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*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK AN OREGON GIRL: A TALE OF AMERICAN LIFE IN THE NEW WEST ***



Virginia "cautiously pushed aside the portiere, then entered the room."

An Oregon Girl

Alfred Ernest Rice

1914

SCENES: Portland, Oregon, and environs.

TIME: Within the last fifteen years.

PERSONAE:

John Thorpe: Director, Investment Co.
Constance: His wife
Virginia: His sister, An Oregon Girl
Dorothy: His five-year-old daughter
Hazel Brooke: His niece
Smith: His Irish coachman
Philip Rutley: Ex-president, Investment Co.
Jack Shore: Ex-secretary Investment Co.
James Harris: Retired merchant
Mrs. Harris: His wife
Sam Harris: His nephew, and hero
Joe Corway: Secretly engaged to Virginia, but forsakes her for Hazel
Mr. Williams: Attorney at Law
Dr. Mackay: The Harris family physician
Simms: A detective
Wells: Harris' coachman
Gene, Spike: Boys
Ship's officers, and others

INTRODUCTORY

In the year 19— a legend adorned with gold and bearing the significant words, "The Securities Investment Association, Mr. Philip Rutley, President, Mr. Jack Shore, Secretary-Treasurer," appeared on the glass panel of a certain office door on Third street, in the city of Portland, Oregon.

These two men were middle-aged bachelors, and moved in select society. Through their social standing they had persuaded two wealthy men of the city to lend their names as stockholders and directors in the company; but the Investment Company's business failed to meet the expenses which the social living of the two promoters felt were demanded of them, and the inevitable happened, viz., a resort to dishonest manipulations of sundry bond transactions by which the two wealthy directors had to "make good."

It resulted, on discovery, in the immediate closing of the office and prosecution of the offenders was ordered; but because of their social standing and promise to leave the city at once, criminal proceedings were suspended.

Three years elapsed. In the medium-sized room of a plainly furnished flat, in a genteel suburb of the "Bay City," a man sat brooding over the ill luck which had pursued him for the past few years. This man, as he sat with elbows on his knees and chin resting on his hands, was looking through the open window and out over the bay, out over that far off rugged ridge of purple and gray and white that projected up in the clear ethereal blue, northward, gazing with eyes fixed into nothingness, for he was deeply absorbed in a review of his past career and of the sunny time he had enjoyed while living in Portland.

His straw colored hair, verging to a sandy hue, framed a smooth shaven face of marked strength and intelligence. His eyes of a bluish gray, were bright when shielded by spectacles, worn more from fashion than necessity, glittered with keenness and energy.

Jack Shore rarely allowed his naturally aggressive and buoyant spirits to remain for long depressed by a gloomy retrospect; but the purpose of his prolonged stare at vacancy on this occasion was attributable to the necessity of another visit to Mr. Loan-on-personal-property.

His reverie was ended by the abrupt entry of his companion, Philip Rutley, who drawled out in quiet tones: "Jack—Aw—I beg pardon. I see you are engaged."

Jack looked at his visitor, noted his dignified bearing and unwonted coolness as he removed his gloves; noted the smile of cunning pleasure that played about his mouth and, from experience, concluded that some deep scheme had been thought out and a line of action forming.

"Well, Phil," he replied, "what game is on now?"

"A well dressed lady and gentleman, strangers," began Phil, "halted me on Market Street and addressed me as 'My Lord Beauchamp.' They warmly shook my hand and gushingly insisted that I promise them the pleasure of presenting our very dear friends,—Mr. and Mrs. Orthodox—to Lord Beauchamp at the Palace tonight."

"Of course, you consented!" quietly laughed Jack.

"Ahem! Unfortunately I had instructed my secretary to 'clear' the yacht for the north this

evening, and as all arrangements were complete, must beg, with profound regrets" (and he bent low with courtly grace) "to decline the pleasure. Should you be visiting England next summer, my cordial invitation to rest a month or so at—a—Beauchamp, Isle of Wight."

"And you—"

"Beckoned a passing cab; bade them 'adieu' and drove on a few blocks."

"I congratulate you on your iron-clad nerve," laughingly remarked Jack. "And you withdrew with your new title,—a—me Lord Beauchamp, sitting jauntily, like a chip on your shoulder,—undisturbed."

"How could I do otherwise? You know I am opposed to shocks, but seriously, Jack, the incident has suggested a way out of our embarrassment."

"How?"

"By carrying the thing on and be a lord in fact, with you as my secretary."

Jack laughed, low and yet with a heartiness that was rollicking in its abandon, and then added by way of parenthesis:

"I shall announce 'Your Grace's' intention to visit Portland."

"Precisely! You are well aware of the great esteem in which Me Lord Beauchamp is likely to be held there, particularly by our friends, The Thorpes, Harrises, et al."

"A proper entry will create quite a stir among the fashionable set," remarked Jack reflectively.

"And give us opportunities to 'work' them some."

"Are you agreed?"

"Yes," responded Jack. "It will be a damn good joke, anyway," and again he laughed, for as the horn of plenty flitted before his vision his spirits soared once more, above the measly depths of want and anxiety. "As an American," he continued, "you have as much right to play the role of Lord, General or Judge as any other name by which your friends may be pleased to 'dub' you."

CHAPTER I.

Within the perimeter of a great semi-circle window in a large luxuriously furnished room of a fashionable residence not far from 6666 Hill, in the city of Portland, two women sat reading.

It was an autumn afternoon, just after a light shower, a little warm but rarely matched for the unusual splendor of its soft, dreamy atmosphere—calm and clear as infinite space.

The incessant roar of the city's commerce floated up and through the screened windows in muffled echoes, but the readers being accustomed to the sound, were undisturbed.

At length one of the readers, a girl who had not seen more than twenty summers, closed the book she had just finished reading and broke the silence with the remark: "Most interesting! A great story!"

"Yes," exclaimed her companion, looking up, "particularly in its treatment of the bogus Count. Indeed, it is realistic enough to be true."

"So it appears!" replied the maid, "but just imagine such a thing to happen—as for instance a tramp to impersonate successfully Lord Beauchamp!"

"My Lord is a gentleman 'to the manor born,' and impossible of counterfeit."

"I understand the reception by Mrs. Harris is to be given in his honor?"

"Yes," replied Mrs. Thorpe, and smiling she went on: "He has promised to take tea with us today."

"And do you know," said Hazel in an awed tone, "he's a Knight of the Order of the Garter? It is reported that he is to be married to a beautiful San Francisco girl."

"I have heard it mentioned, but I hardly think his Lordship seeks a wife in America, because he is very wealthy."

"But, Constance,—love is sometimes eccentric!"

"Quite true, when its underlying motive is mercenary. You remember Philip Rutley."

"Constance!" exclaimed the girl, with a stamp of her foot. "You know the wise proverb, 'Let sleeping dogs lie.'"

It was then that Philip Rutley, impersonating Lord Beauchamp, was ushered in, accompanied by Mr. Joseph Corway.

"Ah! My Lord," greeted Constance arising from her seat. "This delightful corner has lured us to forget to welcome you at the portal of our home. Allow me the pleasure of introducing Miss Hazel Brooke, and you, Mr. Corway,—well you know we are always 'at home' to you."

As Rutley deliberately placed a monocle to his eye, he said, "A corner with such an entrancing vista," carelessly waving his hand toward the open, "is a pardonable lure to dreamy forgetfulness."

Then he stared at the girl and, as he supposed, conveyed the desired impression, muttered: "Charming!" and that word, uttered with quiet and apparently involuntary emphasis, at once made Hazel Brooke his friend, and, to add to the favorable impression which Rutley perceived he had created, he bowed low and said suavely: "Miss Brooke will permit me to say, I rejoice in her acquaintance."

"Your Lordship may find me a deceiver."

"I shall not believe so winsome a flower can be unreal." And he again fixed the monocle to his eye and stared at her in pleased assurance.

"Art simulates many charming things of nature," remarked Mrs. Thorpe, and she slyly glanced at Hazel.

The girl almost laughed; but her gentle breeding came to the rescue, and she bore Rutley's stare with admirable nonchalance, until Mr. Corway, feeling a little amused at Lord Beauchamp's monopoly of the girl's attention answered Mrs. Thorpe: "Yet nature cannot be excelled in anything that is beautiful in art."

For which he received from the girl a smile that thrilled him with a conviction that no lord, no croesus, nor commoner, could dethrone him from her heart.

The ordeal in which Hazel found herself under Rutley's disconcerting stare, was terminated by Mrs. Thorpe.

"Your Lordship must be familiar with many beautiful things of nature. By the way, I want you to visit our conservatory. We have some choice exotics there from the Orinoco."

Rutley removed his monocle, and turned to Mrs. Thorpe. "My secretary obtained some rare specimens in Bogota, nevertheless I shall consider it a pleasure to visit your collection, for indeed it must be superb, judging from such natural beauty already in evidence."

"You are coming, too," said Mrs. Thorpe, turning to Hazel and Mr. Corway.

"Thanks!—that is,—we shall join you presently," stammered Mr. Corway, looking at Hazel with a half smile.

Mrs. Thorpe looked amused as she said: "Oh, very well," and then, halting on the threshold, turned again and added: "Hazel, dear, don't forget the conservatory."

Rutley and Mrs. Thorpe had scarcely gone when Hazel exclaimed: "Well! I'm waiting for you."

"Of course," Corway replied haltingly; then, after a pause, "Hazel!"

"Miss Brooke—please," she corrected, with a tantalizing smile.

"Oh—confound it. Hazel"—he began again.

"Are you coming?" she interrupted, moving away, but with an aggravating smile playing fitfully about her face.

Whereupon he bowed low, with mock formality, approached her offering his arm. "I crave the honor."

The girl placed her hand in his arm with a promptness that flushed his face, but immediately blanched it with the teasing remark: "It's to be only as far as the conservatory, you know."

"And from there around the grounds," he replied tenderly.

"Oh!" she exclaimed. "You insist on going the rounds with me? Oh, very well!" and they laughed together.

Shortly after they had gone, the portieres of an entrance to the left were cautiously parted and a young girl peeped in, then entered the room. She was the embodiment of youth, happiness and expectancy.

She was dressed in the whitest of white muslin. A narrow band of magenta-colored silk encircled her slender waist, the long, loose ends of the bow flowing almost to her feet, while her mass of

raven black hair drawn back from her fair white forehead, and coiled at the back of her shapely head lent a queenly grace to a divinely moulded form.

The suppleness of her carriage, intensified by the simplicity of her soft, faultless dress, was a poem of delight which needed no skill of adornment to beautify; no touch of art to dignify.

Across the room she stole, as lightly as though her feet were winged, and listened at the door.

"I am sure I heard his voice!" Then with a smile of joy, she tripped to the open window overlooking the piazza, and looked out, murmuring—"how I long to see him. My Joe! Handsome, manly Joe, I adore you. And these, his flowers—his favorite flower, our beautiful rose," drawing from her hair two red roses, which she kissed again and again.

"I hurried home because I could not remain away from you, and now—oh, the joy of a glad surprise—I hear footsteps!" and she listened expectantly, then turned to behold Mrs. Harris, an elderly lady of portly bearing and elegantly dressed, who was at that moment entering from the piazza.

"Why, Virginia, I am delighted. You look the happiest girl in the land," taking her hand and kissing her. "Oregon peach-bloom on your cheeks, too; I'll wager you are just in from the farm, you hayseed."

"Yes, and I've had the most delightful time," replied the girl softly. "Romped over the fields of sweet-smelling clover, and through the orchards, and helped in the hay-field, too," she laughed joyously.

"Hands up! I mean the palms," said Mrs. Harris, in mock severity. "It must have been a silver rake you handled in the hay-field," she resumed, after scrutinizing the palms of Virginia's outstretched hands, "for there isn't even a callous."

"It is harvest time," replied the girl, laughing, "and the harvest moon is death to callouses, you know."

"We've missed you, dear, at Seaside," said Mrs. Harris. "But still you look just as charming as though you had been there the entire season."

"You rude flatterer. The seaside is nice, but I love our dear old farm home in the valley, best. Yet"—Virginia continued, demurely, with downcast eyes, "it seemed a little dull this year, and, you see, I have a reason for coming in before the harvest is over."

As the girl stood with downcast eyes, her countenance appeared exquisitely regular, dignified and very beautiful.

"Ah, dear!" exclaimed Mrs. Harris, with admiration. "An affair of the heart—a man in it, eh, dear?—I know him. He will be here in a few moments—lucky fellow!"

"Will he?—are you sure?"

"Dear me! How joyful you are!" said Mrs. Harris, staring kindly at her.

"Oh, if you had been away from your sweetheart for so long a time as I have been from mine"—

"Ha! ha! ha! ha!" laughed Mrs. Harris. "Why, Virginia dear, only two weeks! Really you carry me back to my own girlish days, just after I met James—I remember well—my heart nearly fluttered out of its place."

"My heart fluttered out of its place weeks and weeks ago, and will not flutter back, unless"—

"Unless what, dear?"

"Unless he despises it," she said, with a sigh.

"Well, the dear boy is pining to see you. That I know, so there is a pair of you."

"Is he getting thin?" questioned Virginia, eagerly.

"Not exactly, but—listen!" And Mrs. Harris held up a warning finger as she looked out over the piazza.

"He is coming!"

"Oh, dear!" exclaimed Virginia, in an ecstasy of joy. "I shall hide and surprise him. Oh! his favorites have wilted. I will pluck fresh ones in the conservatory, and hasten back—don't tell!" and with that she flew out of the room through the portieres.

As Mrs. Harris stood alone in a contemplative mood, she said aloud to herself: "Oh, dear! These hearts of ours! How foolish they make us at times—I have often thought our Sam was a 'lady killer,' now I am sure of it."

Just then Sam Harris stepped across the piazza and entered the room.

Sam was a young man just having passed his twenty-fourth birthday. His strong chin was indicative of fidelity to his friends, and his mass of reddish, curly hair lent expression to a jovial expression of countenance.

Sam was particularly joyous in anticipation of meeting Virginia Thorpe. "Have you seen her, Auntie?" and he straightway opened a door leading to the library and looked in; then he closed it.

Mrs. Harris quietly watched him and became disturbed with misgivings, lest his zeal in his present frame of mind would impair the dignity she considered so essential to his enterprise as well as to the position the Harrises held in society.

It was therefore necessary to impress on him the importance of "proper" form, which she immediately undertook, and addressed him with calm stateliness.

"Now, Sam, I warn you to be careful how you greet Virginia. Remember, though but twenty-two, she is an accomplished young lady."

"Don't I know it!" he replied, with a satisfied smile.

"Don't touch the portieres, Sam! Sam!" she exclaimed in alarm, but her command was unheeded, and Sam spread them wide apart, much to his aunt's consternation.

No one being behind the portiere, she appeared amazed, but quickly recovering her composure, continued:

"Dear me! How very strange! Oh, yes, I forgot. She has gone to the conservatory." Then she muttered in low tones:

"Now I have said it, and she told me not to tell."

"Well, I'm off to the conservatory, too—eh, Auntie! Don't follow me," and he strode toward the piazza.

"Sam! Sam! Remain here. I have something to say to you."

"Well, be quick, Auntie. You know I am crazy to see her. Eh! I guess so."

"'Crazy!' Well, remember the least display of rudeness or unseemly eagerness will be promptly met with a frown of displeasure."

"Auntie, she's finer than the petals of a rose."

"But, like a rose, too, she is just as sensitive," cautioned Mrs. Harris, as she majestically moved over to the mantel—and then she abruptly turned, at a fresh thought. "Sam, for the sake of our social prestige—for my own hope that your affection shall be reciprocated"—

"Love, Auntie!" interrupted Sam. "That's the word. It's short and to the point. Eh?"

Quite undisturbed by the interruption, she continued: "And for the supreme pleasure it would afford me to see the house of Harris united to the house of Thorpe, I desire that you give me an example of the manner you intend to approach Virginia."

The idea appeared so grotesque to Sam that he gave a slight inclination of his head, a habit he had somehow acquired in the "Desert," and exclaimed in startled emphasis: "Ea-Ah! How?"

"By addressing me as you would her."

With a smile broadening his face and a roguish twinkle of the eye, he exclaimed: "Can't be done, Auntie! You ain't the real thing. Can't work up any excitement over a counterfeit."

"Sam! It grieves me to say that I fear for your success. Her rejection of your suit would mean humiliation for us. Therefore I insist that you remember what I have told you and address Virginia as I shall instruct you."

Sam was too shrewd to oppose his aunt's determination—a previous experience having taught him the desirability of quietly agreeing with her notions, so with a smile of acquiescence he answered:

"All right, Auntie! Fire away."

Drawing herself up in a stately pose, she passed to the end of the room, turned, and again faced him. "Now, Sam, I request you to impress upon your memory every word I utter, so that you may salute your lady-love in a similar manner. Do you comprehend?"

"I think so, Auntie," and thereupon thrust his hands in his trouser pockets.

"Sam, remove your hands from your pockets. It is neither good form nor in accordance with

polite usage, for a gentleman to bury his hands in his trouser pockets, when in the presence of a lady."

"All right, Auntie!" and he grinned broadly as he removed the offending hands.

With a most affable smile, yet maintaining a dignified carriage, she advanced down the room, halted midway, and gracefully bowed, then continuing, extended her hand, which Sam took. She again bowed and carried his hand to her lips; then taking both his hands in hers and looking straight into his eyes, smiled and said:

"I am delighted to have the honor of congratulating Miss Thorpe on her safe return." She then released his hands and proceeded across the room.

"Is that all?" came from Sam, in a burst of dismay.

Mrs. Harris turned sharply and emphatically exclaimed: "Yes, Sam. In your conversation with Virginia beware of gushing familiarity. Nothing to my mind is more likely to jeopardize your suit than absurd vulgarity." So saying, she again turned and proceeded toward the door.

"Auntie, I can do better than that. Why, you left out the best part." And his eyes twinkled mischievously, while a laugh on his face was suppressed with difficulty.

She turned quickly, and in much surprise exclaimed: "Dear me! I didn't know it. What is it?"

"I will show you." With that Sam passed to the end of the room and turned. "Now, Auntie, I'll try to think that you are my sweetheart, Virginia."

Smiling, he proceeded down the room, halted midway, bowed and then continued toward his aunt, took her right hand, clasped it between his two, and looked into her eyes. He then raised her hand to his left shoulder and while he held it there, pressed her waist with his right arm—"I am delighted to welcome you home again." Pressing her closer to him—"Believe me—I—I can never forget—that I—I,"—then he became absent-minded and, to save himself, suddenly blurted out—"I love you—there!" And he kissed her lips and embraced her vigorously. Then, with a whirl, he released her, laughing as he did so, and exclaimed: "Ah ha! I guess so, eh, Auntie?"

Mrs. Harris recovered herself, in the middle of the room, and gasped out: "Oh, dear! What a shock. I am sure I am twisted all out of shape."

Sam stood with a satisfied grin on his face, and thrust his hands in his trouser pockets, and watched her. "That was love! The real thing—eh, Auntie!"

"Dear me," she exclaimed, between her labored breathing. "I was never treated to anything so rude in my life. Your arm, Sam. Assist me to the piazza. I must have more air."

"Auntie, you wait till I try it on Virginia. Oh, my! Eh!"

Meanwhile a little scene was being enacted in the conservatory, destined to produce the gravest consequences to others than those directly concerned. After examining the rare plants, Mrs. Thorpe and My Lord had passed out to an attractive bed of massed chrysanthemums, fringed with geraniums, then in full flower—leaving Hazel and Corway alone.

Propitious fate again granted him the opportunity he so ardently desired.

They were looking at some violet buds, concealed by giant Canna leaves and a profusion of palms, when there passed through the girl's frame one of those mysterious thrills—which man designates magnetic, but which Providence has really made inscrutable to the human understanding.

"I wonder," she faintly exclaimed, and slowly turning her head—their lips met.

Though stolen, it was delicately done—one of those exquisite little gems of cause and effect, which naturally happen to true sweethearts.

They stood looking at each other in surprised silence.

"I did not grant you that privilege," at length broke from Hazel, in a faltering manner—her cheeks flushing and her soft blue eyes dancing.

"I could not resist the temptation," and taking her two hands in his, added: "Hazel, I love you! Will you be mine?"

"Why, Mr. Corway!" replied the maid, disengaging herself.

She spoke and acted quietly, while a bewitching smile shone in her eyes.

At that moment, unnoticed by them, a shadow suddenly darkened the doorway. It did not tarry long, and swiftly disappeared.

Unseen herself, Virginia had entered the conservatory, her footfalls as light as her joyous young

heart, the happiest of the happy.

Hearing that voice, she had paused, then gently parted some leaves and—the smile died on her lips.

She stood for a moment like one transfixed, listening in an amazed wonder, then, undiscovered, she silently withdrew into deeper foliage.

“Why draw away from me, Hazel?” went on Corway.

“Because! You may not be sincere!” replied the girl, shyly.

“Not sincere? Hazel, from the first moment that I beheld you I felt that I stood in the presence of my fate.”

“But, Mr. Corway,”—she returned, with that provoking smile still lurking about the corners of her pretty mouth—“don’t you love any other?”

“No,” he softly replied.

“Are you sure?”

“Sure!”

“Not even Virginia?”

“I respect her, but do not love her—Oh, Hazel, do not keep me in suspense. Tell me you requite my love—promise to be mine, to cherish and protect forever”—and again he took her unresisting hand in his and drew her near him.

“Well, this is so serious that—don’t you think that I should have a little time to consider it?”

Her face had taken on a half-serious look, but the little cloud was quickly chased away by a happy smile.

Nor did it escape the eager eye of her sweet-heart. He saw that her hesitation was not to be taken seriously, and as a test he said in soft, tremulous accents: “Then the girl I would die for does not love me, does not care for me—”

Turning half around to him, in a pleading and half-reproachful way, she tenderly emphasized: “Oh, I do love you, Joe, with all my heart.” And throwing wide her arms, fell on his breast, with the joy of a maiden’s first love flushing her face.

And then their lips met—deep in the sweet intoxication of love’s first confiding trust.

“Thou perfect flower! To express the fullness of my heart would be impossible,” he joyfully exclaimed.

And thus, while pressing her hand on his shoulder and feeling a ring on her finger, he gently removed it.

“Oh! that’s Virginia’s ring; that is, I got it from her,” she protested feebly, her head pillowed on his breast.

“It shall be a ‘Mizpah’ of trust, dearest, and shall come back to you with an engagement ring,” he softly replied, as he slipped it into his vest pocket.

In one of Virginia’s happy girlish moments, she had picked up the ring from Constance’s dressing table, and admiring its beauty, smilingly slipped it upon her own finger, with the owner’s permission to wear it awhile, but with the injunction to “be careful not to lose it, dear, for I value it very highly. It was John’s gift to me before we were married”—and then later, on that same day, with Hazel’s arm clasping her waist and her own arm clasping Hazel’s, the two happy girls strolling through the grounds—to have Hazel remove it in the same admiring fashion and slip it on her own finger, Virginia yielding to her young cousin, just as Constance, in perfect trust, yielded to her. And then in the morning, all forgetful of the ring, she left for the Valley farm.

And now, on her sudden return, she beheld that same ring taken by Corway as a size for Hazel’s engagement ring, and heard him declare “it shall be a Mizpah of trust, dearest.”

A sigh unconsciously escaped her; a sigh freighted with the blood of fibers as love tore itself away from her heart.

Hazel heard it, and in alarm said to Corway: “What is that? Did you hear it? So like a moan?”

He looked around. “You were mistaken, dearest; there is none here but you and me.”

“Oh, yes, I heard it”—and with a timidity in which a slight sense of fear was discernible, said: “Let us go out in the open.”

But he held her firm, loath to release the beautiful being clasped close to his heart.

"This is for truest love"—and he kissed her again, as she looked up through eyes of unswerving fidelity. "This for never-faltering constancy"—and again their lips met—"And this, a sacred pledge of life's devotion, God helping me, forever more"—and their lips met yet once again.

Then they passed out to join Mrs. Thorpe and Rutley.

Virginia had witnessed the pledge that meant the blighting of her life's fond hopes, and she had heard his passionate declaration.

With straining eyes and a very white face, she watched them depart, till there welled up and gathered thick-falling tears that mercifully shut him out from her sight. She sat down on a bench.

She thought of the honeyed words and eager attention with which he wooed her, and made captive her young heart's deepest, most ardent passion, and now his perfidy was laid bare.

With an effort she became more composed, and exclaimed aloud: "So, the almighty dollar is the object of Joseph Corway's devotion." And as her indignation increased, she sprang from her seat, and with quivering voice, said: "Oh, God! and I did confide in him so fondly, trusted him so guilelessly, and now our engagement is ended and all is over between us—forever." And notwithstanding her effort to suppress them, sob after sob burst forth.

Strong-minded and of powerful emotions, Virginia Thorpe was a queenly woman, a woman whose friendship was prized by her acquaintances, and whose wealth of intellect was a charm to a strikingly graceful figure; and the love that was in her nature once awakened, grew and intensified day by day till at last a steadfast blaze of trust and confidence glorified her personality.

Such she bore for Corway—until she discovered he loved Hazel. Oh, what a change then came over her, as her heart yielded up its dearest desire in tears of scalding bitterness.

"Oh, Joe! tenderly I loved you, passionately I adored you, and you led me to believe that you loved none but me, yet all the time your heart had gone out to another, and this is no doubt the real reason you wanted our engagement to be kept a secret, and my love, which no woman had greater, was but a plaything!" she thought to herself.

She looked at the roses she had unconsciously held in her hand, with infinite tenderness, then crushed them, and broke them.

"Farewell, sweet emblems of truth and love." And throwing the flowers, which she had so fondly kissed but a few moments before, among dead leaves on the ground, said in a voice that trembled with the pathos of the death of love's young dream:

"Thus perish all my young life's happy hopes. Gone! Gone among the things that are dead." Sobs of bitterest disappointment again burst from her lips.

Suddenly she brushed her hand across her eyes—it was then that Virginia's transformation took place.

From the guileless, joyful, winsome maid, emerged a woman—beautiful, but alas, subtle, alert and avenging. With a stamp of her foot she said, with sudden determination:

"Away with these tears. What have I to do with human feelings now? I will conquer this weakness, though in the process my heart be changed to stone.

"Now, Corway, beware of me, for you shall know that the love you have toyed with has changed to hate, an unappeasable, undying hate, and you shall learn, too, that a woman's revenge will pause at nothing that will help to gratify it." Then she slipped out of the conservatory, with the intention to get to her room, if possible, unobserved, but was halted by hearing Constance say: "Virginia, dear! I wish to make you acquainted with Lord Beauchamp."

There was no chance for evasion or escape. Virginia had not noticed them as she passed, for they were hidden by the angle of the conservatory, and she was quite close to them when addressed by Constance.

Quick of wit, the girl realized that some excuse was necessary to account for the appearance of her tear-stained face. Halting in her flight, she drew her handkerchief and commenced to rub her eyes, and speaking with faltering lips, for the wound in her heart was yet raw and tender, she said: "Your Lordship finds me at an awkward moment—something has gotten into my eye, and causes me acute pain, but please believe, I esteem it an honor to number Your Grace among my acquaintances."

"Dear heart!" exclaimed Constance, at once proceeding to examine the girl's eye. "Let me try to relieve you!"

As Virginia felt the touch of loving fingers on her eyelids, she felt powerless to restrain her emotion, and great tears welled up. Her weary head fell forward upon her friend's shoulder, and

she sobbed: "Oh, Constance, dear, the world to me is one black charnel house."

The gentle nature of Constance leaped out in sympathy which, for the moment, smothered her surprise. She threw her arms around Virginia and kissed her on the temple.

That Virginia suffered was enough, she felt instinctively that such an outburst of grief was from a far deeper source than that produced by the mote in her eye.

Virginia always had confided in Constance. That desire to communicate, so natural in youth, was strong in the girl. In Hazel, she had been met with a sort of pity, till she ceased to touch upon girlish secrets with her altogether, but in Constance she found one who would not chide even folly, and so these two were, by the nature of things, very close friends.

"There, dear heart," soothingly said Constance, "rest awhile, for I know the pain must be severe."

Rutley was an involuntary witness to this bit of feminine sympathy, and, no doubt, recalled it to memory in the events that were to come. His immediate concern, however, expressed itself in a cold, matter-of-fact manner. "Oftentimes," he said, "the protection supplied by nature to the human eye seems insufficient, and consequent suffering must be endured. I trust Miss Thorpe will soon find relief."

"Oh! I am sure the pain is only temporary," half rebelliously replied Virginia, drawing away from Constance, and rapidly recovering her self-possession, as she brushed the tears from her eyes. "There," she said, "it is passing away now, and I can see quite distinctly already. Why, how like your lordship resembles a past acquaintance," she remarked, as she eyed him critically.

"Indeed, if the acquaintance you mention was not consigned to the gallows, it might be no sin to resemble him," responded Rutley, stroking his Vandyke beard.

"Oh! his offense was quite serious, poor fellow! Some shady bond transaction with an investment association, in which he, and one Jack Shore, were the officers. I have heard that the directors agreed not to prosecute them on condition that they left the city and never returned."

"In England, were it not for the color of my hair, I should have been taken often for the Marquis of Revelstoke," and to the girl's dismay, he stiffened up and directed on her a most austere and frigid look, then deliberately fixed the monocle to his eye, and remarked, as his frame faintly quivered, as with a slight chill—"It's deuced draughty, don't-che-know!"

He then removed the monocle, and suddenly resumed his habitually suave manner. Picking up a binocle, which lay on the table, he turned to look toward Mt. Hood—"Sublime!" he exclaimed.

"It is very beautiful and white today," remarked Constance.

"Indeed," assured Rutley, "it seems close enough to touch with my outstretched hand."

"My lord's arm would need to be thirty miles long," smiled Mrs. Thorpe, who was then ascending the steps.

"A long reach," responded Rutley, lowering the glass.

"The illusion is due to our clear atmosphere," replied Mrs. Thorpe.

"I presume so," agreed Rutley.

"At times the air is phenomenally clear. One day this past Summer I fancied I could make out the 'Mazamas,' who were then ascending the mountain," quietly remarked Virginia.

"Aw, indeed, very likely; quite so," continued Rutley, handing the glass to Constance, and then turning to Virginia with an alluring smile, added: "And then, the ladies—are so bewitchingly entertaining."

"Presumably your idea of American girls has suggested the art of flattery."

"No, no!" he replied. "It's no flattery, I assure you."

Just then Hazel and Mr. Corway approached the group standing on the piazza.

Virginia saw them, and with an affected sigh, she turned to John Thorpe, who was standing at the head of the piazza steps, and who also was looking at the approaching couple, and taking him aside, said in a low voice: "John, has it occurred to you that Corway is a handsome man?"

"He certainly is good looking and well proportioned, too," replied Thorpe, with a quizzical stare at his sister, and his stare developed a smile, as he added, pleasantly: "But why?—are you, too, becoming enamored of this handsome man?"

With downcast eyes, and sudden flushed cheeks, that betrayed the shame she felt at the part she had elected to assume, her answer was given in a low, serious voice: "I have reason to warn you as my cousin's guardian, that his intentions are not of the best."

Thorpe felt a strange gripping sensation creep into his heart, and then he, too, looked serious, but his seriousness quickly passed, as he thoughtfully muttered: "No, no, 'tis impossible!" and then, in a more unperturbed manner, said slowly: "His reputation for honor and rectitude is above reproach."

Though his muttering was scarcely audible, Virginia heard him. "Are you sure?" she replied, in a voice equally subdued, and with a flash of anger in her meaning glance. "You may find that he will bear watching. And you also may find that his attention to Hazel is an insult to our family honor."

The possibility of Hazel, his guileless orphan niece, of whom he was so proud, could be the victim of a base deception, had never entered his mind, and so it happened that the first shadow that had darkened the serenity of his trust, was, strangely enough, projected by his sister.

As his eyes again fell upon Hazel's sweet, sensible face, then lifted to the manly, honest countenance of her companion, he at once banished the fear from his mind, and impatiently exclaimed: "Oh, this is nonsense!" Then he turned on his heel, hesitated, and again turned, and looked furtively at Corway, muttering: "Yet I cannot banish the thought. I wonder what causes Virginia—no, I have never suspected him of vice." Then he slowly disappeared through the vestibule.

As Corway and Hazel approached the steps, Virginia seemed to stiffen and slightly shudder. She felt like ice, and disdained the slightest recognition which he made to her. She turned away with a look of ineffable contempt, and moved slowly over to Rutley and Constance.

Corway instinctively felt that she had been a witness to his scene with Hazel, but he affected unconcern, and allowed the incident to pass without comment.

During the brief time this significant episode was being enacted, Hazel's attention was attracted to Sam and Dorothy approaching on the drive, so she was unaware of the change that had come over her cousin.

"You must come in, Sam, 'cause I like you, and you haven't been to see us for a long time—Oh, mamma, we have had such fine fun, Sam and I"—and there appeared from around the corner of the piazza Dorothy Thorpe pulling Sam Harris along by the sleeve.

"Well, Sam," said Mrs. Thorpe, overlooking him from the piazza, "we thought you had forgotten us."

"No, indeed," replied Sam, and as he discovered Virginia, he added under his breath: "At least not while that fair party is around."

"Of course, you have acted as Mrs. Harris' escort?"

"My aunt is on the lawn," he answered, and then as he ascended the steps, greeted Virginia. "Miss Thorpe will permit me to congratulate her upon her safe return."

"I have had quite a journey," replied Virginia coldly.

"Well, you have enjoyed it?" ventured Sam, and then he noted a swift questioning glance of anger.

In his dilemma, he felt an awkwardness creeping over him and grinned broadly, and then stupidly faltered: "That is, I guess so!"

"You guess wide of the mark."

"Aha," replied Sam, with a roguish twinkle of the eye, "my eyes do not deceive me, eh?"

"Flattery is embarrassing to me. I beg of you to avoid it." And she thereupon, with a look of weariness, turned and disappeared through the vestibule.

"I guess so! I guess so!" exclaimed Sam, abashed, and a flush of mortification overspread his face.

"Do you like auntie, Sam?" abruptly questioned the child.

She had softly stolen to his side, unperceived, and her voice sounded so close as to startle him.

"Ea, ah!—well, I should think so," he unconsciously muttered.

"Mercy!" exclaimed Mrs. Thorpe, who could ill repress a smile—"Dorothy, dear! I think the robins are calling for you out in the sunshine."

"Come, little one," said Sam, glad of an opportunity to escape from an awkward position. "And while you are listening to the feathered songsters, I'll keep a sharp lookout for the fair party you call auntie. Come," and he took the child's hand and the two ran down the steps. Darting around the corner, they almost collided with John Thorpe and Mrs. Harris, who were approaching to join

the company on the piazza.

"Ha—democratic Hazel in the role of 'noblesse oblige,' is something new—congratulations, my lord, on the conquest!" said Mrs. Harris.

"I am proud of the acquaintance of so fair a democrat," and confronting Mrs. Harris, he continued: "England's nobility lays homage at the feet of your fair democrats, for they are the golden links in the chain of conquest."

"And it is my hope that soon one of the golden links will bear the distinguished title, Lady Beauchamp," replied Mrs. Harris, while her eyes flashed a merry twinkle in the direction of Hazel.

"Of course," remarked Mr. Corway, who, flushed with jealousy resented the allusion. "His lordship doubtless since his arrival in the country has been overwhelmed with offerings of the youth and beauty of America."

"It seems to me that you are talking in mysteries," remarked Hazel.

Mr. Corway moved toward her. "I appeal to the shrine of beauteous Hebe for vindication."

"Ha! ha! ha! ha!" laughed the girl. "Wouldn't it be a surprise if the appeal should be negative?"

"But the shrine of Hebe is not often invincible," rejoined Constance. "You must remember there is hope and there is perseverance—but this is irrelevant," and, turning to Mrs. Harris, continued: "Have you left Mr. Harris at Rosemont?"

"Oh, no! James is out in the flower garden, discussing rose culture with Virginia."

"Then I propose that we join them," said Mrs. Thorpe.

"And I suggest a stroll through the lovely lawn, under the glory of Autumn foliage," added Rutley, who immediately turned and offered Constance his arm, and the two passed down the steps.

Hazel and Corway were following Rutley, when John Thorpe attracted the girl's attention by quietly exclaiming: "Hazel!"

She at once turned to Corway: "I shall be with you directly—uncle has something to say to me."

As Mr. Corway and Mrs. Harris passed down the steps, John Thorpe and Hazel entered the house.

"You have something to say to me, Uncle?"

"Yes, Hazel," and as they passed into the drawing room he bit his lip in an endeavor to appear unperturbed.

With a girl's intuition, she scented something unpleasant, and with a timid and startled look, she faltered: "What—is it Uncle?"

"Hazel," he began, and his eyes rested on his beautiful niece—very beautiful just then, her eyes bright and clear and "peach-bloom" of health, the famed Oregon coloring so becoming to the sex, and as he looked at her he became suddenly conscious of a struggle raging in his breast. A struggle between doubt and confidence—but he stumbled on slowly—"I think—you show more—concern for—a—the company of Mr. Corway than prudence—I mean—Hazel!"

At that moment Virginia pushed aside the portiere and silently stepped into the room.

John Thorpe paused, for he saw the girl's face whiten, and her eyes look into his with an expression of wonderment, and then his heart seemed to leap to his throat, and choke him with a sense of shame at his implication.

He put his arm gently about her, looked into the depths of her blue eyes, and said, kindly: "As you love the memory of your father and your mother, Hazel, beware that you do not make too free in the society of Corway. Let your conduct be hedged about with propriety"—

"Uncle!" she interrupted, drawing away from him like a startled fawn hit from ambush.

Virginia saw her opportunity to sever the friendship between her brother and Corway.

Before her transformation she would have been shocked beyond measure at so wicked a falsehood, as she then decided to launch. Impelled by a consuming desire for revenge, no blush of shame checked her mad course, and "no still small voice" warned her of her sin.

She said: "John, if our family honor is to be protected from scandal, you will prevent your niece from having further to do with Mr. Corway."

Both John and Hazel turned toward her. A deep silence ensued.

Implicit trust and confidence, the confidence begotten in perfect domestic peace and contentment, had followed John Thorpe—but now, for the first time, he found a tinge of shame and indignation had crept into his heart—and he could not banish it.

At last he gravely broke the silence—“Have you no answer to this, Hazel?”

The girl’s eyes flashed resentment, but she refrained from angry expression, for to her uncle she always showed the greatest deference, yet her voice trembled a little as she said, with girlish dignity: “I decline to reply to such an absurdity.”

“Hazel!” warned Virginia, “you are dangerously near ruin when in the company of that man, for his reputation is anything but clean.”

Again a painful silence followed, Hazel, appearing incapable of clearly understanding just what it was all about, stood dumb with astonishment, while John’s varied emotions were seen plainly through the thin veneer of tranquility he tried to maintain.

John Thorpe was jealous of the honor of his house. The mere thought of its possible violation bruised and lacerated him.

Proud of his high position in society; proud of his high rectitude; proud of his father’s untarnished life; proud of the fact that not the faintest shadow of scandal could ever attach to his house or name—the hinted criminations of his orphan niece, maintained in his home as one of the family, beat upon him with much the same effect as the horrifying wings of a bat upon the face of a frightened child.

Virginia saw and felt that the crisis of her ruse was near. Again a flush of daring sprang into her eyes, ominous of deeper sin, but John unconsciously spared her from further commitment. Doubt was master at last, for he chose to lean toward Virginia.

“Hazel!” he exclaimed, his white, grave face betraying a keen sense of his shame. “Your rash fondness for that man is a sacrifice of affection, and I shall forbid him visiting our house.”

“A wise precaution,” commented Virginia.

At last Hazel’s indignation broke through all restraint.

“I am astonished at your implications,” she retorted, her voice becoming pathetic with the sense of her wounded honor. “My ‘rash fondness’! Uncle!” and she drew her slight form up erect, her eyes flashing defiance: “If to believe in Mr. Corway’s preferment is a sacrifice of affection, then that sacrifice is to me an exalted honor, for I have consented to become his wife!”

“Hazel!” gasped John Thorpe, amazed and dismayed at her declaration.

“I have suspected such a calamity would happen—but even now it is not too late to prevent it!” exclaimed Virginia, sharply.

“Why, Virginia,” reproached Hazel, with a stamp of her foot. “You insult me!” and she turned away to conceal the tears that arose.

During a short, impressive silence, Mrs. Harris abruptly entered the room, followed by Corway and Sam. “Dear me!” she exclaimed, as she smilingly surveyed the trio, “James has often gone into raptures over the domestic cooing of the Thorpes, but I was quite unaware that it made them careless of the wishes of their guests.

“Thorpe, your arm”—and she swept down the room and seized his arm. “Hazel, I have brought you an escort,” and with a smile at Virginia, “I don’t think that Sam is far away. You cannot refuse to come now.”

Hazel proudly accepted Corway’s arm. Then they turned to leave the room. As they neared the door, Virginia exclaimed, with low but startling irony: “Il. cavalier is careful to make it appear he is delighted with the society of his affianced. No doubt feeling an honorable justification for his mercenary felicity. Ho, ho,” Virginia laughed, her lips quivering with scorn. “The situation is charming. Ha, ha, ha, ha.”

The principals to this little drama understood its meaning perfectly, but while Mrs. Harris paused for an instant in wonderment, her easy nature forbade worry—and so the incident quickly passed out of her memory, and Sam was too shrewd to show that he heard it, and with his round face beaming with unquenchable admiration, bowed and offered his arm to her, accompanied by the characteristic side movement of his head—“Ea, ha, I guess so—eh, Auntie?”

The joyous manner of utterance was like a shaft of sunshine bursting through the dark, tragic clouds of impending storm.

Virginia’s first attack fell short of accomplishing the purpose intended, yet the seed of doubt, of suspicion and fear of family disgrace had been grounded in her brother’s mind, and it would be strange, indeed, if Corway’s position proved invulnerable to more carefully-planned attacks.

It must be remembered that an opportunity had come at an unexpected moment, and she impulsively seized upon it. Through it all, however, Virginia must be credited with a sincere belief that Corway's intentions toward Hazel were as insincere and mercenary as they had been to her.

CHAPTER II.

The night of the Harris reception at "Rosemont," in honor of Lord Beauchamp, was beautiful. Dark, yet serene and tranquil as the illimitable void through which the myriad of glittering stars swept along on their steady course.

The long, gentle, sloping, velvety lawn, stretching away from the broad steps of the great columned piazza, down to the placid waters of the Willamette, was artistically beautified by clusters of magnolias and chestnut trees and native oaks and firs, while the soft sway of advanced Autumn was disclosed in the mellow, gorgeous tints of the oak and maple leaf projected against the dark evergreen of the stately fir; and afar off, to the north, through vistas in the foliage, gleamed the steady electric arc lights of the city.

Marble statuary glistened in white repose, and groups of majestic palms and ferns and holly stood illumined in the soft light of frosted electric globes and quaint Oriental lanterns.

Out from the deep shadow of a wide-spreading oak, and remote from the range of illumination, an old, decrepit and poorly clad man emerged, peering cautiously about, as if afraid of discovery. As he approached near the house and came under the gleams of light, it could be seen that he was gray-haired and a cripple, for he hobbled slowly with the aid of a stout stick. He proceeded to a clump of ferns and close to a high-back, rustic seat, behind which he stood partially concealed.

Feeling satisfied that he had not been seen, and that he was alone, that part of the grounds being temporarily deserted, he muttered impatiently: "Where the devil does Rutley keep himself? I've been dodging about these grounds for an hour trying to locate him, and to get posted."

The words had scarcely escaped his lips when down behind the seat he ducked.

Simultaneously, Virginia Thorpe and William Harris appeared, descending the piazza steps.

"Congratulations, Mr. Harris, on your reception. It is a brilliant affair, and the grounds are simply beautiful."

"I am delighted at receiving congratulations from a lady whose taste is acknowledged without a peer."

"Now, Mr. Harris, you know I object to flattery," responded Virginia, in a deprecating tone of voice. "Why, I have lost my fan. How unfortunate! I fear I have dropped it in the ball-room."

"I shall try to find it immediately. No, no; no trouble whatever."

"Thanks, Mr. Harris. I shall await your return here."

As Mr. Harris hastened up the steps, Virginia leisurely moved a few yards, and then sat down on a seat, quite unconscious of the figure crouched in hiding behind it.

The proximity of Virginia did not suit the fellow, and he forthwith endeavored to sneak away unseen, but the noise, faint as he made, attracted her attention.

She sprang to her feet with a slight, terrified shriek, but quickly recovering her self-possession, as she noted his aged and bent condition, gently said: "Poor old man, your intrusion on these premises may be unwelcome." After a pause, evidently for an answer, she went on kindly: "Do you seek alms?"

Leaning on his stick he humbly removed his hat, and said in abject tones: "Pitty da sorrow dees old-a da gray hairs. Eesa mak-a da bolda to come a da here, so much-a da rich-a kind-a people to da poor old-a men lik-a da me. Ten-a years eesa black-a da boot; saw da-ood, sella da ba-nan, turnoppsis, carrotsis, ca-babbages; do any-ting for mak-a-da mon, go back-a da sunny Italy. Look-a da lame! Canna da work—mussa da beg, sweet-a da lady—kind-a charity."

"Dear me!" replied Virginia, regretfully. "I haven't a coin with me, but let me advise you to begone, for you must know that if you are discovered here your age will not protect you."

The old man bowed low. "Essa many tanks, kind-a lady. Essa da go."

"And mark me, sir," added Mr. Harris, who had quickly returned with the fan. "Should I find you loitering around these grounds again tonight, officers will take care of you."

"Oh, Signor! Dona tell a da po-lis. Da poor a da old a man essa much da hunger. Begga do mon to buy a da bread. Eesa da all-a Signor. Eesa da all."

"Oh, Mr. Harris, please lend me a coin for him. I fear he really is in need," broke in Virginia.

"There!" responded Mr. Harris, throwing him a coin. "You can thank this benevolent lady, whose presence affords you liberty. Not a word. Off with you from these grounds. Begone."

The old fellow picked up the half-dollar piece, and hobbling away, soon disappeared into the shadow.

"It is a pleasure to return your fan. I found it in the vestibule uninjured."

"Thanks, Mr. Harris," said Virginia, receiving the fan. "I shall be more careful of it hereafter."

"Ea-ah, I guess so, eh, Uncle!" broke in Sam, striding toward them.

"Oh, oh, Sam! Really!" laughed Mr. Harris, as he looked meaningly at him. "Ah! You seem delighted."

"I think so, eh, Uncle," accompanied by the habitual side movement of his head. "Congratulate me on having found Miss Thorpe after a long search," and turning to Virginia, he added, with a smile broadening his face—"you have promised to dance with me. May I indulge in the pleasure now?"

"Yes, Sam," she replied, with an air of fatigue, "but I would rather you defer the pleasure."

"Miss Thorpe is fatigued and Sam is too much of a gallant to deny her a little rest," appealed Mr. Harris.

"Cert!" answered Sam, as a shade of disappointment flitted across his face. "Anything I can do to serve Miss Thorpe shall be done."

"Thank you, Sam," replied Virginia, relieved.

