SUNDRY ACCOUNTS



IRVIN S. COBB

Sundry Accounts

Irvin S. Cobb

THE AUTHOR



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1876 - 1944

AI-created interpretation after Underwood & Underwood photograph, 1930; University of Washington, J. Willis Sayre Collection.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Irvin S. Cobb

Irvin Shrewsbury Cobb was an American journalist, humorist and author, born in Paducah, Kentucky, in 1876. He began reporting while still a teenager, learning his profession through local news. He later moved to New York, where newspaper work brought him national recognition.

Cobb wrote for the New York World and the Saturday Evening Post, combining reporting with short fiction and humorous commentary. His career extended into books, theatre, broadcasting and film. He also reported from Europe during the First World War, moving between entertainment and the observation of major public events.

His writing reflects both his skill as a storyteller and the racial prejudices of the society in which he grew up. Modern scholarship has examined his use of stereotypes alongside his contributions to popular journalism. He died in 1944, leaving a body of work that offers evidence of changing media and of the assumptions carried into them.

Readers can notice the timing of an anecdote: what is delayed, what is exaggerated and whose expectations supply the joke. It is equally useful to ask whose perspective a story leaves outside its circle of sympathy. Attention to both technique and viewpoint makes it possible to understand the humour without overlooking the limitations of its social world.

Biographical references: University Press of Kentucky; Murray State University. Portrait source: Underwood & Underwood photograph, 1930; University of Washington, J. Willis Sayre Collection. Full source records retained in the edition archive.

TO
JOHN WILSON TOWNSEND, Esquire

CHAPTER I

DARKNESS

There was a house in this town where always by night lights burned. In one of its rooms many lights burned; in each of the other rooms at least one light. It stood on Clay Street, on a treeless plot among flower beds, a small dull-looking house; and when late on dark nights all the other houses on Clay Street were solid blockings lifting from the lesser blackness of their background, the lights in this house patterned its windows with squares of brilliancy so that it suggested a grid set on edge before hot flames. Once a newcomer to the town, a transient guest at Mrs. Otterbuck's boarding house, spoke about it to old Squire Jonas, who lived next door to where the lights blazed of nights, and the answer he got makes a fitting enough beginning for this account.

This stranger came along Clay Street one morning, and Squire Jonas, who was leaning over his gate contemplating the world as it passed in review, nodded to him and remarked that it was a fine morning; and the stranger was emboldened to stop and pass the time of day, as the saying goes.

"I'm here going over the books of the Bernheimer Distilling Company," he said when they had spoken of this and that, "and, you know, when a chartered accountant gets on a job he's supposed to keep right at it until he's done. Well, my work keeps me busy till pretty late. And the last three nights, passing that place yonder adjoining yours, I've noticed she was all lit up like as if for a wedding or a christening or a party or something. But I didn't see anybody going in or coming out, or hear anybody stirring in there, and it struck me as blamed curious. Last night—or this morning, rather, I should say—it must have been close on to half-past two o'clock when I passed by, and there she was, all as quiet as the tomb and still the lights going from top to bottom. So I got to wondering to myself. Tell me, sir, is there somebody sick over there next door?"

"Yes, suh," stated the squire, "I figure you might say there is somebody sick there. He's been sick a powerful long time too. But it's not his body that's sick; it's his soul."

"I don't know as I get you, sir," said the other man in a puzzled sort of way.

"Son," stated the squire, "I reckin you've been hearin' 'em, haven't you, singin' this here new song that's goin' 'round about, 'I'm Afraid to Go Home in the Dark'? Well, probably the man who wrote that there song never was down here in these parts in his life; probably he just made the idea of it up out of his own head. But he might 'a' had the case of my neighbor in his mind when he done so. Only his song is kind of comical and this case here is about the most uncomic one you'd be likely to run acrost. The man who lives here alongside of me is not only afraid to go home in the dark but he's actually feared to stay in the dark after he gets home. Once he killed a man and he come clear of the killin' all right enough, but seems like he ain't never got over it; and the sayin' in this town is that he's studied it out that ef ever he gets in the dark, either by himself or in company, he'll see the face of that there man he killed. So that's why, son, you've been seein' them lights a-blazin'. I've been seein' 'em myself fur goin' on twenty year or more, I reckin 'tis by now, and I've got used to 'em. But I ain't never got over wonderin' whut kind of thoughts he must have over there all alone by himself at night with everything lit up bright as day around him, when by rights things should be dark. But I ain't ever asted him, and whut's more, I never will. He ain't the kind you could go to him astin' him personal questions about his own private affairs. We-all here in town just accept him fur whut he is and sort of let him be. He's whut you might call a town character. His name is Mr. Dudley Stackpole."

In all respects save one, Squire Jonas, telling the inquiring stranger the tale, had the rights of it. There were town characters aplenty he might have described. A long-settled community with traditions behind it and a reasonable antiquity seems to breed curious types of men and women as a musty closet breeds mice and moths. This town of ours had its town mysteries and its town eccentrics—its freaks, if one wished to put the matter bluntly; and it had its champion story-teller and its champion liar and its champion guesser of the weight of livestock on the hoof.

There was crazy Saul Vance, the butt of cruel small boys, who deported himself as any rational creature might so long as he walked a straight course; but so surely as he came to where the road forked

or two streets crossed he could not decide which turning to take and for hours angled back and forth and to and fro, now taking the short cut to regain the path he just had quitted, now retracing his way over the long one, for all the world like a geometric spider spinning its web. There was old Daddy Hannah, the black root-and-yarb doctor, who could throw spells and weave charms and invoke conjures. He wore a pair of shoes which had been worn by a man who was hanged, and these shoes, as is well known, leave no tracks which a dog will nose after or a witch follow, or a ha'nt. Small boys did not gibe at Daddy Hannah, you bet you! There was Major Burnley, who lived for years and years in the same house with the wife with whom he had quarreled and never spoke a word to her or she to him. But the list is overlong for calling. With us, in that day and time, town characters abounded freely. But Mr. Dudley Stackpole was more than a town character. He was that, it is true, but he was something else besides; something which tabbed him a mortal set apart from his fellow mortals. He was the town's chief figure of tragedy.

If you had ever seen him once you could shut your eyes and see him over again. Yet about him there was nothing impressive, nothing in his port or his manner to catch and to hold a stranger's gaze. With him, physically, it was quite the other way about. He was a short spare man, very gentle in his movements, a toneless sort of man of a palish gray cast, who always wore sad-colored clothing. He would make you think of a man molded out of a fog; almost he was like a man made of smoke. His mode of living might testify that a gnawing remorse abode ever with him, but his hair had not turned white in a single night, as the heads of those suddenly stricken by a great shock or a great grief or any greatly upsetting and disordering emotion sometimes are reputed to turn. Neither in his youth nor when age came to him was his hair white. But for so far back as any now remembered it had been a dullish gray, suggesting at a distance dead lichens.

The color of his skin was a color to match in with the rest of him. It was not pale, nor was it pasty. People with a taste for comparisons were hard put to it to describe just what it was the hue of his face did remind them of, until one day a man brought in from the woods the abandoned nest of a brood of black hornets, still clinging to the pendent twig from which the insect artificers had swung it. Darkies

used to collect these nests in the fall of the year when the vicious swarms had deserted them. Their shredded parchments made ideal wadding for muzzle-loading scatter-guns, and sufferers from asthma tore them down, too, and burned them slowly and stooped over the smoldering mass and inhaled the fumes and the smoke which arose, because the country wiseacres preached that no boughten stuff out of a drug store gave such relief from asthma as this hornet's-nest treatment. But it remained for this man to find a third use for such a thing. He brought it into the office of Gafford's wagon yard, where some other men were sitting about the fire, and he held it up before them and he said:

"Who does this here hornet's nest put you fellers in mind of—this gray color all over it, and all these here fine lines runnin' back and forth and every which-a-way like wrinkles? Think, now—it's somebody you all know."

And when they had given it up as a puzzle too hard for them to guess he said:

"Why, ain't it got percisely the same color and the same look about it as Mr. Dudley Stackpole's face? Why, it's a perfect imitation of him! That's whut I said to myself all in a flash when I first seen it bouncin' on the end of this here black birch limb out yonder in the flats."

"By gum, if you ain't right!" exclaimed one of the audience. "Say, come to think about it, I wonder if spendin' all his nights with bright lights burnin' round him is whut's give that old man that gray color he's got, the same as this wasp's nest has got it, and all them puckery lines round his eyes. Pore old devil, with the hags furever ridin' him! Well, they tell me he's toler'ble well fixed in this world's goods, but poor as I am, and him well off, I wouldn't trade places with him fur any amount of money. I've got my peace of mind if I ain't got anything else to speak of. Say, you'd 'a' thought in all these years a man would get over broodin' over havin' killed another feller, and specially havin' killed him in fair fight. Let's see, now, whut was the name of the feller he killed that time out there at Cache Creek Crossin's? I actually disremember. I've heard it a thousand times, too, I reckin, if I've heard it oncet."

For a fact, the memory of the man slain so long before only endured because the slayer walked abroad as a living reminder of the

taking off of one who by all accounts had been of small value to mankind in his day and generation. Save for the daily presence of the one, the very identity even of the other might before now have been forgotten. For this very reason, seeking to enlarge the merits of the controversy which had led to the death of one Jesse Tatum at the hands of Dudley Stackpole, people sometimes referred to it as the Tatum-Stackpole feud and sought to liken it to the Faxon-Fleming feud. But that was a real feud with fence-corner ambuscades and a sizable mortality list and nighttime assassinations and all; whereas this lesser thing, which now briefly is to be dealt with on its merits, had been no more than a neighborhood falling out, having but a solitary homicide for its climactic upshot. So far as that went, it really was not so much the death of the victim as the survival of his destroyer—and his fashion of living afterwards—which made warp and woof for the fabric of the tragedy.

With the passage of time the actuating causes were somewhat blurred in perspective. The main facts stood forth clear enough, but the underlying details were misty and uncertain, like some half-obliterated scribble on a badly rubbed slate upon which a more important sum has been overlaid. One rendition had it that the firm of Stackpole Brothers sued the two Tatums—Harve and Jess—for an account long overdue, and won judgment in the courts, but won with it the murderous enmity of the defendant pair. Another account would have it that a dispute over a boundary fence marching between the Tatum homestead on Cache Creek and one of the Stackpole farm holdings ripened into a prime quarrel by reasons of Stackpole stubbornness on the one hand and Tatum malignity on the other. By yet a third account the lawsuit and the line-fence matter were confusingly twisted together to form a cause for disputation.

Never mind that part though. The incontrovertible part was that things came to a decisive pass on a July day in the late 80's when the two Tatums sent word to the two Stackpoles that at or about six o'clock of that evening they would come down the side road from their place a mile away to Stackpole Brothers' gristmill above the big riffle in Cache Creek prepared to fight it out man to man. The warning was explicit enough—the Tatums would shoot on sight. The message was meant for two, but only one brother heard it; for Jeffrey Stackpole, the senior member of the firm, was sick abed with heart

disease at the Stackpole house on Clay Street in town, and Dudley, the junior, was running the business and keeping bachelor's hall, as the phrase goes, in the living room of the mill; and it was Dudley who received notice.

Now the younger Stackpole was known for a law-abiding and a well-disposed man, which reputation stood him in stead subsequently; but also he was no coward. He might crave peace, but he would not flee from trouble moving toward him. He would not advance a step to meet it, neither would he give back a step to avoid it. If it occurred to him to hurry in to the county seat and have his enemies put under bonds to keep the peace he pushed the thought from him. This, in those days, was not the popular course for one threatened with violence by another; nor, generally speaking, was it regarded exactly as the manly one to follow. So he bided that day where he was. Moreover, it was not of record that he told anyone at all of what impended. He knew little of the use of firearms, but there was a loaded pistol in the cash drawer of the mill office. He put it in a pocket of his coat and through the afternoon he waited, outwardly quiet and composed, for the appointed hour when single-handed he would defend his honor and his brother's against the unequal odds of a brace of bullies, both of them quick on the trigger, both smart and clever in the handling of weapons.

But if Stackpole told no one, someone else told someone. Probably the messenger of the Tatums talked. He currently was reputed to have a leaky tongue to go with his jimberjaws; a born trouble maker, doubtless, else he would not have loaned his service to such employment in the first place. Up and down the road ran the report that before night there would be a clash at the Stackpole mill. Peg-Leg Foster, who ran the general store below the bridge and within sight of the big riffle, saw fit to shut up shop early and go to town for the evening. Perhaps he did not want to be a witness, or possibly he desired to be out of the way of stray lead flying about. So the only known witness to what happened, other than the parties engaged in it, was a negro woman. She, at least, was one who had not heard the rumor which since early forenoon had been spreading through the sparsely settled neighborhood. When six o'clock came she was grubbing out a sorghum patch in front of her cabin just north of where the creek cut under the Blandsville gravel pike.

One gets a picture of the scene: The thin and deficient shadows stretching themselves across the parched bottom lands as the sun slid down behind the trees of Eden's swamp lot; the heat waves of a blistering hot day still dancing their devil's dance down the road like wriggling circumflexes to accent a false promise of coolness off there in the distance; the ominous emptiness of the landscape; the brooding quiet, cut through only by the frogs and the dry flies tuning up for their evening concert; the bandannaed negress wrangling at the weeds with her hoe blade inside the rail fence; and, half sheltered within the lintels of the office doorway of his mill, Dudley Stackpole, a slim, still figure, watching up the crossroad for the coming of his adversaries.

But the adversaries did not come from up the road as they had advertised they would. That declaration on their part had been a trick and device, cockered up in the hope of taking the foe by surprise and from the rear. In a canvas-covered wagon—moving wagons, we used to call them in Red Gravel County—they left their house half an hour or so before the time set by them for the meeting, and they cut through by a wood lane which met the pike south of Foster's store; and then very slowly they rode up the pike toward the mill, being minded to attack from behind, with the added advantage of unexpectedness on their side.

Chance, though, spoiled their strategy and made these terms of primitive dueling more equal. Mark how: The woman in the sorghum patch saw it happen. She saw the wagon pass her and saw it brought to a standstill just beyond where she was; saw Jess Tatum slide stealthily down from under the overhanging hood of the wagon and, sheltered behind it, draw a revolver and cock it, all the while peeping out, searching the front and the nearer side of the gristmill with his eager eyes. She saw Harve Tatum, the elder brother, set the wheel chock and wrap the lines about the sheathed whipstock, and then as he swung off the seat catch a boot heel on the rim of the wagon box and fall to the road with a jar which knocked him cold, for he was a gross and heavy man and struck squarely on his head. With popped eyes she saw Jess throw up his pistol and fire once from his ambush behind the wagon, and then—the startled team having snatched the wagon from before him—saw him advance into the open toward the mill, shooting again as he advanced.

All now in the same breath and in a jumble of shock and terror she saw Dudley Stackpole emerge into full sight, and standing clear a pace from his doorway return the fire; saw the thudding frantic hoofs of the nigh horse spurn Harve Tatum's body aside—the kick broke his right leg, it turned out—saw Jess Tatum suddenly halt and stagger back as though jerked by an unseen hand; saw him drop his weapon and straighten again, and with both hands clutched to his throat run forward, head thrown back and feet drumming; heard him give one strange bubbling, strangled scream—it was the blood in his throat made this outcry sound thus—and saw him fall on his face, twitching and heaving, not thirty feet from where Dudley Stackpole stood, his pistol upraised and ready for more firing.

As to how many shots, all told, were fired the woman never could say with certainty. There might have been four or five or six, or even seven, she thought. After the opening shot they rang together in almost a continuous volley, she said. Three empty chambers in Tatum's gun and two in Stackpole's seemed conclusive evidence to the sheriff and the coroner that night and to the coroner's jurors next day that five shots had been fired.

On one point, though, for all her fright, the woman was positive, and to this she stuck in the face of questions and cross-questions. After Tatum stopped as though jolted to a standstill, and dropped his weapon, Stackpole flung the barrel of his revolver upward and did not again offer to fire, either as his disarmed and stricken enemy advanced upon him or after he had fallen. As she put it, he stood there like a man frozen stiff.

Having seen and heard this much, the witness, now all possible peril for her was passed, suddenly became mad with fear. She ran into her cabin and scrouged behind the headboard of a bed. When at length she timorously withdrew from hiding and came trembling forth, already persons out of the neighborhood, drawn by the sounds of the fusillade, were hurrying up. They seemed to spring, as it were, out of the ground. Into the mill these newcomers carried the two Tatums, Jess being stone-dead and Harve still senseless, with a leg dangling where the bones were snapped below the knee, and a great cut in his scalp; and they laid the two of them side by side on the floor in the gritty dust of the meal tailings and the flour grindings. This done, some ran to harness and hitch and to go to fetch doctors

and law officers, spreading the news as they went; and some stayed on to work over Harve Tatum and to give such comfort as they might to Dudley Stackpole, he sitting dumb in his little, cluttered office awaiting the coming of constable or sheriff or deputy so that he might surrender himself into custody.

While they waited and while they worked to bring Harve Tatum back to his senses, the men marveled at two amazing things. The first wonder was that Jess Tatum, finished marksman as he was, and the main instigator and central figure of sundry violent encounters in the past, should have failed to hit the mark at which he fired with his first shot or with his second or with his third; and the second, a still greater wonder, was that Dudley Stackpole, who perhaps never in his life had had for a target a living thing, should have sped a bullet so squarely into the heart of his victim at twenty yards or more. The first phenomenon might perhaps be explained, they agreed, on the hypothesis that the mishap to his brother coming at the very moment of the fight's beginning, unnerved Jess and threw him out of stride, so to speak. But the second was not in anywise to be explained excepting on the theory of sheer chance. The fact remained that it was so, and the fact remained that it was strange.

By form of law Dudley Stackpole spent two days under arrest; but this was a form, a legal fiction only. Actually he was at liberty from the time he reached the courthouse that night, riding in the sheriff's buggy with the sheriff and carrying poised on his knees a lighted lantern. Afterwards it was to be recalled that when, alongside the sheriff, he came out of his mill technically a prisoner he carried in his hand this lantern, all trimmed of wick and burning, and that he held fast to it through the six-mile ride to town. Afterwards, too, the circumstance was to be coupled with multiplying circumstances to establish a state of facts; but at the moment, in the excited state of mind of those present, it passed unremarked and almost unnoticed. And he still held it in his hand when, having been released under nominal bond and attended by certain sympathizing friends, he walked across town from the county building to his home on Clay Street. That fact, too, was subsequently remembered and added to other details to make a finished sum of deductive reasoning.

Already it was a foregone conclusion that the finding at the coroner's inquest, to be held the next day, would absolve him;

foregone, also, that no prosecutor would press for his arraignment on charges and that no grand jury would indict. So, soon all the evidence in hand was conclusively on his side. He had been forced into a fight not of his own choosing; an effort, which had failed, had been made to take him unfairly from behind; he had fired in self-defense after having first been fired upon; save for a quirk of fate operating in his favor, he should have faced odds of two deadly antagonists instead of facing one. What else then than his prompt and honorable discharge? And to top all, the popular verdict was that the killing off of Jess Tatum was so much good riddance of so much sorry rubbish; a pity, though, Harve had escaped his just deserts.

Helpless for the time being, and in the estimation of his fellows even more thoroughly discredited than he had been before, Harve Tatum here vanishes out of our recital. So, too, does Jeffrey Stackpole, heretofore mentioned once by name, for within a week he was dead of the same heart attack which had kept him out of the fight at Cache Creek. The rest of the narrative largely appertains to the one conspicuous survivor, this Dudley Stackpole already described.

Tradition ever afterwards had it that on the night of the killing he slept—if he slept at all—in the full-lighted room of a house which was all aglare with lights from cellar to roof line. From its every opening the house blazed as for a celebration. At the first, so the tale of it ran, people were of two different minds to account for this. This one rather thought Stackpole feared punitive reprisals under cover of night by vengeful kinsmen of the Tatums, they being, root and branch, sprout and limb, a belligerent and an ill-conditioned breed. That one suggested that maybe he took this method of letting all and sundry know he felt no regret for having gunned the life out of a dangerous brawler; that perhaps thereby he sought to advertise his satisfaction at the outcome of that day's affair. But this latter theory was not to be credited. For so sensitive and so well-disposed a man as Dudley Stackpole to joy in his own deadly act, however justifiable in the sight of law and man that act might have been—why, the bare notion of it was preposterous! The repute and the prior conduct of the man robbed the suggestion of all plausibility. And then soon, when night after night the lights still flared in his house, and when

on top of this evidence accumulated to confirm a belief already crystallizing in the public mind, the town came to sense the truth, which was that Mr. Dudley Stackpole now feared the dark as a timid child might fear it. It was not authentically chronicled that he confessed his fears to any living creature. But his fellow townsmen knew the state of his mind as though he had shouted of it from the housetops. They had heard, most of them, of such cases before. They agreed among themselves that he shunned darkness because he feared that out of that darkness might return the vision of his deed, bloodied and shocking and hideous. And they were right. He did so fear, and he feared mightily, constantly and unendingly.

That fear, along with the behavior which became from that night thenceforward part and parcel of him, made Dudley Stackpole as one set over and put apart from his fellows. Neither by daytime nor by nighttime was he thereafter to know darkness. Never again was he to see the twilight fall or face the blackness which comes before the dawning or take his rest in the cloaking, kindly void and nothingness of the midnight. Before the dusk of evening came, in midafternoon sometimes, of stormy and briefened winter days, or in the full radiance of the sun's sinking in the summertime, he was within doors lighting the lights which would keep the darkness beyond his portals and hold at bay a gathering gloom into which from window or door he would not look and dared not look.

There were trees about his house, cottonwoods and sycamores and one noble elm branching like a lyre. He chopped them all down and had the roots grubbed out. The vines which covered his porch were shorn away. To these things many were witnesses. What transformations he worked within the walls were largely known by hearsay through the medium of Aunt Kassie, the old negress who served him as cook and chambermaid and was his only house servant. To half-fearsome, half-fascinated audiences of her own color, whose members in time communicated what she told to their white employers, she related how with his own hands, bringing a crude carpentry into play, her master ripped out certain dark closets and abolished a secluded and gloomy recess beneath a hall staircase, and how privily he called in men who strung his ceilings with electric lights, although already the building was piped for gas; and how, for final touches, he placed in various parts of his bedroom tallow dips

and oil lamps to be lit before twilight and to burn all night, so that though the gas sometime should fail and the electric bulbs blink out, there still would be abundant lighting about him. His became the house which harbored no single shadow save only the shadow of morbid dread which lived within its owner's bosom. An orthodox haunted house should by rights be deserted and dark. This house, haunted if ever one was, differed from the orthodox conception. It was tenanted and it shone with lights.

The man's abiding obsession—if we may call his besetment thus—changed in practically all essential regards the manners and the practices of his daily life. After the shooting he never returned to his mill. He could not bring himself to endure the ordeal of revisiting the scene of the killing. So the mill stood empty and silent, just as he left it that night when he rode to town with the sheriff, until after his brother's death; and then with all possible dispatch he sold it, its fixtures, contents and goodwill, for what the property would fetch at quick sale, and he gave up business. He had sufficient to stay him in his needs. The Stackpoles had the name of being a canny and a provident family, living quietly and saving of their substance. The homestead where he lived, which his father before him had built, was free of debt. He had funds in the bank and money out at interest. He had not been one to make close friends. Now those who had counted themselves his friends became rather his distant acquaintances, among whom he neither received nor bestowed confidences.

In the broader hours of daylight his ways were such as any man of reserved and diffident ways, having no fixed employment, might follow in a smallish community. He sat upon his porch and read in books. He worked in his flower beds. With flowers he had a cunning touch, almost like a woman's. He loved them, and they responded to his love and bloomed and bore for him. He walked downtown to the business district, always alone, a shy and unimpressive figure, and sat brooding and aloof in one of the tilted-back cane chairs under the portico of the old Richland House, facing the river. He took long solitary walks on side streets and byways; but it was noted that, reaching the farther outskirts, he invariably turned back. In all those dragging years it is doubtful if once he set foot past the corporate limits into the open country. Dun hued, unobtrusive, withdrawn, he

aged slowly, almost imperceptibly. Men and women of his own generation used to say that save for the wrinkles ever multiplying in close cross-hatchings about his puckered eyes, and save for the enhancing of that dead gray pallor—the wasp's-nest overcasting of his skin—he still looked to them exactly as he had looked when he was a much younger man.

It was not so much the appearance or the customary demeanor of the recluse that made strangers turn about to stare at him as he passed, and that made them remember how he looked when he was gone from their sight. The one was commonplace enough—I mean his appearance—and his conduct, unless one knew the underlying motives, was merely that of an unobtrusive, rather melancholy seeming gentleman of quiet tastes and habits. It was the feeling and the sense of a dismal exhalation from him, an unhealthy and unnatural mental effluvium that served so indelibly to fix the bodily image of him in the brainpans of casual and uninformed passers-by. The brand of Cain was not on his brow. By every local standard of human morality it did not belong there. But built up of morbid elements within his own conscience, it looked out from his eyes and breathed out from his person.

So year by year, until the tally of the years rolled up to more than thirty, he went his lone unhappy way. He was in the life of the town, to an extent, but not of it. Always, though, it was the daylit life of the town which knew him. Excepting once only. Of this exceptional instance a story was so often repeated that in time it became permanently embalmed in the unwritten history of the place.

On a summer's afternoon, sultry and close, the heavens suddenly went all black, and quick gusts smote the earth with threats of a great windstorm. The sun vanished magically; a close thick gloaming fell out of the clouds. It was as though nightfall had descended hours before its ordained time. At the city power house the city electrician turned on the street lights. As the first great fat drops of rain fell, splashing in the dust like veritable clots, citizens scurrying indoors and citizens seeing to flapping awnings and slamming window blinds halted where they were to peer through the murk at the sight of Mr. Dudley Stackpole fleeing to the shelter of home like a man hunted by a terrible pursuer. But with all his desperate need for haste he ran no straightaway course. The manner of his flight was

what gave added strangeness to the spectacle of him. He would dart headlong, on a sharp oblique from the right-hand corner of a street intersection to a point midway of the block—or square, to give it its local name—then go slanting back again to the right-hand corner of the next street crossing, so that his path was in the pattern of one acutely slanted zigzag after another. He was keeping, as well as he could, within the circles of radiance thrown out by the municipal arc lights as he made for his house, there in his bedchamber to fortify himself about, like one beset and besieged, with the ample and protecting rays of all the methods of artificial illumination at his command—with incandescent bulbs thrown on by switches, with the flare of lighted gas jets, with the tallow dip's slim digit of flame, and with the kerosene's wick three-finger breadth of greasy brilliance. As he fumbled, in a very panic and spasm of fear, with the latchets of his front gate Squire Jonas' wife heard him screaming to Aunt Kassie, his servant, to turn on the lights—all of them.

That once was all, though—the only time he found the dark taking him unawares and threatening to envelop him in thirty years and more than thirty. Then a time came when in a hospital in Oklahoma an elderly man named A. Hamilton Bledsoe lay on his deathbed and on the day before he died told the physician who attended him and the clergyman who had called to pray for him that he had a confession to make. He desired that it be taken down by a stenographer just as he uttered it, and transcribed; then he would sign it as his solemn dying declaration, and when he had died they were to send the signed copy back to the town from whence he had in the year 1889 moved West, and there it was to be published broadcast. All of which, in due course of time and in accordance with the signatory's wishes, was done.

With the beginning of the statement as it appeared in the *Daily Evening News*, as with Editor Tompkins' introductory paragraphs preceding it, we need have no interest. That which really matters began two-thirds of the way down the first column and ran as follows:

"How I came to know there was likely to be trouble that evening at the big-riffle crossing was this way"—it is the dying Bledsoe, of course, who is being quoted. "The man they sent to the mill with the message did a lot of loose talking on his way back after he gave in the

message, and in this roundabout way the word got to me at my house on the Eden's Swamp road soon after dinnertime. Now I had always got along fine with both of the Stackpoles, and had only friendly feelings toward them; but maybe there's some people still alive back there in that county who can remember what the reason was why I should naturally hate and despise both the Tatums, and especially this Jess Tatum, him being if anything the more low-down one of the two, although the youngest. At this late day I don't aim to drag the name of anyone else into this, especially a woman's name, and her now dead and gone and in her grave; but I will just say that if ever a man had a just cause for craving to see Jess Tatum stretched out in his blood it was me. At the same time I will state that it was not good judgment for a man who expected to go on living to start out after one of the Tatums without he kept on till he had cleaned up the both of them, and maybe some of their cousins as well. I will not admit that I acted cowardly, but I will state that I used my best judgment.

"Therefore and accordingly, no sooner did I hear the news about the dare which the Tatums had sent to the Stackpoles than I said to myself that it looked like here was my fitting chance to even up my grudge with Jess Tatum and yet at the same time not run the prospect of being known to be mixed up in the matter and maybe getting arrested, or waylaid afterwards by members of the Tatum family or things of such a nature. Likewise I figured that with a general amount of shooting going on, as seemed likely to be the case, one shot more or less would not be noticed, especially as I aimed to keep out of sight at all times and do my work from under safe cover, which it all of it turned out practically exactly as I had expected. So I took a rifle which I owned and which I was a good shot with and I privately went down through the bottoms and came out on the creek bank in the deep cut right behind Stackpole Brothers' gristmill. I should say offhand this was then about three o'clock in the evening. I was ahead of time, but I wished to be there and get everything fixed up the way I had mapped it out in my mind, without being hurried or rushed.

"The back door of the mill was not locked, and I got in without being seen, and I went upstairs to the loft over the mill and I went to a window just above the front door, which was where they hoisted up grain when brought in wagons, and I propped the wooden shutter of

the window open a little ways. But I only propped it open about two or three inches; just enough for me to see out of it up the road good. And I made me a kind of pallet out of meal sacks and I laid down there and I waited. I knew the mill had shut down for the week, and I didn't figure on any of the hands being round the mill or anybody finding out I was up there. So I waited, not hearing anybody stirring about downstairs at all, until just about three minutes past six, when all of a sudden came the first shot.

"What threw me off was expecting the Tatums to come afoot from up the road, but when they did come it was in a wagon from down the main Blandsville pike clear round in the other direction. So at this first shot I swung and peeped out and I seen Harve Tatum down in the dust seemingly right under the wheels of his wagon, and I seen Jess Tatum jump out from behind the wagon and shoot, and I seen Dudley Stackpole come out of the mill door right directly under me and start shooting back at him. There was no sign of his brother Jeffrey. I did not know then that Jeffrey was home sick in bed.

"Being thrown off the way I had been, it took me maybe one or two seconds to draw myself around and get the barrel of my rifle swung round to where I wanted it, and while I was doing this the shooting was going on. All in a flash it had come to me that it would be fairer than ever for me to take part in this thing, because in the first place the Tatums would be two against one if Harve should get back upon his feet and get into the fight; and in the second place Dudley Stackpole didn't know the first thing about shooting a pistol. Why, all in that same second, while I was righting myself and getting the bead onto Jess Tatum's breast, I seen his first shot—Stackpole's, I mean—kick up the dust not twenty feet in front of him and less than halfway to where Tatum was. I was as cool as I am now, and I seen this quite plain.

"So with that, just as Stackpole fired wild again, I let Jess Tatum have it right through the chest, and as I did so I knew from the way he acted that he was done and through. He let loose of his pistol and acted like he was going to fall, and then he sort of rallied up and did a strange thing. He ran straight on ahead toward the mill, with his neck craned back and him running on tiptoe; and he ran this way quite a little ways before he dropped flat, face down. Somebody else, seeing him do that, might have thought he had the idea to tear into

Dudley Stackpole with his bare hands, but I had done enough shooting at wild game in my time to know that he was acting like a partridge sometimes does, or a wild duck when it is shot through the heart or in the head; only in such a case a bird flies straight up in the air. Towering is what you call it when done by a partridge. I do not know what you would call it when done by a man.

"So then I closed the window shutter and I waited for quite a little while to make sure everything was all right for me, and then I hid my rifle under the meal sacks, where it stayed until I got it privately two days later; and then I slipped downstairs and went out by the back door and came round in front, running and breathing hard as though I had just heard the shooting whilst up in the swamp. By that time there were several others had arrived, and there was also a negro woman crying round and carrying on and saying she seen Jess Tatum fire the first shot and seen Dudley Stackpole shoot back and seen Tatum fall. But she could not say for sure how many shots there were fired in all. So I saw that everything was all right so far as I was concerned, and that nobody, not even Stackpole, suspicioned but that he himself had killed Jess Tatum; and as I knew he would have no trouble with the law to amount to anything on account of it, I felt that there was no need for me to worry, and I did not—not worry then nor later. But for some time past I had been figuring on moving out here on account of this new country opening up. So I hurried up things, and inside of a week I had sold out my place and had shipped my household plunder on ahead; and I moved out here with my family, which they have all died off since, leaving only me. And now I am about to die, and so I wish to make this statement before I do so.

"But if they had thought to cut into Jess Tatum's body after he was dead, or to probe for the bullet in him, they would have known that it was not Dudley Stackpole who really shot him, but somebody else; and then I suppose suspicion might have fell upon me, although I doubt it. Because they would have found that the bullet which killed him was fired out of a forty-five-seventy shell, and Dudley Stackpole had done all of the shooting he done with a thirty-eight caliber pistol, which would throw a different-sized bullet. But they never thought to do so."

Question by the physician, Doctor Davis: "You mean to say that no autopsy was performed upon the body of the deceased?"

Answer by Bledsoe: "If you mean by performing an autopsy that they probed into him or cut in to find the bullet I will answer no, sir, they did not. They did not seem to think to do so, because it seemed to everybody such a plain open-and-shut case that Dudley Stackpole had killed him."

Question by the Reverend Mr. Hewlitt: "I take it that you are making this confession of your own free will and in order to clear the name of an innocent party from blame and to purge your own soul?"

Answer: "In reply to that I will say yes and no. If Dudley Stackpole is still alive, which I doubt, he is by now getting to be an old man; but if alive yet I would like for him to know that he did not fire the shot which killed Jess Tatum on that occasion. He was not a bloodthirsty man, and doubtless the matter may have preyed upon his mind. So on the bare chance of him being still alive is why I make this dying statement to you gentlemen in the presence of witnesses. But I am not ashamed, and never was, at having done what I did do. I killed Jess Tatum with my own hands, and I have never regretted it. I would not regard killing him as a crime any more than you gentlemen here would regard it as a crime killing a rattlesnake or a moccasin snake. Only, until now, I did not think it advisable for me to admit it; which, on Dudley Stackpole's account solely, is the only reason why I am now making this statement."

And so on and so forth for the better part of a second column, with a brief summary in Editor Tompkins' best style—which was a very dramatic and moving style indeed—of the circumstances, as recalled by old residents, of the ancient tragedy, and a short sketch of the deceased Bledsoe, the facts regarding him being drawn from the same veracious sources; and at the end of the article was a somewhat guarded but altogether sympathetic reference to the distressful recollections borne for so long and so patiently by an esteemed townsman, with a concluding paragraph to the effect that though the gentleman in question had declined to make a public statement touching on the remarkable disclosures now added thus strangely as a final chapter to the annals of an event long since occurred, the writer felt no hesitancy in saying that appreciating, as they must, the motives which prompted him to silence, his fellow citizens would one and all join the editor of the *Daily Evening News* in congratulating him upon the lifting of this cloud from his life.

"I only wish I had the language to express the way that old man looked when I showed him the galley proofs of Bledsoe's confession," said Editor Tompkins to a little interested group gathered in his sanctum after the paper was on the streets that evening. "If I had such a power I'd have this Frenchman Balzac backed clear off the boards when it came to describing things. Gentlemen, let me tell you—I've been in this business all my life, and I've seen lots of things, but I never saw anything that was the beat of this thing.

"Just as soon as this statement came to me in the mails this morning from that place out in Oklahoma I rushed it into type, and I had a set of galley proofs pulled and I stuck 'em in my pocket and I put out for the Stackpole place out on Clay Street. I didn't want to trust either of the reporters with this job. They're both good, smart, likely boys; but, at that, they're only boys, and I didn't know how they'd go at this thing; and, anyway, it looked like it was my job.

"He was sitting on his porch reading, just a little old gray shell of a man, all hunched up, and I walked up to him and I says: 'You'll pardon me, Mr. Stackpole, but I've come to ask you a question and then to show you something. Did you,' I says, 'ever know a man named A. Hamilton Bledsoe?'

"He sort of winced. He got up and made as if to go into the house without answering me. I suppose it'd been so long since he had anybody calling on him he hardly knew how to act. And then that question coming out of a clear sky, as you might say, and rousing up bitter memories—not probably that his bitter memories needed any rousing, being always with him, anyway—may have jolted him pretty hard. But if he aimed to go inside he changed his mind when he got to the door. He turned round and came back.

"'Yes,' he says, as though the words were being dragged out of him against his will, 'I did once know a man of that name. He was commonly called Ham Bledsoe. He lived near where'—he checked himself up, here—'he lived,' he says, 'in this county at one time. I knew him then.'

"'That being so,' I says, 'I judge the proper thing to do is to ask you to read these galley proofs,' and I handed them over and he read them through without a word. Without a word, mind you, and yet if he'd spoken a volume he couldn't have told me any clearer what was passing through his mind when he came to the main facts than the

way he did tell me just by the look that came into his face. Gentlemen, when you sit and watch a man sixty-odd years old being born again; when you see hope and life come back to him all in a minute; when you see his soul being remade in a flash, you'll find you can't describe it afterwards, but you're never going to forget it. And another thing you'll find is that there is nothing for you to say to him, nothing that you can say, nor nothing that you want to say.

"I did manage, when he was through, to ask him whether or not he wished to make a statement. That was all from me, mind you, and yet I'd gone out there with the idea in my head of getting material for a long newsy piece out of him—what we call in this business heart-interest stuff. All he said, though, as he handed me back the slips was, 'No, sir; but I thank you—from the bottom of my heart I thank you.' And then he shook hands with me—shook hands with me like a man who'd forgotten almost how 'twas done—and he walked in his house and shut the door behind him, and I came on away feeling exactly as though I had seen a funeral turned into a resurrection."

Editor Tompkins thought he had that day written the final chapter, but he hadn't. The final chapter he was to write the next day, following hard upon a dénouement which to Mr. Tompkins, he with his own eyes having seen what he had seen, was so profound a puzzle that ever thereafter he mentally catalogued it under one of his favorite headlining phrases: "Deplorable Affair Shrouded in Mystery."

Let us go back a few hours. For a fact, Mr. Tompkins had been witness to a spirit's resurrection. It was as he had borne testimony—a life had been reborn before his eyes. Even so, he, the sole spectator to and chronicler of the glory of it, could not know the depth and the sweep and the swing of the great heartening swell of joyous relief which uplifted Dudley Stackpole at the reading of the dead Bledsoe's words. None save Dudley Stackpole himself was ever to have a true appreciation of the utter sweetness of that cleansing flood, nor he for long.

As he closed his door upon the editor, plans, aspirations, ambitions already were flowing to his brain, borne there upon that ground swell of sudden happiness. Into the back spaces of his mind long-buried desires went riding like chips upon a torrent. The substance of his patiently endured self-martyrdom was lifted all in a

second, and with it the shadow of it. He would be thenceforth as other men, living as they lived, taking, as they did, an active share and hand in communal life. He was getting old. The good news had come late, but not too late. That day would mark the total disappearance of the morbid lonely recluse and the rejuvenation of the normal-thinking, normal-habited citizen. That very day he would make a beginning of the new order of things.

And that very day he did; at least he tried. He put on his hat and he took his cane in his hand and as he started down the street he sought to put smartness and springiness into his gait. If the attempt was a sorry failure he, for one, did not appreciate the completeness of the failure. He meant, anyhow, that his step no longer should be purposeless and mechanical; that his walk should hereafter have intent in it. And as he came down the porch steps he looked about him, not dully, with sick and uninforming eyes, but with a livened interest in all familiar homely things.

Coming to his gate he saw, near at hand, Squire Jonas, now a gnarled but still sprightly octogenarian, leaning upon a fence post surveying the universe at large, as was the squire's daily custom. He called out a good morning and waved his stick in greeting toward the squire with a gesture which he endeavored to make natural. His aging muscles, staled by thirty-odd years of lack of practice at such tricks, merely made it jerky and forced. Still, the friendly design was there, plainly to be divined; and the neighborly tone of his voice. But the squire, ordinarily the most courteous of persons, and certainly one of the most talkative, did not return the salutation. Astonishment congealed his faculties, tied his tongue and paralyzed his biceps. He stared dumbly a moment, and then, having regained coherent powers, he jammed his brown-varnished straw hat firmly upon his ancient poll and went scrambling up his gravel walk as fast as two rheumatic underpinnings would take him, and on into his house like a man bearing incredible and unbelievable tidings.

Mr. Stackpole opened his gate and passed out and started down the sidewalk. Midway of the next square he overtook a man he knew—an elderly watchmaker, a Swiss by birth, who worked at Nagel's jewelry store. Hundreds, perhaps thousands of times he had passed this man upon the street. Always before he had passed him with averted eyes and a stiff nod of recognition. Now, coming up

behind the other, Mr. Stackpole bade him a cheerful good day. At the sound of the words the Swiss spun on his heel, then gulped audibly and backed away, flinching almost as though a blow had been aimed at him. He muttered some meaningless something, confusedly: he stared at Mr. Stackpole with widened eyes like one who beholds an apparition in the broad of the day; he stepped on his own feet and got in his own way as he shrank to the outer edge of the narrow pavement. Mr. Stackpole was minded to fall into step alongside the Swiss, but the latter would not have it so. He stumbled along for a few yards, mute and plainly terribly embarrassed at finding himself in this unexpected company, and then with a muttered sound which might be interpreted as an apology or an explanation, or as a token of profound surprise on his part, or as combination of them all, he turned abruptly off into a grassed side lane which ran up into the old Enders orchard and ended nowhere at all in particular. Once his back was turned to Mr. Stackpole, he blessed himself fervently. On his face was the look of one who would fend off what is evil and supernatural.

Mr. Stackpole continued on his way. On a vacant lot at Franklin and Clay Streets four small boys were playing one-eyed-cat. Switching his cane at the weed tops with strokes which he strove to make casual, he stopped to watch them, a half smile of approbation on his face. Pose and expression showed that he desired their approval for his approval of their skill. They stopped, too, when they saw him—stopped short. With one accord they ceased their play, staring at him. Nervously the batsman withdrew to the farther side of the common, dragging his bat behind him. The three others followed, casting furtive looks backward over their shoulders. Under a tree at the back of the lot they conferred together, all the while shooting quick diffident glances toward where he stood. It was plain something had put a blight upon their spirits; also, even at this distance, they radiated a sort of inarticulate suspicion—a suspicion of which plainly he was the object.

