her lips against his as she clung to him. And then they turned as the sound of a whistle came down the valley, and far away they saw a speck of light flashing along. It was the "Overland Limited" disappearing into the East.

"Love is greatest of all, Dan," she said, softly, while he whispered incoherent things to her.

Then they walked down the slope, hand in hand, to where their horses were standing.

"Into the new life, Hilda!" he said.

She placed her arms about his shoulders, and he saw the glory of her eyes, lustrous with that to which she had yielded herself.

"Into the new life!" she answered, smiling.

THE END

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THE story is of a man whose vigorous personality enables him to do justice to himself and to secure justice for himself under most trying conditions. A mysterious wanderer, he wins the better element of a somewhat rough community by his eloquence as the preacher in a neglected parish, meanwhile working in the fields for his support. Lawlessness, heroism, and noble self-sacrifice have their part in the development of an intensely dramatic plot, the interest of which is sustained until the mystery is cleared away, and a satisfactory conclusion is reached with exceeding joy to those who deserve it.

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By JAMES CREELMAN, Author of "On the Great Highway." Six illustrations by Rose Cecil O'Neill. Brown cloth, illustrated cover, rough edges. Size, $5\frac{1}{4} \times 7\frac{3}{4}$. Price, \$1.50.

This is Mr. Creelman's great novel, although as a brilliant writer he is well known throughout the world. His war descriptions and diplomatic interviews display exceptional powers. His story introduces an Englishman of noble family, who comes to America for the purpose of making his way, not by a marriage for money, but by his own ability. Eagle blood—the American spirit—conquers lion blood—the blood of old England. He is Americanized through the strong influence of a Yankee girl who is depicted as the ideal type of American woman. The work is one of great psychological intensity, full of action, tender in its love motif, quick and varied in action.

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