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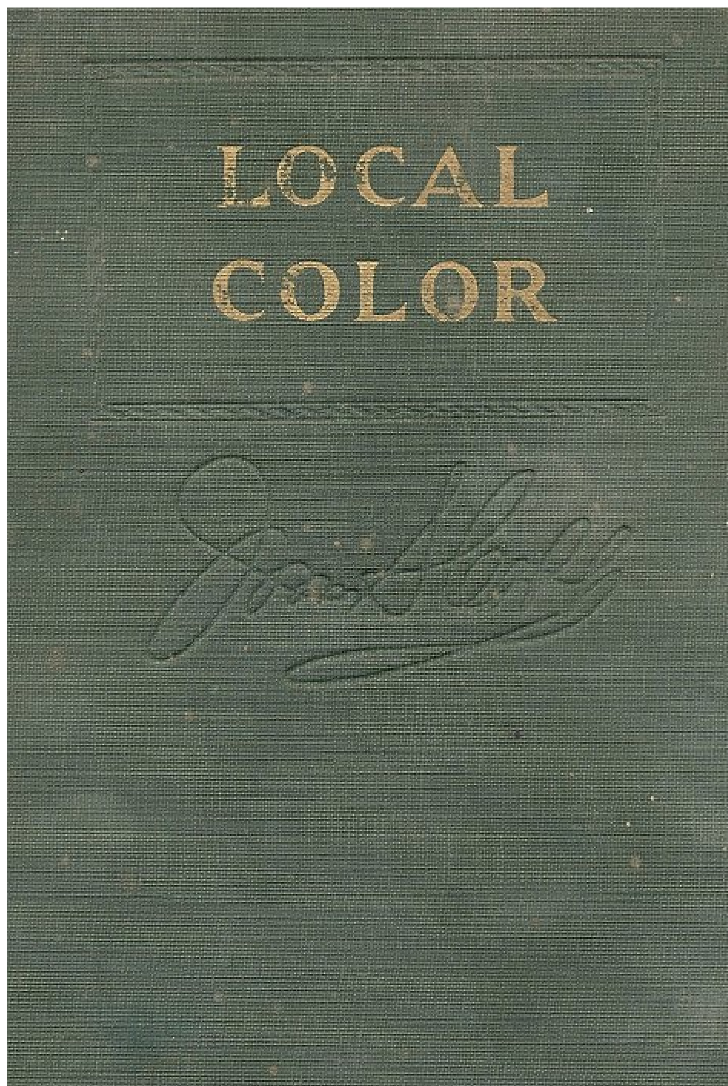
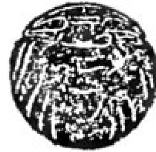


LOCAL COLOR

THE WORKS OF

IRVIN S. COBB

LOCAL COLOR



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TO MY SISTERS

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LOCAL COLOR

CHAPTER I

LOCAL COLOR

FELIX LOOMS, the well-known author, disappeared—or, rather, he went away—on or about June fifteenth, four years ago. He told his friends, his landlady and his publisher—he had no immediate family—he felt run down and debilitated and he meant to go away for a good long stay. He might try the Orient; then again perhaps he would go to the South Seas. When he came back, which might be in a year or two years or even three, he expected to bring with him the material for a longer and better book than any he had written. Meantime he wanted to cut loose, as he put it, from everything. He intended, he said, to write no letters while he was gone and he expected to receive none.

He gave a power of attorney to a lawyer with whom he had occasional dealings, left in bank a modest balance to meet any small forgotten bills that might turn up after his departure, surrendered his bachelor apartments in the Rubens Studio Building, paid off his housekeeper, said good-bye to a few persons, wrote explanatory notes to a few more; and then quietly—as he did everything in this life—he vanished.

Nobody particularly missed him, for he was not a famous author or even a popular one; he was merely well known as a writer of tales dealing in the main with crime and criminals and criminology. People that liked his writings said he was a realist, who gave promise of bigger things. People that did not like his writings said he was a half-baked socialist. One somewhat overcritical reviewer, who had a bad liver and a bitter pen, once compared him to an ambitious but immature hen pullet, laying many eggs but all soft-shelled and all of them deficient in yolk.

Personally Felix Looms was a short, slender, dark man, approaching forty, who wore thick glasses and coats that invariably were too long in the sleeves. In company he was self-effacing; in a crowd he was entirely lost, if you know what I mean. He did not know many people and was intimate with none of those he did know. Quite naturally his departure for parts unknown left his own little literary puddle unrippled.

Looms went away and he did not come back. His publisher never heard from him again; nor did his lawyer nor the manager of the warehouse where he had stored his heavier belongings. When three years had passed, and still no word came from him, his acquaintances thought—such of them as gave him a thought—that he must have died somewhere out in one of the back corners of the East. He did die too; but it was not in the East. He died within a block and a half of the club of his lawyer and not more than a quarter of a mile from the town house of his publisher. However, that detail, which is inconsequential, will come up later.

At about seven-forty-five on the evening of June seventeenth, four years ago, Patrolman Matthew Clabby was on duty—fixed post duty—at the corner of Thirty-fourth Street and Second Avenue. According to the report made by him at the time to his immediate superior and subsequently repeated by him under oath before the grand jury and still later at the trial, his attention was attracted—to use the common formula—by a disturbance occurring on a crosstown trolley car, eastward bound, which had halted just west of the corner.

Patrolman Clabby boarded the car to find a small, shabby man endeavouring to break away from a larger and better-dressed man, who held him fast by the collar. In reply to the officer's questions the large man stated that he had detected the small one in the act of picking his pocket. He had waited, he said, until the other lifted his watch and chain and then had seized him and held him fast and called for help. At least three citizens, passengers on the car, confirmed the main points of the accuser's story. For added proof there were the watch and chain. They were in the thief's side coat pocket. With his own

large firm hands Patrolman Clabby fished them out from there and confiscated them for purposes of evidence. As for the prisoner, he said nothing at all.

The policeman totted down in his little book the names and addresses of the eyewitnesses. This done, he took the small man and led him off afoot to the East Thirty-fifth Street Station, the owner of the watch going along to make a formal charge. Before the desk in the station house this latter person said he was named Hartigan—Charles Edward Hartigan, a private detective by occupation; and he repeated his account of the robbery, with amplifications. The pickpocket gave his name as James Williams and his age as thirty-eight, but declined to tell where he lived, what occupation he followed, or what excuse he had for angling after other people's personal property on a crosstown car.

At this juncture Clabby grabbed one of his prisoner's hands and ran a finger over its inner surface, seeking for callosities of the palm; then he nodded meaningly to the desk lieutenant.

"I guess he's a dip all right, Loot," said Clabby; "the inside of his hand is as soft as a baby's."

"Take him back!" said the lieutenant briefly.

Before obeying, Clabby faced the man about and searched him, the search revealing a small amount of money but no objects that might serve for the prisoner's better identification. So, handling James Williams as casually and impersonally as though he were merely a rather unwieldy parcel, Clabby propelled him rearward along a passageway and turned him over to a turnkey, who turned him into a cell and left him there—though not very long. Within an hour he was taken in a patrol wagon to the night court, sitting at Jefferson Market, where an irritable magistrate held him, on the strength of a short affidavit by Clabby, to await the action of the grand jury.

Thereafter for a period James Williams, so far as the processes of justice were concerned, ceased to be a regular human being and became a small and inconspicuous grain in the whirring hopper of the law. He was as one pepper-corn in a crowded bin—one atom among a multitude of similar atoms. Yet the law from time to time took due cognisance of this mote's existence.

For example, on the morning of the eighteenth a closed van conveyed him to the Tombs. For further example, an assistant district attorney, in about a month, introduced Clabby and Hartigan before the July grand jury. It took the grand jury something less than five minutes to vote an indictment charging James Williams with grand larceny; and ten days later it took a judge of General Sessions something less than three-quarters of an hour to try the said Williams.

The proceedings in this regard were entirely perfunctory. The defendant at the bar had no attorney. Accordingly the judge assigned to the task of representing him a fledgling graduate of the law school. Hartigan testified; Clabby testified; two eyewitnesses, a bricklayer and a bookkeeper, testified—all for the state. The prisoner could produce no witnesses in his own behalf and he declined to take the stand himself, which considerably simplified matters.

Red and stuttering with stage fright, the downy young law-school graduate made a brief plea for his client on the ground that no proof had been offered to show his client had a previous criminal record. Perfunctorily the young assistant district attorney summed up. In a perfunctory way the judge charged the jury; and the jury filed out, and—presumably in a perfunctory fashion also—took a ballot and were back in less than no time at all with a verdict of guilty.

James Williams, being ordered to stand up, stood up; being ordered to furnish his pedigree for the record, he refused to do so; being regarded, therefore, as a person who undoubtedly had a great deal to conceal, he was denied the measure of mercy that frequently is bestowed on first offenders. His Honour gave him an indeterminate sentence of not less than three years at hard labour in state prison, and one of the evening newspapers gave him three lines in the

appropriate ratio of one line for each year. In three days more James Williams was at Sing Sing, wearing among other things a plain grey suit, a close hair-cut and a number, learning how to make shoes.

Now then, the task for me is to go back and begin this story where properly it should begin. Felix Looms, the well-known writer who went away on or about June fifteenth, and James Williams, who went to jail June seventeenth for picking a pocket, were one and the same person; or perhaps it would be nearer the truth to say that James Williams was Felix Looms.

Lest my meaning be misunderstood let me add that this is no tale of a reversion to type. It has nothing whatever to do with any suddenly awakened hereditary impulse. In the blend of Felix Looms' breed no criminal strain persisted. His father was a Congregational preacher from Massachusetts and his mother a district school-teacher from Northern New York. His grandsires, on both sides, were good, clean-strain American stock. So far as we know, never a bad skeleton had rattled its bones in his family's closet. He himself was a product of strict training in a Christian home, a Yale education and much book reading. The transition from Felix Looms, bookworm, author and sociologist, to James Williams, common rogue and convict, was accomplished deliberately, and, as it were, with malice aforethought.

Here was how the thing came about. Secretly, through a period of years, Felix Looms had nursed an ambition to write a great novel of prison life. It is true he had written a number of short stories and at least one novelette dealing with prison life, and, what was more to the point, had sold them after writing them; but they lacked sincerity. There was neither sureness nor assurance about them. He felt this lack; his publishers felt it; and in a way his readers no doubt felt it too, without knowing exactly why they felt it.

It is one of the inexplicable mysteries of the trade of writing that no man, however well he handles the tools of that trade, can write convincingly of things about which he personally does not know. A man might aspire, let us say, to write a story with scenes laid in Northern Africa. In preparation for this task he might read a hundred volumes about Northern Africa, its soil, its climate, its natives, its characteristics. He might fairly saturate himself in literature pertaining to Northern Africa; then sit him down and write his story. Concede him to be a good craftsman; concede that the story was well done; that his descriptions were strong, his phrasing graphic, his technic correct—nevertheless, it would lack that quality they call plausibility. Somehow the reader would sense that this man had never seen Northern Africa with his own eyes or breathed its air with his own nostrils.

To this rule there are two exceptions: A writer may write of things that happened in a past generation, after the last man of that generation is dead—therefore historical novelists are common; or, provided his imagination be sufficiently plastic, he may write of things that are supposed to happen in the future—he may even describe the inhabitants of the planet Mars and their scheme of existence. None will gainsay him, seeing that no contemporary of his has been to Mars or knows more of the conditions that will prevail a year or a century hence than he knows. But where he deals with the actualities of his own day and time he must know those actualities at first hand, else his best efforts fall to the ground and are of no avail. He simply cannot get away with it. Hearsay evidence always was poor evidence.

Felix Looms knew this. In his own case he knew it better than his readers knew it—or even his publisher. Critical analysis of his work had revealed its flaws to him until in his own soul he was ashamed and humiliated, feeling himself to be a counterfeiter uttering a most spurious coinage. So one day he said to himself:

"The worst thing in our modern civilisation is a prison. It is wrong and we know it is wrong; and yet we have devised nothing to take its place. A prison is crime's chemical laboratory; it is a great retort where virulent poisons are

distilled. Civilisation maintains it in the hope of checking certain gross evils; yet in it and by it evils as great are born and fostered. And the truth about it has never been told in the form of fiction, which is the most convincing form of telling the truth. Always the trouble has been that the people who have been in prison could not write about it and the people who could write about it have not been in prison.

"I know I could write about it, and so I am going to prison. I shall go to prison for one year, perhaps two or possibly three years; and when I come out I shall write a novel about prison life that will make my name live after me, for I shall know my facts at first hand—I shall have the local colour of a prison in my grip as no other man has ever had it who had my powers as a writer. I am going to gamble with this thing—the prison. I will give it a slice out of my life for the sake of the great work I shall do afterward."

Mind you, I am not saying he put his big idea—for surely it was an idea and a big one—in exactly those words; but that was his thought. And when he came to work out the plan he was astonished to find how easy it was to devise and to accomplish. Thanks to his mode of life, his practical isolation in the midst of five million other beings, he needed to confide in but one person; and in Hartigan he found that person. Hartigan, a veteran of the detective business, who knew and kept almost as many intimate secrets as a father confessor, showed surprise just twice—first when Looms confided to him his purpose and again when he learned how generously Looms was willing to pay for his co-operation.

Besides, as Looms at their first meeting pointed out and as Hartigan saw for himself, there was no obligation upon him to do anything that was actually wrong. Aboard that crosstown car Looms did really take a watch from Hartigan's pocket. Whatever the motive behind the act, the act spoke for itself. All that Hartigan told under oath on the witness stand was straight enough. It was what he did not tell that mortised the fabric of their plot together and made the thing dovetail, whole truth with half truth.

At the very worst they had merely conspired—he as accessory and Looms as principal—to cheat the state of New York out of sundry years of free board and freedomless lodgings at an establishment wherein probably no other man since it was built had ever schemed of his own free will to abide.

So Hartigan, the private detective, having first got his fee, eventually got his watch back and now disappears from this narrative. So Felix Looms, the seeker after local colour, gave up his bachelor apartments in the Rubens Studio Building and went away, leaving no forwarding address behind him. So James Williams, the petty felon, with no known address except the size number in his hat, went up the river to serve an indeterminate sentence of not less than three years.

From the hour he entered the Tombs on that morning of the eighteenth of June, Felix Looms began to store up material against the day when he should transmute it into the written word. Speaking exactly, he began storing it up even sooner than that. The thrill and excitement of the arrest, the arraignment before the cross magistrate in the night court, the night in the station-house cell—all these things provided him with startlingly new and tremendously vivid sensations. Indeed, at the moment his probing fingers closed on Hartigan's watch the mind pictures began to form and multiply inside his head.

Naturally, the Tombs had been most prolific of impressions; the local colour fairly swarmed and spawned there. He had visited the Tombs once before in his life, but he knew now that he had not seen it then. Behind a mask of bars and bolts it had hidden its real organism from him who had come in the capacity of a sightseer; but now, as an inmate, guarded and watched and tended in his cell like a wild beast in a show, he got under the skin of it. With the air he breathed—and it was most remarkably bad air—he took in and absorbed the flavour of the place.

He sensed it all—the sordid small intrigues; the playing of favourites by the turnkeys; the smuggling; the noises; the smells; the gossip that ran from tier to tier; the efforts of each man confined there to beat the law, against which each of them presumably had offended. It was as though he could see a small stream of mingled hope and fear pouring from beneath the patterned grill of each cell door to unite in a great flood that roared unendingly off and away to the courts beyond.

Mentally Felix Looms sought to put himself in the attitude of the men and women about him—these bona fide thieves and murderers and swindlers and bigamists who through every waking hour plotted and planned for freedom. That was the hardest part of his job. He could sense how they felt without personally being able to feel what they felt. As yet he took no notes, knowing that when he reached Sing Sing he would be stripped skin-bare and searched; but his brain was like a classified card index, in which he stored and filed a thousand and one thoughts. Hourly he gave thanks for a systematic and tenacious memory. And so day by day his copy and his local colour accumulated and the first chapters of his novel took on shape and substance in his mind.

Lying on the hard bed in his cell he felt the creative impulse stirring him, quickening his imagination until all his senses fairly throbbed to its big, deep harmonies. The present discomforts of his position, the greater discomforts that surely awaited him, filmed away to nothingness in the vision of the great thing he meant to accomplish. He told himself he was merely about to barter a bit out of his life for that for which a writer lives—the fame that endures; and he counted it a good bargain and an easy one.

In the period between his arrest and his conviction Felix Looms had one fear, and one only—that at his trial he might be recognised. He allowed his beard to grow, and on the day the summons came for him to go to court he laid aside his glasses. As it happened, no person was at the trial who knew him; though had such a person been there it is highly probable that he would not have recognised Felix Looms, the smugly dressed, spectacled, close-shaved man of letters, in this shabby, squinting, whiskered malefactor who had picked a citizen’s pocket before the eyes of other citizens.

With him to Sing Sing for confinement went four others—a Chinese Tong fighter bound for the death house and the death chair; an Italian wife-murderer under a life sentence; a young German convicted of forgery; and a negro loft robber—five felons all told, with deputies to herd them. Except the negro, Looms was the only native-born man of the five. The Chinaman, an inoffensive-looking little saffron-hided man, was manacled between two deputies. Seeing that the state would presently be at some pains to kill him, the state meantime was taking the very best of care of him. The remaining four were hitched in pairs, right wrist of one to left wrist of the other. A deputy marched with each coupled pair and a deputy marched behind. Looms’ fetter-mate was the Italian, who knew no English—or, at least, spoke none during the journey.

A prison van carried them from the Tombs to the Grand Central Station. It was barred and boarded like a circus cage —the van was—and like a circus cage it had small grated vents at each end, high up. A local train carried them from the station to Sing Sing. From start to finish, including the van ride, the journey took a little less than three hours. Three hours to get there, and three years to get back! Felix Looms made a mental note of this circumstance as he sat in his seat next the car window, with the wife-murderer beside him. He liked the line. It would make a good chapter heading.

The town of Ossining, where Sing Sing is, is a hilly town, the railroad station being at the foot of a hill, with the town mounting up uneven terraces on one side and the prison squatting flat on the river bank on the other. Arriving at Ossining, special and distinguishing honours were paid to the little yellow Chinaman. In a ramshackle village hack, with his two guards, he rode up a winding street, across a bridge spanning the railroad tracks, and then along a ridge commanding a view of the Hudson to the prison.

The four lesser criminals followed the same route, but afoot. They scuffled along through the dust their feet kicked up, and before their walk was done grew very sweaty and hot. The townspeople they met barely turned their heads to watch the little procession as it passed; for to them this was an every-day occurrence—as common a sight as a bread wagon or a postman.

It was not a long walk for the four. Quite soon they came to their destination. An iron door opened for them and in they went, two by two. Felix Looms saw how the German forger, who was ahead of him, flinched up against the negro as the door crashed behind them; but to Looms the sound the door made was a welcome sound. Secretly a high exaltation possessed him.

For a fact, this man who meant to learn about prison life at first hand went to the right place when he went to Sing Sing; for Sing Sing, the main part of it, was built in 1825-28, nearly a hundred years ago, when the punishment of imprisonment meant the punishment of soul and body and mind. In 1825 the man who for his misdeeds forfeited his liberty and his civil rights forfeited also the right to be considered in any wise a human being. As an animal he was regarded and as an animal he was treated, and as an animal he became. The institution made a beast not only of him but of the man who was set to keep him. Also, in such by-products as disease and degeneracy the plant was especially prolific.

The cell house, the dominating structure within the prison close, must look to-day very much as it looked along toward the end of the third decade of last century. Straight-walled, angular, homely beyond conception, it rises high above the stone stockade that surrounds it. Once its interior was lighted and aired only by narrow windows. You could hardly call them windows—they were like slits; they were like seams. About twenty years ago large inlets were cut into the walls. These inlets admit much air and some light.

As the cell house is the core of Sing Sing, so the cell structure is its core. In the exact centre of the building, steel within stone, six levels of cells rise, one level on another, climbing up almost to the roof, from which many hooded, round ventilators stare down like watchful eyes that never sleep. In each tier are two hundred cells, built back to back, each row of cells being faced by narrow iron balconies and reached by narrow wooden stairways. The person who climbs one of those flights of stairs and walks along one of those balconies passes a succession of flat-banded, narrow iron doors. Each door has set into it an iron grill so closely barred that the spaces between the patterns are no larger than the squares of a checkerboard.

Not a single cell has a window in it. Even at high noon the interior is wrapped in a sourish, ill-savoured gloom as though the good daylight had addled and turned sour as soon as it got inside this place. The lowermost cells are always damp. Moisture forms on the walls, sweating through the pores of the stone like an exhalation, so that, with his finger for a pen, a man may write his name in the trickling ooze.

A cell measures in width three feet four inches; in length, six feet six inches; in height, seven feet and no inches. It has a cubic capacity of about one hundred and fifty feet, which is considerably less than half the cubic space provided by our Government for each individual in army barracks in time of war. It contains for furniture a bunk, which folds back against the wall when not in use, or two bunks, swung one above the other; sometimes a chair; sometimes a stool; sometimes a shelf, and always a bucket.

For further details of the sanitary arrangements see occasional grand-jury reports and semioccasional reports by special investigating committees. These bodies investigate and then report; and their reports are received by the proper authorities and printed in the newspapers. Coincidentally the newspapers comment bitterly on the conditions existing at Sing Sing and call on public opinion to rouse itself. Public opinion remaining unroused, the sanitary arrangements

remain unchanged.

The man who occupies the cell is wakened at six-thirty A. M. At seven-thirty he is marched to the mess hall, where he eats his breakfast. By eight o'clock he is supposed to be at work somewhere, either in the workshop or on a special detail. At noon he goes to the mess hall again. He is given half an hour in which to eat his dinner. For that dinner half an hour is ample. At twelve-thirty he returns to his task, whatever it is. He works until quarter past three.

He gets a little exercise then, and at four he is marched to his cell. On his way he passes a table piled with dry bread cut in large slices. He takes as much bread as he wants. Hanging to his cell door is a tin cup, which a guard has just filled with a hottish coloured fluid denominated tea. Being put into his cell and locked in, he eats his bread and drinks his tea; that is his supper. He stays in his cell until between six-thirty and seven-thirty the following morning.

He knows Sundays only to hate them. On Sunday he is let out of his cell for breakfast, then goes to religious services, if he so desires, and at eleven o'clock is returned to his cell for the remainder of the day, with his rations for the day. When a legal holiday falls on Monday he stays in his cell from four o'clock on Saturday until six-thirty Tuesday morning, except for the time spent at certain meals and at divine services.

This is his daily routine. From the monotony of it there is one relief. Should he persistently misbehave he is sent to a dark cell, from which he emerges half blind and half mad, or quite blind and all mad, depending on the length of time of his confinement therein.

This, in brief, is Sing Sing; or at least it is Sing Sing as Sing Sing was when Felix Looms went there. Wardens have been changed since then and with wardens the system is sometimes altered. Physically, though, Sing Sing must always remain the same. No warden can change that.

Had he let it be known that he was a man of clerkly ways and book learning, Felix Looms might have been set to work in the prison office, keeping accounts or filing correspondence; but that was not his plan. So, maintaining his rôle of unskilled labourer, he was sent to the shoe shop to learn to make shoes; and in time, after a fashion, he did learn to make shoes.

He attracted no special attention in the shameful community of which he had become a small and inconsequential member. His had been a colourless and unobtrusive personality outside the prison; inside he was still colourless and unobtrusive. He obeyed the rules; he ate of the coarse fare, which satisfied his stomach but killed his palate; he developed indigestion and a small cough; he fought the graybacks that swarmed in his cell and sought to nibble on his body. By day he watched, he learned, he studied, he analysed, he planned and platted out his book; and at night he slept, or tried to sleep.

At first he slept poorly. Bit by bit he accustomed himself to the bad air; to the pent closeness of his cell; to the feeling in the darkness that the walls were closing in on him to squeeze him to death—a feeling that beset him for the first few weeks; to the noises, the coughing, the groaning, the choking, which came from all about him; to the padding tread of the guards passing at intervals along the balcony fronting his cell. But for a long time he could not get used to the snoring of his cellmate.

Sing Sing being overcrowded, as chronically it is, it had been expedient to put Looms in a cell with another prisoner. To the constituted authorities this prisoner was known by a number, but the inner society of Tier III knew him as The Plumber. The Plumber was a hairy, thick-necked mammal, mostly animal but with a few human qualities too. The animal in him came out most strongly when he slept. As the larger man and by virtue of priority of occupancy he had the lower bunk, while Looms, perforce, took the upper.

The Plumber slept always on his back. When his eyes

closed his mouth opened; then, hour after hour, unceasingly, he snored a gurgling, rumbling drone. It almost drove Looms crazy—that snoring. In the night he would roll over on his elbow and peer down, craning his neck to glare in silent rage at the spraddled bulk beneath him. He would be seized with a longing to climb down softly and to fix his ten fingers in that fat and heaving throat and hold fast until the sound of its exhaust was shut off forever.

After a while, though, he got used to The Plumber's snoring, just as he had got used to the food and the work and the heavy air and the cell and all. He got used to being caged with a companion in a space that was much too small, really, for either of them. A man can get used to anything—if he has to. He even came to have a sort of sense of comradeship for his cellmate.

The Plumber was not a real plumber. By profession he was a footpad, a common highwayman of the city streets, a disciple in practice of Dick Turpin and Jack Sheppard; but possessed of none of those small graces of person, those prettified refinements of air and manner with which romance has invested these masters of the calling.

His title was derived from his method of operation. Dressed in the overalls of an honest workingman and carrying in his pocket a pair of pliers, a wrench and a foot-long scrap of gas pipe, he ranged the darker streets of his own East Side at night on the lookout for business. Spying out a prospective victim, he would first wrap the gas pipe in a handy newspaper; then, stalking his quarry from behind, he would knock him cold with one blow of the gas pipe on the skull, strip the victim's pockets of what cash they contained, and depart with all possible despatch, casting aside the newspaper as he went. If there was any blood it would be on the newspaper; there would be none on the gas pipe.

Should suspicion fall on its owner—why, he was merely a straight-faring artisan, bound homeward, with certain of the tools and impedimenta of his trade on his person. It had been The Plumber's own idea, this device of the gas pipe and the evening paper, and he was proud of it and derisive of the imitators who had adopted it after he, growing incautious, had been caught, as it were, red-handed and sent up the river.

With pride and a wealth of detail he confided these professional secrets to his spectacled little bunkie after he came to know him. A fragment at a time he told Looms of his life, his likes and dislikes, and his associates in crimedom. He taught Looms the tricks of the prison, too—how to pass messages; how to curry the favour of the keepers; how, when so desiring, to smuggle contrabands in and out; how to talk with one's neighbours while at work or at mess, where silence is demanded, which same is accomplished with the eyes facing straight ahead and the words slipping sidewise from the corners of the mouth, the lips meantime moving but little. Considering the differences in them, they came to be pretty good friends.

Evenings and Sundays and holidays The Plumber would take the floor, literally as well as figuratively. He would stand at the door of their cell, shifting from foot to foot like a caged cat-animal in quarters too small for it, and sniffing like an animal through the small squares of the iron lattice; or else he would pace back and forth the length of the cell, constantly scraping his body between the wall and the edge of the upper berth. In these movements he found relief from his restlessness.

And while The Plumber walked and talked Looms would lie prone on his bed listening or making notes. For making these notes he used an indelible pencil, and for greater security against discovery he set them down in shorthand. The shorthand was partly of his own devising and partly based on an accepted stenographic system. As fast as he filled one sheet of paper with the minutely done, closely spaced lines he pasted it to another sheet; so that in time he had a long, continuous strip, all written over thickly with tiny, purplish-blue characters. Being folded flat and thin and inclosed in an envelope made of thin leather pilfered from the shoe shop,

this cipher manuscript was carried by Looms inside his shirt during the day, and it went under his pillow when he slept. Once a week he was sent to the baths. At such times he hid the precious packet beneath his mattress.

The Plumber, of course, had abundant opportunity to examine these notes; but naturally enough he could make nothing of them. Privily he catalogued Looms—or Williams, which he thought was his cell-mate's name—as a sort of harmless lunatic; in short, a nut. Looms meantime made copy out of The Plumber. He meant to use The Plumber as a character in his book—as one of the principal characters. A criminal of the type of The Plumber ought to furnish much material; and without his suspecting it he did furnish much.

At the end of nine months they parted. The Plumber, having completed his term, went forth to sin some more. Thereafter Looms had a cell to himself. Before very long, his record being clean, he was the recipient of a mark of favour from the warden's office. He became a trusty. As a trusty he was doubly alert to win special privileges for himself. He knew all the tricks and devices of the place by now. Outwardly he was every inch a convict—a commonplace convict if not a typical one. Inwardly he now frequently caught himself slipping into a convict's mode of thinking—found himself viewing his prison existence, not as an observer of the system but as an integral part and parcel of the prison machine.

Drugged by the stupefying monotony of it he felt sometimes as though he had always been a convict. The days passed, leaving no conscious impressions on the retina of his brain. It was as though he rode on an endless band, which circled once in twenty-four hours, never changing its gait or its orbit. It took an effort to rid himself of this feeling.

The graybacks which crawled over his body at night, coming out of the cracks of the wall and the folds of his blanket to bite his flesh, no longer made him sick, for they were part of the system too.

Not once did he regret what he had done to get himself into Sing Sing.

The first year went by thus, and the second, and Looms entered on the third. He still kept his flat packet of manuscript close and safe, wearing it in its leather envelope next to his skin; but now he added no more notes in his cryptic shorthand code. He told himself he added no more because he already had at his fingers' ends, waiting to be transcribed into copy, the whole drama of prison life—the poisons it distills; the horrors it breeds; its qualities and its inequalities; its wrongs that might be reformed and its wrongs that can never be reformed. This was what he told himself. The fact remained that for the last seven months of his imprisonment he set down no notes.

At the end of the third year he was discharged.

The man who had entered Sing Sing three years before was not the man who came out. The man who went in had been slender and quick of movement, careful of his personal appearance, almost old-maidish in his neatness. He carried himself erectly; he walked with rather a brisk tread. This man had shapely hands.

The man who came out resembled the other in that he was small of frame and wore thick-lensed glasses. In nearly every other essential regard he differed from him. Even his height seemed less, for now he moved with a stoop in his shoulders and with his head sunken. His hands dangled at his sides as though they had grown too heavy for the arms on which they were hung. They were the hands of one who has done coarse manual labour—the nails were blunted and broken, the palms bossed with warty calluses. This man walked with a time-killing shamble, scraping his feet along. Beneath the natural sallowness of his skin his face had the bleached, unhealthy look of any living thing that has been kept too long in artificial twilight, away from fresh air and sunshine. By its colour it suggested a pale plant growing in a cellar, a weed sprig that

had sprouted beneath a log. It suggested a white grub burrowing in rotted wood.

The greatest change of all, however, was in the expression of the face; for now the eyes moved with a furtive, darting movement—a quick scrutiny that lingered on its target for a second only and then flashed away. And when the lips framed words the mouth, from force of training, was pursed at the corner, so that the issuing speech could be heard with greater distinctness by one who stood alongside the speaker than by one who faced him.

The clothes Looms had worn when he entered the prison had disappeared; so for his reentrance into the world the authorities gave him a suit of prison-made slops, poorly cut and bunchily sewed. They gave him this suit of clothes, a shirt and a hat and a pair of shoes; also a small sum of money, a ticket back to the point from which he had been brought, and the small articles that had been taken from his person at the time he entered Sing Sing.

These and his sheaf of shorthand notes pasted together, folded flat and inclosed in his small leather pack, were all that Felix Looms brought away with him from the prison.

Once more he went afoot along the dusty road, followed the ridge along the river, crossed the bridge above the railroad tracks and descended to the station below to wait for a train bound for the city. Persons who were gathered on the platform looked at him—some understandingly; some curiously. He found it easier to evade their eyes than to return their stares.

Presently a train came and he boarded it, finding a seat in the smoker. The exaltation that had possessed him when he went to Sing Sing was all gone. A certain indefinable numbness affected his body, his limbs, his mind, making his thoughts heavy and his movements sluggish. For months past he had felt this numbness; but he had felt sure that liberty and the coming of the time for the fulfillment of his great work would dissipate it. He was free now, and still the lassitude persisted.

He viewed the prospect of beginning his novel with no particular enthusiasm. He said to himself that disuse of the pen had made him rusty; that the old enthusiasm, which is born of creation, of achievement, of craftsmanship exercised, would return to him as soon as he had put the first word of his book on paper; and that after that the story would pour forth with hardly a conscious effort on his part. It had been so in the past; to a much greater degree it should be so now. Yet, for the moment, he viewed the prospect of starting his novel almost with physical distaste.

In this mental fog he rode until the train rolled into the Grand Central Station and stopped. Seeing his fellow passengers getting off he roused himself and followed them as they trailed in straggling lines through the train shed and out into the great new terminal. It was late afternoon of a summer’s day.

His plans immediately following his advent into the city had all been figured out long in advance. He meant to seek obscure lodgings until he could secure a few needed additions to his wardrobe. Then he would communicate with his publisher and make to him a private confession regarding his whereabouts during the past three years, and outline to him the book he had in mind to write. Under the circumstances it would be easy to secure a cash advance from any publisher.

Thus fortified with ready money Looms would go away to some quiet place in the country and write the book. Mulling these details over in his head he shambled along automatically until suddenly he found himself standing in Forty-second Street. He slipped backward involuntarily, for the crowds that swirled by him daunted him. It seemed to him that they were ten times as thick, ten times as noisy, ten times as hurried as they had been when last he paused in that locality.

For a minute, irresolute, he hesitated in the shelter of the station doorway. Then, guided by habit, a thing which often sleeps but rarely dies, he headed westward. He walked as

close to the building line as he could squeeze himself, so as to be out of the main channels of sidewalk travel. When he came to Fifth Avenue he mechanically turned north, shrinking aside from contact with the swarms of well-dressed, quick-paced men and women who passed him, bound in the opposite direction. From the asphalt beyond the curbing arose a clamour of wheels and hoofs and feet which dinned unpleasantly in his ears, creating a subconscious sense of irritation.

He moved along, dragging his feet, for two blocks; then halted on a corner. A big building rose before him, a building with many open windows. There were awnings and flower boxes at the windows; and, looking in at the window nearest him, he caught sight of well-dressed men and women sitting at tables. With almost a physical jolt he realised that this was a restaurant in which he himself had dined many a time on such an evening as this; somehow, though, those times seemed centuries back of him in a confused previous existence.

A uniformed carriage starter, who stood at one of the entrances, began staring at him and he went on up the avenue with his hands rammed deep into his pockets, his head bent between his shoulders, and his heels dragging on the sidewalk. He had a feeling that everybody was staring at him. It nagged and pestered him—this did.

He continued his way for four or five blocks, or possibly six, for he took no close note of his progress. Really he had no purpose in this northward progress; a restlessness he could not analyse kept him moving. He came to another building, also with awninged windows. He knew it for a club. Once or twice, he recalled, he had been in that club as a guest of a member, but for the moment he could not think of its name. Sitting at a window facing him were two men and in a spurt of reviving memory he placed one of them as a man he had known slightly—a man named Walcroft, a corporation lawyer with offices downtown.

This man Walcroft stared straight into Looms' face, but in his eyes there was no glint of recognition; only on his face was a half-amused, half-contemptuous expression as though he wondered why a person of so dubious an appearance should be loitering along Fifth Avenue at such an hour.

Looms, squinting back at Walcroft through his glasses, felt a poke in the small of the back. He swung round; a policeman approaching from the rear had touched him with a gloved thumb. The look the policeman gave him as they faced each other was at once appraising, disapproving and suspicious.

"Move on!" he said briskly. "Keep movin'!"

"I'm doing nothing," said Looms slowly; but as he spoke he backed away a pace or two and his eyes flickered and shifted uneasily, avoiding the policeman's direct and accusing stare.

"That's the trouble," said the policeman. "You're doin' nothing now, but you're likely to do something if you stay here. Beat it! You're in the wrong street!" With an air of finality the policeman turned away.

Irresolutely the ex-convict retreated a few yards more, stepping out into the roadway. Was he indeed in the wrong street? Was that why he felt so uncomfortable? Yes, that must be it—he was in the wrong street! Fifth Avenue was not for him any more, even though once he had lived on Fifth Avenue.

As he shambled across to the opposite sidewalk he shoved his hand up under his hat, which was too large for him, and scratched his head in a new perplexity. And then to him, in a flash, came a solution of the situation, and with it came inspiration and purpose. It was precisely in that brief moment that Felix Looms, the well-known writer, died, he having been killed instantaneously by the very thing after which he had lusted.

The man who had been Felix Looms—Felix Looms, who was now dead—headed eastward through a cross street. He hurried along, moving now with decision and with more speed than he had shown in his loitering course from the station. In turn he crossed Madison Avenue and Park Avenue and Lexington Avenue, so that soon the district of big restaurants

and clubs and churches and hotels and apartment houses lay behind him and he had arrived in a less pretentious and more crowded quarter. He reached Third Avenue, with its small shops and its tenements, and the L structure running down the middle of it; he crossed it and kept on.

Midway of the next block he came to a place where a building was in course of construction. The ground floor was open to the street, for the façade, which was to be a shop front, had not gone up yet. The slouching pedestrian stopped and looked in searchingly. He saw scattered about over a temporary flooring, which was laid roughly on the basement rafters, a clutter of materials and supplies. He saw a line of gas pipes and water pipes, which protruded their ends from beneath a pile of sheathing, looking rather like the muzzles of a battery of gun barrels of varied bores.

At sight of this piping the eyes of the passer-by narrowed earnestly. Over his shoulders, this way and that, he glanced. There was no watchman in sight. The workmen—all good union men, doubtless—had knocked off for the day; but it was not yet dark and probably the night watchman had not come on duty.

He looked again, and then he stepped inside the building.

In a minute or so he was out. He had one arm pressed closely against his side as though to maintain the position of something he carried hidden beneath his coat. Head down, he walked eastward. Between Third Avenue and Second he found the place for which he sought—a small paved passageway separating two tenements, its street end being stopped with a wooden door-gate which swung unlocked. He entered the alley, slipping into the space just behind the protecting shield of the gate.

When he emerged from here the brick paving of the passage where he had tarried was covered with tough paper, torn to ragged fragments. There was a great mess of these paper scraps on the bricks. A small leather envelope, worn slick by much handling, gaped emptily where it had been dropped in an angle of the wall behind the door. The man responsible for this litter continued on his way. His left arm was still held tight against his side, holding upright a fourteen-inch length of gas pipe the man had pilfered from the unfinished building a block away.

About the gas pipe was wrapped a roll of sheets of thin paper, pasted together end to end and closely covered with minute characters done in indelible, purplish-blue shorthand ciphers. The sheets, forming as they did a continuous strip, spiralled about the gas pipe snugly, protecting and hiding the entire length of the heavy metal tube.

This was about six o’clock. About nine o’clock Marcus Fishman, a Roumanian tailor, going to his home in Avenue A from a sweatshop in Second Avenue, was stalked by a footpad at a dark spot in East Fifty-first Street, not far from the river, and was knocked senseless by a blow on the head and robbed of eleven dollars and sixty cents.

A boy saw the robbery committed and he followed after the disappearing robber, setting up a shrill outcry that speedily brought other pursuers. One of these stopped long enough to pick up a paper-covered gas pipe the fugitive had cast aside.

The chase was soon over. As the fleeing footpad turned the corner of Fiftieth Street and First Avenue he plunged headlong into the outspread arms of Policeman Otto Stein, who subdued him after a brief struggle. The tailor’s money was still clutched in his hand.

In the Headquarters Rogues’ Gallery the prisoner’s likeness was found; also his measurements were in the Bertillon Bureau, thus identifying him beyond doubt as James Williams, who had been convicted three years before as a pickpocket. Further inquiry developed the fact that Williams had been released that very day from Sing Sing.

On his trial for highway robbery, James Williams, as a confirmed and presumably an incorrigible offender, was given no mercy. He got a minimum of five years in state prison at

hard labour.

CHAPTER II

FIELD OF HONOR

THIS war, which started with the assassination of an archduke and his archduchess—a thing we are apt to forget about in the face of a tragedy a billion-fold greater—this war, which started thus and so, already has touched or is touching or yet will touch, at some angle and in some fashion, every one of us in every corner of the world. Some it has touched indirectly, by the oblique. Upon others, who are as numberless now as the sands on the shore, it has come with such brutal emphasis that it must seem to them—such of them as survive—that the whole incredible business was devised and set afoot for the one and the sole purpose of levelling them, their lives and their own small personal affairs in the bloodied red mire of this thing.

For example, let us take the case of Paul Gaston Michel Misereux, his orphaned sister Marie and his orphaned half-sister Helene. In the summer of 1914 they lived in a three-room flat in a five-story tenement house in East Thirteenth Street in New York, not far from the East River.

New York seemed a long, long way then from the town of Sarajevo wherein the egg of war was hatching. Indeed, to the three I have just named New York seemed a long way from most of the things which to their uncomplex natures stood for what was comfortable and domestic and satisfying. They were desperately homesick very often for the Paris where they had been born and reared, and from where they had emigrated two years before after the death of their father.

But that summer the homesickness was wearing off a little. The city, which at the moment of seeing its notched and fangy skyline as they came up the bay had appeared to them not as a gateway into a promised land but as a great sabre-toothed shark of a city lying in wait to grind them up between its jaws, and which for the first few months of their life here had been so cold, so inhospitable, so strange in all its ways, so terribly intent upon its own matters and so terribly disregardful of theirs, was beginning to be something more than a mere abiding place to them. To them it was beginning to be home. The lonesomeness was losing some of its smart. In another year or two more France would be the old country and America would be their country.

Paul fancied himself half an American already. He had taken out his first papers, which, as he figured it, made him part way a citizen. Before very long he would be all a citizen. Likewise, by the practice of a thousand petty economies common among the first generation of foreigners who settle here and most remarkably uncommon among their descendants, they were starting in a small frugal way to prosper. If New York had given them a stone when they came into it asking for bread, it was giving them now the bread, and the butter to go on the bread.

Paul Misereux was a pastry cook. He worked as assistant to a chief pastry cook in a basement kitchen under a big, medium-priced restaurant near Union Square. He was small and dumpy and unhandsome, with the dead-white face of a man cook. His skin, seen by daylight, had a queer glaze on it, like the surface of a well-fluxed, well-baked crockery. Once it had been a blistery red; that though was in the days of his apprenticeship to this trade. The constant heat of it had acted upon him as alcohol does upon the complexion of a man who gets drunk quickly—it made him deathly white at the last, but before that it made him red.

He was the chief breadwinner. Marie had a place as trimmer and saleswoman in a small millinery shop on lower Sixth Avenue. Helene, the half sister and youngest of the three, was the housekeeper. She was inclined to be frail and she had a persistent cough. She was not in the least pretty. For the matter of that, none of them had any provable claim

upon beauty.

So far as looks went Marie was the pick of the lot. At least she had fine eyes and a trim round figure that showed to its best advantage in the close-fitting, smooth-fronted uniform of her employment—a black frock with white collar and cuffs.

That June, there was a balance showing on the happy side of their partnership ledger. Paul had his mind set upon some day owning a business of his own—a bakeshop, perhaps even a small café. For her part Marie meant to be a fashionable milliner in her own right. When Paul was the proprietor of the biggest restaurant on Broadway she would be Madame, the mistress and the owner of the smartest hat-shop along Fifth Avenue. Helene was content to go on keeping house for the other two. The limit of her present ambitions was to be rid of her cough. To marrying and to the rearing of families none of them gave thought yet; there would be time for such things in due season, after affluence had come. Meanwhile, they would dwell together and save and save and save. Deposited to their joint account in the savings bank, the nest-egg of their hopes grew at the rate of a few dollars each week, drawing interest besides; and there was meat in the pot when they felt the need of meat to stay them.

Over yonder in Sarajevo a stumpy Serbian man, with twisted ideas regarding his patriotic duties, loaded up an automatic pistol and waited for a certain carriage of state to pass a given point. The carriage did pass, and presently the man and the woman who rode in it were both of them dead—the first to fall in the war which as to date claimed so rich a toll of the manhood of this planet, and which, being the unslakable glutton that it is, continues to claim more and more with every day that passes. The echoes of those pistol shots ran round the world and round again.

A monarch on a throne in Germany exchanged telegrams with his beloved cousin in Russia, and with another revered and venerated cousin in England, and with a dear but distant kinsman of his in Belgium, and with a respected friend, not related to him by ties of blood or marriage, who chanced for the moment to be the president of a republic in France. A family quarrel started up. The quarrel having progressed to a point where the correspondents lost their affection for one another, they severally called upon the people who suffered them to be what they were to go out and settle the grudge according to a fashion which originated when Cain clouted Abel in the first trade-war of which there is record. Because every other war from that day to this has been a trade-war, too, the plan of settlement has remained the same that was employed by Cain when he made carrion of his brother. The tools of this fashionable industry have been altered and greatly improved, and for that civilisation is to be thanked; but the results do not in the least differ from the original forms.

The people obeyed their rulers' calls. Looking back on it now it seems to us, who are onlookers, that there was no good and sufficient reason why they should have done this, but we know that obedience in such contingencies is a habit which has come down to them—and to us—from our remotest common ancestors, and it runs in our blood with the corpuscles of our blood. It is like a contagious miasma, which, being breathed into the body, afflicts all its victims with the same symptoms. So they put on the liveries designed for them by their lords against the coming of just such an occasion—shoddy-wools, or khakis, or red-and-blue fustians, as the case might be—and they went out, these men and these boys who were not yet men, to adjudicate the misunderstanding which had arisen as between the occupants of sundry palaces in sundry capital cities.

The tide of war—such being the pretty phrase coined by those who would further popularise the institution—lapped one shore after another. It went from hemisphere to continent, from continent to archipelago, from archipelago to scattered islands in seas suddenly grown barren of commerce. It flooded jungles in South Africa; it inundated the back corners of Australia; it picked up and carried away on its backwash men of every colour and of every creed and of every

breed. It crossed the Atlantic Ocean to New York, and having crossed, it reached into a basement near Union Square for Paul Misereux. And the way of that was this:

France called out her reserves. Paul Misereux, although half an American, as has been stated, was likewise a French reservist. So at length the call came to him. Although he was French he was not excitable. He accepted the summons very calmly and as a matter of course. He had been expecting that it would come, sooner or later. That same day he visited the office of the French consul where certain formalities were speedily concluded. Then he went home and to his sister and his half-sister he very quietly broke the news of what had happened and what he had done; and very quietly they took it. For they were not outwardly emotional either.

For six days life in the three-room flat went on very much as it had gone on before, except that the sisters went daily now to early mass, and on the first morning following the brother did not shave himself when he got up. French soldiers mainly wear beards, and he meant his beard should be well sprouted when he reported for service. At the end of those six days, on the seventh day, a new assistant pastry cook began serving in the restaurant cellar and a steamer drew out of her New York dock with flags flying, being bound—God and the submarines willing—for foreign parts. On the deck set apart for the second-class passengers, close up against the rail that was next the shore, Paul Misereux stood, a most dumpy and unheroic figure of a man, with patches of woolly beard showing on his pale chops, waving his hand, and with many others singing the Marseillaise Hymn.

When the steamer was gone from sight down the river toward open water the sisters left the pierhead where they had been standing and went away, Marie to her job in the millinery place on Sixth Avenue and Helene to hers in the small flat.

Except that Paul was gone, life for the remaining two continued for a while after this to be materially unaltered. Beyond a single long letter written on the voyage across and posted upon his arrival at Bordeaux, they had no word of him. For this, though, he was not to blame. A thing so systematic it had no aspect of being of human devisement and subject to human control had caught him. This system took him in hand in the same hour that his feet touched dry land. It gave him a number, it clothed him in a uniform, put a gun in his hands, strapped upon his back and about his waist and on his flanks all the other tools needful for the prosecution of the highly specialised modern trade of manslaughter, and set him aboard a train and started him north. Thereafter the north swallowed him up and concerning him no news whatsoever came back. He was an atom in a world event, and the atoms do not count even though they contribute to the progress of the event itself.

While these sisters of his waited, hoping each day the postman would bring them a letter with a French stamp and a French postmark on it, but sorely dreading what the portent of that letter might be, a stroke of bad fortune befell them. The man who owned the place where Marie worked professed to deal in French wares exclusively; but he had a German name and he spoke with a German accent. Perhaps he felt deeply the things some people said to him and about him and about his Fatherland. Perhaps he found it hard to be neutral in his words and all his acts when so many about him were so passionately unneutral in their words and their acts. Perhaps in those papers which avowedly were pro-German, and in those which avowedly were anti-German, he read editorials that changed his views on certain subjects. You see, the tide of war had searched him out too.

Or perhaps after all he merely realised the need, in a time when business conditions were so unsettled, of economising. At any rate one Saturday, without prior warning, he dismissed from his employ three of his women workers—an outspoken Irish girl, a silent Russian Jewess, whose brothers wore the uniform of a government which oppressed them, and a French girl, this last being Marie Misereux.

Monday morning early Marie was abroad, trying to find for

herself a new job. She was deft enough with her fingers, but there were handicaps which denied her opportunity of proving to any interested person just how deft those fingers of hers were. For one thing, millinery shops, big and little, were retrenching in their expenses or trying to. For another, she was ignorant of the town and of the ways of the millinery trade—her first job had been her only one. Finally, she had only a faulty knowledge of English, and that in some lines is yet a bar against the applicant for work even in the polyglot, more-than-half-foreign city of New York.

The week which began with that Monday morning went by; other Mondays and other weeks went by, and Marie, walking the soles off her shoes upon the pavements uptown and downtown, earned nothing at all. The account in the savings bank, which always before Paul went away had grown steadily and which for the first month or so after he went had grown in a lesser degree, was dwindling and dwindling. Now when Helene coughed she pressed her hand against her side. There was no news of their brother. Except for a few distant cousins three thousand miles away, they had no kinspeople. And in this country they had no friends.

Along the crest of a low hill, like a seam, ran a succession of shattered tree trunks, hemming earthline to skyline with ragged and irregular stitches. Once upon a time, not so very long before, a fine little grove of half-grown poplars had crowned that small eminence. But the cannon and the spouting volleys from the rapid-fire guns had mowed down every tree, leaving only the mutilated and homely boles.

Upon one slope of the hill—the slope that was nearer the city—a triangular-shaped patch of woodland projected its point like a promontory well up toward the hilltop. The shells had wrought most grievously here, too, but, being protected somewhat by the dip in the land, the forest, as they call such a stretch of park timber in Europe, had not suffered in the same proportionate extent that the comb of saplings higher up suffered. The twistified masses of shot-down boughs made good cover for the French sharpshooters.

Just under the far shoulder of the rise, zig-zagging this way and that after the fashion of a worm that has stiff joints, was a German trench—the foremost German trench of all the myriad trenches and cross-trenches that formed the sector of the investments at this particular point. Behind the Germans as they squatted in this trench was the village of Brimont. It had been a village once. Now it was a flattened huddle of broken masonry and shattered woodwork, from which arose constantly a sour stench of rotting things. Back of the site of the village, where a little valley made out between more hills, was a sunken road winding off to the north. Upon either side of the road were fields gouged by misaimed shells until the mangled earth looked as though a thousand swine had rooted there for mast.

That was what the Germans saw when they looked over their shoulders. What they saw when they looked straight ahead was, first, the patch of woodland sheltering their foes and beyond that, three miles away, the old French city of Rheims, with the damaged towers of the great cathedral rising above lesser buildings, and on beyond, melting away into blue reaches of space, the fields of Champagne. That is to say, they could see so much when the weather was clear, which generally it wasn’t. Nine days in ten, this time of the year, it rained—the cold, constant, searching rain of mid-October. It was raining on this particular day, and up on this saucer-rim of land, which ringed the plain in, the wind blew steadily with a raw bite to it.

Firing back and forth between defenders and besiegers went on intermittently. At this spot there was no hard fighting; there had been none for weeks. Farther way, right and left, along the battle line which stretched from Switzerland to the sea, the big guns roared like bulls. But here the men lay in their shelters and nibbled at their foes like mice.

On second thought I beg to withdraw the latter simile. These men were not so much like mice as they were like moles. For they grubbed in the earth, as moles do, eating and

sleeping, living and dying down in their mud burrows. Only, moles keep their fur tidied and fine, while these men were coated and clogged with the tough clayey substance in which they wallowed. It was as much as they could do to keep their rifles in cleansed working order.

Over in the German trench a slim Saxon youth was squatted, ankle-deep in cold yellow water. At intervals he climbed into a small scarp in the wall of the trench, a kind of niche just large enough to hold his body, and kneeling there, with his head tucked down and his shoulders drawn in, he swapped shots with a Frenchman in the woods slightly beneath and directly in front of him. Neither of them ever saw the other. Each in his firing was guided by the smack of his enemy's gun and the tiny puff of white smoke which marked its discharge; each knowing in a general way only the approximate location of the man he coveted to kill, for after an exchange of shots both would shift, the German to another scarp, the Frenchman to another tangle of felled boughs. There was nothing particularly personal, nothing especially hateful or passionate in the present ambition of either. It was merely the job in hand.

As between these two—the Frenchman and the German—there was, excusing the differences of language and religion, no great amount of distinction to be drawn. Temperamentally they were of much the same cast. Each in his separate small sphere of endeavour had been a reasonably law-abiding, reasonably industrious, fairly useful individual, until somebody else, sitting in a high place, had willed it for him that he should put by whatsoever task he might be concerned with and engage in this business of gunning for his fellow-man.

Their uniforms, to be sure, differed in cut and colour, or had so differed until the mud of Champagne had made them of a pattern together. The German soldier's helmet had a sharp spike set in it; the Frenchman's cap had a flattened top. Also the German carried his name and number in a small leather pouch which hung on a thong about his neck and lay snugly against the chilled skin of his breast under his shirt, whereas the Frenchman wore his name and his number on a small brass token that was made fast to a slender wire bracelet riveted about his left wrist.

Concerning these methods of marking men there had been argument from time to time, the German authorities contending that their system is the better of the two. For proof of the claim they point out that in the case of a Frenchman an arm may be torn away, bodily carrying the bracelet and the tag with it, whereas as regards a German, he may be shot in two and yet retain his identification label since it is not so very often that the head is entirely dissevered from the trunk. Here again, as in many other details, they contend German efficiency maintains its superiority over all. On both sides the matter is discussed dispassionately, just as the toxic properties of various makes of poisonous gases are discussed, or the rending powers of shrapnel upon human flesh.

About four o'clock in the afternoon the German climbed up into his favourite scarp once more. Hoping to draw his opponent's fire, he jerked his head up into sight for half a second, then jerked it down again. The trick worked; the Frenchman fired, but fired high. The German shoved his gun barrel out between two clods, shut both eyes—for he was by no means a clever marksman—and pumped a shot back in reply. The bullet from his rifle, which was a long, sharp-nosed, steel-jacketed bullet, devised in accordance with the most scientific experiments, found its billet. It struck the Frenchman as he lay belly downward on the earth with his gunstock against his cheek. It removed two fingers of the Frenchman's right hand, three fingers of his left hand, tore away his lower jaw, beard and all, and passed out at the back of his neck, taking splintered fragments of his spinal processes with it. He turned over on his back, flapping with his arms and legs, threshing about in the wet leaves and in the mud, making grotesque bubbling sounds down in his throat.

Pretty soon after that twilight came on and the rifle firing slackened. The Saxon youth, never knowing he had killed his

enemy, called it a day and knocked off. He hunkered down in the slime to eat a tallowy stew of bull meat and barley from a metal pannikin. It was nourishing enough, this mess was, but it had the aspect of swill. Having eaten, he immediately thereafter crawled, in his wet clothes and soaked boots, into a sort of dugout hollowed in the wall of his trench, and slept there with four of his comrades on a bed of mouldy, damp rye straw. While they slept the vermin travelled from one to another of them, making discriminative choice of which body to bite.

Down in the little forest below, the Frenchman presently quit flapping and quietly bled to death. During the night a burial party of his own people came and found him and shovelled him underground where he lay. But first the sergeant in command of the squad removed the bangle from his wrist. In due course of time, therefore, word was carried back and back by succeeding stages to headquarters, and from there on to Paris, and from Paris on to New York, so that within a month's time or a little less it became the painful duty of a consular clerk in New York to transmit by mail to the deceased's next of kin, a sister, the intelligence, as conveyed in the official notification, that her brother, Paul Gaston Michel Misereux, was heroically dead on the Field of Honour.

For the repose of their brother's spirit they had a mass said at the little French Catholic Church where they worshipped, and in his memory candles burned upon the altar. Out of a length of cheap sleazy stuff they made a mourning frock for Helene. Wearing it, her face seemed whiter than ever and the two red spots in her cheeks seemed redder. Marie had the black frock, with the white collars and cuffs, which had been her uniform as a saleswoman in the place on lower Sixth Avenue; she wore that as she hunted for work. Regardless of their sorrow, the hunt must go on. It went on, and was a vain quest. From much weeping her eyes were swollen and puffy and her face was drawn out of all comeliness. Even though through merciful forbearance each forbore to tell her so, none of those to whom she applied for work cared to hire so homely appearing a serving woman. In another week, or at most two, they would be scraping the bottom of their savings account.

Before this they had lived on scanty rations, wasting never a crumb. Now they trimmed the food allowance still finer. It may have been the lack of sufficient nourishment that caused Helene to drop down in a faint on the floor of the tiny kitchen one evening in the middle of the second week following the receipt of the news from the consul's office. As Marie bent to raise her head in her arms, a little stream of blood began to run from one corner of Helene's mouth. For some time after she recovered consciousness and had opened her eyes the little trickle of blood continued, and Marie, sitting beside her, wiped it away as fast as it oozed out between her lips. The younger girl appeared to suffer no pain, but was very weak. Marie got her undressed and into her bed in the small middle room. Then she ran downstairs to the basement to find out from the caretaker where the nearest doctor was to be found.

It seemed there was one only two doors away. He came presently, a testy man of sixty who was lame. One of his legs was inches shorter than its mate. He lived in a tenement himself and his practice was among tenement dwellers, and he was underpaid and overworked and had trouble enough sometimes to make both ends meet. He grew shorter of breath and of disposition at every step as he wallowed up the stairs, Marie going ahead to show him the way to the rear flat at the top of the house. Wheezing until the sound of his breathing filled the room, he sat down alongside Helene, and while he held one of her pipe-stem wrists in his hand he asked Marie certain questions. Then he told Marie to go into the front room and wait for him there.

In ten minutes or less he limped in to her where she sat with her hands clenched between her knees and her eyes big and rounded with apprehension. He thought he closed the intervening door behind him, but the latch failed to catch in the slot and it swung ajar for a space of two or three inches. Neither of them took note of this.

"She's quiet now," he said: "the hemorrhage is checked. I took a sample of her blood. I'll make a blood test to-morrow morning. How long has this been going on—this cough?"

A good long time, Marie told him—several months. She went on, in her broken English, to explain: "We thought it was but a bad cold, that soon she would be well——"

He broke in on her impatiently:

"That's what you said before. That's no excuse." He looked about him. "How many are there of you living here—just you two?"

"We are quite alone," she told him. "We had also a brother, but—but he now is dead."

It did not occur to her to tell him how the brother had died, or when.

"What's your business?" he demanded. Then as she seemed not to get his intent, he added:

"Can't you understand plain English? What do you do for a living?"

"Your pardon, doctor; I am a milliner."

"And this other girl—your sister—she's been staying at home and doing the housekeeping, you said?"

She nodded. For a moment there was silence, she still seated, he before her balancing himself on the longer leg of the two and on his heavy cane. "I'll make a blood test in the morning," he said at length, repeating what he had said a moment before.

"Doctor," said Marie, "tell me, please, the truth. My sister—is she then so ill?"

"Ill?" he burst out at her irritably. "Ill? I should say she is ill. She's got tuberculosis, if you know what that means—consumption."

She sucked her breath in sharply. Her next question came slowly: "What is there then to do?"

"Well, she couldn't last long here—that's dead certain. You've got to get her away from here. You've got to get her up into the North Woods, in the mountains—Saranac or some place like that—in a sanitarium or an invalids' camp where she can have the right kind of treatment. Then she'll have a chance."

By a chance he meant that with proper care the sick girl might live for three months or for four, or at the outside for six. The case was as good as hopeless now; he knew that. Still his duty was to see that his patients' lives were prolonged—if possible.

"These mountains, I do not know them. We are strangers in this country."

"I'll find out about a place where you can get her in," he volunteered. "I'll bring you the information in the morning—names and addresses and everything. Somebody'll have to go up there with her—you, I guess—and get her settled. She's in no shape to be travelling alone. Then you can leave her there and arrange to send up so much a week to pay for her keep and the treatment and all. Oh, yes—and until we get her away from here you'll have to lay off from your work and stay with her, or else hire somebody to stay with her. She mustn't be left alone for long at a time—she's too sick for that. Something might happen. Understand?"

"And all this—it will cost much money perhaps?"

The cripple misread the note in her voice as she asked him this. This flat now, it was infinitely cleaner than the abodes of nine-tenths of those among whom he was called to minister. To his man's eyes the furnishings, considering the neighbourhood, appeared almost luxurious. That bed yonder against the wall was very much whiter and looked very much softer than the one upon which he slept. And the woman herself was well clad. He had no patience with these scrimping, stingy foreigners—thank God he was himself native-born—these cheap, penurious aliens who would haggle over pennies when a life was the stake. And there was no patience in his uplifted, rumbling voice as he answered her:

"Say, you don't want your sister to be a pauper patient, do you? If you do, just say so and I'll notify the department and they'll put her in a charity institution. She'd last just about a week there. Is that your idea?—if it is, say so!"