"I will call upon Miss Thorpe to favor me with her company later, eh, Uncle?" and Sam bowed and quickly disappeared.

"Sam is a noble-hearted fellow! Ranged the Texas plains a few years, didn't he?"

"Yes," replied Mr. Harris. "When a lad he was threatened with consumption, and physicians recommended a few years of out-door life in Texas. It cured him, but he became a little fixed in the customs. Sterling fellow, though—great heart—all heart. Be seated," pointing to the seat which she had previously occupied.

At that moment there appeared descending the piazza steps Mr. Corway, with Hazel and Constance on either side of him.

"Your reason, Corway, for doubting his title of lord?" interrogated Constance.

"I possess no proofs," replied Corway. "I but express an opinion," and he discreetly refrained from further utterance on the subject, though his thoughts were insistent on his identity of Lord Beauchamp as Philip Rutley.

"But you must have some grounds even for an opinion," persisted Constance.

"Well, if he is not a lord," hazarded Hazel, who, purposely or otherwise, by her joining the discussion, released Mr. Corway from an embarrassing reply, which at that time he was loath to make, "he certainly should be one, for he is such a dear, sweet man, so eminently exact and proper."

"And so distinguished, don't-che-know," finished Mr. Corway, with such peculiarly keen mimicry and smiling abandon as to draw from Hazel a flash of admiration, and from Mrs. Thorpe a ripple of laughter with the remark, "Satire unmasked by Cupid."

Further conversation was interrupted by Beauchamp himself, who appeared alone, descending the broad piazza steps. "It's so warm in there I decided to refresh a little in the cool air."

He halted a moment on one of the steps, fixed the monocle to his left eye, and lordly surveyed the two groups.

After evidently satisfying himself as to their personnel, he deliberately removed the monocle from his eye and resumed his passage down the steps. "Miss Thorpe here, and Mr. Harris, and Mrs. Thorpe, and the fair Hazel"—and ignoring Corway, he went on—"then I shall have no need to commune alone with my thoughts."

"I am sure my Lord Beauchamp is too much of a devotee to the 'tripping muse' to absent himself very long from the ball-room?" volunteered Constance.

"Indeed it would be difficult for me to enjoy myself for any length of time away from the place where, as Byron puts it, 'Youth and Beauty meet, to chase the glowing hours with flying feet.'" And moving over to Hazel, he said: "By the way, you have promised me the pleasure of dancing with you the next waltz."

"Indeed!" replied the maid, eyeing him archly, "the honor of a waltz with my lord is too rare a favor to be neglected."

The gracious and suave smile with which Rutley answered her was not at all appreciated by Mr. Corway.

And as Rutley glanced his way, their eyes met. Virginia saw it. She instantly grasped the full meaning of that glance—the deadly hatred of rivals.

Rutley, with familiarity begotten of mutual esteem, as he fondly hoped, linked Hazel's yielding arm in his and led her toward the piazza. "By the way," and he spoke very confidently, "Mr. Corway seems to have a warm attachment for Mrs. Thorpe"—

The girl halted and looked questioningly at him.

"I mean," continued Rutley, in a sort of apologetic tone, "he is apparently quite the lion with her."

Passing a few feet near them were John Thorpe and Mrs. Harris, who had appeared unnoticed from another part of the grounds.

John Thorpe plainly heard Rutley's allusion to Corway and his wife, and became profoundly sensible of that same strange feeling infolding him, as he experienced when Virginia first intimated Corway's questionable character. "Is it possible that, after all, Constance, and not Hazel, is the real object of his attention?"

He was conscious of a sense of jealousy arising within him, and so strong and virulent as to be beyond control, and compelled him to turn aside, to conceal the anger that must be depicted on his face. He halted while Mrs. Harris joined Virginia and Mr. Harris.

"Mrs. Thorpe is most attractive," Hazel at length replied.

"I have heard that not long ago he was attached to Miss Thorpe, but lately has transferred his affection to another," continued Rutley.

"Virginia was fond of his society, yet 'tis not always, you may remember, that those who have won our love return it."

The strains of dreamy music drifted out upon the air.

"Well, at present, Corway seems persistent in his attentions to Mrs. Thorpe."

Again John Thorpe winced at the connection of his wife's name with Corway.

And then Rutley felt himself pushed aside, while Corway offered his arm to Hazel.

"Will you accompany me to the ball-room?"

Hazel drew a step aside and exclaimed, half angrily, yet seemingly rather pleased at Corway's audacity.

"Joe!"

"Hazel!" he responded with just the faintest suggestion of command in his voice.

It was his first assumption of authority over his affianced, and he won—for unlike the "feminine forwards" of the new school, she appreciated his strong character and showed it by clinging to his arm.

Neither of these two men could be considered handsome, though Corway had the advantage of being more youthful and taller of stature, with large, bright eyes and dark curly hair, which with clear-cut, manly features, seemed to charm the fancy and captivate the maiden's eye.

While Rutley's graceful and pliant frame carried more elegance, an assumed superb superiority, a cold, ironical disdain and lofty ease, bespoke an imperious nature, indifferent to that soft, beguilement so charming to women.

Corway turned to Rutley, and, bowing low, exclaimed, with studied politeness: "I beg my lord's pardon," and so saying, he passed up the piazza steps with Hazel and disappeared within.

They were closely followed by Mr. Harris and Mrs. Thorpe.

Rutley fixed the monocle to his eye and stared at the retreating Corway in blank amazement.

Meanwhile, John Thorpe was absorbed in profound thought, and oblivious of his surroundings, said to himself: "What can his lordship mean? Corway's persistent attention to my wife! Was that mere accidental gossip? He shall explain!" And he looked fixedly at Rutley.

It was at that moment that Mrs. Harris, having reached his side, said: "Your arm, Thorpe. Dear me!" And she started back at seeing his gloomy face. "Why, I declare, the frowning 'Ajax' could

not look more unsociable.”

For a moment Thorpe displayed confusion, but by a strong effort subdued his agitation and offered his arm. “Of late,” he explained, “my nervous system has been subject to momentary shocks.” Leading her toward the piazza, “I beg your pardon.”

“I am afraid that unless you provide yourself with a mask for such occasions the shock is likely to become contagious,” she remarked, as they passed up the steps.

Meanwhile Rutley, having removed the monocle from his eye, allowed his frigidity to dissolve, and, slowly stepping a few paces toward the east end of the house, paused under the shadow of a magnolia, and at once seemed to plunge in deep reflection, to be startled a few moments later by hearing Virginia close to him, in a low tone, saying: “How does my lord propose to resent that insult?”

Seeing him alone, she had noiselessly and unperceived, stolen to his side, convinced by what she had just discovered, that he was meditating some sort of revenge on Corway, and she determined to ascertain its nature.

Her fertile brain had already conceived Rutley her ally, and it was with no uncertain or wavering purpose that she approached him with a question pregnant with sinister import.

Rutley looked at her steadily, as though trying to penetrate her motive, then, without moving his eyes from hers, said deliberately: “Well, if he doesn’t apologize, my friend will call on him.”

“You mean a shooting affair?”

“I do not say, but I understand that is a popular way in this country to avenge an outrage.”

“Yes, that is true,” she said, “particularly in our West, but it is fast going out of fashion. In fact, on the Coast, it is seldom practiced now. Besides, my lord, I advise you not to try it. I’ve heard he’s a dead shot,” and she abruptly stopped and looked furtively about, and then, in a more discreet tone of voice, said: “Will you walk?”

He instantly comprehended her desire to confide something of interest to him, and as they slowly proceeded over the soft, velvety grass, and without betraying haste to know what she was evidently anxious to disclose, he replied, sneeringly:

“Ah, he is! Well, these affairs are settled in an honorable way in a gentleman’s country.”

“I again warn you not to try it,” she said. “If you do, you will likely find yourself a subject for some hospital surgeon.”

“Indeed!” laughed Rutley, with a sarcastic ring in his voice.

She halted, turned to him, and continued in a low tone. “Yes, there is a better plan—that insult can be wiped out in a more effectual manner.”

“How?”

For one moment Virginia looked far off across the placid waters of the Willamette, over and beyond the rugged hills shrouded in gloomy repose. Was it the “still small voice within her crying in anguish ‘beware, beware,’” if so, it was unheeded, drowned in the impetuous desire for revenge.

Shocked and enraged by the discovery of what she considered Corway’s perfidy, a strain of virulent passion possessed her, and subdued her softer and otherwise most charming personality.

“Corway has done me a wrong I never will forget, and I shall not pause at any opportunity to avenge it. My cousin, Hazel, is betrothed to him. My brother has a rash, impetuous temper, and is exceedingly jealous of our family honor. By insinuating Corway’s insincere attachment to Hazel, his money-mad impecuniosity, and so forth, you will produce a coolness between John and Corway that may end in their complete estrangement. We are watched,” she whispered. “Let us move on.” Her alert eyes had discovered Sam standing alone on the piazza steps, shading his eyes with his hand as he looked at them.

She guessed his purpose, but was too far away to hear him say angrily: “If that lord attempts any fooling with that fair party, I’ll give him some eye-shutters, I guess so!”

Without heeding the episode, Rutley replied: “But you must know that your brother has not insulted me, and you must also be aware that the attempt to influence him may fail.”

“If you will follow my directions John will consider you his friend. If properly managed you need have no fear of its ultimate success. For several months last year John was in China. During that time Corway paid frequent visits to his home.”

“But”—interposed Rutley, quickly.

"Do not misunderstand my meaning," responded Virginia, with an involuntary flash of indignation. "Corway is a man of great moral probity. But John may be brought to think him something the reverse. Do you understand?"

"I will have satisfaction!" exclaimed Rutley.

"Somebody is following us," whispered Virginia.

"Where?" queried Rutley. "I fail to see anyone."

"It may have been the shadow of the swinging light," at length she remarked, reassured, and, dismissing the thought from her mind, continued: "I have already warned you of a duel. To prove how insincere Corway's affection is for Hazel, you may call my brother's attention to a ring that he wears on the little finger of his left hand. I let Hazel have it for a short time because she admired it, and begged it from me, and Corway took it from her."

"Has the ring any peculiar feature by which it may be distinguished from others?"

"Yes, a single diamond set in a double heart of pearls."

"Is it yours?" he asked, softly.

"No," Virginia promptly answered, but she added in a hesitating manner, as though weighing the propriety of further explanation—"that is—well—it is mine for the purpose. I let Hazel have it unknown to Constance."

And so it happened, a slip of the tongue, one inadvertent, indiscreet admission, gave him his cue. A vision opened to his mind and he immediately speculated on its possibilities.

"Then the ring belongs to Mrs. Thorpe?" he questioned, insidiously.

"Yes," Virginia affirmed, in a halting way. "John gave it to Constance before they were married."

"Oh, indeed!" Rutley exclaimed, and he muttered low and meaningly, while the whites of his eyes gleamed with sinister import. "Corway wears a ring given by John Thorpe to his wife."

Soon as he had spoken Virginia heard and instinctively felt that she had been indiscreet in admitting the ring belonged to Constance, and said by way of caution: "Of course, I trust in the honor of your lordship to refrain from connecting Mrs. Thorpe's name with the ring, or to, in any manner, let it be known that you know it is not mine."

Evidently Rutley did not hear her, for he was absorbed in thought—thought that produced an evil gleam in his eyes.

A slight pause followed, and taking it for granted my lord would not betray the trust she reposed in him, she said, as looking in his eyes with significant daring: "Draw John's notice to it as confirming Corway's bold and deceitful attention to Hazel."

Virginia was aware that John would recognize the ring as his wife's, but she under-rated the violence of the storm it would precipitate, and she trusted too much in her own ability to control it in the direction she desired. She likewise rated Beauchamp as a weak, egotistical, effeminate sort of man. She was now to experience her great mistake.

Rutley in his turn fixed his gaze steadfastly upon her, and which became so intense, so mysteriously searching, as to cause her, strong-minded woman as she was, to feel she was but a weak thing beside him.

He spoke quietly and without the faintest tremor in his voice. "Do you know to whom you suggested this?"

"Lord Beauchamp," she timidly responded. And then there suddenly sprang into her eyes a new light, accompanied by a slight start.

"Why do you start?" asked Rutley, not for a moment removing his eyes from hers.

"No, 'tis impossible. You cannot be Philip Rutley?" she gasped, as she drew back amazed. "For you have already denied him once to me."

"Yes, I am he!" he exclaimed.

There followed a moment of profound silence. Rutley watching the effect of his disclosure upon her.

And she, at first astounded by his audacious nerve, at length grasped his position, and finally smiled, as though in admiration of his arch achievement. "You are a master imposter," she broke in. "Be as clever with the material I have given you, and Corway will not long stand in your way."

"Did Hazel tell you of my proposal to her three years ago?"

"Yes," she answered promptly.

"I believe she rejected me at that time because of Corway," he musingly added.

"Your opportunity is at hand," she affirmed.

"I accept it," and then he cautioned in a low tone: "Be careful never to breathe my real name."

"And you—you will continue to be?"—and she smiled quizzically as she put the question.

"My Lord Beauchamp."

"A most consummate scoundrel!" she added pleasantly.

"The scoundrel begs to share the compliment with his colleague, Miss Virginia Thorpe," he ironically replied, again bowing low.

That accentuated remark by Rutley revealed to her with sudden vividness the detestable character she was developing.

Acutely sensitive, the stigma smote her with a repugnance that stung and smarted as quivering flesh under the sharp cut of a lash; and being naturally of a fiery temper, she passionately retorted, "It's false!"

The words had scarcely escaped her lips when she realized her indiscretion, and faltered, "I—I—mean—" and then unable to recover from her sudden flight of passion, or to completely subdue her agitation, she burst out aloud, in utter disregard of her surroundings, "Oh! It is awful, awful!"

Rutley was alarmed, and hastily gripped her wrist, and in low tones cautioned, "For God's sake, hush! Don't shout it to the winds! Remember, you urged this damnable business upon me. Do you want me to give it to the world?"

His artifice succeeded, and under his influence she became quieter. "No! No! No!" she whispered. "Don't, please!" Then again she stared at the ground as though dazed with some vague terror. Suddenly she covered her face with her hands and moaned, "What have I done?"

Then, arising from a place of concealment close by, the old Italian Cripple previously mentioned doffed his hat and said, "Eesa da bet, much-a keep-a do mon! Do poor old-a man, Eesa beg-a da mon, a da charity Signora, Signor."

Tossing him a coin, Rutley said, "This is an unseasonable place for your calling, old man." Then, turning to Virginia—"Permit me to escort you to the house."

"I don't like that old man," she replied. "He is prying about everywhere. Do you think he heard me?"

"I have no fear of that," replied Rutley, as they moved on toward the house. "He appears quite old and no doubt is partially deaf."

"Very well," responded Virginia, "and now that we understand each other, I think it time for me to mingle with the guests."

As they disappeared in the distance, the old cripple followed them, flitting from shadow to shadow, with catlike agility, astonishing in such an apparently old man.

Having arrived at the piazza steps, Rutley and Virginia parted.

Returning some distance into the shadow, he softly laughed. "A little startled, eh? Didn't think I could impersonate a peer of England's realm. Well, she knows the secret now and I can safely rely on her assistance because Corway has cast her aside for Hazel. She has given me material with which to strike at him and I will strike home—but not as she suggests. Oh, no!" and again a sinister smile crept over his face. "Dangerous, but Hazel's wealth is worth the risk.

"Meanwhile, I am getting short of funds, and cannot keep up the pace much longer, unless my other plan succeeds. But should I fail altogether—" and he became absorbed in deep study, silent and motionless as the statue of Lincoln by which he stood, but only for a moment. "Everybody here lionizes me, believing I am a genuine nobleman." And then he looked up with a far-off, triumphant expression in his eyes and a cunning smile on his lips, "My lord will borrow a few thousand on his—name—just for a temporary accommodation, and then he will vanish."

A slight noise behind startled him and caused him to look about; but, discovering no one, he regained his composure. To make sure, however, he called in a low voice, "Jack! Jack!"

Whereupon the old cripple again stood forth from his concealment, this time from behind the trunk of the wide spreading oak and, leaning on his stick, obsequiously doffed his hat. "I uncover to a prince of villainy."

"Ha, ha, to my arms, you rascally imposter!" joyfully exclaimed Rutley, as he embraced him.

Halting and drawing away in pretended surprise, Jack exclaimed with dreamy reflection, "Naw, Eesa, not-a bees-a da imposeator. Eesa be Ital-e-own!"

"Splendid, Jack!" exclaimed Rutley with admiration. "Your disguise is perfect, but"—and Rutley laughed—"a little pale about the gills, eh?"

"Eesa look-a like-a ma fadder," and Jack proudly expanded himself. "Make-a da great-a soldier. Note-a da pale here—Naw," touching his ears. "Garibaldi geev-a ma fadder dees-s da Palestrino," and Jack threw open his coat and proudly displayed a medal.

"Palestrino!" exclaimed Rutley gleefully. "Jack, things are coming our way with a rush. Did you hear her—the maiden fair, with the blue black hair, how she plays into our hands?"

Jack grinned and chuckled, "Ah, ah—a Portland rose, Phil!"

"Incomparably beautiful, Jack! But, oh, such devilish thorns!"

"Good for twenty thousand simoleons at any rate? Eh, Phil?"

"Twenty thousand or bust, Jack," grinned Rutley. "You watch me do the trick. I'll make Thorpe wish he were dead. I shall connect his wife's name instead of Hazel's with Corway."

"What!" gasped Jack, dismayed by Rutley's daring.

"By a little juggling of facts, as it were, I'll make Thorpe believe Corway wears the ring given him as a love token by Constance. It was Thorpe's gift to his wife. Do you comprehend? Now, do you understand how simple a thing it will be to make Thorpe wish he were dead? Remember how he and old Harris broke up our investment company?"

"Maybe I don't," replied Jack dolefully, rubbing his stomach in a significant manner.

"And, Jack!" and Rutley glinted at him meaningly and said very seriously, "That fellow Corway suspects me."

"The devil he does! We must get him out of our way."

"Tomorrow!"—and for the space of perhaps five seconds they looked meaningly at each other. Then Rutley broke the silence.

"The child is in the house," continued Rutley seriously and in a low voice.

"Good!" responded Jack. "I was afraid your tableau scheme had failed and Dorothy remained at home."

"Not at all. They jumped at the idea," laughed Rutley, "and on my suggestion Mrs. Harris begged for Dorothy's presence at the 'Fete'."

"Fate!" corrected Jack.

"Too pointed," calmly remarked Rutley.

"Well, the tableau was a great success, 'Hebe' attended by 'Circe' and 'Cupid'."

"Dorothy as 'Circe' posed splendidly; she is the pet of the guests"—and, lowering his voice, Rutley continued gravely:

"I have persuaded her indulgent mother to let the child remain up and enjoy her honors a little longer; she may be out and around now at any moment."

"She wears a white dress and with a light brown sash about her waist. Long golden hair—oh, you know her."

"I shall keep a sharp lookout and take her the first opportunity."

"Skip!" suddenly cautioned Rutley. "Somebody's coming. Keep in the deep shadow."

"Trust me." And as Jack turned to move away he said to himself, "Tonight there'll be things doing, for the devil is at work and hell's a-brewing."

Rutley watched Jack vanish in the gloom, then muttered to himself, "Why this fear? Out with it and to my purpose."

Some readers would call it fate, others would probably have construed it as accidental, while yet again others of a more scientific turn of mind would have reasoned it a result of that strange magnetic attraction whereby two minds, simultaneously engaged in deep absorbing thought on the same subject, are mysteriously drawn toward each other.

That John Thorpe was alone at that moment descending the steps of the piazza, was proof of the phenomenon, there could be no question, and that he was deeply thinking of a subject very near

and dear to him was also evident, for he paused on one of the steps and clapped his hand to his forehead as though to draw out some evil thing that lay leaden within.

Once he shivered as if shaken with a cold of the shadow of some indefinable disaster about to overwhelm him, and then he passed on down the steps muttering to himself in an abstracted manner, "Doubt; terrible, torturing doubt; I cannot endure it!"

"Welcome, Mr. Thorpe," came from Rutley in the mild regularly moderated voice of a man content with his surroundings. "It only needs the quiet tones of a gifted conversationalist to make this beautiful spot supremely pleasant. All honor to Mrs. Harris and her companion."

Mrs. Harris, accompanied by Virginia, had just then appeared from around the east side of the house—"Ah, my lord, your absence from the ballroom occasions much inquiry," said Mrs. Harris.

"Mrs. Harris will confer a favor by satisfying the inquirers with the excuse that his lordship is enjoying a smoke with a friend. Does my lord approve the answer?" replied John Thorpe, eyeing Rutley furtively.

"Most decidedly!" he affirmed.

"Then Virginia and myself will be spectators of the next waltz. Your lordship will favor us with your company soon? Mr. Thorpe, you will not forget your promise to Constance for the Newport?"

"Just in time, eh, auntie, I guess so!" cut in the cheerful voice of strenuous Sam, who had bounded down the steps and stood in front of them before they could turn around.

"Oh, horrors!" gasped Virginia under her breath.

"Why, Sam!" laughed Mrs. Harris, "you want me to dance with you again and Virginia here?"

"Oh, no, not you! I mean her, auntie. If you please," and he bowed to Virginia as he offered her his arm.

Without an instant's hesitation she accepted his arm and at the same time so artfully masked her real feelings that the hot blood raced with joyous glee to the very roots of his hair and caused him to say proudly, "Ha, ha! at last, eh, auntie!"

"I shall be a witness, Sam," replied his aunt in a tone which conveyed a warning.

On ascending the steps Virginia paused to gather up her skirt, turned half around and looked very significantly at Rutley.

He met her glance and bowed. The action brought Mrs. Harris also to a stop.

Observing the halt, Mr. Thorpe exclaimed, "His Grace and myself will be along presently. Au revoir."

And as the party moved on, Sam rejoined under his breath, "I guess so, but not with his fair party, not if Sam knows it."

In the silence that followed for both men, now being alone, were alert, instinctively apprehending danger, John Thorpe drew from the inside pocket of his coat a small cigar case and tendered it to Rutley.

Silently and with studied poise, Rutley took therefrom a cigar and returned the case.

Thorpe then took from the case a match, lighted and offered it to Rutley, who, having meanwhile clipped the end of the cigar with a penknife, accepted the light and then broke the silence with, "Are you not going to smoke, Thorpe?"

"Not at present. A stroll through the grounds is more to my fancy."

"Agreed!" promptly responded Rutley, who added, "and may the exercise lighten your spirits, which appear heavy tonight."

"Yes, unfortunately I have never been able to conceal my emotions, hence the correctness of your conjecture. My spirits are heavy tonight," replied Thorpe in a low voice and with a deep, long drawn sigh.

It was plain to Rutley that Thorpe was evading an abrupt approach to some potent question in his mind, feverishly eager, yet dreading the kind of information it might elicit.

"Bad digestion, Thorpe. Headaches, troubled dreams and the like fellow," suggested Rutley in his jerky manner.

"Deeper!" added Thorpe in a low voice.

"Ha!" exclaimed Rutley significantly, as he eyed his companion askance. "Family!"

"Oh, God! what shall I do?" suddenly broke from Thorpe in a stifled cry of anguish. "I cannot carry the load!" And then he did that which some readers might term a cowardly thing. No doubt he was actuated by motives irresistibly impelling in a man of his peculiarly sensitive nature.

With head bent low, much as a culprit condoning his infamy, humbled as was his pride, to thus confide his misgivings to a stranger, he began in a low voice:

"My Lord, a few moments since I casually heard you drop a remark suggesting a knowledge of my domestic affairs. I speak to you in confidence, and I am sure Your Grace will spare me the humiliation of feeling that confidence is misplaced. Your position gives you at times the advantage of hearing—a—things said of others that is of no moment or concern to you."

Rutley's first thought was, "My opportunity to strike at Corway has come," and if Thorpe at that moment could have seen the cunning leer play about the corners of Rutley's mouth and the flash of exultation that sprang into his eyes, he might have hesitated, nay, ceased to have conversed with him further on such a grave subject.

But the fleeting smile went unseen, the exultant flash as quickly disappeared, and in its place a very serious look came over Rutley's face, as in a low voice he replied, slowly but very distinctly. "Really, Thorpe, I am at a loss to understand your motives in questioning me on matters relative to your domestic affairs, and though I may possess information in which I am not particularly interested, still to asperse the character of any person on mere rumor is not compatible with the dignity or honor of my house; however, if you will be explicit on the subject of your singular request, I shall, through sympathy, communicate all I have heard to relieve or confirm your mind of a—I fancy—a terrible suspicion."

For a few moments Thorpe could not control his agitation. Overpowered by a sense of shame, his imagination at once conjured up dreadful thoughts.

"Sympathy! a—a—to relieve or confirm a terrible suspicion! My God! what does he mean?" And he placed his left hand tightly over his breast as if something hurt him there, while a cold sweat stood out on his brow. Then with a forced calmness, said:

"A—a—have you heard any disparaging remarks about—a—Mr. Corway?"

"Well, Thorpe, you know 'tis not honorable to repeat the 'chic' scandals one hears, though to satisfy you I will say that if you will look at the little finger of Corway's left hand, you will see a gold ring with a single diamond set in a double heart, which he at times—a—carelessly displays."

"A ring with a single diamond! What of it?" impatiently questioned Thorpe.

"Oh!" replied Rutley, with an imperturbable stare, "it was a love token from Mrs. John Thorpe."

"You lie!" exclaimed Thorpe, the nails of his fingers imprinting deeply in the flesh of his tightly clenched fists, with the fierceness of the passion that had flamed within him.

"I do not lie!" Rutley calmly and slowly replied, as he looked steadily into Thorpe's eyes.

"You confound my wife with Hazel," hoarsely accused Thorpe.

"I reiterate," responded Rutley, in the same even tone of voice, "the particular ring in question was a gift from Constance, John Thorpe's wife, and not from Hazel."

Gasping for breath, Thorpe turned his head aside and groaned as he remembered it was his gift to Constance before they were married.

Suddenly he gripped Rutley by the sleeve. They halted and confronted each other. And the dark formless shadow that had followed them also halted.

"From whom have you your information?" queried Thorpe, looking into Rutley's eyes.

"I do not feel at liberty to mention, but it can be substantiated."

"By whom?" demanded Thorpe.

"Well, I don't know of any person more capable than a—a—Mr. Thorpe's wife!" replied Rutley in a most nonchalant and matter-of-fact manner.

And even through the depth of the gloom that surrounded them he saw the scarlet flush of rage and shame flame across Thorpe's white brow as he bowed his head, humbled to the dust.

For a moment not a word was spoken by either of the men. Suddenly Thorpe looked up and hoarsely said:

"My wife! Give me two or three, one which she can substantiate."

"My dear Thorpe," deprecatingly pleaded Rutley. "You have called upon me to undertake a very unpleasant task."

"Your Lordship has gone too far to recede. I must know all"—and there was imminent danger in Thorpe's quivering voice, which Rutley felt was not to be trifled with.

"Well—one thing—Corway's close and steady attention to her during your absence in China."

"You mean to Hazel?" said Thorpe, with a look so deeply concentrated that the movement of a single hair of Rutley's eyelash would have meant an instant blow on the mouth.

"No, I mean—to your wife," accentuated Rutley. "Their secret and protracted wanderings offended your sister. Reproofs, reproaches and warnings were unavailing and ended in Corway being refused admittance to your house, which resulted in frequent quarrels between your wife and your sister."

Thorpe here recalled Virginia's warning, "Corway will bear watching," and he moaned, "Oh, God!"

"He tried many pretenses to regain communication with your wife," resumed Rutley, "one being to visit Hazel Brooke, for whom, except for her money, he has no regard whatever. At length on the discovery of secret correspondence, Virginia became aghast at his boldness and contemplated seeking legal aid when you returned. Of course, she retired and left the matter in your hands and she was unwilling at that time to shock your home-coming with a knowledge of the truth."

"Enough! Enough! Oh, God, what a vile thing has nestled here!" And John Thorpe pressed both hands tightly over his heart in a vain endeavor to suppress the emotion that filled his throat and choked his utterances, and tears of shame gathered in his eyes as he continued slowly:

"When—I—wedded Constance—I took to myself the purest angel out of heaven. But now—! Farewell happiness—farewell peace—forever! Oh, Corway, I want to clutch you by the throat!"

Turning to Rutley, he added tensely, "Follow me."

"Now for satisfaction," muttered Rutley exultantly, and with a sinister smile on his lips he followed John Thorpe up the broad steps and into the blaze of the brilliantly lighted ballroom.

A shadow straightened itself up behind a bed of massed asters, deepened, grew thicker and resolved itself into the solid form of a man. It was Jack Shore. He had dodged them unseen and overheard their conversation.

Perhaps it was through hearing the conspiracy and its masterly execution that shocked him into moralizing on man's inhumanity to man.

At any rate, he exclaimed half aloud, "As cold-blooded a bit of villainy as possible to conceive. I didn't think Phil had it in him." Suddenly he shrugged his shoulders.

"I say, old man," cut in Sam, appearing from the east side of the piazza, "you want to look alive there. You are getting too near the front. First thing you know uncle will have you sent up as a vag."

Though taken by surprise, Jack, having just turned to move off into the deeper shadow, halted and, removing his hat, faced Sam in an assumed most humble and abject terror, "Signor, I don-a mean to come-a da close. Jess-a tried to get-a da peep ov-a da grand-a fete of-a much-a da rich people. Eesa da all, Signor."

"It's all right, old man, but take my advice and keep off the grounds. 'Twill be better for your health."

In the meantime Dorothy had fluttered down the great steps and ran toward Sam.

"Hello, little one! Having lots of fun, eh!"

And with the same, he caught Dorothy's hands and he commenced to dance her about as he sang the words, "Little Bo-peep had lost her sheep and couldn't tell where to find them."

"Oh, don't Sam; I want to find papa!" replied the child, impatiently.

"You do, eh? Now, don't you want me to be your escort?"

"Come, I'll tell you how to find him. You shall sit on my shoulder and be the tallest queen of the party, while I be the horse to 'lope about in search of your papa."

"Thank you, Sam, but I can't stay for a ride now. I'm in such a hurry; some other time," and the child turned from him and ran toward the slowly retreating form of Jack.

"You are, eh? All right, and while you are looking for papa, I'm going to look for the fair party you call auntie. I guess so!" Whereupon Sam quickly sprang up the steps. Arriving on the piazza he halted, turned around and looked toward the child as though the premonition of something wrong—something associated with the child's insecurity, being alone—had suddenly darted into

his brain; but seeing others of the guests at that moment emerging from the east front of the house on the well lighted grounds, he dismissed the "still small voice" of warning from his mind and passed in among the dancers.

"Papa, papa! Where is my papa?" called Dorothy.

Jack, while pretending to leave the grounds, had kept a sly eye on Sam, and upon that individual's disappearance, at once turned and answered the child in a voice soft and gentle, and soothing as that of dreamy Italy.

"Yous-a tink-a your-a papa was-a da here-a. What eesa da name?"

"Thorpe!" replied Dorothy, without the faintest fear or hesitation. "That is my name, too. I want to find him right away. Can you tell me where he is? Mama sent me to ask him to come and dance."

"Yes-a da child-a. Eesa da know where eesa papa be. Eef-a youse-a be note-a fraid and will-a come wid-a me, Eesa take-a youse-a da papa," and the sly old man looked into her eyes with such beaming kindness that at once won her confidence.

"I'm not afraid of you. I like old men. Mama says we should respect old men. But I'm in such a hurry, you know. Mama is waiting for me."

"Well, geeve-a me youse-a da hand and Eesa take-a you straight-a da heem."

Without the least suspicion or timidity, she instantly placed her little hand in his and the two proceeded toward the river, much faster than his supposed crippled condition would lead an older person to expect.

"Youse-a love-a da papa and da mama much-a, donn-a youse?" he continued.

"Oh, yes! Ever so much."

"Eesa good-a girl. We'll soon-a da fine eem," and he added to himself, "when the horn of plenty pours its golden stream into Jack's pocket."

While they were crossing a depression, or rather a long hollow formation in the contour of the grassy slope, and close to some locust trees, the thick foliage of which threw a deep shadow on the spot, Jack thrust his free hand into his pocket and removed the stopper from a bottle of chloroform which he had provided for this occasion, and saturated a colored handkerchief with it. Some of it passed through the lining of his pocket and immediately impregnated the air with its odor.

Dorothy got a whiff of it and drew away with the remark, "Dear me, what a funny smell!"

"Naw, eesa—nicey da smell, jes like-a da poppy, so beautiful-a da flower," replied Jack, reassuringly.

"Well, I don't like it, anyway," she said.

At that moment she was standing a couple of yards from him, they had come to a halt, and it was necessary for him to act adroitly and with promptness, to reassure her and avoid arousing her suspicion, so he pretended to stumble and then fell to the ground.

Arising to his knees, he groaned as though in seeming pain, and gripped his right wrist with his left hand.

"Oh, oh! Eesa da hurt-a bad. Break-a da arm; oh, oh!" And in order to get her close to him, he said, "Get-a da bot' in-a da pock'."

The cunning fellow knew well how to touch the chord of sympathy that is ever present in the guileless heart of innocent childhood.

The response came in a wondering look of infinite tenderness and compassion, for the child did not clearly comprehend Jack's request and she asked:

"Did you break your arm?"

"Eesa da hurt-a bad. Oh, oh!" he groaned, "get-a da bot', da bot'-a, child; get-a da bot'."

"Poor man! Shall I run for the doctor?"

"No, no, no, note-a da dock! Help-a me get-a da bot' in-a da pock! Quick-a, deeze-a side. Put in-a da hand. Take eem out—oh, oh!"

Perceiving that he meant her to take something out of his pocket, on the right side of his coat, and not understanding the significance of the word "bot," she drew near to thrust in her hand.

That instant Jack's left arm encircled her form and his right hand clapped the saturated

handkerchief over her mouth and nostrils and held her to him.

She struggled in his arms to free herself, but without avail.

As a feeling of stupor stole over her senses, Jack, still on his knees, watched her with the keenest of eyes, and muttered soothingly, "Eesa nice-a da girl. Nice-a da smell lak-a da dreamy Italy."

Some rascals would have made short work of the matter, but Jack was by nature very tender and considerate of children, which accounted for his slow application of the powerful drug. It soon had her under its influence, and when she became limp and nerveless he laid her on the grass. Again he saturated the handkerchief and held it to her nostrils, and with distended, tragic eyes watched her doze into unconsciousness.

Feeling satisfied that she would not speedily recover, he let the handkerchief lie loose on her nostrils and mouth, then he arose to his feet and with the stealthy, catlike tread of an Indian, skulked from shadow to shadow until he had made a complete circuit of the spot.

Having assured himself that no one was in the vicinity, he swiftly turned and again fell on his knees beside the child.

He looked intently in her face and noted the sweet expression of childish innocence and trust in the repose. "She sleeps, beautiful child! As sweetly innocent and confiding as God ever inspired with the breath of life."

Then from under his coat, where a hump appeared in the back, he drew out a grey woolen cloth about four feet square and folded it about the child, gathered her in his arms and arose to his feet.

"Mine, mine, though no harm shall come to you, pretty one! Twenty thousand dollars shall be the price of your liberty."

And, keeping in the shadows and away from the lights as much as possible, he wended his way toward the river and soon became obscured in the distant gloom.

When John Thorpe, closely followed by Rutley, entered the great ballroom in search of Corway, the guests who saw him were struck with the pallor of his face and the strangely piercing yet lustreless dark eyes that shone out from beneath his shaggy, frowning eyebrows. His cold, stony look repelled all smiles and discouraged all questions. Through the room he strode, regardless alike of the timid whisperings of women and offended stare of men. He cared not what they thought, for every sentiment of rudeness or discourtesy, every tender feeling of grief or pain, was drowned by his one great mad, overpowering passion to wreak summary vengeance on the author of his bitter shame.

Not for a moment had he suspected "My Lord's" integrity and utter disinterestedness, and the maddening fire of his disgrace kindled within him and fanned to a crucible heat by Rutley burned with unquenchable fury.

Men of the temperament of John Thorpe are not blessed with a stoical mind in moments of great excitement, nor are they apt to pause and tranquilly reason out the pros and cons of this most prolific source of human tragedies.

He had loved his wife too fondly and too well to go and openly charge her with unfaithfulness.

His life heretofore had been very happy, but now the first "damned spot" in the clear blue of his domestic horizon would not out, the feeling of suspicion would not smother. And it grew and enlarged with amazing rapidity, and haunted him till the very thought of Corway aroused his latent jealousy to a pitch that became unbearable. Rutley had developed the demon within him.

The love that had become a fixed part of his being, flooding him with its radiance, had been violently wrenched from his heart, and his only, all-absorbing, insatiable desire was to confront the man who was responsible for it.

Oh, for the frailty of human happiness!

Out near the steps of the east piazza a group of ladies and gentlemen, composed of Mr. and Mrs. Harris, Mr. Corway and Hazel were chatting merrily about the new waltz and incidentally they had referred to the prolonged absence of "My Lord" and John Thorpe from the ballroom. Mrs. Harris discovered them on the piazza approaching the steps and exclaimed, "Ah, here come the truants."

Without a moment's hesitation, John Thorpe descended the steps alone, Rutley remaining on the piazza.

"Mr. Harris," said John Thorpe in a husky voice, "in the name of the society whom he contaminates, I demand that you eject that man from this place."

This peremptory and extraordinary demand, coupled with its insinuation, stunned the hearers,

who looked from one to the other in startled amazement.

The dead silence that followed was broken by Mr. Harris, who answered in a grave, dazed way, as thoughts of Thorpe's sanity flitted through his brain, "But, Thorpe! I—what—I don't think—my hearing is not exactly right of late. I did not understand—"

Without removing his steady gaze from Corway, Mr. Thorpe reiterated his words slowly and with stinging accentuation, "I demand that you eject that man from this place," and he pointed his finger dramatically at Corway, while glints of merciless intent shot from his eyes.

The red flushed into Mr. Harris's face as he realized the indignity his guests and himself were being subjected to.

"Thorpe—John—you are insulting all of us. Mr. Corway is my guest. What is the meaning of this affront to my hospitality?"

"To defend my honor!" cried the distracted man, lost to all sense of propriety or decorum, "or to add my blood to the other crimes that disgrace him."

"In the name of all that's astounding, what do you mean, Thorpe?" exclaimed Corway.

"I mean that I intend to avenge the irreparable wrong I have suffered," replied Mr. Thorpe, fairly hissing the words from between his teeth.

"Irreparable wrong! To whom do you refer?"

"To you, scoundrel! Tell how you came by that ring!"

Mr. Harris had listened to the two men with ill-concealed impatience, but when Mr. Thorpe called Mr. Corway, one of his guests, a scoundrel, and dangerous business appearing imminent, he could control his indignation no longer and shouted, "Mr. Thorpe's carriage immediately! Here, Sam, your assistance. Wells, get some more help to maintain order."

The words had scarcely been uttered, when Sam, who had appeared with Virginia on the piazza, sprang down the steps to his uncle's assistance. They were quickly joined by the coachman and gardener who, having chanced to meet in a nearby secluded angle of the porch, had heard the loud, passionate words and were at once available for duty.

"Hold, Mr. Harris!" spoke up Corway, who seemed to be less disturbed than either Thorpe or his host, "don't be hasty in this matter! Mr. Thorpe is certainly laboring under some delusion."

"I will not listen to you," replied Mr. Harris, now worked up to a fury. "Mr. Thorpe's conduct is outrageous. Away with him to his carriage."

"I guess so!" responded Sam, pulling off his coat and looking at his uncle sideways, "stampede the corral, eh, uncle? That's what you want!"

"Away with him!" repeated Mr. Harris, gesticulating with his arms wildly.

The two lackeys advanced, encouraged no doubt by the assurance of Sam's assistance.

They were brought to an abrupt halt by Corway, who stepped in front of them and declared with heat, "Stand back! I demand an explanation!"

In a low, hoarse voice that quivered with the intensity of his passion, with ghastly white face, and glittering eyes that flashed the lie to his forced calmness, Thorpe replied: "You shall have it—blackguard, liar, and coward!" With which he struck Corway on the mouth with the back of his closed hand.

Corway passionately rushed at him and attempted to strike, but Mr. Harris sprang between them and caught his upraised arm, and with the help of Sam, separated them.

When Sam sprang down the steps to his uncle's assistance, Virginia was left standing on the piazza watching the progress of the quarrel with intense interest and also evidently alarmed at the violent passion her brother displayed.

With a woman's intuition, she surmised that Rutley had worked on John's jealous susceptibilities with merciless finesse.

Rutley, who was watching her, noted her alarmed expression, and feeling it to be a sign of weakening purpose, stepped over and stood beside her, so silently that she was quite unaware of his presence.

"It's a horrible wrong," she muttered.

The words were caught by Rutley, and he whispered, so close as to startle her, "Remember the wrong Corway has done you."

The excited men barely had been separated when Corway spoke with passionate emphasis, "You

shall hear from me."

"Quite soon enough for your courage," sneered Thorpe.

"No, no, my brother shall not fight with him!" exclaimed Virginia, appalled at the magnitude the quarrel had assumed.

Swiftly she glanced at Rutley and said with tremulous lips: "What have you told him to cause such fearful passion?"

"What you bade me," he coolly replied, and with a gloating smile on his lips, added: "The result is what you wanted, isn't it?"

"Not so terrible," she gasped. "There must be some awful mistake."

And Rutley's smile deepened, but as he looked into her horrified eyes and blanched face, and noted the change from vengeance to anxiety and consternation fast coming over her, he knew but too well when the change was complete, in a moment of frenzied zeal to explain and save her brother, she, womanlike, was likely to undo and wreck all his work.

He realized that the moment was fraught with the gravest danger to his plans and person, and he acted quickly, but with the utmost coolness.

Her hand held straight down by her side was closed tightly, expressive of immediate and determined action.

He gripped her wrist. It hurt her. The action concealed from others by the folds of her dress, succeeded in diverting her attention, and he followed it up by whispering, so that she alone heard him, "Remember—the material you gave me; Corway has met his deserts and you are avenged!"

And then the voice of Constance cleft the air, in a wild, terrifying scream. "John, John! Save Dorothy! She's adrift on the water."

Her piercing cry freighted with a mother's anguish, at once filled all who heard it with consternation, in the midst of which Mrs. Harris exclaimed, "Dear me, how dreadful it all is!"

All turned in the direction of the cry and almost immediately Constance, in an agony of despair, and deathly white, frantically rushed among them.

She looked appealingly from one to the other, her heart in her throat and pathos in her voice. "I heard her cry, 'Mama! Papa! Help! Save me!' Oh, will no one rescue my darling?"

"I'm off," said Sam, in his short, sententious way, and rushed toward the river.

The sudden strain on her nerves was greater than Constance could bear.

Naturally of a weak constitution, the ordeal was overpowering; the mother's affection, forming a magnetic part of her heart, leapt out to her child and left her numb and cold almost unto death, and then her limbs trembled, and with Sam's words ringing in her ears, down she sank, a senseless being.

Virginia's consternation was complete. She rushed down the steps, knelt beside her prostrate form, thrust her arm lovingly under her head and sobbed: "Constance! Dear Constance! Don't give way so. Dorothy will be found."

CHAPTER III.

When Constance revived, she found herself in a quiet room remote from noise or intrusion, whither she had been tenderly carried. Virginia was with her, and with the aid of a professional nurse, who lived near by and was called in by Mrs. Harris, had been successful in restoring her to consciousness.

The reception was still swinging along at its full height, and while a few of the guests had heard in an indifferent way of some trouble on the lawn, the reports were so varied and coupled with the fact that no names were obtainable to give the reports zest, the incident was soon forgotten, and by the great mass of the guests was not even heard of.

It was a sore spot in her breast that throbbed and beat heavily upon the door of its prison as later she was being driven home in her carriage. Not a word from John to soothe the aching void. She did not even inquire about him, contenting herself with the simple assurance that he was doing his best to find Dorothy.

For two days the strain was upon her, breaking down by its heart violence her constitution, already frail to the declining point. Scarcely more than a year had passed since Constance had been stricken down with typhoid fever of a malignant type.

She had never regained her usual health and strength, and though the family physician had

pronounced her recovery complete, there were those of her friends who, with bated breath, questioned his conclusion and predicted an after effect which in time would develop some strange and serious ailment.

Telephone inquiries regarding the lost child began to come in the second day, but none of any comfort to the distracted mother.

Not one intimation of her husband's quarrel with Corway had reached her. Mrs. Harris had been careful, upon Constance's recovery at the reception, not to breathe a word, or to allow, where she could control it, the faintest whisper likely to arouse her suspicion.

And as for Hazel, she had not clearly understood Mr. Thorpe's drift when he assaulted Corway. Nevertheless, she somehow had a vague idea that Constance was the cause; but being a discreet young woman, she had refrained from mentioning anything about it to her, thus leaving Constance completely ignorant of the true cause of John Thorpe's absence from home.

Perhaps if she had not been so absorbed in the recovery of Dorothy, her attention would have been arrested on perusing one of the daily papers by an ambiguous paragraph referring to a choice morsel of scandal on the "tapis" in a prominent family, and which was likely to terminate in a tragedy. It was a society paragraph separate from the report of the probable drowning of the child, Dorothy Thorpe. Several personal acquaintances had become aware, through the crafty Rutley, of a serious difference having arisen between John Thorpe and his beautiful wife, and some of these personal acquaintances, with significant looks, at once connected it with the mysterious disappearance of the child.

The fact that none of the fashionable set had visited her since the reception did not suggest a thought of being shunned. And so she waited for news of her child—waited with heart leaden with the chill of hope deferred—waited in momentary expectation of the home-coming of John.

She watched for him through the window, foreshadowing by his appearance on the walk gladness or sorrow.

"It is now the second day," she muttered, "since that eventful night, and yet no relief from this awful suspense. No word to cheer, or lead me to hope that Dorothy lives."

"It is no use grieving so much, Constance," broke in Hazel, who had just entered the room. "Dorothy may be safe with her father, somewhere. Try, dear, to think so, anyway. It is much the best."

"I cannot put away that winsome face from my mind, Hazel. Something tells me that I shall see her no more," and tears came into her eyes, despite her efforts to restrain them.

"There, yees be at it again, sure mam, yees do be makin' us all feel miserable."

It was Smith who spoke, in a soft, appealing voice, full of sympathy and tenderness, the common heritage of his race. He had entered the room by the parlor door, and stood with his hat in his hand—a short, thick-set man, with a full, smooth-shaven, ruddy face, strong in its lines of "true to a trust." His thin hair was tinged with gray. He wore a black frock coat that had seen considerable wear; in fact, that style of a coat was worn by him for the double purpose of partly concealing the "humiliating" curves of his short bent legs, and also the dignity he fancied it lent to his stature. He had been the family coachman for some years, and was familiarly called "Smith."

As Constance turned to him, he continued with a look suggestive of tearful sympathy.

"Will yees try to forget the trouble, and be the token av it, may it please ye mam, just wipe away that tear, do, dear."

"You have always been a good soul, Smith," and Constance tried to smile through her tears.

"Of course, but we are anxious to know the result of your search," remarked Hazel.

He was silent for a moment, and nervously commenced to fidget with his hat.

