

FIGHTING SNUB REILLY AND OTHER STORIES

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Freeditorial 

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1. FIGHTING SNUB REILLY

Ten minutes before Snub Reilly left his dressing-room a messenger delivered a letter. His seconds and his manager protested against his reading anything which might well be disturbing at such a critical moment, for the little man was fighting for his title, and Curly Boyd, the aspirant to championship honors, had knocked out four successive opponents before he claimed his right to a meeting with the World Champion.

"Let me see it," said Snub, and he was something of an autocrat. The letter was typewritten and was signed by two reputable men whose names were

honored in the sporting world.

Snub read the letter slowly.

"A challenge," he said tersely, "for £10,000 a side."

"Who is the feller?" asked his manager.

"They call him 'An Unknown'; he wants to meet the winner of tonight's fight. Send a wire and say I accept."

His manager grinned. He was a stout man with a moist face, and he had infinite confidence in Snub, but—

"Better wait till after the fight?" he suggested.

"Send it," said Snub curtly, and put on his dressing-gown.

Manager Seller dispatched the wire, not without some discomfort of mind. The fourth round brought him relief.

Curly Boyd, an approved European champion, had himself to thank for such an early ending to his rosy dreams. He had detected, as he thought, a certain unsteadiness in Snub's leg movements, an uncertainty that was a hint of a stagger. So Curly, relying upon his excellent fitness, had put everything into a projected left and right. Incidentally he was fighting the greatest ring strategist of his day, and when he uncovered his jaw for the fraction of a second...

"Eight... nine... ten—out!" said a far-away voice in Curly's ear. Somebody shook him by his gloved hand, and he heard above the roaring in his head a louder roar, and dropped his head wearily to catch a glimpse of a figure in a flowered dressing-gown slipping through the gangway into the gloom behind the ring seats.

It was a fine thing for Snub, because the eyes of the world were on that fight—outside the building limousines were parked twenty deep—and before he reached his dressing-room the news of his victory was quivering in dots and dashes on every line and cable that ran from the city.

He stripped off his dressing-gown and submitted to the attentions of the masseur with some sign of impatience. Ten minutes after the fight he left the building by a side door, and mingled with the thousands who crowded about the entrances. Modesty was Snub Reilly's favorite vice.

The echoes of such a combat were not to die down in a day, for Snub was something of a national hero. This champion who never gave interviews, who was so taciturn and secretive that his very seconds did not meet him until the

day before his fights, appealed to the popular imagination as no other ring favorite had done. And when, at the end of the press description, it was announced that "An Unknown" had challenged the winner for a purse of \$50,000 (£10,000), and the challenge had been accepted, there was an added value to the news.

Even staid and sleepy Rindle, dedicated to the education of youth, was excited, wildly excited for Rindle. The headmaster read the account of the fight at breakfast and hummed and ha'd his approval of the lightning stroke which laid the presumptuous Curly Boyd so low. And on the opposite side of the breakfast table Vera Shaw, nineteen and beautiful, hid a newspaper on her lap, read furtively and was thrilled. A group of boys en route from their dormitories-houses to prayers and morning school, gathered about one daring soul who had broken all school regulations by purchasing forbidden literature, and whooped joyously.

It was natural that Barry Tearle, the mathematical master, should stop in the midst of correcting exercises, hitch up his gown at the neck for comfort, and sit back to study the account. Natural, because he was also games master and instructor of the noble art to Rindle School.

He put down the paper with a thoughtful frown and went back to his exercises, lighting his pipe mechanically the while. Presently he gathered the papers together and rose. The bell was clanging the warning for prayers in Hall, at which solemn function all masters were expected to be present. He hurried across the quadrangle-campus and under the archway above which was part of the head's quarters. He never passed under that arch without wondering whether Vera owned those rooms. It was part of the daily routine of unconscious speculation, and he was so wondering as he turned to join the stream of boys on the flagged path to Hall, when he heard his name called.

He turned quickly, startled almost, and swept off his cap.

It was the subject of his thoughts.

"I saw you come home this morning."

She pointed an accusing finger and he blushed.

"Did—did you? My car had a breakdown near Northwood—I hope I didn't disturb you?"

No errant boy called to his study to explain a delinquency could have looked more patently guilty than he, and she laughed, and when Vera Shaw laughed, it required all his self-possession to behave sanely.

"No, you didn't disturb me. I couldn't sleep and was sitting at the window approving of the moon when you sneaked into the quad—there is no other word for it. Did you see the fight?" she asked suddenly, and he gasped.

"No, I did not see the fight," he said severely; "and I'm surprised—"

"Pooh!" She flicked her finger at him. "I've read every bit about it. Do tell me who is 'An Unknown' who is going to fight that darling Snub—run, you'll be late!"

The bell had stopped, the trembling note of the organ quivered in the still air, and Barry gathered up his gown and sprinted. He hoped she would be waiting when chapel ended, and was the first to leave after the final "amen." She was standing where he had left her, but Sellinger was with her, and, forgetful of the admirable charity toward all men which he had so recently intoned, Barry cursed Sellinger most heartily.

John Sellinger lived in Rindle; his ancestors had founded Rindle School, and he himself assumed the style and manner and mental attitude of hereditary patron saint to the school. He was tall, overtopping Barry by six inches, florid, well fed, and prosperous. He was good-looking too, in a heavy, aquiline way. And he made no secret that his patronage of Rindle might extend to acquiring relationship with its headmaster.

"Morning, Tearle. I suppose you didn't see the fight?"

"No, I didn't see the fight," said Barry savagely. "Have I nothing better to do—did you?" he asked suddenly.

"Yes, rather—I was just telling Vera all about it. Wonderful fellow, Reilly. Smaller even than you."

"Is it possible?" asked Barry, affecting an extravagant surprise. "Could you see him?"

"Don't be sarcastic," said Mr. Sellinger. "Of course you could see him—you don't see much of him from where I sat, he doesn't stand still long enough, but, boy, he's a fighter!"

"So the papers say," said Barry wearily.

"As to the unknown idiot who wants to fight him—"

"Good morning," said Barry shortly, and with a lift of his hat went on.

"Curious fellow that." Sellinger shook his head. "Can't quite make him out, Vera."

"Mr. Sellinger." Her tone was very quiet.

"Yes, Vera?"

"Will you please not call me by my Christian name?"

He was surprised and hurt.

"But, my dear child—"

"But I'm not your dear child," she said in the same voice. "I'm not even a child."

He drew himself erect, for he was a Sellinger of Rindle; and Sellingers of Rindle have drawn themselves erect for several centuries at the mere suggestion that they could not do just what their sweet fancy dictated.

"Of course, if you wish it, Ve—Miss—er—Shaw; by all means. I'm sorry if I've offended you."

He was not sorry except for himself, of course; but it was the kind of reply that a representative of the oldest family in the county should make.

"You haven't offended me—only I don't like it. Why do you think that Mr. Tearle is curious?"

"Well," he hesitated, "a schoolmaster isn't the best paid professional in the world, and yet Tearle lives in style, has a car of his own, is always dressed well."

She looked at him in that weary, patient way which women can make so offensive.

"Other people have money—you have money, and yet it isn't curious," she said coldly. "Or do you think it is curious because you haven't got it all?"

He smiled indulgently.

"How like you to defend him!" he said, and before indignation could permit an appropriate reply he went on: "Did your father say whether the School Extension Committee was meeting at the usual hour?"

She shook her head and half turned to go.

"I wish—" he began, and stopped.

"You wish?"

"Well"—this time his halt of speech was less natural—"I wish that other arrangements would be made about—"

"About what?" She was exasperated by his studied hesitations, but she was curious.

"About the money that has been raised for the school extension. It is a tremendous sum for a—well, for an ill-paid master to handle."

He knew he had made a mistake before the words were out, for the girl's face had gone from crimson to white as the drift of his meaning appeared.

"Do you"—she was breathless, and her voice sounded strange even to her—"do you—mean to suggest that Mr. Tearle—gets his money for motor-cars... oh, it's too absurd—too wicked—how dare you!"

He blinked at her in amazement. He had never regarded her as anything but a soft, fluffy, kitteny thing, and a possible ornament to his gloomy house. He looked aghast upon a fury; her gray eyes, dark with passion, her lips straight drawn and unbecoming. That is the impression he carried away with him—her mouth was unbecoming in anger.

"My dear—" he began.

"You must have an evil mind to think such things," she flamed. "I hate you!"

He stood as a man petrified until she had disappeared through the porch of Dr. Shaw's study. Then he pulled up his collar, and stalked haughtily through the schoolhouse gate.

"Very unbecoming," he spluttered to himself. "Very unladylike... very unnecessary...."

Vera Shaw saw him depart from the window of her bedroom, and made faces at him which were unbecoming and certainly unladylike. Then she sat on the edge of her bed and wept bitterly. Which was unnecessary.

Dr. Shaw came into lunch ten minutes earlier than she had expected, and brought Sellinger with him, to the girl's intense annoyance.

"I've asked Sellinger to stay to lunch, Vera," he said. "Will you tell Mrs. Burdon to put another place at the table? We have a meeting of the Extension Committee this afternoon, and I cannot send Mr. Sellinger all the way back."

A more sensitive man than Sellinger might have been hurt by the apology for his invitation; but Sellinger was not that kind of man. He smiled graciously upon the girl, and in that smile conveyed a tacit agreement that what had

happened that morning should be overlooked and forgotten.

Fortunately for Vera, there was little need for her to speak, for the conversation centered about the afternoon committee meeting. She was alert for any comment which might be remotely disparaging to Barry Tearle; but Mr. Sellinger, with unexampled wisdom, was careful to keep off the subject, and when Tearle's name came into the conversation it was Dr. Shaw who was responsible.

"There was rather an unpleasant little incident this morning in town," he said—and when those of Rindle School referred to "town," they meant all that part of Rindle which was not school. "I don't know what started it, but I'm quite sure the boy was not in the wrong."

"Is one of the boys in trouble, Father?" asked Vera quickly.

"Well, not exactly in trouble. You remember—do you know the man Crickley—he has a tumbledown shanty on the Jamaica Road?"

She nodded.

"An awful ruffian," she said; "he was at court last year, and he drinks, doesn't he?"

"I should imagine he had been drinking this morning. He was going through the town with his unfortunate wife, and apparently something she said disagreed with him—at any rate, the brute hit her first with his stick, and although I don't suppose he hurt her very much, one of the boys of the fifth— young Tilling, to be exact—who happened to be passing, interfered...."

"Good for him!" said the girl, her eyes sparkling.

Dr. Shaw smiled.

"It looked like being bad for him," he said. "For the blackguard turned his attention to the boy, and had him by the scruff of his neck, according to accounts, when Tearle, who was going over to the higher mathematical set, came upon the scene. I understand he asked the man very civilly to release the boy; whereupon he certainly loosed his hold of the boy, but he struck at Tearle."

The girl opened her mouth in consternation.

"Was he—was he hurt?" she asked.

"No, I don't think he was," the doctor chuckled quietly. "Tearle, you know"— he turned to Sellinger—"is our games master, and a rattling good instructor in

boxing. I saw the captain of the school, who witnessed the encounter, and he is most enthusiastic about what followed."

"Did he strike the man? Was there a brawl?" asked Sellinger, ready to be shocked.

"I don't think there was much of a brawl, but he certainly struck the man," said the doctor dryly. "Crickley had to be assisted away."

Sellinger shook his head heavily.

"I don't know whether that sort of thing's good for Rindle," he said, in his capacity of patron saint.

"Nonsense!" said the doctor sharply, and the girl beamed upon her father. "A most excellent lesson and example to the boys. It means, of course, that the boys in Tearle's form will give themselves airs, but it is what I would term a most excellent thing to have happened."

Sellinger was discreetly silent on this conclusion.

"I talked to Tearle after school," he said. "Of course, Tearle was most apologetic." He paused and frowned. "Do you know, Vera," he said, "I had the most extraordinary impression when I was speaking to Tearle. In this morning's paper—which, of course, you haven't read, my dear, at least not the part that I am referring to—there was a reference to a challenge which had been issued by a certain Unknown to the boxer, Snub Reilly."

"You don't mean that—" she said breathlessly.

"Yes, I had that impression—that Tearle was the Unknown. You see, I mentioned the fight of the previous evening, and I talked to him about the challenge, just as I might talk to Sellinger here, in an ordinary matter-of-fact way. And do you know that he went as red as a beetroot?"

Sellinger laughed loud and heartily.

"That would be too absurd," he said contemptuously. "I grant that our friend Tearle may be a most excellent boxer, but an excellent amateur has no earthly chance against even a third-class professional; and Snub Reilly is at the top of his class."

Dr. Shaw shrugged.

"I agree it is ridiculous," he said.

"Besides," Sellinger went on, enlarging his argument, "before that match can

occur, somebody has got to find ten thousand pounds; and ten thousand pounds is a lot of money—"

Vera was looking at him, and their eyes met. She saw in his the dawn of a great suspicion, and her hand gripped the handle of her bread-knife murderously. It was Sellinger who changed the subject abruptly, but the girl knew that he was far from relinquishing his theory.

Sellinger went out to telephone to his house, and the girl was left alone with her father.

"Daddie," she said, "do you like Mr. Sellinger?"

He looked at her over his glasses.

"No, dear; to be candid," he said slowly, "I think him a most unmitigated bore."

She held out her hand solemnly and her father gripped it.

"I think you are the most wonderful father in the world," she said. "And all this time I was thinking that you loved him."

"I loathe him," said her father frankly, "in so far as it is possible for a person of my profession to loathe anybody. But the Sellingers are a sort of tradition at Rindle, and one has to be civil to them."

"I'm going to tell you something."

She walked over and shut the door which Sellinger had left open.

"Do you know what he suggested to me this morning?"

"Who, Sellinger?"

She nodded.

"He suggested that the School Extension funds are being stolen by Mr. Tearle."

Dr. Shaw jumped up, pink with anger.

"How dare he? It's a monstrous suggestion!" he said. "I shall tell him—"

"No, you'll tell him nothing," said Vera hastily. "What is the use of my giving you my confidence? I am only telling you for your guidance."

Mr. Shaw sat down in his chair again.

"A disgraceful suggestion," he rumbled, "and palpably stupid. Certainly, Tearle as treasurer has control of the money."

"Is it cash? I mean, could you go into a room and take so many hundreds or thousands from a box?" asked the girl, and Dr. Shaw laughed.

"Of course not. The money is represented by certain securities—stocks in various industries and railways. Tearle has the handling and the care of these stocks—he is a capital man of business. But to suggest—!" he fumed, and it needed all the girl's power of persuasion to bring him back to a condition of calm.

Mr. Sellinger went home that night deep in thought, and sat up until two o'clock in the morning writing letters to his friends. One of these friends was an editor of a newspaper closely identified with sport, and from him in a few days he learned more particulars of the challenge which had been issued to the great Snub Reilly. The fifty thousand dollars had to be deposited by the fifth of the following month, the sum being lodged in the bank in the name of three prominent sportsmen, one of whom was the writer. Where would Tearle get his fifty thousand? He was absolutely certain that Tearle was the challenger, and the news he had from the school confirmed him in his opinion. Further confirmation came one day at a committee meeting when Tearle had taken some papers from his pocket. Amongst them Sellinger saw a somewhat gaudy print. It was strangely familiar to him, but it was not until he got home that it flashed upon him that the print was a program of the Reilly-Boyd fight! So Tearle had been a spectator after all! And he had sworn that he had not seen the fight! The master, too, was in strict training, and once, looking from his bedroom in the dark hours of the morning—Sellinger was not a good sleeper—he saw a figure in white vest and shorts run past the lodge entrance, and recognized Barry Tearle as the runner.

The weeks that followed were for Mr. Sellinger weeks of interest and investigation. At a meeting of the Extension Committee, which gathered once a week to transact formal business, he asked for and secured a list of the securities held by the treasurer. And with this in his possession he bided his time.

There arrived at this period an unobtrusive individual who took lodgings in the village and appeared to have very little to do except to loaf about the school and watch the boys and the masters go in and out. He was a charming man, who made friends with the postmaster, and was on good terms with all the tradesmen before he had been in the village three days. One night Sellinger was finishing his dinner when a visitor was announced. It was the stranger, who greeted his employer deferentially.

"Well, Mr. Sellinger," he said, with satisfaction, "I have a few items of information for you which will interest you."

"Have you got him?" asked Mr. Sellinger eagerly.

"I wouldn't like to say that," said the detective, "but I rather fancy that if we haven't got him, we've put him in a very tight corner."

He took a notebook from his pocket, and turned the leaves.

"Yesterday afternoon Tearle sent a registered envelope to Taylor and Grime, the brokers. I got the address, because I'm a friend of the postmaster's—anyway, that was easy. I went straight up to the city by the night train, and called at Taylor and Grime the next morning, and it couldn't have happened better for me, because there's a clerk in the office who I know very well. As a matter of fact, I saved him from a whole lot of trouble a couple of years ago."

"What was it that Tearle sent?" asked Sellinger, holding his breath.

"Five thousand shares in the Rochester and Holbeach Railroad, one thousand shares in the Land Development Syndicate, and a thousand shares in the Newport Dock Corporation."

"Wait a moment," said Sellinger hastily, and went to his desk. He came back with a list.

"Read the names of those stocks over again," he said, and the detective complied.

"That's it!" Sellinger nodded. "All these shares are held by Tearle on behalf of the School Extension Fund!"

The detective looked at him curiously.

"Well, what are you going to do—pinch him?" he asked, and Mr. Sellinger smiled.

"No," he said softly, "I don't think we need arrest him yet awhile."

He paced up and down the room.

"I'll tell you what I'll do," he said. "I'm having the masters up to dinner tomorrow night. It's a practice that the Sellingers have always followed since the foundation of the school—I suppose you know that Rindle School was founded by one of my ancestors."

The detective did not know, but bowed reverently.

"Tearle lives with old Mrs. Gold in the High Street," Sellinger went on. "She's as deaf as a brick, and I believe goes to bed every night at nine o'clock. His rooms are a long way from where she and the servants sleep, and anyway she's so deaf that she wouldn't hear you."

"What's the idea?" asked the detective

"Whilst I have Mr. Tearle here"—Sellinger emphasized his words with a regular thrust of his finger into his hireling's waistcoat—"you will make a very careful search through Tearle's papers."

The detective nodded.

"I get you," he said. "But how am I to find my way into the house?"

"The front door is always unfastened when Tearle is out at night," said Sellinger. "He was telling the Head last week that he never carried a key, and most of the houses leave their doors open—there is no crime in Rindle.

"Except what we commit," said the detective humorously.

"That," said Mr. Sellinger gravely, "is an impertinence. This is not a crime: I am acting in the best interests of justice."

The Sellinger dinner, which, as Mr. Sellinger said, was a feature of Rindle School life, was a deadly dull affair to two of the guests. For the host, with commendable foresight, had so arranged the seats that Vera Shaw sat at one end of the board on his right, and Barry Tearle at the other end of the long table on Dr. Shaw's right. This arrangement suited Mr. Sellinger admirably, because he had a proposal to make to Vera, the terms of which had taken a good day's thought. The girl, who would never have attended but for the fact that the three mistresses which Rindle boasted were present, was openly bored—a fact which Mr. Sellinger did not observe.

They were half-way through dinner when Sellinger exposed his grand scheme.

"Miss Vera," he said (he had compromised to that extent), "I want to make a suggestion to you, and I wonder how you'll take it?"

"That depends upon the suggestion," she said coolly.

"It may shock you," he began cautiously, lowering his voice. "But—how would you like to see the fight?"

"See the fight?" she repeated, startled. "Do you mean the fight between—"

"Between Snub Reilly and the Great Unknown," he said jocularly.

She thought a moment.

"I hardly think I'd like to see it at all," she said. "I do not approve of women attending such exhibitions."

"Suppose the Great Unknown were a friend of yours?" he said deliberately, and her face went pink.

"How absurd! Do you suggest—"

"I not only suggest, but I know," he said. "You must promise not to tell Tearle, because, if my surmise is correct, he would be upset by your knowing, and maybe the thing would peter out."

"But it's nonsense," she said contemptuously. "How could Mr. Tearle find ten thousand—" She bit her lip.

"He may have friends," said Sellinger suavely.

There was a silence.

"Do you think he could win—supposing he were—the—Unknown?"

"Why not?" lied Sellinger. "I'm told he is a very brilliant boxer, and I'm not so sure that Snub Reilly couldn't be beaten."

He saw the girl's head turn slowly, and, as if obeying a common impulse, Barry Tearle raised his head at that moment.

"Why do you want me to go?" she asked suddenly. But he was prepared for that: it was in framing the answer to such a question that he had spent the morning.

"Because," he said stoutly, "I think he will win. And, what is more"—it cost him a greater effort to deliver this sentiment than to carry out the rest of the scheme—"because I've an idea that Tearle is fond of you."

She turned quickly away, and did not reply for some minutes.

"I'll go on one condition," she said, "and I think that it can be managed. I have to go to town, and my aunt has asked me to stay the night—I can easily pretend that I am going to a theatre. Who will take me?"

"I, of course," said Mr. Sellinger gallantly, and she nodded.

"What is the condition?" he asked.

"That if you find you are wrong, and the—the Unknown is not Mr.—Tearle—"

you will take me away."

"Of course," said Mr. Sellinger heartily. "I wouldn't dream of allowing you to see the fight unless our friend was involved. Now remember, Miss Vera, it is absolutely necessary that you should not mention this matter to Mr. Tearle. Let it be a surprise to him. I can imagine," he went on, "how delighted he would be, how nerved for the—er—combat."

"Don't let us talk about it any more," she said.

To Barry Tearle's intense disappointment she left with her father, and scarcely spoke two words to him. He was puzzled. What had she and Sellinger been talking about so earnestly? he wondered. Did they know—he went pale at the thought.

He walked back to his lodgings a greatly worried young man.

The last guest had hardly departed before the detective was ushered into Sellinger's library, and one glance at his face revealed to that gentleman the measure of his success.

"We've got him, sir," he said exultantly. "Here you are." He laid a sheet of paper before the other.

"What is this?"

"I've copied them from a letter which I found on his table."