For long years Mr. Stackpole's faculties for observation of the motives and actions of his fellows had been sheathed. Still, disuse had not altogether dulled them. Constant introspection had not destroyed his gift for speculation. It was rusted, but still workable. He had read aright Squire Jonas' stupefaction, the watchmaker's

ludicrous alarm. He now read aright the chill which the very sight of his altered mien—cheerful and sprightly where they had expected grim aloofness—had thrown upon the spirits of the ball players. Well, he could understand it all. The alteration in him, coming without prior warning, had startled them, frightened them, really. Well, that might have been expected. The way had not been paved properly for the transformation. It would be different when the *Daily Evening News* came out. He would go back home—he would wait. When they had read what was in the paper people would not avoid him or flee from him. They would be coming into his house to wish him well, to reëstablish old relations with him. Why, it would be almost like holding a reception. He would be to those of his own age as a friend of their youth, returning after a long absence to his people, with the dour stranger who had lived in his house while he was away now driven out and gone forever.

He turned about and he went back home and he waited. But for a while nothing happened, except that in the middle of the afternoon Aunt Kassie unaccountably disappeared. She was gone when he left his seat on the front porch and went back to the kitchen to give her some instruction touching on supper. At dinnertime, entering his dining room, he had, without conscious intent whistled the bars of an old air, and at that she had dropped a plate of hot egg bread and vanished into the pantry, leaving the split fragments upon the floor. Nor had she returned. He had made his meal unattended. Now, while he looked for her, she was hurrying down the alley, bound for the home of her preacher. She felt the need of his holy counsels and the reading of scriptural passages. She was used to queerness in her master, but if he were going crazy all of a sudden, why that would be a different matter altogether. So, presently, she was confiding to her spiritual adviser.

Mr. Stackpole returned to the porch and sat down again and waited for what was to be. Through the heat of the waning afternoon Clay Street was almost deserted; but toward sunset the thickening tides of pedestrian travel began flowing by his house as men returned homeward from work. He had a bowing acquaintance with most of those who passed.

Two or three elderly men and women among them he had known fairly well in years past. But no single one of those who came along

turned in at his gate to offer him the congratulation he so eagerly desired; no single one, at sight of him, all poised and expectant, paused to call out kindly words across the palings of his fence. Yet they must have heard the news. He knew that they had heard it—all of them—knew it by the stares they cast toward the house front as they went by. There was more, though, in the staring than a quickened interest or a sharpened curiosity.

Was he wrong, or was there also a sort of subtle resentment in it? Was there a sense vaguely conveyed that even these old acquaintances of his felt almost personally aggrieved that a town character should have ceased thus abruptly to be a town character—that they somehow felt a subtle injustice had been done to public opinion, an affront offered to civic tradition, through this unexpected sloughing off by him of the rôle he for so long had worn?

He was not wrong. There was an essence of a floating, formless resentment there. Over the invisible tendons of mental telepathy it came to him, registering emphatically.

As he shrank back in his chair he summoned his philosophy to give him balm and consolation for his disappointment. It would take time, of course, for people to grow accustomed to the change in him—that was only natural. In a few days, now, when the shock of the sensation had worn off, things would be different. They would forgive him for breaking a sort of unuttered communal law, but one hallowed, as it were, by rote and custom. He vaguely comprehended that there might be such a law for his case—a canon of procedure which, unnatural in itself, had come with the passage of the passing years to be quite naturally accepted.

Well, perhaps the man who broke such a law, even though it were originally of his own fashioning, must abide the consequences. Even so, though, things must be different when the minds of people had readjusted. This he told himself over and over again, seeking in its steady repetition salve for his hurt, overwrought feelings.

And his nights—surely they would be different! Therein, after all, lay the roots of the peace and the surcease which henceforth would be his portion. At thought of this prospect, now imminent, he uplifted his soul in a silent pæan of thanksgiving.

Having no one in whom he ever had confided, it followed naturally that no one else knew what torture he had suffered through all the nights of all these years stretching behind him in so terribly long a perspective. No one else knew how he had craved for the darkness which all the time he had both feared and shunned. No one else knew how miserable a travesty on sleep his sleep had been, he reading until a heavy physical weariness came, then lying in his bed through the latter hours of the night, fitfully dozing, often rousing, while from either side of his bed, from the ceiling above, from the headboard behind him, and from the footboard, strong lights played full and flary upon his twitching, aching eyelids; and finally, towards dawn, with every nerve behind his eyes taut with pain and strain, awakening unrefreshed to consciousness of that nimbus of unrelieved false glare which encircled him, and the stench of melted tallow and the stale reek of burned kerosene foul in his nose. That, now, had been the hardest of all to endure. Endured unceasingly, it had been because of his dread of a thing infinitely worse—the agonized, twisted, dying face of Jess Tatum leaping at him out of shadows. But now, thank God, that ghost of his own conjuring, that wraith never seen but always feared, was laid to rest forever. Never again would conscience put him, soul and body, upon the rack. This night he would sleep—sleep as little children do in the all-enveloping, friendly, comforting dark.

Scarcely could he wait till a proper bedtime hour came. He forgot that he had had no supper; forgot in that delectable anticipation the disillusionizing experiences of the day. Mechanically he had, as dusk came on, turned on the lights throughout the house, and force of habit still operating, he left them all on when at eleven o'clock he quitted the brilliantly illuminated porch and went to his bedroom on the second floor. He undressed and he put on him his night wear, becoming a grotesque shrunken figure, what with his meager naked legs and his ashen eager face and thin dust-colored throat rising above the collarless neckband of the garment. He blew out the flame of the oil lamp which burned on a reading stand at the left side of his bed and extinguished the two candles which stood on a table at the right side.

Then he got in the bed and stretched out his arms, one aloft, the other behind him, finding with the fingers of this hand the turncock

of the gas burner which swung low from the ceiling at the end of a goosenecked iron pipe, finding with the fingers of that hand the wall switch which controlled the battery of electric lights roundabout, and with a long-drawn sigh of happy deliverance he turned off both gas and electricity simultaneously and sank his head toward the pillow.

The pæaned sigh turned to a shriek of mortal terror. Quaking in every limb, crying out in a continuous frenzy of fright, he was up again on his knees seeking with quivering hands for the switch; pawing about then for matches with which to relight the gas. For the blackness—that blackness to which he had been stranger for more than half his life—had come upon him as an enemy smothering him, muffling his head in its terrible black folds, stopping his nostrils with its black fingers, gripping his windpipe with black cords, so that his breathing stopped.

That blackness for which he had craved with an unappeasable hopeless craving through thirty years and more was become a horror and a devil. He had driven it from him. When he bade it return it returned not as a friend and a comforter but as a mocking fiend.

For months and years past he had realized that his optic nerves, punished and preyed upon by constant and unwholesome brilliancy, were nearing the point of collapse, and that all the other nerves in his body, frayed and fretted, too, were all askew and jangled. Cognizant of this he still could see no hope of relief, since his fears were greater than his reasoning powers or his strength of will. With the fear lifted and eternally dissipated in a breath, he had thought to find solace and soothing and restoration in the darkness. But now the darkness, for which his soul in its longing and his body in its stress had cried out unceasingly and vainly, was denied him too. He could face neither the one thing nor the other.

Squatted there in the huddle of the bed coverings, he reasoned it all out, and presently he found the answer. And the answer was this: Nature for a while forgets and forgives offenses against her, but there comes a time when Nature ceases to forgive the mistreatment of the body and the mind, and sends then her law of atonement, to be visited upon the transgressor with interest compounded a hundredfold. The user of narcotics knows it; the drunkard knows it; and this poor self-crucified victim of his own imagination—he knew

it too. The hint of it had that day been reflected in the attitude of his neighbors, for they merely had obeyed, without conscious realization or analysis on their part, a law of the natural scheme of things. The direct proof of it was, by this nighttime thing, revealed and made yet plainer. He stood convicted, a chronic violator of the immutable rule. And he knew, likewise, there was but one way out of the coil—and took it, there in his bedroom, vividly ringed about by the obscene and indecent circlet of his lights which kept away the blessed, cursed darkness while the suicide's soul was passing.

CHAPTER II

THE CATER-CORNERED SEX

They had a saying down our way in the old days that Judge Priest administered law inside his courthouse and justice outside of it. Perhaps they were right. Certainly he had a way of seeking short cuts through thickets of legal verbiage to the rights of things, the which often gave acute sorrow to the souls of those members of the bar who venerated the very ink in which the statutory act had been printed and worshiped manfully before the graven images of precedent. But elsewise, generally speaking, it appeared to give satisfaction. Nobody ever beat the judge in any of his races for reëlection, and after a while they just naturally quit trying.

Nor did it seem to distress him deeply when the grave and learned lords of the highest tribunal of the commonwealth saw fit, as they sometimes did, to quarrel with a decision of his which, according to their lights, ran counter to the authorities and the traditions revered by these august gentlemen.

"Ah-hah!" he would say in his high penny-flute voice when such a thing happened. "I see where the honorable court of appeals has disagreed with me agin. Well, they've still got quite a piece to go yit before they ketch up with the number of times I've disagreed with them."

But he never said such a thing in open court. Such utterances he reserved for his cronies and confidants. Once he was under the dented tin dome where he sat for so many years he became so firm a stickler for the forms and the dignities that practically a sacerdotal air was imparted to the proceedings. As you might say, he was almost high church in his adherence to the ritualisms. Lawyers coming before him did not practice the law in their shirt sleeves. They might do this when appearing on certain neighbor circuits, but not here. They did not smoke while court was in session, or sit reared back in their chairs with their feet up on the counsel tables and on the bar railings. Of course when not actually engaged in addressing the court one might chew tobacco in moderation, it being an indisputable fact that such was conducive to lubrication of the

mental processes and a sedative for the nerves besides; but the act of chewing must be discreetly and inaudibly carried on, and he who in the heat of argument or under the stress of cross-questioning a perverse witness failed to patronize the cuspidors which dotted the floor at suitable intervals stood in peril of a stern admonishment for the first offense and a fine for the second.

Off the bench our judge was the homeliest and simplest of men. On the bench he wore his baggy old alpaca coat as though it were a silken robe. And, as has been heretofore remarked, he had for his official and his private lives two different modes of speech. As His Honor, presiding, his language was invariably grammatical and precise and as carefully accented as might be expected of a man whose people never had very much use anyway for the consonant "r." As William Pitman Priest, Esq., citizen, taxpayer, and Confederate veteran he mishandled the king's English as though he had but small personal regard for the king or his English either.

Similarly he always showed respect, outwardly at least, for the written letter of the statute as written and cited. But when it seemed to him that justice tempered with mercy stood in danger of being choked in a lawyer's loop of red tape he sheared through the entanglements with a promptitude which appealed more strongly, perhaps, to the lay mind than to the professional. And if, from the bench, he might not succor the deserving litigant or the penitent offender without violation to the given principles of the law, which, aiming ever for the greater good to the greater number, threatened present disaster for one deserving, he very often privily would busy himself in the matter. This, then, was why they had that saying about him.

It largely was in a private capacity that Judge Priest figured in the various phases relating to the Millsap case, with which now we are about to deal. The beginning of this was the ending of Felix Millsap, but from its start to its finish he alone held the secrets of all its aspects. The best people in town, those who made up the old families, knew the daughter of this Felix Millsap; the people whose families were not so old perhaps, but by way of compensation more likely to be large ones, the common people, as the word goes, knew the father. The best people commiserated decorously with the daughter when her father was abruptly taken from this life; the

others wondered what was going to become of his widow. For, you see, the daughter moved in very different circles from the one in which her parents moved. Their lines did not touch. But Judge Priest had the advantage on his side of moving at will in both circles. Indeed he moved in all circles without serious impairment to his social position in the community at large.

Briefly, the case of her who had been Eleanor Millsap was the case of a child who, diligently climbing out of the environment of her childhood, has attained to heights where her parents may never hope to come, a common enough case here in flux and fluid America, and one which some will applaud and some will deplore, depending on how they view such matters; a daughter proclaiming by her attitude that she is ashamed of the sources of her origin; a father and a mother visibly proud of their offspring's successful rise, yet uncomplainingly accepting the rôles to which she has assigned them—there you have this small family tragedy in forty words or less.

When the Millsaps moved to our town their baby was in her second summer. With the passage of years the father and the mother came, as suitably mated couples often do, to look rather like each other. But then, probably there never had been a time when they, either in temperament or port, had appeared greatly unlike, seeing that both the pair were colorless, prosaic folk. So for Nature to mold them into a common pattern was merely a detail of time and patience. But their little Eleanor betrayed no resemblance to either in figure or face or personality. It was in this instance as though hereditary traits had been thwarted; as though two sober barnyard fowl had mated to bear a golden pheasant. They were secluded, shy, unimaginative; she was vivid and sprightly, with dash to her, and audacity.

They lived in one of those small gloomy houses whose shutters always are closed and whose fronts always are blank; a house where the business of living seems to be carried on surreptitiously, almost by stealth. She, from the time she could walk alone, was actively abroad, a bright splash of color in the small oblong of shabby front yard. The father, Felix Millsap, was an odd-jobs woodworker. He made his living by undertakings too trivial for a contracting carpenter and joiner to bid on and too complicated for an amateur to

attempt. The mother, Martha by name, took in plain sewing to help out. She had about her the air of the needle drudge, with shoulders bowed in and the pricked, scored fingers of a seamstress, and a permanent pucker at one corner of her mouth from holding pins there. The daughter showed trim, slender limbs and a bodily grace and a piquant face which generations of breeding and wealth so very often fail to fashion.

When she graduated as the valedictorian of her class in the high school she cut a far better figure in the frock her mother had made for her than did any there on the stage at St. Clair Hall; she had a trick of wearing simple garments which gave them distinction. Already she had half a dozen sweethearts. Boys were drawn to her; girls she repelled rather. Girls found her too self-centered, too intent on attaining her own aims to give much heed to companionships. They called her selfish. Well, if selfishness is another name for a constant, bounding ambition to get on and up in the world Eleanor Millsap was selfish. But for the boys she had a tremendous attraction. They admired her quick, cruel wit, her energy, her good looks. She met her sweethearts on the street, at the soda fountain, in that trysting place for juvenile sweetheartings, the far corner of the post-office corridor.

She never invited any of these youthful squires of hers to her house; they kept rendezvous with her at the corner below and they parted from her at the gate. They somehow gathered, without being told it in so many words, that she was ashamed of the poverty of her home, and, boylike, they felt a dumb sympathy for her that she should be denied what so many girls had. But for all her sidewalk flirtations, she kept herself aloof from any touch of scandal; the very openness of her gaddings protected her from that. Besides, she seemed instinctively to know that if she meant to make the best possible bargain for herself in life she must keep herself unblemished—must give of her charms but not give too freely. Town gossips might call her a forward piece, as they did; jealousy among girls of her own age might have it that she was flip and fresh; but no one, with truth, might brand her as fast.

Having graduated with honors, she learned stenography—learned it thoroughly and well, as was her way with whatever she undertook—and presently found a place as secretary to Dallam

Wybrant, the leading merchandise broker of the three in town. Now Dallam Wybrant was youngish and newly widowed—bereft but rallying fast from the grief of losing a wife who had been his senior by several years. Knowing people—persons who could look through a grindstone as far as the next one, and maybe farther—smiled with meaning when they considered the prospect. A good-looking, shrewd girl, always smart and trig and crisp, always with an eye open for the main chance, sitting hour by hour and day by day in the same office with a lonely, impressionable, conceited man—well, there was but one answer to it. But one answer to it there was. Nobody was very much surprised, although probably some mothers with marriageable daughters on their hands were wrung by pangs of envy, when Dallam Wybrant and Eleanor Millsap slipped away one day to Memphis and there were married.

As Eleanor Millsap, self-reliant, self-sufficient and latterly self-supporting, the girl through the years had steadily been growing out of the domestic orbit which bounded the lives of her parents. As Mrs. Dallam Wybrant, bride of an up-and-coming business man, with an assured social position and wealth—as our town measured wealth—in his own name she was now to pass entirely beyond their humble horizon and vanish out of their narrowed social ken. True enough, they kept right on living, all three of them, in the same town and indeed upon paralleling and adjacent streets; only the parents lived in their shabby little sealed-up coffin box of a house down at the poorer end of Yazoo Street; the daughter, in her handsome new stucco house, as formal and slick as a wedding cake, up at the aristocratic head of Chickasaw Drive. And yet to all intents and purposes they were as far apart, these two Millsaps and their only child, as though they abode in different countries. For she, mind you, had been taken up by the best people. But none of the best people had the least intention of taking up her father and mother as well. She probably was as far from expecting it or desiring it as any other could be. In fact a tale ran about that she served notice upon her parents that thereafter their lives were to run in different grooves. They were not to seek to see her without her permission; she did not mean to see them except when and where she chose, or if she chose—and she did not choose.

One evening—it might have been about a year and a half after the marriage of his daughter—Felix Millsap was on his way home from work, a middle-aged figure, moving with the clunking gait of a tired laborer who wears cheap, heavy shoes, his broad splayed hands dangling at the ends of his arms as though in either of them he carried an invisible weight. It had been a hot day, and where he had been toiling on a roof shed which required reshingling the sun had blazed down upon him until it sucked his strength out of him, leaving him limp and draggy. He walked with his head down, indifferent in his sweated weariness to things about him. All the same, the motorman on the Belt Line car swinging out of Yazoo Street into Commercial should have sounded his gong for the turning. Therein lay his contributory negligence. Also, disinterested witnesses subsequently agreed that he took the curve at high speed. It was one of these witnesses who saw what was about to happen and cried out a vain warning even as the motorman ground on his brakes in a belated effort to avoid the inevitable. Felix Millsap was dead when they got him out from under the forward trucks. The doctors said he must have died instantly; probably he never knew what hit him.

In all the short and simple annals of the poor nothing, usually, is shorter and simpler than the funeral of one of them. For the putting away underground of the odd-jobs man perhaps thirty persons of his own walk in life assembled, attesting their sympathies by their presence. But the daughter of the deceased neither attended the brief services at the place of his late residence nor rode to the cemetery to witness the burial. It was explained by the minister and by the undertaker to those who made inquiry that for good and sufficient reasons Mrs. Wybrant was not going anywhere at present. But she sent a great stiff set piece of flowers, an elaborate, inadequate thing with a wire back to it and a tin-foil footing, which sat alongside the black box during the service and afterwards was propped upright in the rank grass at the head of the grave. It was doubly conspicuous by reason of being the only example of what greenhouse men call floral offerings that graced the occasion. And she had written her mother a nice letter; the clergyman made this point plain to such as spoke to him regarding the absence of Mrs. Wybrant. He had seen the letter; that is to say, he had seen the envelope containing it. What the

clergyman did not know was that to the letter the daughter had added a paragraph, underscored, suggesting the name of a leading firm of lawyers as suitable and competent to defend their interests—her mother's and her own—in an action for damages against the street-car company.

However, as it developed, there was no need for the pressing of suit. The street-railway company, tacitly confessing fault on the part of one of its employees, preferred to compromise out of hand and so avoid the costs of litigation and the vexations of a trial. The sum paid in settlement was by order of the circuit court lodged in the hands of a special administrator, as temporary custodian of the estate of the late Felix Millsap, by him to be handed over to the heirs at law. So far as the special administrator was concerned, this would end his duties in the premises, seeing that other than this sum there was no property to be divided.

The little house at the foot of Yazoo Street belonged to the widow. It had been deeded to her at the time of its purchase years and years before, and she had been a copartner in the undertaking of paying off the mortgage upon it by dribs and bitlets which represented hard work and the strictest economy. Naturally her husband had made no will. Probably it had never occurred to him that he would have any property to bequeath to anyone. But by virtue of his having died under a street car rather than in his bed he was worth more dead than ever, living, he had dreamed of being worth. He was worth eight thousand dollars in cash. So, as it turned out, he had left something other than a name for sober reliability and a reputation for paying his debts. And no doubt, in that bourn to which his spirit had been translated out of a battered body, his spirit rejoiced that the manner of his taking off had been as it was.

But if the special administrator rested content in the thought that his share in the transaction practically would end with but few added details, his superior, the chief judicial officer of the district, felt called upon to take certain steps on his own initiative solely, and without consulting any person regarding the advisability of his action. It was characteristic of Judge Priest that he should move promptly in the matter. To a greater degree it also was characteristic of him that, setting out for a visit to one of no social account whatsoever, he should garb himself with more care than he might

have shown had he been going to see one of those mighty ones who sit in the high places. In a suit of rumply but spotless white linen, and carrying in one hand his best tape-edged palm-leaf fan, he rather suggested a plump old mandarin as, on that same evening of the day when the street-railway company effected settlement, he knocked at the front door of the cottage of the Widow Millsap.

She was in and she was alone. She was one of those women who always are in and nearly always are alone. Immediately, then, they sat in her front room, which was her best room. Her sewing machine was there, and her biggest oil lamp and her few small sticks of company furniture, her few scraps of parlor ornamentation; a bad picture or two, gaudily framed; china vases on a mantel-shelf; two golden-oak rockers, wearing on their slick and shiny frontlets the brand of an installment-house Cain who murdered beauty and yet failed in his designings to achieve comfort. It was as hot as a Dutch oven, that little box of a room inclosed within its thin-planked walls. It was not a place where one would care to linger longer than one had to. Judge Priest came swiftly to the heart of the business which had sent him thither.

"Ma'am," he was saying, "this is a kind of a pussonal matter that's brought me down here this hot night, and with your consent I'll git right to the point of it. Ordinarily I'm a poor hand at diggin' into the business of other people. But seein' that I knowed your late lamented husband both ez a worthy citizen and ez an honest, hard-workin' man, and seein' that in my official capacity it has been incumbent upon me to issue certain orders in connection with your rights and claims arisin' out of his ontimely death, I have felt emboldened to interest myself, privately, in your case—and that's why I'm here now.

"To-day at the cotehouse, when the settlement wuz formally agreed to by the legal representatives of both sides, an idea come to me. And that idea is this: Now there's eight thousand dollars due the heirs, you bein' one and your daughter, Mrs. Dallam Wybrant, bein' the other. Half of eight thousand dollars wouldn't be so very much to help take keer of a person, no matter how keerful they wuz; but eight thousand dollars, put out at interest, would provide a livin' in a way fur one who lived simply, and more especially in the case of one who owned their own home and had it free from debt, ez I understand is the situation with reguards to you.

"On the other hand, your daughter is well fixed. Her husband is a rich man, ez measured by the standards of our people. It's probable that she'll always be well and amply provided fur. Moreover, she's young, and you, ma'am, will some day come to the time when you won't be able to go on workin' with your hands ez you now do.

"So things bein' thus and so, it seems to me that ef the suggestion was made to your daughter, Mrs. Dallam Wybrant, that she should waive her claim to her share of them eight thousand dollars and sign over her rights to you, thereby inshorin' you frum the fear of actual want in your declinin' years; and her, ez I have jest been statin', not needin' the money—well, it seems to me that she would jest naturally jump at the notion. So if you would go to her yourself with the suggestion, or git somebody in whose good sense and judgment you've got due confidence to go to her and her husband and lay the facts before them, I, fur one, knowin' a little somethin' of human nature, feel morally sure of the outcome. Why, I expect she'd welcome the idea; maybe she's already thinkin' of the same thing and wonderin' how, legally, it kin be done. And that, ma'am, is what brings me here to your residence to-night. And I trust you will appreciate the motive which has prompted me and furgive me if I, who's almost a stranger to you, seem to have meddled in your affairs without warrant or justification."

He reared back in his chair, a plump hand upon either knee.

Through this the widow had not spoken, or offered to speak. Now that he had finished, she answered him from the half shadow in which she sat on the farther side of the sewing machine upon which the lamp burned. There was no bitterness, he thought, in her words; merely a sense of resignation to and acceptance of a state of things not of her own contriving, and not, conceivably, to be of her own undoing.

"Judge," she said, "perhaps you know by hearsay at least that since my daughter's marriage she has lived apart from us. Neither my husband nor I ever set foot in the house where she lives. It was her wish"—she caught herself here, and he, sensing that she was equivocating, nevertheless inwardly approved of the deceit—"I mean to say that it was not my wish to go among her friends, who are not my friends, or to embarrass her in any way. I am proud that in

marrying she has done so well for herself. In thinking of her happiness I shall always try to find happiness for myself.

"But, judge, you must know this too: She did not come to the—the funeral. Well, there was a cause for that; she had a reason. But—but she had not been here for months before that. She—oh, you might as well hear it if you are to understand—she has never once been here since she married!

"And so, Judge Priest, I cannot go to her until I am sent for—not under any circumstances nor for any purpose. If she has her pride, I in my poor small way have my pride, too, my self-respect. When she needs me—if ever she does—I'll go to her wherever she may be if I have to crawl there on my hands and knees. What has gone before will all be forgotten. But don't you see, sir?—I can't go until she sends for me. And so, Judge Priest, while I thank you with all my heart for your thoughtfulness and your kindness, and while I'd be glad, too, if Ellie saw fit or could be made to see that it would be a fine thing to give me this money in the way you have suggested, I say to you again that I cannot be the one to go to her. I will not even write to her on the subject. That, with me, is final."

"But, ma'am," he said, "ef somebody else went—some friend of yours and of hers—how about it then?"

She shook her head.

"Her friends—now—are not my friends. My friends are not hers any more; most of them never were her friends. Besides, the idea did not originate with me. Either the proposition must come from her direct or it must be presented to her by some third party. And I can think of no third party of my choosing that she would care to hear. No, Judge Priest, I have nobody to send."

"All right then," he stated, "since I set this here ball in motion I'll keep it rollin'. Ma'am, I'll take it on myself to speak to Mrs. Dallam Wybrant in your behalf."

"But, Judge Priest," she protested, "I couldn't ask you to do that for me—I couldn't!"

"Ma'am, you ain't asked me and you don't need to ask me. I'm askin' myself—I'm doin' this on my own hook, and ef you'll excuse me I'll start at it right away. When there's a thing which needs to be done ez bad ez this thing needs to be done, there oughtn't to be no

time lost." He stood up and looked about him for his hat. "Ma'am, I confidently expect to be back here inside of half an hour, or an hour at most, with some good news fur you."

To one who had traveled about more and seen the homes of wealthy folk—to a professional decorator, say, or an expert in furnishing values—the drawing-room into which Judge Priest presently was being ushered might have seemed overdone, overly cluttered up with drapery and adornment. But to Judge Priest's eye the room was all that a rich man's best room should be. The thick stucco walls cut out the heat of the night; an electric fan whirred upon him as he sat in a deep chair of puffed red damask. A mulatto girl in neat uniform—this uniform itself an astonishing innovation—had answered his ring at the door and had ushered him into this wonderful parlor and had taken his name and had gone up the broad stairs with the word that he desired to see the lady of the house for a few minutes upon important business. He had asked first for Mr. and Mrs. Dallam Wybrant; but Mr. Wybrant, it seemed, was out of town; Mrs. Wybrant, then, would do. The maid, having delivered the message, had returned to say her mistress would be down presently and the caller was to wait, please. Waiting, he had had opportunity to contrast the present settings with those he had just quitted. Perhaps the contrast between them appeared all the greater by reason of the freshness of his recollection of the physical surroundings at the scene of his first visit of that evening.

She came down soon, wearing a loose, frilly, wrapperlike garment which hid her figure. Approaching maternity had not softened her face, had not given to it the glorified Madonna look. Rather it had drawn her features to haggardness and put in her eyes a look of sharpened apprehension as though dread of the nearing ordeal of suffering and danger overrode the hope which, along with the new life, was quick within her. She greeted Judge Priest with a matter-of-fact directness. Her expression plainly enough told him she was at a loss to account for his coming.

"I'm sorry, sir," she said in her rather metallic fashion of speaking, "that Dallam isn't here. But he was called to St. Louis this morning on business. I hope you will pardon my receiving you in negligée. I'm not seeing much company at present. The maid, though, said the business was imperative."

"Yes, ma'am, it is," answered Judge Priest, rather ceremoniously for him, "and I am grateful to you fur lettin' me see you and I don't aim to detain you very long. I kin tell you in a few words whut it is that has brought me."

He was as good as his promise—he did tell her in a few words. Outlining his suggestion, he used much the same language which he had used once already that night. He did not tell her, though, he had come to her direct from her mother. He did not tell her he had been to her mother at all. It might have been inferred that his present hearer was the first to hear that which now he set forth.

"Well, ma'am," he concluded, "that's the condition ez I view it. And if you likewise see your way clear to view it ez I do the whole thing kin be accomplished with the scratch of a pen. And you'll have the satisfaction of knowin' that through your act your mother will be well provided fur fur the rest of her life." He added a final argument, being moved thereto perhaps by the fact that she had heard him without change of expression and with no glance which might be interpreted as approval for his plan. "I take it, ma'am, that you do not need the money involved. You never will need it, the chances are. You are rich fur this town—your husband is, anyway."

She replied then, and to the old man, harkening, it seemed that her words fell sharp and brittle like breaking icicles. One thing, though, might be said for her—she sought no roundabout course. She did not quibble or seek to enwrap the main issue in specious excuses or apologies for her position.

"I decline to do it," she said. "I do not feel that I have the right to do it. I understand the motives which may have actuated you to interest yourself in this affair, but I tell you very frankly that I have no intention of surrendering my legal rights in the slightest degree. You say I do not need the money, but in the very same breath you go on to say the chances are that I shall never need it. So there you yourself practically admit there is a chance that some day I might need it. Besides, I do not rate my husband a rich man, though you may do so. He is well-to-do, nothing more. And his business is uncertain—all business is. He might lose every cent he has to-morrow in some bad investment or some poor speculation.

"There is still another reason I think of: I have nothing—absolutely nothing—in my own name. It irks me to ask my

husband, generous though he is, for every cent I use, to have to account to him for my personal expenditures. Before I married him I earned my own living and I paid my own way and learned to love the feeling of independence, the feeling of having a little money that was all my own. My share of this inheritance will provide me with a private fund, a fund upon which I may draw at will, or which I may put away for a possible rainy day, just as I choose."

"But ma'am," he blurted, knowing full well he was beaten, yet inspired by a desperate, forlorn hope that some added plea from him might break through the shell of this steel-surfaced selfishness—"but, ma'am, do you stop to realize that it's your own mother who'd benefit by this sacrifice on your part? Do you stop to consider that if there's one person in all this world who's entitled—"

"Pardon me, sir, for interrupting you," she said crisply, her tone icy and sharp, "but the one person who is entitled to most consideration at my hands has not actually come into the world yet. It is of that person that I must think. I had not meant to speak of this, but your insistence forces me to it. As you may guess, Judge Priest, I am about to become a mother myself. If my baby lives—and my baby is going to live—that money will belong to my child should anything happen to me. I must think of what lies ahead of me, not of what has gone before. My mother owns the home where she lives; she will have her half of this sum of money; she is, I believe, in good health; she is amply able to go on, as she has in the past, adding to her income with her needle. So much for my mother. As a mother myself it will be my duty, as I see it, to safeguard the future of my own child, and I mean to do it, regardless of everything else. That is all I have to say about it—that is, if I have made myself sufficiently plain to you, Judge Priest."

"Madam," said he, and for once at least he dropped his lifelong affectation of ungrammatical speech and reverted to that more stately and proper English which he reserved for his judgments from the bench, "you have indeed made your position so clear by what you have just said that I feel there is nothing whatsoever to be added by either one of us. Madam, I have the pleasure to bid you good night."

He clamped his floppy straw hat firmly down upon his head—a thing the old judge in all his life never before had done in the presence of a woman of his race—and he turned the broad of his

back upon her; and if a man whose natural gait was a waddle could be said to stride, then be it stated that Judge Priest strode out of that room and out of that house. Had he looked back before he reached the door he would have seen that she sat in her chair, huddled in her silken garments, on her face a half smile of tolerant contempt for his choler and in her eye a light playing like winter sunlight on frozen water; would have seen that about her there was no suggestion whatsoever that she was ruffled or upset or in the least regretful of the course she had elected to follow. But Judge Priest did not look back. He was too busy striding.

Perhaps it was the heat or perhaps it was inability long to maintain a gait so forced, but the volunteer emissary ceased to stride long before he had traversed the three-quarters of a mile—and yet, when one came to think it over, a span as wide as a continent—which lay between the restricted, not to say exclusive, head of Chickasaw Drive and the shabby, not to say miscellaneous, foot of Yazoo Street. It was a very wilted, very lag-footed, very droopy old gentleman who, come another half hour or less, let himself drop with an audible thump into a golden-oak rocker alongside the Widow Millsap's sewing machine.

"Ma'am," he had confessed, without preamble, as he entered her house, she holding the door open for his passage, "I come back to you licked. Your daughter absolutely declines even to consider the proposition I put before her. As a plenipotentiary extraordinary I admit I'm a teetotal failure. I return to you empty-handed—and licked."

To this she had said nothing. She had waited until he was seated; then as she seated herself in her former place, with the lamp between them, she asked quietly, almost listlessly, "My daughter saw you then?"

"She did, ma'am, she did. And she refused point-blank!"

"I am sorry, Judge Priest—sorry that you should have been put to so much trouble needlessly," she said, still holding her voice at that emotionless level. "I am sorry, sir, for your sake; but it is no more than I expected. I let you go to her against my better judgment. I should have known that your errand would be useless. Knowing Ellie, I should have known better than to send you."

He snorted.

"Ma'am, when a little while ago, settin' right here, I told you I thought I knowed a little something about human nature I boasted too soon. Sech a thing ez this thing which has happened to-night is brand-new in my experience. You will excuse my sayin' so, but I kin not fathom the workin's of a mind that would—that would—" He floundered for words in his indignation. "It is not natural, this here thing I have just seen and heard. How your own flesh and blood could—"

"Judge Priest," she said steadily, "it is not my own flesh and blood that you accuse. That is my consolation now. For I know the stock that is in me. I know the stock that was in my husband. My own flesh and blood could never treat me so."

He stared at her, his forehead twisted in a perplexed frown.

"I mean to say just this," she went on: "Ellie is not my own child. She has not a drop of my blood or my husband's blood in her. Judge Priest, I am about to tell you something which not another soul in this town excepting me—now that my husband is gone—has ever known. We never had any children, Felix and I. Always we wanted children, but none came to us. Nearly twenty-three years ago it is now, we had for a neighbor a young woman whose husband had deserted her—had run away with another woman, leaving her without a cent, in failing health and with a six-month-old girl baby. That was less than two years before we came to this town. We lived then in a little town called Calais, on the Eastern Shore of Maryland.

"Three months after the husband ran away the wife died. I guess it was shame and a broken heart more than anything else that killed her. She had not a soul in the world to whom she could turn for help when she was dying. We two did what we could for her. We didn't have much—we never have had much all through our lives—but what we had we divided with her. We were literally the only friends she had in this world. At the last we took turns nursing her, my husband and I did. When she was dying she put her baby in my arms and asked me to take her and to care for her. That was what I had been praying all along that she would do, and I was glad and I gave her my promise and she lay back on the pillow and died.

"Well, she was buried and we took the child and cared for her. We came to love her as though she had been our own; we always loved her as though she had been our own. Less than a year after the mother died—that was when Ellie was about eighteen months old—we brought her with us out here to this town. Her baptismal name was Eleanor, which had been her mother's name—Eleanor Major. The father who ran away was named Richard Major. We went on calling her Eleanor, but as our child she became Eleanor Millsap. She has never suspected—she has never for one moment dreamed that she was not our own. After she grew up and showed indifference to us, and especially after she had married and began to behave toward us in a way which has caused her, I expect, to be criticized by some people, we still nursed that secret and it gave us comfort. For we knew, both of us, that it was the alien blood in her that made her turn her back upon us. We knew the reason, if no one else did, for she was not our own flesh and blood. Our own could never have served us so. And to-night I know better than ever before, and it lessens my sense of disappointment and distress.

"Judge Priest, perhaps you will not understand me, but the mother instinct is a curious thing. Through these last few years of my life I have felt as though there were two women inside of me. One of these women grieved because her child had denied her. The other of these women was reconciled because she could see reflected in the actions of that child the traits of a breed of strangers. And yet both these women can still find it in them to forgive her for all that she has done and all that she may ever do. That's motherhood, I suppose."

"Yes, ma'am," he said slowly, "I reckin you're right—that's motherhood." He tugged at his tab of white chin whisker, and his puckered old eyes behind their glasses were shadowed with a deep compassion. Then with a jerk he sat erect.

"I take it that you adopted the child legally?" he said, seeking to make his tone casual.

"We took her just as I told you," she answered. "We always treated her as though she had been ours. She never knew any difference."

"Yes, ma'am, quite so. You've made that clear enough. But by law, before you left Maryland, you gave her your name, I suppose? You went through the legal form of law of adoptin' her, didn't you?"

"No, sir, we didn't do that. It didn't seem necessary—it never occurred to us to do it. Her mother was dead and her father was gone nobody knew where. He had abandoned her, had shown he didn't care what might become of her. And her mother on her deathbed had given her to me. Wasn't that sufficient?"

Apparently he had not heard her question. Instead of answering it he put one of his own:

"Do you reckin now, ma'am, by any chance that there are any people still livin' back there in that town of Calais—old neighbors of yours, or kinfolks maybe—who'd remember the circumstances in reguard to your havin' took this baby in the manner which you have described?"

"Yes, sir; two at least that I know of are still living. One is my half sister. I haven't seen her in twenty-odd years, but I hear from her regularly. And another is a man who boarded with us at the time. He was young then and very poor, but he has become well-to-do since. He lives in Baltimore now; is prominent there in politics. Occasionally I see his name in the paper. He has been to Congress and he ran for senator once. And there may be still others if I could think of them."

"Never mind the others; the two you've named will be sufficient. Whut did you say their names were, ma'am?"

She told him. He repeated them after her as though striving to fix them in his memory.

"Ah-hah," he said. "Ma'am, have you got some writin' material handy? Any blank paper will do—and a pen and ink?"

From a little stand in a corner she brought him what he required, and wonderingly but in silence watched him as he put down perhaps a dozen close-written lines. She bided until he had concluded his task and read through the script, making a change here and there. Then all at once some confused sense of realization of his new purpose came to her. She stood up and took a step forward and laid one apprehensive hand upon the paper as though to stay him.

"Judge Priest," she said, "what have you written down here? And what do you mean to do with what you have written?"

"Whut I have written here is a short statement—a memorandum, really, of whut you have been tellin' me, ma'am," he explained. "I'll

have it written out more fully in the form of an affidavit, and then to-morrow I want you to sign it either here or at my office in the presence of witnesses."

"But is it necessary?" she demurred. "I'm ignorant of the law, and you spoke just now of my failure to adopt Ellie by law. But if at this late date I must do it, can't it be done privately, in secret, so that neither Ellie nor anyone else will ever know?"

"Ellie will have to know, I reckin," he stated grimly, "and other folks will know too. But this here paper has nothin' to do with any sech proceedin' ez you imagine. It's too late now fur you legally to adopt Mrs. Dallam Wybrant, even though any person should suggest sech a thing, and I, fur my part, don't see how any right-thinkin' person could or would do so. She's a free agent, of full age, and she's a married woman. No, ma'am, she has no legal claim on you and to my way of thinkin' she has no moral claim on you neither. She's not your child, a fact which I'm shore kin mighty easy be proved ef anyone should feel inclined to doubt your word. She ain't your legal heir. She ain't got a leg—excuse me, ma'am—she ain't got a prop to stand on. I thought Ellie had us licked. Instid it would seem that we've got Ellie licked."

He broke off, checked in his exultant flight by the look upon her face. Her fingers turned inward, the blunted nails scratching at the sheet of paper as though she would tear it from him.

"No, no, no!" she cried. "I won't do that! I can't do that! You mustn't ask me to do that, judge!"

"But, ma'am, don't you git my meanin' yit? Don't you realize that not a penny of this eight thousand dollars belongs to Mrs. Dallam Wybrant? That she has no claim upon any part of it? That it's all yours and that you're goin' to have it all for yourself—every last red cent of it—jest ez soon ez the proof kin be filed and the order made by me in court?"

"I'm not thinking of that," she declared. "It's Ellie I think of. Her happiness means more to me than a million dollars would. What I have told you was in confidence, and, judge, you must treat it so. I beg you, I demand it of you. You must promise me not to go any further in this. You must promise me not to tell a living soul what I have told you to-night. I won't sign any affidavit. I won't sign

anything. I won't do anything to humiliate her. Don't you see, Judge Priest—oh, don't you see? She feels shame already because she thinks she was humbly born. She would be more deeply ashamed than ever if she knew how humbly she really was born—knew that her father was a scoundrel and her mother died a pauper and was buried in a potter's field; that the name she has borne is not her own name; that she has eaten the bread of charity through the most of her life. No, Judge Priest, I tell you no, a thousand times no. She doesn't know. Through me she shall never know. I would die to spare her suffering—die to spare her humiliation or disgrace. Before God's eyes I am her mother, and it is her mother who tells you no, not that, not that!"

He got upon his feet too. He crumpled the paper into a ball and thrust it out of sight as though it had been a thing abominable and unclean. He took no note that in wadding the sheet he had overturned the inkwell and a stream from it was trickling down his trouser legs, marking them with long black zebra streaks. He looked at her, she standing there, a stooped and meager shape in her scant, ill-fitting gown of sleazy black, yet seeming to him an embodiment of all the beatitudes and all the beauties of this mortal world.

"Ma'am," he said, "your wishes shall be respected. It shall be ez you say. My lawyer's sense tells me that you are wrong—foolishly, blindly wrong. But my memory of my own mother tells me that you are right, and that no mother's son has got the right to question you or try to persuade you to do anything different. Ma'am, I'd count it an honor to be able to call myself your friend."

Already, within the hour, Judge Priest had broken two constant rules of his daily conduct. Now, involuntarily, without forethought on his part, he was about to break another. This would seem to have been a night for the smashing of habits by our circuit judge. For she put out to him her hand—a most unlovely hand, all wrinkled at the back where dimples might once have been and corded with big blue veins and stained and shriveled and needle scarred. And he took her hand in his fat, pudgy, awkward one, and then he did this thing which never before in all his days he had done, this thing which never before he had dreamed of doing. Really, there is no accounting for it at all unless we figure that somewhere far back in Judge Priest's ancestry there were Celtic gallants, versed in the small sweet

tricks of gallantry. He bent his head and he kissed her hand with a grace for which a Tom Moore or a Raleigh might have envied him.