"Sure, ave yees'l wait till I think ave all the places I whint to, and all the people I sphoke to"—and he dolefully muttered under his breath—"Sure I dunno what I'll rayport at all, at all—"

"You are very thoughtful and persistent, Smith," responded Constance.

"Yis, indade, mam, I try to be that very same. Sure, wasn't I up at Rose-a-mant and walked the bache there and watched the boats, but niver a sight did I git ave Mr. Thorpe."

"I know John is leaving no stone unturned to find Dorothy," assured Constance, "but you, poor man, you must be tired with your long walk."

"The walk was long, but me heart was warrum for yees, and I didn't moind it at all, at all. Sure, the child may not be in the water at all. Will yees try to think so, dear?" And again the beseeching look came over his expressive face.

"Do you think so, Smith?" interrogated Hazel.

"Well, I 'ave me own ideas, Miss, and to be plain, and not hurtin' yees failin's, I think she was kidnapped."

"You do?" questioned Hazel, surprised, for such a possibility had never crossed her mind.

"I do," he replied.

"Sure, I have no rason to think so, Miss, at all, at all; but says I to myself, says I, 'I'll just flim-flam around the 'dago' quarters in South Portland, on me own account, keeping a sharp lookout betimes.'"

"What did you find there?" again asked the girl.

"Nothin' I wanted, Miss, unless it war a sassy fellow wid a big black moustache, and a skin full ave greenbile."

"But you were not looking for him," replied Hazel.

"Not wan bit, Miss, though I do belave now he do be lookin' for me. Indade, Miss, I was not failin' well at all, at all. Sure, wasn't the little darlint missin', and between the sorrow at home and the failin' in me heart, and the long walk, and the cowl'd mornin', and the sassy look the fellow gave me—"

"What were you doing that so offended him?" interrupted Hazel.

"Indade, I was just walkin' around Carbut Strate and Hood Strate for a little divarsion—not wan bit more or less, Miss—an' he axed me what I wanted. Says I to him, says I, respectful-like, 'Maybe yees can tell me did yees see a little girl strayin' about widout a home. A lady sint me to inquire.'

"He immejetly made some raymark, quick an' sharp-like, about the dam desavin' wimmen—"

"Oh!" Hazel exclaimed, interrupting him.

"Shocking!" exclaimed Constance.



Smith—"Indade Miss, Oi followed wid wan on the soule ave his plexus."

"Sure—and I beg yees pardon fir sayin' it, darlints, but that's just what he towld me and niver a wink whint wid it, the blackguard!

"I up and axed him who he'd be refarrin' to, because I had in my moind a sartin lady wid trouble ave her own.

"He says, says he, wid a snarl, 'None ave yees business.'

"Widout thinkin' whether he meant anything by it or not, I tould him he was a gintleman and a

liar, too. So I did.”

“You insulted him!” exclaimed Hazel, astounded.

“Indade I did, Miss, in foine style, sure”—and he spoke softly to Hazel—“he got it right betwix the two eyes, and I followed it wid wan on the soule ave his plexis.”

“You did!” Hazel exclaimed, amazed, yet with an irrepressible smile that flickered about her pretty mouth.

“I did!” he replied gravely.

“Is the soul of one’s plexus in his eyes, Smith?” interrogated Hazel.

“Sure, some say it do be the cramps; but I think it do be trouble ave the bowels, Miss,” he answered.

“Poor man!” exclaimed Constance, and she looked at Smith reproachfully.

He quickly turned to her with a disgusted look on his face, and slowly exclaimed, “Yis mam!”

During the silence that followed Smith realized that he had spoken hastily and rude, and the disgust so palpably in evidence quickly merged into a look of grave concern.

His native wit, however, came to his aid in a singular apology.

“While the fellow hunted for a soft spot on the pavement, I called up a nearby doctor to help him,” he said.

“You shall be repaid,” Constance assured him in an absent manner.

“Praise God, it will not be the ‘dago’ who’ll do it!” he solemnly replied, and then he softly asked.

“Be there any more arders, mam?”

“No, Smith, you must be in need of rest. Thank you for all your kindness,” and Constance turned from him with grief, unaffected, still on her face. “God bless yees!” he replied, and then as he turned to leave the room, said to himself, “I shud loike to see the wan—bad luck to him—who brought all this trouble on the poor missus,” and he shut his teeth tight in silent rage.

After he had gone Constance pressed her hand down on the top of her head and said distractedly, “Still no word of encouragement; no relief to this strain that seems to be tearing my brain asunder!”

Under the circumstances, inaction, to one of Hazel’s temperament, was anything but pleasant, and the young girl was to be condoned rather than censured for desiring to get away from the distress that pervaded the house. Moreover, she felt that something must be done to relieve the strain that weighed so heavily upon Constance.

“Don’t you think I had better see Mrs. Harris, dear?” she said, with a wistful look of sympathy at Constance. “Perhaps she may have something to tell.”

“Very well,” replied Constance. “Do, dear, if you think some good may come from your visit. Virginia may be home soon and I shall not be alone.”

“I shall get my wraps.”

After Hazel had left the room, Constance, dispirited and sadly out of harmony with Smith’s simple recital of his search for Dorothy, stepped out on the piazza, as though the air of the close room oppressed her.

The sky was cloudy, the air raw and cold.

Dorothy’s pet canary, with its bill thrust under its wing, rested on the perch of its cage, glum and inert, immediately before her.

“Poor thing!” she exclaimed tenderly. “Sweet, sweet! Look up, pet!”

The dainty little beauty, with a throat of silky mellowness, looked curiously about, gave a “cheep” of recognition and then again buried its bill under its wing.

“Even my darling’s pet will not be comforted.” And tears stole into her eyes as she turned away from the bird. “Oh, Sam, I’ve been so anxious to hear from you! Have you found my darling?”

Sam had approached the steps unseen by her, and when she turned away from the bird he stood directly in front of her, though at a little distance.

Her mind at once recalled his words, which rang in her ears as she sank to the ground on that fateful night of the reception, and it was therefore the first and most natural question uppermost

in her mind when she saw him.

He started back in evident surprise and answered confusedly:

"Well—I—I am sure, Mrs. Thorpe, if I had found her, I should only be too glad to—to tell you."

"And you have no tidings of her? But—come in, I am sure something important brought you here."

She entered the house, followed by Sam, who muttered to himself, "She's conjuring tears already, but I'm proof, were they to fall like rain. I guess so!"

Upon entering the room he looked at her steadfastly and quizzically.

There was something in his look, too, that bore the imprint of effrontery.

She stared at him and asked timidly with alarm in her voice. "Oh, what do you know of her?"

"I—I—beg your pardon, Mrs. Thorpe, but—well, the truth is, I called to know if you have any information of her."

"How can you ask that question of me?" replied Constance brokenly, while again the tears welled up in her eyes.

"You see, madam—ahem! You won't be offended with me, for God knows I do not mean any offense to you, but—ahem—you see, madam, you are the unhappy cause of as fine a hearted gentleman as was ever born being a broken-spirited, a—a—blighted man!"

"Sam!" she affrightedly exclaimed. "What are you saying?"

"This," continued he, with dauntless determination, "and I'll tell you the truth. You are the talk of the town, and they say you—you—you've secured the child from your husband."

Her face became ashy white as the meaning of John's absence from home dawned on her mind. She staggered, then sank into a chair. Presently she looked up with a sort of dazed, wandering expression and tried to smile through watery eyes. "My cup of woe is very full, Sam! Please don't jest with me!"

He wiped the perspiration from his brow, for he felt his resolution to accomplish what he had set out to do was fast crumbling.

He rushed on, "I am not jesting. No, I guess not! I know I am paining you, but I have a duty to do which I shall do, as I have always done through my life. And as this affair occurred at my uncle's place, they say he knows more about it than he cares to tell, which he doesn't. And I have come to see if you really don't know something of the whereabouts of Dorothy, as that would relieve my uncle and aunt of much embarrassment—at least—I guess so!"

Her lips trembled with the pathos of her reply: "Did I know of the fate of my child, heaven could not bless me with a more joyful desire—to let you know, to let your aunt know, that Dorothy is—is safe. As it is, I would to heaven that I were dead and with my darling." And her head fell forward on the table as a burst of heart-rending agony shook her frame.

It was evident Sam was uneasy and much affected by her distress. He coughed and tried to clear his throat again and again. "Ahem!—you must excuse me, Mrs. Thorpe—ahem! But—but, Lord—Lord! I can't bear to hear you take on that way. Ahem! Ahem! I'm rough and thoughtless in my way, and it seems harsh and brutal to speak to you as I have done—I guess so!—and if any man in my hearing says you have hidden your child—why, by Heavens, I'll knock the lie back through his teeth."

Sam had forgotten his resolution to resist the influence of a woman's tears; moreover, he felt convinced he was standing in the presence of a true, atrociously wronged and much slandered woman, and in his eagerness to undo the wrong he had done her by practically charging her with the wrecking of her husband's happiness and connivance at the child's disappearance, had lost control of that gentleness he felt due to the weaker sex, especially this bereaved woman. He stammered an apology in a soft regretful tone of voice.

"I—I—beg your pardon. I—I could not help it. These expressions will slip out now and again, won't they? I guess so. I am satisfied you are deeply grieved about Dorothy, and I'm interested in her, too. The fact is, I was so anxious on my aunt's account that I have behaved like a brute. Now please understand me, you are not friendless, for I shall do my best for you, and if Dorothy is out of water I'm going to find her. I'm off now, so good-bye!"

And he was gone—glad to get away from the distress that raised a lump in his throat which all his labored coughing could not dislodge.

Sam had entered her presence a scoffer. He had made up his mind that her grief was as deceitful as her reputed double life. He departed, her firm friend and almost choked with disgust at his own readiness to believe the foul reports, magnified by gossiping busybodies.

Gradually Constances' emotion subsided. She sat upright in the chair. A significant dryness had come into her eyes as she stared at the wall with profound abstraction. Out of the haze John Thorpe's picture gradually emerged.

Suddenly she exclaimed in strangely low tones, almost a whisper—tones in which a woman's life was projected on the horoscope of faithfulness, immutable as the "Rock of Ages":

"John! John! You are breaking my heart!"

Then her mind began to settle upon one object—to see her husband, John Thorpe.

"It must be some mistake!" she muttered. "It cannot be so. John would never treat me thus. I will have Smith seek him and deliver a message at once."

She went to her desk and wrote a hasty note, requesting John to come home to her immediately. With the sealed note in her hand, she hurried out to find Smith. She found him fast asleep on an old couch just inside the coach-house door, and remembering his tired look, softly said: "Poor man! How fatigued he must be! After all, what matters it for a few hours?" And then, instead of arousing him, she took his coat off the rack and gently covered him, murmuring in a broken voice that betrayed the pathos of her trouble: "Asleep, with the peace of God resting on his face. Heaven bless and reward your faithful heart. Sleep on."

Returning to the house, she sat down at the table to think of a possible something she had done to cause John's unkind behavior.

A shadow darkened the doorway. She turned mechanically. A tall, grave and elderly gentleman, with stooping shoulders and bared head, stood in the entrance.

Constance arose. He approached her and said softly: "I beg to apologize for the intrusion. The door being open, and seeing you within, I entered unannounced."

"Oh, Mr. Williams! Have you any tidings of Dorothy?"

"I regret not being able to bring any tidings of your child. The river has been carefully dragged for a considerable distance in front of 'Rosemont.' I fear she is drowned and the body carried down to the Columbia."

"My poor darling!"

"There is yet hope, however, that your child lives. An old cripple—a disreputable looking vagabond—was seen lurking about the grounds the night she was lost. He has not been seen since. Detectives are baffled in tracing him. He may have abducted your child. It's the only hope that she is alive, though I admit, a frail one."

"Heaven give me strength to hope it is so. But who could be so cruel as to steal away my little darling? No, no, she is drowned!"

"I have to announce a disagreeable errand," and he paused, not quite satisfied of the propriety of the moment for so serious a declaration as he was about to make; but he at length continued hesitatingly:

"As—as your—legal adviser—" Again he paused.

Constance looked at him timidly. A cold, creepy fear of something dreadful about to happen chilled her. Her blanched face and beseeching eyes warned him of very grave consequences.

"What is it, Judge?" she whispered with parched lips, "speak out; tell me what you have come for."

"Are you strong enough?—I think—perhaps—I had better defer—"

"Oh, yes, my strength is not great—but—the suspense—I cannot bear. Let me hear—what it is." He hesitated no longer.

"As your attorney, I have been served with a notice of an application for a divorce, by John Thorpe, from his wife, Constance."

With bowed head he laid the document on the table.

She clasped her hand to her head, clutched the back of a chair for support, for the suddenness and weight of the blow staggered her. She, however, managed to bear herself bravely up.

"And—could—he really believe this of me?" she said distractedly.

"He has, at the same time, placed at your disposal in the National Bank a sum of money for your immediate wants." He paused. A solemn quietness pervaded the room.

At length he continued in a low, grave tone: "I am prepared to receive instructions. Shall I give notice of your intention to resist his application for divorce?"

Still leaning on the chair for support, and without lifting her bowed head, or raising her downcast eyes, she said in a voice barely articulate with the huskiness and tremor of threatened physical collapse, "Please leave me for awhile. Providence has seen fit to afflict me so sorely that I must beg a little time to try to think. But, stay!" And her voice gathered a little strength in an effort to keep from breaking down altogether:

"I desire to receive nothing from John. I shall not reply to his complaint, and you will return the money he has placed to my credit in the bank. Now, please leave me; I desire to be alone."

During his professional experience, the "Judge" had been a witness to many painful scenes, and familiarity had calloused somewhat his sense of sympathy. But as he gazed upon the white, spiritually chaste face of this frail woman, a conviction that a great wrong was being done to her forced and crowded itself upon his brain.

"Someone must answer for it before a higher than human court," he thought, and then with bent head he left her, feeling that he would value beyond price the power to effect a little gleam of sunshine to heal her broken heart.

"Dorothy! Dorothy!" he muttered, and he passed out from her presence with words of Tennyson on his lips:

"Oh, for the touch of a vanished hand,
The sound of a voice that is still!"

After he had gone, Constance remained motionless. She was strangely quiet, yet wrapt in thoughts of bitterest shame and grief, the world had little left for her to care for.

A sense of gloom enveloped her. Its shadow bore heavily upon her oppressed spirits, smothering by its weight the stifled cry of her heart's anguish.

It was therefore with a wondrously calm voice, pregnant with tragic pathos, that she at length broke the stillness: "I am sure of the cause of John's absence now, and the very worst has come to me. What now can compensate me for the humiliation of being thought by him so shameless and debased? Oh, how wretched I am!" and with a moan, she placed her hand on the top of her head.

"Oh, heaven spare my reason—yet—what is reason to me now? Or—life? My darling is drowned. John has left me, and with them hope and happiness are gone forever."

It was then a strange, uncanny, desperate flash leapt into her eyes. Suddenly she withdrew her hand from the top of her head, but instantly pressed it to her brow.

In a moment her appearance underwent a great change. Under the continuous strain, the strands of grief and despair had at last snapped asunder and up rushed an exultation that instantly overwhelmed all opposition to a suddenly conceived and terrible purpose. She whispered with an earnestness intense as it was significant: "There is a way out." Then she suddenly burst into a frenzy of pathetic joy as she thought of the phial of laudanum in the medicine chest in her room.

"A passage to my darling beyond!"

She did not see Virginia standing in the doorway, nor did she pause as some do to take a last farewell look at earth and sky. Her mind was set upon the swift accomplishment of an object.

Upon reaching her room, she took up the phial of laudanum and then, as she fell on her knees, locked her hands together, and her voice softened into tenderness—softened in inexpressibly sweet and plaintive tones, as she cried out in a whisper of her soul's anguish:

"Rock of Ages, cleft for me!"

She was standing in the shadow of the valley of death.

Strangely coincident, the inspiring notes of the "Star Spangled Banner" softly broke upon the air from a piano in the music room below. As the grand strains swelled upward, they were met with a break in the clouds through which the sun poured down a flood of dazzling glory.

At that moment Dorothy's pet canary began to sing. The delicate little feathered thing, that had nestled its bill under its wing in the raw cold of the morning, felt the warm influence of the sunshine that fell upon it, and looked up, twittered, lifted its voice in surprised gladness, and then in response to the soft strains that were pealing forth from the music room, broke into song.

Higher and higher it swelled, cleaving the air with its exultant melody.

Oh! the wild soaring flight of that joyous song!

Through the partly closed window it burst and flooded the room with its gladness and cheer. Death stayed his hand.

The little silken feathered throat of her darling's pet had turned aside the "Grim Sickle."

She heard it. Out over the entrancing beauty of Autumn-dyed vegetation, her sad eyes wandered—wandered wistfully over nature bathed in the splendor of the sun's radiance. She heeded the call, and then, appalled at her contemplated sin, she cowered—bowed down—lower, lower. In tones of resignation—tones tremulous with awe of the Omnipotent, she said: "Have pity upon me, Merciful Heaven!"

And then very softly Virginia knelt beside her, gently encircling her waist with her arm, and looked into her spiritual face with eyes overflowing with tears. In a broken voice, scarcely articulate through a great sob, she said: "Oh, Constance! Constance, dear, I am punished enough already!"

After Hazel had completed her attire for a visit to Mrs. Harris, she descended the stairs with the same feeling of gloom and depression upon her.

Slow and hesitating as was her action—as though undecided as to the propriety of leaving Constance, and while drawing on her gloves, she aimlessly wandered into the music room and listlessly sat on the piano stool. Then, with her head turned looking out of the window, she let her fingers ramble over the keys of the instrument. Then she saw Virginia pass up the walk and enter the house, but after the lapse of a few moments and her cousin not appearing, Hazel entered the drawing room to greet her—but too late. Through the open door she heard a step on the main stairs above. Hazel followed. On passing the table the divorce bill caught her eye. For a moment she paused and picked it up; then laid it down, her breath coming in gasps, for she instantly realized a crisis of a very grave moment had appeared. She ran upstairs, surmising that Virginia was connected with the "divorce bill," for she had not seen Mr. Williams.

And then she heard Virginia's voice. Softly she stole to the door and looked in. There, kneeling on the floor, were Constance and Virginia, looking into each other's eyes, Constance drawn back in timid alarm, and Virginia blinded with tears, clasping the hand that held the laudanum phial, her free arm thrown lovingly around Constance's waist.

Hazel silently drew back, an overpowering emotion suffusing her eyes with tears. "Poor Constance! Her trouble thickens fast. What will the end be?"

CHAPTER IV.

Rutley had found time during the frantic appearance of Constance at the "fete," to threaten Virginia with public exposure if she failed to keep their secret. It was that threat that induced her to pause in a momentary conceived intention to demand an explanation from her brother. The passionate earnestness—the uncontrollable fury she discovered in her brother—produced an awe, and aroused her to a sense of some terrible mistake, and of the far-reaching effect her conspiracy with Rutley was likely to have. Each moment, instead of exultation, increased her sorrow at the course she had pursued.

Between fear of publicity of the part she had played, coupled with her hatred of Corway, and consequent satisfaction in her triumph at his discomfiture—at the same time alarmed at her brother's imminent danger in a probably tragic affair—all contributed to indecision, and she realized to her dismay that she had placed herself in the power of a man who had proved himself a master "Iago."

Her intuition caused her to shrink from him. He comprehended and pressed closer. Despite her powerful will and keen perception, and possession of those womanly attributes of sympathy and kindness to suffering humanity, she felt herself incapable, just then, of defying him.

The cry of Constance that Dorothy was in the water scattered the quarreling party, which rushed to the river's edge.

Virginia and Mrs. Harris remained with Constance, but Rutley made it his business to keep his eyes on her and under pretense of searching the grounds, remained near by, in order to restrain her from approaching her brother.

Her opportunity to undo all, which under a more prompt determination would have succeeded—was lost, simply because it had taken her some time to care for Constance, and also to arrive at a fixed conclusion, irrespective of the threats or cajoling of Rutley—and then John Thorpe disappeared. Two days she diligently searched for him, surmising that he was searching for Dorothy, but all her efforts to locate him were fruitless. She had just returned from a stubborn search of the hotels, when she heard the frenzied cry of, "A passage to my darling beyond." She recognized the voice and stole through the doorway, just in time to see Constance pass upstairs.

As Virginia entered the room, she passed the table on which lay the divorce paper. The printed word attracted her attention, and at once arrested her onward course. She picked it up. "John Thorpe, from his wife, Constance." Horror and dismay swept across her face with lightning rapidity. Here, then, was the key to Rutley's horrible revenge. Now she knew that Constance was made to stand for Hazel.

The document dropped from her nerveless hand, and with wildly beating heart she flew up the stairs after Constance. Noiselessly she opened the door. Before her—on her knees, with bowed head, the phial of laudanum between her clasped hands, was the woman who had received the terrible blow intended for Corway.

Virginia's heart seemed to still its beating. Her blood seemed to be congealing to ice as she stood incapable of motion, and listened to the piteous appeal from that pure, broken heart.

In a moment she understood it all—the intent—the arresting hand of fate—the startled submission of a meek and contrite spirit to the Divine will, and below—the divorce paper.

Satisfied that Constance would not again attempt an act of self-destruction, and unequal, in her present frame of mind, to the task of ministering comfort to the woman whose grief must be partially laid to her door—for it must be remembered that Virginia had not in any manner contributed to the abduction of Dorothy, and was as much at a loss to account for the child's disappearance as her mother—she withdrew, her mission unfilled—her atonement inconceivably harder to accomplish. She seemed overcome with a suffocating sensation. She must have air. Out of the house she mechanically passed. Down the steps and around the grounds—under the silent falling vine and russet and golden-colored leaves she hurried, neither looking to the right nor to the left.

Born on her father's Willamette Valley farm, yet this city home, of her childhood and of her womanhood, now so enchantingly beautiful in its Autumn glory, its fragrant coying whisper had no charm to impede her onward flight, no power to lift her bowed head.

She was thinking of the one within. "And it is all my fault. I feel sure of that, for it would have been impossible for Rutley to have angered John so much with any other name. I must have been mad ever to have confided in him that it was Constance's ring.

"Oh, what shall I do? What shall I do? God forgive me!" she moaned, as she sought solace under a maple. But there was no rest for her. She returned to the house. Mechanically she opened the door and with one longing heartsore purpose—to seek the seclusion of her apartment—to throw herself on the couch and bury her face in her hands in a vain hope to get relief in tears. But there, just inside the door, on the hall table, she saw through moist-swollen eyes, something white.

She picked it up. It was a letter addressed to her, in a coarse scrawl. She fled to her room, there she sat on a chair near the window and opened the letter. The characters were bold, but slovenly written, and almost illegible, and then somehow the light did not appear strong or bright as it should be. She bent over close to the window—no better, save that she could make out the word "Virginia."

Becoming more interested, she turned on the electric light, and even then her eyes seemed weak, and the letters so run together as to appear blurred. She took up a magnifying glass that lay on the table, and by its aid was at last able to decipher the note.

Virginia, ther party as sends er this kin tell yer somethink about er party yer wud lie ter knows, perwiden yer meets me nere the top of the long steps at or eleven ternight—alone, mind yer—alone in ther city park. Yerl be safe if alone.

She was at once convinced that the note had a deep significance. She turned it over and over and read and re-read it again and again.

It was clearly meant for a clandestine meeting—with whom? Ha!

The handwriting was evidently disguised, for it was quite different from that on the envelop, and the illiteracy plainly intended to deceive. Nevertheless the information might be of inestimable value—perhaps John, maybe of Dorothy.

Her mind was almost in a state of frenzy at her impotent efforts to undo the mischief she had wrought, and even this "straw" gave a certain measure of relief, by offering work for solution.

"I will go!" she said aloud. Having made up her mind to take the risk, her spirits lightened perceptibly.

As the envelop bore no postmark, she at once plied the housemaid with questions. Who delivered the letter? How had it come on the hall table? The questions were put in a quiet, indifferent manner, so as not to excite curiosity.

At the usual time the maid had taken it from the private mail box, which was of iron and old-fashioned, and fastened to the porch buttress, and she guessed that the mail carrier had brought it with the other mail. Virginia spoke kindly to the girl, and after casually commenting on the beautiful sunshine, returned to her room and prepared for the adventure. She utterly disregarded in her mind that the mail carrier had brought the letter. Since it was not postmarked, it could not have passed through the postoffice.

Some one had sneaked in some time during the night or early in the morning and placed it in the box. That was her decision.

CHAPTER V.

That night, heavily veiled, she entered the park, alone. She was familiar with the contour and walks and knew the location of the long steps, but in her agitation, she thoughtlessly took to the walk on the left of the main entrance.

The darkness was not deep. Above could be seen stray fleecy clouds, flitting athwart the vast realms of space, while the atmosphere near the earth's surface was laden with a thin vapor. Down low on the horizon, above the line of hills, swung the half-moon, aglow with soft pale light, while the nearby electric arcs were scarcely affected by the haze that enveloped them. Every element seemed to have conspired to make the night a fit one in its baneful purpose.

As she proceeded, endeavoring to control her fears, though her heart beat wildly with misgivings, the stillness of the night was broken only by the sound of her own footfalls on the cement pavement, and ever and anon were mingled with the distant attenuated sounds of belated cosmopolitan life. At times her walk would be rapid, then slow and hesitating, almost a halt, as she approached some indefinite object, and as the clouds sped hurriedly across the face of the moon, grotesque shadows loomed up suddenly, shying her into moments of terror until discovered to be fantastic bushes or other odd-shaped growths.

Her sustained, keen, alert watchfulness preyed severely upon her tense nerves. At length she arrived at the place she thought designated in the note. She stepped off the walk onto the grass, and stood under the deeper darkness of a cedar. The stillness was profound; so much so that she fancied she could hear the throb of her own tumultuous heart.

And to add to the unseasonable moment, the weird, uncanny howl of a jackal, confined in the park menagerie, pierced the night air and caused cold shivers to race up and down her frame.

"It's a lonely spot," she whispered to herself. "And this is the top of the long walk. Now the time—yet! I can see no one. I do not feel safe."

Just then a man moved slowly from the shadows near the fountain. He leisurely walked toward the reservoir. She watched him for a moment, until the pale moonlight again faded away, and darkness shut him from view. Then, as if by inspiration, she suddenly remembered that the note directed her to the top of the "long steps." In her excitement, she had taken the wrong direction, and was then at the top of the long walk.

Cautiously as possible, she crept down the bank, crossed the bridge, that spanned the park's main artery, and though confusing in the darkness, she at last found her way to the appointed place without meeting or seeing anyone, but with nerves almost snapping asunder, and so fatigued that her limbs trembled.

She sat on a bench near a clump of small firs to get a little rest, and while peering through the darkness, which at that point was faintly illumined by the mass of distant lights spread over the city before and beneath her, she made out the figure of a man walking leisurely on the drive below where she was sitting.

She arose to her feet, and silently stepped in the deep shadow of a clump of trees, and watched him. She took him to be the same man she had seen a little while before near the fountain. As she watched him, another man, who had been concealed in the grove of trees, recently trimmed out to make way for the traditional group of Indians in bronze, "The Coming of the White Man," and which now graces the spot—stole up with cat-like tread behind her, and then, quite close, halted, and silently stood regarding her.

Virginia was watching the stranger on the road, almost directly below her, with such intense eagerness as to be quite unconscious of the dark shadow behind her.

"Perhaps I am being watched," she thought. "I will go down the steps." She turned about, and was terrified to discover a roughly-clad man at her elbow. Her heart seemed to stop its beat.

"What do you mean? Who are you?" she gasped.

The man lifted his hat, bowed and softly said: "Bees a-note a da fraid, Signora de Virginia. Eesa nota-a do you-a da harm. I come to da meet-a you."

His easy, respectful manner reassured her. Relieved, she said: "Then it was you who sent me the note this morning?"

"He, he, he, he," he chuckled low, but exultantly. "Eesa tole-a da self a-da letta would-a da fetch a-you."

"What do you want—what am I—who are you?"

He turned his head aside, and muttered to himself. "She doesn't recognize me as the old cripple," and evaded a direct answer by asking her: "Donna you da know-a me?"

"Your voice sounds like"—and she thought of the old cripple who intruded on Mr. Harris' grounds a few nights since. "Yes—what"—And she halted, unable to frame her thoughts into words.

He laughed low and gutturally. "He, he, he, he, eesa be a da fine-a artiste. Make-a da boss actor—like-a Salvina—bime by, eh?"

"You—you—you kidnapped little Dorothy," she almost shrieked, forgetting her fear, and searching him with glittering eyes.

Jack Shore, for it was he, chuckled gleefully.

"You make-a da wild-a guessa, Signora, Eesa not-a da old-a cripple."

"You were in disguise, a beggar. I gave you money. What have you done with the child?"

"What-a da child-a?" he asked, gruffly.

"Dorothy Thorpe!"

"He, he, he, he," he again chuckled, and sharply turned on her: "Who tole-a you, Eesa gott-a da kid?"

"What did you want to meet me here for? Was it not to tell me where Dorothy is?"

"Oh, he, he, he, he," he laughed. "Eesa jessa da thought-a youda like-a see me—alone—at night, Signora." And he watched her from the corners of his eyes, as, with bent head, he muttered:

"Turnoppsis, carrotsis, ca-babbages, black-a da boots, steal-a da chil. Anyting dees-a gett-a da mon. Go back a da sunny Italy!"

"What was your motive for kidnapping the child?" she asked, without heeding his significant answer.

"Da mon!" he promptly replied. Up to that moment he had equivocated.

"You are frank," she rejoined, and then asked: "Is Dorothy safe?"

"Youse-a da bet she's a da safe," he proudly replied.

"Ah!" It was a sigh of glad relief that she uttered, for she believed the man's statement to be true, and with the information her spirits rose.

"How many of you are there in this?" she quietly asked.

"Eesa not-a da beeze, jess-a da myself."

"You told me you sent the note requesting this meeting. Who wrote it? It was not you!" she demanded.

Jack was not expecting so pointed a question and was thrown somewhat off his guard by her abrupt eagerness. He answered thoughtlessly—or, it may have been, indifference to the importance.

"Eesa my good-a da friend."

"So there are at least two of you in this 'over the road' business?"

Chagrined, he thought how easily he had been trapped. "Hang it! I didn't mean to make a break like that." And then he exclaimed, between his teeth, for he realized too late the slip of his tongue.

"See-a da here. Da mon. Eesa want. How much-a you-a da give to gett-a back-a da kid? Speak a da quick."

Virginia perceived he was getting angry and restless.

It was about that time that Sam, who was lying on his stomach in a slight depression, peered over the rise in the ground a short distance from the two. He was a little too far away to hear distinctly, except occasional words, as their voices were pitched in a low key.

"How much will I give?" replied Virginia, surprised, and then her voice lowered again.

"You are a poor man, no doubt, but you have your liberty, which is priceless, and I warn you of the severe penalty for the offense you are committing. It is most dangerous business."

"Liberty, wid out-a da mon! Eesa be damn! Say, Signora, yous-a come-a down wid a da handsome

da mon—Eesa take de kid—wid da longa golda hair so nicey da shiney, and da bigg-a da brown eyes.”

“Dorothy, I am sure!” she thought.

“Well, what do you call the handsome mon?”

“Eesa note-a bees-a da hard. Eesa cheap at-a da twenty thous.”

“Twenty thous—what!”

“Bigg-a da round flat dollairs!”

“Twenty thousand dollars!” angrily exclaimed Virginia, for the moment forgetting herself, and then again her voice fell almost to a whisper.

“You dare ask that from me! Knowing that I have but to call and the police would hound you to prison.”

Jack swiftly wheeled about and rolled his eyes in alarm. The word police startled him, and for the moment he verily believed they were within call, a circumstance he at once set down to his lax watchfulness, but he soon felt reassured, and, turning upon her said, sarcastically:

“Oh, that-a beesa a lettle a da game-a. He, he, he, he,” he laughed low and gleefully, in strange contrast to the white of his eyeballs, which shone with sinister effect as he leered at her.

“Two play-a dees-a da trick, Signora! Wouldn’t yous-a look-a da well bees-a compan-e-on ove-a mine, in a da pen, eh, Signora. He, he, he, he,” he again laughed.

“Eesa don-a da know some-a da ting about eesa da Duc, eh! Eesa don-a da hear a da game between ee mand a da Signora da Virginia, eh! Sacramento!” He fairly ground out the last word between his teeth.

Virginia shuddered and then involuntarily exclaimed: “Villain!”

Jack turned upon her swiftly, ceremoniously bowed, and again leered at her. Then, with a most offensive smirk playing about his mouth, said: “Tank-a da Signora, my a da pard.”

Her face burned with the red that flushed up. She felt that even the darkness could not conceal her flaming cheeks. She bent her head in humiliation and shame at the all too well merited rebuke.

For a moment there followed intense stillness. She thought of what he had possibly heard at the Harris reception. “His disclosure would incriminate me with Rutley. Still, it matters not. My duty to my God, my home and Constance is to make reparation for the wrong I have done.”

She broke the silence in an assumed, haughty tone. “Well, as you are poor and in need, I will give you five hundred dollars upon return of the child; but if you do not comply by noon tomorrow I shall inform the police.”

“Eesa bett-a note!” he replied, with an unmistakable menace in his voice. “Eef yourse da squeal on a da ma, Signora—look-a da out!” And so saying, he slowly drew his finger across his throat.

The action was most significant. “Eesa bett-a da keep a da mum! Understand-a! Youse-a geeve a me a da twenty da thouse-a dollair, youse-a take a da kid—but youse-a da squeal!” and he drew close and hissed at her—“Bett-a da look a for her eesa mong a da weeds in a da Willamette.”

His attitude was so threatening, and his speech uttered with such savage earnestness, that it drove all courage from her heart. Again she felt, as once before, at the Harris reception, how puny a thing she was in the presence of a strong, masculine rascal.

She, however, quickly mastered the momentary sickening alarm that had seized her, and assuming a bold, threatening manner, in which she astonished herself, for she felt anything but defiant just then, said in a voice low and determined:

“Scoundrel! If you harm that child, I, myself, will weave the rope to hang you!”

Jack leered at her. “So Signora”—laughed, laughed low and derisively. “Ha, ha, ha, Signora lak-a da job, eh? Eesa mak-a da boss a hang-a man, eh?”

Jack could not repress a smile of admiration at her courage, and his lips quivered to exclaim: “God, she is game!”

“An-a deesea lettle white-a da hands-a,” he sneered. “Stain ’em all a da red, eh?” and he chuckled low, as though amused. “Oh, ha, ha, ha.” Suddenly he changed his tone and again continued threateningly. “Now look-a da ere. Eef-a youse-a da want a kid, gett-a da mon a da quick—twenty da thous, for eesa tink a da move-a da way. May bees gett-a da organ en-a da monk, go down South Amereek. Eef youse-a danna da squeal, da kid bees-a da safe; but effe youse-a da tell a po-

lis, eesa mak-a da me a devil," and he again drew close to her and hissed out between his teeth.

"When eesa be lik-a dat, Eesa does a da murda," and so saying, he thrust his hand inside his double-breasted short coat, and partially drew out a glittering knife. "Eesa you da see?"—and he leaned over to her, a sinister glint shooting from the corner of his eye—"Eesa slit more's a da one-a windpipe." As he replaced the knife, a low whistle sounded off toward the right. It startled him, for he muttered as if alarmed. "Ha, some one is watching me." And without another word or moment of delay, glided off southward, and disappeared in the darkness.

Sam having seen the glitter of a knife against the dim city lights, unconsciously gave a low whistle of warning, and sprang to his feet. He believed Virginia was in imminent peril.

For a moment he stood irresolute, unwilling to uncover his identity to her or to in any wise have her think he had been shadowing her. Then feeling satisfied she was not hurt, he sped away on the track of the Italian.

Virginia was alone. She, also, had seen the figure of a man suddenly loom up on the right and then hasten after the supposed Italian.

The terror that now had seized her, the strain that gave artificial courage, so worked upon her nerves as to produce a trembling of her limbs, and to avoid a threatened collapse she sank down on the grass.

Her strength gradually returned, her agitation quieted and she began to think with lucidity. She had been followed by whom? Most likely a detective in the pay of her brother.

"Thank God!" His unknown presence at a perilous moment had been sweetly welcome. "Dorothy is not dead," she thought. "Thank Heaven for that, too; but she is in the hands of a murderous scoundrel, who would not hesitate to shed innocent blood were his own safety jeopardized."

An attempt at rescue by the police would, no doubt, result in the death of Dorothy. She must act alone, act at once. Having arrived at that conclusion, she arose to her feet. To get Dorothy home was the first thing to be done—the mother's life depended upon that.

How could she get twenty thousand dollars to pay the ransom? She bent her head in thought. She had been instrumental in the ruin and disgrace of her only brother's happy home. If it was in human power to restore happiness to that home, she would do it. The Italian is in desperate need of money. She could hypothecate her income; sell her jewels.

"I will offer him all I can possibly obtain—then, if he will not release Dorothy," and her voice took on a soft, strange, resolute calmness. "God helping me, I will take her from him, even though," and she looked at her own little white hands, "these do become stained red in the work."

Then she made her way out of the park, and returned to her home.

CHAPTER VI.

Sam had followed Virginia and stood unseen within ten yards of her when that morning she sat under the maple after she had left Constance. He noted how absorbed she was in thought—noted her grave, white, shocked face, and her bowed head. His sympathy went out to her. Oh, what wouldn't he then have given to be able to clasp her in his arms, to comfort her—the woman he so madly loved! Though free and impulsive in his manner with other women, to her he was as coy and modest and respectful as a boy of fifteen.

He lingered near the premises for a time, from an impelling sympathy to be near her in her trouble, and hoping she would re-appear, but in that he was disappointed.

He returned again in the evening, resolved to call on her. He ascended the piazza steps and crossed to the door, but somehow at the moment could not muster courage to push the button. After meditating for a moment, he turned and softly passed along the piazza. On reaching the south extension he halted, for the sound of a door softly closing caught his ear, and then he saw Virginia emerging from the side entrance, closely veiled. In a moment Sam was all alertness.

He wondered at her veiled appearance at that hour, about half past ten, and at her avoiding the main front entrance. He followed at a distance and saw her enter a Washington and Twenty-third street car. He boarded the next one that came along.

Fortunately the interval between the two cars was short, there having been a breakdown on Fifth and Washington streets, resulting in the cars being bunched. Sam stood at the front end of the car beside the motorman, and in the darkness—the front inside blinds being down—was able to keep a sharp lookout at the car just ahead.

At the intersection of Washington and Twenty-third streets, the forward car stopped, and he distinctly saw a woman alight. "Virginia!" he muttered, and as his car passed on, he saw her walking toward the park entrance. One block further along Twenty-third street Sam alighted, and rapidly retraced his steps to Washington street. On rounding the corner, and coming into view of

the park entrance, where blazed an arc light, he caught sight of her again, entering the gateway.

Sam briskly covered the distance, keeping well under the line of shadows.

"Did you notice the path a lady took, who entered the park a minute since?" he inquired of a park policeman.

"Yes; that way!" and the policeman waved his hand to the left.

"Thank you," and Sam followed the direction indicated. A strange foreboding hurried him on. He was then fully aroused to something extraordinary about to happen. He walked on the grass whenever possible to muffle the sound of his footfalls, and soon was rewarded by making out the dim form of a woman some distance ahead, being still in the range of the gate arc light. There was no mistaking the figure. From that moment he never lost sight of her.

To avoid suspicion of shadowing her, he took a diverging path and boldly clambered over the hill, and proceeded toward the children's playgrounds, apparently away from her. Passing on and in the direction of the reservoirs, he at length stopped at the fountain.

He was the "man near the fountain" whom she discovered while she was standing under the cedar.

Sam had stopped but a moment when, to his amazement, he discovered Virginia suddenly had disappeared down the hillside. He at once followed her, and was the man she again saw on the driveway beneath her. Again she disappeared, and he shrewdly suspected, into the deep shadow of the clump of firs nearby.

He was straining his eyes diagonally up the slope, trying to penetrate the gloom, when a low scream of terror assailed his ears, and was quickly followed by a low, reassuring masculine voice. He determined to get near them. He threw himself flat against the bank and, shielded some by the unmowed grassy slope, dragged himself along for about fifty feet, to where the driveway, rounding westward, divided them from the long flight of steps. He passed within fifty feet of the couple, then cautiously pulled himself near the summit. The ridge was strategically of great value. It enabled him to flank them unseen.

He immediately availed himself of its cover and sneaked slowly and cautiously along the side of the crest to a point which he judged to be near enough to them, and then he peered above the summit. The couple were between him and the dim city lights. He strained his ears to catch their words, and drew himself closer, inch by inch, fearing discovery, yet desperately anxious to catch the purpose of the meeting, and when he saw the glittering knife, his alarm gave expression in the low whistle.

When he sprang on in pursuit of Jack, it was with a determination to ascertain who he was, where he lived, and, if possible, to gain some knowledge of his purpose in this meeting with Virginia at such an unseasonable time and place.

The few words of low-spoken conversation he had heard gave him no clue to the real object of the meeting; but he was convinced that some grave and momentous purpose was involved to have induced Virginia to keep so perilous an appointment alone.

"Did she make the appointment?" The thought was no sooner uttered than it gave place to another equally as suggestive, for just then thoughts raced through Sam's brain with amazing rapidity. "Or, rather, was she not compelled to meet the stranger by some power which he had obtained over her—some secret of her life which she feared—a deathly fear, of disclosure, and which this man knew, and its power he knew only too well, how to wield."

The more he thought about it, the more the mystery, for such it appeared to him, deepened. He determined to fathom it. Inured to a rough, open-air life on the Texas plains, his constitution was hard and tough, and well seasoned for the job presented—and, it must be confessed, it was to his liking.

Sam felt his blood tingle as his enthusiasm rose to the prospect of a genuine adventure, and he hurried along, over the soft, yielding grass, to catch sight of the fellow ahead. A clump of low bushes suddenly confronted him. It was an unusually dark spot, and then, for the first time, he thought of the ugly knife the stranger had displayed, and realized that he himself was unarmed.

He almost halted—wary of running into an ambush, and cautiously made a wide detour, meanwhile alert for any sudden surprise from the direction of the bush. Discovering no sign of a crouching figure there, he hastened on, and finally caught sight of a moving shadow, as it crossed a faint shaft of light shot from a window of a dwelling on Ford street, to his left.

"Ah, I guess so. That's the party," he muttered to himself, and from that moment Sam was as keen on the trail as a sleuth on the scent, never losing sight of his quarry, but himself avoiding, as he believed, discovery.

Occasionally, as the moon cleared from an obscuring cloud, he could make out the man halting under the shelter of a fir or clump of saplings, evidently to listen for sounds of a pursuer, and

then, seemingly satisfied, again move on.

So far the direction of his course was toward the reservoir, but of a sudden he turned, and sharply cutting across Sam's front, swiftly entered the deep gloom of a cluster of cedars, where he was lost to the eyes of the pursuer.

It was plain that his man intended to avoid exit by the main gate, or by Park avenue, a circumstance to cause Sam keen chagrin, for he hoped by an adroit move to get a good square look at the fellow's face as he would pass under the entrance arc light.

To the right, a foot path wound its way to the main gate. To the left of a cluster of dark firs stretched a comparative level, past the bear pit, and right down to the deer corral; but what park features lay beyond and between the firs and corral, he could not determine. In his effort to mislead Sam, the fugitive had doubled on his track, and at that moment was but a short distance west of the starting point. Sam reasoned that this man would not cross that smooth, grassy plot, nor emerge from his retreat and go down the path, but most likely would take a direct course through the cluster of firs, and under the shelter of their dark shadow strike the fence directly opposite, and so reach the Barnes road, a hundred yards or so west of the park gate.

It was obvious that time was an important factor. There being no possible place of concealment between his present position and the firs, he must either go back and take a circuitous route, or boldly approach by the path. He chose the latter. Skirting the firs—for he dared not enter the cluster's gloomy precincts in his defenseless condition—he soon passed them and discovered a succession of odd-looking shrubs, trained to fantastic growths by the gardener. They afforded excellent cover right down past the bear pit to the deer corral fence, which ran along the brow of the hill; farther down, a second fence, which still exists, bounded the deer corral and separated the park from the Barnes road. A little further along and against the upper picket fence (since removed), a mass of tangled ivy and Virginia creeper foliage, revelled in wild luxuriance.

The vines had seized upon and had grown about and over some dwarf locust trees, forming a series of natural bowers, rather picturesque by daylight, but at night, dismally dark and forbidding.

Sam hesitated, which was well for him, for under the shadow of these dark vines, Rutley and Jack Shore had met by previous arrangement. They were silently watching him.

"I cannot shake him off. He tracks me like a bloodhound," Jack informed his companion, in a whisper.

"The meddlesome fool!" replied Rutley. "If he will not stop following you—why—he carries his life in his hands."

"No, no! Not that. We don't want any killing in ours, Phil, anything but that. Who is he?"

"Sam Harris. I saw him follow Virginia and was sure he would run foul of you."

"The simpleton is harmless anyway. He is moving to the fence. See him? Hist!"

After studying the wild growth for a few moments, Sam decided to approach it by way of the fence. There he suddenly dropped to his knees and crept noiselessly—very close beside the fence, toward the tangle. As he neared it he could make out its black cavernous recesses. Twice he paused, his eyes strained with the utmost tension of watchfulness against a surprise, for he now fully believed that the man he was attempting to shadow was a desperate character.

However, he crept nearer, hardly stirring a blade of grass, so cautious was his progress—so silent his movements. He listened intently, scarcely breathing, lest its sound should betray his presence. His hands gently touched a vine to part the leaves—instantly he was greeted with a hiss and a rattle, and then something glittered close to his eyes, which in the moment of his startled alarm he believed to be the glitter of a reptile's fangs. It caused him to bolt suddenly with a panicky feeling at his heart, and then it brought from Jack a soft chuckle of merriment.

"He's not as plucky as the girl. We must throw him off the scent at any cost," whispered Rutley, "or we will be trapped." Suddenly he laid his hand on Jack's arm and continued with a low, sardonic laugh: "I have it, Jack. You lead him down on the Barnes road; I'll meet him there," and without any further delay Rutley slipped down the steep slope to his automobile, which lay in the deep shadow of the canyon walls, a little further to the west, where he waited with the evil purpose in his heart for the climax.

Sam was no coward. He had faced dangerous situations fearlessly, but that hiss and rattle, in the stillness of a dark, lonely and forbidding place, fairly raised his hair, and lent a lightness to his feet that amazed him, when he halted and noted the distance covered in the few moments of his flight.

"One of those deadly reptiles got out of the park zoo," he thought, "sneaked his way into that jungle—I guess so!" and he wiped the beads of perspiration from his face as he added aloud: "An almighty close call! But," and he looked up at the dark sky, and then around and about, and as gathering confidence returned to him, continued: "I shall not give up yet, not yet. I guess not."

Yet it was apparent his pursuit of the stranger had signally failed, and he stood motionless wondering what course then best for him to adopt.