Mr. Sellinger picked up the paper and fixed his glasses. It was from a city bank and acknowledged the receipt of fifty thousand dollars which had been paid into Barry Tearle's account. But it was the second extract which filled Mr. Sellinger with joy. It was merely three lines copied from the counterfoil of Barry Tearle's check-book, which showed that the sum of fifty thousand dollars had been made out in favor of the Fight Committee!

Mr. Sellinger rubbed his hands.

"You've done splendidly, my friend, splendidly," he said. "Now, what shall we do?"

"You ought to have him arrested at once," said the detective, shaking his head. "Unless you take immediate steps, you'll never recover that money."

"No, no," said Sellinger.

He knew something better than that, but this he did not explain to the detective. He was going to see Tearle beaten—and somebody else was going

to see him beaten too. And when the fight was over, the comedy would develop into drama and melodrama at that.

"I want somebody to have a lesson," he said solemnly, "a lesson which they will never forget in their lives, and which may have a lasting beneficial effect upon their future. To the uninitiated, my act may seem a cruel one; but it is often necessary, my friend, that one should be cruel to be kind."

"But what about the money?" asked the puzzled but practical detective. "That is going to be lost."

"I don't think so," said Mr. Sellinger. "If it is, then I am happily in a position to make good to the school the amount that this man has stolen."

He might have kept his secret, he might have maintained his outward calm to the grand dénouement; but it was impossible that he could keep his knowledge pent so long. The girl left for town early on the morning of the fight, and Barry, when he learned she had gone, and had gone without seeing him, felt as though the motor of life had dropped out. He himself went up by the afternoon train, having secured permission from the Head. An hour before he left, Dr. Shaw sent for him, and the doctor was obviously ill at ease.

"You wanted me, sir?" said Barry, coming into the study, and the Head looked round with a start.

"Yes, er—yes, Tearle," said the doctor uncomfortably. "Sit down, will you? I wanted to say to you—that I wish you luck."

He put out his hand.

"I'm a little worried, you know, Tearle, about it all, and to me it seems that you haven't a ghost of a chance."

"What do you mean, sir?"

"I mean, I believe you are the Unknown who has challenged this boxer, and somehow I wish you hadn't. It is not that I disapprove of boxing, and although there is certain to be a little trouble if the truth comes out that you are the challenger, we can get over that. No, it's the fear that you have risked your own private fortune"—he hesitated—"unless, of course, you persuaded your friends to assist you?"

"No, sir, it is all my own money," said Barry Tearle steadily.

"I hope you win." Dr. Shaw shook him cheerfully by the hand. "You're a good fellow, Tearle, and—and I hope you win; and I'm sure if my—if my girl knew,

and of course she doesn't dream that you are taking part in this contest, that she would echo my wishes."

Barry wrung his hand in silence and left with a little lump in his throat.

It was a grand adventure for the girl. All day she had thought about nothing else, and alternated between hope and dread. Sometimes it was dread of the spectacle she would see; sometimes—and more often—it was the picture of Barry Tearle's failure which made her shiver. The faithful Mr. Sellinger arrived at nine o'clock in the evening. He was in his most jovial mood, as he had reason to be, for he had just parted from two Central Office detectives after putting them in possession of the vital facts.

He had arranged that the girl should arrive at the theatre where the fight was taking place, in time to miss some of the minor encounters which preceded it, and it was while they were waiting in the vestibule for one such contest to finish that he was hailed by a friend, and left her for a moment.

Vera was feeling self-conscious and uncomfortable. It did not bring ease to her mind that there were other ladies present. She felt ashamed and furtive and mean, and for the first time she began to have serious doubts as to what effect her presence would have upon the man whose victory she desired.

She still told herself that Sellinger was mistaken, and that the challenger was some other person than Barry, but in her heart of hearts she knew that she would see the man she loved within that cruel ring; and the thought of it set her heart thumping wildly.

"Talk to me later, Johnson. I'm going to get my seat," she heard Sellinger say, and then he took her arm and led her down a long aisle.

The theatre was in darkness save for the brilliant lights which hung above a square, white platform.

So that was the ring! It was smaller than she had expected. She looked round at the spectators in the gloom, and thought she had never seen so many thousands of faces so close together. She was seized with a panic as to what all those thousands would say if Barry was defeated. Would they cheer? She stopped, gripping fast to Sellinger's arm. She couldn't bear that.

"I don't think I'll go in," she whispered. "I really don't think that I can stand it."

"Come along," said Sellinger soothingly, and led her down to a ring seat.

She was too near. She knew that she was too near. She would rather see this thing at such a distance as made it impossible to distinguish between one

fighter and the other. But she was there now and she must stay. And then it was that Sellinger could keep his secret no longer.

There was some delay, they learned. Snub had not arrived, but had telephoned that he was on the way. But for the delay, and the opportunity which it gave him, Sellinger might have maintained his silence to the end. But now he bent over the girl, and step by step traced the progress of his investigations, and she listened, chilled with horror. She could not even find the words to protest.

He might have noticed her distress, and in pity have toned down his lurid recital; but he was hot with triumph, and found a joy in his brutality. And then the climax came, when the girl was clutching to the arm of her chair, half fainting. The man to whom Sellinger had spoken in the vestibule came up, and said Snub had arrived. Mr. Johnson was stout, red faced, and white haired.

"Is the Unknown here?" demanded Sellinger with a grim smile.

"Oh yes, he's here. I'm told he's going to—"

"He's going nowhere," almost shouted Sellinger. "I've got a couple of detectives waiting for him, my friend."

"Oh, don't, don't!" said Vera, white to her lips.

"A couple of detectives?" The man looked from one to the other. "Well, I think that's rotten of you, Sellinger. The man has had his punishment. Why should he have more?"

"You know him, then?"

"I know him very well indeed," said Sellinger. "I don't know about his punishment."

"He had two years' imprisonment for forgery in Australia. He was one of the best lightweights we've had in this country for years. I told them that they ought to have come out boldly and told the public that it is Kid Mackay who was challenging; but the men who are behind him insisted on introducing him as 'An Unknown,' an idiotic piece of tactics."

The color was coming back to the girl's face as her eyes were fixed upon the other.

"Who is he?" she whispered.

"Kid Mackay, madam," said Sellinger's friend, and went on: "One of the best lads in the ring three years ago—"

"Then it's not Tearle?" wailed Sellinger.

Such a look of bewilderment was on his face that she could have laughed. Then with a start she remembered.

"You must take me away. You promised that if it was not—"

Her words were interrupted by a roar. A man was coming down one of the aisles in a purple dressing-gown. As he swung up between the ropes, his broad, good-humored face all smiles, one half the audience recognized the Unknown as the erstwhile champion and understood the reticence that his backers had shown.

But now a greater roar shook the building. Another figure moved amidst his seconds, and leaping lightly up to the ring, dodged through the ropes. From every part of the vast hall came a shout:

"Snub—Snub Reilly!"

"Snub Reilly!" Mr. Sellinger's voice was hollow, and then Snub Reilly turned, and the girl half rose from her seat.

For the man who stared down at her with wonder in his open eyes was Barry Tearle!

Mr. Sellinger sat, stricken dumb, his mouth agape. As for the girl, she looked on as if in a trance. She saw the preliminaries, watched the opening of the first round, her eyes never leaving the lithe figure that leaped and lunged. She could hear the thud of gloves as they struck, but whose gloves they were and who was being struck she could not tell. It was at the beginning of the second round that "the Unknown" forced the fighting, in spite of the injunctions and prayers of his seconds to remain strictly on the defensive for the first eight rounds. Right and left flashed Snub's terrible fists. The Unknown staggered. A second blow to the jaw landed, timed to the fraction of a second....

The fight was over. It was over, too, for Vera Shaw, and Barry Tearle leaped the ropes in time to catch her as she fainted....

It was in the Head's study the next morning that Barry Tearle, unmarked by his exertions the night before, told his story.

"My father was a boxer," he said. "He used to travel the country fairs, and every penny he made he put into my education. He did something more—he taught me the game as no man knew it better than he. He died whilst I was at the University, and it looked as though my education was going to stop short. I loved my studies, and I loved the life I had planned for myself. But I wanted

money. I had no friends or influence. One morning at breakfast I saw in the sporting press a challenge issued on behalf of a man whom I had seen fight, and whom I thought I could beat. I pawned everything I had to cover his modest stake, and, adopting the name of Snub Reilly—Reilly is my second name, by the way—I fought him and won. I have fought during every vacation for three years, and"—he looked down at the girl—"I have fought my last fight."

The doctor cleared his throat.

"Vera has told me something of Mr. Sellinger's accusation. You sold some bonds?"

Barry nodded.

"They were my own bonds," he said. "I had to raise ten thousand pounds to cover this challenge. They were bonds similar to those which you held for the Extension Fund."

"Naturally," Dr. Shaw nodded, "you would buy the best stock, both for the school and for yourself."

He was looking down at his blotting-pad thoughtfully.

"You have fought your last fight?" he said.

Barry nodded.

"Yes, sir. From now on, Snub Reilly disappears. I have made a considerable sum, quite sufficient for my needs."

"Nobody at the school knows you are—Snub Reilly?"

"Except Mr. Sellinger," said Vera.

"I do not think Mr. Sellinger will be anxious to talk about the part he has played in a business which is only discreditable in so far as he has been concerned," said Dr. Shaw.

For the second time in twenty-four hours he put out his hand.

"I rather think," he said, "I should like to have seen that fight. Wouldn't you, Vera?"

The girl shuddered and shook her head.

"Of course not, of course not. How could I ask such a thing?" said the doctor tenderly, and he dropped his hand on her shoulder. "You couldn't imagine my

little girl in that sort of atmosphere, could you, Tearle?"

Mr. Barry Tearle shook his head. He and Vera went out together into the old-world quadrangle, and neither spoke.

"I must go into the house now, Barry," she said. "You—you weren't very much hurt last night?" she added anxiously. "Oh, my dear, I was so happy when you won." She laid her hands impulsively on his breast. "And I've quite forgiven your little lie!"

"My little lie!" He was astonished.

"You said you had not seen the fight that night."

He smiled.

"I didn't see it," he insisted. "I felt it—but I didn't see it."

Since the classrooms overlook the quadrangle, what followed would have been witnessed by the whole of the fifth classical form but for the tact of the head prefect of School House who happened to be standing by the window, and closed it with a bang.

2. JIMMY'S BROTHER

I feel I should like to know Jimmy's brother. I picture him not unlike Jimmy, though leaner and a thought more wiry, with an air of profound profundity and wisdom, and the softest of Scotch accents which need not be reproduced.

I fancy, too, that the whole of his regiment must be wiry, solemn men, either possessed of a sense of humor and jealousy concerted or else void entirely of that virtue and most earnest in their several contemplations of things.

Jimmy himself gives you the impression that he is forever on the verge of laughter, yet is repressing that natural and proper desire lest he waste valuable time which might be employed in telling you a good story.

He has a flat in town, somewhere in the Temple I should imagine, for just as ballast is counter to buoyancy and even balloons are associated with sandbags, so does the joyous heart seek for bleakness of habitation.

Jimmy's brother is, as I say, very serious, as all young Scotsmen are, and looks upon life with solemn eyes, conscious of the beauties of vision and at the same

time apprehending all the wastage of its undeveloped natural resources.

He is such a man as would stand speechless before the glories of Niagara Falls, frozen solid in a bitter winter, and would make rapid calculations as to the amount of ice that could be cut, the cost of its transportation, and its profit when delivered c.i.f. New York.

He is like all earnest men, a soldier, paying fleeting visits to town, where he discusses the army in a way which would make the scant hair of the high command rise up like little anti-aircraft guns pointing menacingly to the heavens.

Jimmy got a phone message the other day and recognized the voice of his brother.

"I'd like to come round and see you on a very important matter," said the voice, and Jimmy said, "Come along," albeit cautiously, being prepared for the worst.

Jimmy would never be surprised if his brother came to his flat leading an elephant that he had found wandering about, for he was notoriously fond of animals, and, indeed, the request which the brother had to make when he eventually arrived was startling enough.

Jimmy's brother, burnt of face and wearing the soiled khaki of a blameless life, came into Jimmy's office.

"And where the devil do you come from!" asked Jimmy in his most elderly brotherly tone.

A man, a wicked soldier, had gone on leave and spent many days beyond those specified on Army Form B.260 in riotous and possibly licentious living, and he had been arrested by an unsympathetic constabulary in the act of giving a gratuitous display of bomb-throwing, the improvised grenade being a quart pot, and the entrenched enemy being a somewhat terrified landlord crouching behind the counter. Therefore, Jimmy's brother had been sent up "with a lance-corporal to bring the criminal back to judgment.

"Well?" said Jimmy, on guard.

"Well," repeated Jimmy's brother, impressive to the last degree. "We have got him in London, but we were allowed three days to bring him from Liverpool to the camp, and we have done it in one."

He paused as though expecting Jimmy to read into this bald and uninspiring statement all that was in his mind.

"Well" said Jimmy again. "I suppose you are taking him back to camp?"

"We were allowed three days, and we have done it in one," said Jimmy's brother deliberately, "which means we have two days to spare, and we don't get many spare days in Kitchener's army; so we have decided to stay in town."

"But," protested Jimmy, the horrible truth dawning upon him slowly, "what is going to happen to the prisoner!"

"That's just it," said Jimmy's brother. "We have got to do something with him." He leant across the table and... "Do you mind looking after him for a couple of days?" he asked, with the nonchalance of one who was demanding a light for a cigar.

Jimmy gasped and said many things which he probably regretted at a later stage, but he told his relative where he would see him before he took charge of this youthful delinquent.

"He is quite a nice chap," protested Jimmy's brother, "when he's sober. Keep him away from the drink. He'll do little jobs around the house." He grew enthusiastic. "He cleans silver," he said suggestively.

But Jimmy would have none of it, for he had no silver that required cleaning.

"Where is your prisoner, now!" he said.

"He's with the corporal," parried Jimmy's brother.

"But where?" insisted Jimmy.

"They're at a picture palace in Regent Street," pleaded this emissary of the crown. "Be a sport and lend us your coal cellar for a couple of days."

But Jimmy was adamant, nor was another friend whom Jimmy's brother was able to beat up any more willing, though it was discovered, in the course of skillful cross-examination conducted by Jimmy's brother, that the friend had an available bathroom.

"What do you want a bathroom for?" urged the young military gentleman passionately.

"To keep my coals in," said the other sardonically.

Eventually Jimmy's brother went down disconsolate, and spent the whole afternoon searching for his prisoner and his superior officer, the two having left the picture palace before he arrived. They were eventually run to earth in a

music hall near Piccadilly Circus, and the imprisonment difficulty was got over by taking a couple of rooms in a small temperance hotel in Bloomsbury, the prisoner being locked in one, and his two comrades occupying the other.

The next morning the prisoner protested.

"All the time I am away from the regiment," he said truculently, "I am losing my pay. I want to go back to camp at once."

"You shut up," said Jimmy's brother.

"Haven't you any sense of decency?" demanded the corporal.

"We are going round sight-seeing," explained Jimmy's brother, "and if you behave yourself you can come along, but you will have to pay your own bus fares."

Whereupon the prisoner broke into such a wealth of vile and violent language that they compromised on the question of fares.

Jimmy's brother is a sentimentalist. No less was the corporal, for I gather that they were both Scots.

They found a great tenderness of mind in the vast spaces of St. Paul's Cathedral, though the prisoner, who was a southerner, could do no more than stand with a cynical sneer on his lips, passing remarks about statues and tombs, sarcastic and uncalled for.

It was in the crypt that the man's baseness was finally revealed. Before the grave of Nelson stood Jimmy's brother and the lance-corporal, reverent—almost liquid in their emotions. Jimmy's brother stretched out his hand and laid it upon the tomb of the great admiral.

"Nelson," he murmured, and repeated his oath of allegiance right down to "So help me!" and the corporal, quivering with emotion, followed suit.

They turned to the prisoner. "This is Nelson's tomb," murmured Jimmy's brother urgently.

"To hell with Nelson!" snarled the prisoner. "I'm losing a bob a day!"

So they took him back to camp that very day.

"You don't deserve a holiday," said Jimmy's brother severely.

"An' I don't want one," said the prisoner, "not unless you make it worth me while."

"Men like you ruin the army," said the lance-corporal.

They were still wrangling when the train drew out of the station, leaving Jimmy with tears in his eyes. Yet he was not unhappy.

3. THE CHRISTMAS CUP

COLONEL DESBORO was an easy-going man, and, for himself, did not greatly object to patched carpets, an odd-handled knife or two, and chintz covers that had faded and thinned through over-much washing. But he had no desire that Joan should go through life in an environment of patches and makeshifts.

"He's a very nice fellow, Martin, but—" He shook his head.

The big "but" about the Great Sham of Sunna Lodge was put more definitely by Miss Ethel Morsel later in the day, when Joan Desboro called at Ael Hall, a little too early for the "club," but in nice time to absorb from experienced twenty-six the wisdom so vitally necessary to twenty-one and three months.

"Men," said Æthel, with an air of finality, "are naturally children. They boast and they lie, and mean no harm by it. Children. They never grow up." She said this in the manner of one who had wrapped a clever thought in a gossamer of paradox.

The girl who was perched on the fender of Æthel Morsel's sitting-room sighed and knit her forehead in a tremendous frown. She was more than pretty even in the searching light of a March morning. Her figure was slim, every movement revealed a new and pleasing grace; but she was no philosopher, and her views about men were too concentrated to be of any use in a broad and general conspectus of their merits.

To rich people like Æthel philosophy comes as natural as purring to a cat, but with the poor, philosophy is a painful exercise, And the Desboros were so poor that they could not afford to hide the fact.

"Mark is a little difficult," she admitted reluctantly, but I don't think you quite understand him, Æthel."

"He's American," said Æthel significantly, and when Joan murmured "Canadian," she ignored the distinction.

"He's a boaster and, of course, quite impossible," said Æthel. "We don't even know that he has any money. And he's not 'county.' We had better be very careful." She nodded ominously.

"Why?"

But the warning obliquely flung was not amplified, and there was really no reason why it should have been.

"Martin must be well off—he paid a thousand pounds for a horse," said Joan with some spirit. A thousand pounds was an awful lot.

"Money for horses means nothing," said the practical Æthel. "Quite dreadful people buy horses. Of course he must have money—he does no work. Papa says he is probably living on his capital. And that can end only in bankruptcy."

Not by candlelight or moonlight could Æthel Morsel be described as pretty. She had been "Ethel" in the baptismal register, and "Ethel" she would have been to the end of her days but for the advent of Ælfred Burdenlast, a young man of considerable musical attainments, but with no especial gift for earning his daily bread.

The association was of a transitory kind. He came, made love with a certain delicacy, was figuratively thrown on to the ash-pit by Mr. Morsel, and faded from human ken. Some say that he went to Hollywood and became a cinema star. He left an additional vowel in Æthel's name, and a heart which never again glowed to the music and banners of romance.

The Morsels were the Morsels of Braystone, in the county of Westshire. There was another branch in Northumberland, but nobody knew anything about them; how they ever got to Northumberland is a mystery.

Arthur Persimmin Morsel was very rich, an owner of ten thousand acres, a deer forest, a trout stream, a tract of territory in Angola, a ranch in Canada, and a flat in Park Lane. He was a large pink man, who rode to hounds with the greatest care, and knew every gate and safety path in Westshire. He had never seen a live fox, except at the Zoological Gardens, for he was rather short-sighted. Nevertheless, his picture appeared in certain illustrated weeklies with great regularity as "Mr. Morsel, the well-known fox-hunter." Thus he was depicted on his horse and off, or else with a very black face (flashlight photographs produce that effect sometimes), in a very white shirt and his pink jacket (which also photographed black), at the annual hunt ball.

It is a copybook axiom that riches do not necessarily bring content, and this was the case with Mr. Morsel. He was a hard bargainer, a shrewd buyer, and

the sight of money flowing past his golden reservoir, untrapped by the many channels which maintained its height, made him a very unhappy man. And money came easily to him: his luck was phenomenal. He invariably returned from Monte Carlo with an addition to his capital; he never played at the Paddock (of which exclusive club he was one of the most respected—or, at least, one of the oldest members) without rising from the table a winner, though it was uncharitably suggested that he chose his table judiciously, preferring the society of callow and monied youth to the competition of hard-faced men to whom the playing of poker was a natural instinct. And when he had a house-party at Matte Hall the male guests were chosen as carefully. He once won four thousand pounds at a sitting from a youth named Jones, and derived great satisfaction from his coup, for by so doing, as he said, he "knocked the infernal nonsense out of the young cub."

All foolish young men were "young cubs" to Mr. Morsel, just as all gentlemen who never went beyond half-crown bridge were "old foxes."

Jones is a very usual name, sometimes borne by unusual people. Ferdie Jones, for example, was an unusual youth. He had been desperately in love with Æthel, and had advanced the impossible suggestion that with the four thousand pounds left over from his patrimony he should turn Sunna Lodge into a poultry farm, marry Æthel, and live happily ever after.

Long days had passed since Æthel lost her heart to an impecunious violinist. She had acquired balance and a sense of what was due to wealth. Important people had looked wistfully at her, a rackets peer had once kissed her. She consulted her father about Ferdie. Mr. Morsel frowned at his cigar and invited Ferdie to spend a week-end at the Hall.

It was a fair game, if anything is fair when one player of *écarté* had learnt the game only a few weeks before, and the other could draw cards in his sleep.

So Ferdie Jones went away, and Sunna Lodge appeared in the back page of *The Times* as:

"A desirable hunting box in a good hunting district. Two packs. Company's water, own electric plant. A bargain...."

Once a week during the winter it was the usual thing to drop in at Matte Hall for tea. Nobody knew how the practice started, but Matte Hall on Thursday afternoon became a sort of county club.

The big oak-lined banqueting hall, with its huge fireplace piled with blazing logs in the colder weather, was crowded with people between the hours of five and six-thirty. They sat on the ancient settles, or (if they were young and

"rheumatics" was one of the missing words of their bright lexicons) they perched on the window seats or leant against the panelled walls, adding new lustre to the polish.

And everybody talked at once.