"No, no, no," she said, "not charity—not for my sister."

"I thought as much," he said, a little mollified. "All right then, I'll write a letter to the sanitarium people; they ought to make you a special rate. Oh, it'll cost you twenty-five dollars a week maybe—say, at the outside, thirty dollars a week. And that'll be cheap enough, figuring in the food she'll have to have and the care and the nursing and all. Then, of course, there'll be your railroad tickets on top of that. You'd better have some ready money on hand so we can get her shipped out of here before it's too—Well, before many days anyhow."

She nodded.

"I shall have the money," she promised.

"All right," he said; "then you'd better hand me two dollars now. That's the price of my call. I don't figure on charging you for making the blood test. And the information about the sanitarium and the letter I'm going to write—I'll throw all that in too."

She paid him his fee from a small handbag. At the hall door he paused on his stumping way out.

"I think she'll be all right for to-night—I gave her something," he said with a jerk of his thumb toward the middle room. "If you just let her stay quiet that'll be the best thing for her. But you'd better run in my place the first thing in the morning and tell me how she passed the night. Good night."

"Good night, doctor—and we thank you!"

He went clumping down the steps, cursing the darkness of the stairwell and the steep pitch of the stairs. Before the sound of his fumbling feet had quite died away Marie, left alone, had made up her mind as to a certain course. In so short a time as that had the definite resolution come to her. And as she still sat there, in an attitude of listening, Helene, in the middle room, dragged herself up from her knees where she had been crouched at the slitted door between. She had heard all or nearly all the gruff lame doctor said. Indeed, she had sensed the truth for herself before she heard him speak it. What he told her sister was no news to the eavesdropper; merely it was confirmation of a thing she already knew. Once up on her bare feet, she got across the floor and into her bed, and put her head on the pillow and closed her eyes, counterfeiting sleep. In her mind, too, a plan had formed.

It was only a minute or two after this that Marie came silently to the door and peered in, looking and listening. She heard the regular sound of the sick girl's breathing. By the light of the gas that was turned down low she saw, or thought she saw, that Helene was asleep. She closed the door very softly. She freshened her frock with a crisp collarband and with crisp wristbands. She clasped about her neck a small gold chain and she put on her head her small, neat black hat. And then this girl, who meant to defile her body, knelt alongside her bed and prayed the Blessed Virgin to keep her soul clean.

With her handbag on her arm she passed out into the hall. Across the hall a Jewish family lived—by name, the Levinski family—consisting of a father who was a push-cart peddler, a gross and slattern mother who was continually occupied with the duties of being a mother, and any number of small Levinskis. In answer to her knock at their door, Mrs. Levinski came, a shapeless, vast shape in her night dress, bringing with her across the threshold strong smells of stale garlic, soiled flannel and cold fried carp. Marie had a nodding acquaintance with this neighbour of hers and no more.

"My sister, she is sick," she told Mrs. Levinski. "And I must go out. Please, will you listen? If she should awake and call out for me, you will please to tell her I am gone but soon will be back again. If you please?"

Mrs. Levinski said she would, and to show she meant it opened wide her door before she returned to her household

duties.

For November the weather was warm, but it was damp and would be damper. A fine drizzle was falling as Marie Misereux came to the lower hallway entrance and looked out into the night; and East Thirteenth Street, which is never entirely empty, was almost empty. She hesitated a moment, with her left hand clenched tight against her breast, and then stepped out, heading westward. At the first avenue crossing she came upon a man, a fairly well-dressed man, who stood below the stoop of a private house that had been converted into some sort of club, as if undecided in his own mind whether to go in or to stay out. She walked straight up to him.

"Will you go with me, m'sieur?" she said.

He peered at her from under his hatbrim. Almost over them was a street lamp. By its light he saw that her face was dead white; that neither her lips nor her cheeks were daubed with cosmetics, and that her lips were not twisted into the pitiable, painted smile of the streetwalker. Against the smooth fulness of her dress her knotted left hand made a hard, white clump. Her breasts, he saw, heaved up and down as though she had been running and her breath came out between her teeth with a whistling sound. Altogether she seemed most oddly dressed and most oddly mannered for the part she played.

"You want me to go with you?" he asked, half incredulously, half suspiciously, still staring hard.

"If—if you will be so good."

"Do you need the money that bad?"

"Assuredly, m'sieur," she said with a simple, desperate directness. "Why else would I ask you?"

"Say," he said almost roughly, "you better go on home. I don't believe you belong on the streets. Here!"

He drew something that was small and crumply from a waistcoat pocket, and drawing a step nearer to her he shoved it between two of the fingers of her right hand.

"Now, then," he said, "you take that and hustle on back home."

He laughed, then, shamefacedly and in a forced sort of way, as though embarrassed by his own generosity, and then he turned and went quickly up the steps and into the club house.

She looked at what he had given her. It was a folded dollar bill. As though it had been nasty to the touch, she dropped it and rubbed her hand upon her frock, as if to cleanse it of a stain. Then, in the same instant nearly, she stooped down and picked up the bill from the dirty pavement and kissed it and opened her black handbag. Except for a few cents in change, the bag was empty. Except for those few cents and a sum of less than ten dollars yet remaining in the savings bank, the two dollars she had given the lame doctor was all the money she had in the world. She tucked the bill up in still smaller compass and put it in the bag. She had made the start for the fund she meant to have. It was not charity. In the sweat of her agonized soul she had earned it.

She crossed over the first bisecting avenue to the westward, and the second; she passed a few pedestrians, among them being a policeman trying door latches, a drunken man whose body swayed and whose legs wove queer patterns as he walked, and half a dozen pale, bearded men who spoke Yiddish and gestured volubly with their hands as they went by in a group. At Third Avenue she turned north, finding the pavements more thickly populated, and just after she came to where Fourteenth Street crosses she saw a heavily built, well-dressed man in a light overcoat, coming toward her at a deliberative, dawdling gait. She put herself directly in his path. He checked his pace to avoid a collision and looked at her speculatively, with one hand fingering his moustache.

"Will you go with me?" she said, repeating the invitation she had used before.

"Where to?" he said, showing interest.

"Where you please," she said in her halting speech.

"You're on," he said. He fell in alongside her, facing her

about and slipping a hand well inside the crook of her right arm.

"You—you will go with me?" she asked. Suddenly her body was in a tremble.

"No, sister," he stated grimly, "I ain't goin' with you but you're sure goin' with me." And as he said it he tightened his grip upon her forearm.

He had need to say no more. She knew what had happened. She had not spent two years and better in a New York tenement without learning that there were men of the police—detectives they called them in English—who wore no uniforms but went about their work apparelled as ordinary citizens. She was arrested, that was plain enough, and she understood full well for what she had been arrested. She made no outcry, offered no defence, broke forth into no plea for release. Indeed her thought for the moment was all for her half-sister and not for herself. So she said nothing as he steered her swiftly along.

At a street light where a patrol telephone box of iron was bolted to the iron post the plain-clothes man slowed up. Then he changed his mind.

"Guess I won't call the wagon," he said. "I happen to know it's out. It ain't far. You and me'll walk and take the air." He turned with her westward through the cross street. Then, struck by her silence, he asked a question:

"A Frenchy, ain't you?"

"Yes," she told him. "I am French. Where—where are you taking me, m'sieur? Is it to the prison—the station house?"

"Quit your kiddin'," he said mockingly. "I s'pose you don't know where we're headin'? Night court for yours—Jefferson Market. Right over here across town."

"They will not keep me there long? They will permit me to go if I pay a fine, eh? A small fine, eh? That is all they will do to me, is it not so?"

He grunted derisively. "Playin' ignorant, huh? I s'pose you're goin' to tell me now you ain't never been up in the night court before?"

"No, no, m'sieur, never—I swear it to you. Never have I been—been like this before."

"That's what they all say. Well, if you can prove it—if you ain't got any record of previous complaints standin' agin' you, and your finger prints don't give you away—you'll get off pretty light, maybe, but not with a fine. I guess the magistrate'll give you a bit over on the Island—maybe thirty days, maybe sixty. Depends on how he's feelin' to-night."

"The Island?"

"Sure, Blackwell's Island. A month over there won't do you no harm."

"I cannot—you must not take me," she broke out passionately now. "For thirty days? Oh, no, no, m'sieur!"

"Oh, yes, yes, yes!" He was mimicking her tone. "I guess you can stand doin' your thirty days if the rest of these cruisers can. If you should turn out to be an old offender it'd likely be six months——"

He did not finish the sentence. With a quick, hard jerk she broke away from him and turned and ran back the way she had come. She dropped her handbag and her foot spurned it into the gutter. She ran straight, her head down, like a hunted thing sorely pressed. Her snug skirt hampered her though. With long strides the detective overtook her. She fought him off silently, desperately, with both hands, with all her strength. He had to be rough with her—but no rougher than the emergency warranted. He pressed her flat up against a building and, holding her fast there with the pressure of his left arm across her throat, he got his nippers out of his pocket. Another second or two more of confused movement and he had her helpless. The little steel curb was twined tight about her right wrist below the rumpled white cuff. By a twist of the handles which he held gripped in his palm he could break the skin. Two twists would dislocate the wrist bone. A strong man doesn't fight long after the links of the nippers start biting

into his flesh.

"Now, then," he grunted triumphantly, jerking her out alongside him, "I guess you'll trot along without balkin'. I was goin' to treat you nice but you wouldn't behave, would you? Come on now and be good."

He glanced backward over his shoulder. Three or four men and boys, witnesses to the flight and to the recapture, were tagging along behind them.

"Beat it, you," he ordered. Then as they hesitated: "Beat it now, or I'll be runnin' somebody else in." They fell back, following at a safer distance.

He had led his prisoner along for almost a block before he was moved to address her again:

"And you thought you could make your getaway from me? Not a chance! Say, what do you want to act that way for, makin' it harder for both of us? Say, on the level now, ain't you never been pinched before?"

She thought he meant the pressure of the steel links on her wrist.

"It is not that," she said, bending the curbed hand upward. "That I do not think of. It is of my sister, my sister Helene, that I think." Her voice for the first time broke and shivered.

"What about your sister?" There was something of curiosity but more of incredulity in his question.

"She is ill, m'sieur, very ill, and she is alone. There is no one but me now. My brother—he is dead. It is for her that I have done—this—this thing to-night. If I do not return to her—if you do not let me go back—she will die, m'sieur. I tell you she will die."

If she was acting it was good acting. Half convinced against his will of her sincerity, and half doubtfully, he came to a standstill.

"Where do you live—is it far from here?"

"It is in this street, m'sieur. It is not far." He could feel her arm quivering in the grip of his nippers.

"Maybe I'm makin' a sucker of myself," he said dubiously, defining the diagnosis as much to himself as to her. "But if it ain't far I might walk you back there and give this here sister of yours the once-over. And then if you ain't lyin' we'll see——"

"Must I go so?" She lifted her hand up, indicating her meaning.

"You bet your life you're goin' that way or not at all. I'm takin' no more chances with you."

"But it would kill her—she would die to see me so. She must not know I have done this thing, m'sieur. She must not see this——" The little chain rattled.

"Come on," he ordered in a tone of finality. "I thought that sick sister gag was old stuff, but I was goin' to give you a show to make good——"

"But I swear——"

"Save your breath! Save your breath! Tell your spiel to the judge. Maybe he'll listen. I'm through."

They were almost at the doors of the squat and ugly building which the Tenderloin calls Jeff Market when he noticed that her left hand was clutched against her breast. He remembered then she had held that hand so when she first spoke to him; except during her flight and the little struggle after he ran her down, she must have been holding it so all this time.

"What's that you've got in your hand?" he demanded suspiciously, and with a practiced flip of the nipper handles swung her round so that she faced him.

"It is my own, m'sieur. It is——"

"Nix, nix with that. I gotta see. Open up them fingers."

She opened her hand slowly, reluctantly. The two of them were in the shadow of the elevated structure then, close up alongside a pillar, and he had to peer close to see what the object might be. Having seen he did not offer to touch it, but he considered his prisoner closely, taking her in from her head

to her feet, before he led her on across the roadway and the pavement and in at one of the doors of that odoursome clearing house of vice and misery, mercy and justice, where the night court sits seven nights a week.

First, though, he untwisted the disciplinary little steel chain from about her wrist. The doorway by which they entered gave upon the Tenth Street face of the building and admitted them into a maze of smelly dim corridors and cross-halls in the old jail wing directly beneath the hideous and aborted tower, which in a neighbourhood of stark architectural offences makes of Jefferson Market courthouse a shrieking crime against good looks and good taste.

The inspector’s man escorted the French girl the length of a short passage. At a desk which stood just inside the courtroom door he detained her while a uniformed attendant entered her name and her age, which she gave as twenty-one, and her house number, in a big book which before now has been Doomsday Book for many a poor smutted butterfly of the sidewalks. The detective, standing by, took special note of the name and the address and, for his own purposes, wrote them both down on a scrap of card. This formality being finished, the pair crossed the half-filled courtroom, he guiding by a hand on her elbow, she obeying with a numbed and passive docility, to where there is a barred-in space like an oversized training den for wild animals. This cage or coop, whichever you might choose to call it, has a whited cement wall for its back, and rows of close-set rounded iron bars for its front and sides, and wooden benches for its plenishings. The bars run straight up, like slender black shadows caught and frozen into solidity, to the soiled ceiling above; they are braced across with iron horizontals, which makes the pen strong enough to hold a rhino. Its twin stands alongside it, filling the remaining space at the far side of the big room. In the old days one pen was meant for male delinquents and one for female. But now the night court for men holds its sessions in a different part of town and only women delinquents are brought to this place. It may or may not be a reflection upon our happy civilisation—I leave that point for the sociologists to settle—but it is a fact that ninety per cent of them are brought here charged with the same thing.

The first coop held perhaps a dozen women and girls. One of them was quietly weeping. The others, looking, as they sat on one of the benches in their more or less draggled finery, like a row of dishevelled cage birds of gay plumage, maintained attitudes which ranged from the highly indifferent to the excessively defiant. The detective unlatched the door, which was of iron wattles too, and put his prisoner inside.

“You’ll have to stay here awhile,” he bade her. His tone was altered from that which he had employed toward her at any time before. “Just set down there and be comfortable.”

But she did not sit. She drew herself close up into a space where wall and wall, meeting at right angles, made a corner. Her cellmates eyed her. Being inclined to believe from her garb that she probably was a shopgirl caught pilfering, none of them offered to hail her; all of them continued, though, to watch her curiously. As he closed and bolted the door and moved away the plain-clothes man, glancing back, caught a fair look at her face behind the iron uprights. Her big, staring eyes reminded him of something, some creature, he had seen somewhere. Later he remembered. He had seen that same look out of the staring eyes of animals, lying with legs bound on the floor of a slaughterhouse.

Following this, the ordinary procedure for him would have been to call up the East Twenty-second Street station house by telephone and report that, having made an arrest, he had seen fit to bring his prisoner direct to court; then visit the complaint clerk’s office in a little cubby-hole of a room, and there swear to a short affidavit setting forth the accusation in due form; finally, file the affidavit with the magistrate’s clerk and stand by to await the calling of that particular case. Strangely enough, he did none of these things.

Instead, he made his way direct to the magistrate’s desk inside the railing which cut the room across from side to side.

The pent, close smell of the place was fit to sicken men unused to it. It commingled those odours which seem always to go with a police court—of unwashed human bodies, of iodoform, of stale fumes of alcohol, of cheap rank perfumery. Petty crime exhales an atmosphere which is peculiarly its own. This man was used to this smell. Smelling it was to him a part of the day’s work—the night’s work rather.

The magistrate upon the bench was a young magistrate, newly appointed by the mayor to this post. Because he belonged to an old family and because his sister had married a rich man the papers loved to refer to him as the society judge. As the detective came up he was finishing a hearing which had lasted less than three minutes.

“Any previous record as shown by the finger prints and the card indexes?” he was asking of the officer complainant.

“Three, Your Honour,” answered the man glibly. “Suspended sentence oncet, thirty days oncet, thirty days oncet again. Probation officer’s report shows that this here young woman——”

“Never mind that,” said the magistrate; “six months.”

The officer and the woman who had been sentenced to six months fell back, and the detective shoved forward, putting his arms on the top of the edge of the desk to bring his head closer to the magistrate.

“Your Honour,” he began, speaking in a sort of confidential undertone, “could I have a word with you?”

“Go ahead, Schwartzmann,” said the magistrate, bending forward to hear.

“Well, Judge, a minute ago I brought a girl in here; picked her up at Fourteenth Street and Thoid Avenue for solicitin’. So far as that goes it’s a dead-open-and-shut case. She come up to me on the street and braced me. She wasn’t dressed like most of these Thoid-Avenue cruisers dress and she’s sort of acted as if she’d never been pinched before—tried to give me an argument on the way over. Well, that didn’t get her anywheres with me. You can’t never tell when one of them dames will turn out in a new make-up, but somethin’ that happened when we was right here outside the door—somethin’ I seen about her—sort of——” He broke off the sentence in the middle and started again. “Well, anyhow, Your Honour, I may be makin’ a sucker of myself, but I didn’t swear out no affidavit and I ain’t called up the station house even. I stuck her over there in the bull-pen and then I come straight to you.”

The magistrate’s eyes narrowed. Thus early in his experience as a police judge he had learned—and with abundant cause—to distrust the motives of plain-clothes men grown suddenly philanthropic. Besides, in the first place, this night court was created to circumvent the unholy partnership of the bail-bond shark and the police pilot fish.

“Now look here, Schwartzmann,” he said sharply, “you know the law—you know the routine that has to be followed.”

“Yes, sir, I do,” agreed Schwartzmann; “and if I’ve made a break I’m willin’ to stand the gaff. Maybe I’m makin’ a sucker of myself, too, just like I said. But, Judge, there ain’t no great harm done yet. She’s there in that pen and you know she’s there and I know she’s there.”

“Well, what’s the favour you want to ask of me?” demanded His Honour.

“It’s like this: I want to slip over to the address she gave me and see if she’s been handin’ me the right steer about certain things. It ain’t so far.” He glanced down at the scribbled card he held in his hand. “I can get over there and get back in half an hour at the outside. And then if she’s been tryin’ to con me I’ll go through with it—I’ll press the charge all right.” His jaw locked grimly on the thought that his professional sagacity was on test.

“Well, what is her story?” asked the magistrate.

“Judge, to tell you the truth it ain’t her story so much as it’s somethin’ I seen. And if I’m makin’ a sucker of myself I’d rather not say too much about that yet.”

“Oh, go ahead,” assented the magistrate, whose name was Voris. “There’s no danger of the case being called while you’re gone, because, as I understand you, there isn’t any case to call. Go ahead, but remember this while you’re gone—I don’t like all this mystery. I’m going to want to know all the facts before I’m done.”

“Thank you, sir,” said Schwartzmann, getting himself outside the railed inclosure. “I’ll be back in less’n no time, Your Honour.”

He wasn’t, though. Nearly an hour passed before an attendant brought Magistrate Voris word that Officer Schwartzmann craved the privilege of seeing His Honour alone for a minute or two in His Honour’s private chamber. The magistrate left the bench, suspending the business of the night temporarily, and went; on the way he was mentally fortifying himself to be severe enough if he caught a plain-clothes man trying to trifle with him.

“Well, Schwartzmann?” he said shortly as he entered the room.

“Judge,” said the detective, “the woman wasn’t lyin’. She told me her sister was sick alone in their flat without nobody to look after her and that her brother was dead. I don’t know about the brother—at least I ain’t sure about him—but the sister was sick. Only she ain’t sick no more—she’s dead.”

“Dead? What did she die of?”

“She didn’t die of nothin’—she killed herself with gas. She turned the gas on in the room where she was sick in bed. The body was still warm when I got there. I gave her first aid, but she was gone all right. She wasn’t nothin’ more than a shell anyhow—had some wastin’ disease from the looks of her; and I judge it didn’t take but a few whiffs to finish her off. I called in the officer on post, name of Riordan, and I notified the coroner’s office myself over the telephone, and they’re goin’ to send a man up there inside of an hour or so to take charge of the case.

“And so, after that, feelin’ a sort of personal interest in the whole thing, as you might say, I broke the rules some more. When I found this here girl dead she had two pieces of paper in her hand; she’d died holdin’ to ’em. One of ’em was a letter that she’d wrote herself, I guess, and the other must ’a’ been a letter from somebody else—kind of an official-lookin’ letter. Both of ’em was in French. I don’t know exactly why I done it, unless it was I wanted to prove somethin’ to myself, but I brought off them two letters with me and here they are, sir. I’m hopin’ to get your court interpreter to translate ’em for me, and then I aim to rush ’em back over there before the coroner’s physician gets in, and put ’em back on that bed where I found ’em.”

“I read French—a little,” said the young magistrate. “Suppose you let me have a look at them first.”

Schwartzmann surrendered them and the magistrate read them through. First he read the pitiably short, pitiably direct farewell lines the suicide had written to her half-sister before she turned on the gas, and then he read the briefly regretful letter of set terms of condolence, which a clerk in a consular office had in duty bound transcribed. Having read them through, this magistrate, who had read in the newspapers of Liège and Louvain, of Mons and Charlevois, of Ypres and Rheims, of the Masurien Lakes and Poland and Eastern Prussia and Western Flanders and Northern France; who had read also the casualty reports emanating at frequent intervals from half a dozen war offices, reading the one as matters of news and the other, until now, as lists of steadily mounting figures—he raised his head and in his heart he silently cursed war and all its fruits. And next day he went and joined a league for national preparedness.

“Schwartzmann,” he said as he laid the papers on his desk, “I guess probably your prisoner was telling the whole truth. She did have a brother and he is dead. He was a French soldier and he died about a month or six weeks ago—on the Field of Honour, the letter says. And this note that the girl left, I’ll tell you what it says. It says that she heard what the doctor

said about her—there must have been a doctor in to see her some time this evening—and that she knows she can never get well, and that they are about out of money, and that she is afraid Marie—Marie is the sister who's in yonder now, I suppose—will do something desperate to get money, so rather than be a burden on her sister she is going to commit a mortal sin. So she asks God to forgive her and let her be with her brother Paul—he's the dead brother, no doubt—when she has paid for her sin. And that is all she says except good-bye."

He paused a moment, clearing his throat, and when he went on he spoke aloud, but it was to himself that he spoke rather than to the detective: "Field of Honour? Not one but two out of that family dead on the Field of Honour, by my way of thinking. Yes, and though it's a new name for it, I guess you might call Fourteenth Street and Third Avenue a Field of Honour, too, and not be so very far wrong for this once. What a hellish thing it all is!"

"How's that, sir?" asked Schwartzmann. "I didn't quite get you." He had taken the two papers back in his own hands and was shuffling them absently.

"Nothing," said the magistrate. And then almost harshly: "Well, what do you want me to do about the woman in the pen yonder?"

"Well, sir," said the other slowly, "I was thinkin' that probably you wouldn't care to tell her what's just come off in the flat—at least not in court. And I know I don't want to have to tell her. I thought maybe if you could stretch the rules so's I could get her out of here without havin' to make a regular charge against her and without me havin' to arraign her in the regular way——"

"Damn the rules!" snapped Voris petulantly. "I'll fix them. You needn't worry about that part of it. Go on!"

"Well, sir, I was thinkin' maybe that after I found somebody to take these letters back where they belong, I could take her on home with me—I live right down here in Greenwich Village—and keep her there for the night, or anyhow till the coroner's physician is through with what he's got to do, and I'd ask my wife to break the news to her and tell her about it. A woman can do them things sometimes better'n a man can. So that's my idea, sir."

"You're willing to take a woman into your home that you picked up for streetwalking?"

"I'll take the chance. You see, Your Honour, I seen somethin' else—somethin' I ain't mentioned—somethin' I don't care to mention if you don't mind."

"Suit yourself," said the other. "I suppose you'll be looking up the newspaper men before you go. This will make what they call a great heart-interest story."

"I don't figure on tellin' the reporters neither," mumbled Schwartzmann, as though ashamed of his own forbearance.

The magistrate found the detective's right hand and started to shake it. Then he dropped it. You might have thought from the haste with which he dropped it that he also was ashamed.

"I'll see you don't get into any trouble with the inspector," he said. Then he added: "You know of course that this brother was a French soldier?"

"Sure I know it—you told me so."

"You're German, aren't you?" asked Voris. "German descent, I mean?"

"I don't figure as that's got anythin' to do with the case," said the plain-clothes man, bristling.

"I don't either, Schwartzmann," said the magistrate. "Now you go ahead and get that woman out of this hole."

Schwartzmann went. She was where he had left her; she was huddled up, shrinking in, against the bars, and as he unlatched the iron door and swung it in and beckoned to her to come out from behind it, he saw, as she came, that her eyes looked at him with a dumb, questioning misery and that her left hand was still gripped in a hard knot against her breast. He knew what that hand held. It held a little, cheap, carved white crucifix.

I see by the papers that those popularly reputed to be anointed of God, who are principally in charge of this war, are graciously pleased to ordain that the same shall go on for quite some time yet.

CHAPTER III

THE SMART ALECK

CAP'N BUCK FLUTER, holding his watch in the approved conductor's grip, glanced back and forth the short length of the four-five accommodation and raised his free hand in warning:

"All aboard!"

From almost above his head it came:

"If you can't get a board get a scantlin'!"

Clustered at the White or shady end of the station, the sovereign Caucasians of Swango rocked up against one another in the unbridled excess of their merriment. Farther away, at the Coloured or sunny end of the platform, the assembled representatives of the African population guffawed loudly, though respectfully. To almost any one having the gift of spontaneous repartee it might have occurred to suggest the advisability of getting a plank provided you could not get a board. It took Gash Tuttle to think up scantling.

The humourist folded his elbows on the ledge of the window and leaned his head and shoulders out of the car, considering his people whimsically, yet benignantly. He wore attire suitable for travelling—a dented-in grey felt hat, adhering perilously to the rearmost slope of his scalp; a mail-order suit of light tan, with slashed seams and rows of buttons extending up the sleeves almost to the elbows; a hard-surfaced tie of pale blue satin; a lavender shirt, agreeably relieved by pink longitudinal stripings.

Except his eyes, which rather protruded, and his front teeth, which undoubtedly projected, all his features were in a state of active retreat—only, his nose retreated one way and his chin the other. The assurance of a popular idol who knows no rival was in his pose and in his poise. Alexander the Great had that look—if we may credit the likenesses of him still extant—and Napoleon Bonaparte had it, and David Garrick, to quote a few conspicuous examples.

Alone, of all those within hearing, Cap'n Buck Fluter did not laugh. Indeed, he did not even grin.

"All right, black boy," he said. "Let's go from here!"

The porter snatched up the wooden box that rested on the earth, flung it on the car platform and projected his person nimbly after it. Cap'n Buck swung himself up the step with one hand on the rail. The engine spat out a mouthful of hot steam and the wheels began to turn.

"Good-by, my honeys, 'cause I'm gone!" called out Mr. Tuttle, and he waved a fawn-coloured arm in adieu to his courtiers, black and white. "I'm a-goin' many and a-many a mile from you. Don't take in no bad money while your popper's away."

The station agent, in black calico sleeve-protectors and celluloid eyeshade, stretched the upper half of his body out the cubby-hole that served him for an office.

"Oh, you Gash!" he called. "Give my love to all the ladies."

The two groups on the platform waited, all expectant for the retort. Instantly it sped back to them, above the clacking voice of the train:

"That's all you ever would give 'em, ain't it?"

Mr. Gip Dismukes, who kept the livery stable, slapped Mr. Gene Brothers, who drove the bus, a resounding slap on the back.

"Ain't he jest ez quick ez a flash?" he demanded of the company generally.

The station agent withdrew himself inside his sanctum, his sides heaving to his mirthful emotions. He had drawn a fire acknowledged to be deadly at any range, but he was satisfied. The laugh was worth the wound.

Through the favoured section traversed by the common carrier to whose care genius incarnate had just committed his precious person there are two kinds of towns—bus towns and non-bus towns. A bus town lies at an appreciable distance from the railroad, usually with a hill intervening, and a bus, which is painted yellow, plies between town and station. But a non-bus town is a town that has for its civic equator the tracks themselves. The station forms one angle of the public square; and, within plain sight and easy walking reach, the post office and at least two general stores stand; and handily near by is a one-story bank built of a stucco composition purporting to represent granite, thus signifying solidity and impregnability; and a two-story hotel, white, with green blinds, and porches running all the way across the front; also hitch rails; a livery stable; and a Masonic Hall.

Swango belonged to the former category. It was over the hill, a hot and dusty eighth of a mile away. So, having watched the departing four-five accommodation until it diminished to a smudgy dot where the V of the rails melted together and finally vanished, the assembled Swangoans settled back in postures of ease to wait for the up train due at three-eight, but reported two hours and thirty minutes late. There would still be ample time after it came and went to get home for supper.

The contemptuous travelling man who once said that only three things ever happened in Swango—morning, afternoon and night—perpetrated a libel, for he wilfully omitted mention of three other daily events: the cannon-ball, tearing through without stopping in the early forenoon; the three-eight up; and the four-five down.

So they sat and waited; but a spirit of depression, almost of sadness, affected one and all. It was as though a beaming light had gone out of their lives. Ginger Marable, porter and runner of the Mansard House, voiced the common sentiment of both races as he lolled on a baggage truck in the sunshine, with his cap of authority, crowned by a lettered tin diadem, shoved far back upon his woolly skull.

“Dat Mistah Gashney Tuttle he sho is a quick ketcher,” stated Ginger with a soft chuckle. “W’ite an’ black—we suttinly will miss Mistah Tuttle twell he gits back home ag’in.”

Borne away from his loyal subjects to the pulsing accompaniment of the iron horse’s snorted breath, the subject of this commentary extended himself on his red plush seat and considered his fellow travellers with a view to honing his agile fancy on the whetstones of their duller mentalities. On the whole, they promised but poor sport. Immediately in front of him sat a bride and groom, readily recognisable at a glance for what they were—the bride in cream-coloured cashmere, with many ribbons; the groom in stiff black diagonals, with braided seams, and a white lawn tie. A red-faced man who looked as though he might be a deputy sheriff from somewhere slept uneasily one seat in the rear. He had his shoes off, revealing gray yarn socks. His mouth was ajar, and down in his throat he snored screechily, like a planing mill. The youngest member of a family group occupying two seats just across the aisle whimpered a desire. Its mother rummaged in a shoebox containing, among other delicacies, hard-boiled eggs, salt and pepper mixed and enveloped in a paper squill, blueberry pie, leaking profusely, and watermelon-rind preserves, and found what she sought—the lower half of a fried chicken leg. Satisfied by this gift the infant ceased from fretful repining, sucking contentedly at the meat end; and between sucks hammered contentedly with the drumstick on the seat back and window ledge, leaving lardy smears there in the dust.

Cap’n Buck—captain by virtue of having a regular passenger run—came through the car, collecting tickets. At no time particularly long on temper, he was decidedly short of it to-day. He was fifteen minutes behind his schedule—no unusual thing—but the locomotive was misbehaving. Likewise a difference of opinion had arisen over the proper identity of a holder of mileage in the smoker. He halted alongside Gash Tuttle, swaying on his legs to the roll and pitch of the car floor.

“Tickets?” he demanded crisply.

“Wee gates, Cap,” answered the new passenger jovially. “How does your copperosity seem to sagashuate this evenin’?”

“Where goin’?” said Fluter, ignoring the pleasantry. “I’m in a hurry. What station?”

“Well,” countered the irrepressible one, “what stations have you got?”

Cap’n Buck Fluter’s cold eye turned meaningly toward the bell cord, which dipped like a tired clothesline overhead, and he snapped two fingers peevishly.

“Son,” he said almost softly, “don’t monkey with me. This here ain’t my day for foolin’!”

Favoured son of the high gods though he was, Gash Tuttle knew instantly now that this was indeed no day for fooling. Cap’n Buck was not a large man, but he had a way of growing to meet and match emergencies. He handled the Sunday excursions, which was the acid test of a trainman’s grit. Coltish youths, alcoholically keened up or just naturally high spirited, who got on his train looking for trouble nearly always got off looking for a doctor. As regards persons wishful of stealing a ride, they never tried to travel with Cap’n Buck Fluter oftener than once. Frequently, for a period of time measurable by days or weeks, they were in no fit state to be travelling with any one except a trained nurse.

Gash Tuttle quit his fooling. Without further ado—whatever an ado is—he surrendered his ticket, receiving in exchange a white slip with punchmarks in it, to wear in his hatband. Next came the train butcher bearing chewing gum, purple plums in paper cornucopias, examples of the light literature of the day, oranges which were overgreen, and bananas which were overripe, as is the way with a train butcher’s oranges and bananas the continent over. In contrast with the conductor’s dourness the train butcher’s mood was congenially inclined to persiflage.

After an exchange of spirited repartee, at which the train butcher by an admiring shake of the head tacitly confessed himself worsted, our hero purchased a paper-backed work entitled, “The Jolly Old Drummer’s Private Joke Book.” This volume, according to the whispered confidences of the seller, contained tales of so sprightly a character that even in sealed covers it might be sent by mail only at the sender’s peril; moreover, the wink which punctuated this disclosure was in itself a promise of the spicy entertainment to be derived from perusal thereof. The price at present was but fifty cents; later it would go up to a dollar a copy; this, then, was a special and extraordinary rate.

The train continued on its course—not hurriedly, but with reasonable steadfastness and singleness of purpose. After much the same fashion the sun went down. The bride repeatedly whisked cindery deposits off her cashmered lap; the large-faced man, being awakened by one of his own snores, put on his shoes and indulged in fine-cut tobacco, internally applied; but the youngest passenger now slept all curled up in a moist little bundle, showing an expanse of plump neck much mottled by heat-rash, and clutching in one greased and gritted fist the denuded shank-bone of a chicken with a frieze of gnawed tendons adhering to its larger joint.

At intervals the train stopped at small way stations, bus or non-bus in character as the case might be, to let somebody off or somebody on. Cap’n Buck now made his trips carrying his lantern—the ornate nickel-plated one that had been awarded to him in the voting contest for the most popular trainman at the annual fair and bazaar of True Blue Lodge of the Junior Order of American Mechanics. It had his proper initials—J. J. F.—chased on its glass chimney in old English script, very curlicue and ornamental. He carried it in the crook of his left elbow with the handle round his biceps; and when he reached the end of his run he would extinguish its flame, not by blowing it out but by a quick, short, expert jerk of his arm. This is a trick all conductors seek to acquire; some of them succeed.

Twilight, the stage manager of night, had stolen insidiously

on the scene, shortening up the backgrounds and blurring the perspectives; and the principal character of this tale, straining his eyes over the fine print, had reached the next to the last page of “The Jolly Old Drummer’s Private Joke Book” and was beginning to wonder why the postal authorities should be so finicky in such matters and in a dim way to wish he had his fifty cents back, when with a glad shriek of relief the locomotive, having bumped over a succession of yard switches, drew up under a long open shed alongside a dumpy brick structure. To avoid any possible misunderstanding this building was labelled Union Depot in large letters and at both ends.

Being the terminus of the division, it was the train’s destination and the destination of Mr. Tuttle. He possessed himself of an imitation leather handbag and descended on solid earth with the assured manner of a seasoned and experienced traveller. Doubtless because of the flurry created by the train’s arrival and the bustling about of other arrivals his advent created no visible stir among the crowd at the terminal. At least he noticed none. Still, these people had no way of knowing who he was.

In order to get the Union Depot closer to the railroad it had been necessary to place it some distance away from the heart of things; even so, metropolitan evidences abounded. A Belt Line trolley car stood stationary, awaiting passengers; a vociferous row of negro hackmen were kept in their proper places by a uniformed policeman; and on the horizon to the westward a yellow radiance glowed above an intervening comb of spires and chimneys, showing where the inhabitants of the third largest second-class city in the state made merry at carnival and street fair, to celebrate the dedication and opening of their new Great White Way—a Great White Way seven blocks long and spangled at sixty-foot intervals with arc lights disposed in pairs on ornamental iron standards. Hence radiance.

Turning westward, therefore, Mr. Tuttle found himself looking along a circumscribed vista of one-story buildings with two-story fronts—that is to say, each wooden front wall extended up ten or fifteen feet above the peak of the sloping roof behind it, so that, viewed full-on, the building would have the appearance of being a floor taller than it really was. To add to the pleasing illusion certain of these superstructures had windows painted elaborately on their slab surfaces; but to one seeking a profile view the false work betrayed a razor-like thinness, as patently flat and artificial as stage scenery.

Travellers from the Eastern seaboard have been known to gibe at this transparent artifice. Even New York flat dwellers, coming direct from apartment houses which are all marble foyers and gold-leaf elevator grilles below and all dark cubby-holes and toy kitchens above, have been known to gibe; which fact is here set forth merely to prove that a sense of humour depends largely on the point of view.

To our Mr. Tuttle such deceits were but a part of the ordered architectural plan of things, and they moved him not. What did interest him was to note that the nearmost of these bogusly exalted buildings displayed, above swinging twin doors, a cluster of lights and a sign testifying that this was the First Chance Saloon. Without looking he sensed that the reverse of that Janus-faced sign would advertise this same establishment as being the Last Chance. He did not know about Janus, but he did know about saloons that are handily adjacent to union depots. Moreover, an inner consciousness advised him that after a dry sixty-mile trip he thirsted amain. He took up his luggage and crossed the road, and entered through the knee-high swinging doors.

There was a bar and a bar mirror behind it. The bar was decorated at intervals with rectangles of fly paper, on the sticky surfaces of which great numbers of flies were gummed fast in a perished or perishing state; but before they became martyrs to the fad of sanitation these victims had left their footprints thickly on the mirror and on the fringes of coloured tissue paper that dangled from the ceiling. In a front corner, against a window, was a lunch counter, flanked on one side by

stools and serving as a barricade for an oil stove and shelves of cove oysters in cans, and hams and cheeses for slicing, and vinegar cruets and pepper casters and salt cellars crusted with the saline deposits of the years. A solitary patron was lounging against the bar in earnest conversation with the barkeeper; but the presiding official of the food-purveying department must have been absent on business or pleasure, for of him there was no sign.

Gash Tuttle ordered a beer. The barkeeper filled a tall flagon with brew drawn from the wood, wiped the clinging froth from its brim with a spatulate tool of whittled cedar, and placed the drink before the newcomer, who paid for it out of a silver dollar. Even as Mr. Tuttle scooped in his change and buried the lower part of his face in the circumference of the schooner he became aware that the other customer had drawn nearer and was idly rattling a worn leather cup, within which dice rapped against the sides like little bony ghosts uneasy to escape from their cabinet at a séance.

The manipulator of the dice held a palm cupped over the mouth of the cup to prevent their escape. He addressed the barkeeper:

“Flem,” he said, “you’re such a wisenheimer, I’ll make you a proposition: I’ll shake three of these here dice out, and no matter whut they roll I’ll betcha I kin tell without lookin’ whut the tops and bottoms will come to—whut the spots’ll add up to.”

The other desisted from rinsing glassware in a pail beneath the bar.

“Which is that?” he inquired sceptically. “You kin tell beforehand whut the top and bottom spots’ll add up?”

“Ary time and every time!”

“And let me roll ’em myself?”

“And let you roll ’em yourself—let anybody roll ’em. I don’t need to touch ’em, even.”

“How much’ll you risk that you kin do that, Fox?” Roused greed was in the speaker’s tone.

“Oh, make it fur the drinks,” said Fox—“jest fur the drinks. I ain’t aimin’ to take your money away frum you. I got all the money I need.” For the first time he seemed to become aware of a third party and he turned and let a friendly hand fall on the stranger’s shoulder. “Tell you whut, Flem, we’ll make it drinks fur this gent too. Come on, brother,” he added; “you’re in on this. It’s my party if I lose, which I won’t, and ole Flem’s party if he loses, which he shore will.”

It was the warmth of his manner as much as the generosity of his invitation that charmed Mr. Tuttle. The very smile of this man Fox invited friendship; for it was a broad smile, rich in proteids and butterfats. Likewise his personality was as attractively cordial as his attire was striking and opulent.

“‘Slide or slip, let ’er rip!’” said Mr. Tuttle, quoting the poetic words of a philosopher of an earlier day.

“That’s the talk!” said Fox genially. He pushed the dice box across the bar. “Go to it, bo! Roll them bones! The figure is twenty-one!”

From the five cubes in the cup the barkeeper eliminated two. He agitated the receptacle violently and then flirted out the three survivors on the wood. They jostled and crocked against one another, rolled over and stopped. Their uppermost faces showed an ace, a six and a five.

“Twelve!” said Flem.

“Twelve it is,” echoed Fox.

“A dozen raw,” confirmed Gash Tuttle, now thoroughly in the spirit of it.

“All right, then,” said Fox, flashing a beam of admiration toward the humourist. “Now turn ’em over, Flem—turn ’em over careful.”

Flem obeyed, displaying an ace, a deuce and a six.

“And nine more makes twenty-one in all!” chortled Fox triumphantly.

As though dazed, the barkeeper shook his head.

“Well, Foxey, ole pardner, you shore got me that time,” he confessed begrudgingly. “Whut’ll it be, gents? Here, I reckin the cigars is on me too, after that.” From a glass-topped case at the end of the bar alongside Gash Tuttle he produced a full box and extended it hospitably. “The smokes is on the house—dip in, gents. Dip in. Try an Old Hickory; them’s pure Tampas—ten cents straight.”

He drew the beers—large ones for the two, a small one for himself—and raised his own glass to them.

“Here’s to you and t’ward you!” he said.

“Ef I hadn’t a-met you I wouldn’t a-knowed you,” shot back Gash Tuttle with the lightning spontaneity of one whose wit moves in boltlike brilliancy; and at that they both laughed loudly and, as though dazzled by his flashes, bestowed on him the look that is ever the sweetest tribute to the jester’s talents.

The toast to a better acquaintance being quaffed and lights exchanged, the still nonplussed Flem addressed the winners:

“Well, boys, I thought I knowed all there was to know about dice—poker dice and crap dice too; but live and learn, as the feller says. Say, Fox, put me on to that trick—it’ll come in handy. I’ll ketch Joe on it when he gits back,” and he nodded toward the lunch counter.

“You don’t need to know no more’n you know about it already,” expounded Fox. “It’s bound to come out that way.”

“How is it bound to come out that way?”

“Why, Flem, it’s jest plain arithmetic; mathematics—that’s all. Always the tops and bottoms of ary three dice come to twenty-one. Here, gimme that cup and I’ll prove it.”

In rapid succession, three times, he shook the cubes out. It was indeed as the wizard had said. No matter what the sequence, the complete tally was ever the same—twenty-one.

“Now who’d ’a’ thought it!” exclaimed Flem delightedly. “Say, a feller could win a pile of dough workin’ that trick! I’d ’a’ fell fur some real money myself.”

“That’s why I made it fur the drinks,” said the magnanimous Fox. “I wouldn’t put it over on a friend—not for no amount; because it’s a sure-thing proposition. It jest naturally can’t lose! I wouldn’t ’a’ tried to skin this pardner here with it even if I’d ’a’ thought I could.” And once more his hand fell in flattering camaraderie on a fawn-coloured shoulder. “I know a regular guy that’s likewise a wise guy as soon as I see him. But with rank strangers it’d be plumb different. The way I look at it, a stranger’s money is anybody’s money——”

He broke off abruptly as the doorhinges creaked. A tall, thin individual wearing a cap, a squint and a cigarette, all on the same side of his head, had entered. He stopped at the lunch counter as though desirous of purchasing food.

“Sh-h! Listen!” Fox’s subdued tones reached only the barkeeper and Mr. Tuttle. “That feller looks like a mark to me. D’ye know him, Flem?”

“Never seen him before,” whispered back Flem after a covert scrutiny of the latest arrival.

“Fine!” commented Fox, speaking with rapidity, but still with low-toned caution. “Jest to test it, let’s see if that sucker’ll fall. Here”—he shoved the dice cup into Gash Turtle’s grasp—“you be playin’ with the bones, sorter careless. You kin have the first bet, because I’ve already took a likin’ to you. Then, if he’s willin’ to go a second time, I’ll take him on fur a few simoleons.” The arch plotter fell into an attitude of elaborate indifference. “Go ahead, Flem; you toll him in.”

Given a guarantee of winning, and who among us is not a born gamester? Gash Tuttle’s cheeks flushed with sporting blood as he grabbed for the cup. All his corpuscles turned to red and white chips—red ones mostly. As for the barkeeper, he beyond doubt had the making of a born conspirator in him. He took the cue instantly.

“Sorry, friend,” he called out, “but the grub works is closed down temporary. Anything I kin do fur you?”

“Well,” said the stranger, edging over, “I did want a fried-

aig sandwich, but I might change my mind. Got any cold lager on tap?”

“Join us,” invited Fox; “we’re jest fixin’ to have one. Make it beer all round,” he ordered the barkeeper without waiting for the newcomer’s answer.

Beer all round it was. Gash Tuttle, too eager for gore to more than sip his, toyed with the dice, rolling them out and scooping them up again.

“Want to shake for the next round, anybody?” innocently inquired the squint-eyed person, observing this byplay.

“The next round’s on the house,” announced Flem, obeying a wink of almost audible emphasis from Fox.

“This here gent thinks he’s some hand with the bones,” explained Fox, addressing the stranger and flirting a thumb toward Gash Tuttle. “He was sayin’ jest as you come in the door yonder that he could let anybody else roll three dice, and then he could tell, without lookin’ even, whut the tops and bottoms would add up to?”

“Huh?” grunted the squinty-eyed man. “Has he got any money in his clothes that says he kin do that? Where I come frum, money talks.” He eyed Gash Tuttle truculently, as though daring him to be game.

“My money talks too!” said Mr. Tuttle with nervous alacrity. He felt in an inner vest pocket, producing a modest packet of bills. All eyes were focused on it.

“That’s the stuff!” said Fox with mounting enthusiasm. “How much are you two gents goin’ to bet one another? Make it fur real money—that is, if you’re both game!”

“If he don’t touch the dice at all I’ll bet him fur his whole roll,” said the impetuous newcomer.

“That’s fair enough, I reckin,” said Fox. “Tell you whut—to make it absolutely fair I’ll turn the dice over myself and Flem’ll hold the stakes. Then there can’t be no kick comin’ from nobody whatsoever, kin there?” He faced their prospective prey. “How strong are you?” he demanded, almost sneeringly. “How much are you willin’ to put up against my pardner here?”

“Any amount! Any amount!” snapped back the other, squinting past Fox at Gash Tuttle’s roll until one eye was a button and the other a buttonhole. “Twenty-five—thirty—thirty-five—as much as forty dollars. That’s how game I am.”

Avarice gnawed at the taproots of Gash Tuttle’s being, but caution raised a warning hand. Fifteen was half of what he had and thirty was all. Besides, why risk all on the first wager, even though there was no real risk? A person so impulsively sportive as this victim would make a second bet doubtlessly. He ignored the stealthy little kick his principal accomplice dealt him on the shin. “I’ll make it fur fifteen,” he said, licking his lips.

“If that’s as fur as you kin go, all right,” said the slit-eyed man, promptly posting his money in the outstretched hand of the barkeeper, who in the same motion took over a like amount from the slightly trembling fingers of the challenger.

Squint-eye picked up the dice cup and rattled its occupants.

“Come on now!” he bantered Gash Tuttle. “Whut’ll they add up, tops and bottoms?”

“Twenty-one!” said Mr. Tuttle.

“Out they come, then!”

And out they did come, dancing together, tumbling and somersaulting, and finally halting—a deuce, a trey and a four.

“Three and two is five and four is nine,” Gash Tuttle read off the pips. “Now turn ’em over!” he bade Fox. “That’s your job—turn ’em over!” He was all tremulous and quivery inside.

In silence Fox drew the nearest die toward him and slowly capsized it. “Four,” he announced.

He flipped the deuce end for end, revealing its bottom: “Five!”

He reached for the remaining die—the four-spot. Dragging it toward him, his large fingers encompassed it for one

fleeting instance, hiding it from view entirely; then he raised his hand: “Six!”

“Makin’ twenty-one in all,” stuttered Gash Tuttle. He reached for the stakes.

“Nix on that quick stuff!” yelled his opponent, and dashed his hand aside. “The tops come to nine and the bottoms to fifteen—that’s twenty-four, the way I figger. You lose!” He pouched the money gleefully.

Stunned, Gash Tuttle contemplated the upturned facets of the three dice. It was true—it was all too true! Consternation, or a fine imitation of that emotion, filled the countenances of Flem and of Fox.

“That’s the first time I ever seen that happen,” Fox whispered in the loser’s ear. “Bet him again—bet high—and git it all back. That’s the ticket!”

Mr. Tuttle shook his head miserably, but stubbornly. For this once, in the presence of crushing disaster, the divine powers of retort failed him. He didn’t speak—he couldn’t!

“Piker money! Piker money!” chanted the winner. “Still, ever’ little bit helps—eh, boys?”

And then and there, before Gash Tuttle’s bulging and horrified eyes, he split up the winnings in the proportion of five for Flem and five for Fox and five for himself. Of a sudden the loser was shouldered out of the group. He looked not into friendly faces, but at contemptuous backs and heaving shoulders. The need for play acting being over, the play actors took their ease and divided their pay. The mask was off. Treachery stood naked and unashamed.

Reaching blindly for his valise, Gash Tuttle stumbled for the door, a load lying on his daunted spirit as heavy as a stone. Flem hailed him.

“Say, hold on!” He spoke kindly. “Ain’t that your quarter yonder?”

He pointed to a coin visible against the flat glass cover of the cigar case.

“Sure it is—it’s yourn. I seen you leave it there when I give you the change out of that dollar and purposed to tell you ’bout it at the time, but it slipped my mind. Go on and pick it up—it’s yourn. You’re welcome to it if you take it now!”

Automatically Gash Tuttle reached for the quarter—small salvage from a great and overwhelming loss. His nails scraped the glass, touching only glass. The quarter was cunningly glued to its underside. Surely this place was full of pitfalls. A guffawed chorus of derision rudely smote his burning ears.

“On your way, sucker! On your way!” gibed the perfidious Fox, swinging about with his elbows braced against the bar and a five-dollar bill held with a touch of cruel jauntiness between two fingers.

“Whut you got in the gripsack—hay samples or punkins?” jeered the exultant Slit-Eye.

“Yes; whut is the valise fur?” came Flem’s parting taunt.

Under their goadings his spirit rallied.

“Cat’s fur, to make kittens’ britches!” he said. Then, as a final shot: “You fellers needn’t think you’re so derned smart—I know jest exactly how you done it!”

He left them to chew on that. The parting honours were his, he felt, but the spoils of war—alas!—remained in the camp of the enemy. Scarcely twenty minutes at the outside had elapsed since his advent into city life, and already one-half of the hoarded capital he had meant should sustain him for a whole gala week was irretrievably gone, leaving behind an emptiness, a void as it were, which ached like the socket of a newly drawn tooth.

Vague, formless thoughts of reprisal, of vengeance exacted an hundredfold when opportunity should fitly offer, flitted through his numbed brain. Meantime though adventure beckoned; half a mile away or less a Great White Way and a street fair awaited his coming. That saffron flare against the sky yonder was an invitation and a promise. Sighing, he shifted his valise from one hand to the other.

The Belt Line car, returning stationward, bore him with small loss of time straightway to the very centre of excitement; to where bunting waved on store fronts and flag standards swayed from trolley poles, converting the County Square into a Court of Honour, and a myriad lights glowed golden russet through the haze of dust kicked up by the hurrying feet of merrymaking thousands. Barkers barked and brass bands brayed; strange cries of man and beast arose, and crowds eddied to and fro like windblown leaves in a gusty November. And all was gaiety and abandon. From the confusion certain sounds detached themselves, becoming intelligible to the human understanding. As for example:

"Remembah, good people, the cool of the evenin' is the time to view the edgycated ostritch and mark his many peculiarities!"

And this:

"The big red hots! The g-e-r-reat big, juicy, sizzlin' red hots! The eriginal hot-dog sand-wige—fi' cents, halluf a dime, the twentieth part of a dollah! Here y'are! Here y'are! The genuwine Mexican hairless Frankfurter fer fi' cents!"

And this:

"Cornfetti! Cornfetti! All the colours of the rainbow! All the pleasures of the Maudie Graw! A large full sack for a nickel! Buy cornfetti and enjoy yourselves."

And so on and so forth.

The forlorn youth, a half-fledged school-teacher from a back district, who had purchased the county rights of a patent razor sharpener from a polished gentleman who had had to look at the map before he even knew the name of the county, stood on a dry-goods box at the corner of Jefferson and Yazoo, dimly regretful of the good money paid out for license and unsalable stock, striving desperately to remember and enunciate the patter taught him by the gifted promoter. For the twentieth time he lifted his voice, essaying his word-formula in husky and stuttering accents for the benefit of swirling multitudes, who never stopped to listen:

"Friends, I have here the Infallible Patent Razor Sharpener. 'Twill sharpen razors, knives, scissors, scythe blades or any edged tool. If you don't believe it will——" He paused, forgetting the tag line; then cleared his throat and improvised a finish: "If you don't believe it will—why, it will!" It was a lame conclusion and fruitful of no sales.

How different the case with a talented professional stationed half a block down the street, who nonchalantly coiled and whirled and threw a lasso at nothing; then gathered in the rope and coiled and threw it again, always at nothing at all, until an audience collected, being drawn by a desire to know the meaning of a performance seemingly so purposeless. Then, dropping the rope, he burst into a stirring panegyric touching on the miraculous qualifications of the Ajax Matchless Cleaning and Washing Powder, which made bathing a sheer pleasure and household drudgery a joy.

Never for one moment abating the flow of his eloquence, this person produced a tiny vial, held it aloft, uncorked it, shook twenty drops of its colourless fluid contents on the corrugated surface of a seemingly new and virgin sponge; then gently kneaded and massaged the sponge until—lo and behold!—lather formed and grew and mounted and foamed, so that the yellow lump became a mass of creamy white suds the size of a peck measure, and from it dripped huge bubbles that foamed about his feet and expired prismatically, as the dolphin was once believed to expire, leaving smears upon the boards whereon the operator stood.

Thereat dimes flowed in on him in clinking streams, and bottles of the Matchless flowed from him until, apparently grown weary of commerce, he abandoned his perch, avowedly for refreshment, but really—this being a trade secret—to rub shavings of soft yellow soap into the receptive pores of a fresh sponge and so make it ready against the next demonstration.

Through such scenes Gash Tuttle wandered, a soul apart. He was of the carnival, but not in it—not as yet. With a pained mental jolt he observed that about him men of his own age

wore garments of a novel and fascinating cut. By contrast his own wardrobe seemed suddenly grown commonplace and prosaic; also, these city dwellers spoke a tongue that, though lacking, as he inwardly conceded, in the ready pungency of his own speech, nevertheless had a saucy and attractive savour of novelty in its phrasing. Indeed, he felt lonely. So must a troubadour of old have felt when set adrift in an alien and hostile land. So must the shining steel feel when separated from the flint on which it strikes forth its sparks of fire. I take it a steel never really craves for its flint until it parts from it.

As he wormed through a group of roistering youth of both sexes he tripped over his own valise; a wadded handful of confetti struck him full in the cheek and from behind him came a gurgle of laughter. It was borne in on him that he was the object of mirth and not its creator. His neck burned. Certainly the most distressing situation which may beset a humourist follows hard on the suspicion that folks are laughing—not with him, but at him!

He hurried on as rapidly as one might hurry in such crowded ways. He was aware now of a sensation of emptiness which could not be attributed altogether to the depression occasioned by his experience at the First and Last Chance Saloon; and he took steps to stay it. He purchased and partook of hamburger sandwiches rich in chopped onions.

Later it would be time to find suitable lodgings. The more alluring of the pay-as-you-enter attractions were yet to be tested. By way of a beginning he handed over a ten-cent piece to a swarthy person behind a blue pedestal, and mounting eight wooden steps to a platform he passed behind a flapping canvas curtain. There, in company with perhaps a dozen other patrons, he leaned over a wooden rail and gazed downward into a shallow tarpaulin-lined den where a rather drowsy-appearing, half-nude individual, evidently of Ethiopian antecedents, first toyed with some equally drowsy specimens of the reptile kingdom and then partook sparingly and with no particular avidity of the tail of a very small garter snake.

Chance, purely, had led Gash Tuttle to select the establishment of Osay rather than that of the Educated Ostrich, or the Amphibious Man, or Fatima the Pearl of the Harem, for his first plunge into carnival pleasures; but chance is the hinge on which many moving events swing. It was so in this instance.

Osay had finished a light but apparently satisfying meal and the audience was tailing away when Gash Tuttle, who happened to be the rearmost of the departing patrons, felt a detaining touch on his arm. He turned to confront a man in his shirtsleeves—a large man with a pock-marked face, a drooping moustache and a tiger-claw watch charm on his vest. It was the same man who, but a minute before, had delivered a short yet flattering discourse touching the early life and manners and habits of the consumer of serpents—in short, the manager of the show and presumably its owner.

“Say!” began this gentleman.

“Say yourself,” flashed Gash, feeling himself on safe ground once more; “your mouth’s open.”

The man grinned in appreciation of the thrust—a wincing grin, as though owning himself beaten in the very first sally.

“All right, old scout,” he said jovially, “I will. Come back here where nobody can’t hear me while I say it.” He drew the younger man to the inner side of the platform and sank his voice to a confidential rumble. “Soon as I seen you comin’ in I says to myself, ‘That’s the party I’m lookin’ for.’ You don’t live here in this town, do you?”

Gash Tuttle shook his head and started to speak, but the big man was going on. Plainly he was not one to waste time in idle preliminaries:

“That’s the way I doped it. You’re in the profesh, ain’t you? You’ve been workin’ this street-fair game somewhere, ain’t you?”

“No,” Gash Tuttle confessed, yet somehow at the same time feeling flattered.

“Well, that just goes to show how a guy can be fooled,” said

the Osay man. “I’d ’a’ swore you was on to all the ropes in this biz. Anyway, I know just by the cut of your jib you’re the party I’m lookin’ for. That’s why I braced you. My name’s Fornaro; this here is my outfit. I want somebody to throw in with me—and I’ve made up my mind you’re the party I’m lookin’ for.”

Once bitten, twice shy; and Gash Tuttle’s fifteen-dollar bite was still raw and bleeding. He started to pull away.

“I wouldn’t choose to invest in anything more until I’d looked it over,” he began. The large man grasped him by his two lapels and broke in on him, drowning out the protest before it was well started.

“Who said anything about anybody investin’ anything?” he demanded. “Did I? No. Then listen to me a minute—just one minute. I’m in a hurry my own self and I gotta hand you this proposition out fast.”

Sincerity was in his tone; was in his manner too. Even as he spoke his gaze roved past Gash Tuttle toward the tarpaulin draperies which contributed to their privacy, and he sweat freely; a suetlike dew spangled his brow. There was a noise outside. He listened intently, then fixed a mesmerising stare on Gash Tuttle and spoke with great rapidity and greater earnestness:

“You see, I got some other interests here. Besides this pit show, I’m a partner in a store pitch and a mitt-joint; and, what with everything, I’m overworked. That’s the God’s truth—I’m overworked! What I need is a manager here. And soon as I seen how you handled yourself I says to myself, ‘That’s the party I want to hire for manager.’ What did you say your name was?”

“Tuttle—Gashney P. Tut——”

“That’s enough—the Tuttle part will do for me. Now, Tuttle, set down that there keister of yours—that gripsack—and listen. I gotta go down the street for a half hour—maybe an hour—and I want you to take charge. You’re manager while I’m gone—the joint is yours till I git back. And to-night, later on, we’ll fix up a deal together. If you think you like the job we’ll make a reg’lar arrangement; we’ll make it permanent instid of temporary. See?”

“But—but——”

“But nothin’! I want to find out if my first judgment about you is correct. See? I want to make a test. See? That’s it—a test. You ain’t goin’ to have much to do, first off. The nigger is all right s’long as he gits his dope.” He motioned toward the canvas-lined retreat where Osay now dozed heavily among the coils of his somnolent pets. “And Crummy—that’s my outside man—kin handle the front and make the spiel, and take in what money comes in. I’ll mention to him as I’m leavin’ that you’re in charge. Probably I’ll be back before time for the next blow-off. All you gotta do is just be manager—that’s all; and if anybody comes round askin’ for the manager, you’re him. See?”

His impetuosity was hypnotising—it was converting; nay, compelling. It was enough to sweep any audience off its feet, let alone an audience of one. Besides, where lives the male adult between the ages of nine and ninety who in his own mind is not convinced that he has within him the making of a great and successful amusement purveyor? Still, Gash Tuttle hesitated. The prospect was alluring, but it was sudden—so sudden.

As though divining his mental processes, the man Fornaro added a clinching and a convincing argument.

“To prove I’m on the dead level with you, I’m goin’ to pay you for your time—pay you now, in advance—to bind the bargain until we git the details all fixed up.” He hauled out a fair-sized wad of currency and from the mass detached a frayed green bill. “I’m goin’ to slip you a she-note on the spot.”

“A which?”

“A she-note—two bones. See?”

He forced the money into the other’s palm. As Gash Tuttle automatically pocketed the retainer he became aware that this brisk new associate of his, without waiting for any further

token of agreement on his part, already was preparing to surrender the enterprise into his keeping. Fornaro backed away from him and dropped nimbly down off the back of the platform where there was a slit in the canvas wall; then turned and, standing on tiptoe to bring his mouth above the level of the planking, spoke the parting admonition in hasty tones:

"Remember now, you're the boss, the main guy, the whole cheese! If anybody asts you tell 'em you're the manager and stick to it."