True, he was in a dilemma, and instinctively realized that to remain in the park was useless. So, without forming any practical conclusion, and for the purpose of keeping active, he again moved toward the fence. It was then he conceived the notion to climb over the fence and make a short descent to the gate, in order to catch sight of Virginia, for she could not be far away yet, and to follow her and secretly to protect her on her return to her home. With that object in mind, he climbed the fence, and, securing a position on its top, looked cautiously about. He was some distance to the west of the tangle of vines, from which he was screened by the foliage of a small tree that grew nearby.



Sam—"One of those deadly reptiles got out of the Park Zoo."

The gate light threw a faint glimmer along the fence, and on the Barnes road in the gorge below. He peered down the steep hillside, and looked up and down the road. There being no one in sight, he let his legs slip quietly down the other side of the fence, and gradually lowered himself, without sustaining other injury than a few trivial scratches. As he brushed mechanically the debris which had clung to his clothes, he was surprised to see the figure of a man step out, seemingly from the fence itself, and slip down the hillside, and climbing the lower fence, cross the almost dry bed of the stream, close to the road, and proceed cityward.

Sam was sure the man, whoever he was, had not been on the corral side of the fence a moment before, and to give the mysterious appearance a deeper significance, the point of exit was about the location of the tangled vines. The appearance of the man differed from the one he had followed, inasmuch that one had on a long coat and bushy beard, the other wore a short pilot coat and mustache. For a moment Sam was puzzled, and he scratched his head. Suddenly he broke out in an unconscious whisper to himself, as though urged on by some supernatural agency, for afterward it surprised him when he thought of that moment: "Damned if I don't think he's the same party I've been after, disguised."

And he made straight for the place, as near as he could estimate, where the man had emerged.

It was a few moments before he found it, but a close examination soon revealed two yielding pickets of the fence. True, just sufficient to admit a man's body sideways, but there it was, as he afterwards discovered, and perfectly screened from observation by masses of slender leaf-laded branches and twigs. The inner, bushy part being skilfully cut away. The trick employed to evade him was now palpable. The hiss, the buzzing rattle, the glitter—"Ah; it was the glitter of a steel blade"—and at the thought he shivered, as with an icy chill, for he realized how dangerously near a death-trap he had ventured. As the reaction came, his face flamed with the hot blood of indignation and chagrin at the smart dodge by which he had been temporarily baffled.

In the distance, down near the park entrance, was still dimly visible the retreating form of a man. Sam determined to follow him.

He slid and partly tumbled down the steep hillside, sprang over the lower fence, and crossed the bed of the creek and on to the road—and was so intent on his mission that he did not hear or see,

until it was almost upon him, a dark, noiseless machine, approaching from the rear. He moved hastily aside to let it pass, but to his intense astonishment, the automobile followed him with evident intention of running him down. Again he sprang aside, but too late. The front wheel grazed his left leg and swung him around on to the rear wheel, which hurled him violently to the ground.

Having accomplished his purpose, Rutley at once stopped the machine, alighted, and examined Sam.

He was soon joined by Jack, who asked, in a low voice: "Have you killed him?"

"I don't think so. Bad gash on the side of his head, though."

"Dangerous?"

"Impossible for me to say."

"Just unconscious?" anxiously inquired Jack.

"Yes; but I don't think he will interfere with us again for some time. What shall we do with him?"

"Take him home."

"Good idea," grunted Rutley. "It becomes you decidedly well, Jack, after being a villain, to play the good Samaritan. Well, take this handkerchief and bind his wound," and he raised Sam's head while Jack bound up the wound.

"It will make old Harris feel under an obligation to me."

"And you can touch him for the loan of ten thousand, to square accounts," added Jack. And again Rutley laughed.

"Come, let's pack him on to the machine."

CHAPTER VII.

Shortly after the insult forced upon him by John Thorpe at the Harris reception, and finding it impossible to enjoy the spirit of the gay throng, Mr. Corway took his departure.

Disappointed in his endeavor to communicate with Hazel, who deemed it discreet to avoid his presence until after the affair had been cleared up—and actuated by the purest motives, he could not but feel that he was the mistaken victim of some foul play with which fate had strangely connected him.

He recalled the profound respect he had always entertained for and on every occasion he had shown Mrs. Thorpe. And as his thoughts of the affair deepened, his natural fire of resentment softened and died out as effectually as though he had been summoned to stand beside the deathbed of some very dear friend. And the more he thought of it, the more disagreeable and repugnant a quarrel with John Thorpe appeared to him; yet his honor as a gentleman grossly insulted, forbade any other way out of it.

Finally he decided to consult Mr. Harris on the best course to pursue, and for that purpose determined to visit Rosemont the next day.

It was well on in the afternoon that he left his hotel for the Jefferson street depot, and while walking along First street he noticed a closed "hack," drawn by a pair of black horses, rapidly proceeding in the same direction.

As it passed him, he felt sure that he had caught a glimpse of Lord Beauchamp's profile, through the small, glazed lookout at the back of the vehicle.

It was late when Corway returned from Rosemont, and strangely coincident, as he stepped down off the car he saw that same "hack" move off, and that same face inside, made plain by a chance gleam of light from a street lamp, that quivered athwart the casement of the door. But except for a thought of "devilish queer, unless 'me lord' was expecting some one," he attached no further importance to it, and dismissed it from his mind.

He proceeded up Jefferson street with head bent low, engrossed in deep meditation, for Mr. Harris was unable to give him any concrete advice on the matter, and he was recalling to memory every conceivable act he had committed, or words he had uttered that could have been possibly misconstrued by Mr. Thorpe to urge the latter to a frenzy and so violent an outburst, when he was abruptly halted by a peremptory order: "Hands up!"

Simultaneously two masked men stepped out from the shadow of a gloomy recess of a building between Second and Third streets, and one of them poked the muzzle of an ugly-looking revolver in his face.

At that moment Mr. Corway had his hands thrust deep in his light overcoat pockets, and the suddenness of the demand made at a time when his mind was in a perturbed, chaotic state, evidently was not clearly comprehended. At any rate, he failed to comply instantly, with the result that he received a heavy blow on the back of his head with some blunt instrument, which felled him like a log. His unquestioned personal courage, and his reputation of being a dead shot at twenty paces availed him nothing. He was not permitted time, short as was needed, to wrest his mind from its pre-occupied business to grasp a mode of defense, before he was struck down. He thought he had met with, what many others before him have met on the streets of Portland after dark, a "holdup."

When he recovered consciousness the smell of tar and whiskey was strong about him. To his dazed senses, for his brain had not completely cleared of a stunned sensation in his head, this smell was incomprehensible, and suddenly becoming startled, he cried out, half aloud: "For the love of God, where am I?" And then a recollection of the apparent "holdup" dawned on his mind.

He lay still for a moment trying to trace his actions following the blow he had received, but in vain; all was a blank. It was very dark where he was lying, and he fancied he heard the swish of waters. He put out his right hand and felt the wooden side of a berth. He put out his left hand and felt a wooden wall. Then he tried to sit up, but the pain in his head soon compelled him to desist.

He lay quiet again and distinctly heard a sound of straining, creaking timbers. He at once concluded he was on a ship. "Why! Wherefore! Good God, have I been shanghaied?" were the thoughts that leaped to his mind, and notwithstanding the pain in his head, he attempted to sit up, but his head bumped violently against some boards just above him, and he fell back again, stunned. He had struck the wooden part of the upper berth. He, however, soon recovered and commenced to think lucidly again. He knew how prevalent the practice of forcibly taking men to fill an ocean ship's crew had become in Portland and other Coast cities by seamen's boarding house hirelings, and he felt satisfied that he was one of their victims.

He put his hand in his pocket for a match; there was none; and his clothes felt damp, then a fresh whiskey odor entered his nostrils. "Have I been intoxicated?" The question startled him, but he could not remember taking any liquor. "No; I am sure of that, but why this odor; perhaps this berth has been occupied by some 'drunk'."

A feeling of disgust urged him to get out of it at once, and he threw his leg over the side of the berth and stood upright.

The pain in the back of his head throbbed so fiercely that he clapped his hand over it, which afforded only temporary relief. He then thought of his handkerchief, which he found in his pocket, and though smelling of whiskey, he bound it about his head.

Being now in full possession of his faculties, and feeling strong on his legs, he determined to investigate his quarters. "Oh, for a light!"

Again he felt in his pockets for a match and found none, but he discovered that his watch was gone, and a further search revealed that every cent of his money was gone.

At this time, in addition to occasional indistinct sounds of the swish of waters against the bow, he heard some tramping about overhead, as by barefooted men, acting seemingly under orders from a hoarse voice farther away.

His first impulse was to shout to apprise them of his presence, but on second thought decided to remain silent for a time, or until he could determine their character.

So he proceeded to grope around, first extending his foot in different directions, and then his hands. He found three berths, one above the other, and then, fearful of bumping his head against some projecting beam or other obstacle, put out his left hand as a feeler before him, and slowly worked along by the side of the berths.

Soon his foot struck something hard, unlike wood, for it appeared to give a little, and putting down his hand, felt it to be a coil of rope. It was in an open space at the end of the berths. A little further his foot struck some wood, and feeling about with his hand, found it was a partition wall. On rounding the partition a very thin ray of light issued from a crevice in front, and then he discovered steps.

He crawled up to a door, opened it, and peered out on a pile of lumber. Above it masts towered up into the darkness, with sails hoisted, but unset and flapping lazily to and fro in the wake of the breeze.

It was near the dawn, light clouds almost transparent and partly obscuring the moon, drifted along in the sky, while here and there, through openings of deepest blue, glittered countless stars.

The air was fresh, too, a little raw and chill, but good to inhale after the dead rank odor from which he had just escaped.

An open space in the lumber pile just in front of the fore-castle door, and left to facilitate ingress and egress, gave him room to stretch. The light that glimmered faintly through a chink in the door was from a lantern that hung on the fore-mast, a few feet above the deck-load of lumber.

By the aid of this light he looked over and along the surface of the lumber aft to where some men were dimly silhouetted against the aft sail, then swinging abeam, by a lantern on the poop.

Without hesitation he mounted the lumber and was immediately accosted by a gruff voice from behind: "Where away now shipmate?"

"That's something I should like to know," replied Corway, turning around and facing the questioner.

Then he saw that the ship was being towed down the Columbia River, of which he was certain by its width, by a steamer, and the man who had addressed him was leaning on the boom that swung over the fore-castle.

"You'll know soon enough when your 'watch' comes," said the man with a grunt that may have been meant for a laugh.

"I say, friend," went on Corway, pleadingly, "I am not a sailor, and as there must be some mistake about me being on this ship, may I ask what means were used to get me aboard?"

"Well, that's a rummie," said the fellow, leering at Corway, and after a moment of seeming reflection, he continued: "Well, I reckon it's not a mate's place to give out information, but bein' you've a sore top an' wearin' city clothes, I will say this much: you had stowed away such a bally lot of booze that you come to the ship like a gentleman, sir. Yes, sir. And nothing short of a hack with a pair of blacks to draw it, would do for you, sir."

"In a hack, you say!" exclaimed Corway, alertly.

"Yes, sir; in a hack, just as we cast off from the sawmill wharf at Portland."

"Strange! The hack I saw yesterday afternoon, and again at the depot last night, was drawn by black horses," muttered Corway to himself, and after a moment of deep reflection, went on: "Looks like a conspiracy to get me out of the way. I say, my good fellow, do you remember the time I was brought on board and how many were in the party?"

"That's none o' my business," replied the mate, turning away.

"Oh, come now," said Corway, pleadingly, for he believed this man could tell more about the affair than he cared to.

"Well, all I seen was three swabs that said they was from the Sailor boardin' house, chuck you aboard about two bells," replied the mate, indifferently, as he straightened himself up.

Corway then noted the huge proportions of the fellow and thought: "What a terrorizing bully he could be to the poor sailors that chanced to anger him at sea."

"But I never was in a sailor boarding house in my life."

"Oh, tryin' to crawfish from your bargain, eh?" laughed the big fellow. "It won't go; ship's bally well short-handed, long vige, too, and the capt'n had to do it!"

"Do what?" Corway sharply snapped.

"Why, he pays over the money afore they'd h'ist ye over the rail. Better talk to the capt'n. He's comin' for'ard now," and the mate stepped over and leaned on the bulwark.

Corway at once turned and moved toward the captain, who was approaching with his first officer, from amidships, smoking a cigar.

"Yes, I am the captain. What do you want?"

"To be put ashore!" Corway demanded. "I've been sandbagged and robbed, and evidently sold to you for a sailor, which I am not."

"Not a sailor, eh," the captain said, taking the cigar from his mouth and looking sharply at Corway. "What did you sign the articles for?"

"I never signed any articles." By this time Corway was fully alive to his position and spoke with rising heat and ill-suppressed indignation.

"Oh, yes you did!" sneered the first officer, "but you were too drunk to remember it."

"Repeat that, and I'll choke the words back down your throat," and Corway stepped menacingly toward him.

The captain held up his hand warningly and looked at Corway as if he was daffy, then said slowly

and meaningly: "Be careful, young man; that is insubordination; a repetition will land you in irons. The boarding-house master swore that he saw you sign the articles, and he had other witnesses to your signature to satisfy me before I paid him your wages for six months in advance on your order."

"I signed no articles, and I know nothing about it," fumed Corway. "And I again demand, as an American citizen, that you put me ashore, or I shall libel this ship for abduction."

"Ah, ah, ah," sneered the first officer, who was unable to conceal his ill-will to Corway since the latter's threat to choke him. "Give the dandy a lady's handkerchief, and he'll believe the ship's a jolly good wine cask."

Corway struck him square on the mouth. "Take that for your insolence, you contemptible puppy," and following him up with clenched fists, as the officer stumbled back, said wrathfully: "If you speak to me that way again, I'll break in your anatomy."

"Here, Judd," called the captain to the mate on the forecastle. "Take this fellow to the strong room and keep him there on 'hardtack' for three days."

"Aye, aye, sir," replied Judd.

Hearing the captain's orders, and seeing the commotion he had created, Corway saw that his only chance for escape was to go overboard, and without further hesitation sprang toward the side of the ship for a plunge, but his toe caught on the edge of a warped board and down he went sprawling.

The big mate jumped on him, and though he fought desperately, he was overpowered, and the last he remembered was being dragged by the collar over the lumber toward the forecastle.

When he next got on deck the ship was far out to sea and bowling along in a stiff breeze.

It is said that it is an ill wind that doesn't blow somebody good.

So with Mr. Corway, for though the boarding-house toughs had nearly given him his quietus and sent him on a long journey, they had conveniently done him the effective service of quashing an encounter with John Thorpe.

CHAPTER VIII.

When Sam regained consciousness it was to find himself on a couch in his uncle's home, with the odor of ammonia in his nostrils. For a couple of minutes he lay very still, collecting his scattered senses, and then, as the clouds that darkened his brain cleared away, the events of the night dawned upon his memory.

Two men were in the room conversing in low tones. They were standing near the dressing-case, back of the couch, which had been drawn out to the middle of the room to facilitate examination of his injuries. One of the speakers he recognized by the voice as his uncle. The other he soon made out to be the family doctor.

"Then you are quite satisfied he is not badly hurt?"

"So far as I have been able to examine him, yes. The concussion, when he struck the hard roadbed, produced insensibility. The cut of the cuticle covering the left parietal bone, just above the ear, is not dangerous, since there is no fracture. I do not anticipate any serious result, fortunately. It might have been worse—it might have been worse!"

"Quite true; still we should have more confidence in his recovery if we were certain the worst has passed."

"All passed, Uncle—I guess so!" spoke up Sam, in cheery tones, and he sat up on the couch.

"Ha, ha, Sam, my boy; not so fast. Glad to hear your voice again, but you must rest; you must rest. You need it. The doctor insists," and Mr. Harris hastened to his side to urge him again to lie down.

Nevertheless Sam arose to his feet and remarked: "All right, Uncle! A little sore up there," and he motioned to the sore side of his head. "But that's all—I guess."

"You must avoid excitement," cautioned the doctor. "And I advise you at once to take to your bed and remain there until I make a thorough diagnosis of your case, which I shall do in the morning."

"Not if I know it. Not much—I guess not!" mentally noted Sam.

Turning to Mr. Harris, he asked: "How long have I been unconscious, Uncle, and who brought me home?"

The question was put by Sam with an eagerness bordering on excitement.

It was noticed by both the gentlemen.

"I insist that you go to bed, Sam," pleaded Mr. Harris.

"The very best thing you can do, sir," added the doctor.

"Of course, Uncle, I shall do so to please you; but the only soreness I feel is on the side of my head, and I've often felt worse. But you have not answered my questions."

"You were unconscious for about two hours. My Lord Beauchamp brought you home in an automobile. It seems he was returning from a spin out on the Barnes road and accidentally ran his machine against you. He, like the perfect gentleman he is, immediately stopped and went to your aid. He recognized you and brought you home with all speed."

"Ah! Very queer!" exclaimed Sam, significantly.

"What is queer, Sam?" Mr. Harris interrogated, with a keen, penetrating, yet puzzled look.

"Why, that fellow," and Sam checked himself from making a grave charge, by indifferently remarking: "Oh, it seems queer to be run over," and then he looked up and continued: "Doctor, I thank you for your attention; good night."

"Uncle, good night; I'm going to bed."

"Very sensible, Sam; good night."

"This powder is an opiate and will act to produce sound sleep, which is very essential to counter the shock your nervous system has received," said the doctor, as he laid out the potion. "Take it, after getting into bed."

"Thank you," and Sam fingered the powder gingerly. "Good night, Doctor."

"Good night, sir."

As Mr. Harris and the doctor left the room Sam stood for a moment in deep thought, then muttered to himself: "That fellow out there near midnight. No lights or gong on his machine. Deliberately ran me down—and Virginia about! Did he know she was to be there?" He shook his head—"It looks queer." And then he lifted his eyes in a quick, resolute way.

"I'll be back in the park at dawn—I guess so!"

With that he flipped the opiate out of the window.

CHAPTER IX.

It was in the gray of the dawn when Sam alighted from the first outbound car at the junction of Twenty-third and Washington streets and immediately struck out for the City park.

He was desirous of being the first visitor there, and he was inordinately curious to examine by the light of day the ground he had traversed a few hours previous, and particularly the spot where Virginia had met the mysterious stranger, as also the tangle of vines in which he was satisfied had lurked most deadly danger.

He had been urged on by an indefinable something, a sort of presentiment that quickened to impatience, his desire for an early trip to the park, and pursuing his way steadily along, afraid of no ambush now, for he was armed, he at length arrived at the spot which he recognized by the clump of firs close to the row of the esplanade benches. He examined the ground as carefully as the uncertain light would permit. Discovering nothing unusual, he was about to abandon the search and make his way over to the tangle of vines, when on second thought he decided to wait awhile for stronger light. Producing a cigar, he contentedly sat on a bench—the very same Virginia had occupied—near a tree.

Sam was not of a romantic turn of mind, yet his attention was arrested by the sublime grandeur of the scene confronting him. The morning was emerging from the deep darkness of night, mild, clean and fresh. The base of the distant eastern hills was yet shrouded in inky blackness—a blackness intensified by a vast superimposed floating mass of thin fog, seemingly motionless in the noticeably still air.

The billowy crest of this fleecy, semi-transparent mass of vapor reflected a mellow chastity, while the irregular points of the rugged mountain tops were sharply defined against the soft emerald, golden-pink light that streaked and massed the sky in the advance of a promising Autumn morn.

The huge, glistening white peaks of Hood and Adams and St. Helens, towered in lofty majesty, clear and individually distinct above the high altitudes of the range that encompassed them, and even as he looked, a soft, rose-red tinge tipped the apex of Mount Hood, which appeared

unusually close, and crept softly down the glaxis of its snow-covered, precipitous sides.

And nearer, at his feet, in a basin—the city spread out far and wide.

The silvery green waters of the Willamette River, cutting through the city's center, silently glided along its sinuous course to the Columbia; while patches of thin mist flitted timidly about on its placid surface, to vanish like tardy spirits of a departing night.

The grand panorama gave his usually buoyant spirits pause.

Gradually the light of his eyes changed from absorbing admiration to a reflective mood, in which the strange behavior of Virginia Thorpe was the predominating subject.

That money, possibly blackmail, was the object of the stranger—scoundrel. Sam could think of him in no other light after the night's experience. There was no doubt, for he had plainly heard her say in a loud, surprised tone, "Twenty thousand dollars."

Suddenly the hoarse whistle of a far-off industrial establishment vibrated the air and aroused him from his deep reverie. The morning was well advanced.

As the light in his eyes quickened from a pensive stare at the ground a few paces from his feet, he perceived a shred of red peeping between the blades of short grass. He picked it up. It was a narrow piece of soiled and worn ribbon, but attached to it was an old oxidized bronze medal, about the size of a silver quarter-dollar. The inscription upon its rim was in Latin, but Sam clearly made out one word, "Garibaldi," from which he concluded its late owner must be an Italian.

From the smooth condition of the medal, and unweathered appearance of the ribbon, he judged it must have been recently lost.

"What if it had been accidentally dropped by the man talking to Virginia last night?" The idea was fraught with great possibilities.

"A clue! A sure clue, as I live," and Sam's enthusiasm soared with the recollection of seeing the man thrust his hand into the inside breast of his coat to show the knife, when it was quite possible the medal either became unfastened from its clasp, or being loose in his pocket, had been drawn out with the knife and slipped noiselessly to the ground.

Somehow Sam's thoughts flew back to the night of his uncle's reception, and connected the old Italian beggar loitering about the grounds with the medal.

"Was he the owner of the medal? And, if so, was he the same party that met Virginia, and whom he had followed last night?"

"Heavens! Could he have kidnapped Dorothy?" A train of thought had been started and rushed through Sam's brain with prodigious alacrity.

"Was the twenty thousand dollars he had heard Virginia mention with surprise, a ransom?"

"If Virginia knew that Dorothy was in the hands of the Dago, why did she keep it secret? And what business had Beauchamp out on the Barnes road last night?" Sam derided the idea of him being out there alone, for a spin.

With these thoughts, and others, pregnant with momentous possibilities, he continued the search. Finding nothing more, he sprang onto the path that led to the tangle of vines. There was the very spot. No mistaking it. Along that fence he had crept in the darkness of night. Those the leaves he had touched with his hands, and he thrust his stout cane among them, but no hiss, or rattle, or glitter of something sinister, greeted his probing now.

Into the gloomy recess of the jungle he made his way, derisively fearless of any possible lurking danger.

He parted the overhanging foliage to let in more light. Ah, it was all plain now.

There close to his elbow was the artfully concealed exit through the foliage, and the pickets loose at the bottom. There the man had stood—not more than a foot of space separating them when Sam's hand touched the leaves, and the glitter—well, it was the vicious glint of an ugly knife. Of that Sam now felt perfectly satisfied.

Pushing the leaves further apart to enlarge the opening overhead, so as to admit more light, he discovered several strands of hair of a brownish color clinging to the end of a broken twig in the cavity of the tangle, which he at once conjectured had been torn from the man's false beard. These strands of hair Sam carefully gathered and placed between the leaves of his notebook. "Maybe, maybe they'll be useful some day. I guess so," he muttered.

He resumed the search, but with the exception of a few indistinct shoeprints on the soft soil, found nothing more to interest him, and squeezing himself through the aperture in the fence, he quickly emerged on the Barnes road, well satisfied with his morning's work.

One hour later, with his hat jauntily set on the side of his head, effectually concealing the wound, Sam was walking on Third street, in front of the "Plaza" blocks, where several vegetable vendors rendezvous preparatory for their morning's work. Several bustling women, hotel stewards and others were out early, marketing. As he wended his way through the bargain-driving throng, the loud voice of an olive-skinned huckster standing on the rear footboard of his heavily-laden wagon, attracted his attention. It was a covered, one-horse express wagon, common on the city streets, and contained a motley assortment of oranges, bruised bananas, melons and the like.

He was putting in a paper bag some bananas he had sold to a woman, who stood by, at the same time talking volubly—evidently in an effort to fend off her too curiously searching eyes from the over-ripe fruit.

"Eesa good-a da lady. Nice-a da ripe-a."

"Oh, they are too ripe! Put in those other ones, they don't look so soft."

"Eesa note-a da soft-a; only a da black-a da skin. Look-a," and he peeled a diminutive banana.

"How nice and clean those are in that wagon over there. I think I'll buy some of them. You needn't mind putting those up for me."

"Sacre, Tar-rah-rah! Eesa beg-a da pardon, good-a da lady. Take eem all for a ten-a da cent-a," and he thrust the bag of fruit into her hands. "Eesa 'chink' wagon. Show all-a da good-a side, hide-a da rotten side. Da morrow, Eesa sell-a da turnoppsis, carrottsis, cababages, every kind-a da veg-a-ta-bles. Some-a time Eesa black-a da boots. Saw da ood. Do anyting gett-a da mon. Go back-a da sunny Italy."

He was so insistent, with fear of being made a subject for coarse remonstrance, she paid him his price and departed. Whereupon he again began to bawl out in his peculiar Dago dialect: "Or-ranges! Ba-nans! Nice-a da ripe-a banans. Ten-a cents-a doz-z. Me-lo-nas! War-ter-me-lo-nas! Nice-a da ripe-a Musha Me-lonas!" and he suddenly lowered his voice on observing Sam halt in front of him.

"Eesa tenna cent-a da one. Nice-a da ripe-a, my friend. Take-a eem a da home, two for-a da fifteen-a da centa." And he handled a couple of small melons.

"Sacre, da damn," and his voice again rose to a high pitch, as he shouted: "Me-lo-nas! Ba-nans! Nice-a da ripe-a da Ba-nans. Tenn-a cents-a doz!"

The peculiar idioms of the fellow, and his manner of delivery seemed strangely familiar, and as Sam moved along slowly, a pace or two, rumaging his brain for identification, he suddenly remembered the old cripple at his uncle's reception, and also, only last night, the mysterious stranger in the park.

It may be pertinent to remark that Jack Shore had obtained most of his dago dialect from a close study of this very man. The similarity of speech and voice, therefore, was accountable for Sam's mistake of identification.

A moment later, among a passing throng, Sam stopped and pretended to pick up a small copper-colored medal appended to a bit of soiled ribbon. He halted and ostentatiously displayed it, turning it over and over in his hands while examining it. It attracted the attention of an Italian nearby, who at once claimed the medal.

"If it is yours, no doubt you can describe certain marks which appear on its surface?"

"I don-a have to. Eets a Garibaldi! Giv-a da me!"

"What else?" Sam pressed for more definite information, for he immediately became convinced that this claimant was not the real owner.

The word Garibaldi attracted a second Italian, a short, fat man, with huge, flat face, who was at once apprised of the find. He asked Sam to let him have it for examination.

Sam refused to let it pass from his hands, explaining that this man had claimed it, but seemingly was unable to identify it. "I will deliver it to the officer," and he beckoned a policeman to approach.

There followed instantly a lively colloquy between the two Italians, the second one declaring it belonged to Giuseppe—for he had seen him with it, and he turned to Sam.

"That man," indicating the fruit vendor, on express wagon license number 346, "is own it. I'm sure he will it tell-a you so," and he shouted, "Giuseppe!"

Giuseppe heard and shouted back, "Ta-rah-rah!"

As they moved toward him the short man continued to address Sam. "His fadder was wit Garibaldi at Palestrino."

"Giuseppe, have you lost your fadder's medal?"

Giuseppe had stepped from his wagon to the curb. With a surprised look he instantly replied, "No! Eesa len eem to deeza fren."

"When you len eem?" the short, fat man asked.

"Eesa bout five-six day. Why for youse-a ax deeze-a question?"

There was no mistaking the fact that Giuseppe's frank response conveyed the truth.

Sam believed him.

The short man again spoke. "This man pick eem up there. It belong to you. Ask eem for it."

"Geeve it-a da me, boss."

"This man has claimed it as his. Yet he cannot identify it," replied Sam. "Now, to prove it is yours, tell me its size, and the letters on its two sides."

"Eesa bout as big as-a deeze." And Giuseppe produced an American quarter dollar. "Look-a da close. Eesa one-a da side 'Emanual Rex.' Below eet a Garibaldi. In-a da middle eesa solidar holding a flag."

"So far, good!" exclaimed Sam, eyeing the man searchingly and committing to memory his every lineament.

Giuseppe continued, "Eesa da odder side, 'Palestrino, MDCCCXLIX.' In a da middle, 'Liber.'"

"Correct!" said Sam.

"What color is the bit of ribbon?" asked the policeman.

"Eesa be da red. A leetle-a da faded," was the answer.

Sam was convinced that Giuseppe was the real owner of the medal. A possible important discovery. And he smiled as their eyes met full, face to face. And the Italian smiled at Sam's open-faced frankness; but utterly unsuspecting the splendidly concealed satisfaction that prompted the smile from Sam.

"Where does the man live to whom you loaned this?" asked Sam.

Giuseppe appeared puzzled. He looked up the street, then down the street, but finally said, "I dunno, eesa move away las week."

"Where did he live?"

"In-a da cabin—odder side Nort Pacific Mill, at-a da Giles lak."

"What is his name?"

"George-a da Golda!"

Sam was careful to appear unconcerned, and, to avoid questions that might arouse suspicions of something "crooked"—"Well," he continued, "I have no doubt the medal is yours, but it is a valuable souvenir, and as Mr. Golda may have something to say, I shall leave my address with this officer." He thereupon handed the officer a card, remarking, "Please file it at your headquarters."

Then again turning to Giuseppe, Sam continued, "You notify Mr. Golda to call at the police station and put in his claim and I will be on hand with the medal at any time the authorities apprise me of Mr. Golda's arrival."

The Italian's disgust was plain and he ejaculated, "Sacre da-be damn! Eesa mak George-a Golda fetch eem back. Garibaldi geeve eet-a ma fadder."

Without further question, Sam proceeded on his way to Simm's office. That Giuseppe was not the man Sam was after, appeared certain, but that he was well acquainted with the fellow, there seemed no doubt.

Giuseppe must be watched, for he would find Golda to get the medal back, as it was evident Giuseppe treasured it as an heirloom.

While deeply engrossed on this line of thought, Sam was starting down Third street on his way to Detective Simms' office, and had nearly reached Alder street when his reverie was interrupted by a familiar voice, exclaiming, "Good marnin', sor!"

"How are you?" responded Sam, recognizing Smith.

"Sure, I'm failin' foine, axcipt"—and a wistful look came into his eyes—"axcipt for a sore spot in me heart. God shield her!" and he bent his head reverently.

Sam knew full well the object of Smith's allusion, and said sympathetically, "You share in the sorrow of your house?"

"Indade: I do, sor! Tin years ave I known her swate disposition. Sure, didn't I drive her coach to the church whin she married him? And she was kind to my poor wife, too, whin she suffered betimes wid brankites. God rest her soule! She's wid the angels now! But I see yeese do be hurted!"

"A bruise! An accident last night, but it's nothing, I guess! Are you out for a bracer this morning?"

"Just a little sthrole, wid me eye open for signs."

"Signs of what?"

"Oh, the dinsity of the cratchur! Sure, I do be always lookin' fer the little wan."

"Why don't you search the river?" suggested Sam significantly; "her mother says she is drowned."

"Yis! Poor woman! And she belaves it, too, so she do. But says I to myself, says I, some blackguard thaif has sthole the little sunbeam of her heart, which do be nearly broken entirely, so it do!" and Smith turned his head away to hide the tears that came unbidden to his eyes.

"Do you think so?"

"I do."

"Do you?"

"I do, by me faith, I do, and ave I could lay me hands on the wan who is raysponsible fer it, sure there'd be somethin' doin'!"

Sam had slim faith in George Golda calling at the police station to claim the medal, but he believed it possible to locate him by diligent and discreet inquiry. With that idea he beckoned Smith into a lobby of an adjacent building, which at that early hour was untenanted, and produced the medal from his vest pocket. Handing it to Smith, he said guardedly, "I found it in the City Park this morning."

"Sure I can't rade Frinch at all, at all!" said Smith, examining the bronze.

"It's a Garibaldi medal. I can trust you with it?"

"Phwat d'yees mane?" Smith responded with a snap.

"This," and Sam added confidentially in a low voice, "circulate among the shanties and scow dwellers below the North Pacific mill. Show the medal, prudently, mind, but never let it pass out of your hands."

"I want!" responded Smith, thrusting it in his inside coat pocket. "Be it raysponsible for yeese hurt?"

"Of that—well, no matter—I fear where the fellow who lost the bronze lives—there will be found the little one." Sam had spoken in a voice so soft and low and grave that it startled Smith.

During the pause that followed, he looked at Sam in steadfast amaze.

"Do yeese belave it?" he finally asked.

"I do!"

"Sure, yeese do be after me own hart. I tould thim some thaivin' blackguard——"

"Hush!" Sam interrupted, "not so loud. If a fellow by the name of George Golda claims it"——

"George Golda!" repeated Smith.

"Yes; if George Golda claims it bring him to me. If he will not come, track him, and let me know where he lives as soon as possible. Do it quietly."

"Sure, I will that. D'yeese think he's the wan?" whispered Smith, intensely interested.

"We shall see," replied Sam. "But don't part with the bronze. You will remember?"

"I will, be me soul, I will, and be the token ave it, I'll"—and Smith spat on his hands and made

other significant manifestations quite understandable to descendants of a fighting nation.

Immediately thereafter Sam continued on to Simms' office, and there, closeted with the detective, related his experience.

Twenty minutes later, a quiet, unassuming, seedy-looking man carelessly lounged about in the vicinity of the Plaza fountain, and no matter what position he occupied, or where he loitered, express No. 346 and its driver never escaped from his sight.

CHAPTER X.

The sun had traversed half the distance from the horizon to the zenith when Rutley called at Rosemont for information concerning the seriousness of Sam's injuries, and incidentally to have a chat with Hazel, for he was very fond of the girl.

"We appreciate your lordship's anxiety to learn of Sam's condition, and I am sure Sam will express to you his gratefulness for promptly bringing him home," added Mrs. Harris.

"I am glad he is able to be about," continued Rutley, looking at the floor, "though I should imagine a few days of quiet rest after such a vigorous shake-up would be attended by beneficial results."

"I am sure of it," said Mr. Harris; "for immediately he regained consciousness there seemed to come over him a worry about something—"

"Dear me!" exclaimed Mrs. Harris, in surprise. "I cannot conceive Sam being worried about anything."

"Nevertheless, my dear, the boy did appear worried last night, or rather early this morning, and though he spoke and acted quite rational, still it has given me much concern." Again turning to Rutley, "And imagine my astonishment, too, when on going to his room early this morning I found he had gone."

"He hadn't even been in bed—had evidently not undressed—just flung himself down on the couch."

"You don't apprehend the wound exerts undue pressure on the brain?" queried Rutley, in the most carefully studied manner, as he looked meaningfully at Mr. Harris.

"James, you should have insisted on the doctor remaining with the dear boy over night."

"My dear, Sam would not listen to it. I think nervousness and a gloriously fresh morning urged him to an early walk, and his return has been delayed by meeting some friends."

"Quite likely," responded Rutley.

"If Sam continues to worry, I shall advise a trip to Texas. The bracing air of that latitude has heretofore proven very beneficial to his constitution."

"A happy idea, Mr. Harris," and the grave, concerned look that had settled on Rutley's face relaxed and vanished in a smile of cunning satisfaction, as he thought how agreeable it would be to have that troublesome fellow out of the way. "I have crossed that country and can testify to the purity, dryness and health invigorating quality of its air. Indeed, I do not think you could suggest a more wholesome vacation than a month of rollicking, free life on the Texas plains."

"A trip to Texas may all be very well in its way, but I know something of the dear boy's malady and believe that no climatic change, temporary or prolonged, can be of the least benefit to him," impressively broke in Mrs. Harris.

"Well, well! Now I do remember that when a boy Sam fell and severely hurt his left knee; and so the old complaint is asserting itself again, eh? You see, Your Lordship"—

"Dear me! How stupid men are!" interrupted Mrs. Harris, with much dignity.

"Ah! James, the dear boy's affliction is of deeper moment. It lacerates the very source and fountain of life. It is, I may add, an affair of the heart."

"Oh! You don't tell Sam is—is—ahem, ahem!"—and to suppress a smile Mr. Harris coughed.

"It is possible you misconceive your most estimable lady's meaning," suggested Rutley, with a smile. "Perhaps it is a case of heart failure."

"Nonsense!"

"James!" quickly retorted Mrs. Harris, with asperity.

Mr. Harris looked meaningfully at her, then turned to Rutley. "I beg Your Lordship's pardon. I did

not mean to ridicule your suggestion. At the time I used the word 'nonsense' I was thinking of the fact, the one of love," replied Mr. Harris.

"James! I never thought when I plighted my love to you it was nonsense!" and Mrs. Harris brushed a handkerchief across her eyes.

"There, there, dear heart!" and Mr. Harris stepped to her side, tenderly turned her face upward and kissed her lips. "That day was the happiest of my life, though I have been happy ever since."

"Heart of gold!" exclaimed Mrs. Harris, smiling through her tears. "And I have never wished I had turned from that altar of our happy union."

"I perceive the cause of Sam's worry now, dear," and the irrepressible Mr. Harris turned to Rutley, "You see, My Lord, it is this way, a lovely young lady guest—since Mr. Corway's strange disappearance—is an inadvertent companion of our Sam, and his troubles were brought on by the sly darts of a little fellow with wings."

"Wrong again!" asserted Mrs. Harris. "James, let me assure you in all candor that Hazel Brooke is not the lady our Sam is worrying about, as the fair democrat can testify."

Just then Hazel entered the room, a poem of grace; a rose glow overspread her soft cheeks, while her eyes sparkled with health and vivacity.

Rutley's eyes at once betrayed his admiration.

The girl was quick to notice it and immediately evinced her pleasure by advancing straight to his side.

"Good morning, My Lord. When I plucked this beauty," displaying a slender stemmed white chrysanthemum which was held between her fingers, "I instinctively felt that it was to adorn the breast of a distinguished friend, and now see where it flies for rest," and she smilingly fastened the flower to the lapel of his coat.

"I shall proudly treasure it, for without doubt its chrysalis chastity is jealous of its human rival, hence the parting of the two flowers. Is it not so?" questioned Rutley, with the most winsome, yet grave smile he could fashion.

"Hazel—the Lady Beauchamp, sounds quite recherche," Mrs. Harris whispered to Mr. Harris.

"Looks as if it might be a go," he responded in like tones.

"It is white and pretty," Hazel murmured, casting a demure glance at her own faultlessly white dress and then naively remarked, while a serious question stole over her countenance:

"I have just come from the water front, where I have been watching the men drag for poor little Dorothy."

"Poor child! So sad to be drowned!" said Mrs. Harris, in a reflective mood.

"Or stolen!" exclaimed Mr. Harris. "I shall not give up hope until that old cripple is located."

Only Hazel noticed the swift glance Rutley shot at Mr. Harris, but she gave it no significance.

"Poor fellow, he feels the loss of his child very deeply," continued Mr. Harris. "Yesterday Thorpe was in one of the boats for three hours. My Lord may see them dragging the river from the piazza." Whereupon Mr. Harris and Rutley went out on the piazza, leaving Mrs. Harris and Hazel by themselves.

"Hazel, dear," spoke Mrs. Harris softly and confidentially, "there is a lady's tiara awaiting you, if my judgment is not faulty."

"He seems to be a nice sort of man," replied the girl.

"A nice sort of man!" remarked Mrs. Harris, astonished. "Why, Hazel! He is one of the nobility. Superior, distinguished! Do you note his condescending air? It is hereditary, my dear. Conscious of being above us, yet every look and move indicates a study to make a descent to our level."

"Notwithstanding—I think—well—I prefer Joe!" demurely insisted the maid. "He is not quite so polished, but—I like him better, anyway."

"What! A commoner to a lord? A straw hat to a lady's tiara? Why, Hazel!"

"That is my choice," replied the girl, quietly but firmly.

Hazel's calm dignity irritated Mrs. Harris, and she remarked with a puzzled expression of countenance, "Dear me! I never could understand the fountain of your democratic ideas, Hazel; and the enigma is deeper to me now than ever."

Hazel's reply, muttered with the same quiet dignity, was as puzzling to Mrs. Harris as ever. "I am

an American, and I love our country too well to leave it for some foreign land.”

Further conversation was cut short by Mr. Harris, who addressed Hazel.

“Did you notice John Thorpe in one of the boats, Hazel?”

“I think so; they were too far away to say positively,” replied the girl.

“Well, here comes Sam, and—and—yes, it’s Virginia Thorpe!” exclaimed Mr. Harris exultantly turning to Mrs. Harris.

“Did I not say it was possible he had met with a friend? Look how proud and joyous he seems walking by her side. No kink in his knee now. Sound as a bell.”

“James, I beg again to correct you. Sam is not lame. His malady has something to do with the charming lady by his side,” remarked Mrs. Harris.

“Oh, I see. She has a pull on him, eh?”

“Yes, a most strenuous one, I may add, as you mere merchants speak of it.”

When Sam entered the room, he was greeted by Mr. and Mrs. Harris with much fervor.

Sam had removed his hat in the vestibule and unconsciously displayed the evidence of his night’s encounter with the automobile. The sight of the plastered wound on his head caused Mrs. Harris to exclaim:

“Oh, my boy, my boy!” and she put her motherly arms about his neck.

“All right, aunty!” said Sam, as he lightly kissed her on the forehead. “Never felt better. Just a scratch. Might have been worse. Eh? I guess so!” and he held her at arms’ length and grinned at her affectionately.

“Where is Virginia? I am sure we saw her with you, Sam!” questioned Mr. Harris.

“She wouldn’t come in, uncle. Gone on down to the shore. She expressed a wish to find you there.”

“Oh!” exclaimed Mr. Harris, with alacrity. “I shan’t disappoint her. Splendid young lady. Brainy, good-looking, very fetching, eh, Sam?” and so saying, he turned, bowed to Rutley and left the room.

“I am thankful you were not killed, and think how much we owe his lordship for having so promptly brought you home,” continued Mrs. Harris.

Sam looked sharply at Rutley, not having noticed him in the room before.

Rutley met his stare with a most affable bow and remarked, “I am pleased to see that Mr. Samuel Harris is able to be about.”

There was a bit of keen cynicism, a sort of faltering regret in Rutley’s delivery, which did not escape detection by Sam.

It almost confirmed him in his suspicion that My Lord had run him down in a deliberate attempt to kill or disable him. The impression caused him momentarily to withhold speech, even in his aunt’s presence. The incident was noticed by Mrs. Harris, who at once concluded something was amiss with Sam, and visions of dementia occasioned by the wound flitted across her brain.

“Dear me! What is coming over him?” she remarked in an awed voice. “He never acted so queer before. Sam!” and she shook him and looked in his face as though she feared some distressing discovery.

Rutley was perceptibly uneasy under Sam’s steady stare and suddenly assumed a pose of freezing haughtiness, deliberately and with studied ceremony adjusted the monocle to his eye and fixed a stony stare at Sam.

Then he turned to Hazel, the very apotheosis of stilted grace and, offering her his arm, said in his most suave and gracious manner:

“I shall be deeply sensible of the honor of your company for a stroll on the lawn.”

For a moment the girl hesitated, as though undecided between courtesy due her hostess and friendliness to My Lord.

Observing the embarrassed expression of Mrs. Harris caused by Sam’s rudeness, she chose to accept Rutley’s arm, remarking, “It is so very beautiful this morning that I love to be out in the soft sunshine.”

Then through the room they passed—passed Mrs. Harris, to whom Rutley bent his head, passed

Sam, who might as well have been in the Antipodes, for all Rutley seemed to see of him, though he looked directly at him, through him, and beyond him, out into the sunshine, with a triumphant smile playing about the corners of his mouth.

"Oh, Sam! you have humiliated me beyond anything I could ever dream of," said Mrs. Harris, whose pain and bewilderment was plainly evident.

"Aunty!" and Sam stooped and gently kissed her forehead.

"I'm sorry my rudeness got the best of me. I did not mean to offend or pain you; but I shall never apologize to that fellow. Never! Never!"

His earnestness was so intense, so unlike his usual self, that his aunt abruptly arose from the chair and in a startled voice said, "Dear me! Why, what do you know, Sam?"

"Why!"—and Sam's face broke into a broad smile, his usual buoyant spirit asserting itself—"why, bless your dear soul, aunty, he's a villain!"

"Lord Beauchamp a villain!" she exclaimed, horrified, and she straightened up in offended dignity.

"Sam, permit me to declare you shock me with your irreverence."

"Well, he gave me the jolt"——

"Not another word!" and she held up her warning finger. "I perceive it my duty, a duty unhappily too long deferred, to instruct you in the art of proper form, especially when in the presence of the nobility," and so saying, she swept down the room with all the stately majesty of a grand dame.

At the mantle she turned and continued, "The case being important, I shall read you a lesson on deportment by—by, dear me! I have forgotten the author's name. But that is immaterial. I shall get the book from the library. Don't leave the room," and so saying she entered the library, to his great relief.

Sam was in a very serious frame of mind. The night's work had developed tragic possibilities, and anything of a lugubrious nature interposing in his trend of thought was dismissed at once.

It was, therefore, no easy task for him to assume readily an air of nonchalance, even in the presence of his aunt, who had schooled him in the art. So the moment he was alone his thoughts plunged again into the absorbing events of the night, and presently he found himself considering the policy of making his aunt a confidant.

"Had I better tell her my suspicions?" he thought; "she will ask awkward questions. No, it will not do! Not yet!"

He was aroused from his reverie by a low, deep whispered "Sst!" Looking up, he saw Smith peeping from behind the half open vestibule door.

Smith dared not enter the room for fear of disturbing Mrs. Harris and exciting her curiosity. He saw her enter the library and then he signaled to Sam. Having caught his attention, he held up a warning finger and again repeated "Sst!" adding in a whisper, "Ave some impartant news to tell yees."

It was well that Smith enjoined caution, for his eyes were expanded and aglow with excitement, and the muscles of his face, tense with serious import, twitched nervously.

Sam's exclamation of concern died on his lips, and he at once stepped into the vestibule, alert with expectation. Softly closing the door, he said, "What is it, Smith? Speak low and be quick. Aunty is in there"—and he indicated with his thumb the library.

"Sure, she's in good company, God presarve them. Will yees listen, plaise?"

"Yes, hurry!"

"Whill. I flim-flammed around the scow dwellin's an' shanties on the neck ave lant betwix Giles Lak an' the river—just beyant the North Pacific Mills, but divil a wan be the name ave Garge Golda cud I foind at all. Sure, I was nearly dishartened entirely, so I wus, whin who shud bump forninst me but me frint Kelly."

"Well?" grunted Sam.

"Kelly is a longshoreman, and he understands his business, too, so he do; but he says he's too big and fat to wurruk much, an' I belaiive him, too, so I do."

"Well, go on!" again grunted Sam, impatiently.

"Sure, I showed him the Garibaldi you gave me this marnin. 'Where did yees foind that?' says he, careless like.

"I didn't find it at all," says I; "my friend found it."

"Where at?" says he.

"In the City Park," says I. "Some fellow lost it last night."

"Sure?" says he, and he looked at me hard.

"Sure!" says I. "Phwat wud I be lyin' to yees fer?"

"An' phwat was the owner doin' out in the City Park last night?" says he.

"Divil a bit do I know," says I.