"We got on to a new scent at Figgerty Farm—a vixen, and she gave us a run for two and a half hours, my boy! Killed at Reverly Copse . . . went to earth near Crawford's place. . . . He's a half-brother to Bachelor's Fancy—a fine 'lepper' with legs as sound as a bell of brass. . . . You can't do better than go to Critchfords; the breeches I bought there four years ago are like new. . . ."

They all talked at once—all except Mr. Mark Martin, who drifted from group to group, listening with a smile on his good-looking face.

Nobody took much notice of Mark. They were too polite to roast him, too satisfied with the possession of his guilty secret to pursue inquiries any further. And when he found an opening, as he sometimes did, they listened with extraordinary courtesy.

"You don't get hunting in this county that any way approaches the sport we have in Canada. I remember an old hunter of mine. . . ."

They listened, not looking at one another, interjecting in the proper places a conventional expression of their surprise and wonder. But everybody knew that he couldn't ride!

Whether Mark Martin was an American, a Canadian, or plain English, he was certainly an amiable man. His age was something under thirty, but not very far under, and it was he who purchased, from the agents of the departed Jones, Sunna Lodge, that desirable residence. He was not "county" in the strict sense. You could not be "county" unless you had an immediate interest in a family vault, or could claim part proprietorship in one of those commemorative tablets which adorn the walls of so many parish churches, and which usually start off with a coat-of-arms and end with:

Also the wife of the above

Sir Thos. Smithington, Kt.

But hunting breeds a sort of democracy. Stout men and women, hard-riding and wind-bitten (as they are described by local reporters), grow tender towards one another in the common bond which unites all who go forth on horses to the destruction of vulpes alopex.

Mr. Martin had a stable of horses in training, and was a member of the hunt,

and he had often appeared in the field, but generally on foot. Sometimes he would come to a meet in his expensive car, but never had he appeared on horseback. It was regrettable, he explained, but he had kicked an ankle, or he had bruised a knee, or he had one of those fearful headaches which made riding a positive torture.

He had also been photographed in hunting pink, and his picture had appeared alongside of Mr. Morsel's. He had been photographed at the hunt ball sitting side by side with Lady Mary Seprals (that hard-riding, wind-bitten woman). But nobody had ever seen him riding a horse.

There was an occasion when he turned up at the Highcliffe Point-to-Point wearing jockey's breeches and top boots, and it had been announced, not only in the local newspaper, but in those stately metropolitan organs devoted to the sport of kings, that he would ride his own horse, Ripple Along, in the Highcliffe Handicap.

But this time he had a sprained shoulder, and with great regret handed over his mount to a professional rider, who won. Indeed, many of Mr. Martin's horses won races, though in other hands than his.

When it was given out that he would ride Lumber in the Hunt Gold Cup, people remembered the sprain and gave him another chance. But this time he cut his finger (and there was the hugely bandaged digit in proof). Some talk there was of asking him to resign from the hunt, but nothing came of it.

And then came the supreme bluff of the Great Sham. He entered Lumber in the Christmas Cup at Wolverston Races. The Christmas Cup is to hunting people the blue ribbon of steeplechasing. It is the "paramount and Olympic prize" which brings the shires in full force to Wolverston.

Moreover, it was publicly announced that Lumber would be ridden by Mr. Martin himself. Colonel Desboro heard this news at first hand, and wriggled uncomfortably in the deep and none-too-comfortable arm-chair.

"What a weird beggar you are, Martin!" he said, becoming frank in his irritation. "Enter the horse by all means, but why tell people you're going to ride it?"

Mark looked at him thoughtfully. "I don't know. I thought I would," he said. He tapped his long riding-boots with his hunting-crop—he never went abroad without this evidence of his horsemanship. "I rather like to see fellows riding their own horses."

"But, Mark, is it necessary you should ride at all?" broke in Joan. Her voice

was troubled, and that frown of hers had become almost immovable in the past few days. "People are so horrid about—things."

His look of astonishment was badly simulated.

"And the Wolverston course wants an awful lot of riding, Mark. Captain Burnley, who won the race last year, told me there wasn't a course in England, not even the National course, that took so much out of a horse and a rider."

"In Canada—" began Mark.

"This isn't Canada," interrupted the Colonel shortly. "This is Wolverston, and the Christmas Cup isn't a point-to-point affair. You'll have to compete against men like Ridley and Burnley and other fellows who are as good as the best professionals. I think your horse has a big chance—I was telling Joan just before you came—and I suppose in the end it will win. But why on earth commit yourself to the statement that you will ride?"

He glanced across at his daughter and signalled her to leave the room, and when they were alone he said: "I'm going to talk straight to you, Martin. Joan and you have developed rather a friendship in the past six months. What is there in it?"

The younger man eyed him steadily. "There's a lot in it, Colonel," he said quietly. "I love Joan and I'm hoping that you will give her to me—one of these days."

Colonel Desboro filled his pipe with great deliberation.

"It comes down to a question of your prospects, my young friend," he said gruffly.

It required a physical and spiritual effort on his part to mention so mundane a subject as money, but he braced himself.

"You have an income, I suppose?" Mark Martin nodded, "I have three thousand a year," he said.

The Colonel looked up quickly in surprise and fingered his chin. "That's a pretty good income," he admitted.

"So Mr. Morsel seems to think," replied the other gravely.

"Morsel? What has he to do with it?"

The young man studied the bone crook of his crop as though he had only just discovered its use.

"He's been making inquiries about my position, fortunately through a friend of mine in London. He happens to be a commercial agent, and inquiries of that character come to him."

The Colonel sat upright, pipe in hand. "The dickens he has!" he said softly. "Do you play cards, Martin?"

Mark Martin shook his head. "No," he said. "I like an occasional gamble, but not on cards. Why do you ask, Colonel?"

But Colonel Desboro was too charitable to give expression to his thoughts. Instead: "Do you mind if I speak plainly to you, my friend?"

Mark shook his head, guessing what was coming.

"You are not really a very good rider, are you?"

Gently as the question was put, it was blunt enough, and the young man resumed his study of the hunting-crop.

"I'm one of the best riders in Canada," he said doggedly, and the Colonel smiled.

"We've all got our little weaknesses, my boy," he said kindly. "I remember when I was a kid I distressed my poor dear mother—who'd rather have died than tell a lie—by describing a dog-fight that I hadn't seen!"

He waited.

"I've never seen a dog-fight, either," said Mark simply. "If you want me to say that I am a bad rider, I'm afraid I must disappoint you. I'm really awfully good. And, Colonel—I'm very fond of Joan and everything, but I've not asked her to marry me—yet."

Colonel Desboro looked at him sharply. "Is there my special reason?" The other nodded. "A very good reason. Nothing discreditable to me, but—well, I don't know. Would you mind very much if nothing was definitely settled until after the Christmas Cup?"

Colonel Desboro considered this matter. "No," he said slowly, "there is no desperate hurry. But why the Christmas Cup?"

"Until after I've won it."

Mark was avoiding the questioning eyes of the older man.

"Till after you've won it, eh? " The Colonel pursed his lips, and then: "All

right, let it go at that. Jackson trains the horse, doesn't he?"

Mark nodded.

"I'll come over one morning and see you do an exercise gallop," said the Colonel, not without malice, and had the satisfaction of seeing the young man start.

"I'd rather you didn't," he said; "I'm really fearfully nervous—that's my only weakness. If I knew anybody was looking on, I should feel terrible. It's a sort of stage-fright," he explained lamely. "I don't know whether you ever had it?"

"I've never been on the stage." The Colonel was unusually blunt that morning. "In fact, I've never pretended to be anything else but what I am, and I think other people would be happier if they followed my example."

"I must tell Morsel that," said Mark innocently, "for he is pretending that he has taken a violent liking to me!"

Mr. Arthur Persimmin Morsel was a gentleman who had many of the attributes of the eagle. He could hover on extended pinions and, to the uninitiated eye, appear to be motionless, when in reality he was planning a devastating swoop.

It was the news in The Westshire Gazette that made him hover a little more tensely.

"Lumber is a certain runner in the Christmas Cup. He will be ridden by his owner, Mr. Mark Martin, the wealthy young Canadian who a year ago purchased Sunna Lodge, which has been unoccupied since Mr. Ferdinand Jones went abroad. Mr. Martin is an enthusiastic fox-hunter, and is certain to take a lot of beating in the Cup."

Amongst the many channels which drained into the golden pit of Mr. Morsel was one labelled Westshire Gazette, of which he was the principal shareholder and chairman of directors. He rang up the editor, a civil and obliging man.

"Where did you get that paragraph about Martin?" he asked.

The editor begged him to wait one moment whilst he interviewed the chief reporter, who was also the chief sub-editor and all the other sub-editors there were. After a while he came back.

"It was written by Mr. Martin himself," he said. Morsel smiled into his trim white moustache. "I thought so," he said.

The training of Lumber for the Christmas Cup was taken in hand during the month of November. Every morning Mr. Martin could be seen driving in the

direction of his trainer's stables, and invariably he was attired in riding breeches and most businesslike leggings. And every day, a few hours later, he would alight from his car at the end of the village, and come walking briskly up the street, his boots splashed with mud. And at that hour there were quite a number of people to be met with in the village. Joan met him twice. Mr. Morsel saw him on several occasions and was rather amused. To Æthel one evening he said:

"What are you doing about Christmas, my dear?" Æthel was doing nothing about Christmas.

"You might ask the Desboros to dinner, and ask that fellow Martin over. And, in case I forget it, I'd like you to put the Desboro girl next to this young cub."

"Good heavens—why?" asked Æthel.

Mr. Morsel was lighting a cigar, and she had to wait till he stopped to breathe. "A whim of mine."

"Is he, really training his horse?" asked Æthel.

"The vicar told me that he had seen him come in, his boots and breeches splashed with mud."

"He does that half-way between here and Jackson's place," said Mr. Morsel, without smiling. "Breaks off a twig, dips it into the nearest puddle and flicks it round. I've had a man watching him for a week."

"But has he been riding the horse?" insisted Æthel.

"He hasn't been near the horse," replied her father. All the riding has been done by Jenkins, the stable boy."

"Is he mad?" demanded Æthel, who could find no other explanation.

"No, my dear—vanity, just vanity. Not a had fellow apart from that infernal nonsense of his. I suppose these Americans like to be thought well of, and cut a dash with their money. Don't forget the Christmas Eve dinner. Write pretty soon in case they make another engagement."

It was the practice of Mr. Morsel to go to London once a week to a board meeting. He was methodical in his habits. He usually walked from the terminus to Piccadilly, where his town car was waiting for him. This walk supplied the constitutional which was denied him by his early departure from Matte Hall. He knew Priggins's Riding School very well, and passed its gates every morning he came to London. Indeed, he had a friendly feeling for

Priggins's Riding School, because over the office entrance, by the side of the gate, was a small sign, supported on wrought-iron brackets, depicting a noble-looking fox-hunter in a beautifully-fitting pink coat, jumping a huge fence with a confident smile on his handsome face. Once he had taken Æthel that way and had pointed out the curious resemblance between the handsome, smiling gentleman and himself.

He had turned into the street which holds Priggins's establishment, when ahead of him he saw a familiar figure, It was Mr. Mark Martin, and he was hurrying along, evidently having left the taxi which was turning as Mr. Morsel came into the street. He moved furtively and, with a nervous glance round, disappeared through the gates of the riding school. Mr. Morsel's jaw dropped in astonishment, and then a curious gleam came to his eyes. He stopped opposite the open gates and looked into the sand-covered courtyard. It was empty. Without hesitation he turned into the little office, and gathered that the gentleman in riding breeches and highly-polished boots who was writing a letter as he came in was either Mr. Priggins himself or some one in authority. It proved to be both.

"Oh yes, Mr. Morsel," said Priggins respectfully when the visitor had cautiously revealed himself, with a request that the object of his call should be treated confidentially. "I know your name very well, sir; I saw a photograph of you in County Sport the other day."

"Very likely, very likely," said Mr. Morsel, with a grand air of indifference. "Now, I want you to tell me, Mr. Priggins, in the strictest confidence, do you know that young man who came into your yard a few minutes ago?"

There was a little window above the desk which commanded a view of the courtyard, and Mr. Priggins had duly noted the arrival.

"Oh, he?" He chuckled as at a good joke. "He's a gentleman from the country—Martin by name."

"What does he do here?"

Again Mr. Priggins smiled. "Well, to tell you the truth, he's rather a source of income to me, Mr. Morsel. He's been taking riding lessons off and on for the past month, but I've never been able to get him out of the school."

A slow smile dawned on Mr. Morsel's pink face.

"A good rider, is he?" he asked almost joyfully.

"Good rider! If I only could get him to sit on a horse properly, I'd be happy! I've given up trying, and have handed him over to one of my assistants. There

are some people you can never teach to ride: they haven't the gift for it."

Morsel considered. "Is it possible to get a peep at him?" he suggested.

Mr. Priggins nodded, took down a key from the board-lined wall, and, leading the way through a door, traversed a harness-room and conducted the inquirer up a steep and narrow flight of dark stairs. At the top he paused, his hand on a door.

"If you don't want him to know you're here, you'd better not speak," he said, and Mr. Morsel nodded.

The riding-master opened the door cautiously. They were on a small wooden balcony overlooking the school, which was a fairly large hall, its door covered deep with peat moss. Riding at a jog-trot was Mr. Mark Martin. His back was towards the observer, but even if he had faced the other way it seemed doubtful whether he would have noticed anything but the extreme unsteadiness of the large roan horse he was riding. He swayed in the saddle like a drunken man, and bumped up and down at the psychologically wrong moment in a manner which was curious to see. And all the time there was an exchange of instruction and protest between the rider and a sad young man in gaiters who directed the lesson.

"Keep your elbows down, sir. Your toes in, sir. Put your shoulders back, sir. No, sir, don't hold him by the mane. Walk!"

"Can't walk! Beastly thing jolts. Whoaa, you brute! Am I doing any better today?"

Even the riding instructor, inured as he was to the habit of praise, would not answer in the affirmative. Mr. Morsel shook with laughter and his face grew purple.

"Now, sir, just try trotting again. Keep your elbows down by your side. Your hands up—that's right, sir. Now, sir. . . ."

The indignant horse broke into a steady trot. Mr. Mark Martin rolled like a ship in a heavy gale. He lost an iron and clutched at the mane. He slipped forward on the horse's withers, he pushed himself back on to the horse's quarters, and finally he slipped ungracefully from the horse's neck to the tanned floor.

"Good heavens! Phew?"

A touch on Mr. Morsel's elbow and he withdrew through the door and down the stairs. A few minutes later he was walking away, swinging his umbrella, a

beatific smile upon his face.

Christmas Eve at Matte Hall: the countryside still white with the heavy snows that had fallen on the Monday; cedar logs burning in the great fireplace: holly wreaths decorously hung on the panelled walls; and a gay company about the generous board of Mr. Persimmin Morsel.

And everybody (except one) was happy, for the very season was as a vintage wine, and Mark found himself, to his comfort, placed next to Joan Desboro. There was a whisper that Æthel's engagement to Lord Winderley was to be announced, but this proved to be premature, though his lordship (who was a fawn-coloured man with a heavy yellow moustache) was seated next to her, and from time to time they looked at one another understandingly.

There was no talk but of the Wolverston races and the Cup. The redoubtable Captain Burnley was there, an apple-faced man who regarded all public meals as tiresome preliminaries to the consumption of old brandy, and Lady Mary, who had bought a new hunter at Tattersalls' and had discovered unsuspected values in her purchase. The Rev. Walter Affelow, the famous hunting parson, who was famous rather for his prowess over a country than for his other Christian qualities, was there, and Gonnington-Drake, one of the leading lights of the Paddock Club; even Boulby Malcolm, the hunting banker, and, facing Mark, Colonel Desboro, a very uneasy man, but not quite so uneasy as the nervous girl who sat by Mark's side.

"Oh, there'll be racing all right," said Burnley confidently. "The course dries up easily and gets most of the sun that is going. I went round the track this morning. By Jove, those fences will take some jumping! A horse has only got to touch them and you're down— stiff as a park wall!"

"The water kills them," said the Rev. Walter Affelow complacently. "After weather like this the take-off will be like batter pudding!"

"Riding yours?"

It was Mr. Morsel's careless inquiry that cut through the conversation.

Mark nodded with a smile. "Yes, I shall be riding mine. What is more, I shall win. Don't any of you people miss Lumber! I went down into Wolverston yesterday and had a look at the Cup—it's a beauty! Of course, I've got dozens of 'em," he went on, and with one accord the whole table stopped talking, "but, curiously enough, I've never had a gold cup."

"I don't remember seeing them on your sideboard," said the vicar.

"I've got a packing-case full of 'em. I haven't troubled to get them out," said

Mark carelessly.

"How's the horse?" asked Burnley.

"Never better," replied Mark complacently, as he sipped his wine. "He gave me a wonderful ride this morning. I'm a little worried about the water jump, too, but I think I can get over that. The wretched people who bet at Wolverston would scream if you asked them for the odds to fifty pounds."

Everybody agreed as to this, for the poverty, or parsimony, of Wolverston bookmakers was notorious. The girl by his side was groaning inwardly. She tried ineffectually to turn the conversation in another direction.

"I thought of keeping Lumber for the National," Mark rattled on. "One could win a fortune there."

"You can win a fortune at Wolverston," said Mr. Morsel slowly. "Come now, Martin, to oblige you I will turn bookmaker for your especial benefit!"

There were eight people at that table who saw the fly thrown and waited breathlessly for the fish to rise. And he rose nobly.

"By Jove, would you?" said Mark.

"He will be at least six to one against," said Morsel, "especially if you ride him yourself. Now, I'll make you an offer. I'll lay you twelve thousand to two that Lumber doesn't win the Cup."

"I'll take you," said Mark, half rising from his seat.

"Wait a moment. This is the only condition—that you are the rider."

They saw the change that came to the younger man's face. The girl was looking at him appealingly, and her heart sank as she saw the smile fade.

"That-er-that isn't necessary, is it?" he asked. "I mean, suppose anything happened to me—and I had rather a twinge of rheumatism this morning."

"You say you're going to ride the horse, you're the best rider in Canada, and I'm offering you a wager that you couldn't get and will not get on the course."

And now the company knew just why Mr. Mark Martin had been invited to dinner, and why the girl had been placed by him. He must either refuse, humiliate her hopelessly, and be completely and finally exposed, or he must save his face at the cost of two thousand pounds. He looked left and right as though seeking a way of escape.

"I'll take your wager, Mr. Morsel," he said loudly.

"You can make it eighteen thousand to three thousand, if you like," suggested Morsel.

He leaned back in his chair, his eyes never moving from the face of the Great Sham.

"I'll take that!"

"There you are," Mr. Morsel beamed, "there you are, my boy! You've made eighteen thousand pounds! If I don't pay you," he said jovially, "you can post me at the Paddock Club.

And that, for the girl, was the tragedy of the evening.

Mark drove her back in his car to the little cottage. Colonel Desboro sat behind and brooded on the vanity of youth. As for Joan, she did not speak until he helped her to alight from the machine.

"Why did you do it, Mark?" she asked, and he knew from her voice that she was really hurt.

"I am awfully sorry, but I had to do it, my dear."

When Colon Desboro had gone in, she lingered. "Mark, why did you tell father—" She did not finish the sentence.

"About not asking you until the Cup was run?"

She nodded; her face in the moonlight was very pale, and he thought he had never seen her look so eerily beautiful.

"Is there some reason why I should not—bear your name?" she asked.

"There is—yes," he answered awkwardly. "But I think that reason will not exist after Boxing Day."

The authorities invariably drafted large forces of police to Wolverston for Boxing Day, and they were needed to control the crowd which flocked up to Knights' Field, where the races were held. An unclouded blue sky, an invigorating, frosty morning, and the little stands and paddock were crowded; the field where the motors were parked was black with shining roofs.

Joan did not see The Sham until after the second race, and then, with a groan, she noted that, although he was wearing his jockey breeches and boots, he walked with a limp.

"It's nothing," he said almost savagely. "I knocked my knee getting into the car."

"You won't be able to ride?"

"I think so." He was almost brusque.

Mr. Morsel, in his big tweed coat with the fur collar, was also an amused observer of the limp. He saw Mark disappear into the stewards' room, and laughed softly.

Æthel was never at her best on a cold day—her nose had a tendency to redden in the northern breezes— but there was a very good reason why she, who never went even to point-to-point meetings because of this disability, which even a powder-puff would not overcome, should have an interest in the Christmas Cup. For Mr. Mark Martin was to give her an additional wedding present. It is true he did not know that his three thousand pounds would be invested in the most luxurious and expensive of motor-cars. but that, indeed, was its destination. Moreover, she had a very natural and proper desire to be present on the occasion of the great exposure.

"He has gone in to tell the stewards he can't ride, and, by Jove, he's only just in time!" said Morsel, for already the riders were coming from the weighing-room, their gaudy caps showing incongruously above heavy overcoats and turned-up collars.

But Mr. Martin said nothing to the stewards about his inability to ride. He interviewed the three stewards, and they accepted certain alterations which he suggested.

"It's too late to alter it on the card or even on the number-board. You'll have to go out as you are," said the senior steward. "Have you notified the change, in accordance with the rules, to the Hunt Committee?"

"Yes," said Mark, and showed the letter he had received from the august secretary of National Hunt.

"That's all right," said the steward. "You'd better hurry up: the saddling bell will be ringing in a few minutes. Have you weighed out?"

Mark smiled. "Yes, I've weighed out," he said, and, to the everlasting amazement of Mr. Morsel, he came out from the weighing-room swinging his whip, limping a little, but showing no other sign of perturbation.

Mr. Morsel watched like a man in a dream, and saw him get up on to the back of the big chestnut. He cantered down to the post and did not fall off. When

the flag fell he was the first away, heading his field by half a length. The preliminary fence was an easy one, but it was sufficiently difficult to make an inexperienced rider fall. So far from falling, Mark seemed part of the horse. He overleapt his antagonists at every fence, and took the water jump in his stride.

Joan stood by her father on a farm waggon, open-mouthed, amazed, dreaming, she thought, so that she pinched herself. But she was wide awake. Lumber was leading by a field. He hopped the two last fences like a bird and cantered up the straight, an easy winner by a distance.