Let us now for a briefened space cast up in a preliminary way the tally on behalf of the whimsical devils of circumstance and the part they are to play in the culminating and concluding periods of this narrative. On the noon train of the day following the night when that occurred which has been set forth in the foregoing pages, Judge Priest, in the company of Doctor Lake and Sergeant Jimmy Bagby, late of King's Hell Hounds, C.S.A., departs for Reelfoot Lake upon his annual fishing trip. In the afternoon Jeff Poindexter, the judge's body servant, going through his master's wardrobe seeking articles suitable for his own adornment in the master's absence, is pained to discern stripings of spilled ink down the legs of a pair of otherwise unmarred white trousers, and, having no intention that garments which will one day come into his permanent possession shall be thus disfigured and sullied, promptly bundles them up and bears them to the cleansing, pressing and repairing establishment of one Hyman Pedaloski. The coat which matches the trousers goes along too. Upon the underside of one of its sleeves there is a big ink blob. Include in the equation this *emigré*, Hyman Pedaloski, newly landed from Courland and knowing as yet but little of English, whether written or spoken, yet destined to advance by progressive stages until a day comes when we proudly shall hail him as our most fashionable merchant prince—Hy Clay Pedaloski, the Square Deal Clothier, Also Hats, Caps & Leather Goods. Include as a factor Hyman by all means, for lacking him our chain of chancy coincidence would lack a most vital link.

At Reelfoot Lake many black bass, bronze-backed and big-mouthed, meet the happy fate which all true anglers wish for them; and the white perch do bite with a whole-souled enthusiasm only equaled by the whole-souled enthusiasm with which also the mosquitoes bite. This brings us to the end of the week and to the fifth day of the expedition, with Judge Priest at rest at the close of a satisfactory day's sports, exhaling scents of the oil of penny-royal. Sitting-there under a tent fly, all sun blistered and skeeter stung, all tired out but most content, he picks up a two-day-old copy of the *Daily Evening News* which the darky boatman has just brought over to camp from the post office at Walnut Log, and he opens it at the

department headed Local Laconics, and halfway down the first column his eye falls upon a paragraph at sight of which he gives so deep a snort that Doctor Lake swings about from where he is shaving before a hand mirror hung on a tree limb and wants to know whether the judge has happened upon disagreeable tidings. What the judge has read is a small item in this wise, namely:

Born last evening to Mr. and Mrs. Dallam Wybrant, at their palatial mansion on Chickasaw Drive, in the new Beechmont Park Realty Development tract, an infant daughter, their first-born. Mother and child both doing well; the proud papa reported this morning as being practically out of danger and is expected to be entirely recovered shortly, as Dock Boyd, the attending medico, says he has brought three hundred babies into the world and never lost a father yet. Ye editor extends heartiest congrats. Dal, it looks like the cigars were on you!

The next chapter in the sequence of chapters leading to our climax is short but essential. Returning home Sunday evening, Judge Priest is informed that twice that day a strange young white lady has stopped at the house urgently requesting that immediately upon his arrival he be so good as to call on Mrs. Dallam Wybrant on a matter of pressing moment. Bidden to describe the messenger, Jeff Poindexter can only say that she 'uz a powerful masterful-lookin' Yankee-talkin' lady, all dressed up lak she mout belong to some kind of a new secret s'ciety lodge, which is Jeff's way of summing up his impressions of the first professional trained nurse ever imported, capped, caped and white shod, to our town.

It was this same professional, a cool and starchy vision, who led the way up the wide stairs of the Chickasaw Drive house, the old judge, much mystified, following close behind her. She ushered him into a bedroom, bigger and more gorgeous than any bedroom he had ever seen, and leaving him standing, hat in hand, at the bedside of her chief charge, she went out and closed the door behind her.

From the pillows there looked up at him a face that was paler than when he had last seen it, a face still drawn from pangs of agony recently endured, but a face transfigured and radiant. The Madonna look was in it now. Outside, the dusk of an August evening was thickening; and inside, the curtains were half drawn and the electrics not yet turned on, but even so, in that half light, the judge could

mark the change here revealed to him. He could sense, too, that the change was more spiritual than physical, and he could feel his animosity for this woman softening into something distantly akin to sympathy. At her left side, harbored in the crook of her elbow, lay a cuddling bundle; a tiny head, all red and bare, as though offering to Judge Priest's own bald, pinkish pate the sincere flattery of imitation, was exposed; and the tip of a very small ear, curled and crinkled like a sea shell. You take the combination of a young mother cradling her first-born within the hollow of her arm and you have the combination which has tautened the heartstrings of man since the first man child came from the womb. The old man made a silent obeisance of reverence; then waited for her to speak and expose the purpose behind this totally unexpected summons.

"Judge Priest," she said, "I have been lying here all day hoping you would come before night. I have been wishing for you to come ever since I came out from under the ether. Thank you for coming."

"Ma'am, I started fur here ez soon ez I got your word," he said. "In whut way kin I be of service to you? I'm at your command."

She slid her free hand beneath the pillow on which her head rested and brought forth a crinkled sheet of paper and held it out to him.

"Didn't you write this?" she asked.

He took it and looked at it, and a great astonishment and a great chagrin screwed his eyes and slackened his lower jaw.

"Yes, ma'am," he admitted, "I wrote it. But it wuzn't meant fur you to see. It wuzn't meant fur anybody a-tall to see—ever. And I'm wonderin', ma'am, and waitin' fur you to tell me how come it to reach you."

"I'll tell you," she answered. "But first, before we get to that, would you mind telling me how you came to write it, and when, and all? I think I can guess. I think I have already pieced the thing together for myself. Women can't reason much, you know; but they have intuition." She smiled a little at this conceit. "And I want to know if my deductions and my conclusions are correct."

"Well, ma'am," he said, "ez I wuz sayin', no human eye wuz to have read this here. But since you have read it, I feel it's my bounden

duty, in common justice to another, to tell you the straight of it, even though in doin' so I'm breakin' a solemn pledge."

So he told her—the how and the why and the where and the when of it; details of which the reader is aware.

"I thought I wasn't very far wrong, and I wasn't," she said when he had finished his confession. She was quiet for a minute, her eyes fixed on the farther wall. Then: "Judge Priest, unwittingly, it seems, you have been the god of the machine. I wonder if you'd be willing to continue to serve?"

"Ef it lies within my powers to do so—yessum, and gladly."

"It does lie within your power. I want you to have the necessary papers drawn up which will signalize my giving over to my mother my share of that money which the railway paid two weeks ago, and then if you will send them to me I will sign them. I want this done at once, please—as soon as possible."

"Ma'am," he said, "it shall be as you desire; but ef it's all the same to you I'd like to write out that there paper with my own hand. I kin think of no act of mine, official or private, in my whole lifetime which would give me more honest pleasure. I'll do so before I leave this house." He did not tell her that by the letter of the law she would be giving away what by law was not hers to give. He would do nothing to spoil for her the sweet savor of her surrender. Instead he put a question: "It would appear that you have changed your mind about this here matter since I seen you last?"

"It was changed for me," she said. "This paper helped to change it for me; and you, too, helped without your knowledge; and one other, and most of all my baby here, helped to change it for me. Judge Priest, since my baby came to me my whole view of life seems somehow to have been altered. I've been lying here to-day with her beside me, thinking things out. Suppose I should be taken from her, and suppose her father should be taken, too, and she should be left, as I was, to the mercy of the world and the charity of strangers. Suppose she should grow up, as I did—although until I read that paper I didn't know it—beholden to the goodness and the devotion and the love of one who was not her real mother. Wouldn't she owe to that other woman more than she could have owed to me, her own

mother, had I been spared to rear her? I think so—no, I know it is so. Every instinct of motherhood in me tells me it is so."

"Lady," he answered, "to a mere man woman always will be an everlastin' puzzle and a riddle; but even a man kin appreciate, in a poor, faint way, the depths of mother love. It's ez though he looked through a break in the clouds and ketched a vision of the glories of heaven. But you ain't told me yit how you come to be in possession of this here sheet of note paper."

"Oh, that's right! I had forgotten," she answered. "Try to think now, judge—when my mother refused to let you go farther with your plan that night at her house, what did you do with the paper?"

"I shoved it out of sight quick ez ever I could. I recall that much anyway."

"Did you by any chance put it in your pocket?"

"Well, by Nathan Bedford Forrest!" he exclaimed. "I believe that's purzackly the very identical thing I did do. And bein' a careless old fool, I left it there instid of tearin' it up or burnin' it, and then I went on home and plum' furgot it wuz still there—not that I now regret havin' done so, seein' whut to-night's outcome is."

"And did your servant, after you were gone, send the suit you had worn that night downtown to be cleaned or repaired? Or do you know about that?"

"I suspicion that he done that very thing," he said, a light beginning to break in upon him. "Jeff is purty particular about keepin' my clothes in fust-rate order. He aims fur them to be in good condition when he decides it's time to confiscate 'em away frum me and start in wearin' 'em himself. Yessum, my Jeff's mighty funny that way. And now, come to think of it, I do seem to reckerlect that I spilt a lot of ink on 'em that same night."

"Well, then, the mystery is no mystery at all," she said. "On that very same day—the day your darky sent your clothes to the cleaner's—I had two of Dallam's suits sent down to be pressed. That little man at the tailor shop—Pedaloski—found this paper crumpled up in your pocket and took it out and then later forgot where he had found it. So, as I understand, he tried to read it, seeking for a clue to its ownership. He can't read much English, you know, so probably he has had no idea then or thereafter of the meaning of it; but he did

know enough English to make out the name of Wybrant. Look at it and you'll see my name occurs twice in it, but your name does not occur at all. So don't you see what happened—what he did? Thinking the paper must have come from one of my husband's pockets, he smoothed it out as well as he could and folded it up and pinned it to the sleeve of Dallam's blue serge and sent it here. My maid found it when she was undoing the bundle before hanging up the clothes in Dallam's closet, and she brought it to me, thinking, I suppose, it was a bill from the cleaner's shop, and I read it. Simple enough explanation, isn't it, when you know the facts?"

"Simple," he agreed, "and yit at the same time sort of wonderful too. And whut did you do when you read it?"

"I was stunned at first. I tried at first not to believe it. But I couldn't deceive myself. Something inside of me told me that it was true—every word of it. I suppose it was the woman in me that told me. And somehow I knew that you had written it, although really that part was not so very hard a thing to figure out, considering everything. And somehow—I can't tell you why though—I was morally sure that after you had written it some other person had forbidden your making use of it in any way, and instinctively—anyhow, I suppose you might say it was by instinct—I knew that it had reached me, of all persons, by accident and not by design.

"I tried to reach you—you were gone away. But I did reach that funny little man Pedaloski by telephone, and found out from him why he had pinned the paper on Dallam's coat. I did not tell my husband about it. He doesn't know yet. I don't think I shall ever tell him. For two days, judge, I wrestled with the problem of whether I should send for my mother and tell her that now I knew the thing which all her life she had guarded from me. Finally I decided to wait and see you first, and try to find out from you the exact circumstances under which the paper was written, and the reason why, after writing it, you crumpled it up and hid it away.

"And then—and then my baby came, and since she came my scheme of life seems all made over. And oh, Judge Priest"—she reached forth a white, weak hand and caught at his—"I have you and my baby and—yes, that little man to thank that my eyes have been opened and that my heart has melted in me and that my soul has

been purged from a terrible selfish deed of cruelty and ingratitude. And one thing more I want you to know: I'm not really sorry that I was born as I was. I'm glad, because—well, I'm just glad, that's all. And I suppose that, too, is the woman in me."

One given to sonorous and orotund phrases would doubtless have coined a most splendid speech here. But all the old judge, gently patting her hand, said was:

"Well, now, ma'am, that's powerful fine—the way it's all turned out. And I'm glad I had a blunderin' hand in it to help bring it about. I shorely am, ma'am. I'd like to keep on havin' a hand in it. I wonder now ef you wouldn't like fur me to be the one to go right now and fetch your mother here to you?"

She shook her head, smiling.

"Thank you, judge, that's not necessary. She's here now. She was here when the baby came. I sent for her. She's in her room right down the hall; it'll be her room always from now on. I expect she's sewing on things for the baby; we can't make her stop it. She's terribly jealous of Miss McAlpin—that's the trained nurse Dallam brought back with him from St. Louis—but Miss McAlpin will be going soon, and then she'll be in sole charge. She doesn't know, Judge Priest, that what she told to you I now know. She never shall know if I can prevent it, and I know you'll help me guard our secret from her."

"I reckin you may safely count on me there, ma'am," he promised. "I've frequently been told by disinterested parties that I snore purty loud sometimes, but I don't believe anybody yit caught me talkin' in my sleep. And now I expect you're sort of tired out. So ef you'll excuse me I'll jest slip downstairs, and before I go do that there little piece of writin' we spoke about a while ago."

"Wouldn't you like to see my baby before you go?" she asked. Her left hand felt for the white folds which half swaddled the tiny sleeper. "Judge Priest, let me introduce you to little Miss Martha Millsap Wybrant, named for her grandmammy."

"Pleased to meet you, young lady," said he, bowing low and elaborately. "At your early age, honey, it's easier fur a man, to understand you than ever it will be agin after you start growin' up. Pleased indeed to meet you."

If memory serves him aright, this chronicler of sundry small happenings in the life and times of the Honorable William Pitman Priest has more than once heretofore commented upon the fact that among our circuit judge's idiosyncrasies was his trick, when deeply moved, of talking to himself. This night as he went slowly homeward through the soft and velvety cool of the summer darkness he freely indulged himself in this habit. Oddly enough, he punctuated his periods, as it were, with lamp-posts. When he reached a street light he would speak musingly to himself, then fall silent until he had trudged along to the next light. Something after this fashion:

Corner of Chickasaw Drive and Exall Boulevard:

"Well, sir, the older I git the more convinced I am that jest about the time a man decides he knows a little something about human nature it's a shore sign he don't know nothin' a-tall about it, 'specially human nature ez it applies to the female of the species. Now, f'rinstance, you take this here present instance: A woman turns aginst the woman she thinks is her own mother. Then she finds out the other woman ain't her own mother a-tall, and she swings right back round agin and—well, it's got me stumped. Now ef in her place it had 'a' been a man. But a woman—oh, shuckin's, whut's the use?"

Corner of Chickasaw Drive and Sycamore Avenue:

"Still, of course we've got to figger the baby as a prime factor enterin' into the case and helpin' to straighten things out. Spry little trick fur three days old, goin' on four, wuzn't she? Ought to be purty, too, when she gits herself some hair and a few teeth and plumps out so's she taken up the slack of them million wrinkles, more or less, that she's got now. Babies, now—great institutions anyway you take 'em."

Corner of Sycamore Avenue, turning into Clay Street:

"And still, dog-gone it, you'll find folks in this world so blind that they'll tell you destiny or fate, or whutever you want to call it, jest goes along doin' things by haphazard without no workin' plans and no fixed designs. But me, I'm different—me. I regard the scheme of creation ez a hell of a success. Look at this affair fur a minute. I go meddlin' along like an officious, absent-minded idiot, which I am, and jest when it looks like nothin' is goin' to result frum my interference but fresh heartaches fur one of the noblest souls that

ever lived on this here footstool, why the firm of Providence, Pedaloski and Poindexter steps in, and bang, there you are! It wouldn't happen agin probably in a thousand years, but it shore happened this oncet, I'll tell the world. Let's see, now, how does that there line in the hymn book run?—'moves in a mysterious way His wonders to perform.' Ain't it the truth?"

Last street lamp on Clay Street before you come to Judge Priest's house:

"And they call 'em the opposite sex! I claim the feller that fust coined that there line wuz a powerful conservative pusson. Opposite? Huh! Listen here to me: They're so dad-gum opposite they're plum' cater-cornered!"

CHAPTER III

A SHORT NATURAL HISTORY

If ever a person might be said to have dedicated his being to the pursuit of leisure, that selfsame was Red Hoss Shackleford, of color, and highly so. He was one who specialized in the deft and fine high art of doing nothing at all. With him leisure was at once a calling to be followed regularly and an ideal to be fostered. But also he loved to eat, and he had a fancy for wearing gladsome gearings, and these cravings occasionally interfered with the practice of his favorite vocation. In order that he might enjoy long periods of manual inactivity it devolved upon him at intervals to devote his reluctant energies to gainful labor. When driven to it by necessity, which is said to be the mother of invention and which certainly is the full sister to appetite, Red Hoss worked. He just naturally had to—sometimes.

You see, in the matter of being maintained vicariously he was less fortunately circumstanced than so many of his fellows in our town were, and still are. He had no ministering parent doing cookery for the white folks, and by night, in accordance with a time-hallowed custom with which no sane housekeeper dared meddle, bringing home under a dolman cape loaded tin buckets and filled wicker baskets. Ginger Dismukes, now—to cite a conspicuous example—was one thus favored by the indulgent fates.

Aunt Ca'line Dismukes, mother of the above, was as honest as the day was long; but when the evening of that day came, such trifles, say, as part of a ham or a few left-over slices of cake fell to her as a legitimate if unadvertised salvage. Every time the quality in the big house had white meat for their dinner, Ginger, down the alley, enjoyed drumsticks and warmed-up stuffing for his late supper. He might be like the tapeworm in that he rarely knew in advance what he would have to eat, but still, like the tapeworm, he gratefully absorbed what was put before him and asked no questions of the benefactor. Without prior effort on his part he was fed even as the Prophet Elijah was fed by the ravens of old. This simile would

acquire added strength if you'd ever seen Aunt Ca'line, her complexion being a crow's-wing sable.

Red Hoss had no dependable helpmate, such as Luther Maydew had, with a neatly lettered sign in her front window: Going-Out Washing Taken in Here. Luther's wife was Luther's only visible means of support, yet Luther waxed fat and shiny and larded the earth when he walked abroad. Neither had Red Hoss an indulgent and generous patron such as Judge Priest's Jeff—Jeff Poindexter—boasted in the person of his master. Neither was he gifted in the manipulation of the freckled bones as the late Smooth Crumbaugh had been; nor yet possessed he the skill of shadow boxing as that semiprofessional pugilist, Con Lake, possessed it. Con could lick any shadow that ever lived, and the punching bag that could stand up before his onslaughts was not manufactured yet; wherefore he figured in exhibition bouts and boxing benefits, and between these lived soft and easy. He enjoyed no such sinecure as fell to the lot of Uncle Zack Matthews, who waited on the white gentlemen's poker game at the Richland House, thereby harvesting many tips and whose otherwise nimble mind became a perfect blank twice a year when he was summoned before the grand jury.

Red Hoss did, indeed, have a sister, but the relations between them were strained since the day when Red Hoss' funeral obsequies had been inopportunely interrupted by the sudden advent among the mourners of the supposedly deceased, returning drippingly from the river which presumably had engulfed him. His unexpected and embarrassing reappearance had practically spoiled the service for his chief relative. She never had forgiven Red Hoss for his failure to stay dead, and he long since had ceased to look for free pone bread and poke chops in that quarter.

So when he had need to eat, or when his wardrobe required replenishing, he worked at odd jobs; but not oftener. Ordinarily speaking, his heart was not in it at all. But at the time when this narrative begins his heart was in it. One speaks figuratively here in order likewise to speak literally. A romantic enterprise carried on by Red Hoss Shackleford through a period of months promised now a delectable climax. As between him and one Melissa Grider an engagement to join themselves together in the bonds of matrimony had been arranged.

Before he fell under Melissa's spell Red Hoss had been regarded as one of the confirmed bachelors of the Plunkett's Hill younger set. He had never noticeably favored marriage and giving in marriage—especially giving himself in marriage. It may have been—indeed the forked tongue of gossip so had it—that the fervor of Red Hoss' courting, when once he did turn suitor, had been influenced by the fortuitous fact that Melissa ran as chambermaid on the steamboat *Jessie B.* The fact outstanding, though, was that Red Hoss, having ardently wooed, seemed now about to win.

But Melissa, that comely and comfortable person, remained practical even when most loving. The grandeur of Red Hoss' dress-up clothes may have entranced her, and certainly his conversational brilliancy was altogether in his favor, but beyond the glamour of the present, Melissa had the vision to appraise the possibilities of the future. Before finally committing herself to the hymeneal venture she required it of her swain that he produce and place in her capable hands for safe-keeping, first, the money required to purchase the license; second, the amount of the fee for the officiating clergyman; and third, cash sufficient to pay the expenses of a joint wedding journey to St. Louis and return. It was specified that the traveling must be conducted on a mutual basis, which would require round-trip tickets for both of them. Melissa, before now, had heard of these one-sided bridal tours. If Red Hoss went anywhere to celebrate being married she meant to go along with him.

Altogether, under these headings, a computed aggregate of at least eighty dollars was needed. With his eyes set then on this financial goal, Red Hoss sought service in the marts of trade. Perhaps the unwonted eagerness he displayed in this regard may have been quickened by the prospect that the irksomeness of employment before marriage would be made up to him after the event in a vacation more prolonged than any his free spirit had ever known. Still, that part of it is none of our affair. For our purposes it is sufficient to record that the campaign for funds had progressed to a point where practically fifty per cent of the total specified by his prudent inamorata already had been earned, collected and, in accordance with the compact, intrusted to the custodianship of one who was at once fiancée and trustee.

On a fine autumnal day Red Hoss made a beginning at the task of amassing the remaining half of the prenuptial sinking fund by accepting an assignment to deliver a milch cow, newly purchased by Mr. Dick Bell, to Mr. Bell's dairy farm three miles from town on the Blandsville Road. This was a form of toil all the more agreeable to Red Hoss—that is to say, if any form of toil whatsoever could be deemed agreeable to him—since cows when traveling from place to place are accustomed to move languidly. By reason of this common sharing of an antipathy against undue haste, it was late afternoon before the herder and the herded reached the latter's future place of residence; and it was almost dusk when Red Hoss, returning alone, came along past Lone Oak Cemetery. Just ahead of him, from out of the weed tangle hedging a gap in the cemetery fence, a half-grown rabbit hopped abroad. The cottontail rambled a few yards down the road, then erected itself on its rear quarters and with adolescent foolhardiness contemplated the scenery. In his hand Red Hoss still carried the long hickory stick with which he had guided the steps of Mr. Bell's new cow. He flung his staff at the inviting mark now presented to him. Whirling in its flight, it caught its target squarely across the neck, and the rabbit died so quickly it did not have time to squeak, and barely time to kick.

Now it is known of all men that luck of two widely different kinds resides in the left hind foot of a graveyard rabbit. There is bad luck in it for the rabbit itself, seeing that the circumstance of its having a left hind foot, to begin with, renders life for that rabbit more perilous even than is the life of a commonplace rabbit. But there is abiding good luck in it for the human who falls heir to the foot after the original possessor has passed away. To insure the maximum of fair fortune for the legatee, the rabbit while in the act of jumping over a sunken grave in the dark of the moon should be killed with a crooked stick which a dead man has carried; but since there is no known record of a colored person hanging round sunken graves in the dark of the moon, the left hind foot of an authentic graveyard rabbit slain under any circumstances is a charm of rare preciousness.

With murky twilight impending, it was not for Red Hoss Shackleford to linger for long in the vicinity of a burying ground. Already, in the gloaming, the white fence palings gleamed spectrally and the shadows were thickening in the honeysuckle jungles beyond

them. Nor was it for him to think of eating the flesh of a graveyard rabbit, even though it be plump and youthful, as this one was.

Graveyard rabbits, when indubitably known to be such, decorate no Afro-American skillet. Destiny has called them higher than frying pans.

Almost before the victim of his aim had twitched its valedictory twitch he was upon it. In his hand, ready for use, was his razor; not his shaving razor, but the razor he carried for social purposes. He bent down, and with the blade made swift slashes right and left at a limber ankle joint, then rose again and was briskly upon his homeward way, leaving behind him the maimed carcass, a rumpled little heap, lying in the dust. A dozen times before he reached his boarding house he fingered the furry talisman where it rested in the bottom of his hip pocket, and each touching of it conveyed to him added confidences in propitious auguries.

Surely enough, on the very next day but one, events seemed organizing themselves with a view to justifying his anticipations. As a consequence of the illness of Tom Montjoy he was offered and accepted what promised to be for the time being a lucrative position as Tom Montjoy's substitute on the back end of one of Fowler & Givens' ice wagons. The Eighteenth Amendment was not as yet an accomplished fact, though the dread menace of it hung over that commonwealth which had within its confines the largest total number of distilleries and bonded warehouses to be found in any state of this union. Observing no hope of legislative relief, sundry local saloon keepers had failed to renew their licenses as these expired. But for every saloon which closed its doors it seemed there was a soda fountain set up to fizz and to spout; and the books of Fowler & Givens showed the name of a new customer to replace each vanished old one. So trade ran its even course, and Red Hoss was retained temporarily to understudy, as it were, the invalid Montjoy.

In an afternoon lull following the earlier rush of deliveries Mr. Ham Givens came out to where Tallow Dick Evans, Bill Tilghman and Red Hoss reclined at ease in the lee of the ice factory's blank north wall and bade Red Hoss hook up one of the mules to the light single wagon and carry three of the hundred-pound blocks out to Biederman's ex-corner saloon, now Biederman's soft-drink and ice-cream emporium, at Ninth and Washington.

"Better let him take Blue Wing," said Mr. Givens, addressing Bill Tilghman, who by virtue of priority of service and a natural affinity for draft stock was stable boss for the firm.

It was Bill Tilghman who once had delivered himself of the sage remark that "A mule an' a nigger is 'zackly alike—'specially de mule."

"Can't tek Blue Wing, Mist' Givens," answered Bill. "She done went up to Mist' Gallowayses' blacksmith shop to git herse'f some new shoes."

This pluralization of a familiar name was evidence on Bill Tilghman's part of the estimation in which he held our leading farrier, Mr. P. J. Galloway.

"All right, take one of the other mules then. But get a hustle on," ordered Mr. Givens as he reëntered his office.

"Dat bein' de case, I reckin I'll tek dat white Frank mule," said Red Hoss. "'Tain't no use of him standin' in de stall eatin' his ole fool haid off jes' 'cause Tom Montjoy is laid up."

"Boy," said Bill Tilghman, "lissen! You 'cept a word of frien'ship an' warnin' f'um somebody dat's been kicked by more mules 'en whut you ever seen in yore whole life, an' you let dat Frank mule stay right whar he is. You kin have yore choice of de Maud mule or de Maggie mule or Friday or January Thaw; but my edvice to you is, jes' leave dat Frank mule be an' don't pester him none."

"How come?" demanded Red Hoss. "I reckin I got de strength to drive ary mule dey is."

"I ain't sayin' you ain't," stated Bill Tilghman. "A born ijiot could drive dat mule, so I jedge you mout mek out to qualify. 'Tain't de drivin' of him—hit's de hitchin' up of him which I speaks of."

Tallow Dick put in, "Hit's dis way wid dat Frank: In his early chilehood somebody muster done somethin' painful to dat mule's haid, an' it seem lak it lef' one ondurin' scar in his mind. Anyway, f'um dat day hencefor'ard he ain't let nobody a-tall, let alone hit's a plum' stranger to him lak you is, go prankin' round his haid. Ef you think a mule's back end is his dangersome end you jes' try to walk up to ole Frank face to face, ez nigger to mule, an' try to hang de mule jewelry over his years. Da's all, jes' try it! Tom Montjoy is de onliest one which kin slip de bit in dat mule's mouf, an' de way he do it is to go into de nex' stall an' keep speakin' soothin' words to him, an' put

de bridle on him f'um behinehand of his shoulder lak. But when Tom Montjoy ain't wukkin', de Frank mule he ain't wukkin' neither any. Yessuh, Tom Montjoy is de sole one which dat Frank mule gives his confidences to, sech as dey is."

Red Hoss snorted his contempt for his warning.

"Huh, de trouble wid dat mule is he's pampered! You niggers done pamper him twell he think he owns dese whole ice-factory premises. Whut he need fur whut ails him is somebody which ain't skeered of him. Me, I aims to go 'crost to dat stable barn over yonder 'crost de street an' walk right in de same stall wid dat Frank same ez whut I would wid ary other mule, an' ef he mek jes' one pass at me I'm gwine up wid my fistes an' give him somethin' to brood over."

Bill Tilghman looked at Tallow Dick, looking at him sorrowfully, as though haunted by forebodings of an impending tragedy, and shook his head slowly from side to side. Tallow Dick returned the glance in kind, and then both of them gazed steadfastly at the vainglorious new hand.

"Son, boy," inquired old Bill softly, "whut is de name of yore mos' favorite hymn?"

"Whut my favorite hymn got to do wid it?"

"Oh, nothin', only I wuz jes' studyin'. Settin' yere, I got to thinkin' dat mebbe dey wuz some purticular tune you might lak sung at de grave."

"An' whilst you's tellin' Unc' Bill dat much, you mout also tell us whar 'bouts in dis town you lives at?" added Tallow Dick.

"You knows good an' well whar I lives at," snapped Red Hoss.

"I thought mebbe you mout 'a' moved," said Tallow Dick mildly. "'Twouldn't never do fur me an' Bill yere to be totin' de remains to de wrong address. Been my experience dat nothin' ain't mo' onwelcome at a strange house 'en a daid nigger, especially one dat's about six feet two inches long an' all mussed up wid fresh mule tracks."

"Huh! You two ole fools is jes' talkin' to hear yo'se'fs talk," quoth Red Hoss. "All I axes you to do is jes' set quiet yere, an' in 'bout six minutes f'um now you'll see me leadin' a tamed-down white mule wid de britchin' all on him outen through dem stable barn do's."

"All right, honey, have it yo' own way. Ef you won't hearken an' you won't heed, go ahaid!" stated Uncle Bill, with a wave of his hand.

"You ain't too young to die, even ef you is too ole to learn. Only I trust an' prays dat you won't be blamin' nobody but yo'se'f 'bout this time day after to-mor' evenin' w'en de sexton of Mount Zion Cullud Cemetery starts pattin' you in de face wid a spade."

"Unc' Bill, you said a moufful den," added Tallow Dick. "De way I looks at it, dey ain't no use handin' out sense to a nigger ef he ain't got no place to put it. 'Sides, dese things offen-times turns out fur de best; orphants leaves de fewest mourners. Good-by, Red Hoss, an' kindly give my reguards to any frien's of mine dat you meets up wid on 'yother side of Jordan."

With another derisive grunt, Red Hoss rose from where he had been resting, angled to the opposite side of the street and disappeared within the stable. For perhaps ninety seconds after he was gone the remaining two sat in an attitude of silent waiting. Their air was that of a pair of black seers who likewise happen to be fatalists, and who having conscientiously discharged a duty of prophecy now await with calmness the fulfillment of what had been foretold. Then they heard, over there where Red Hoss had vanished, a curious muffled outcry. As they subsequently described it, this sound was neither shriek nor moan, neither oath nor prayer. They united in the declaration that it was more in the nature of a strangled squeak, as though a very large rat had suddenly been trodden beneath an even larger foot. However, for all its strangeness, they rightfully interpreted it to be an appeal for succor. Together they rose and ran across Water Street and into the stable.

The Frank mule had snapped his tether and, freed, was backing himself out into the open. If a mule might be said to pick his teeth, here was a mule doing that very thing. Crumpled under the manger of the stall he just had quitted was a huddled shape. The rescuers drew it forth, and in the clear upon the earthen stable floor they stretched it. It was recognizable as the form of Red Hoss Shackleford.

Red Hoss seemed numbed rather than unconscious. Afterward Bill Tilghman in recounting the affair claimed that Red Hoss, when discovered, was practically nude clear down to his shoes, which being of the variety known as congress gaiters had elastic uppers to hug the ankles. This snugness of fit, he thought, undoubtedly explained why they had stayed on when all the rest of the victim's

costume came off. In his version, Tallow Dick averred he took advantage of the circumstance of Red Hoss' being almost totally undressed to tally up bruise marks as counter-distinguished from tooth marks, and found one of the former for every two sets of the latter. From this disparity in the count, and lacking other evidence, he was bound to conclude that considerable butting had been done before the biting started.

However, these conclusions were to be arrived at later. For the moment the older men busied themselves with fanning Red Hoss and with sluicing a bucket of water over him. His first intelligible words upon partially reviving seemed at the moment of their utterance to have no direct bearing upon that which had just occurred. It was what he said next which, in the minds of the hearers, established the proper connection.

"White folks suttinly is curious." Such was his opening remark, following the water application. "An' also, dey suttinly do git up some mouty curious laws." He paused a moment as though in a still slightly dazed contemplation of the statutory idiosyncrasies of the Caucasian, and then added the key words: "F'rinstance, now, dey got a law dat you got to keep lions an' tigers in a cage. Yassuh, da's de law. Can't no circus go 'bout de country widout de lions an' de tigers an' de highyenas is lock' up hard an' fas' in a cage." Querulously his voice rose in a tone of wondering complaintfulness: "An' yit dey delibert'ly lets a man-eatin' mule go ramblin' round loose, wid nothin' on him but a rope halter."

Across the prostrate form of the speaker Bill Tilghman eyed Tallow Dick in the reminiscent manner of one striving to recall the exact words of a certain quotation and murmured, "De trouble wid dat Frank mule is dat he's pampered."

"Br'er Tilghman," answered back Tallow Dick solemnly, "you done said it—de mule is been pampered!"

The sufferer stirred and blinked and sat up dizzily.

"Uh-huh," he assented. "An' jes' ez soon ez I gits some of my strength back ag'in, an' some mo' clothes on, I'm gwine tek de longes', sharpes' pitchfork dey is in dis yere stable an' I'm gwine pamper dat devilish mule wid it fur 'bout three-quarters of an hour stiddy."

But he didn't. If he really cherished any such disciplinary designs he abandoned them next morning at sunup, when, limping slightly, he propped open the stable doors preparatory to invading its interior. The white demon, which appeared to have the facility of snapping his bonds whenever so inclined, came sliding out of the darkness toward him, a malignant and menacing apparition, with a glow of animosity in two deep-set eyes and with a pair of prehensile lips curled back to display more teeth than by rights an alligator should have. It was immediately evident to Red Hoss that in the Frank mule's mind a deep-seated aversion for him had been engendered. He had the feeling that potential ill health lurked in that neighborhood; that death and destruction, riding on a pale mule, might canter up at any moment. Personally, he decided to let bygones be bygones. He dropped the grudge as he tumbled backward through the stable doors and slammed them behind him. That same day he went to Mr. Ham Givens and announced his intention of immediately breaking off his present associations with the firm.

"Me, I is done quit foolin' wid ole ice waggins," he announced airily after Mr. Givens had given him his time. "Hit seems lak my gift is fur machinery."

"A pusson which wuz keerful wouldn't trust you wid a shoe buttoner—dat's how high I reguards yore gift fur machinery," commented Bill Tilghman acidly. Red Hoss chose to ignore the slur. Anyhow, at the moment he could put his tongue to no appropriate sentence of counter repartee. He continued as though there had been no interruption:

"Yassuh, de nex' time you two pore ole foot-an'-mouth teamsters sees me I'll come tearin' by yere settin' up on de boiler deck of a taxiscab. You better step lively to git out of de way fur me den."

"I 'lows to do so," assented Bill. "I ain't aimin' to git shot wid no stray bullets."

"How come stray bullets?"

"Anytime I sees you runnin' a taxiscab I'll know by dat sign alone dat de sheriff an' de man which owns de taxiscab will be right behine you—da's whut I means."

"Don't pay no 'tention to Unc' Bill," put in Tallow Dick. "Whar you aim to git dis yere taxiscab, Red Hoss?"

"Mist' Lee Farrell he's done start up a regular taxiscab line," expounded Red Hoss. "He's lookin' fur some smart, spry cullid men ez drivers. Dat natchelly bars you two out, but it lets me in. Mist' Lee Farrell he teach you de trade fust, an' den he gives you three dollars a day, an' you keeps all de tips you teks in. So it's so long and fare you well to you mule lovers, 'ca'se Ise on my way to pick myse' out my taxiscab."

"Be sure to pick yo'se'f out one which ain't been pampered," was Bill Tilghman's parting shot.

"Nummine dat part," retorted Red Hoss. "You jes' remember dis after I'm gone: Mules' niggers an' niggers' mules is 'bout to go out of style in dis man's town."

In a way of speaking, Red Hoss in his final taunt had the rights of it. Lumbering drays no longer runneled with their broad iron tires the red-graveled flanks of the levee leading down to the wharf boats. They had given way almost altogether to bulksome motor trucks. Closed hacks still found places in funeral processions, but black chaser craft, gasoline driven and snorting furiously, met all incoming trains and sped to all outgoing ones. Betimes, beholding as it were the handwriting on the wall, that enterprising liveryman, Mr. Lee Farrell, had set up a garage and a service station on the site of his demolished stable, and now was the fleet commander of a whole squadron of these tin-armored destroyers.

Under his tutelage Red Hoss proved a reasonably apt pupil. At the end of an apprenticeship covering a fortnight he matriculated into a regular driver, with a badge and a cap to prove it and a place on the night shift. Red Hoss felt impressive, and bore himself accordingly. He began taking sharp turns on two wheels. He took one such turn too many. On Friday night of his first week as a graduate chauffeur he steered his car headlong into a smash-up from which she emerged with a dished front wheel and a permanent marcel wave in one fender. As he nursed the cripple back to the garage Red Hoss exercised an imagination which never yet had failed him, and fabricated an explanation so plausibly shaped and phrased as to absolve him of all blameful responsibility for the mishap.

Mr. Farrell listened to and accepted this account of the accident with no more than a passing exhibition of natural irritation; but next morning when Attorney Sublette called, accompanied by an irate client with a claim for damages sustained to a market wagon, and bringing with him also the testimony of at least two disinterested eye-witnesses to prove upon whose shoulders the fault must rest, Mr. Farrell somewhat lost his customary air of sustained calm. Cursing softly under his breath, he settled on the spot with a cash compromise; and then calling the offender to his presence, he used strong and bitter words.

"Look here, boy," he proclaimed, "I've let you off this time with a cussing, but next time anything happens to a car that you are driving you've got to come clean with me. It ain't to be expected that a lot of crazy darkies can go sky-hooting round this town driving pot-metal omnibuses for me without one of them getting in a smash-up about every so often, and I'm carrying accident insurance and liability insurance to cover my risks; but next time you get into a jam I want you to come through with the absolute facts in the case, so's I'll know where I stand and how to protect myself in court or out of it. I don't care two bits whose fault it is—your fault or some other lunatic's fault. The truth is what I want—the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth, so help you God. And He'll need to help you if I catch you lying again! Get me?"

"Boss," said Red Hoss fervently, "I gits you."

Two nights later the greater disaster befell. It was a thick, drizzly, muggy night, when the foreground of one's perspective was blurred by the murk and when there just naturally was not any background at all. Down by the Richland House a strange white man wearing a hand-colored mustache and a tiger-claw watch charm hailed Red Hoss. This person desired to be carried entirely out of town, to the south yards of the P. T. & A. Railroad, where Powers Brothers' Carnival Company was detraining from its cars with intent to pitch camp in the suburb of Mechanicsville hard by and furnish the chief attractions for a three days' street fair to be given under the auspices of the Mechanicsville lodge of Knights of Damon.

After they had quit the paved streets, Red Hoss drove a bumpy course diagonally across many switch spurs, and obeying instructions from his fare brought safely up alongside a red-painted

sleeping car which formed the head end of the show train where it stood on a siding. But starting back he decided to skirt alongside the track, where he hoped the going might be easier. As he backed round and started off, directly in front of him he made out through the encompassing mists the dim flare of a gasoline torch, and he heard a voice uplifted in pleading:

"Come on, Lena! Come on, Baby Doll! Come on out of that, you Queenie!"

Seemingly an unseen white man was urging certain of his lady friends to quit some mysterious inner retreat and join him where he stood; all of which, as Red Hoss figured it, was none of his affair. Had he known more he might have moved more slowly; indeed might have stopped moving altogether. But—I ask you—how was Red Hoss to know that the chief bull handler for Powers Brothers was engaged in superintending the unloading of his large living charges from their traveling accommodations in the bull car?

There were three of these bulls, all of them being of the gentler sex. Perhaps it might be well to explain here that the word "bull," in the language of the white tops, means elephant. To a showman all cow elephants are bulls just as in a mid-Victorian day, more refined than this one, all authentic bulls were, to cultured people, cows.

Obeying the insistent request of their master, forth now and down a wooden runway filed the members of Powers Brothers' World Famous Troupe of Ponderous Pachydermic Performers. First came Lena, then Baby Doll and last of all the mighty Queenie; and in this order they lumberingly proceeded, upon huge but silent feet, to follow him alongside the cindered right of way, feeling their way through the fog.

Now it is a fact well established in natural history—and in this instance was to prove a lamentable one—that elephants, unlike lightning bugs, carry no tail lamps. Of a sudden Red Hoss was aware of a vast, indefinite, mouse-colored bulk looming directly in the path before him. He braked hard and tried to swing out, but he was too close upon the obstacle to avoid a collision.

With a loud metallic smack the bow of the swerving taxicab, coming up from the rear, treacherously smote the mastodonic Queenie right where her wrinkles were thickest. Her knees bent

forward, and involuntarily she squatted. She squatted, as one might say, on all points south. Simultaneously there was an agonized squeal from Queenie and a crunching sound from behind and somewhat under her, and the tragic deed was done. The radiator of Red Hoss' car looked something like a concertina which had seen hard usage and something like a folded-in crush hat, but very little, if any, like a radiator.

At seven o'clock next morning, when Mr. Farrell arrived at his establishment, his stricken gaze fastened upon a new car of his which had become to all intents and purposes practically two-thirds of a car. The remnant stood at the curbing, where his service car, having towed it in, had left it as though the night foreman had been unwilling to give so complete a ruin storage space within the garage. Alongside the wreckage was Red Hoss, endeavoring more or less unsuccessfully to make himself small and inconspicuous. Upon him menacingly advanced his employer.

"The second time in forty-eight hours for you, eh?" said Mr. Farrell. "Well, boy, you do work fast! Come on now, and give me the cold facts. How did the whole front end of this car come to get mashed off?"

Tone and mien alike were threatening. Red Hoss realized there was no time for extended preliminary remarks. From him the truth came trippingly on the tongue.

"Boss, man, I ain't aimin' to tell you no lies dis time. I comes clean."

"Come clean and come fast."

"A elephint set down on it."

"What!"

"I sez, suh, a elephint set down on it."

In moments of stress, when tempted beyond his powers of self-control, Mr. Farrell was accustomed to punctuate physically, as it were, the spoken word. What he said—all he said—before emotion choked him was: "Why—you—you—" What he did was this: His right arm crooked upward like a question mark; it straightened downward like an exclamation point; his fist made a period, or, as the term goes, a full stop on the point of Red Hoss Shackleford's jaw. What Red Hoss saw resembled this:

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Only they were all printed flashingly in bright primary colors, reds and greens predominating.