"D'yees know him?" says he.

"Faith, an' I do not; d'yees?" says I.

"Indade I do," says he.

"Yees do?" says I.

"I do," says he, "fer a black-browed, black-moustached, divil-skinned dago."

"Where may be his residence?" says I, not wan bit anxious, but with me best efforts to kape me heart from jumpin' up in me mout'.

"He lives in a scow cabin up beyant there, at Ross Island," says he.

"He do, do he?" says I.

"He do!" says he. "Sure, ave I not talked wit him over that same bit ave bronze but yisterday?"

"Will yees show me the scow cabin?" says I.

"Indade I'll do that same," says he, "and wan thing more," says he.

"Hist!" and Smith spoke very low and cautiously. "He heard a child cry—or maybe it was a cat. Kelly didn't know which, not bein' interested."

The two stared at each other for a moment in silence, then Sam said: "How long has your friend Kelly known him?"

"I don't know—sure, I didn't ax him, but I thought it was important to tell yees at once. Kelly is waitin' down be the shipyard. Will yees come?"

"I'll meet both of you there in an hour. Sh! Aunty is coming. Mum is the word, Smith!"

"Sure, the ould divil himself cudn't make me tell it to yees aunt." As he was leaving, Smith said in a whisper, "We'll wait for yees."

"I'll be along soon," replied Sam, and he muttered thoughtfully, "May be something in it."

CHAPTER XI.

Suddenly Sam became all attention, for he heard the voice of Mrs. Harris, who then reappeared with an open book in her hand.

"The work is entitled 'Chesterfieldian Department,' by Garrilus Gibbs, Ph.D. D. D., Now, Sam, I desire your strict attention to this paragraph," and she read from the book.

"Nothing so militates against the first impression of a gentleman as ingratitude for a special service rendered; for example"—and she looked at Sam very significantly, as she lowered the book, "His Grace was so solicitous about your hurt that, regardless of convenience and also of prior appointments, he hastened to make a personal call, rather than use the 'phone."

"Particularly so," Sam added, provoked to grin, "when a right pretty and wealthy maid is in the corral. Eh, aunty?"

"That is my lord's prerogative, but I shall permit of no digression," she severely remarked. "To continue—nothing to mind so convincingly proclaims the ignorance of an ill-bred commoner than vulgar liberty in the presence of a peer of England's realm! You follow me?"

"I guess I do, aunty," Sam replied, with his characteristic side movement of the head, and then, as he stood in an expectant attitude, carelessly fingered, with both hands, his watch chain.

"Sam, stop fidgeting with your watch chain. It is characteristic of a nervous gawk. The very reverse of good form and quite unbecoming a well-bred, polite gentleman."

"All right, aunty, fire away." And Sam's eyes twinkled mischievously, as his hands fell by his side.

"In order that the house of Harris shall not be defamed through an act of discourtesy to one of its guests, I insist, first of all, that you give me an example of your expression of gratitude to his Lordship for his great humanitarian act and kindness to you in your hour of insensibility."

"Ea—ah! Eh!" ejaculated Sam in laughing surprise, but much as he disliked to comply, he felt there was no use trying to dodge the issue.

His aunt was determined and experience had taught him that in order to retain the indulgence of the "best and fondest aunt on earth," a discreet concurrence in her whims was imperative. So with an agreeable smile, he added, "All right, aunty, here goes."

"For the purpose of approach, you may address me as 'my lord,'" interjected Mrs. Harris.

"Ha! That's easier, aunty," and a smile of satisfaction spread over his face.

"Proceed!" exclaimed his aunt, sententiously.

"I beg to express to your lordship"—

"Sam!" said Mrs. Harris, interrupting him, "you have omitted the very pith and essence of initiatory greeting."

"Ea—ha! How?" exclaimed Sam, surprised.

"By neglecting to make obeisance."

"To you, aunty?"

"To me. Now, Sam, beware of shyness. Bow naturally and with unaffected ease."

"All ready?" inquired Sam.

"Proceed!"

With that he bowed—bowed with a charm of grace that brought a look of pleased surprise from Mrs. Harris. It was evident she was already mollified.

"I beg your lordship will permit me the honor personally to express my appreciation, and to tender to you my heartfelt thanks for your kind services to me last night."

The smile of unaffected pleasure that brightened his face, at the knowledge that his aunt was pleased, assisted him wonderfully through the ordeal, for such he considered it.

"My compliments, Sam!" exclaimed Mrs. Harris, who appeared immensely pleased.

"Aw—deuced well delivered, don't che know!"

They turned and beheld Rutley and Hazel standing in the doorway.

Sam's chagrin was very great, and conscious of his inability to conceal his disgusted facial expression, turned aside and muttered, "Wouldn't that fizz you?"

Mrs. Harris was evidently much gratified, for she pointedly remarked, "Your lordship must now concede that our boy was not intentionally rude."

As for Sam, his vexation was great, and though he discreetly kept silence, the hot blood reddened his face perceptibly. He had unwittingly humbled himself to a man, who, he felt instinctively, was his enemy.

Just what brought Rutley and Hazel to the doorway in time to hear Sam's expression of thanks was never explained. But it may be presumed he had some announcement to make which the unexpected apology from Sam had made unnecessary.

Its effect on Rutley was instantaneous, for his frigidity melted as snow beneath a summer sun. The monocle came down from his eye and a gracious, condescending smile overspread his face.

"I am very sorry the accident happened, and I beg you to believe I have been deeply concerned about your hurt."

"We are sure your lordship has suffered great mental anguish over the unfortunate affair," responded Mrs. Harris, relieved by Rutley's condescension.

"Late yesterday evening," he went on, "I received information that a child resembling Dorothy, and accompanied by a lady whose face was veiled, were seen entering a certain residence out near the park," explained Rutley, continuing. "I beg you to understand that I entertain a deep interest in the fate of the child, and since the river has not yielded up its secret, and the voice of scandal is rife in innuendoes, I immediately set out to investigate."

"Unsuccessful, I had passed along the road and was returning, no doubt at higher speed than justified by the darkness of the night. Absorbed in meditation, I must have temporarily been negligent of proper vigilance, when to my horror, the form of a man suddenly loomed up a few paces directly ahead."

"Dear me, how unfortunate!" exclaimed Mrs. Harris, shivering.

"Impossible to stop the swift moving machine, in the short space that separated us, I swerved to the right.

"At that moment the man must have discovered me, for he, too, sprang to the right. The impact was inevitable. I hastened to the unfortunate one's assistance, and you may appreciate my amazement when I recognized my friend, your own relative. Of course, I conveyed him home at once."

"How very good of you," said Hazel, with admiring eyes.

"We shall never be able sufficiently to thank your lordship," added Mrs. Harris, "and we hope that our dear boy will not expose himself to so great a danger again."

As to what Sam thought of the explanation, he kept silent; nevertheless he turned half around and would have whistled significantly had he not at that moment checked himself, for fear of again embarrassing his aunt.

It was at this moment Virginia entered the room, insistently ushered in by Mr. Harris, who, profuse in politeness, said:

"Please do me the honor to be seated, for I know you must be fatigued."

But Virginia, on discovering Rutley, seemed to be suddenly overcome with a timidity quite foreign to her usual self-possession, and shrank away as if to leave the room. Observing her evident embarrassment and, of course, ignorant of the true cause, Mr. Harris concluded she had conceived him as declining her request, and he at once, in a confidential whisper, attempted to reassure her.

"I can accommodate you with a check for five thousand today, and more in a week."

"Oh, I—I thank you very much," she replied, and though her nervousness was apparent, she managed to control herself. Mr. Harris gently led her to a seat, remarking in a whisper, "I'll write the check for you at once."

She turned upon him very grateful eyes, but almost instantly a shadow crept across her face as she said, "The security I have to offer—"

Mr. Harris looked pained, and lifting his hand, he interrupted her with, "Don't, please don't let the security trouble you."

Again Virginia's eyes unconsciously fastened upon Rutley, who at the same time was regarding her with a keen inquiring gaze. It was the first time they had met since the night of Thorpe's quarrel with Corway, and although Virginia had resolved to cast off all fear of his threat of incriminating disclosures, she nevertheless, while in his presence, felt a subtle influence change her rebellious disposition into a timorous apprehension. The sensation was so strange, so creepy, and at the same time so convincing, that she arose from the seat and muttered in broken accents, "I—I'll await you outside, Mr. Harris. The air in this room is—is so close."

She had turned half around toward the door, when Mrs. Harris addressed her.

"Virginia, dear! Don't go! Most interesting. My lord has just related how last night he accidentally knocked Sam down near the City Park."

Virginia unconsciously repeated, "Last night, he accidentally knocked Sam down, near the City Park."

The information was so startling and her curiosity so keen that she stared at Rutley and Sam alternately, while they in turn stared at each other and at her most significantly.

Mrs. Harris observed the wonderment her information had created, but without troubling her easy brains to penetrate the meaning, added, after due pause, "Yes, dear—a bandaged head, as you see, was the result."

"It was very dark, near midnight, and his lordship was driving an automobile fast."

Heedless of Mrs. Harris' further remarks and so absorbed in an effort to solve the puzzle that Virginia thought:

"What business had he out there at that time of night? Did he know I was there? And Sam there, too! It must have been he who followed me,"—and she shot such a swift meaning glance at him that had he caught it the effect must have been disconcerting.

"Queer, how late at night young men carry on their larks nowadays," broke in Mr. Harris with fine humor.

Mrs. Harris was quick to correct him. "Dear me! James, it was on urgent business, no less than a search for Dorothy, but unfortunately unsuccessful."

"I myself am also inclined to the belief Dorothy was stolen. No doubt a demand will soon be made for her ransom," said Mr. Harris.

"Such a notion seems to me as far-fetched, as it is unlikely, for I do not believe the family has an enemy in the world," promptly rejoined Mrs. Harris.

"Vague insinuations of kidnapping find credence through the estrangement of the parents being given publicity," suggested Rutley, in a soft, serious, yet bland manner, which brought from Hazel an explosive reply, "I am sure Constance had no knowledge of it."

"Impossible for Constance to plot at an abduction of her own child, and as for John Thorpe, his grief is too great to permit the faintest suspicion to rest on him," suavely admonished Mrs. Harris warmly.

"John!" gasped Virginia. She was the first to see Thorpe standing in the vestibule, the doors of which had been left open. John Thorpe had entered so quietly that none in the room saw him approach, and their conversation at the moment was so concentrated upon the mystery of Dorothy's disappearance that none of them heard his weary footfalls draw near. He was careworn and haggard.

If John Thorpe felt any emotion on seeing Virginia and hearing her startled voice, he gave no sign. Unmoved, he coldly let his aching eyes rest on her, and then he lifted them to Mr. Harris. In that brief space of time, Rutley saw in Virginia's abashed eagerness to address her brother, a shadow of peril threaten him. The situation called for immediate action. He had previously noted his magnetic power over her and at once brought into requisition the wonderful "nerve" distinctly his heritage, and which had so often befriended him in moments of danger. Under cover of the fresh interest manifested in Mr. Thorpe's appearance, he coolly, quietly, and without the least hesitation, quickly placed himself beside her, and whispered in her ear: "Beware!"

His tone was so menacing, though concealed by an unctious personality, that Virginia shrank from him, yet with the low, rebellious exclamation: "Scoundrel!"

Nevertheless, she timidly deemed it discreet to arrange a meeting with John alone.

Mr. Harris silently grasped Mr. Thorpe by the hand. They had been close friends, socially and in business affairs for many years, and the hopeless, haggard, careless appearance of his long time friend touched Mr. Harris deeply.

"Poor fellow," he said, sympathetically. "You look all in."

"Sleepless nights and wearisome days have doubtless produced results," languidly replied Mr. Thorpe. "Mr. Harris, I have come to beg your hospitality for an hour's rest."

"Welcome to 'Rosemont,' thrice welcome, my dear friend. I shall have a quiet room prepared at once. Make yourself comfortable for a few moments until I return," and the energetic Mr. Harris immediately set out on his mission.

"Dear me!" commented Mrs. Harris, "If we could but unravel the mystery of Dorothy's disappearance, what a relief it would be. Do you think it possible the child was abducted, Mr. Thorpe?"

"Would to God I could believe it true," he gravely replied.

"I am loath to believe that the mother was aware of it," interposed Rutley, in his soft, lazy, drawling voice, "but"—

Surprised, Mrs. Harris promptly interrupted him with: "Dear me, have you heard that Constance had intrigued for her child's disappearance?"

Rutley fixed his gaze on Virginia, then transferred it to John Thorpe as he falteringly replied to Mrs. Harris' question: "Circumstances of a—a suspicious character tend to—a—implicate her."

A dead silence followed. So silent, that Sam suddenly cast an alarmed look at Virginia, as though he feared she had heard him hiss—"The contemptible sissy!"—and was surprised that no response met his silent thought, either by look or word.

Virginia was speechless. Yet she was bursting to tell them Dorothy was alive, but in captivity. She remembered the terrible threat made by the Italian in the park. It burned into her brain and made her tremble with anxiety lest the secret should get out and the child's life jeopardized thereby.

But, how to deny the vile lie that Constance was a party to the kidnapping? It was a question that

baffled completely all the ingenuity that had aided her in other situations.

While she was racking her brains for some guiding thought, to silence slanderous tongues, she heard John Thorpe very gravely say: "My lord must be mistaken."

It was such sweet relief to know that he did not believe Constance was guilty of the crime that Virginia unconsciously exclaimed: "Thank Heaven!"

After John Thorpe had expressed his disbelief in his wife's guilt, he slowly turned on his heel, intending to leave the room, for the conversation was painful to him and the company too closely associated with his unhappiness, for the quiet rest he so much needed. He had scarcely turned toward the door when he was halted by Mr. Harris, who had just entered from the hall, and announced a restful room in readiness for his immediate use.

To his surprise, John Thorpe turned and wearisomely said: "I thank you, Mr. Harris, but an important matter that I have neglected has just come to my mind. I beg to apologize for the needless trouble I have caused you." And he turned slowly and went toward the door.

Virginia perceived that unless immediate steps were taken, her opportunity to arrange a meeting with John would be lost. It was, therefore, with a startled cry of disappointment that she addressed him: "John! I have something"—she hesitated.

Thorpe halted on the threshold and half turned around. Aghast, Virginia arose from her seat, when Rutley drawled out in his most suave accents:

"Miss Thorpe is manifestly fatigued from over-exertion," and instantly taking her by the arm, led her reluctantly, and in timidity, to a seat on a divan, the end of which he wheeled forward, ostensibly to give her a better view of the lawn, then inundated with sunshine, but in reality to avert her eyes from the face of her brother.

John Thorpe gazed inquiringly for a second and then, with head bent, slowly and gravely left the house.

Mr. Harris started to accompany Thorpe, to press him to rest awhile, but on recalling his obligation to Virginia, checked himself and turned into the library.

Sam's indignation at the vile, unkind thrust made on the character of a bereaved woman, spoke eloquently in his blazing eyes, nevertheless out of regard for his aunt's wishes he closed his teeth tightly in silence, but on seeing the pseudo lord's insistent familiarity with Virginia, and noting her strange hesitant submission as he rather more than familiarly escorted her to the divan, Sam's rage burst through his discretion and his manly, straight-forwardness asserted itself, in utter disregard of his aunt's warnings.

Rutley had evidently thrown out the base insinuation as a feeler, but the manner in which Sam met it—met it squarely in the "Wild West way," quickly disabused his mind of any idea he may have had that Constance was friendless.

"Sir!" Sam said; "I know but one little word that fitly characterizes your insinuation concerning Mrs. Thorpe," and unwilling to resist the natural gravity of his feet toward Rutley, sidled up close to him, and, with a quiver of contempt in his voice, finished: "And down in Texas they taught me to brand it 'a damned lie!'"

Sam was rewarded in a manner he little anticipated, and by the woman who had heretofore despised him, for with eyes that sparkled with admiration and lips that parted in a smile of glad surprise, she involuntarily murmured: "Splendid, Sam!" His silly, boyish side had vanished, and in its place his true, strong, sterling character stood revealed. In that one moment he knew that he had won from her a tribute of esteem, but he did not at that time realize that it was a long step toward the consummation of his devout desire—to win her heart.

If an electric bolt had at that moment descended from the clear, ethereal blue, and wrecked the house, Mrs. Harris' consternation could not have been greater.

"Oh!" she faintly gasped. "Dear me! Oh, Sam, how could you!" and then she staggered almost to collapse in his arms.

For a moment Rutley was astounded, then drawing himself up in a pose of statuesque haughtiness, again most studiously adjusted his monocle to his eye and directed at alert Sam a stony stare of ineffable disdain. Then he languidly drawled, without a muscle of his white, bloodless face moving:

"Aw, it's deuced draughty, don't-che know!"

A few minutes later Mr. Harris beckoned Virginia into the library. After delivering her the check he had promised, they together went out in search for John Thorpe, but he had disappeared.

Had they looked more closely and further up the hillside, they might have seen a haggard man sitting in the shadow of a fir, apparently weary of the world, and pondering on the vicissitudes of life.

CHAPTER XII.

In the meantime Virginia had been doing her utmost, in a quiet way, to obtain the necessary amount of Dorothy's ransom.

Conscious of an imperative demand likely to be made upon her at any moment, she had partially prepared for it by secretly borrowing some five thousand dollars upon her jewelry and income, and she had obtained five thousand more from Mr. Harris, who was eager to favor her, because of the obligations it would place her under to his family, particularly Sam.

It was useless to approach Hazel for assistance, as John Thorpe was administrator of her estate. However, she was in a fair way to get more on a trust deed for some real estate that was in her name—when the summons came, peremptory and threatening.

She pondered over the situation long and profoundly, and having at length thoroughly made up her mind on a line of procedure, she prepared for the meeting.

Of delicate mould, carefully educated, and accustomed to vivacious and accomplished companions, Virginia was little intended for the desperate enterprise she had determined to undertake, in the dead hour of the coming night. More than once she shuddered at the thought, but that vision of Constance in the shadow of the "grim sickle," nerved her on to the rescue, and it also afforded her a sense of relief from the distress her mind endured. Overwhelmed at the magnitude of the misfortune so suddenly overtaken Constance, she hesitated not for an instant to risk her life in its undoing.

Personality, social position, beauty, youth, refinement—all were cast aside, unconsidered and unthought of in the execution of the one perilous act that confronted her.

The intention to rescue Dorothy may be construed under the conditions surrounding her as commendable, but in one so young and fair, it would appear hair-brained, impracticable and, worst of all, dangerously indiscreet. Virginia had not been in any manner contributory to the disappearance of Dorothy, and yet be it remembered, only a heroine pure and simple would dare brave the act. Moreover, she had permitted Constance to accompany her, thus immensely increasing her hazard and responsibility.

That afternoon, thinking to cheer the mother, who was plunged in silent grief, Virginia had intimated a suspicion that Dorothy was a captive. Instantly an unnatural calm possessed Constance, and changed her sweet and tractable nature into a determined and obstinate resolution to accompany Virginia. It was useless for the girl to plead additional peril. No excuse, no matter how artfully conceived or ingeniously framed, could turn Constance from her purpose, to share in the danger. And what danger would not the mother brave to rescue her darling?

So insistent, yet so strangely calm, as to cause a fear that the fevered excitement that burned so fiercely beneath the forced tranquility, would in a measure break out and jeopardize all—that Virginia only at last reluctantly consented. But not before she had exacted a promise from Constance to maintain the strictest silence.

On their arrival at the foot of Ellsworth street, they made their way cautiously along to a little cove above Bundy's boathouse, where they discovered a small skiff with oars in row-locks. Virginia had been informed that a boat would be provided for her at a certain spot, and therefore did not hesitate to avail herself of its use. Whether anybody was watching her mattered little in her suppressed, excited state of mind. Quietly she slipped the line and was in the act of drawing the skiff in position for Constance to get in, when from afar, across the water, seemingly from the depth of the island woods, the cry of a crow penetrated the silent air.

They stood still and listened—listened intently—with a vague, terrified notion that it was meant as a signal of danger.

Again she heard the cry, as distinct as before. Constance gripped Virginia's arm for support.



"Virginia realized that in her own calmness and self-possession lay the surest support to her companion's strength."

"What does it portend?" Virginia asked herself. "Why should it come from the woods if it was a signal of her starting to cross the water. It may have been an answer to a flash from some one concealed nearby." She looked above, about, but the same darkness, the same quietness prevailed. Not a leaf stirred to disturb the deep repose of night. Afar off, down the river, a steamer whistled for the steel bridge draw.

It startled her out of her reverie, and finally she concluded the "caw," which seemingly sounded from the opposite woods, was really at the shore, and resulted from the peculiar condition of the atmosphere. Without further pause, and quietly as possible, they stepped into the boat, and at once commenced the passage.

The water was calm and mirror-like, and Virginia, having had some experience in handling a skiff, dipped the muffled blades with scarcely a sound. Silently, slowly, cautiously, she propelled the boat along, ever and again turning her head to peer into the deep darkness shrouding the island.

She headed the boat diagonally across the water, so as to strike near the middle of the island. She adopted that course in order that the cabin, which was quite invisible under the deeper shadow of the woods, would come in line between her and the harbor lights. Her reckoning was correct. She had passed the object of her venture without discovering it, but as the island loomed denser and darker on drawing near, it enabled her to locate the craft with precision. She turned the boat, and keeping within the deep shadow that fringed the rim of the island, made straight for the cabin.

As they approached it, the strain on Constance became tense. Virginia watched her narrowly, fearful for the consequences of a disappointment, and she realized, too, that in her own calmness and self-possession, lay the surest support to her companion's strength. The consciousness of that power nerved, steadied and aided her wonderfully.

CHAPTER XIII.

"Caw! Caw!" sounded with startling distinctness in the still, dark wooded depths of Ross island. For a moment the silence was intense; then it was broken again by the familiar, long-drawn out, guttural cry, "Caw! caw!" of the black scavenger bird. And silence once more settled down upon the scene, and seemed deeper, thicker and more profound than before.

It may have been a half a minute after the second cry when an answer, faint, though clearly audible, was echoed from a neighboring part of the woods.

"Come on!" quietly exclaimed Sam Harris, who, with John Thorpe, stood beside the trunk of a fir that grew midway on the island near its north end.

"An uncanny signal!" remarked Mr. Thorpe, in the same low tones.

"Yes, somehow I feel as though it betokens serious business," softly replied Sam. "Be careful. A thick vine here. Step clear," he whispered, as they moved cautiously along.

They had proceeded in silence some distance, part of the time groping their way by the aid of a match, lighted now and again, but artfully concealed, for the darkness was very deep, when through a rift in the wild growth of underbrush a man's form was seen to move.

"Wait!" suddenly whispered Sam, in a warning tone. "There is a man ahead of us."

There was no mistaking it, for as they stood stock-still in their tracks, they saw a man's form occasionally obtruding between them and an electric light that shed its rays from afar off, across the water.

"Do you think he is the detective?" asked Thorpe, in a low voice.

"Wait!" and Sam placed his two hands over his mouth so as to form a hollow, and called out in moderate tones: "Caw! caw!"

It was answered by a single "caw," low, but seemingly so near that they were startled, and for a moment felt that they were being deceived.

They remained motionless and silent—Sam with his hand grasping the butt of a revolver.

The "caw" was repeated low, but with reassuring effect, for they now discovered that while the sound was apparently near, due to atmospheric conditions, it was in reality fully two hundred feet away.

"Detective Simms," whispered Sam. "He is waiting for us."

"Then let's hurry," urged his companion.

The words had scarcely left his lips when Thorpe's boot caught in a vine and down he went, making considerable noise as he stumbled and fell on his hip.

"You must be more careful," enjoined Sam, in a low tone, as he helped Thorpe to his feet.

"Much haste, less speed, and then a little noise may endanger our success, I fear. Are you hurt?"

"No, thanks. Let's go on," impatiently replied Thorpe.

As they drew near the detective, in order to make doubly sure of avoiding a trap, Sam uttered in a low voice the word "Hope!" It was a watchword previously arranged and provided as an additional precaution against a possible contingency of deep darkness rendering prompt recognition difficult.

It was answered by the word "Good," uttered in equally low and cautious tones, and which at once put them at their ease.

Almost immediately they met the detective at the edge of the clearing. Before them, a little to the left, dimly but clearly outlined against the harbor lights, was a typical Willamette River cabin, commonly known on the waterfront as a "scow dwelling," moored about fifty feet from the shore, broadside on. It was the object of their venture.

So intent were they on sizing it up, and the problem of boarding it, that they were quite insensible to the magnificent panorama spread out beyond, and further to the left of Portland by night. At their feet the dark, shimmering Willamette silently glided along its course to the mighty Columbia; the great bridges on which the street cars, in a blaze of light, swiftly crossed and recrossed the gloomy river; the darkly-outlined towering masts of the ocean shipping in the lower harbor, the great industrial landmarks that reared their lofty shadows in different parts of the city. The myriad of bluish electric lights, that shone out like diamonds in the clear, balmy night, spread out over the city and up and up, in terraces and by gradual stages, to the hills, and along the heights that stretched away north-westerly. For miles on either side of the river the lights spread out, till at length, in diminishing brilliancy, they were lost in the shadow of the distant rugged hills, whose irregular dark-wooded crests were sharply defined against the rare splendor of the firmament, then aglow with glittering stars.

In fact, all the grandeur of the far-stretching panorama was neglected and lost to them in the intensity of their gaze upon the humble dwelling before them, built on a raft of logs.

(Booms of saw-logs are now moored abreast the cabin anchorage.)

Sam left Thorpe and the detective and wormed his way nearer the shore, to a position where he could obtain a better view of the cabin. Lying flat on his stomach, and concealed as much as possible, behind some driftwood and low, dead brush, he listened intently, and studied the situation with the practical eye of the frontiersman. He made out the cabin to be about twenty-four feet long, seven or eight feet high, with two small windows on the side which was nearest him. There being a light in one of the windows, he concluded the cabin was divided into at least two parts. The logs upon which the cabin was built projected some four feet at either end, on which was a platform, but no protecting railing. Proof that the occupant was not a family man, as "scow-dwellers" with children are careful to have railings about their craft.

He judged that the logs were large and water-soaked, and securely fastened together, and by their combined weight effected a certain stability and steadiness to the cabin resting thereon, during bad weather.

There appeared no means of reaching the cabin except by boat or swimming, and the mud of the river bottom at that point was evidently deep. Now and again he heard voices in the cabin,

seemingly in altercation. But the distance was too great for him to distinguish the words. The quietness was profound except for the gentle lapping of the water, and disturbed occasionally by ripping sounds from a sawmill some distance down the river, which, if anything, added to the stillness instead of diminishing it.

Once he started at what sounded like a moan very near him, but it was so indistinct, so much like a faint whispering whistle, and it was immediately succeeded by the buzzing whirr of a bat as it darted about, and deep silence again environing him, that he dismissed the sound as a fantasy.

He was mentally calculating upon the chances of a surprise and rescue, and in an attempt to drag himself a few feet nearer the water-line to catch, if possible, some words of the conversation going on in the cabin. He stretched out his right hand to grasp what appeared to be a piece of driftwood, to aid in pulling himself along. His hand fell upon the dry, warm body of some animal.

He almost yelled aloud, so great was his fright. For a moment his heart beat madly. But the same strength of will that rushed to his aid in smothering the yell also quieted his agitation and restored his confidence.

The incident had almost jeopardized the favorable prospect of their enterprise. But nothing untoward happening, he again put out his hand and touched the body. It was warm and did not stir. The animal was lying on its side, and he plainly felt a faint throbbing of its heart. He ran his hand down its legs, then along its spine to a large limb of a tree that lay across its neck. He concluded that it was a little dog when his hand felt a small rope wound tightly about the limb.

His curiosity being fully aroused, he determined upon further investigation. Not daring to light a match he did the next best thing that occurred to him. Still retaining his prone position, Sam passed his hand along the dog's spine to the fore shoulder, and under the piece of wood, to its neck. Then he discovered the poor thing was in the last throes of strangulation. Its breathing was scarcely perceptible. Its tongue, swollen thick, protruded from its mouth.

Instantly his sympathy for the little sufferer became acute, and, without thinking of possible results should the dog recover quickly, whipped out his knife and severed the coils of rope about the limb. Using his left hand as a lever, his elbow being a pivot, he pried up the weighty limb and with his right hand drew the dog from under it and to him. He quickly unwound the few remaining coils from around its neck, and as he did so, smiled with pleasurable emotion—for he was sure that he felt a feeble lick of the dog's tongue on his hand.

A dog's life is an inconsequential thing, according to some people's way of thinking, but here was proof that under Sam's rough and unpolished exterior there throbbed a heart full of gentleness and sympathy for suffering animals. He took the dog, which he then recognized as a small, shaggy Scotch terrier, under his arm and stole back to the detective and Mr. Thorpe.

In discussing the affair afterward, it was deemed probable that the detective, finding his long vigil at the edge of the woods tiresome, had unconsciously fallen asleep; though he indignantly denied it, and during that time the dog had been taken on shore and tied to a heavy piece of driftwood to give warning of the approach of strangers by night, but the poor thing had become tangled in the brush, and in its efforts to extricate itself had tightly twisted the rope about its neck, and the heavy limb had rolled over and pinioned it to the ground.

In the meantime Mr. Thorpe and the detective were engaged in low, earnest conversation.

"Are you satisfied the child is my little Dorothy?" asked Mr. Thorpe.

"I am not positive, but I believe so. I have watched all the afternoon in hopes of catching a glimpse of her. Once I heard a child cry."

"Yet the child may not be Dorothy!"

"True!" replied the detective, "but whether the child be yours or not, I am satisfied the little thing in that cabin is there against its will."

"Did you note any visitors to the cabin this evening?"

"Yes; a man rowed over from the direction of 'Bundy's' about half an hour ago. He is in there now."

"Do you think the Italian, his visitor and the child are the only ones there?"

"I am positive they are the only ones in that cabin at this moment."

"Then let's wade out there," urged Mr. Thorpe.

"Careful!" cautioned Sam, who had just come up. "I know the Dago to be a cunning and dangerous man. We could not wade out that far any way, in the soft mud and tangled roots of that bottom. We must have the small boat."

"What have you there?" It was the detective who spoke.

"Our first rescue. A mascot!" and then Sam related the incident.

"Good!" exclaimed Mr. Thorpe. "Its bark would have betrayed us."

The three then held a brief consultation. Shortly afterward Sam retraced his steps along the trail, back to the steam launch, with the "mascot" steadily recovering, but still under his arm.

CHAPTER XIV.

Within the cabin, so zealously watched by the detective prior to the journey of Thorpe and Sam across the island, were the occupants—Jack Shore and his little captive, Dorothy Thorpe. The child was carefully and secretly guarded, and at the same time made as comfortable as the limited quarters of her captor would permit.

Jack Shore was kind to the child, and though fully conscious of the severe penalty of his desperate undertaking should he be discovered, he nevertheless allowed her a certain freedom of the abode in which he had placed her, of course always providing for securely bolted outer doors.

During the preceding night she had been secretly and quietly removed from her first hiding place to the cabin. Her silence was obtained by the promise of being taken home should she be a good little girl, and not make a disturbance. But as a precaution she had been wrapped up in a manner so as completely to blindfold her, and in her childish confidence was conveyed without any trouble, in the dead hour of night, to the cabin.

The interior of the cabin was divided into two rooms. The small one was used as a sleeping apartment, having two roughly-constructed bunks, one above the other. On one wall was a small four-paned window that gave light to the room. A small mirror, and a man's clothing hung on the wall, and a short, well-worn strip of carpet covered the floor. The large room served the purpose of a kitchen, dining room, pantry, laundry and general utility combined. There was a small cook stove in the corner near the dividing partition. One dishcloth and a couple of towels hung on a line across the corner of the room over the stove. A shallow box about three feet square, and nailed to the wall beside the window, served as a cupboard for provisions. A table, an old chair, a three-legged stool and a box constituted the remaining furniture.

At night a lighted lamp rested on a bracket above the table, and on this particular night Jack's coat hung beside the lamp.

The main entrance door of the cabin was at the kitchen end, and opened inward. There was also a door at the bedroom end of the cabin, securely locked and bolted. The door in the partition between the two rooms was in line with the other doors, and had a small pane of glass, six by six inches, in the upper panel.

On this eventful night Dorothy was seated on the chair, her head resting on her arms on the end of the table, indifferently watching Jack. He, with a cigar in his mouth and in his gray shirtsleeves, was standing in front of the table wiping a dishpan, the last of the evening cleanup. Putting the pan away under the shelf, he hung the dishcloth beside its mate on the line, and carefully stretched it out to dry. Then, as he sat down on the stool at the end of the table opposite Dorothy, a smile of satisfaction stole over his dark, swarthy face when he surveyed the result of his work—a clean and tidy appearing room.

"Eesa be so nice-a da clean. So bute-a da corner. Eesa like-a da fine-a house. Tar-rah-rah! Tink-a eesa get-a da fote-da-graph of eet a made. Put eem in-a Sunny da paper. Eh-a da Daize! What a use-a da tink? Eh!"

Dorothy raised her head and looked at him in offended, childish dignity.

"My name is not A da Daize; it is Dorothy!"

"Eesa like-a da Daize a bet! What youse-a tink? Eesa nicey da room, eh Daize?"

Then the child indifferently looked at the corner with its stove and adjuncts. She had been detained in his company now—for four days, and, childlike, was intuitively quick in interpreting the broken, stumbling Dago utterances of Jack.

"It is not so nice as our kitchen," she naively replied. "But maybe the photo will make people think you are a good cook!"

"A da cook-a!—naw, eesa be damn! Turnoppsis! Carrotsis! Cababbages! Black-a da boots"—

"Well, then," interrupted the child, pouting, "a rich man if you like; I don't care."

"Eesa mores-a da bet," and he smiled approvingly. "And a Sunny-a da paper print under da fote-da-graph some-a ting like-a deeze—A da corner ova-a da dining room—maybees-a da den wud look-a da bet," he muttered reflectively. "In deeze-a home ova-a a Signor George-a da Golda—house-a dat, eh, a Daize?"

"Is that your name?" she inquired.

"Eesa good-a da name? A Daize."

"May I stay in here when the photo man comes?"

"Sure-a Daize!"

"Oh, good!" and the child clapped her little hands and laughed gleefully.

Jack looked at her quizzically, and then, seating himself on the stool, took the child between his knees.

"Tell-a me, da Daize, what-a da for youse-a like-a da picture take-a here, eh?"

"Cause!" she answered shyly.

"Cause-a da what? Speak-a Daize."

"I don't like to."

"A Daize! Youse a know I bees-a da friend, speak-a."

"Well, then my papa would know where to find me."

"I deez-a thought so. Daize, youse-a tink I beez a da bad-a man. Eh, why?"

"Cause you promised to take me home and you have not."

"Well-a Daize, your-a good-a da girl, and—eef-a da papa donn-a da come bees-a da morn, we'll-a go for-a da fine him, eh! Now youse-a da like-a me now? Eh, a Daize?"

"Oh, I like you ever so much for that, and we'll go home tomorrow?"

"Sure-a Daize! Now tell-a me some-a ting about a da Virginia."

"If I do you'll sure take me home tomorrow?"

"Sure-a Daize! Eesa beez a da good a da woman, eh? Much a da like a you. Eh, a da Daize?"

"Oh, yes; she would do anything for me, and I love my aunt, too."

"Eesa look a da nicey. Mose a beez a da rich, eh-a Daize?"

"My aunt does oil paintings, too."

"Eesa got a much a da mon, eh a Daize?"

"Oh, yes; a pocket full," replied the unsuspecting child.

"Everybody says that she is rich, and I guess that it must be true," muttered Jack, and he could not suppress a smile of satisfaction the child's information gave him.

"Eesa time to go a da bed, a Daize. Kiss a me good a da night."

"If I do, you won't forget your promise?"

"What a da promise?"

"To take me home tomorrow."

"Sure a Daize. I donna forget."

Then the child kissed him, and at the contact of her soft, warm lips with his—like a stream of sunshine, the child innocence of purest lips, pierced his heart with a shaft of kindly sympathy.

"Good a da night, a Daize," he said in a voice soft and gentle. Then he released the child and arose to his feet. It drew from her a look of steady admiration, and then she replied:

"Good night!" On the threshold of the sleeping apartment she turned and said:

"I shall pray for you tonight, Mister Golda. I shall pray for you not to forget tomorrow." And she softly closed the door.

As Jack mildly stared at the child, the light in his eyes changed to a look far off, and there gradually stole over his face an aspect of infinite sadness, reminiscent of the days of his childhood.

On resuming his presence of mind, he went to the cupboard and took from there a bottle. After removing the stopper he took a straight draught of liquor, turned low the light and tip-toed to the

bedroom door, listened, and heard Dorothy say:

"Oh, dear Jesus, make George Golda good; help him remember his promise to take me home tomorrow."

Jack was deeply moved by the child's sweet disposition, and he turned away disgusted at the despicable role he was enacting, and muttered reflectively: "Good God, that I should come to this! From secretary-treasurer of the Securities Investment Association to be a kidnapper of babes!

"Jack Shore, the kidnapper! What a fall is here! Yes, I have sunk so low as to abduct from a fond, suffering mother one of the purest gems of flesh and blood that ever blest a home. And for what? The almighty dollar! Only that, and nothing more! Curse the damned dollar that drives men to crime!

"Curse it for cramming hell with lost souls. I'll wash my hands of this whole business; I'll have no more of it; I'll take the child home!"

The resolution was so cheering, so fruitful of kindly intent, and urged on by the "still, small voice" within him to do right, that he decided to fortify himself with a second drink of liquor. Then a contra train of reflection seized him, and he whispered, as one suddenly confronted with an appalling calamity:

"Ah, ah! What am I saying? And I have scarcely a dollar in the world! Have gone hungry for the want of it—and here is twenty thousand of the beautiful golden things actually in sight—almost at my finger tips!" and with the thought blank concern spread over his face, and the kindly purpose, the human compassion for his fellow being in its transient passage to his heart, again took flight and the "still, small voice" within him shrank abashed to silence.

"Out with this sentimental nonsense! The Thorpes can stand the loss of a few thousand without a twitch of an eyelash."

The sound of a couple of gentle taps on the starboard side of the cabin broke his train of audible thoughts and claimed his quick attention.

The taps were repeated distinctly. He answered them with three light taps on the wall, given by the joint of his finger. Then he quietly opened the door, and Philip Rutley, with the collar of his coat turned up closely about his face, stood in the opening.

"All skookum, Jack?" he questioned, in low tones, on entering.

"All skookum, Phil," answered Jack, as he locked and bolted the door.

"Good! I love to look at the little darling. Jack, she is a gold mine." And, so saying, Rutley took the lamp from over the shelf and cautiously opening the door, peered within.

"Isn't she pretty?" Then he quietly closed the door, replaced the lamp on the shelf, turned down his coat collar and said in a low, pleased voice: "Well, old boy, our troubles are nearly over. Virginia will come tonight."

"Alone?" queried Jack, in low tones, and he looked significantly at his colleague.

"Yes, and with the ducats! I caused her to be secretly informed that she must meet you here by twelve o'clock this night, and prepared to pay the ransom. Any liquor handy, Jack? I'm feeling a bit nervous after that pull. The boat sogged along as heavy as though a bunch of weeds trailed across her prow."

Jack smiled, but proceeded to the cupboard and produced a bottle, together with a glass. Removing the cork, he offered both bottle and glass to Rutley with the remark: "Old Kaintuck—dead shot! The best ever. Help yourself!"

"That's an affectionate beauty spot about your right eye, Jack," remarked Rutley, taking the bottle and tumbler from him.

"You haven't told me how it happened."

"I was out on Corbett street when that damned Irish coachman of Thorpe's sauntered along as though he had a chip on his shoulder, and he had the nerve to ask me if I had seen the child."

"Do you think he suspected you?" queried Rutley, pausing with the glass and bottle in his hands.

"No; it was a random shot. But it made me hot, and—well, the long and the short of it was the doctor worked over me an hour before I was able to walk."

"I see," commented Rutley, pouring some liquor into the glass and setting the bottle on the table. "A sudden and unexpected attack, eh! May the fickle jade smile on us tonight," and so saying, he drank the liquor with evident relish, and handed the glass to Jack.

Jack, misunderstanding his quotation of the "fickle jade," interpreting it as meant for Virginia, at once replied:

"The jade may smile and smile, and be a villain, but she must 'pungle' up the 'dough.'" And pouring some liquor in the glass he drained it.

Jack's misapplication of the popular quotation caused Phil to smile, then to chuckle. "Ha, ha, ha, ha, the jade!"

Then he produced a couple of cigars from his vest pocket, and offering one to Jack, continued: "She deserves no mercy."

"None whatever," replied Jack, as he took the cigar.

"If she had not weakened, we should never have selected her to pay the ransom," resumed Rutley.

"Ha, ha, ha, ha," laughed Jack, as he put a match to the cigar. "Her penitent mood makes her an easy mark. The price of her atonement'll be twenty thousand dollars."

Again Rutley chuckled, chuckled convivially, for evidently the softening influence of the liquor relaxed his tensely attuned nerves. "Ha, my boy, she shall not enjoy the bliss of restoring the child to her mother. I shall be the hero in this case," and he lowered his voice. "After Virginia has paid the ransom, I shall take the child to her father." Then he looked at Jack significantly and laughed—laughed in a singularly sinister, yet highly pitched suppressed key.

Jack penetrated Rutley's purpose at once and the prodigious nerve of the fellow caused him likewise to laugh. But Jack's laugh was different from Rutley's, in so much that it conveyed, though suppressed and soft, an air of rollicking abandon.

"And get the reward of ten thousand dollars offered for the child's recovery."

"Precisely," laughed Rutley.

His laugh seemed infectious, for Jack joined him with a "Ha, ha, ha, ha. And borrow ten thousand more from old Harris for being a Good Samaritan to his nephew, Sam, eh! Have another, Phil," and again he laughed as he offered the glass.

Rutley took the glass and filled it. "A forty thousand cleanup, Jack, just for a bit of judicious nerve! He, he, he, he," and then his laughter ceased, for the simple reason that his lips could not perform the act of drinking and laughing at the same time.

"Ha, ha, ha, ha," laughed Jack, in response. "A damned good thing, eh, Phil?" and he took the glass, filled it, and drank. "Has anybody heard from Corway?"

"Shanghaied," laconically replied Rutley.

"He's off on the British bark Lochlobin. No fear of any trouble from him for several months."

"How, in the name of God, did you do it?" asked Jack, fairly enthralled with Rutley's nerve.

"Oh, it was easy. Fixed it up with some sailor boarding-house toughs, but I only got \$50 out of it all told, including his watch. But, my dear boy, that is not all I have planned in this plunge. You know I am desperately in love with the orphan?"

"Hazel!" exclaimed Jack. "Ho, that was plain long ago," and he laughed again.

"She's the sweetest little girl in the world, Jack, and the best part of it is, she has a cool hundred thousand in her own right."

"Marry her," promptly advised Jack.

"That is my intention, Jack, and the day after tomorrow I visit Rosemont to persuade her to elope with me. Quite a society thrill—don't you know?"

"Thrill!" replied Jack, astonished. "You mean sensation. Hazel eloped with me Lord Beauchamp, Knight of the Garter. Have one on that, Phil."

"Oh, she's a darling, Jack, and now that Corway is out of the way—I think she'd like—to wear the garter," and he grinned jovially.

"A garter is fetching, Phil."

"Success to the garter! May Lady Hazel never let it fall; ha, ha," and Jack laughed merrily as he filled the glass.

"Evil be to him who evil thinks. My garter, Jack! He, he, he, he." There was no mistaking the fact that the two men were verging on the hilarious, and though fully aware of the importance of conversing in low tones, they continued, because they felt satisfied the critical period of their

operations had passed and success was assured.

Again Rutley laughed. "Jack, I've had an itching palm today."

"So have I. See how red it is with scratching, and the sole of my left foot has been tickled to fits."

"The signs are right, Jack. I congratulate you on your luck, and if it is as good as your judgment of liquor—it is a damned good thing." He laughed as he seized the glass. "This is the proof," and he forthwith tossed it off, and handed the glass to Jack.

Jack's convivial spirits were quite willing. He took the glass, filled it, and laughingly said: "What is good for the devil, applies to his imp." Then he drained the glass and again laughed.

Rutley joined in. "You make me blush! Did you say your left foot tickled?"

"Yes!"

"You will change domiciles. What do you say to secretary-treasurer of the Securities Investment Association?"

"What? Resurrect the old S. I. A.?" Jack replied, and he stared at Rutley with amazement.

"Yes! Thorpe and Harris put us out of business. Why not use their 'simoleons' to start up again?" And he chuckled with evident satisfaction.

"Agreed, Phil! Start her up with a full page ad in a Sunday paper, eh? Ha, ha, ha, ha—a damned good thing."

"Precisely! Ahem," coughed Rutley. "We are pleased to announce that our former fellow townsmen, Mr. Philip Rutley and Mr. Jack Shore have returned very wealthy."

"And were received with open arms," added Jack, and he laughed. "Damned good joke, Phil; damned good joke. Have one on that!" And he turned and picked up bottle and glass from the table and offered them to his colleague.

Rutley always maintained a dignified bearing, yet his manners were quite unconventional, and suave, and easy, and it must be understood that neither of them on this occasion became boisterous. He took the proffered bottle and glass, poured liquor in the glass, and after setting the bottle on the table, said: "Thirty days later, a-hem! We congratulate the stockholders of the reorganized Securities Investment Association on the able and efficient management of your officers, Manager Philip Rutley and Secretary-Treasurer Jack Shore." He then drained the glass and handed it to Jack.

"Ha, ha, ha, ha," laughed Jack, as he took the glass and poured the liquor in it, and pointedly added: "Addenda! It affords us much pleasure to apologize for our former charge of wilful dishonesty against the gentlemen above mentioned. Signed: John Thorpe, James Harris, committee." And Jack drained the glass.

"He, he, he, he," softly laughed Rutley. "Very proper, my boy; quite so!"

"It only needs the measly 'yellow goods' to make it practical," suggested Jack.

"My dear, ahem, Mr. Secretary, don't let that trifle worry you. The 'yellow goods' are coming as sure as day follows night."

"I hope the day will not again plunge us into night," laughed Jack.

"Oh, don't put it that way," testily rejoined Rutley. "Disagreeably suggestive, you know—damned bad taste."

Rutley's supersensitiveness, in their present situation, was greeted by Jack with a burst of suppressed laughter. "When Eve tempted and Adam bit, he took his medicine without a fit. Have another, Phil."

Without accepting the bottle, and seemingly without heeding the remark, Rutley inquired, a bit seriously: "Is the dog on guard?"

"Yes," replied Jack, standing stock still, with the bottle in one hand and the tumbler in the other. "Tied to a stick of driftwood on shore. No interlopers while Snooks is on watch. Why?" The question was asked rather soberly.

"I received a tip that you are shadowed and trouble may come before dawn. When it comes the little one must not be here."

"I agree with you," responded Jack. "I've lost that medal somewhere, too."

"Ye Gods!" gravely replied Rutley, with an alarmed look. "If it falls into the hands of a detective, it may serve as a clue. Curious, too. I recall now that the dog didn't bark or growl when I approached the cabin."