Mr. Morsel said nothing. He was incapable of speech. He could only stare, in a mad kind of way, as, with a smile on his brown face, Martin touched his hat to the applauding fox-hunters, and then he said hollowly:

"I've been caught."

But he sent his cheque that night. The cheque had been cleared when he met Mark Martin, and would have passed him with a glare, but Mark stopped him.

"I think you ought to know, Mr. Morsel," he said, "that I raced in an assumed name."

"Eh?" said Morsel, suddenly alert. "That isn't allowed under the rules."

"The horse was not nominated in my name, but the name of my trainer," said Mark quietly, "and at the last minute I notified the Hunt Committee that I was not Mark Martin, but Mark Martin Jones, and received permission to ride."

"Jones!" The name had a familiar ring.

"You knew a brother of mine—Ferdie. He's on my ranch now in Canada, Morsel. He had the effrontery to fall in love with your daughter, and you cleared up that entanglement by taking four thousand pounds from him at a card game he knew nothing about. I'm not saying it wasn't a straight game: I'm merely stating a fact. I am sending him four out of the eighteen thousand you so kindly gave me." He emphasised "gave." "And it was a gift, Mr. Morsel." There was a smile in the eyes that met the glare of the infuriated man. "You see, I am the best amateur rider in Canada. By the way, did you enjoy your morning in the riding school? That was the fourth occasion on which I tried to lure you in—you hadn't noticed me before. Four is my lucky number!"

Mr. Morsel waved his hands wildly, gurgled something, and passed on.

"I still don't realise," said Joan that night, "What was the dreadful secret you had to tell me. Why shouldn't I bear your name?"

He shook his head with gentle melancholy.

"Jones!" he said.

"And a very nice name," she said with conviction.

4. THE MAN IN THE GOLF HUT

He walked down the stairs from the great man's study, and at every two steps he came to a halt as some new aspect of the situation appeared to him. He had an absurd desire to sit down on the heavily carpeted treads and take his time over his musings, and once or twice he did lean on the sloping and massive handrail to allow himself a physical ease that his mind might work with greater smoothness.

Of course, the whole thing was madness—stark lunacy, and the greatest, least reasonable, most extravagant of all the lunacies was John Jenner's sublime egotism. His name must be protected; his honour must be avenged; he must face the world without blush or reproach.

Bobby Mackenzie chuckled hysterically but internally.

There were seven more stairs to descend before he came to the broad landing from whence one reached the drawing-room and Leslie Jenner.

"Phew!" said Bobby, drew a handkerchief from his sleeve, and wiped his brow.

He went down two steps and lingered... down three more and halted, drumming the handrail with nervous fingers... then boldly took the last two together, strode across the landing, laid a resolute hand upon the doorknob, and found his knees shaking.

And yet he was a sturdy young man, good and healthy looking, practised in the ways of social intercourse and one who was not unused to meeting difficult situations. Once, in a shattered trench fronting the Hindenburg line, he had pushed nerve-shattered men into action with a ribald jest which had become an army classic. At this moment he did not feel humorous.

He turned the knob with an effort of will which would have nerved a condemned man to put the rope about his own neck.

A girl was standing against the fireplace, her back to him. She did not look round even when he banged the door. He saw her shoulders shake, and looked back at the door.

"Miss Jenner," he said huskily, "don't... don't...!"

She turned, and he gasped.

"You were... laughing?" he asked incredulously.

"Of course I was laughing," she scoffed. "Isn't it laughable—father's absurd scheme?"

He nodded very slowly. He was very fond of Leslie Jenner. Every man was fond of her—a wisp of a girl, light-treading, lissome, quick-thinking.

"I told you some of the story before you went up to father," she said. "I suppose he told you the rest?"

"I suppose he did," he admitted carefully.

"He told you that I had spent the night with an unknown man in the golf hut?" she said.

He nodded again.

"I'll tell you the rest." She settled herself on a fender-seat and pointed to the big arm-chair opposite to her. Bobby seated himself meekly.

"I'd been to the Winslows," she said; "they're great pals of father's. Old Winslow is one of the two gods of finance whom father worships; father is the other. They had a birthday party—one of their numberless children has reached twenty-one without mishap, and naturally they wanted everybody to rejoice and be exceeding glad. Daddy was going, but something colossal happened at the last minute—steel rose an eighth or lard fell a twenty-fourth or something—and naturally the world stopped revolving. I went alone—Winslows' place is about twelve miles out of town, and you have to cross a piece of waste land that is called Smoke Park. It is a desolation and an abomination—"

"Must you be scriptural?" pleaded Bobby. "I only ask because your parent has been—"

"The Book of Job?" interrupted the girl quickly—"He hath made me a byword to the people, and I am become an open abhorring'—I thought he might. Well, to continue this strange story. Nothing happened at the dance except that I saw you flirting outrageously with Sybil Thorbern—"

"Flirting!" groaned Bobby. "Oh lord!—well, go on."

"Anyway, you were talking most earnestly to her—Jack Marsh pointed out that fact."

"He would," said Bobby. "I'm hardly likely to flirt with the wife of my best pal—but go on."

"Coming back at a little after midnight," she continued, "my car stopped. There was oil where gas should have been or gas where oil was due, I can't tell you. Anyway, Anderson, that's the chauffeur, disappeared into the interior of the bonnet and remained, uttering strangled moans from time to time, and emerging at intervals to apologize for the weather. You see, being a warm night I went in an open car, without hood or anything, and it began to rain like... like...."

"Hell," suggested the sympathetic man in the chair.

"Yes—thank you. I was getting wet through, and I remembered that there was a shelter—a small respectable hut which had been erected for golfers—we were on the course when we finally went dead. Without saying a word to Anderson, I tripped daintily along a path and found the hut. By this time it was raining—um—well, as you said. The door of the hut was closed, but it opened readily enough and I stepped inside. I was within hailing distance of the car, but the chauffeur had not seen me go, you understand?"

The other nodded.

"No sooner was I inside when I had a horrible feeling that there was somebody else there. I went spiney and shivery and made for the door. Before I could reach it somebody caught me by the arm. He was very gentle but very firm.

"'If you shout,' he said, in a disguised voice—I knew the voice was disguised—I'll knock your infernal head off!'"

"I see," said Bobby; "he was a gentleman."

"He wasn't bad," said the girl; "after that he was quite nice. He said that he hated doing this, but it was all for my good, and he hoped that I'd have the sense to see that he wouldn't have taken the step but for circumstances over which he had no control. In fact, it struck me that he was nervous himself."

"You couldn't see him?"

"No—it was absolutely dark. Then I heard the chauffeur's voice shout 'Are you there?' I was going to answer, but the man put his hand over my mouth. Then I

heard the car drone down the road. Anderson thought I must have walked on, and went along to pick me up. I don't know what I said to the gentleman in the hut—I think I was offensive. He didn't seem to mind.

"'You will stay here till one-thirty,' he said, 'and then you can go home.'"

"The brute! You were terribly frightened I suppose?" said Bobby.

"No—the queer thing is that I wasn't," replied the girl. "I just recognized that this was an unusual person. I even made up stories about him."

"Like what?" asked the interested Bobby.

"Well, perhaps he had committed a murder, an old feud, you know, and that sort of thing, and was making his escape when I came in upon him. I was puzzled about the one-thirty. Why did he want me to stay so long? Presently, however, I got a clue. There was a sound of a car coming along the road, and I saw its head-lamps appear over the rise. It was from the same direction as I had come, and stopped at identically the same spot where my car had stopped. I heard somebody get down, then I heard a whistle. And this is where the queerest part of the adventure began. My jailer literally pushed me into a corner of the hut.

"'Don't make a sound,' he said quite fiercely, and then he walked to the door, opened it, and stepped out. I heard somebody say, 'Is that you?' and then my man replied in a horrid, gruff, growling voice: 'Nothing doing!' The other person made no reply, but I heard his feet scuttling back to the car, and presently the car moved on, working up to a terrific pace before it disappeared."

"What did your man do?" asked Bobby.

"He came back," said the girl, "and he was laughing as though at the greatest joke in the world. But it was no joking matter for him, for just as I started in to ask with all the dignity that I could command that he should escort me at once to my home, along came papa's car from the opposite direction and pulled up near the golf hut. I heard father's loud voice cursing Anderson.

"'Of course she's in the golf hut, you fool,' he said. 'Do you think a daughter of mine wouldn't have sufficient sense to come in out of the rain? Give me one of those head-lamps.'"

"He took the lamp in his hand, and then my jailer began to get agitated.

"'Is he coming here?' he whispered. 'Who is it?'"

"'My father,' I said very coldly.

"'Your father!'"

"There was a kind of horror in his voice that went straight to my heart," said Leslie. "He turned to me and asked: 'What is your name?' I told him, and I think he nearly dropped."

"He didn't realize how important a prisoner he had, I suppose?" suggested Bobby.

"Don't be sarcastic—at any rate, father was no sooner on the path leading up to the hut, when my ruffian threw open the door and bolted like a hare. I saw father's lamp turn in his direction, but daddy could only have caught a glimpse of his back. And then, Bobby," said the girl solemnly, "the fat was in the fire! Of course, if I'd had a glimmer of intelligence, I should have told father the truth and stuck to my story."

"Though it was an extremely improbable one," said Bobby gravely, and the girl nodded.

"It was improbable, but it was true. The improbability of the yarn, however, struck me first. My imagination was too keen. I pictured just how father would stand with his hands on his hips and his legs apart, glaring down at me, and I just didn't feel like explaining.

"'Who was that man?' demanded father, and his voice was so deceptively mild and reasonable that I thought I had an easy escape—and I just gave the name that came into my head!"

"Which happened to be mine," said Bobby sadly.

"Which happened to be yours," she agreed.

"Did it strike you," asked Bobby, "that you would have the devil of a job explaining me away—especially as I bolted? That you were spoiling my young career, blackening my fair name, and jeopardizing my prospects?"

"Not until afterwards," she confessed ruefully. "When I got home I went to daddy and told him the whole truth, and he said I was shielding you, that by heavens I should make amends, by heavens he had half a mind to shoot you, and by heavens such a large blot had never been splashed upon the family escutcheon—of course, I knew I was wrong. I know I am wrong now. I want you to forgive me, Bobby. It is pretty hard on me you know—I've still to tell Jack Marsh."

"Oh, Jack Marsh!" said the young man softly. "Is he an interested party in this business?"

She hesitated.

"In a way," she said; "you see, there's a sort of understanding—I'll tell you frankly, Bobby. I'm rather fond of Jack, and I'm rather afraid of him. I'm fond of you too, but I'm not afraid of you. You see?"

"I see," said Bobby, "and that is rather a good thing."

There was a certain significance in his words, and she looked at him sharply.

"Oh, by the way, you haven't told me what happened upstairs. Did father ask you to marry me?"

He nodded.

"He not only asked, he demanded."

"Poor boy," she smiled; "you had an awful difficulty in getting out of it, didn't you?"

"Not at all," said Bobby, brushing invisible crumbs from his knees, "not at all. In fact, I didn't get out of it."

"You didn't—get out of it?" she asked breathlessly, staring at him.

"No," said Bobby, "I didn't. I just said 'All right!'"

There was a long silence.

"What does that mean? Do you mean to say—that you accepted me?" she asked faintly.

Bobby nodded.

"There was nothing else to do," he answered, with a dismal smile. "He insisted upon the affair taking place at once, and was frightfully keen on a quiet wedding."

She had nothing to say, being literally speechless.

"It is extremely tough on me," said Bobby bitterly. "I have always looked forward to a wedding with bridesmaids and crossed swords in the porch, and 'Hark the Herald Angels Sing!' and all that sort of stuff. I was never so disappointed in my life as when he talked about a 'quiet wedding.'"

"But—but Bobby," she wailed, "you haven't really—"

He nodded.

"I had to do it for the sake of your dear old family escutcheon," he said. "I don't know very much about your escutcheon, but if it's anything like mine it wants electro-plating. Our family has been making mesalliances since the days of Robert Bruce."

Suddenly she realized the horrible fact that, quite unknown to her, she was engaged.

"You mustn't do it," she cried vehemently. "Bobby, you must go straight to father and tell him—tell him you weren't the man. The engagement must be broken off! I insist upon this! It is—it is awful!"

Bobby sniffed.

"Suppose you go to father and you tell him I'm not the man," he said; "after all, you're better authority than I am."

"But this is tragic," she said, pacing the room; "it is monstrous!"

"Oh, I don't know," said Bobby, sitting back in his chair and putting the tips of his fingers together; "I'm not so sure that it is so bad. Mind you, you're not the kind of girl I should have chosen."

"Bobby, you're insulting!"

"No, I'm not," he said; "honest to goodness, I'm not. I have a terrifically high opinion of you, and I should never have dared in my position to have offered marriage. Your father, however, insists upon the marriage taking place immediately, insists upon giving me £100,000 worth of shares in his shipping company—"

"He is going to pay you!" she gasped. "For marrying me! Bobby!" She swallowed something, then walked quickly to the door. "I'm to see father, and I'll tell him the whole hideous truth. I love him dearly and I would do anything to save him unhappiness, but I am not going to have my life wrecked—I'll tell him that."

"You might tell him something about my life being wrecked too," called Bobby from the chair.

Probably she did not hear him, for she was out of the room and half-way up the stairs before he had finished. She came to the door of the study and no farther. Three minutes later she made a solemn re-entry to the drawing-room,

closing the door behind her.

"Bobby," she said soberly, "I dare not do it. Poor daddy! I just opened the door, and he was—" she choked.

"Yes?" said Bobby interestedly.

"He was sobbing as if his heart would break," gulped the girl.

"I shouldn't have thought £100,000 would have affected him like that," said Bobby thoughtfully.

"You brute!" she flamed. "Of course, it wasn't the money. It was me—me." She sat down, covering her face with her hands.

"It may have been me too," said the insistent Bobby; "after all, a nice man like your father would be awfully cut up at the thought that a life such as mine promises to be, and a career—"

"Your life and your career!" she interrupted angrily. "Oh, what a fool I've been, what a fool!"

Bobby did not interrupt, to agree or deny, and presently she grew calmer.

"I'll go through with it," she said wearily. "I could laugh if it were not so terrible."

"I couldn't even laugh," said Bobby; then: "I wonder if I could persuade him—I'd have had a try if you hadn't told me about Jack Marsh."

She swung round at him.

"What do you mean?" she asked.

"Just what I say," said Bobby coolly. "It was the mention of Jack Marsh which has sealed your young fate."

"Bobby!"

Bobby was standing up, his back to the fire, and his lips were tight pressed.

"We'll go through with this marriage," he said. "Maybe it is going to be pretty rotten for both of us, but I have an idea that it'd be worse for you if I didn't go through."

Another long silence, then:

"When shall it be?" she asked, averting her gaze.

Bobby scratched his chin.

"What are you doing next Thursday?" he demanded.

Three weeks later they sat on opposite sides of a breakfast-table in a private sitting-room of the Hotel Maurice reading their several correspondence. Through the open window came the clatter and whirr of the traffic on the Rivoli and the indefinable fragrance of a spring-time which further advertised its presence in the masses of mimosa, the golden clusters of daffodils, and in the shallow bowls of violets occupying every table in the room.

The girl threw a letter across the table to her husband.

"You'd better read this," she said; "it is from Jack Marsh."

He took up the letter and read it from beginning to end, so slowly that she grew impatient.

"Oh, do hurry," she complained; "there's nothing in it. I think Jack is being very nice about the whole business."

"Very!" he handed the letter back. "If you take my advice, you'll write to him, and having thanked him like a little lady, tell him that under the circumstances it is inadvisable that you should meet again."

She could only stare at him.

"What on earth do you mean?" she demanded.

"You can add," he went on, "that your husband objects to the continuation of the acquaintanceship."

"I'll do nothing of the sort," said the girl, the color coming to her face, her eyes shining dangerously.

"It is my wish," said the lofty Bobby. "Forgive me if I pull out the autocratic stop, but I have asked precious little of you since we have been married, and it is not my intention to make any other demands upon you. This, however, I insist upon. After we have been married a few years I will allow you to divorce me, and you can take as your portion those beautiful shipping shares which your dear father bestowed upon me as a wedding gift. But, in the meantime, you will do as I wish. Jack Marsh is an undesirable acquaintance."

"From your point of view," she scoffed.

"From your point of view too, only you haven't the—only you don't know it," he said.

She checked an inclination to throw a fish-knife at his head, and sat back, her hands folded on her lap.

"I shall take not the slightest notice of anything you say," she said; "my friends are my friends, and they will continue to be such. Perhaps you would like to see my other letters? I had half a dozen from feminine relatives, congratulating me upon my marriage and envying me my happiness. Do you mind if I laugh?"

"Why not?" said the imperturbable Bobby. "I can show you letters that I've had from maiden aunts, infinitely more comic. I could show you, I've got it here somewhere," he searched among the pile of letters at his elbow, "an epistle from Uncle Angus, reminding me that the first-born of the Mackenzies is invariably called—"

She rose from the table.

"If you're going to be horrid, I will not stay," she said; "that sort of humor doesn't amuse me."

They came back to London a week later to all appearances a happily married couple, and London relieved them both of a particular strain, for here each had friends and peculiar interests which neither shared with the other. The marriage was the most unreal experience which had come either to Bobby or to the girl.

Bobby described the ceremony as being rather like a joint application for a dog license, and said that it left him with the same emotions that would have been aroused by an appearance before an Income Tax commissioner. The "honeymoon" had bored them both, save for the odd intervals when they found a common pleasure amongst the treasures of the Louvre.

London and its gaiety spelt relief.

A few nights after their return, Mrs. Vandersluis-Carter gave a dinner and dance. Neither Leslie nor Bobby were invited to the dinner, but both went on to the ball. About midnight Bobby, wandering about in search of his wife, found her sitting in an alcove head to head with Jack Marsh. Marsh was doing the talking, and by his doleful appearance Bobby gathered that he was telling the girl the sad story of his life.

She looked up and saw something in Bobby's face which she didn't like, and took a hasty farewell of her former fiancé.

"Will you go along, Leslie?" said Bobby. "I'll join you in a few minutes. I want to speak to Marsh for a while."

"Let us go together," she said nervously.

"If you please," said Bobby, and his voice was firm, "will you go and wait for me?"

Marsh was on his feet too, sensing trouble. Leslie still hesitated, and the matter might have passed off quietly only Marsh felt it incumbent upon him to say a few words.

"Leslie was just telling me," he said, with all the geniality at his command, "that—"

"My wife's name is Mrs. Mackenzie," said Bobby. "You can forget that she was ever called Leslie by you."

"Bobby, Bobby!" whispered his wife in terror of a scene.

"And I would add this," said Bobby, taking no notice of her, "that the next time I catch you speaking with her I will take you by the scruff of the neck and I will kick you into Kingdom Come. Does that appeal to you?"

Marsh was white with rage.

"You're a pretty good talker, Mackenzie," he said; "you ought to be in Parliament."

Bobby's answer was appallingly unexpected. Without drawing back, his fist shot out and Mr. Marsh went to the floor.

"I'm not going to explain anything to you," said Bobby to his agonized wife that night. "I'm only telling you that you must not meet Marsh or there will be trouble. In a few years' time, I promise you, you can divorce me—just as soon as it is decent. In the meantime, if you want to avoid this kind of unpleasantness, you must also avoid J. Marsh." It was unfortunate that Bobby's assault had been witnessed by the one person beside Marsh who hated him.

Sybil Thorbern had reason enough by her own code. Into the sympathetic ears of her husband she poured the story of Bobby's infamy. He, poor, good man, listened uncomfortably because he was Bobby's oldest friend.

"The man is a savage," she said, "absolutely undisciplined."

"Bobby isn't bad," protested her husband feebly. He was a ruddy man, twenty years his wife's senior, an out-of-doors man with a detestation of any crisis which involved mental effort. "Bobby is a little wild, Sybil, but if he hit Marsh, you can be sure that Marsh deserved it."

Whereupon, stung to indiscretion, Mrs. Thorbern blurted venom. She was a pretty woman and had many admirers. Her husband took almost a pride in the fact, but the kind of admiration which Bobby Mackenzie had expressed to his wife (as she told the story) left a cloud on his brow.

"When did this happen?" he asked.

"The night of the Winslows' ball, a few days before this fellow married Leslie Jenner."

"I can hardly believe it," he said, in a troubled voice, "and yet—" he remembered certain circumstances, a packed valise lying in the hall, the discovery of his wife in traveling clothes ready to go out after midnight, and the lame excuse she made.

"I was mad," she excused herself; "every woman has that spasm of madness, however much she loves her husband, and for a moment he carried me off my feet. And then I realized how sweet you were and how good and ... Douglas, I hadn't the heart...!"

She was weeping now passionately, but her hysteria was due more to fright than to contrition. For she had said too much, made her accusations too direct, and even in the exalted moment of her vengeance was panic-stricken at the possible consequences of her "confession."

"Douglas, you won't say any more about it, will you?" she pleaded. "I oughtn't to have told you."

"I'm glad you did," he said. "I remember—" he said slowly, "some bruises on your arm that night—did he do that?"

She nodded.

"Yes, yes, but you won't go any farther with this matter, will you, Douglas? Please, please, dear, for my sake!"

"I'll think about it," said Douglas Thorbern unsteadily, and went up to his room.

The next morning there was a meeting between two distressed women. Bobby was out when Mrs. Thorbern called at the hotel where the young people were staying, and Leslie, who knew her well enough and disliked her instinctively, received the wife of Bobby's best friend.

"Leslie, I want you to help me," she blurted. "I'm in an awful fix. I was very annoyed with Bobby, and I told my husband something about him and I'm

afraid, I'm afraid...!"

"What did you tell your husband about Bobby?" demanded Leslie coldly.

The fact that she had parted from Bobby that morning in a spirit of the bitterest hostility did not lessen her feeling of antagonism toward Mrs. Thorbern. The woman hesitated.

"I—I told him that Bobby wanted to run away with me."

Leslie sat down suddenly.

"Bobby wanted to run away with you?" she repeated incredulously.

The other nodded.

"When did this happen?"

"On the night of the Winslows' ball, you remember?"

"Oh, I remember," said Leslie grimly; "I have a very good reason for remembering. So Bobby wanted to run away with you, did he?"

Again Mrs. Thorbern hesitated.