The canvas flapped behind him and he was gone. And Gash Tuttle, filled with conflicting emotions in which reawakened pride predominated, stood alone in his new-found kingdom.

Not for long was he alone, however. To be exact, not for more than half a minute at the very most. He heard what he might have heard before had his ears been as keenly attuned as the vanished Fornaro's were. He heard, just outside, voices lifted conflictingly in demand, in expostulation, in profane protest and equally profane denunciation of something or other. A voice which seemed to be that of the swarthy man denominated as Crummy gave utterance to a howl, then instantly dimmed out, as though its owner was moving or being moved from the immediate vicinity with unseemly celerity and despatch. Feet drummed on the wooden steps beyond the draperies. Something heavy overturned or was overthrown with a crash.

And as Mr. Tuttle, startled by these unseemly demonstrations, started toward the front entrance of his domain the curtain was yanked violently aside and a living tidal wave flowed in on him, dashing high and wide. On its crest, propelled by irresistible cosmic forces, rode, as it were, a slouch-hatted man with a nickel-plated badge on his bosom, and at this person's side was a lanky countryman of a most threatening demeanour; and behind them and beyond them came a surging sea of faces—some hostile, some curious, and all excited.

"Who's in charge here?" shouted the be-badged man.

"Me—I am," began Gash Tuttle. "I'm the manager. What's wanted?"

"You are! I 'rest you in the name of the law for runnin' a skin game!" the constable whooped gleefully—"on a warrant swore out less 'en a hour ago."

And with these astounding words he fixed his fingers, grapple-hook fashion, in the collar of the new manager's coat; so that as Gash Tuttle, obeying a primal impulse, tried to back away from him, the back breadth of the coat bunched forward over his head, giving him the appearance of a fawn-coloured turtle trying to retreat within its own shell. His arms, hampered by sleeves pulled far down over the hands, winnowed the air like saurian flippers, wagging in vain resistance.

Holding him fast, ignoring his muffled and inarticulate protests, the constable addressed the menacing countryman:

"Is this here the one got your money?"

"No, 'tain't. 'Twas a big ugly feller, with mushtashes; but I reckin this here one must've helped. Lemme search him."

"Hands off the prisoner!" ordered the constable, endeavouring to interpose his bulk between maddened accuser and wriggling captive.

He spoke too late and moved too slowly. The countryman's gouging hands dived into Mr. Tuttle's various pockets and were speedily out again in the open; and one of them held money in it—paper and silver.

"Here 'tis!" barked the countryman, exultant now. "This here two-dollar bill is mine—I know it by this here red-ink mark." He shuffled out the three remaining bills and stared at them a moment in stupefaction, and his yelp of joy turned to a bellow of agonised berserk rage. "I had two hundred and twenty-eight dollars in cash, and here ain't but seventeen dollars and sixty cents! You derned sharper! Where's the rest of my mortgage money that yore gang beat me out of?"

He swung a fearsome flail of an arm and full in Gash

Tuttle's chest he landed a blow so well aimed, so vigorous, that by its force the recipient was driven backward out of his coat, leaving the emptied garment in the constable's clutches; was driven still further back until he tottered on the rear edge of the platform and tumbled off into space, his body tearing away a width of canvas wall and taking it along with him as he disappeared.

Perhaps it was because he fell so hard that he bounced up so instantaneously. He fought himself free of the smothering folds of dusty tarpaulin and turned to flee headlong into the darkness. He took three flying steps and tripped over the guy rope of the next tent. As he fell with stunning violence into the protecting shadows he heard pursuit roll over the platform past Osay, thud on the earth, clatter on by him and die away in the distance to the accompaniment of cheers, whoops and the bloodthirsty threats of the despoiled countryman.

If one has never stolen a ride on a freight train the task presents difficulties and dangers. Still, it may be done, provided one is sufficiently hard pressed to dare its risks and risk its discomforts. There is one especially disagreeable feature incident to the experience—sooner or later discovery is practically inevitable.

Discovery in this instance came just before the dawn, as the freight lumbered through the swampy bottoms of Obion Creek. A sleepy and therefore irritable brakeman found, huddled up on the floor of an empty furniture car, a dark heap, which, on being stirred with a heavy boot-toe, moved and moaned and gave forth various other faint signs of life. So, as the locomotive slowed down for the approach to the trestle, he hoisted the unresisting object and with callous unconcern shoved it out of the open car door on to the sloping bank of the built-up right of way—all this occurring at a point just beyond where a white marker post gleamed spectrally in the strengthening light of the young summer day, bearing on its planed face the symbol, S-3—meaning by that, three miles to Swango Junction.

At sunup, forty minutes later, a forlorn and shrunken figure, shirt-sleeved, hatless and carrying no baggage whatsoever, quit the crossties and, turning to the left from the railroad track some rods above the station, entered, with weary gait, a byway leading over the hill to the town beyond. There was a drooping in the shoulders and a dragging of the mud-incrusted legs, and the head, like Old Black Joe's, was bending low.

The lone pedestrian entered the confines of Swango proper, seeking, even at that early hour, such backways as seemed most likely to be empty of human life. But as he lifted his leaden feet past the Philpotts place, which was the most outlying of local domiciles, luck would have it that Mr. Abram Philpotts should be up and stirring; in fact, Mr. Philpotts, being engaged in the milk and butter business, was out in his barn hitching a horse to a wagon. Chancing to pass a window of the barn he glanced out and saw a lolled head bobbing by above the top of his back fence.

"Hey there!" he called out. "Hey, Gash, what air you doin' up so early in the mornin'?"

With a wan suggestion of the old familiar sprightliness the answer came back, comically evasive:

"That's fur me to know and fur you to find out!"

Overcome, Mr. Philpotts fell up against his stable wall, feebly slapping himself on the legs with both hands.

"Same old Gashney!" he gurgled. "They can't nobody ever git ahead of you, kin they boy?"

The words and the intent of the tribute reached beyond the palings. Their effect was magical; for the ruler was in his realm again, back among his loyal, worshipful subjects. The bare head straightened; the wearied legs unkinked; the crushed and bruised spirit revived. And Gashney Tuttle, king of jesters, re-crowned, proceeded jauntily on his homeward way, with the wholesome plaudits of Mr. Philpotts ringing in his gratified ears and the young sun shining, golden, in his

face.

CHAPTER IV

BLACKER THAN SIN

IT was the year after the yellow fever that Major Foxmaster moved out from Virginia; that would make it the year 1876. And the next year the woman came. For Major Foxmaster her coming was inopportune. It is possible that she so timed it with that very thing in mind. To order her own plans with a view to the upsetting and the disordering of his plans may have been within the scope of her general scheme. Through intent, perhaps, she waited until he had established himself here in his new environment, five hundred miles from tidewater, before she followed him.

Be this as it may, that was what happened. The Major came out in the spring of the year. He was pushing fifty then, a fine upstanding figure of a man—what women, for lack of a better name, call distinguished looking. He had been a lieutenant in the Mexican War and a major in the Civil War—on the Confederate side, of course, seeing that he came from the seaboard side and not from the mountainous flank of Virginia.

You get some notion of what manner of man he was when I tell you that in all the years he lived in this city, which was a fair-sized city, only one man ever called him by his first name. Behind his back he was to others The Major, sometimes The Old Major, and rarely Major; but to his face people always hailed him, properly, as Major Foxmaster. And, despite the role he was to play in the community, he never acquired a nickname; and that was not so strange, either. You give nicknames to geysers, but not to glaciers.

This man’s manner was icily formal toward those he deemed his inferiors, icily polite toward those whom he acknowledged his equals. He had no code for his intercourse with superiors because he never met anybody whom he regarded as his social superior. He looked upon the world with a bleak, chill eye, and to it he showed a bleak, chill face. It was a mask really—a mask of flesh held in such fine and rigid control that it gave no hint, ever, of what went on in the cool brain behind it. A professional poker player would have traded five years out of his life to be the owner of such a face.

Well, the Major came. He had money, he had family, he had a military record; likewise he had the poise and the pose which, lacking all the other things, still would have given him consideration and a place in town life. His status in the financial world became fixed when he deposited in the largest bank a drawing account of such size as instantly to win the cuddling admiration of the president of the bank. He had established himself in rooms at the Gaunt House—then, and for many years thereafter, the principal hotel. Before fall he was proposed for membership in the exclusive Kenilworth Club, that was the unattainable Mecca toward which many men turned wistful eyes. Judge Sherwan, who was afterward to be his only close friend, sponsored his candidacy and he was elected promptly. Very soon his life fell into the grooves that always thenceforward it was to follow.

The Major did not go into any business. Opportunities to go into this or that were in due season presented to him. He listened with his air of congealed courtesy, but declined them all, explaining that his present investments were entirely satisfactory and yielded him a satisfactory income. Like many men of his breed and generation, he liked a good horse so well that it was more than a liking—with him it was a love. Afternoons he frequently drove one: a ramping bay mare with a fractious temper and a set of gifted heels. He was fond of cards, and in the evenings generally played cards with certain of his fellow club members in a private room at the Kenilworth Club.

These men, though, never became his friends, but were merely the men with whom he played cards. If of a morning after breakfast he went for a walk, as sometimes happened, he

went alone, except on those infrequent occasions when Judge Sherwan accompanied him. At the beginning he was asked to affairs at the homes of influential people; but, since he never accepted these invitations—any of them—people presently quit asking him. Among a hundred thousand human beings he became, or rather he remained, so far as interchange of thought, or of affection, or of confidence, or of intimacy was concerned, a social Crusoe upon a desert island set in an empty sea, with no Man Friday to bear him company in his loneliness—unless it might be said that old Sherwan qualified, after a fashion, for the Man-Friday job.

You see, the Major knew all along that—sooner or later—the woman would be coming. For these few months he had played the truant from his destiny, or his Nemesis, or his fate, or by whatever fancy name you might choose to call it; but there was no chance of his having escaped it altogether. Through strength of will power he could in silence continue to endure it as he had in silence endured it through the years that stretched-backward between young-manhood and middle age. Through pride he would involve no other person, however remotely, in the sorry web of his own weaving. Mentally he manoeuvred to stand apart from his kind; to render himself as inaccessible, as aloof, as unknowable by them as the core of an iceberg.

Nevertheless, it was inevitable that the channels of his outer life, no matter how narrowly they ran or how coldly they coursed, would be disturbed and set awry by her coming. A cultivated and well-sustained indifference to popular opinion is all well enough, but gossip is a corrosive that eats through the calluses until it finds quick flesh underneath. The Major might arm himself against showing what he felt, but he could not armour himself against feeling what he felt. He knew it—and she knew it. Perhaps that was why she, this one time, delayed her coming until he had ample opportunity for becoming, in a measure, fixed in the community and identified with it.

She came. One morning in the young spring of the year following the year when this narrative begins, Major Foxmaster stepped out from between the tall pillars of the Gaunt House doorway to find her waiting for him upon the sidewalk. She stood close to the curbing, a tall and straight figure, swathed all in dead and dreary black, with black skirts hiding her feet and trailing on the bricks behind her; with black gloves upon her clasped hands; with a long, thick veil of black crêpe hiding her face and the shape of her head, and descending, front and back, almost to her waist—a striking figure and one to catch the eye.

After the first glance he gave no heed to her at all, nor she to him—except that when he had descended the short flight of stone steps and set off down the street at his usual brisk, soldierly gait, she followed, ten paces in his rear. By reason of her skirts, which swept the ground round her, and by reason, too, that her shoes had soles of felt or of rubber, she seemed almost to float along the pavement behind him, without apparent effort—certainly without sound.

Two blocks down the street he entered a business house. She waited outside, as silent as a mute and as funereal as a pall. In a few minutes he reappeared; she fell in behind him. He crossed over to the other side; she crossed, too, maintaining the distance between them. Crossing, his heels hit hard upon the rutted cobbles of the roadway; but she glided over them noiselessly and smoothly, almost like one who walked on water. He went into the Kenilworth Club and for an hour or two sat in the reading room behind a newspaper. Had he raised his eyes he might have seen, through the window, the woman waiting on the curb. He ate his luncheon there in the club at a table in a corner of the dining room, alone, as was his way. It was two o’clock and after before he left to go to the livery stable where he kept his mare. She followed, to wait outside the livery stable until he had driven away in his gig, bound for the trotting track where the city’s horse fanciers exercised their harness stock.

For a space, then, she disappeared. Having returned the

rig to its quarters and having dined at the Gaunt House, the Major came forth once more at eight-thirty o'clock to return to the Kenilworth for a bout at the cards. He was spruced and for the second time that day he had shaved. Plainly his measured and customary habit of life was to go on just as it had gone on before the woman came—or, rather, it might be said that it was only now reassuming the routine which, with breaks in between, it had pursued through so many years. Major Foxmaster came down the steps, drawing on his gloves. From the deeper darkness beyond a patch of yellowish glow where a gas lamppost stood the woman emerged, appearing now as an uncertain, wavering shape in her black swathings. Again she followed him, at a distance of a few paces, to the Kenilworth Club; again she waited in the shadows cast by its old-fashioned portico while he played his game and, at its end, cashed in his winnings—for the Major won that night, as very often he did; again she followed him homeward at midnight through the silent and empty street. Without a word or a sign or a backward glance he ascended the steps and passed within the doors of the Gaunt House. Without a word or a sign she lingered until he had disappeared; then she turned off the pavement into the road and vanished, swimming away upright, as it were, without visible motion of her limbs or her body, into a stilled and waveless sea of darkness.

I have here set down the story of this day with such detail because, with occasional small variations, it was to be the story of an uncounted number of other days coming after it.

Inside of twenty-four hours the whole city knew the tale, and buzzed and hummed with it. Inside of forty-eight hours the woman, by common consent, had been given the names she was ever thereafter to wear. She was, to some, The Woman in Black; to others, Foxmaster's Shadow. Inside of a week or two the town was to know, by word of mouth passed on from this person to that, and by that person to another, all that it was ever to know of her.

She came from the same place whence he came—a small Virginia town somewhere near the coast. As the current reports ran, the Foxmaster plantation and the plantation of her family adjoined; as children—remember, I am still quoting the account that was generally accepted—they had played together; as young man and young woman they had been sweethearts. He wronged her and then denied her marriage. Her father was dead; she had no brothers and no near male relatives to exact, at the smaller end of a pistol, satisfaction from the seducer. So she dedicated her days and nights to the task of haunting him with the constant reminder of his crime and her wrongs. She clad herself in black, with a veil before her face to hide it, as one in mourning for a dead life; and she set herself to following him wherever he might go. She never spoke to him; she never, so far as the world at large knew, wrote to him nor meddled in any fashion whatsoever with him or his affairs—but she followed him.

The war, coming on, broke for four years the continuity of her implacable plan of vengeance. When the war was over, and he came back home, she took it up again. He left the town where he had been reared and moved to Richmond, and then after a time from Richmond to Baltimore; in due season she followed after. Finally he had moved to this more westerly city, lying on the border between the North and the South. And now here she was too.

Through an agent in Virginia she had leased, ready furnished, the old Gresham place, diagonally across the way from the front entrance of the Gaunt House; that fact speedily came out, proving that, like him, she also had means of her own. Through this same agent the taxes were thereafter paid. Presumably she moved in under cover of night, for she was a figure that, once seen, was not to be forgotten; and most certainly no one could remember having seen her before that fine spring morning when Major Foxmaster came out of the Gaunt House to find her waiting for him.

She had brought her servants with her—a middle-aged mulatto man and his wife, a tall, young, coal-black negro woman; both of them as close-mouthed as only some negroes

can be, when they are the exceptions to prove the rule of a garrulous race. The mulatto man was a combination of butler and gardener. It was he who did the marketing, dealing with the tradespeople and paying all the bills. The negro woman was the cook, presumably. Passers-by rarely saw her. These two, with their mistress, composed the household.

For such a mistress and such a household the old Gresham place made a most fit abiding place. It was one of those houses that seemed builded for the breeding of mysteries and the harbouring of tragedies—the kind of house that cannot stand vacant long without vaguely acquiring the reputation of being haunted. It was a big, foursquare house of greyish stone, placed in the exact centre of a narrow, treeless lot, which extended through for the full depth of the city block. In front of it was a high picketed fence and a deep, bare grassplot; behind it was a garden of sorts, with a few stunted and illy-nourished berry bushes; and on each side of it was a brick wall, so high that the sunshine never fell on the earth at the side of the house toward the north; and even in the hottest summer weather the foundation stones there were slick and sweaty with the damp, and big snails crawled on the brick wall that ran in the shadow of the wall, leaving trails of a luminous slime across the slick greenish mould which covered the bricks.

The woman took this house, with its gear and garnishings, just as the last of the Greshams had left it when he died. During the months and years it remained tenantless all the upper windows had been tightly shuttered; she left them so. In the two lower front windows, which flanked the deeply recessed front door and which lacked blinds, were stiff, heavy shades of a dull silver colour, drawn down until only a glassed space of inches showed between their unfringed ends and the stone copings. These, too, were left as they had been. They accorded well with the blank, cold house itself; they matched in with its drear old face; they made you think of coins on a dead man’s eyes.

This house, as I have said, stood almost opposite the Gaunt House. What went on within it no outsider ever knew, for no outsider ever crossed its threshold—to this good day no outsider ever has known; but every day its door opened to let out its draped and veiled mistress, setting forth on her business, which was to follow Major Foxmaster; and every night, when that day’s business was done, it opened again to let her back in. In time the town grew used to the sight; it never grew tired of talking about it.

As for Major Foxmaster, he would dodge about the country no more; for, in the long run or the short, dodging availed him nothing. The years behind him proved that. He would bide where he was until death, which was the supreme handicapper, named the winner of this, the last heat of their strange match. He would outlive her and be free; else she would outlive him, to see her long-famished hatred sated. And he wondered whether, if he died first, she, in her black mourning, would dog his dead body to the grave as she had dogged his living steps! It was a morbid fancy and, perhaps because it was morbid, it found a lodgment in the Major’s mind, recurring to him again and again. The existence that he —and she—had willed him to lead was not conducive to an entirely healthy mental aspect.

Whatever his thoughts were, he betrayed none of them to the rest of creation. Exactly as before she appeared, so he continued to deport himself. His behaviour showed no change. He took his walks, drove his bay filly, played his cards at the Kenilworth. He carried his head as high as ever; he snapped his military heels down as firmly as ever on the stones of the street and the bricks of the sidewalk. With a pair of eyes that were as inscrutable and yet as clear as two bits of hard blue ice, and with a face like a square of chipped flint, he went his daily and his hourly way, outwardly oblivious to the stares of acquaintance and stranger alike, seeming not to know that ten paces in his rear, or twelve, came drifting this erect veiled shape which was clad all in dead black—as black as sin, as black as his sin had been, as black as her misery had been—the incarnate embodiment of her shame and his.

In fair weather as in foul, in blistering midsummer and blizzardy midwinter, daytime and nighttime, she followed him. If she lost the trail she waited in all patience until he reappeared. She seemed tireless and hungerless. Wet or cold or heat seemed not to affect her. In her grim pursuit of him her spirit rose triumphant above the calls of the flesh. At midnight, after a long vigil outside the Kenilworth, she moved behind him with the same swift, noiseless, floating motion that marked her in the morning. And so it went with these two.

If he did not notice her presence, neither did he seek ever to elude her. If he never spoke to her, neither did he speak of her to others. As for the woman, she never spoke to any one at all. Outside the walls of the house where she lived her voice was never heard and her face was never seen. Only one person ever dared speak to the Major of her.

Old Sherwan himself did not dare. Of all human beings he stood nearest to the Major. If the Major might be said to have an intimate Judge Sherwan was the one. Moreover, he, Sherwan, was by way of being a he-gossip, which of all the created breeds of gossips is the most persistent and the most consistent, the most prying and, therefore, the most dangerous. He yearned for the smell of impropriety as a drug-fiend yearns for his drug. His was a brackish old soul and from its soured depths he dearly loved to spew up the bilge waters of scandal. The pumps leading to that fouled hold were always in good order. Give him the inch of fact and he would guarantee to provide the ell of surmise and innuendo. Grown too old to sin actually he craved to sin vicariously—to balance always on the edge of indiscretion, since he no longer plunged into it bodily.

Wherefore, after the woman came and the first shock of her coming wore off, he made a point of being seen in Major Foxmaster’s company as much as possible. The share of notoriety the association brought him was dear to his withered, slack-valved old heart. In his manner and his look, in the very way he cocked his hat and waggled his stiffened legs, you discerned that he wished to divide with his friend the responsibility for the presence of his friend’s trailing shadow.

But, for all this and all that, he did not dare ever to speak of her to Major Foxmaster. Joel Bosler dared to, though, he being one of the meagre-minded breed proverbially reputed to go rushing in where angels fear to tread. This Joel Bosler was a policeman; his beat included the Gaunt House corner and both sides of the street upon which the Gaunt House fronted. He was a kindly enough creature; a long slab-pole of a man, with the face of an old buck sheep. For some reason—which he least of all could fathom—Joel Bosler had contracted a vague sort of attachment for the Major. They met occasionally on the sidewalk outside the hotel; and, since the Major always responded with iced and ceremonial politeness to the policeman’s salute, it may have been that this, to Bosler’s limited mind, was proof of a friendly understanding existing between them.

One day, about a month after the woman moved into the old Gresham place, Bosler, having first scratched his head assiduously for a space of minutes to stimulate the thought, was moved to invade the Gaunt House lobby and send his name upstairs to the Major’s rooms. A negro bell boy brought word back that the Major would be very glad to see Policeman Bosler, and Policeman Bosler accordingly went up. The Major was in the sitting room of his suite of rooms on the second floor. Bosler, bowing, came in and shut the door behind him with an elaborate carefulness.

“Good morning, sir?” said Major Foxmaster formally, with the note of polite interrogation in his tone; and then, as Bosler stood fingering his blue cap and shuffling his feet: “Well, sir; well?”

“Major Foxmaster, suh,” began Bosler, “I—er—I kinder wanted to say somethin’ to you privatelike.”

He halted lamely. Before the daunting focus of those frigid blue eyes his speech, carefully rehearsed beforehand, was slipping away from him.

“Except for ourselves, there is no one within hearing,” stated the Major. “Kindly proceed—if you will be so good.”

“Well, suh,” faltered Bosler, fumbling his words out—“well, suh, Major Foxmaster, it’s this-a-way: I’ve been—been a-thinkin’ it over; and if this here lady—this woman that wears black all the time—the one that’s moved into the old Gresham place acrost the street—if she pesters you any by follerin’ you round every wheres, the way she does—I thought I’d be very glad—if you said the word—to warn her to quit it, else I’d—I’d have to take steps agin her by law or somethin’. And so—and so——” He stopped altogether. He had been chilled at the moment of his entrance; now he was frozen mentally to below the zero point.

The Major spoke, and his syllables battered on Joel Bosler’s unprotected head like hailstones.

“Have you ever observed that the person to whom you refer has spoken to me?” he demanded.

“No, suh; but——”

“Or ever molested me in any way?”

“Oh, no, suh; but, you see——”

“Have you ever observed that I spoke to her?”

“No, suh; but——”

“Have you any reason for believing, of your own knowledge, that she knows me?”

“Well, suh, I——”

“Or that I am acquainted with her?”

“Well, I——”

“Then, sir, since she is minding her own business and I am minding my own business, I suggest that you take pattern by such examples and cultivate the habit of minding your own business. Kindly do not address me hereafter upon this subject—or any other. I find your conversation singularly unattractive. Good day, sir!”

Policeman Joel Bosler had no recollection afterward of having withdrawn himself. He presently found himself downstairs in the lobby, and, a little later on, outside the hotel, upon his regular beat. How he got there or how long it took him to get there he could not, with any degree of certainty, say.

Presently, though, he saw the Major issue forth from the Gaunt House door. And as the Major’s foot descended upon the first step of the flight leading down to the street level, the gate of the old Gresham place across the way clicked, and here came the cloaked, veiled woman, floating noiselessly across the road to follow him.

Joel Bosler, still in a state of intellectual numbness, watched them as they passed down the street—the Major striding on ahead, the gliding woman ten paces behind him. He had witnessed the same sight perhaps thirty times before. In days to come he was to witness it hundreds of times more; but always he watched it and never grew weary of watching it. Nor did the eyes of the rest of the town weary of watching it.

And so the thing went on.

The years went by. Five of them went by. Ten of them went by. A new generation was growing up, coming into manhood and womanhood. An old generation was thinning out and dying off. The Gaunt House was no longer the best hotel in the city. It was the second best and, before very long, was to be the third best. Tall business houses—six, seven, eight, nine stories tall—shouldered up close to it; and they dwarfed it, making it seem squatty and insignificant, whereas before it had loomed massive and monument-high, dominating the corner and the rest of the block. Once the cobbled road before its doors had clinked to the heel-taps of smart carriage horses. Now it thundered clamorously beneath the broad iron-shod tires of dray and vans.

The old Gresham place, diagonally across the way, looked much as it had always looked; indeed, there was not much about it, exteriorly speaking, to undergo change. Maybe the

green mould in the damp, slick walk at its northern side was a little bit greener and a little bit thicker; and maybe, in summer, the promenading snails were a trifle more numerous there. The iron gate, set in the middle breadth of the iron fence, lolled inward upon one rusted hinge, after the fashion of a broken wing. The close-drawn shades in the two lower front windows had faded from a tarnished silver colour to a dulled leaden colour; and one of them—the one on the right-hand side—had pulled away and awry from its fastenings above and was looped down, hanging at a skewed angle behind the dirtied and crusted panes, as though one of the coins had slipped halfway off the dead man's eyelids. People persistently called it the old Gresham place, naming it so when they pointed it out to strangers and told them the tale of its veiled chatelaine and her earthly mission.

For, you know, Major Foxmaster's shadow still followed after Major Foxmaster. Long before, these two had been accepted as verities; it might now be said of them that they had become institutional—inevitable fixtures, with orbits permanent and assured in the swing of community life. In the presence of this pair some took a degree of pride, bragging when away from home that they came from the town where so strange a sight might forever be seen, and when at home bringing visitors and chance acquaintances to this corner of the town in order to show it to these others.

Along with this morbid pride in a living tragedy ran a sort of undercurrent of sympathy for its actors. From the beginning there had been pity for the woman who, the better everlastingly to parade her shame, hid her face eternally from the light of day; and in possibly a more limited circle there had been abundant pity for the man as well. Settling down to watch the issue out, the town, from the outset, had respected the unbendable, unbreakable fortitude of the man, and respected, also, the indomitable persistency of the woman.

For a variety of very self-evident reasons no one had ever or would ever meddle in the personal affairs of Major Foxmaster. For reasons that were equally good, though perhaps not so easy to define in words, none meddled with her either. Street gamins feared to jeer her as she passed, without knowing exactly why they feared.

In these ten years the breaks in the strange relationship had been few and short. Once a year, on an average, the Major made short trips back to Virginia, presumably upon business pertaining to his estate and his investments. Such times the woman was not seen abroad. Once, in '79, for a week, and once again, just following the great blizzard of '81, she was missed for a few days; and people wondered whether she was ailing or housebound, or what. For those days the Major walked without his shadow. Then the swathed figure reappeared, tracking him about as before.

Time undeniably was working its changed with Major Foxmaster, as with his surroundings. He must be about sixty now; but, seeing him for the first time, you might have been pardoned for setting him down as a man of seventy or thereabouts—he looked it. His shoulders, which formerly he carried squared back so splendidly, were beginning to fold in upon the casing of his ribs. His hair used to be black, shot with white hairs; it was now white, shot with a few black hairs. His back had had a hollow in it; there was a curve in it yet, but the curve was outward instead of inward. When a man's figure develops convex lines where there used to be concavities, that man is getting on; and the Major plainly was getting on pretty fast. His eyes, which remained dignifiedly and defiantly scornful of all the world, and of all the world might think and might say, nevertheless were filmed over the least bit, so that they lost something of their icy blue keenness. His face, though, with the jaws sinking in upon the shrunken gums and the brows growing shaggier, was as much of a mask as it had ever been.

What was true of Major Foxmaster was seemingly not true of her who followed him. Within the flapping shapelessness of her disguise her figure showed as straight and supple as in the beginning, and her noiseless step was as nimble and quick

as ever it had been. And that was a mighty strange thing too. It was as though her shroud of wrappings, which kept the sunshine and the wind off her, kept off age too.

This very same thought came at length into Major Foxmaster's head. It took lodgment there and sprouted, sending out roots into all the odd corners of his mind. It is not for me to tell why or how he got this notion, or exactly when. It is for me merely to narrate as briefly as may be the progress of the obsession and its consequences.

Another five years passed, and then three, making eight more on top of the first ten. Major Foxmaster was crowding seventy; he looked eighty. Men and women who had been children when he moved out from Virginia were themselves almost face to face with impending middle age and had children of their own growing up, who, in their turn, would hear the story of Major Foxmaster's shadow and bear it forward into yet another generation. The stone copings above the Gaunt House door were sooty black with the accretions of decades; for this was a soft-coal town, and factories, with tall chimneys that constantly vomited out greasy black smoke, had crept up, taking the old hotel by flank and by rear. The broken shade in the right-hand lower front window of the old Gresham place, across the way, was gone altogether, having parted its rotted fabric from its decayed fastenings; so the bleak, bare face of the house winked with one dead eye and stared with the other.

The crotchety bay mare was long gone to the bone yard. Her hide was chair bottoms and her gristles were glue; and out on the trotting track wealthy young bloods of the town exercised her get and her skittish grand-get. The Major did not drive a harness nag any more—he had a palsy of the hands and a stoop of the spine; but in most regards he adhered to the old habits. He took his daily constitutionals—sometimes alone—except, of course, for the tagging black shape behind him—oftener with the octogenarian Sherwan; and of evenings he played his poker games at the Kenilworth Club, which, after the way of ultraconservative clubs, stood fast on its original site, even though the neighbourhood about it was so distressfully altered. His heels had quit ringing against the sidewalk; instead, his legs lifted tremulously and his feet felt for a purchase on the earth when he set them down.

His face was no longer chipped grey flint; it was a chalk-white, with deep lines in it. The gold-headed cane of ebony wood, which he carried always, had ceased to be an ornament to his gait and had become a necessary prop to his step. His jaws sagged in until there were deep recesses at the corners of his mouth; and there, in those little hollow places, the spittle would accumulate in tiny patches. Possibly, by reason of the bleary casts that had overspread them, his eyes—still the faithfully inscrutable peepholes of his brain—gave no betrayal of the racking thoughts behind them. They were racking thoughts too. The delusion was a mania now—a besetting mania, feeding on silence and isolation, colouring and tincturing all the processes of his intellect.

By years—so he reasoned it out with himself in every waking hour—by years, she who bided within that shuttered house over the way was his age, or near it. By rights, her draped form should be as shrunken and warped as his own. By rights, the face behind that thick black veil should be as old as his, and bleached, moreover, to a corpsey paleness. Yet the furtive glances he stole over his shoulder told him that the figure behind him moved as alertly erect as ever it had; that its movements had the same sure and silent swiftness.

So that, after a while, Major Foxmaster began to think things that no entirely sane man has any business thinking. He began to say to himself that now he had solved the secret which, all these years, had been kept from his ken. A curse had been put upon him—that was it; that must be it! Behind that veil was no face old and sunken and wasted as his was, but, instead, a young, plump face, with luminous grey eyes set in it, and a sweet, full mouth, and about it wavings of lustrous, rich brown hair—the face of the girl he once loved as she

looked in the days before he quit loving her.

He held up his own hands before his watery eyes. They were trembly, wrinkled hands, gnarled in their knuckles, corded on their backs. They were the colour of scorched leather—the texture of it too. But hers must be the plump little white hands he remembered, with rosy-pink palms and bright, pointed nails. Before a long mirror in his dressing room he studied himself—studied his bowed back and his hunching shoulders and his shaky shanks—and all. Her figure, inside its flapping black draperies, was straight as an arrow; her head poised itself firmly upright on her shoulders. That much at least he knew; so if that much were true, why was not the rest of it true too?

It was not fair! According to his lights he had fought out the fight with only such weapons as Nature and his own will gave him; but the Supreme Handicapper had stacked the cards against him. He was bound to lose the long, long race. He could not last much longer. He could feel age tugging at every flabby muscle; infirmity was forever fingering his tissues, seeking the most vulnerable spot at which to strike in at him.

He would lie down and die. And not until then—not until the last rattle of breath had scaped out of his collapsing windpipe; not until she, still triumphantly active and alert and youthful, still cloaked and gloved and hooded, had followed his sapped, empty shell to the graveyard—would she surrender and shrivel into her rightful semblance, growing old and feeble in an hour or in a day. It was not fair—this conjury business! From the beginning he never had a chance to win. All the days of his manhood he had walked with a living nightmare. Why, in dying, should he be doomed to point the moral of a living ghost tale?

First he told himself it could not be true; that it was a hideous imagination born of his broodings. This was the fag-end of the nineteenth century in which he lived, when supernatural events did not happen. Then he told himself it must be true—the testimony before his eyes proved the fact of what he could not see. Then something happened which, as far as Major Foxmaster was concerned, settled the issue.

On a winter night, after rough weather, the Major came feebly out of the Kenilworth Club, groping his way and muttering to himself. This habit of muttering to himself was one that had come on him just lately.

There were patches of ice upon the sidewalk, and the wind, like a lazy housewife, had dusted the snow back into corners and under projections. Between the porticoes of the doorway his foot slipped on one of these little ice patches. He threw out his gloved left hand to catch at some support and his fingers closed on her black-clad arm, where she had drawn herself into the shelter and shadow of the door-arch to await his appearance.

For the first time in nearly fifty years he touched her.

He jerked his hand back and fled away at a staggering, crippling run; and, as he ran to hide himself within his rooms, in panting gulps he blasphemed the name of his Maker; for to his feel her flesh, through the thick cloth sleeve on her arm, had seemed to him to be as firm and plump as it had felt when he was twenty-two and she was twenty. The evidence was complete.

All through the next day he kept himself behind closed doors, wrestling with his torments; but in the evening old Sherwan came for him and he dressed himself. They started out together, a doddering, tottering twain; suggesting, when they halted for a moment to rest at the foot of the office stairs, a pair of grey locust husks from which age, spider-fashion, had sucked out all the rich juices of health and strength; suggesting, when they went on again, a pair of crawling sick beetles which, though sick, still could crawl a little.

Side by side they crossed the tarnished, shabby old lobby, with its clumpings of dingy grey pillars and its red-plush sofa seats, and, in the centre, its rotunda mounting to the roof, up

floor by floor, in spiral rings that in perspective graduated smaller and smaller, like an inverted funnel; and side by side they issued forth from beneath the morguelike copings of the outer door and descended the Gaunt House steps—Major Foxmaster feeling ahead of him with his cane, and Judge Sherwan patting his left breast with his open hand—just as Policeman Joel Bosler, now dead and gone, had seen them do upon many another such evening as this. Promptly and inevitably befell another thing, then, which likewise the late deceased Bosler had witnessed times without number.

From the darker space beyond the corner lamp-post, out into the gassy yellow circle of radiance, appeared the straight, gliding black form, advancing on silent, padded feet and without visible effort, relentlessly to follow after them wheresoever they might choose to go.

So, then, at sight of the familiar apparition the icy shell of half a century thawed and broke to bits and was washed away in a freshet of agony; and to his one friend, for one moment, Major Foxmaster bared his wrung and tortured soul. He threw down his cane and threw up his arms.

“Sherwan,” he shrieked out, “I can’t stand it any longer—I can’t stand it! It’s killing me! I must look at the face—I must know!”

With a sudden frenzied energy he darted at the cloaked shape. It hesitated, shrinking back from his onward rush as though daunted; but he fixed his clutching fingers in the crêpe veil and tore it in twisted rags from the front of its wearer, and the light shone full on the face revealed beneath the close black hood of the bonnet. … He gave one blubbery, slobbered, hideous yell and fell flat at the base of the lamp-post.

Old Sherwan saw the face too. Swollen and strengthened with senile rage, he seized the figure by both its arms and shook it.

“You hussy! You wench! You Jezebel! You she-devil!” he howled at the top of his cracked voice, and rocked his prisoner to and fro. “What’s this? What does this mean, you hell spawn?”

A dart of pain nipped at his diseased heart then, and closed his throat. For a moment, without words, they struggled together. With a heave of her supple arms she broke his hold. She shoved him off from her and reared back on her heels, breathing hard—a full-blooded negress, with chalky popeyes and thick, purplish lips that curled away in a wide snarl from the white teeth, and a skin that was blacker than sin.

“Whut does hit mean?” she answered; and, through stress of fear and mounting hope and exultation, her voice rose to a camp-meeting shout:

“I tells you whut hit means: Hit means Ise Minnie Brownell, Ole Miss’ cook. Hit means Ole Miss is been daid ’mos’ fo’teen years—ever sence she taken down sick endurin’ de big blizzard. Hit means dat w’en she lay a-dyin’ she put de promise onto me to bury her in secret; an’ den to put on her clo’es an’ to foller, walkin’ behine dat man, daytime an’ nighttime, twell he died. Dat’s whut hit means!”

She sought to peer past him and her tone sharpened down, fine and keen:

“Is he daid? Oh, bless de good Lawd A’mighty! Is he daid? ’Cause, ef he’s daid, me an’ Hennery, w’ich is my lawful wedded husban’, we kin go back to Furginia an’ claim de prop’ty dat Ole Miss lef in trust to come to me w’en I kin prove he’s daid. Oh, look, please, suh, mister, and see ef he ain’t dead?”

Old Sherwan ran to the lamp-post and dropped down on both his knees, and shook his friend by the shoulders.

“Foxmaster!” he called. “Foxmaster, you’re free! You’re free! I tell you, you’re free! Foxmaster, look at me! Foxmaster, do you hear me? You’re free, I tell you!”

But the Major did not hear him. The Major was flat on his back, with his arms outstretched and the fingers of both his hands gripped in the rags of a black crêpe veil; and at the corners of his mouth the little patches of spittle bubbles were drying up. The Major would never hear anything again in this

world.

CHAPTER V

THE EYES OF THE WORLD

IF there were a hundred men in a crowd and Chester K. Pilkins was there he would be the hundredth man. I like that introduction. If I wrote a book about him I doubt whether I could sum up Mr. Pilkins' personality more completely than already I have done in this the first sentence of this the first paragraph of my tale. Nevertheless, I shall try.

Card-indexing him, so to speak, filling in the dotted lines after the fashion pursued by a candidate for admission to Who's Whosoever Can, we attain this result: Name? Chester K(irkham) Pilkins; born? certainly; parentage? one father and one mother; lives? only in a way of speaking; married? extensively so; business? better than it was during the panic but not so good as it might be; recreations? reading, writing, arithmetic and the comic supplements; clubs? Prospect Slope Pressing, Montauk Chess, Checkers and Whist, King's County Civic Reform and Improvement; religion? twice on Sunday, rarely on week-days; politics? whatever is the rule; height? sub-average; weight? less than sub-average; hair? same as eyes; eyes? same as hair; complexion? variable, but inclining to be fair, and warmer in moments of embarrassment; special distinguishing characteristics? Oh, say, what's the use?

This would apply to Chester K. Pilkins as once he was, not as now he is. For there has been a change. As will develop. But at the time when we begin our study of him Mr. Pilkins resided in a simple and unostentatious manner in Brooklyn, N. Y., on one of those streets which are named for semi-tropical flowering shrubs for the same reason that hunting dogs are named for Greek goddesses and race horses for United States senators and tramp steamers for estimable maiden ladies. In a small, neat house, almost entirely surrounded by rubber plants, he lived with his wife, Mrs. Gertrude Maud Pilkins. This phraseology is by deliberate intent. His wife did not live with him. He lived with her. To have referred to this lady as his better half would be dealing in improper fractions. At the very lowest computation possible, she was his better eight-tenths.

By profession he was an expert bookkeeper, in the employ of a firm doing a large bond and stock brokerage business on the sinful or Manhattan shore of the East River. The tragedy and the comedy, the sordid romance and the petty pathos of Wall Street rolled in an unheeded torrent over his head as he, submerged deep in the pages of his ledgers, sat all day long dotting his *i*'s and crossing his *t*'s, adding his columns and finding his totals. Sometimes of evenings he stayed on to do special accounting jobs for smaller concerns in need of his professional services.

Otherwise, when five o'clock came he took off his little green-baize apron, his green eyeshade and his black calico sleeve protectors, slipped on his detachable cuffs, his hat and his coat, took his umbrella in hand, and leaving New York and its wicked, wanton ways behind him, he joined with half a million other struggling human molecules in the evening bridge crush—that same bridge crush of which the metropolis is so justly ashamed and so properly proud—and was presently at home in Brooklyn, which is a peaceful country landscape, pastoral in all its instincts, but grown up quite thickly with brick and mortar. There he gave his evenings to the society of his wife, to the chess problems printed from time to time in the *Eagle*, and to reading his encyclopedia, which had been purchased on the instalment plan, at the rate of so much down, so much a week. It seemed probable that Mr. Pilkins would finish reading his encyclopedia before he finished paying for it, which is more than most of us can say, however literary our aims and aspirations. He liked to pick up a volume for half an hour or so immediately prior to his retiring. He said it rested him. He had got as far as the middle of the very

interesting one named *Gib to Jibe*. Once in a while, though, the Pilkinses went out in society. That is to say, Mrs. Pilkins went, and took Mr. Pilkins with her.

I would not have you believe from all this that Mr. Pilkins entertained no views of his own on current topics. His convictions upon certain heads were most definite and settled, and on favourable occasions openly he voiced them. Among other things he believed that if somebody would only start up an old-time minstrel show, such as we used to see when we were boys, it would make a fortune; that the newspapers printed a pack of lies every day because they had to have something to fill up their columns; that there was a great deal of grafting going on and something should be done about it right away; that the winters were changing, because of the Gulf Stream or something, so you couldn't depend on the climate any more; that owing to the high cost of living it was practically impossible to get a good sixty-cent table-d'hôte dinner nowadays; and that Mrs. Pilkins was in many respects a very unusual woman.

She was all of that. Get Gertrude Maud. She looms before us, large and full of figure, majestic of bearing and fair of face, her general aspect indeed a very general aspect. She was competent by inheritance and domineering by instinct. It was common talk in the circle in which Gertrude Maud moved, towing Chester behind her, that she had Bohemian leanings. True, she had never smoked a cigarette in all her blameless life, nor touched her lips to strong drink; nor yet had she patronised studio teas and attended the indoor anarchistic revels of the parlour-radicals established in the neighbourhood of Washington Square. Rather she betrayed her Bohemian trend by what she wore than by what she did.

She was addicted to festooning about her neck large polished beads of the more popular hard woods and upon her bosom plaquelike articles which apparently had originated with a skilled cabinetmaker and joiner. Her wrists and her forearms she adorned with art-work bracelets of hammered metals set with large muddy-looking stones—almost anything that would look well in a collection of geological specimens was, in the eyes of Gertrude Maud, jewelry. Her costumes of state, displayed in connection with these ornamentations culled from the vegetable and mineral kingdoms, were cut square in the neck and extended straight up and down, being ungirthed at the waistline but set off with red and blue edgings, after the style of fancy tea towels. As her woman friends often remarked in tones of admiration, she had never worn stays in her life, and yet just look what a figure she had! Sometimes, the weather being favourable, she wore sandals.

Excelling, as she did, in the social graces, Mrs. Pilkins was greatly in demand for neighbourhood parties. She was an amateur palmist of great note. At a suitable time in the course of the evening's festivities she would possess herself of the left hand of some gentleman or lady present—usually a gentleman's hand—and holding it palm upward, she would gently massage its surface and then begin uttering little gasping sounds betokening intense surprise and gratification.

"Do you know, really," she would say when she had in part recovered, such being the regular formula, "I don't believe in all my experience I hardly ever saw such an interesting hand?"

Peering close and ever closer she would trace out the past, the present and the future, seeing strange influences coming into the other's life, and long journeys and dark strangers; and presently, with a startled cry, she would pounce upon the heart line, and then, believe me, she would find out things worth telling! And if the owner of the captive hand chanced to be a young man whose life was so exemplary as to be downright painful, he would endeavour by his air to convey the impression that the fence round the South Flatbush Young Ladies' Seminary had been builded extra high and extra strong especially on his dangerous account. Hardly could the rest wait to have Mrs. Pilkins read their palms too. And while this went on, Mr. Pilkins would be hanging about on the outskirts of the group, feeling very null and void. Really his

only excuse for being there at all was that Gertrude Maud needed some one to get her rubbers off and on and to bring her home.

Naturally, as one adept in the divination of the dearest characteristics of men and women, and also because she was a wife and subject to the common delusions of wives as a class, Mrs. Pilkins felt she knew Chester—felt she could read him like a book. This only goes to show how wrong a woman and a wife can be. For behind the mild and pinkish mask which he showed to her and to creation at large Chester Pilkins nursed unsuspected ambitions, undreamed-of dreams. He hankered with a hankering which was almost a pain to stand for once anyhow before the eyes of the world. Within him a secret fire seethed; he ached and glowed with it, and yet none knew of it. He would have died in his tracks before he voiced his burning desire to any human being, yet constantly it abode with him. He was tired—oh, so tired—of being merely one of the six millions. He craved to be one among the six millions. He peaked and he pined with it.

This longing is commoner probably among city dwellers than among those who live in the smaller settlements of men, and for that there is, as I believe, a good and sufficient reason. In the little community there are no nobodies. Anybody is somebody. But where the multitude is close-packed, nearly anybody is everybody and nearly everybody is anybody. The greater the number within a given space, the fewer are there available for purposes of pomp, prominence and publicity. A few stand out above the ruck; the rest make up the unconsidered mass—mute, inglorious and, except briefly in the census figures, unsung. And Chester K. Pilkins yearned to stand out.

Twice in his life he had thought he was about to attain conspicuousness and be pointed out by men as something other than Mrs. Chester K. Pilkins' husband. They were narrow escapes, both of them. Because each was such a narrow escape, that made the disappointment all the greater. Once on a rainy, blowy evening, when the narrow gore of Nassau Street where it debouches into Park Row was a mushroom bed of wet, black umbrella tops and the bridge crush at the mouth of the Bridge took on an added frenzy, a taxicab, driven at most unlawful speed, bored through the fringes of the press, knocked a man galley west, and, never checking its gait, fled into the shelter of the L pillars toward Chatham Square and was gone from sight before more than six or eight spectators could get its license numbers wrong.

The man was Chester K. Pilkins. He was butted violently from behind as he fought his way across the asphalt, with his collar turned up against the wet gusts and his thoughts intent on getting a seat aboard the transpontine car. He never had gotten a seat aboard it yet, but there was no telling when he might. Immediately on being struck he was projected some yards through space in a galley-westerly direction, and when he struck he rolled over and over in the mud, greatly to the detriment of a neat black overcoat buttoning under a fly front, and with silk facings upon the lapels, then in its third season of service. Kind hands—very many of them—lifted him up from where he lay with a long scratch on his nose and a passing delusion within his brain that he had taken a long rough trip somewhere and was coming back by slow stages. Sympathetic persons, about equally divided in their opinion as to whether most of his bones were or were not broken, bore him with all gentleness into the drug store in the World Building, propped him against a show case, and packed about him in a dense mass, those good Samaritans in the front row calling upon those behind them to stand back, in heaven's name, and give him a little air. There a kindly disposed bootblack brushed him off, and a soda-water clerk offered him malted milk with a dash of nerve tonic in it, and a policeman, using a stubby lead pencil, took down his name and address in a little red book, and a blithe young interne came on the tail of an ambulance with a kit of surgical tools in his hand, and presently departed, obviously disappointed to find there was no need of a capital operation to be performed forthwith upon the spot; and, altogether, the victim was made much of. A little later,

somewhat shaken and sore but not materially damaged, he rode home—standing up and swaying in the aisle, as was customary—holding with one hand to a strap and with the other at intervals caressing his wounded nose.

Next morning he bought all the morning papers printed in English—there are still a considerable number of morning papers in Greater New York that are printed in English—and with a queer, strangled little beat of anticipatory pride in his throat-pulse he searched assiduously through all of them, page by page and heading by heading, for the account of his accident. He regarded that accident in a proprietary sense. If it wasn't his, whose then was it? Only one paper out of all the lot had seen fit to mention the affair. In a column captioned Small Brevities he found at last a single, miserable, puny six-line paragraph to the effect that a pedestrian—pedestrian, mind you!—giving his name as Charles Piffles, had been knocked down by an unidentified automobile, and after having been given first-aid treatment by Patrolman Roger P. Dugan, of the Peck's Slip Station, and receiving further attention at the hands of Ambulance Surgeon Max Loeb, who came from Battery Place Hospital in response to a call, was able to go to his home, at such and such an address, borough of Brooklyn. And even the house number as set down was incorrect. From that hour dated Chester K. Pilkins' firm and bitter belief in the untrustworthiness of the metropolitan press.

The other time was when he was drawn on a panel for jury duty in the trial of a very fashionable and influential murderer. A hundred householders were netted in that venire, and of the number I daresay Chester Pilkins was the hundredth. With the ninety and nine others he reported at a given hour at a given courtroom, and there for two days he waited while slowly the yawning jury box filled with retired real-estate dealers and jobbers in white goods. Finally his own name was reached and the clerk called it out loudly and clearly. Shaking the least bit in his knees and gulping hard to keep his Adam's apple inside his collar, Mr. Pilkins took the stand and nervously pledged himself truthfully to answer all such questions as might be put to him touching on his qualifications for service in the case now on trial. He did answer them truthfully; more than that, he answered them satisfactorily. He had no conscientious scruples against the infliction of capital punishment for the crime of murder in the first degree. From his readings of the public prints he had formed no set and definite opinion as to the guilt or innocence of the accused. He was not personally acquainted with the deceased, with the prisoner at the bar, with the attorneys upon either side, with the officers who had made the arrest, with the coroner's physician who had conducted the autopsy, or with any one connected in any way with the case. He professed himself as willing to be guided by His Honour on the bench in all matters pertaining to the laws of evidence, while exclusively reserving the right to be his own judge of the weight and value of the testimony itself. So far, so good.

The district attorney nodded briefly. The lawyers for the murderer, confabbing with their heads together, gave no sign of demur. The presiding justice, a large man, heavily moustached and with more chins than he could possibly need, who had been taking a light nap, was aroused by the hush which now befell and sat up, rustling in his black silk sleeping gown.

Behind Chester Pilkins' waistcoat Chester Pilkins' heart gave a little gratified jump. He was about to be accepted; he would be in the papers. He saw a sketch artist, who sat just beyond the rail, squint at him from under his eyebrows and lower a pencil to a scratch pad which was poised upon a right kneecap. A picture would be published. What mattered it though this picture would purely look excessively unlike him? Would not the portrait be suitably labelled? Mentally he visualised the precious lines:

Juror No. 9—Chester K. Pilkins, No. 373 Japonica Avenue; certified accountant; 39; married; no children.

From somewhere back of the moustache His Honour's voice was heard rumbling forth hoarsely:

"If-no-objections-from-either-side-let-juror-be-sworn."

At Mr. Pilkins' side appeared a court functionary bearing a grimed and venerable volume containing many great truths upon its insides and many hungry germs upon its outside. Mr. Pilkins arose to his feet and stretched forth a slightly tremulous hand to rest it upon The Book. In this moment he endeavoured to appear in every outward aspect the zealous citizen, inspired solely by a sense of his obligations to himself and to the state. A sort of Old Roman pose it was. And in that same moment the blow fell and the alabaster vase was shattered.

Senior counsel for the defence—the one with the long frock coat and the sobbing catch in his voice—bobbed up from where he sat.

"Defence-excuses-this-gentleman," he grunted, all in one word, and sat down again.

The artist scratched out a shadowy outline of the lobe of Mr. Pilkins' left ear and the southeastern slope of his skull—for already this talented draftsman had progressed thus far with the portrait—and in less than no time our Mr. Pilkins, surcharged now with a sense of injury and vaguely feeling that somehow his personal honour had been impugned, was being waved away from the stand to make room for a smallish, darkish gentleman of a Semitic aspect. With his thoughts in such turmoil that he forgot to take with him the bone-handled umbrella which he had carried for two years and better, he left the courtroom.

Really, though, he never had a chance. The defence had expended upon him one of its dwindling store of peremptory challenges because in the moment of being sworn he appeared a person of so stern and uncompromising an exterior. "Besides," the senior counsel had whispered hurriedly to his associates—"besides, he seems so blamed anxious to serve. Bad sign—better let him go." And so they let him go. But, on the other hand, had he worn a look less determined the district attorney would have challenged him on the suspicion of being too kind-hearted. The jury system is a priceless heritage of our forefathers, and one of the safeguards of our liberties, but we do things with it of which I sometimes think the forefathers never dreamed.

Thus, with its periods of hopefulness and its periods of despairing, life for our hero rolled on after the placid fashion of bucolic Brooklyn, adrowse among its mortary dells and its masonry dingles, until there came the year 1915 A. D. and of the Constitution of the United States the One Hundred and I forget which. For long the Pilkinses had been saving up to take a trip to Europe, Chester particularly desiring to view the Gothic cathedrals of the Continent, about which Volume *Cad to Eve* of his encyclopedia discoursed at great length and most entertainingly. For her part, Mrs. Chester intended to mingle in the gay life of the artistic set of the Latin Quarter, and then come home and tell about it.

By the summer of 1914 there was laid by a sum sufficient to pay all proper costs of the tour. And then, with unpardonable inconsiderateness, this war had to go and break out. The war disagreeably continuing, Europe was quite out of the question. If Europe must have a war it couldn't have the Pilkinses. So in the early spring of the following year, the combined thoughts of Mr. and Mrs. Pilkins turned longingly westward. Mr. Pilkins had never been beyond Buffalo but once; that was when, on their wedding tour, they went to Niagara Falls. Mrs. Pilkins once had visited her married sister residing in Xenia, Ohio. Such portion of the Great West as lay beyond Xenia was to her as a folded scroll. So Westward Ho! it was.

I deem it to have been eminently characteristic of Chester that he spent three evenings preparing, with the aid of timetables, descriptive folders furnished by a genial and accommodating ticket agency and a condensed hotel directory, a complete schedule of their projected itinerary, including the times of arrivals and departures of trains, stop-overs, connections, cab and bus fares, hotel rates, baggage regulations, and what not. Opposite the name of one junction

town beyond the Rockies he even set down a marginal note: “At this point see Great American Desert.”

Leaving Chicago on the second lap of the outbound half of the momentous journey, they took a section in a sleeping car named appropriately for a Hindu deity. For once in his life Chester was above his wife, where he could look down upon her. But that was in the nighttime, when he lodged in the upper. Daytimes he reverted to his original and regular state, becoming again one of the submerged tenth of one-tenth. In the dining car Mrs. Pilkins selected the dishes and gave the orders, and he, submissive as the tapeworm, ate of what was put before him, asking no questions. In the club car, among fellow travellers of his own sex, he was as one set apart. They talked over him and round him and if needs be through him to one another; and when, essaying to be heard upon the topics of the day, then under discussion, he lifted up his voice some individual of a more commanding personality—the member of the legislature from Michigan or the leading osteopath of Council Bluffs—would lift his voice yet higher, wiping him out as completely as though he had been a naught done in smudged chalk upon a blackboard. After all, life in the free and boundless West threatened to become for him what life in cribbed, cabined and confined Brooklyn had been; this was the distressing reflection which frequently recurred to him as he retired all squelched and muted from the unequal struggle, and it made his thoughts dark with melancholy. Was there in all this wide continent no room for true worth when habited in native modesty?

In time they reached a certain distinguished city of the Coast, nestling amid its everlasting verdure and real-estate boomers. But in the rainless season the verdure shows an inclination to dry up. However, this was in the verdant springtime, when Nature everywhere, and especially in California, is gladsome and all-luxuriant. From the station a bus carried them through thriving suburbs to a large tourist hotel built Spanish Mission style and run American plan. The young man behind the clerk’s desk took one prognostic look at Chester as Chester registered, and reached for a certain key, but while in the act of so doing caught a better glimpse of Mrs. Chester, and, changing his mind, gave them a very much better room at the same price. There was something about Mrs. Pilkins.

That evening, entering the dining-room, which was a great, soft-pine Sahara of a place dotted at regular intervals with circular oases called tables, each flowing with ice water and abounding in celery, in the native ripe olives shining in their own oils, and in yellow poppy blossoms in vases, the Pilkinses instantly and intuitively discovered that they had been ushered into a circle new to them. Some of the diners in sight were plainly, like themselves, tourists, transients, fly-by-night sightseers from the East, here to-day and going to-morrow. But sundry others present, being those who had the look about them of regular guests, were somehow different. Without being told, the newcomers at once divined that they were in a haunt of the moving-picture folk, and also by the same processes of instinctive discernment were informed of another thing: As between the actors newly recruited from that realm of art which persons of a reminiscent turn of mind are beginning to speak of as the spoken drama, and the actors who had been bred up and developed by its one-time little half-sister, the moving-picture game, a classifying and separating distinction existed. It was a distinction not definable in words, perhaps; nevertheless, it was as apparent there in that dining-room as elsewhere. You know how the thing goes in other lines of allied industries? Take two agents now—a road agent, let us say, and a book agent. Both are agents; both belong to the predatory group; both ply their trades upon the highway with utter strangers for their chosen prey; and yet in the first flash we can tell a book agent from a road agent, and vice versa. So it was with these ladies and gentlemen upon whom Chester K. Pilkins and wife—beg pardon, Mrs. Chester K. Pilkins and husband—now gazed.

At the table to which a post-graduate head-waitress escorted them and there surrendered them into the temporary

keeping of a sophomore side-waitress there sat, in a dinner coat, a young man of most personable appearance and address, with whom, as speedily developed, it was not hard to become acquainted, but, on the contrary, easy. Almost as soon as the Pilkinses were seated he broke through the film ice of formality by remarking that Southern California was, on the whole, a wonderful country, was it not? Speaking as one, or as one and a fractional part of another, they agreed with him. Did it not possess a wonderful climate? It did. And so on and so forth. You know how one of these conversations grows, expands and progresses.

Presently there were mutual introductions across the fronded celery and the self-lubricating ripe olive. This accomplished, Mr. Pilkins was upon the point of stating that he was in the accounting line, when their new acquaintance, evidently holding such a detail to be of no great consequence, broke in upon him with a politely murmured "Excuse me" and proceeded to speak of a vastly more interesting subject. His name, as they already knew, was Mr. Royal Harcourt. He was of the theatrical profession, a thing they already had guessed. He told them more—much more.

It would seem that for long he had withstood the blandishments and importunities of the moving-picture producers, standing, as it were, aloof from them and all their kind, holding ever that the true artist should remain ever the true artist, no matter how great the financial temptation to enter the domain of the silent play might be. But since so many of equal importance in the profession had gone into the pictures—and besides, after all was said and done, did not the pictures cater educationally to a great number of doubtlessly worthy persons whose opportunity for acquaintance with the best work of the legitimate stage was necessarily limited and curtailed?—well, any way, to make a long story no longer, he, Mr. Royal Harcourt, had gone into the pictures himself, and here he was. Taking it that he had been appealed to, Mr. Pilkins nodded in affirmation of the wisdom of the step, and started to speak. "Excuse me, please," said Mr. Harcourt courteously but firmly. Plainly Mr. Harcourt was not yet done. He resumed. One who had a following might always return to the legitimate finding that following unimpaired. Meanwhile, the picture business provided reasonably pleasant employment at a most attractive remuneration.

"So, as I said just now," went on Mr. Harcourt, "here I am and here you find me. I may tell you that I am specially engaged for the filming of that popular play, The Prince of the Desert, which the Ziegler Company is now making here at its studios. My honorarium—this, of course, is in confidence—my honorarium for this is eight hundred dollars a week." He glanced at their faces. "In fact, strictly between ourselves, nine hundred and fifty." And with a polished finger nail Mr. Harcourt flicked an imaginary bit of fluff from a fluffless coat lapel.

Awe descended upon the respective souls of his listeners, and there lingered.

"And of course for that—that figure—you play the leading part?" Mrs. Pilkins put the question almost reverently.

A trace, just a trace, of unconscious bitterness trickled into their tablemate's voice as he answered:

"No, madam, I could hardly go so far as to say that—hardly so far as to say that exactly. My good friend, Mr. Basil Derby, has the title rôle. He originated the part on Broadway—perhaps that explains it. I play the American newspaper correspondent—a strong part, yet with touches of pure comedy interspersed in it here and there—a part second only to that of the star."

"Does he—this Mr. Derby—does he get anything like what you are paid?" ventured Mr. Pilkins. Surely the Ziegler Company tempted bankruptcy.

"I suspect so, sir, I suspect so."

Mr. Harcourt's tone indicated subtly that this world was as yet by no means free from injustice.

Before the meal was anywhere near ended—in fact, before

they reached the orange sorbet, coming between the roast beef *au jus* and the choice of young chicken with giblet sauce or cold sliced lamb with pickled beets—the Pilkinses knew a great deal about Mr. Royal Harcourt, and Mr. Royal Harcourt knew the Pilkinses were good listeners, and not only good listeners but believing ones as well. So a pleasant hour passed speedily for all three. There, was an especially pleasant moment just at the close of the dinner when Mr. Harcourt invited them to accompany him at ten o'clock on the following morning to the Ziegler studios, and as his guest to witness the lensing of certain episodes destined to figure in the completed film drama of The Prince of the Desert. Speaking for both, Mrs. Pilkins accepted.