"I wonder!" exclaimed Jack. "Maybe Snooks has got loose and is wandering about the island. We had better make sure."

Setting the bottle and tumbler on the table, he opened the cabin door and stepped somewhat unsteadily on the platform. Closing the door, he peered shoreward, then softly whistled. After listening intently, and hearing nothing, he called, in a low voice:

"Snooks! Snooks!" Receiving no response, and being unable to identify shapeless objects on the shore, through the darkness, he re-entered the cabin, quietly as possible, and with a concerned look on his face.

"I believe the dog has got away. I'll go ashore and investigate."

"I'll go with you," assured Rutley. "Jack, better see that the child's asleep."

Jack took the lamp from the bracket, opened the partition door, looked in at the sleeping child, and closed the door as gently as he had opened it. "Sound asleep," he whispered. Then he replaced the lamp, blew out the light, and made his way out onto the platform, accompanied by Rutley.

Quietly they stepped into a small boat, fastened to the logs, and pushed off towards the shore.

It was then Jack remembered that he had not locked the door, and wanted to return for that purpose, but Rutley demurred.

"Time is precious," he murmured, rather thickly. "Besides we shall be gone only a few minutes, and it is unlikely that the child will stir in the darkness."

CHAPTER XV.

They had scarcely reached the shore when another small boat came gliding noiselessly along down toward the cabin. The boat contained Virginia and Constance. As they approached near, propulsion ceased, and the boat drifted along. Virginia turned half around on her seat, listened intently, and looked at the dark cabin, with eyes that fairly sparkled, in her effort to penetrate its interior. Slowly the boat drew along the platform. Quietly and cautiously they stepped out, and after fastening the line which held the boat to an iron ring which had been driven into one of the logs for that purpose, Virginia took Constance by the hand, which she felt tremble, and caused her to whisper: "Courage, dear." Then she tapped gently on the door.

Receiving no response, she tapped again, then tried the knob, and, to her amazement, the door opened.

For a moment they stood on the threshold, irresolute. A whiff of tobacco smoke brushed their nostrils.

Virginia timidly stepped within, followed closely by Constance. The darkness was intense, the stillness profound. "Whew!" Virginia ejaculated, in a whisper. "The den reeks with tobacco smoke. He must be asleep."

She softly closed the door and lighted one of the matches which she had been careful to provide herself with.

"There is no one here," whispered Constance, in tones of terrifying disappointment.

Up to that time she had religiously kept her promise to observe the strictest silence, but when in the dim light produced by the match, her eyes swiftly took in the untenanted room, her heart sank in chilly numbness.

Virginia noted the famished, haunted look that had crept into her eyes, and as she turned away with a fresh pang in her heart, discovered the bottle and tumbler on the table.

It suggested a clue, and she replied, in low tones, and in the most matter-of-fact manner, that, surprised herself, "He must be intoxicated, the beast."

The coolness of the utterance had the effect, in a measure, of reassuring Constance, who then, discovering a closed door directly in front, breathlessly exclaimed: "That door must open to another room."

It was at that moment that the light died out. Virginia stood stock still and listened. She pressed her left hand tight against her heart to still the terrible throbbing.

She heard Constance grope her way to the partition door. She heard the nervous fingers on the framework. She heard the latch click.

"Be careful, dear. Oh, be careful, dear!" admonished Virginia, in a whisper of frenzied anxiety—and then she heard the door pushed open.

A moment of profound silence and then followed the sound of a step within. Constance stood beside Dorothy—with only the deep darkness and two feet of empty space separating them.

Who shall say that the subtle power which impelled the mother on in the dense darkness, first to the door, then to open it, and then to step within beside her child, was not magnetic intuition?

Virginia softly followed her to the door, produced a match and rubbed it against the casing.

At that moment Constance was standing inside the threshold, her right hand still on the open door latch; her back to Virginia. She was looking straight ahead into the darkness.

The scraping of the match caused her to turn her head.

“Oh, Dorothy, darling!” was all that the poor heart-broken mother could utter.

So sudden and great was the transport called forth by the discovery of Dorothy quietly sleeping near her elbow, that her senses grew dizzy, and as she sank to the floor on her trembling knees, convulsively outstretched her hands to clasp the face of her child.

It was a favor of fate that placed them at that moment alone with the child, for whom Virginia was prepared to sacrifice her life to rescue. A decree that paid homage to the act of a heroine.

True, the unhappy cause that impelled her to act was indirectly of her own making, and a sense of justice and remorse urged her to remedy it. Nevertheless the act itself, for daring the rescue, was most heroic.

When Constance threw her hands out to clasp Dorothy, the child awakened with a start, and at the same time the match light became extinguished.

After her prayer, Dorothy laid down on the bunk without undressing, as had been her custom, since in the custody of Jack, and almost immediately fell asleep.

Her guileless little heart, cherishing confidence in his promise, provoked a smile of spiritual beauty that settled on her sweet young face—unflect by earthly misgivings. As she slept there came into her dream a vision of terraces, grown over with lovely flowers, and there were green, grassy plots and gorgeous colored butterflies darting in and out among the flowers and golden sunshine. And out from somewhere, in the serene hazy distance, came the silvery song of her own canary bird. Where? And as she looked and listened, a butterfly, oh, so large and beautiful, with semi-transparent rose, pearl wings dotted and fringed with emerald gems, hovered tantalizingly near her. She was tempted to catch it, but each time, though perilously near, it evaded her tiny clutch, and so drew her on over velvety lawns and grassy slopes to a babbling brook.

The prismatic winged thing fluttered over some pebbles and alighted on a slender willow twig. She stood on a stone, reached out to clutch the beauty, and just as her little fingers were about to close on it, the voice of her mother rang out in frantic warning—“Dorothy! Dorothy!”

And then her foot slipped, and as she was falling she felt herself suddenly clasped in strong arms, and borne upward, to awake with the cry of “Dorothy” ringing in her ears.

For a moment or two the child lay perfectly still, then gradually to her returning senses, the room smelled of tobacco smoke, and supposing that it was her captor’s hand that clasped her face, said: “Oh, Mr. Golda, the room is full of smoke!”

“Hush, dear,” cautioned Virginia. “Your mother and Aunt Virginia are here.”

“Oh, Mamma and Aunty!” joyfully exclaimed Dorothy, for she recognized Virginia’s well-known voice, and sitting up, said:

“You’ve come to take me home, haven’t you?”

Again the match light faded out.

The voice of Dorothy seemed to thrill Constance with new energy, for, with a frantic effort, she partially recovered her composure. She struggled to her feet, and in a rapture of thanksgiving, folded the child to her heart.

“Oh, my darling, my darling, please God, they shall never take you from me again. No, never again.” And she kissed her with a passionate joy, such as only a fond mother can feel for her helpless infant.

“Oh, mamma, I am so glad,” responded Dorothy, clasping her little arms about her mother’s neck.

“Dorothy, dear, where is he?” questioned Virginia, in a whisper.

“He was in the room when I came to bed, Auntie.”

"He is not there now. He must be away." And a prospect of getting the child away without a struggle nerved her to instant action.

"Come," she exclaimed, "we must go at once. Don't speak, sweetheart. Silence; come, Constance, quick!"

"Yes, yes; go on," was Constance's almost hysterical reply.

And so, with the child in her arms and Virginia pulling at her sleeves to guide and hasten her, they groped as cautiously as possible in the darkness, towards the cabin door.

They had proceeded a few paces when Virginia, in her eagerness, rubbed against the table; she stepped aside to clear it, and in doing so, jolted Constance.

It was then, under the strain of the stifled emotions of the past few days, and the great excitement attendant on the present enterprise, together with the sudden reactionary joy of again clasping her child, that the first symptom of the mother's mental breakdown occurred.

"Oh," she faintly screamed, "the boat rocks," and she would have fallen to the floor had not a chair, the only one in the cabin, luckily stood nearby. She stumbled against it and sank upon the seat, with Dorothy tightly clasped in her arms.

Unable in the darkness to comprehend the pause, Virginia tugged urgently at Constance's sleeve.

"Come along, dear, we must be quick."

"Very well! Why don't you use the paddles?" replied Constance, in an altered tone, a strange metallic ring in her voice, and with less agitation than she had recently displayed.

Still unable, or rather refusing herself to think anything was wrong, and with a panicky impatience to be gone from the den, Virginia again urged Constance to hasten.

"Don't sit there, dear! Come along! We have not a moment to lose. Shall I carry Dorothy?"

The answer startled her; a new terror had appeared.

"Don't you see that I am holding my heart tight. I cannot let go to help you. Make the boat go faster. Why don't you paddle."

Virginia's heart leaped to her throat. "Her mind is giving away," she exclaimed, with a gasp.

There, then, the typhoid aftermath, which had been predicted would develop in time in Constance some strange and serious ailment, had found a lodgement, and now, bursting into life, lay siege to nature's most wonderful creation, the human brain. A moment of terrifying consternation followed.

"What shall I do now?" Virginia distractedly exclaimed.

"Paddle, paddle, paddle," feebly responded Constance.

Unmindful of the reply, Virginia stood as if transfixed with despair. She racked her brain for a way out. The situation was fast verging on the tragic.

"I will barricade the door!" she determined. "No, he may smash in the roof or sink us; I must get them away somehow."

"Oh, Constance, dear, try to be strong. Fight down this weakness. The boat is waiting. We must escape. Help me! Oh, God, help! Help!"

Her voice began in a subdued, frantic appeal, and ended in a sob of heart-rending despair for succor.

Like a shaft of sunshine bursting through a rift in the dark, lowering clouds of dismay, came the answer from Constance:

"I will! I will! Let me think! Oh, yes, we had better go now. Lead on! Hasten!" And she arose from the seat.

"Thank Heaven. The dark spot has gone," Virginia fervently exclaimed. "Her brain has cleared again."

How joyfully she struck another match further to accelerate their passage.

"Keep close to me, dear. Are you tired? Let me help you." And she placed her right arm about the waist of Constance, the match held forward in her left hand lighting the way. They had proceeded a few steps when the door opened. She drew back with a slight, terrified exclamation: "Oh!"

Jack Shore stood in the doorway.

CHAPTER XVI.

The men had been ashore, had found the rope cut in several places, and the dog gone. The circumstances were so suspicious and fraught with so much danger to them, that they decided upon the immediate removal of the child. On their return toward the cabin, Rutley discovered a faint glimmer of light within, and in a whisper, called Jack's attention to it.

"I am sure I blew it out," Jack whispered, alarmed.

"Do you think the child awakened and struck a match?" again whispered Rutley.

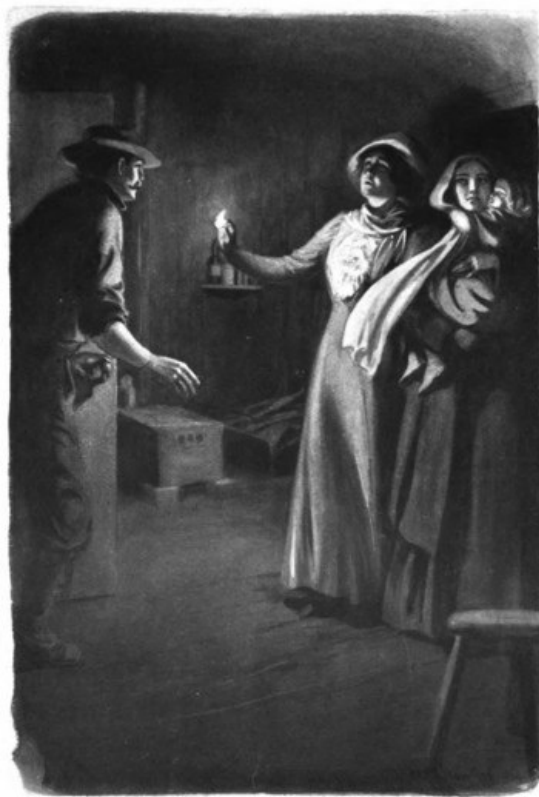
"No; no matches within her reach. Perhaps Virginia has come. Hello! A strange boat here."

"The light moves," continued Rutley, in a whisper.

"I will get out here," whispered Jack, and he sprang out of the boat quietly onto the platform. "Take the boat to the other end of the cabin."

As he opened the door, the profile of the women and child appeared, dimly outlined by the match light held in Virginia's hand.

As she staggered back, surprised and terrified, for the moment, Jack pushed his way in, closed the door, bolted and locked it, and put the key in his pocket. Then he struck a match and lighted the lamp.



"Virginia drew back with a slight terrified exclamation, 'Oh!' Jack Shore stood in the doorway."

After surveying the group, he gruffly laughed.

"Ha, ha, ha, ha, ha, Signora make a da bold a break in a da house, eh? Ha, ha, ha, ha. Eesa try tak a Daize from a da nicey home, eh? Ha, ha, ha, ha."

"Yes," she replied, without hesitation or a qualm of fear in her voice. "That was my intention, but the devil's emissary has blocked it."

Without a trace of fear, quietly and strangely free from agitation, Constance made her way to the door, and laid her hand on the bolt to unfasten it.

Jack took hold of her small, round wrist, turned her about and pushed her back a few paces. "Note a beez in a da hurry, Signora."

"Who are you?" she timidly asked.

"Ha, ha, ha, hic, Eesa compan-e-on say I beez a da devil," Jack laughed jeeringly.

"Oh, very well," she replied, mildly. "The devil is always hungry for someone. Who do you want now?"

"A Daize, a da Daize. Yous a lak a me, eh, a Daize?"

"No, no; the devil shall not have my heart. My precious darling now." And Constance shrank from him, pressing the little form tighter to her breast.

"But you may have money," she indifferently added.

Jack smiled and bowed obsequiously.

"Ten-na years eesa sella da banans, turnoppsis, carrottsis, cababbages—mak a da mon, naw! Now eesa steal a da kid, do anyting for a mak a da mon. Da mon, da mon," he repeated slowly three times, with deep-toned Dago emphasis. "Then eesa-go back a da sunny Italia," a phrase that escaped his lips as though shot from a rapid firer.

In the meantime Rutley had entered from the other door, locked it, and softly crept to the partition door, where he stood listening and noting, through the small glass panel, the situation within.

Scorning preliminaries, Virginia said:

"I have brought you all that I could get. Take it!" And she laid a package of crisp banknotes on the table. Jack's eyes bulged and glistened at the sight of so much money within his grasp. He eagerly picked up the package, which was fastened in the middle by a band of paper, flipped the ends of the banknotes back and forth with his finger, then proceeded to count the money. His action was business-like.

Without unfastening the band, he held one end of the package firmly down on the table with the knuckles of his left hand, doubled the other end back, and held it with his fingers and let each note slip back separately to a flat position on the table, until he counted them all.

Meanwhile Virginia had gently pushed Constance to the seat, and as she watched him she muttered, as though speaking to herself: "I could get no more than ten thousand dollars. If that will not satisfy him, then let fate come to the rescue, for a life hangs on the issue tonight."

"Turnoppsis, Carrottsis, Ca-babbages, Ta-rah-rah. Eesa fat a da pack," said Jack, as he thrust the package of money inside his vest. "Saw da ood, hic"—But it appearing loose and risky to keep it there, he took it out, rolled it up and forced it in his trousers' back pocket. "Black a da boots, hic." Still feeling dissatisfied with the security of either pocket he at last put it in the inside pocket of his coat, hanging near the lamp over the table. And then he turned to Virginia.

"Eesa part a da mon? Hic. Much a beez a da tanks, Signora."

"You will now liberate the child?" she pleaded, in faltering speech.

"Ta-rah-rah! You sa fetch a me only a da half!" exclaimed Jack, feigning surprise at her request.

"Yousa da rich. Gotta da mon a plent. Go, Signora, get a moores a da mon. Leave a Daize a da here."

"Mr. Golda, I'll not stay. I am going home with mamma!" and Dorothy pouted indignantly.

Seeing him obdurate, and fearing the effect of a forcible separation from her mother now so fondly clasped in her arms, Virginia resolved to try persuasion once more, before putting into execution the plans she had matured as a last and desperate resort. With blanched face, its very seriousness compelling attention, she said, in a faltering voice:

"If your heart is human you cannot look upon that stricken mother without feeling that in the last great day the Judge of all will judge you as you now deal with her."

He turned from her without a word, derision betrayed in his face, contempt in his action. It, however, placed Jack in a dilemma. There the mother, for whom he felt a kindly interest, quietly resting with her lost darling in her arms, yet ever and anon a scared, haunted look flitted from her eyes.

He looked at the girl a moment, then broke into low, derisive laughter.

"Ha, ha, ha, ha. Eesa fine a da lady. He, he, he, he. Signora beez a da accomplice ova da conspirator to break a up a da brodder's home, eh? Signora good a da lady."

"Ha, ha, ha, ha," and suddenly lowering his voice, said:

"Turnoppsis, Carrottsis, Ca-babbages," then paused and picked up the bottle to take a drink. "If the child goes home now," he thought, "Phil gets no reward; no," and he set the bottle down on the table with a bang, without taking the premeditated drink.

"No, Ma sees a Daize a beez a da safe. Ma sees no a da harm come a Daize."

"I have brought you all the money I could obtain, and now I demand that you release the child,"

Virginia said, firmly.

"Eesa be damn! Yous a fetch a me a da mon, a da rest, ten a thous, an an—a Daise beez a da liber. Eesa da late a now, Signora. Much a bet for a youse a da go home, hic."

Virginia's blanched but resolute face indicated that the critical moment had arrived. Then her voice quivered slightly, as with suppressed, quiet dignity, she said: "I shall give you no more."

The declaration aroused Constance. She looked up. "Yes, oh, yes; give him more!" she exclaimed, in plaintive alarm. "He shall have a million, two million; I will get it for him."

The extravagant offer, the soft, troubled, pensive stare, caused Jack to straighten up and gaze directly at her.

Virginia's alert eyes at once caught the superstitious fear that had suddenly betrayed itself in his face.

"Don't you see her mind is giving way!" she exclaimed, and while he stood staring at Constance, she seized the occasion as one favorable for escape.

"Come dear," she urged, "he will not stop us now."

"It is dangerous," was the soft, helpless reply. "The clouds are thickening, and the storm will soon burst."

"Courage, dear, the clouds will soon roll by. Come," Virginia urged, half lifting her to her feet.

"Oh, very well, we must go," was the indifferent response.

A step forward, and again that timid, startled, fawn-like terror overcame her. "Oh, dear," she plaintively exclaimed, "the boat rocks; hold fast to me, sweetheart." And she halted with a swaying motion, as though her limbs were incapable of firmly sustaining her.

With distended eyes. Jack stared at her. "Heavens!" he thought; "I cannot separate that poor mother from her child. I cannot do it. If Phil wants the reward he must take the child home himself."

The thought was scarcely developed when the voice of his partner rang out from the other room, hoarse, disguised, and peremptory:

"What's the matter with you? Separate them! Take the kid and turn the woman out."

Then it was Virginia realized that she had two men to deal with instead of one.

Undaunted, her courage arose to the occasion. She had come prepared for trouble of a most serious nature, and in her determination to succeed, it mattered little, now that she had shaken off the first trembling of fear, whether one or more men stood in her way.

She stepped over close to Jack, bent forward and looked up sideways in his face, a magnetic fire scintillating from her eyes that seemed to pierce his inmost thought, and slowly drew his gaze to her. Under the spell Jack forgot his assumed character, for once he forgot to use the Dago dialect.

"Don't look at me in that way; it was not all my work," he said, apologetically.

He had spoken in plain English. Yet in Virginia's tensely excited frame of mind it passed unchallenged.

"You acknowledge a share in it. And if you lay a hand on her child, I'll call down upon you the blasphemy of a madhouse."

The art she employed to play upon his heightened imagination was intensely eloquent, and exquisitely enacted. On the impulse of the moment the threat served to unnerve him completely and had Jack been the only one to deal with, their escape at that moment would have been certain.

A prey to his own secret superstition, though openly ridiculed theosophy, Jack stood spellbound, his fear distorted by the influence of the liquor he had drunk.

True, Rutley had braced him some, but Virginia threw about him a glow of such awesome consequences that he again weakened and unconsciously repeated under his breath: "The curse of a madhouse! Oh, I can't do it! I'm a bit human yet."

Then came a second roar from Rutley, impatient and contemptuous.

"Separate them, you chicken-hearted knave! Separate them, damn you, and be quick about it, too!" A slight jar at that moment struck the cabin.

Jack came out of his semi-trance with a shudder and, recovering his nerve, seemed to be

disgusted at his momentary weakness, and forthwith he attempted to get between the women and the cabin door, addressing the child:

"A Daize a mus stay a dare. Yous a lak a me, eh a Daize?"

"Wretch, stand back!" Virginia commanded. She realized that the supreme moment had come.

Jack leered at her. Without further heed he addressed the child:

"A Daize, yous a da know I beez a kind to you," and he took hold of her arms. "Let a da go Eesa say hic. Let a da go da kid."

"No, no!" Constance cried, as she resisted his effort to separate them. "You shall not have my darling! You shall not take her again."

"Take your villainous hands off!" ordered Virginia, and at the same time she dealt him a stinging blow in the face, which caused him to loose his hold on Dorothy and stagger back.

At that moment, too, he was startled by footsteps on the roof. He paused with a confused idea whether the sound on the roof had not really emanated from Rutley in the other room. Concluding in favor of the latter, he continued: "Yous a da defy a me eh, hic, sacramento! Eesa mak a da let a go da kid, or eesa break a da arm."

Meanwhile Virginia had placed herself between Constance and Jack and, drawing a revolver from under her jacket, leveled it at him.

Utterly reckless of her own danger, and her eyes ablaze with daring she exclaimed in a voice low and thrilling with intense determination, "Stand where you are, you vile epitome of a man! Dare try to bar our way out, and witness heaven, I'll rid the earth of a scoundrel too long infesting it!"

A quaking pause followed, more trying to her nerves than the peril of the situation itself, and she backed toward the door.

Her action provoked an exclamation from Jack. "God, the girl's game!" He stood mentally measuring the space that separated them, while a cunning leer developed on his face. He was about to spring, when Sam's shuffling on the roof became distinct.

"Another accomplice! God protect the child!" murmured Virginia. And then in the moment of her dismay, Jack sprang forward and grasped her pistol hand. She fired, but the excitement had unnerved her, and the bullet went wide of its mark.

In the struggle that ensued he forced her down on her knees, wrenched the weapon from her hand. As he was placing it in his pocket, it slipped from his grasp and slid along the floor, where it lay beyond his reach, near the partition door. Then he leered at her, and pinioned her hands behind her. "Now kiss a da me."

Notwithstanding the danger of her position, she managed to suppress her terror, and she exclaimed defiantly, "Never!" and with one concentrated desperate effort in which all the suppleness, strength and agility of youth were called into action, succeeded in breaking his grasp, and sprang to her feet.

Deprived of her revolver, yet she had foreseen such a contingency, and had provided a last means of defense. She produced a small dagger from her corsage. Her fingers tightened convulsively around the handle, and she said in a trembling voice:

"Back, you ruffian! The point is poisoned! Beware!"

The action was so quick, and the blade glittered aloft with such deadly intent, that Jack leaped back.

Meanwhile Rutley's attention had been absorbed by the struggle going on between Jack and Virginia, but when he heard the footsteps on the roof his alarm became manifest. "I must get the child at once, or all will be lost," he muttered.

Hastily taking a handkerchief from his pocket, he tied it about the lower part of his face, then he swung open the partition door and entered, the same instant that Jack had forced Virginia to her knees.

Without a pause, he promptly made for Constance, grasped the child and tried to tear her from her mother.

Constance, too affrighted to scream, resisted with all her might.

"Let go, damn you—let go, or I'll drown her!" and with savage hands he wrenched Dorothy away from her. Trying to escape with Dorothy in his arms, Rutley confronted Virginia.

"Release her!" she demanded.

He looked at the dagger, quivering ominously in her hand, and Dorothy dropped from his nerveless hands and he jumped back beside Jack, hoarsely exclaiming, "God, she's a tartar!"

"Run to your mother, Dorothy! To the boat, Constance, quick!" urged Virginia, as she stood erect, fearless and tragic between the men and their prey.

"Are we curs to be daunted by this Oregon girl, this slip of a woman?" exclaimed Rutley hoarsely.

"Beware! The edge is sharp, the poison deadly!" cautioned Virginia, in a voice that thrilled and which left no doubt as to her determination to use the weapon to the limit of her ability.

Jack laughed—laughed low, hoarse and sarcastically. "He, he, he, he, he. Scarce da fine a lady—wid a da white a nice a hand. Mak-a eem all a da carmine, eh? He, he, he, he, he, he."

She made no reply, yet there darted from her eyes a lightning flash of desperate purpose.

Rutley clearly understood the sign and, leaning over close to Jack, whispered: "We must get the knife from her at all hazards."

"Signora, good a da lady, eh! Mak a da bloody fista, eh!" Jack leered as he concentrated his gaze upon the girlish form drawn up to her fullest height before him.

Again he laughed low and hoarsely:

"Ha, ha, ha, ha! Eesa know a da way to fix 'em!"

Swiftly opening the partition door, he thrust in his hand, pulled a covering off from the bunk, then after closing the door, he proceeded rapidly to tie the corners together, muttering meanwhile, "Eesa mak a da loop, lak a da bag. See! Ha, ha, ha, ha!"

To Virginia the trap appeared so simple and ingenious, its application so promising of success, that as she watched its preparation her heart leaped to the opportunity presented as a last chance.

"Attack them now—attack them now!" urged her judgment with startling force. Louder it seemed to grow, till at last, maddened by the very repugnance of its conception, a sickening sense of fear overpowered her, her nerves suddenly collapsed, and she seemed to lose the power of action.

Having completed the snare, which had taken only a few moments to prepare. Jack bent forward, showing the white of his teeth as a wolf of its fangs when about to spring on its prey.

"Now together!" he whispered.

Virginia saw her danger and realized the crisis of all her efforts to make atonement for the wrong she had caused Constance was at hand.

Again the affrighted despairing cry burst in an audible whisper from her lips.

"Help! Help! Oh, God in heaven, help!" Just what Jack would have done in his fury it is impossible to say, for the liquor had frenzied him, and Virginia's stubborn resistance had aroused in him a latent devil. His intention, whatever it may have been, was frustrated by Sam, who at that moment smashed in the window, covered him with his revolver and shouted, "Throw up your hands!"

The crash of broken glass arrested Jack's attention, and upon looking around he discovered the muzzle of a large caliber revolver thrust through the broken window and leveled straight at him.

So sudden was the surprise, so unexpected and imminent the danger, that he automatically flung up his hands.

Upon crossing the island, after leaving Thorpe and the detective at the edge of the wood, Sam had immediately boarded the launch, and stowing the dog in a comfortable position on cotton waste in the "fo-castle," directed the engineer to proceed to the north end of the island.

On arriving at the point agreed upon, aside from the cabin's range of city lights, Sam got into a small boat, provided for the occasion, and pushed ashore, after having conveyed Thorpe and the detective on board the launch.

A consultation was held, and it was arranged that the detective and Smith, who had remained in the launch, should go in the small boat, assail the south door and cut off escape in that direction, while Thorpe and Sam in the launch would take a position at the main door of the cabin.

After securing an axe from the launch, the detective and Smith proceeded as quickly as possible on their mission. Instead of rowing, they paddled along, Indian fashion, the dip of the blades scarcely disturbing the silence that enveloped them. The launch steamed slowly along in the boat's wake, and just as noiselessly, and was the first to touch one of the logs which supported the cabin.

They heard voices within that seemed feminine and familiar to both Sam and Thorpe, though uncertain on account of the low tone.

As prearranged, Sam stealthily clambered up on the roof and crawled to the starboard side, where he lay flat on his stomach, and peered head down, in through the loose curtained four-paned window. What he saw prompted him to instantaneous action, and the crash of broken glass followed.

Rutley immediately grasped the situation as one fraught with the gravest peril. He saw that Sam's revolver covered Jack, and saw, too, that a few feet nearer the partition door would place him in a position out of line of Sam's aim, as the small cupboard, beside the window, formed an angle that sheltered that part of the room. On the instant, therefore, he leaped toward the partition door. As he sprang toward the door, his eyes fastened on Jack's coat. To secure the package of money from its pocket was, for his deft fingers, but the work of a moment; then into the sleeping room he darted and closed the door.

While Jack's hands were up, Thorpe called from the outside to open the door. At the same time he shook it violently, and began to batter it with the axe.

During this time Constance stood with her back to the wall, her arms straight down by her side, with the palms of her hands flattened against the boards, as one seeks support at times on a ship at sea. She appeared insensible alike to fear or position. Yet the horror of the affair shone in her distended eyes.

"The boat rocks, the storm is upon us," she muttered.

At the moment Smith commenced to batter the other door of the cabin, Jack took the chance, and sprang to one side, out of line of Sam's revolver.

"It's the police!" he exclaimed wildly, and in the panic that seized him he quite forgot his assumed character.

He picked up the revolver that he had wrenched from Virginia, and which lay upon the floor, and his attitude became so threatening and malignant as to cause her to utter a slight terrified scream.

Even Dorothy's large innocent eyes blazed, and she struck at him in defense of Virginia. "Mr. Golda, you're a bad, bad man."

The child's voice raised in Jack a "forlorn hope," for he muttered, "Dorothy shall be my guarantee of escape."

Simultaneously the door flew open under Thorpe's blows, and he stood in the entrance.

"Oh, papa, papa!" cried Dorothy, as she ran toward him.

Seeing his opportunity, Jack desperately clutched the child with his left hand. Swinging Dorothy in front of him, and before her father, he pointed the revolver at her head, and in that position addressed him in a sort of screeching yell, "Stop!"

Thorpe stood horror-stricken. His heart leaped to his throat. "My God! madman, what will you do?" he hoarsely exclaimed, and motioned as if to rescue the child.

With a tighter clutch, and a more maddening menace, Jack again addressed him, "Stop, not a step nearer!" And to emphasize his purpose, he placed the muzzle of the revolver close to her head.

Observing the desperate peril in which Dorothy was placed, and with a courage born of horror and despair, Virginia stole to Jack's back, and with a wild frantic scream of "Save her!" seized his pistol hand between both her own, and in the struggle that immediately ensued, and in which all her strength was exerted, the weapon fell to the floor.

And then Sam tore open the broken window, swung himself through to the floor, and instantly grappled with Jack.

Virginia's attack forced Jack to release Dorothy, who was immediately gathered in her father's arms.

"Safe, my blessed child, safe!" he fervently exclaimed.

And then poor Virginia, courageous, strong-minded, kind-hearted, passionate Virginia, having sustained the frightful nervous strain till the last moment, swayed, and sank to the floor in a swoon.

Meanwhile Constance stood beside the cabin door, staring at the men in a dazed and vacant manner. She had heard Virginia, and repeated mechanically, "Save Dorothy!" and now repeated after Mr. Thorpe, in tones as though a very dear voice had kindled a spark calling back loving recollections. She drew her hand across her brow, as though trying to clear away some web that

obscured her memory, and stared at her husband like one suddenly awakened from a dream. A moment after and she whispered with awe in her voice, "John! John!"

Almost immediately Rutley had returned to the room without the child, but with Jack's money, the door near him was being battered. He at once concluded that the game was up, and his own safety necessitated an immediate escape. How? He must decide at once.

How many surrounded the cabin? Ha! If he only knew, and then the hatch occurred to him.

He knew the big logs upon which the cabin was built raised it some ten or twelve inches above water. There lay his way—out—quick. He lifted the cover, and silently sank beneath the floor between the logs.

Then he let the trap door fall back in position above him, just as the cabin door gave way and the detective entered, followed by Smith, who handled an axe.

It was then that Constance seemed to recover suddenly her reason, for she rushed toward her husband with outstretched arms, exclaiming in a voice fraught with rapturous thanksgiving, "John! John and Dorothy!" An inexpressible joy shone in her eyes.

But her advance was met with a cold, stern frown and a backward wave of the hand. Not a word escaped him.

For a moment she stood irresolute; then she passed the tips of her fingers across her brow again and again—"Oh, this horrible dream that I can't shake off!" Again she seemed to recover her reason and her voice, soft and sobbing, said, "John, you don't believe me shameless and debased, do you? You can't believe it, for it is false, false, I say! and the boat won't clear from it! Let me help"—and her voice hardening, she went on—"Give me a paddle. We must escape. Save Dorothy!" and she threw out her hands to him appealingly.

A swift compassionate look swept across Thorpe's face. The first doubt of his wife's guilt had seized upon his brain, and he said chokingly, "My God, is it possible my wife is innocent?"

He had half turned around to her, but on remembering the ring, his face again set stern, then without another word he waved her back with a single motion of his hand.

But the sound of his voice had once more stirred up a filament of intelligence and she sobbed, "John! John!" She got no further. She saw him turn away and, placing her hand to her side, trembled, and with a moan on her lips, sank down beside Virginia.

And at that moment the detective appeared in the partition doorway and was followed closely by Smith, who, upon seeing the prostrate woman, senseless on the floor, at once concluded a foul crime had been committed, and exclaimed, with horror and rage on his face:

"Oh, the murtherin' blackguard!"

In the struggle Jack broke from Sam and stooped to pick up the revolver. But Sam, coached in Texas, had him covered with his own revolver in a twinkling, and with the characteristic side movement of his head, said with a grin of satisfaction, "If you touch it, I'll send a bullet through your brain!"

CHAPTER XVII.

After Jack Shore had been securely handcuffed, and after a hasty but bootless search for his partner in crime, Detective Simms hustled him into the launch, and desiring to get him behind the prison bars without delay, ordered the engineer to run the boat across the river at once so as to avoid any attempt at release by possible confederates.

A hasty examination of both Constance and Virginia convinced Mr. Thorpe that they were not seriously hurt, and were rendered senseless only by a shock of great mental excitement.

To remain until after their recovery would only add torture to a painful situation; he therefore made them as comfortable as the limited means at hand would allow, and then taking Dorothy with him, boarded the launch, leaving Sam and Smith to watch over and care for his wife and sister until the arrival of a physician, whom he intended to dispatch to their aid as quickly as possible. Dorothy objected to leaving her mother, but was sternly overruled and awed into submission by her father.

Ten minutes after her rescue the boat was speeding toward Madison Street landing with John Thorpe and Dorothy, Jack Shore and Detective Simms, taciturn and grave.

As the boat drew away, both Sam and Smith silently contemplated the two insensible women on the floor. For some moments neither spoke a word, profoundly absorbed in a grave contemplation of the questionable necessity of the two women undertaking so dangerous a mission.

To Sam it appeared plain they had very recently learned of Dorothy's place of captivity; but why

they had not imparted the information to some of their male friends, why they had kept her place of concealment secret, and why, also, they had undertaken her release just prior to the arrival of her father on the scene, was a mystery. It only resulted in a suspicion that they had somehow heard of John Thorpe's premeditated attempt at rescue, and were alarmed lest Dorothy should fall into his hands.

Smith's mind was not of an analytical nature; in fact, he did not think their presence was attributable to anything other than a mother's natural heart-breaking longing to recover her darling as swiftly as possible, and in the enterprise Virginia had joined her.

And as he thought of the indifference and cruel desertion of John Thorpe with her child, for whom she had made such a sacrifice, a solemn, serious look of sadness gathered on his face and deepened into contempt and anger. And the compassion in his heart welled up and at length broke from between his lips, in unconscious mutterings. "Sure, he tuk her darlint from her an' left her lyin' there, too, so he do, on the hard flure, wid her sinses gone out from her hid completely. The heartless man!"

"The trouble between them is serious," Sam replied, as he knelt down beside Virginia and commenced to chafe her hands.

"Sure, don't I know it, so I do!" rejoined Smith, as he followed Sam's example and set to chafing Constance's hands between his own. "An' he's broke her heart entirely, so he ave," he went on, "an' her hands do be numb wid no life in thim at all."

Then he was silent for a time and worked industriously to bring back into her hands the warmth that had fled.

Suddenly he asked Sam in an eager, anxious whisper, "Do yees belave she'd do wrong?"

"No!" Sam promptly replied.

"Naither do I. Indade she's as swate an' innocint a lady as wan ave hivin's angels. Sure, she cudn't do wrong at all, at all."

"Not at all!" responded Sam gravely.

"An' the mister shud ave better sinse than to trate her so unkind, don't yees think so now?"

"Thorpe is a damned fool, I guess!" Sam answered gloomily.

"Indade, I do belave it, too, so I do!"

Again there was silence. Again it was broken by Smith, who said in a low, confidential tone: "I'll tell yees, I belave it do be some attracious divil ave come betwain thim."

"You do!" Sam snapped at him, as though he interpreted Smith's allusion a direct reference to Virginia.

"Indade I do, so I do!"

"Why do you think so?" Sam asked, a tinge of annoyance at Smith's persistence still appearing in the manner of asking.

"Isn't she an angel? An' it's only the divil cud sipporate an angel from her husband. Sure, man, dear, what more do yees want to prove it?"

A twitching of Virginia's eyelids at that moment caught Sam's attention. It was nature's first harbinger of approaching consciousness. He held up his hand for Smith to be silent. The twitching, however, ceased, and her eyelid remaining closed, again became motionless.

"A false alarm!" he muttered, and proceeded to chafe her hands more industriously than before. It was evident that Sam liked the occupation; for this young lady had unconsciously woven a mesh of enthralling servitude about his heart, and his idolizing; passionate fondness had at last been rewarded by unexpectedly finding himself permitted to caress her at will; to stroke her hair, to contemplate her fair face, to press her hands between his own.

Sam shrewdly suspected that Virginia was somehow the cause of Thorpe's estrangement from his wife, but wherefore and why, were parts that she alone could explain, and her lips were sealed.

That she was also mysteriously connected with the abduction of the child, he felt was a moral certainty. And her meeting with the Italian in the lonely park at dead of night could have offered no other solution. It had acted as a temporary restraining factor upon the ardor of his love and admiration. But now, as she lay so still and insensible in his care and protection; now, as he gazed on her fair features, all his doubts of her chastity and loyalty to those she loved vanished, and an all conquering fondness suddenly burst in a flood of radiance upon him, sweeping away all his misgivings before it, irresistible and impetuous as the flight of an avalanche.

It was very quiet at that moment; so still that the rippling water, as it lapped along the logs which

supported the cabin, sounded very distinct. Smith imagined he heard a splash, and assuming a listening attitude, said cautiously, "Phwat may that mane?"

After a pause, Sam alertly remarked, "We have not kept a lookout. What if the dago's partner should steal in on us?"

Smith's eyes blazed with anger. Laying Constance's hand down, he sprang to his feet. "Be the power ave justice," he exclaimed between his teeth, "sure, an' it do be a devil ave a bad job the rogue'll take on, to boord us now."

"If you see anybody lurking near, call me," said Sam.

"Niver yees moind! Just lave the thavin' blackguard to me! I'll attind to him!" Smith answered, a savage joy betrayed on his face, and, seizing hold of the axe, he crept softly to the door. After listening a moment, he opened it and stepped out, closing the door behind him.

Again there was silence. Again Sam tenderly smoothed away Virginia's abundant silky black hair from her face, and fondly chafed her temples. And as he thought of her swift recovery, a recovery that would place a great gulf between him and this one girl who could make him the happiest being on all God's green earth, he muttered; "Oh, for one touch of those ruby colored lips—even if it be stolen."

Virginia's face was very close to him, and as he looked at her he detected a faint warmth in her cheeks; noted the fine mold, the delicate tracery of blue veins through her clear white skin—the temptation was very great. His heart thumped wildly and then—unmindful of the impropriety, or unwilling to resist the natural inclination of his arm to slip under her full, round, snowy neck—raised her head and touched her lips with his. The contact germinated a magnetic spark that raced through her veins and instantly awoke her to life.

She sprang to her feet, the red blood of active youth flushing her face to crimson. For one moment she looked indignant, fully conscious of the liberty he had taken. Sam bent his head abashed, and said apologetically—said in tones and manner that left no mistake as to his honest love and deep respect for her—"You looked so beautiful that—really now—I could not help it—forgive me!"

Her mobile face, that had set in a shock of alarm, indignation and scorn, softened and, as the events of the night flooded her memory, changed to a smile. For one moment it loitered in her eyes and on her lips, and then again changed to a grave, serious look that developed tears in her beautiful blue eyes. She held out her hand to him. Were his eyes deceiving him? Could he believe it? Yes, and he stood dazed with overpowering joy that she was not offended at the liberty.

He took her hand and gently carried it to his lips. Then she turned to the aid of Constance, knelt beside her, felt her hands, her face, her neck, and asked him. "Who was so mean to strike her down?"

For answer he sadly shook his head, and replied gravely, "She sank to the floor after John Thorpe refused her."

Then bitter tears trickled down Virginia's face as she continued to chafe her hands; but finding her efforts to restore warmth were unavailing, the same gripping at her heartstrings again possessed her. She raised her eyes to him, a frantic pleading in her voice, "Help me, Sam; oh, help me bring back the life that has nearly fled!"

"Help you!" he repeated proudly, as he stood in front of the girl who had for the first time asked of him a favor in her distress, the favor of a "good samaritan."

And then, looking straight at her, he said, very seriously, as he knelt and took Constance's other hand, "The strength that God has given me is at your service, now and forever!"

She understood, and he noted with pleasure that no swift questioning glance of anger, no look of weariness and turning away, as once before, followed his magnanimity.

At that moment Smith, who stood on the platform just outside the cabin door, was heard to say in a loud voice:

"Move on there! The channel be over beyant, in the middle ave the water! Kape yees head more sout be aste!" Then he was heard muttering indistinctly, with only such disjointed words as "blackguard," "whillip" and "divilish rat," clearly audible.

It was soon, however, followed by angry words delivered in an aggressively belligerent voice: "Be hivins, don't yees come near us! Kape off, sure, d'yees moind, yees blackguards, or I'll put a hole through yees bottom that'll sink yees down to the place where yees do belong, so ye do!"

Suddenly changing his voice to an anxious tone, said, "Phwat d'yees want? Phwat's that? Doctor, sure! Praise be to God! Oh, we've been waitin' for yees, doctor dear, till our hearts do be broken entirely. Be me soul, it's the thruth; not wan bit more nor less. Come, dear, yees do be wanted quick!"

A lurch at the cabin told that the launch had arrived. The door was hastily opened and Smith pushed the doctor in.

"There they be, sure, lyin' en the flure wid no sinse in thim at all, at all. Do yees be quick, doctor, and hivin'll reward yees!"

Skillful application of proven restoratives, however, failed to produce sensibility, and the doctor considered the case so grave that he ordered Constance be removed to her home as quickly as possible.

She was, therefore, tenderly taken on board the launch and conveyed home.

The sun's rays had burst through and dispersed the early morning mists before Constance recovered from the shock, but, alas! with the shadow of a wreck enveloping her.

CHAPTER XVIII.

The next morning Sam determined upon a personal interview with the prisoner. Upon arrival at the County jail, where the prisoner had been transferred, Sam encountered Smith, who was standing on the curb talking to a policeman.

"How dy yus do, Sor?" was Smith's greeting.

"Getting along as fast as could be expected," he answered.

"It do be surprisin' the number ave blackguards there do be infesting the straits ove Portland after dark these days. Houldups, an' 'break-o-day Johnnies' an' 'shanghoin' an'—an' kidnappin'—an' what bates me, all the worrk to be had at good wages the while—whill wan ave the rogues do be off his bait for a time, so he do!"

"Sure, Smith, no mistake about that," Sam laughed. "We slipped it over him in fine shape last night. Have you seen him this morning?"

"Indade oi 'ave, Sor, and he's the very wan that run the soule ave his plexis ferninst me hand the other day for spakin' disrespectful ave a lady."

"I came to see him," Sam said, with a smile at Smith's chivalry.

"Indade! Sure yees'll not recognize him as the wan we tuk last night at all, fir the color ave hair do be turnin' from black to a faded straw, so it do."

"Through terror of his position, I suppose."

"Not wan bit, sor. It came out in the wash. It do be this way. Yees see, the orficers cudn't get him to spake wan worrd an' no sweatbox or other terror ave the force did he fear, at all, sure! So they turned the water on him, after takin' off his clothes with the aid of two 'trustys,' and it was raymarked by the jailer that his skin do look uncommon fair, an the hair on his limbs was a sandy color, an' not black, like the hair on his hid, and his mustache oily black, too, so it do."

"Artificial coloring," suggested Sam.

"Sure, that's jist phat the jailor sid, the very same worrds, although do yees naw the color blend av his nick from the color bone up was a beautiful bit of worrk, as nate an' natural as anything yees would want to see."

"He is possibly an Italian artist."

"Sure, he's no Italian at all, fir the trustys soaped an' lathered an' scrubbed all the Dago off ave him. He raysisted loike a madman, but it was no use, and whin they held him under the shower bath his heavy black mustache fell off onto the floor. Wan ave the trustys picked it up and said, says he: 'By jimminy, he's no Dago at all; he's a scoogy.' An' I say so, too, so I do. And the jailer raymarked it was just as he expected, and then he tould them to get the scoogy into his duds."

"I will try and get permission to see him."

Sam then entered the office, followed by Smith. They were readily allowed to see the prisoner, and upon approaching his cell, Sam recognized him at once, and the Sheriff wrote on the record, opposite the name of George Golda—"Alias, Jack Shore."

An hour later Sam Harris was closeted with Detective Simms, in his office.

"I believe the fellow who escaped from the cabin last night," said Sam, "was Jack Shore's partner Philip Rutley, otherwise known as 'Lord Beauchamp'."

"Why do you suspect the lord to be Philip Rutley?" inquired the detective.

"Because they were partners in business, and inseparable chums socially," replied Sam. "And

where one was to be found, the other was not far away."

"You say he got ten thousand dollars from the bank on your uncle's indorsement?" inquired the detective.

"Yes," replied Sam, "and tomorrow afternoon he is to be uncle's guest at Rosemont."

"Well, tonight my lord will attempt to leave the city, but he will find it impracticable," remarked the detective, dryly. "I desire you to keep strictly mum on this matter for twenty-four hours, and I promise you positive identification of his lordship."

Later, Detective Simms, smoking a cigar, sauntered carelessly into the "sweatbox," where Jack Shore was still confined, and dumb as a stone statue on the question of kidnapping.

After silently looking at Jack for a time, he said with a smile: "If you had been shrewd you would not be here. You were sold."

"Then I am either a knave or a fool?" interrogated Jack, carelessly.

"To be frank," laughed Simms, "you are both. A knave for trusting Rutley, and a fool for doing his dirty work. I suppose you will think it is a lie when I say he 'tipped' us to the cabin for the ten thousand dollars reward offered by Mr. Thorpe for recovery of the child, and a promise of immunity from imprisonment."

"Who is Rutley?" nonchalantly asked Jack.

"Why, your partner; that fellow who has been masquerading as a lord."

"Lord who?"

"Come, now," Simms laughed. "Why, me Lord Beauchamp! Surprised, eh?" and again Simms laughed and looked at Jack questioningly. "Well," he continued at length, "you must be a cheap guy to believe that fellow true to you. See here, he gave the whole thing away. Don't believe it, eh? Well, I'll prove it. We knew the time Miss Thorpe was to be at the cabin. We knew the dog was on watch and removed it. We knew the exact time Rutley was to be with you, and arranged for him to get away without your suspicion. Why, our man was waiting with a boat as soon as he got out of the cabin."