"I told my husband so, but—"

"Did you tell him the truth," asked Leslie, "or were you just lying?"

"I—well, there was some trouble with Bobby and me...."

"Were you speaking the truth or a lie?" asked Leslie again, and her voice was steady. "Personally, I know you were lying, because Bobby would not do so mean a thing."

"Naturally you would defend your husband," bridled Mrs. Thorbern.

"Naturally," said the girl calmly.

"He's a beast!" Mrs. Thorbern burst forth tearfully. "He has ruined my life!"

Her sincerity was unmistakable, and Leslie felt a little pang at her heart, but there was in her composition some of her father's shrewdness, his dogged insistence.

"Did Bobby ask you to run away with him?" She returned to the question and knew that her own future happiness was at stake, for she had dreamed of a future which did not exclude from her life the man who met her at meals and talked solemn nonsense about matrimony.

"Yes!" cried Mrs. Thorbern at last, and Leslie smiled.

"That, my dear girl, is a naughty, wicked lie!" she said. "Bobby never wanted you to run away with him—in fact, I'm going to ask him to tell me the story, because I am sure you are concealing something."

"All I want you to do is to warn Bobby to keep out of my husband's way." Mrs. Thorbern's voice held a menace. "You're horribly unsympathetic, Leslie; I did hope I should find a friend in you."

"What do you want me to do?" asked the girl; "agree with you that Bobby is a blackguard? I rather think that I know him better than you."

"I'm glad you have that illusion," said Mrs. Thorbern icily. "Your understanding of him was violently sudden; there was something rather mysterious about your marriage."

"Mysterious?" drawled the girl; "but aren't all marriages a little mysterious?"

Mrs. Thorbern shrugged her shoulders and was on her way to the door when Leslie stopped her with a cry. The older woman looked round and saw a light burning in the girl's eyes.

"Wait, wait," said Leslie excitedly, "this story about Bobby—this story you told your husband—when did you arrange to run away with him?" and then, as the other hesitated, she corrected, "when did you tell your husband that Bobby wanted to run away with you?"

"On the night of the Winslows' ball."

"And did your husband—have any idea that you were going to run away—with anybody?"

"He knew nothing," said Mrs. Thorbern, "he—oh, what is the good of telling you?"

"Oh please, please tell me," begged Leslie. "I am really anxious to know."

"Douglas found me dressed ready to go," said Mrs. Thorbern slowly, "and he—he—discovered my dressing-bag in the hall. I didn't expect him back that night. He had gone to Edinburgh on some business."

"And you were meeting—Bobby—somewhere near the Winslows?"

Again the hesitation.

"Yes, I was meeting him—him—"

"At any time?" asked the girl breathlessly, and Mrs. Thorbern looked at her with suspicion.

"I told my husband," she was careful to say, "that I was meeting Bobby between twelve and half-past one."

"I know," Leslie almost whispered the words; "you were meeting him at the golf hut in Smoke Park!"

It was Mrs. Thorbern's turn to show astonishment and uneasiness.

"You were meeting him at the golf hut before half-past one—and it wasn't Bobby you were meeting at all!"

"How do you know?" asked the woman harshly.

"It was Marsh—Jack Marsh—and Bobby knew you were going to run away, and he stopped you—that's what you mean when you say he wrecked your life!"

Mrs. Thorbern's breath was labored.

"Bobby is a sneak," she cried. "He listened, he listened! I'd have gone with Jack then, but he caught me by the arm—your charming Bobby—I had the bruise marks for days!"

"And he was waiting in the hut for you," said the girl slowly.

"Jack?"

Mrs. Thorbern looked at her open-mouthed, but the girl shook her head.

"No, Bobby," she said softly, "the splendid darling! It was he who was in the hut all the time waiting for you to keep your appointment and determined to save your husband's name. And that's why he wouldn't tell me—because it meant giving you away."

"How do you know he was there?" asked the woman.

"Because I was there too," said Leslie proudly.

Bobby came down to dinner that night, glum of face, and found his wife waiting for him in the hall.

"I'm in all sorts of trouble," he said. "I've had a perfectly rotten letter from an old pal of mine."

"He'll write you an apology in the morning," said the girl cheerfully.

He stared at her.

"How do you know? Are you going in for clairvoyance or something?"

"He'll write you an apology, because I told his wife she had to tell him the truth."

Bobby stopped dead.

"Look here, young person," he said, "what is the mystery?"

She smiled up in his face.

"Don't make a scene in public, Bobby," she said, "and do take that gloomy look off your face. I want to start off on my second honeymoon without a sad thought."

He stood gaping down at her.

"When do we start?" he asked hollowly.

"We'll go by the boat train that leaves Victoria at nine o'clock in the morning," she said.

He looked at his watch.

"What about the train that goes to Bournemouth tonight?" said he.

5. A ROMANCE IN BROWN

"Romance...? Yes, of a kind. Romance brings up the nine- fifteen... and there is romance in... well, courtship and that sort of thing. But life is fairly humdrum and unexciting. Wars... at a distance are immensely stirring, but close at hand, look rather like a street accident multiplied by millions. Life is utterly devoid of sensation, and romance is really sensation of a pleasant kind."

James Calcott Berkley sniffed.

"I wouldn't have your mind for money," he said, and his senior partner chuckled softly to himself.

He was a stout man and comfortable. You could not imagine him without a stiff collar and a heavy watch-guard. Jim often wondered what he looked like

in pyjamas—the chances were that he wore a nightshirt anyway—a silk nightshirt with broad magenta stripes.

"Money doesn't buy experience," said Mr. Calley. "Years, disappointments, knowing successions of exquisitely featured chorus girls and small-part ladies, who look like Athens at its palmiest, and talk like the Old Kent Road; it's being looked at with pure limpid eyes, so big and innocent that you get a lump in your throat, and watching them, change to granite when they price the little present you've given to their owner."

This time Jim Berkley sighed.

"What a perfectly horrible past you must have, Calley!" he said.

"On the contrary," protested the stout Mr. Calley, "my life has been singularly free from complications. There is a gray which has a purplish tinge—that is the color which most nearly represents the past of Cæsar Calley. We look at the matter from the standpoint of fifty and twenty-seven. You ought to be married," he went on, and Jim closed his eyes wearily. "That statement may make you dither, but it is a fact. Marriage destroys the icing, but reveals the cake, and you can't live on almond icing any more than you can make a square meal of Turkish Delight. You're well off, you're nice looking, you have decent standards of conduct ... in fact, you're a desirable match."

"I have never actually met anybody..." said Jim. "There are thousands of girls, of course—"

"But they lack the atmosphere of romance," interrupted the other dryly; "they eat food and they ride to hounds, and they are entirely without mystery. You'll never get married if you wait for mystery. There is nothing mysterious about women—they are just men with a different code of honour. They never pay their card debts, but they won't take tea in your rooms unless they bring their aunts."

"Br-r!" shivered Jim. "Marriage! The wedding reception... the awful church and the best man and the tight boots and the confetti!"

Mr. Calley put on his gold-rimmed glasses and surveyed his partner dispassionately.

"Even Prince Charming had to go through something of the sort when he wed the Fairy Princess," he said, "and I guess the fairy princess sat up half the night worrying whether the bridesmaids ought to wear gray charmeuse or white tulle. There is nothing wholly romantic and nothing wholly sordid. You can't have silk without worms."

Jim Berkley made a hasty exit. Marriage was a subject which irritated and annoyed him. And when Galley said that no woman had mystery ...!

His watch said twenty minutes past three o'clock, and he stood at the window looking down into Gresham Street. He was so standing, absorbed in his thoughts, when Calley put his head in at the door.

"Hullo? Looking for the Brown Girl?" he asked.

"No!" said Jim loudly.

"Thought you might be; queer bird—I'm off. Shan't be up tomorrow—I'm playing in a foursome at Mid-Surrey."

"Good-night," said Jim absently.

"As to romance," insisted Calley, "have you ever considered Boccaccio's stories in cold blood? Why, there isn't a Sunday newspaper that doesn't beat the story of Violante and Theodoro—"

"Oh, shut up!" snarled Jim, and his amiable partner closed the door grinning.

The bells of St. Olives tolled the half-hour, and then James Calcott Berkley reaped the regard of his vigil. The Brown Girl was walking slowly along the pavement on the opposite side of the road—as she walked every day when the bells of St. Olives rang the half-hour.

He took up the pair of field-glasses that were on his desk, and standing back from the window, focused them. She was exquisitely beautiful—he had never seen such loveliness in his life. Invariably she was dressed in brown; but seldom did she wear the same costume twice. Who was she? By the regularity of her appearance, he was certain that she was employed somewhere in the neighborhood. Yet, she was too well dressed to be an ordinary employee, too young to hold any responsible post. And then, most unaccountable phenomenon of all, there was the little old woman who was always waiting for her, and to whom she invariably handed a letter with a little smile.

Every day this happened, the little old woman in the plaid shawl hobbled across the street and took the letter; there was a brief exchange of words and the little old woman crossed the street again, and the girl passed on out of sight. That happened today.

It was Calley who had first seen her, and in his prosaic unimaginative way had christened her "the Brown Girl." And yet it was a name which Jim liked. "Queer bird!" He shuddered at the grossness of the description. Presently she was out of sight, and he turned with a sigh and a sense of bitter resentment to a

review of the day's transactions, for Jim was a stockbroker, as his father had been before him.

The arrival of his secretary with letters to sign gave him an idea.

"Thompson, I've often wondered how... well, poor people, without opportunities for meeting socially... get acquainted."

"Yes, sir? Well, they sort of meet," said Thompson vaguely. "You mean young men and young ladies?"

Jim, very hot, nodded, not daring to meet the eyes of his clerk, lest his secret be read.

"Generally the girl's got a brother who asks a boy to the house, or they meet at a dance. There are thousands of ways."

Jim coughed as he scribbled his name.

"Yes... but suppose he doesn't know the brother—if there is a brother. Just sees her on the street, and... well... falls in love with her and all that sort of thing?"

Thompson was young, but experienced.

"That's a bit difficult," he said, "because no lady likes to be picked up, in a manner of speaking. He just finds out who she is, and gets somebody to introduce him."

Jim shook his head impatiently.

"But, suppose he doesn't know who she is... suppose he just sees her and doesn't know from Adam or Eve what her name is?"

Mr. Thompson considered this weighty problem.

"There are several stunts he can work, such as picking up a handkerchief and saying 'Excuse me, miss, is this yours?' or he can follow her home and make inquiries, or he can pretend that he's met her before—"

"None of which methods appeal to me, Thompson," said Jim sharply, and went a fiery red under Thompson's suspicious scrutiny.

He went back to his flat in Portland Place, his mind wholly occupied by the Brown Girl, her mystery, her glorious beauty. That night he dreamed of her; she and he were sitting on the yellow sands, and before them stretched the unbroken horizon of a sunlit sea. He was holding her hand, sublimely, supremely happy, and she was looking at him shyly and saying, "Harold, do

you think you really will be happy?"

When he awoke, and recalling the dream realized that his name was not "Harold," he was aggrieved until he remembered that dreams go contrariwise, and that no unknown Harold would ever hold her hand.

Calley was away next morning and he was glad, because he had determined to follow Thompson's advice—with modifications. He must discover who she was. The uncertainty was worrying him—spoiling his days and disturbing his nights.

At three-thirty, when the clock of St. Olives struck, he was waiting in the doorway of his office. He saw the little old woman come into Gresham Street from the Moorgate Street end, and take up her station.

And then he saw the Brown Girl. Nearer at hand, she was more radiantly lovely than ever. Looking neither to left nor to right, she came slowly on, and the little woman in the plaid shawl crossed the street to meet her. There was a brief colloquy, the invariable flash of the Brown Girl's smile, and then the little old woman recrossed the road, clutching tightly at the white envelope. The Brown Girl resumed her walk, and Jim, with a flutter at his heart, followed her boldly.

She turned into Moorgate Street, with Jim a dozen paces behind her. Her costume was expensive, her feet were daintily shod, her stockings of silk—he knew this much of woman's mystery.

Suddenly, to his surprise she stopped by the side of a limousine that was drawn up by the side of the street, opened the door and stepped in. He could only stand still, paralyzed with astonishment. The car was on the move, when the door opened and the girl stepped out. The reason for this reckless action was not at first apparent, for Jim did not see the bag she had dropped until after he had sprung forward and lifted her from where she lay.

"It is nothing. I'm sorry to have troubled you... I tapped on the window, but Bennett did not hear me.... I was so alarmed about losing my bag...."

Nevertheless, she limped as she walked to where the bag lay. Jim snatched it up for her.

"Are you sure you aren't hurt?" he asked, and in his agitation his voice sounded as though it belonged to somebody else.

"No... really... it was stupid of me."

"Can't I take you somewhere... to a doctor's?" he asked, as he helped her into

the car. The crowd that every such occurrence attracts had gathered.

"No... yes, please come in with me," she said hurriedly, and when he followed her and the machine moved on: "I'm really not hurt, but I didn't wish to argue with you before all those people. I really am quite well—you won't mind if I drop you at Liverpool Street? I am awfully grateful to you."

She also was a little incoherent.

Jim sat by her side, bolt upright, hardly daring to breathe. He was dazed and bewildered, and had not recovered when, in response to her signal, the car pulled up.

"I feel I'm being very rude in turning you out," she said, and her smile was adorable, "but... I don't want mother to know that I have been in the city."

"Of course not," said Jim. It seemed the most natural thing in the world that she should not wish her mother to know that she had been in the city.

He took her hand and dropped it instantly. She seemed amused. Watching the car as it plunged into the traffic he saw her looking back through the glass panel in the hood, and waved his hand. He was astounded at his boldness.

That night he thought of her. He found time to have dinner and read the evening newspapers, but these were the briefest interruptions to his thoughts.

Calley was boisterously cheerful next morning. He and his partner had unexpectedly beaten the club champions.

"My putting was a little short of marvelous," he said immodestly. "I'll show you one shot I did—Ferguson, the pro., said he'd never seen anything approaching it. Now, suppose this paper-weight is the ball...."

"And, by the way, Jim," he said, when he had finished his demonstration, "I want to be away all next Thursday. I'll look in in the morning, but I want to go almost immediately. I'm playing Jack Anderson, and we've got a side bet of a tenner. Will you remember that? Somebody must be at the office to deal with Balter's account—he's buying now, and he's a tetchy devil."

"I'll be here," said Jim, "though it is deplorable that a man of your age and substance should spend his days chasing an inoffensive ball."

"You don't know what golf is to an intellectual man," said Calley.

He went away after lunch and Jim was thankful. Ordinarily, golf talk mildly interested. Today it was torture.

At three-thirty the Brown Girl came into Gresham Street. He was watching her from the shadow of the doorway, and, waiting until the little drama had been played out and the woman in the plaid shawl had left her, he quickened his pace and overtook her as she turned the corner of the street.

"Forgive me the unpardonable liberty," he stammered, hat in hand, "but I was worried... I wondered, I mean, if your ankle was better?"

For a second she looked at him distrustfully.

"Yes; it is quite well. It is kind of you to ask."

Here he was at a loss to find an excuse to continue the conversation, but he was desperate.

"There is something I should like to say to you, Miss—"

He saw alarm in her eyes and cursed himself for being the cause.

"Jones—Ella Jones. My name isn't Jones, really, but I can't tell you..." she said. "I'm afraid I can't wait... I have an appointment ... you aren't Signor Vallassini, are you?"

The question took him aback.

"No," he said. "I'm not. I'm—not Signor... I didn't catch the name?"

"It doesn't matter—besides, I ought to have known that you weren't Italian. Oh!"

She was frightened now, looking at him with wide-opened eyes.

"You're... a detective!" she gasped.

He hadn't the presence of mind, nor yet the power of speech, to deny the charge.

"Will you come with me, please?" she asked hurriedly, and he accompanied her in silence to the waiting car. She gave some instructions to the driver and then stepped in. Jim followed, his heart beating wildly.

A detective! What had she to fear and who was Signor Whatever-his-name was? Into what tangle of trouble had this beautiful girl strayed?

"I won't ask you who you are, but I have a feeling that you have been watching me."

She waited for him to speak.

"Yes," he hesitated. "I have been...."

"For long?"

He nodded miserably.

"And you have seen me give the envelope to the agent?"

"To the old lady," he said, and she bit her lower lip.

"I meant 'old lady,'" she said. "You think it is strange, but I cannot explain. There are others involved—it is not my secret."

"I'm sure it isn't," said Jim. "My name, by the way, is Jim—"

"Don't tell me!" she begged earnestly. "I don't think it would be fair to you. You are doing your duty and it is hateful of me even to suggest that you can be bought—"

"I'm not a detective," said Jim. "Believe me, Miss Jones, I'm not a detective. I'm a very prosaic stockbroker, but if there is anything in the world I can do for you, I'd... I'd die to serve you!"

There was no mistaking his sincerity. Startled as she was by his passionate declaration, she recognized the earnestness of the man by her side. She went red and white, and then:

"I wonder if I can trust you?" she asked in a low voice.

Jim Berkley could only nod rapidly. He was incapable of speech.

"I can't tell you the whole story," she said, "but briefly it is this. My father, as a young man, lived in Italy and became, half in fun, half for the adventure of the thing, a member of a secret society. When he left Italy he thought the matter was ended, and indeed for many years the Milani—that was the name of the gang—left him alone. He became rich and married. A year ago he received a summons from the Milani, calling on him to assassinate—"

She mentioned a name revered in certain political circles, detested in others, and Jim gasped.

"Alternatively he was to pay a certain sum of money every day. They refused to accept a lump sum, wishing to give him a daily reminder of his obligations to the gang. Every day I come to Gresham Street, where I am met by one of the emissaries of the Milani—"

"That old woman?" asked Jim incredulously.

"That old woman," nodded the girl; "poor dear, I'm sure she doesn't realize the dreadful character of her errand, or the kind of people she is working for. The head of the movement is a villain named Vallassini—an Italian."

"But why doesn't your father inform the police?" asked Jim.

"He would be shot dead tomorrow," said the girl. "No, that isn't the way out. I have thought of a dozen."

"If you can tell me in what way I can help," said the fervent Jim, "I'll do anything!"

The car was passing through the streets of Bloomsbury. They might have been running along the top of the great wall of China for all that Jim noticed. He was conscious only of this vital and blessed fact. He was alone with the Brown Girl, her sleeve touched his, her little shoe was against his. He touched it furtively.

"There is one thing you could do," she said, "but it would involve such risks that I hardly dare ask you. You have been a soldier?"

"Yes—who hasn't?" said Jim, daring to smile for the first time. "And please do not worry about risks. There is nothing on earth I wouldn't face—"

"I'm sure," she said hastily; "but this is no ordinary risk. I want to know where these people live. Especially the Italian."

"Vaselini?" asked Jim. "I can remember his name by thinking of cold cream."

"Vallassini," corrected the girl; "the woman goes to him every day. Follow her... yet I hate asking you. These people are desperate—"

Jim drew a long breath.

"So am I," he said; "I'm desperately anxious to help you."

She dropped him at the end of Portland Place. It was a coincidence that she chose this spot, and this time he held her hand a little longer.

"You will see me tomorrow. After the old woman has left me, follow her. I will meet you... where?"

Outside the Regent's Park Station he suggested, and to this she agreed.

It required a little maneuvering to get away from the office next day. Calley was in one of his rare working moods.

"Going home?" he said in surprise, and looked up at the clock. "Well, perhaps

you're right.... I've a good mind to go myself. I'll walk with you."

"Don't trouble," said Jim in haste. "I'm—I'm meeting somebody quite close at hand."

"Somebody romantic, I hope," said Calley, crudely sarcastic.

Jim did not trouble to reply. Again he watched the meeting, but this time he followed the little old woman. He saw the girl pause at the corner of Moorgate Street and look back; he sensed approval and gratitude in that glance, and his heart swelled with pride.

The woman in the plaid shawl made her slow way across Southwark Bridge. On the other side she boarded a car and Jim followed....

At eight o'clock that night he met the girl at the appointed rendezvous.

"Your old woman's name is Murphy. She has a fruit stall near the Exchange, and she lives at 47 Paton Street, Herne Hill—she has one room," he reported. "She has twice been in the hands of the police for violent assaults on other ladies of her calling, but of late years, owing to infirmity and her conversion to the temperance movement, she has lived a fairly uneventful life."

"And Vallassini?"

Jim shook his head.

"Nobody knows him; the old woman has no visitors so far as I can discover."

They were pacing together the deserted pavement of Park Crescent. It was very dark and once, when her foot slipped, she caught Jim's arm and did not let it go.

"I want to ask you something," said Jim huskily, after they had walked to and fro for a quarter of an hour, mainly in silence; "I want to ask you something."

She inclined her head.

"I love you," said Jim.

He felt the arm in his shiver—but she did not take it away.

"I love you dearly.... I have loved you ever since I first saw you. You are my dream girl... the mystery I have worshipped...."

"Oh, please!" she whispered imploringly. "I can't...."

"I want you to marry me. I am... well known... I mean I'm not... I mean I can

give you a position."

"Oh, Jim!" she murmured, and he stooped and kissed her.

"My father will be furious," she said in a muffled voice. He was holding her very tightly at the time. "But I do love you... and I don't know your name even, except Jim... and I hate the thought of marriage and all the fuss that people make."

"I loathe it too, darling. I want to run away to some quiet registry office—"

"That's just how I feel—but we'll have to tell father."

"I suppose so," said Jim. "Of course we must tell him. Why not now?"

She did not answer at once.

"Mother will be horrified," she said, "and father will hate you. He has always wanted me to marry a rich man—are you rich?"

Jim laughed and kissed her again. He needed very little excuse.

"I'm not poor," he said. "Who was the man?"

"An awful person. I've never met him, but he must be a terrible prig. He thinks women are commonplace, and he says he'll not marry until he meets the ideal woman. I hate being trotted out for inspection like a prize horse that has to impress the purchaser, so the only time he came to dinner I went to bed."

"The brute!" said Jim. "Do I know him?"

"You may do. He's well known in the city—James Calcott Berkley."

"Eh?" said Jim Berkley hollowly.