As the last gay asterisk faded from before his blinking eyes Red Hoss found himself sitting down on a hard concrete sidewalk. Coincidentally other discoveries made themselves manifest to his understanding. One was that the truth which often is stranger than fiction may also on occasion be a more dangerous commodity to handle. Another was that abruptly he had severed all business connections with Mr. Lee Farrell's industry. His resignation had been accepted on the spot, and the spot was the bulge of his left jaw.

Somewhat dazed, filled with an inarticulate but none the less sincere conviction that there was neither right nor justice left in a misshapen world, Red Hoss got up and went away from there. He deemed it the part of prudence to go utterly and swiftly away from there. It seemed probable that at any moment Mr. Farrell might emerge from his inner office, whither, as might be noted through an open window, he had retired to pour cold water on his bruised knuckles, and get violent again. The language he was using so indicated.

Presently Red Hoss, with one side of his face slightly swollen and a curious taste in his mouth, might have been seen boarding a Locust Street car southbound. He was on his way to Mechanicsville. In the back part of his brain lurked vaguely a project to seek out the man who owned those elephants and plead for some fashion of redress for painful injuries innocently sustained. Perhaps the show gentleman might incline a charitable ear upon hearing Red Hoss' story. Just how the sufferer would go about the formality of presenting himself to the consideration of the visiting dignitary he did not yet know. It was all nebulous and cloudy; a contingency to be shaped by circumstances as they might develop. Really sympathy was the balm Red Hoss craved most.

He quit the car when the car quit him—at the end of the line where the iron bridge across Island Creek marked the boundary between the municipality and its principal suburb. Even at this hour Mechanicsville's broadest highway abounded in fascinating sights and alluring zoölogical aromas. The carnival formally would not open till the afternoon, but by Powers Brothers' crews things already

had been prepared against the coming of that time. In all available open spaces, such as vacant lots abutting upon the sidewalks and the junctions of cross streets, booths and tents and canvas-walled arenas had been set up. Boys of assorted sizes and colors hung in expectant clumps about marquees and show fronts. Also a numerous assemblage of adults of the resident leisure class, a majority of these being members of Red Hoss' own race, moved back and forth through the line of fairings, inspired by the prospect of seeing something interesting without having to pay for it.

Red Hoss forgot temporarily the more-or-less indefinite purpose which had brought him hither. He joined a cluster of watchful persons who hopefully had collected before the scrolled and ornamented wooden entrance of a tarpaulin structure larger than any of the rest. From beneath the red-and-gold portico of this edifice there issued a blocky man in a checkered suit, with a hard hat draped precariously over one ear and with a magnificent jewel gleaming out of the bosom of a collarless shirt. All things about this man stamped him as one having authority over the housed mysteries roundabout. Visibly he rayed that aura of proprietorship common to some monarchs and to practically all owners of traveling caravansaries. Seeing him, Red Hoss promptly detached himself from the group he had just joined, and advanced, having it in mind to seek speech with this superior-appearing personage. The white man beat him to it.

"Say, boy, that's right, keep a-coming," he called. His experienced eye appraised Red Hoss' muscular proportions. "Do you want a job?"

"Whut kinder job, boss?"

"Best job you ever had in your life," declared the white man. "You get fourteen a week and cakes. Get me? Fourteen dollars just as regular as Saturday night comes, and your scoffing free—all the chow you can eat thrown in. Then you hear the band play absolutely free of charge, and you see the big show six times a day without having to pay for it, and you travel round and see the country. Don't that sound good to you? Oh, yes, there's one thing else!" He dangled a yet more alluring temptation. "And you wear a red coat with brass buttons on it and a cap with a plume in it."

"Sho' does sound good," said Red Hoss, warming. "Whut else I got to do, cunnel?"

"Oh, just odd jobs round this pitch here—this animal show."

"Hole on, please, boss! I don't have no truck wid elephints, does I?"

"Nope. The elephants are down the line in a separate outfit of their own. You work with this show—clean out the cages and little things like that. Don't get worried," he added quickly, interpreting aright a look of sudden concern upon Red Hoss' face. "You don't have to go inside the cages to clean 'em out. You stay outside and do it with a long-handled tool. I had a good man on this job, but he quit on me unexpectedly night before last."

The speaker failed to explain that the recent incumbent had quit thus abruptly as a result of having a forearm clawed by a lady leopard named Violet.

"'Bout how long is dis yere job liable to last?" inquired Red Hoss. "You see, cunnel, Ise 'spectin' to have some right important private business in dis town 'fore so very long."

"Then this is the very job you want. After we leave here to-morrow night we strike down across the state line and play three more stands, and then we wind up with a week in Memphis. We close up the season there and go into winter quarters, and you come on back home. What's your name?"

"My full entitled name is Roscoe Conklin' Shackleford, but 'count of my havin' a kinder brightish complexion dey mos' gin'rally calls me Red Hoss. I reckin mebbe dey's Injun blood flowin' in me."

"All right, Red Hoss, let it flow. You just come on with me and I'll show you what you'll have to do. My name is Powers—Captain Powers."

Proudly sensing that already he was an envied figure in the eyes of the group behind him, Red Hoss followed the commanding Powers back through a canvas-sided marquee into a circular two-poled tent. There were no seats. The middle spaces were empty. Against the side walls were ranged four cages. One housed a pair of black bears of a rather weather-beaten and travel-worn aspect. Next to the bears, the lady leopard, Violet, through the bars contemplated space, meanwhile wearing that air of intense boredom peculiar to most caged animals. A painted inscription above the front of the third

cage identified its occupant as none other than The Educated Ostrich; the Bird That Thinks.

Red Hoss' conductor indicated these possessions with a lordly wave of his arm, then led the way to the fourth cage. It was the largest cage of all; it was painted a bright and passionate red. It had gilded scrollings on it. Upon the ornamented façade which crossed its front from side to side a lettered legend ran. Red Hoss spelled out the pronouncement:

Chieftain, King of Feline Acrobats! The Largest Black-maned Nubian Lion in Captivity! Danger!

The face of the cage was boarded halfway up, but above the top line of the planked cross panel Red Hoss could make out in the foreground of the dimmed interior a great tawny shape, and at the back, in one corner, an orderly clutter of objects painted a uniform circus blue. There was a barrel or two, an enormous wooden ball, a collapsible fold-up seesaw and other impedimenta of a trained-animal act. Red Hoss had heard that the lion was a noble brute—in short, was the king of beasts. He now was prepared to swear it had a noble smell. Beneath the cage a white man in overalls slumbered audibly upon a tarpaulin folded into a pallet.

"There's the man you take your orders from if you join us," explained Powers, flirting a thumb toward the sleeper. "Name of Riley, he is. But you draw your pay from me." With his arm he described a circle. "And here's the stock you help take care of. The only one you need to be careful about is that leopard over yonder. She gets a little peevish once in a while. Well, I would sort of keep an eye on the ostrich here alongside you too. The old bird's liable to cut loose when you ain't looking and kick the taste out of your mouth. You give them both their distances. But those bears behind you is just the same as a pair of puppies, and old Chieftain here—well, he looks pretty fierce and he acts sort of fierce too when he's called on for it, but it's just acting with him; he's trained to it. Off watch, he's just as gentle as an overgrown kitten. Riley handles him and works him, and all you've got to do when Riley is putting him through his stunts is to stand outside here and hand him things he wants in through the bars. Well, is it a go? Going to take the job?"

"Boss," said Red Hoss, "you speaks late—I done already tooken it."

"Good!" said Powers. "That's the way I love to do business—short and sweet. You hang round for an hour or two and sort of get acquainted with things until Riley has his nap out. When he wakes up, if I ain't back by that time, you tell him you're the new helper, and he'll wise you up."

"Yas suh," said Red Hoss. "But say, boss, 'scuse me, but did I understand you to mention dat eatin' was in de contract?"

"Sure! Hungry already?"

"Well, suh, you see I mos' gin'rally starts de day off wid breakfust, an' to tell you de truth I ain't had nary grain of breakfust yit!"

"Got the breakfast habit, eh? Well, come on with me to the cook house and I'll see if there ain't something left over."

Despite the nature of his calling as a tamer of ferocious denizens of the tropic jungle, Mr. Riley, upon wakening, proved to be a person of a fairly amiable disposition. He made it snappy but not unduly burdensome as he initiated Red Hoss into the rudimentary phases of the new employment. As the forenoon wore on the conviction became fixed in Red Hoss' mind that for an overlord he had a white man who would be apt to listen to reason touching on any proposition promising personal profits with no personal risks.

Sharp upon this diagnosis of his new master's character, a magnificent idea, descending without warning like a bolt from the blue, struck Red Hoss on top of his head and bored in through his skull and took prompt root in his entranced and dazzled brain. It was a gorgeous conception; one which promised opulent returns for comparatively minor exertions. To carry it out, though, required coöperation, and in Riley he saw with a divining glance—or thought he saw—the hope of that coöperation.

In paving the way for confidential relations he put to Riley certain leading questions artfully disguised, and at the beginning seemingly artlessly presented. By the very nature of Riley's answers he was further assured of the safety of the ground on which he trod, whereupon Red Hoss cautiously broached the project, going on to amplify it in glowing colors the while Riley hearkened attentively.

It was a sheer pleasure to outline a proposition to a white gentleman who received it so agreeably. Fifteen minutes after the first tentative overtures had been thrown out feeler-wise, Red Hoss

found that he and Riley were in complete accord on all salient points. Indeed they already were as partners jointly committed to a joint undertaking.

After the third and last afternoon performance, in which Red Hoss, wearing a proud mien and a somewhat spotty uniform coat, had acquitted himself in all regards creditably, Riley gave him a leave of absence of two hours, ostensibly for the purpose of quitting his boarding house and collecting his traveling wardrobe. As a matter of fact, these details really required but a few minutes, and it had been privily agreed between them that the rest of the time should be devoted by Red Hoss to setting in motion the actual preliminaries of their scheme.

This involved a personal call upon Mr. Moe Rosen, who conducted a hide, pelt, rag, junk, empty-bottle and old-iron emporium on lower Court Street, just off the Market Square. September's hurried twilight had descended upon the town when the scouting conspirator tapped for admission at the alley entrance to the back room of Mr. Rosen's establishment, where the owner sat amid a variegated assortment of choicer specimens culled from his collected wares. Mr. Rosen needed no sign above his door to inform the passing public of the nature of his business. When the wind was right you could stand two blocks away and know it without being told. Here at Mr. Rosen's side door Red Hoss smacked his nostrils appreciatively. Even to one newly come from a wild-animal show, and even when smelled through a brick wall, Mr. Rosen's place had a graphic and striking atmosphere which was all its own.

As one well acquainted with the undercurrents of community life, Red Hoss shared, with many others, the knowledge that Mr. Rosen, while ostensibly engaged in one industry, carried on another as a sort of clandestine by-product. Now this side line, though surreptitiously conducted and perilous in certain of its aspects, was believed by the initiated to be really more lucrative than his legitimatized and avowed calling. Mr. Rosen was by way of being—by a roundabout way of being—what technically is known as a bootlegger. He bootlegged upon a larger scale than do most of those pursuing this precarious avocation.

It was stated in an earlier paragraph that national prohibition had not yet come to pass. But already local option held the adjoining

commonwealth of Tennessee in a firm and arid grasp; wherefore Mr. Rosen's private dealings largely had to do with discreet clients thirstily residing below the state line. It was common rumor in certain quarters that lately this traffic had suffered a most disastrous interruption. Tennessee revenue agents suddenly had evinced an unfriendly curiosity touching on vehicular movements from the Kentucky side.

A considerable chunk of Mr. Rosen's profits for the current year had been irretrievably swallowed up when a squad of these suspicious excisemen laid their detaining hands upon a sizable order of case stuff which—disguised and broadly labeled as crated household goods—was traveling southward by nightfall in a truck, heading toward a destination in a district which that truck was destined never to reach.

Bottle by bottle the aromatic contents of the packages had been poured into the wayside ditch to be sucked up by an unappreciative if porous soil. The truck itself had been confiscated. Its driver barely had escaped, to return homeward afoot across country bearing dire tidings to his employer, who was reported, upon hearing the lamentable news, literally to have scrambled the air with disconsolate flappings of his hands, meanwhile uttering shrill cries of grief.

Moreover, as though to top this stroke of ill luck, further activities in the direction of his most profitable market practically had been brought to a standstill by reason of enhanced vigilance on the part of the Tennessee authorities along the main highroads running north and south. Between supply and demand, or perhaps one should say between purveyor and consumer, the boundary mark dividing the sister commonwealths stretched its dead line like a narrow river of despair. It was not to be wondered at, therefore, that the sorely pestered Mr. Rosen should be at this time a prey to care so carking as to border on forthright melancholia. Never a particularly cheerful person, at Red Hoss' soft knock upon his outer door he raised a countenance completely clothed in moroseness where not clothed in whiskers and grunted briefly—a sound which might or might not be taken as an invitation to enter. Nor was his greeting, following upon the caller's soft-footed entrance, calculated to promote cordial intercourse.

"What you want, nigger?" he demanded, breaking in on Red Hoss' politely phrased greeting. Then without waiting for a reply, "Well, whatever it is, you don't get it. Get out!"

Nevertheless, Red Hoss came right on in. Carefully he closed the door behind him, shutting himself in with Mr. Rosen and privacy and a symposium of strong, rich smells.

"'Scuse me, Mist' Rosen," he said, "fur bre'kin' in on you lak dis, but I got a little sumpin' to say to you in mos' strictes' confidence. Seems lak to me I heard tell lately dat you'd had a little trouble wid some white folkses down de line. Co'se dat ain't none o' my business. I jes' mentioned it so's you'd understan' whut it is I wants to talk wid you about."

He drew up an elbow length away from Mr. Rosen and sank his voice to an intimate half whisper.

"Mist' Rosen, le's you an' me do a little s'posin'. Le's s'posen' you has a bar'l of vinegar or molasses or sumpin' which you wants delivered to a frien' in Memphis, Tennessee. Seems lak I has heared somewhars dat you already is got a frien' or two in Memphis, Tennessee? All right den! S'posin', den, dat you wrote to your frien' dat dis yere bar'l would be comin' along to him inside of a week or ten days f'um now wid me in de full charge of it. S'posin', den, on top o' dat I could guarantee you to deliver dat bar'l to your frien' widout nobody botherin' dat bar'l on de way, and widout nobody 'spectin' whut wuz in dat bar'l, an' widout nobody axin' no hard questions about dat bar'l. S'posin' all dem things, ef you please, suh, an' den I axes you dis question: How much would dat favor be wuth to you in cash money?"

As a careful business man, Mr. Rosen very properly pressed for further particulars before in any way committing himself in the matter of the amount of remuneration to be paid for the accommodation proposed. At this evidence of interest on the other's part Red Hoss grinned in happy optimism.

"Mist' Rosen, 'twon't hardly be no trouble a-tall," he stated. "In de fust place, you teks a pot o' blue paint an' you paints dat bar'l blue f'um head to foot. De bluer dat bar'l is de more safer she'll be. An' to mek sure dat de color will be right yere's a sample fur you to go by."

With that, Red Hoss produced from a hip pocket a sliver of plank painted on both sides in the cerulean hue universally favored by circus folk for covering seat boards, tent poles and such paraphernalia of a portable caravansary as is subject to rough treatment and frequent handling. At this the shock of surprise was such as almost to lift Mr. Rosen up on top of the cluttered desk which separated him from his visitor. It did lift him halfway out of his chair.

"Nigger," he declared incredulously, "you talk foolishness! A mile away those dam Tennessee constables would be able to see a plain barrel which ain't got no paint on it at all, and now you tell me I should paint a barrel so blue as the sky, and yet it should get through from here to Memphis. Are you crazy in the head or something, or do you maybe think I am?"

"Nummine dat," went on Red Hoss. "You do lak I tells you, an' you paints de bar'l right away so de paint'll git good an' dry twixt now an' We'n'sday night. Come We'n'sday night, you loads dat blue bar'l in a waggin an' covers it up an' you fetches it to me at de back do' of de main wild animal tent of dat carnival show which is now gwine on up yere in Mechanicsville. Don't go to de tent whar de elephints is. Go to de tent whar de educated ostrich is. Dar you'll fin' me. I done tuk a job as de fust chief 'sistant wild-animal trainer, an' right dar I'll be waitin'. So den you turns de bar'l over to me an' you goes on back home an' you furgits all 'bout it. Den in 'bout two weeks mo' when I gits back yere I brings you a piece o' writin' f'um de gen'elman in Memphis sayin' dat de bar'l has been delivered to him in good awder, an' den you pays me de rest o' de money dat's comin' to me." He had a canny second thought. "Mebbe," he added, "mebbe it would be better for all concern' ef you wrote to yore frien' in Memphis to hand me over de rest of de money when I delivers de bar'l. Yassuh, I reckins dat would be de best."

"The rest of what money?" demanded Mr. Rosen sharply. "I ain't said nothing about giving no money to nobody. What do you mean—money?"

"I mean de rest of de money which'll be comin' to me ez my share," explained Red Hoss patiently. "De white man dat's goin' to he'p me wid dis yere job, he 'sists p'intedly dat he must have his share paid down cash in advance 'count of him not bein' able to come

back yere an' collek it fur hisse'f, an' likewise 'count of him not keerin' to have no truck wid de gen'elman at de other end of de line. De way he put it, he wants all of his'n 'fore he starts. But me, Ise willin' to wait fur de bes' part of mine anyhow. So dat's how it stands, Mist' Rosen, an' 'scusin' you an' me an' dis yere white man an' your frien' in Memphis, dey ain't nary pusson gwine know nothin' 'bout it a-tall, 'ceptin' mebbe hit's de lion. An' ez fur dat, w'y de lion don't count noways, 'count of him not talkin' no language 'ceptin' 'tis his own language."

"The lion?" echoed Mr. Rosen blankly. "What lion? First you tell me blue barrel and then you tell me lion."

"I means Chieftain—de larges' black-mangy Nubbin lion in captivation," stated Red Hoss grandly, quoting from memory his own recollection of an inscription he but lately had read for the first time. "Mist' Rosen, twixt you an' me, I reckins dey ain't no revenue officer in de whole state of Tennessee which is gwine go projeckin' round a lion cage lookin' fur evidence."

Disclosing the crux of his plot, his voice took on a jubilant tone. "Mist' Rosen, please, suh, lissen to me whut Ise revealin' to you. Dat blue bar'l of yourn is gwine ride f'um yere plum' to Memphis, Tennessee, in a cage wid a lion ez big ez ary two lions got ary right to be! An' now den, Mist' Rosen, le's you an' me talk 'bout de money part of it; 'cause when all is said an' done, dat's de principalest part, ain't it?"

The town of Wyattsville was, as the saying goes, all agog. Indeed, as the editor of the Wyattsville Tri-Weekly Statesman most aptly phrased it in the introductory sentence of a first-page, full-column article in his latest issue: "This week all roads run to Wyattsville."

The occasion for all this pleasurable excitement wast the annual fair and races of the Forked Deer County Jockey Club, and superimposed upon that the street carnival conducted under the patronage and for the benefit of Wyattsville Herd Number 1002 of the Beneficent and Patriotic Order of American Bison. Each day would be a gala day replete with thrills and abounding in incident; in the forenoons grand free exhibitions upon the streets, also judgings and awards of prizes in various classes, such as farm products, livestock, poultry, needlework, pickles, preserves and art objects; in the afternoons, on the half-mile track out at the fair grounds,

trotting, pacing and running events; in the evenings the carnival spirit running high and free, with opportunities for innocent mirth, merriment and entertainment afforded upon every hand.

This was Monday night, the opening night. The initial performance of the three on the nightly schedule of Powers Brothers' Trained Wild Animal Arena approached now its climax, the hour approximately being eight-forty-five. The ballyhoo upon the elevated platform without had been completed. Hard upon this an audience of townspeople and visitors which taxed the standing capacity of the tented enterprise had flowed in, after first complying with the necessary financial details at the ticket booth. The Educated Ostrich, the Bird That Thinks, had performed to the apparent satisfaction of all, though it might as well be confessed that if one might judge by the intelligent creature's expression, the things it thought while going through its paces scarcely would be printable. Violet, the lady leopard, had obliged by yowling in a spirited and spitty manner when stirred up with a broom handle. The two bears had given a complete if somewhat lackadaisical rendition of their act. And now the gentlemanly orator in charge, who, after his ballyhoos, doubled as master of ceremonies and announcer of events, directed the attention of the patrons to the largest cage of the four.

As was customary, the culminating feature of the program had been invested with several touches of skillful stage management, the purpose being to enhance the thrills provided and send the audience forth pleased and enthusiastic. In high boots and a tiger-skin tunic, Mr. Riley, armed with an iron bar held in one hand and a revolver loaded with blank cartridges in the other, stood poised and prepared to leap into the den at the ostensible peril of his life and put his ferocious charge through a repertoire of startling feats. His eye was set, his face determined; his lower jaw moved slowly. This steel-hearted man was chewing tobacco to hide any concern he might feel.

Red Hoss Shackleford, resplendent in his official trappings, made an elaborate ceremonial of undoing the pins and bolts which upheld the wooden panels across the front elevation of the cage. The announcer took advantage of the pause thus artfully contrived to urge upon the spectators the advisability of standing well back from the guard ropes. Every precaution had been taken, he informed

them, every possible safeguard provided, but for their own sakes it were well to be on the prudent side in case the dauntless trainer should lose control over his dangerous pupil. This warning had its usual effect. With a forward rush everyone instantly pressed as closely as possible into the zone of supposed menace.

Here a curious psychological fact obtrudes. In each gathering of this character is at least one parent, generally a father, who habitually conveys his offsprings of tender years to places where they will be acutely uncomfortable, and by preference more especially to spots where there is a strong likelihood that they may meet with a sudden and violent end. Wyattsville numbered at least one such citizen within her enrolled midst. He was here now, jammed up against the creaking rope, holding fast with either clutch to a small and a sorely frightened child who wept.

Red Hoss finished with the iron catches. Behind the shielding falsework he heard and felt the rustle and the heave of a great sinewy body threshing about in a confined space. He turned his head toward the announcer, awaiting the ordained signal.

"Are you all ready?" clarioned that person. "Then go!"

With a clatter and crash down came the wooden frontage. It was a part of the mechanics intrusted to the docile and intelligent Chieftain that so soon as the woodwork had dropped he, counterfeiting an unappeasable bloodthirstiness, should fling himself headlong against the straining bars, uttering hair-raising roars. This also was the cue for Riley to wriggle nimbly through a door set in the end of the cage and slam the door behind him; then to outface the great beast and by threats, with bar and pistol both extended, to force him backward step by step, still snarling but seemingly daunted, round and round the cage. Finally, when through the demonstrated power of the human eye Chieftain had been sufficiently cowed, Riley would begin the stirring entertainment for which all this had been a spectacular overture. Such was the preliminary formula, but for once in his hitherto blameless life Chieftain failed to sustain his rôle.

He did not dash at his prison bars as though to rend them from their sockets; he did not growl in an amazingly deep bass, as per inculcated schooling; he did not bare the yellow fang nor yet unsheathe the cruel claw. With apparent difficulty, rising on his all

fours from where he was crouched in the rear left-hand corner of his den, Chieftain advanced down stage with what might properly be called a rolling gait. Against the iron uprights he lurched, literally; then, as though grateful for their support, remained fixed there at a slanted angle for a brief space.

A faunal naturalist, versed in the ways of lions, would promptly have taken cognizance of the fact that Chieftain, upon his face, wore an expression unnatural for lions to wear. It was an expression which might be classified as dreamily good-natured. His eyes drooped heavily, his lips were wreathed in a jovial feline smile. Transfixed as he was by a shock of astonishment and chagrin, Riley under his breath snapped a word of command.

In subconscious obedience to his master's voice, Chieftain slowly straightened himself, came to an about face, and with his massive head canted far to one side and all adroop as though its weight had become to him suddenly burdensome, and his legs spraddled widely apart to hold him upright, he benignantly contemplated the sea of expectant and eager faces that stretched before him. Slowly he lifted a broad forefoot and with its padded undersurface made a fumbling gesture which might have been interpreted as an attempt on his part to wipe his nose.

The effort proved too much for him. Lacking one important prop, he lost his balance, toppled over and fell heavily upon his side. The fall jolted his mouth widely ajar, and from the depths of his great throat was emitted an immense but unmistakable hiccup—a hiccup deep, sincere and sustained, having a high muzzle velocity and humidly freighted with an aroma as of a hundred hot mince pies.

From the spellbound crowd rose a concerted gasp of surprise. Chieftain heeded it not. With the indubitable air of just recalling a pleasant but novel experience, and filled with a newborn desire to renew the sensation, he groggily regained his feet and reeled back to the corner from whence he had come. Here, with the other properties of his act, a slickly painted blue barrel stood upended. Applying his nose to a spot at the base of it, he lapped greedily at a darkish aromatic liquid which, as the entranced watchers now were aware, oozed forth in a stream upon the cage floor through a cranny treacherously opened between two sprung staves. And all the while he tongued up the escaping runlet of fluid he purred and rumbled

joyously and his tawny sides heaved and little tremors of pure ecstasy ran lengthwise through him to expire diminishingly in lesser wriggles at the tufted tip of his gently flapping tail.

Then all at once understanding descended upon the audience, and from them together rose a tremendous whoop. A joyous whoop it was, yet tinged with a feather edging of jealous regret on the part of certain adult whoopers there. They had paid their quarters, these worthy folk, to see a lion perform certain tricks and antics; and lo, they had been vouchsafed the infinitely more unique spectacle of a lion with a jag on! It was a boon such as comes but once in many lifetimes, this opportunity to behold majestic Leo, converted into a confirmed inebriate by his first indulgence in strong and forbidden waters, returning to his tippling.

To some perhaps in this land of ours the scene would have served to point a moral and provide a text—a lamentable picture of the evils of intemperance as exemplified in its effects upon a mere unreasoning dumb brute. But in this assemblage were few or none holding the higher view. Unthoughtedly they yelled their appreciation, yelling all the louder when Chieftain, having copiously refreshed himself, upreared upon his hind legs, with both his forepaws winnowing the perfumed air, and after executing several steps of a patently impromptu dance movement, tumbled with a happy, intoxicated gurgle flat upon his back and lapsed into a coma of total insensibility.

But there was one among them who did not cheer. This one was a square-jawed person who, shoving and scrooging, cleft a passage through the applauding multitude, and slipped deftly under the ropes and laid a detaining grasp upon the peltry-clad shoulder of the astonished Riley. With his free hand he flipped back the lapel of his coat to display a badge of authority pinned on the breast of his waistcoat.

"What's the main idea?" His tone was rough. "Who's the chief booze smuggler of this outfit? How'd that barrel yonder come to be traveling across country with a soused lion?"

"You can search me!" lied Riley glibly. "So help me, Mike, all I know is that that barrel was slipped over on me by a big nigger that joined out with us up here in Kentucky a week ago! I told him to get me a barrel, meaning to teach the lion a new trick, and he stuck that

one in there. But I hadn't never got round to using it yet, and I didn't know it was loaded—I'll swear to that!"

Cast in another environment, Mr. Riley might have made a good actor. Even here, in an embarrassing situation calling for lines spoken ad lib. and without prior rehearsals, he had what the critics term sincerity. His fine dissembling deceived the revenue man.

"Well, that being the case, where is this here nigger, then?" demanded the officer.

Riley looked about him.

"I don't see him," he said. "He was right alongside just a moment ago too. I guess he's gone."

This, in a sense, was the truth, and in still another sense an exaggeration. Red Hoss was not exactly gone, but he certainly was going. A man on horseback might have overtaken him, but with the handicap of Red Hoss' flying start against the pursuing forces no number of men afoot possibly could hope to do so.

At the end of the second mile, and still going strong, the fugitive bethought him to part with his red coat. He already had run out from under his uniform cap, but a red coat with a double row of brass buttons and brass-topped epaulettes on it flashing next morning across a bland autumnal landscape would be calculated to attract undesired attention. So without slackening speed he took it off and cast it behind him into the darkness. Figuratively speaking, he breathed easier when he crossed the state line at or about five A.M. As a matter of fact, though, he was breathing harder. Some hours elapsed before he caught up with his panting.

Traveling in his shirt sleeves, he reached home too late for the wedding. Still, considering everything, he hardly would have cared to attend anyhow. Either he would have felt embarrassed to be present or else the couple would, or perhaps all three. On such occasions nothing is more superfluous than an extra bridegroom. The wedding in question was the one uniting Melissa Grider and Homer Holmes. It was generally unexpected—in fact, sudden.

The marriage took place on a Wednesday at high noon in the office of Justice of the Peace Dycus. Red Hoss arrived the same afternoon, shortly after the departure of the happy pair for Cairo, Illinois, on a honeymoon tour. All along, Melissa had had her heart

set on going to St. Louis; but after the license had been paid for and the magistrate had been remunerated there remained but thirty-four dollars of the fund she had been safeguarding, dollar by dollar, as her other, or regular, fiancé earned it. So she and Homer compromised on Cairo, and by their forethought in taking advantage of a popular excursion rate they had, on their return, enough cash left over to buy a hanging lamp with which to start up housekeeping.

Late that evening, while Red Hoss still wrestled mentally with the confusing problem of being engaged to a girl who just had been married to another, a disquieting thought came abruptly to him, jolting him like a blow. Looking back on events, he was reminded that the sequence of painful misadventures which had befallen him recently dated, all and sundry, from that time when he was coming back down the Blandsville Road after delivering Mr. Dick Bell's new cow and acquired a fresh hind foot of a graveyard rabbit. He had been religiously toting that presumably infallible charm against disaster ever since—and yet just see what had happened to him! Surely here was a situation calling for interpretive treatment by one having the higher authority. In the person of the venerable Daddy Hannah—root, herb and conjure doctor—he found such a one.

Before going into consultation the patriarch forethoughtedly collected a fee of seventy-five cents from Red Hoss. At the outset he demanded two dollars, but accepted the six bits, because that happened to be all the money the client had. This formality concluded, he required it of Red Hoss that he recount in their proper chronological order those various strokes of ill fortune which lately had plagued him; after which Daddy Hannah asked to see the talisman which coincidentally had been in the victim's ownership from beginning to culmination of the enumerated catastrophes. He took it in his wrinkled hand and studied it, sides, top and bottom, the while Red Hoss detailed the exact circumstances attending the death of the bunny. Then slowly the ancient delivered his findings.

"In de fust an' fo'mos' place," stated Daddy Hannah, "dis yere warn't no reg'lar graveyard rabbit to start off wid. See dis li'l' teeny black spot on de und'neath part? Well, dat's a sho' sign of a witch rabbit. A witch rabbit he hang round a buryin' ground, but he don't go inside of one—naw, suh, not never nur nary. He ain't dare to. He stay outside an' frolic wid de ha'nts w'en dey comes fo'th, but da's all.

De onliest thing which dey is to do when you kills a witch rabbit is to cut off de haid f'um de body an' bury de haid on de north side of a log, an' den bury de body on de south side so's dey can't jine together ag'in an' resume witchin'. So you havin' failed to do so, 'tain't no wonder you been havin' sech a powerful sorry time." He started to return the foot to its owner, but snatched it back.

"Hole on yere a minute, boy! Lemme tek' nuther look at dat thing." He took it, then burst forth with a volley of derisive chuckling. "Huh, huh, well ef dat ain't de beatenes' part of it all!" wheezed Daddy Hannah. "Red Hoss, you sho' muster been in one big hurry to git away f'um dat spot whar you kilt your rabbit and ketched your charm. Looky yere at dis yere shank j'int! Don't you see nothin' curious about de side of de leg whar de hock sticks out? Well den, cullid boy, ef you don't, all I got to say is you mus' be total blind ez well ez monst'ous ignunt. Dis ain't no lef' hind foot of no rabbit."

"Whut is it den?"

"It's de right hind foot, dat's whut 'tis!" He tossed it away contemptuously.

After a long minute Red Hoss, standing at Daddy Hannah's doorstep with his hands rammed deep in pockets, which were both empty, spoke in tones of profound bitterness. He addressed his remarks to space, but Daddy Hannah couldn't help overhearing.

"Fust off, I gits fooled by de right laig of de wrong rabbit. Den a man-eatin' mule come a-browsin' on me an' gnaw a suit of close right offen my back. Den I runs into a elephint in a fog an' busts one of Mist' Lee Farrell's taxiscabs fur him an' he busts my jaw fur me. Den I gits tuk advantage of by a fool lion dat can't chamber his licker lak a gen'l'man, in consequence of which I loses me a fancy job an' a chunk of money. Den Melissa, she up an'—well, suh, I merely wishes to say dat f'um now on, so fur ez I is concerned, natchel history is a utter failure."

CHAPTER IV

IT COULD HAPPEN AGAIN TO-MORROW

"Sorry, ma'am," said the Pullman conductor, "but there's not a bit of space left in the chair car, nor the sleeper neither."

"I'm sorry too," said the young woman in the tan-colored tailor-mades. She was smartly hatted and smartly spatted; smart all over from toque-tip to toe-tip. "I didn't know until almost the last minute that I'd have to catch this train, and trusted to chance for a seat."

"Yes'm, I see," commiserated the man in blue. "But you know what the rush is this time of year, and right now on top of all that so many of the soldiers getting home from the other side and their folks coming East to meet 'em and everything. I guess though, miss, you won't have much trouble getting accommodated in one of the day coaches."

"I'll try it," she said, "and thank you all the same."

She picked up her hand bag.

"Wait a minute," he suggested. "I'll have my porter carry your valise on up to the other cars."

Men of all stations in life were rather given to offering help to Miss Mildred Smith, the distinguished interior decorator and—on the side—amateur investigator for Uncle Sam with a wartime record for services rendered which many a professional might have envied. Perhaps they were the more ready to offer it since the young woman seemed so rarely to need it.

This man's reward was a brisk little nod.

"Please don't bother," she said. "This bag isn't at all heavy, and I'm used to traveling alone and looking out for myself." She footed it briskly along the platform of the Dobb's Ferry station. At the door of the third coach back from the baggage car a flagman stopped her.

"All full up in here, lady," he told her, "but I think maybe you might find some place to sit in the next car beyond. If you'll just leave your grip here I'll bring it along to you after we pull out."

As she reached the door of the coach ahead the train began to move. This coach was comfortably filled—and more than comfortably filled. Into the aisles projected elbows and feet and at either side doubled rows of backs of heads showed above the red plush seats. She shrugged her shoulders; it meant standing for a while at least; probably someone would be getting off soon—this train was a local, making frequent stops. It was not the train she would have chosen had the choosing been left altogether to her, but Mullinix of the Secret Service, her unofficial chief, had called her away from a furnishing and finishing contract at a millionaire's mansion in the country back of Dobb's Ferry to run up state to Troy, where there had arisen a situation which in the opinion of the espionage squad a woman was best fitted to handle, provided only that woman be Miss Mildred Smith. And so on an hour's notice she had dropped her own work and started.

Now, though, near the more distant end of the car she saw a break in one line of heads. Perhaps the gap might mean there would be room for her. She made her way toward the spot, her trim small figure swaying to the motion as the locomotive picked up speed. Drawing nearer, she saw the back of one seat had been turned so that its occupants faced rearward toward her. In this seat, the one farther from her as she went up the aisle, were a man and a woman; in the nearer seat, facing this pair and sitting next the window, was a second woman—a girl rather—all three of them, she deduced from the seating arrangement, being members of the same party. A suitcase rested upon the cushions alongside the younger woman.

"I beg your pardon," said the lone passenger, halting here, "but is this place taken?"

The man's face twisted as though in annoyance. He made an undecided gesture which might be interpreted either as an affirmative or the other thing. "I'm sorry if I am disturbing you," added Miss Smith, "but the car is crowded—every inch of it except this seems to be occupied."

"Oh, I guess it's all right," he said, though in his begrudged consent was a sort of indirect intimation that it was not altogether all right. He half rose and swung the suitcase up into the luggage rack overhead, then tucked in his knees so she might slip into the place opposite him next the aisle.

"Excuse me," he said a moment later, "but I could change seats with you if you don't mind."

Her eyebrows went up a trifle.

In her experiences it had not often happened that seemingly without reason a male fellow traveler had suggested that she give him a place commonly regarded as preferable to his own.

"I do mind, rather," she answered. "Riding backward makes me carsick sometimes. Still I will change with you if you insist on it. I'm the intruder, you know."

"No, no, never mind!" he hastened to say. "I guess it don't make any difference. And there's no intrusion, miss—honest now, there ain't."

Miss Smith opened the book she had brought along and began to read. She felt that obliquely her enforced companions were studying her—at least two of them were. The one with whom she shared a seat had not looked her way; except to draw in her body a trifle as Miss Smith sat down she had made no movement of any sort. Certainly she had manifested no interest in the new arrival. In moments when her glance did not cross theirs, Miss Smith, turning the pages of her book, considered the two who faced her, subconsciously trying—as was her way—to appraise them for what outwardly they presumably were. Offhand she decided the man might be the superintendent of an estate; or then again he might be somebody's head gardener. He was heavily built and heavily mustached with a reddish cast to his skin and fat broad hands. The woman alongside him had the look about her of being a high-class domestic employee, possibly a housekeeper or perhaps a seamstress. Miss Smith decided that if not exactly a servant she was accustomed to dealing with servants and in her own sphere undoubtedly would figure as a competent and authoritative person.

Of her own seat mate she could make out little except that she was young—young enough to be the daughter of the woman across from her, and yet plainly enough not the woman's daughter. Indeed if first impressions counted for anything she was of a different type and a different fiber from the pair who rode in her company. One somehow felt that she was with them but not of them; that she formed the alien apex of a triangle otherwise harmonious in its social

composition. She was muffled cheek to knees in a loose cape of blue military cloth which quite hid the outlines of her figure, yet nevertheless revealed that she was slimly formed and of fair height. The flaring collar of the garment was upturned, shielding her face almost to the line of her brows. But out of the tail of her eye Miss Smith caught a suggestion of a youthful regular profile and admiringly observed the texture of a mass of thick, fine, auburn hair. Miss Smith was partial to auburn hair; she wondered if this girl had a coloring to match the rich reddish tones that glinted in the smooth coils about her head.

Presently the man fumbled in a breast pocket of his waistcoat and found a long malignant-looking cigar. He bit the end of it and inserted the bitten end in his mouth, rolling it back and forth between his lips. Before long this poor substitute of the confirmed nicotinist for a smoke failed to satisfy his cravings. He whispered a word to his middle-aged companion, who nodded, and then with a mutter of apology to Miss Smith for troubling her he scrouged out into the aisle and disappeared in the direction of the smoker.

Left alone, the woman very soon began to yawn. It was to be judged that the stuffy air of the car made her dozy. She kept her eyes open with an effort, her head lolling in spite of her drowsy efforts to hold it straight, yet all the while bearing herself after the fashion of one determined not to fall asleep.

A voice spoke in Miss Smith's ear—a low and well-bred and musical voice.

"I beg your pardon," it said hesitatingly, then stopped.

Miss Smith turned her head toward the speaker and now for the first time had a fair chance to look into the face of the voice's owner. She looked and saw the oval of a most comely face, white and drawn as though by exhaustion or by deep sorrow, or perhaps by both. For all their pallor the cheeks were full and smooth; the brow was broad and low; the mouth firm and sweet. From between the tall collars of the cape the throat, partly revealed, rose as a smooth fair column. What made the girl almost beautiful were her eyes—eyes big and brown with a fire in them to suggest the fine high mettle of a resolute character, but out of them there looked—or else the other was woefully wrong—a great grief, a great distress bravely borne. To herself—all in that instant of looking—she said mentally that these

were the saddest, most courageous eyes she ever had seen set in a face so young and seemingly bespeaking so healthful a body. For a moment Miss Smith was so held by what she saw that she forgot to speak.

"I beg your pardon," repeated the girl. "I wonder if you would be good enough to bring me a drink of water—if it isn't too much trouble. I'm so thirsty. I can't very well go myself—there are reasons why I can't. And I don't think she"—with a sidelong glance toward the nodding figure opposite—"I don't think she would feel that she could go and leave me.'

"Certainly I will," said Miss Smith. "It's not a bit of bother."

"What is it?" The woman had been roused to full wakefulness by the movement of the stranger in rising.

"Please don't move," said Miss Smith. "Your young lady is thirsty and I'm going to bring her a drink of water—that's all."

"It's very good of you, miss," said the elder woman. She reached for her hand bag. "I think I've got a penny here for the cup."

"I've plenty of pennies," said Miss Smith.

At the cooler behind the forward door she filled a paper cup and brought it back to where the two were. To her surprise the elder woman reached for the cup and took it from her and held it to the girl's lips while she drank. With a profound shock of sympathy the realization went through Miss Smith that the girl had not the use of her hands.

Having drunk, the girl settled back in her former posture, her face half turned toward the window and her head drooping as if from weariness. The woman laid the emptied cup aside and at once was dozing off again. The third member of the group sat in pitying wonder. She wondered what affliction had made a cripple of this wholesome-looking bonny creature. She thought of ghastly things she had read concerning the dreadful after effects of infantile paralysis, but rejected the suggestion, because no matter what else of dread and woe the girl's eyes had betrayed the face was too plump and the body, which she could feel touching hers, too firm and well nourished to betoken a present and wasting infirmity. So then it must have been some accident—some maiming mishap which probably had not been of recent occurrence, since nothing else about

the girl suggested physical impairment. If this deduction were correct, the wearing of the shrouding blue cape in an atmosphere almost stiflingly close stood explained. It was so worn to hide the injured limbs from view. That, of course, would be the plausible explanation. Yet at the same time an inner consciousness gave Miss Smith a certain and absolute conviction that the specter of tearfulness lurking at the back of those big brown eyes meant more than the ever-present realization of some bodily disfigurement.

Fascinated, she found her eyes searching the shape beside her for a clew to the answer of this lamentable mystery. In her covert scrutiny there was no morbid desire to spy upon another's hidden miseries—our Miss Smith was too well-bred for that—only was there a sudden quickened pity and with that pity a yearning to offer, if opportunity served, any small comfort of act or word which might fitly come her way. As her glance—behind the cover of her reopened book—traveled over the cloaked shape searching for a clew to the secret she saw how that chance promised to serve her ends. The girl was half turned from her, a shoulder pressing against the window ledge; the twist of her body had drawn one front breadth of the cape awry so that no longer did it completely overlap its fellow. In the slight opening thus unwittingly contrived Miss Smith could make out at the wearer's belt line a partly obscured inch or two of what seemed to be a heavy leathern gear, or truss, which so far as the small limits of the exposed area gave hint as to its purpose appeared to engage the forearms like a surgical device, supporting their weight below the bend of the elbows. With quickening and enhanced sympathy the little woman winced.

Then she started, her gaze lifting quickly. Of a sudden she became aware that the girl was regarding her straightforwardly with those haggard eyes.