"Did he get away?" It was the first question that Jack had asked, though non-committal, in which Simms detected a faint anxiety. Simms was the very embodiment of coolness and indifference. "Not from us, no; but he is out on bail."

That assertion was a masterstroke of ingenuity, and he followed it up with the same indifference. "Would you like to know who his sureties are?"

Jack maintained a gloomy silence.

"Just to convince you that I am not joking, I will show you the document." And Simms turned lazily on his heel and left him. Returning a few moments later with a document, he held it for Jack to look at.

"Do you note the amount? And the signatures?—James Harris, John Thorpe. You must be familiar with them," and the detective smiled as he thought of the trick he was employing to fool the prisoner, for he had himself written the signatures for the purpose.

"Jack's breathing was heavier and his face somewhat whiter, yet by a superhuman effort he still maintained a gloomy frown of apparent indifference.

"The reward was paid to him this morning," continued the detective, between his puffs of smoke.

"How much?" asked Jack, unconcerned.

"Ten thousand dollars!"

"Quite a hunk!" Jack said, carelessly. For he thought of the package that Rutley had deftly abstracted from his pocket in the cabin, and he was glad of it, for it would be used in his defense. And then he muttered to himself: "This 'duffer' is slick and thinks he can work me, but I'll fool him."

"The fellow is pretty well fixed," continued the detective, as he eyed Jack inquisitively.

"Clear of this case with twenty thousand dollars in his pocket."

"What!" exclaimed Jack, for the first time amazed, and then checking himself, said negligently:

"I understood you to say the reward was ten thousand dollars?"

"So I did. Ten thousand reward and that ransom money of Miss Thorpe's."

"The devil he has!"

Jack was beginning to waver. He thought of Rutley holding back the "tip" that he was shadowed, and also about the dog not barking at his approach, for some time after he had entered the cabin. Either of which incidents, had it been mentioned immediately upon entry, would have made escape possible. It seemed to corroborate the detective's assertion—that he was sold. His jaws set hard.

"Can you prove that to me?"

"Sure!"

CHAPTER XIX.

On the afternoon of the second day following the rescue of Dorothy, Mr. Thorpe, accompanied by his child, visited Mr. Harris by urgent invitation. The trees were still dressed in their leafy glow of autumn glory and, with the luxuriant green velvety grass of the lawn, invited a pause for contemplation of the entrancingly serene and happy condition earth intended her children to enjoy. Above was a clear, infinitely beautiful blue sky, through which the radiant orb of day poured down its golden shafts of light in masses of exuberant splendor and warmth.

It was an environment singularly touching and persuasive in its appeal to human nature for "Peace on earth and good will toward men."

As John Thorpe and his child walked up the path toward the house and arrived near the spot where his quarrel with Mr. Corway had taken place, just one week previous, he could not but halt, sensitive to the insidious influence so softly streaming about him—so gentle, yet so powerful in contra-distinction to the unhappy change that had so recently come into his life. Oh, for something to banish the bitter memories conjured up as his gaze riveted on the "damned spot" where his wife's inconstancy had been told to him.

And as he looked, a far-off dreamy stare settled in his eyes, as there unrolled before his vision the sweet bliss of happy years fled—gone, as he thought, never to return.

"Oh, God!" he exclaimed, overwhelmed with sudden emotion, and he clapped his hand to his forehead as an involuntary groan of anguish welled up from his heart.

His composure slowly returned to him, but the eroding effect of his smothered anguish would not obliterate, and he found himself thinking, "It was unwise to come to this place—here where memory is embittered by recollections of what has been. Terrible revelation! Terrible! Yet—I could not have been brought to credit it but for the evidence of my eyes."

These words seemed to startle him with a new light, for he paused, and then in a voice almost reduced to a whisper, fruitful with eager doubt, said, "What have my eyes proved to me? Is there room for a possibility of a mistake? No, no! The ring is evidence of her guilt. Oh, Constance, when I needed you, the world owned no purer or more perfect woman; but now—fallen, fallen, fallen!"

While deeply absorbed in sad reflection, Dorothy stole to his side and, looking up, wistfully, in his face, said:

"Dear papa, isn't mama here, either?"

The question from the child, uppermost in her mind, aroused him from his heart-aching reverie. He looked at her sternly. "Mama," he repeated; "child, breathe that name no more! Banish it from your memory! Oh, no, no, no! I did not mean that!" and he turned his head aside with downcast eyes, shocked and ashamed at his passionate outburst in the presence of his little child.

He sat down on a bench and put her on his knee, and as he did so became conscious of the child again looking wistfully in his eyes.

"Well, you are sorry for leaving mama in that old cabin, aren't you?"

It forced him to turn his eyes away from her, and with a tremor of pain in his voice, muttered: "Twenty times the child has said that to me today," and, turning to her, he said gently and with infinite compassion:

"Dorothy, you are too young to comprehend. It is my intention to remove you from the home of your birth, to take you East, and educate you there. Now, don't trouble me with questions, dear," and he kissed the fair young brow and, looking into her sweet innocent brown eyes, he saw reflected in them her mother's.

Then he turned his head aside and muttered: "So much like her mother! Oh, Constance! Constance! My judgment condemns you, but my heart—my heart will not leave you!"

Down from the house leisurely strolled Mr. Harris and Hazel.

"His Grace has just communicated to me the most amazing information about Virginia. It is so

absurd that I felt quite angry with him for mentioning it," Hazel said quite seriously.

"And what did he tell you?" inquired Mr. Harris. "If it is no secret?"

"He told me that it is common talk that she was found in the cabin with Constance at the time of Dorothy's rescue by her father, having just rewarded the Italian for abducting the child, and that they both swooned when uncle found them there."

"Lord Beauchamp must have been misinformed," broke in Mr. Harris, with a grave face. "If such were the case Sam would have told me. All idle tattle—mischievous gossip!"

"Ah! Mr. Thorpe and Dorothy!"

"Oh, darling!" exclaimed Hazel, and she gathered the child in her arms, kissed her, and flew off to the house with her.

"Well, John, I am glad to meet you again," shaking his hand, "though to tell the truth, I did not expect you."

"It has cost me bitter memories, Mr. Harris."

"I have long since discovered," continued Mr. Harris, "that while time cannot heal a deep-rooted sorrow, it softens many of its asperities. When do you depart for the East?"

"I have made arrangements to leave tomorrow."

"You are doing just what would prompt any man in like position to do. I trust we shall hear from you occasionally."

"It is now my purpose, after arranging for Dorothy's education, to travel abroad for an indefinite period, but I shall endeavor to keep in communication with you."

Linking his arm in that of his guest, Mr. Harris said: "Come, John, let us join Mrs. Harris on the piazza. She is anxious to have a chat with you."

Turning in the direction of the house, to their surprise they confronted Virginia. Mr. Thorpe at once withdrew his arm from that of Mr. Harris, and stepping aside with an offended dignity, remarked reproachfully:

"I was not aware of having merited the honor you do me."

Mr. Harris threw up his hands deprecatingly. He understood the purport of the allusion and was dumb. He had been quite unaware of the presence of Virginia, and knowing of the estrangement between brother and sister, felt embarrassed. He was rescued from his dilemma by Virginia, who addressed him in a grave voice.

"Please leave us, Mr. Harris."

His respect and esteem for her was sincere and great. Her good sense and becoming modesty had often impressed him as a woman of sterling qualities. Utterly disbelieving and discrediting the insinuations and innuendoes which Rutley had set afloat to his own advantage concerning her antagonistic relation with her brother, he conceived her to be the unhappy subject of a combination of circumstances over which she had no influence. A prey to anxiety, she retained little of the color and less of the vivacity formerly so conspicuously her heritage; yet her broad brow glistened white with an intellectuality that beautified her with spiritual chastity.

He was struck, too, with her very serious and pallid face, and his heart went out to her. He bowed low in answer to her request, and without a word gravely turned away and left them.

John Thorpe saw that Virginia was suffering from some great mental strain, nevertheless he chose to appear icily indifferent. He attributed her contrite appearance to the fact that he had surprised her and Constance in the cabin with the abductor of his child. He could conceive of no reason for them being there other than collusion with the Italian, for he believed they were cognizant of Dorothy's place of imprisonment all the time, and while it was possible the Italian held the child for ransom, they kept her place of concealment secret, under the belief that she was safer from seizure by Thorpe than at home or with friends, and also that it would draw the sympathy of acquaintances to Constance, and though Dorothy told him in her childish way that Virginia had given George Golda money, a minute search of his clothes and about the cabin failed to disclose it, and John Thorpe interpreted her defense of Dorothy as an unexpected contingency arising from the frenzied fury of the Italian to save himself from capture when he found escape cut off.

When Virginia swooned, it mercifully relieved her from a most embarrassing and painful position.

Such were his thoughts as he directed a stony stare of freezing haughtiness upon her—the woman, his sister, whom he now regarded as beyond the pale of blood relationship.

"I did not expect to meet you here," he said in a voice grave with a sense of the worry from which

he was suffering and from which wrong he could not, no matter how he reasoned, disassociate the name of his sister.

"I have tried to find you—to meet you—to—in short, to demand an explanation of this affair; but until now I have been unsuccessful."

She spoke hesitatingly and with a slight tremor in her voice, otherwise there was no indication of the great emotion that she was laboring under. In short, her demeanor, while firm and of simple dignity, was of the gravest character imaginable.

"You have broken all ties between us," he answered slowly.

"John, John! Don't turn away! Stop!" and she held up a warning finger as, stepping in front of him, she barred his way.

"You shall hear me. For I believe what I have to tell you is of the utmost importance. But first, what cause have you for divorcing Constance?"

"You ask that question?" he slowly emphasized.

"Yes, I ask that question," as steadily and definitely she regarded him.

"If on my return from China you had not concealed from me her infatuation for that man—that fellow Corway—this unhappy trouble would have been over long ago."

"I have concealed nothing from you! John, I am sure it is all a mistake."

"All a mistake?" he angrily repeated. "You concealed nothing from me! When her notoriety was of such common gossip that strangers were familiar with details!"

"If you had not degraded Constance by so meanly believing the palpable artifice of a—a stranger," quietly and gravely replied Virginia—"if you had but given her an opportunity to defend herself, you would have found no cause for divorce; no cause even to fear the tainted breath of scandal could ever attach to Constance. Oh, John, it is all wrong! Constance is innocent! She has never been untrue to you!"

Excitedly he turned to her, his face ablaze with the fervor of his amazement, as he repeated:

"Innocent—Constance! Constance innocent!"

"Yes," promptly responded Virginia. "I who know it, swear it is true—swear it is the truth in the sight of that high throne before which we shall all stand in the Judgment Day.

"It was I who originated the dreadful insinuations against Mr. Corway."

"Yes, yes! That may be true—but—" and Thorpe's manner again relapsed to a heart-aching resignation, as he sadly added: "He wore my wife's ring!"

"Yes, that is true, John, but unknown to her and most assuredly without her consent," eagerly asserted Virginia, and she related the manner Corway obtained the ring, and how she subsequently had indiscreetly informed Beauchamp it was "your gift to Constance."

Those of poor wayward humanity who, in moments of great passion have done a great wrong, know what torture is silently endured as day and night, in moments awake and in dreams asleep, the crime haunts them, and knocks, knocks, knocks, without ceasing, upon the soul's door for release of the secret.

Such were Virginia's feelings, and the sweet happiness experienced when she confessed her sin shone in her face with convincing truthfulness.

John listened to her with ever increasing amazement, and when she had concluded, his cold, austere demeanor had perceptibly softened. Yet Thorpe breathed hard.

"You vilified Corway's character and I have heard recently of his—of her mad infatuation for him and of his frequent visits to our home while I was away in China."

"The source of your information was a lie. You received it gratuitously from Beauchamp, did you not?"

"I have not mentioned the source of my information. Why do you think he was my informant?"

"Because he hated Corway."

"And you conspired with him to ruin my home," quickly interrupted Thorpe, and again coldly turned from her.

"You shall hear me!" and Virginia insistently gripped his coat sleeve and turned him toward her. "I have sought you too long to explain this unhappy affair, and now that I have found you, you must hear me out."

Smothering his impatience, Thorpe said: "Well!"

"I loved Corway, oh, so fondly!—but, alas, too well, and I allowed myself to cherish the belief that in his endearing manifestations he reciprocated my love. But on my premature return from the farm, I unexpectedly heard him declare his passion for Hazel. Then an all absorbing desire for revenge possessed me.

"I resolved to break their engagement and first endeavor to estrange him—from your friendship. To accomplish that end I traduced his character and created a suspicion that his attention to Hazel was insincere and mercenary, expecting that after Corway was denied access to your home, I could smooth over the unpleasantness between you and Hazel and eventually annul his betrothal to her. But your informant juggled the names, made Constance the subject of Corway's affection instead of Hazel, and led you to believe the ring was a love token from her to him."

"He insisted and repeated that Constance was the guilty one and not Hazel," dubiously commented Thorpe.

"I understand now, it was out of revenge," she laconically replied.

"Revenge! What wrong have I done Lord Beauchamp?" questioned Thorpe, amazed at Virginia's disclosures.

"You will understand when I disclose, as I have recently learned that he is Philip Rutley, masquerading as Lord Beauchamp."

"God of our fathers!" exclaimed Thorpe, clapping his hand to his white forehead, to still the pain of sudden doubt of his wife's inconstancy, that had seized him.

"What punishment is this inflicted on me?"

Then turning to Virginia with fierce light in his eyes, he sprang at her. In one bound he clutched her by the wrist, glared in her eyes, and said:

"And you, my only sister, have known all this and permitted him to wreak his vengeance upon my innocent wife, who never bore him malice, or did him wrong by thought, word or deed."

"I did not think that harm would fall on Constance." Yet even before she had finished speaking, a change came over Thorpe, and his grip on her wrist loosened. A victim of doubt and suspicion, his moods were as changing and variable as the coloring of a chameleon. Apparently he was not yet satisfied of the complete innocence of his wife or of the truthfulness of his sister, for he said, in a voice saddened by reflection: "That does not explain your connection with the abduction of Dorothy."

"I have them with me," she muttered, appreciating the importance of clearing herself. "Yes, they are here," and she hastily produced from her corsage an envelope having had the foresight to preserve them as most precious testimony in case of need.

The moment had come and found her prepared. Handing him the two notes, with a winsome expression of thankfulness, she said:

"Read them, John, this one first, and you will know why I was in the cabin."

She had handed to him the two notes received from George Golda, though in reality they had been penned by his colleague, Rutley. The first note asked for a meeting in the City park. The second demanded the amount of ransom that night on penalty of removal of Dorothy.

"The time was urgent in the extreme," she continued. "Unable to secure the amount of ransom demanded, I resolved to go alone to the cabin, determined to rescue Dorothy."

"You entered then."

"But you were not alone; Constance was with you," he corrected.

"When I told her my purpose, she pleaded so hard. Oh, so hard to go with me, that I could not deny her. I have told you all."

John Thorpe was not the only listener to Virginia's pleading. Intensely interested, neither of them noticed Sam Harris approach, and with him the little Scotch terrier, which had completely recovered from its painful experience on the launch at Ross Island. When he first caught sight of them confronting each other, he gave a low whistle of surprise, and then, as he drew near to address them, involuntarily he heard her last words. His eyelids twitched with pleasure as he listened to the idol of his heart vindicate Constance. Smothering a cry of joy, he turned and at once withdrew, muttering to himself: "Lord, how light my heart feels! Virginia is doing the right thing now, I guess. Come, Doctor"—the name he had given to the dog—"we'll leave them for awhile, eh?" And the brown eyes of the grateful canine looked up at him with almost human intelligence and affection.

John Thorpe's demeanor had undergone a great change in the few minutes he had listened to

Virginia. His frigid haughtiness had softened, through successive stages, to a gentleness bordering on compassion.

"I will take care of these," said he, in a voice of tenderness, as he placed the notes in his pocket. "But, oh, God in Heaven! What shall I say to my beloved wife?"

"You believe me, John?" Virginia cried, in a tone of heartfelt thankfulness—her eager gaze fastened on his face. Her pleading touched him deeply. He took her in his arms, gently kissed her fair brow, and in a broken voice, said:

"Virginia, we are only human, with human failings; but in your honor and truthfulness of this dreadful affair, God bear witness to my faith!"

A devout joy flushed the pallor of her beautiful face, as she responded with a thankful heart, purified as gold with fire: "My prayers are answered, and my brother is himself again."

"Yes, Virginia," he continued, with the fervor of family pride, as he thought of the part she had taken in Dorothy's rescue—"And in that book which shall be opened in the last great day, there will be pointed out by the Recording Angel—my sister's atonement." Then, without releasing her, he went on in an altered, anxious voice: "And my darling wife! Where is Constance? Tell me, Virginia, that I may go to her at once and plead her forgiveness."

"What shall I say?" she whispered, awestruck, caught in a moment of forgetfulness of the woman who suffered for it all. "I must not tell him where she is. No, no, no! Not yet!" and she battled to subdue her agitation that she might invent some plea to postpone the meeting with his wife. "Not now; not now, John," and drawing away from him, unconsciously put out her hand as though to ward off some impending evil.

"Why not?" he asked in surprised tones. "I must see her. I must know where my darling wife is at once!"

A flash of pain shot athwart the girl's features as she muttered under her breath: "Oh, dear! What shall I tell him, what shall I say? What shall I do now?"

Thorpe hastily stepped forward to her assistance, and with concern in his voice, said: "Virginia, you are ill!"

"Let me rest for a moment or two"—trying her utmost to appear unperturbed, and as she sank on a bench, continued brokenly: "I shall be all right presently. The long walk—the terrible strain"—

"My dear sister, you need assistance," interrupted Thorpe. "You must let me help you to the house and obtain proper care for you," and he tenderly attempted to lift her to her feet.

"No, no, no!" she quickly responded; "I—shall be better in a few moments. Just a little—quiet rest, John, and alone, please. I shall soon be well again."

"As you desire, Virginia; but I shall tell Mrs. Harris."

"No, no, John! Don't tell her! I wish to be alone for awhile."

"Very well, dear; as I have a message for Mr. Harris, shall seek him at the house; but I will return in a few moments," and then, considerate for her wish to be alone, he left her.

Helpless to resist the impetus of her consuming desire to reunite John and his wife, Constance, she yet dreaded the aftermath of the shock his discovery must surely produce. Virginia knew not which way to turn or what course to pursue.

"Oh, Auntie! Auntie! I'm so glad you've come. Mamma is coming to see me, too. Isn't she?" and Dorothy, having caught sight of Virginia, ran to her, and then, not to be denied, in her childish way climbed up on the bench beside her and affectionately clasped her little arms about her neck.

"Papa doesn't like her," she proceeded, in a low, serious, confidential manner, "and wants me not to like her, too. But I shall like her. I shall always love-dear mamma-as-long-as-I-live!" The last few words were uttered in a quivering voice, but with a decision that appeared marvelous in one so young.

Folding her arms about the child, Virginia fondly looked into her eyes. "God bless you, sweet, winsome soul!" And then they kissed.

"Aunty, won't you take me to mamma?" pleaded the child. A ray of light had at last unexpectedly illumined a path for Virginia to pursue. Suddenly releasing the child, she arose to her feet and said, with animation: "Some good may come of it. I will seek Mrs. Harris and have her detain John while I bring Constance—and Dorothy together—before he meets her. Yes, darling," she said, taking Dorothy's hand; "you shall see your mother."

On a low point of land formed by a bend in the Willamette, a couple of boys were playing at what is termed "skipping." The exercise consisted in throwing a stone so as to make it skim along the surface of the water in a series of long skips, the greater number of skips attesting the skill of the thrower. The surface of the river was very smooth and placid, which was a factor in tempting the boys to the exercise. They had been at it for some time and, boy-like, in their enthusiasm, had overdone it, and consequently were beginning to fag, when one of them suddenly spied an exceptionally smooth, round flat stone, suitable for the purpose, and stooped to pick it up. The other boy, a short distance behind him, seeing his opportunity, cried out in a frolicsome spirit:

"Hi! Gene! Hold, there." And he immediately ran and, placing his two hands on the stooping boy's back, lightly leaped over him, straddle fashion, and then himself took a stooping position further on, subject to a like performance.

At once the sport known as "leap-frog" was entered into with zest by the boys. It carried them some distance along the river shore, and they were so engrossed with the new exercise, which sustained in their case, at all events, the old adage that, "A change of occupation is a good recreation," as to be entirely oblivious of approaching a solitary woman dressed in sober gray, sitting on a stump of driftwood near the water's edge and gazing vacantly on the river.

One of the boys, named Gene, big-limbed, loose-jointed and clumsy, in doing his turn, and while astraddle the "frog," lost his balance and tumbled sideways, dragging the under boy over with him. The smaller boy, named Spike, got to his feet first, and with a fire in his eye, angrily said: "Youse do it again and I'll smash you one."

"I couldn't help it. It was your fault, anyway, Why didn't you hold steady," replied Gene.

"You big lubber; youse done it on purpose." said Spike, rubbing his shin. "I'm not going to play any more," and as he turned away, muttered to himself: "I've a notion to soak him one."

"Oh, look!" cried Gene. "A woman's agoing in swimming with her clothes on!" The boys at once forgot their differences, drew close together and watched her with much curiosity.

"Say, but the water is cold. I was in yesterday and couldn't stay a minute," said Gene. "Gee, but I got my clothes on quick! I was near froze."

"She's skeart already; see how she's looking about—must-a lost somethin'."

"Let's ask her," said Gene.

"Youse shut up, won't you."

"She's saying something. Hear?"

"Sounds like 'Dorothy,'" said Spike. "Look at her dig them hands in the water."

"Say, she's crazy, sure!" whispered Gene.

At which they drew back awe-struck, yet fascinated by the grotesque buffoonery inseparable from the insane.

"Somebody'd better go and phone the cops," whispered Spike, excitedly. "She'll get drowned, and then we'll get in a bar'l of trubble."

"I'll go," said Gene, half frightened, and glad of an excuse to get away from the uncanny spectacle. "Who's got a phone near here?" he asked.

"Up at the big house, yonder. Harris'. They's got one, but youse don't want to leave me here alone with that crazy woman. She's coming ashore. Kin youse hear what she's saying?" They listened intently.

"I'm sure I saw her," she said in tones strangely pitiful. "Her golden hair floated on the surface like a silken mesh—then sank down, down—ah, there it is again." And she outstretched her hand and tried to grasp something.

"Gone again! Oh! I wish someone would help me get her. I am so tired and the river is so deep and cold," and as she stepped out from the water onto the shingle, her frame shivered as with a chill. She sat on the stump of driftwood, fatigued by exertion.

"Let's go and talk to her," whispered Gene.

"Youse better not. Youse can't tell what them crazy people will do sometimes. They ack queer mighty sudden."

"Say! She wouldn't hurt anything. Ain't she nice looking! I'll bet she was kind when she was all right," said Gene.

"Talks of golden hair. Must be her baby drowned has made her crazy," said Spike.

"I'm going to speak to her, anyway," and so saying, Gene boldly approached her.

"Say, lady! What are you looking for?" he asked, as he timidly stood in front of her.

"Dorothy," she softly answered, and then slowly shifted her wistful eyes from the water to the boys.

"Whose Dorothy?" asked Spike, with an air of quiet respect, as he joined Gene and stood in front of her.

"The sweetest babe in all the world. See, in this—her likeness," and she drew from the bosom of her dress a medallion and held it for the boys to look at.

"Sure! She's a beaut!" exclaimed Spike, admiringly.

"Say, that picture is just like you," remarked Gene, looking over the medallion at the face before him.

"Yous dress is wet, Missus," said Spike.

"Were you looking for your baby there?" queried Gene, nodding toward the river.

She suddenly arose to her feet and listened, meanwhile tenderly replacing the medallion in her corsage.

"I must not rest longer. The storm will soon be on us. The boat rocks."

She paused in a listening attitude: "Her voice! I hear it again. She is calling, 'Mamma, papa, help! Save me!' There! There!"—and she pointed over the water. "See that golden web glistening in the sunshine. It's her hair. She's beckoning me! Give me the paddles!—the paddles, quick!" And then she cried out with a gasp that sounded very much like a sob: "Save Dorothy!"

CHAPTER XXI.

When John Thorpe left Virginia in search of Mr. Harris, he found him in conversation with Sam, at the foot of the piazza steps. Above them, on the piazza, was seated Mrs. Harris.

"I understand," remarked Mr. Harris to Sam, "that there was another man in the cabin, but somehow he escaped."

"There was another man there," replied Sam, "but he went down through a trap door in the floor, Uncle."

"Did he drown," questioned Mr. Harris.

"Oh, no! The logs raised the floor of the cabin about a foot above the water. He got away between them and swam ashore. We didn't find it out until he had made good his escape."

It was then Mr. Thorpe addressed Mr. and Mrs. Harris. It being the first opportunity presented to perform a duty, that was clearly incumbent on him, and without further hesitation, he said: "Mr. and Mrs. Harris and Sam, who heard me abuse Mr. Corway on this ground last Wednesday night, I wish now to recall what I then said. If an entire misapprehension of facts can be an excuse for the animosity with which I then spoke, I am anxious to apologize for my behavior, as circumstances have made me aware how unjust were my aspersions. I regret that Mr. Corway is not present to receive my apology and to shake hands with him, for there is not a man in Oregon for whom I have greater respect."

Mr. Harris was unable to conceal his gratification at the sudden ending of an unpleasant dilemma, and exclaimed: "John, I heartily congratulate you on the agreeable termination of an ugly affair."

"Dear me! I am really delighted," added Mrs. Harris, who, having gotten up from her chair at the first few words uttered by John Thorpe, and leaning forward on the piazza railing, stared at the men below in rapt attention. And Sam joined in the general joy by exclaiming, with a broad grin and a whirl of his hat: "Whoop! Let's celebrate the burial of the hatchet, eh, Auntie."

"How vulgar," quietly remarked Mrs. Harris, as she straightened up, and with severity plainly graven on her face, said: "Sam, I desire a word with you after dinner."

"Ya-ah! May good digestion wait on appetite, eh Auntie! I guess so," replied Sam, with a roguish twinkle of his eye and the inimitable side movement of his head.

"Dear me," continued Mrs. Harris, "I may as well be resigned to the inevitable, for I fear the 'Texas brand' will never groom out."

"I must go home," exclaimed Mr. Thorpe. "My impatience to meet Constance is consuming me. Mrs. Harris and gentlemen, pray pardon my haste," and, lifting his hat, he withdrew.

Then Sam related in detail the bath and discovery of Jack Shore at the jail.

"Fact, Uncle," he continued, "a regular fiend."

"What! Jack Shore, of the Securities Investment Association!" exclaimed Mr. Harris, with surprise.

"The same identical chap, Uncle."

"Dear me; who was his confederate?" questioned Mrs. Harris.

"We have yet to discover, but suspect a certain person well known to you."

"Whom do you suspect?" sharply demanded Mrs. Harris.

"A much-honored member of society," replied Sam, with fine sarcasm.

"But we must have his name," insisted Mrs. Harris. She was promptly supported by Mr. Harris, who said: "By all means, we must know who he is."

"My Lord Beauchamp!" Sam answered, with emphasis.

"Dear me," gasped Mrs. Harris. "What a shock!" and then, recovering herself, she repeated doubtfully: "Lord Beauchamp an imposter?"

"He's a villain anyhow, Auntie!" exclaimed Sam. "The same 'gent' who ran me down when I was tracking the Dago up there near the City park—thought he put me out of business."

"What proof have you that he is an imposter?" demanded Mrs. Harris, sternly.

"Yes, proof, proof! That is what we want!" exclaimed James Harris, visibly agitated.

"To satisfy himself the detective cabled our Ambassador at London to make inquiry. This morning he received a reply." And so saying, Sam took from his pocket an envelop containing a cablegram and handed it to Mr. Harris, with the remark: "Uncle, the detective turned it over to me at noon."

Mr. Harris took from the envelop the cablegram, and adjusting his eyeglasses, read aloud:

"There's only one Lord Beauchamp in England's peerage, and he, with whom I am personally acquainted, was at the embassy yesterday."

It was signed "White."

Then Mr. Harris looked over the paper in his hand—over the eyeglasses into nothingness, with an expression on his face of deep chagrin, and in a low voice, as though muttering to himself, indiscreetly said:

"Damn the luck! The fellow is into me for ten thousand dollars."

The words had scarcely escaped from his lips when Mrs. Harris, her eyes staring with astonishment, sharply exclaimed:

"Ten thousand dollars! Why, James Henry, you must have been hypnotized!"

It caused Sam to smile, and remark with a look of reproach: "Auntie!"

"He came to me with a plausible story and many regrets, unexpectedly ran short of funds; produced a cablegram purporting to come from his brother, the Duke Villier, only yesterday, authorizing him to draw for two thousand pounds. To oblige him I indorsed the draft, went with him to the bank, and it was immediately honored. I will phone for a policeman at once," and Mr. Harris turned away to put his purpose into effect, when Sam intercepted him.

"Stay, Uncle; I have taken upon myself the duty of swearing out a warrant for his arrest, and in order there shall be no possibility of his escape, I have arranged with detectives, having Jack Shore in charge, to identify and arrest him."

"James, do not wait a moment!" impatiently exclaimed Mrs. Harris. "Have him arrested at once."

"Auntie, he cannot escape the officers, who are concealed, waiting signal," Sam assured her.

And then, as if fate had so ordered, the object of their anathemas—in the company of Hazel, complacently sauntered from the tennis lawn, and, rounding the angle of the house, suddenly appeared close to the group.

"It was so stupid of me. I am sure your lordship did not enjoy the game at all," said the girl. It was at that game of tennis that Rutley found opportunity to propose marriage to Hazel, for he believed that she was so disappointed at Corway's disappearance, and which he took care to insinuate was through cowardice, and that she was so impressed with his rank, wealth and manners, that it would be easy to persuade her; but he found the girl repelled his advances so

firmly and decisively that he at once abandoned the idea of attempting to entice her to elope, and abruptly ended the game. And so, because of his love for this girl, he had delayed his purpose to escape from the city, and jeopardized his chances accordingly.

When Rutley's eyes first rested on James Harris, he involuntarily started at the change in his looks, but though seemingly perturbed for an instant, his self-possession never really deserted him. Straight on to the broad steps he strode with a suavity of manner quite in keeping with his usual phlegmatic bearing. Whatever distrust or apprehension may have troubled his thoughts, no exterior indication was visible. His face was impassive and inscrutable as the "Sphinx." His nerves were steel, his acting superb.

"I find in Miss Brooke an expert tennis player," he said, addressing Mrs. Harris, who was leaning forward, her hands resting on the rail, staring at him.

"It's an outrage, sir! A damned outrage!" explosively exclaimed Mr. Harris, who was unable to control his indignation.

Still unperturbed, Rutley turned to Mr. Harris and said: "I quite agree with you, Sir, for the scandal is deplorable, and Corway should be punished." Turning to Mrs. Harris, he continued:

"Indeed, Mrs. Harris, you Americans seem to excel in most everything where skill and brains are essential."

There was not a flaw or tremor in his voice to betray an uneasy mind or prescience of a coming storm. It was then, however, he realized that something was wrong, for he noticed that they were looking coldly at him. Slowly drawing himself up with a haughty bearing, he carefully adjusted the monocle in his left eye and turned slowly about as he stared at each of them, and said in slow, sharp, biting accents:

"It's deuced—draughty—don't—che—know!"

"Yes, quite chilly, isn't it, old chappie! I guess so!" declared Sam, patronizingly.

"I demand, sir, the return of ten thousand dollars that you swindled me out of yesterday," said Mr. Harris, with indignation flushing his face.

"And I demand, in the name of the law, ten thousand dollars that you stole from—a—George Golda, while in the scow-dwelling night before last," said Sam.

Still unperturbed, Rutley merely shifted his eyes from one to the other without moving his head or a muscle of his body, much in the manner of an automaton, and answered with a drawl:

"Aw, a money swindle! And a—a—theft of money from a scow-dwelling! Really, gentlemen, this is—a—a—a—deuced good joke!" And then he laughed, laughed in a shrill, screechy falsetto key, unnatural, and chilling as an icy breath from the Arctic.

"This is no joke, sir, as you will soon realize."

"You have been detected. Your villainy is exposed, and your damned rascality is at an end," said the irate Mr. Harris.

"For twenty years in the pen at Salem, eh, old chappie!" said Sam, with a grin of satisfaction.

"Curse the luck," muttered Rutley to himself. "What a fool I was not to have vanished last night. It's deuced ugly, don't-che know," he continued aloud, in the same cutting accents. "Let me warn you, gentlemen, there is a limit to one's forbearance!"

"You are a cheat, a villain, an imposter!" fumed Mr. Harris. "And there is the proof," and he flourished the cablegram in Rutley's face. "You are imposing on the public under the cloak of an assumed title, and unless you immediately hand over to me ten thousand dollars I shall give you into custody."

"Of the officers of the law, eh, Auntie?" and as Sam uttered the last words, up went his right hand extended straight with the index finger pointing aloft.

It was the signal agreed upon for the officers to appear, and forthwith they emerged with Jack Shore between them, and Smith following, from a vine inclosed arbor, partially concealed by a group of trees a few rods down the hill.

Pretending not to notice the approach of the officers and their prisoner, Sam grinned at Rutley and banteringly said:

"Come now, own up, you intentionally put me 'out of business' with the automobile. But it was a bungled job, wasn't it, old chappie?"

Rutley yielded not an iota of his haughty bearing. Totally unsuspecting the near approach of the officers from behind, he directed a frigid, steady, contemptuous stare at his accusers, and with an air of puzzled understanding, said:

"What is the meaning of this insult to my honor? I again warn you, gentlemen, of your liability for libel."

"Law is a venturesome sport, my lord," ironically exclaimed Sam. "Let me introduce Mr. George Golda"—

Rutley leisurely turned and stared at Jack.

—"Alias, Jack Shore," continued Sam, with a laugh.

"Well, my poor man. What is your mission?" interrogated Rutley.

Jack stared steadily at Rutley, but kept silent.

"Ha, ha, ha, ha, ha," derisively laughed Rutley. Then turning to the group, said: "What new joke is this, gentlemen?" Again he turned toward Jack in pretense of a closer scrutiny.

That Rutley was surprised was quite evident, and he stepped forward with some object in view. Mr. Harris seemed to imagine some purpose in Rutley's movement, and stepping in front of him, said: "Hold, your little game is up!"

"I guess so," quickly added Sam, who stood ready to assist.

Realizing he was at bay, Rutley recovered his self-possession as quickly as he had lost it.

Again he laughed in that high-pitched, screechy key of ineffable disdain. "He, he, he, he," and turning to Mr. Harris said, sarcastically: "The idea! You, a retired merchant, a successful business man; experienced in the qualities of keen perception, of fine discrimination, of the most perfect discernment and adroitness, to support this outrage," and he waved his hand toward Jack. And again drawing himself up erect, haughtily fixed his cold gray eyes steadily on Mr. Harris, and continued in a drawl: "It's deuced ugly, don't-che know; deuced ugly, by Jove."

While Rutley had been speaking, Virginia appeared on the scene. "Ha, Virginia," sharply called out Mrs. Harris, and she beckoned to her to hasten. "Now we shall prove his villainy."

"Ha, ha," sneered Rutley. "Now you shall realize how foully you have slandered me. The lady will prove that I am Lord Beauchamp."

As Virginia approached near, Mrs. Harris being unable to contain her impatience, again addressed her: "Virginia, dear! Can you enlighten us as to that man's identity?"

Rutley tried to catch her eye, and at last, having succeeded, lifted his eyebrows meaningly, then nearly closed his eyes as he fixed on her a stare of glittering concentration.

"Madam," he ejaculated significantly, "beware! These gentlemen and ladies have dared to question my right to the title of Lord Beauchamp, and I have assured them that you know me, of course you do, and will tell them so." His manner was confident and insinuating, but he had over-rated his power of hypnotic influence over the girl.

She looked at him steadily, in which freezing haughtiness, contempt and pity were commingled. Her fear of him had passed. She did not falter now.

"Yes, I know you; and you are known to all present, but, unhappily, not as thoroughly as you are known to me."

"Who is he?" demanded Mrs. Harris.

"Beware!" cautioned Rutley, "for what you say you must prove in a court of law."

Defiant, the girl spoke, her enunciation clear and faultless. "His name is Philip Rutley, and he is masquerading as my Lord Beauchamp for fraudulent and unlawful purposes."

"Ha, ha, ha," laughed Rutley, sarcastically. "Delightfully refreshing, gentlemen."

"Oh!" came from Hazel, and then, as if doubting the announcement, exclaimed: "But the color of Rutley's hair is on the pumpkin order."

"When the dye is washed out it will be on the pumpkin order again," laughed Sam.

"He of the investment company?" questioned Mrs. Harris, with a puzzled expression of countenance.

"The very same chap, Auntie," said Sam.

"Dear me, such ingratitude!" and Mrs. Harris looked disgusted. "Why, the rascal promised never to return if we would not prosecute him."

"He, he, he, he, how very funny," derisively laughed Rutley, in that high-pitched, screechy falsetto key he was so well trained in, and at times he nervously stroked his Vandyke beard.

"I shall at once bring an action at law against you for malicious libel," upon which he started to pass Mr. Harris. His purpose was understood and frustrated by Sam, who promptly seized him by the collar. "I guess not!"

"Well done, Sam!" exclaimed Mrs. Harris.

"Take your hands off!" demanded Rutley, who began to scuffle violently with Sam.

"Hold him fast, Sam," cheerfully encouraged Mr. Harris, who rushed to Sam's assistance, followed by Smith.

"I guess so."

At that moment, by a dexterous movement, Rutley slipped out of his coat, swiftly turned, and exclaimed:

"Damn your eyes, take that," and violently struck at Sam, who adroitly dodged the blow, dropped the coat and squared up to him.

"I'm your huckleberry; I guess. Good time to square that little run-down now. Come down the hill out of the sight of the ladies."

"I'll go wid yees," volunteered Smith. "Sure, an' I'll see fair play, an' may the divvil take me lord."

Mr. Harris picked up Rutley's coat and there fell out of one of the pockets two packages of banknotes. He let the coat fall and picked up the packages. Flourishing them about his head, he laughed—"Ha, ha, ha, ha."

The detective turned to Jack and said, quietly: "You wanted the proof: there it is," and he pointed to the money held by Mr. Harris. "He will be pinched, but Mr. Thorpe is to secure his release."

"Why, there are twenty thousand dollars here!" exclaimed Mr. Harris, examining the packages of money.

"Now you believe me, don't you?" said the detective to Jack.

"Yes," replied Jack, "you were right," and then he stepped forward alone, close to Rutley, and with a sneer on his face, confronted him. "So, my noble partner! You gave me the kiss of 'Judas' for ten thousand shekels, eh?"

Rutley was amazed, but maintaining his imperturbability, exclaimed: "You propound a riddle, my poor man. I don't know you."

"Ha, ha, ha, ha," laughed Jack, bitterly. "The riddle should be plain with the key in your keeping. But I know *you*, me Lord Beauchamp, alias Philip Rutley. Now, damn you, take the medicine your treachery awards you."

Rutley straightened up, his mortification was very great. Naturally astute, shrewd and alert, for once he had been caught napping. With distended, staring eyes, he whispered, aghast: "Jack, Jack," and then, recovering himself, composedly said: "A—my poor fellow, you are mistaken; I don't know you," and then he swung himself about and laughed in that peculiar, high-pitched key—"He, he, he, he; he must be crazy."

"Crazy, eh!" and Jack laughed low, hoarsely and derisively. "Ha, ha, ha, ha. The detective told me you had sold me for the reward offered for recovery of the child, but I would not believe him. Now! I know he told the truth. For the proof is there," and he pointed to the money in the hands of Mr. Harris. "The proof that you betrayed your partner"—

"You lie! You lie! Damn you, you lie!" exclaimed Rutley bitterly, as he swiftly turned to Jack, and then muttered to himself: "Ye Gods, I have been trapped by a fluke." Then, with marvellous nerve, declared: "Oh, this is preposterous; I will immediately bring some friends and prove that you malign me," and so saying he turned to move off.

"Detective Simms, he is your man; arrest him!" said Mrs. Harris.

On seeing his chance of escape lessening every moment Rutley abandoned all idea of further defense, and made a grab for his coat.

Quick as was his action, he could not outmaneuver Sam, who promptly threw himself upon Rutley's back, and locked his arms about him, pinioning him as in a vice. And while in that position the detective slipped on the handcuffs.

On releasing him, Sam turned with a broad grin of satisfaction to his aunt—"How is that for the Texas brand, eh, Auntie?"

He got for his answer a smile, and an exclamation that pleased him immensely. "Splendid, Sam."

"The neatest bit of work done since his partner tried to find a soft spot on Carbit strait

pavement," added Smith, with a look of admiration.

In the meantime Mr. Harris had been examining the packages of money, turning them over and over, looking first at one and then at another. Of a sudden his face lit up with a smile, as he exclaimed: "Why, this is mine; the identical package that he obtained from the bank on my indorsement. I can swear to it. But this?" And he looked meaningly at Virginia.

"It looks like the package of notes I gave the Italian for Dorothy's ransom," she replied.

"He never sold me after all," muttered Jack, who became painfully astonished on hearing Mr. Harris declare that Rutley had obtained one of the packages of money from the bank on his indorsement. And as the plan by which he was tricked into betrayal of his accomplice became evident, his chagrin deepened to grief. He turned to Rutley and said, brokenly: "Phil, I take it all back," and then he muttered absently as he realized the futility of regret. "But it is too late—I have been tricked into a confession."

"The jig is up," replied Rutley. "I shall take my medicine like a man."

"That money must remain in the custody of the police until the court decides for the owner," said the detective.

"Certainly," affirmed Mr. Harris, who handed him the two packages.

"This one is mine, and contains ten thousand dollars. And this contains a like amount and belongs to Miss Thorpe. I shall apply to the court for restitution tomorrow," remarked Mr. Harris.

"Very well, sir. Now please hand me that coat and we will go," said the detective.

Mr. Harris picked up the coat and handed it to the detective.

"Keep it, old man," advised Rutley, with lofty disdain. "Keep it as a memento of how you were once charmed by one of England's nobility," he laughed derisively.

"I will have no gift from a thief," indignantly exclaimed Mr. Harris, as he handed over the coat. "Officers, away with them."

"Good-bye Charles, Reginald, De Coursy, West-ma-coate Cosmos, me Lord Beauchamp. Fare thee well," said Sam, with a grin.

It was at that time that the little Scotch terrier began to sniff at Jack's trouser legs inquisitively. The dog had wandered near him, attracted by the sound of his familiar voice, and though it evidently scented something intimate, could not recognize his former master in the changed appearance resultant on his enforced bath. And so the dog sniffed and sniffed while the glint of its upward turned eyes ominously resented any friendly overture.

Jack had noticed the dog about, and now that it was sniffing at his leg, he softly spoke to it, saying: "Good-bye, Snooks," whereupon to his surprise the dog growled at him. Again he said, soothingly: "Good bye Snooks," putting out his hand to fondle it, but the dog, in one of those singularly unsympathetic moods rare to its nature, would have none of him, and barked at him furiously.

It was the finishing stroke to his shame and degradation. "An outcast, a stranger, so low I have fallen that my own dog barks at me."

"Come along," urged the detective to Rutley and Jack. But Rutley halted and turned to Hazel, with the same marvellous air that had won for him confidence in critical moments of "my lord's" career.

"Ta, ta, pet," said he, in his softest blandishment to Hazel. "That was a ravishing kiss you gave me in the conservatory awhile ago. Ta, ta," and he threw her a kiss with his free hand and followed it with a tragic scowl at Sam.

"The horrid man," indignantly exclaimed Hazel.

"Good-bye, Virginia," and he smiled patronizingly at her. "You 'peached' on your pal, but rogues do that sometimes. Tra-la."

"Officer, away with them," ordered Mr. Harris, with disgust.

"Get a move on, old chappie," said Sam.

"Come along," urged the detective.

But Rutley balked, and looking at Mrs. Harris, laughed, the same high-pitched, uncanny laugh he had used previously.

"I had almost forgotten you, Auntie," he drawled in his most suave and engaging manner. "You know that it is bad form to take one's leave without saying 'adieu,' and believe me," and he again

laughed, "I thank you for your lavish reception in honor of the fake lord."

"Officer, away with them," stormed Mr. Harris.

Though Rutley was forced away a step or two he still kept his eyes fixed on Mrs. Harris, and managed to hold his ground long enough to add, ironically: "Adieu, Auntie! Ta, ta!"

"March yees blackguards, march," said Smith, pushing the men along.

"How very rude! I have never had anything so scurrilous said to me before in my life."

"He wasn't a real lord, Auntie. Only tried to act like one, eh, I guess so," and Sam inwardly chuckled at the balm he offered for her discomfiture.

"Sam, you had better assist the officers to the railway station," suggested Mr. Harris.

"Oh, quite to my fancy, Uncle!" and Sam immediately proceeded after the detectives and their prisoners.

The silence that fell on the group as they watched the prisoners move down the hill was broken by Hazel, who, turning to Mr. Harris, said: "It was clever of Sam. Indeed, Uncle, it seems to him is due the honor of breaking the spell of a pretender."

"I am satisfied now that my lord will serve a 'spell' with his partner in the state penitentiary," replied Mr. Harris.

"A fate that deservedly overtakes adventurers and imposters," remarked Mrs. Harris.

"And a most pungent warning to the frantic race society runs to entertain titled swindlers!" added Mr. Harris, gravely.

At that moment Sam hurriedly reappeared and approached Mr. Harris, who hastened to meet him. "What is wrong, Sam?" "Has he got away?" was the anxious inquiry.

"I guess not, Uncle," replied Sam, who seemed excited, and then nodding his head toward the river, said, in an undertone. "Something out of gear down there. A boy just told me a woman was wading in the water trying to find her drowned baby—and—and I thought"—

"What! Who do you think she can be, eh? It cannot be"—And they exchanged significant glances.

Sam tapped his head impressively. "The boy said she plunged her hands in the water, talked queer, and heard her call 'Dorothy.'"

"If it should be her! Good God! And John must be hereabouts, too. Let us go to her at once. Quietly, make no fuss. Come along," and Mr. Harris turned hastily.

"What is the trouble now, James?" called out Mrs. Harris.

"No time," was all the satisfaction she got, and the two hastened down to the shingle.

"Dear me! Something serious has happened, I am sure!" and seeing a boy standing irresolute on the walk, addressed him:

"Here boy, do you know what is going on down there?"

"A crazy woman," the boy answered, drawing near. "She's wading in the river."

"Poor thing!" sympathetically exclaimed Mrs. Harris. "What is she wading in the river for? Did you hear her speak?"

"Yes'm, a little; but I was afraid and didn't stay but a minute. I came up to phone the police."

"Dear me! What did the poor creature say?"

"She said her baby was drowned. I'm pretty sure she called it Dorothy."

An agonizing shriek of "Constance!" broke from the three women simultaneously, and horror and consternation was depicted on every countenance.