"Do you know him? You must. Daddy has always poked fun at me because I am romantic. I love romance and all that is colorable in life. I love all that is out of the beaten ways. At first daddy's story thrilled me—then it frightened me. When he asked me to help him, I was glad—because he is a dear, even though he sneers at things that are precious to me. He always says I'll never find romance in this humdrum city—but he's wrong!"

She squeezed his arm and he kissed her again. He was calm now.

"What is your father's name, darling?" he asked softly.

"Cæsar Calley—of Berkley & Calley."

"Cæsar Calley!" repeated Jim. "Do you mind if we don't tell your father, Ella? Do you mind if I get a license tomorrow and we're married secretly the next day—that will be Thursday?"

She put up her face to his.

"Yes... I have an idea that father is playing golf on Thursday."

"I have an idea that he isn't," said Jim Berkley.

So on Thursday morning they were married, and Cæsar Calley, with his golf clubs propped against his desk, waited impatiently for the arrival of his junior partner to release him for his match. In a sense the day was spoilt for Mr. Cæsar Calley. In another sense it was the happiest day of his life.

When the telegram came, he sat back and smiled and did not stop smiling all day.

As the bells of St. Olives chimed the half-hour after three, he went down into Gresham Street and interviewed the old apple woman in the plaid shawl.

"The young lady hasn't come, sir," she said.

"No, and she won't come any more, Mrs. Murphy," said Cæsar Calley as he opened his note-case. "You'll miss the little money I sent you every day, but here is sufficient to last you for a year."

The little old woman took the notes and slid them into her skirt- pocket.

"Five shillings a day you used to send me," she quavered, "and I never earned money easier. Not quite right in her head, you said, sir?" she asked.

"She's recovered now," said the shameless Calley; "quite recovered!"

6. THE PERFECT GENTLEMAN

Mrs. Leverton Cam really reached her decision long before her legacy came, and when she was just plain Mrs. Wainford, the widow of a very gallant officer, who had died fighting on the Somme.

Plain Mrs. Wainford she had never been. At twenty she was beautiful; at thirty-five hers was that ethereal loveliness which would have inspired poets had she lived in a poetic age. The news of Willie's death had shocked her—or rather, she was shocked by her own attitude, for her first sensation had been one of incredible relief. It was a painful shutting down of an unpleasant story. The magnificent heroism of his passing should have wiped out all bitternesses—memories of crude infidelities, of shameless dishonesty, of that one open-

handed blow he had struck her.

But somehow these ugly pictures remained in her mind. And then came Slick, handsome, tall, debonair; a young man who met trouble, for which he was mainly responsible, with a smile. She thought she loved him; she was sure he loved her. There was no earthly reason why they should not marry. Marriage stood for bondage in her mind, and the prospect was not alluring. Yet she would have married Slick; her real humiliation was that he had always found a good reason against such a course. And Slick Dawlish became involved in the Maidstone baccarat scandal and narrowly escape prosecution.

Misfortunes do not come singly. Within a month he figured in yet another unsavory affair. One of his horses was most palpably pulled; there followed an inquiry, and a few weeks later that deadly notice in the Racing Calendar:

"Following upon an inquiry by the Stewards of the Jockey Club into the running of 'Dictionnaire,' the Stewards warned Mr. Basil Winden Dawlish off Newmarket Heath."

Slick read the announcement with some amusement and got on to the telephone to his friend. Apparently she had read about it in the evening newspaper. "I suppose I'd better pop off to the Continent somewhere, Bunny. What do you say to a trip—"

"You go alone, Slick." The voice was very cold, very even. For a moment he was shaken out of his indifference.

There is no need to put on record his expostulations, the story of his many journeys to Cheyne House, only to find that Mrs. Wainford was out. Five years passed. The Leverton Cam fortune and the Leverton Cam diamonds came to Bunny Wainford. He read one day the announcement that she had changed her name by deed poll, and went smiling to bed—he had been up all night trimming an opulent young Guardsman who had the misfortune to sit in a game with him. Slick's manipulation of a pack of cards was his most amazing accomplishment.

He used to read of her movements in the society columns of the newspapers:

"Mrs. Leverton Cam, the widow of a very gallant officer..."

When he read this he laughed till the tears came into his eyes. For Slick had a secret which he shared with none.

They met occasionally, but he paid no further visit to the flat until a certain 24th of December...

The dinner had been a good one; the game which followed had been short and profitable. Slick came out of a club which was not too particular as to its membership, feeling at peace with the world. How much of his benignity was traceable to that excellent '19 wine and that marvelous old brandy, and how much to his momentary affluence, it may be difficult to separate.

He hailed a cab with a lordly gesture, his first intention being to go home to his flat in St. James's Street, yet, when the cabman asked for orders:

"Cheyne House, Chelsea Embankment," he said.

The cabman drew a long face.

"The fog's thick along the Thames, sir. I've only just come from Westminster."

Slick was dimly conscious that the fog was thick where he stood—a yellow, blinding mist through which the street lamps glowed wanly.

"Cheyne House," he repeated, and got in.

Their progress was slow. Somewhere in the region of Chelsea, as they guessed rather than knew, the cabman stopped and Slick got out.

"The Embankment can't be very far from here, sir," and added: "It's a wonderful night for The Cat."

At the moment Slick was not interested in fashionable burglars, though The Cat's exploits had been a general topic of conversation at most of the dinner-tables he had visited in the past week or two.

"All right," he said, and paid the cabman magnificently.

He had a knowledge of topography and a surprising memory. He remembered, for example, certain big, acorn-shaped rail-tops that surrounded a museum, and when, groping in the dark, he felt one of these, his progress to Cheyne House was simplified. It was five years since he had put his foot inside that flat of hers... If she was rotten to him, he could go away again. After all, a fellow had an excuse for calling at this season of the year. He had still got her key on his ring... He ought to return that. Perhaps the hall porter would not admit him... He wished he could climb like that cat bird, and chuckled for a long time at the thought of the surprise it would give Bunny. He was not quite sober.

Marjorie, the maid, opened the door to him Her face was a little pallid; one hand was behind her. "Oh, Mr. Dawlish!" she gasped, and seemed very relieved. She opened the door wider. "Won't you come in?"

He walked into the lighted hall, hung up his hat and coat, and followed the girl, who backed before him, into the drawing-room—the same room, but beautifully decorated. The furniture was new, terribly expensive; the lamp brackets on the wall were of silver; the glass chandelier was new. He grinned.

"Mrs. Leverton Cam is out," said the girl. "She went to the theatre with Lady Lorford."

"Oh!" He stroked his chin gravely, saw that the maid's hand was still behind her.

"What have you got there?" he asked. Silently she produced the thing she was holding—a small poker.

"Are you expecting a friend?" he asked good-humoredly.

It was the cat burglar she feared; her defensive attitude was not an unusual phenomenon. Had not old Mrs. Curter recently invested in a large Navy revolver to protect her emeralds? And that pink-faced woman who lived with somebody or other—he couldn't remember whom—invested in police whistles and burglar alarms?

The maid was talking. "It's like out of a book, isn't it, sir? Fancy a burglar wearing evening dress—"

"Good Lord!" said Slick. "All burglars wear evening dress some time or other; it's part of their punishment."

He walked to the French windows, opened them with some difficulty, and stepped out on to the balcony. Below was unrelieved murkiness.

"It's a ghastly night, eh? Get me a spot."

She went out and came back with a tray, and he helped himself liberally, though he remembered that whisky goes badly on top of champagne.

Now that the maid had recovered herself, she remembered certain prohibitions, and was a little uneasy. This he detected, and he anticipated the cause.

"Excuse me, sir... Madame will be rather angry, won't she, when she finds you here?"

He was looking at her. Marjorie had got older; all the bloom had gone. He took a pack of cards from his pocket, and, sitting down to a little table, began to shuffle and cut almost mechanically.

"Marjorie, do you remember the old times when nobody had a bob in the world?" he asked. "I bet they've put up the rent of this flat since I left. Somebody told me Cheyne House had become quite fashionable."

He offered the cards to the girl.

"Cut," he said laconically.

She hesitated and presently obeyed, a little awkwardly, a little timidly. He dealt five cards quickly to her and five to himself.

"Don't pick them up," he said. "You've got three aces and two kings," and when she turned the cards up he roared with laughter. "I learnt that at Sunday school," he said, and suddenly bent his head, listening. "There's a car."

He opened the window again and walked on to the balcony, and presently heard the whine and rattle of an ancient machine. A taxi. He came back, closing the window, and found the girl still waiting a little apprehensively.

"Mr. Dawlish, I wish you'd try to persuade Madam to keep her jewels at the safe deposit," she said. "It terrifies me having those diamonds in the flat. And everybody knowing that she's got them here. There was a bit in the paper the other night; I cut it out."

She searched the mantelpiece, where apparently she had deposited the cutting. He took the slip from her hand and read:

"Mrs. Leverton Carn is one of the society women who do not fear cat burglars. Most ladies would keep the Carn diamonds in a bank, but Mrs. Leverton Carn prefers the security of her own safe."

"Silly," was his comment. "She's asking for it."

"With this burglar around—" began the girl, and then the bell rang.

Slick poured himself out another whisky. He heard Bunny's voice, the click of an opening door, but did not look round. He knew she was standing in the doorway surveying him, and guessed that that survey had in it nothing of approval. Presently he turned his eyes.

"Come in, Bunny. Don't stand on ceremony; we're all friends here," he said.

She was lovely—he expected nothing less—lovelier than he had ever seen her.

She took off her wrap and handed it to Marjorie.

"I will ring when Mr. Dawlish has gone—which will be very soon," she added.

And, when the door had closed on the maid: "Did you come to see me or Marjorie?"

He laughed quietly.

"Your tastes are so catholic that one is never sure—tea-shop waitresses, grass widows ready for the haymaker, chorus-girls."

Her shrug completed the category.

"And widow ladies down on their luck, eh?" said Slick, amused.

She walked to the little settee near the fire and sat down, offering her cold hands to the blaze.

"I deserved that," she said, without looking up, "but I thought you could resist the temptation. Marjorie tells me you did have the decency to ring. You have never returned the key."

He was on the point of telling her that it was in his pocket. Instead:

"Lost it," said Slick.

She looked at him thoughtfully. "You haven't improved."

"When my little reformer got tired of improving me, I lost interest," he said flippantly.

She might have told him that it was impossible to improve a man who would rather steal than work.

"I often wonder why you didn't turn cat burglar," she said; "it is the fashionable branch of your profession."

He shivered.

"Cat burglar—any kind of burglar—horrible life! Out of doors in all kinds of beastly weather—climbing up spouts —ugh!"

She smiled faintly.

"Card-sharping is easier—picking up stupid young men of your own class and fleecing them."

He laughed.

"You're frightfully amusing tonight. What have you been seeing—a musical comedy? Not that that would depress you. You can't hurt my feelings, Bunny

darling."

Her shoulders moved imperceptibly. Then, as his hand strayed to the decanter: "Don't drink any more, Slick."

"Call me Basil," he mocked her. "Basil! Fancy giving me a name like that! No wonder I went wrong."

He splashed some soda into the glass.

"If they'd christened me Percy, I'd have had a chance."

"Where did you get the name 'Slick'?" she asked him, and it occurred to her that it was amazing she had never asked that question before.

"At school—" he began, and stopped short. "When I was a kid."

She almost gasped with astonishment at her discovery. She had known him all these years, and for the first time in her life she had discovered his raw spot.

"I wonder what they'd think of you at your school—now?" she asked innocently, and saw the scowl gather on his face, and guessed she was right. Here was the chink in his armour.

"I don't want to discuss my school," he said gruffly. "Do you mind? We'll keep that out of the conversation."

She looked at him in amused wonder.

"That's your tender spot, is it? I never knew that before. The perfect gentleman!" She mimicked him. "'We will not discuss my school do you mind? We are old Festonians.'"

She saw the angry red come to his face.

"Drop it! I mean that," he said.

She might call him a thief, and he would laugh; a card-sharper, and he would be amused. She had called him worse than either, and he had done no more than make her an ironical bow. But at the first reference to his school...

"Why have you come?" she asked quietly. He felt in his pocket, took out a note-case, laid two banknotes on the table.

"The last time I saw you I borrowed a couple of hundred. Here they are."

She looked at the money contemptuously.

"Who was the victim?" she asked.

"A fellow from America," said Slick easily. "They've got all the money except that bit."

He put the cards back. "The perfect gentleman!" she said.

He nodded and smiled. "I was good enough for you once, old girl," he said, as he reached for the decanter.

Her hand fell on his wrist, but he shook it off.

"You've got foolish ideas, Bunny," he said. "You think everybody's honest except the pros. Why, there isn't a club in London that hasn't got its sharps—only they pretend that it's temperament. You know the feller who wriggles about in his chair if you don't return his spade? He's a sharp, but doesn't know it."

She waited, and, when he had put down the glass:

"I don't know that I want you to stay, Slick, I suppose Christmas is the excuse that brought you? Well, I will accept your kind wishes—and now you can go."

He tried to take her hand, but she drew back; and then, before she realized what had happened, she was in his arms, and he was kissing her. She broke loose furiously, white as death.

"You brute!" she breathed. Slick Dawlish was not smiling any more. He stood glowering down at her, his hands in his pockets.

"Brute! That's been my trouble—I've been too gentle with you! If I'd treated you as your husband treated you—"

"We'll leave his name out of it!" she cried, in a cold fury. "Slick, haven't you any decent feeling, that you can mention the name of a man who died honorably in action—a man of your own regiment—a man you pretend was a friend of yours?"

He was off his guard now. Anger, wounded vanity, a tremendous sense of grievance, a desire to hurt as he had been hurt, dominated him, to the exclusion of all the considerations which had governed him during all the long years.

"He was no friend of yours, Bunny," he said brutally. "Don't see him in a halo because he passed out."

His voice was tremulous with anger.

"He never hesitated to take a hunting-crop to you—you told me that yourself. Your life was a hell upon earth with him—don't forget it!"

"He's dead," she said in a low voice.

Slick Dawlish swallowed his whisky at a gulp.

"I'm talking about him alive. You sneer about me being unfaithful —good Lord!"

And now she turned on him in a fury.

"I don't want to hear what you're going to say," she said tensely. "I forgave him all when the news came—you yourself brought it. Have you no shame, no decency? He treated me badly—I've never said he didn't—but his sacrifice wiped that out and left him a clean memory. If you had only gone with him!"

"I'm jolly glad I didn't," said Slick, and his tone infuriated her.

"The perfect gentleman! The old Festonian!"

Now he turned with a snarl.

"Drop it!"

"That hurts you," she taunted. "I'd like to print your record on every wall of your old school. I'd like to have a banner on the playing field—'Slick Dawlish, an old boy of this school, is a card-sharper—a man without honour to comrades living or faith to the dead!'"

He was livid with fury.

"Faith to Bill Wainford—that damned coward!"

He saw her eyes open wide with horror, but nothing could check him now.

"I'll tell you! Bill Wainford deserted in the face of the enemy the night before the big push."

"That's a lie"

"He went to save his skin," he went on remorselessly. "He'd have been court-martialled for robbing the regimental funds if he hadn't. I told the lie about his being killed—I swore I'd seen it—they found out the truth after they'd granted your pension, and they hushed it up."

She came nearer and nearer to him, her beautiful face distorted with anger. Then suddenly he felt the sting of her palm on his cheek.

"You liar! You horrible liar! Get out!"

He was sober now; watched her, unmoved and silent, as she almost ran to the wall and pressed the bell...

Marjorie came in.

"Show that man to the door and never let him come in again."

Slick Dawlish went out into the fog, stood for a long time by the ornamental wall which surrounded the block, and then, his fingers moving mechanically through his pockets, he touched a key. This key was one of the excuses he had had for calling. He must see Bunny again, tell her a lie, swear to her that he had never meant what he said, that old Bill had died honorably...

He went upstairs again very slowly. It was nearly half an hour after he had left the flat that he inserted the key and opened the door. The hall was in darkness; in the drawing-room, one small globe, overlooked by the maid, still glowed.

He was a little muddled now. Incursion into the night air had made his legs curiously weak. And then he heard a queer scratching noise, and turned his head towards the curtained window.

Crack!

He drew back against the wall, and a little later the curtains parted and the bearded face of a man appeared.

Who the devil was this? Slick frowned. Was there another man? The intruder was in evening dress, the white front slightly soiled—The Cat!

As he stepped into the open, Slick Dawlish's hand gripped his collar and swung him round. That left of his was drawn back to strike, when—

"My God! Bill!" he whispered. "Bill Wainford!"

Was he dreaming? His head was reeling. It may have been a drunken fantasy.... Then he heard the voice.

"Slick!" He saw the glint of a knife in the intruder's hand.

"Is this your place?"

Slick shook his head, for the moment incapable of speech.

"It belongs to a woman, doesn't it? Mrs. Leverton Cam. Funny—my wife had relations of that name. Are you—er—a friend of hers?"

He picked up the hat he had dropped and put it on the sofa. Slick nodded.

"You're the cat-man, eh?"

Wainford laughed softly.

"Yes. It would have been bad luck if I'd been pinched. I only came out of Dartmoor six months ago. Can I have a drink?"

Slick pointed to the decanter.

"Don't talk too loudly," he said. Wainford looked round at him as he was pouring out the whisky.

"Is there anybody here? Mrs. Leverton Cam?"

Again Slick nodded.

"She's as rich as the devil, isn't she?"

"Don't talk so loud," Slick warned him again.

The newcomer had had many adventures, and spoke of them with that old, pitiable pride of his. He had reached America after his skip from Cambrai, got into trouble in Connecticut, and was gaoled. When he came out, he fell into the association of a bank smasher and was caught again. Together they broke gaol and got across to Canada.

"Ever heard of Toby Lands—the man who held up the cashier in Leicester and got away with three thousand? That was me—they caught me on the next job: I got three years."

"Fascinating," said Slick, and Wainford looked at him suspiciously.

"What are you doing?"

Slick smiled slowly.

"All the tricks you taught me, old boy. I'm the best pupil you ever had, Bill."

"The cards, eh? You haven't seen my wife?"

"She's abroad," said Slick quickly.

"Good luck!" said Wainford, raising his glass with an ironical gesture.

"She was a bit of a weeper. Still sweet on her?"

Slick did not answer this question. He indicated the door.

"You had better go while the going's good."

"I thought I'd leave decorated with diamonds."

Wainford was looking round the flat. He saw a photograph, and before Slick could stop him he had picked it up.

"Bunny!" he whispered. "Mrs. Leverton Carm—she's Bunny!"

"Don't be a fool," said Slick.

Wainford looked round at him with his sly smile.

"Dont be a fool, eh? Mrs. Leverton Cam is the late Mrs. Wainford. I heard that this woman had changed her name when she came into the stuff, but I never guessed. She'll hear my voice in a minute"—and then, extravagantly—"and will come running into the arms of her loving husband!"

"She'll hear nothing," said Slick quietly. "There's a double door and a lobby beyond that. She thinks you're dead."

Wainford smiled crookedly.

"She'll know I'm alive! A quarter of a million, wasn't it? With all that money, old boy, we'll buy peace with the world—Monte and Egypt and a nice quiet little flat somewhere up west, eh?" He chuckled.

Slick's eyes did not leave him.

"The old life, with her money—is that the idea?" he asked slowly. "The old hunting-crop and the girls?" He whistled softly.

"Have you gone pious?" sneered Wainford.

It was a mistake to have asked such a question. Slick had not gone pious; his mind at that moment was with the dead; the good fellows whom this man had deserted.

"Bill"—his voice was very, very soft—"you know what happens to deserters in the face of the enemy? They die."

Wainford grinned at him.

"There's no war on now."

"Yes, there is," said Slick, and his voice was very, very low.

"I'm the enemy. You think you're going to Bunny, don't you, to break her heart

all over again?" He shook his head. "You're going back into the dark where you belong, Bill."

"Do you think so?" hissed Wainford.

As the other's hand reached for him, Slick saw the flick of a knife and caught the man by the wrist. For a second they swayed and struggled, and then...

What happened, Slick never knew. Only he felt the man gripped in his arms go slack; saw the blood well over the white shirt-front. Then he heard Bunny's voice.

"Who's there?"

Wainford had fallen on his knees, kneeling against him. A dead man... Slick had no doubt of that. Stooping, he lifted him, carried him to the sofa, and sat him in the corner, jamming a hat upon his head.

"Who is that man?"

Bunny was standing in the doorway leading to her bedroom; she wore a dressing-gown, hurriedly fastened, over her night-clothes. Slick looked up stupidly.

"Hello!... Old friend of mine. We met after separation of years. Doesn't speak very much," he said, with grim humor. "He'll never say anything—or do anything to hurt you, Bunny."

Bunny rang the bell.

"Tha's all right." Slick's voice was thick and drunken. He was talking to the dead man, lolling, his arm supporting. "I've been telling her a lot of lies, old boy, and I've come back to apologize. All right, Bunny."

He put a hand under the arm of the inanimate thing and lifted it. It was grotesquely alive, stupidly drunken. He dragged it as he walked unsteadily with his burden to the doorway.

"Goo'-night, Bunny... always a perfect gentleman."

Outside the fog was thicker than ever. He could cross the road, and there was a parapet that divided him from the river, where a dead man might drop quietly out of sight and be no more seen by him.

He heard a splash, and then the chiming of Big Ben as it struck twelve.

"Merry Christmas!"

He waved his hand towards where Bunny sat weeping in a room somewhere at the back of the fog.

7. KID GLOVE HARRY

Mr. Solomon Parsons was a lawyer of sagacity and genius. He had beneath the polished dome of his pink head something of the qualities of a great general. There might be added to this catalogue of his qualities an instinct of equilibrium which assisted him, despite many temptations, to walk inside the true line which divides legitimate from questionable practice. This instinct of equilibrium enabled him to walk straightly even upon the line. Once he toppled to the wrong side, taking no harm, as it happened, except the demolition of every castle he had builded; but there was some excuse for him, for he had invested heavily upon a falling market, a form of insanity not uncommon in men of the learned professions, as our curb broker will tell you. He was not ruined. There was no need for embezzlement or the transference of his clients' assets, such as he controlled, to his own accounts. It just meant that he had to sell loan securities and write to his son, telling him that he must give up all idea of going into the army, come home, and work.