"Can you tell what the—the trouble is with me?" she asked.

She spoke under her breath, the wraith of a weary little smile about her mouth.

"Oh, I'm so sorry," answered Miss Smith contritely. "But please believe me—it was not mere cheap inquisitiveness that made me look."

"I think I know," said the girl softly. "You were sorry. And it doesn't matter much—your seeing. Somehow I don't mind your seeing."

"But I haven't really seen—I only caught a glimpse. And I'm afraid now that I've been pressing too closely against your side; perhaps giving you pain by touching your arms."

"My arms are not hurting me," said the girl, still with that queer ghost of a smile at her lips. "I've not been hurt or injured in any way."

"Not hurt? Then why—"

She choked the involuntary question even as she was framing it.

"This—this has been done, I suppose, to keep me from hurting anyone else."

"But—but I don't understand."

"Don't you—yet? Then lift a fold of my wrap—carefully, so no one else can see while you are looking. I'd rather you did," she continued, seeing how Miss Smith hesitated.

"But I am a stranger to you. I don't wish to pry. I——"

"Please do! Then perhaps you won't be worrying later on about—about me if you know the truth now."

With one hand Miss Smith turned back the edge of the cape, enlarging slightly the opening, and what she saw shocked her more deeply than though she had beheld some hideous mutilation. She saw that about both of the girl's wrists were snugly strapped broad leather bands, designed something after the fashion of the armlets sometimes worn by athletes and artisans, excepting that here the buckle fastenings were set upon the tops of the wrists instead of upon the inner sides; saw, too, that these cuffs were made fast to a wide leather belt, which in an unbroken band encircled the girl's trunk, so that her prisoned forearms were pressed in and confined closely against her body at the line of her waist. Her elbows she might move slightly and her fingers freely; but the hands were held well apart and the fingers in play might touch only the face of the broad girthing, which presumably was made fast by buckles or lacings at her back. As if the better to indicate how firmly she was secured, the wearer of these strange bonds flexed her arm muscles

slightly; the result was a little creaking sound as the harness answered the strain. Then the girl relaxed and the sound ended.

"Oh, you poor child!" The gasped exclamation came involuntarily, carrying all the deeper burden of compassion because it was uttered in a half whisper. Quickly she snugged the cloak in to cover the ugly thing she had looked upon. "What have you done that you should be treated so?"

Indignation was in the asking—that and an incredulous disbelief that here had been any wrongdoing.

"It isn't what I've done—exactly. I imagine it is their fear of what they think I might do if my hands were free."

"But where are you going? Where are these people taking you? You're no criminal. I know you're not. You couldn't be!"

"I am being taken to a place up the road to be confined as a dangerous lunatic."

In the accenting of the words was no trace of rebellion or even of self-pity, but merely there was the dead weight and numbness of a hopeless resignation to make the words sound flat and listless.

"I don't believe one word of it!" exclaimed Miss Smith, then broke off short, realizing that the shock of the girl's piteous admission had sent her own voice lifting and that now she had a second listener. The woman diagonally across from her was sitting bolt upright and a pair of small eyes were narrowing upon her in a squint of watchful and hostile suspicion. Instantly she stood up—a small, competent, determined body.

"I'll be back," she stated, disregarding the elder woman and speaking to the younger. "And I'm going to find out more about you, too, before I'm done."

Her step, departing, was brisk and resolute.

In the aisle near the forward door she encountered the flagman.

"There is a man in the smoker I must see at once," she said. "Will you please go in there and find him and tell him I wish—no, never mind. I see him coming now."

She went a step or two on to meet the person she sought, halting him in the untenanted space at the end of the coach.

"I want to speak with you, please," she began.

"Well, you'll have to hurry," he told her, "because I'm getting off with my party in less'n five minutes from now. What was it you wanted to say to me?"

"That young girl yonder—I became interested in her. I thought perhaps she had been injured. Then more or less by chance I found out the true facts. I spoke to her; she told me a little about her plight."

"Well, if you've been talking to her what's the big idea in talking to me?"

His tone was churlish.

"This isn't mere vulgar curiosity on my part. I have a perfectly proper motive, I think, in inquiring into her case. What is her name."

"Margaret Vinsolving."

"Spell it for me, please—the last name?"

He spelled it out, and she after him to fix it in her mind.

"Where does she live—I mean where is her home?"

"Village of Pleasantdale, this state," shortly.

"Who are her people?"

"She's got a mother and that's all, far as I know."

"What asylum are you taking her to?"

"No asylum. We're taking her to Doctor Shorter's Sanitarium back of Peekskill two miles—Dr. Clement Shorter, specialist in nervous disorders—he's the head."

"It is a private place then and not a state asylum?"

"You said it."

"You are connected with this Doctor Shorter's place, I assume?"

"Yep."

"In what capacity?"

"Oh, sort of an outside man—look after the grounds and help out generally with the patients and all. And now, say, lady, if that'll satisfy you I guess I better be stepping along. I got to see about getting this here patient and the matron off the train; that's the matron that's setting with her."

"Just a moment more, please."

She felt in a fob set under the cuff of her left sleeve and brought forth a small gold badge and held it cupped in her gloved hand for him to see. As he bent his head and made out the meaning of the badge the gruff air dropped from him magically.

"Oh, I see!" he said. "Secret Service, eh? All right, ma'am, what more did you want to know? Only I'd ask you speak brisk because there ain't so much time."

"Tell me briefly what you know of that child."

"Not such a lot, excepting she's a dangerous lunatic, having been legally adjudged so yestiddy. And her mother's paying for her keep at a high-class place where she can have special treatment and special care instead of letting her be put away in one of the state asylums. And so I'm taking her there—me and the matron yonder. That's about all, I guess."

"I don't believe it."

"You don't believe what?"

He was beginning to bristle anew.

"Don't believe she is insane at all, much less dangerously so. Why, I've just been talking with her. We exchanged only a few words, but in all that she said she was so perfectly rational, so perfectly sensible. Besides, one has only to look at her to feel sure some terrible mistake or some terrible injustice is being done. Surely there is nothing eccentric, nothing erratic about her; now is there? You must have been studying her. Don't you yourself feel that there might have been something wrong about her commitment?"

He shook his head.

"Not a chancet. Everything's been positively regular and aboveboard. You can't railroad folks into Doctor Shorter's place; he's got too high a standing. Shorter takes no chances with anybody."

"But she seemed so absolutely normal in speech, manner—everything. I've seen insane persons before now and—"

"Excuse me, but about how many have you seen?"

"Not many, I admit, but—"

"Well, excuse me again, lady, but I thought as much. Well, I have—plenty of 'em I've seen in my time. See 'em every day for the matter of that. Listen to me! For instance, now, we've got a case up

there with us now. He's been there going on fifteen years; used to be a preacher, highly educated and all that. Look at him and you wouldn't see a thing out of the way with him except that he'd be wearing a strait-jacket. Talk to him for maybe a week and you wouldn't notice a single thing wrong about him. He'd just strike you all along as being one of the nicest, mildest, old Christian gents you ever met up with in your whole life. But get him on a certain subject; just mention a certain word to him and he'd tear your throat out with his bare hands if he could get at you."

"But this poor girl, surely her case is different? Was it really necessary to bind her hands as you've done?"

"Lady, about these here violent ones you can't never tell. Me, I never saw her in my life before I went down after her this morning, and up to now she hasn't made me a mite of trouble. But I had my warning from them that turned her over to me. Anyhow, all I needed was the story of her own mother, as fine a lady as you'd care to see and just about broken-hearted over all this. You'd think from the way she carried on she was the one that was being put away and not the daughter. And yet, what did the mother swear to on her sacred oath? She swore to the daughter's having tried, not once but half a dozen separate times to kill her, till she was afraid for her own life—positively!

"Besides, lady, it's been my experience, and I've had a heap of it, that it's the quiet-acting ones that are apt to strike the quickest and do the most damage when the fit comes on 'em. So taking everything into consideration, I felt like as if I oughter be purty careful handling her on this trip. But she's all right. Probably nobody on this train, outside of you, knows there's anything wrong with her and it was accidental-like, so you tell me, the way you come to find out—you taking that seat alongside her and getting into talk with her whilst I was in yonder smoking. It's better she should be under control thataway than that she should maybe get a spell on her right here in this car or somewheres and me be forced to hold her down by main strength and possibly have to handle her pretty rough. I put it to you now, ain't it? The way she's fixed she can't harm herself nor no one else. You take it from me, lady, that while I've been in this business for so long I don't always get my private feelings harrowed up over the case of a nice-looking young girl like this one is, like an outsider

might, still at that I ain't hard-hearted and I ain't aiming to be severe just because I can. But what else is there for me to do except what I'm doing? I ask you. Say, it's funny she talked to you. She ain't said hardly a word to us since she started. Didn't even say nothing when I put the hobbles on her."

"I'm not questioning your judgment," said Miss Smith, "but she is so pitiable! She seemed to me like some dumb, frightened, wild creature caught in a trap. And despite what you say I'm sure she can't be mad. Please, may I speak with her again—if she herself doesn't mind?"

"I'm afeared it's too late," he said not unkindly. "We're slowing down for Peekskill now. I'll have to step lively as it is to get 'em off shipshape. But if you've still got any doubts left in your mind you can look up the court records at White Plains. You'll find everything's been done positively legal and regular. And if you should want to reach me any time to find out how she's getting along or anything like that, why my name is Abram Foley, care of Doctor Shorter."

He cast this farewell information back over his shoulder as he hurried from her.

Half convinced yet doubting still, and filled wholly with an overmastering pity, Miss Smith stood where she was while the train jerkily came to a standstill. There she stayed, watching, as the trio quitted the car. Past her where she stood the man Foley led the way, burdened with the heavy suitcase. Next came his charge, walking steadily erect, mercifully cloaked to her knees in the blue garment; and the matron, in turn behind her, bearing a hand bag and an odd parcel or two. About the departing group a casual onlooker would have sensed nothing unusual. But our Miss Smith, knowing what she did know, held a clenched hand to the lump that had formed in her throat. She was minded to speak in farewell to the prisoner, and yet a second impulse held her mute.

She fell in behind the three of them though, following as far as the platform, being minded to witness the last visible act of the tragedy upon which she had stumbled. Her eyes and her heart went with them as they crossed through the open shed of the station, the man still leading, the matron with one hand guiding their unresisting ward toward where a closed automobile, a sort of hybrid between a town car and an ambulance, was drawn up on the driveway just

beyond the eaves of the building. A driver in a gray livery opened the door of the car for its occupants.

Alongside the automobile the girl swung herself round, her head thrown back, as a felon might face about at the gateway of his prison—for a last view of the free world he was leaving behind. Seemingly the vigilant woman misinterpreted this movement as the first indication of a spirit of kindling obstinacy. Alarmed, she caught at the girl to restrain her. Her grasp closed upon the shoulder of the cape and as the wrenched garment came away in her hand the prisoner stood revealed in her bonds—a slim graceful figure, for all the disfigurement of the clumsy harness work which fettered her.

An instant later the cape had been replaced upon her shoulders, hiding her state from curious eyes, but in that same brief space of time she must have seen leaning from the train, which now again was in motion, the shape of her unknown champion, for she nodded her head as though in gratitude and good-by and her white face suddenly was lighted with what the passenger upon the car platform, seeing this through a sudden mist of tears, thought to be the bravest, most pitiable smile that ever she had seen.

The train doubled round an abrupt curve, in the sharpness of its swing almost throwing her off her feet, and when she had regained her balance and looked again the station was furlongs behind her, hidden from sight by intervening buildings.

It was that smile of farewell which acted as a flux to carry into the recipient's mind a resolution already forming. Into things her emotions were likely to lead her headlong and impetuously, but for a way out of them this somewhat unusual young woman named Smith generally had for her guide a certain clear quality of reasoning, backed by an intuition which helped her frequently to achieve satisfactory results. So it was with her in this instance.

Her share of the business in Troy completed, as speedily it was, she stayed in Albany for half a day on her way back and called upon the governor. At first sight he liked her, for her good looks, for her trigness, her directness and more than any of these for the excellent mental poise which so patently was a part of her. The outcome of her visit to him and his enthusiastic admiration for her was that the district attorney of Westchester County shortly thereafter instituted an investigation, the chief fruitage of that investigation being

embodied in a somewhat longish letter from him, which Miss Smith read in her studio apartment one afternoon perhaps three weeks after the date of her meeting on trainboard with that adjudged maniac, the girl Margaret Vinsolving.

To the letter was a polite preamble. She skipped it. We may do well to follow her lead and come to the body of it, which ran like this:

"Mrs. Janet Vinsolving is the widow of a colonel in our Regular Army. My information is that she is a woman of culture and refinement. Since the death of her husband some eight years ago she has been residing in a small home which she owns in the outskirts of Pleasantdale village in this county. From the fact that she keeps no servants and from other facts brought to me I gather that she is in very modest circumstances. She has been living quite alone except for the daughter, Margaret, who is her only child. The daughter was educated in the public schools of the county. Lately she has been studying applied designing with a view to becoming an interior decorator."

"Ah, now I know another reason why I was drawn to her!" interpolated the reader, speaking to herself. With heightened interest she read on:

"On inquiry it appears that among her former schoolmates and teachers she was popular, though not inclined to make intimates. She is reputed to have been rather high-tempered, but seemingly throughout her childhood and young girlhood there was nothing about her conduct or appearance to indicate a disordered mind. Indeed there was no suggestion of mental aberration on her part from any source until within the past month. However, I should add that it is rather hard to arrive at any accurate estimate of her general behavior by reason of the fact that mother and daughter led so secluded a life. They had acquaintances in the community, but apparently no close friends there or elsewhere.

"About four weeks ago, on the twenty-eighth of last month to be exact, the mother, described to me as being in a state of great distress, visited Justice Cannavan, then sitting in chambers at White Plains, and asking for a private interview with him, requested an inquiry into the sanity of the girl Margaret, with a view, as she explained, of protecting her own life. Her daughter, she alleged, had

without warning developed a homicidal tendency aimed at the applicant.

"According to Mrs. Vinsolving, the girl, who always theretofore had been a devoted and affectionate child, had made at least five separate and distinct attempts to kill her, first by putting poison into her food and later by attempting to strangle her at night in her bed. Next only to a natural desire to have her own physical safety insured, the mother was apparently inspired by a wish to surround the truth regarding her beloved child's aberration with as much secrecy as possible. At the same time she realized that a certain amount of publicity was inevitable.

"Acting under the statutes, the justice appointed two reputable practicing physicians of the county, namely Dr. Ernest Malt, of Wincorah, and Dr. James P. McGlore, of Pleasantdale, to sit as a commission for the purpose of inquiring into Miss Vinsolving's mental state. The mother, still exhibiting every evidence of maternal grief, appeared before these gentlemen and repeated in detail the account of the attacks made upon her, as previously described to His Honor.

"The girl was then brought before the commission. It was explained to her that under the law she had the right to demand a hearing in open court before a jury chosen to pass upon her sanity. This she waived, but from this point on throughout the inquiry she steadfastly declined to make answers to the questions propounded to her by the members of the commission in an effort to ascertain her mental status, but on the contrary persistently maintained a silence which they interpreted as a phase of insane cunning characteristic of a type of abnormality not often encountered, but in their opinion the more sinister and significant because of its rarity.

"They accordingly drew up a finding setting forth that in their opinion and deliberate judgment the unfortunate young woman was suffering from a progressive and therefore probably incurable form of dementia. The justice immediately signed the necessary orders for her detention and commitment. To save the daughter from being sent to a state institution the mother provided funds sufficient for her care at Doctor Shorter's sanitarium, an establishment of unimpeachable reputation, and she accordingly was taken there in proper custody, as you yourself are aware.

"My information from the sanitarium, which I procured in response to your request, and the governor's instructions to me for a full inquiry into all the circumstances is that since her confinement Miss Vinsolving has been under constant observation. She has been orderly and obedient and except for slightly melancholic tendencies, which might easily be provoked by the nature of her environment, is quite natural in her behavior. I draw the inference, however, that this docility may be merely the forerunner of an outburst at any time.

"Altogether my investigation convinces me that no miscarriage of the law could possibly have occurred in this instance. There is certainly no ground for suspecting that the mother had any ulterior or improper motive in seeking to have her daughter and sole companion deprived of liberty. Neither the mother nor any other person alive can hope to profit in a financial sense by reason of the girl's temporary or permanent detention.

"The girl herself is without means of her own. The mother for her maintenance is largely dependent upon the pension she receives from the United States Government. The girl had no income or estate of her own and no expectancy of any inheritance from any imaginable source other than the small estate she will legally inherit at the death of her mother. Finally I may add that nowhere in the case has there developed any suggestion of a scandal in the life of mother or daughter or of any clandestine love affair on the part of either.

"These briefly are the available facts as compiled by a trustworthy member of my staff, Assistant District Attorney Horace Wilkes, to whom I detailed the duty of making a painstaking inquiry. If I may hereafter be of service to you in this matter or any other matter, kindly command me. I have the honor to be,

"Yours etc., etc."

With a little gesture of despairful resignation Miss Smith laid the letter down. Well, there was nothing more she could do; nothing more to be done. She had come to a blind end. The proof was conclusive of the worst. But in her thoughts, waking and sleeping, persisted the image of that gallant, pathetic little figure which she had seen last at the Peekskill station, bound, helpless, alone and all

so courageously facing what to most of us would be worse than death itself. Awake or in sleep she could not get it out of her mind.

At length one night following on a day which for the greater part she had spent in a study of the somewhat curious laws that in New York State—as well as in divers other states of the Union—govern the procedure touching certain classes coming within purview of the code, she awoke in the little hours preceding the dawn to find herself saying aloud: "There's something wrong—there must be—there has to be!"

Until daylight and after she lay there planning a course of action until finally she had it completed. True, it was a grasping at feeble straws, but even so she meant to follow along the only course which seemed open to her.

First she did some long-distance telephoning. Then immediately after breakfast she sent to the garage round the corner for her runabout and in it she rode up through the city and on into Westchester, now beginning to flaunt the circus colors of a gorgeous Indian summer. An hour and a half of steady driving brought her to the village of Pleasantdale. She found it a place well named, seeing that it was tucked down in a cove among the hills between the Hudson on the one side and the Sound on the other.

Following the directions given her by a lone policeman on duty in the tiny public square, she ran two blocks along the main street and drew up where a window sign giving name and hours advertised that James P. McGlore, M.D., here professionally received patients in his office on the lower floor of his place of residence. A maidservant answered the caller's knock, and showing her into a chamber furnished like a parlor which had started out to be a reception room and then had tried—too late—to change back again into a parlor, bade her wait. She did not have long to wait. Almost immediately an inner door opened and in the opening appeared the short and blocky figure of a somewhat elderly, old-fashioned-looking man with a square homely face—a face which instantly she classified as belonging to a rather stupid, very dogmatic and utterly honest man. He had outjutting, belligerent eyebrows and a stubborn underjaw that was badly undershot. He spoke as he entered and his tone was noticeably not cordial.

"The girl tells me your name is Smith. I suppose from that you're the young person that the district attorney telephoned me about an hour or so ago. Well, how can I serve you?"

"Perhaps, doctor, the district attorney told you I had interested myself in the case of the Vinsolving girl—Margaret Vinsolving," she began. "I had intended to call also upon your associate, Doctor Malt, over at Wincorah, but I learn he is away."

"Yes, yes," he said with a sort of hurried petulance. "Know all about that. Malt's like a lot of these young new physicians—always running off on vacations. Mustn't hold me responsible for his absences. Got no time to think about the other fellow. Own affairs are enough—keep me busy. Well, go on, why don't you? You were speaking of the Vinsolving girl. Well, what of her?"

"I was saying that I had interested myself in her case and—"

He snapped in: "One moment. Let's get this all straightened out before we start. May I inquire if you are closely related to the young person in question?"

"I am not. I never saw her but once."

"Are you by any chance a close friend of the young woman?"

He towered over her, for she was seated and he had not offered to sit down. Indeed throughout the interview he remained standing.

Looking up at him, where he glowered above her, she answered back promptly:

"As I was saying, I never saw her but once—that was on the day she was carried away to be placed in confinement. So I cannot call myself her friend exactly, though I would like to be her friend. It was because of the sympathy which her position—and I might add, her personality—roused in me that I have taken the liberty of coming here to see you about her."

Under his breath he growled and grunted and puffed certain sounds. She caught the purport of at least two of the words.

"Pardon me, doctor," she said briskly, "but I am not an amateur philanthropist. I trust I'm not an amateur anything. I am a business woman earning my own living by my own labors and I pay taxes and for the past year or so I have been a citizen and a voter. Please do not regard me merely as an officious meddler—a busybody with nothing to do except to mind other people's affairs. It was quite by chance

that I came upon this poor child and learned something of her unhappy state."

The choleric brows went up like twin stress marks accenting unspoken skepticism.

"A child—of twenty-four?" he commented ironically.

"A child, measured by my age or yours. As I told you, I met her quite accidentally. She appealed to me so—such a plucky, helpless, friendless little thing she seemed with those hideous leather straps binding her."

"Do you mean to imply that she was being mistreated by those who had her in charge?"

"No, her escorts—or attendants or warders or guards or whatever one might call them—seemed kindly enough, according to their lights. But she was so quiet, so passive that I—"

"Well, would you expect anyone who felt a proper sense of responsibility to suffer dangerous maniacs to run at large without restraint or control of any sort upon their limbs and their actions?"

"But, doctor, that is just the point—are you so entirely sure that she is a dangerous maniac? That is what I want to ask you—whether there isn't a possibility, however remote, that a mistake may conceivably have been made? Please don't misunderstand me," she interjected quickly, seeing how he—already stiff and bristly—had at her words stiffened and bristled still more. "I do not mean to intimate that anything unethical has been done. In fact I am quite sure that everything has been quite ethical. And I am not questioning your professional standing or decrying your abilities.

"But as I understand it, neither you nor Doctor Malt is avowedly an alienist. I assume that neither of you has ever specialized in nervous or mental disorders. Such being the case, don't you agree with me—this idea has just occurred to me—that if an alienist, a man especially versed in these things rather than a general practitioner, however experienced and competent, were called in even now—"

"And you just said you were not reflecting upon my professional abilities!"

His tone was heavily sarcastic.

"Of course I am not! I beg your pardon if my poor choice of language has conveyed any such impression. What I am trying to get

at, doctor, in my inexpert way, is that I talked with this girl, and while I exchanged only a few words with her, nevertheless what she said—yes, and her bearing as well, her look, everything about her—impressed me as being entirely rational."

He fixed her with a hostile glare and at her he aimed a blunt gimlet of a forefinger.

"Are you quite sure you are entirely sane yourself?"

"I trust I am fairly normal."

"Got any little funny quirks in your brain? Any little temperamental crotchets in which you differ from the run of people round you? Think now!"

"Well," she confessed, "I don't like cats—I hate cats. And I don't like figured wall paper. And I don't like—"

"That will be sufficient. Take the first point: You hate cats. On that count alone any confirmed cat lover would regard you as being as crazy as a March hare. But until you start going round trying to kill other people's cats or trying to kill other people who own cats there's probably no danger that anyone will prefer charges of lunacy against you and have you locked up."

She smiled a little in spite of her earnestness.

"Perhaps it is symptomatic of a lesion in my brain that I should be concerning myself in the case of a strange girl whom I have seen but once—is that also in your thoughts, Doctor McGlore?"

"We'll waive that," he said. "For the sake of argument we'll concede that your indicative peculiarities assume a harmless phase at present. But this Vinsolving girl's case is different—hers were not harmless. Her acts were amply conclusive to establish proof of her mental condition."

"From the district attorney's statement to me I rather got the impression that she did not indulge in any abnormal conduct while before you for examination."

"Did he tell you of her blank refusal to answer the simplest of the questions my associate and I put to her?"

"Doctor," she countered, seeking to woo him into a better humor, "would you construe silence on a woman's part as necessarily a mark of insanity? It is a rare thing, I concede. But might it not sometimes be an admirable thing as well?"

But this gruff old man was not to be cajoled into pleasanter channels than the course his mood steered for him.

"We'll waive that too. Anyhow, the mother's evidence was enough."

"But was there anything else other than the mother's unsupported story for you to go on and be guided by?"

"What else was needed?" he retorted angrily. "What motive could the mother have except the motives that were prompted by mother love? That was a devoted, desolated woman if ever I saw one. Look here! A daughter without cause suddenly turns upon her mother and tries to kill her. Well, then, either she's turned criminal or she has gone crazy!

"But why should I go on debating with you a matter which you don't know anything about in the first place and in which you have no call to interfere in the second place?

"I don't want to be sharp with you, young woman, but that's the plain fact. The duty which I undertook under the law and as a reputable physician was not a pleasant one, and it becomes all the less pleasant when an unqualified layman—laywoman if you prefer to phrase it that way—cross-examines me on my judgment."

"Doctor, let me repeat again I have not sought to cross-question you or belittle your knowledge. But you speak of the law. Do you not think it a monstrous thing that two men even though they be of high standing in their profession as general practitioners, but without special acquaintance with mental derangements—I am not speaking of this particular case now but of hundreds of other cases—do you not think it a wrong thing that two such persons may pass upon a third person's sanity and upon the uncorroborated testimony of some fourth person recommend the confinement of the accused third person in an asylum for the insane?"

"I suppose you know a person so complained of—or accused, as you put it—has the right to a jury trial in open court. This girl that you're so worked up about had that right. She waived it."

"But is a presumably demented person a fit judge of his or her own best course of conduct? In your opinion shouldn't there be other safeguards in their interests to insure against what conceivably might be a terrible error or a terrible injustice?"

He didn't exactly sneer, but he indulged himself in the first cousin of a sneer.

"You've evidently been fortifying yourself to give me a battle—reading up on the subject, eh?"

"I've been reading up on the subject—not, though, for the purpose of entering into a joint debate on the subject with anyone. But, doctor, I have read enough to startle me. I never knew before there were such laws on the statute books. And I have learned about another case, the case of that rich man—a multimillionaire the papers called him, which means I suppose that at least he was well-to-do. You remember about him, I am sure? A commission declared him of unsound mind. He got away to another state where the legal processes of this state could not reach him. The courts of that other state declared him mentally competent and capable of managing his own affairs—and for a period of years he did manage them. Here the other month, under a pledge of safe conduct, he returned to New York on legal business and while he was here he carried his cause to a higher court and that court ruled him to be sane and entitled to his complete freedom of body and action. But for years he had been a pseudofugitive in enforced exile and for years he had carried the stigma of having been adjudged insane. This thing happened, incredible as it sounds. It might happen again to-day or to-morrow. It—"

"Excuse me for interrupting your flow of eloquence," he said with a labored politeness, "but I thought you came here to discuss the case of a girl named Vinsolving, not the case of a man I never heard of before. Now, at least I'm not going to discuss generalities with you and I'm not going to sit here and join with you in questioning the workings of the law either. The laws are good enough for me as they stand. I'm a law-abiding citizen, not one of these red-eyed socialistic Bolsheviks that are forever trying to tear down things. I believe in taking the laws as I find them. Let well enough alone—that's my motto, young woman. And there are a whole lot more like me in this country."

"Pardon me for breaking in on you, sir," she said, fighting hard to keep her temper, "but neither am I a socialist or a Bolshevik."

"Then I reckon probably you're one of these rampant suffragists. Anyhow, what's the use of discussing abstracts? If you don't like the law why don't you have it changed?"

"That's one of the very things I hope before long to try to do," she replied.

"It'll keep you pretty busy," he responded with a sniff of profound disapproval. "But then you seem to have a lot of spare time on your hands to spend in crusading round. Well, I haven't. I've got my patients to see to. One of 'em is waiting for me now—if you'll kindly excuse me?"

She rose.

"I'm sorry," she said sincerely, "if either my mission or my language has irritated you. I seem somehow to have defeated the purpose that brought me—I mean a faint hope that perhaps somehow I might help that girl. Something tells me—call it intuition or sentimentality or what you will—but something tells me I must keep on trying to help her. I only wish I could make you share my point of view."

"Well, you can't. Say, see here, why don't you go to see the mother? I judge she might convince you that you are on the wrong tack, even if I can't."

"That's exactly what I mean to do," she declared.

Something inside her brain gave a little jump. It was curious that she had not thought of it before; even more curious that his labored sarcasms had been required to set her on this new trail.

"Well, at that, you'd better think twice before you go," he retorted. "She was a mighty badly broken-up woman the last time I saw her, but even so I judge she's still got spunk enough left in her to resent having an unauthorized and uninvited stranger coming about, seeking to pry into her own private sorrow. But it's your affair, not mine. Besides, judging by everything, you probably don't think my advice is worth much anyhow."

"Oh, yes, but I do—I do indeed! And I thank you for it."

"Don't mention it! And good day!"

The slamming of the inner door behind him made an appropriate exclamation point to punctuate the brevity of his offended and

indignant departure. For a moment she felt like laughing outright. Then she felt like crying. Then she did neither. She left.

"Poor, old opinionated, stupid old, conscientious old thing!" she was saying to herself as she let herself, unattended, out of the front door. "And yet I'll wager he would sit up all night and work his fingers to the bone trying to save a life. And when it comes to serving poor people without expecting payment or even asking for it, I know he is a perfect dear. Besides, I should be grateful to him—he gave me an idea. I don't know where he got it from either—I don't believe he ever had so very many of his own."

Again the handy cop in the communal center set her upon her way. But when she came to the destination she sought—a small, rather shabby cottage standing a mile or so westward from the middle of things communal, out in the fringes of the village where outlying homesteads tailed away into avowed farmsteads—the house itself was closed up fast and tight. The shutters all were closely drawn and against the gatepost was fastened a newly painted sign reading: "For Sale or Rent. Apply to Searle, the Up-to-Date Real Estate Man, Next Door to Pythian Hall."

Not quite sure she had stopped at the right place, Miss Smith hailed a man pottering in a chrysanthemum bed in the yard of the adjoining cottage.

"Mrs. Vinsolving?" he said, lifting a tousled head above his palings. "Yessum, she lives there—leastwise she did. She moved away only the day before yesterday. Sort of sudden, I think it must have been. I didn't know she was going till she was gone." He grinned in extenuation of the unaccountable failure of a small-town man to acquaint himself with all available facts regarding a neighbor's private affairs. "But then she never wasn't much of a hand, Mrs. Vinsolving wasn't, for mixing with folks. I'll say she wasn't!"

Back she turned to seek out Searle, he of up-to-date real estate. In a dingy office upstairs over the local harness store a lean and rangy gentleman raised a brindled beard above a roll-top desk and in answer to her first question crisply remarked, "Can't tell."

"But surely if she put her property in your hands for disposal she must have given you some address where you might communicate with her?" pressed Miss Smith.

"Oh, yes, she done that all right, but that ain't the question you ast me first. You ast me if I could tell you where she was—and that I can't do."

"I see. Then I presume she left instructions with you not to give her present whereabouts to anyone?"

"Well, you might figger it out that way and mebbe not so far wrong," said the cryptic Mr. Searle. "But if you think you'd like to buy or rent her place I'm fully empowered to act. Got the keys right here and a car standing outside—take you right on out there in a jiffy if you say the word."

He rose up and followed her halfway down the steps, plainly torn between a desire to make a commission and a regret that under orders from his client he could furnish no details regarding her late movements.

"If you're interested in any other piece of property in this vicinity—" were the last words she heard floating down the stair well as she passed out upon the uneven sidewalk.

She knew exactly what she meant to do next. At sight of her badge, as shown to him through his wicketed window marked "General Delivery," the village postmaster gave her a number on a side street well up-town in New York, adding: "Going away, Mrs. Vinsolving particularly asked me not to tell anybody where her mail was to be sent on to. Kind of a secretive woman anyhow, she was, and besides she's had some very pressing trouble come on her lately. I presume you've heard something about that matter?"

She nodded.

"I suppose now," went on the postmaster, his features sharpening with curiosity, "that the Federal authorities ain't looking into that particular matter? Not that I care to know myself, but I just thought it wouldn't be any harm to ask."

"No," said Miss Smith, "I merely wanted to see her on a personal matter and I only let you see my credential in order to learn her forwarding address."

Provided with the requisite information, she figured that before night she would interview the widow or know good reasons why. That the other woman had quitted her home seemingly in a hurry and with efforts at secrecy gave zest to the quest and added a trace of bepuzzlement to it too. Even so, she did not herself know what she meant to say to the woman when she had found her in her present abiding place or what questions she would ask. Only she knew that an inner prompting stronger than any reasoned-out process drove her forward upon her vague and blinded mission. Fool's errand it might be—probably was—yet she meant to see it through.

But she had not reckoned upon the contingency that on this fine October forenoon, for the first time since buying his new touring car, Mr. Jake Goebel, shirt-waist manufacturer in a small way in Broome Street and head of a family in a large way in West One Hundred and Ninety-ninth Street, would be undertaking to drive the said car unaided and untutored by a more experienced charioteer on a trial spin up the Albany Post Road, accompanied—it being merely a five-passenger car—only by Mrs. Rosa Goebel, wife of the above, six little Goebels of assorted sizes and ages and Mrs. Goebel's unmated sister, Miss Freda Hirschfeld of Rivington Street. In Getty Square, Yonkers, about noontime occurred a head-on collision, the subsequent upshots of which were variously that divers of those figuring in the accident went in the following directions:

Miss Smith to a doctor's office near by to have a sprained wrist bandaged; and thence home in a hired automobile.

Her runabout to a Yonkers repair shop and garage.

Mr. Goebel, with lamentations, to the office of an attorney making a specialty of handling damage suits, thence home by train with the seven members of his family party, all uninjured as to their limbs and members but in a highly distracted state nervously.

Mr. Goebel's car to another repair shop and garage.

The traffic policeman on duty in Getty Square to the station house to make a report of the fifth smash-up personally officered by him within eight hours—on a Sunday his casualty list would have been longer, but this was a week day, when pleasure travel was less fraught with highway perilousness.

It so happened that Mullinix came to town from Washington next morning and, following his custom, rang up his unpaid but none the less valued aid to inquire whether he might come a-calling. No, he might not, Miss Smith being confined to her room with cold compresses on her injured wrist, but he might render a service for her if so minded—and he was. To him, then, over the wire Miss Smith stated her requirements.

"I want you please to go to this address"—giving it—"and see whether you find there a Mrs. Janet Vinsolving, a widow. I rather imagine the place may be a boarding house, though I won't be sure as to that. It will not be necessary for you to see her in person; in fact I'd rather you did not. What I want you to do is to learn whether she is still there, and if so how long she expects to stay there, and generally anything you can about her movements. She went there only three days ago and inasmuch as she has a reputation in her former home for keeping very much to herself this may be a more difficult job than it sounds. But do the best you can, won't you, and then notify me of the results by telephone? No, it is a personal affair—nothing to do with any of our official undertakings. I'll tell you more about it when I see you. I expect I shall be able to receive visitors in a day or two; just now I feel a bit shaken up and unstrung. That's all, and thank you ever so much."

Within an hour he had her on the telephone again.

"Hello!" she said. "Yes, this is Miss Smith. Oh, it's you, is it? Well, what luck?... Oh, so it was a boarding house, after all.... And you found her there?... No? Then where is she?... What? Where did you say? Bellevue!... I knew it, I knew it, something told me!... No, no, never mind my ravings! Go on, please, go on!... Yes, all right. Now then, listen please: You jump in a taxi and get here to my apartments as soon as you can. I'll be dressed and ready when you arrive to go over there with you.... What?... Oh, bother the doctor's instructions. It's only a sprain anyhow and I feel perfectly fit by now, honestly I do ... tell you I'd get up out of my dying bed to go.... Yes, indeed, it is important—much more important than you think! Come on for me, I'll be waiting."

When fifteen minutes later the perplexed Mullinix halted a taxi at the Deansworth Studio Building she was at the curbing, her left arm

in a sling and her eyes ablaze with barely controlled emotions. Before he could move to get out and help her in she was already in.

"Bellevue Hospital, psychopathic ward," he told the driver as she climbed nimbly inside.

As the taxi started she turned to Mullinix, demanding: "Now tell it to me all over again. When you are through, then I'll explain to you why I am so interested."

"Well," he said, "there isn't so very much to tell. The address you gave me turned out to be a boarding house just as you suspected it might—a second-rate place but apparently highly respectable, kept by a Mrs. Sheehan. It's been under the same management at the same place for a good many years. It wasn't very much trouble for me to find out what you wanted to know, because the whole place was in turmoil after what had happened just an hour or so before I got there. And when it developed that I had come to inquire about the cause of all the excitement every old-lady boarder in the house wanted to tell me about it all at the same time.

"It seems that three days ago this Mrs. Vinsolving applied at the place for room and board. Mrs. Sheehan vaguely remembered her as having been her guest for a short time ten or twelve years ago. At that time she was with her husband, Colonel Vinsolving, who it appears has since died, and a daughter about ten years or twelve years of age—a little girl with red hair, as Mrs. Sheehan recalls. This time, though, she came alone, carrying only hand baggage. Except that she seemed to be nervous and rather harassed and unhappy looking, there was nothing noticeably unusual about her. Mrs. Sheehan took her in willingly enough.

"She went straight to her room on the third floor and stayed there, having her meals brought up to her. But this morning early she went to the landlady and begged for protection, saying she was in fear of her life. Mrs. Sheehan very naturally inquired to know what was up—and then Mrs. Vinsolving told her this story:

"She said she had discovered a conspiracy to murder her, headed by—guess who? The late Kaiser, no less! She said that the Kaiser in disguise had escaped from Holland, leaving behind him in his recent place of exile over there a double made up to look like him, and was now in hiding in this country for the sole purpose of having Mrs.

Vinsolving assassinated in revenge, because her late husband, while an officer in the Army, had perfected a poison gas deadlier than any other known, which, being kept a secret by this Government and used against the German army in the war, had brought about the victory for our side and led to the overthrow of the Kaiser's outfit.

"She went on to say she had run away from some suburban town or other to hide in New York and that was why she had taken refuge at Mrs. Sheehan's, thinking she would be in safety. But now she knew the plotters had tracked her, because she had just detected that the maid who had been bringing up her meals to her was really a German agent, and acting under orders from the Kaiser had put poison into her food. All of which naturally surprised Mrs. Sheehan considerably, especially as the accused servant happened to be a perfectly reliable Finnish girl who has been working for Mrs. Sheehan for five years and who had two brothers in the Seventy-seventh Division overseas.

"It didn't take Mrs. Sheehan two minutes—she being a pretty level-headed person evidently—to see what ailed her new boarder. She managed to get Mrs. Vinsolving quieted down and get her back again into her room, and then she called in the policeman on the post and inside of an hour the woman had been smuggled out of the house and was on her way to Bellevue in an ambulance with a doctor and a policeman guarding her. But by that time, of course, the news had leaked out among the other boarders and the whole place was beginning to stew with excitement. It was still stewing when I got there.

"Well, as soon as you told me over the telephone that you were bent and determined on going to Bellevue, though I do not see why you should be in such a hurry about it and taking chances on setting up an inflammation in your injured arm, because even though you do know the poor crazed creature you can't be of any help—"

"I don't know her. I never saw her in my life."

"Then why—"

"That part can wait. I'll explain later. You were saying that as soon as you talked with me over the telephone you did something. What was it?"

"Oh, yes, I called up Doctor Steele, chief surgeon in the psychopathic ward, who happens to be a friend of mine and one of us besides"—he tapped the badge he wore under his coat lapel—"and told him I was bringing you down to see this woman, and he volunteered some information of the case in advance of your coming. I've forgotten just what he called the form of insanity which has seized her—it's a jaw-breaking Latin name—but anyhow, he said his preliminary diagnosis convinced him that it must have been coming on her for some time; that it was marked by delusions of persecution and by an exaggerated ego, causing its victims to imagine themselves the objects of plots engineered by the most distinguished personages, such as rulers and high dignitaries; and that while in this state a man or a woman suffering from this particular brand of lunacy was apt to shift his or her suspicion from one person to another—first perhaps accusing some perfectly harmless and well-meaning individual, who might be a relative or a near friend, and then nearly always progressing to the point in his or her madness where the charge was directed against some famous character."

"Did you hear anywhere any mention made of a daughter—the red-haired child of twelve years ago?" inquired Miss Smith.

"To be sure I did, but I'd forgotten about her," said Mullinix. "Mrs. Sheehan told me that somewhere in her excited narrative Mrs. Vinsolving did say something about the daughter. As nearly as I can recall, she told Mrs. Sheehan that five or six weeks ago, or some such matter, her daughter had tried to kill her and that she thought then the daughter had gone mad, but that now she knew the girl had joined the Kaiser's gang for pay. I made a mental note of this part of the rigmarole at the time Mrs. Sheehan was repeating it to me, and then it slipped my mind. But now putting that yarn alongside of what Doctor Steele tells me about the symptoms of the disease, I see the connection—first the daughter, then the strange servant girl and finally the Kaiser. But say, I wonder why the daughter hasn't been keeping some sort of a guard over the poor demented creature? What can she have been thinking about herself to let her mother go running foot-loose round the country, nursing these changing delusions?"

"She couldn't very well help herself," put in Miss Smith. "The daughter is in an asylum—put there five weeks ago on the mother's complaint."

"But heavens alive, how could that have happened?"

"Very easily—under the laws of this state," she answered grimly. Then speaking more quickly: "I've changed my mind about going to Bellevue with you. Please tell the driver to take me to the Grand Central Station. I don't know what train I'm going to catch, except that it's the next one leaving on the Hudson River Division for up state. You go on then, please, to the hospital and find out all you can about this case and call me on the long-distance to-night—no, that won't do either. I don't know where I'll be. I may be in Peekskill or in Albany—I can't say which. I tell you—I'll call you at eight o'clock; that will be better.

"No, no!" she went on impetuously, reading on his face the protest he meant to utter. "My wrist is well bandaged and giving me no pain. I'm thinking now of what a poor brave girl had on both her wrists when last I saw her and of what she must have been enduring since then. I'll explain the biggest chapter of the story to you on the way over before you drop me at the station."

At the Grand Central she left behind a thoroughly astonished gentleman. He was clear on some points which had been puzzling him from time to time during this exceedingly busy morning, but still much mystified to make out the meaning of Miss Smith's farewell remark as he put her aboard her train.

"I only wish one thing," she had said. "I only wish I might take the time to stop at the village of Pleasantdale and break the news to a certain Doctor McGlore who lives there. I trust I am not unduly cattish, but I dearly would love to watch the expression on his face when he heard it. I think I'd do it, too, if I were not starting on the most imperative errand that ever called me in my life."

A week later, to the day, two expected visitors were ushered into the private chamber of the governor at Albany—one of them a small, exceedingly well-groomed and good-looking woman in her thirties, and one a slender pretty girl with big brown eyes and wonderful auburn hair.