"Almighty Heaven!" exclaimed Virginia, whose face had blanched at the news. "She has followed me here. I'll get some wraps, for poor Constance must be chilled through and through," and with that she hastened into the house.

"Virginia, dear!" Mrs. Harris called after her, "you will find wraps in my room."

Hazel had already started toward the river, and noting the girl's impatience, she went on: "Hazel and I will not wait for you."

As Mrs. Harris followed after Hazel, she kept muttering: "Dear me! What a shock! What a shock

to one's nerves!"

CHAPTER XXII.

The officers, with their prisoners, had reached the railway track, and were leisurely walking toward the little station when a commotion in a group of people on the shingle, a couple of hundred yards ahead, attracted their attention. Smith, who had accompanied the officers, started to investigate. He had proceeded but a short distance when his movement was accelerated by seeing Mr. Harris and Sam hastening down the slope toward the little group before mentioned.

Upon arrival at the station, one of the officers, Simms, hurried forward to ascertain the cause of the trouble, for evidently something serious had happened. The two prisoners were thus left, handcuffed, it is true, but under guard of only one officer, whose attention was also attracted by the excitement ahead. The officer gave his prisoners little attention, for he believed they were perfectly secure, as Jack's right wrist was handcuffed to the officer and Rutley was linked to Jack.

Rutley soon found that he could "slip the bracelet" and, nudging Jack, displayed his free hand. Jack gave him a significant wink, at the same time gently nodded his head for him to "break." For an instant Rutley was tempted to strike down the unsuspecting officer, and attempt to release Jack, but the chance of detection in the act, and inviting instant pursuit was so great, that he decided to try to escape alone. Silently he stepped apart; farther, then he slipped behind the station.

A swift, noiseless dash to a culvert, through it and up along a small ravine, soon put him out of sight of the officers. His last view of them convinced him that they were still unmindful of his escape.

Arriving at a considerable elevation, to where a clump of brush concealed him from the view of those below, he paused and took a hasty glance around. The sweep of the slope was too clear and unobstructed for any possibility of escape to the woods that covered the hill a couple of hundred yards distant, without him being seen. His determination was daring and instant.

He would enter "Rosemont house," seek a hiding place, secure some sort of disguise, and in the night effect his escape.

Following the depression he soon appeared on a level with the house. Taking advantage of such cover as was afforded by shrubbery and hedges, and cowering close to earth, he quickly traversed the space that had separated him from the house. Throwing himself prostrate among some ivy that grew in thick profusion along the basement of the south side as a protection from the Winter rain, he lay there effectually concealed and listened with tense nerves for sounds of pursuit.

The silence was unbroken save for the spasmodic whirr of a lawn mower on a distant part of the grounds. Having recovered his wind, he looked up. Above him was an open window, but screened. If he could enter by that window he might gain the loft without discovery, and once there he felt satisfied that a good hiding place could be found. The front entrance would be easier, but the risk of being seen crossing the piazza was too great. He decided to try the window. Arising from his concealment, and refreshed by his short rest, enthusiasm bounded through his veins.

"I will get away yet," he muttered between his clenched teeth. "I saw the women following Harris down to the shore and the house must be deserted by all save the servants, and they are likely in the kitchen."

Another swift glance at the window, and mentally estimating its height from the ground, he felt certain that an entrance through it was practicable. There was no time to be lost.

The "water table" afforded a footing, and by the aid of an iron trellis erected to support a climbing vine, he reached the window. There an obstacle was encountered. He tried to raise the screen, but it would not budge. In his exasperation he nearly tore his finger nails off trying to raise it from the bottom. Realizing that he was becoming excited he at once forced a calmness which he deemed highly essential, if he was to succeed. Every moment, too, was fraught with danger of discovery.

Pushing his hand against one side of the screen edgewise in an attempt to loosen it, the thing suddenly fell in. The thick carpet smothered the noise. He had unwittingly pressed against the edge that inclosed the springs, and in so doing released the other edge of the screen from the groove. Noiselessly he sprang inside. It was the library. He turned and cautiously scanned the hillside. No persons were in sight. Then he quietly replaced the screen.

His daring coolness and nerve were now under full control. He stole out of the room, into the hall, with every sense alert to avoid discovery. His goal was the attic. He knew that the only way to reach it was by the service stairs, which he could use from the second floor. Before him was the main stairs. Without a moment of hesitation he leaped up the soft, thick, velvet-covered steps, his footfalls as silent as the tread of a cat.

A door was ajar on his left; he cautiously pushed it open and entered. He saw at once that it was Sam's room. He glanced about, then opened a dresser drawer. "Ha, a revolver!" It was the work of a moment to examine the magazine.

"Empty!" he exclaimed, with disgust, and was about to replace it when, on second thought: "It may do for a bluff." Another hasty look and he picked up a hunting knife, which he also appropriated. A slight noise at that moment startled him and caused him to look around alarmed. He slipped behind a door for concealment. After a moment of tense suspense, and the quietness continuing unbroken, he stole out of the room.

So far everything was in his favor. Further along two doors, a few feet apart, were open. He had passed one on his way to the attic stair, when, of a sudden, he heard a slight sound, as of a person moving lightly in the room. He instantly turned aside and passed through the second open doorway. Virginia stood before him. She was at that moment hastening from the room, absorbed in thoughts of Constance.

With a stifled, painful cry of "Oh!" she shrank from him in a vague terror. Her face paled and her eyes expanded in manifest fright. Speech deserted her. The power of motion fled and the shawl intended for Constance fell from her arm. She appeared paralyzed.

Rutley softly closed the door behind him and locked it and put the key in his pocket. The dressing room door received the same attention. Then he turned to her. He was surprised to meet her, but observing the terror his presence inspired, he at once determined to force her to aid him to escape. He misjudged her character. For one moment he stood silently watching her. All the sharp intensity of his gaze concentrated on her frightened eyes; then he laughed low and gloatingly—"Ha, ha, ha. The girl that took on cold feet and betrayed her pal! I meant to say 'colleague,'" he corrected, with a sneer of apology. The smirk of his offensive stare and more offensive words irritated. She began to recover from her sudden fright and became immediately aware that her present situation required not only coolness but the most adroit handling. She accordingly nerved herself for the encounter.

Again he leered at her, and continued in the same soft, guarded, but suave voice: "To be caught alone and in a trap with her intended victim is one of the dispensations of an inscrutable and just Providence."

Virginia was regaining her self-possession every moment now. Courage was surging through her nerves in increasing power. Her eyes commenced to blaze.

"Your effrontery is offensive. Your meaning an enigma!" she indignantly replied.

"Indeed! Then I'll make it plain," he hissed. "I want you to cover my flight for liberty.

"You see I have escaped," he went on rapidly. "The officers are baffled—my trail so far is undiscovered."

"You mistake!" she corrected, with surprising coolness and decision. "By the dispensation of an inscrutable, but just Providence, the blackguard's trail is blazed—the trap is sprung and you cannot escape!"

Rutley's eyes snapped fire. He saw that a policy of sneering and bullying persuasion to aid him would fail ignominiously. He must use force. His aspect became black and threatening.

"Damn you!" he hissed. "See here, moments are precious. The game too desperate. Beware! You must find a place of concealment for me. The loft has storerooms. Come, and in the darkness of tonight you must aid me to clear from the premises."

"Never!" she resolutely exclaimed, her eyes ablaze with indignation.

"Soft! Not so loud, my fair partner," Rutley cautioned. "You led me into this scrape. You must help me out of it."

"Let me pass!" And she motioned for him to stand aside.

He did not move.

"Do you deny me?" she said, sternly.

"Not so fast, my dear. I intend to keep you near me, as a hostage for my escape. No harm shall befall you if you are tractable," he went on. "And I again warn you that you must speak guardedly and softly or I shall be compelled to gag you and bind you and carry you to a place of concealment. Oh, I'll see to it that you shall not have the satisfaction of betraying my hiding place."

"Incarnate monster; dare you imprison me?"

"Only for a few hours, until the dead of night blackens all objects alike—then I shall go forth, leaving a note to announce your hiding place. Do you prefer to be hidden in a trunk, or shall it be among the old rummage in the loft?" Though his manner of address was faultlessly polite, his

face was as colorless and impassive as marble, and his voice low, calculating and cold.

Virginia paled as she took in the meaning of this purpose, and her voice quivered with a note of fear, as drawing her slender form erect in semblance of defiance she said: "Would you strike down a defenseless girl?"

"I am troubled with no qualms of conscience when dealing with an enemy, be that enemy man, woman or a scorpion. Come! We have wasted too much time already."

He stepped lightly toward her.

Virginia anticipated his move and placed the table between them. Many small articles incident to a lady's toilet were on the table. Rutley perceived that should the table be upset in a scuffle, he could not hope for time to gather up and rearrange the toilet articles, and then the spilt powders and perfumes on the carpet would surely indicate a struggle having occurred in the room.

Virginia was also alert to the importance of the table in the situation. Her fine instinct of the purport of his thoughts quickened her measure of defense. She grasped the edge of the table with both her hands. Rutley saw her purpose, drew back and side-stepped. Virginia also side-stepped, but kept close to the table and directly opposite him. She realized that the danger of her position was very great.

In the cabin she had been armed and prepared for an extreme emergency. Now she was without defensive weapons of any kind save her native wit, her courage and the table to which she clung.

Never taking his eyes from her, Rutley stood for a moment, indecisive and silent. Yet his mind was working furiously.

"A woman stands in my way," he inaudibly muttered with clinched teeth. "Time is pressing. I will force her into submission!"

The intense strain on his nerves drew a cold dew of perspiration that glistened on his brow. Slowly he drew the revolver from his pocket. Slowly he raised it and pointed it at her, then hissed, as he glared at her: "Remove your hands from the table and assist me to escape."

Virginia again drew herself erect, her eyes sparkling with defiance and her face aglow with courage.

"I know my death would only add one more crime to your record," she said, with a faint quiver in her soft voice, and after a slight pause, she went on more steadily: "But you dare not shoot and your threats are vain."

As he gazed on her slight form drawn erect; those pure, brave, steadfast, blue eyes; those features, delicate and tense with a sense of the danger of her position, she affected him strongly; thrilled him with an admiration which, with all his virile power and hardened senses, he could not mask. "You are daring a desperate man," he resumed. "One who means to halt at no crime to secure his flight to liberty."

The softened expression of his features, softened in spite of himself, led Virginia to think that his words were not meant to be taken too seriously, and so hope and fear alternated with amazing swiftness on her expressive face, which at last settled into a look of credulity and prompted her to hazard a smile at his threat.

"Beware!" he hissed, struggling to appear fierce. "Do not mistake me!"

"Oh, no; I do not mistake you," she replied, again smiling faintly, "for I know you are too much of a man to redden your hands with the life of a puny, defenseless girl."

The artless play of her features to entice him from his desperate purpose was exquisite, and not without temporary success.

"Her witchery is unnerving me," he silently muttered, as he felt his will-power was dominant no longer.

As their eyes remained fastened on each other he felt an awe seize him, and he for the moment forgot his design. He drew back and said, almost submissively: "God, you are brave, and beautiful as brave. I can't harm you." And he slowly lowered the revolver.

Even then a sudden recovery from his weakness developed a new plan of attack. Virginia's unerring instinct, however, warned her to mistrust his flattering declaration. "It's a subterfuge," she thought, "cunningly devised to draw me away from the table." She remained silent, but more watchful, if possible, than before.

On abandoning a bullying policy, Rutley had moved step by step toward the table opposite to Virginia, and finally placed his left hand on it. His assumed admiration was well sustained and his changed line of persuasion, though its sincerity she doubted, promised in the end success.

"The wrongs I have done," he continued, "had better not have been done, I acknowledge, but

they are mended. Worse might have been. Our meeting in this room was accidental. My presence in this house is known only to you. Will you aid me to escape?"

"Aid you to escape!" she repeated, in tones that had lost their agitation, and which now seemed natural and only to carry a note of indignation. "You, the man who nearly wrecked my brother's home, betrayed his trust and would have robbed him of his life. You, the man who kidnapped his child, caused his wife to lose her reason, and whose death may yet add murder to your other crimes—dare ask me to help you escape?"

"Yes," he slowly replied. And feeling that his hand rested firmly on the table, he began cautiously to lean forward, meanwhile saying in a soft, insinuating voice: "I dare ask you to help me escape, for I mistake if in a nature where such courage and gentleness exist there beats a heart irresponsive to the cry of distress.

"I am down, and standing on the threshold of a long term of imprisonment. Again I appeal to you and offer this weapon as a pledge of good faith," and he laid the revolver on the table.

The tension on Virginia's nerves relaxed, her voice became steadier, calmer and more natural. "Why did you vilify the character of Constance, a frail, innocent woman, whose piety and goodness made her incapable of doing you harm by thought, word or deed?"

"Revenge on Thorpe," he replied, "for closing my office."

As the words slowly issued from between his lips, his weight on the table increased—he felt his control of it was now sure.

Virginia's eyes searched him thoroughly, and aside from the fact that flattery was distasteful to her, his cold, calculating, unemotional eyes glittering with a sinister purpose, startled her and confirmed her impression of his insincerity.

To maintain a safe distance, but still clinging to the table, she instinctively drew backward, suspicious of some sudden movement, but she made no effort to secure the revolver. Rutley noticed the change and coolly pressed forward.

Virginia drew further backward. She saw through his artifice and once more began to fear him. The strain on her nerves was becoming severe and her countenance warmed with contending emotions. He had pleaded for aid to escape and expressed himself as sorry for his misdeeds. Yet she believed his protestations were not sincere.

Nevertheless, considering how much she was in his power, the great scandal his testimony in court would create, the complete undoing of all his wicked schemes, and the possibility of him leading a better life, was fast weighing in his favor, besides only brute revenge would be gratified by his long imprisonment, and his punishment, therefore, only an empty satisfaction.

Rutley read her thoughts and a cunning smile played about his mouth. He never really intended to trust his liberty in her keeping, and since she was the only person with actual knowledge of his whereabouts, he did not propose to jeopardize his chance of escape by allowing her freedom. For his own safety, he was bound to conceal her as well as himself, at least until darkness set in. His humble appeal was but a ruse to gain her sympathy, and his simulated penitence for his wickedness was an artifice, but it succeeded in touching the tender cords of the girl's heart.

Her vigilance abated. Her hand slipped from the table. She straightened up and cast her eyes to the floor, as one often does when mentally absorbed in weighing the potency of some great question. The moment he had maneuvered for, and waited for, and watched for, had arrived.

The spring of a cat upon an unsuspecting mouse could not have been swifter, more sudden or unerring. The cloven hoof was revealed. Before she had time to even guess at his purpose, his hand was upon her mouth, while his other arm was thrown around her form, binding her arms to her sides. He forced her into a wicker chair that stood conveniently near and held her down sideways with the aid of his knee.

This method permitted him to withdraw his arm from around her form and to snatch a doily from the table which he quickly wadded and forced into her mouth, gagging her effectively. Then his eyes swept the room for something that would serve as a cord to bind her.



Rutley—"I could even kiss those red, ripe, cherry lips."

On the floor, distant a couple of yards, lay the shawl that Virginia had let fall from her nerveless arm when Rutley entered the room. He wriggled the chair toward it, and by extending his foot drew the shawl to his grasp.

It was a summer shawl, of generous proportions. The fabric was silk-wool mixture, of fine network weave, and consequently light and strong. Twisting it into a rope he bound her arms and limbs, meantime saying in a low, guarded voice, and with the utmost sauvity and coolness:

"I'll not be ruder or rougher than is necessary, my beauty. There! Now you are secure. I could even kiss those red, ripe cherry lips without fear of protest, but I'll not contaminate them by contact with those of a blackguard. No, no! Don't thank me for that, honey dear, for I'm content to witness your mute appreciation of my motive."

After he had bound her, he drew back a pace or two and critically surveyed his work.

"You must pardon me, dear heart, for deeming it prudent to make that gag a little more secure," and taking a handkerchief from his pocket he bound it over her mouth, knotting the ends at the back of her head. "Rest assured, brave little girl," he resumed, in that same low, hissing voice, "I'm not a sneak thief, a burglar or a rake, though I do aspire to membership in that proud and great American order 'The Honorable Grafter'."

Having completed gagging her, he stood off a pace and chuckled. "There, I think that will do!"

In the silence that followed Rutley was startled to hear a low, cautious voice on the lawn below say: "He is either in the house or up there in the timber."

"They've tracked me here," Rutley viciously hissed, his manner changed to intense alertness. He grasped the revolver and went on, "While I have been dallying with you, precious time was lost, damn you! I'll see that you don't stand between me and liberty again!"

Virginia was again terrified and helpless at a moment when aid of the most determined and daring character was within call.

Then a second voice said: "The officers do be kapin' a lookout down be the river, and if he's in the water, sure they'll nab him. D'yees think he'd likely be up on the hill top in the brush?"

"I cannot say," replied the first voice, "but it looks to me as though he could not have crossed that open space unseen."

Both of the men had spoken in low and serious tones and were recognized by the intent listeners in the room above as Sam and Smith.

They were evidently baffled and in a quandary as to the direction Rutley had taken after escape from the officer, and approached the house to warn the servants of Rutley's escape.

"Maybes," resumed Smith in the same low, cautious voice, "he whint up the hill be way ave the

ravine, over beyant there.”

Sam made no reply. He had caught sight of the profile of Virginia’s face. Her eyes, terrified and tensely drawn, were askance and looking in his direction. The handkerchief over her mouth he first mistook as an evidence of physical suffering. He stepped back a pace, thinking to obtain a better view. He was disappointed.

What he had seen was a reflection of her face in the “dresser mirror,” that by some strange chance had been adjusted at an angle which deflected objects downward.

He had aimlessly halted at a point directly in line of the reflection cast by the mirror over the casement, and upon looking up saw through the screened window the reflection.

Those terrified eyes he had seen, suddenly set him in a ferment. “Probably—by God!” he muttered under his breath.

“Phwat be yees lookin’ at? Sure, I can say nothin’,” exclaimed Smith.

“I’ll just step in the house and ’phone for a sheriff’s posse to search the timber, and prevent his escape from the hill. You wait near-by for me.”

Sam had spoken loud as a ruse to deceive Rutley, for he felt morally certain that the cause of that frightened look in Virginia’s eyes was the presence of the man he was after.

“Sure, I will that, and kape me eyes on the ravine, too.”

As Sam started for the front door, Smith stalked about, with a stick in his hand, warily glancing from side to side and ready to fight on the instant.

Rutley prepared for a struggle, for he believed that Sam would ramble through the house. “Virginia must be concealed, but where?” He could not carry her to the attic, for Sam might meet him with her in his arms. “Ah, the closet!”

Thrusting the revolver in his pocket, he swiftly opened the door. Then he placed a chair within for her comfort, and without further hesitation gathered her in his arms and carried her to the closet. After seating her on the chair, and while drawing some of Mrs. Harris’ skirts about her, he said to her in a low voice: “After I dispose of that meddlesome fool, I’ll carry you to the loft and doubtless we’ll find room in one of the large trunks stored there to conceal you; and I warn you, on peril of your life, to sit still!”

He then cautiously closed the door.

His next step was to remove the revolver from his pocket and carefully examine it. “It’s a desperate bluff, but I’ll try it.”

There were two doors to the room other than the door of the closet; one opened into the hall, the other into a large bathroom and through to the bedroom beyond. He took the keys from his pocket and unlocked both doors, which he had fastened on meeting Virginia, and then placed the large cane arm chair, which he piled with cushions, to the right side of the table and a few feet from the hall door.

His movements were swift, silent and deliberate. Down behind the back of the chair he crouched and watched both doors with tigerish steadiness. He had barely taken his position when footsteps were heard in the hall. They passed the door, then returned, halted, and the next instant low taps sounded on the door.

Simultaneously the closet door back of Rutley cautiously opened and Virginia stepped forth gagless and free. She had been more frightened than hurt or helpless, and had not discovered it until imprisoned in the closet. Left to herself, she immediately struggled to free her limbs from bondage. One foot was unexpectedly loosed and then the other. Her hands quickly followed, and the twisted shawl fell to the floor.

Rutley had depended partly on her fear of him to remain passive, for the shawl was not long enough to permit her limbs being bound together and securely tied with a knot. Having freed her hands, it was the work of a moment to remove the gag from her mouth.

She stood motionless and silent save for the palpitation of her heart, which seemed thunderous in its beat. Rutley had not heard her, his attention being wholly absorbed by the sounds in the hall, and being back of him, she had time to quiet her agitation and analyze the situation.

Again low raps sounded on the door.

“What shall I do?” she inaudibly muttered, “for to aid me Sam will walk in to his death. Oh, heaven inspire me!”

As the hall door slowly opened, she tried in her agony to shriek a warning, but not a sound escaped her lips. Terror and apprehension had for the moment bereft her of voice.

Suddenly, like a divine flash, she remembered Jack Shore's blanket device in the cabin at Ross Island. She turned half around, silently stooped and picked up the shawl from the closet floor. She was very nervous and her agitation caused a trifling delay, which to her appeared hours, in untwisting the wrap and spreading it out, suspended on her two hands before her.

Sam cautiously appeared around the door. He was keenly alert, for he fully expected an encounter with Rutley, being quite satisfied that no other person would dare to gag Virginia, but when in that swift glance he saw her only in the room, and she with the gag removed and fingering a shawl, his surprise was so great that he forgot his caution. He pushed the door open wider and entered the room. His lips parted to speak.

That instant Rutley said sharply, "Hands up!"

Sam's hands went up, and he looked into the muzzle of a revolver, pointed at him from behind the chair.

Rutley stood up. At almost the same moment Virginia swiftly approached from behind and threw the net over his head, and shrieked, "Help! Help!"

In the furiousness of his rage to throw off the shawl, Rutley's hands became entangled in the net, and he shouted, "Oh, hell!"

Sam sprang upon him and wrenched the revolver from his hand. Then, as he leaped back a couple of paces, said to Rutley: "Hands up! It's my turn now, old chappie!"

Rutley paid no heed to the command and at last cleared from the net with a snarl.

"He, he, he—a devil is toothless when hell is without fire!" Then with a fiendish leer, drew the knife from his breast pocket. "Damn you!" said he, crouching for a spring on Sam, "you've crossed my path once too often!"

Swiftly Sam looked at the revolver and exclaimed with deep chagrin, "Empty!" He, however, gripped it by the muzzle and prepared for the encounter.

The men slowly circled each other for an opening. Suddenly they clinched, and in the struggle Sam was fortunate to seize Rutley's knife hand.

It was then that Virginia again proved her great courage and resourcefulness. Watching her chance, she hooked her left forearm under Rutley's chin about his throat, and simultaneously pressing her little right clenched fist against the small of his back, pulled his head backward, and screamed, "Help! Help!" [The act is a form of garrotte used in asylums and when resolutely applied quickly reduces the most powerful and refractory subject to submission.]

The suddenness of the attack and from such an unexpected quarter, accompanied by the choking pressure on his throat, caused Rutley to loosen his grip on the knife, which fell to the floor, and he exclaimed with a gurgling sound, "Oh, God!"

Sam instantly locked his arms around his body.

Rutley was powerless. His arms were firmly bound to his sides in a grip of iron. Meantime Smith stalked back and forth looking for trouble. He had arrived in front of the main entrance when the cry of "Help, help!" broke upon the still air. It proceeded from the second story of the house, and he at once recognized it as the voice of Virginia.

"By hivvins, the girl do be in throuble!" he muttered anxiously. "Ave it do be the blackguard we be lookin' for—sure!" And without further hesitation, Smith rushed up the steps and into the house.

Again the cry of "Help!" rang out.

"I'll help ye, darlint, be me soul, I will that. Hould him for wan minnit, and I'll attind to him. Oh, the skulkin' blackguard! 'E do be a bad divil, so 'e do. Just lave him to me, darlint; lave him to me, and I'll settle his nerves wid this bit of fir."

By this time Smith had mounted the stairs, when he was again startled to hear her cry: "Help! Oh, hasten, or blood will be shed!"

"I'm comin', darlint. Hould him wan minnit and I'll attind to him." Upon entering the room, he at once seized Rutley's hands and twisted them behind his back.

"A bit of stout cord, miss, is what we want to bind the divil."

"Hold him!" and she flew to the linen closet.

"Hould him, is it!" exclaimed Smith, with a laugh. "Sure, miss, yees nadn't hint that to me at all, at all. Indade, miss, it's a nate bit ave wurruk well done, and I do be proud of yees, too, so I do."

Virginia soon entered the room with a stout piece of cord, which she handed to Sam, saying, "Oh,

I'm so thankful for your opportune arrival!"

On seeing Rutley thoroughly secured, and her excitement subsiding, Virginia expressed her gratefulness to Sam and Smith for rescuing her from what she believed to be a terrible fate, then snatching up the shawl from the floor, flew down the stairs with a cry of pain on her lips for Constance.

Having at last securely bound Rutley's hands, Sam signalized the event with a broad grin.

"There, old chappie! I don't think you will break away a second time."

"Sure, ave 'e do, 'twill be after this bit of Arigin fir's been splintered on his hid," answered Smith.

Rutley made no reply. He seemed absorbed in thought, and though chagrin and disgust on his face betrayed a sense of his plight, no expression of bitterness escaped him. His dauntless, debonair spirit was still unbroken.

"I had her bound and shut up in the closet," he muttered to himself. It was an involuntary exclamation in an undertone, and at the moment he seemed quite oblivious to his position.

"Yees did!" explosively exclaimed Smith. "The likes of yees, a dirty, thavin' blackguard, to bind the young lady and shut her up in a closet! Sure, if I had seen yees do it, there'd be somethin' doin'." And Smith flourished his stick in a threatening manner.

"The sissy is no match for a fool-killer," grinned Sam, as he wound the cord several additional turns around Rutley's arms and body.

"Outclassed by a slip of a girl," Rutley muttered abstractedly, and enslaved by her witchery; "surely hell hath no cunning to match her genius for strategems!"

"Indade, the divil's imp is azey mark for the wit ave an Arigin girl, an' be the token ave it, yees'l go back and jine yees mate with the bracelets," said Smith ironically.

"Aunty is coming!" exclaimed Sam in a listening attitude. "We must get him out of the house at once!"

"March, yees blackguard, march!" promptly ordered Smith, laying his hand roughly on Rutley's arm to urge him along.

"Hands off!" sharply exclaimed the latter, shaking Smith's hand off and regarding him with a haughty stare; then, in a cutting high-pitched voice, he went on: "No liberties, flannel-mouthed cur—scat!"

"He is game," muttered Sam.

The stigma uttered in tones of withering contempt fairly lashed Smith into a foaming passion. He instantly dropped his stick, tore off his coat, spat on his hands, and while squaring off to Rutley, pranced about, beside himself with rage, and when he at last found speech, he said explosively: "Flannel-mouthed cur, is it yees be callin' me? Sure, Oi'll attind to yees blackguard. Och, sure Oi wouldn't strike yees wid yees hands tied, ye murtherin' villain! Oi mane to be fair wid yees, too, so Oi do, though ye little deserve it, and be the token ave it, Oi'll sit ye free to recave the batin' that will make yees respect my nation!" and in the heat of his rage and quite forgetful of place and environment, furiously untied the knot Sam had made to fasten the cord which he wound several times around Rutley's body, and then giving it a vigorous pull, sent Rutley spinning around like a top.

The thing was done so quick that Sam in his surprise was unable to check Smith, and had difficulty in restraining him from untying Rutley's hands also.

"Hold, Smith! Have it out with him some other time, not now or here," he said, laying his hand on Smith's arm, and then observing Smith with an angry stare, directed at him, Sam grinned and went on mockingly:

"His lordship wants you to keep your hands off."

"E do, do 'e?" replied Smith, his anger abating, and breaking into a hoarse laugh; "sure, Oi would not touch yees at all, at all except wid a pair ave steel nippers." Then he put on his coat, picked up the stick and commenced to poke Rutley toward the door, saying meanwhile, much to Rutley's frowning mortification, but helpless resistance: "March, yees blue-blooded gentleman, with the appetite for a pinitintary residence. March, yees thavin' ruffian, march!"

Scowling and turning, yet maintaining his always haughty bearing, Rutley passed "off the stage" by the back stairs, accompanied by his guards, but as Sam had declared, "game to the last."

In order to avoid creating excitement by appearing within view of the little sorrowful group, now near the front of the house, they placed him in a vine-covered arbor, which was convenient and, leaving Smith to guard him, Sam hurried off to inform the officers of their capture.

CHAPTER XXIII.

Down on the beach they found her—the woman upon whom the blow had fallen so cruelly, and from whom the “grim sickle” had so recently turned aside.

She was sitting on a low grassy knoll, gentle and pensive, a vacant stare in her sweet brown eyes as they wistfully scanned the surface of the water.

“Oh, heavens! We must get her to the house at once! Go, Sam, bring the carriage down. Haste, haste!” urged Mr. Harris.

And then John Thorpe saw her. Absorbed in deep meditation of his wrong to his innocent wife, ashamed and sorrowful, he was proceeding to the little depot, when, observing the frantic rush down the slope, and desiring to ascertain its cause, yet with an indefinable panicky feeling that seemed to freeze the very blood in his veins, he followed on. Without an instant of delay, in a moment, he had leaped to her side, tenderly clasped her to his heart, and with a voice trembling with emotion, said:

“Oh, my darling wife, my pure, sweet, injured Constance! Forgive me! It was all a terrible mistake!”

“I must go now. The storm is nearly over. I know that she is in the water, and the lilies are hiding her from me. But I shall find her. Give me the paddles. Save Dorothy.”

Constance had spoken in a soft, quiet voice. It had no touch of bitterness, no plaint of sadness; yet the yearning note of a heart dry with most intense grief was there—sounded on the chord of dethroned reason.

When she began to speak, he looked into her eyes with an eager, appealing tenderness, expecting a responsive, forgiving tear, but instead he met a gentle, strange, vacant stare. As she proceeded he held her from him at arms' length, bewildered and confused for the moment in his interpretation of her meaning, and then the truth burst upon him. Shocked and horrified, he cried out in the anguish of his heart, “Merciful heaven, she is mad!” And then his eyes fell on her wet garments.

“God forgive me, darling! I know you never can!” he said in a voice made husky with a great sob that rose up in his throat. Without further delay, he gathered her unresisting form in his arms and tenderly bore her up to the house. The grave little procession followed.

He had arrived with his precious burden close to the great steps of the piazza, when she struggled from his arms, and stood half turned about, her wistful brown eyes looking blankly at him.

It was then that Virginia appeared on the piazza, her face deathly white and her eyes still bearing traces of the terrifying ordeal she had so recently gone through with Rutley. On seeing Constance, down the steps she flew and folding the shawl about her stricken friend's shoulders, clasped her arms about her and said chokingly: “Oh, why have you followed me, poor suffering heart?”

“I'm so cold,” was all Constance said, and she shook as with an ague.

“Oh, this is too appalling to be true! Speak, dear! Throw off that meaningless stare, and assume intellect's rightful light,” beseeched Thorpe, and as he paused and gazed upon her sweet pensive face, awaiting recognition, great tears welled up in his eyes and silently rolled down his cheeks. Again he spoke to her: “Constance, do you not know me?” and then he turned his head away with an indescribable sickness at heart.

“Yes! Oh, yes! I know you! You want ransom money for my Dorothy. Very well, you shall have it!” and she thrust her hand into her corsage, and took therefrom some scraps of paper, a few of them falling on the grass. “There are ten thousand”—and she handed the papers to him, in a manner so gentle yet so full of unaffected artfulness, that he took them, while his heart seemed to still its beat and sink leaden and numb with the torture of his own accusing conscience.

“You shall have more,” she continued with plaintive assurance, “all I can get.” Then her eyes fell on the scraps of paper on the grass. She picked them up and pushed them with the others into his hand. “There are more thousands. Take it all for my Dorothy—my darling! Now give me the paddles, the paddles! Where are the paddles? Hasten, save Dorothy!”

There were no dry eyes in the little gathering of friends—all friends now—who heard her, and even Sam, who had halted on his way to the officers, was forced to turn aside and wipe his eyes and remark in an unsteady voice:

“I don't know what makes my eyes water so.”

“God help me!” exclaimed Virginia. “Henceforth my life is consecrated to watch over and care for her.”

"I am equally guilty," solemnly continued Mr. Thorpe. "I should not have acted with such anger. This is the blackening left by jealousy's burning passion, the essence of which will cling to my soul long after my heart becomes insensible clay."

"It is not insanity of an incurable kind," gravely remarked Mr. Harris. "I have closely watched her facial expression and it appears to me the trace of reason is not entirely gone. I think she is delirious, and I have read that when persons are delirious some slight token, perchance a flower, a chord of melody, a face, a name, brought forcibly to bear on the mind may recall it to moments of reason. If it is so, then her intellect will recover from the shock. We will bring this to proof, Mrs. Thorpe," he proceeded, "look at these friends about you; do you not remember any of us?"

"I must not rest longer," Constance said suddenly; "I thought I had her once, but the water was so deep I could not reach her."

"We must get her into the house and into bed at once," said Virginia, clasping her tenderly about the waist.

"Dear me! Yes, I am sure her wet garments will jeopardize her health," said Mrs. Harris in support of Virginia.

But Constance resisted, and in doing so sat down on the bench. Hazel addressed her: "Constance, do you not know me? Do you not remember Hazel? Try to think, dear Constance, you surely cannot forget me!"

She slowly shook her head and said plaintively: "The storm is over. Make the boat go faster. We must be quick. There, she is calling—'Mama! Papa! Mama! Help!' Listen, Virginia, dear, do you not hear her?" And sure, enough, the voice of Dorothy was heard, saying: "Oh, Sam! Where is mama? Tell me."

And around from the conservatory, with a snow white aster in her hand, ran the child, followed by Sam, who, fearing the child in her rambles was likely to discover the presence of Rutley, induced her to appear on the front lawn by telling her that her mother was not far away. The child did not stop, but continued right up to her mother and clasped her arms about her neck.

"Oh, mama! Dear mama! I'm so glad you have come! Aren't you going to kiss me?"

Receiving no immediate response, the child unclasped her arms and drew back a pace offended.

"That voice!" said Constance, startled. She drew the tips of her fingers across her forehead, very much like one clutching at the filmy shreds of a vanishing dream. "Oh, the boat rocks!"

"Mama, aren't you going to speak to me?" and tears began to gather in the child's eyes. Again Constance started, and her frame trembled, as her eyes rested on Dorothy. She raised her hands slowly and covered her face. Again she removed her hands and muttered: "It's a spectre—a thing unreal which haunts me. Leave me. Pity me, oh, pity me, shade of my darling! You pain me! You make my heart ache! Go, go!"

Dorothy wept, and turning to Virginia, said: "Mama won't kiss me, nor speak to me," and the heartbroken child buried her head sobbing in the folds of Virginia's dress.

Constance pressed her hand over her heart and muttered: "Oh, John, I have been faithful to you, yet you doubted me—spurned me on that dreadful night I found Dorothy! She is gone from me now—gone, gone, gone!" and she bent forward, covering her face with her hands, and sobbed bitterly.

"Thank heaven!" exclaimed Virginia, "reason's floodgates have opened at last."

Sam again turned away to wipe his eyes, saying, "I cannot think what makes my eyes so sore."

And John Thorpe exclaimed, with trembling lips, "My God, have mercy! I cannot bear this!" And he, too, turned as though to walk away.

Mr. Harris held up a warning finger for him to stay.

"My poor mama!" and Dorothy again went close to her, comprehending in her childish way that her mother was sorely distressed. The sound of the child's voice caught Constance's attention. She lifted her head and fixed her eyes on Dorothy. Then she fell forward on her knees, stretched out her hands and murmured: "Not gone, still here!" She touched the child's hands and uttered a low cry, continuing in quavering accents of fear, of hope, of joy:

"Solid flesh; warm, pulsating life!" and she gently clasped the child's face between her two hands. "You cannot be a phantom! In the name of heaven, speak!"

"Indeed, mama, I am your own Dorothy. Aren't you going to kiss me?" and the child again entwined her arms about her mother's neck and looked into her eyes with a wistful appeal.

"Dorothy, my darling Dorothy, alive!"

It was a moment of absorbing interest. For an instant she held the child at arms' length, with eyes devouring her lineaments. Then in a rapture of joy and thanksgiving she folded Dorothy to her heart and kissed her again and again.

"Oh, heaven, I thank thee!" were the only words she could utter, as she strained the little form tighter to her heart. And as she looked upward, and the mist cleared from her eyes, she saw John bending toward her—saw him lift his arms and outstretch them to her—saw his lips part, and heard him say, as though his heart were in his mouth, "Constance, forgive me!"

Oh, such sweet relief! Her gaze was steadfast for an instant, then arising to her feet, she fell on his breast and clasped her arms about his neck and sobbed, "John! My own dear John! I've had such a horrid dream!"

He folded his arms about her and pressed her very close to his breast, and as his lips tremulously touched her forehead, said with heartfelt fervor: "God grant that we may never part again. No, nevermore, my darling Constance."

"Thank heaven, she was only delirious!" fervently exclaimed Mr. Harris.

"I guess so, eh, aunty?" and Sam, with a look of immense satisfaction, suddenly threw his arms about Virginia and gave her a tremendous hug, and to his inexpressible joy and amazement she reciprocated his caress.

"Noble Sam, my hero, you have won my heart at last!"

Her words were of tremendous meaning to Sam. His joy knew no bounds. He looked over to his aunt, amazement, intense satisfaction and admiration sparkling in his eyes. "At last, eh, aunty!" and then his lips touched Virginia's in a kiss of undying fidelity.

CHAPTER XXIV.

The exposure and wet garments, which Constance had worn during the most critical period of her delirium, had the customary effect. She had been quickly ushered into the house, the wet clothes removed, her limbs and feet chafed by tender hands, and under the influence of a stimulant, and warmly wrapped and in bed, the poor, worn, exhausted soul soon fell asleep. She awoke six hours later in a raging fever.

The doctor had anticipated that something of the kind would happen, and was in the house at the time of her awakening. In so fragile a constitution, weakened by grief and trouble, it was not strange that the fever made prodigious headway, and swiftly reached its height. The crisis arrived several hours after the attack.

She lay very still, apparently on the confines of death. The most profound stillness pervaded the room. The doctor, watch in hand, held her wrist and noted her pulse. Its beat was so feeble that only his experienced fingers could detect it at all. John Thorpe stood at the side of the bed opposite the doctor, bending over and watching her half open lips with an intensity of anxiety impossible to describe. Beside him stood Dorothy, with tears trickling down her face, for the child, though too young to comprehend its meaning, was affected by the solemnity of the scene, and by her aunt's quiet grief.

Virginia was kneeling at the foot of the bed, her face buried in her hands, in an endeavor to stifle her sobs, while Mrs. Harris looked ruefully out of the window.

Several times the doctor moved only to place his ear close to Constance's heart, and again he would place his hand there and press gently. Now and again he moistened her lips with a piece of ice and cooled the damp cloth on her hot brow.

At a moment when least expected, she moaned and then her chest heaved with a light breath. Quietly she opened her eyes and looked slowly around. There, before her, stood John and Dorothy. Her eyes rested on them. She recognized them and smiled faintly and said feebly, scarcely above a whisper, "Dorothy, darling, and John!"

"Safe," announced the doctor, and his face, beaming with confidence, carried joy to the little group of anxious watchers.

CHAPTER XXV.

One day, shortly after Constance had started on the road to recovery, and before she had been removed from "Rosemont" to her home, Virginia, Hazel and Sam were grouped on the piazza discussing in low tones the probable sentence of Rutley and Jack Shore. Sam held the morning paper in his hand, which he casually perused. Virginia was particularly happy and vivacious, and indeed, had she not reason in the reconciliation of John Thorpe and Constance; the rescue of Dorothy; the recovery by Constance of her reason, so threatening and dire in its flight, and the passing of that awful consuming fever that had seized upon the frail mind and body of Constance—was productive of such devout and fervent gladness that she felt at peace with the world. Even

that old bitterness, so virulent and overpowering toward Corway, had gone out from her heart completely, and as she pondered on his sudden disappearance, the thought that he may have come to a violent death caused tears to spring into her beautiful eyes. It was a mute but an inexpressibly sad testimony to the final closing of love's first dream.

At that moment Sam exclaimed, "Well, what do you think of this?" and then he looked over the paper and grinned at Hazel knowingly.

The girl stood his stare for a moment, then impatiently said, "Why don't you read it?"

And Sam read: "The item is headed, 'A Bottle Picked Up at Sea. As the bar tug Hercules was cruising beyond the bar, farther out than usual, last Tuesday, Captain Patterson espied a bottle bobbing about in the wash of a swell and picked it up. On being opened, it was found to contain a sealed message to a young Portland woman, with instructions for the finder please to deliver at once.

"The bottle had been cast overboard September 15th, from the British bark Lochlobin, two days out, bound for Sydney."

Expressions of wonder and speculation from the young ladies were scarcely ended when a messenger boy was seen approaching. At the foot of the piazza steps he produced two letters and, tipping his cap to the group above, enquired for Miss Hazel Brooke.

Yes—a message from the deep.

He delivered one of the letters which he held in his hand to Hazel, and then said: "The other letter is for Miss Virginia Thorpe," which the housekeeper at Mr. Thorpe's home, where he had first enquired for Miss Brooke, had asked him to deliver at Rosemont, too.

The boy touched his cap respectfully and left. Sam accompanied him a short distance, and slipped a gold piece into his hand. The boy thanked him, and took his departure whistling.

Meanwhile Hazel opened the letter, and her eyes raced over the contents; then she fairly danced with joy.

"Oh, such good news, Virginia!" she exclaimed, without taking her eyes from the letter. "It's from Joe. Poor Joe! He was sandbagged or shanghai'd, whatever that is, but he is well now, on a ship bound for Australia, and will be home in about three months."

But the glad message to one fell on the unreceptive ears of the other. Virginia had also opened the letter addressed to her. She had noted the bold letters and familiar writing, glanced at the postmark, and noted its date; dated at Portland over two weeks past; but, undeterred save by a slight fluttering at her heart, she read:

"Dear Virginia: For some time past; in fact, since our hasty engagement, I have been searching the depths of my heart, to see if my love for you is genuine, and I am sorry to say that I have found the love I had rashly expressed is not deeply felt, and in spite of all my determination to think only of you, my heart would stray to another.

"Dear Virginia, I implore you to consider me a trifler, quite unworthy of the exalted love that is in your noble nature to bestow; and I beg of you to release me from our engagement, which, if insisted on being maintained, must result in a life of unhappiness for us both. Let us be to each other as brother and sister, and I shall ever bless you and pray for you.

"Joseph Corway."

She did not tear the letter to shreds, nor stamp it under her feet. She stood with it in her hand, which slowly fell down by her side, while a look of sadness and of reminiscence stole into her eyes. And she commenced to experience, too, the greatest difficulty in restraining a dewy profuseness that would arise and cloud her sight. She had thought that her heart was steeled against any expression of tenderness for him that might assail it, but she discovered that she was still a young girl with a girl's emotions, impossible of subjection.

An overpowering desire to be alone until she could master her emotion and clear away the mist from her eyes caused her to descend the steps. The sense of motion steadied her, and it enabled her to think and to say unconsciously, half aloud to herself, "If father had burst his cerements and arisen from his grave to tell me this, I should have refused to believe him," and with the thought of what Constance had suffered, a moan unconsciously escaped her.

Here, then, was the key to Virginia's transformation. This delayed letter—cruel, it was true—was addressed to her at the farm three days before her sudden return home, and had as slowly followed her, for rural postal facilities were at that time dependent on the farmer going to town for his mail.

Hazel heard the moan, and looked up from the note which she had read and re-read, and kissed time and again. She saw Virginia in apparent pain, and at once flew down the steps, crying, "Oh,

Virginia, dear! What has caused you so much grief?" and she sought to caress her.

But Virginia, with an effort subduing her emotions, drew away, answering, "Nothing, dear, nothing; it's all past, all gone now!"

Sam came up just then. He cast a swift glance at her distressed face, and then to the letter which she held in her hand, and surmised that it had to do with her trouble. His first thought was, "Damn that messenger boy!" He, however, made no attempt to break in on her mood.

Virginia returned his look almost defiantly at first, as though his questioning glance was rude, but the little cloud quickly vanished, when Hazel said, "Something serious, dear? Won't you let me share your trouble?"

"Oh, no! It's all past, all gone," she answered firmly. "I'm quite strong now, and to prove it, we will have a little bonfire. Sam, have you a light?"

Quietly Sam produced a match-box from his pocket, took a match, lighted it and handed it over.

Virginia applied the fire to the letter. As it burned down to the last bit, which she dropped from her hand, and disappeared in smoke, she looked up and as her eyes fell on the transcendently beautiful autumn vista, and then rested on Sam's strong and at that moment deeply apprehensive face, there gradually came into them a steadfast look of admiration and loyalty.

Sam caught the wondrous expression. He stepped forward, his arms opened, and she fell on his shoulder, her arms about his neck.

"Will it ever return, darling?" he said soothingly.

"Never again, Sam," and as she turned her face up to him their lips met in a seal of absolute trust and affection.

CHAPTER XXVI.

Philip Rutley and Jack Shore were duly arraigned for abduction and felony, tried and convicted on both counts, and each was sentenced to a maximum penalty of twenty years in the state penitentiary at Salem.

Even then Rutley's penchant for conspiracy asserted itself. One afternoon, just four months after the prison doors closed on them, the inner corridor guard was killed, a second overpowered and knocked unconscious. So swiftly and silently was the work done that before discovery six convicts had escaped to the outer court. There, however, on a general alarm being sounded, three of them were shot down from the walls. The others surrendered.

One of the convicts who was shot and died almost instantly was Philip Rutley.

When last heard of, Jack Shore was still serving his time in an industrial department, devoting his talents to the manufacture of stoves, and reducing his sentence by good behavior.

The first act of Mr. Thorpe after his happiness had been restored was to recognize substantially Smith's invaluable service to the family. Sufficient to say that Smith was presented with a ticket good for one first-class passage to the "Emerald Isle" and return, and in addition to his four months' vacation on full pay, a goodly sum in cash for incidental expenses.

That Smith appreciated Mr. Thorpe's generosity, is begging the question. On arrival in the old country, he found conditions had changed since he left there thirty years ago. The old haunts of his boyhood days had been transformed. The old folks had long since departed this life—"God rest their souls!" His friends and acquaintances had disappeared from the county or were no more—strange faces everywhere—all had changed save the old parish church; that alone remained undefined by the ravages of time.

"And now, my duty done, Oi'll go back to America." On taking his farewell, sad and impressive thoughts occupied his mind. "Shall I niver see the ould sod again, the dear ould land that gave me birth, the grain ave its hills, and the dear little shamrock—long life to it." And as a mist gathered in his eyes, he reverently knelt, lower he bent, till his lips touched the grassy ground, which he lovingly kissed.

"Farewell, an' may it please God to bring ye from the gloom ave tribulation into the sunshine ave happiness and prosperity. Farewell, dear ould Erin, my heart'll be wid ye always."

The End.

About the book:

Title: An Oregon Girl

Subtitle: A Tale of American Life in the New West

Author: Alfred Ernest Rice

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