Mr. Solomn Parsons paid his differences like a respectable man, and was honest because honesty is the best policy. And then it was that old man Glenmere died and left to Solomon the proving of his eccentric will. Any will which contains a condition or request may be classified as "eccentric." Mr. Parsons spent one afternoon reading over the provisions which made the will remarkable, and then sat down and wrote for the second time to Miss Dorothy Trent.

His principal clerk came in whilst the letter was in process of completion.

"Oh, by the way," said Solomon, looking up, "I am writing to Miss Trent about her legacy."

"Do you want the letter copied, sir?" asked the clerk.

"No, no, it's not necessary," said his employer airily. "It's merely an informal note of congratulation."

"A very fortunate young woman," said the chief clerk, "she's worth nearly half a million. He's left a lot of holdings in Canada, hasn't he, —land and all that sort of thing?"

"Yes, yes," this time Mr. Parsons was impatient. "All right, Jackson, I'll attend to this matter. Ask Mr. Reginald to come in and see me."

Reginald made his glum appearance and dropped into a chair on the opposite side of his father's writing-table. He was a pallid, willowy, young man, with hair on his upper lip.

"How are you getting on, my boy?" asked Solomon benevolently, as he licked down the envelope of his letter to Miss Trent.

"I hate this place," grumbled his hope and pride. "Really, governor, it's pretty tough on me. I never dreamt that you were so hard up."

"My investments unfortunately went wrong," said Solomon smoothly. "Still," he went on, "I hope you're going to make yourself as comfortable as you can, Reggie. At the back of my head is an idea which may develop very favorably for you. A large fortune and a pretty wife, eh, my boy —how does that strike you?"

Mr. Reginald sniffed. "That sort of thing only happens in books," he said irritably.

"It happens in real life, believe me." His father nodded his head emphatically. "I am a much older man than you, and in my profession I have seen many strange happenings. Post this letter for me."

His son took the envelope and glanced at the address. "Who is she?" he asked.

"She's the girl who came into old Glenmere's fortune. Half a million, my boy!" said his father archly.

His son looked up quickly.

"Is this the girl you're thinking about?"

Mr. Parsons nodded.

"Bosh!" said his ungrateful son. "What chance have I? She'll be simply surrounded by all sorts of fellows the moment it is known that she has money; and a girl like that who has been poor is pretty certain to jump at the first likely man who come along—and besides the will makes a quick marriage pretty easy for her."

Mr. Parsons smiled.

"Post the letter," said he, "and have a little faith in your father, my boy."

The quiet Newhaven household of Dorothy Trent and her mother had been prepared for the sensation which was coming. There had been no secret that Grandfather Trent, though he offered little assistance to his one relative whilst he was living, had made ample provision for her when he had passed beyond the responsibilities of the real estate business, and a brief note from the lawyer asking for authority to administer the estate, had announced the disposal of the old man's fortune, "with conditions."

"Which, of course, my dear," said the mild Mrs. Trent, "you will carry out."

"That entirely depends upon what they are, mother," said the girl quietly. "If it is one of those curious wills which directs me to marry the orphan child of his favorite butler, you may be sure that dear grandfather's money will go to the old ladies' home or The Society for Promoting International Discord or whatever the alternative is."

"I'm sure your dear grandfather—" began Mrs. Trent apologetically, and the girl laughed.

"My dear Mary Ann," she said, "you're not sure of anything in the world or anybody. I await the wicked lawyer's letter—I'm sure he's wicked; all lawyers are, who handle wills—with a great deal of interest. In the meantime I'm not going to the office—I feel I ought to get something out of this."

Mrs. Trent made her usual weak protest. She had spent her life protesting against the inevitable, in which category she placed her daughter's inflexibility of purpose. The Trents lived in a little house on the outskirts of the town. Dorothy was employed as stenographer in Newhaven's biggest store, and her horizon had been largely determined by the urban boundaries. Yet there was within her a surging desire to burst out into a large world, and now that it seemed that all her long-cherished dreams of travel were to be fulfilled, she felt that the "condition" must be unusually severe before she refused.

"Mother," she asked, "if—if this money did not come, would you be terribly disappointed?"

Mrs. Trent smiled, which Dorothy, reading the signs by long practice, knew meant that she hadn't given the matter a great deal of thought, and was busy making up her mind at that moment.

"It would mean a lot to me, Dorothy dear," said the older woman; "one always feels that one is living on the brink of a volcano."

It was a favourite expression of hers, and Dorothy, long inured and tired of speculating why her mother chose so tragic an illustration, said nothing,

waiting for her to continue.

"Of course, dear, it would save you from work, and give you a very happy time," Mrs. Trent went on, gathering her arguments en route.

"Never mind about me, mother, I'm thinking of you. Would you be horribly disappointed?"

"I think I should," said Mrs. Trent, nodding her head, and employing a tone which suggested that she was surprised to find herself taking this decisive opinion.

"I should be disappointed—but, my dear, there is no question of your not getting the money, is there?"

"I'm thinking of the conditions," said the girl.

The garden gate clicked, and the girl turned her head to see the postman with a solitary letter.

"Special delivery," she said grimly. "This must be from Solomon the Wise One."

She went to the door and took it in, and a glance at the superscription on the envelope verified her surmise. She sat down at the table, her mother peering anxiously at her over her glasses, and read the letter through carefully, then read it again.

"Humph!" said Dorothy.

"What is it, my dear?" asked Mrs. Trent tremulously.

"It's the condition, and really it isn't a terrible condition after all. Shall I read you the letter?"

Mrs. Trent nodded.

"Dear Miss Trent," began Dorothy, "I have already communicated to you that fact that your grandfather, James Trent, deceased, has left a will appointing me to be his sole executor and you his sole legatee save for a small sum which is left to me, his lawyer, as a token of his regard and affection." (Mr. Solomon Parsons might have written "very small" sum and underscored the qualification.) "Your grandfather, as you may know, married very late in life, and had strong views upon the postponement of matrimony. He desires that you should marry—"

Mrs. Trent all of a twitter sat up.

"Good gracious, Dorothy, who is the young gentleman?"

"There is no young gentleman," said Dorothy coldly, without looking up. "Listen. 'Desires that you should marry early in life. He stipulates that you shall inherit one-tenth of his legacy immediately, and the other nine-tenths upon your wedding day, and he directs that if you do not marry before your twenty-fourth birthday the remainder of his estate shall go to the Railway Benevolent Fund. Yours faithfully, etc.'"

The girl folded the letter and sat with her hands clasped on her lap, looking across to her mother. "Well, that's fairly reasonable," she said; "that means another"—she calculated quickly—"well, over a year of freedom."

"And in that time, my dear," said Mrs. Trent, "maybe you will discover somebody on whom your affections may rest as a house upon a rock."

Trent shook her head, for girls had changed sadly since her youth. As she often remarked.

A month later, Dorothy Trent with the light of joy in her eyes sat in Mr. Solomon Parsons' office. And Mr. Solomon Parsons was talking.

"I think it is necessary that you should see the property," he was saying, "and particularly if you are going to sell it, that you should be on the spot to sign the necessary documents—you have the administration of the estate, you know," he added, "until you fail definitely to fulfill the conditions of the will."

"Who wants to buy it?" asked the girl again. "Sir John Storey. You see, he owns the greater part of the adjoining property, and why he wants yours, Heaven knows! Your grandfather's Canadian agent writes me that he already possesses about five hundred square miles of his own."

"Perhaps he wants to keep chickens," said Dorothy. "Does he live there?" asked the girl.

The lawyer nodded.

"That an English baronet should isolate himself from the amenities of society and bury himself in the wilds of the Canadian Rockies, I cannot understand," he said, "but, there the fact is, he's been living there for, six years. He has a vast estate and seems to be satisfied, so it is no business of ours."

Dorothy thought for a moment.

"I'd simply love to go," she said, "but I can't see how I can go alone."

Mr. Solomon Parsons smiled. "I'll arrange that, my dear lady," he said. "I am

making up a party, my son and, myself. You've met my son in the outer office as you came through."

The girl shook her head.

"There was only an elderly gentleman, who I think is your clerk, and the office boy," she said.

Mr. Solomon Parsons bridled.

"The office boy, my dear Miss Trent," he said, with some acerbity, "was my son Reginald."

She murmured her apologies.

But the business was too important for Mr. Solomon Parsons to take very deep offence.

"As I was saying, we will go out with you, see you to Sir John's house—he has, by all accounts, a very beautiful house—and he wrote some time ago saying that he would make us very welcome if we came. By the way, there is a two or three-day journey across the—er—mountains and things, and I understand it's a rather difficult country. You don't mind that?"

"It will be lovely!" said Dorothy, her eyes shining.

So it came about that one chilly morning in early October, the lake steamer, The Nelson, set down three passengers at Little Pine Beach. To two of these, Little Pine Beach was a most inhospitable village of tin buildings, which promised little in the way of creature comfort. To the third, this shelf of land under the towering gray scarp of Mount Macgregor was a veritable fairyland. She had ceased to gurgle with joy at the sight of snow-capped mountains or vast wheat lands. Ship and train and boat had been vehicles of enchantment. She had lived for weeks in a sort of dumb wonder.

The clean tang of mountain air; the fragrance of pine and balsam; the delicious incense of burning wood—she had stood on the observation platform of the car in the early mornings and snuffed them ecstatically. And she had seen the sun rise on virgin snows, and heard the thunder of milky torrents crashing furiously through deep ravines, and had lived with a God she knew and worshipped.

"It is precious chilly," grumbled Mr. Parsons, "and I suppose there won't be a thing here fit to eat," looking around anxiously, and when a middle-aged man in mackinon coat and top boots detached himself from a group at the door of one of the dwellings, he went toward him, and met the newcomer half-way.

"Your father arranged for somebody to be here to meet us, didn't he, Mr. Parsons?" said the girl.

"Reggie," murmured that gentleman; "why don't you learn to call me Reggie, Dorothy?"

"Because it would encourage you to call me Dorothy," said the girl tartly.

Mr. Reginald Parsons was the one blot upon an otherwise perfect trip. The lawyer she could tolerate, but this sleek youth and his half-hearted love-making was getting on her nerves.

"I wish you wouldn't be so unpleasant toward me," he said plaintively. "I really didn't think I'd like you when I heard I was coming on the trip, but at the first sight of you I was head over heels—"

"Will you tell me, is this the person your father expects to meet here?"

"No, it isn't," snapped Reggie. "He's a fellow who is going on a trip with us, a lawyer or something."

"Do we start from here?" asked the girl, interested.

"I hope so," said the gloomy youth, "and the sooner we start the better."

Mr. Parsons was coming back now with his companion.

"I want to introduce you to Judge Henesey," he said, "He's going to make the trip with us."

The stranger, a sober-looking man of fifty, shook hands solemnly with the party.

"Your horses and traps are ready for the journey," he said. "You know it is a three days' hike?"

"Is the journey a pretty one?" asked the girl. "Of course it is, it couldn't be anything else."

"Well," said the other cautiously, "I don't know whether it's pretty, but it's certainly interesting. The trail is a mighty difficult one to follow unless you know it. None of the boys round here ever go up. You reckoned on getting a guide here, didn't you?"

He addressed the lawyer, and Mr. Parsons nodded.

"A man named Harvey."

The Judge raised his eyebrows. "Joe Harvey! Why, I'm afraid you're going to be disappointed. Harvey broke his leg a week ago and they sent him down to Nelson; but I dare say I'll find somebody, though nobody around here ever goes on to the fellow's estate."

He went back to his tin hut from whence he had come. The curious group about the door was now increased to half a dozen men, and with these he spoke.

"There's a man who came in last night, but I don't know whether you'll care to take him."

"Who is he?" asked Solomon.

"Well, we call him Kid Glove Harry. He's a trapper or something, though he never seems to have any pelts for sale. He turns up regular every six months, and some say he's a bad character, though I've never heard anything definitely against him."

Mr. Parsons hesitated.

"Why do they call him Kid Glove Harry?"

"Because he wears kid gloves, I guess," said the other dryly; "he ain't much to look at. You'd better see him."

He whistled and crooked his finger, and a man detached himself from the group. Judge Henesey had no more than told the truth when he described the newcomer as unattractive. His hair was long, he had a six months' stubbly growth of beard, and one eye was obscured by a dirty bandage. His clothes were stained and worn, and his rusty boots were gaping. A pack was swung over his back, and held by a bandolier of rope, and the general ferocity of his appearance was heightened by the Winchester he carried under his arm and the long-barrelled Colt which swung at his hip.

He did not speak, and made none of the gestures of humility which Mr. Solomon expected from all men he engaged for service, but stood surveying the party calmly out of his one undamaged eye.

"Does he know the trail?" asked Mr. Solomon doubtfully.

The man nodded.

"What is your name?"

The girl was staring at the wild man with glee. Somehow he matched the scene and satisfied her artistic requirements. In curiosity she looked at his

hands as Mr. Parsons spoke, and sure enough they were encased in tight-fitting gloves which might have been kid and at one time were probably white.

"That'll do, Harry," said the lawyer, and the man without a word turned his back upon the party and strode away.

"You'll not get him to talk. In some of the camps they call him 'Dummy.' He hates talking."

"Does he hate shaving, too?" said Reggie. "Couldn't we get him trimmed up a bit"

The Judge bit off the end of his cigar and lit it.

"The only barber at Little Pine Beach has had delirium tremens for a week," he said deliberately.

"I suppose we'll have to take him," decided Mr. Solomon Parsons, "though I can't say that he impresses me very favorably."

To the girl, Kid Glove Harry was the one fascinating figure of the party. She rode behind him on the trail, and speculated upon the kind of life that this type of man would live. To her he was something out of a book, a figure from the land of fiction. She wondered if that revolver which flapped at his side as he jogged along had ever been used offensively; how he had got that injury to his eye. Between her speculations and the loveliness of the scene which burst into view as the little party climbed higher and higher toward Dead Horse Pass, she was so fully occupied that nightfall came too quickly.

The horses were unpacked and camp made for the night. Judge Henesey had a consultation with their guide, and came back to the party shaking his head.

"We shall have to pitch our own tents and cook our own food," he said. "He says he will cook for the young lady but nobody else."

"You can tell him from me," said Mr. Parsons, with dignity, "that if there's any cooking to be done, we'll cook for the young lady."

"And you can tell him from me," said the young lady in question, with some determination, "that I shall be most happy to test his powers as a chef."

Mr. Solomon Parsons said nothing, but looked significantly at his son. Kid Glove Harry might be the greatest villain unhung, but he made an excellent soup and a no less excellent cup of coffee; and Mr. Solomon Parsons, who was a good trencherman, eyeing the remains of his canned beef meal, sniffed the fragrance of the soup and broke the tenth commandment.

The trail widened, and the girl was able to ride side by side with her wild man the next morning.

"Is your eye very bad?" she asked.

"Not very," replied the man gruffly. She wanted to ask how it had happened, but did not dare, and as though reading her thoughts he said,

"Back-fire from my rifle—shooting a lynx."

They rode on in silence which the girl again broke.

"This is wonderland to me. I suppose it is very ordinary to you, and you do not see the beauty as I see it."

He did not reply to her question, but after a while asked:

"Why are you going up to the Storey's?"

She told him frankly, and he listened without comment. She noted that his beard was shot with gray, nevertheless she found it difficult to tell his age. His skin was burnt brown, and there were wrinkles about his eyes—he might have been fifty or thirty. She was taking a surreptitious survey of him when he turned suddenly and looked her full in the face.

"You needn't have come out anyway," he said. "Lawyers could have signed those documents or whatever it is you have to sign."

"My lawyer said it was necessary," she said. She might have added that she did not question her lawyer's decision, and had leapt at the opportunity of seeing a new world. Suddenly she uttered an exclamation.

"Why, tomorrow's my birthday," she said. "I shall be twenty-three. It would be rather awkward if I was twenty-four."

He took no notice of her, and she was piqued. They rode for half a mile in silence, and then unexpectedly:

"Why not twenty-four, eh?"

"It is of no importance," she said coldly, and he did not urge her to any further confidence.

That night was a trying one for her. Reggie was unusually affectionate, and his father seemed to give his son every opportunity to be alone with his client. The climax came when Mr. Solomon Parsons strode off with the Judge to explore a wooded slope. The girl had finished her meal and was getting up

when Reggie 's hand caught her arm.

"Don't go," he said, clearing his throat; "there is something I want to say to you, Dorothy."

His tone was so changed that she looked at him in astonishment.

"Dorothy, I love you," he said huskily—"I just love you like the devil!"

"I don't want to be loved like the devil!" she said calmly enough, though she was quaking. She sat with her hands on her lap looking at him, as Reggie described afterwards, as though he were some new kind of insect, and he grew desperate.

("Carry the citadel by force, my boy," his father had urged him that afternoon.)

"Dorothy," said the young man, gripping her by the hand, "I am not worthy of you."

"Thank Heaven we agree on something," she said, and tried to rise, then before she knew what had happened, she was in his arms, his lips pressed to hers. She struggled, but the strongest and most determined of girls would have been caught at a disadvantage. It was then that a finger and thumb pinched Reggie's right ear urgently, and he released his hold of the girl and looked up, white with passion.

"Damn you, what do you mean" he snarled.

He tried to leap to his feet, but since his rate of rising was governed largely by the will of the man who held his ear, his progress was slow and painful.

Kid Glove Harry released his grip, and with a slight push sent the young man reeling back. He said no word, but looked at Mr. Reginald Parsons, and there was something in that look which fired whatever red blood the young man possessed.

With an oath he tugged at his belt. "Put that gun down," said Kid Glove Harry quietly, and the scowling youth obeyed.

"What is the matter?" It was Mr. Solomon Parsons, who came stumbling through the undergrowth at the sound of his son's angry voice.

The girl, breathless and a little frightened, stood aloof, and heard Reggie give his account of what had happened—an account by no means unflattering to himself. To her amazement, Mr. Parsons heard the story without exhibiting anger for the palpable boorishness of his son or apologies to the victim. Only Judge Henesey standing in the background looked a little puzzled.

The lawyer turned with a bland smile to the girl.

"My dear young lady, this is unfortunate, doubly unfortunate, because of a discovery of mine the day we left Nelson." She said nothing, but a sudden sense of dismay filled her, for what reason she could not understand.

"There was a telegram there," said the lawyer, and he took a folded paper from his pocket.

"What was the telegram?" she asked steadily. "How does it affect me?"

"It affects you rather nearly," said Mr. Solomon Parsons slowly; "it appears that in my reading of your grandfather's will, I made a slight mistake. You are to be married," he spoke distinctly, "before your twenty-third birthday, not your twenty-fourth."

She gasped. "My twenty-third!" she said incredulously. "Surely you are wrong."

"I deeply regret the error, but it was your twenty-third birthday that the will stipulated. I wish now that I had shown it to you," he said, with unctuous regret, "but there the matter stands."

The girl pressed her hand against her forehead and thought.

"Then you mean," she said slowly, "that unless I am married today —tonight —I forfeit the remainder of my grandfather's estate?"

He nodded, and smiled a little.

Kid Glove Harry, a silent spectator, saw the blood mount to the girl's cheeks.

"It was a plot!" she cried, her voice trembling a little; "that is why you wanted me to come to the wilds of Canada. I needn't have come here at all. You planned to have me here in the woods, here in the wilderness on the eve of my twenty-third birthday so that you could marry me to —that!"

She pointed to the scowling Reginald. She thought a little while, evidently trying to piece together the details of Mr. Parsons' strategy.

"And you're a lawyer, of course," she said, nodding to Judge Henesey, "and you could marry me."

"That was the idea, miss—I understood from this gentleman," Judge Henesey spat as he spoke, "that you wanted a wedding in the hills."

She looked round desperately. She knew now what that money meant to her,

the freedom, the happiness it would give to her, the opportunity for travel—for life; and looking, she saw Kid Glove Harry, tangle-bearded, bandaged eyed, and poverty stricken, and her heart leapt. She walked toward him.

"May I speak to you for a moment?" she said, and led him aside.

She was red with embarrassment when she spoke.

"Are you married?" she asked jerkily.

He shook his head.

"If I gave you ten thousand dollars—a hundred thousand dollars," she said breathlessly, "to marry me, would you promise to leave me when you have brought me back to Pine Beach"

He thought a while. "Yes; I would leave you when we came back to Pine Beach

if you wished," he said.

She looked at him keenly, but his eyes never wavered.

"And you will marry me?" she said.

He nodded.

"I don't see why not," he drawled. "I'm doing nothing particular this evening."

She came back to the fire.

"You can marry me, Judge Henesey, can you not?"

He nodded.

"With or without a license?"

"Yes," he said.

Very good."

She put her hand in Kid Glove Harry's.

"Marry me," she said.

Mr. Solomon Parsons sprang forward.

"You can't do it," he roared.

"You can't prevent it," said the girl.

"You bet you can't," said Kid Glove Harry. "Go right ahead, Judge..."

That night Dorothy slept in the tent of her husband, and Kid Glove Harry, rolled in a blanket, slept before her door.

It was a silent party that rode over the hills and down the slope to the big wooden mansion which was their destination.

Mr. Solomon Parsons spoke only once that morning when he asked the Judge:

"What's that fellow's name?"

"Torker or Morley, or something," said the Judge. "I didn't catch it correctly, but I'll get it when I give him the certificate today."

The girl rode ahead with her husband, and beyond an observation about the weather they, too, were silent. It was when they had come into view of the eccentric baronet's mansion that the girl asked:

"Have you ever met Sir John Storey?"

He shook his head.

She asked another question, and he replied with a nod; a further, and again he shook his head.

"You don't like talking very much, do you?" she asked.

"Not very much," he replied. "I'd just hate to say what was in my mind."

She looked at him in alarm.

"I guess I'll part with you when we get to the homestead," he said. "You won't want any Kid Glove Harrys hanging around."

"You promised to see me to Little Pine," she said, "and besides, I must find out where you live to send you that money."

"I don't want any money," he said.

"You promised," she said, and he made no reply.

The homestead was a revelation to her. As they grew nearer, she saw it was a dwelling which combined the architectural beauties of the colonial house with the ornate decoration of a Swiss chalet. And there were servants—real servants—in white starched dress fronts who helped the party to alight, and showed them into the great hall, the walls covered with skins and trophies.