"But, Gertrude Maud," murmured Mr. Pilkins doubtfully as the two of them were leaving the dining-room to hear the orchestra play in the arched inner garden where the poinsettia waved its fiery bannerets aloft, reminding one somewhat of the wagging red oriflamme of a kindred member of the same family—the Irish setter—and the inevitable spoiled childling of every tourist hotel romped to and fro, whining for pure joy, making life a curse for its parents and awakening in the hearts of others reconciling thoughts touching upon the late King Herod, the bald-headed prophet who called the bears down out of the hills, and the style of human sacrifices held to be most agreeable to the tastes of the heathenish god Moloch. "But, Gertrude Maud," he repeated demurringly as he trailed a pace behind her, seeing she had not heard or seemed not to have heard. In her course Mrs. Pilkins halted so suddenly that a double-stranded necklet of small wooden darning eggs of graduated sizes clinked together smartly.

"Chester," she stated sharply, "don't keep bleating out 'Gertrude Maud' like that. It annoys me. If you have anything to say, quit mumbling and say it."

"But, Ger—but, my dear," he corrected himself plaintively, "we were going to visit the orange groves to-morrow morning. I have already spoken to the automobile man——"

"Chester," said Mrs. Pilkins, "the orange groves can wait. I understand they have been here for some time. They will probably last for some time longer. To-morrow morning at ten o'clock you and I are going with that nice Mr. Harcourt. It will be an interesting experience and a broadening one. We are here to be broadened. We will see something very worth while, I am convinced of it."

Indeed, they began to witness events of an acutely unusual nature before ten o'clock. As they came out from breakfast there darted down the lobby stairs at the right a young maiden and a youth, both most strikingly garbed. The young lady wore a frock of broad white-and-black stripes clingingly applied to her figure in up-and-down lines. She had a rounded cheek, a floating pigtail, and very large buckles set upon the latchets of her twinkling bootees. The youth was habited as a college boy. At least he wore a Norfolk jacket, a flowing tie of the Windsor, England, and East Aurora, New York, variety, and trousers which were much too short for him if they were meant to be long trousers and much too long for him if they were meant to be short trousers. Hand in hand, with gladsome outcry, this pair sped through the open doors and vaulted down the porch steps without, as nimbly as the chamois of the Alpine steeps, toward a large touring car, wherein sat a waiting chauffeur, most correctly liveried and goggled.

Close behind them, in ardent pursuit, an elderly, rather obese gentleman, in white waistcoat, white side whiskers and white spats—patently a distressed parent—tore into sight, waving his arms and calling upon the fleeing pair to halt. Yet halted they not. They whisked into the rear seat of the automobile just as the elderly gentleman tripped on a crack in the planking of the veranda and was precipitated headlong into the arms of a fat bellboy who at this exact moment emerged from behind a pillar. It was a very fat bellboy—one that could not have weighed an ounce less than two hundred pounds, nor been an hour less than forty years old—and he was grotesquely comical in a suit of brass buttons and green cloth incredibly tight for him. Locked in each other's arms the

parent and bellboy rolled down the steps—bumpety-bump!—and as progressing thus in close communion they reached the surface of the driveway, a small-town policeman, wearing long chin whiskers and an enormous tin star, ran forward from nowhere in particular, stumbled over their entangled forms and fell upon them with great violence. Then while the three of them squirmed and wriggled there in a heap, the automobile whirled away with the elopers—it was, of course, by now quite plain that they must be elopers—casting mocking, mirthsome glances backward over their diminishing shoulders.

"Slap stick! Rough-house! Cheap stuff! But it goes—somehow it goes. The public stands for it. It passes one's comprehension." It was Mr. Royal Harcourt who, standing just behind the Pilkinses, commented in tones of a severe disparagement. They became cognisant also of a man who had been stationed in the grass plot facing the hotel, grinding away at a crank device attached to a large camera. He had now ceased from grinding. Except for the camera man, the disapproving Mr. Harcourt and themselves, no one else within sight appeared to take more than a perfunctory interest in what had just occurred.

"Come with me," bade Mr. Harcourt when the outraged parent, the fat bellboy and the small-town policeman had picked themselves up, brushed themselves off and taken themselves away. "You have seen one side of this great industry. I propose now to introduce you to another side of it—the artistic side."

He waved his arm in a general direction, and instantly a small jitneybile detached itself from a flock of jitneybiles stationed alongside the nearer curbing and came curving up to receive them. This city, I may add in passing, was the home of the original mother jitney, and there, in her native habitat, she spawned extensively before she moved eastward, breeding busily as she went.

To the enlarged eyes of the Pilkinses strange phases of life were recurringly revealed as the vehicle which their guide had chartered progressed along the wide suburban street, beneath the shelter of the pepper trees and the palms. Yet the residential classes living thereabout appeared to view the things which transpired with a languid, not to say a bored, manner; and as for Mr. Harcourt, he, sitting in front alongside the driver, seemed scarcely to notice them at all.

For example: Two automobiles, one loaded with French Zouaves and the other with Prussian infantrymen, all heavily armed and completely accoutred, whizzed by them, going in the opposite direction. A most winsome, heavily bejewelled gypsy lass flirted openly with an affectionate butler beneath the windows of a bungalow, while a waspish housemaid, evidently wrought to a high pitch by emotions of jealousy, balefully spied upon them from the shelter of an adjacent shrubbery clump. Out of a small fruit store emerged a benevolent, white-haired Church of England clergyman, of the last century but one, in cassock, flat hat and knee breeches. With him walked a most villainous-appearing pirate, a wretch whose whiskered face was gashed with cutlass scars and whose wicked legs were leathered hip-deep in jack boots. These two were eating tangerines from the same paper bag as they issued forth together.

The car bearing our friends passed a mansion, the handsomest upon the street. Out from its high-columned portals into the hot sunshine staggered a young man whose lips were very red and whose moustache was very black, with great hollows beneath his eyes and white patches at his temples—a young man dressed in correct evening attire, who, pausing for a moment, struck his open hand to his forehead with a gesture indicative of intense despair—you somehow opined he had lost all at the gaming table—then reeled from sight down a winding driveway. One glimpsed that his glistening linen shirt bosom was of a pronounced saffron cast, with collar and tie and cuffs all of the same bilious tone to match.

"Noticed the yellow, didn't you?" asked Mr. Harcourt.

“That means he’s been doing indoor stuff. Under the lights yellow comes out white.”

At the end of a long mile the jitney halted at a gateway set in a high wooden wall beyond which might be seen the peaks of a glass-topped roof. About this gateway clustered a large assemblage of citizens of all ages and conditions, but with the young of both sexes predominating. As the young women uniformly wore middy blouses and the young men sport shirts, opened at the neck, there were bared throats and wide sailor collars wherever one looked.

“Extra people,” elucidated their host. “They get three a day —when they work. We’ll probably use a lot of them to-day.”

Within the inclosure a new world unfolded itself for the travellers from the Atlantic seaboard—in fact, sections of several new worlds. At the heels of Mr. Harcourt they threaded their way along a great wooden stage that was open, front and top, to the blue skies, and as they followed after him they looked sideways into the interior of a wrecked and deserted Belgian farmhouse; and next door to that into a courtroom now empty of everything except its furnishings; and next door to that into a gloomy dungeon with barred windows and painted canvas walls. They took a turn across a dusty stretch of earth beyond the far end of the segmented stage, and, lo, they stood in the gibbering midriff of an Oriental city. Behind all was lath, furring and plaster, chicken wire, two-by-fours and shingle nails; but in front ’twas a cross-section of teeming bazaar life. How far away seemed 373 Japonica Avenue, Brooklyn, then!

An energetic man in laced boots and a flannel shirt—Mr. Harcourt called him the director—peered angrily into the perspective of the scene and, waving a pasteboard megaphone in command, ordained that a distant mountain should come ten feet nearer to him. Alongside of this young man Mohammed was an amateur. For the mountain did obey, advancing ten feet, no more and no less. Half a score of young men in cowboy garb enshrouded themselves in flowing white draperies, took long, tasselled spears in their hands, and swung themselves upon the backs of horses—and, behold, a tribe of Bedouins trotted through the crowded, winding way, scattering mendicants, priests, camel drivers and peddlers from before their path.

Upon the edge of all this Chester K. Pilkins hovered as one entranced. He had lost Mrs. Pilkins; he was separated from Mr. Harcourt.

He became aware of three damsels of tender years who sat in a row upon a pile of rough lumber near at hand. They wore flowing robes of many colours; they were barefooted, their small toes showing pleasantly pink and white below the hems of their robes, and their arms were drawn primly behind them. He watched them. Although manifestly having no part in the scene then being rehearsed for filming, they continued to hold their arms in this restrained and presumably uncomfortable attitude, as though they might be practising some new form of a deep-breathing exercise.

As he watched, one of the three, catching his eye, arose and came padding her little bare feet through the dust to where he stood.

“Do me a favour?” she inquired archly.

“Why—why, yes, certainly, if possible,” answered Mr. Pilkins.

“Sure, it’s possible. See this?” She shook her head, and a wayward ringlet which dangled down against one cheek was agitated to and fro across her pert face. “Well, it’s tickling my nose something fierce. Tuck it back up out of sight, will you?”

“I’m—I’m afraid I don’t understand,” stammered Mr. Pilkins, jostled internally.

She turned slowly round, and he saw then that her wrists were crossed behind her back and firmly bound together with a length of new cotton rope.

“I’m one of the captive Armenians,” she explained, facing him again. “More’n a hour ago Wagstaff—he’s the assistant director—he tied us up. We gotta stay all tied up, just so, till

our scene goes on. He's such a bug on all them little details—Wagstaff is! Go on—be a good fella and get this hair up out of my face, won't you? I'll be sneezing my head off in another minute. But say—mind the make-up."

A brightish pink in colour, Mr. Pilkins extended a helping hand, tingling inside of himself.

"Chester!"

It was his master's voice, speaking with most decided masterfulness. As though the errant curl had been red-hot Mr. Pilkins jerked his outstretched fingers back. The Armenian maiden retired precipitately, her shoulders twitching.

"Chester, come here!"

Chester came, endeavouring, unsuccessfully, to avoid all outward semblance of guilt.

"Chester, might I ask what you were doing with that—that young person?" Mrs. Pilkins' manner was ominous.

"I was helping her—a little—with her hair."

"With her—why, what—do you——"

"She is tied. Her hands, you know. ... She——"

"Tied, is she?" Mrs. Pilkins bestowed a chilled stare upon the retreating figure of the captive. "Well, she deserves to be. They should keep her tied. Chester, I want you to stay close to me and not go wandering off again."

"Yes, my dear, I will—I mean, I won't."

"Besides, you may be needed any minute now. Mr. Harcourt"—she indicated that gentleman, who had approached—"has been kind enough to invite us to take part in this beautiful production."

"But, my dear—but——"

"Chester, I wish for my sake you would refrain from keeping on saying 'but.' And please quit interrupting."

"You see—it's like this," explained Mr. Harcourt: "It's the scene at the dock when the heroine gets home. You two are to be two of the passengers—the director says he'll be very glad to have you take part. I just spoke to him. There will be many others in the scene—extras, you know. Think you'd like it? It will be an experience."

"As you say, Mr. Harcourt, it will be an experience," said Mrs. Pilkins. "I accept with pleasure. So does my husband."

Promptly ensued then action, and plenty of it. With many others, recruited from the ranks of the populace, the Chester Pilkinses were herded into a corner of the open-faced stage at the back side of the bazaar—a corner which the two presiding genii of that domain, known technically and respectively as the boss carpenter and the head property man, had, by virtue of their magic and in accordance with an order from their overlord, the director, transformed, even as one waited, from something else into the pierhead of a New York dock. With these same others our two friends mounted a steep flight of steps behind the scenes, and then, shoving sheeplike through a painted gangway, in a painted bulkhead of a painted ship, they flocked down across a canvas-sided gangplank to the ostensible deck of the presumable pier, defiling off from left to right out of lens range, the while they smiled and waved fond greetings to supposititious friends.

When they had been made to do this twice and thrice, when divers stumbling individuals among them had been corrected of a desire to gaze, with the rapt, fascinated stare of sleep-walkers, straight into the eye of the machine, when the director was satisfied with his rehearsal, he suddenly yelled "Camera!" and started them at it all over again.

In this instant a spell laid hold on Chester Pilkins. As one exalted he went through the picture, doing his share and more than his share to make it what a picture should be. For being suddenly possessed with the instinct to act—an instinct which belongs to all of us, but which some of us after we have grown up manage to repress—Chester acted. In his movements there was the unstudied carelessness which is best done when it is studied; in his fashion of carrying his furled umbrella and his strapped steamer rug—the Ziegler Company had furnished the steamer rug but the umbrella was his own—there was natural

grace; in his quick start of recognition on beholding some dear one in the imaginary throng waiting down on the pier out of sight there was that art which is the highest of all arts.

With your permission we shall skip the orange groves, languishing through that day for Mr. and Mrs. Chester K. Pilkins to come and see them. We shall skip the San Francisco Exposition. We shall skip the Yosemite Valley, in which to Chester there seemed to be something lacking, and the Big Trees, which after all were much like other trees, excepting these were larger. These things the travellers saw within the scope of three weeks, and the end of those three weeks and the half of a fourth week brings them and us back to 373 Japonica Avenue. There daily Chester watched the amusement columns of the *Eagle*.

On a Monday evening at seven-fifteen he arrived home from the office, holding in his hand a folded copy of that dependable sheet.

“Chester,” austerely said Mrs. Pilkins as he let himself in at the door, “you are late, and you have kept everything waiting. Hurry through your dinner. We are going over to the Lewinsohns for four-handed rummy and then a rarebit.”

“Not to-night, Gertrude Maud,” said Chester.

“And why not to-night?” demanded the lady with a rising inflection.

“Because,” said Chester, “to-night we are going to the Bijou Palace Theatre. The Prince of the Desert goes on to-night for the first run.”

“Oh,” said Mrs. Pilkins understandingly. “I’ll telephone Mrs. Lewinsohn we can’t come—make some excuse or other. Yes, we’ll go to the Bijou Palace.” She said this as though the idea had been hers all along.

Seated in the darkened auditorium they watched the play unfold upon the screen. They watched while the hero, a noble son of the Arabic sands, rescued the heroine, who was daughter to a comedy missionary, from the clutches of the wicked governor-general. They saw the barefoot Armenian maids dragged by mocking nomads across burning wastes to the tented den of a villainous sheik, and in the pinioned procession Chester recognised the damsel of the truant curl and the ticklish nose. They saw the intrepid and imperturbable American correspondent as, unafraid, he stood in the midst of carnage and slaughter, making notes in a large leather-backed notebook such as all newspaper correspondents are known to carry. But on these stirring episodes Chester K. Pilkins looked with but half an eye and less than half his mind. He was waiting for something else.

Eventually, at the end of Reel Four, his waiting was rewarded, and he achieved the ambition which all men bear within themselves, but which only a few, comparatively speaking, ever gratify—the yearning to see ourselves as others see us. While the blood drummed in his heated temples Chester Pilkins saw himself, and he liked himself. I do not overstretch the truth when I say that he liked himself first-rate. And when, in the very midst of liking himself, he reflected that elsewhere over the land, in scores, perhaps in hundreds of places such as this one, favoured thousands were seeing him too—well, the thought was well-nigh overpowering.

For the succeeding three nights Mr. Pilkins’ fireside knew him not. The figure of speech here employed is purely poetic, because, as a matter of fact, the house was heated by steam. But upon each of these three evenings he sat in the Bijou Palace, waiting for that big moment to come when he before his own eyes should appear. Each night he discovered new and pleasing details about himself—the set of his head upon his shoulders, the swing of his arm, the lift of his leg; each night, the performance being ended, he came forth regarding his fellow patrons compassionately, for they were but the poor creatures who had made up the audience, while he veritably had been not only part of the audience but part of the entertainment as well; each night he expected to be

recognised in the flesh by some emerging person of a keen discernment of vision, but was disappointed here; and each night he went home at ten-forty-five and told Gertrude Maud that business on the other side of the bridge had detained him. She believed him. She—poor, blinded wretch—did not see in his eyes the flickering reflection of the spark of desire, now fanning into a flame of resolution within the brazier of his ribs.

Thursday night came, and The Prince of the Desert film concluded its engagement at the Bijou Palace. Friday night came, but Chester K. Pilkins did not. He did not come home that night nor the next day nor the next night. Without warning to any one he had vanished utterly, leaving behind no word of whatsoever nature. He was gone, entirely and completely gone, taking with him only the garments in which he stood—a black cutaway, black four-in-hand tie, black derby hat, plain button shoes, plain, white, stiff-bosomed shirt. I am quoting now from the description embodied in a printed general alarm sent out by the police department, which general alarm went so far as to mention considerable bridge-work in the upper jaw and a pair of fairly prominent ears.

At last Chester K. Pilkins, although not present to read what was printed of him, got into the papers. Being questioned by reporters, his late employers declared that the missing man was of unimpeachable habits and that his accounts were straight, and immediately then, in a panic, set experts at work on his books. Remarkable to state, his accounts were straight. In the bank, in his wife's name, he had left a comfortable balance of savings. His small investments were in order. They likewise were found to be in his wife's name; it seemed he had sent a written order for their transfer on the eve of his flight—if flight it was. The house already was hers by virtue of a deed executed years before. Discussing the nine-day sensation, the ladies of the neighbourhood said that even if Chester Pilkins had run away with some brazen hussy or other, as to them seemed most probable—because, you know, you never can tell about these little quiet men—at least he had left poor, dear Gertrude well provided for, and that, of course, was something.

Something this may have been; but the deserted wife mourned and was desolate. She wanted Chester back; she was used to having him round. He had been a good husband, as husbands go—not exciting, perhaps, but good. Despite strong evidences to the contrary, she could not bring herself to believe that deliberately he had abandoned her. He was dead, by some tragic and violent means, or else he had been kidnapped. Twice with a sinking heart she accompanied a detective sergeant from borough headquarters to the morgue, there to gaze upon a poor relic of mortality which had been fished out of the river, but which bore no resemblance to her Chester nor, indeed, to anything else that once had been human. After this the police lost even a perfunctory interest in the quest. But the lady was not done. She paid a retainer to a private detective agency having branches over the country, and search was maintained in many places, high and low.

Three months went by; then a fourth. Japonica Avenue may have forgotten Chester Pilkins, but Gertrude Maud had not. At the tag end of the fourth month came tidings from the main office of the detective agency which, overnight, started Mrs. Pilkins to where—as the passenger agents for the transcontinental lines so aptly phrased it—California's Golden Strand is kissed by the pellucid waves of the Sun-Down Sea. It couldn't be true, this report which had been brought to her by a representative of the great sleuth for whom the agency was named; indeed, it was inconceivable to one who knew her husband that such a report could be true, but she would make certain for herself. She would—so this suffering, conscientious woman told herself—leave no stone unturned. She would neglect to follow up no clue merely because of its manifest improbability.

So back she journeyed to that selfsame town where the Ziegler studios were housed. A local representative of the agency, being advised by telegraph in advance of her coming, met her at the station. Expressing physically the gentle sympathy of an honorary pallbearer, he led her to an

automobile, and with her he drove for miles through streets which she remembered having traversed at least once before, until in the far suburban reaches of the city, where the blue foothills of the coast range came down toward the sea, he brought her to a centre of the moving-picture industry; not the Ziegler establishment this time, but to the curious place known as Filmville—ninety fenced-in acres of seeming madness. It was getting on toward five o'clock in the afternoon when the automobile halted before its minareted portals. Leaving Mrs. Pilkins in the car her companion went to confer briefly with a uniformed individual on duty at the door. Returning to her he spoke as follows:

"The—ahem—the party we've got under suspicion is out on location with a company. But they're due back here before dark. I guess we'd better wait a spell."

He helped her to alight, dismissed the automobile, and accompanied her to an ornamental seat facing an exceedingly ornamental fountain which spouted in a grass plot hard by the gates to Filmville. As she sat and waited, strangely clad men and women—purporting to represent in their attire many periods of the world's history and many remote corners of the world's surface—passed by, going in and out. From over the high walls came to her jungle sounds and jungle smells, for this large concern maintained its own zoo upon its own premises. Persistently a sacred cow of India, tethered in a recess of the fence where herbage sprouted, mooed for an absent mate. The voice of the creature matched Mrs. Pilkins' thoughts. Internally she was mooing for her mate too.

Twilight impended when two automobile loads of principals, attired cowboyishly and cowgirlishly, came thumping out of the north along the dusty road. These persons dismounted and trooped inside. A little behind them, heralded by a jingle of accoutrement, came a dozen or so punchers riding ponies. With jest and quip bandied back and forth, and to the tinkling of their spurs, these last dropped off their jaded mounts, leaving the ponies to stand with drooping heads and dragging bridles, and went clumping on their high heels into a small wooden place, advertising liquid refreshment, which stood across the way. The detective softly joggled Mrs. Pilkins' elbow.

"Come on, ma'am," he said; "just follow me. And don't say anything until you're sure. And don't scream or faint or anything like that—if you can help it."

"I shan't," said Mrs. Pilkins, all a-tremble. She was resolved not to scream and she was not the fainting kind.

Very naturally and very properly, as a gently nurtured woman, Mrs. Pilkins had never seen the interior of a barroom. From just inside the swinging doors where her escort halted her she looked about the place with the eye of curiosity, and even though her mind swirled tumultuously she comprehended it—the glassware, the pictures on the walls, the short bar, the affable dispenser who stood behind it, and the row of cowboys who lined the front of it from end to end, with their backs and hunched shoulders all turned to her, stretching away in a diminishing perspective.

"Wait a minute, lady," advised the detective in a whisper. "Take your time and look 'em over careful. And be sure—be sure to be sure."

The lady strove to obey. She looked and she looked. At the back of the room three punchers were clumped together, withdrawn slightly from their fellows—a tall puncher, a medium-sized puncher, and between these two a small puncher.

"Here, ol'-timer," bade the tall puncher, drumming with his knuckles upon the bar, "wait on fellers that a-got a real thirst. Three long beers!"

The beers were drawn and placed at properly spaced intervals before the three. Their three right elbows rose at an angle; three flagons of creamy brew vanished.

A fourth cowboy slid down toward them.

"Well," he demanded boisterously, "how's Little Chestnut makin' out? Still saddle sore? Still hatin' to think of the place

where you got to meet that there old paint pony of yourn to-mor' mornin'?"

It was the tall cowboy who made answer.

"Nix on that Chestnut thing," he said. "That's old stuff. You should a-seen the little man stay by that pinto of hisn when she got uptious a while ago—jist stay by her and pour the leather into her. No, sir, that there Chestnut stuff don't go any more for this bunch. This here"—and his long flannel-clad arm was endearingly enwrapped about the shoulders of his small companion—"this here boy from now on is Old Chesty."

Even though viewed from behind, it might be seen that the person thus rechristened was protruding a proud chest. With a little swagger he breasted the bar.

"I'm buying," he stated loudly. "Everybody's in on this one."

"Whee!" yelled the big cowboy. "Chesty's buyin'—this one's on Old Chesty."

But another voice rose above his voice, over-topping it—the cry of an agonised woman:

"Oh, Chester!"

As though he had been bee-stung the little man pivoted on his heels. His chaps hung floppingly about his short legs; his blue shirt was open halfway down his sunburnt chest; his pistol holster flapped against his flank; his wide white hat was upon the back of his head; his neck was tanned brown; his face was red and sweaty; his large outstanding ears were burnt a bright, translucent crimson; his hands were dirty—but it was Chester. For one moment, contemplating the accusing, brimming eyes of the lady, he flinched and shrank as one reared amid the refining influences of Japonica Avenue under such circumstances as these might well have flinched, might well have shrunk. Then he stiffened and in all visible regards was again Old Chesty, the roughrider.

"Hello, Gertrude," he said, just like that.

"Oh, Chester!" she wailed the words in louder key even than before.

Like the gentleman that he was, the barkeeper turned squarely round and began polishing the valve of a beer pump with the palm of his moist hand. With a glance which swiftly travelled from one to another the tall cowboy gathered up his fellows and speedily they withdrew through the swinging doors, passing the lady with faces averted, profoundly actuated all by considerations inspired of their delicate outdoor sensibilities. Except for the detective person, husband and wife, to all intents and purposes, stood alone, face to face.

"Oh, Chester," she repeated for the third time, and now forgivingly her arms were outstretched. "Oh, Chester, how could you do it?"

"Do what, Gertrude?"

"Run away and l-l-leave me. What did you do it for?"

"Three dollars a day," he answered simply. There was no flippancy in the reply, but merely directness.

"Oh, Chester, to give up your home—your position—me—for that! Oh, what madness possessed you! Chester, come back home."

"Back home to Brooklyn? Not on your life." His tone was firmness itself. He spoke commandingly, as one who not only is master of himself but of a present situation. "Gertrude, you'd better stay here, too, now that you've come. I guess maybe I could get 'em to work you in on the regular list of extras. You'd probably film well." He eyed her appraisingly.

"But, oh, Chester, to go—as you went—with never a word—never a line to me!"

"Gertrude, you wouldn't have understood. Don't you see, honey, it's like this." He took her in his arms, even as she had meant to take him into hers, and, with small, comforting pats upon her heaving back, sought to soothe her. "It's like this—I'm before the public now. Why, Gerty, I'm in the eyes of the world."

CHAPTER VI

THE GREAT AUK

As regards the body of the house it lay mostly in shadows—the man-made, daytime shadows which somehow always seem denser and blacker than those that come in the night. The little jogs in the wall behind the boxes were just the same as coalholes. The pitched front of the balcony suggested a deformed upper jaw, biting down on darkness. Its stucco facings, shining dimly, like a row of teeth, added to the illusion. At the bottom of the pit, or the family circle, or whatever it was they called it at the Cosmos Theatre, where the light was somewhat better, the backs of the seats showed bumpily beneath the white cloths that covered them, like lines of graves in a pauper burying ground after a snowstorm.

A third of the way back, in this potter's field of dead-and-gone laughter, a man was hunched in a despondent posture. His attitude would make you think of a lone ghost that had answered the resurrection trump too soon and now was overcome with embarrassment at having been deceived by a false alarm. The brim of his hat rested on the bridge of his nose. Belonging, as he did, to a race that is esteemed to be essentially commercial, he had the artistic face and the imaginative eyes which, as often as not, are found in those of his breed.

His name was Sam Verba. He was general director for Cohalan & Hymen, producing managers. He was watching a rehearsal of a new play, though he did not appear to be. Seemingly, if he was interested in anything at all it was in the movements of two elderly chore-women, who dawdled about the place deliberatively, with dust rags and brooms. Occasionally, as one of the women raised her voice shrilly to address her distant sister, he went "Sh-h! Sh-h!"—like a defective steam pipe. Following this the offender would lower her voice for a space measurable by seconds.

Border lights, burning within the proscenium arch, made the stage brightly visible, revealing it as a thing homely and nude. Stage properties were piled indiscriminately at either side. Against the bare brick wall at the back, segments of scenes were stacked any-which-way, so that a strip of a drawing room set was superimposed on a strip of a kitchen and that in turn overlapped part of a wainscoted library, the result being as though an earthquake had come along and shaken one room of somebody's house into another room and that into another, and then had left them so. In sight were four women and nine men, who perched on chairs or tables or roosted, crow-fashion, upon the iron steps of a narrow staircase which ascended to the top tier of dressing rooms, extending along a narrow balcony above. The hour was eleven o'clock in the morning. Therefore these persons wore the injured look which people of their nocturnal profession customarily wear upon being summoned out of their beds before midday.

At a little table, teetering on rickety legs almost in the trough of the footlights, sat a man hostilely considering a typewritten script, which was so interlined, so marked and disfigured with crosses, stars, and erasures that only one person—the author of these ciphers—might read his own code and sometimes even he couldn't. The man at the table was the director, especially engaged to put on this particular piece, which was a comedy drama. He raised his head.

"All right, children," he said, "take the second act—from the beginning. Miss Cherry, Mrs. Morehead—come along. Stand by, everybody else, and, please, in Heaven's name, remember your cues—for once."

A young woman and a middle-aged woman detached themselves from one of the waiting groups and came downstage. The young woman moved eagerly to obey; she was

an exceedingly pretty young woman. The other woman, having passed her youth, strove now to re-create it in her costume. She wore a floppy hat and a rather skimpy frock, which buttoned down her back, school-girl fashion, and ended several inches above her ankles. Under the light her dyed hair shone with the brilliancy of a new copper saucepan. There were fine, puckery lines at her eyes. Her skin, though, had the smooth texture which comes, some say, from the grease paint, and others say from plenty of sleep.

She held in one hand a flimsy, blue-backed sheaf; it was her part in this play. Having that wisdom in her calling which comes of long experience, she would read from it until automatically she had acquired it without prolonged mental effort; would let her trained and docile memory sop up the speeches by processes of absorption. Miss Cherry carried no manuscript; she didn't need it. She had been sitting up nights, studying her lines. For she, the poor thing, was newly escaped from a dramatic school. Mrs. Morehead wanted to make a living. Miss Cherry wanted to make a hit.

These two began the opening scene of the act and, between them, carried it forward. Miss Cherry as the daughter, was playing it in rehearsal, exactly as she expected to play it before an audience, putting in gestures, inflections, short catches of the breath, emotional gasps—all the illusions, all the business of the part. On the other hand, Mrs. Morehead appeared to have but one ambition in her present employment and that was to get it over with as speedily as possible. After this contrasted fashion, then, they progressed to a certain dramatic juncture:

"But, mother," said Miss Cherry, her arms extended in a carefully-thought-out attitude of girlish bewilderment, "what am I to do?"

Mrs. Morehead glanced down, refreshing her memory by a glance into the blue booklet.

"My child," she said, "leave it to destiny."

She said this in the tone of a person of rather indifferent appetite, ordering toast and tea for breakfast.

A pause ensued here.

"My child," repeated Mrs. Morehead, glancing over her shoulder impatiently, but speaking still in the same voice, "leave it to destiny."

"Well, well——" snapped the man at the little table, "that's the cue, 'leave it to destiny.' Come on, McVey? Come a-w-n, McVey? Where's McVey?" He raised his voice fretfully.

A nervous, thin man hurried down the stage.

"Oh, there you are. Go ahead, McVey. You're keeping everybody waiting. Didn't I tell you you'd have to read the grandfather's part to-day?"

"No, sir, you didn't," said McVey, aggrieved.

"Well, anyhow, I meant to," said his superior.

"But I'm reading Miss Gifford's part this morning," said McVey, who was the assistant stage manager. "She had to go to see about her costumes."

"You'll have to read 'em both, then," ordered the special director. "Anyhow, the parts don't conflict—they're not on the stage together during this act. Do the best you can. Now let's go back and take those last two sides over again."

Vibrantly and with the proper gesture in the proper place, Miss Cherry repeated her speech. Wearily and without gestures, Mrs. Morehead repeated hers. The flustered McVey, holding the absentee Miss Gifford's part in one hand and the mythical grandfather's in the other, circled upstage and, coming hurriedly down, stepped in between them.

"No, no, no," barked the director, "don't come on that way—you'll throw both these ladies out. Come on at the upper side of that blue chair, Mac; that's the door. This is supposed to be a house. You can't walk right through the side of a house without upsetting things. You realize that, don't you? Once more—back again to 'leave it to destiny.'"

The rehearsal went on by the customary process of advancing a foot and a half, then retreating a foot, then re-

advancing two feet. The novices in the cast were prodigal of their energy, but the veterans saved themselves against what they knew was coming later, when they would need all they had of strength and more, besides.

A young man let himself in through the box-office door and stood in that drafty, inky-black space the theatrical folks call the front of the house and the public call the back of the house. Coming out of the sunlight into this cave of the winds, he was blinded at first. He blinked until he peered out the shape of Verba, slumped down midway of a sheeted stretch of orchestra chairs, and he felt his way down the centre aisle and slipped into a place alongside the silent, broody figure. The newcomer was the author of the play, named Offutt; his age was less than thirty; and his manner was cheerful, as befitting an author who is less than thirty and has placed a play with an established firm.

"Well," he said, "how's everything going?"

"Rotten, thank you!" said Verba, continuing to stare straight ahead. "We're still shy one grandfather, if that should be of any interest to you."

"But you had Grainger engaged—I thought that was all settled last night," said the playwright.

"That tired business man? Huh!" said Verba expressively. "By the time he'd got through fussing over the style of contract he wanted, in case he liked the part and we liked him in it, and then quarrelling about the salary he was to get, and then arguing out how high up the list his name was to appear in the billing, your friend Grainger was completely exhausted.

"And then, on top of that, he discovered we were going to Chicago after the opening in Rochester, and he balked. Said his following was here in New York. Said he'd supposed we were coming right in here after the opening instead of fussing round on the road. Said he couldn't think of being kept out of New York at the beginning of the season unless he got at least seventy-five more a week. Said he'd go back to vaudeville first. Said he had a swell offer from the two-a-day shops anyhow.

"Then I said a few things to Grainger and he walked out on me. His following!—do you get that? Grainger could carry all the following he's got in the top of his hat and still have plenty of room left for his head. So there you are, my son—within ten days of the tryout and nobody on hand to play dear old grandfather for you! And nobody in sight either—in case anybody should happen to ask you."

"Oh, we'll find somebody," said Offutt optimistically. The young of the playwrighting species are constitutionally optimistic.

"Oh, we will, will we? Well, for example, who?—since you're so confident about it."

"That's up to you," countered Offutt, "I should worry!"

"Take it from me, young man, you'd better worry," growled Verba morosely.

"But, Verba," contended Offutt, "there must be somebody loose who'll fit the part. What with thousands of actors looking for engagements——"

"Say, Offutt, what's the use of going over that again?" broke in Verba in a tone which indicated he was prepared to go over it again. "To begin with, there aren't thousands of actors looking for jobs. There are a few actors looking for jobs —and a few thousand others looking for jobs who only think they can act. Offhand, I can list you just three men fit to play this grandfather part—or four, if you stick in Grainger as an added starter."

He held up a long, slender hand, ticking off the names on his fingers.

"There's Warburton, and there's Pell, and there's old Gabe Clayton. Warburton's tied up in the pictures. Damn the movies! They're stealing everybody worth a hang. I got a swell offer myself yesterday from the Ziegler crowd to direct features for 'em. The letter's on my desk now. Old Gabe is in a sanitarium taking the rest cure—which means for the time

being he's practically sober, but not available for us or anybody else. And Guy Pell's under contract to Fructer Brothers, and you know what a swell chance there is of their loaning him to our shop.

"That doesn't leave anybody but Grainger, who's so swelled up with conceit that he's impossible. And, anyhow, he's too young. Just as I told you yesterday, I only figured him in as a last chance. I don't want a young fellow playing this part—with his face all messed up with false whiskers and an artificial squeak in his voice. I want an old man—one that looks old and talks old and can play old.

"He's got to be right or nothing's right. You may have written this piece, boy; but, by gum, I'm responsible for the way it's cast, and I want a regular, honest-to-God grandfather. Only," he added, quoting the tag of a current Broadway story, "only there ain't no such animal."

"I still insist, Verba," put in Offutt, "that you overestimate the importance of the grandfather—he's only a character bit."

"Son," said Verba, "you talk like an author! Maybe you thought he was a bit when you wrote him in; but he's not. He's going to carry this play. He's the axle that the whole action turns on and if he's wrong the whole thing's wrong. If he falls down your play falls down."

"Well, suppose he is," said Offutt plaintively. The bruised worm was beginning to turn. "Am I to blame because I write a part so human and so lifelike that nobody's competent to do it?"

Verba gave him a sidelong glance and grinned sardonically. "Don't ask me whose fault it is," he said. "I know this: In the old days actors were actors." Verba, who was perhaps forty-four, spoke with the air of having known Edmund Kean intimately. "They bred real artists then—people who had versatility and a range. You got hold of a play and you went out and hired a bunch of troupers, and they played it for you. Now we don't have actors any more—we only have types.

"Everybody's a type. A man or a woman starts out being one kind of type, and sticks right there. Dramatists write parts for types, and managers go out and hire types for the parts. Sometimes they can't find the right type and then there's another expensive production taking a trip to its eternal rest in the storehouse. I don't know whose fault it is—I only know it's not mine. It's hell—that's what it is—simply hell!"

Gloom choked Verba. He stared moodily ahead of him, where the broad of a wide, blue-ginghamed back showed above the draped tops of the next row of seats but one. Suddenly he smote his hands together.

"Bateman!" he exclaimed. "Old Bird Bateman!"

Up from behind the next row of seats but one rose a chorelady with her nose in the air and her clenched fists on the places where her hips should have been—if she had any hips.

"I beg your par-r-don?" she inquired, quivering with a grand, indignant politeness; "was you referrin' to me as an ould boid?"

"Madam," said Verba, "resume your pleasures. I wasn't thinking of you."

"Thin why was you lookin' at me whin you said it? You may be the owner of this bum dump, f'r all I care, but job or no job, let me tell you this, young man—there's no black Prowtestant Jew alive kin call me out of me own name an'——"

"Oh, shut up," said Verba, without heat. He got on his feet. "Come on, Offutt, the lady thinks I'm trying to flirt with her and between the three of us, we're breaking up rehearsals. Let's get out—I've got an idea." In the half light his eyes shone like a cat's.

Outside, on the hot pavement, he took Offutt by the lapels of his coat. "Boy," he said, "did you ever hear of Burton Bateman—better known as Old Bird Bateman?"

Offutt shook his head.

"Never did," he confessed.

"You're too young at this game to remember, I guess," said

Verba. "Well, then, did you ever hear of the Scudder Stock Company?"

"Of course I've heard of that," said Offutt. "It was long before my time though."

"It was long before everybody's time," assented Verba. "Ten years is the same as a century on this street. But twenty-five years ago Burt Bateman played leads with the Scudder Stock Company—yes; and played juveniles and walking gentlemen and friends of the family and long-lost heirs and Dutchmen and Irishmen and niggers—played high-comedy parts and low-comedy parts—played anything there was to play.

"He wasn't one of your single-barrelled modern types and none of your old-time ranting scenery-biters either; he was an actor. If he'd come along a little later they'd have made a star out of him and probably ruined him. You'd have remembered him then. But he never was a star. He never was featured even. He just kept right on being an actor. And gee, how he could eat up an old man's part!"

"You speak of him as though he were dead," said Offutt.

"He might as well be—he's forgotten," said Verba, unconsciously coining all Broadway's epitaph for all Broadway's tribe. "I haven't seen him for fifteen years, but I understand he's still alive—that is, he hasn't quit breathing. Somebody was telling me not long ago they'd crossed his trail 'way downtown.

"You see, Burt Bateman was a character in his way, just as old Nate Scudder was one in his way. I guess that's why they hung together so long. When the theatrical district started to move uptown Nate wouldn't move with it. It moved from Fourteenth Street to Twenty-third, and from there to Thirty-fourth, and from there to Forty-second—and it's still headed north. But Scudder stayed where he was. And it broke him—broke his heart, too, I guess. Anyhow, he died and his organisation scattered—all but Bateman. He wouldn't scatter. The heirs fell out and the estate—what was left of it—got tied up in litigation; and it's been tied up ever since."

He turned and waved a long arm at a passing taxi. The driver curved his machine up to the curb.

"Come on!" said Verba, making to cross the sidewalk.

"Come on where?" asked Offutt.

"We're going to University Place—you and me," said Verba, quickened and alive all over with his inspiration. "We're going down to Scudder's Theatre. Didn't know there was such a theatre as Scudder's, did you? Well, there is—what's left of it. We're going down there to find Old Bird Bateman. That's where he was, last accounts. And if the booze hasn't got him he's going to play that damn grandfather in this show of yours."

"Can he do it?"

Verba halted with one foot in the taxi.

"Can he do it? Watch him, boy—that's all! Just watch him. Say, it's a notion—digging that old boy out of the graveyard.

"You never heard of him and I'd forgotten him; but you take a lot of these old-timers who don't think there've been any actors since Fanny Davenport and Billy Florence—they'll remember him. And you bet they'll come to see him. We'll give this town a sensation—and that's what it loves, this town—sensations."

Once upon a time—that was when he was a green reporter newly come to town—Offutt had known, more or less minutely, almost every prowlable inch of the tip of the long seamy tongue of rock that is called Manhattan Island. Now, as a story-writer and a play-writer, he only went down there when he sought for local colour in Greenwich Village, or around Washington Square or on the lower East Side. As for Verba, he found his local colour, ready-mixed, in scene-painters' pots and make-up boxes. Being a typical New Yorker—if there is such a thing—he was as insular, as provincial, as closely bound to his own briefened ranging ground as none but a typical New Yorker can be. To him this wasn't a metropolis of

five boroughs, many bridges and five-and-a-half millions. To him this was a strip of street, something less than two miles long, with shorter stretches of street meeting it at right angles, east and west, as ribs meet a spine. His map of New York would have resembled a codfish's skeleton, its head aiming toward far-away Harlem, the fork in its tail pointing to the distant Battery. To him therefore Twenty-third Street was Farthest South. What might lie below was in the Antarctic Circle of community life.

They crossed Twenty-third Street and invaded a district grown strange to his eyes—a district where tall loft buildings, the successors to the sweatshops of an earlier, but not very much earlier, day, mounted, floor by floor, above the humbler roofs of older houses. They crossed Fourteenth, the taxi weaving a way through dense masses of men who gabbled in strange tongues among themselves, for lunch-time had come and the garment workers, the feather-workers and the fur-workers, deserting their work benches for an hour, had flocked into the open, packing the sidewalks and overflowing upon the asphalt, to chaffer and gossip and take the air. Just below Fourteenth Street they swung eastward and turned into University Place, which is a street of past memories and present acute activities, and, in a minute, obeying Verba's instructions, their driver brought them to a standstill before a certain number.

"Give it the once-over," advised Verba as he climbed out and felt in his pocket for the fare. "You can figure for yourself how far out of the world it is—nobody's had the nerve to try to open it up as a moving-picture palace. And that's the tip-off on any shack in this burg that'll hold a crowd, a screen and a projecting machine all at the same time."

Offutt looked, and marvelled that he had never noticed this place before since surely, covering assignments or on exploration jaunts, he must have passed it by a score of times. It stood midway of the block. On one side of it was a little pawnshop, its single grimy window filled with the strange objects which persons acquire, seemingly, for pawning purposes exclusively—sword-canes and mandolins with mother-of-pearl insets in them, and moss-agate cuff buttons. On the other side was a trunk store with half of its wares cluttering the narrow-door passage and signs everywhere displayed to inform the public that the proprietor was going out of business and must sell his stock at an enormous sacrifice, wherefore until further notice, perfectly ruinous prices would prevail. It appears to be a characteristic of all trunk-stores that their proprietors are constantly going out of business and that their contents, invariably, are to be had below cost.

Between these two establishments gaped a recessed and cavernous entryway flanked by two big stone pillars of a dropsical contour and spanned over at the top by a top-heavy cornice ponderously and painfully Corinthian in aspect. The outjutting eaves rested flat on the coping stones and from there the roof gabled up sharply. Old gates, heavily chained and slanting inward, warded the opening between the pair of pillars, so that the mouth of the place was muzzled with iron, like an Elizabethan shrew's.

Above, the building was beetle-browed; below, it was dish-faced. A student of architectural criminology would pause before this facade and take notes.

The space inclosed within the skewed and bent gate pickets was a snug harbour for the dust of many a gritty day. There were little grey drifts of it at the foot of each of the five steps that led up to the flagged floor level; secretions of grime covered the barred double doors on beyond the steps, until the original colour was only to be guessed at; scraps of dodgers, pieces of newspaper and tattered handbills adhered to every carved projection at the feet of the columns, like dead leaves about tree boles in the woods.

On the frieze overhead might be made out, in lettering that once had been gold-leafed, the line: Scudder's Family Theatre. The words were scarcely decipherable now. Bill-posters had coated every available inch of space with snipes and sheets.

Verba shook the gates until the hasps gritted and the chains clanged.

"Nobody at home," he said. "I guess the sheriff locked her up when the lawsuits started and then threw away the key. Well, let's scout round. Somebody's sure to know our man; they told me Bateman was a neighbourhood character down here. A cop ought to be able to help us—only I don't see one. Maybe they don't have cops in this street."

Speculatively his eyes ranged the vista up and down the block and opposite. He pointed to a saloon diagonally across the way, next door to the first corner south.

"When in doubt," he said, "ask everybody's friend. Come on; we'll go over and brace the barkeep."

A young man, with a humorous slant to his eyebrows and dark hair combed back from the forehead in neatly ornate scallops, pulled down the front of a reasonably clean white jacket and spread both hands on the bar, awaiting their pleasure.

"Mister Wine Clerk," said Verba, using the ceremonial title of his Tenderloin range, "we're trying to find an old boy named Bateman—Burton Bateman, retired actor by profession. Ever hear of him?"

"Sure!" assented the barkeeper. "He's part of the fixtures—Old Bird is; but he ain't about now. To ketch him, you've come an hour late."

"Lives round here somewhere, doesn't he?"

"Search me," said the young man succinctly. "I guess he don't exactly live anywhere—not in a regular lodging house or anything like that. See? I never asked him—him being sort of touchy about his private affairs—but I guess he sleeps in some hole somewhere. He mostly does his scoffin' here though—as a guest of the house."

"Does his what here?" asked Verba.

"His scoffin'—his feedin'. See?" The young man flirted a thumb in the direction of the free-lunch counter.

"Oh! He eats here?"

"You said it! The boss—man that owns this liquor store—is a kind of an old-timer round here himself. I've heard him say he knowed The Bird away back yonder when the old theatre 'crost the street was runnin' and things was breakin' better for the old boy than what they do now. So he stakes him to a drink every now and then—Old Bird won't take a piece of change, but he will take a drink—and he lets him browse off the free lunch all he's a mind to.

"He comes driftin' in here twicet a day regular and fills up on chow for nothin'! But he's been here already and left to-day—'bout an hour ago. I figure he won't be back now till 'long about four or five o'clock."

Verba became cognisant of a tugging at his coat. An incredibly small, incredibly ragged boy, with some draggled first editions under his arm, had wormed silently in between his legs and was looking up at him with one eye. The boy had only one eye to look with. The other eye was a flattened slit over a sunken socket.

"Mister! Say, Mister!" beseeched the gamin earnestly. "Gimme fi' cent and I'll——"

"Hey, you, Blinky!" interposed the barkeeper, bending over the bar to see the small intruder. "Beat it!"

There was a scurrying thud of bare feet on the tiled floor and the wizened intruder magically had vanished between the swinging doors.

"You gents can sit down and wait if you want to," said the barkeeper. "It's liable to be a long time though. Or I can tell Old Bird, when he comes in, somebody's askin' for him and try to hold him for you. I could phone you even, if it's important—if you'll gimme your number."

"It is important—in a way," said Verba. "Suppose we do that, Offutt—give the wine clerk our telephone number."

He laid a coin and a card on the bar. The young man regarded the name and the address on the card briefly.

“All right!” he said, depositing the coin in his pocket and the card against the mirror at his back. “I won’t forget. The old boy don’t have many people lookin’ for him. Fact is, I don’t remember he ever had anybody lookin’ for him before. Are you gents friends of his? … No? Well, anyhow, I’ll fix it.”

“Funny old sneezer!” he continued. “Dippy a little up here, I guess.”

He tapped himself on the forehead.

“If he had a habit I’d say sometimes he was hopped. F’r instance, he’ll come in here and spiel off something to me ’bout havin’ been in his Louie Kahn’s drawin’-room—anyhow, that’s what it sounds like. The only Louie Kahn round here that I know of runs a junk shop over in Ninth Street. And it’s a cinch that Louie Kahn ain’t got no drawin’-room. Or he’ll tell me he’s been spendin’ the day on the seabeach. Only yes’day he was handin’ me that junk.”

“Mightn’t he have taken a little run down to Coney?” suggested Verba hopefully.

“Go to Coney—him!” scoffed the barkeeper. “Where’d he raise the coin for carfare down to Coney? You can take it from me, gents, Old Bird forgot what the sad sea waves sound like, long time ago. I’ll lay you a little eight-to-five he ain’t been a quarter of a mile away from this liquor store in ten years. … Well, good day, gents.”

“It strikes me, Verba,” began Offutt as they passed out, “that possibly we’re only wasting our time. If what that gabby young drink wrestler just said is right we’re——”

Something wriggled at his knees and caromed off against Verba. A single bright, greedy eye appraised them with an upward flash.

“Mister! Mister, listen!” pleaded a voice, the owner of which managed somehow to be in the path of both of them at once. “I heard yous spielin’ in there. I know where Old Boid is. I kin show yous where he is.”

“Where is he?” demanded Verba.

“Gimme fi’ cent—gimme ten cent—first. It’s a secrut. It’s worth ten cent.”

“It is,” agreed Verba gravely. “It’s worth all of ten cents now and it’ll be worth a quarter more to you, sonny, if you deliver the goods.”

He tendered the advance instalment of the fee and a hand, all claws like a bird’s foot, snatched it away from him.

Blinky carefully pouched the dime in some unfathomable inner recess of his rags. Having provided against any attempt to separate him from the retainer in the event of the negotiations falling through, his code of honour asserted itself.

“It’s a secrut. See? They ain’t nobody but me and two-t’ree udder kids wise to it. Yous gotta swear yous won’t tell ’im nor nobody ’twas me tipped yous off. If yous did it’d spoil me graft —he’d be sore. See? Cold nights he lets us kids bunk in there wit’ ’im. And daytimes we plays audiunce for ’im. See?”

“You play what for him?” asked Offutt.

“C’m on, an’ I’ll show yous,” bade Blinky. “Only yous is gotta lay dead w’ile it’s comin’ off. See?”

“We’ll lay dead,” pledged Verba.

Satisfied, Blinky led the way. Mystified, they followed. He led them back across University Place again; and on past Scudder’s Family Theatre, with the lowering stone frontal bone above and, below, the wide maw, bitted and gagged by its scold’s bridle of snaffled iron; and on round the corner below into a fouled, dingy cross street.

Beyond the canvas marquee of a small walled-in beer garden the child went nimbly through a broken panel in a short stretch of aged and tottery wooden fencing. Wriggling through the gap behind him they found themselves in a small inclosure paved with cracked flagging. Confronting them was a short flight of iron steps, leading up to a wide, venerable-appearing doorway, which once, as the visible proof showed, had been sealed up with plank shorings, nailed on in vertical strips.

"One of the old side entrances to Scudder's," said Verba. "Where the carriages used to wait, I guess. The plot thickens—eh, Offutt?"

Offutt nodded, his eyes being on their small guide. A little sense of adventure possessed them both. They had the feeling of being co-conspirators in a little intrigue.

"Wotcher waitin' fur?" demanded Blinky. "Stick wit' me and don't make no noise." He climbed the iron steps and shoved the nail-pocked door ajar. "Watch yer step!" he counselled as he vanished within. "It's kind o' dark in yere."

Kind o' dark was right. Straining their eyes they stumbled along a black passage, with Blinky going on ahead silently. They turned once to the left and once to the right and emerged, where the light was somewhat clearer, into the shelter of a recess just behind the lower boxes of the abandoned playhouse.

"Wow!" said Verba in a sort of reverential undertone, as though he stood in the presence of death. "I haven't been here in twenty-odd years. Why, the last time I was here I was a kid!"

Veritably he did stand in the presence of death. The place looked dead and smelled dead and was dead. The air was heavy-laden with bone-yard scents—rot and corrosion and rust and dust. With the taints of moulded leather and gangrened metal, of worm-gnawed woodwork and moth-eaten fabrics, arose also from beneath their feet that other stench which inevitably is begotten of neglect and lonesomeness within any spot inclosed by walls and a roof, provided sun and wind and human usage are excluded from it long enough. Offutt sniffed and, over Verba's shoulder, looked about him.

He could make out his immediate surroundings fairly well, for the curtains that had guarded the windows in the hip roof and round one upper side of the building were turned by decay into squares of lace-work, patterned with rents and with cracks; and in some instances they had fetched away from their fastenings altogether.

Through the glass panes, and through the grime that bleared the glass, a measure of daylight filtered, slanting in pale bluish streaks, like spilt skim milk; on vistas of the faded red-plush chairs; on the scrolled and burdened decorations of the proscenium arch; on the seamy, stained curtain; on the torn and musty hangings of the boxes; on an enormous gas chandelier which, swinging low over the pit from the domed ceiling above, was so clumped with swathings of cobweb that it had become a great, dangling grey cocoon.

Curving in wide swings from above their heads to the opposite side ran three balconies, rising one above the other, and each supported by many fat pillars. The spaces beneath these galleries were shadowy and dark, seeming to stretch away endlessly. So, too, was the perspective of the lower floor, at the back, elaborated by the gloom into a vast, yawning mouth which fairly ached with its own emptiness. But at the front the screened angles of sunlight, stippled as they were with billions of dancing motes, brought out clearly enough the stage of the old theatre and, down under the lip of the stage, the railed inclosure of the orchestra and, at either side, the scarred bulkheads and fouled drapings of the stage boxes, upper tier and lower tier.

Close at hand Offutt was aware of crawling things which might be spiders, and a long grey rat which scuffled across the floor almost beneath his feet, dragging its scaled tail over the boards with a nasty rasping sound. He heard other rats squealing and gnawing in the wainscoting behind him. He was aware, also, of the dirt, which scabbed and crusted everything. And he felt as though he had invaded the vault of an ancient tomb. Sure enough, in a manner of speaking, he had done just that.

"Some place—huh, mister?" said the small gutter-sparrow proudly, and, though he spoke in a whisper, Offutt jumped. "Stick yere, yous two," ordered the child. "Somethin'll be comin' off in a minute."

Seemingly he had caught a signal or a warning not visible

to the older intruders. Leaving them, he ran briskly down a side aisle, and apparently did not care now how much noise he might make, for he whooped as he ran. He flung his papers aside and perched himself in a chair at the very front of the pit. He briskly rattled the loose back of the chair in front of him, and, inserting two dirty fingers at the corners of his mouth, emitted the shrill whistle by which a gallery god, since first gallery gods were created into an echoing world, has testified to his impatient longings that amusement be vouchsafed him.

As though the whistle had been a command, the daubed old curtain shivered and swayed. A dead thing was coming to life. Creaking dolefully, it rolled up and up until it had rolled up entirely out of sight.

A back drop, lowered at a point well down front, made the stage shallow. Once upon a time this back drop had been intended to represent a stretch of beach with blue rollers breaking on beyond. Faded as it was, and stained and cracked and scaly as it was now, the design of the artist who painted it was yet discernible; for he plainly had been one who held by the pigmented principle that all sea sands be very yellow and all sea waves be very blue.

Out of the far wings came a figure of a man, crossing the narrowed space to halt midway of the stage, close up to the tin gutter where the tipless prongs of many gas-jet footlights stood up like the tines in a garden rake. Verba's hand tightened on Offutt's arm, dragging him farther back into the shadows, and Verba's voice spoke, with a soft, tense caution, in Offutt's ear: "Lord! Lord!" Verba almost breathed the words out. "'Backward, turn backward, O Time, in your——' Look yonder, Offutt! It's him!"

He might have spared the urging. Offutt was looking and, without being told, knew the man at whom he looked was the man the two of them had come here to find. The lone gamin in the pit clapped his talons of hands together, making a feeble, thin sound. To this applause, as to a rousing greeting, the figure behind the footlights bowed low, then straightened. And Offutt could see, by one of the slanting bars of tarnished daylight, which stabbed downward through the dusk of the place, that the man up there on the stage was a very old man, with a heavy, leonine face and heavy brows and deep-set, big grey eyes, and a splendid massive head mopped with long, coarse white hair; and he was dressed as a fop of sixty years ago and he carried himself so.

The slash of indifferent sunshine, slicing into the gloom like a dulled sword blade, rested its lowermost tip full upon him. It brought out the bleached pallor of his skin, for his face was free from any suggestion of make-up, and it showed the tears and frays in his costume, and the misshapen shoes that were on his feet, and the high-shouldered, long-tailed coat and the soiled, collarless shirt which he wore beneath the once gorgeous velvet waistcoat.

In one hand he held, by a dainty grip on the brim, a flat-crowned derby hat, and between the fingers of the other hand twirled a slender black walking stick, with the shreds of a silken tassel adhering to it. And everything about him, barring only the shoes and the shirt, which plainly belonged to his everyday apparel, seemed fit to fall apart with age and with shabbiness.

"Ladies and gentlemen," he said—and his voice filled all the empty house by reason of its strength and its toned richness—"with your kind indulgence I shall begin this entertainment with an attempt at an imitation of the elder Sothern in his famous rôle of Lord Dundreary, depicting him as he appeared in one of the scenes from that sterling and popular comedy, Our American Cousin, by Tom Taylor, Esquire."

With that, instantly stepping into character, he took a mincing, jaunty pace or two sideways. Half turning toward an imaginary confrère and addressing that mythical listener, he began a speech which, being pieced together with other speeches, at once lengthened into a kind of monologue. But he knew the lines—that was plain; and he knew the part, too, and for the moment lived and breathed it, and in all regards

veritably was it. That, likewise, the watching pair of eavesdroppers could realise, though neither of them was of sufficient age to remember, even had he seen, the great craftsman whose work old Bateman now was counterfeiting.

The interlopers looked on and, under the spell of a wizardry, forgot indeed they were interlopers. For before their eyes they saw, wonderfully re-created, a most notable conception, and afterward would have sworn, both of them, that all of it—the drawl and the lisp, the exaggerated walk, the gestures, the play of leg and arm, the swing of body, the skew of head, the lift of eyebrow even—was as true and as faithful to the original as any mirrored image might be to the image itself.

How long they stood and watched neither Verba nor Offutt was subsequently able to say with any reasonable exactitude. It might have been four minutes; it might have been six, or even eight. When later, taking counsel together, they sought to reckon up the time, the estimates varied so widely they gave up trying to reconcile them.

This much, though, they were sure of—that, in his mumming, old Bateman rose magically triumphant above the abundant handicaps of his own years and his own physique, his garb and his environment. Doing the undoable, he for the moment threw aside his years as one might throw aside the weight of a worn-out garment, and for that moment, to suit his own designs of mimicry, made floods of strength and youthfulness course through those withered arteries.

The old man finished with a whimsical turn of his voice and a flirt of his cane to match it. He bowed himself off with the hand which held the hat at his breast, and promptly on the second he disappeared the ancient curtain began to descend, Blinky meanwhile clapping with all his puny might.

Offutt turned to his companion. Behind the shelter of the box Verba's lean, dark face was twitching.

"Is he there? Can he act? Was I right?" Verba asked himself each question, and himself answered each with a little earnest nod. "Gee, what a find!"

"Not a find, Verba," whispered Offutt—"a resurrection—maybe. We've seen a genius in his grave."

"And we're going to dig him up." In his intentness Verba almost panted it. "Wait! Wait!" he added warningly then, though Offutt had not offered to stir. "This is going to be a Protean stunt, I take it. Let's let him show some more of his goods; for, by everything that's holy, he's got 'em!"

Up once more the curtain lifted, seemingly by its own motive power; and now the seaside drop was raised, and they beheld that, behind it, the stage had been dressed for another scene—a room in a French house. A secrétaire, sadly battered and marred, stood at one side; a bookcase with broken doors and gaping, empty shelves stood at the other, balancing it off. Down stage was an armchair. Its tapestry upholstering was rotted through and a freed spiral of springs upcoiled like a slender snake from its cushioned seat. All three pieces were of a pattern—"Louie-the-Something stuff," Verba would have called them.

A table, placed fronting the chair but much nearer the right lower entrance than the chair was, and covered with a faded cloth that depended almost to the floor, belonged evidently to the same set. The scenery at the back showed a balcony, with a wide French window, open, in the middle. Beyond the window dangled a drop, dingy and discoloured as all the rest was, but displaying dimly a jumble of painted housetops and, far away in the simulated distance, the Arc de Triomphe. The colours were almost obliterated, but the suggestion of perspective remained, testifying still to the skill of the creator.

From the wings where they had seen him vanish Bateman reappeared. The trousers and the shoes were those he had worn before; but now, thrown on over his shirt, was the melancholy wreck of what once had been a blue uniform coat, with huge epaulets upon the shoulders and gold braid upon the collar and the cuffs, and brass buttons to fasten it in double-breasted fashion down the front. Now, though, it hung

open. Some of the buttons were missing, and the gold lacings were mere blackened wisps of rags.

Bateman came on slowly, with dragging feet, his arms and legs and head quivering in a violent palsy. He stared out of the window as he let himself down carefully into the ruined armchair. His first movement proved that he played a venerable, very decrepit man—a man near death from age and ailments; yet by his art he managed to project, through the fleshly and physical weaknesses of the character, a power of dignity, of dominance, and of mental authority. He rolled his head back weakly.

"'My child,'" he said, addressing a make-believe shape before him, "'I must help to receive our brave, victorious troops. See! I am fittingly dressed to do them honour.'"

His tones were pitched in the cracked cackle of senility. He paused, as though for an answer out of space. His inflection told as he, in turn, replied that this answer had been a remonstrance:

"'No, no, no!'" he said almost fiercely. "'You must not seek to dissuade me.'"

The words stung Verba's memory, raising a welt of recollection there.

"I've got it!" he said exultantly, not forgetting, though, to keep his voice down. "Siege of Berlin, by that French fellow—what's his name?—Daudet!"

"I remember the story," answered Offutt.

"I remember the play," said Verba. "Somebody dramatised it—Lord knows who—and Scudder put it on here as a curtain raiser. I saw it myself, Offutt—think of that! Sitting up yonder in the old peanut roost—a kid no bigger than that kid down there—I saw it. And now I'm seeing it again; seeing Burt Bateman play the part of the old paralytic—you know, the old French officer who was fooled by his doctor and his granddaughter into believing the French had licked the Germans, when all the time 'twas the other way and——"

"Sh-h!" counselled Offutt.

After another little wait Bateman was going on with his scene:

"'Listen! Listen!'" he cried, cupping a tremulous palm behind his ear. "'Do you not hear them far away?—the trumpets—the trumpets of victorious France! Our forces have entered Berlin! Thank God! Thank God! All Paris will celebrate. I must greet them from the balcony.'"