"Governor," said Miss Smith, "I want the pleasure of introducing to you the gamest girl in the whole world—Margaret Vinsolving."

He took the firm young hand she offered him. "Miss Vinsolving," he said, "in the name of the State of New York and on behalf of it I ask your forgiveness for the great and cruel wrong which unintentionally was done to you."

"And I want to thank you for what you have done for me, sir," she answered him simply.

"Don't thank me," he said. "You know the one to thank. If I had not set the machinery of my office in motion on your behalf within five minutes after your benefactress here reached me the other day I should have deserved impeachment. But I should never have lived to face impeachment. I'm sure the slightest sign of hesitation on my part would have been the signal for your advocate to brain me with my own inkstand." His face sobered. "But, my child, for my own information there are some things I want cleared up. Why in the face of the monstrous charges laid against you did you keep silent—that is one of the things I want to know?"

Before answering, the girl glanced inquiringly at her companion.

"Tell him," counseled Miss Smith.

Steadily the girl made answer.

"When my poor mother accused me of trying to kill her I realized for the first time that her mind had become affected. No one else, though, appeared to suspect the real truth. Perhaps this was because she seemed so normal on every other subject. So I decided to keep silent. I thought that if I were taken away from her for a while possibly the separation and with it the lifting of the imaginary fear of injury at my hands, which had upset her, might help her to regain her reason and no outsider be ever the wiser for it. I am young and strong; I believed I could bear the imprisonment without serious injury to me. I believe yet—for her sake—I could have borne it. And I knew—I realized what would happen to her if she were placed in such surroundings as I have been in and made to pass through such experiences as those through which I have passed. I felt that all hope of a cure for her would then be gone forever. And I love my mother." She faltered, her voice trembling a bit, then added: "That is why I kept silent, sir."

"But, my dear child," he said, "what a wrong thing for you to have done. It was a splendid, chivalrous, gallant sacrifice, but it was wrong. And if you don't mind I'd like to shake hands with you again."

"You see, sir, there was no one with whom I might advise in the emergency that came upon me without warning," she explained. "I had no confidante except my mother, and she—through madness—had turned against me. I had no friend then—I have one now, though."

And she went to Miss Smith and put her head on the elder woman's shoulder.

With her arms about the girl, Miss Smith addressed the governor.

"We are going away a while together for a rest," she told him. "We both need it. And when we come back she is going to join me in my work. Some day Margaret will be a better interior decorator than her teacher can ever hope to be."

"Then from now on, so far as you two are concerned, this ghastly thing should be only an unhappy dream which you'll strive to forget, I'm sure," he said. "It's all over and done with, isn't it?"

"Over and done with for her—yes," said Miss Smith. "But how about your duty as governor? How about my duty as a citizen? Shouldn't we each of us, you in your big way and I in my small way, work to bring about a reform in the statutes under which such errors are possible? Think, governor, of what happened to this child! It may happen again to-day or to-morrow to some other equally innocent sufferer. It might happen to any one of us—to me or to someone dear to you."

"Miss Smith," he stated, "if ever it happens to you I shall take the witness stand on your account and testify to two things: First, that you are the sanest human being in this state; and second, that you certainly do know how to play a hunch when you get one. If I had your intuition, plus my ambition, I wouldn't be governor—I'd be running for president. And I'd win out too!"

CHAPTER V

THE RAVELIN' WOLF

When the draft came to our town as it came to all towns it enmeshed Jeff Poindexter, who to look at him might be any age between twenty-one and forty-one. Jeff had a complexion admirably adapted for hiding the wear and tear of carking years and as for those telltale wrinkles which betray care he had none, seeing that care rarely abode with him for longer than twenty-four hours on a stretch. Did worry knock at the front door Jeff had a way of excusing himself out of the back window. But this dread thing they called a draft was a worry which just opened the door and walked right in—and outside the window stood a jealous Government, all organized to start a rookus if anybody so much as stepped sideways.

Jeff had no ambition to engage in the jar and crash of actual combat; neither did the idea of serving in a labor battalion overseas appeal to one of his habits. The uniform had its lure, to be sure, but the responsibilities presaged by the putting on of the uniform beguiled him not a whipstitch. Anyhow, his ways were the ways of peace. As a diplomat he had indubitable gifts; as a warrior he felt that he would be out of his proper element. So when answering a summons which was not to be disregarded Jeff appeared before the draft board he was not noticeably happy.

"Unmarried, eh?" inquired his chief inquisitor.

"Yas, suh—I means, naw, suh," stated Jeff. "I ain't never been much of a hand fur marryin' round."

He forced an ingratiating smile. The smile fell as seed on barren soil—fell and died there.

"Mother and father? Either one or both of them living?"

Never had Jeff looked more the orphan than as he stood there confessing himself one. He fumbled his hat in his hands.

"No dependents at all then, I take it?"

"Yas, suh, dey shorely is," answered Jeff smartly, hope rekindling within him.

"Well, who is it that you help support—if it's anybody?"

"Hit's Jedge Priest—tha's who. Jedge, he jes' natchelly couldn't git 'long noways 'thout me lookin' after him, suh. The older he git the more it seem lak he leans heavy on me."

"Well, Judge Priest may have to lean on himself for a while. Uncle Sam needs every able-bodied man he can get these times and you look to be as strong as a mule. Here, take this card and go on through that door yonder to the second room down the hall and let Doctor Dismukes look you over."

Jeff cheered up slightly. He knew Doctor Dismukes—knew him mighty well. In Doctor Dismukes' hands he would be in the hands of a friend. Beyond question the doctor would understand the situation as this strange and most unsympathetic white man undoubtedly did not.

But Doctor Dismukes, all snap and smartness, went over him as though he had never seen him before in all his life. If Jeff had been a horse for sale and the doctor a professional horse coper, scarcely could the examination have been carried forward with a more businesslike dispatch.

"Jeff," said the doctor when he had finished and the other was rearranging his wardrobe, "you ought to be ashamed of yourself for being so healthy. Take your teeth now—your teeth are splendid. I only wish I had a set like 'em."

"Is dey?" said Jeff despondently, for the first time in his life regretting his unblemished ivory.

"They certainly are. You wouldn't need a gun, not with those teeth you wouldn't—you could just naturally bite a German in two."

Jeff shivered. The very suggestion was abhorrent to his nature.

"Please suh, don't—don't talk lak that," he entreated. "I ain't cravin' to bite nobody a-tall, 'specially 'tis Germans. Live an' let live—tha's my sayin'."

"Yep," went on the doctor, prolonging the agony for the victim, "your teeth are perfect and your lungs are sound, your heart action is splendid and I know something about your appetite myself, having seen you eat. Black boy, listen to me! In every respect you are absolutely qualified physically to make a regular man-eating bearcat of a soldier"—he paused—"in every respect excepting one—no, two."

If a drowning man clutching for a straw might be imagined as coincidentally asking a question, it is highly probable he would ask it in the tone now used by Jeff.

"Meanin'—meanin' w'ich, suh?"

"I mean your feet. You've got flat feet, Jeff—you've got the flattest feet I ever saw. I don't understand it either. So far as I've been able to observe you've spent the greater part of your life sitting down. Somebody must have hit you on the head with an ax when you were standing on a plowshare and broke your arches down."

It was an old joke, but it fitted the present case, and Jeff, not to be outdone in politeness, laughed louder at it than its maker did. Indeed Jeff felt he had reason to laugh; a great load was lifting from his soul.

"Jeff," went on the doctor, "deeply though it may grieve both of us, it nevertheless is my painful duty to inform you that you have two perfectly good exemptions from military service—a right one and a left one. Now grab your hat and get out of here."

"Boss," cried Jeff, "Ise gone. Exemptions, tek me away frum yere!"

So while many others went away to fight or to learn how to fight, as the case might be, Jeff stayed behind and did his bit by remaining steadfastly cheerful. Never before, sartorially speaking, had he cut so splendid a figure as now when such numbers of young white gentlemen of his acquaintance were putting aside civilian garb to put on khaki. Jeff had one of those adaptable figures. The garments to which he fell heir might never have fitted their original owner, but always they would fit Jeff. Gorgeous in slightly worn but carefully refurbished raiment, he figured in the wartime activities of the colored population and in ostensibly helpful capacities figured in some of the activities of the white folks too.

Going among his own set his frequent companion was that straw-colored light of his social hours, Ophelia Stubblefield. It helped to reconcile Jeff to the rigors of the period of enforced rationing as he reflected that the same issues and causes which made lump sugar a rarity and fat meat a scarcity had rid him of his more dangerous competition in the quarter where his affections centered. Particularly on one account did he feel reconciled. A spirit of the most soothful resignation filled him when he gave thought to the

moral certainty that the most formidable and fearsome of his rivals, that bloody-minded bravo, Smooth Crumbaugh, would daunt him never again with threats of articular dismemberment with a new-honed razor. For Smooth Crumbaugh was gone and gone for good. First the draft had carried him away and then the pneumonia had carried him off. War had its compensations after all.

Wearing Ophelia upon one arm and wearing in the crook of the other a high hat which once had been the property of a young man now bossing an infantry battalion in the muddiest part of France, Jeff appeared prominently in the Armistice celebration at the First Ward Colored Baptist Church. Still so accoutered—Ophelia on his one hand and the high hat held in proper salute against his breast—he served upon the official reception committee headed by the Rev. Potiphar Grasty and by Prof. Rutherford B. H. Champers, principal of the Colored High School, which greeted the first returning squad of service men of color.

Home-comers who had been clear across the ocean brought back with them almost unbelievable but none the less fascinating accounts of life and customs in foreign parts. The tales these traveled ones had to tell were eagerly listened to and as eagerly passed along, dowered at each time of retelling with prodigal enlargements and amplifications the most generous.

A ferment of discontent began to stir under the surface of things; a sort of inarticulate rebellion against existing conditions, which presently manifested itself in small irritations at various points of contact with the white race. It was nothing tangible as yet, nothing upon which one might put a hand or cap with a word of comprehensive description. Indeed it had been working for weeks like a yeast in the minds of sundry black folk before their Caucasian neighbors began to sense it at all, and for this there was a reason easily understandable by anyone born and reared in any sizable town in any one of the older states lying below Mason and Dixon's Line. For in each such community there are two separate and distinct worlds—a black one and a white one—interrelated by necessities of civic coördination and in an economic sense measurably dependent one upon the other, and yet in many other aspects as far apart as the North Pole is from the South.

Regarding what the white world is feeling and thinking and saying, the lesser black world that is set down within it is nearly always better informed than is the other and larger group touching on new movements and growing sentiments amongst the darker-skinned factors. Into the white man's house, serving in this or that domestic capacity, goes the negro as an observant witness to the moods and emotions of his or her employer and bringing away an understanding of the family complexities and the current trend of opinion as it shapes itself beneath that roof.

But the white man, generally speaking, views the negro's private life only from the outside, and if he be a Southern-born white man, wise in his generation, seeks to look no further, for surface garrulity and surface exuberance do not deceive him, but serve only to make him realize all the more clearly that he is dealing with members of what at heart is one of the most secretive and sensitive of all the breeds of men. But since this started out to be the chronicle of an episode largely relating to Jeff Poindexter and one other and not a psychological study of actions and reactions as between the two most numerous races in this republic, it is perhaps as well that we should get on with our narrative.

If the leaven of unrest, vague and formless as it was at the outset, properly might be said to date from the time of the return of divers black veterans, it took on shape and substance after the advent of one Dr. J. Talbott Duvall, an individual engaging in manner, and in language, dress and deportment fascinating beyond degree; likewise an organizer by profession and a charmer of the opposite sex by reason of qualifications both natural and acquired.

A doctor he was, as witness the handle to his name, and yet a doctor of any known variety he was not. Confessedly he was no doctor of medicine, though his speech dripped gorgeous ear-filling Latin words which sounded as though they might be the names of difficult and sinister diseases; nor was he doctor of divinity, though speedily he proved himself to be at home in pulpits. He was not a horse doctor or a corn doctor or a conjure doctor or a root-and-herb doctor or a healer by faith or the laying on of hands. His title, it seemed, was his by virtue of a degree conferred upon him by a college—a white man's college—somewhere in the North. His accent was that of a traveled cosmopolite superimposed upon the speech of

a place away off somewhere called the West Indies. He had money and he spent it; he had a wardrobe of distinction and he wore it; he had a gift for argumentation and he exercised it; he had a way with the ladies and he used it. His coming had created a social furor; his subsequent ministrations amounted to what for lack of a better word is commonly called a sensation.

If there were those who from motives, let us say, of envy looked with the jaundiced eye of disfavor upon his mounting popularity and his constantly widening scope of influence they mainly kept their own counsel or at least refrained from voicing their private prejudices in public places. One gets fewer bumps traveling with the crowd than against it.

Even so bold a spirit and customarily so outspoken a speaker as Aunt Dilsey Turner, Judge Priest's black cook of many years' incumbency, saw fit somewhat to dissemble on the occasion of a call paid by Sister Eldora Menifee, who came dressed to kill and inspired by the zeal of the new convert to win yet other converts. Entering by way of the alley gate one fine forenoon, Sister Eldora found Aunt Dilsey sitting in the kitchen doorway hulling out a mess of late green peas newly picked from the house garden.

"Sist' Turner," began the visitor, "I hopes I ain't disturbin' you by runnin' in on you this mawnin'."

"Honey," said Aunt Dilsey, "you're jes' ez welcome ez day is frum night. Lemme fetch you a cheer out yere on the gallery." And she made as if to heave her vast comfortable bulk upright.

"No'm, set right where you is," begged Sister Menifee. "I ain't got only jes' a few minutes to stay. Things is mighty pressin' with me. I got quite a number of my lady frien's to see to-day an' you happens to be the fust one on de list."

"Is tha' so?" inquired Aunt Dilsey. Her tone was cordiality itself, but one less carried away by the enthusiasm of the mission which had brought her than Sister Eldora Menifee was might have caught a latent gleam of hostility in the elder woman's eye. "Well, go on, Ise lis'enin'."

"Well, Sist' Turner, ef you's heared 'bout de work I been doin' lately I reckin mebbe you kin guess whut brung me to yore do'. I is

solicitin' you fur yore fellership ez a reg'lar member of de ladies' auxiliary of de new s'ciety w'ich Doct' J. Talbott Duvall is got up."

"Meanin' perzactly w'ich s'ciety? Dis yere Doct' Duvall 'pears to be so busy gittin' up fust one thing an' then 'nother seems lak I ain't been able to keep track of his doin's, 'count of my bein' so slow gittin' round on my feet by reason of de rheumatism."

"Meanin' de Shinin' Star Cullid Uplift and Progress League—dat's de principalest activity in w'ich he's now engaged. De dues is one dollar down on 'nitiation an' twenty cents a week an'—"

"Wait jes' one minute, Sist' Menifee, ef you please. 'Fore we gits any furder 'long answer me dis one question Ise fixin' to ast you—do dis yere new lodge perpose to fune'lize de daid?"

"We ain't tuck up dat point yit; doubtless we'll come to de plans fur dat part later. Fur de time bein' de work is jes' to form de ladies' auxiliary an' git de main objec's set fo'th."

"Lis'en, chile. Me, I don't aim never so long as I lives an' keeps my reason to jine no lodge w'ich don't start out fust thing by fune'lizin' de daid. Ise thinkin' now of de case of dat pore shif'less Sist' Clarabelle Hardin dat used to live out yere on Plunkett's Hill. She up an' jined one of dese newfandangle' lodges w'ich didn't have nothin' to it but a fancy name an' a fancy strange nigger man runnin' it, an' right on top of dat she up an' died 'thout a cent to her back. An' you know whut happen den? Well, I'm gwine tell you. Dat pore chile laid round de house daid fur gwine on three days an' den she jes' natchelly had to git out to de cemetery de bes' way she could. Not fur me, honey, not fur me. Dey got to have de money in de bank waitin' an' ready to bury de fus' member dat passes frum dis life before dey gits a cent of mine."

"But dis yere lodge is gwine have a more 'portant puppose 'en jes' to fune'lize de daid," protested Sister Eldora. "We aims to do somethin' fur de livin' whilst yet dey's still alive. Curious you ain't tuck notice of de signs of de times ez dey's been expounded 'mongst de people by Doct' Duvall. He sho' kin 'splain things in a way to mek you a true believer." The advocate of the new order of things sank her voice to a discreet half whisper. "Sist' Turner, we aims at gittin' mo' of de rights dat's due us. We aims to see dat de pore an' de lowly an' de downtrodden-on is purtected in dey rights. We aims—"

"Num'mine whut you aims at—de question is, is you gwine be able hit whar you aims? An' lemme tell you somethin' more, Sist' Eldora Menifee. I ain't needin' no ladies' auxiliary to tell me whut my rights is. Neither I ain't needin' to pay out no twenty cents a week to find out neither. W'en it comes to dat, all de ladies' auxiliary w'ich I needs is jes' me, myse'f. I knows good an' well whut my rights is already an' Ise gwine have 'em, too, or somebody'll sho' git busted plum wide open. Mind you, I ain't sayin' nothin' 'ginst dis new man nur 'ginst dem w'ich chooses to follow 'long after his teachin's. Ise jes' sayin' dat so fur ez my jinin' in wid dis yere lodge is concern' you's wastin' yore breath. Better pass along, honey, to de nex' one on dat list of your'n, 'thout you's a mind to stay yere an' watch me dish up Jedge Priest's vittles fur 'im."

"Mebbe if Doct' Duvall wuz to come hisse'f an' mek manifest to you de high pupposes—" began Sister Eldora. But Aunt Dilsey cut her off short.

"Wouldn't mek no diffe'nce ef he come eighty times a day an' twice ez offen on Sunday. Anyway, I reckins my day fur jinin' things is done over."

There was a dead weight of finality in her words. She rose heavily. As Sister Menifee departed Aunt Dilsey became aware of the presence of Jeff Poindexter. He was emerging from behind the door.

"Been hidin' inside dat kitchen lis'enin', I s'pose?" demanded Aunt Dilsey.

"Couldn't help frum hearin'," admitted Jeff. It was evident that he was not deeply grieved over the failure of Sister Menifee to make headway against Aunt Dilsey's opposition. "At the last you suttinly give dat woman her marchin' orders, didn't you, Aunt Dilsey?"

"An' sech wuz my intention frum de start off," she confided. "Minute she come th'ough dat back gate yonder I knowed whut she wuz comin' fur an' I wuz set an' ready wid de words waitin' on de tip of my tongue."

"Me, I don't fancy dat Duvall neither," stated Jeff. "I ain't been sayin' much 'bout him one way or 'nother but I been doin' a heap o' steddyin'."

"Yas, I knows all 'bout dat too," snapped Aunt Dilsey. "I got eyes in my haid. You los' yore taste fur dis yere big-talkin', fine-lookin' man

jes ez soon ez he started sparkin' round dat tore-down limb of a 'Phelia Stubblefield. Whut ails you is you is jealous; hadn't been fur dat I lay you'd be runnin' round wid yore tongue hangin' out suckin' in ever'thing he sez ez de gospil truth same ez a lot of dese other weak-minded ones is doin'. Oh, I know you, boy, frum ze ground up! An' furthermo' I knows dis Doct' Duvall likewise also, even ef I ain't never seen him but oncet or twicet sence fust he come yere to dis town all dress' up lak a persidin' elder. I don't lak his looks an' I don't lak his ways, jedgin' by whut I hears of 'em frum dis one an' dat one, an' most in special I don't lak his color. He ain't clear brown lak whut I is, an' he ain't muddy black lak whut you is, neither he ain't high yaller lak some is. To me he looks most of all lak de ground side of a nickel wahtermelon. An' in all de goin' on sixty-two yeahs of my life I ain't never seen no pusson callin' theyselves Affikins dat had dat kind of a sickly greenish-yaller-whitish complexion but whut trouble come pourin' frum 'em sooner or later, an' most gin'rally sooner, lak manna pourin' from de gourd of de Prophet Jonah. Dat man is a ravelin' wolf, ef ever I seen one."

"Whut kind of a wolf did you say, Aunt Dilsey?" asked Jeff.

"Consult de Scriptures an' you won't be so ignunt," she answered crushingly. "Consult de Scriptures an' you'll read whar de ravelin' wolf come down on de fold, an' whut he done to de fold after he'd done come down on it wuz more'n aplenty. An' now, boy, you git on out of my kitchen an' go on 'bout yore business—ef you's got any business, w'ich I doubts. I ain't got no mo' time to waste on you den whut I is on dat flighty-haided Eldora Menifee, a-traipsin' round frum one back do' to 'nother with her talk 'bout ladies' auxiliaries an' gittin' yo rights fur a dollah down an' twenty cents a week."

Jeff faded away. It was comforting in a way to find Aunt Dilsey on his side, even though her manner rather indicated she resented the fact that he was on hers. A few evenings later he found out something else. He was made to know that in another and entirely unsuspected quarter the endeavors of the diligently crusading and organizing Duvall person had roused more than a passing curiosity.

One evening, supper being over, Judge Priest lingered on in his low-ceiled dining room smoking his corncob pipe while Jeff cleared away the supper dishes. It was the same high-voiced deliberately ungrammatical Judge Priest that the kindly reader may

recall—somewhat older than at last accounts, somewhat slower in his step—but then he never had been given to fast movements—and perhaps just a trifle balder.

"Wuz dey anythin' else you wanted, jedge, 'fore I locks up the back of the house an' lights out?" Jeff inquired when the table had been reset for breakfast.

"Yes, I think mebbe there wuz," drawled the old man. He hesitated a moment almost as though at a loss for a proper phrasing of the thing he meant to say next. Then: "Jeff, what's come over your race in this town here lately?"

"Meanin' w'ich, suh?" countered Jeff. "Me, I ain't notice nothin' out of the way—nothin' particular."

"Haven't you? Well, I think I have. Jeff, I don't want to be put in the position of pryin' into the private and the personal affairs of other folks, reguardless of color. I have to do enough of that sort of thing in my official capacity when I'm settin' in judgment up at the big cote house. But unless I can get some confidential information frum you I don't know where else I'm likely to git it, and at the same time I sort of feel as ef I should try to get hold of it somewheres or other ef it's humanly possible."

"Yas, suh."

"Now heretofore in this community the two races—white and black—have got along purty tolerably well together. We managed to put up with your shortcomings and you managed to put up with ours, which at times may have been considerable of a strain on both sides. Still we've done it. But it seems to me here of late there's been a kind of an undercurrent of discontent stirrin' amongst your people—and no logical reason fur it either, so fur as I kin see. Yet there it is.

"There wuz that rumpus two-three weeks ago down in Market Square. A little more and that affair could have growed into a first-class race riot. And here last Saturday night followed that mix-up out by the Union Depot when Policeman Gip Futtrell got all carved up and two darkies got purty extensively shot. And night before last the trouble that occurred on that Belt Line car out in Hollandville; that looked mighty threatenin', too, fur a while. And in between all these more serious things a lot of little unpleasantnesses

keep croppin' up—always takin' the form of friction between whites and blacks.

"One of these here occurrences might be what you'd call an accident and two of them in rapid succession a coincidence, but it looks to me like now it's gittin' to be a habit. It's leadin' to bad blood and what's worse it's leadin' to a lot of spilt blood and our city gittin' a bad name and all that.

"And I know the respectable black folks in this town don't want that to happen any more than the respectable white people do.

"Now then, Jeff, whut's at the bottom of all this—I mean on your side of the color line? Who's stirrin' up old grudges and kindlin' new ones? I've sort of got my own private suspicions, but I'd like to see ef your ideas run along with mine. Got any suggestions as to the underlying causes of this ill feelin' that's sprung up so lately and without any good reason for it either so fur ez I kin see?"

Now ordinarily Jeff would have held firmly to the doctrine that white folks should tend to their business and let black folks tend to theirs. For all his loyalty to his master, a certain race consciousness in him would have bade him keep hands off and tongue locked. But here a strong personal prejudice operated to steer Jeff away from what otherwise would have been his customary course.

"Jedge," he said, drawing a pace or two nearer his employer, "did you ever hear tell of a pale-yaller party w'ich calls hisse'f Doct' J. Talbott Duvall dat come yere a few weeks ago?"

"Ah, hah!" said the judge as though satisfied of the correctness of a prior conclusion. "I thought possibly my mind might be on the right track. Yes, I've heard of him and I've seen him. Whut of him?"

"Jedge, I trusts you won't tell nobody else whut I'm tellin' you, but dat's sho' de one dat's at the bottom of the whole mess. He's the one dat's plantin' the pizen. Me, I ain't had no truck wid him myse'f, but dat ain't sayin' I don't know whut he's doin', case I do. He calls hisse'f a organizer."

"Ah, hah! And whut is he organizin'?"

"Trouble, jedge. Dat's whut—trouble fur a lot of folks. Jedge, fo' we goes any further lemme ast you a coupler questions, please, suh. Is it true dat over dere in some of dem Youropean countries black folks is jes' the same ez white folks, ef not more so?"

Choosing his words, the old man elucidated his understanding of the social order as it prevailed in certain geographical divisions and subdivisions of the continent of Europe.

"Yas, suh, thanky, suh," said Jeff when the judge had finished. "I reckin mebbe one main trouble over dere is, jedge, dat dem folks ain't been raised de way you an' me is."

"Jeff," said the judge, "I'm inclined to think probably you're right."

"Yas, suh. Now den, jedge, here's one mo' thing. Is it true dat in all dem furrin countries—Russia an' Germany an' Bombay an' all—dat the po' people, w'ite or black or whutever dey color is, is fixin' to rise up in they might an' tek the money an' de gover'mint an' de fine houses an' the cream of ever'thing away frum dem dat's had it all 'long?"

Again the judge expounded at length, touching both upon upheavals abroad and on discords nearer home. Next it was Jeff's turn to make disclosures having a purely local application and he made them. Listening intently, Judge Priest puckered his bald brow into furrows of perplexity.

"Jeff," he said finally, "I'm much obliged to you fur tellin' me all this. It backs up what I'd sort of figgered out all by myself. The whole world appears to be engaged in standin' on its esteemed head at this writin'. I reckin when old Mister Kaiser turned loose the war he didn't stop to think that mebbe the war was only one of a whole crop of evils he wuz lettin' out of his box of tricks. Or mebbe he didn't care—bein' the kind of a person he wuz. And I'm prone to believe also that when the Germans stopped fightin' us with guns they begun fightin' us with other weapons almost as dangersome to our peace of mind and future well-bein'. Different parts of this country are in quite a swivet—agitators preachin' bad doctrine—some of 'em drawin' pay from secret enemies across the sea fur preachin' it, too, I figger—and a lot of highly disagreeable disturbances croppin' up here and there. But I was hopin' that mebbe our little corner of the world wouldn't be pestered. But now it looks ez ef we weren't goin' to escape our share of the trouble."

"Jedge," asked Jeff, "ain't they some way dis Duvall pusson could be fetched up in cote? I suttinly would admire to see dat yaller man wearin' a striped suit of clothes."

"Well, Jeff," said the judge, "I doubt either the legality or the propriety of such a step, ef you get what I mean. From whut you tell me I don't see where he's really broken any laws. He's got a right to come here and organize his societies and lodges and things so long as he don't actually come out in the open and preach violence. He's got a perfect right under the law to organize this here new drill company you speak about. I sometimes think that ef all the young men in this country had been required to do a little more drillin' in years gone by we'd be feelin' somewhat safer to-day. Anyway, it's a mighty great mistake sometimes to make a martyr out of a rascal. Puttin' him in jail, unless you're absolutely certain that a jail is where he properly belongs, gives him a chance to raise the cry of persecution and gives his followers an excuse to cut loose and smash up things. You git my drift, don't you?"

"Yas, suh, think I do. Well den, suh, ef I wuz runnin' dis town seems to me I'd git a crowd of strong-minded gen'elmen together some evenin' in the dark of the moon an' let 'em call on dis yere slick-haided half-strainer an' invite him to tek his foot in his hand an' marvil further. Ef one of 'em wuz totin' a rope in his hand sorter keerless lak it might help. Ropes is powerful influential. An' the sight of tar an' feathers meks a mighty strong argument, too, Ise heared tell."

"Jeff," said the judge, "I'm astonished that you'd even suggest sech a thing! Mob law is worse even than no law at all. Besides," he added—and now there was a small twinkle in his eye to offset to a degree the severity in his tones—"besides, the feller that was bein' called on by the committee might decline to take the hint and then purty soon you might have another self-made martyr on your hands. But ef he ran away on his own hook now—ef something came up that made him go of his own accord and go fast and cut a sort of a cheap figure in the eyes of his deluded followers whilst he was goin'—that'd be a different thing altogether. Start a crowd of folks, white or black or brown, to laughin' at a feller and they'll quit believin' in him. Worshipin' a false god and laughin' at him at the same time never has been successfully done yit."

He sucked his pipe. "Jeff," he resumed, "what do you know, ef anything, about the past career and movements of this here J. Talbott Et Cetery?"

Jeff knew a good deal—at second hand. Didn't the object of his deepest aversions persist in almost nightly calls upon the object of his deepest affections? Paying such calls, didn't the enemy spend hours—hours upon hours doubtless—pouring into Ophelia's ear accounts of his recent triumphs as an uplifter in other towns and other states? Didn't the fascinated and flattered Ophelia in turn recount these tales to one whose opportunities for traveling and seeing the great world had been more circumscribed? Had not Jeff writhed in jealous misery the while he heard the annals of a rival's successes? So Jeff made prompt answer.

"Yas, suh, I suttinly does. Ise heared a right smart 'bout dis yere Duvall's past life frum—frum somebody. 'Cordin' to the way he norrates it, he wuz in Nashville, Tennessee 'fore he come yere; an' 'fore dat in Mobile, Alabama; an' 'fore dat in Little Rock, Arkansaw. Seem lak w'en he ain't organizin' or speechifyin' he ain't got nothin' better to do den run round amongst young cullid gals braggin' 'bout the places he's been an' the things he done whilst in 'em."

Jeff spoke with an enhanced bitterness.

"I see. Then I take it ef he spends so much time in seekin' out female society that he's not a married man?"

"So he say—so he say! But, Jedge Priest, ef ever I looked on the spittin'-image of a natchel-born marryin' nigger, dat ver' same Duvall is de one."

Judge Priest seemed not to have heard this last. He sat for a bit apparently studying the tips of his square-toed, low-quarter shoes.

"Jeff," he said when he had given his feet a long half minute of seeming consideration, "I would like to know some facts about the previous life and general history of the individual we've been discussin'—I really would. In fact my curiosity is sech that I might even be willin' to spend a little money out of my own pocket, ef needs be, in order to find out. So I was jest wonderin' whether you wouldn't like to take a little trip, with all expenses paid, and tour round through some of our sister states and make a few private inquiries. It occurs to me that everything considered you might make a better job of it as an amateur investigator than a regular professional detective of a different color might. Do you know where by any chance you

could git hold of a good photograph of this here individual—I mean without lettin' him know anything about it?"

"Yas, suh, dat I does," stated Jeff briskly.

The conference between master and man lasted perhaps fifteen minutes longer before Jeff was dismissed for the night. Mainly it dealt with ways, means and purposes. Upon the heels of it, within forty-eight hours two events—seemingly nowise related or bearing one upon the other—occurred. An ornately framed photograph lately bestowed as a gift and treasured as a trophy of sentimental value mysteriously vanished from the mantelpiece of the front room of Ophelia Stubblefield's pa's house; and Jefferson Poindexter, carrying a new and very shiny suitcase, unostentatiously left town late at night on a southbound train.

Darktown in Nashville knew him for a brief space as a visiting nobleman with money in all his pockets and apparently nothing of importance to do except to spend it in divertisements suitable to the social instincts of a capitalist of leisure. In Mobile at the Elite Colored Beauty Parlors for the first time in his life he tendered his finger nails for ministrations at the hands of a dashing chocolate-ice-cream-colored manicurist and spent the remainder of that same afternoon in a sunny spot, glistening pleasantly.

If in both these cities and likewise in Little Rock, which next he favored with his presence, he made himself known to brothers of his particular lodge—the Afro-American Order of Supreme Kings of the Universe has a large and a widely distributed membership—and if under the sacred pledge of secrecy which only may be broken on pain of mutilation and death by torture he—with the aid of these fraternal allies of his—conducted certain discreet inquiries, why, that was his own private business. Assuredly, so far as surface indications counted, he appeared to have no business other than pleasurable pursuits. From Little Rock he turned his face southeastward, landing at Macon, Georgia, where he lingered on for upward of a week, breaking his visit only by a day's side trip to a smaller town south of Macon. Altogether Jeff was an absentee from his favorite haunts back home for the greater part of a month.

He reached town on a Monday. Betimes Tuesday morning, inspired outwardly by the zeal of one just won over from skepticism to the immediate advisability of following a sapient course, he

sought opportunity to become a member in good standing of the Shining Star Colored Uplift and Progress League, a simple ceremony and a brief, since it involved merely the signing of one's name on Dotted Line A of a printed form card and the paying of a dollar into the hand of Dr. J. Talbott Duvall. On Tuesday evening the league met in stated session at Hillman's Hall on Yazoo Street and Jeff was early on hand, visibly enthusiastic and professedly ready to do all within his power to further the aims and intents of the organization. As a brand snatched from the burning he was elevated before the eyes of the assemblage so that all might see him and mark his mien of newborn fervor, for Doctor Duvall, following his custom, called to places upon the platform the proselytes enrolled since the previous meeting, to the end that older members might observe the physical proof of a steady and a healthful growth.

So there sat Jefferson in the very front row of wooden chairs, where all might behold him and he might behold all and sundry. About him were his recent fellow converts. Almost directly behind him was a door giving upon a side entrance; there was another door serving similar purposes upon the opposite side of the stage. Beyond him to the left in the center of the stage were grouped the honorary officers of the league, flanking and supporting their chief.

Being an honorary officer carried with it, as the title might imply, honor and prominence second only to that enjoyed by the president-organizer, but it entailed no great weight of responsibility, since practically all the actual work of the league had from the very outset been generously assumed by Doctor Duvall. It was he who cared for the funds, he who handled disbursements, he who conducted the proceedings, he who made the principal addresses on meeting nights, he who between meetings labored without cessation to spread educational propaganda. That he found time for all these purposeful endeavors and yet crowded in such frequent opportunity for mingling socially among the lambs of his flock—notably the ewe lambs—was but evidence, accumulating daily, of his genius for leadership and direction.

This night the session opened with a prayer—by Doctor Duvall; an eloquent and a moving prayer indeed, its sonorous periods set off and adorned with noble big words and quotations in foreign tongues. The prayer would be followed, it had been announced, by

the reading of the minutes of the previous session, after which Doctor Duvall would speak at length with particular reference to things lately accomplished and the even more important things in contemplation for the near future.

Standing for the prayer, Jeff could look out over what a master of words before now has fitly described as a sea of upturned faces—faces black, brown and yellow. Had he been minded to give thought to details he might have noted how at every polysyllabic outburst from the inspired invocationist old Uncle Ike Fauntleroy, himself accounted a powerful hand at wrestling with sinners in prayer, was visibly jolted by admiration; might, if he had had a head for figures, have kept count of the hearty amens with which Sister Eldora Menifee punctuated each pause when Doctor Duvall was taking a fresh breath; might have cast a side glance upon Ophelia Stubblefield in a new and most becoming hat with ostrich plumage grandly surmounting it. But under the hand which he held reverently cupped over his brow Jeff's eyes were fixed upon a certain focal point,—to wit, the door of the main entrance at the length of the hall from him. It was as though Jeff waited for something or somebody he was expecting.

Nor did he have so very long to wait. The prayer was done and well done. In its wake, so to speak, there spouted up from every side veritable geysers of hallelujahs and amens. The honorary secretary, Brother Lemuel Diuguid, smelling grandly of expensive hair ointments—Brother Diuguid being by calling a head barber—stood up to read the minutes of the preceding regular session, and having read them sat down again. A friendly and flattering bustle of anticipation filled the body of the hall as Doctor Duvall rose and moved one pace forward and—raising a hand for silence—began to speak. But he had no more than begun, had progressed no farther than part way of his first smoothly launched sentence, when he was made to break off by an unseemly interruption at the rear. The honorary grand inner guard on duty at the far street door, after a brief and unsuccessful struggle with unseen forces, was observed to be shoved violently aside from his post. Bursting in together there entered two strangers—a tall yellow woman and a short black man, and both of them of a most grim and determined aspect. He moved fast, this man, but even so his companion moved faster still. She was

three paces ahead of him when, bulging impetuously past those who sprang into the center aisle as though to halt her onward rush—all others present being likewise up on their feet—she came to a halt near the middle of the hall and, glaring about her defiantly, just double-dog-dared any present to lay so much as the weight of one detaining finger upon her. There was something about her calculated to daunt the most willing of volunteer opponents, and so while those at a safe distance demanded the ejection of the intruders, those nearer her hesitated.

"Th'ow me out?" she whooped, echoing the words of outraged and startled members of the Shining Star. "I'd lak to see de one dat's gwine try it! An' 'fo' anybody talk 'bout th'owin' out lettum heah me whilst I sez my say!"

Towering until she seemed to increase in stature by inches, she aimed a long and bony finger dead ahead.

"Ax dat slinky yaller man up yonder on dat flatfo'm ef he gwine give de order to th'ow me out!" she clarioned in a voice which rose to a compelling shriek. "But fust off ax him whut he meant—marryin' me in Mobile, Alabama, an' den runnin' 'way frum his lawful wedded wife under cover of de night! Ax him—dat's all, ax him!"

"An' ax him one thing mo'!" It was the voice of her short companion rising above the tumult. "Ax him whut he done wid de funds of de s'ciety he 'stablished at Little Rock, Arkansaw, all of w'ich he absconded wid dis last spring!"

As though the same set of muscles controlled every neck the heads of all swung about, their eyes following where the accusers pointed, their ears twitching for the expected blast of denial and denunciation which would wither these mad and scandalous detractors in their tracks.

Alas and alackaday! With his splendid figure suddenly all diminished and shrunken, with distress writ large and plain upon his features, the popular idol was step by step flinching backward from the edge of the platform—was step by step inching, edging toward the side door in the right-hand wall.

And in this same instant the stunned assemblage realized that Jeff Poindexter, by nimble maneuvering, had thrust himself between the retreating figure and the exit, and Jeff was crying out: "Not dis way

out, Doct' Duvall. Not dis way! The one you married down below Macon is waitin' fur you behin' dis do'!"

The doctor stopped in midflight and swung about and his eye fell upon the right-hand door and he moved a yard or two in that direction; but no more than a yard or two, for again Jeff spoke in warning, halting him short:

"Not dat way neither! The one frum dat other town whar you uster live is waitin' outside dat do'—wid a pistil! Seems lak you's entirely s'rounded by wives dis evenin'!"

To the verge of the footlights the beset man darted, and like a desperate swimmer plunging from a foundering bark into a stormy sea he leaped far out and projected himself, a living catapult, along the middle aisle. He struck the tall yellow woman as the irresistible force strikes the supposedly immovable object of the scientists' age-old riddle, but on his side was impetus and on hers surprise. She was bowled over flat and her hands, clutching as she went down, closed, but on empty and unresisting air. Literally he hurdled over the stocky form of the little black man behind her, but as the other flitted by him the fists of the stranger knotted firmly into the skirts of its wearer's long black frock coat and held on. There was a rending, tearing sound and as the back breadth of the garment ripped bodily away from the waistband there flew forth from the capsized tail pockets a veritable cloudburst of currency—floating, fluttering green and yellow bills and with them pattering showers of dollars and halves and dimes and quarters and nickels.

That canny instinct which had led the fugitive apostle of the uplift to hide the collected funds of the league upon his person rather than trust to banks and strong boxes was to prove his ruination financially but his salvation physically. While those who had believed in him, now forgetting all else, scrambled for the scattered money—their money—he fled out of the unguarded door and was instantly gone into the shielding night—a sorry shape in a bob-tailed garment.

At a somewhat later hour Judge Priest in his living room was receiving from Jefferson Poindexter a much lengthier and more elaborated account of the main occurrences of the evening at Hillman's Hall than has here been presented. Speaking as he did in the dual rôle of spectator and of an actuating force in the events of

that crowded and exciting night, Jeff spared no details. He had come to the big scene of his narrative when his master interrupted him:

"Hold on a minute, Jeff! I don't know ez I get the straight of it all yit. I rather gathered frum whut you told me yesterday when you landed back home and made your report that you'd only been able to dig up one certain-sure wife of this feller's—the one that came along with you and that little Arkansaw darky. You didn't say anything then about bein' able to prove he wuz a bigamist."

"Huh, jedge, I didn't have to prove it! Dat man wuz more'n jes' a plain bigamist. He sho' wuz a trigamist, an' ef the full truth wuz knowed I 'spects he wuz a quadrupler at the very least. He proved it hisself—way he act' w'en the big 'splosion come."

"But the two women you told him were waitin' behind those side doors for him—how about them?"

"Law, jedge, dey wuzn't dere—neither one of 'em wuzn't. Jes' lak I told you yistiddy, I couldn't find only jest one woman dat nigger'd married an' run off frum, an' her I fetched 'long wid me. But lak I also told you, I got kind of traces of one dat uster live below Macon but w'ich is now vanished, an' ever'whar else I went whar he'd lived befo' he come yere de signs wuz manifold dat he wuz a natchel-born marryin' fool, jes' lak I 'spicioned fust time ever I see him. So w'en he started fur dat fust do' I taken a chancet on him an' w'en I seen how he cringed an' ducked back I taken another chancet on him, an' the subsequent evidences offers testimony dat both times I reckined right. Jedge, the late Doct' Duvall muster married some powerful rough-actin' gals in his time ef he thought the Mobile one wuz the gentlest out of three. Well, anyway, suh, the ravelin' wolf is gone frum us, an' fur one I ain't 'spectin' him back never no mo'. An' I reckin dat's the main pint wid you an' me both."

"The ravelin' whut?"

"Dat's whut Aunt Dilsey called him oncet, speechifyin' to me 'bout him—the ravelin' wolf. Only he suttinly did look he wuz comin' unraveled mighty fast the last I seen of him."

CHAPTER VI

"WORTH 10,000"

You might have called Vincent C. Marr a self-made man and be making no mistake about it. For he was self-made; not merely self-assembled, as so many men are who attain distinction in this profession or that calling. Entirely through his own efforts, with only his native wit to light the way for him, he had pulled himself up, step by step, from the very bottom of his trade to the very top of it. His trade was the applied trade of crookedness; his pursuit the pursuit of other folks' cash resources. He had the envy and admiration of his friends in allied branches of the same general industry; he had the begrudged respect of his official enemies, the police; while his accomplishments—the tricks he pulled, the coups he scored, the purses he garnered—were discussed and praised by the human nits and lice of the Seamy Side, just as the achievements in a legitimate field of a Hill or a Schwab or a Rockefeller might be talked of among petty shopkeepers and little business men. He had, as the phrase goes, everything—imagination, resource, ingenuity, audacity, utter ruthlessness.