There was a butler, a pompous stout man, who treated them with a courtesy and punctilio which, remembering the surroundings, would have seemed to the girl ridiculous but for the awe he inspired in her. She looked around for Kid Glove Harry, but he had disappeared.

Reggie, with a sneer on his face, saw the look and asked:

"Where's your husband. Mrs.—I don't know your name?"

The girl flushed. She turned to the butler.

"Will you see if Mr.—Mr.—if my husband is outside?" she said. She hated that smile on Reggie's face—hated it more bitterly when she realized that she, too, did not even know her own name.

The butler came back. "He will see you later, madam," he said deferentially.

"Is Sir John here?" asked the lawyer.

"No, sir, he is not in the house at present. I will let you know when he returns. I have sent your suit-cases to your bedrooms, gentlemen. Will you dress for dinner? Sir John invariably does."

The two men had brought their dress-suits. Judge Henesey had parted company at the door, and only stopping to fill the marriage certificate with Kid Glove Harry's name, was on his way back to Little Pine.

The girl did not meet her husband that afternoon. Once she saw him riding back from the trail, where he had left the Judge, and she noted with a little pang that he had made his way to the back of the house, where she guessed the servants' quarters were.

She dressed for dinner with more than usual care. There was a fun and a novelty of dressing here in the wilderness, and there was—

"Pshaw!" she said, and dismissed the idea. It was too absurd to be entertained. Why should she want to dress to please a brigand like the guide, who probably had no other thought in his head than a desire to get away to the nearest town and drink the money she would give him? And yet she looked forward with something like pleasure to his appearance.

She came down to dinner radiant, and into the dining-room with its shaded electric lamps (the eccentric baronet had a water-power plant, and generated his own electricity from a waterfall three miles away, she discovered), happy in the consciousness that she was not displeasing.

Reggie looked at her with a grin.

"Where's your husband?" he asked, and chuckled at her obvious exasperation.

The girl looked up to the butler, who stood by a chair at the end of the table.

"Will you tell my husband that dinner is served?" she asked a little huskily.

She would play the game out to the end, she thought.

"Kid Glove Harry is his name," added Mr. Reginald Parsons.

The butler bowed and went out. He came back in a few minutes, and standing by the door, his head erect, conscious of the importance of the occasion, announced:

"Kid Glove Harry."

And at the sight of the man who came in, Mr. Solomon Parsons gasped, and the girl rose from her chair wide-eyed.

It was a clean-shaven man with fine eyes (these she recognized), and he was dressed in the conventional smoking-jacket and starched shirt of civilization. He came forward with a little smile and a bow, and seated himself at the head of the table.

He surveyed the men with grim amusement, then he turned to the girl.

"I hope you're not shocked," he said, "but do you know I had been in the wilderness and haven't had a hair-cut or shave for six months."

He looked up at the butler.

"Mr. Tibbins," he said, "bring her ladyship some ice water."

Then Mr. Solomon Parsons recovered his power of speech. He asked in a hollow tone:

"Then you're Sir John Storey?"

"That is what I am called."

"But nobody knew you at Little Pine."

"I never go there in state," said Sir John, with a little smile. "I shoot at the back of that country, and sometimes go into the village. I happened to arrive there, the day before you came, in a very deplorable condition, Lady Storey," he said gravely, addressing the girl, and she colored. "They know me as Kid Glove Harry from an eccentricity of mine."

"Why do you wear kid gloves?" demanded the curious Mr. Solomon.

"To keep my hands clean," said the other calmly. "That's a curious reason, isn't it?"

That night, when the men had gone to bed, he walked with the girl along a long porch overlooking the moonlit valley. Fifty miles away, above white peaks of his lowly fellows, rose the hoary head of Macdonald.

"It's a wonderful place, this," said the girl.

It was the first time she had spoken to him that evening.

"I don't wonder that you hide yourself away, but isn't it very lonely?"

He flicked the ash from his cigarette before he spoke.

"It is very lonely," he said; and after an interval of silence, "It will be a thousand times more lonely after I have taken you to Little Pine Beach."

She laughed, a soft gurgling laugh, and leant over the rail of the porch.

"I think you're very quixotic," she said, "but I think, if you take me to Little Pine, you'll be—"

"What?" he asked.

She didn't make an immediate reply.

"I promised you I would take you to Little Pine," he said doggedly, "and I must keep my word."

"You also said, 'if you wish,'" she said softly.

"And do you wish?"

She was playing with the tendril of a vine that twined about one of the verandah supports, and what she said was in so low a tone that he did not hear her. But he took a chance and caught her in his arms, and it seemed that he had just guessed right.

8. "NIG-NOG!"

This story is about a matter which, in itself, is ancient history. It is only told

now because Mr. Cymbeline Smith (his real name is something which is almost as outrageous) has placed himself under a fifty-thousand dollar bond that he will not "associate in any way whatsoever" his name or his preparation with those which occur in this story, "providing a genteel account of the aforesaid affair be put into writing by a newspaper man." This is that genteel account.

Cymbeline Smith is an American citizen who made a deal of money in the traveling circus business before he took up the serious study of medicines. It had been an asset of his that he might have stood as a model for any artist who desired to draw Uncle Sam. He had a long, somewhat dissatisfied face, a fringe of amber and gray whisker at his chin, he always wore a top hat of antique shape and trousers which were strapped under Wellington boots. In the circus days he affected a blue cut-away swallowtail and a high stock, but these he abandoned when he gave his mind and money to medical science, and produced in conjunction with a drummer (who afterwards drank himself to death) the preparation which is known commercially as "Nig-Nog!" I have little space to dilate upon the pharmaceutical values of "Nig-Nog!" You have read the full page and the double page ads., and you know (or you disbelieve) that "Nig-Nog!" cures all nervous ailments, builds up nerve forces, clears the dazed and dopey brain, and restores to its vie—, to its grateful and delighted purchaser that roseate outlook upon life, that balance of reason, that clarity of vision which the brainworker, the cigarette-fiend, and the chronic pessimist cannot enjoy.

It was described as being compounded from a prescription which had been in the family of a Royal House of Europe for five hundred years, but this may not have been true. Now it is a fact that an advertised patent medicine which does not produce most of the results it claims brings ruin to its proprietor, for it costs more money to put the first supplies on the market than it is humanly possible to get back even if every bottle is sold. But "Nig-Nog!" was a success from the beginning. It sold in the United States of America by the million. It did build up nerve forces and clear the dazed and dopey brain. It did restore the balance of reason and the clarity of vision. And its delighted patrons told other sufferers that "Nig-Nog!" was according to specification, and in consequence Cymbeline Smith grew rich and lived in a suite at Knickerbocker House and drove a machine which was something between Cinderella's Fancy Coach and a Band Wagon.

And then he crossed the waters to conquer Europe. He flooded the London market with "Nig-Nog!"; he added a new tone to the English landscape; in car and train, on omnibus, on house-side, in druggist window, in printed page he spoke earnestly, violently, almost convincingly of "Nig-Nog!"—its virtues, its

amazing qualities, and, still more, amazing cheapness.

And then he did that which of all things was unpardonable. Overlooking the weald of Sussex was a long and wooded ridge, and at its highest point was Weald Lodge, the country home of the Rt. Hon. Gregory Thessiger, Minister of Ordnance, an irritable, intolerant man who had a mild dislike for most Americans and a violent dislike for that type of American which Cymbeline Smith represented. Because he was a great man and people trembled at his nod, and because he was almost godlike to the villagers of Adfriston, he had never seriously considered the building possibility of the nine-acre lot which lay on the slope of the hill between his estate and the village. He woke one morning to discover that Mr. Cymbeline Smith had purchased that "estate" through a soulless agent at Eastbourne.

To say that Mr. Thessiger was annoyed, was to put the matter with amusing moderation. He endeavored to cancel the sale. He offered to buy the ground, but Cymbeline Smith was first and foremost a showman, and the thought that he was to be a neighbor of the powerful Minister of a most powerful British Cabinet was not wholly abhorrent to him. So he built a dwelling which was a tactful compromise between the White House and the Tower of London, thus reconciling in one spasm of architecture the ideals of the new and the old world. But the culminating point of his infamy came when he took possession and added his final improvement.

The newspaper reporters who saw Mr. Thessiger step from his car at the door of the Treasury reported him as looking ill and worried, and drew conclusions which were wholly erroneous. The Prime Minister also noted the haggard face of his colleague, and his conclusions were almost as wide of the mark as the reporters'.

He walked across to where the Minister sat, and dropped his hand upon his shoulder.

"I think you are worrying too much about this business, Thessiger," he said; "the outlook is not as bad this morning as it was. I think Baramia will climb down."

Thessiger looked up.

"It's not that, Prime Minister," he said irritably; "It's that infernal Yankee! Confound his impertinence!"

The Prime Minister was secretly relieved. He had heard about the infernal Yankee before.

"Is his castle finished!" he asked.

"Finished!" spluttered the other. "Do you know what the rascal has done? On the roof of his house, sir, right under my nose so that I cannot miss it, he has had an electric sign put up: 'NIG-NOG FOR THE NERVES.' It is illuminated at night. He has made it impossible for me to live in my own house. By-heavens, I'll sue him!"

"An electric sign?" said the Premier; "but surely he will take it down if you ask?"

"Ask!" roared the other. "I have demanded, I have pleaded—I didn't go myself, of course, but I sent Grey, my man; but the scoundrel says it is good advertising, for it can be read from the trains six miles away. 'Nig-Nog!' for the nerves," he repeated, grinding his teeth. "Good heavens, if I had only known that he was coming!"

"Why not sue him in the court? He seems to be a nuisance within the meaning of the Act," said the Prime Minister soothingly.

It was very necessary that he should calm his violent colleague, for certain matters were coming up for consideration which called for Thessiger's support on a measure to which, as the Prime Minister knew, the Minister of Ordnance was bitterly opposed. His worst fears were realized when that measure was brought forward. If Thessiger had been violent at previous sittings of the Cabinet, he was now wholly unmanageable; and the Prime Minister walked down to the House of Commons with the Minister of Finance.

"Thessiger is going to make a split," he said moodily, "and at a time when we all ought to stand together and drop petty differences. I'd hate to lose him, but he has things all wrong. He doesn't seem to realize Baremia's object. I wish this infernal American had not come to bother him. He was unmanageable enough without that added cause of irritation. You are a suave sort of devil, Ralph," he said suddenly. "Why don't you go to this 'Nig-Nog!' man and see if you couldn't persuade him to drop his electric sign?"

The other laughed.

"One has to be a very suave kind of devil," he repeated, "to persuade a patent medicine advertiser to surrender a good position. My acquaintance with the press, which is fairly extensive, does not encourage me to believe that Mr. Smith is amenable to reason, but I will try if you like."

So Cymbeline Smith, sitting on his broad verandah, with his red-slipped feet elevated to the rail and with a long cigar between his strong white teeth, had a

visitor.

"Why, it's very good of you," said Cymbeline, who had reached that point of prosperity where he accepted the unexpected visits of Cabinet Ministers as an ordinary event of life. "I would like to oblige Mr. Thessiger, Sir Ralph, but I am a business man. I am, sir," he went on in his finest oracular style, "not only a business man, but a humanitarian, a benefactor of the human race, a man to whom the sufferings of his fellow-creatures is a clarion call to duty.

It is my opinion, sir, and it is the opinion shared by the faculty of the United States of America, that there is no more pernicious act that a man can permit than to deny to a suffering world a knowledge of this sovereign remedy. 'Nig-Nog!', sir, may be found in the medicine chests of royal and imperial personages. It may be seen, a bright and pleasant sight, on the shelves of the humblest cottages. Until that miraculous compound, which is at once a prophylactic, a refreshment, and a cure which secures the palingenesis of the atrophied nerve centers and the reintegration of the frazzled brain, is known to every man, woman, and child of your ancient country, I cannot, without reproaching myself with my treachery to humanity, relax in the slightest degree my effort to bring 'Nig-Nog!' to the notice of the world."

"But, my dear Mr. Smith," said Sir Ralph smoothly, "surely it would serve your purpose if the electric sign were placed at our expense nearer to the railway line."

Mr. Cymbeline Smith shook his head.

"No, sir," he said, "the very remoteness of these golden words twinkling against the dark and mysterious background of the immemorial hills produces in the mind of the sufferer the impression of hope—for hope, sir, is a distant prospect. Hope, sir, is the Uranus of the psychological sky."

That night Mr. Thessiger was sitting at his desk in the big library of his house in Chepstowe Place. To be exact, he alternated between the table and the fireplace, for he had half written six letters of resignation which had been consigned to the flames, and the seventh had been begun when his butler came in, closing the door discreetly behind him.

"What is it, Carter?" asked the Minister, looking up.

"The Countess Castlavera. She wishes to see you on a very important matter."

A look of surprise came to Mr. Thessiger's face and he pulled out his watch. It was nine o'clock.

"Ask the Countess to come in, please, Carter."

He half crossed the room to meet the beautiful woman who was ushered in by the butler.

"My dear Countess," he said, "this is a great surprise and a great pleasure."

"I am afraid you are fearfully busy," she said, with a quick glance at the table. "What curious blotting paper you use!"

He smiled as he pulled forward a chair for his visitor.

"All Ministers use black blotting paper," he said; "It tells no stories."

"And you have so many secrets to hide—what a wonderful thing it is to be a Minister!"

The envy and admiration in her tone was particularly flattering to this lonely man, and, indeed, his friendship with the Countess, which had begun in a small Algerian hotel where they had found themselves in the most unfashionable season of the year, the only people of consequence amongst the guests, had been a source of the greatest comfort to him.

They had met in Paris once, and then the Countess, who was a widow, had come to London and had established her little salon in Curzon Street, and Mr. Thessiger had been an occasional visitor. That she was a fascinating woman is well enough known. Absurdly young for a widow, her eyes had that quality of blue which is found only in the eastern skies at sunset. They were that rich, cloudy blue that particularly appealed to him. Her hair he had likened in his one poetical indiscretion to "a mane of daffodils." Her mouth was small and delicately shaped—her chin, her poise, her air, were all adequately described in that "Memory of Algiers" published in the Saturday Review over the initial "T," the authorship of which was ascribed by none to the somewhat forbidding Minister of Ordnance.

"I have come to see you on rather an important matter," she smiled, "and it is because I know I can trust you that I have come at all."

He inclined his head, at once gratified and curious.

For the moment all thought of the Cabinet crisis, of the grave issues which were pending in the country, even of the exasperating vendor of patent medicines vanished from his mind, and his attention was concentrated upon this fragrant, delicate thing who already occupied too large a portion of his thoughts for his comfort.

"My late husband was, as you know, the agent for an armament firm. He had invented a wonderful howitzer—that is the word?"

Mr. Thessiger nodded.

"And most of the specifications were deposited in a Paris bank. The very secret parts of the gun he confided to me; they were never put on paper."

Mr. Thessiger raised his eyebrows in surprise.

"A somewhat complicated thing to remember, my dear Countess."

She smiled a little sadly.

"And yet by memorizing day after day I had the whole particulars here," she tapped her forehead, "except one, and that has escaped me. I am anxious to sell the gun to a certain government—you need have no fear, it is a government very friendly to yours," she laughed, "and I have recalled everything except the exact mixture in the recoil cylinders."

Mr. Thessiger shook his head.

"I am afraid I cannot help you," he said.

"You can," she said emphatically; "if I were to see another gun, I am sure it would all come back to me. I mean, if I saw it in the process of making; and I want you to help me to this extent, that you give me a permit to visit one of your great gun factories."

The minister made no reply. It was rather a delicate position. The big gun factory, and particularly that section in which the recoils were made, was inaccessible to the general public.

"I cannot answer you straight away," he said. "I do not know what objections there are."

In this he did not speak the truth, for there were many objections. For example, the new 9:6 was in process of creation, and it would be impossible for a visitor with any knowledge of guns to overlook this fact. She seemed to divine what was going on in his mind, for she said quickly:

"Please understand that I know nothing of guns, and that my technical knowledge is confined to just one tiny bit of their construction."

"I cannot give you permission yet. I will let you know in the morning," said Mr. Thessiger; and in a few minutes the conversation had drifted off into more conventional channels, and the Minister was listening with an inward purr of satisfaction to divers things which had been expressed about his genius, all of which views were conveyed to him in the most subtle fashion.

She left him with a sense of longing and an additional feeling of irritation. He slept badly, and in the morning he decided upon his line of action. Incidentally he had decided that there was no valid objection to issuing the permit which the Countess had asked for. He would only be another few days in the Cabinet and he might at least utilize his power to grant her that favor.

As for the other matter, he would oppose the breach with Baremia—for that was what the new Defense Bill would involve.

On that he was determined. He knew that his opposition to the Government would split the Cabinet, for he had enjoyed something of a following in the House, sufficient at any rate to turn the scales against the Government. Once resolved, every hour brought a new argument, which justified to himself the attitude he had adopted. Baremia was bluffing. War was incredible, and being incredible was impossible. Before lunch he had worked himself up to a condition of smouldering anger against his colleagues. To make matters worse, a tactless member of the Cabinet called upon him before the House sat to urge a point of view which could only be described as crassly ignorant.

As the day advanced he grew more and more irritable, more and more unbearable. He snapped and snarled at his secretaries, he declined point-blank to attend the extraordinary meeting of the Cabinet which was summoned for two o'clock, and refused with equal vehemence a luncheon party with the Prime Minister. He walked down to the House that afternoon, a raw man all on edge.

To his alarm he found the hand he put up to return the salute of a passing acquaintance was shaking, and turned into a druggist's shop. The man behind the counter knew him.

"I want something to steady me, Mr. Bolsover," said the Minister. "I am a little nervy."

"I think I know the very thing," said the man. He went behind the little partition and presently came out with a glass containing a white mixture that fizzed and spluttered.

"Drink this quickly," he said, and Mr. Thessiger, with a growl at doing anything he was told, drank the mixture.

"It's not very unpleasant to take," he said in surprise.

"No, sir," smiled the chemist, "It is rather palatable. We have a great demand for that particular medicine. It has really a marvelous effect upon the jaded nerves."

"Is it your own prescription?"

The chemist shook his head.

"I wish it were. I should be a rich man," he laughed. "As a rule I do not recommend proprietary drugs, but this is out of the ordinary. It is called 'Nig-Nog'—"

"It is called what?" roared Mr. Thessiger.

"'Nig-Nog,' sir."

"If I had known that!" said the Minister between his teeth. "If I had only known that!"

He turned quickly and walked from the store boiling with rage. This was the last straw.

The House was crowded, but the Ministerial bench was empty. Ministers had gathered in the Premier's room, and they were not happy.

"Well, gentlemen," said the Prime Minister at last. He stood balancing himself upon the stone fireguard, his hands behind him and his big, harsh mouth curved in a little smile. "I think we must reconcile ourselves to going out—that doesn't matter so much. What does matter is the fact that we are likely to land this country in a pretty unholy mess."

"Don't say 'we,' " said Ralph Yerne grimly; "say Thessiger."

"He is wholly impossible," said the stout and florid Minister of the Interior. "I went to him, my dear Prime Minister, with arguments which were absolutely unanswerable, and he had the audacity to tell me to go to the devil, sir! I have never been so insulted in my life."

"I don't think arguments are much good for Thessiger," said the Prime Minister, regarding the ceiling with minute interest. "He is determined to oppose our measures of National Defense, and there is an end to it."

"What I can't understand," said Sir Ralph, "is that an intelligent man like Thessiger runs around with that infernal Castlavera woman. Everybody knows she is an agent of The Big Embassy, and I have tried in a delicate way to hint as much. She is a very dangerous woman, particularly when one knows that The Big Embassy have been trying to get some particulars of our new 9:6 guns. Thessiger is in a position to supply the information."

"Thessiger is not a fool," said the Prime Minister. "He is—"

At that moment the door opened and Thessiger came in. The Prime Minister looked at him and gasped. For the first time in his life, Thessiger's unhappy face was wreathed in smiles and he chuckled as he entered.

He nodded round genially.

"Had a most amusing experience," he said, and laughed again. "You remember that infernal American?"

"The 'Nig-Nog' man?" said the Prime Minister, relieved to find that his colleague was capable of taking a cheerful view of anything.

"The 'Nig-Nog' man," said Thessiger. "Do you know that ten minutes ago I was inveigled into drinking some of his noxious preparation. The joke is on me with a vengeance," he laughed this time with rare heartiness, and they stared at him. "I have been thinking things over on my way up. Prime Minister," he went on, "and I believe I have taken rather a narrow view of your proposal, in fact I do not think I have been very normal lately. How do you do. Coulter?" he waved a cheerful hand to the astounded Minister of the Interior. "No," he went on, "I am going to support that measure of yours. I think it is a very wise and very sound measure. One has to look at things clearly and drop the purely personal view."

"I am delighted " began the Prime Minister.

"Not a bit, sir," said the jovial Thessiger; "but the 'Nig-Nog' story is quite a good one, don't you think?"

He strolled out of the room humming a tune and entered his own private bureau, crossed to the desk, and pressed a bell-push. His chief clerk entered a little apprehensively.

"Oh, by the way," said Thessiger, "that pass I issued to the Countess Castlavera, has it been sent?"

"No, sir, not yet," said the clerk quickly; "but I will send it by special messenger. I am very sorry—"

"Oh, don't bother about it," said Thessiger. "You can cancel it. Perhaps it was rather indiscreet to issue a pass of that character. And—wait, please," the clerk was at the door and turned back; "send down to the druggist and get me a dozen packages of—er—'Nig-Nog' I think they call it."

"Which druggist, sir?"

"They sell it everywhere," said Thessiger. "Surely you have heard of 'Nig-

Nog'!

"The speech of the Minister of Ordnance," wrote the leader writer of The Times, "was a masterpiece of constructive eloquence, though it is not wholly clear what the Right Honorable gentleman meant when he referred to the Defensive Bill as being a dose of 'Nig-Nog' for nerve-shattered Europe..."

If the readers of The Times did not understand, Mr. Cymbeline Smith grasped the allusion with remarkable rapidity, and was only prevented from adding this wonderful testimonial to the already inflated list by the eloquent persuasion of a combined Cabinet and a promise which I have endeavored to fulfill.

THE END

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