With a mighty effort he reared himself to his feet, straightening his slanted shoulders, erecting his lolled head. His fingers fumbled at button and buttonhole, fastening his coat at the throat. He swung one arm imperiously, warding off imaginary hands.

"'The trumpets! The trumpets! Hark! They come nearer and nearer! They sound for the victory of France—for a heroic army. I will go! Doctor or no doctor, I pay my homage this day to our glorious army. Stand back, *ma chérie*!'"

Offutt, fifty feet away, caught himself straining his ears to hear those trumpets too. A rat ran across his foot and Offutt never knew it.

"'They come! They come!'" chuckled Bateman.

He dragged himself up stage, mounted the two stairs to the balcony, and stood in the window, at attention, to salute the tri-coloured flag. Nor did he forget to keep his face half turned to the body of the house.

He smiled; and the two unseen spies, staring at that profiled head, saw the joy that was in the smile. Then, in the same moment, the expression changed. Dumb astonishment came first—an unbelieving astonishment; then blank stupefaction; then the shock of horrified understanding; then unutterable rage.

Offutt recalled the tale from which the playlet had been evolved, and Verba, for his part, recalled the playlet; but, had neither known what they knew, the both of them, guided and informed only by the quality of Bateman's acting, still could have anticipated the climax now impending; and, lacking all

prior acquaintance with the plot of it, yet would have read that the cripple, expecting to cheer his beloved French, saw advancing beneath the Arc de Triomphe the heads of the conquering Germans, and heard, above the calling bugles, not the Marseillaise, but the strains of a Teuton marching song. His back literally bristled with his hate. He spun about full face, a mortally stricken man. His clenched fists rose above his head in a command.

"'To arms! To arms!'" he screamed impotently, with the rattle already in his throat. "'The Prussians! The Prus——'"

He choked, tottered down the steps, reeled forward and fell headlong out into the room, rolling in the death spasm behind the draped table; and as, ten seconds later, the curtain began to unroll from above and lengthen down, Offutt found himself saying over and over again, mechanically:

"Why, he's gone, isn't he?"

"He kept the table between him and the house and crawled out behind it—trust him not to spoil his picture!" explained Verba. "And trust him to know the tricks of his trade." He tugged at Offutt's elbow. "Come on, boy; I've seen enough and so have you, I guess. Let's go sign him."

He fumbled at the wall.

"Side passageway back to the stage ought to be round here somewhere. Here it is—that's lucky!"

Guiding himself by the touching of his outstretched hands upon the walls of the opening, Verba felt his way behind the box, with Offutt stumbling along in his rear. So progressing, they came to an iron-sheathed door. Verba lifted its latch and they were in a place of rancid smells and cluttering stage duffel. Roaches fled in front of them. On their left a small wooden door stood partly ajar, and through the cranny they looked, as they passed, into a dressing room, where a pallet of old hangings covered half the floor space, and all manner of dingy stock costumings and stage trappings hung upon hooks.

"Here's where he must sleep," said Verba. "What a place for a white man to be living in!"

He felt for his handkerchief to wipe his soiled hands, and then together they saw Bateman advancing toward them from out of the extreme rear of the stage. Over his shoulders was thrown a robe of heavy ragged sacking and upon his face he had hung a long, false beard of white hair. He glared at them angrily. And Offutt, in instantaneous appraisal, interpreted most surely the look out of those staring big grey eyes.

Verba extended his hand and opened his mouth to speak; but Bateman was already speaking.

"What business have you here?" he demanded. "Strangers are not permitted here during performances. How came the stage doorkeeper to admit you? He has been here too long, that doorkeeper, and he grows careless. I shall have him discharged."

"But, Mr. Bateman," began Verba, half puzzled, half insistent, "I'm in the business myself. I want to——"

"Stand aside!" ordered the old man almost violently. "You cannot have been long in the business, young sir, else you would be more mannerly than to interrupt an artist when his public calls for him. Out of my way, please!"

He strutted by them in stilted vanity and gripped the lifting ropes of the old curtain where they swung in the near angle of the wings, and pulled downward on them with an unexpected display of muscular force. The curtain rose; and as Blinky, still at his place, uplifted a little yell of approbation the old man, bending his shoulders, passed out into the centre of the French drawing-room set and, extending a quivering hand, uttered sonorously the command:

"'Blow, winds, and crack your cheeks! rage! blow!'"

"The mad scene from King Lear," said Offutt.

"Sure—Shakspere!" agreed Verba. "Old Scudder was a bug on that Bard stuff. So was Bateman. He used to know it from cover to cover—Othello, Hamlet, Lear—the whole string. ... Anyhow, Offutt, I've found the only man to do the grandfather's part in that show of yours, haven't I?"

“I’m sorry to say it, Verba, but you’re wrong,” stated Offutt.

“How do you mean—I’m wrong?” demanded Verba irritably. Out of the corner of his mouth he aimed the protest at his companion; but his eyes, through the gap of the first entrance, were fixed on Bateman as he strode back and forth, and his ears drank in the splendid full-lunged volume and thrill of Bateman’s voice as the player spoke snatches from the play. “He’s not too old—if that’s what you mean; he’s just about old enough. And he’s all there, even if he is old. Didn’t you see the strength he had when he hoisted up that heavy curtain?”

“I think I know where that strength came from,” said Offutt. “Just a minute, Verba—did you ever hear of the Great Auk?”

“He was in vaudeville, wasn’t he?” asked Verba, still staring at Bateman. “A trick juggler or something?”

Offutt forgot to smile.

“The Great Auk was a bird,” he said.

“Oh, I see; and I’ve been calling Bateman Old Bird,” said Verba. “I get you.”

“No, you don’t get me,” went on Offutt. “The Great Auk was a rare creature. It got rarer and rarer until they thought it had vanished. They sent an expedition to the Arctic Circle, or wherever it was the thing bred, to get one specimen for the museums; but they came back without it. And now the Great Auk is an extinct species.”

“What the devil are you driving at?” snapped Verba, swinging on him.

“Listen yonder!” bade the dramatist. “That old man out yonder is telling you, himself, in better words than I could tell you.”

He pointed a finger through the wings. Craning their necks, they heard the deep voice speak the lines:

“‘Pray, do not mock me:
I am a very foolish fond old man,
Fourscore and upward, not an hour more nor less;
And, to deal plainly,
I fear I am not in my perfect mind.’”

Verba hearkened and he understood. After a little he nodded in gloomy affirmation of the younger man’s belief.

“I guess you’re right, Offutt,” he said disappointedly. “I guess I’d have seen it, too, only I was so sort of carried away. Real acting does me that way—when I see it, which ain’t often.”

He paused a minute in uncertainty. Then resolution came to him.

“Well,” he said, “come on; there’s no use of our hanging round here any longer. I’ll give Blinky his quarter—he certainly earned it ten times over—and then we’ll go back uptown, and I’ll telephone Grainger he can have his seventy-five more a week.”

“But what are we going to do about—him?” Offutt indicated who he meant with a wave of his arm toward the stage.

It was Verba’s turn. Verba knew the stage and its people and its ways as Offutt would never know them. He had been an actor, Verba had, before he turned managing director for Cohalan & Hymen.

“What are we going to do about him?” he repeated; and then, as though surprised that the other should be asking the question: “Why, nothing! Offutt, every haunted house is entitled to its ghost. This is a haunted house if ever there was one; and there’s its ghost, standing out there. You mentioned an extinct species, didn’t you? Well, you were dead right, son. So take your good-by look now, before we go, at the last of a great breed. There’ll be no more like him, I’m thinking.”

“But we can’t leave him here like this!” said Offutt. “His mind is gone—you admit it yourself. They’ve got hospitals and asylums in this state—and homes too. It would be a mercy to take him with us.”

“Mercy? It would be the dam’dest cruelty on earth!” snapped Verba. “How long do you suppose he’d live in an asylum if we tore him up by the roots and dragged him away from this place? A week? I tell you, a week would be a blamed long time. No, sir; we leave him right here. And we’ll keep our mouths shut about this too. Come on!”

He tiptoed to the iron door and opened it softly. Then, with his hand on the latch, he halted.

Bateman was just finishing. He spoke the mad king’s mad tag-line and got himself off the stage. He unreeled the stay rope from its chock. The curtain rumbled down. Through it the insistent smacking of Blinky’s skinny paws could be heard.

Smiling proudly the old man listened to the sound. He forgot their presence behind him. He stood waiting. Blinky kept on applauding—Blinky was wise in his part too. Then, still smiling, Bateman stripped off his beard, and, putting forth a bony white hand, he plucked aside the flapping curtain and stepped forth once more.

Scrouging up behind him and holding the curtain agape, they saw him bow low to the pit where Blinky was, and to the empty boxes, and to the yawning emptiness of each balcony; and they knew that to him this was not a mangy cavern of dead memories and dead traditions and dead days, peopled only by gnawing rats and crawling vermin and one lone little one-eyed street boy, but a place of living grandeurs and living triumphs. And when he spoke, then they knew he spoke, not to one but to a worshipping, clamorous host.

“Ladies and gentlemen,” he began, with a bearing of splendid conceit, “I thank you for the ovation you have given me. To an artist—to an artist who values his art—such moments as this are most precious——”

“Come on, Offutt!” whispered Verba huskily. “Leave him taking his call.”

CHAPTER VII

FIRST CORINTHIANS

CHAP. XIII., v. 4

SINCE this must deal in great part with the Finkelstein family and what charity did for them, I began the task by seeking in the pages of an invaluable book called Ten Thousand Familiar Quotations for a line that suitably might serve as the text to my chapter. Delving there I came upon abundant material, all of it more or less appropriate to our present purpose. There were revealed at least a half a dozen extracts from the works of writers of an established standing that might be made to apply. For instance, Wordsworth, an English poet of the Early Victorian Era, that period which gave so much of rhythmic thought to Britain and so much of antirhythmic furniture to us, is credited with having said:

The charities that soothe and heal and bless
Are scattered at the feet of man like flowers.

Now that passage, at first blush, appeared exactly to fit the Finkelsteins. Most certainly charities were scattered at their feet and likewise showered on their heads.

However, before making a definite choice, I went deeper into this handy volume. As a result, I exhumed an expression attributed to Pope—not one of the Roman Popes, but Pope, Alex. (b. 1688; d. 1744)—to the effect that

In faith and hope the world will disagree,
But all mankind’s concern is charity.

That statement likewise proved in a measure applicable. To the Finkelsteins it must have seemed that all mankind’s concern was charity, devised for their especial benefit.

Now Hood takes an opposite view. In that choppy style of versification so characteristic of this writer, Hood is discovered saying:

Alas for the rarity
Of Christian charity
Under the sun!

Speaking with particular reference to the case in hand I must respectfully but nevertheless firmly take issue with the late Hood. Assuredly the components of this particular household group had no cause to cavil concerning the rarity of Christian charity. Christian charity went miles out of its way to lavish rich treasures from a full heart upon them. Under the sun, too, under the rays of an ardent and a scorching sun, was some of it bestowed. But of that phase, more—as the fancy writers say—anon.

The Scriptures were found to abound in reference to this most precious of the human virtues. What does Peter say? Peter—First Epistle, fourth chapter and eighth verse—says: “Charity shall cover the multitude of sins.” Here, too, a point might be stretched without giving offence to any interested party. I cannot deny there were a multitude of Finkelsteins. That, there is no gainsaying.

Elsewhere in the Good Book it is set forth: “Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal; … and”—furthermore—“though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not charity, I am nothing.”

One of the most significant recollections of at least two members of the Finkelstein family in their experiences with the manifestations of charity was associated with mountains. And was not the occasion of the outing of the *Evening Dispatch’s* Fresh Air Fund made glad by the presence and the activities of Prof. Washington Carter’s All-Coloured Silver

Cornet Band? If ever you heard this organisation you would know that, when it came to sounding brass and cymbals which tinkled when not engaged in clashing, no band had anything whatsoever on Prof. Washington Carter’s.

But it was hard by, in the Testaments, that I happened on the one verse which seemed best to sum up the situation in its more general aspects; and notably the first three words of the said verse. The text has been chosen, therefore, after much consideration of the subject and its merits.

To proceed: In Pike Street, approximately midway of a block that enjoys the dubious distinction of being a part of the most congested district of the globe, up four flights of stairs and thence back to the extreme rear, the Finkelstein family, at the time of its discovery, resided. There were many of them and their lot was very lowly. To begin at the top, there was Papa Finkelstein, a man bearded and small, shrinking, unobtrusive and diffident; fashioned with sloping shoulders and an indented chest as though in his extreme youth, when his bones were supple and yielding, a partly successful effort had been made to crowd him, head first, into a narrow-mouthed jar. His back was bent, for he was of the race that for more than nineteen centuries has borne, palfrey-like, upon its patient spines the persecutions of the world.

Next in order came Mamma Finkelstein, hiding her dark head beneath a wig of slick brown horsehair in accordance with the same ritual which ordained that her husband should touch not the corners of his beard. To attend to the business of multiplying and replenishing the earth with Finkelsteins was her chief mission in life. From the family stepladder of these two no rungs were missing. Indeed, about a third of the way down there was a double rung—to wit, twins. The married life of the pair extended over a period of less than eleven years and already there were eight little Finkelsteins, ranging from little to littler to littlest.

Papa Finkelstein was by profession an old-clo’ man. It was his custom to go into the favoured sections where people laid aside their weathered habiliments instead of continuing to wear them, and there watching on street corners to waylay pedestrians of an ample and prosperous aspect, and to inquire of them in his timid and twisted English, whether they had any old clothes to sell. A prospective seller being by this method interested, Papa Finkelstein would accompany the other to his apartment—follow him, rather—and when discarded garments had been fetched forth from closets and piled in a heap upon the floor he would gaze deprecatingly at the accumulation and then, with the air of one who courts ruin by his excessive generosity, tender one dollar and thirty-five cents for the entire lot.

So far so good, this course being in perfect accord with the ethics of the old-clo’ business. But if, as most generally, the owner of the raiment indignantly declined the first offer Papa Finkelstein was at a loss to proceed with the negotiations. The chaffering; the bargaining; the raising of the amount in ten-cent advances, each advance accompanied by agonised outcry; the pretended departure; the reluctant return from the door; the protest; the entreaty; the final gesture, betokening abject and complete surrender, with which the buyer came up to two dollars and fifteen cents—all this, so agreeable to the nature of the born old-clo’ man, was quite beyond him. Oftener than not, the trading ended in no trade.

Or if a bargain was arrived at, if he bore away his bundled purchases to the old-clothes mart on Bayard Street, just off the Bowery, where daily the specialist in sick hats, let us say, swaps decrepit odd trousers and enfeebled dress waistcoats for wares more suitable to his needs, still he tempted bankruptcy. Sharper wits than his, by sheer weight of dominance, bore him down and trafficked him, as the saying goes, out of his eyeteeth. He could have taken over a tannery and run it into a shoestring in no time at all. Many a day was there when he returned home at eventide with nothing to show for his day’s industry except lamentable memories and two tired flat feet.

Lacking the commercial instinct, he was a failure in trade;

lacking, too, the artistic, neither would he have made headway with his coreligionists as a professional *Schnorrer*. By persistent and devoutful attendance upon synagogue services, by the constant exhibition of his poverty in public places, he might have enlisted the sympathies of the benevolent among his fellow worshippers. But he was a dilettante in the practice of piety, even as in the practice of the old-clo' business. Except as the head of a family, he was what this world is pleased to call a failure.

From all this I would not have you jump at the conclusion that Papa and Mamma Finkelstein and their steadily accruing progeny constituted an unhappy group. Mere precarious existence and the companionship of one another spelled for them contentment. The swarming East Side satisfied them as an abiding place. To the adults it was a better home by far than the drear, dreadful land of pogroms and Black Hundreds from which they had fled; to the younger ones it was the only home they had ever known. They were used to its tormented sky lines, faced in on either side by tall tenements and blocked across by the structures of elevated roads and the stone loops of viaducts; they were used to its secondhand sunshine that filtered down to them through girders and spans. To them the high arch of the Bridge approach was an acceptable substitute for the rainbow; their idea of the profusion of Nature was a tiny square, containing many green benches, a circular band stand, and here and there a spindling tree.

Having nothing they craved for nothing. When there was food they ate thereof; *kosher* food preferably, though the food of the *Goyim* was not despised. When there was none they went without, feeding on the thought of past feasts and the hope of future ones. Being without knowledge of the commoner rule of hygiene, their days were neither enhanced by its advantages nor disturbed by its observances.

With the coming of the winter Mamma Finkelstein sewed up her offspring, all and sundry, in their heavy undergarments. Only one consideration ever interposed to prevent her from so doing—the occasional absence of any heavy undergarments in which to sew them up. To the pores, which always ye have with ye, she gave no heed. An interrupted duct more or less meant nothing to her, she being serenely unaware of the existence of such things as ducts, anyhow. In the springtime she cut the stitches and removed the garments, or such portions of them as had not been taken up by natural process of absorption, finding her young, as now newly revealed, to be pinkish, though soiled as to their skins, and in every regard hale, hearty and wholesome.

Thus abided the Finkelsteins in their dire and happy extremity at the time of their discovery. The manner of their being discovered came about as follows:

Christmastide impended. The spirit of it was every where reflected: in the price tags; in the swollen ankles and aching insteps of shop girls on their feet behind counters twelve to fifteen hours a day; in the harassed countenances and despairing eyes of shoppers; in the heaving sides and drooping heads of wearied delivery-wagon teams; in the thoughts of the children of the rich, dissatisfied because there was nothing Santa Claus could bring them they didn't already have; in the thoughts of the children of the poor, happy as they pressed their cold little noses against the plate-glass fronts of toy shop windows and made discriminating selection of the treasures which they would like for Santa to bring them, but knowing at the same time he couldn't because of his previous engagements among the best families.

This all-pervading spirit penetrated even into the newspaper offices, borne thither upon the flapping wings of the full-page display advertisements of our leading retail establishments. One of the papers—the *Morning Advocate*—compiled a symposium of paragraphed miseries under the title of the One Hundred Most Deserving Cases of Charity, and on the Monday before Christmas printed it with a view to enlisting the aid of the kindly disposed. The list was culled largely from the files of various philanthropic organisations. But it so befell that a reporter, who had been detailed on these

assignments, was passing through Pike Street on his way back to the office from one of the settlement houses when he encountered Papa Finkelstein, homeward bound after a particularly disappointing business day uptown.

The reporter was impressed much by the despondent droop of the little man’s sloping shoulders and by the melancholy smoulder in his big, dark eyes; but more was he impressed by the costume of Papa Finkelstein. It was a part of Papa Finkelstein’s burden of affliction that he customarily wore winter clothes in the summertime and summer clothes in the wintertime. On this gusty, raw December day he wore somebody’s summer suit—a much larger somebody evidently—and a suit that in its youth had been of light-coloured, lightweight flannel. It was still lightweight.

Infolded within its voluminous breadths the present wearer shivered visibly and drew his chilled hands farther up into its flapping sleeve ends until he resembled the doubly mutilated victim of a planing-mill mishap. If his expression was woebegone, his shoe soles were more—they practically were all-begone. A battered derby hat—size about seven and five-eighths—threatened total extinguishment of his face, being prevented from doing so only by the circumstance of its brim resting and pressing upon the upper flanges of the owner’s ears. They were ears providentially designed for such employment. Broad, wide and droopy, they stood out from the sides of Papa Finkelstein’s head like the horns of the caribou.

This reporter was a good reporter. He knew a human-interest story when he met it walking in the road. He turned about and tagged Papa Finkelstein to his domicile and there, after briefly inspecting the Finkelstein household in all its wealth of picturesque destitution, he secured the names and the address from the head of it, who perhaps gave the desired information all the more readily because he had not the slightest idea of what use this inquiring stranger wished to make of it.

Half an hour later the reporter was saying to the irritable functionary in charge of the *Advocate’s* news desk:

“Oh, so-so; just fair to middling, most of them; about the usual run of shad. But, say, I’ve got one bird of a case. I dug it up myself—it’s not down on any of the records I got from the charity people. When it comes to being plumb down and out none of them has anything on the meek and lowly Finkelsteins.”

“Good!” said the news editor. “You might lead with it if you want to. No, I guess you’d better run ’em alphabetically—it won’t do to be playing favourites.”

Mark now, how a little flame may kindle a large blaze: The afternoon half sister of the *Morning Advocate* was the *Evening Dispatch*. Between the two papers, owned as they were by the same gentleman and issued from the same printshop, a bitter rivalry prevailed; it generally does in such instances.

On Tuesday morning the city editor of the *Evening Dispatch* ran an agile and practiced eye through the story the *Advocate* had printed. With his shears he chopped out the first column of it. With his pencil he ringed one paragraph in the scissored section and then he lifted his voice and called to him a young woman professionally known as Betty Gwin, who sat in the city room at a desk somewhat withdrawn from copy readers, rewriters and leg men. This distinction of comparative aloofness was hers by right, she being a special-feature writer, under yearly contract, and, therefore, belonging to the aristocracy of the craft.

After the custom of her sex Miss Betty Gwin—whose real name, I may state, in confidence, was Ferguson—first put a hand up to be sure that her hair was quite right and then put it behind her to be sure her belt made proper connection with her skirt at the back; and then she answered her superior’s call. Answering it, all about her betokened confidence and competence. And why shouldn’t it? As a pen-smith this young person acknowledged no superiors anywhere. Her troupe of trained performing adjectives was admitted to be the smartest in town. Moreover, she was artistically ambidextrous. Having written a story she would illustrate it with her own hand. Her

drawings were replete with lithesome curves; so, too, was her literary style. None but a Betty Gwin could write what she wrote; none but a Betty Gwin properly illustrate it afterward.

"Fergy," said the city editor, "here's a beaut for you—right in your line. Full of that heart-throb junk nine ways from the jack. Those idiots upstairs gave it ten lines when it was worth six sticks all by itself—buried it when they should have played it up. You run down to this number and get a good, gummy, pathetic yarn. We'll play it up for to-morrow, with a strong picture layout and a three-col. head. Might call it: 'What Christmas Means for the Whatyoumaycall'em Family and What Christmas Might Mean for Them!' Get me?"

He passed over the clipping. In a glance his star comprehended the pencilled passage.

"Judging from the name and the neighbourhood Christmas wouldn't excite this family much, anyhow," she said.

"What do you care?" said her chief crisply. "There's a story there—go get it!"

Doubtlessly the Christmas spirit got into Betty Gwin's typewriter keys. Certainly it got into her inkpot and deposited the real essence of the real sob stuff there. The story she wrote trickled pathos from every balanced paragraph; there was pity in the periods and sentiment in the semicolons. As for the exclamation-points, they simply were elongated tear drops. It was one of the best stories Betty Gwin ever wrote. She said so herself—openly. But the picture that went with the story was absolutely diademic; it crowned figures of speech with tiaras of the graphic art. It showed Mamma Finkelstein seated on an upended box, which once had contained pickled herrings, surrounded by the eight little Finkelsteins. The children looked like ragged cherubs.

To accomplish this result it had been necessary for Miss Gwin to depart somewhat from a faithful delineation of the originals. But of what value is the creative ability unless it be used to create? I ask you that and pause for a reply. Not that the junior Finkelsteins were homely; without an exception they were handsome and well-formed. A millionaire might have been proud to own them.

But the trouble was, the Old Masters, who first painted cherubim, were mainly Italians, and for a variety of reasons chose their models from a race other than that to which the Finkelsteins appertained. To make her portraits conform with the popular conceptions of cherubs Miss Gwin saw fit to—shall we say?—conventionalise certain features. Indeed, when it came to reproducing for publication the physical aspect of Master Solly Finkelstein she did more than conventionalise—she idealised. Otherwise subscribers, giving the picture a cursory inspection, might have been led to believe that this cherub's wings had sprouted mighty high up on him. For Solly, eldest man child of the Finkelstein brood, had inherited the paternal ear—not all of it, as we know, but an ample and conspicuous sufficiency. Yet, with his ears trimmed, he, on his own merits, had enough of sombre child beauty for any seven-year-older anywhere. So Betty Gwin trimmed them—with her drawing pencil.

The bright light of publicity having been directed upon this cheerfully forlorn family, results followed. Of the publicity its beneficiaries knew nothing. Such papers as Papa Finkelstein read were Yiddish papers; he was no bookworm at that. Of the results, though, they were all speedily made aware.

Miss Gwin embodied the original and pioneer one of the forces speedily set marching to the relief of the Finkelsteins. Persons of a philanthropic leaning, reading what she had written and beholding what she had drawn, were straightway moved to forward, in care of that young author and the publication which she served, various small sums of money to be conveyed to this practically fireless, substantially foodless and semigarmentless household. Miss Gwin thought, at first, of founding a regular subscription list under the title of Betty Gwin's Succour Fund; but, on second thought, disliked the sound of the phrase when spoken, although it looked well enough written out.

Instead, she elected to carry in person to their proper destination the cash contributions already in hand, and along with them a somewhat more cumbersome offering consisting of a one-piece costume sent by a young lady in the theatrical profession—the chorus profession, to be circumstantial about it—who had accompanied the donation with a note on scented violet note paper, with a crest, stating that she wished the devoted mother of those “poor birdlings”—a direct quotation, this, from Miss Gwin’s story—to have the frock, and to keep it and wear it for her very own. With the Compliments of Miss Trixie Adair, of the Gay Gamboliers Musical Comedy Company.

Thus laden, Miss Gwin descended upon Pike Street and ascended upon the Finkelsteins, bringing with her, in addition to the other things mentioned, an air of buoyancy and good cheer. As on the occasion of her former call, two days earlier, the medium of intercourse between the visitor and the heads of the household was Miriam, aged nine, the topmost round of the family stepladder, ably reenforced by her brother Solly, who was mentioned just a bit ago with particular reference to his ears. In truth I should put it the other way round; for, to be exact, it was Solly who sustained the main burden of translation, his sister being a shy little thing and he in temperament emphatically the opposite.

Besides, his opportunities for acquiring facility and a repertoire in tongues had been more extensive than hers. While Miriam frequented the hallways of the tenement, or, at best, the sidewalk in front of it, concerned with the minding of the twins—Israel and Isadore, but both called, for convenience, Izzy—it was his practice to range far and wide, risking death beneath trolley cars, capture by the law, and murder at the hands of roused custodians of jobbing houses and buildings in course of construction, about which he lurked on the lookout for empty packing cases and bits of planking, and the like—such stuff as might be dragged home and there converted into household furnishings or stove fuel, depending upon whether at the moment the establishment stood more desperately in need of something to sit on than of something to burn.

Even now, at the tender age of seven, going on eight, Solly betrayed the stirrings of a restless ambition such as his sire had never known. It was an open question whether he would grow up to be a gunman or a revered captain of finance. A tug of fate might set his eager footsteps toward either goal. Already he had a flowing command of the sort of English spoken by startled and indignant motormen, pestered policemen and watchmen, tempted by provocation entirely beyond their powers of self-control. So Solly served as chief interpreter while Miss Gwin informally tendered the presents that had been intrusted to her charge for transmission.

In the same spirit Papa and Mamma Finkelstein, who continued to entertain the vaguest of theories regarding the sources of and the reasons for these benefactions, accepted them gratefully, with no desire to look a gift horse in the mouth. Gift horses were strange livestock in their experience, anyhow.

The money—eight dollars and ninety-five cents, all told—went for fuel and food; but mainly for food. With the Finkelsteins, life was a feast or else it was a famine; in their scheme of domestic economics they sought no middle ground. As for the gown bestowed by Miss Trixie Adair, of the Gay Gamboliers, Mamma Finkelstein started wearing it right away, merely adapting it to existing conditions—conditions that were, with her, not only existent but, I may say, chronic. It was—or had been—a pale-blue evening gown of a satinlike material, with no neck and no sleeves to the upper part, but with a gracefully long train to the skirt part, and made to hook up the back.

Because of the frequency of the demands put upon the maternal resources by the newest and smallest Finkelstein, it was deemed expedient and, in fact, essential to turn the gown round backward, so as to have the bodice fastenings directly in front of Mamma Finkelstein instead of directly behind her.

This necessitated drawing the train up from beneath the occupant's feet and draping it, sash-fashion, about her waist. Mamma Finkelstein wore it so. She was wearing it so that afternoon when Mrs. F. Fodderwood Bass arrived, direct from upper Fifth Avenue, and also the next morning when Miss Godiva Sleybells came, representing, semi-officially and most competently, the Cherry Hill Neighbourhood House.

Since of these two Mrs. F. Fodderwood Bass was first, firstly then we may consider her. I will begin by stating that she was a lady of augmented wealth and indubitable preeminence, being of that elect group who have ceased merely to smell society from afar off and now taste of its exclusive delights close up. For her it had been a hard climb, laboriously uphill all the way, boulder-strewn and beset by hazards, pitfalls and obstacles. But she had arrived finally upon those snow-capped peaks where the temperature is ever below freezing and life may only be maintained artificially.

Inasmuch as she had not been born to breathe the atmosphere of this rarefied altitude, but had achieved her right to breathe it by her own efforts, Mrs. F. Fodderwood Bass felt it incumbent on her to maintain her position away up there on Mount Saint Elias by such manifold and varied activities as were most aptly designed to make for publicity, which meant prominence, which meant success. For the moment she was principally concerned with living up to the rôle of good angel to the worthily indigent. Those who loved her and in return wished to be loved by her called her the Lady Bountiful of the Slums.

She conferred the sweet boon of charity with the aid of a press agent, a subscription to a clipping bureau, a special secretary—not her regular secretary, but a special one—and a new photograph—copyright by De Valle, Fifth Avenue, all infringements prohibited—appearing about once in so often in the Sunday Magazine Sections.

It was no strain upon the eyes to gaze upon Mrs. F. Fodderwood Bass; nor yet upon her photograph. Nor did she consciously and willfully deny any properly respectful person the opportunity. A distinguished portrait painter once had said, shortly after completing a commission which brought him large pecuniary returns from Mr. F. Fodderwood Bass, that Mrs. F. Fodderwood Bass possessed the most beautiful profile on the entire North American continent. When in company the recipient of this tribute kept her side face turned to the majority present—the greatest possible good to the greatest possible number, you see. She had one secret regret: one could not walk sideways—or, at least, one could not for any considerable distance.

I would not go so far as to say that Mrs. F. Fodderwood Bass actually read the prose poem emanating from Miss Betty Gwin's sympathetic typewriter; but I will go so far as to say that promptly the article of that gifted young word chandler was brought to her attention. No time was to be lost; in fact, no time was lost. Very shortly thereafter Mrs. F. Fodderwood Bass, attired in housings appropriately plain, to accord with her errand—housings which had cost less than five hundred dollars, exclusive of import duties—and suitably riding in a simple French limousine of but forty-eight horse power, was conveyed southward and eastward from her home to Pike Street. Her arrival there created a measure of popular tumult only to be equalled by a bank run or a fire alarm. A self-appointed escort at least seventy-five strong piloted her up four flights to the Finkelstein flat.

Papa Finkelstein was out temporarily, and Mamma Finkelstein was stunned into a state approximating dumb stupor by the grandeur of the visitation that appeared before her, heralded though its coming had been by many small, excited couriers dashing up the stairs in advance. Though Mamma Finkelstein was of humble station, Mrs. F. Fodderwood Bass did not deny her a treat. Throughout her stay, which was short, she remained standing in the doorway, with her profile presented to the dazzled stare of her hostess.

Her purpose being explained through volunteer interpreters, and largess having been bestowed generally, she

masterfully bore away Miriam, Solly and the two small duplicate Izzys, Mamma Finkelstein making no sign either of demur to or acquiescence in the plan, to a Christmas-tree entertainment given under her direct patronage in a rented hall some distance north of Cooper Union.

At eight P. M., long before their mother had in any visible respect rallied from her coma of dumb bewilderment, these four, a torpid and satiated quartet, were safely returned to the home nest, gorged on goodies, and laden with small gifts for themselves and for their yet more juvenile sisters and brothers. Throughout the remainder of the evening, though, little Miriam persisted in regarding her father with a certain silent and distressful reproach in her big black eyes. Made uneasy by his daughter's bearing he questioned her; and she divulged something she had heard.

It seemed that in explaining the intent of the festival of Christmas, Mrs. F. Fodderwood Bass, though actuated by the best intentions imaginable, had nevertheless revealed certain phases of Sacred History which, when the first shock of disclosure was over, left sensitive little Miriam in a state of mind where she stood ready to fix direct responsibility upon her own parent. Papa Finkelstein may have been lax in the precept and practice of his theological beliefs, but assuredly his convictions were both sound and orthodox. Immediately he developed an entirely unwarranted but none the less sincere distrust for the motives of Mrs. F. Fodderwood Bass.

Truly, he wronged her there. There was nothing that was ulterior, but much that was superior in the lady's attitude toward the lower forms of animal life which she observed flourishing below her. By lower forms of animal life I, as the historian of this episode, would include everything and everybody outside of her set. These lesser manifestations of an inscrutable scheme of creation she regarded benignantly, tolerantly and at times—wonderingly. To her they seemed so—well, so different—if you get my meaning and hers. One wondered sometimes, really one did, if they could be so susceptible to emotion and sensation as those who had been called to service in a higher sphere of activity? The answer might be yes and then again it might be no. It all depended upon one's point of view. Indeed when one came to ponder these matters, so much always did depend upon one's point of view, did it not? Meanwhile pending the ultimate solution of these perplexing sociological problems, she would minister Samaritanlike to the wants of the needy, and not forget to advertise the Samaritan. That was at once her pleasure and her duty.

If Papa Finkelstein's suspicions endured through the night, as I have my reasons for believing they did endure, they found no permanent lodgment in the bosom of his helpmate; for the next morning an event occurred that for the time being, at least, served to dispossess Mamma Finkelstein's mind of all lesser considerations. I refer to the arrival of Miss Godiva Sleybells, from the Cherry Hill Neighbourhood House. Mrs. F. Fodderwood Bass typified amateur philanthropy; but not so Miss Sleybells. She came, panoplied with purposeful intent, as the specialised, the expert, the austere representative of systematic relief.

In a period not far remote the allegation had been made that, so often, organised charity was lacking in the personal and the direct touch. It had been said that its common attitude was this: if a starving man applied for help in the guise of sustenance, organised charity took his name and address and made a very painstaking investigation of the merits of the mendicant and his plea, sparing neither time nor expense in the scope of its inquiry. His case being established as a worthy one, organised charity took steps to seek him out and providing he had not inconsiderately died in the interim, or moved to another park bench, it bestowed upon him a small blue ticket entitling the holder to saw wood so many hours a day at a specially maintained wood yard, and to receive in return for such labour a specified number of frugal meals. Mind you I do not pretend to assume that this actually was the fact; I merely repeat a form of criticism current at one time. But now, organised charity was become more personal and

possibly a trifle less statistical in its methods. For proof, observe how promptly Miss Godiva Sleybells moved. She, too, read Miss Betty Gwin's account of the lorn Finkelsteins. She waited not for an inquisition to be made and a report to be filed. She girded up her walking skirt, as a result of which girding it hiked in front and it drooped behind; and she put on her heavy rubbers and she came.

She walked in, unannounced, on the assembled Finkelsteins and the instant she crossed the threshold all there, regardless of age, somehow realised that they were hers to do with as she pleased; realised that in her efficient hands they would be but as plastic clay between the fingers of the moulder. Everywhere she went Miss Sleybells conveyed this feeling. It travelled with her even as her aura. She could walk through a crowded street, pausing not and looking neither to the right nor the left and yet leave behind her, in the minds of those among whom she had passed, the firm conviction that she had taken this particular street under her direct management and control. Nay more. She could traverse a stretch of empty landscape and even after she was gone, inanimate nature would somehow bear the impress of her dominance as though thereafter the Original Creator of that landscape would be relieved of all responsibility in connection with its conduct, maintenance and development. Were there more like her in this hemisphere, woman would not now be asking for the suffrage. But man would be.

A variety of causes had actuated her in going into settlement work. One half the world didn't know how the other half lived. Miss Sleybells meant to find out. Already she had written a considerable number of magazine articles embodying the fruits of her observations and deductions among the poor. Eventually, from the rich stores of her knowledge she meant to draw material for a novel. This novel would be in the style of the best work of Gorky, only stronger and more vivid than Gorky, and infinitely rich in its analytical appraisals of character. One who knew Miss Sleybells might not doubt of this. If she had had a middle name, her middle name would have been Thoroughness.

Such, in brief, was the ardent and enthusiastic woman who invaded the Finkelstein citadel, surprising its resident garrison in the middle of their comfortable untidiness and causing them instantly and unconditionally to capitulate before her onslaught. She looked about her, choosing for her initial attack the point of least resistance. It was the second to the youngest Finkelstein, Lena by name, engaged at the moment in regaling her infantile palate with a mid-forenoon snack consisting of a large, sea-green dill pickle and a rather speckly overripe banana. By Mrs. Finkelstein's standards these two articles constituted a well-balanced food ration. If the banana was soft and spotty, the pickle certainly was firm and in the immature hands of Lena practically indestructible. Besides, the results spoke for themselves. Lena liked her dill pickle and her banana; and she thrived on them.

Miss Sleybells looked and said: "Tut! Tut!" And with these words she deprived the startled and indignant child of both those treasures. That, however, was merely the beginning. She fell to then in earnest—most expeditiously and painstakingly fell to. From a neighbouring lady, more addicted to the healthful exercise of sweeping than Mamma Finkelstein was, she commandeered the use of a broom; also a mop. She heated water to the boiling point upon the rickety stove. She gave little Miriam a quarter and sent the child forth to buy two kinds of soap—human and laundry. Following this things ensued with a dizzying celerity.

At the outset, Miss Sleybells completely upset Mamma Finkelstein's domestic arrangements; or, rather, she disturbed and disarranged them, for to have them upset was Mamma Finkelstein's notion of having them properly bestowed. She ferreted out from beneath beds the stored accumulations of months. She pried open the windows, admitting the chill air of winter in swift gusts. She swept, she dusted, and with suds she mopped the floor and stayed not her hand. She herded the abashed Finkelsteins into a corner, only to drive them out again before the strokes of broom and mop and dust rag, all

the while tut-tutting like a high-powered dynamo.

This done, she took individual after individual in hand for cutaneal renovation. While Mamma Finkelstein hovered timorously by, stricken with a great and voiceless apprehension, Miss Sleybells took scissors and snipped the children out of their flannel swaddlings into which they had so carefully been sewn but a short six weeks before. As fast as she denuded a submissive form she bathed it soapily, set it before the fire to dry out, and seized, with moist, firm grasp, upon another unresisting victim. I indulge in no cheap effort at punning but speak the sober fact when I say Miss Godiva Sleybells that day proved herself a veritable Little Sister of the Pore.

Presently from the group of small naked figures squatted by the stove a sound of sneezing arose. The baby began it and the baby's example was contagious. Soon these youthful Finkelsteins who had undergone the water ordeal, as contradistinguished from those who had not yet undergone it, were going off with sneezes at regular half-minute intervals, like so many little pink cuckoo clocks.

Behind Miss Sleybells' indomitable back, then, Mamma Finkelstein wrung her hands in mute and helpless distress. But no word of protest did she utter. For one thing, her knowledge of the English language practically was negligible. For another thing, she dared not speak even had she had the words. To Mamma Finkelstein, Miss Sleybells personified the visible authority of the state—that same dread force which, in the guise of truant officers, sought to drag Miriam away to public school when her services were required for nursing duties; and which, again, wearing brass and blue, harried Solly from his wood-collecting enterprises.

Starting with the youngest and progressing toward the top, Miss Sleybells bathed up the line as far as the twins before she stopped. She stopped there for lack of living material.

Solly, opportunely, had fled into hiding, and with him Miriam, his sister. Anyhow, Miss Sleybells reflected, as she looked about her at the surroundings, now all cleansed and dampish, all lathered and purged, that she had done a great deal for one day—a very great deal. Still, much remained undone.

Upon leaving, she gave Mamma Finkelstein express and explicit commands regarding the conduct of her home, speaking with especial reference to fresh air, ablutions and diet. By nods and by gestures Mamma Finkelstein pledged obedience, without sensing in the smallest degree what she was promising to do. Then Miss Sleybells announced that she would return on the morrow, and departed. Mamma Finkelstein understood that part, at least, and her wigged head sank in her hands. Papa Finkelstein, arriving home shortly before dark, sustained a hard shock. For a minute he almost thought he must have got into the wrong flat.

Miss Godiva Sleybells was as good as her word; in fact, better. She did come back the next day and on many days thereafter, coming to correct, to admonish, to renovate, to set erring feet upon the properest way, to scold poor Mamma Finkelstein for her constantly recurrent backslidings from the paths of domestic duty. Nearly always she came at unexpected intervals; and, having come, she entered always without knocking. Mamma Finkelstein fell into the habit of hearkening fearsomely for the sound of footsteps in the hall without.

Being warned by an approaching resolute tread, betokening flat, low heels and broad, sensible soles, she would drop whichever child she happened to be mothering at that moment and fly about in a perfect frenzy of purposeless activity, snatching up things, casting them aside, rattling kitchen pans, shoving loose articles—and nearly everything she owned was loose—out of sight. The artifice was a transparent one at best. Assuredly it never deceived Miss Godiva Sleybells. With shiftlessness she had no patience. Shiftlessness was one of several thousand things with which she had no patience.

It was on the occasion of her second visit that Miss Sleybells brought along and bestowed upon Mamma

Finkelstein a bound volume dealing with the proper care of infants, and bade her consult its pages. This gift Mamma Finkelstein put to usage, but not the usage the donor had devised for it. She gave it to the next-to-the-youngest baby, who was teething, to cut her little milk teeth upon. The sharp corners proved soothing to the feverish gums of Lena; but, under constant and well-irrigated mumblings, the red dye on the covers came off, resulting in an ensanguined appearance of Lena's lips and a sharp attack of colic elsewhere in Lena. Mamma Finkelstein had suspected evil lurked within the volume; now she was certain dangers abode in its outer casings. She kindled a fire with it.

It was on the occasion of her third visit that Miss Sleybells brought with her two co-labourers who listened intently and took notes while their guide discoursed upon the subject of the Finkelstein family's domestic and hygienic shortcomings, she speaking with the utmost candour and just as frankly as though her living topics had not been present at the time.

It was following the occasion of her fourth visit that Miss Godiva prepared and read to a company of her associates in the Neighbourhood House a paper dealing with her observations in this particular quarter. In the course of her reading she referred variously to the collective Finkelsteins as a charge, a problem, a question, an enigma and a noteworthy case.

For all her lack of acquaintanceship with the language, it is possible that Mamma Finkelstein, in her dim, inarticulate way, comprehended something of Miss Godiva's attitude toward her. Perhaps she would have preferred to be regarded not as a problem but occasionally as a person. Perhaps she craved inwardly for those vanished days of comparative privacy and unlimited disorderliness within the two rooms she called her home. Her situation may have been miserable then. Miss Sleybells said so. But what matters misery if its victims mistake it for happiness?

But since Mrs. Finkelstein never by act or sign or look betrayed her feelings, whatsoever they may have been, it is not for me or for you to assume that she harboured resentment. She was a daughter of a tribe bitted and bridled to silent endurance; of a people girthed and saddled through the centuries to the uncomplaining bearing of their burdens.

Meantime Mrs. F. Fodderwood Bass was by no means slack in well-doing. As regards the younger Finkelsteins particularly, her alms-deeds were many. She took them under her silken wings. At intervals she arrived, rustling, to confer advice and other things more material and therefore more welcome. She spoke of the Finkelsteins as her Pet Charities.

Among the younger inmates of the flat her visits were by no means distasteful. Quite aside from the gifts she brought, the richness of the clothes she wore appealed to a heritage of their ancestry that was in them; they had a natural taste and appreciation for fabrics. But Papa Finkelstein found it impossible to cure himself of his earlier suspicions. He remembered what he remembered, and remained dubious.

For all that, Mrs. F. Fodderwood Bass presently aimed her batteries of benevolence upon him. It was like this: She had aided conspicuously in a Bundle Day movement. Someone else, I believe, originated the idea, but Mrs. F. Fodderwood Bass practically took it over as soon as she heard about it. Through the daily press an appeal was made to the well-to-do of the community that they should assemble into parcels their cast-off garments for distribution among the poor. The police force, the fire department, the express companies and the newspapers—all were to cooperate in gathering up such parcels and depositing them at a designated central station, where the objects of this bounty on a given date might be outfitted.

The notion caught the fancy and became popular. It assumed a scope beyond the dream horizon of its creator and of the legatees of the notion; for in itself it had four elements that inevitably appeal to the New York heart: first, generosity, for New York may be thoughtless, but it is vastly generous underneath its face-paint; second, novelty; third, size; and

fourth, notoriety. But the greatest of these is notoriety.

The effects were magnificently far-reaching. Thousands made contributions; thousands of others profited thereby. Many a poor Bowery “dinner waiter,” owning merely a greasy short jacket and one paper-bosomed shirt, and compelled therefore to serve in some quick order place for his food and nothing else, secured, without cost, the dress suit of his visions and was in consequence enabled to get a regular job, in a regular restaurant, with regular pay and regular tips. Many a shivering derelict got a warm if threadbare overcoat to cover him. Many a half-clad child repaired to a big building and there selected whole garments suitable to his or her size, if not to his or her station. And meanwhile the sponsors of the affair, including Mrs. F. Fodderwood Bass and lesser patronesses, looked on approvingly, acquiring merit by the minute and, incidentally, long reading notices in all the papers.

On the day before Bundle Day the lady called in Pike Street, timing her arrival so as to be sure of finding Papa Finkelstein in. With the aid of Miriam and Solly she explained to him her designs. He was to come to such and such an address next morning and be equipped with a wardrobe less accessibly ventilated to the eager and the nipping air of winter than the one he now possessed.

Papa Finkelstein solemnly pledged himself to be there at the appointed hour, and so she went away, well-content. Therein, however, a subtle Oriental strain of duplicity in Papa Finkelstein’s nature found play. He had no intention of having his timid sensibilities massacred before a large crowd to make a Bundle Holiday. It may have been that he feared in Mrs. F. Fodderwood Bass’ friendly overtures there was concealed a covert campaign to proselyte him away from the faith of the Fathers. It may have been that, through professional reasons, he privily deplored a movement calculated to strike so deadly a blow at the very vitals of the old-clo’ business. At any rate he did not go where she had bade him go; completely he absented himself therefrom.

It was late in the afternoon of the following day before Mrs. F. Fodderwood Bass realised that Papa Finkelstein had not yet appeared. She called to her a footman of her employ, specially detailed to attend her on this occasion, and ordered him to proceed at once to Pike Street and find her missing ward and bring him before her. Being a good footman, his expression gave no clue to his feelings. He deemed it to lie far outside the proper functions of a footman to be hunting up persons named Finkelstein; but he obeyed.

For the moment the scene must shift to Pike Street. The time is half an hour later. Partly by words, partly by wide-armed gesticulations, Papa Finkelstein explained his position in the matter, if not his private reasons.

“Is that so?” said the footman, whose name was Cassidy—Maurice J. Cassidy. He fixed a strong hand grippingly in the back of Papa Finkelstein’s collar. “Well, you listen to me, young fella! Wan way or another you’re goin’—wit’ me, nice and peaceable or in an ambylance. You can make your own choice.”

The words possibly were confusing to the alien understanding, but the large knobby fist, which swayed to and fro an inch or so below the tip of the captive’s nose, spoke in a language that is understood of all men. Papa Finkelstein saw his way clear to accompanying Footman Cassidy. Aboard the street car, on the way uptown, several of his fellow passengers decided he must be a thief who had been caught red-handed, and said it served him right.

Arriving, he was ushered—perhaps I should say propelled—into the presence of Mrs. F. Fodderwood Bass. She greeted his appearance coosomely. Or is cooingly the right word? At any rate, she cooed her approval; she cooed beautifully, anyhow. With open pride she directed the attention of certain of her associate patronesses to the little huddled shape of Cassidy’s prisoner.

“Ah, there he is!” she said. “My Pet Charity! So improvident, so shiftless; but isn’t he just too picturesque!”

Levelling their lorgnettes on him, her friends agreed in chorus that he was very picturesque. They wondered, though, why he wriggled so.

"The dearest, gentlest little man!" continued Mrs. F. Fodderwood Bass in clear, sweet tones. "So diffident, but so grateful for everything—the poor, tattered dear! He never says a word to me when I talk to him; but by the look in his eyes I can tell he is fairly worshipping the ground I walk on."

As if to prove the truth of what she said Papa Finkelstein's gaze even now was directed upon the floor at her feet.

"Now, Cassidy," went on his mistress, "you take him into one of the dressing rooms yonder and have him undress. It's too bad nearly everything has been picked over; but we shall find something for him, I'm sure."

Within a curtained recess Cassidy explained his meaning with threatening mien.

"Take off thim rags!" he commanded.

Rags they may have been, but Papa Finkelstein cherished them. Reluctantly he parted with them, filled with the melancholy conviction that he should see them never more. It was a true foreboding. But that was not the worst of it. Papa Finkelstein was in figure slight and of a contour difficult to drape garments upon. Moreover, it was as his benefactor had said—everything had been picked over so. Nevertheless, a selection agreeable to the lady's ideals was finally made.

Fifteen minutes passed. At the end of those fifteen minutes Papa Finkelstein, under the menacing urgings of Footman Cassidy, made a diffident but spectacular reappearance before the Bundle Day audience. His head was bent apologetically low, so that his whiskers, spraying upon his bosom, helped to cover him. His two hands were spread flat upon his chest, hiding still more of his abashed shape. Nevertheless, it might be discerned that Papa Finkelstein wore the abandoned cream-coloured whipcords of somebody's chauffeur—very abandoned and very cream-coloured, the whole constituting a livery, complete, from the visored cap upon his head to the leather puttees reefed about his bowed shanks.

"Now just look at him!" cried Mrs. F. Fodderwood Bass in an ecstasy. "How neat! How trim! How cosy!"

Papa Finkelstein didn't want to be neat. He abhorred cosiness; likewise trimness. Moreover he shrunk mentally from the prospect of his homeward journey, foreseeing difficulties. There again was his intuition prophetically justified.

At the corner of Hester Street and the Bowery a skylarking group beheld him and greeted him with cries of an almost incredulous joy. By force they detained the little man, making mock of him in English and in Yiddish. The English passed over his head, but into his soul the Yiddish bit deep, leaving scars. He wrested himself free and fled to his home. His arrival there made a profound impression on Mamma Finkelstein—after she recognised him. So did his language.

Only the absolute necessity of gleaning rent money from the realms of trade drove him forth two days later from the comparative sanctuary of the inner room of his domicile. In the spirit he suffered, and in the flesh as well. Citizens en route to the Subway, on being hailed with inquiries touching on old clothes, from an undersized pedestrian attired as a chauffeur, in reduced circumstances, who had neglected to shave for a long time past, did not halt to listen. They halted to laugh and to gibe and to gird with derision. Until Papa Finkelstein had effected a trade with a compassionate but thrifty compatriot, with an utter disregard for intrinsic values exchanging what he wore for whatsoever the other might give, just so it sufficiently covered him, he felt himself to be a hissing and a byword in the highways—which he was.

And now into the tangling skeins of the Finkelstein family's life in their relation to the charitable impulses enlisted upon their behalf—but without their consent or their approval—it is fitting to reintroduce Miss Betty Gwin. Springtime came and passed, its passage dappled for all the Finkelsteins with memory spots attesting the more or less intermittent

attentions of Mrs. F. Fodderwood Bass, and the more or less constant ministrations of Miss Godiva Sleybells.

Summer came; and with the initial weeks of summer came also the time for the first of the series of annual outings conducted under the auspices of the *Evening Dispatch's* Fresh Air Fund for the Children of the Poor. Yearly it was the habit of this enterprising sheet to give excursions to the beach, employing therefor a chartered steamboat and the contributions of the public.

The public mainly put up the money; the owner of the *Evening Dispatch*, Mr. Jason Q. Welldover, principally took the credit, for thereby, on flaunting banners and by word of speech, was his name and his fame made glorious throughout the land. As repeatedly pointed out in the editorial columns of his journal, the Little Ones of the slums were enabled, through the Generosity of This Paper, to breathe in the Life-giving Ozone of kindly Mother Ocean; to Play upon the sands; to Disport themselves in the very Lap Of Nature; returning home at eventide Rejuvenated and Happy—the phraseology and the capitalisation alike being direct quotations from the *Evening Dispatch*.

Since Miss Betty Gwin was on the staff of the *Evening Dispatch*, it was quite natural that she should take a personal pride as well as a professional interest in the success of the opening outing of the season. As suitable candidates for admission to its dragooned passenger list she thought of Miriam Finkelstein and Solly Finkelstein. She pledged herself to see that these two were included in the party. Nor did she forget it. Upon the morning of the appointed date she went personally to Pike Street, assumed custodianship of the favoured pair and, her own self, escorted them to the designated place of assemblage and transferred them into the keeping of Mr. Moe Blotch.

Mr. Blotch belonged in the *Evening Dispatch's* Circulation Department. Against his will he had been drafted for service in connection with the Fresh Air Fund's excursion. He was a rounded, heavy-set person, with the makings of a misanthrope in him. That day completed the job; after that he was a made and finished misanthrope.

While murder blazed in his eyes and kind words poured with malevolent bitterness from his lips, Mr. Blotch marshalled his small charges, to the number of several hundred, in a double file. To each he gave a small American flag, warning each, on peril of mutilation and death, to wave that flag and keep on waving it until further orders. Up at the head of the column, Prof. Washington Carter's All-Coloured Silver Cornet Band struck up a clamorous march tune and the procession started, winding its way out of the familiar Lower East Side, across the tip of Manhattan Island, to the verge of the strange Lower West Side.

Well up in the line, side by side, marched Miriam and Solly, the twain whose fortunes we are following. Possibly from stress of joyous anticipation they shivered constantly. However, it was a damp and cloudy day, and, for early June, very raw. Even Mr. Moe Blotch, muffled as he was in a light overcoat, shivered.

The route of march led past the downtown offices of the *Evening Dispatch*, where, in a front window, the proprietor, Mr. Jason Q. Welldover, waited to review the parade. According to his instructions from a higher authority, Mr. Blotch now gave the signal for an outburst of appreciative cheering from the small marchers. Obeying the command, they lifted up their voices; but, doubtlessly through stage fright or lack of chorus drilling, the demonstration, considered for vocal volume, was not altogether a success. It was plaintive rather than enthusiastic. It resembled the pipings of despondent sandpipers upon a distant lea. Standing in the window, Mr. Welldover acknowledged the tribute by bowing, he then holding the pose until his staff photographers had caught him—once, twice, three times.

Half a mile more of trudging brought the little travellers to a dock above the Battery. Alongside the dock lay a steamboat so swathed in bunting and bannered inscriptions as to present

the appearance of being surgically bandaged following a succession of major operations. The smokestack suggested a newly broken leg, enveloped in first-aid wrappings. The walking beam rose above a red-and-white-and-blue mass, like a sprained wrist escaping from its sling. The boiler deck was trussed from end to end; and everywhere recurred, in strikingly large letters, the names of Mr. Jason Q. Welldover and the *Evening Dispatch*.

Without loss of time, Mr. Blotch drove his excursionists aboard; and soon then, to the strains of martial music, the swaddled craft was moving gayly down the river. Or, anyhow, she moved as gayly as was possible, seeing that the river was of a rumpled, grayish aspect, abounding in large waves, and each wave flounced with a ruffle of dirty-white foam; and seeing, further, that an exceedingly keen wind blew dead against her, searching out the remotest and most sheltered recesses of her decks. Mr. Blotch remained in the engine room throughout the journey.

But all pleasant things must have an end; and eventually, although to some aboard it seemed even longer than that, the steamer reached Coney. Somewhere on this globe there may be a more dispiriting, more dismal spot than Coney is on a wet and cloudy day in the early part of June. I have heard Antarctic explorers speak with feeling of the sense of desolation inspired by contemplation of the scenery closely adjacent to the South Pole; but, never having been at or near the South Pole, I am still pledged to Coney Island.

A hot dog merchant there, hearing the strains of music and beholding the approach of a multitude, lit his fires and laid specimens of his wares upon the grid to brown and sizzle. A closer view of the massed crowd, advancing toward him from the pier, disillusioned him. As a regular subscriber to the *Evening Dispatch* he knew that these oncoming hosts were not to be considered, even remotely, as prospective patrons. For had it not been written and repeatedly written that they were to be regaled, ABSOLUTELY WITHOUT EXPENSE, at Stanchheimer’s Chowder Pavilion? Verily it had been so written. Uttering fluent maledictions in his sonorous native Greek, the hot dog man went inside his booth, pulled down the shades and turned off the gas.

On a wide and windswept shore, where pallid sands ran down to pallid sea, and sea in turn ran out and out to mingle, under shrouding fog banks, with lowering skies, the small Fresh-Air funders were turned loose and sternly ordered to enjoy themselves. Perversely, they persisted in huddling in close, tight clusters, as though drawn together by a gravitation of common discomfort. Their conductor was not to be thwarted. He had a duty to perform—a duty to them and to his employer—and scrupulously he meant to obey it if it cost forty lives. From group to group Mr. Moe Blotch ran, yanking its members out into the cheerless open.

“Play, consarn you! Play!” he blared at them. “Laugh and sing and dig in the sands! Breathe in the life-giving ozone or I’ll break every bone in your bodies!”

Little Miriam found herself alone and lonesome in the shadow of a depressingly pale-yellow dune. She thought of the warm and comfortable tenement hallway, crowded as it would be with gossiping little deputy mothers and crawling, babbling babies. She thought of the shifting panorama of Pike Street’s sidewalk life, spectacular and thrilling. She thought of her own two special charges—Izzy and Izzy—deprived now of their customary guardianship and no doubt pining for it.

These poignant memories overcame her. She lifted her face to the unresponsive vault of heaven, and she wept. Once she was at it, there was no false restraint in her weeping; she bemoaned her lot shrilly, copiously and damply. Moisture streamed from her eyes, her mouth, her nose. In her rendition there was a certain aquatic wholeheartedness that would have interested and startled a student of natural hydraulics. Practically this child had riparian rights.

To her side came running Solly, her brother, likewise weeping. His antlerlike ears, undefended and, as it were, defiantly outbranching to the edged breezes, were now two

chilled disks, shot through their more membranous surfaces with bluish, pinkish, greenish tones, like mother-of-pearl. His nose, from tip to base, was one frigid and painful curve. And, to top all, Solly, venturing too near the beach edge, had been surprised by a quick, large wave. From his waist down he dripped sea water. His fortitude succumbed before this final misfortune. He mingled his tears with Miriam's, substantially doubling the output.

Their sorrow might have touched a heart of stone; but Mr. Blotch, embarking on this mission of pleasure, had left his heart behind him, foreseeing that its presence might be inconvenient to a proper discharge of his philanthropic obligations. He charged down upon them, separated their entwined arms and, with terrible threats, required them to play and dig in the sand.

So they played and they dug in the sand. Choking back their sobs and burying their little, cold fingers in the cold, gritty sand, they played and dug through the long forenoon until dinnertime; and after dinner they dug and played some more, until the hour for departure arrived, cutting short all their blithesome misery.

Beyond question, Solly next day would have developed pneumonia, except that pneumonia was far too troublesome a luxury for any of the Finkelstein family to be having. Besides, at this juncture the weather providentially turned off to be warm and seasonable, and, scouting in East Broadway, he happened upon a large, empty crockery crate, which seemed to lack a friend. He up-ended it, crawled inside it and made off with it; and so completely hidden was he within its capsized depths that one observing the spectacle might have been excused for assuming that a crockery crate was out for a walk on its own account. In the joys of perilous adventures and treasure-findings Solly conquered his symptoms and forgot to fall ill.

The weather continued to be warm and warmer. By mid-July it was so warm that the interior of the tenements became insufferable, and the dwellers slept of nights on fire escapes and in doorways, and even in the little squares and out on the pavement gratings, stretched—whole rows of them—upon pallets and quilts. The hot spell afforded Miss Godiva Sleybells an opportunity to do something that was really worth while for the two older of the eight younger Finkelsteins. She came one simmering day and told them the splendid news. They were to have a week—a whole week—on a farm up in the Catskills.

With memories of Coney still vivid in their young brains, Miriam and Solly inwardly quailed at the prospect; but they went. There was nothing else for them to do; the determined dragoness in the double-lensed spectacles, who managed their mother and condemned them at intervals to trials by soap and water, had so ordained it.

I wish I might say the two children were wrong in their forebodings; I wish I might paint their week in the Catskills as a climactic success. Perhaps from Miss Godiva Sleybells' viewpoint it was a success; but, remember, I am concerned with detailing not her impressions so much as the impressions of these small wards of hers.

Remember, too, that in saying what I must, as a truthful historian, say, I mean not to reflect upon the common aims or the general results of that splendid charity which each year sends thousands of poor children to the country, there for a spell to breathe in a better air than ever they have breathed, and to eat of better fare than ever they have eaten. In this instance I am afraid the trouble was that the city had trapped the small Finkelsteins too early. If they had not been born in its stone-and-steel cage, at any rate they could not remember a time when they had not lived in it. They were like birds, which, being freed, cannot use their wings because they have never used them, but only flutter about distractedly, seeking to return to the old confines within the bars of the prison and the familiar perches of its constricted bounds. Distance—free, limitless and far-extending—daunts those other birdlings as it daunted these two small human ones. It was so strange an experience to them to be thrust into the real out-of-doors. And

to most of us whatever is strange is uncomfortable—until we get accustomed to it.