Yet it would seem hard to conceive a more humble beginning than his had been. His father was a cobbler in a little West Virginia coal town. At sixteen he ran away from home to go with a small circus. This circus was a traveling shield for all manner of rough extortioners. Card sharps, shell workers, petermen, sneak thieves, pickpockets, even burglars rode its train. They had a saying that the owner of this show sold the safe-blowing privileges outright but retained a one-third interest in the hold-up concession. That was a whimsical exaggeration of what perhaps had a kern of truth in it. Certainly it was the fact of the case that the owner depended more upon his lion's cut of the swag which the trailing jackals amassed than upon the intake at the ticket windows. Bad weather might kill his business for a week; a crop failure might lame it for a month; but the graft was as sure as anything graftified can be. When the runaway youth, Vince Marr, inserted himself beneath the protecting wing of this patron he knew exactly whither his ultimate ambitions

tended. He had no vague boyish design to serve a 'prenticeship as stake driver or roustabout in the hope some day of graduating into a rider or a tumbler, a ringmaster or a clown. He joined out in order that among these congenial influences he might the quicker become an accomplished thief.

Starting as a novice he had to carve out his own little niche in company where the competition already was fierce. His rise, though, was rapid. So far as the records show he was the first of the Monday guys. He developed the line himself and gave to it its name. A Monday guy was a plunderer of clotheslines. He followed the route of the daily street parade; rather he followed a route running roughly parallel to it. He set out coincidentally with it and he aimed to have his pilfering stint finished when the parade was over. He prowled in alleys and skinned over back fences, progressing from house yard to house yard while the parade passed through the streets upon which the houses faced. From kitchen boilers and laundry heaps, from wash baskets and drying ropes, he skimmed the pick of what was offered—silk shirts, fancy hose, women's embroidered blouses, women's belaced under-things. His work was made comparatively easy for him, since the dwellers of the houses would be watching the parade.

His strippings he carried to the show lot and there he hid them away. That night in the privilege car the collections of the day would be disposed of by sale or trade to members of the troupe and the affiliated rogues. Especially desirable pieces might be reserved to be shipped on to a professional receiver of stolen goods in a certain city. Naturally, pickings were at their best on a Monday, for since Mother Eve on the first Monday hanged her fig leaf out to dry, Monday has been wash day the world over. Hence the name for the practitioner of the business.

Vince Marr did not very long remain a Monday guy. The risks were not very great, everything considered. Suppose detection did come; suppose the cry of "Stop thief!" was raised. Who would quit watching a circus parade to join in a hunt for a marauder already vanished in a maze of outbuildings and alleyways? Still there were risks to be taken, and the rewards on the whole were small and uncertain. Before he reached his nineteenth year young Marr was the manager of a weighing pitch. Apparently he had but one

associate in the enterprise; as a matter of fact he had four. In the place where holidaying crowds gathered—on a circus lot, at a street carnival, outside the gates of a county fair—he and his visible partner would set up his weighing device, and then stationing himself near it he would beseech you to let him guess your correct weight. If he guessed within three pounds of it, as recorded by the machine, you owed him a nickel; if he failed to guess within three pounds of it you owed him nothing. "Take a chance, brother!" he would entreat you with friendly jovial banter. "Be a sport—take a chance!" Let us say you accepted his proposition. Swiftly he would flip with his hands along your sides, would slap your flanks, would pinch you gently as though testing your flesh for solidity, then would call out loudly so that all within earshot might hear: "I figure that the gentleman weighs—let me see—exactly one hundred and forty-seven pounds." Or perhaps he would predict: "This big fellow will pull her down at two hundred and eight pounds, no more and no less." Then you placed yourself in the swinging seat of the machine with your feet clear of the earth, and his partner duly weighed you. Sometimes Marr guessed your weight; quite as often, though, he failed to come within three pounds of it and you paid him nothing for his pains. It was difficult to figure how so precarious a means of income could be made to yield a proper return unless the scales were dishonest.

The scales were honest enough. The real profits were derived from quite a different source. Three master dips—pickpockets—were waiting for you as you moved off; they attended to your case with neatness and dispatch. Their work was expedited for them by reason that already they knew where you carried your valuables. Once Marr ran his swift and practiced fingers over your body he knew where your watch was, your wallet, your purse for small change, your roll of bills.

A code word in his patter advertised to his confederates exactly whereabouts upon your person the treasure was carried. Really the business gave splendid returns. It was Marr, though, who had seized upon it when it merely was a catchpenny carnival device and made of it a real money earner. Moreover, the pickpockets took the real peril. Even in the infrequent event of the detection of them there was no evidence to justify the suspicion that the proprietors of the weighing machine were accessories to the pocket looting. Vince Marr

was like that—always playing safe for himself, always thinking a jump ahead of his crowd and a jump and a half ahead of the police.

He was never the one to get into a rut and stay there. Long before the old-time grafting circuses grew scarce and scarcer, and before the street-fairing concessions progressed out of their primitive beginnings into orderly and recognized organizations, he had quitted both fields for higher and more lucrative ramifications of his craft. Ask any old-time con man who ostensibly has reformed. If he tells you the truth—which is doubtful—he will tell you it was Chappy Marr who really evolved the fake foot-racing game, who patched up the leaks in the wireless wire-tapping game, who standardized at least two popular forms of the send game, who improved marvelously upon three differing versions of the pay-off game.

All the time he was perfecting himself in his profession, fitting himself for the practice of it in its highermost departments. He learned to tone down his wardrobe. He polished his manners until they had a gloss on them. He labored assiduously to correct his grammar, and so well succeeded at the task that except when he was among associates and relapsed into the argot of the breed, he used language fit for a college professor—fit for some college professors anyway. At thirty he was a glib, spry person with a fancy for gay housings. At forty-five, when he reached the top of his swing, he had the looks, the vocabulary and the presence of an educated and a traveled person.

He had one technical defect, if defect it might be called. In the larger affairs of his unhallowed business he displayed a mental adaptability, a talent to think quickly and shift his tactics to meet the suddenly arisen emergency, which was the envy of lesser underworld notables; but in smaller details of life he was prone to follow the line of least resistance, which is true of the most of us, honest and dishonest men the same. For instance, though he had half a dozen or more common aliases—names which he changed as he changed his collars—he pursued a certain fixed rule in choosing them, just as a man in picking out neckties might favor mixed weaves and varied patterns but stick always to the same general color scheme. He might be Vincent C. Marr, which was his proper name, or among intimates Chappy Marr. Then again he might be Col. Van Camp Morgan, of Louisiana; or Mr. Vance C. Michaels, a Western mine

owner; or Victor C. Morehead; he might be a Markham or a Murrill or a Marsh or a Murphy as the occasion and the rôle and his humor suited. Always, though, the initials were the same. Partly this was for convenience—the name was so much easier to remember then—but partly it was due to that instinct for ordered routine which in a reputable sphere of endeavor would have made this man rather conventional and methodical in his personal habits, however audacious and resourceful he might have been on his public side and his professional. He especially was lucky in that he never acquired any of those mouth-filling nicknames such as Paper Collar Joe wore, and Grand Central Pete and Appetite Willie and the Mitt-and-a-Half Kid and the late Soapy Smith—picturesque enough, all of them, but giving to the wearers thereof an undesirable prominence in newspapers and to that added extent curtailing their usefulness in their own special areas of operation.

Nor had he ever smelled the chloride-of-lime-and-circus-cage smell of the inside of a state's prison; no Bertillon sharp had on file his measurements and thumb prints, nor did any central office or detective bureau contain his rogues-gallery photograph. Times almost past counting he had been taken up on suspicion; more than once had been arrested on direct charges, and at least twice had been indicted. But because of connections with crooked lawyers and approachable politicians and venal police officials and because also of his own individual canniness, he always had escaped conviction and imprisonment. There was no stink of the stone hoosgow on his correctly tailored garments, and no barber other than one of his own choosing had ever shingled Chappy Marr's hair. Within reason, therefore, he was free to come and go, to bide and to tarry; and come and go at will he did until that unfortuitous hour when the affair of the wealthy Mrs. Propbridge and her husband came to pass.

When the period of post-wartime inflation came upon this country specialized thievery marched abreast with legitimate enterprise; with it as with the other, rewards became tremendously larger; small turnovers were regarded as puny and contemptible, and operators thought in terms of pyramiding thousands of dollars where before they had been glad to strive for speculative returns of hundreds. By now Chappy Marr had won his way to the forefront of his kind. The same intelligence invoked, the same energies exercised, and in

almost any proper field he would before this have been a rich man and an honored one. By his twisted code of ethics and unmorals, though, the dubious preëminence he enjoyed was ample reward. He stood forth from the ruck and run, a creator and a leader who could afford to pass by the lesser, more precarious games, with their prospect of uncertain takings, for the really big and important things. He was like a specialist who having won a prominent position may now say that he will accept only such patients as he pleases and treat only such cases as appeal to him.

This being so, there were open to him two especially favored lines: he might be a deep-sea fisherman, meaning by that a crooked card player traveling on ocean steamers; or he might be the head of a swell mob of blackmailers preying upon more or less polite society. For the first he had not the digital facility which was necessary; his fingers lacked the requisite deftness, however agile and flexible the brain which directed the fingers might be. So Chappy Marr turned his talents to blackmailing. Blackmailing plants had acquired a sudden vogue; nearly all the wise-cracking kings and queens of Marr's world had gone or were going into them. Moreover, blackmailing offered an opportunity for variety of scope and ingenuity in the mechanics of its workings which appealed mightily to a born originator. Finally there was a paramount consideration. Of all the tricks and devices at the command of the top-hole rogue it was the very safest to play. Ninety-nine times out of a hundred the victim had his social position or his business reputation to think of, else in the first place he would never have been picked on as a fit subject for victimizing. Therefore he was all the more disposed to pay and keep still, and pay again.

The bait in the trap of the average blackmailing plant is a woman—a young woman, good-looking, well groomed and smart. It is with her that the quarry is compromisingly entangled. But against women confederates Chappy Marr had a strong prejudice. They were such uncertain quantities; you never could depend upon them. They were emotional, temperamental; they let their sentimental attachments run away with their judgment; they fell in love, which was bad; they talked too much, which was worse; they were fickle-minded and jealous; they were given to falling out with male pals, and they had been known to carry a jealous grudge to the point

of turning informer. So he set his inventions to the task of evolving a blackmailing snare which might be set and sprung, and afterwards dismantled and hidden away without the intervention of the female knave of the species in any of its stages. Trust him—smooth as lubricating oil, a veritable human graphite—to turn the trick. He turned it.

The upshot was a lovely thing, almost foolproof and practically cop-proof. To be sure, a woman figured in it, but her part was that of the chosen prey, not the part of an accessory and accomplice. The greater simplicity of the device was attested by the fact that for its mounting, from beginning to end, only three active performers were needed. The chief rôle he would play. For his main supporting cast he needed two men, and knew moreover exactly where to find them. Of these two only one would show ever upon the stage. The other would bide out of sight behind the scenes, doing his share of the work, unsuspected, from under cover.

For the part which he intended her to take in his production—the part of dupe—Mrs. Justus Propbridge was, as one might say, made to order. Consider her qualifications: young, pretty, impressionable, vain and inexperienced; the second wife of a man who even in these times of suddenly inflated fortunes was reckoned to be rich; newly come out of the boundless West, bringing a bounding social ambition with her; spending money freely and having plenty more at command to spend when the present supply was gone; her name appearing frequently in those newspapers and those weekly and monthly magazines catering particularly to the so-called smart set, which is so called, one gathers, because it is not a set and is not particularly smart.

Young Mrs. Propbridge figured that her name was becoming tolerably well known along the Gold Coast of the North Atlantic Seaboard. It was too. For example, there was at least one person entirely unknown to her who kept a close tally of her comings and her goings, of her social activities, of her mode of daily life. This person was Vincent Marr. Thanks to the freedom with which a certain type of journal discusses the private and the public affairs of those men and women most commonly mentioned in its columns, he presently had in his mind a very clear picture of this lady, and he followed her movements, as reflected in print, with care and fidelity;

it was as though he had a deep personal interest in her. For a matter of fact, he did; he had a very personal interest in her. He had been doing this for months; in his trade, as in many others, patience was not only a virtue but a necessity. For example, he knew that her determined and persistent but somewhat crudely engineered campaigning to establish herself in what New York calls—with a big S—Society was the subject in some quarters of a somewhat thinly veiled derision; he knew that her husband was rather an elemental, not to say a primitive creature, but genuine and aboveboard and generous, as elemental beings are likely to be. Marr figured him to be of the jealous type. He hoped he was; it might simplify matters tremendously.

On a certain summer morning a paragraph appeared in at least three daily papers to the effect that Mr. and Mrs. Justus Propbridge had gone down to Gulf Stream City, on the Maryland coast; they would be at the Churchill-Fontenay there for a week or ten days. It was at his breakfast that Marr read this information. At noon, having in the meantime done a considerable amount of telephoning, he was on his way to the seaside too. Mentally he was shaking hands with himself in a warmly congratulatory way. Gulf Stream City was a place seemingly designed, both by Nature and by man, for the serving of his purposes.

Residing there were persons of his own kidney and persuasion, on whom he might count for at least one detail of invaluable coöperation. For a certain act of his piece, a short but highly important one, he also must have a borrowed stage setting and a supernumerary actor or so.

Immediately upon his arrival he sought out certain dependable individuals and put them through a rough rehearsal. This he did before he claimed the room he had engaged by wire at the Hotel Crofter. The Hotel Crofter snuggled its lesser bulk under an imposing flank of the supposedly exclusive and admittedly expensive Churchill-Fontenay. From its verandas one might command a view of the main entrance of the greater hotel.

It was on a Tuesday that the Propbridges reached Gulf Stream City. It was on Wednesday afternoon that the husband received a telegram, signed with the name of a business associate, calling him to Toledo for a conference—so the wire stated—upon an urgent

complication newly arisen. Mr. Propbridge, as all the world knew, was one of the heaviest stockholders and a member of the board of the Sonnesbein-Propbridge Tire Company, which, as the world likewise knew, had had tremendous dealings in contracts with the Government and now was having trouble closing up the loose ends of its wartime activities.

He packed a bag and caught a night train West. On the following morning, which would be Thursday, Mrs. Propbridge took a stroll on Gulf Stream City's famous boardwalk. It was rather a lonely stroll. She had no particular objective. It was too early in the day for a full display of vivid costumes among the bathers on the beach. She encountered no one she knew.

Really, for a resort so extensively advertised, Gulf Stream City was not a particularly exciting place. For lack of anything better to do she had halted to view the contents of a shop window when an exclamation of happy surprise from someone immediately behind her caused Mrs. Propbridge to turn around.

Immediately it was her turn to register astonishment. A tall, well-dressed, gray-haired man, a stranger to her, was taking possession of her right hand and shaking it warmly.

"Why, my dear Mrs. Watrous," he was saying, "how do you do? Well, this is an unexpected pleasure! When did you come down from Wilmington? And who is with you? And how long are you going to stay? General Dunlap and his daughter Claire—you know, the second daughter—and Mrs. Gordon-Tracy and Freddy Urb will be here in a little while. They'll be delighted to see you! Why, we'll have a reunion! Well, well, well!"

He had said all this with scarcely a pause for breath and without giving her an opportunity to speak, as though surprise made him disregardful of labial punctuation of his sentences. Indeed, Mrs. Propbridge did not succeed in getting her hand free from his grasp until he had uttered the final "well."

"You have the advantage of me," she said. "I do not know you. I am sure I never saw you before."

At this his sudden shift from cordiality to a look half incredulous, half embarrassed was almost comic.

"What?" he demanded, falling back a pace. "Surely this is Mrs. Beeman Watrous of Wilmington? I can't be mistaken!"

"But you are mistaken," she insisted; "very much mistaken. My name is not Watrous; my name is Propbridge."

"Madam," he cried, "I beg ten thousand pardons! Really, though, this is one of the most remarkable things I ever saw in my life—one of the most remarkable cases of resemblance, I mean. I am sure anyone would be deceived by it; that is my apology. In my own behalf, madam, I must tell you that you are an exact counterpart of someone I know—of Mrs. Beeman Watrous, a very good friend of mine. Pardon me once more, but may I ask if you are related to Mrs. Beeman Watrous? Her cousin perhaps? It isn't humanly possible that two persons should look so much alike and not be related?"

"I don't think I ever heard of the lady," stated Mrs. Propbridge somewhat coldly.

"Again, madam, please excuse me," he said. "I am very, very sorry to have annoyed you." He bowed his bared head and turned away. Then quickly he swung on his heel and returned to her, his hat again in his left hand.

"Madam," he said, "I am fearful that you are suspecting me of being one of the objectionable breed of he-flirts who infest this place. At the risk of being tiresome I must repeat once more that your wonderful resemblance to another person led me into this awkward error. My name, madam, is Murrill—Valentine C. Murrill—and I am sure that if you only had the time and the patience to bear with me I could find someone here—some acquaintance of yours perhaps—who would vouch for me and make it plain to you that I am not addicted to the habit of forcing myself upon strangers on the pretext that I have met them somewhere."

His manner was disarming. It was more than that; it was outright engaging. He was carefully groomed, smartly turned out; he had the manner and voice of a well-bred person. To Mrs. Propbridge he seemed a candid, courteous soul unduly distressed over a small matter.

"Please don't concern yourself about it," she said. "I didn't suspect you of being a professional masher; I was only rather startled, that's all."

"Thank you for telling me so," he said. "You take a load off my mind, I assure you. Pardon me again, please—but did I understand you to say a moment ago that your name was Propbridge?"

"Yes."

"It isn't a very common name. Surely you are not the Mrs. Propbridge?"

Without being in the least presuming he somehow had managed to convey a subtle tribute.

"I am Mrs. Justus Propbridge, if that is what you mean," she said.

"Well, then," he said in tones of relief, "that simplifies matters. Is your husband about, madam? If he is I will do myself the honor of introducing myself to him and repeating to him the explanation I have just made to you. You see, I am by way of being one of the small fish who circulate on the outer edge of the big sea where the large financial whales swim, and it is possible that he may have heard my name and may know who I am."

"My husband isn't here," she explained. "He was called away last night on business."

"Again my misfortune," he said.

They were in motion now; he had fallen into step alongside her as she moved on back up the boardwalk. Plainly her amazing resemblance to someone else was once more the uppermost subject in his mind. He went back to it.

"I've heard before now of dual personalities," he said, "but this is my first actual experience with a case of it. When I first saw you standing there with your back to me and even when you turned round facing me after I spoke to you, I was ready to swear that you were Mrs. Beeman Watrous. Look, manner, size, voice, hair, eyes—all identical. I know her very well too. I've been a guest at one or two of her house parties. It's curious that you never heard of her, Mrs. Propbridge; she's the widow of one of the Wilmington Watrouses—the firearms people, you know—guns, rifles, all that sort of thing—and he left her more millions than she knows what to do with."

Now Mrs. Propbridge had never heard of any Wilmington Watrouses, but plainly, here in the East they were persons of consequence—persons who would be worth knowing.

She nodded as though to indicate that now she did faintly recall who it was this kindly stranger had meant.

He went on. It was evident that he was inclined to be talkative. The impression was conveyed to her that here was a well-meaning but rather shallow-minded gentleman who was reasonably fond of the sound of his own voice. Yet about him was nothing to suggest over-effusiveness or familiarity.

"I've a sort of favor to ask of you," he said. "I've some friends who're motoring over to-day from Philadelphia. I had to run on down ahead of them to see a man on business. They're to join me in about an hour from now"—he consulted his watch—"and we're all driving back together to-night. General Dunlap and Mrs. Claire Denton, his daughter—she's the amateur tennis champion, you know—and Mrs. Gordon-Tracy, of Newport, and Freddy Urb, the writer—they're all in the party. And the favor I'm asking is that I may have the pleasure of presenting them to you—that is, of course, unless you already know them—so that I may enjoy the looks on their faces when they find out that you are not Mrs. Beeman Watrous. I know they'll behave as I did. They won't believe it at first. May I?"

What could Mrs. Propbridge do except consent? Indeed, inwardly she rejoiced at the prospect. She did not know personally the four named by this Mr. Murrill, but she knew mighty well who they were. What person familiar with the Social Register could fail to know who they were? Another thing had impressed her: The stranger had mentioned these notables with no especial emphasis on the names; but instead, quite casually and in a manner which carried with it the impression that such noted folk as Mrs. Denton and her distinguished father, and Freddy Urb the court jester of the innermost holies of holies of Newport and Bar Harbor and Palm Beach, and Mrs. Gordon-Tracy, the famous beauty, were of the sort with whom customarily he associated. Plainly here was a gentleman who not only belonged to the who's-who but had a very clear perception of the what-was-what. So fluttered little Mrs. Propbridge promptly said yes—said it with a gratified sensation in her heart.

"That's fine of you!" said Murrill, visibly elated. It would appear that small favors were to him great pleasures. "That's splendid! Up until now the joke of this thing has been on me. I want to transfer it

to them. I'm to meet them up here in the lounge of the Churchill-Fontenay."

"That's where I am stopping," said Mrs. Propbridge.

"Is it? Better and better! We might stroll along that way if you don't mind. By Jove, I've an idea! Suppose when they arrive they found us chatting together like old friends—suppose as they came up they were to overhear me calling you Mrs. Beeman Watrous. That would make the shock all the greater for them when they found out you really weren't Mrs. Watrous at all, but somebody they'd never seen before! Are you game for it?... Capital! Only, if we mean to do that we'll have to kill the time, some way, for forty or fifty minutes or so. Do you mind letting me bore you for a little while? I know it's unconventional—but I like to do the unconventional things when they don't make one conspicuous."

Mrs. Propbridge did not in the least mind. So they killed the time and it died a very agreeable death, barring one small incident. On Mr. Murrill's invitation they took a short turn in a double-seated roller chair, Mr. Murrill chatting briskly all the while and savoring his conversation with offhand reference to this well-known personage and that. At his suggestion they quit the wheel chair at a point well down the boardwalk to drink orangeades in a small glass-fronted café which faced the sea. He had heard somewhere, he said, that they made famous orangeades in this shop. They might try for themselves and find out.

The experiment was not entirely a success. To begin with, a waiter person—Mr. Murrill referred to him as a waiter person—sat them down near the front at a small, round table whose enamel top was decorated with two slopped glasses and a bottle one-third filled with wine gone stale. At least the stuff looked and smelled like wine—like a poor quality of champagne.

"Ugh!" said Mr. Murrill, tasting the air. "Somebody evidently couldn't wait until lunch time before he started his tippling. And I didn't suspect either that this place might be a bootlegging place in disguise. Well, since prohibition came in it's hard to find a resort shop anywhere where you can't buy bad liquor—if only you go about it the right way."

When the waiter person brought their order he bade him remove the bottle and the slopped glasses, and the waiter person obliged, but so sulkily and with such slowness of movement that Mr. Murrill was moved to speak to him rather sharply. Even so, the sullen functionary took his time about the thing. Nor did the orangeade prove particularly appetizing. Mr. Murrill barely tasted his.

"Shall we clear out?" he asked, making a fastidious little grimace.

At the door, on the way out, he made excuses.

"Sorry I suggested coming into this place," he said, sinking his voice. "Either it is a shop which has gone off badly or its merits have been overadvertised by its loving friends. To me the whole atmosphere of the establishment seemed rather dubious, eh, what? Well, what shall we do next? I see a few bathers down below. Shall we go down on the beach and find a place to sit and watch them for a bit?"

They went; and he found a bench in a quiet place under the shorings of the boardwalk close up alongside one of the lesser bathing pavilions, and they sat there, and he talked and she listened. The man had an endless fund of gossip about amusing and noted people; most of them, it would seem, were his intimates. Telling one or two incidents in which these distinguished friends had figured, he felt it expedient to sink his voice to a discreet undertone. There was plainly apparent a delicacy of feeling in this; one did not shout out the names of such persons for any curious passer-by to hear. It developed that there was one specially close bond between him and the members of General Dunlap's family, an attachment partly based upon old acquaintance and partly upon the fact that the Dunlaps thought he once upon a time had saved the life of the general's youngest daughter, Millicent.

"Really, though, it was nothing," he said deprecatingly, as befitted a modest and a mannerly man. "The thing came about like this: It was once when we were all out West together. We were spending a week at the Grand Cañon. One morning we took the Rim Drive over to Mohave Point. No doubt you know the spot? I was standing with Millicent on the outer edge of the cliff and we were looking down together into that tremendous void when all of a sudden she fainted dead away. Her heart isn't very strong—she isn't athletic as Claire, her older sister, and the other Dunlap girls are—and I suppose the

altitude got her. Luckily I was as close to her as I am to you now, and I saw her totter and I threw out my arms—pardon me—like this." He illustrated with movements of his arms. "And luckily I managed to catch her about the waist as she fell forward. I held on and dragged her back out of danger. Otherwise she would have dropped for no telling how many hundreds of feet. Of course it was only a chance that I happened to be touching elbows with the child, and naturally I only did what anyone would have done in the same circumstances, but the whole family were tremendously grateful and made a great pother over it. By the way, speaking of rescues, have you heard about the thing that happened to the two Van Norden girls at Bailey's Beach last week? I must tell you about that."

Presently they both were surprised to find that forty-five minutes had passed. Mr. Murrill said they had better be getting along; he made so bold as to venture the suggestion that possibly Mrs. Propbridge might want to go to her rooms before the automobile party arrived, to change her frock or something. Not that he personally thought she should change it. If he might be pardoned for saying so, he thought it a most becoming frock; but women were curious about such things, now honestly weren't they? And Mrs. Propbridge was constrained to confess that about such things women were curious. She had a conviction that if all things moved smoothly she presently would be urged to waive formality and join the party at luncheon. Mr. Murrill had not exactly put the idea into words yet, but she sensed that the thought of offering the invitation was in his mind. In any event the impending meeting called for efforts on her part to appear at her best.

"I believe I will run up to our rooms for a few minutes before your friends arrive," she said as they arose from the bench. "I want to freshen up a bit."

"Quite so," he assented.

He left her at the doors of the Churchill-Fontenay, saying he would idle about and watch for the others in case they should arrive ahead of time.

Ten minutes later, while she was still trying to make a choice between three frocks, her telephone rang. She answered the ring; it was Mr. Murrill, who was at the other end of the line. He was distressed to have to tell her that word had just reached him that on

the way down from Philadelphia General Dunlap had been taken suddenly ill—an attack of acute indigestion, perhaps, or possibly a touch of the sun—and the motor trip had been halted at a small town on the mainland fifteen miles back of Gulf Stream City. He was starting immediately for the town in a car with a physician. He trusted the general's indisposition was not really serious but of course the party would be called off; and the invalid would return to Philadelphia as soon as he felt well enough to move. He was awfully sorry—Mr. Murrill was—terribly put out, and all that sort of thing; hoped that another opportunity might be vouchsafed him of meeting Mrs. Propbridge; he had enjoyed tremendously meeting her under these unconventional circumstances; and now he must go.

It was not to be denied that young Mrs. Propbridge felt distinctly disappointed. The start of the little adventure had had promise in it. She had forecast all manner of agreeable contingencies as the probable outcome.

For some reason, though, or perhaps for no definite reason at all, she said nothing to her husband, on his return from Toledo, of her encounter with the agreeable Mr. Murrill. Anyway, he arrived in no very affable state of mind. As a matter of fact he was most terrifically out of temper. Somebody or other—presumably some ass of a practical joker, he figured, or possibly a person with a grudge against him who had curious methods of taking vengeance—had lured him into taking a hot, dusty, tiresome and entirely useless trip. There was no business conference on out at Toledo; no need for his presence there. If he could lay hands on the idiot who had sent him that forged telegram—well, the angered Mr. Propbridge indicated with a gesture of a large and knobby fist what he would do to the aforesaid idiot.

The next time Mr. Propbridge was haled to the broiling Corn Belt he made very sure that the warrant was genuine. One of these wild-goose chases a summer was quite enough for a man with a size-nineteen collar and a forty-six-inch waistband.

The next time befell some ten days after the Propbridges returned from the shore to their thirty-thousand-dollars-a-year apartment on Upper Park Avenue. The very fact that they did live in an apartment and that they did spend a good part of their time there would stamp them for what they were—persons not yet to be included among the

really fashionable group. The really fashionable maintained large homes which they occupied when they came to town to have dental work done or to launch a débutante daughter into society; the rest of the year they usually were elsewhere. It was the thing.

Business of importance sent Mr. Propbridge to Detroit, and then on to Chicago and Des Moines. On a certain afternoon he caught the Wolverine Limited. Almost before his train had passed One Hundred and Twenty-fifth Street Mrs. Propbridge had a caller. She was informed that a member of the staff of that live paper, People You Know, desired to see her for a few minutes. Persons of social consequence or persons who craved to be of social consequence did not often deny themselves to representatives of People You Know. Mrs. Propbridge told the switchboard girl downstairs to tell the hallman to invite the gentleman to come up.

He proved to be a somewhat older man than she had expected to see. He was well dressed enough, but about him was something hard and forbidding, almost formidable in fact. Yet there was a soothing, conciliatory tone in his voice when he spoke.

"Mrs. Propbridge," he began, "my name is Townsend. I am one of the editors of People You Know. I might have sent one of our reporters to see you, but in a matter so important—and so delicate as this one is—I felt it would be better if I came personally to have a little talk with you and get your side of the affair for publication."

"My side of what affair?" she asked, puzzled.

He lifted one lip in a cornerwise smile.

"Let me give you a little advice, Mrs. Propbridge," he said. "I've had a lot of experience in such matters as these. The interested parties will be better off if they're perfectly frank in talking to the press. Then all misunderstandings are avoided and everybody gets a fair deal in print. Don't you agree with me that I am right?"

"You may be right," she said, "but I haven't the least idea what you are talking about."

"I mean your trouble with your husband—if you force me to speak plainly; I'd like to have your statement, that's all."

"But I haven't had any trouble with my husband!" she said. Her amazement made her voice shrill. "My husband and I are living together in perfect happiness. You've made a mistake."

"No chance," he said, and suddenly his manner changed from the sympathetic to the accusing. "Mrs. Propbridge, we have exclusive advance information from reliable sources—a straight tip—that the proof against you is about to be turned over to your husband and we've every reason to believe that when he gets it in his hands he's going to sue you for divorce, naming as corespondent a certain middle-aged man. Do you mean to tell me you don't know anything about that?"

"Of course I mean to! Why, you're crazy! You're—"

"Wait just one minute please," he interrupted the distressed lady. "Wait until I get through telling you how much I know already; then you'll see that denials won't help you any. As a matter of fact we're ready now to go ahead and spring the story in next week's issue, but I thought it was only fair to come to you and give you a chance to make your defense in print—if you care to make one."

"I still tell you that you've made a terrible mistake," she declared. Her anger began to stir within her, as indignation succeeded to astonishment. "How dare you come here accusing me of doing anything wrong!"

"I'm accusing you of nothing. I'm only going by the plain evidence. I might be lying to you. Other people might lie to you. But, madam, photographs don't lie. That's why they're the best possible evidence in a divorce court. And I've seen the evidence. I've got it in my pocket right now."

"Evidence against me? Photographs of me?"

"Sure. Photographs of you and the gray-haired party." He reached in a breast pocket and brought out a thin sheaf of unmounted photographs and handed them to her. "Mrs. Propbridge, just take a look at these and then tell me if you blame me for assuming that there's bound to be trouble when your husband sees them?"

She looked, and her twirling brain told her it was all a nightmare, but her eyes told her it was not. Here were five photographs, enlarged snapshots apparently: One, a profile view, showing her standing on a boardwalk, her hand held in the hand of the man she had known as Valentine C. Murrill; one, a quartering view, revealing them riding together in a wheel chair, their heads close together, she smiling and he apparently whispering something of a pleasing and

confidential nature to her, the posture of both almost intimate; one, a side view, showing the pair of them emerging from an open-fronted café—she recognized the façade of the place where they had found the orangeades so disappointing—and in this picture Mr. Murrill had been caught by the camera as he was saying something of seeming mutual interest, for she was glancing up sidewise at him and he had lowered his head until his lips almost touched her ear; one, showing them sitting at a small round table with a wine bottle and glasses in front of them and behind them a background suggesting the interior of a rather shabby drinking place, a distinct impression of sordidness somehow conveyed; and one, a rear view, showing them upon a bench alongside a seemingly deserted wooden structure of some sort, and in this one the man had been snapped in the very act of putting his arms about her and drawing her toward him.

That was all—merely five oblong slips of chemically printed paper, and yet on the face of them they told a damning and a condemning story.

She stared at them, she who was absolutely innocent of thought or intent of wrong-doing, and could feel the fabric of her domestic life trembling before it came crashing down.

"Oh, but this is too horrible for words!" the distressed lady cried out. "How could anybody have been so cruel, so malicious, as to follow us and waylay us and catch us in these positions? It's monstrous!"

"Somebody did catch you, then, in compromising attitudes—you admit that?"

"You twist my words to give them a false meaning!" she exclaimed. "You are trying to trap me into saying something that would put me in a wrong light. I can explain—why, the whole thing is so simple when you understand."

"Suppose you do explain, then. Get me right, Mrs. Propbridge—I'm all for you in this affair. I want to give you the best of it from every standpoint."

So she explained, her words pouring forth in a torrent. She told him in such details as she recalled the entire history of her meeting with the vanished Mr. Murrill—how a doctored telegram sent her

husband away and left her alone, how Murrill had accosted her, and why and what followed—all of it she told him, withholding nothing.

He waited until she was through. Then he sped a bolt, watching her closely, for upon the way she took it much, from his viewpoint, depended.

"Well," he said, "if that's the way this thing happened and if you've told your husband about it"—he dragged his words just a trifle—"why should you be so worried, even if these pictures should reach him?"

Her look told him the shot had struck home. Inwardly he rejoiced, knowing, before she answered, what her answer would be.

"But I didn't tell him," she confessed, stricken with a new cause for concern. "I—I forgot to tell him."

"Oh, you forgot to tell him?" he repeated. Now suddenly he became a cross-examiner, snapping his questions at her, catching her up sharply in her replies. "And you say you never saw this Mr. Murrill—as you call him—before in all your life?"

"No."

"And you've never seen the mysterious stranger since?"

"There was nothing mysterious about him, I tell you. He was merely interesting."

"Anyhow, you've never seen him since?"

"No."

"Nor had any word from him other than that telephone talk you say you had with him?"

"No."

"Did you ever make any inquiries with a view to finding out whether there was such a person as this Mrs. Beeman Watrous?"

"No; why should I?"

"That's a question for you to decide. Did you think to look in the papers to see whether General Dunlap had really been taken ill on a motor trip?"

"No."

"Yet he's a well-known person. Surely you expected the papers would mention his illness?"

"It never occurred to me to look. I tell you there was nothing wrong about it. Why do you try to trip me up so?"

"Excuse me, I'm only trying to help you out of what looks like a pretty bad mess. But I've got to get the straight of it. Let me run over the points in your story: No sooner do you land in Gulf Stream City than your husband gets a faked-up telegram and goes away? And you are left all alone? And you go for a walk all by yourself? And a man you never laid eyes on before comes up to you and tells you that you look a lot like a friend of his, a certain very rich widow, Mrs. Watrous—somebody, though, that I for one never heard of, and I know the Social Register from cover to cover, and know something about Wilmington too. And on the strength of your imaginary resemblance to an imaginary somebody he introduced himself to you? And then you let him walk with you? And you let him whisper pleasant things in your ear? Two of those pictures that you've got in your hand prove that. And you let him take you into one of the most notorious blind tigers on the beach? And you sit there with him in this dump—this place with a shady reputation—"

"I've explained to you how that happened. We didn't stay there. We came right out."

"Let me go on, please. And you let him buy you wine there?"

"I've told you about that part, too—how the bottles and the glasses were already on the table when we sat down."

"I'm merely going by what the photographs tell, Mrs. Propbridge. I'm merely saying to you what a smart divorce lawyer would say to you if ever he got you on the witness stand; only he'd be trying to convict you by your own words and I'm trying to give you every chance to clear yourself. And then after that you go and sit with him—this perfect stranger—in a lonely place alongside a deserted bath house and nobody else in sight?"

"There were people bathing right in front of us all the time."

"Were there? Well, take a look at Photograph Number Five and see if it shows any bathers in sight. And he slips his arm around you and draws you to him?"

"I explained to you how that happened," protested the badgered, desperate woman. "No matter what the circumstances seem to be, I did nothing wrong, I tell you."

"All right, just as you say. Remember, I'm taking your side of it; I'm trying to be your friend. But here's the important thing for you to consider: With those pictures laid before them would any jury on earth believe your side of it? Would they believe you had no hand in sending your husband that faked-up telegram? Would they believe it wasn't a trick to get him away so you could keep an appointment with this man? Would any judge believe you? Would your friends believe you? Or would they all say that they never heard such a transparent cock-and-bull story in their lives?"

"Oh, oh!" she cried chokingly, and put her face in her hands. Then she threw up her head and stared at him out of her miserable eyes. "Where did those pictures come from? You say you believe in me, that you are willing to help me. Then tell me where they came from and who took them? And how did you manage to get hold of them?"

His baitings had carried her exactly to the desired place—the turning point, they call it in the vernacular of the confidence sharp. The rest should be easy.

"Mrs. Propbridge," he said, "you've been pretty frank with me. I'll be equally frank with you. Those pictures were brought to our office by the man who took them. I have his name and address, but am not at liberty to tell them to anyone. I don't know what his motives were in taking them; we did not ask him that either. We can't afford to question the motives of people who bring us these exclusive tips. We pay a fancy price for them and that lets us out. Besides, these photographs seemed to speak for themselves. So we paid him the price he asked for the use of them. Destroying these copies wouldn't help you any. That man still has the plates; he could print them over again. The only hope you've got is to get hold of those plates. And I'm afraid he'll ask a big price for them."

"How big a price?"

"That I couldn't say without seeing him. Knowing the sort of person he is, my guess is that he'd expect you to hand him over a good-sized chunk of money to begin with—as a proof of your intentions to do business with him. You'd have to pay him in cash; he'd be too wise to take a check. And then he might want so much apiece for each plate or he might insist on your paying him a lump sum for the whole lot. You see, what he evidently expects to do is to sell them to your husband, and he'd expect you at least to meet the

price your husband would have to pay. Any way you look at it he's got you at his mercy—and, as I see it, you'll probably have to come to his terms if you want to keep this thing a secret."

"Where is this man? You keep saying you want to serve me—can't you bring him to me?"

"I'm afraid he wouldn't come. If he's engaged in a shady business—if he's cooked up a deliberate scheme to trap you—he won't come near you. That's my guess. But if you are willing to trust me to act as your representative maybe the whole thing might be arranged and no one except us ever be the wiser for it."

Mrs. Propbridge being an average woman did what the average woman, thus cruelly circumstanced and sorely frightened and half frantic and lacking advice from honest folk, would do. She paid and she paid and she kept on paying. First off, it appeared the paper had to be recompensed for its initial outlay and for various vaguely explained incidental expenses which it had incurred in connection with the affair. Then, through Townsend, the unknown principal demanded that a larger sum should be handed over as an evidence of good faith on her part before he would consider further negotiations. This, though, turned out to be only the beginning of the extortion processes.

When, on this pretext and that, she had been mulcted of nearly fourteen thousand dollars, when her personal bank account had been exhausted, when most of her jewelry was secretly in pawn, when still she had not yet been given the telltale plates, but daily was being tortured by threats of exposure unless she surrendered yet more money, poor badgered beleaguered little Mrs. Propbridge, being an honest and a straightforward woman, took the course she should have taken at the outset. She went to her husband and she told him the truth. And he believed her.

He did not stop with believing her; he bestirred himself. He had money; he had the strength and the authority which money gives. He had something else—he had that powerful, intangible thing which among police officials and in the inner politics of city governments is variously known as a pull and a drag. Straightway he invoked it.

Of a sudden Chappy Marr was aware that he had made a grievous mistake. He had calculated to garner for himself a fat roll of the

Propbridge currency; had counted upon enjoying a continuing source of income for so long as the wife continued to hand over hush money. Deduct the cuts which went to Zach Traynor, alias Townsend, for playing the part of the magazine editor, and to Cheesy Mike Zaugbaum, that camera wizard of newspaper staff work turned crook's helper—Zaugbaum it was who had worked the trick of the photographs—and still the major share of the spoils due him ought, first and last, to run into five gratifying figures. On this he confidently had figured. He had not reckoned into the equation the possibility of invoking against him the Propbridge pull backed by the full force of this double-fisted, vengeful millionaire's rage. Indeed he never supposed that there might be any such pull. And here, practically without warning, he found his influence arrayed against an infinitely stronger influence, so that his counted for considerably less than nothing at all.

Still, there was a warning. He got away to Toronto. Traynor made Chicago and went into temporary seclusion there. Cheesy Zaugbaum lacked the luck of these two. As soon as Mrs. Propbridge had described the ingratiating Mr. Murrill and the obliging Mr. Townsend to M. J. Brock, head of the Brock private-detective agency, that astute but commonplace-appearing gentleman knew whom she meant. Knowing so much, it was not hard for him to add one to one and get three. He deduced who the third member of the triumvirate must be. Mr. Brock owed his preëminence in his trade to one outstanding faculty—he was an honest man who could think like a thief. Three hours after he concluded his first interview with the lady one of his operatives walked up behind Cheesy and tapped him on the shoulder and inquired of him whether he would go along nice and quiet for a talk with the boss or was inclined to make a fuss about it. In either event, so Cheesy was assured, he, could have his wish gratified. And Cheesy, who had the heart of a rabbit—a rabbit feeding on other folks' cabbage, but a timorous, nibbling bunny for all that—Cheesy, he went.

In Toronto Marr peaked and pined. He probably was safe enough for so long as he bided there; there had been no newspaper publicity, and he felt reasonably sure that openly, at least, the aid of regular police departments would not be set in motion against him; so he put the thoughts of arrest and extradition and such like unpleasant

contingencies out of his mind. But li'l' old N'York was his proper abiding place. The smell of its streets had a lure for him which no other city's streets had. His crowd was there—the folk who spoke his tongue and played his game. And there the gudgeons on which his sort fed schooled the thickest and carried the most savory fat on their bones as they skittered over the asphaltum shoals of the Main Stem.