The journey mountainward frightened the small pair. They had never been on a train before. As they clung to each other, cowering low in their seat every time the locomotive hooted, they resolved that willingly they would never be on one again. Upon reaching their destination they were required to sleep in separate beds, which was an experience so very different from the agreeable and neighbourly congestion of sleeping four or five to a bed, as at home. Next morning they were given for breakfast country eggs and country milk—the one fresh-laid by the hen; the other fresh-drawn from the udder.

For Miriam and Solly it proved a most unsatisfactory meal. This milk came from a cow, whereas the milk they knew came from a milkman. It was so yellow, so annoyingly thick, so utterly lacking in the clear blue, almost translucent, aspect of East Side milk! The Catskill egg likewise proved disappointing. After the infrequent Pike Street egg, with its staunchness and pungency of flavour, it seemed but a weak, spiritless, flat-tasting thing.

When breakfast was over they went forth upon kindly compulsion from the farmhouse kitchen and, barefooted, were turned loose on a grassy mead. At once all Nature appeared in a conspiracy against them. The wide reaches of space disturbed them, whose horizon always had been fenced in with tall, close-racked buildings. The very earth was a pitfall, bearded with harsh saw-edged grass blades, drenched with chilly dews, and containing beneath the ambush of its green covering many rough and uneven depressions. The dew irritated Solly’s naked legs, making him long for the soothing contact of Pike Street’s mud-coated cobbles. Miriam stubbed her shrinking pink toes against hidden clods when she essayed a timorous step or two forward. So both of them stood still, then, very much at a loss to know what they should or could do next.

Somebody suggested to Miriam that she pick the wild flowers and the wild vine tendrils and weave them into garlands. Was it her fault that her very first selections should be a spray of poisoned sumac, first cousin to poison ivy, and that her second should be a handful of nettles? Somebody else undertook to induct Solly into the pleasures of tree climbing. Was it altogether his fault that he should promptly fall out of the first crotch and painfully sprain and bruise himself in several places?

And when, finally, they had been induced to quit the immediate proximity of the farmhouse, which at least provided a refuge and a shelter from suspected dangers, and had ventured over a fence and into a pasture, a most terrible thing occurred. Toward them there suddenly advanced an enormous red creature, tossing a huge head crowned with sharp horns, and emitting frightful, rumbling sounds from a great rubbery muzzle.

With shrieks of terror, they fled blindly into a patch of woodland that was perhaps two acres in extent; and, losing themselves in its—to them—vast and impenetrable depths, they remained there, crouching behind a tree until discovered, tearful, hungry and disconsolate, by a volunteer search party shortly before sunset. Miriam’s subsequent description of the monster that had menaced them, as detailed to her mother, gave Mamma Finkelstein a mental picture of something which might be likened to a cross between a raging rhinoceros and a hook-and-ladder motor truck. For it had been many a year since Mamma Finkelstein herself had seen a yearling heifer. And Miriam never had seen one before.

It was indeed a hard and an irksome week. The end of it saw the two small adventurers, both sun-blistered and peeling, both broken out as to hands and legs with strange, irritating rashes, and both with gladness in their little homesick souls, returning to the beloved perils and the customary pleasures of the torrid town.

After this the Finkelsteins for a while had a welcomed respite from kindness. They fairly revelled in it; but not for a great while, nor, in fact, for very long, did it endure. Following

Labor Day, Mrs. F. Fodderwood Bass came back from her country place up Greenwich way and reopened her city place. It transpired that with her she had brought a perfectly splendid idea. She was going to establish the Finkelsteins on an abandoned farm. While motoring about over the country lanes in Connecticut she had found the very spot for them—an ideal spot, indeed—nine acres, and nine miles from a railroad, with a ruinous little cottage, all furnished, perched upon a rocky hillock in the centre of the nine acres.

It was upon this site she was resolved they should be domiciled. There—as she herself said—Papa Finkelstein might turn farmer and maybe make a fortune. There Mamma Finkelstein could rear her brood in peace and quiet, far aloof and remote from the teeming multitude. There the fresh, pure air of the country would restore the bloom of health to the cheeks of all the little Finkelsteins. What mattered it though the little Finkelsteins were already so healthy that if they had been any healthier than they were it might have been necessary to tap them for it? I am not detailing what was actually the case, but what Mrs. F. Fodderwood Bass, in the exuberance engendered by her generous impulses, said about it.

A scheme so large required cooperation. Mrs. F. Fodderwood Bass secured it from Miss Godiva Sleybells, whom she had met upon more than one occasion when the two of them chanced to happen in upon the Finkelsteins at the same time, and from Miss Betty Gwin, who frequently had been called upon to detail to a hungry reading public particulars concerning Mrs. F. Fodderwood Bass' social and charitable endeavours.

Together these three constituted a committee on ways, means and publicity. Mrs. F. Fodderwood Bass provided the funds for leasing the nine acres and for transporting its ten future tenants to their future home. Miss Godiva Sleybells agreed, for her part, to insure that the prospective colonists, both big and little, were properly loaded and properly shipped to their destination. Miss Betty Gwin wrote a moving word picture two columns long about it, in which she mentioned the late Baron de Hirsch once and Mrs. F. Fodderwood Bass a great many times.

Actually the day preceding the day set for the removal of the Finkelsteins arrived before it occurred to the three conferees that they had entirely forgotten until that minute to take the Finkelsteins into their confidence—not that it very much mattered; this was but an incidental detail, which before now had been altogether overlooked. Miss Sleybells volunteered to go and tell them. She went and she did.

Reporting back to the principal factor in this kindly little conspiracy, Miss Sleybells said the Finkelstein family had been stunned—literally stunned into dumb silence by the grateful joy the tidings brought to them. She said surprise and gratitude had left them absolutely speechless. Naturally she had no way of knowing, when she broke the glad news, that Solly thought of Coney's inhospitable sands and treacherous seas; that Miriam thought of the fearsome Catskill cow; that their mother, whose whole life had been bounded by two Ghettos—one in the Old World and one in the New, and who knew no other life—thought of a great variety of things; and that the children, ranging from the twins downward, would have done some thinking, too, had they been of suitable age thus to indulge their juvenile intellects.

She had no way of knowing that, when she was gone from among them, Papa Finkelstein stood erect and, elevating his two hands in passionate entreaty toward heaven, with solemn fervour uttered the only words which it is fated that we, in this recital, shall ever hear him utter. He spake them in the tongue with which he was most conversant. He said:

"*Gott bei heit!*"

September's hurried twilight was folding in upon Pike Street. Against the curbing, surrounded by an admiring throng, stood Mrs. F. Fodderwood Bass' third-best car. Hard by stood an express wagon, its driver ready to receive what

puny freightage of household and personal belongings as might be consigned to his care. And upstairs, upon the top floor of a certain tenement, in the narrow hall outside the Finkelstein flat, stood Mrs. F. Fodderwood Bass, Miss Godiva Sleybells and Miss Betty Gwin. The first named of these three was come to witness the accomplishment of her beautiful purpose; the second, to lend her executive abilities to the details of the undertaking; the third, to write a piece about it.

In accord with her regular habit Miss Sleybells turned the knob. The knob turned part way, but the door did not open; so she rattled the knob and knocked with her knuckles on the panel. Mrs. F. Fodderwood Bass raised her flutelike voice in cooing accents.

“Open the door, my dear charities,” she said clearly. “It is I—your good angel.”

Miss Betty Gwin stooped and applied a squinted eye at the keyhole. Miss Sleybells knocked again—harder. There was no answer.

I shall tell you why there was no answer. The reason is a good and sufficient one. All day within their two rooms the Finkelstein family had bided, waiting, waiting; hoping against hope. With the sound of well-remembered footsteps in the hall without, with the sound of a well-known voice uplifted, the last faint remnant of hope expired.

In melancholy resignation Papa Finkelstein nodded to Mamma Finkelstein; and Mamma Finkelstein, stifling the plaint of the youngest baby in her shawl, nodded back to him in sorrowful confirmation of the worst. With gestures he imposed deep silence upon all present. He tiptoed into the rear room and his people followed, tiptoeing also. He climbed out of the back window and descended the fire-escape ladder to the fire-escape landing at the level of the next floor below. He balanced himself there and into his extended arms, Mamma Finkelstein passed down to him, one by one, their children; and he, in turn, passed them in at a window where Mrs. Esther Rabinowitz, a good-hearted neighbour, received them, and deposited them in a mute row upon her kitchen floor. At the last Mamma Finkelstein descended and joined him.

They assembled their progeny. They noiselessly emerged from Mrs. Rabinowitz’ hall door; and, noiselessly all, they fled down the stairs and out into the gathering twilight of Pike Street, which has a way of growing shabby and soiled-looking as it gathers. They had deserted all their small belongings; they knew not where that night they might lay their heads; they had no idea where they were going—but they were on their way.

Up on the top floor Miss Sleybells knocked and knocked again. Miss Gwin put her ear to the locked, barred door and listened and listened for betraying sounds within; and Mrs. F. Fodderwood Bass raised her coo to yet a flutier pitch. And while they were thus engaged the Finkelstein family, one and all, vanished into the cloaking, protecting dusk where Pike Street runs toward the river.

Did I say Finkelstein family? I was wrong there.

For purposes of better concealment Papa Finkelstein had changed the name. The inspiration had come to him even as he gripped the topmost round of the fire-escape ladder. Changing it, he had seen fit to honour, by virtue of self-adoption, a race of Irish kings, and notably a policeman of his acquaintance, a descendant of that kingly line. He changed it to Finnigan. Loss to the Finkelsteins would thenceforth be gain to the Finnigans.

So they vanished away—Papa Meyer Finnigan, Mamma Leah Finnigan—née Pincus—Miriam Finnigan, Solly Finnigan, the Finnigan twins, Izzy and Izzy; Benjamin Finnigan, Rebecca Finnigan, Lena Finnigan, and so on down to Baby Leopold Finnigan—and were gone!

For does it not stand written that——? But see Corinthians—first, thirteenth and fourth—and notably the first three words of the same. Only it should have been written there, in

amplification, that there is a limit.

CHAPTER VIII

ENTER THE VILLAIN

IT IS conceded, I believe, that every story should have a moral; also, whenever possible, a heroine or a hero, a villainess or a villain, a plot and a climax. Now this story has a villain of sorts, if you choose to look upon him in that light; but no hero, and no climax. And certainly there is no moral to adorn the tale. So far as I have been able to discover it is absolutely moral-less. So then, reader, if you, being thus foreadvised regarding these avowed shortcomings of my narrative, choose to go further with it, the responsibility must be yours and not mine. Don't you come round afterward saying I didn't warn you.

The rise of the curtain discloses the city room of *The Clarion*, a New York morning newspaper. The hour is six-thirty P. M., the period is the approximate present, and the season is summer time. At a desk in the foreground is discovered the head office boy in the act of scissoring certain marked passages out of copies of the afternoon papers and impaling them upon spindles. Beyond him, at a big oaken table shaped like half of a pie, a lone copy reader is humped in his chair, chewing on a cold pipestem and editing a bad piece of copy with a relentless black lead. In this case the copy reader is named Hemburg. He is of a type of which at least one example is to be found in nearly every large newspaper shop—a competent failure, gone alcoholically to seed; usually holding down a desk job; rarely quite drunk and rarely quite sober, and in this mid-state of befuddlement performing his work with a strange mechanical accuracy; but once in a while he comes on duty cold sober—cause unknown—and then the chances are he does something unpardonably wrong, something incredibly stupid, which costs him his job. Just such a man is this present man Hemburg. As, shoving his pencil, he carves the very giblets out of the last sheet of the belated typewritten manuscript lying under his hand, the sunlight, slanting in at a west window behind him, falls over his shoulders in a streaked flood, making his reddened face seem redder than ever—as red as hearth paint—and turning his ears a bright, clear, pinkish colour, as though they might be two little memorial panes set there in dedication to the wasted life and the frittered talents of their owner.

Farther up stage the city-hall reporter, who because he has passed his fortieth birthday and has grey in his hair is known as Pop, and the ship-news reporter, who because he is the ship-news reporter is known as Skipper, the same as in all well-regulated newspaper offices, are pasting up their strings, both of them being space men. Otherwise the big bare room with its rows of desks and its scrap-strewn floor is quite empty. This hour, coming between six and seven, in the city room of *The Clarion* or any other big paper, is apt to be the quietest of all hours between starting time, early in the afternoon, and quitting time, early in the morning. The day city editor, having finished his stint, has gone off watch, leaving behind for his successor, the night city editor, a single scrawled sheet upon which is recorded the tally of things accomplished, things undertaken and things failed at. The reporters who got afternoon assignments have most of them turned in their stories and have taken other assignments which will keep them out of the office until much later. So almost an ecclesiastical quiet fills the city room now.

For the matter of that, it is only in the dramatic versions that a newspaper office ever attains the aspect of frenzied tumult so familiar and so agreeable to patrons of plays purporting to deal with newspaper life. As usually depicted upon the stage, a city room near press time is something like a skating rink, something like the recreation hall of a madhouse, something like a munitions factory working overtime on war orders, and nothing at all like a city room. Even when its manifold activities are in full swing the actual city room, save

for the click of typewriter keys, is apt to be as sedately quiet as—let's see now! What would make a suitable comparison? Well—as sedately quiet, say, as the reading room of the average Carnegie Library.

Six-thirty-four—enter the villain.

The practical door at the right opened and Mr. Foxman came in. In just what he stood in he might have posed for the typical picture of the typical New York business man; not the tired business man for whom the musical shows are supposed to be written but the kind of business man who does not tire so easily. A close-cropped, greyish moustache, a pair of nose glasses riding a short, pugnacious nose in front of two keen eyes, a well-knit middle-age shape inside of a smart-fitting suit, a positive jaw, an air of efficiency and a square shoulder —that briefly would be Mr. Hobart Foxman, managing editor of *The Clarion*.

His nod included the city-hall reporter and the ship-news man. Passing by Hemburg without speaking, he halted a minute alongside the desk where the head copy boy speared his shearings upon his battery of spindles.

"Singlebury come in yet?" asked Mr. Foxman.

"No, sir; not yet, sir," said the head copy boy. "But he's due any minute now, I guess. I phoned him you wanted to see him at a quarter to seven."

"When he comes tell him to come right into my office."

"Yes, sir; I'll tell him, sir."

"Did you get those envelopes out of the morgue that I telephoned you about?"

"Yes, sir; they're all four of 'em on your desk, sir," said the boy, and he made as though to get up from his seat.

"Never mind," said Mr. Foxman. "I guess I can find them without any help. … Oh, yes, Benny, I'm not to be disturbed during the next hour for anything. Nobody is to see me except Singlebury. Understand?"

"Yes, sir—nobody," said Benny. "I'll remember, sir."

Inside his own room, which opened directly upon the city room, Mr. Foxman brushed from his desk a neatly piled file of the afternoon papers, glanced through a heap of mail—some personal mail, but mostly official—without opening any of the letters, and then gave his attention to four big soiled manila envelopes which rested side by side upon his wide blue blotter pad. One of these envelopes was labelled, across its upper front, "Blake, John W."; the second was labelled "Bogardus, S. P."; the third, "Pratt, Ezra"; and the fourth, "Pearl Street Trolley Line." Each of the four bulged dropsically with its contents, which contents, when Mr. Foxman had bent back the envelope flaps and emptied the envelopes, proved to be sheafs of newspaper clippings, some frayed with handling and yellowed with age, some still fresh and crisp, and all bearing the stencilled identification mark of the functionary who runs what is called in some shops the obit department and in other shops the morgue.

Keeping each set in its own separate pile, Mr. Foxman began running through these clippings, now and then putting aside one for future consideration. In the midst of this he broke off to take up his desk telephone and, when the girl at the private switchboard upstairs answered, bade her ring for him a certain private number, not to be found in the telephone directory.

"That you, Moreau?" briskly asked Mr. Foxman when, after a short wait, a voice at the other end of the wire spoke. "How are you? … Quite well, thank you. … I want to speak with the general. … Yes, yes, yes, I know that, but this is important—very important. … Yes, I know that too; but I won't detain him but a minute. … Thanks. … Yes, I'll wait right here."

There was another little delay while Mr. Foxman held the receiver to his ear and kept his lips close to the transmitter. Then:

"Good evening, general—Foxman speaking."

Into the managing editor's tone was come a soothed and softened deference—something of the same deference which

Benny, the head office boy, had used in addressing Mr. Foxman. It was a different tone, very, from the sharpened, almost staccato note that Mr. Foxman had been employing but a minute before. Why not? Moreau was but the great man's private secretary and this man, whom now he addressed, was the great man himself—General Robert Bruce Lignum, sole proprietor of *The Clarion*—and the only person, barring himself, from whom Mr. Foxman took orders. Big fleas, you know, have smaller fleas which on them prey; but while preying, the little fleas, if they be little fleas wise in their own generation, are, I take it, likely to cultivate between bites and to use that flattering conversational accent which, the world over, is the most subtle tribute that may be paid by the smaller to the greater and by the greater to the most great. In this agreeably tempered tempo then Mr. Foxman continued, with pauses for his employer's replies.

"Sorry, general, to have to call you just as you're starting for the pier, but I was particularly anxious to catch you before you left the house." Instinctively he lowered his voice, although there was no need for any excess of caution. "General, I think I've got that trolley-grab exposé practically lined up. Bogardus told me this afternoon that the third man—you know the one I mean—is ready to talk. It looks to me like a bigger thing even than we thought it might be. It's a scurvy crew we're dealing with, but the end justifies the means. Don't you think so, sir? … Yes, that's right, too—when thieves fall out honest men get their due. … Sir? … Yes, that's my idea, too—to spring the first big story right out of a clear sky and then follow up with an editorial campaign and supplementary news stories until we get action in the district-attorney's office. … How's that, sir? … Oh, no, indeed, general, not the slightest particle of danger in my opinion. Personally, I think all this talk about floating mines and submarines has been greatly exaggerated. … I think you can go right ahead in perfect safety. You must know, general, that I wouldn't be giving you this advice if I thought there was the slightest danger. … Well, good-by, general, and pleasant voyage. … Oh, yes, indeed, I'll surely find some way of keeping you posted about the situation at Albany if anything develops in that quarter. … Well, good-by again, general."

He hung up the receiver and turned his hands again to the contents of the morgue envelopes. He was still at this when there came at his door a knock.

"Come in," he said without looking up.

The man who entered was tall and slender, young enough to be well this side of thirty and old enough, in his experiences, to wear that manner of schooled, appraising disillusionment which marks so many of his calling. Most good reporters look like good reporters; they radiate from them knowledge, confidence, skepticism, sometimes a little of pessimism, and always a good deal of sophisticated enthusiasm. It is the same air which goes with men, be their separate callings what they may, who have devoted their lives to prying open the lid of the world to see what makes the thing tick. They have a curiosity not only to see the wheels go round but to find out what the motive power behind and beneath the wheels may be.

Never mind what the after-dinner speaker says—the press is not an Archimedean lever and probably never was. It is a kit containing a cold chisel, a test acid, an assay chemical and a paint-box. Generally the users of this outfit bear themselves accordingly. Once in a while, though, there comes along a reporter who deceivingly resembles a rather stupid, good-natured plumber's helper dressed in his Sunday best. To look at him he seems as plain as an old shoe, as open as an old shoe too. But if you have something to hide from the public gaze, beware this person. He is the most dangerous one of them all. His business being everybody's business, he is prepared to go to any ends to dig it out. As a professional detective he could make himself famous. He prefers to remain a journeyman reporter.

"Take a chair, Singlebury," said Mr. Foxman; "I'll be through here in just a minute."

Singlebury sat down, glancing about him. It was the first time he had seen this room. He had been on *The Clarion's* staff less than a month, having come on from the West, where he served the years of his apprenticeship on a San Francisco daily. Presently his chief swivelled half round so as to face him.

"Young man," he said, "I've got a cracking good assignment for you—one that ought to put you in right, in this shop and this town. Ordinarily this job would go to Shesgren—he usually handles this sort of thing for me—but Shesgren is up at Albany keeping his eye on General Lignum's political fences, and I don't want to call him back, especially as the general is leaving the country to-night. Besides you did a good job of work last week on that Oskarson baby-stealing mystery, and so I've decided to give you a chance to swing this story."

"Thank you, sir," said Singlebury, flushing up a little. "I'll do my best, sir."

"Your best won't do—you've got to do better than your best. Did you ever hear, since you came to this town, of the Pearl Street trolley line or the Pearl Street trolley loop?"

"Well," said Singlebury, "I know there is such a line as the Pearl Street line. That's about all."

"That needn't hamper you," said Mr. Foxman. "I'd a little rather you went at this thing with an open mind, anyhow. These clippings here"—he tapped one heap of them with his forefinger—"ought to give you a pretty clear idea of the situation in the past, if you'll read 'em through carefully. They'll show you that the Pearl Street line has been a sort of financial football for certain interests down in Wall Street for a good many years. The fellows behind it starved it to death and let the equipment run down while they juggled the paper and skinned the dear public."

"I see," said Singlebury; "same old story—plenty of water for the road but no solid nourishment for the investors."

"That's a good line," commended Mr. Foxman; "better save it up for your story and use it there. But it's not the same old story over again. At least this time there's a new twist to it.

"Up until now the crowd that have been manipulating the stock stayed inside the law, no matter what else they may have done that was shady. But I have cause to believe that a new gang has stepped in—a gang headed by John W. Blake of the Blake Bank. You've heard of him, I guess?"

Singlebury nodded.

"It's been known for some time on the inside that the Blake outfit were figuring on a merger of some of the independent East Side surface lines—half a dozen scattered lines, more or less. There've been stories printed about this—we printed some of them ourselves. What hasn't been known was that they had their hooks into the Pearl Street line too. Poor outcast as it is, the Pearl Street line, with the proposed Pearl Street loop round Five Points—a charter was granted for that extension some time ago—will form the connecting link to the combination they're figuring on. And then on top of that there's the direct connection to be made with the new Brooklyn subway that's being built now. If you'll look at the map of the East Side lines you'll see for yourself how important it is for the group that intends to take control of the trolley lines on this side of the river and hopes to control the subway to the other side of the river that they should have the Pearl Street loop in their grip. With it they win; without it there's doubt of the success of their plan.

"Well, that part of it is legitimate enough, I suppose. The common stock of the Pearl Street line has been shoved down and down and down, until to-day it touched twenty. And Blake's crowd on the quiet have been buying it in—freezing out the small stockholders as they went along, and knowing mighty good and well that the day they announced their merger the stock would go up with a jump—thirty or forty or fifty points maybe—and then they'd clean up. Well, I suppose that's legitimate too—at least it's recognised as regular on Wall Street, provided you can get away with it. But behind the scenes there's been some outright, downright, grand larceny

going on and, along with that, legislative corruption too.

"The stealing has been covered up so far, under a blanket of legal embroidery and fancy phraseology. Trust a wise outfit of lawyers, like the outfit Blake has on his pay roll, to attend to those little details. But I have reason to believe, having got hold of the inside story from strictly private sources, that the gang now in control have laid themselves liable to prison sentences by a few of the tricks they've pulled off. For instance, they haven't let a little thing like bribery stand in their way. They weren't satisfied to stifle a competitive interest politely and quietly, according to the Wall Street standards. No; these thugs just naturally clubbed it to death. I guess they saw so much in it for themselves they took a long chance on being indicted if the facts ever came out. And I happen to know where we can get the facts if we go about it in the right way. Listen, carefully!"

For five minutes he talked on, expounding and explaining in straightaway, sharp sentences. And Singlebury, on the edge of his chair, listening, felt the lust of the big-game hunter quicken within him. Every real reporter is a big-game hunter at heart, and the weapon he uses frequently is a deadly one, even though it is nothing more than a lead pencil costing five cents at any stationery shop. The scent was in his nose now, dilating his nostrils; he wriggled to take the trail.

"Now, then, you've got the inside dope, as I get it myself," said Mr. Foxman at the end of those pregnant five minutes. "You can see for yourself, though, that a good deal of it—the vital part of it as it stands now—is mostly surmise and suspicion. Naturally, we can't go to the bat against this gang with suspicions; we'd probably land in jail ourselves for criminal libel, instead of landing a few of them in jail, as we hope to do. But if we can prove up—if we can get hold of the rest of the evidence—it'll make one of the sweetest beats that was ever pulled off in this town.

"Of course, as you can see, John W. Blake is the principal figure in the whole intrigue, just as the Pearl Street line is the key to the merger scheme. But you stay away from Blake. Don't go near him—yet. If he gets wind of what we are figuring on doing here in this office he might have influence enough to make trouble for us before we're ready for the big blow-off. Leave Blake out of it for the time being—leave him strictly alone! He can do his talking and his explaining after we've smoked the nigger out of the woodpile. But here are two other men"—he touched the remaining piles of sorted-out clippings—"who are willing, under cover, to indulge in a little conversation. I want you to read these morgue clippings, more to get an angle on their personalities than for any other reason. Bogardus—Samuel P. Bogardus—used to be Blake's best little trained performing lobbyist. When it comes to handling the members of a general assembly or a board of aldermen he's fuller of cute tricks than a clown dog is. Old Pratt is a different kind of crook—a psalm-singing, pussyfooted old buccaneer, teaching a Bible class on Sundays and thimblerigging in Wall Street on week days. As a Pharisee who's working at the trade he'd make any Pharisee you ever ran across out yonder on the Pacific Slope, where you came from, look like a piker.

"Well, for reasons best known to themselves they happen just at present to be sore at Blake. There's been a falling-out. He may have used them to do his dirty work in the past; and then, when this melon is ripe to cut, frozen both of them out of the picnic. I don't care anything about their quarrels, or their motives either; I am after this story.

"Now, then, here's your campaign: You take to-night off—I'll tell the night city editor I've assigned you on a special detail—and you spend the evening reading up on these clippings, so you'll have the background—the local colour for your story—all in your head. To-morrow morning at ten o'clock you go to the Wampum Club up on East Fiftieth Street and send your name in to Mr. Bogardus. He'll be waiting there in a private room for you, and old Pratt will be with him. We'll have to keep them under cover, of course, and protect them up to the limit, in exchange for the stuff they're willing to give

up to us. So you're not to mention them as the sources of any part of your information. Don't name them in your story or to anybody on earth before or after we print it. Take all the notes you please while you're with them, but keep your notes put away where nobody can see 'em, and tear 'em up as soon as you're done with 'em. They'll probably keep you there a couple of hours, because they've got a lot to tell, son; take it from me they have. Well, say they keep you three hours. That'll give you time to get your lunch and catch the subway and be down town by two-thirty.

"At three o'clock to-morrow afternoon you go to the law offices of Myrowitz, Godfrey, Godfrey & Murtha in the Pyramid Building on Cedar Street. Ask to see Mr. Murtha. Send your name in to him; he'll be expecting you. Murtha is in the firm now, but he gets out on the fifteenth—four days from now. There's been a row there, too, I believe, and the other partners are shoving him out into the cold. He's sore. Murtha ought to be able to tell the rest of what you'll have to know in order to make our story absolutely libel proof. It may take some digging on your part, but he'll come through if you only go at him the right way. In questioning him you can probably take your cues from what Bogardus and Pratt have already told you. That end of it, though, is up to you. Anyhow, by this time to-morrow night you ought to have your whole story lined up."

"Do you want me to come back here then and write it for the next morning?" asked Singlebury.

"I don't want you to write it here at all," said Mr. Foxman. "This thing is too big and means too much for us to be taking a chance on a leak anywhere. Have you got a quiet room to yourself where nobody can break in on you?"

"Yes, sir," said Singlebury. "I'm living at the Godey Arms Hotel."

"All right then," said Mr. Foxman. "You rent a typewriter and have it sent up to your room to-morrow morning. When you are ready to start you get inside that room and sit down at that typewriter with the door locked behind you, and you stay there till you've finished your yarn. You ought to be able to do it in a day, by steady grinding. When you're done tear up all your notes and burn the scraps. Then put your copy in a sealed envelope and bring it down here and deliver it to me, personally, here in this room—understand? If I'm busy with somebody else when you get here wait until I'm alone. And in the meantime, don't tell the city editor or any member of the staff, or your closest friend, or your best girl—if you've got one—that you are working on this story. You've not only got to get it but you've got to keep your mouth shut while you're getting it and after you've got it—got to keep mum until we print it. There'll be time enough for you to claim credit when the beat is on the street."

"I understand, sir," said Singlebury. "And I'm certainly mighty grateful to you, Mr. Foxman, for this chance."

"Never mind that," said Mr. Foxman. "I'm not picking you for this job because I like the colour of your hair, or because I'm taken by the cut of your clothes. I'm picking you because I think you can swing it. Now, then, go to it!"

Singlebury went to it. With all his reporter's heart and all his reporter's soul and, most of all, with all his reporter's nose he went to it. Tucked away in a corner of the evening edition's art room, deserted now and dark except for the circle of radiance where he sat beneath an electric bulb, he read and reread the scissorings entrusted to him by Mr. Foxman, until his mind was saturated with the subject, holding in solution a mass of information pertaining to the past activities of the Pearl Street trolley line and of John W. Blake, freebooter of big business; and of Ezra Pratt, class leader and financier; and of S. P. Bogardus, statesman and legislative agent.

It was nearly midnight before he restored each group of clippings to its proper envelope and took the envelopes to a grated window behind the library and handed them in to a youth on duty there. First, though, he took time, sitting there in the empty art room, to write a short, joyous letter to a certain person in San Jose, California, telling her the big

chance had come to him very much sooner than he had expected, and that if he made good on it—as he had every intention of doing—they might not, after all, have to wait so very long for that marriage license and that wedding and that little flat here in little old New York. Then he went uptown to the Godey Arms Hotel, where his dreams that night were such dreams as an ambitious young man very much in love with two sweethearts—one a profession and the other a girl—might be expected to dream under such circumstances.

Next morning, at the Wampum Club, he saw Bogardus, a grey-haired, rotund man, and Pratt, an elderly gentleman, with a smile as oily as a fish duck's apprehending minnows, and a manner as gentle as a fox's stalking a hen-roost. From these two he extracted all that he had expected to get and more besides. Indeed, he had but to hold out his hands and together they shook fruity facts and fruitier figures down upon him in a shower. Until nearly two o'clock they kept him with them. He had just time to snatch a hurried bite at a dairy lunch, board a subway express at the Grand Central, and be at the offices of Myrowitz, Godfrey, Godfrey & Murtha at three o'clock. A sign painter was altering the firm's name on the outer door of the firm's reception room, his aim plainly being to shorten it by the elimination of the Murtha part of it. On beyond the door the gentleman who thus was being eliminated received Singlebury in a private room and gave him nearly two hours of his valuable time.

From what Mr. Foxman had said Singlebury rather expected Mr. Murtha, at the outset, might be reluctant to furnish the coupling links between the legal chicanery and the financial skullduggery which would make this projected merger a conspicuous scandal in a district of conspicuous industrial scandals; had rather expected Mr. Murtha's mind might require crafty sounding and skillful pumping. Here Singlebury was agreeably surprised, for, it being first understood that Mr. Murtha's name was nowhere to appear in what Singlebury might write, Mr. Murtha proved to be as frank as frank could be. Indeed, when it came to a disclosure of the rôles played by two of his associates, from whom now he was parting, Mr. Murtha, the retiring member of this well-known house of corporation law, betrayed an almost brutal frankness. They, doubtlessly, would have called it rank professional treachery—base, personal ingratitude and a violation of all the ethics of their highly ethical calling.

Mr. Murtha, looking at things through very different glasses, put it on the high ground of his duty, as a citizen and a taxpayer, to the general health and the general morality of the general public. It is this same difference of opinion which makes neighbourhood quarrels, lawsuits and wars between nations popular in the most civilised climes.

In all essential details, the tale, when Murtha was through with Singlebury and Singlebury was through with Murtha, stood completed and connected, jointed and doubt-proof. That second evening Singlebury spent in his room, arranging his data in their proper sequence and mapping out in his head his introduction. Next day, all day, he wrote his story. Just before dusk he drew the last page out of his typewriter and corrected it. The job was done and it was a good job. It ran four columns and over. It stripped that traffic grab to its bare and grinning bones. It was loaded with bombshells for the proposed merger and with the shrapnel of certain criminal prosecution for the men behind that merger, and most of all for John W. Blake, the man behind those other and lesser men.

To Singlebury, though, it was even more than this. To him it was a good story, well written, well balanced, happily adjusted, smartly phrased; and on top of this, it was the most precious jewel of a reporter's treasure casket. It was a cracking, smashing, earth-shaking, exclusive—scoop, as they would have called it out yonder on the Coast where he came from—beat, as they would call it here in New York.

Personally, as per instructions, he put the finished manuscript into the hands of Mr. Foxman, in Mr. Foxman's office, then stood by while Mr. Foxman ran through the opening paragraphs.

“Singlebury,” said Mr. Foxman, laying the sheets down, “this looks to me like a good piece of work. I like your beginning, anyhow. The first ten lines ought to blow that bunch of pirates clean out of water.” He glanced keenly at the drooping figure of the other. “Kind of played out, aren’t you?”

“A little,” confessed the reporter. “Now that it’s over, I do feel a bit let down.”

“I’ll bet you do,” said Mr. Foxman. “Well, you’d better run along to your hotel and get a good night’s rest. Take to-morrow off too—don’t report here until day after to-morrow; that’ll be Friday, won’t it? All right then, I’ll see you Friday afternoon here; I may have something of interest to say to you then. Meanwhile, as I told you before, keep your mouth shut to everybody. I don’t know yet whether I’ll want to run your story to-morrow morning or the morning after. My information is that Blake, through his lawyers, will announce the completion of the merger, probably on Friday, or possibly on Saturday. I may decide to hold off the explosion until they come out with their announcement. Really, that would be the suitable moment to open fire on ’em and smash up their little stock-market game for them.”

Dog-tired and happier than any poor dog of a newspaper man has a right to be, Singlebury went to his room and to bed. And when finally he fell asleep he dreamed the second chapter of that orange-blossomy dream of his.

Being left to himself, Mr. Foxman read Singlebury’s copy through page by page, changing words here and there, but on the whole enormously pleased with it. Then he touched a buzzer button under his desk, being minded to call into conference the chief editorial writer and the news editor before he put the narrative into type. Now it happened that at this precise moment Mr. Foxman’s own special boy had left his post just outside Mr. Foxman’s door to skylark with a couple of ordinary copy boys in the corridor between the city room and the Sunday room, and so he didn’t answer the summons immediately. The fact was, he didn’t hear the bell until Mr. Foxman impatiently rang a second and a third time. Then he came running, making up a suitable excuse to explain his tardiness as he came. And during that half minute of delay there leaped out of nowhere into Mr. Foxman’s brain an idea —an idea, horned, hoofed and hairy—which was to alter the current of his own life and, directly or indirectly, the lives of scores of others.

It would seem I was a trifle premature, back yonder near the beginning of this chapter, when I used the line: Six-thirty-four—enter the villain.

Because, as I now realise, the villain didn’t enter then. The villain did not enter until this moment, more than forty-eight hours later, entering not in the guise of a human being but in the shape of this tufted, woolly demon of a notion which took such sudden lodgment in Mr. Foxman’s mind. Really, I suppose we should blame the office boy. His being late may have been responsible for the whole thing.

He poked a tow head in at the door, ready to take a scolding.

“D’yer ring, sir?” he inquired meekly.

“Yes, three times,” said Mr. Foxman. “Where have you been?”

“Right here, sir. Somethin’ you wanted, sir?”

“No; I’ve changed my mind. Get out!”

Pleased and surprised to have escaped, the towhead withdrew. Very deliberately Mr. Foxman lit a cigar, leaned back in his chair, and for a period took mental accounting of his past, his present and his future; and all the while he did this a decision was being forged for him, by that busy devilish little tempter, into shape and point and permanency.

In his fingers he held the means of making himself independent—yes, even rich. Why—he began asking himself the plaguing question and kept on asking it—why should he go

on working his life out for twelve thousand dollars a year when, by one safe, secret stroke, he could make twelve times twelve thousand, or very possibly more? He knew what happened to newspaper executives who wore out in the harness. Offhand, he could think of half a dozen who had been as capable as he was, as active and as zealous, and as single-purposed in their loyalty to the sheets they served as he was to this sheet which he served.

All of these men had held high editorial posts and, in their prime, had drawn down big salaries, as newspaper salaries go. Where were they now, since they had grown old? He knew where they were—mighty good and well he knew. One trying to run a chicken farm on Staten Island and daily demonstrating that a man who could manage a newspaper does not necessarily know how to manage a flock of temperamental White Leghorn hens; one an exchange editor, a neglected and unconsidered figure of obscurity, a nonentity almost, and a pensioner, practically, in the same shop whose affairs his slackened old hands had once controlled; one or two more of them actually needy—out of work and out at elbows; and so on, and so forth, through the list.

Well, it rested with Mr. Foxman to avert such a finish to his own career; the instrument fitted to combat the prospect was here in his grasp. Temptation, whispering to him, bade him use it—told him he would be a sorry fool not to use it. What was that line about Opportunity's knocking once at every man's door? And what was that other line about there being a tide in the affairs of men, which, taken at the flood, leads on to fortune?

After all, it meant only that he break faith with five men:—with his employer, General Lignum, who trusted him; with his underling, Singlebury, who had done a good job of work for him; and with three others whom, for the sake of convenience, he mentally grouped together—Bogardus and Pratt and Murtha, the lawyer. These three he eliminated from the equation in one puff of blue cigar smoke. For they were all three of them crooks and plotters and double dealers, masters of the dirty trick and the dirty device, who conspired together to serve not the general good, but their own squalid and contemptible ends.

For General Lignum he had more heed. Perhaps I should say here that until this hour this man, Hobart Foxman, had been an honest man—not just reasonably honest but absolutely honest, a man foursquare as a smokehouse. Never before had it occurred to him to figure up to see whether honesty really paid. He did some brisk figuring now.

After all, did it pay? As a reporter, back yonder in the old days when he, a raw cub, first broke into this wearing, grinding newspaper game, he had despised fakers and faking and the petty grafting, the cheap sponging to which he saw some reporters—not many, perhaps, but some—descending. As an assistant sporting editor, after his first promotion from the ranks, he had been content to live upon his somewhat meagre salary, refusing to fatten his income by taking secret pay from prize-fight promoters wishful of getting advertisements dressed up as news stories into the columns of the sporting page. As a staff correspondent, first at Albany and then at Washington, he had walked wide of the lobbyists who sought to corrupt and succeeded in corrupting certain correspondents, and by corrupting them were able sometimes to colour the news, sometimes to suppress it. Always the dispatches he signed had been unbiased, fair, above the board.

To be sure, Foxman had played office politics the while he went up, peg by peg. To men above him he had been the assiduous courtier, crooking the pregnant knee before those who might help him onward. But, then, that was a part of the game—office politics was. Even so, playing it to the top of his bent, he had been on the level. And what had being on the level brought him? It had brought him a place of executive authority and a salary of twelve thousand a year. And these two things—the place and the twelve thousand—he would continue to have and to hold and to enjoy for just so long as he

was strong enough to fight off ambitious younger men, climbing up from below as he had climbed; or, worse luck, for just so long as he continued to please the mercurial millionaire who two years earlier, at public outcry, had bought *The Clarion*, lock, stock and barrel, with its good will and fixtures—just as a man might buy a cow with its calf in the drover's pen.

That brought him round again to a consideration of General Lignum. Metaphysically he undressed the general and considered him naked. He turned him about and looked at him on every side. The result was not flattering to that impressive and dignified gentleman. Was General Lignum so deserving of consideration? What had General Lignum ever done in all his luxurious days to justify him to a place in the sun? Lignum never worked for his millions; he inherited them. When Lignum bought *The Clarion*, then as now a losing property, he had been actuated by the same whim which makes a spoiled child crave the costliest toy in the toy shop and, like that spoiled child, he would cast it aside, unmindful of its future, in the same hour that he tired of his newest possession and of the cost of its upkeep.

Wasn't Lignum lavishing wads of his easy-come, easy-go money on it now, because of his ambition to be a United States senator? Most certainly he was—for that and nothing else. Barring his wealth, which was a gift to him, and his newspaper, which was a plaything, what qualified this dilettante to sit in the seats of the mighty? What did Lignum know of the toil and the sweat and the gifts spent by men, whose names to him were merely items in a pay roll, to make *The Clarion* a power in the community and in the country? What did he care? In the last analysis what anyhow was this General Robert Bruce Lignum except a bundle of pampered selfishness, wrapped up in a membrane, inclosed in a frock coat and lidded under a high hat? When he got that far Mr. Foxman decided he owed Lignum nothing, as compared with what Lignum owed him. Well, here was a chance to collect the debt, with back dividends and interest accrued. He would collect. He would make himself independent of the whims of Lignum, of the necessity of daily labour, of the uncertainties of his position, of the certainty of the oncoming of age when his hand must tire and his wits grow blunted.

This left to be disposed of—only Singlebury. And Singlebury, in Mr. Foxman's mind, was now become the least of the factors concerned. In this, his new scheme of things that had sprung full-grown from the loins of a great and a sudden desire, a Singlebury more or less mattered not a whit. In the same moment that he decided to discard Singlebury the means of discarding Singlebury came to him.

That inspiration clarified the situation tremendously, interlocking one part of his plan with the others. In any event the lips of Pratt, Bogardus and Murtha were closed, and their hands tied. By now Lignum was at least a thousand miles out at sea. In the working out of his scheme Foxman would be safe from the meddlings and muddlings of Old Lignum. Already he had begun to think of that gentleman as Old Lignum instead of as General Lignum, so fast were his mental aspects and attitudes altering. Finally, with Singlebury out of the way, the plot would stand up, a completed and almost a perfect edifice.

However, there was one contingency to be dared. In a way it was a risk, yet an inevitable one. No matter what followed he must put the exposé story into print; that absolutely was requisite to the proper development of the plan. For Mr. Foxman well knew the psychological effect of the sight of cold type upon the minds of men planning evil things. He didn't know John W. Blake personally, but he knew John W. Blake's kind, and he figured John W. Blake as being in his essentials no different from the run of his kind. Nor was he wrong there, as will appear. Moreover, the risk, while necessary to the carrying out of his present designs, was a risk only in the light of possibilities arising later. Being now fully committed to the venture, he told himself he shouldn't much care if detection did come after the accomplishment of his purpose. Long before that could happen, he, having made his pile and being secure in the possession of a fortune, would be able to laugh

in the faces of his own little world, because anyhow he meant to move on into another circle very soon thereafter. Yes; there was one risk to be taken. On the instant that he arrived at this point in his reasonings he set about taking it.

First off, he read Singlebury's copy through once more, amending the wording in a few places. He made certain accusations direct and forcible where the reporter, in his carefulness, had been a trifle vague. Then he drew to him a block of copy paper and set about heading and subheading the story. In the days when he sat in the slot of a copy desk Mr. Foxman had been a master hand at headlining; with disuse his knack of hand had not grown rusty. He built and balanced a three-column, three-decker top caption and, to go under it, the heavy hanging indentions and the bold cross lines. From the body of the manuscript, also, he copied off several assertions of a particular emphasis and potency and marked them to go at the top of the story in blackface, with a box about them. This much done, he went to his door and hailed the night city editor, sitting a few yards away.

"Oh, Sloan," he said, "send a boy upstairs for McManus, will you?"

"McManus isn't here to-night," answered Sloan. He got up and came over to his chief. McManus was the make-up editor.

"This isn't McManus' night off, is it?" asked Mr. Foxman.

"No, Mac's sick," explained Sloan; "he was complaining last night and went home early, and I stayed on to make up his last two pages for him. A little while ago his wife telephoned in from Bayside that he was in bed with a high fever. She said the doctor said it was a touch of malaria and that Mac couldn't possibly get back to work for a week, anyhow."

"I see," said Mr. Foxman slowly. He ran his eye over the city room. "Whom did you put on in his place?"

"Gykeman."

"Gykeman, eh?" Mr. Foxman considered a moment. This news of McManus' indisposition pleased him. It showed how willing was Fate to keep on dealing him the winning cards. But Gykeman wasn't his choice for the task he had in mind; that called for someone of a less inquiring, less curious mind than Gykeman owned. Again his eye ranged the city room. It fell on a swollen and dissipated face, purplish under the electric lights.

"I believe you'd better bring Gykeman back downstairs," he said, "I want him to read copy on that Wilder poisoning case that's going to trial to-morrow in General Sessions. Let's see." He went through the pretense of canvassing the available material in sight. Then:

"Hemburg will do. Put Hemburg on make-up until Mac is well again."

"Hemburg?" The city editor's eyebrows arched in surprise. "I thought you didn't think very highly of Hemburg, Mr. Foxman."

"Hemburg's all right," said Mr. Foxman crisply; "it's his personal habits I don't fancy very much. Still, with half a load on Hemburg is capable enough—and I never saw him with less than half a load on. He can handle the make-up; he used to be make-up man years ago on the old *Star-Ledger*, it seems to me. Put him on instead of Gykeman—no, never mind; send him in here to me. I'll tell him myself and give him some good advice at the same time."

"Well, just as you think best," said Sloan, miffed that his own selection should have been rejected, but schooled to an unquestioning obedience by the seemingly slack—but really rigorous—discipline of a newspaper shop. "I'll send him right in."

Two minutes later Hemburg was standing in an attitude of attention alongside Mr. Foxman's desk, and from his chair Mr. Foxman was looking up at him steadily.

"Hemburg," he stated, "I can't say that I've been altogether pleased with you here of late."

Hemburg put up a splotched, tremulous hand, to hide a weak mouth, and spoke in his own defence from between his

fingers.

"Well, I'm sorry if anything has gone wrong, Mr. Foxman," he began; "I try——"

"I don't mean there's any particular complaint," stated Mr. Foxman, "only it struck me you've been getting into a rut lately. Or that you've been going stale—let's put it that way. On my own judgment I've given orders that you are to go on make-up temporarily, beginning to-night. It's up to you to make good there. If you do make good, when McManus comes back I'll look round and see if there isn't something better than a forty-dollar-a-week copy-reading job for you in this office."

"I'm—I'm certainly obliged to you, Mr. Foxman," stuttered Hemburg. "I guess maybe I was getting logy. A fellow certainly does get in a groove out there on that copy desk," he added with the instinct of the inebriate to put the blame for his shortcomings on anything rather than on the real cause of those shortcomings.

"Perhaps so," said Mr. Foxman; "let's see if making a change won't work a cure. Do you see this?" and he put his hand on the sheaf of Singlebury's copy lying on his desk, under the captions he himself had done. "Well, this may turn out to be the biggest beat and the most important story that we've put over in a year. It's all ready to go to the type-setting machines—I just finished reading copy on it myself. But if it leaks out—if a single word about this story gets out of this building before we're ready to turn it loose on the street—the man responsible for that leak is going to lose his job no matter who or what he is. Understand?

"Now, then, excepting you and me and the man who wrote it, nobody employed inside this building knows there is such a story. I want you to take it upstairs with you now. Don't let 'em cut it up into regular takes for the machines. Tell the composing-room foreman—it'll be Riordan, I guess—that he's to take his two best machine operators off of whatever they're doing and put 'em to work setting this story up, and nothing else. Those two men are to keep right at it until it's done. I want a good, safe-mouthed man to set the head. I want the fastest proofreader up there, whoever that may be, to read the galley proofs, holding copy on it himself. Impress it on Riordan to tell the proofreader, the head setter and the two machine men that they are not to gab to anyone about what they're doing. When the story is corrected I want you to put it inside a chase with a hold-for-release line on it, and cover it up with print paper, sealed and pasted on, and roll it aside. We've already got one hold-for-release yarn in type upstairs; it's a Washington dispatch dealing with the Mexican situation. Better put the two stories close together somewhere out of the way. Riordan will know where to hide them. Then you bring a set of clean proofs of this story down here to me—to-night. I'll wait right here for you.

"I'd like to run the thing to-morrow morning, leading with two columns on the front page and a two-column turnover on page two. But I can't. There's just one point to be cleared up before it'll be safe to print it. I expect to clear up that point myself to-morrow. Then if everything is all right I'll let you know and we'll probably go to the bat with the story Friday morning; that'll be day after to-morrow. If it should turn out that we can't use it I want you to dump the whole thing, head and all, and melt up the lead and forget that such a story ever passed through your hands. Because if it is safe—if we have got all our facts on straight—it'll be a great beat. But if we haven't it'll be about the most dangerous chunk of potential libel that we could have knocking about that composing room. Do you get the point?"

Hemburg said he got it. His instructions were unusual; but, then, from Mr. Foxman's words and manner, he realised that the story must be a most unusual one too. He carried out the injunctions that had been put upon him, literally and painstakingly. And while so engaged he solemnly pledged himself never again to touch another drop of rum so long as he lived. He had made the same promise a hundred times before. But this time was different—this time he meant it. He

was tired of being a hack and a drudge. This was a real opportunity which Mr. Foxman had thrown in his way. It opened up a vista of advancement and betterment before him. He would be a fool not to make the most of it, and a bigger fool still ever to drink again.

Oh, but he meant it! It would be the straight and narrow path for him hereafter; the good old water-wagon for his, world without end, amen. Noticeably more tremulous as to his fingers and his lips, but borne up with his high resolve, he put the clean proofs of the completed story into Mr. Foxman's hands about midnight, and then hurried back upstairs to shape the layout for the first mail edition.

As Mr. Foxman read the proofs through he smiled under his moustache, and it was not a particularly pleasant smile, either. Printer's ink gave to Singlebury's masterpiece a sinister emphasis it had lacked in the typewritten copy; it made it more forceful and more forcible. Its allegations stuck out from the column-wide lines like naked lance tips. And in the top deck of the flaring scare head the name of John W. Blake stood forth in heavy black letters to catch the eye and focus the attention. Mr. Foxman rolled up the proof sheets, bestowed them carefully in the inside breast pocket of his coat, and shortly thereafter went home and to bed.

But not to sleep. Pleasing thoughts, all trimmed up with dollar marks, ran through his head, chasing away drowsiness. All the same he was up at eight o'clock that morning—two hours ahead of his usual rising time. Mrs. Foxman was away paying a visit to her people up-state—another fortunate thing. He breakfasted alone and, as he sipped his coffee, he glanced about him with a sudden contempt for the simple furnishings of his dining room. Well, there was some consolation—this time next year, if things went well, he wouldn't be slaving his life out for an unappreciative taskmaster, and he wouldn't be living in this cheap, twelve-hundred-dollar-a-year flat, either. His conscience did not trouble him; from the moment the big notion came to him it had not. Greed had drugged it to death practically instantaneously.

No lees of remorse, no dreggy and bitterish reflections, touching upon the treachery he contemplated and the disloyalty to which he had committed himself, bothered him through that busy day. In his brain was no room for such things, but only for a high cheerfulness and exaltation. To be sure, he was counting his chickens before they were hatched, but the eggs were laid, and he didn't see how they could possibly addle between now and the tallying time of achieved incubation. So, with him in this frame of mind, the day started. And it was a busy day.

His first errand was to visit the safety-deposit vaults of a bank on lower Broadway. In a box here, in good stable securities of a total value of about sixteen thousand dollars, he had the bulk of his savings. He got them out and took them upstairs, and on a demand note the president of the bank loaned him twelve thousand dollars, taking Mr. Foxman's stocks and bonds as collateral. In the bank he had as a checking account a deposit somewhat in excess of two thousand dollars. Lying to Mrs. Foxman's credit was the sum of exactly ten thousand dollars, a legacy from an aunt recently dead, for which as yet Mrs. Foxman and her husband had found no desirable form of investment. Fortunately he held her power of attorney. He transferred the ten thousand from her name to his, which, with what he had just borrowed and what he himself had on deposit, gave him an available working capital of a trifle above twenty-four thousand dollars. He wrote a check payable to bearer for the whole stake and had it certified, and then, tucking it away in his pocket, he went round the corner into Broad Street to call upon John W. Blake at the Blake Bank. The supreme moment toward which he had been advancing was at hand.

As a man of multifarious and varied interests, and all of them important, Mr. Blake was a reasonably busy man. Before now ordinary newspaper men had found it extremely hard to see Mr. Blake. But Mr. Foxman was no ordinary newspaper man; he was the managing editor of *The Clarion*, a paper of

standing and influence, even if it didn't happen to be a money-maker at present. Across a marble-pillared, brass-grilled barrier Mr. Foxman sent in his card to Mr. Blake and, with the card, the word that Mr. Foxman desired to see Mr. Blake upon pressing and immediate business. He was not kept waiting for long. An office boy turned him over to a clerk and the clerk in turn turned him over to a secretary, and presently, having been ushered through two outer rooms, Mr. Foxman, quite at his ease, was sitting in Mr. Blake's private office, while Mr. Blake read through the galley proofs of Singlebury's story to which the caller had invited his attention.

The gentleman's face, as he read on, gave no index to the feelings of the gentleman. Anyhow, Mr. Blake's face was more of a manifest than an index; its expression summed up conclusions rather than surmises. As a veteran player—and a highly successful one—in the biggest and most chancy game in the world, Mr. Blake was fortunate in having what lesser gamesters call a poker face. Betraying neither surprise, chagrin nor indignation, he read the article through to the last paragraph of the last column. Then carefully he put the crumpled sheets down on his big desk, leaned back in his chair, made a wedge of his two hands by matching finger tip to finger tip, aimed the point of the wedge directly at Mr. Foxman, and looked with a steadfast eye at his visitor. His visitor looked back at him quite as steadily, and for a moment or two nothing was said.

"Well, Mr. Foxman?" remarked Mr. Blake at length. There was a mild speculation in his inflection—nothing more.

"Well, Mr. Blake?" replied the other in the same casual tone.

"I suppose we needn't waste any time sparring about," said Mr. Blake. "I gather that your idea is to publish this—this attack, in your paper?"

"That, Mr. Blake, is exactly my idea, unless"—and for just a moment Mr. Foxman paused—"unless something should transpire to cause me to change my mind."

"I believe you told me when you came in that at this moment you are in absolute control of the columns and the policy of *The Clarion*?"

"I am—absolutely."

"And might it be proper for me to ask when you contemplate printing this article—in what issue?" Mr. Blake was very polite, but no more so than Mr. Foxman. Each was taking the cue for his pose from the other.

"It is a perfectly proper question, Mr. Blake," said Mr. Foxman. "I may decide to print it day after to-morrow morning. In the event of certain contingencies I might print it to-morrow morning, and again on the other hand"—once more he spoke with deliberate slowness—"I might see my way clear to suppressing it altogether. It all depends, Mr. Blake."

"Did it ever occur to you that with this warning which you have so kindly given me, I have ample opportunity to enjoin you in the courts from printing all or any part of this article on to-morrow or any subsequent day?"

"You are at perfect liberty to try to enjoin us, Mr. Blake. But did it ever occur to you that such a step wouldn't help your case in the least? Go ahead and enjoin, Mr. Blake, if you care to, and see what would happen to you in the matter of—well, let us say, undesirable publicity. Instead of one paper printing these facts—for they are facts, Mr. Blake—you would have all the papers printing them in one shape or another."

"Without arguing that point further just now, might I be allowed to mention that I fail to understand your motive in coming to me, Mr. Foxman, at this time?" said the banker.

"Mr. Blake," said Mr. Foxman, contemplating the tip of his cigar, "I'll give you two guesses as to my motive, and your first guess will be the correct one."

"I see," stated the other meditatively, almost gently. Then, still with no evidences of heat or annoyance: "Mr. Foxman, there is a reasonably short and rather ugly word to describe what you are driving at. Here in this part of town we call it blackmail."

"Mr. Blake," answered the editor evenly, "there is a much shorter and even uglier word which describes your intentions. You will find that word in the second—or possibly it is the third—line of the first paragraph of the matter you have just been reading. The word is 'steal.'"

"Possibly you are right, Mr. Foxman," said Mr. Blake dryly. He drew the proof sheets to him, adjusted his glasses and looked at the topmost sheet. "Yes, you are right, Mr. Foxman—I mean about the word in question. It appears in the second line." He shoved the proofs aside. "It would appear you are a reasonable man—with a business instinct. I flatter myself that I am reasonable and I have been in business a good many years. Now, then, since we appear to be on the point of thoroughly understanding each other, may I ask you another question?"

"You may."

"What is your price for continuing to be—ahem—reasonable?"

"I can state it briefly, Mr. Blake. Being a newspaper man, I am not a wealthy man. I have an ambition to become wealthy. I look to you to aid me in the accomplishment of that desire. You stand in a fair way to make a great deal of money, though you already have a great deal. I stand in the position not only of being able to prevent you from making that money, but of being able to make a great deal of trouble for you, besides. Or, looking at the other side of the proposition, I have the power to permit you to go ahead with your plans. Whether or not I exercise that power rests entirely with you. Is that quite plain?"

"Very. Pray proceed, Mr. Foxman. You were going to say——"

"I was going to say that since you hope to make a great deal of money I wish by cooperation with you, as it were, to make for myself a sum which I regard as ample for my present needs."

"And by ample—you mean what?"

"I mean this: You are to carry me with your brokers for ten thousand shares of the common stock of the Pearl Street trolley line on a ten-point margin. The account may be opened in the name of Mr. X; I, of course, being Mr. X. I apprehend that the party known as X will see his way clear to closing out the account very shortly after the formal announcement of your plans for the East Side transit merger—certainly within a few days. If there should be any losses you will stand them up to and including the ten-point margin. If there should be any profits they go, of course, to Mr. X. I do not anticipate that there will be any losses, and I do anticipate that there will be some profits. In payment for this friendly accommodation on your part, I for my part will engage to prevent the publication in *The Clarion*, or elsewhere, of the statements contained in those proofs and now standing in type in our composing room, subject to my order to print the story forthwith, or to withhold it, or to kill it outright."

"Anything else, Mr. Foxman?" inquired Mr. Blake blandly.

"Yes, one other thing: You are to give the necessary order now, in my presence, over the telephone to your brokers. After that you are to go with me to their offices to complete the transaction and to identify me properly as the Mr. X who is to be the owner of this particular account; also you are to explain to them that thereafter the account is subject to my orders and mine alone. I think that will be sufficient."

"It would seem, Mr. Foxman, that you do not trust me to deal fairly with you in this matter?"

"I do not have to trust you, Mr. Blake. And so I choose not to."

"Exactly. And what guaranty have I that you will do your part?"

"Only my word, Mr. Blake. You will observe now that the shoe is on the other foot. I do not have to trust you—whereas you do have to trust me. But if you need any guaranty other than the thought of where my self-interest lies in the matter I may tell you that in addition to the stocks which you are to

carry for me I intend to invest in Pearl Street common to the full extent of my available cash resources, also on a ten-point margin. Here is the best proof of that." He hauled out his certified check for twenty-four thousand and some odd dollars and handed it over to Mr. Blake.

Mr. Blake barely glanced at it and handed it back, at the same time reaching for his desk telephone.

"Mr. Foxman," he said, "there may be some pain but there is also considerable pleasure to me in dealing with a reasonable man. I see that your mind is made up. Why then should we quibble? You win, Mr. Foxman—you win in a walk. Whatever opinions I may entertain as to your private character and whatever opinions you may entertain as to my private character, I may at least venture to congratulate you upon your intelligence. … Oh, yes, while I think of it, there is one other thing, Mr. Foxman: I don't suppose you would care to tell me just how you came into possession of the information contained in your article?"

"I would not."

"I thought as much. Excuse me one moment, if you please." And with that Mr. Blake, still wearing his poker face, joggled the lever of the telephone.

What with certain negotiations, privately conducted and satisfactorily concluded at the brokers', Mr. Foxman was engaged until well on into the afternoon. This being done, he walked across to the front of the stock exchange, where he found a rank of taxis waiting in line for fares when the market should close. The long, lean months of depression had passed and the broker gentry did not patronise the subway these days. Daily at three o'clock, being awearied by much shearing of woolly, fat sheep, they rode uptown in taxicabs, utterly regardless of mounting motor tariffs and very often giving fat tips to their motor drivers besides. But it is safe to say no broker, however sure he might be of the return of national confidence, gave a fatter tip that day than the one which Mr. Foxman handed to the taxicab driver who conveyed him to his club, in the Upper Forties. Mr. Foxman was in a mood to be prodigal with his small change.

Ordinarily he would have spent an hour or two of the afternoon and all of the evening until midnight or later at *The Clarion* office. But on this particular day he didn't go there at all. Somehow, he felt those familiar surroundings, wherein he had worked his way to the topmost peg of authority, and incidentally to the confidence of his employer and his staff, might be to him distastefully reminiscent of former times. Mind you, he had no shame for the thing he had done and was doing; but instead had only a great and splendid exhilaration. Still, he was just as comfortable in his own mind, staying away from that office. It could get along without him for this once. It might as well get used to the sensation anyway; for very shortly, as he figured the prospect, it would have to get along without him.

At his club he ate a belated luncheon and to kill the time played billiards with two other men, playing with his accustomed skill and with a fine show of spirits. Billiards killed the time for him until seven-thirty, which exactly suited his purpose, because at seven-thirty the acting make-up editor should be reporting for duty down at *The Clarion* shop.

Mr. Foxman entered a sound-proof booth in the little corridor that opened off the main-entry hall of the club and, after calling up the night desk and notifying Sloan he would not come to the office at all that night, asked Sloan to send Hemburg to the telephone.

"Is that you, Hemburg?" he was saying, half a minute later. "Listen, Hemburg, this is very important: You remember that story I turned over to you last night? … Yes, that's the same one—the story I told you we would run, provided I could establish one main point. Well, I couldn't establish that point—we can't prove up on our principal allegation. That makes it dangerous to have the thing even standing in type. So you go upstairs and kill it—kill it yourself with your own hands, I

mean. I don’t want to take any chances on a slip-up. Dump the type and have it melted up. And, Hemburg—say nothing to anyone about either the story itself or what has happened to it. Understand me? … Good. And, Hemburg, here’s another thing: You recall the other story that I told you was being held for release—the one on the Mexican situation? It’s got a Washington date line over it. Well, shove it in to-night as your leading news feature. If we hold it much longer it’s liable to get stale—the way things are breaking down there in Mexico. All right; good-bye!”

He had rung off and hung up and was coming out of the little booth when a fresh inspiration came to him and he stepped back in again. One factor remained to be eliminated—Singlebury. Until that moment Mr. Foxman had meant to sacrifice Singlebury by the simple expedient of sending him next day on an out-of-town assignment—over into New Jersey, or up into New England perhaps—and then firing him by wire, out of hand, for some alleged reportorial crime, either of omission or of commission. It would be easy enough to cook up the pretext, and from his chief’s summary dismissal of him Singlebury would have no appeal. But suppose Singlebury came back to town, as almost surely he would, and suppose he came filled with a natural indignation at having been discharged in such fashion, and suppose, about the same time, he fell to wondering why his great story on the Pearl Street trolley steal had not been printed—certainly Singlebury had sense enough to put two and two together—and suppose on top of that he went gabbling his suspicions about among the born gossips of Park Row? It might be awkward.

These were the thoughts that jumped into Mr. Foxman’s mind as he stepped out of the booth, and in the same instant, while he was stepping back in again, he had the answer for the puzzle. Since he meant to make a burnt offering of Singlebury, why not cook him to a cinder and be done with it, and be done with Singlebury too? A method of doing this was the inspiration that came on the threshold of the telephone booth; and when immediately he undertook to put the trick into effect he found it, in its preliminary stages, working with that same satisfactory promise of fulfillment that had marked all his other undertakings, shaping into the main undertaking.

For example, when he called up the Godey Arms Hotel and asked for Mr. Singlebury, which was the thing he next did, the telephone operator of the hotel exchange told him Mr. Singlebury had gone out for the evening, leaving word behind that he would be back at midnight. Now that exactly suited Mr. Foxman. Had Singlebury been in he had meant, on the pretext of desiring to question him later upon some trivial point in the big story, to have Singlebury be at some appointed telephone rendezvous shortly after midnight. But he knew now with reasonable certainty where Singlebury would be during that hour. This knowledge simplified matters considerably; it saved him from the bother of setting the stage so elaborately. Without giving his name to the young woman at the hotel switchboard he asked her to tell Singlebury, upon his return, that a gentleman would call him up on business of importance some time between twelve and one o’clock. She said she would remember the message and, thanking her, he rang off. Well content, he went to a theatre where a farce was playing, sat through the performance and, going back again to his club after the performance, had a late supper in the grill.

At twelve-forty-five he finished his coffee. Entering the telephone booth he got first the Godey Arms upon the wire, and then, after a moment, the waiting and expectant Singlebury. In his mind all evening Mr. Foxman had been carefully rehearsing just what he would say and just how he would say it. Into his voice he put exactly the right strain of hurried, sharp anxiety as he snapped:

“Is that you, Singlebury?”

“Yes, it’s Singlebury,” came back the answer. “That’s you, Mr. Foxman, isn’t it? I rather imagined it would be you from what——”

Mr. Foxman broke in on him.

“Singlebury, there’s hell to pay about that story you wrote

for me. Somebody talked—there was a leak somewhere."

"On my word of honour, Mr. Foxman," said the jostled Singlebury, "it wasn't I. I obeyed your orders to the letter and——"

"I haven't time now to try to find out who gabbled," snapped back Mr. Foxman; "there are things more important to consider. About half-past seven to-night—that was when I first tried to reach you from down here at the office—I got wind that Blake's crowd had found out about our surprise and were getting busy. That was what I'd been afraid of, as I told you. In the fear that they might try to enjoin us if we held off publication any longer I gave orders to slam the story into the early-mail edition that went to press twenty minutes ago. And now—now when the mischief is done—when thousands of papers are already printed—I find out that we've committed criminal libel, and the worst kind of criminal libel—not against Blake—we are safe enough there—but against Eli Godfrey, Senior, one of the biggest lawyers in this town. In your story you accused him of being one of the lawyers who helped to frame this deal. That's what you did!"

"Yes—but—why—but"—stammered Singlebury—"but, Mr. Foxman, Eli Godfrey, Senior, was the man. He was—wasn't he? All my information was——"

"It was his son, Eli Godfrey, Junior, his partner in the firm," declared Mr. Foxman, lying beautifully and convincingly. "That's who it was. The father had nothing to do with it; the son everything. You got the whole thing twisted. I've snatched the forms back and I'm throwing the story out of the second edition and filling the hole with a Washington story that we happened to have handy. So your story probably won't be in the edition that you will see. But that doesn't help much—if any. We've kept the libel out of our local circulation, but it's already in the early mails and we can't catch up with it or stop it there. It's too late to save us or to save you."

"To save me?"

"That's what I said. I guess you don't know what the laws against criminal libel in this state are? *The Clarion* will be sued to the limit, that's sure. But, as the man who wrote the story, you can be sent to the penitentiary under a criminal prosecution for criminal libel. Do you understand—to the penitentiary? I'm liable, too, in a way of course—anybody who had anything to do with uttering or circulating the false statement is liable. But you are in worse than the rest of us."

In his room at the other end of the wire panic gripped poor Singlebury. With a feeling that the earth had suddenly slumped away from under his feet he clung desperately to the telephone instrument. He had accepted this terrifically startling disclosure unquestioningly. Why should he question it?

"But if—if there was no malice—if the mistake was made innocently and in ignorance——" he babbled.

In his place in the club telephone booth Mr. Foxman, interpreting the note of fright in the reporter's voice, grinned to himself. Singlebury, it was plain, didn't know anything about libel law. And Singlebury, it was equally plain, was accepting without question or analysis all that he was hearing.

"Lack of malice doesn't excuse in this state!" Mr. Foxman said, speaking with grim menace; "you haven't a leg to stand on. There'll be warrants out before breakfast time in the morning; and by noon you'll be in a jail cell unless you get out of this town to-night before they find out the name of the man who wrote this story. Have you got any money?"

"I've—I've got some money," answered Singlebury, shaping the words with difficulty. "But, Mr. Foxman, if I'm responsible I can face the consequences. I'm willing to——"

"Singlebury, I'm telling you that you haven't a chance. I sent you out on this story—that was my mistake—and you got your facts twisted—that was your mistake. Even so, I don't want to see you suffer. I tell you you haven't a show if you stay in this state ten hours longer. You'll wear stripes. I'm warning you—giving you this chance to get away while there's still time—because you're a young man, a stranger in this

community, with no influence to help you outside of what *The Clarion* could give you, and that would be mighty little. *The Clarion* will be in bad enough itself. The man who owns this paper would sacrifice you in a minute to save himself or his paper. He can't afford to throw me to the lions, but with you it's different. If you beat it he may make a scapegoat of you, but it'll be at long distance where it won't hurt you much. If you stay you'll be a scapegoat just the same—and you'll serve time besides. Because I can't help feeling sorry for you I'm offering you a chance by giving you this warning."

"I'll go then—I'll go right away, I'll do as you say, sir. What—what would you suggest?"

"If I were you I'd catch a ferry for the Jersey shore before daylight—they run all night, the ferries do. And as soon as I landed on the Jersey shore I'd catch a train for the West or the South or somewhere and I'd stay on it till it stopped, no matter how far it took me—the farther from this town the better. And for the time being I'd change my name—that's my parting confidential advice to you. Good-bye. I've wasted more time already than I can spare." And having, as he figured, chosen the proper moment for ringing off, Mr. Foxman accordingly rang off.

But he made sure of the last detail—this calculating, foreseeing, prudent man. It was less than six blocks from his club to Singlebury's hotel. He drove the distance as speedily as a motor could carry him and, halting the taxi he had hired in the quiet street on the opposite side of the roadway, he, hidden in its interior, sat waiting and watching through the cab window; until, a little later, he saw Singlebury issue from the doorway of the Godey Arms, carrying a valise in his hand, saw him climb into a hansom cab and saw him drive away, heading westward.

By Mr. Foxman's directions his own cab trailed the cab bearing the other right to the ferry. Not until his eyes had followed the diminishing figure of the reporter while it vanished into the ferry house did he give orders to his driver to take him home to his apartment. Seasoned and veteran nighthawk of the Tenderloin that he was, the driver concerned himself not a bit with the peculiar conduct of any passenger of his. He did simply as he was told. If he was paid his legal fare and a sufficient tip besides, he could forget anything that happened while he and his chariot were under charter. For a sufficiently attractive bonus he would have winked at manslaughter. That was his code.

Being deposited at his home shortly before three A. M., Mr. Foxman became aware of a let-down sensation. With the strain relieved he felt the after-effects of the strain. He was sleepy and he was very tired; likewise very happy. Not a slip had occurred anywhere. Blake had been tractable and Singlebury had been credulous, and Hemburg, of course, had been obedient. The story would never see daylight, the big merger would be announced according to schedule, and Pearl Street common would go kiting up thirty or forty, or maybe fifty points. And he was loaded to the gunwales with the stock—bought at nineteen and three-quarters. For obvious reasons Blake would keep his mouth shut; for other reasons, just as good, Pratt, Bogardus and Murtha would keep their mouths closed too. They might, in private, indulge in a spell of wonderment, but they would do their wondering where no outsider overheard it—that was sure.

Hemburg, who travelled in an alcoholic maze anyhow, doing as he was told and asking no questions, would not be apt to talk. Why should he talk? Moreover, upon some plausible excuse Mr. Foxman meant that Hemburg and *The Clarion* should shortly part company. General Lignum, happily, would be absent from the country for at least a month and possibly for six weeks. If by the time he returned he hadn't forgotten all about the East Side traction business it would be easy enough to make him forget about it. Pulling wool over Lignum's eyes should be the easiest of jobs. Lignum would be having his political ambitions to think about; one beat more or less would mean nothing to Lignum, who had no journalistic instincts or training anyway.

As for Singlebury—well, the coup by which that young man had been disposed of was the smartest trick of them all, so Mr. Foxman told himself. Every avenue leading to possible detection was closed up, blocked off and sealed shut. In any event he, Hobart Foxman, was bound to make his pile; it was highly probable that there would be no price to pay in the subsequent loss of Hobart Foxman's professional reputation. He had been prepared, if need be, to surrender his good name in exchange for a fortune, but if he might have both—the name and the fortune—so much the better for Hobart Foxman.

He hummed a cheerful little tune as he undressed himself and got into bed. There he slept like a dead man until the long hand of the clock had circled the clock face a good many times.

It was getting along toward eleven o'clock in the forenoon and the summer sunlight, slipping through chinks in the curtains at the windows of his bedroom, had patterned the bed covers with yellow stencillings when Mr. Foxman awoke. For a spell he yawned and stretched. Then, in his slippers and his dressing gown, he went through the hall to the dining room to tell the maid out in the kitchen she might serve him his breakfast. According to the rule of the household copies of all the morning papers were lying at his place on the dining table. There was quite a sizable heap of them. *The Clarion*, folded across, made the topmost layer of the pile. Governed more by a habit of long standing than by any active desire to see what it contained, he picked it up and opened it out.

Out in the kitchen the maid heard some one in the dining room give a queer strangled cry. She came running. Her master stood in the middle of the floor with an opened newspaper in his two shaking hands. He didn't seem to see her, didn't seem to hear the astonished bleat which promptly she uttered; but above the rim of the printed sheet she saw his face. She saw it in the first instant of entering, and for sundry succeeding seconds saw nothing else. It was a face as white as so much chalk, and set in it a pair of eyes that popped from their sockets and glared like two shiny, white-ringed, agate marbles, and at its lower end a jaw that lolled down until it threatened self-dislocation. The maid figured Mr. Foxman had been rendered suddenly and seriously unwell by something shocking he had found in the paper.

Therein she was right; it was a true diagnosis if ever there was one. Mr. Foxman had been suddenly and sorely stricken in the midst of health and contentment; Mr. Foxman was now seriously unwell, both physically and as to the state of his nervous system.

Indeed the gentleman was in even more deplorable case than the foregoing words would indicate. Mr. Foxman was the engineer who is hoisted by his own petard. He was the hunter who falls into the pitfall he himself has digged, who is impaled on the stake he himself has planted. He was the hangman who chokes in the noose he wove for other victims. In short, Mr. Foxman was whatever best describes, by simile and comparison, the creature which unexpectedly is wrecked and ruined by contrivances of its own devisement.

At the top of the first page of *The Clarion*, smeared across three columns in letters which, to Mr. Foxman's petrified gaze, seemed cubits high, ran a certain well-remembered scare head, and under that, in two-column measure, a box of black-faced type, and under that, with its accusations bristling out from the body matter like naked lance tips, followed the story which told of the proposed Pearl Street trolley grab and the proposed East Side merger steal.

All of it was there, every word of it, from the crackling first paragraph to the stinging wasp tail of the last sentence!

The telephone has played a considerable part in this recital. It is to play still one more part and then we are done with telephones.

Mr. Foxman regained the faculty of consecutive thought—presently he did. He ran to the telephone, and after a little time during which he wildly blasphemed at the delay he

secured connection with the office of the firm of brokers who carried the account of Mr. X.

It was too late to save anything from the wreckage; the hour for salvaging had gone by. A clerk's voice, over the wire, conveyed back the melancholy tidings. A bomb had burst in Wall Street that morning. The East Side merger scheme had been blown into smithereens by a sensational story appearing in *The Clarion*, and the fragments still were falling in a clattering shower on the floor of the stock exchange. As for Pearl Street trolley common, that had gone clear through to the basement. The last quotation on this forsaken stock had been seven and a half asked, and nothing at all offered.

The account of Mr. X, therefore, was an account no longer; it was off the books. Mr. X's ten-point margin having been exhausted, Mr. X had been closed out, and to all intents and purposes neither he nor his account any longer existed.

Mr. Foxman's indisposition increased in the intensity of its visible symptoms until the alarmed maid, standing helplessly by, decided that Mr. Foxman was about to have a stroke of some sort. As a matter of fact he had already had it—two strokes really, both of them severe ones.

We go back a little now—to the evening before. We go back to the alcoholic Hemburg, trying to make good in his *ad-interim* eminence as acting make-up editor and, in pursuance of this ambition, riding for the time being upon the water wagon, with every personal intention of continuing so to ride during all time to come.

When he came on duty shortly after seven o'clock every famished, tortured fibre in him was calling out for whiskey. His thirst was riding him like an Old Man of the Seas. He sweated cold drops in his misery and, to bolster his resolution, called up every shred of moral strength that remained to him. Inside him a weakened will fought with an outraged appetite, and his jangled nerves bore the stress of this struggle between determination and a frightful craving.

In this state then, with his brain cells divided in their allegiance to him and his rebellious body in a tremor of torment, he was called upon very soon after his arrival at the office to carry out an important commission for the man who had bestowed upon him his temporary promotion. Taking the command over the wire, he hurried upstairs to execute it.

Had he been comparatively drunk it is certain that Hemburg would have made no slip; automatically his fuddled mind would have governed his hand to mechanical obedience of the direction. But being comparatively sober—as sober as nearly twenty-four hours of abstinence could make him—poor Hemburg was in a swirl of mental confusion. At that, out-mastered as he was, he made only one mistake.

There were two stories lying in type, side by side, on the stone. One of them was to be played up in the leading position in the make-up. The other was to be dumped in the hell-box. That was the order, plain enough in his own mind. So one of them he dumped, and the other one he put in the forms to be printed.

The mistake he made was this: He dumped the wrong one and he ran the wrong one. He dumped the long Washington dispatch into a heap of metal linotype strips, fit only to be melted back again into leaden bars, and he ran the Singlebury masterpiece. That's what Hemburg did—that's all.

Well then, these things resulted: Mrs. Foxman lost her ten-thousand-dollar legacy and never thereafter forgave her husband for frittering away the inheritance in what she deemed to have been a mad fit of witless speculation. Even though his money had gone with hers she never forgave him.

Mr. Foxman, having sold his birthright of probity and honour and self-respect for as bitter and disappointing a mess of pottage as ever mortal man had to swallow, nevertheless went undetected in his crookedness and continued to hold his job as managing editor of *The Clarion*.

General Robert Bruce Lignum, a perfectly innocent and

well-meaning victim, was decisively beaten in his race for the United States senatorship. Mr. Blake saw to that personally—Mr. John W. Blake, who figured that in some way he had been double-crossed and who, having in silence nursed his grudge to keep it warm, presently took his revenge upon Foxman's employer, since he saw no way, in view of everything, of hurting Foxman without further exposing himself. Also, to save himself and his associates from the possibility of travelling to state's prison, Mr. Blake found it incumbent upon him to use some small part of his tainted fortune in corrupting a district attorney, who up until then had been an honourable man with a future before him of honourable preferment in the public service. So, though there were indictments in response to public clamour, there were no prosecutions, and the guilty ones went unwhipped of justice. And after a while, when the popular indignation engendered by *The Clarion's* disclosure had entirely abated, and the story was an old story, and the law's convenient delays had been sufficiently invoked, and a considerable assortment of greedy palms at Albany and elsewhere had been crossed with dirty dollars, the East Side merger, in a different form and with a different set of dummy directors behind it, was successfully put through, substantially as per former programme. But by that time the original holders of Pearl Street trolley stocks had all been frozen out and had nothing to show for their pains and their money, except heart pangs and an empty bag to hold.

Bogardus, the lobbyist, and old Pratt, the class leader, and Lawyer Murtha, the two-faced—not one of whom, judged by the common standards of honest folk, had been actuated by clean motives—enjoyed their little laugh at Blake's passing discomfiture, but afterward, as I recall, they patched up their quarrels with him and each, in his own special field of endeavour, basked once more in the golden sunshine of their patron's favour, waxing fat on the crumbs which dropped from the greater man's table.

Hemburg's reward for striving, however feebly, to cure himself of the curse of liquor was that promptly he lost his place on *The Clarion's* staff—Mr. Foxman personally attended to that detail—and because of his habits could not get a job on any other paper and became a borrower of quarters along Park Row.

Singlebury, who did a good reporter's job and wrote a great story, was never to have the small consolation of knowing that after all he had not committed criminal libel, nor that he had not got his names or his facts twisted, nor even that his story did appear in *The Clarion*. Without stopping long enough even to buy a copy of the paper, he ran away, a fugitive, dreading the fear of arrest that had been conjured up in another's imagination and craftily grafted upon his beguiled intelligence. And he never stopped running, either, until he was in Denver, Colorado, where he had to make a fresh start all over again. While he was making it the girl in San Jose, California, got tired of waiting for him and broke off the engagement and married someone else.

What is the moral of it all?

You can search me.

CHAPTER IX

PERSONA AU GRATIN

TO EVERY town, whether great or ungreat, appertain and do therefore belong certain individualistic beings. In the big town they are more or less lost, perhaps. In the smaller town they are readily to be found and as readily to be recognised. There is, for example, the man who, be the weather what it may and frequently is, never wears underwear, yet continues ever to enjoy health so robust as to constitute him, especially in winter time, a living reproach to all his fleece-lined fellow citizens. There is the man who hangs round somebody's livery stable, being without other visible means of support, and makes a specialty of diagnosing the diseases of the horse and trimming up fox terrier pups, as regards their ears and tails. Among the neighbouring youth, who yield him a fearsome veneration, a belief exists to the effect that he never removes the tails with an edged tool but just takes and bites them off. There is the man who, because his mother or his wife or his sister takes in sewing, has a good deal of spare time on his hands and devotes it to carving with an ordinary pocketknife—he'll show you the knife—a four-foot chain, complete with solid links and practical swivel ornaments, out of a single block of soft pine, often achieving the even more miraculous accomplishment of creating a full-rigged ship inside of a narrow-mouthed bottle.

There is the man who goes about publicly vainglorious of his ownership of the finest gold-embossed shaving mug in the leading barbershop. There is the man—his name is apt to be A. J. Abbott or else August Ackerman—who invariably refers to himself as the first citizen of the place, and then, to make good his joke, shows the stranger where in the city directory he, like Abou ben Adhem—who, since I come to think about it, was similarly gifted in the matter of initials—leads all the rest. There is the town drunkard, the town profligate, the town beau, the town comedian. And finally, but by no means least, there is the man who knows baseball from A, which is Chadwick, to Z, which is Weeghman. These others—the champion whittler, the dog-biter, and the whole list of them—are what you might call perennials, but he is a hardy annual, blossoming forth in the spring when the season opens and His Honour, the Mayor, throws out the first ball, attaining to full-petalled effulgence along toward midsummer, as the fight for the flag narrows, growing fluffy in the pod at the seedtime of the World's Series in October, and through the long winter hibernating beneath a rich mulch of Spalding's guides and sporting annuals.

The thriving city of Anneburg, situate some distance south of Mason and Dixon's Line at the point where the Tobacco Belt and the Cotton Belt, fusing imperceptibly together, mingle the nitrogenous weed and the bolled staple in the same patchwork strip of fertile loam lands, was large enough to enjoy a Carnegie library, a municipal graft scandal, and a reunion of the Confederate Veterans' Association about once in so often, and small enough to have and to hold—and to value—at least one characteristic example of each of the types just enumerated. But especially did it excel in its exclusive possession of J. Henry Birdseye.

This Mr. Birdseye, be it said, was hardly less widely known than a certain former governor of the state, who as the leading citizen of Anneburg took a distinguished part in all civic and communal movements. Yet the man was not wealthy or eloquent; neither was he learned in the law nor gifted with the pen. His gainful pursuit was that of being a commercial traveller. His business of livelihood was to sell Good Old Mother Menifee's Infallible Chill Cure through nine adjacent counties of the midcontinental malaria zone. But his principal profession was the profession of baseball. In his mind G. O. P.

stood for Grand Occidental Pastime, and he always thought of it as spelled with capital letters. He knew the national game as a mother knows the colour of her first-born's eyes. He yearned for it in the off-season interim as a drunkard for his bottle. Offhand he could tell you the exact weight of the bat wielded by Ed Delehanty in 1899 when Ed hit 408; or what Big Dan Brouthers' average was in Big Dan's best year; or where Cap. Anson was born and how he first broke into fast company, and all the lesser circumstances connected with that paramount event. His was the signature that headed the subscription list which each February secured for Anneburg a membership franchise in a Class C League, and he the sincerest mourner when the circuit uniformly blew up with a low, penniless thud toward the Fourth of July.

He glanced at the headlines of the various metropolitan papers for which he subscribed; that was because, as a patriotic and public-spirited American, he deemed it to be his duty to keep abreast of war, crimes, markets, politics, and the other live issues of the day; but what he really read was the sporting department, reading it from the vignette of its chief editor, displayed in the upper left-hand corner, to the sweepings of minute diamond dust accumulated in the lower right-hand corner.

In short, J. Henry Birdseye was a fan in all that the word implies. In a grist mill, now, a fan means something which winnows out the chaff from the grain. In the Orient a fan means a plane-surface of coloured paper, bearing a picture of a snow-capped mountain, and having also a bamboo handle, and a tendency to come unravelled round the edges. But when anywhere in these United States you speak of a fan, be you a Harlem cliff-swallow or a Bangtown jay, you mean such a one as J. Henry Birdseye. You know him, I know him, everybody knows him. So much being conceded, we get down to our knitting.

Springtime had come: 'twas early April. The robin, which is a harbinger in the North and a potpie in the South, had winged his way from Gulfport, Mississippi, to Central Park, New York, and, stepping stiffly on his frost-bitten toes, was regretting he had been in such a hurry about it. Palm Beach being through and Newport not yet begun, the idle rich were disconsolately reflecting that for them there was nowhere to go except home. That Anglophobiac of the feathered kingdom, the English snipe, bid a reluctant farewell to the Old Southern angleworms whose hospitality he had enjoyed all winter, and headed for Upper Quebec, intent now on family duties. And one morning Mr. Birdseye picked up the Anneburg *Press Intelligencer*, and read that on their homebound journey from the spring training camp the Moguls, league champions four times hand-running and World's Champions every once in a while, were by special arrangement to stop off for half a day in Anneburg and play an exhibition game with the Anneburg team of the K-A-T League.

Nor was it the second-string outfit of the Moguls that would come. That band of callow and diffident rookies would travel north over another route, its members earning their keep by playing match games as they went. No, Anneburg, favoured among the haunts of men, was to be honoured with the actual presence of the regulars, peerlessly captained by that short and wily premier of all baseball premiers, so young in years yet so old in wisdom, Swifty Megrue; and bearing with him in its train such deathless fixtures of the Temple of Fame as Long Leaf Pinderson, the Greatest Living Pitcher, he who, though barely out of his teens, already had made spitball a cherished household word in every American home; Magnus, that noble Indian, catcher by trade, a red chieftain in his own right; Gigs McGuire, mightiest among keystone bagsmen and worshipped the hemisphere over as the most eminent and at the same time the most cultured umpire-baiter a dazzled planet ever beheld; Flying Jenny Schuster, batsman extraordinary, likewise base-stealer without a peer; Albino Magoon, the Circassian Beauty of the outfield, especially to be loved and revered because a product of the Sunny Southland; Sauer and Krautman, better known as the Dutch Lunch battery; little Lew Hull, who could play any position between

sungarden and homeplate; Salmon, a veritable walloping window-blind with the stick; Jordan, who pitched on occasion, employing a gifted southpaw exclusively therefor; Rube Gracey; Streaky Flynn, always there with the old noodle and fast enough on his feet to be sure of a fixed assignment on almost any other team, but carried in this unparalleled aggregation of stars as a utility player; Andrew Jackson Harkness; Canuck LaFarge, and others yet besides. These mastodons among men would flash across the palpitant Anneburg horizon like a troupe of companion comets, would tarry just long enough to mop up the porous soil of Bragg County with the best defensive the K-A-T had to offer, and then at eventide would resume their journey to where, on the vast home grounds, new glories and fresh triumphs awaited them.

No such honour had ever come to Anneburg before; and as Mr. Birdseye, with quickened pulse, read and then reread the delectable tidings, forgetting all else of lesser import which the *Press Intelligencer* might contain, a splendid inspiration sprang full-grown into his brain, and in that moment he resolved that her, Anneburg's, honour should be his, J. Henry Birdseye's, opportunity. Opportunity, despite a current impression, does not knock once at every man's door. Belief in the proverb to that effect has spelled many a man's undoing. He has besat him indoors awaiting the sound of her knuckles upon the panels when he should have been ranging afield with his eye peeled. As a seasoned travelling man Mr. Birdseye knew opportunity for what she is—a coy bird and hard to find —and knew that to get her you must go gunning for her. But he figured he had the proper ammunition in stock to bring down the quarry this time—the suitable salt to put on her tail. Of that also he felt most certain-sure.

The resolution took definite form and hardened. Details, ways and means, probable contingencies and possible emergencies—all these had been mapped and platted upon the blueprints of the thinker's mind before he laid aside the paper. To but one man—and he only under the pledge of a secrecy almost Masonic in its power to bind—did Mr. Birdseye confide the completed plan of his campaign. That man was a neighbour of the Birdseyes, a Mr. Fluellen, more commonly known among friends as Pink Egg Fluellen. The gentleman did not owe his rather startling titular adornment to any idiosyncrasy of complexion or of physical aspect. He went through life an animate sacrifice to a mother's pride. Because in her veins coursed the blood of two old South Carolina families, the Pinckneys and the Eggners, the misguided woman had seen fit to have the child christened Pinckney Eggner. Under the very lip of the baptismal font the nickname then was born, and through all the days of his fleshy embodiment it walked with him. As a boy, boy-like, he had fought against it; as a man, chastened by the experience of maturity, he had ceased to rebel. Now, as the head of a family, he heard it without flinching.

On his way downtown after breakfast, Mr. Birdseye met Mr. Fluellen coming out of his gate bound in the same direction. As they walked along together Mr. Birdseye told Mr. Fluellen all, first, though, exacting from him a promise which really was in the nature of a solemn oath.

"You see, Pink Egg," amplified Mr. Birdseye when the glittering main fact of his ambition had been revealed, "it'll be like this: The Moguls get in here over the O. & Y. V. at twelve-forty-five that day. Coming from the West, that means they hit Barstow Junction at eleven-twenty and lay over there nine minutes for the northbound connection. Well, I'm making Delhi the day before—seeing my trade there. I drive over to the junction that evening from Delhi—it's only nine miles by buggy—stay all night at the hotel, and when the train with the team gets in next morning, who climbs aboard her? Nobody but just little old me."

"But won't there be a delegation from here waiting at Barstow to meet 'em and ride in with 'em?"

Mr. Birdseye was wise in the lore of local time cards. He shook his head.

“Not a chance, Pinkie, not a chance. The only way to get out to Barstow from here that morning would be to get up at four o’clock and catch the early freight. No, sir, the crowd here won’t see the boys until we all come piling off at the union depot at twelve-forty-five. By that time I’ll be calling all those Moguls by their first names. Give me an hour; that’s all I ask—just an hour on the same train together with ’em. You know me, and from reading in the papers about ’em, you know about what kind of fellows those Moguls are. Say, Pink Egg, can’t you just close your eyes and see the look on Nick Cornwall’s face when he and all the rest see me stepping down off that train along with Swifty Megrue and old Long Leaf and the Indian, and all the outfit? I owe Nick Cornwall one anyway. You remember how shirty he got with me last year when I went to him and told him if he’d switch Gillam from short to third and put Husk Blynn second in the batting order instead of fifth, that he’d improve the strength of the team forty per cent. If he’d only a-done that, we’d have been in the money sure. But did he do it? He did not. He told me there was only one manager getting paid to run the club, and so far as he knew he was him. Manager? Huh! Look where we finished—or would have finished if the league had lasted out the season. Eight teams, and us in eighth place, fighting hard not to be in ninth.”

“Suppose, though, J. Henry, there just happens to be somebody else from Anneburg on the twelve-forty-five?”

Perhaps it was a tiny spark of envy in Mr. Fluellen’s heart which inspired him to raise this second doubt against the certainty of his friend’s coup.

“I should worry if there is!” said Mr. Birdseye. “Who else is there in this town that can talk their own language with those boys like I can? I’ll bet you they’re so blamed sick and tired of talking with ignorant, uneducated people that don’t know a thing about baseball, they’ll jump at a chance to associate with a man that’s really on to every angle of the game—inside ball and averages and standings and all that. Human nature is just the same in a twenty-thousand-a-year big leaguer as it is in anybody else, if you know how to go at him. And if I didn’t know human nature from the ground up, would I be where I am as a travelling salesman? Answer me that.”

“I guess you’re right, J. Henry,” agreed Mr. Fluellen. “Gee, I wish I could be along with you,” he added wistfully.

Mr. Birdseye shook his head in earnest discount of any such vain cravings upon Mr. Fluellen’s part. If there had been the remotest prospect of having Mr. Fluellen for a companion to share in this glory, he wouldn’t have told anything about it to Mr. Fluellen in the first place.

“Anyhow, I reckon my wife wouldn’t hear to it,” said Mr. Fluellen hopelessly. “She’s funny that way.”

“No, it wouldn’t do for you to be along either, Pink Egg,” said Mr. Birdseye compassionately but with all firmness. “You don’t know the real science of baseball the same as I do. They wouldn’t care to talk to anybody that was even the least bit off on the fine points. I was just thinking—I’ll be able to give ’em some tips about how to size up the situation here—not that they need it particularly.”

“J. Henry, you wouldn’t tip ’em off to the weak spots in the Anneburg team?” Loyalty to local ideals sharpened Mr. Fluellen’s voice with anxiety.

“Certainly not, Pink Egg, certainly not,” reassured Mr. Birdseye. “What do you think I am? Not that they need to be told anything. They’ll wipe up the ground with our bunch of morning glories anyway—best we can hope for is that we don’t get skunked and that the score is kind of low. But I’ll certainly put ’em wise to that soft place back of centre field, where the grass is high. That’s only true sportsmanship, that’s only fair.”

“Yes,” assented Mr. Fluellen, “I reckon that’s no more than fair. Well, as I said before, J. Henry, I certainly wish I was going to be with you.”

The great day came and was auspiciously sunshiny from its dawning onward. Contrary to the custom of trains in certain

interior sections of our common country, the train upon which so much depended slid into Barstow Junction at eleven-twenty, exactly on time. On the platform of the little box station, awaiting it, stood our Mr. Birdseye, impatiently enduring the company of a combination agent-telegrapher-ticketseller, who wore pink sleeve-garters with rosettes on them and a watch charm carved from a peach kernel to represent a monkey with its tail curved over its back.

Mr. Birdseye was costumed in a fashion befitting the spirit of the hour, as he sensed it. The main item of his attire was a new light-gray business suit, but lightening touches of a semi-sporting character were provided by such further adornments as a white Fedora hat with a wide black band, a soft collar held down trimly with a gold pin fashioned like a little riding-crop, and low tan shoes with elaborated gunwalelike extensions of the soles, showing heavy stitching. The finger tips of a pair of buckskin gloves, protruding from a breast pocket of his coat, suggested two-thirds of a dozen of small but well-ripened plantains. His visible jewelry included dog’s-head cuff buttons and a fob strap of plaited leather with a heavy silver harness buckle setting off its pendant end.

Looking the general effect over from time to time during that dragging forenoon, he had each separate time felt himself to be habited in accordance with the best taste and the best judgment, considering the nature of the occasion and the rôle he meant to play. An added fillip to his anticipations was afforded by the consciousness that no rival would divide the coming triumph with him. Anneburg had forty thousand inhabitants, including whites—that is, forty thousand by the United States census reports; seventy-five thousand by patriotic local estimates. By sight or by name Mr. Birdseye knew most of the whites and many of the blacks, browns and yellows. At the hotel no Anneburgian name was registered, saving and excepting his own; in the little knot gathered on the platform no familiar Anneburg shape now disclosed itself. He was alone and all was well.

The locomotive rolled in and gently halted, as though to avoid jostling its precious freightage of talent. Behind it, tailing along up the track, stretched two day coaches and sundry Pullmans. From these last dropped down dark-faced figures, white-clad in short jackets, and they placed boxes below every alternate set of car steps. The train conductor dismounted. Carrying a small handbag, Mr. Birdseye approached and hailed him.

“Hello, Cap,” he said, “have a smoke.”

“Thanks.” The conductor deposited the cigar with tender care in the crown of his uniform cap. “Smoke it later on, if you don’t mind. Nice weather.”

“Which car are the boys on?” asked Mr. Birdseye.

“Boys—which boys?”

“Why, the boys that are going to play Anneburg, of course.”

“Oh, that bunch? Back yonder.” He flirted a thumb over his shoulder toward the tail of his vestibuled convoy. If the conductor meant to say more he lost the chance through his own slowness. Already Mr. Birdseye was hurrying up the cindered stretch beyond the platform.

At the portals of the rearmost Pullman but one a porter interposed himself.

“Private sleeper, cap’n,” he warned.

“That’ll be all right,” stated Mr. Birdseye. “That’s the one I’m looking for—came out from Anneburg especially to meet the boys and ride in with ’em.” He proffered a small cardboard slip and with it a large round coin. “Take the Pullman fare out of that and keep the change.”

“A’ right, suh, boss—an’ much obliged.” The porter pouched dollar and ticket with one hand and with the other saluted profoundly. He aided the generous white gentleman to mount the steps.

Within the door of the coach, at the mouth of its narrow end passage, Mr. Birdseye halted to take swift inventory of its interior. It was a sleeper of the pattern familiar to all who travel much and widely; it looked its part and smelled it,

giving off the inevitable torrid aromas of warm plush and heat-softened shellac. It contained fifteen or eighteen occupants scattered through its length, some sitting singly, some paired off and, in one group, four together, playing cards—all young or youngish men, all smartly dressed, all live-looking. At first glance Mr. Birdseye told himself he was in the right car. At second glance he told himself he was not so absolutely sure. For one thing, the persons here revealed seemed so quiet, so sedate; there was no skylarking; no quips flying back and forth; no persiflage filtering out of the open windows. Still, for one initiated, it should be an easy task to make sure, and very sure at that.

Almost in arm-reach of him two of the passengers faced each other from opposite seats with a checkerboard upon their knees. The one who had his back to Mr. Birdseye, a tall, light-haired person, kept his head bent in deep study of the problem of the next move. His opponent looked up. Barring the cut and colour of his costume he might have passed, with his smooth, rosy cheek and his round, blue Irish orb, for a Christian Brother. Full well did Mr. Birdseye know that Gigs McGuire, foremost of all second-basemen, had studied for the priesthood before he abandoned the seminary for the stadium. Indeed, he knew all about Gigs McGuire that the leading chroniclers of baseball had ever written for publication. He advanced half a pace, his right arm extended, a greeting forming on his lips.

The ensuing conduct of the blue-eyed man was peculiar, not to say disconcerting. He stared at Mr. Birdseye for the brief part of a brief second. Then he twisted his head over his shoulder, and, without addressing anyone in particular, rapidly uttered the word "Cheese!" thrice in a tone of seeming impatience. And then he picked up a red disk and with it jumped a black one. Mr. Birdseye felt constrained to step along.

Across the aisle diagonally were the four who played at cards. It was to be seen that bridge was the game occupying them. And bridge, properly played, is an absorbing pursuit, requiring concentration and silence. None of the quartet bestowed so much as a sidelong look upon Mr. Birdseye as Mr. Birdseye, slowly advancing toward the middle of the car, passed them by.

Thus progressing, he came close to one who spraddled in solitary comfort over two seats. This one was interred nose-deep in a book.

"Hello," said Mr. Birdseye tentatively, almost timidly, for increasing doubt assailed him.

"'Lo," answered the reader in a chill monosyllable without lifting his face from his book. Mr. Birdseye noted that the book contained verse printed in German, and he regretted having spoken. It wasn't in the nature of things for a ballplayer to be reading German poetry in the original, and he had no time to waste upon any other than a ballplayer.

In that same instant, though, his glance fell on the next two passengers, and his heart gave a glad upward leap in his bosom. Surely the broad man with the swarthy skin and the straight black hair must be the Indian. Just as surely the short, square man alongside, the owner of that heavy jaw and that slightly up-tilted nose, could be none but the Richelieu of managers. Mr. Birdseye almost sprang forward.

"Well, Chief!" he cried genially. "Well, Swifty! I thought I'd find you. How's everything?"

Coldly they both regarded him. It was the short, square man who answered, and the reader behind put down his volume of Heine to listen.

"Everything would be all right if they'd only keep these car doors locked," said the short man, and he didn't speak as a true sportsman should speak—tone, inflection, pronunciation, all were wrong. Enthusiasm was lacking, joviality was woefully missing. He continued, in the manner rather of a civil engineer—an impassive ordinarily civil engineer, say, who was now slightly irritated about something: "I figure you've made a mistake. This gentleman is not a chief—he's my private

secretary. And my name does not happen to be Swift, if I heard you right. My name is Dinglefoogle—Omar G. Dinglefoogle, of Swedish descent.”

He disengaged his gaze from that of the abashed Birdseye and resumed his conversation with his companion at a point where it had been interrupted:

“Have it your own way, John. Abbey for yours, but Sargent and Whistler for mine—yes, and Remington.”

“But where are you going to find anything to beat that thing of Abbey’s—The Search for the Holy Grail?” It was the swarthy man taking up the issue. “Every time I go to Boston——”

Moving onward in a small, self-generated fog of bewilderment which travelled with him, Mr. Birdseye heard no more. So moving, he passed in turn a young man who was bedded down in a nest of pamphlets and Government bulletins dealing in the main apparently with topics relating to forestry or else with intensive farming; and a young man who napped with his hat over his eyes; and another young man intently making notes on the back of an envelope; and two young men silently examining the mechanism of a gold watch which plainly was the property of one of the two; until at the far end of the car he came to one more young man who, casting aside a newspaper and straightening to get the kinks out of his back, showed Mr. Birdseye a profiled face of a clear pinkish colour, with a calm, reflective eye set in it under a pale yellow eyebrow and, above, a mop of hair so light as to be almost white. Verily there could be no confusion of identity here. Coincidence was coincidence, but so unique, so distinctive, a physical aspect was not to be duplicated outside of a story book.

“Say, I’d know you anywhere by your pictures,” said Mr. Birdseye, and extended the right hand of fellowship.

“That’s the main objection to those pictures—they do look a little like me,” replied the young man with a smile so grave as to verge upon the melancholy. Half rising, he shook hands with the other. “Have a seat?” Hospitably he indicated the cushioned expanse in front of him and drew in his knees.

Here was proof, added and cumulative. The voice of the pale-haired young man was as it should be, a gently modulated r-slurring voice. Was it not known of all men that Albino Magoon, the Circassian Beauty of the outfield, owned allegiance of birth to the Sunny Southland, Mr. Birdseye’s own land? Bond and double bond would they share between them. In a flutter of reviving joy Mr. Birdseye scrooged in and sat.

The young man, having done the courtesies, sat back modestly as though awaiting the newcomer’s pleasure in the matter of choosing a topic for conversation. Mr. Birdseye lost no time. He knew the subjects fittest to be discussed.

“Well,” he said, “what do you think about Chicago’s chances? Think she’s going to give New York a run for her white alley this year?”

“I’m sure I don’t know, suh.” Such was the first sentence of the astonishing rejoinder. “Chicago is growing, awfully fast—faster than any big interior city, I presume, but the latest figures show New York has a greater population now, including suburbs, than London even. It’s hardly possible, I reckon, for Chicago to hope to catch up with New York—this year or any other year.”

Puzzled, I must admit, but by no means nonplussed, Mr. Birdseye jibed and went about mentally. As the cant phrase goes, he took a new tack.

“Say, listen,” he said; “do you know what I think? I think the Federals gave you-all a rotten deal. Yes, sir, a rotten deal all the way through. Naturally down here nearly everybody feels that way about it—naturally the sympathies of nearly everybody in this part of the country would turn that way anyhow. I reckon you’d know that without my telling you how we feel. Of course a good knock-down-and-drag-out fight is all right, but when you sit down and figure out the way the Federals behaved right from the start——”

The other put up an objecting hand.

"I hope you'll excuse me, suh," he said, "but I don't believe in keeping those old sores open. I thought sectionalism was dying out everywhere—I hoped it was, anyway. My father fought the Federals for four years and he died reconciled. I don't know why we younger men shouldn't be. After all, we're all Americans now."

"I wasn't speaking of the Federal Army," explained Mr. Birdseye, desperately upset. "I was speaking of the Federal League."

"Oh, the Federal League!" said the other. "I beg your pardon, suh. Are you—are you interested in baseball?" He put the question wonderingly.

"Am I interested in—well, say, ain't you interested?"

"Me? Oh, no, suh. I make it a rule never to discuss the subject. You see, I'm a divinity student. I reckon you must've mistaken me for somebody else. I was afraid so when you first spoke. I'm mighty sorry."

"Yes, I must've," agreed Mr. Birdseye. He got upon his own feet and stumbled over the young man's feet and ran a hand through the hair on his pestered head. "I guess I must've got in the wrong car."

"That's probably it," said the pale-haired one. His odd-coloured but ingenuous countenance expressed solicitude and sympathy for the stranger's disappointment. Indeed, it wrinkled and twitched almost as though this tender-hearted person meant to shed tears. As if to hide his emotions, he suddenly reached for his discarded newspaper and in its opened pages buried his face to the ears—ears which slowly turned from pink to red. When next he spoke it was from behind the shelter of his newsprint shield, and his voice seemed choked. "Undoubtedly that's it—you got in the wrong car. Well, good-bye, my brother—and God bless and speed you."

At this precise moment, with the train just beginning to pull out from Barstow Junction, with the light-haired man sinking deeper and deeper inside the opened sheets, and with Mr. Birdseye teetering on uncertain legs in the aisle, there came to the latter's ears what he might have heard before had his hearing been attuned for sounds from that quarter. He heard a great rollicking, whooping, vehement outburst coming from the next car back, which was likewise the last car. It had youth in it, that sound did—the spirit of unbridled, exuberant youth at play, and abandon and deviltry and prankishness and carefreedom. Mr. Birdseye faced about. He caught up his handbag and, swift as a courier bearing glad tidings, he sped on winged feet—at least those extensive soles almost approximated wings—through the cramped passage flanking the smoking compartment. Where the two cars clankingly joined beneath a metal flange he came into collision with a train butcher just emerging from the rear sleeper.

Butch's hair was dishevelled and his collar awry. He dangled an emptied fruit basket in one hand and clinked coins together in the palm of the other. On his face was a grin of comic dismay and begrudged admiration.

"Some gang back there—some wild gang!" he murmured and, dodging adeptly past Mr. Birdseye, was gone, heading forward.

The searcher rounded the jog of the compartment reservation, and inside him then his soul was lifted up and exalted. There could be no mistake now. Within the confines of this Pullman romped and rampaged young men and youths to the number of perhaps twenty. There seemed to be more than twenty of them; that, though, was due to the flitting movements of their rambunctious forms. Norfolk-jacketed bodies, legs in modishly short trousers deeply cuffed at the bottoms, tousled heads to which rakish soft hats and plaid travelling caps adhered at angles calculated to upset the theory of the attraction of gravitation, showed here, there, everywhere, in a confused and shifting vista. Snappy suit cases, a big, awkward-looking, cylindrical bag of canvas, leather-faced, and two or three other boxes in which, to judge by their shapes, stringed musical instruments were

temporarily entombed, encumbered a seat near by.

All this Mr. Birdseye's kindled eye comprehended in the first quick scrutiny. Also it took in the posture of a long, lean, lanky giant in his early twenties, who stood midway of the coach, balancing himself easily on his legs, for by now the train was picking up speed. One arm of the tall athlete—the left—was laid along his breast, and in its crook it held several small, half-ripened oranges. His right hand would pluck up an orange, the right arm would wind up, and then with marvellous accuracy and incredible velocity the missile would fly, like a tawny-green streak, out of an open window at some convenient target. So fast he worked and so well, it seemed as though a constant stream of citrus was being discharged through that particular window. An orange spattered against a signpost marking the limits of the yard. Two oranges in instantaneous succession struck the rounded belly of a water tank, making twin yellow asterisks where they hit. A fourth, driven as though by a piston, whizzed past the nappy head of a darky pedestrian who had halted to watch the train go by. That darky ducked just in time.

Mr. Birdseye lunged forward to pay tribute to the sharpshooter. Beyond peradventure there could be but one set of muscles on this continent capable of such marksmanship. But another confronted him, barring his way, a stockily built personage with a wide, humorous face, and yet with authority in all its contour and lines.

"Well, see who's here!" he clarioned and literally he embraced Mr. Birdseye, pinning that gentleman's arms to his sides. He bent his head and put his lips close to Mr. Birdseye's flattered ear, the better to be heard above the uproar dinning about them. "What was the name?" he inquired.

"Birdseye—J. Henry Birdseye."

Continuing to maintain a firm grasp upon Mr. Birdseye's coat sleeve the stocky individual swung about and called for attention:

"Gentlemen, one moment—one moment, if you please."

Plainly he had unquestioned dominion over this mad and pranksome crew. His fellows paused in whatever they were doing to give heed unto his words.

"Boys, it gives me joy to introduce to you Colonel Birdshot."

"Birdseye," corrected his prisoner, overcome with gratification, not unmixed with embarrassment.

"I beg your pardon," said the master of ceremonies. Then more loudly again: "I should have said Col. Birdseye Maple."

"Three cheers for the walking bedroom set!" This timely suggestion emanated from a wiry skylarker who had drawn nigh and was endeavouring to find Mr. Birdseye's hand with a view to shaking it.

Three cheers they were, and right heartily given too.

"And to what, may I ask—to what are we indebted for the pleasure of this unexpected but nevertheless happy meeting?" asked the blocky man. One instant he suggested the prime minister; the next, the court jester. And was not that as it should be too? It was, if one might credit what one had read of the king-pin of managers.

"Why—why, I just ran over from Anneburg to meet you and ride in with you—and sort of put you onto the ropes and everything," vouchsafed Mr. Birdseye.

"Well, isn't that splendid—we didn't expect it!" Once more he addressed his attentive fellows:

"Gentlemen, you'll never guess it until I tell you. It is none other than the official reception committee bearing with it the keys of the corporation. I shrewdly suspect the Colonel has the words 'Welcome to Our City' tattooed upon his chest."

"Let's undress him and see."

The idea was advanced by the same wire-drawn youngster who had called for the cheers. He laid hold on Mr. Birdseye's collar, but instantly the happy captive was plucked from his grasp and passed from one to another of the clustering group. They squeezed Mr. Birdseye's fingers with painfully affectionate force; they dealt him cordially violent slaps upon

the back. They inquired regarding his own health and the health of his little ones, and in less than no time at all, it seemed to him, he, somewhat jostled and dishevelled, confused but filled with a tingling bliss, had been propelled the length of the aisle and back again, and found himself sitting so he faced the directing genius of this exuberant coterie of athletes. The rest, sensing that their leader desired conference with the newcomer, resumed their diversions, and so in a small eddy of calm on the edge of a typhoon of clamour these two—Birdseye and the great manager—conversed together as man to man.

"And so you ran down to meet us—that was bully," said the blocky man. His mood was now serious, and Mr. Birdseye set himself to reply in the same spirit. "What's the prospects for a crowd over in Anneburg?"

"Couldn't be better," Mr. Birdseye told him. "Everybody in town that can walk, ride or crawl will be out to see you fellows play."

"To see us play—that's good!"

"The Mayor is going to be there, and ex-Governor Featherston—he's about the biggest man we've got in Anneburg—and oh, just everybody."

"Whosoever will, let him come, that's our motto," stated his vis-à-vis; "entertainment for man and beast. You'll be there of course?"

"In a front seat—rooting my head off," promised Mr. Birdseye, forgetting in the supreme joy of this supreme moment that he owed first duty to Anneburg's own puny contenders. "Say, you fellows are just exactly like I thought you'd be—regular hellions. Well, it's the old pep that counts."

"You said it—the old pep is the thing."

"What kind of a trip did you have coming up?"

"Fine—fine from the start."

"And where do you go from Anneburg?"

"Asheville, then Richmond. Anneburg is the smallest town we play."

"Don't think we don't appreciate it, Swifty. Say, the Big Fellow certainly can pitch, can't he?" Mr. Birdseye pointed toward the flinger of oranges who, having exhausted his ammunition, was now half out of a window, contemplating the flitting landscape. "How's his arm going to be this year?"

"Better than ever—better than ever. I guess you know about the no-hit game he pitched last year—the last game he played?"

"Tell me something about that kid I don't know," boasted Mr. Birdseye. "I've followed him from the time he first broke in."

"Then you know he's there with the pipes?"

"The pipes?"

"Sure—the educated larynx, the talented tonsils, the silver-lined throat—in other words, the gift of song."

"Why, I didn't know he sang," owned Mr. Birdseye, a mite puzzled.

"That's it—let a fellow do one thing better than anybody else, and they forget his other accomplishments. Sing? Well, rather! And punish old John J. Mandolin, too, if anybody should ask you."

So saying, the speaker drew forth a bulldog pipe and proceeded to load it from a leather tobacco case.

"I don't have to keep in condition, seeing as I'm merely running things," he explained. "But you bet I make my flock keep in condition—no boozing and mighty little cigarette smoking for them while their little papa's eye is on them."

"I've always heard you were strong for discipline," said Mr. Birdseye, plastering the flattering unction on thickly.

"I have to be, with a rowdy outfit like this one. Look yonder—that's a sample of the way they carry on when the bridle is off."

Three of these temporarily unhaltered colts had captured the car porter. Two held him fast while the third massaged his

woolly scalp with hard knuckles. Half a dozen more shouted advice to the operator. The porter broke away and fled, his expression betraying that he hardly knew whether to feel indignant or complimented. Mr. Birdseye saw that the volunteer masseur, now approaching them, had coal-black hair and snapping black eyes, and a skin the colour of polished cherry.

"That's the Chief coming, of course?" opined Mr. Birdseye. His tone was filled with reverence.

"Sh-h, don't let him hear you. If I had a big Indian whatyoumaycallim for a grandfather I'd advertise it, but he's a little touchy on the subject. Great boy though—one of the best."

"Part Pawnee, ain't he?"

"No; Parsee, I think."

Mr. Birdseye was going to ask where that tribe lived, but skylarking broke out in a fresh quarter and he forgot it. They talked averages then, or started to. Mr. Birdseye was made proud to find his companion agreed with him that Tris Speaker undoubtedly had a shade on Joe Jackson, and then was just about to take up the question of Honus Wagner's ability to come back after his last season's slump—a vital issue and one upon which he entertained decided views in the affirmative—when something occurred. Without being able to comprehend exactly how it came about, he discovered himself all of a sudden forming one link in a human chain of which six or eight more were likewise component parts. With arms intertwined and heads bent toward a common centre, they all mingled their lusty voices in snatches of song and glee and roundelay, and he—he perforce joined with them. One moment Merrily They Rolled Along, Rolled Along, Rolled Along—indeed they did; the next, From Aunt Dinah's Quilting Party they were Seeing Nell-l-l-i-e Home. Then a single minstrel advanced the duly credited assertion of parties unnamed that A Nigger Won't Steal, whereupon several others instantly and melodiously responded to the effect that be this as it may, I Caught Three in My Cornfield; One Had a Shovel and One Had a Hoe and if That Ain't Stealing I Don't Know! And so on without cessation for many fleeting, glorious, golden minutes. Once Mr. Birdseye, feeling certain he recognised the blithesome tenor whose wide shoulders his right arm encompassed, broke off his carolling long enough to say:

"Some doings, eh, Flying Jenny?"

Whereat the singer, thus jovially addressed, conferred a wink and a grin upon him and shouted back: "Don't be so blamed formal—just call me Jane!" and then skillfully picked up the tune again and kept right on tenoring. They were all still enmeshed and in all unison enriching the pent-up confines of their car with close harmonies when the train began to check up bumpingly, and advised by familiar objects beginning to pass the windows Mr. Birdseye realised that they approached their destination. It didn't seem humanly possible that so much time had elapsed with such miraculous rapidity, but there was the indisputable evidence in Langford's Real Estate Division and the trackside warehouses of Brazzell Brothers' Pride of Dixie fertilizer works. From a chosen and accepted comrade he now became also a guide.

"Fellows!" he announced, breaking out of the ring, "we'll be in in just a minute—this is Anneburg!"

Coincidentally with this announcement the conductor appeared at the forward end of the car and in a word gave confirmatory evidence. Of the car porter there was no sign. Duty called him to be present, but prudence bade him nay. He had discretion, that porter.

The song that was being sung at that particular moment—whatever it was—was suffered to languish and die midway of a long-drawn refrain. There was a scattering of the minstrels to snatch up suit cases, bags and other portable impedimenta.

"I'll ride up to the hotel with you," suggested Mr. Birdseye, laying a detaining hand upon the master's elbow. "If I get a chance there's something I want to tell you on the way." He was just remembering he had forgotten to mention that

treacherous soft spot back of centre field.

"You bet your blameless young life you'll ride with us!" answered back the other, reaching for a valise.

"What? Lose our honoured and esteemed reception committee now? Not a chance!" confirmed an enormous youth whose bass tones fitted him for the life of a troubadour, but whose breadth of frame qualified him for piano-moving or centre-rushing. With a great bear-hug he lifted Mr. Birdseye in his arms, roughly fondling him.

"You're going to the Hotel Balboa, of course," added Mr. Birdseye, regaining his feet and his breath as the caressing grip of the giant relaxed.

"Hotel Balboa is right, old Pathfinder."

"Then we'd all better take the hotel bus uptown, hadn't we?"

"Just watch us take it."

"I'll lay eight to five that bus has never been properly taken before now."

"But it's about to be." He who uttered this prophecy was the brisk youngster who had objected to being designated by so elaborated a title as Flying Jenny.

"All out!"

Like a chip on the crest of a mountain torrent Mr. Birdseye was borne down the car steps as the train halted beneath the shed of the Anneburg station. Across the intervening tracks, through the gate and the station and out again at the far side of the waiting room the living freshet poured. As he was carried along with it, the Indian being at his right hand, the orange thrower at his left, and behind him irresistible forces ramping and roaring, Mr. Birdseye was aware of a large crowd, of Nick Cornwall, of others locally associated with the destinies of the Anneburg team, of many known to him personally or by name, all staring hard, with puzzled looks, as he went whirling on by. Their faces were visible a fleeting moment, then vanished like faces seen in a fitful dream, and now the human ground swell had surrounded and inundated a large motorbus, property of the Hotel Balboa.

Strong arms reached upward and, as though he had been a child, plucked from his perch the dumfounded driver of this vehicle, with a swing depositing him ten feet distant, well out of harm's way. A youth who plainly understood the mystery of motors clambered up, nimble as a monkey, taking seat and wheel. Another mounted alongside of him and rolled up a magazine to make a coaching horn of it. Another and yet another followed, until a cushioned space designed for two only held four. As pirates aforetime have boarded a wallowing galleon the rest of the crew boarded the body of the bus. They entered by door or by window, whichever chanced to be handier, first firing their hand baggage in with a splendid disregard of consequences.

In less than no time at all, to tallyho tootings, to whoops and to yells and to snatches of melody, the Hotel Balboa bus was rolling through a startled business district, bearing in it, upon it and overflowing from it full twice as many fares as its builder had imagined it conceivably would ever contain when he planned its design and its accommodations. Side by side on the floor at its back door with feet out in space, were jammed together Mr. J. Henry Birdseye and the aforesaid blocky chieftain of the band. Teams checked up as the caravan rolled on. Foot travellers froze in their tracks to stare at the spectacle. Birdseye saw them. They saw Birdseye. And he saw that they saw and felt that be the future what it might, life for him could never bring a greater, more triumphant, more exultant moment than this.

"Is that the opera house right ahead?" inquired his illustrious mate as the bus jounced round the corner of Lattimer Street.

"No, that's the new Second National Bank," explained Mr. Birdseye between jolts. "The opera house is four doors further down—see, right there—just next to where that sign says 'Tascott & Nutt, Hardware.'"

Simultaneously those who rode in front and atop must likewise have read the sign of Tascott & Nutt. For the bus, as though on signal, swerved to the curb before this establishment and stopped dead short, and in chorus a dozen strong voices called for Mr. Nutt, continuing to call until a plump, middle-aged gentleman in his shirt sleeves issued from the interior and crossed the sidewalk, surprise being writ large upon his face. When he had drawn near enough, sinewy hands stretched forth and pounced upon him, and as the bus resumed its journey he most unwillingly was dragged at an undignified dogtrot alongside a rear wheel while strange, tormenting questions were shouted down at him:

"Oh, Mr. Nutt, how's your dear old coco?"

"And how's your daughter Hazel?—charming girl, Hazel!"

"And your son, Philip Bertram? Don't tell me the squirrels have been after that dear Phil Bert again!"

"You'll be careful about the chipmunks this summer, won't you, Mr. Nutt—for our sakes?"

"Old Man Nutt is a good old soul."

But this last was part of a song, and not a question at all.

The victim wrested himself free at last and stood in the highroad speechless with indignation. Lack of breath was likewise a contributing factor. Mr. Birdseye observed, as they drew away from the panting figure, that the starting eyes of Mr. Nutt were fixed upon him recognisingly and accusingly, and realised that he was in some way being blamed for the discomfiture of that solid man and that he had made a sincere enemy for life. But what cared he? Meadow larks, golden breasted, sat in his short ribs and sang to his soul.

And now they had drawn up at the Hotel Balboa, and with Birdseye still in the van they had piled off and were swirling through the lobby to splash up against the bulkhead of the clerk's desk, behind which, with a wide professional smile of hospitality on his lips, Head Clerk Ollie Bates awaited their coming and their pleasure.

"You got our wire?" demanded of him the young manager. "Rooms all ready?"

"Rooms all ready, Mister——"

"Fine and dandy! We'll go right up and wash up for lunch. Here's the list—copy the names onto the register yourself. Where's the elevator? Oh, there it is. All aboard, boys! No, wait a minute," countermanded this young commander who forgot nothing, as he turned and confronted Mr. Birdseye. "Before parting, we will give three cheers for our dear friend, guide and well-wisher, Colonel Birdseye Maple. All together:

"Whee! *Whee!* WHEE!"

The last and loudest Whee died away; the troupe charged through and over a skirmish line of darky bell hops; they stormed the elevator cage. Half in and half out of it their chief paused to wave a hand to him whom they had just honoured.

"See you later, Colonel," he called across the intervening space. "You said you'd be there when we open up, you know."

"I'll be there, Swifty, on a front seat!" pledged Mr. Birdseye happily.

The overloaded elevator strained and started and vanished upward, vocal to the last. In the comparative calm which ensued Mr. Birdseye, head well up, chest well out, and thumbs in the arm openings of a distended waistcoat, lounged easily but with the obvious air of a conqueror back toward the desk and Mr. Ollie Bates.

"Some noisy bunch!" said Mr. Bates admiringly. "Say, J. Henry, where did they pick you up?"

"They didn't pick me up, I picked them up—met 'em over at Barstow and rode in with 'em."

"Seems like it didn't take you long to make friends with 'em," commented Mr. Bates.

"It didn't take me half a minute. Easiest bunch to get acquainted with you ever saw in your life, Ollie. And kidders? Well, they wrote kidding—that's all—words and music. I wish you could a-seen them stringing old man 'Lonzo Nutt down

the street! I like to died!” He unbent a trifle; after all, Mr. Bates was an old friend. “Say, Ollie, that gang won’t do a thing to our little old scrub team this afternoon, with Long Leaf Pinderson pitching. I saw him in action—with oranges. He——”

“Say, listen, J. Henry,” broke in Mr. Bates. “Who in thunder do you think that gang is you’ve been associating with?”

“Think it is? Who would it be but the Moguls?”

“Moguls?”

A convulsion seized and overcame Mr. Bates. He bent double, his distorted face in his hands, his shoulders heaving, weird sounds issuing from his throat. Then lifting his head, he opened that big mouth of his, afflicting the adjacent air with raucous and discordant laughter.

“Moguls! Moguls! Say, you need to have your head looked into. Why, J. Henry, the Moguls came in on the twelve-forty-five and Nick Cornwall and the crowd met ’em and they’re down to the Hotel Esplanade right this minute, I reckon. We tried to land ’em for the Balboa, but it seemed like they wanted a quiet hotel. Well, they’ll have their wish at the Esplanade!”

“Then who—then who are these?”

It was the broken, faltering accent of Mr. Birdseye, sounded wanly and as from a long way off.

“These? Why, it’s the College Glee Club from Chickasaw Tech., down in Alabama, that’s going to give a concert at the opera house to-night. And you thought all the time you were with the Moguls? Well, you poor simp!”

In addition to simp Mr. Bates also used the words boob, sucker, chunk of Camembert and dub in this connection. But it is doubtful if Mr. Birdseye heard him now. A great roaring, as of dashing cataracts and swirling rapids, filled his ears as he fled away, blindly seeking some sanctuary wherein to hide himself from the gaze of mortal man.

Remaining to be told is but little; but that little looms important as tending to prove that truth sometimes is stranger than fiction. With Swifty Megrue coaching, with Magnus, the Big Chief, backstopping, with Pinderson, master of the spitball, in the box twirling, nevertheless and to the contrary notwithstanding, the Anneburg team that day mopped up, the score standing:

	R	H	E
Anneburg	6	9	1
Moguls	4	7	2

CHAPTER X

SMOOTH CROSSING

ON this voyage the *Mesopotamia* was to sail at midnight. It was now, to be precise about it, eleven forty-five P. M. and some odd seconds; and they were wrestling the last of the heavy luggage aboard. The Babel-babble that distinguishes a big liner's departure was approaching its climax of acute hysteria, when two well-dressed, youngish men joined the wormlike column of eleventh-hour passengers mounting a portable bridge labelled First Cabin which hyphenated the strip of dark water between ship and shore. They were almost the last persons to join the line, coming in such haste along the dock that the dock captain on duty at the foot of the canvas-sided gangway let them pass without question.

Except that these two men were much of a size and at a first glance rather alike in general aspect; and except that one of them, the rearmost, bore two bulging handbags while the other kept his hands muffled in a grey tweed ulster that lay across his arms, there was nothing about them or either of them to distinguish them from any other belated pair of men in that jostling procession of the flurried and the hurried. Oh, yes, one of them had a moustache and the other had none.

Indian file they went up the gangway and past the second officer, who stood at the head of it; and still tandem they pushed and were pushed along through the jam upon the deck. The second man, the one who bore the handbags, gave them over to a steward who had jumped forward when he saw them coming. He hesitated then, looking about him.

“Come on, it's all right,” said the first man.

“How about the tickets? Don't we have to show them first?” inquired the other.

“No, not now,” said his companion. “We can go direct to our stateroom.” The same speaker addressed the steward:

“D-forty,” he said briskly.

“Quite right, sir,” said the steward. “D-forty. Right this way, sir; if you please, sir.”

With the dexterity born of long practice the steward, burdened though he was, bored a path for himself and them through the crowd. He led them from the deck, across a corner of a big cabin that was like a hotel lobby, and down flights of broad stairs from B-deck to C and from C-deck to D, and thence aft along a narrow companionway until he came to a cross hall where another steward stood.

“Two gentlemen for D-forty,” said their guide. Surrendering the handbags to this other functionary, he touched his cap and vanished into thin air, magically, after the custom of ancient Arabian genii and modern British steamship servants.

“'Ere you are, sirs,” said the second steward. He opened the door of a stateroom and stood aside to let them in. Following in behind them he deposited the handbags in mathematical alignment upon the floor and spoke a warning: “We'll be leavin' in a minute or two now, but it's just as well, sir, to keep your stateroom door locked until we're off—thieves are about sometimes in port, you know, sir. Was there anything else, sir?” He addressed them in the singular, but considered them, so to speak, in the plural. “I'm the bedroom steward, sir,” he added in final explanation.

The passenger who had asked concerning the tickets looked about him curiously, as though the interior arrangement of a steamship stateroom was to him strange.

“So you're the bedroom steward,” he said. “What's your name?”

“Lawrence, sir.”

“Lawrence what?”

“I beg your pardon, sir?” said the steward, looking puzzled.

“He wants to know your first name,” explained the other prospective occupant of D-forty. This man had sat himself down upon the edge of the bed, still with his grey ulster folded forward across his arms as though the pockets held something valuable and must be kept in a certain position, just so, to prevent the contents spilling out.

“’Erbert Lawrence, sir, thank you, sir,” said the steward, his face clearing, “I’ll be ’andy if you ring, sir.” He backed out. “Nothing else, sir? I’ll see to your ’eavy luggage in the mornin’. Will there be any trunks for the stateroom?”

“No trunks,” said the man on the bed. “Just some suitcases. They came aboard just ahead of us, I think.”

“Right, sir,” said the accommodating Lawrence. “I’ll get your tickets in the morning and take them to the purser, if you don’t mind. Thank you, sir.” And with that he bowed himself out and was gone.

As the door closed behind this thoughtful and accommodating servitor the fellow travellers looked at each other for a moment steadily, much as though they might be sharers of a common secret that neither cared to mention even between themselves. The one who stood spoke first:

“I guess I’ll go up and see her pull out,” he said. “I’ve never seen a ship pull out; it’s a new thing to me. Want to go?”

The man nursing the ulster shook his head.

“All right, then,” said the first. He pitched his own topcoat, which he had been carrying under his arm, upon the lone chair. “I’ll be back pretty soon.” He glanced keenly at the one small porthole, looked about the stateroom once more, then stepped across the threshold and closed the door. The lock clicked.

Left alone, the other man sat for a half minute or so as he was, with his head tilted forward in an attitude of listening. Then he stood up and with a series of shrugging, lifting motions, jerked the ulster forward so that it slipped through the loop of his arms upon the floor. Had the efficient Lawrence returned at that moment it is safe to say he would have sustained a profound shock, although it is equally safe to say he would have made desperate efforts to avoid showing his emotions. The man was manacled. Below his white shirt-cuffs his wrists were encircled by snug-fitting, shiny bracelets of steel united by a steel chain of four short links. That explained his rather peculiar way of carrying his ulster and his decidedly awkward way of ridding himself of it.

He stepped across the room and with his coupled hands tried the knob of the door. The knob turned, but the bolt had been set from the outside. He was locked in. With his foot he dragged forward a footstool, kicking it close up against the panels so that should any person coming in open the door suddenly, the stool would retard that person’s entrance for a moment anyway. He faced about then, considering his next move. The circular pane of thick glass in the porthole showed as a black target in the white wall; through it only blankness was visible. D-deck plainly was well down in the ship’s hull, below the level of promenades and probably not very far above the waterline. Nevertheless, the handcuffed man crossed over and drew the short silken curtains across the window, making the seclusion of his quarters doubly secure.

Now, kneeling upon the floor, he undid the hasps of the two handbags, opened them and began rummaging in their cluttered depths. Doing all these things, he moved with a sureness and celerity which showed that he had worn his bonds for an appreciable space of time and had accustomed himself to using his two hands upon an operation where, unhampered, he might have used one or the other, but not both at once. His chain clinked briskly as he felt about in the valises. From them he first got out two travelling caps—one a dark grey cap, the other a cap of rather a gaudy check pattern; also, a plain razor, a safety razor and a box of cigars. He examined the safety razor a moment, then slipped it back into the flap pocket where it belonged; took a cigar from the box and put the box back into the grip; tried on first one of the

travelling caps and then the other, and returned them to the places from which he had taken them; and reclosed and refastened the grips themselves. But he took the other razor and dropped it in a certain place, close down to the floor at the foot of one of the beds.

He shoved the footstool away from the door, and, after dusting off his knees, he went and stood at the porthole gazing out into the night through a cranny in the curtains. The ship no longer nuzzled up alongside the dock like a great sucking pig under the flanks of an even greater mother-sow; she appeared to stand still while the dock seemed to be slipping away from her rearward; but the man who looked out into the darkness was familiar enough with that illusion. With his manacled hands crossed upon his waistcoat and the cigar hanging unlighted between his lips, he watched until the liner had turned and was swinging down stream, heading for the mouth of the river and the bay.

He lit the cigar, then, and once more sat himself down upon the edge of the bed. He puffed away steadily. His head was bent forward and his hands dangled between his knees in such ease as the snugness of the bracelets and the shortness of the chain permitted. Looking in at him you would have said he was planning something; that he was considering various problems. He was still there in that same hunching position, but the cigar had burned down two-thirds of its length, when the lock snicked a warning and his companion re-entered, bearing a key with which he relocked the door upon the inner side.

"Well," said the newcomer, "we're on our way." There was no reply to this. He took off his derby hat and tossed it aside, and began unbuttoning his waistcoat.

"Making yourself comfortable, eh?" he went on as though trying to manufacture conversation. The manacled one didn't respond. He merely canted his head, the better to look into the face of his travel mate.

"Say, look here," demanded the new arrival, his tone and manner changing. "What's the use, your nursing that grouch?"

Coming up the gangway, twenty minutes before, they might have passed, at a casual glance, for brothers. Viewed now as they faced each other in the quiet of this small room such a mistake could not have been possible. They did not suggest brothers; for all that they were much the same in build and colouring they did not even suggest distant cousins. About the sitting man there were abundant evidences of a higher and more cultured organism than the other possessed; the difference showed in costume, in manner, in speech. Even wearing handcuffs he displayed, without trying to do so, a certain superiority in poise and assurance. In a way his companion seemed vaguely aware of this. It seemed to make him—what shall I say?—uneasy; maybe a bit envious; possibly arousing in him the imitative instinct. Judging of him by his present aspect and the intonations of his voice, a shrewd observer of men and motives might have said that he was amply satisfied with the progress of the undertaking which he had now in hand, but that he lately had ceased to be entirely satisfied with himself.

"Say, Bronston," he repeated, "I tell you there's no good nursing the grouch. I haven't done anything all through this matter except what I thought was necessary. I've acted that way from the beginning, ain't I?"

"Have you heard me complain?" parried the gyved man. He blew out a mouthful of smoke.

"No, I haven't, not since you made the first kick that day I found you out in Denver. But a fellow can't very well travel twenty-five hundred miles with another fellow, sharing the same stateroom with him and all that, without guessing what's in the other fellow's mind."

There was another little pause.

"Well," said the man upon the bed, "we've got this far. What's the programme from this point on regarding these decorations?" He raised his hands to indicate what he meant.

"That's what I want to talk with you about," answered the

other. “The rest of the folks on this boat don’t know anything about us—not a blessed thing. The officers don’t know—nor the crew, nor any of the passengers, I reckon. To them we’re just two ordinary Americans crossing the ocean together on business or pleasure. You give me your promise not to make any breaks of any sort, and I’ll take those things off you and not put them on again until just before we land. You know I want to make this trip as easy as I can for you.”

“What earthly difference would it make whether I gave you my promise or not? Suppose, as you put it, I did make a break? Where would I break for out in the middle of the Atlantic Ocean? Are you still afraid of yourself?”

“Certainly not; certainly I ain’t afraid. At that, you’ve been back and forth plenty of times across the ocean, and you know all the ropes on a ship and I don’t. Still, I ain’t afraid. But I’d like to have your promise.”

“I won’t give it,” said he of the handcuffs promptly. “I’m through with making offers to you. Four days ago when you caught up with me, I told you I would go with you and make no resistance—make no attempt to get away from you—if you’d only leave my limbs free. You knew as well as I did that I was willing to waive extradition and go back without any fuss or any delay, in order to keep my people in this country from finding out what a devil’s mess I’d gotten myself into over on the other side. You knew I was not really a criminal, that I’d done nothing at all which an American court would construe as a crime. You knew that because I was an American the British courts would probably be especially hard upon me. And you knew too—you found that part out for yourself without my telling you—that I was intending to go back to England at the first chance. You knew that all I needed was a chance to get at certain papers and documents and produce them in open court to prove that I was being made a scapegoat; you knew that if I had just two days free on British soil, in which to get the books from the place those lying partners of mine hid them, I could save myself from doing penal servitude. That was why I meant to go back of my own accord. That was why I offered to give you my word of honour that I would not attempt to get away. Did you listen? No!”

“Well, didn’t I make the whole thing as easy for you as I could?” protested his companion. He spoke as if in self-defence, or at least in extenuation.

“Easy? Didn’t you put these things on me? Haven’t I worn them every minute since then, awake or asleep, except when I was dressing or undressing?”

“What’s the use of going into all that all over again? This was too big a case for me to be taking any risks. I’d had a hard enough job locating you; I couldn’t afford to lose you. Let me ask you a few questions: Didn’t we travel all the way from Denver in a stateroom, so that outside of the conductors and a couple of porters there wasn’t a soul knew you was in trouble? Didn’t I show you how to carry that overcoat over your arms when we were changing cars at Chicago, and again coming across New York to-night, so’s nobody would catch on? Didn’t I steer clear of reporters all along the line? Didn’t I keep it all a secret when I was sending the wire on ahead to book the passage?”

He paused; then remembered something else:

“Didn’t I go to the trouble of buying a lighter pair of cuffs than the ones I usually use and having an extra link set in the chain so as to keep your arms from cramping, wearing them? Yes, I did—I did all those things and you can’t deny it.

“Nobody on this boat suspects anything,” he went on. “Nobody here knows you’re Bronston, wanted in London for that Atlas Investment Company swindle, and I’m Keller, chief operative for the Sharkey Agency. So far as anybody else knows we’re just Mr. Brown and Mr. Cole, a couple of friends travelling together. Until the day we land over there on the other side you can keep on being Mr. Brown and I’ll keep on being Mr. Cole. I’ll keep this stateroom door locked at night just to be on the safe side. And seeing as we’ve got seats together at the same table I guess we’d better make a point of taking our meals together at the same time. Otherwise, you

can do just what you please and go where you please and I won't bother you. These folks on this boat will think we're just a couple of pretty close friends." He fished a key ring out of his pocket, selected a certain key and bent over the other man. "Here, hold your hands up for a minute. You ought to be glad enough to get rid of those darbies. There!"

He lifted the opened bracelets off his prisoner's wrists and pitched them, clinking, upon the bedcover.

"Have it your own way," said the freed Bronston. "But remember, I've had my say. I'm making no pledges, now or hereafter." With his fingers, which were long and slender, he chafed his flesh where the steel had bruised it red.

"Oh, all right, all right," answered Keller; "I'm willing to take the chance—although there ain't really any chance to take. I'll get these things out of sight first thing."

He picked up the handcuffs and dropped them into a pocket of his ulster where it lay on the one chair in the room, and wadded a handkerchief down into the pocket upon them. "Now, then, everything is shipshape and proper. There's no reason why we can't be pals for three or four days anyway. And now what do you say to turning in and getting a good night's rest? I'm good and tired and I guess you are too."

Whistling to himself like a man well satisfied with the latest turn in a difficult situation, he began to undress. The other followed suit. They were both in their pajamas and both were in bed and the lights had been put out before Bronston spoke:

"Mind you, Keller," he said, "I'm not fooled to any great extent by this change in attitude on your part."

"What do you mean?" asked Keller sharply.

"Well," said Bronston, "I can't help but realise that you've got a selfish and a personal motive of your own for doing what you've just done. You're bound to know that if the truth about us were to get out the people on this boat probably wouldn't value your company any higher than they'd value mine—maybe not so highly as they might value mine."

Keller sat up in bed.

"I don't get you," he said. "Just what do you mean by that?"

"You're a private detective, aren't you?"

"Well, what of it?" demanded Keller. "What's wrong with my being a private detective?"

"I didn't mean to hurt your feelings," said Bronston, suddenly grown drowsy. He settled his head down in the pillow and rolled over on his side, turning his back to his roommate. "Let's go to sleep."

Instantly he seemed to be off; he began drawing long, heavy breaths. With a snort Keller settled down, uttering grumbled protests in an injured and puzzled tone. Presently he slept, too, with the choky snores of a very weary man.

So far as we know they both slept the sleep of travel-worn men until morning. It was seven o'clock and the sunlight was flooding in at the porthole when their bathroom steward knocked upon the outer panels of their door, at first softly, then more briskly. When they had roused and answered him, he told them that their baths were ready and waiting for them; also that the weather was fine and the sea smooth. It was Bronston who went first to the bathroom. He had come back, and was dressing himself when Keller, after clearing his throat several times, reopened a subject which seemingly had laid uppermost in his dormant mind while he slept.

"Say, Bronston," he began in an aggrieved voice, "what made you say what you said just after we turned in last night —about private detectives, you know?"

"Oh, let it drop," answered Bronston, as though the topic were of no consequence.

"No," pressed Keller, "I won't let it drop. I'd like to know what you meant. I don't care much for that sort of talk."

Bronston had his shaving kit open and was soaping his cheeks in front of a small mirror at a stationary washstand in the corner of the room. He turned with the lather brush in his hand.

“If you insist then,” he said, “I’ll tell you what I meant. If the facts about our relationship should get out—if the truth should leak out in any way—I’m inclined to think there might be some sympathy for me aboard this ship. People are apt to have a sympathy for any man who’s in trouble through no real fault of his own, especially as there are apt to be people on this boat—Americans—who’ve heard some of the inside history of this trouble I’m in. They might believe me when I told them that I was an innocent party to the transaction, especially as there is no way, as things stand now, of my proving my innocence. But you’re a private detective, and at the risk of wounding your feelings I’m going to repeat something which you probably realise already, and that is that people at large don’t particularly fancy a person of your calling in life. No, nor the calling either. I presume you remember, don’t you, what the biggest detective in America said not so very long ago in a signed article? He said most of the private detective agencies were recruited from among ex-convicts—said a big percentage of the private detectives in the United States were jailbirds and evidence-fixers and blackmailers and hired thugs!”

“I don’t care what Burns or anybody else said.” Keller’s voice betokened indignation. “I may not have had as much education as some other people, but I’ve made my own way in the world and I’m no crook, nor no old lag neither. There’s nobody got anything on me. Besides, unless somebody tells ’em, how’re they going to know what line of business I’m in, any more than they’ll know, just from looking at you, that you’re on your way back to London to stand trial for a felony?”

“My friend,” said Bronston gently, “everything about you spells private detective. You’ve got it written all over you in letters a foot high.”

“What now, for instance, gives me away?” There was incredulity in the question, but also there was a tinge of doubtfulness too.

“Everything about you, or nearly everything, gives you away—your clothes, your shoes, your moustache. But particularly it’s your shoes and your moustache. I wonder why all detectives wear those broad-toed, heavy-soled shoes?” he added, half to himself.

“What’s wrong with my moustache?” asked Keller, craning to contemplate himself over Bronston’s shoulder in the mirror. “Seems to me you used to wear a moustache yourself. The description that was sent to our people said you wore one, and your not wearing it made it all the harder for me to trail you when I was put on the case.”

“Oh, I cut mine off months ago,” said Bronston, “and besides it was always a modest, close-cropped affair. I never wore the ends of my moustache turned up like a cow’s horns.” He glanced at Keller quizzically. “Honestly, aside from any other considerations, I think you’d look better without one.”

“Let’s drop the moustache part,” said Keller, who seemed nettled. “Tell me, what’s wrong with my clothes?”

“To be frank,” criticised Bronston, “you run just a bit to extremes. There’s that cap you bought yesterday evening when we stopped at that store on our way across town. It struck me as being—well, a trifle loud.”

“I don’t see anything wrong with this cap, if you’re asking me,” said Keller. He drew it forth from his opened handbag and slipped it on his head. It slipped down until his ears stopped it; its owner whistled in astonishment. “Yes, by gee!” he exclaimed, “there is something wrong with it too—it’s too large.” He drew it off and examined the little tag pasted in the crown. “Why, it’s a full half size too large.” He turned to Bronston.

“You told the clerk what numbers we wanted. Remember, don’t you, offering to attend to that while I was getting me a bathrobe, so as to save time? See if he made any mistake in yours?”

Bronston slid on the cap he had bought, a plain grey one; it stuck on the top of his head.

“Yes,” he said, “the idiot must have got the sizes twisted.

This one is a half size too small for me."

"And mine's a half size too large," said Keller. "I suppose we'll have to trade."

"There's nothing else to do," said Bronston, "although I can't say I fancy this plaid design much."

In accordance with the plan of Keller, as stated the night before, they went to breakfast together to find that they had been assigned places at a five-seated, circular table on the balcony of the dining saloon. Their tablemates were an elderly couple, who said little to each other and nothing at all to strangers, and a tall, reserved, exceedingly silent Englishman. The indefinable something that marked these two men as hailing from different circles and different environments was accentuated in their table manners. Keller ate correctly enough, but there was a suggestion of grossness about him, an awkwardness in his fashion of holding his fork while he cut his ham. But he watched Bronston closely, and before the end of the meal had begun to copy Bronston's method of handling a fork.

They had quit the dining room and sought out the location of their deck chairs when, for the first time, the detective seemed to become aware that Bronston's cheeks were rosy and smooth, whereas a roughened stubble covered his own jowls. "I think I'll go below and take a shave," he said, running the palm of his hand over his chops.

"Use my safety, if you feel like it," suggested Bronston casually. "There's a new blade in it."

Half an hour later, when Bronston invaded the stateroom to get a pocketful of cigars, Keller stood facing the mirror, putting on his collar and tie.

"I couldn't find my razor," he said, with his head turned away from Bronston; "I must've left it on that Chicago train. And yet I'd have sworn I put it into my valise. So I had to use yours. But you were wrong when you said it had a new blade in it. If that's a new blade I'll eat it. It mighty near pulled my upper lip off."

"Your upper lip?" echoed Bronston instantly.

"Sure," said Keller. There was a touch of embarrassment in his tone as he faced Bronston. "I took your advice about this moustache of mine—clipped it close with the scissors and then gave myself the twice-over with your safety." His upper lip showed bare; the skin had a bleached look and was raw from the scraping it had just undergone.

As Keller passed out of the room, caressing the place where his moustache had been, Bronston noted that Keller had made other changes in his person. Keller had exchanged the bright green tie which he wore at breakfast for a dull brown bow; and he had put on a lighter pair of shoes—patent-leather shoes, with thin soles and buttoned uppers. His broad-toed, heavy-soled pair showed under his bed where he had shoved them.

Conceding the weather to be fair, as in this instance it assuredly was, the majority of the passengers upon a big liner eastward bound give over their first day at sea to getting used to their new and strange surroundings, to getting lost in various odd corners of the ship and finding themselves again, to asking questions about baggage gone astray, to wondering why they are not seasick. As regards the two principal characters of this narrative, nothing of interest occurred during the first day except that Keller went below late in the afternoon to take a nap, and that shortly before dark, when he had waked, Bronston limped in with a look of pain upon his face, to report that while watching a lifeboat drill he had got a foot hurt.

"A clumsy ass of a coal passer dropped his oar and hit me right on the big toe with the butt of it," he explained. "I didn't give him away, because the second officer was right there and I judged he would have given the poor devil fits for being so careless. But it hurts like the very mischief."

He got his left shoe off and sat for a bit caressing the bruised member.

“The skin isn’t broken evidently,” he continued, in response to Keller’s inquiries concerning the extent of the injury; “but there’s some swelling and plenty of soreness.” He started to put his shoe back on his stockinged foot, but halted with a groan.

“If you don’t mind,” he said to Keller, “I’m going to wear those heavy shoes of yours for a day or two. They’re easier than mine and broader in the toe.”

“Help yourself,” agreed Keller. “Seeing as we’ve swapped caps we might as well swap shoes too. Anyhow, I kind of like this pair I’ve got on, even if they do pinch a little.” He contemplated his shining extremities admiringly. Shortly afterward they went up to dinner. After dinner Bronston found reason for returning to the stateroom. Here he did a strange thing. He dropped a pair of perfectly good shoes out of the porthole.

Conceding further that on a big liner’s second day out the weather continues fine, the Americans among the first-cabin passengers begin making acquaintances; and, under official guidance, go on trips of exploration and discovery to the engine room and the steerage and the steward’s domain. Card games are organised and there is preliminary talk of a ship’s concert. The British travellers, on the other hand, continue for the most part to hold themselves aloof. This also was true of the second day’s passage of the *Mesopotamia*.

Keller—or Cole, to use the name which he now used—met some congenial fellow countrymen in the smoking room and played bridge with them for small stakes during most of the afternoon. Bronston, who apparently did not care for cards, saw his warder only at the lunch hour, preferring to spend the time in his steamer chair upon the deck, enjoying the air, which was balmy and neither too warm nor yet too cool, but just right. Presently as he sat there he fell into a conversation—which was at first desultory, although it shortly took on a more animated character—with a rather fluffy young lady who occupied the steamer chair next his own. She dropped a book which she had been reading; he picked it up and returned it to her. That was how it started, at first with an interchange of polite commonplaces, then with a running bestowal of small confidences on the part of the young lady, who proved to be talkative.

By bits and snatches it developed that her name was Miss Lillian Cartwright and that her home was in Evanston, Illinois. There were several other Evanston people on the boat—she pointed out a group of them some distance down the deck—but she was not travelling with them. She was travelling with her uncle, Major Slocum. Perhaps her new acquaintance had heard of her uncle, Major Slocum? He was a prominent attorney in Chicago, quite a prominent attorney, and he was also on the staff of the present governor of Illinois, and in former years had taken a deep interest in the welfare of the Illinois National Guard.

“Possibly you may have seen his name in the papers,” she said. “Uncle is always getting into the papers.”

Bronston rather thought he had heard the name. Miss Cartwright talked on. This was her first trip at sea. She had expected that she would be seasick, but on the contrary she felt splendid; not a suggestion of seasickness so far. Really she felt almost disappointed—as though she had been cheated out of something. But seriously, wasn’t the sea just perfectly lovely? She loved the sea. And she loved the *Mesopotamia* too; it was so big and so roomy and the officers were so polite; and even the seamen were accommodating about answering questions. She was always going to travel on the *Mesopotamia* after this. They—her uncle and she—were on their way to Scotland to visit her married sister who lived there. It wasn’t certain yet whether they would leave the ship at Fishguard and run up to London for a day or two, or go straight on to Liverpool and from there take the train for Scotland and stop off in London on the way back. Her uncle rather favoured going on to Liverpool. Here Bronston found a chance to slip in a word or two.

"I'm sure I've noticed your uncle—tall, isn't he, and distinguished and rather military looking? I should like very much to meet him. You might introduce him to me, and then perhaps he would be good enough to introduce us two properly to each other. I answer to the name of Brown." He stood up and lifted his cap. "I expect to be back in a little while."

The plan seemed to please Miss Cartwright. "That would be fun, wouldn't it?" she said, as Bronston moved off up the deck.

It is possible that she repeated to her uncle what Bronston—or Brown—had said. For when Bronston happened along again a few minutes later, Major Slocum was sitting with his niece, and upon being introduced, arose and clasped Mr. Bronston's hand with a warm cordiality. The Major was one of those native-born Demosthenes with a stiff spine and a fine mane of rather long, iron-grey hair. His manner of speech betrayed him instantly as one addicted to after-dinner oratory. Instinctively, as it were, one gathered that his favourite toast was The Ladies—God Bless 'Em.

As he confided to his niece afterward, the Major found this Mr. Brown to be an exceedingly well-mannered, well-informed person; and indeed the conversation did cover a wide range of subjects that afternoon.

It first took on a briskened tone when a lone porpoise came tumbling across the waves to race with the ship. From porpoises the talk turned to whales, and from whales to icebergs, and from icebergs to disasters at sea, and from that to discipline aboard ship, and from that to discipline in the army and in the national guard, which was where Major Slocum shone. Thence very naturally it drifted to a discussion of police discipline as it existed in certain of the larger American cities, notably New York and Chicago, and thence to police corruption and crime matters generally. Here Mr. Bronston, who had until now been third in the conversational output, displayed a considerable acquaintance with methods of crime detection. He knew about the Bertillon system and about finger-print identifications, and what was more he knew how to talk about them—and he did. There are two classes of people who are interested in shop talk of crime—those who know something of the subject and those who do not. Miss Cartwright and Major Slocum listened attentively to most of what the young man had to say, and both professed themselves as having been deeply entertained.

It followed, quite in the order of things, therefore, that the three of them should agree to meet in the lounge after dinner and take their coffee together. They did meet there, and the evening was made to pass both pleasantly and rapidly. The Major, who told quite a considerable number of his best stories, was surprised when eleven o'clock arrived. Meanwhile, Keller played bridge in the smoking room. He didn't turn in until after midnight, finding Bronston already in bed.

At the latter's suggestion they breakfasted abed the following morning; and so the forenoon was well spent when they got upon deck. Fine weather continuing, the ship ran a steady course. The side-to-side motion was barely perceptible. Having finished the prescribed morning constitutional—twelve times round the ship—Miss Cartwright was sitting in her steamer-chair, feeling just a wee bit lonely and finding so smooth a crossing just a trifle monotonous, when Bronston came up, looking spick and span. She preened herself, greeting him with sprightly words, and when after a few minutes of small talk he offered to initiate her into the mysteries of horse billiards, up on the boat deck, she accepted the invitation instantly.

They went up and the young lady proved an apt and willing pupil. There on the boat deck Major Slocum presently found them. He didn't care to play, but he kept score for them. The Major put the sonorous emphasis of the true orator's delivery into everything he said; his calling off of the count invested it with the solemnity and vocal beauty of a well-delivered ritual.

Presently when the game was over and they sat, all three, side by side upon a bench in the lee of one of the huge

ventilator funnels, the younger man spoke up and said he was afraid Miss Cartwright must be getting chilled without a wrap. She insisted that she was perfectly comfortable, but masterfully declaring that she needed better protection for her shoulders than a silken blouse and a light jacket he got up.

"I'll just run down and get my grey ulster," he said. "I think I left it in my chair."

Leaving uncle and niece together he hurried below. True enough, his grey ulster dangled across the arm of the steamer chair, but after picking it up he made a trip on down to D-deck and spent perhaps a minute in his stateroom with the door closed. No, probably it wasn't more than half a minute that he spent there. At any rate he was back upon the boat deck almost immediately, holding up the coat while Miss Cartwright slipped her arms into the sleeves. All women like to be waited on and most women like to wear masculine garments of one sort or another. He buttoned the collar about her throat and she smiled up at him her appreciation of his thoughtfulness.

"Aren't men's overcoats just adorable!" she babbled; "so big and warm and comfy and everything! And they have such lovely big pockets! The very next coat I get is going to be made like a man's, and have some of those nice big pockets in it." She shoved her hands deep into the side pockets in what she fondly conceived to be a mannish manner.

"Why, what's this?" she asked. "There's something heavy and jingly in——"

She stopped short, for the owner of the ulster was looking at her meaningly and shaking his head as a signal for silence.

"What did you say, my dear?" inquired her uncle absently.

"Nothing," she answered, but her fingers continued to explore the depths of the pocket, and into her eyes came a half-puzzled, half-excited look. She opened her lips as though to speak, then closed them with an effort.

Bronston proposed another go at horse billiards—just a short game before luncheon. Again the Major volunteered to score for them. The game was still going on when Keller appeared. He stopped within easy hailing distance of the trio.

"About ready for luncheon?" he called out, addressing Bronston.

"Just a minute or so," answered Bronston, and went on showing his pupil how to make a certain shot.

Keller took a turn up and down the deck. He felt rather out of the picture somehow. His appetite was active too; trust the North Atlantic air for that. He took a turn or two more, growing hungrier with every step. Five minutes passed, and still the game showed no sign of breaking up. He swung about and approached them.

"Say," he said, seeking to put a subtle shade of meaning into his words, "I'd like to go to lunch—if you don't mind."

"Oh, very well," said Bronston; "we'll stop, then." Keller advanced until he was quite near them. As he did so he became aware that Miss Cartwright was staring hard at him. Bronston, all of a sudden, seemed to remember the small proprieties of the occasion.

"Miss Cartwright, Major Slocum," he said, "this is my—this is Mr.—" he hesitated the merest fraction of a second—"Mr. Cole, who is travelling with me this trip."

Miss Cartwright nodded, the Major bowed, Keller pulled off his cap. They descended the steps in a straggling procession, Miss Cartwright and Bronston being in front, the Major next and Keller bringing up the rear. At the foot of the stairs Bronston addressed the young lady.

"I'll relieve you of my coat now," he said. "I'm afraid you did find it rather heavy." He looked straight into her eyes as he spoke and touched his lips with a forefinger. She nodded back to show she thoroughly understood the signal, and then he took the ulster across his arm and he and Keller moved on ahead.

"Look here, Bronston," grumbled Keller when they were out of earshot of the Major and his niece, "you acted kind of

funny up yonder. It looked to me like you didn't care much about introducing me to your swell friends."

"To tell you the truth," apologised Bronston, "I forgot for the moment what your travelling name was—couldn't remember whether it was Cole, or something else. That's why I hung fire. It did make the situation a bit awkward, didn't it? I'm sorry."

"Oh, all right," said Keller; "that explains it. But I was a little sore just for a minute."

At the door leading into the first cross hall Bronston glanced back over his shoulder. Miss Cartwright and her uncle were not following them. They had halted upon an untenanted stretch of deck, and the young woman was saying something to her uncle and accenting with gestures what she said. Her hands moved with the briskness which generally accompanies an eager disclosure of important tidings. The Major, his stately head bent to hear her, was nevertheless looking at the vanishing figures of the two men.

Bronston smiled gently to himself as he and Keller crossed the threshold and headed for the dining saloon. He didn't go near Miss Cartwright or Major Slocum again that day, but in the course of the afternoon he, watching from a distance, saw her in earnest conversation with two of her friends from Evanston—and both of these two were women. Immediately Bronston went below and stayed there. He didn't even get up for dinner. The excuse he gave Keller, when Keller came in at dinnertime, was that he wanted to go over some papers connected with his case. The small desk at which he sat was littered with papers and he was steadily making notes upon a scratch pad. He asked Keller to ask their dining-room steward to bring him a light meal upon a tray.

At this point we digress, in order to drag in the fact that this ship, the *Mesopotamia*, was one of the largest ships afloat at this time. The following year there would be bigger ones in commission, but for the moment she ranked among the largest. She was over eight hundred feet long and of a beam measurement and a hull depth to correspond; but even upon a craft of such amplified proportions as this was news travels with amazing rapidity, especially if it be news calculated to arouse and to excite. Such a ship might be likened to a small, compact town set afloat, with all the social ramifications of a small town and with all of a small town's curiosity regarding the private affairs of the neighbours. Ashore gossip flies swiftly enough, goodness only knows; at sea it flits from point to point, as if on the wings of the swallow. What one knows every one else knows, and knows it very soon too.

The digression is concluded. Let us return to the main thread of our narrative. Let us go back to the joint occupants of D-forty.

It was nine-twenty that same evening when Keller broke in upon his companion, who sat at the little desk, still busied with his writing. Keller seemed flustered, not to say indignant. He slammed the door behind him viciously.

"Somebody's on," he stated, speaking with disconsolate conviction. "I know I haven't said anything, and it don't stand to reason that you'd be talking; but they're on."

"On what?" inquired Bronston calmly.

"On to us—that's what! It's leaked out who we are."

"What makes you think that?"

"I don't think anything about it—I know. I've got the proofs. We had our little game all fixed up for to-night—me and the same three fellows I've been playing with right along; but when I looked them up in the smoking room after dinner they all three excused themselves—said they didn't feel like playing. Well, that was all right, but a little later I saw Latham and Levy joining in a game with two other men, both strangers to me. So I tried to get into another game that was just starting up, and the fellows there horned me out. I could tell they didn't want to be playing with me. And going through the lounge I tumbled, all of a sudden, to the fact that all the people there, men and women both, were looking hard at me and nodding to one another—get what I mean? Maybe they

didn’t think I saw them—I didn’t let on, of course—but I did see ’em. I tell you they’re on. Say, what do you know about a lot of stuck-up people passing up a man cold, just because they’ve found out some way that he’s a private detective?”

Overcome by his feelings he snorted in disgust. Then added, as an afterthought: “Well, what’s the next move? What do you think we’d better do now?”

Bronston considered a moment before answering.

“If your suspicions are correct I take it the best thing for us to do is to stay away from the other passengers as much as we possibly can during the rest of this trip. At least that’s what I figure on doing—with your consent.”

“How about that Miss What’s-her-name, the girl who was with you this morning?” asked Keller. “How are you going to cut her out?”

“That’s simple enough—merely by not going near her, that’s all,” said Bronston. “Admitting that you are right and that we have been recognised, the young woman probably wouldn’t care to be seen in my company anyhow. As things seem to stand now it might be embarrassing for her.”

“I guess you’ve got the right dope,” said Keller. “If anybody objects to my company they know what they can do. What do you figure on doing—sticking here in the room?”

“Remaining in a stateroom for a day or so won’t be much of a privation to a man who faces the prospect of being locked up in an English jail indefinitely,” said Bronston. “It’ll merely be a sort of preliminary training. Besides, we ought to reach shore to-morrow night or the next morning. I shall certainly stay where I am.”

“Me too, I guess,” said Keller dolorously. “I sure was enjoying that little game, though.”

After all, as it turned out, Keller wouldn’t have cared to leave his quarters anyhow on the next day. For overnight the sea, so placid and benignant until now, developed a passing fit of temperament. In the morning the sea wasn’t exactly what you would call rough, but on the other hand it wasn’t exactly what you would call absolutely smooth; and Keller, being a green traveller, awoke with a headache and a feeling of squeamishness in his stomach, and found it no privation to remain upon the flat of his back. Except for a trip to the bathroom Bronston did not venture out of the room either. He read and wrote and smoked and had his meals brought to him. Keller couldn’t touch food.

So the situation stood in the middle of the afternoon when there came a gentle knock at the door. Keller was dozing then, but roused himself as Bronston called out to know what was wanted. The voice which answered through the panels was the voice of their bedroom steward, Lawrence.

“I’ve a wireless, sir,” he said; “just received from the coast. It’s addressed to ‘Sharkey Agency’s Operative, aboard Steamship *Mesopotamia*,’ and the wireless operator brought it to the purser, sir, and the purser told me to bring it to this stateroom. Was that right, sir?”

Keller sat up with a groan. His head was swimming.

“Stay where you are,” said Bronston; “I’ll get it for you”; and before Keller could swing his feet to the floor Bronston had unbolted the door and had taken the message from Lawrence’s hand. The steward, standing outside, had time only to murmur his inevitable “Thank you, sir,” and catch one peep at the interior of the stateroom before the door was closed in his face. Bronston turned and handed the sealed envelope to Keller.

“What did I tell you last night about ’em all being on?” said Keller. “A message comes with no name on it, and yet they know right where to send it. And, say, did you get a flash at the look on that steward’s face? Somebody’s been telling that guy something too.”

He opened the brown envelope and glanced at the small sheet that it contained. “The London officer will meet us at Liverpool,” he said, as he crumpled the paper and tossed it aside. “We land at the other place first, don’t we—Fishhawk,

or whatever its name is?"

"Fishguard," Bronston told him. "Or rather, we stop off Fishguard, and tenders come out to meet us and to take off mail and passengers. Then the ship goes on to Liverpool."

"Good enough," said Keller. "You and me will stay right here in this stateroom until we get to Liverpool; that'll be some time to-morrow, won't it?"

"To-morrow afternoon, probably," said Bronston. He went back to his writing, whistling a little tune to himself.

The precaution of the overcareful Keller proved unnecessary, because in the morning word was brought by the bathroom steward that a notice had just been posted in the gangway opposite the purser's desk announcing that because of the roughness of the channel the liner would proceed straight to Liverpool without stopping off Fishguard at all. Nevertheless, the detective kept the stateroom door locked. With land in sight he was taking no chances at all.

Since their stateroom was on the port side and the hills of Wales stood up out of the sea upon the other side, they saw nothing of Fishguard as the *Mesopotamia* steamed on up the choppy channel. Mainly they both were silent; each was busy with his own thoughts and speculations. Hampered in their movements by the narrow confines of their quarters they packed their large bags and their small ones, packing them with care and circumspection, the better to kill the time that hung upon their hands. Finally Bronston, becoming dissatisfied with his own bestowal of his belongings, called in the handy Lawrence to do the job all over again for him.

As the shifting view through their porthole presently told them, they left the broad channel for the twistywise river. The lightships which dot the Mersey above its mouth, like street-lamps along a street, were sliding by when Lawrence knocked upon the door to ask if the luggage was ready for shore. He was told to return in a few minutes; but instead of going away he waited outside in the little corridor.

"Well," said Keller, "I guess we'd better be getting up on deck, hadn't we?" He glanced sidewise at the shiny steel cuffs, which he had fished out from an ulster pocket and which lay upon the rumpled covers of his bed. Alongside them was the key of the door.

"I suppose so," said Bronston indifferently; "I'll be with you in a minute." With his back half turned to Keller he was adjusting the seemingly refractory buckle of a strap which belonged about one of the valises. He had found it necessary to remove the strap from the bag.

"Hello, what's this?" he said suddenly. The surprise in his tone made Keller look. Bronston had leaned across the foot of his bed and from a wall pocket low down against the wainscoting had extracted something.

"Why, it's a razor," he said, holding it up; "and what's more it looks like your razor—the one you thought you'd lost."

"That's what it is," said Keller, taking it from him. "I wonder how in thunder it got itself hid there? I'll stick it in my pocket."

"Better not," advised Bronston. "If I'm not mistaken it is against the English law to carry a razor upon the person. A locked valise would be a better place for it, I should say."

"I guess you're right," agreed Keller. "In a strange country it's just as well to be careful."

He turned and stooped down, fumbling with the hasps upon his small handbag. As he did, something supple and quick descended in a loop over his head and shoulders. In an instantaneous flash of alarm he sensed that it was the same broad strap which he had seen a moment before in the hands of the other man. As he straightened with an exclamation of surprise, the strap was violently tightened from behind, the tough leather squeaking under the strain as the tongue of the buckle slipped through a handy hole; and there he was, trussed fast about the middle, with his arms bound down against his sides just at the elbows, so that his lower arms flapped in the futile fashion of a penguin's wings. He cried out then, cursing and wriggling and straining. But a man who

would have been his equal in bodily vigour even though his limbs were unhampered was upon him from the rear, pitching him forward on his bed, face downward, wrestling him over on his side, muffling his face in a twist of bed clothing, then forcing his wrists together and holding them so while there was a jingle of steel chain and a snapping together of steel jaws. Half suffocated under the weight of his antagonist, with his mouth full of blanket and his eyes blinded, overpowered, tricked, all but helpless, lashing out with his feet in a vain protest against this mishandling, Keller now was dimly aware of a wallet being hurriedly removed from his breast-pocket and of something else of equal bulk being substituted for it. Then he was yanked upon his feet, a cap was jammed upon his head, the leather noose about his body was cast off, and he stood unsteadily—a composite picture of dishevelment, dismay, chagrin and rage—wearing upon his two clamped hands the same gyves which his conqueror had worn when they boarded the ship.

"You'll pay for this—I'll make you pay for this!" he sputtered. "I'll show you up! Damn you, take these things off of me!" and he tugged impotently at his bonds until his wrist-bones threatened to dislocate themselves. "You ain't got a chance to get away with this—not a chance," he cried. "I'll raise this whole ship! I'll——"

"Rest perfectly easy," said Bronston calmly, soothingly almost, as he flung the strap aside and stepped back. "The ship has already been raised, or a part of it. If you weren't so excited you would know that our friend Lawrence has been trying to get in the door for the last half minute or so. I think he must have heard you kicking. Let us admit him."

He had the key in his hands—in the stress and fever of the encounter he had even remembered, this thoughtful man, to secure the key. And now, with his eyes turned toward the captive, who remained stupefied at this inexplicable manœuvre, he was stepping backward and unfastening the door, and swinging it open for the admission of the astounded servant.

"Lawrence," snapped Bronston in the voice of authority and command, "I want you. My man here tried to give me the slip and I had to use a little violence to secure him. Bring these bags and come along with us to the deck. I shall possibly need your help in making the explanations which may be necessary. Understand, don't you?"

Reaching backward, he slipped a shining gold coin into Lawrence's palm; he slid into a grey ulster; he advanced a step and fastened a firm hand upon the crook of Keller's fettered right arm. Involuntarily the captive sought to pull away.

"I keep telling you you ain't got a chance," he blurted. "I'll go to the captain——"

"No, my noisy friend, you won't go to the captain," Bronston broke in on his tirade, "but you'll be taken to him." With a forward swing he thrust Keller across the threshold and they bumped together in the narrow cross hall. "Come along now, Lawrence, and look sharp," he bade the pop-eyed steward over his shoulder.

We may briefly sketch the details of the trip through the passageway, and up the steps from D-deck to C-deck and from C-deck to B, for really it occupied less time than would be required for a proper description of it. Suffice it to say that it was marked by many protestations and by frequent oaths and by one or two crisp commands and once by a small suggestion of a struggle. These sounds heralded the progress of the trio as they moved bumpingly along, so that the first officer, catching untoward noises which rose above the chatter of the passengers who surrounded him, garbed and ready for the shore, stepped back from the deck into the cabin foyer, followed by a few first-cabin folk who, like him, had heard the clamour and had gathered that something unusual must be afoot.

The first officer barred the way of the procession. He was a competent and self-possessed young man, else he would not have been the first officer. At sight of his brass buttons and

gold-braided sleeves Keller, still striving to cast off Bronston's hold, emitted a cry of relief.

"Captain! Captain!" he yelled; "listen to me. Listen to me a minute, please."

"The captain is on the bridge until the ship has docked," answered the uniformed one. "I am the first officer. What is the trouble?"

"There is no trouble—now." It was Bronston speaking; speaking authoritatively and without outward signs of excitement. "Would you care to hear what I have to say, Mr. Officer?"

"I would."

"But, see here, I'm the one that's got a right to do the talking," burst in a frenzied gurgle from the sorely beset Keller. "You listen to me. This is an outrage!"

"One at a time," quoth the first officer in the voice of one accustomed to having his orders obeyed. "Proceed," he bade Bronston.

"You may have heard," stated Bronston, "that we are a detective and a prisoner. I believe there has been talk to that effect on board here for the past day or two."

The first officer—his name was Watts—nodded to indicate that such rumours had come to his ears.

"Very well, then," went on Bronston; "my man here will probably claim he is being kidnapped. That is his last hope." He smiled at this. "He tried to get away from me a bit ago. We had a tussle. The steward here heard us struggling. I overpowered him and ironed him. Now, for reasons best known to himself, I apprehend that he will claim that he is really the detective and that I am really the prisoner. Will you kindly look at us both and tell me, in your opinion, which is which?"

Dispassionately, judicially, First Officer Watts considered the pair facing him, while curious spectators crowded together in a semicircle behind him and a thickening stream of other first-cabin passengers poured in from off the deck, jostling up closely to feast their gaping eyes upon so sensational an episode. It took the young Englishman only a moment or two to make up his mind; a quick scrutiny was for him amply sufficient. For one of these men stood at ease; well set up, confident, not noticeably rumpled as to attire or flustered as to bearing. But the other: His coat was bunched up on his back, one trouser leg was pulled half way up his shin; his mussed hair was in his eyes; his cap was over one ear; his eyes undoubtedly had a most wild and desperate look; from his mouth came vain words and ravings. Finally there were those handcuffs. Handcuffs, considered as such, may not signify guilt, yet somehow they typify it. So far as First Officer Watts was concerned those handcuffs clinched the case. To his understanding they were *prima facie* evidence, exceedingly plausible and highly convincing. Promptly he delivered his opinion. It was significant that, in so doing, he addressed Bronston and ignored Keller:

"I'm bound to say, sir, the appearances are in favour of you. But there should be other proof, don't you think—papers or something?"

"Certainly," agreed Bronston. He drew a red leather wallet from his own breast-pocket and handed it over to Watts. Then, working deftly, he extracted half a dozen letters and a sheaf of manuscript notes from an inner pocket of Keller's coat and tendered them for examination; which crowning indignity rendered Keller practically inarticulate with madness. Watts scanned these exhibits briefly, paying particular attention to a formal-looking document which he drew from the red wallet.

"These things seem to confirm what you say," was his comment. He continued, however, to hold the written and printed testimony in his hands. He glanced at the impressive document again. "Hold on; this description of the man who is wanted says he has a moustache?"

"Oh, I'm going to offer you other proof, plenty of it," Bronston promised, cutting in on Keller, who grew more incoherently vocal with each moment. "Would you be so good

as to send for the ship’s barber?”

“Bring the barber!” ordered Watts of a wide-eyed cabin boy.

“This steward has served us since we came aboard,” went on Bronston, indicating Lawrence. “Now, my man, I want you to tell the truth. Which of us two seemed to be in charge on the night you first saw us—the night we came aboard—this man or I?”

“You, sir,” answered Lawrence. “I recall quite distinctly that ’twas you spoke to me about the ’eavy luggage.”

“Who took from you the wireless message which you brought yesterday to our stateroom, addressed to the representative of the Sharkey Detective Agency?”

“You, sir.”

“Who handed you your tip a few minutes ago for serving us during the voyage?”

“You did, thank you, sir.”

A figure of dignity pushed forward through the ring of excited spectators and a sonorous, compelling voice was raised impressively. Major Slocum had been late in arriving upon the scene, but what he now said earned for him instant attention.

“Mr. Officer,” announced the Major with a gesture which comprehended the central pair of figures, “you may accept it from me as an absolute and indisputable fact that this gentleman, who calls himself Brown, is a bona-fide detective. I gleaned as much from my conversation with him upon the occasion of our first meeting. He evinced a wide knowledge of police matters. Of the other person I know nothing, except that, since Brown is the detective, he must perforce be the prisoner.” He cleared his throat before going on:

“Moreover, deeply though I regret to bring a lady, and especially a young lady, into a controversy involving a person who is charged with crime”—here he blighted the hapless Keller with a glare—“deeply as I regret it, I may say that my niece is in position to supply further evidence.”

The crowd parted to admit Miss Lillian Cartwright, then closed in behind her. Excitement flushed the young lady’s cheeks becomingly. The first officer bowed to her:

“Pardon me, miss, but would you mind telling us what you know?”

“Why, I’ve known for two days—no, three days, I think—who they were,” stated Miss Cartwright. “Mr. Brown—the detective, you know—loaned me his ulster the other morning; and when I put it on I felt something—something heavy that jingled in the pocket. Mr. Brown didn’t seem to want me to take it out or speak about it. But at the very first chance I peeped in the pocket, and it was a pair of handcuffs. I’d never seen any handcuffs before—closely, I mean—so I peeped at them several times. They are the same handcuffs that are on that man now.”

“That was my overcoat he loaned you!” yelled Keller, waving his coupled hands up and down in his desperate yearning to be heard in his own defence. “Those handcuffs were in my overcoat pocket, I tell you, not in his.”

“Oh, no,” contradicted Miss Cartwright, most positively. “Yours is a brown ulster. I’ve seen you wearing it evenings on the deck. And this was a dark-grey ulster, the same one that Mr. Brown is wearing this very minute.

“And I remember, too, that on that very same morning you came up and asked Mr. Brown to take you to lunch, or rather you asked him to go to lunch so that you could go, too. You spoke to him twice about it—quite humbly, I thought.”

There were murmurs of applause at this. Another voice, unheard until now, spoke out, rising above the confused babbling. It was the voice of a sophisticated New Yorker addressing an equally sophisticated friend:

“There’s nothing to it, Herman! Look at those feet on Brown. Nobody but a bull would be wearing shoes like that. And pipe the plaid lid—a regulation plain-clothes man’s get-up, the whole thing is.”

“But those are my shoes he’s wearing,” wailed Keller, feeling the trap closing in upon him from every side. “Those are my shoes—I loaned ’em to him.”

“Lawrence,” said Bronston, “you’ve been giving our shoes to Boots and getting them back from him, haven’t you?”

“Yes, sir.”

“Are these shoes which I have on now the same shoes I’ve been wearing right along?”

“Oh, yes, sir, the same boots!”

“When you helped me pack my luggage to-day, did you notice any other shoes?”

“No, sir.”

“I wasn’t in my stocking feet when I came aboard, was I?”

“Oh, no, indeed, sir.” This with a respectful smile.

“Then these must be the only shoes I have or have had, mustn’t they?”

Before Lawrence could make answer to this question the ship’s barber appeared at the first officer’s elbow, touching his cap.

“You wanted me, sir?” he asked.

“I wanted you,” put in Bronston. “Look at me closely, please. How long would you say that it has been since I wore a moustache?”

With the air of a scientist examining a rare and interesting specimen, the barber considered the speaker’s upper lip.

“Not for some months, sir, I should say,” he announced with professional gravity, while all the audience craned their necks to hear his words.

“Now, then,” said Bronston, yanking Keller forward into the full light, “would you please look this prisoner over and tell us how long, in your opinion, it has been since he wore a moustache?”

A pause ensued; all waited for the decision.

“I should say, sir,” stated the barber at the end of half a minute, “that ’e’s been wearing a moustache lately—I should say that ’e must ’ave took it off quite recently. ’Is upper lip is still tender—tenderer than the rest of ’is face.”

“But I took it off since we sailed,” blared Keller. He turned furiously on Bronston. “Damn you, you conned me into taking it off!”

“Why should I do that?” parried Bronston coolly; his manner changed, becoming accusing. “Why should I persuade you to cut off the principal distinguishing mark as set forth in the description that was sent to our people from London, the thing which aided me in tracing and finding you?”

A sputtered bellow was the answer from Keller, and a suggestion of applause the response from the crowd. The popular verdict had been rendered. Before the tribunal of the onlookers the prisoner stood convicted of being rightfully and properly a prisoner. Even in his present state Keller realised this, and filled for the moment with a sullen resignation he dropped his manacled hands.

“Remember,” he groaned, “somebody’ll pay out big damages if you let this man off this ship. That’s all I’ve got to say now. He tricked me and he’ll trick you, too, if he can!”

“Mr. First Officer,” said Bronston, “hasn’t this farce gone far enough? Is there any lingering doubt in your mind regarding our proper identities?”

The first officer shook his head. “I am satisfied,” he said with unqualified conviction in his words; “quite satisfied. Indeed, sir, I was satisfied from the beginning. I only wished to be absolutely sure.”

“I thought as much,” said Bronston. “I am expecting a man from Scotland Yard to meet us here at Liverpool. Would you please bring him to me here? This man is dangerous, and I prefer to have assistance before taking him off the boat. Kindly explain the situation to the Scotland Yard man as he comes aboard, will you, please, and ask him to hurry.”

“I understand,” said Mr. Watts, moving back. “Clear the

way, please," he bade those about him. "We are about to dock, I think."

He was a bit late. The steamer had already swung to, broadside, alongside the long landing stage, and just as Mr. Watts, in a great hurry, reached the rail, the gangway went out. But before the first eager shoregoer could start down it, a square-jawed, stockily-built man, with short side whiskers, came briskly up it from the other end. He spoke ten words to the first officer, and the first officer, escorting him, bored back through the press to the foyer, explaining the situation in crisp sentences, as he made a path for the newcomer to the spot where Bronston, with his legs braced, was jamming the blasphemous and struggling Keller into an angle of the cabin wall. For Keller had once more grown violent. At sight of this the square-jawed man jumped forward to lend a hand.

"Inspector Drew, from Scotland Yard," he said, by way of introduction for himself as he grabbed for one of Keller's flailing legs.

"All right, inspector," answered Bronston, between hard-set teeth. "I'm glad to see you. I'm having trouble handling our man."

"So I see," said Drew, "but we'll cure that in a jiffy." He cured it by the expedient of throwing the whole weight of his body upon Keller. Together he and Bronston pressed the captive flat and helpless against the woodwork.

"The boat train is waiting," panted Drew in Bronston's ear. "Shall we get our man aboard?"

"I'm not going on any train!" snorted Keller, his voice rising to an agonised shriek.

"Oh, yes, but you are, me beauty!" said the inspector. "Get him by the other arm," he told Bronston. "I'll take care of him on this side."

Propelled by an irresistible force, held fast by strong grips upon his coat-collar and his elbows, shoved along, while his feet dragged and scuffled under him and his pinioned hands waggled the air impotently, hurried on so fast that his profane sputterings gurgled and died in his throat—thus and after such a fashion did the hapless, helpless Keller travel across the deck and through the crowd, which parted before him and closed in behind; thus did he progress, without halt, across the landing dock, on past the stand of the customs office and out at the other side of the dock, where, upon tracks that ran along the quay, a train stood with steam up. Bodily he was flung in at an open coach door; roughly he was spun about and deposited like a sack of oats upon the seat of a compartment, and Inspector Drew, gasping for breath but triumphant, shoved a knee into his heaving chest to keep him there.

"Whew, that was a job!" puffed Bronston, releasing his grasp of their still feebly struggling charge. "Inspector, can you keep him where he is for just a minute or two? I'll see to it that the baggage is brought here."

"I can keep the gentleman quiet," said Drew, mending his grip and shoving down hard upon the wriggling human cushion beneath him.

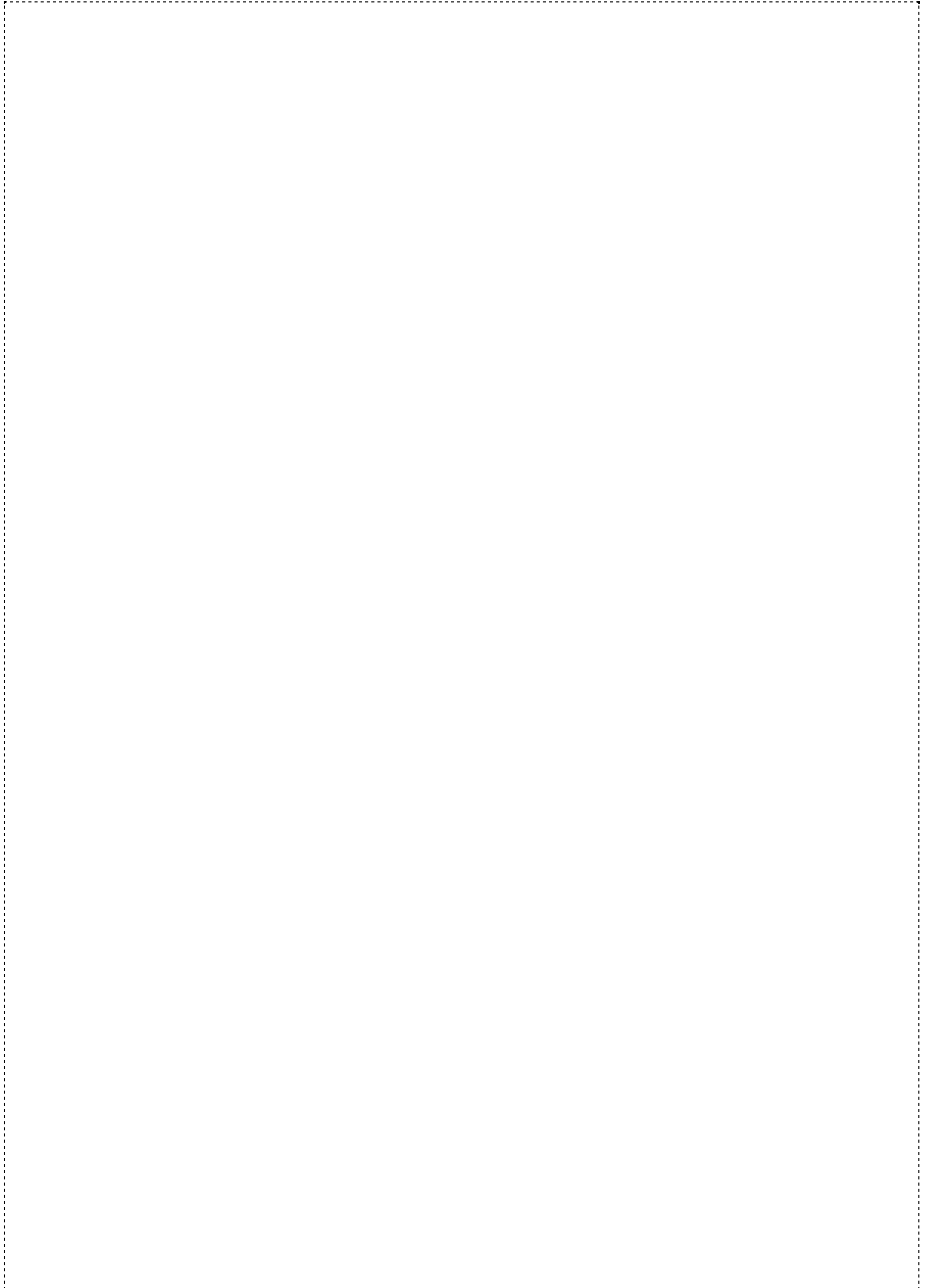
"For God's sake, don't let him get away! Don't——" The rest was but muffled gurglings and snortings, made meaningless and wordless by a sinewy, tweed-clad forearm, which was jammed across poor Keller's face with crushing and extinguishing violence.

"Go get your baggage," panted Inspector Drew. "He'll stay right 'ere with me, no fear." So Bronston stepped down out of the compartment and slammed the door fast behind him.

As the passengers of the *Mesopotamia* come swarming aboard the boat train, and as the boat train prepares to pull out for London, we may as well leave the inspector and the handcuffed detective wrestling there together in the narrow confines of that English railway compartment.

Because that was where Bronston left them.

THE END



Transcriber’s Notes

Inconsistent hyphenation retained as originally printed: cooperation/co-operation, everyday/every-day, lamppost/lamp-post, pipestem/pipe-stem, upended/up-ended.

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