For a month, emulating Uncle Remus' Brer Fox, he lay low, resisting the gnawing discontent that kept screening delectable visions of Broadway and the Upper Forties and Seventh Avenue before his homesick eyes. It was a real nostalgia from which he suffered. He endured it, though, with what patience he might lest a worse thing befall. And at the end of that month he went back to the big town; an overpowering temptation was the reason for his going. There had arisen a chance for a large turnover and a quick get-away again, with an attractively large sum to stay him and comfort him after he resumed his enforced exile. An emissary from the Gulwing mob ran up to Toronto and dangled the lure before his eyes.

Harbored in New York at the present moment was a beautiful prospect—a supremely credulous cattleman from the Far West, who had been playing the curb market. A crooks' tipster who was a clerk in a bucket shop downtown had for a price passed the word to the Gulwings, and the Gulwings—Sig and Alf—were intentful to strip the speculative Westerner before the curb took from him the delectable core of his bank roll. But the Gulwing organization, complete as it is in most essential details, lacked in its personnel for the moment a person of address to undertake the steering and the convincing—to worm a way into the good graces of the prospective quarry; to find out approximately about how much in dollars and cents he might reasonably be expected to yield, and then to stand by in the pose of a pretended fellow investor and fellow loser, while the cleaning up of the plunger was done by the competent but crude-mannered Messrs. Sigmund and Alfred Gulwing and their associates. For the important rôle of the convincer Marr was suited above all others. It was represented to him that he could slip back to town and, all the while keeping well under cover, rib up the customer to go, as the trade term has it, and then withdraw again to the Dominion. A price was fixed, based on a sliding scale, and Marr returned to New York.

Three days from the day he reached town the Westerner, whose name was Hartridge, lunched with him as his guest at the Roychester, a small, discreetly run hotel in Forty-sixth Street. After luncheon they sat down in the lobby for a smoke. For good and sufficient reasons Marr preferred as quiet a spot and as secluded a one as the lobby of the hotel might offer. He found it where a small red-leather sofa built for two stood in a sort of recess formed on one side by a jog in the wall and on the other side by the switchboard and the two booths which constituted the Roychester's public telephone equipment. To call the guest rooms one made use of an instrument on the clerk's desk, farther over to the left.

To this retreat Marr guided the big Oregonian. From it he had a fairly complete view of the lobby. This was essential since presently, if things went well or if they did not go well, he must privily give a designated signal for the benefit of a Gulwing underling, a lesser member of the mob, who was already on hand, standing off and on in the offing. Sitting there Marr was well protected from the view of persons passing through, bound to or from the grill room, the desk or the elevators. This also was as it should be. Better still, he was practically out of sight of those who might approach the telephone operator to enlist her services in securing outside calls. The outjutting furniture of her desk and the flanks of the nearermost pay booth hid him from them; only the top of the young woman's head was visible as she sat ten feet away, facing her perforated board.

The voices of her patrons came to him, and her voice as she repeated the numbers after them: "Greenwich 978, please."

"Larchmont 54 party J."

"Worth 9009, please, miss."

"Vanderbilt 100."

And so on and so forth, in a steady patter, like raindrops falling; but though he could hear he could not be seen. Altogether, the spot was, for his own purposes, admirably arranged.

So they sat and smoked, and pretty soon, the occasion and the conditions and the time being ripe, Marr outlined to his new friend Hartridge, on pledge of secrecy, a wonderfully safe and wonderfully simple plan for taking its ill-gotten money away from a Tenderloin pool room. Swiftly he sketched in the details; the opportunity, he

divulged in strict confidence, had just come to him. He confessed to having taken a great liking to Hartridge during their short acquaintance; Hartridge had impressed him as one who might be counted upon to know a good thing when he saw it, and so, inspired by these convictions, he was going to give Hartridge a chance to join him in the plunge and share with him the juicy proceeds. Besides, the more money risked the greater the killing. He himself had certain funds in hand, but more funds were needed if a real fortune was to be realized.

There was need, though, for prompt decision on the part of all concerned, because that very afternoon—in fact, within that same hour—there in the Roychester he was to meet, by appointment, the conniving manager of an uptown branch office of the telegraph company, who would coöperate in the undertaking and upon whose good offices in withholding flashed race results at Belmont Park until his fellow conspirators, acting on the information, could get their bets down upon the winners, depended the success of the venture. Only, strictly speaking, it would not be a venture at all, but a moral certainty, a cinch, the surest of all sure things. Guaranties against mischance entailing loss would be provided; he could promise his friend Hartridge that; and the telegraph manager, when he came shortly, would add further proof.

The question then was: Would Hartridge join him as a partner? And if so, about how much, in round figures, would Hartridge be willing to put up? He must know this in advance because he was prepared to match Hartridge's investment dollar for dollar.

And at that Hartridge, to Marr's most sincere discomfiture, shook his head.

"I'll tell you how it is with me," said Hartridge. "These broker fellows downtown have been touchin' me up purty hard. I guess this here New York game ain't exactly my game. I'm aimin' to close up what little deals I've still got on here and beat it back to God's country while I've still got a shirt on my back. I'm much obliged to you, Markham, for wantin' to take me into your scheme. It sounds good the way you tell it, but it seems like ever'thing round this burg sounds good till you test it out—and so I guess you better count me out and find yourself a partner somewheres else."

There was definiteness in his refusal; the shake of his head emphasized it too. Marr's rôle should have been the persuasive, the insistent, the argumentative, the cajoling; but Marr was distinctly out of temper.

Here he had ventured into danger to play for a fat purse and all he would get for his trouble and his pains and the risk he had run would be just those things—pains and trouble and risk—these, and nothing more nourishing.

"Oh, very well then, Hartridge," he said angrily, "if you haven't any confidence in me—if you can't see that this is a play that naturally can't go wrong—why, we'll let it drop."

"Oh, I've got confidence in you—" began Hartridge, but Marr, no patience left in him, cut him short.

"Looks like it, doesn't it?" he snapped. "Forget it! Let's talk about the weather."

He lifted his straw hat as though to ease its pressure upon his head and then settled it well down over his eyes. This was the sign to the Gulwings' messenger, watching him covertly from behind a newspaper over on the far side of the lobby, that the plan had failed. The signal he had so confidently expected to give—a trick of relighting his cigar and flipping the match into the air—would have conveyed to the watcher the information that all augured well. The latter's job then would have been to get up from his chair and step outside and bear the word to Sig Gulwing, who, letter-perfect in the part of the conspiring telegraph manager, would promptly enter and present himself to Marr, and by Marr be introduced to the Westerner. The hat-shifting device had been devised in the remote contingency of failure on Marr's part to win over the chosen victim. Plainly the collapse of the plot had been totally unexpected by the messenger. Over his paper he stared at Marr until Marr repeated the gesture. Then, fully convinced now that there had been no mistake, the messenger arose and headed for the door, the whole thing—signaling, duplicated signaling and all—having taken very much less time for its action than has here been required to describe it.

The signal bearer had taken perhaps five steps when Hartridge spoke words which instantly filled Marr with regret that he had been so impetuously prompt to take a no for a no.

"Say, hold your hosses, Markham," said Hartridge contritely. "Don't be in such a hurry! Come to think about it, I might go so far as to risk altogether as much, say, as eight or ten thousand dollars in this scheme of yours—I don't want to be a piker."

In the hundredth part of a second Marr's mind reacted; his brain was galvanized into speedy action. Ten thousand wasn't very much—not nearly so much as he had counted on—still, ten thousand dollars was ten thousand dollars; besides, if the Gulwings did their work cannily the ten thousand ought to be merely a starter, an initiation fee, really, for the victim. Once he was enmeshed, trust Sig and Alf to trim him to his underwear; the machinery of the wire-tapping game was geared for just that.

He must stop the departing messenger then, must make him understand that the wrong sign had been given and that the fish was nibbling the bait. Yet the messenger's back was to them; ten steps, fifteen steps more, and he would be out of the door.

For Marr suddenly to hail a man he was supposed not to know might be fatal; almost surely at this critical moment it would stir up suspicion in Hartridge's mind. Yet some way, somehow, at once, he must stop the word bearer. But how? That was it—how?

Ah, he had it! In the fraction of a moment he had it. It came to him now, fully formed, the shape of it conjured up out of that jumble of words which had been flowing to him from the telephone desk all the while he had been sitting there and which had registered subconsciously in his quick brain. The pause, naturally spaced, which fell between Hartridge's 'bout-faced concession and Marr's reply, was not unduly lengthened, yet in that flash of time Marr had analyzed the puzzle of the situation and had found the answer to it.

"Bully, Hartridge!" he exclaimed. "You'll never regret it. Our man ought to be here any minute now.... By Jove! That reminds me—I meant to telephone for some tickets for to-night's Follies—you're going with me as my guest. Just a moment!"

He got on his feet and as he came out of the corner and still was eight feet distant from the telephone girl, he called out loudly, as a

man might call whose hurried anxiety to get an important number made him careless of the pitch of his voice: "Worth 10,000! Worth 10,000!"

He feared to look toward the door—yet. For the moment he must seem concerned only with the hasty business of telephoning.

Annoyed by his shouting, the girl raised her head and stared at him as he came toward her.

"What's the excitement?" she demanded.

With enhanced vehemence he answered, putting on the key words all the emphasis he dared employ:

"I should think anybody in hearing could understand what I said and what I meant—*Worth 10,000*!"

He was alongside her now; he could risk a glance toward the door. He looked, and his heart rejoiced inside of him, for the messenger had swung about, as had half a dozen others, all arrested by the harshness of his words—and the messenger was staring at him. Marr gave the correct signal—with quick well-simulated nervousness drew a loose match from his waistcoat pocket, struck it, applied it to his cigar, then flipped the still burning match halfway across the floor. No need for him again to look—he knew the artifice had succeeded.

"Here's your number," said the affronted young woman. With a vicious little slam she stuck a metal plug into its proper hole.

Marr had not the least idea what concern or what individual owned Worth 10,000 for a telephone number. Nor did it concern him now. Even so, he must of course carry out the pretense which so well had served him in the emergency. He entered the booth, leaving the door open for Hartridge's benefit.

"Hello, hello!" he called into the transmitter. "This is V. C. Markham speaking. I want to speak to"—he uttered the first name which popped into his mind—"to George Spillane. Want to order some tickets for a show to-night." He paused a moment for the sake of the verities; then, paying no heed to the confused rejoinder coming to him from the other end of the wire, and improvising to round out his play, went on: "What's that?... Not there? Oh, very well! I'll call him later.... No, never mind, Spillane's the man I want. I'll call again."

He hung up the receiver. Out of the tail of his eye as he hung it up he saw Sig Gulwing just entering the hotel, in proper disguise for the character of the district telegraph manager with a grudge against pool rooms and a plan for making enough at one coup to enable him to quit his present job; the job was mythical, and the grudge, too—bits merely of the fraudulent drama now about to be played—but surely Gulwing was most solid and dependable and plausible looking. His make-up was perfect. To get here so soon after receiving the cue he must have been awaiting the word just outside the entrance. Gulwing was smart but he was not so smart as Marr—Marr exulted to himself. In high good humor, he dropped a dollar bill at the girl's elbow.

"Pay for the call out of that, miss, and keep the change," he said genially. "Sorry I was so boisterous just now."

Thirty minutes later, still radiating gratification, Marr stood at the cigar stand making a discriminating choice of the best in the humidor of imported goods. Gulwing and Hartridge were over there on the sofa, cheek by jowl, and all was going well.

Half aloud, to himself, he said, smiling in prime content: "Well, I guess I'm bad!"

"I guess you are!" said a voice right in his ear; "and you're due to be worse, Chappy, old boy—much worse!"

The smile slipped. He turned his head and looked into the complacent, chubby face and the pleased eyes of M. J. Brock, head of Brock's Detective Agency—the man of all men in this world he wished least to see. For once, anyhow, in his life Marr was shaken, and showed it.

"That's all right, Chappy," said Brock soothingly, rocking his short plump figure on his heels; "there won't be any rough stuff. I've got a cop off the corner who's waiting outside if I should need him—in case of a jam—but I guess we won't need him, will we? You'll go along with me nice and friendly in a taxicab, won't you?" He flirted his thumb over his shoulder. "And you needn't bother about Gulwing either. I've seen him—saw him as soon as I came in. I guess he'll be seeing me in a minute, too, and then he'll suddenly remember where it was he left his umbrella and take it on the hop."

Marr said not a word. Brock rattled on in high spirits, still maintaining that cat-with-a-mouse attitude which was characteristic of him.

"Never mind worrying about old pal Gulwing—I don't want him now. You're the one you'd better be worrying about; because that's going to be a mighty long taxi ride that you're going to take with me, Chappy—fifteen minutes to get there, say, and anywhere from five to ten years to get back—or I miss my guess.... Yes, Chappy, you're nailed with the goods this time. Propbridge is going through; his wife too. They'll go to court; they'll shove the case. And Cheesy Zaugbaum has come clean. Oh, I guess it's curtains for you all right, all right."

"You don't exactly hate yourself, do you?" gibed Marr. "Sort of pleased with yourself?"

"Not so much pleased with myself as disappointed in you, Chappy," countered the exultant Brock. "I figured you were different from the rest of your crowd, maybe; but it turns out you're like all the others—you will do your thinking in a groove." He shook his head in mock sorrow. "Chappy, tell me—not that it makes any difference particularly, but just to satisfy my curiosity—curiosity being my business, as you might say—what number was it you called up from here about thirty minutes back? Come on. The young lady over yonder will tell me if you don't. Was it Worth 10,000?"

"Yes," said Marr, "it was."

"I thought so," said Brock. "I guessed as much. But say Chappy, that's the trunk number of the Herald. Before this you never were the one to try to break into the newspapers on your own hook. What did you want with that number?"

"That's my business," said Marr.

"Have it your way," assented Brock with ironic mildness. "Now, Chappy, follow me a minute and you'll see how you dished your own beans: You call up Worth 10,000—that's a private matter, as you say. But Central gets the call twisted and gives you another number—that's a mistake. And the number she happens to give you is the number of my new branch office down in the financial district—that's an accident. And the fellow who answers the call at my shop happens to be Costigan, my chief assistant, who's been working on the Propbridge case for five weeks now—and that's a

coincidence. He doesn't recognize your voice over the wire—that would be luck. But when, like a saphead, you pull your new moniker, but with the same old initials hitched to it, and when on top of that you ask for George Spillane, which is Cheesy by his most popular alias—when you do these things, why Chappy, it's your own fault.

"Because Costigan is on then, bigger than a house. You've tipped him your hand, see? And with our connections it's easy—and quick—for Costigan to trace the call to this hotel. And inside of two minutes after that he has me on the wire at my uptown office over here in West Fortieth. And here I am; as a matter of fact, I've been here all of fifteen minutes.

"It all proves one thing to me, Chappy. You're wiser than the run of 'em, but you've got your weak spot, and now I know what it is: You think in a groove, Chappy, and this time, by looking at the far end of the groove, you can see little old Warble-Twice-on-the-Hudson looming up. And you won't have to look very hard to see it, either.... Well, I see Gulwing has taken a tumble to himself and has gone on a run to look for his umbrella. Suppose we start on our little taxi ride, old groove thinker?"

CHAPTER VII

MR. LOBEL'S APOPLEXY

The real purpose of this is to tell about Mr. Lobel's attack of apoplexy. What comes before must necessarily be in its nature preliminary and preparatory, leading up to the climactic stroke which leaves the distinguished victim stretched upon the bed of affliction.

First let us introduce our principal. Reader, meet Mr. Max Lobel, president of Lobel Masterfilms, Inc., also its founder, its chief stockholder and its general manager. He is a short, broad, thick, globular man and a bald one, wearing gold-rimmed spectacles, carrying a gold-headed cane and using a private gold-mounted toothpick after meals. His collars are of that old-fashioned open-faced kind such as our fathers and Mr. John D. Rockefeller, Sr., used to wear; collars rearing at the back but shorn widely away in front to show two things—namely, the Adam's apple and that Mr. Lobel is conservative. But for his neckwear he patronizes those shops where ties are exclusively referred to as *scarves* and cost from five dollars apiece up, which proves also he is progressive and keeps abreast of the times. When he walks he favors his feet. Mostly, though, he rides in as good a car as domestic currency can buy in foreign marts.

Aside from his consuming desire to turn out those surpassing achievements of the cellular-cinema art known as Lobel's Masterfilms, he has in life two great passions, one personal in its character, the other national in its scope—the first a craving for fancy waistcoats, the second a yearning to see the name of Max Lobel in print as often as possible and in as large letters as likewise is possible; and for either of these is a plausible explanation. Mr. Lobel has a figure excellently shaped for presenting the patternings of a fanciful stomacher to the world and up until a few years ago there were few occasions when he might hope to see the name Lobel in print. For, know you, Mr. Lobel has not always been in the moving-picture business. Nobody in the moving-picture business has always been in the moving-picture business—excepting some of

the child wonders under ten years of age. And ten years ago our hero was the M. Lobel Company, cloak and suit jobbers in rather an inconspicuous Eastern town.

What was true of him as regards his comparatively recent advent into the producing and distributing fields was true of his major associates. Back in 1911 the vice president and second in command, Mr. F. X. Quinlan, moved upward into a struggling infantile industry via the stepping-stone of what in the vernacular of his former calling is known as a mitt joint—summers at Coney, winters in store pitches—where he guided the professional destinies of Madame Zaharat, the Egyptian seeress, in private, then as now, Mrs. F. X. Quinlan née Clardy.

The treasurer and secretary, Mr. Simeon Geltfin, had once upon a time been proprietor of the Ne Plus Ultra Misfit Clothing Parlors at Utica, New York, a place where secondhand habiliments, scoured and ironed, dangled luringly in show windows bearing such enticing labels as "Tailor's Sample—Nobby—$9.80," "Bargain—Take Me Home For $5.60," and "These Trousers Were Uncalled For—$2.75."

The premier director, Mr. Bertram Colfax, numbered not one but two chrysalis changes in his career. In the grub stage, as it were, he had begun life as Lemuel Sims, a very grubby grub indeed, becoming Colfax at the same time he became property man for a repertoire troupe playing county-fair weeks in the Middle West.

As for the scenario editor and continuity writer, he in a prior condition of life had solicited advertisements for a trade journal. So it went right down the line.

At the time of the beginning of this narrative Lobel Masterfilms, Inc., had attained an eminence of what might be called fair-to-medium prominence in the moving-picture field. In other words, it now was able to pay its stars salaries running up into the multiples of tens of thousands of dollars a year and the bank which carried its paper had not yet felt justified in installing a chartered accountant in the home offices to check the finances and collect the interest on the loans outstanding. Before reaching this position the concern had passed through nearly all the customary intervening stages. Nearly a decade rearward, back in the dark ages of the filmic cosmos, the Jurassic Period of pictures, so to speak, this little group of pathfinders tracking under the chieftainship of Mr. Lobel into

almost uncharted wilds of artistic endeavor had dabbled in slap-stick one reelers featuring the plastic pie and the treacherous seltzer siphon, also the trick staircase, the educated mustache and the performing doormat.

Next—following along the line of least resistance—the adventurers went in more or less extensively for wild-western dramas replete with stagecoach robberies and abounding in hair pants. If the head bad man—not the secondary bad man who stayed bad all through, or the tertiary bad man who was fatally extinguished with gun-fire in Reel Two, but the chief, or primary, bad man who reformed and married Little Nell, the unspoiled child of Death Valley—wore the smartest frontier get-up of current year's vintage that the Chicago mail-order houses could turn out; if Little Nell's father, appearing contemporaneously, dressed according to the mode laid down for Forty-niners by such indubitable authorities as Bret Harte; if the sheriff stalked in and out of lens range attired as a Mississippi River gambler was popularly supposed to have been attired in the period 1860 to 1875; and if finally the cavalry troopers from the near-by army post sported the wide hats and khaki shirts which came into governmental vogue about the time of the Spanish War, all very well and good. The action was everything; the sartorial accessories were as they might be and were and frequently still are.

Along here there intruded a season when the Lobel shop tentatively experimented with costume dramas—the Prisoner of Chillon wearing the conventional black and white in alternating stripes of a Georgia chain gang and doing the old Sing Sing lock step and retiring for the night to his donjon cell with a set of shiny and rather modern-looking leg irons on his ankles; Mary Queen of Scots and Catharine de' Medici in costumes strikingly similar; Oliver Goldsmith in Sir Walter Raleigh's neck ruff and Captain Kidd's jack boots.

But this season endured not for long. Costume stuff was nix. It was not what the public wanted. It was over their heads. Mr. Lobel himself said so. Wake him up in the middle of the night and he could tell you exactly what the public did and did not want. Divining the popular will amounted with him to a gift; it approximated an exact art; really it formed the corner stone of his success. Likewise he knew—but this knowledge perhaps had come to him partly by

experience rather than altogether by intuition—that historical ten reelers dealing with epochal events in the life of our own people were entirely unsuited for general consumption.

When this particular topic untactfully was broached in his presence Mr. Lobel, recalling the fate of the elaborate feature entitled Let Freedom Ring, had been known to sputter violently and vehemently. Upon this production—now abiding as a memory only, yet a memory bitter as aloes—he had spared neither expense nor pains, even going so far as personally to direct the filming of all the principal scenes. And to what ends? Captious critics, including those who wrote for the daily press and those who merely sent in offensive letters—college professors and such like cheap high-brows—had raised yawping voices to point out that Paul Revere galloping along the pre-Revolutionary turnpike to spread the alarm passed en route two garages and one electric power house; that Washington crossing the Delaware stood in the bow of his skiff half shrouded in an American flag bearing forty-eight stars upon its field of blue; that Andrew Jackson's riflemen filing out from New Orleans to take station behind their cotton-bale breastworks marched for some distance beneath a network of trolley wires; that Abraham Lincoln signing the Emancipation Proclamation did so while seated at a desk in a room which contained in addition to Lincoln and the desk and the Proclamation a typewriter and a Persian rug; that at Manila Bay Admiral Dewey wore spats and a wrist watch.

But these primitive adventurings, these earlier pioneering quests into the realm of the speculative were all in limbo behind them, all wiped off the slate, in part forgiven, in a measure forgotten. Since that primitive beginning and those formulative middle periods Lobel Masterfilms had found their field, and having found it, now plowed and tilled it. To those familiar with the rise and the ever-forward movement of this, now the fourth largest industry in the civilized globe—or is it the third?—it sufficiently will fix the stage of evolutionary development attained by this component unit of that industry when I state that Lobel Masterfilms now dealt preponderantly with vampires. To be sure, it continued to handle such side lines as taffy-haired ingénues from the country, set adrift among the wiles and pitfalls of a cruel city; such incidentals as soft-pie comickers and chin-whiskered by-Hectors; such necessary

by-products as rarely beautiful he-juveniles with plush eyelashes and the hair combed slickly back off the forehead in the approved Hudson seal effect—splendid, manly youths these, who might have dodged a draft or two but never yet had flinched from before the camera's aiming muzzle. But even though it had to be conceded that Goldilockses and Prince Charmings endure and that while drolls and jesters may come and go, pies are permanent and stale not, neither do they wither; still, and with all that, such like as these were, in the Lobel scheme of things, merely so many side lines and incidentals and by-products devised and designed to fatten out a program.

Where Mr. Lobel excelled was in the vamp stuff. Even his competitors admitted it the while they vainly strove to rival him. In this, his own chosen realm of exploration and conquest he stood supremely alone; a monarch anointed with the holy oils of superiority, coroneted with success's glittering diadem. Look at his Woman of a Million Sins! Look at his Satan's Stepchild, or How Human Souls are Dragged Down to Hell, in six reels! Look at A Daughter of Darkness! Look at The Wrecker of Lives! Look at The Spider Lady, or The Net Where Men Were the Flies! Look at Fair of Face Yet Black of Heart! All of them his, all box-office best bets and all still going strong!

Moreover by now Lobel Masterfilms had progressed to that milestone on the path of progress and enterprise where genuine live authors—guys that wrote regular books—frequently furnished vehicles for stardom's regal usages. By purchase, upon the basis of so much cash or—as the case might be—so little cash down on the signing of the contract and the promise of so much more—often very very much more—to be paid in royalties out of accrued net profits, the rights to a published work would be acquired. Its name, say, was A Commonplace Person, which promptly would be changed in executive conclave to The Cataract of Destiny, or perhaps Fate's Plaything, or in any event some good catchy title which would look well in electrics and on three sheets.

This important point having been decided on, Mr. Ab Connors, the scenario editor, would take the script in hand to labor and bring forth the screen adaptation. If the principal character in the work, as originally evolved by her creator, was the daughter of a storekeeper in a small town in Indiana who ran away from home and went to

Chicago to learn the millinery business, he, wielding a ruthless but gifted blue pencil, would speedily transform her into the ebon-hearted heiress of a Klondyke millionaire, an angel without but a harpy within, and after opening up Reel One with scenes in a Yukon dance hall speedily would move all the important characters to New York, where the plot thickened so fast that only a succession of fade-outs and fade-ins, close-ups and cut-backs saved it from clabbering right on Mr. Connors' hands.

The rest would be largely a matter of continuity and after that there was nothing to worry about except picking out the cast and the locations and building the sets and starting to shoot and mayhap detailing a head office boy to stall off the author in case that poor boob came butting in kicking about changes in his story or squawking about overdue royalty statements or something. Anyhow, what did he know—what could he be expected to know—about continuity or what the public wanted or what the limitations and the possibilities of the screen were? He merely was the poor fish who'd wrote the book and he should ought to be grateful that a fellow with a real noodle had took his stuff and cut all that dull descriptive junk out of it and stuck some pep and action and punch and zip into the thing and wrote some live snappy subtitles, instead of coming round every little while, like he was, horning in and beefing all over the place.

And besides, wasn't he going to have his name printed in all the advertising matter and flashed on the screen, too, in letters nearly a fifth as tall as the letters of Mr. Lobel's name and nearly one-third as tall as the name of the star and nearly one-half as tall as the name of the director and nearly—if not quite—as tall as the name of the camera man, and so get a lot of absolutely free advertising that would be worth thousands of dollars to him and start people all over the country to hearing about him? Certainly he was! And yet, with all that, was there any satisfying some of these cheap ginks? The answer was that there was not.

There was never any trouble, though, about casting the principal rôle. That was easy—a matter of natural selection. If it could be played vampishly from the ground up, and it usually could—trust Mr. Connors for that—it went without question to Vida Monte, greatest of all the luminaries in the Lobel constellation and by

universal acknowledgment the best vampire in the business. In vampiring Vida Monte it was who led; others imitatively followed. Compared with her these envying lady copy cats were as pale paprikas are to the real tabasco. Five pictures she had done for Lobel Masterfilms since placing herself under Lobel's management and a Lobel contract, all of them overpowering knock-outs, sensations, sure-fire hits. On the sixth she now was at work and her proud employer in conversation and in announcements to the trade stood sponsor for the pledge that in its filming Monte literally would out-Monte Monte.

Making his word good, he took over volunteer supervision of the main scenes. His high-domed forehead glistening with sweat, his spectacles aflame like twin burning glasses, his coat off, his collar off, his waistcoat off, he snorted and churned, a ninety-horse dynamo of a little fat man, through the hot glary studio, demanding this improvement, detecting that defect, calling for this, that or the other perfect thing in a voice which would have detained the admiring ear of an experienced bull whacker. Before him Josephson, the little camera man, quailed. From his path extra people departed, fleeing headlong; and in his presence property men were as though they were not and never had been. Out of the hands of Bertram Colfax, born Sims, he wrenched a megaphone and through it he bellowed:

"Put more punch in it, Monte—that's what I'm asking you for—the punch! Choke her, Harcourt! Choke him right back, Monte! Now-w-w then, clinch! Clinch and hang on! Good! And now the kiss! You know, Monte, the long kiss—the genuwine Monte kiss! Oh, if you love me, Monte, give me footage on that kiss! That's it—hold it! Hold it! Keep on holding it!"

"But, Mr. Lobel, now," protested Colfax, born a Sims but living it down and feeling that never more than at this minute, when rudely the steersman's helm had been snatched from his grasp, was there greater need that he should be a Colfax through and through——"but, Mr. Lobel, it was my idea that up to this point anyway the action should be played with restraint to sort of prepare the way for——"

"What do you mean restraint?"

"Well, I thought to emphasize what comes later—for a sort of comparative value—that if we were just a little subtle at the beginning—"

"Sufficient, Colfax! Listen! Don't come talking to me about no subtles! When you're working the supporting members of the cast you maybe could stick in some subtles once in a while to salve them censors, but so far as Monte is concerned you leave 'em out!"

"But—but—"

"Don't but me any buts! Listen! Ain't I taken my paralyzed oath that this here picture should make all the other vamp pictures which ever were taken look like pikers? I have! Listen! For Monte, the way I feel, I shouldn't care if she don't do a single subtle in the whole damn picture."

He had taken his paralyzed oath and he kept it. It was a wonderful story. The queen of the apaches, ruling the Parisian underworld by her fire, her beauty, her courage, accepts German gold to betray her country, and attempts by siren wiles to seduce from the path of duty Capt. Stuyvesant Schuyler of the U. S. A. general staff; almost succeeds too because of his blind passion for this glorious, sinful creature. At the crucial moment, when about to surrender to his Delilah secrets which would destroy the entire Allied cause and open the gates of Paris to the conquering foe, he is saved by a vision of his sainted, fade-in-and-fade-out mother's face. Overcome with remorse, he resigns his commission, and fleeing from temptation returns to America, a broken-hearted man; proves heart is broken by constantly pressing clenched hand to left breast as though to prevent pieces from slipping down into the abdominal cavity. Distress of the apache queen on finding her intended victim gone. Suddenly a real love, not the love of the wanton, but a purer, deeper emotion wakens in her breast. Close-up showing muscular reflexes produced upon the human face by wakening processes in the heart.

Quitting the gay life, she follows him to Land of Free. Finds him about to marry his sweetheart of childhood, a New York society girl worth uncounted millions but just middling looking. Prompt bust-up of childhood sweetheart's romance. Abandonment of social position, wealth, everything by Schuyler, who declares he will make the stranger his bride—accompanying subtitle, "What should we care what the world may say? For after all, love is all!" Discovery on day

before marriage of papers proving that Lolita—that's the lady apache's name—is really Schuyler's half sister, due to carryings-on of Schuyler's late father as a young art student in Paris with Lolita's mother, a famous gypsy model. Renunciation by Lolita of Schuyler. Her suicide by imbibing poison from secret receptacle in ring. Schuyler, after registering copious grief, reënters American Army under assumed name as a private in the ranks. Returns to battlefield in time to take part in decisive action of the war. All the officers in his brigade above the rank of corporal having apparently been killed by one devastating blast of high explosive, he assumes command and leads dauntless charge of the heavy artillery through the Hindenburg Line. Is made a colonel on the spot. Rides up Fifth Avenue alongside of Pershing in grand triumphant parade of home-coming First Division, carrying a large flag and occasionally chatting pleasantly with Pershing. On eve of marriage to childhood's sweetheart, who remains faithful, he goes to lonely spot where Lolita lies buried and places upon the silent mound her favorite flower, a single long-stemmed tiger lily. Fade out—finish!

Artistically, picturesquely, from the standpoint of timeliness, from the standpoint of vampirishness, from any standpoint at all, it satisfied fully every demand. It was one succession of thrilling, gripping, heart-lifting scenes set amid vividly contrasting surroundings—the lowest dive in all Paris; the citadel at Verdun; grand ballroom of the Schuyler mansion at Newport; the Place Vendôme on a day when it was entirely unoccupied except by moving-picture actors; Fifth Avenue on its most gala occasion—these were but a few samples. The subtitles fairly hissed to the sibilant swishing of such words as traitress, temptress, tigress and sorceress. And the name of it—you'd never guess—the name of it was The She-Demon's Doom! When Mr. Lobel spoke those words inspired he literally took them up in his arms and fondled them and kissed them on the temples. And why not? They were his own brain children.

He had kept his paralyzed word and he could prove it. For because this Vida Monte was one of those mimetic pieces of flesh which, without any special mental coöperation, may alter the body, the face, the muscles, the expression, the very look out of the eyes, to suit the demands of prompters and teachers; because of the plan of direction

so powerfully engineered by the master mind of Lobel and, under Lobel, the lesser mind of Colfax, born Sims; because of the very nature of the rôle of Lolita the abandoned, this picture was more daring, more sensual, more filled up with voluptuous suggestion, with coiling, clinging, writhing snakiness, with rampant, naked sexuality—in short and in fine was more vampirishly vampiratious than this, the greatest of all modern mediums for the education, the moral uplift and the entertainment of the masses, had ever known.

And then one week to the day after Mr. Lobel shot the last scene she up and died on him.

That is to say, a woman named Glassman, a Hungarian by birth, in age thirty-two years, widowed and without children or known next of kin, died in a small bungalow in a small town up in the coast range north of Los Angeles. When the picture was done and Vida Monte took off the barbaric trappings and the heavy paste jewels and the clinging reptilian half gowns of the rôle she played, with them she took off and laid aside the animal emotionalism, the theatricalistic fever and fervor, the passion and the lure that professionally made up Vida Monte, movie star. She took off even the very aspect of herself as the show shop and as patrons of the cinemas knew her; and she put on a simple traveling gown and she tucked her black hair up in coils beneath a severely plain hat and she became what really she was and always had been—a quiet, self-contained, frugal and—except for her splendid eyes, her fine figure and her full mobile mouth—a not particularly striking-looking woman, by name Sarah Glassman, which was, in fact, her name; and quite alone she got on a train and she went up into the foothills to a tiny bungalow which she had rented there for a month or so to live alone, to do her own simple housekeeping, to sew and to read and to rest.

It was the day after the taking of the last segment of the picture that she went away. It was four days later that she sickened of the Spanish influenza, so called. It was not Spanish and not influenza, though by any other name it would have been as deadly in its devastating sweep across this country. And it was within forty-eight hours after that, on a November afternoon, that word came to the Lobel plant that she was dead. Down there they had not known even that she was sick.

"The doctor in that there little jay town up there by the name Hamletsburg is the one which just gets me on the long-distance telephone and tells me that she died maybe half an hour ago."

Mr. Lobel in his private office was telling it to Vice President Quinlan and Secretary-Treasurer Geltfin, the only two among his associates that his messenger had been able to find about the executive department at the moment. He continued:

"Coming like a complete shock, you could 'a' knocked me down with a feather, I assure you. For a minute I couldn't believe it. This doctor he has to say it to me twice before I get it into my head. Shocking—huh? Sudden—huh? Awful—what? You bet you! That poor girl, for her my heart is bleeding. Dead and gone like that, with absolutely practically no warning! It don't seem possible! Taken down day before yesterday, the doctor says, and commenced getting from bad to worse right away. And this morning she goes out of her head and at two-forty-five this afternoon all of a sudden her heart gives out on her and she is dead before anybody knows it. Awful, awful!"

Mr. Lobel wagged a mournful poll.

"More than awful—actually it is horrifying!" quoth Mr. Geltfin. Visibly at least his distress seemed greater than the distress of either of the others. "All off alone up there by herself in some little rube town it must come to her! Maybe if she had been down here with specialists and surgeons and nurses and all she would 'a' been saved. Too bad, too bad! People got no business going away from a big town! Me, I get nervous even on a motor trip in the country and—"

"Everything possible which could be done was done," resumed Mr. Lobel. "So you don't need you should worry there, Geltfin. The doctor tells me he can't get no regular trained nurse on account there is so much sickness from this flu and no regular nurses there anyway, but he tells me he brings in his wife which she understands nursing and he says the wife sticks right there day and night and gives every attention. There ain't nothing we should reproach ourselves about, and besides we didn't know even she was sick—nobody knew.

"Dead and gone, poor girl, and not one week ago—six days, if I got to be exact—she is sitting right there in that same seat where you're

sitting now, Geltfin, looking just as natural and healthy as what you look, Geltfin; looking just as if nothing is ever going to happen to her."

Mr. Geltfin had hastily risen and moved nearer the outer door.

"An awful thing—that flu!" he declared. "Lobel, do you think maybe she could 'a' had the germs of it on her then?"

"Don't be a coward, Geltfin!" rebuked his senior severely. "Look at me how I am not frightened, and yet it was me she seen last, not you! Besides, only to-day I am reading where that big doctor in Cincinnati, Ohio—Silverwater—says it is not a disease which you could catch from somebody else until after they have actually got down sick with it. Yes, sir, she sits right there telling me good-by. 'Mr. Lobel,' she says to me—I had just handed her her check—'Mr. Lobel,' she says, 'always to you,' she says, 'I should be grateful. Always to you,' she says, 'I should give thanks that two years ago when I am practically comparatively unknown you should 'a' given me my big chance.' In them very words she says it, and me setting here at this desk listening at her while she said so!

"Well, I ain't lost no time, boys. Before even I sent to find you I already got busy. I've got Appel starting for up there in half an hour in my car to take charge of everything and with orders to spare no expense. The funeral what I am going to give that girl! Well, she deserves it. Always a hard worker, always on the job, always she minds her own business, always she saves her money, always a perfect lady, never throwing any of these here temperamentals, never going off in any of these here highsterics, never making a kick if something goes wrong because it happens I ain't on the lot to run things, never——"

It threatened to become a soliloquy. This time it was Quinlan who interrupted:

"You said it all, Lobel, and it's no need that you should go on saying it any more. The main points, I take it, are that we're all sorry and that we've lost one swell big asset by her dying—only it's lucky for us she didn't take ill before we got through shooting The She-Demon."

"Lucky? Huh! Actually, lucky ain't the right word for it!" said the president. "When I think of the fix we should 'a' been in if she hadn't

finished up the picture first, I assure you, boys, it gives me the shivers. Right here and now in the middle of being sorry it gives me the shivers!"

"It does, does it?" There was something so ominous in Mr. Geltfin's sadly ironic remark—something in tone and accent so lugubriously foreboding that his hearers swung about to stare at him. "It does, does it? Well, all what I've got to say is, Lobel, you've got some shivers coming to you! We've all got some shivers coming to us! Having this girl die on us is bad business!"

"Sure it is," agreed the head, "but it might be worse. There's one awful big salary cut off the pay roll and if we can't have her with us no longer there's nobody else can have her. And the profits from that last picture should ought to be something positively enormous—stupendous—sensational. Listen! I bet you that from the hour we release——"

"You ain't going to release!" broke in Geltfin, his wizen features sharpening into a peaky mask of grief.

"Don't talk foolishness!" snapped Mr. Lobel. "For why shouldn't we be going to release?"

"That's it—why?" Mr. Quinlan seconded the demand.

"Because you wouldn't dare do it!" In his desire to make clear his point Mr. Geltfin fairly shoveled the words out of himself, bringing them forth overlapping one another like shingles on a roof. "Because the public wouldn't stand for it! Always you brag, Lobel, that you know what the public want! Well then, would the public stand for a picture where a good, decent, straight girl that's dead and will soon be in her grave is for six reels doing all them suggestive vampire stunts like what you yourself, Lobel, made her do? Would the public stand for calling a dead woman names like she-demon? They would not—not in a thousand years—and you should both know it without I should have to tell you! With some pretty rough things we could get by, but with that thing we could never get by! The public, I tell you, would not stand for it. No, sir; when that girl died the picture died with her. You just think it over once!"

Out of popped eyes he glared at them. They glared at him, then they looked at each other. Slowly Mr. Lobel's head drooped forward as though an unseen hand pressed against the back of his neck.

Quinlan casting his eyes downward traced with one toe the pattern of the rug under his feet.

On top of one sudden blow, heavy and hard to bear, another now had followed. Since Lobel had become one of the topnotchers with a reputation to maintain, expenses had been climbing by high jumps, but receipts had not kept pace with expenses. There were the vast salaries which even the lesser drawing cards among the stars now demanded—and got. There were war taxes, excess profit taxes, amusement taxes. There was to be included in the reckoning the untimely fate of Let Freedom Ring, a vastly costly thing and quickly laughed to death, yet a smarting memory still. Its failure had put a crimp in the edge of the exchequer. This stroke would run a wide fluting of deficit right through the middle of it.

The pall of silence lasted no longer than it has here taken to describe how it fell and enveloped them. Mr. Geltfin broke the silence without lifting the prevalent gloom. Indeed his words but depressingly served to darken it to a very hue of midnight.

"Besides," he added, "there is anyhow another reason. We know what a nice clean girl she was in private life. We know that all them wild romance stories about her was cooked up in the press department to make the suckers believe that both on and off the screen she was the same. But she wasn't, and so I for one should be afraid that if we put that fillum out she'd come back from the dead to stop it!"

He sank his voice, glancing apprehensively over his shoulder.

"Lobel, you wouldn't dare do it!"

"Lobel," said Quinlan, "he's right! We wouldn't dare do it!"

"Quinlan," admitted Lobel, "it's right—I wouldn't dare do it."

In that same instant of his confession, though, Mr. Lobel bounded out of his chair, magically changing from a dumpy static figure of woe into the dynamo of energy and resourcefulness the glassed-in studios and the out-of-door locations knew.

"I got it!" he whooped. "I got it!" He threw himself at an inner door of the executive suite and jerked it open. "Appel," he shouted, "don't start yet! I got more instructions still for you. And say, Appel, you ain't seen nobody but only Quinlan and Geltfin—eh? You ain't told nobody only just them? Good! Well, don't! Don't telephone

nobody! Don't speak a word to nobody! Don't move from where you are!"

He closed the door and stood against it as though to hold his private secretary a close prisoner within, and faced his amazed partners.

"It's a cinch!" he proclaimed to them. "I just this minute thought it up myself. If I must say it myself, always in a big emergency I can think fast. Listen! Nobody ain't going to know Monte is dead; not for a year, not maybe for two years; not until this last big picture is old and worn out; not until we get good and ready they should know. Vida Monte, she goes right on living till we say the word."

"But—but—"

"Wait, wait, can't you? If I must do all the quick thinking for this shop shouldn't I sometimes get a word in sideways? What I'm telling you, if you'll please let me, is this: The girl is dead all right! But nobody knows it only me and you, Quinlan, and you, Geltfin, and Appel in this next room here. Even the doctor up there at Hamletsburg he don't know it and his wife she don't know it and nobody in all that town knows it. And why don't they know? Because they think only it is a woman named Sarah Glassman that is dead. Actually that sickness no doubt changed her so that even if them rubes ever go to see high-class feature fillums there didn't nobody recognize her. If they didn't suspect nothing when she was alive, for why should they suspect something now she is dead? They shouldn't and they won't and they can't!

"What give me the idea was, I just remembered that when the doctor called me up he spoke only the name Glassman, not the name Monte. He tells me he calls up here because he finds in her room where she died a card with the name Lobel Masterfilms on it. And likewise also I just remembered that in the excitement of getting such a sad news over the telephone I don't tell him who really she is neither."

"Holy St. Patrick!" blurted Quinlan, up now on his feet. "You mean, Lobel——"

"Wait, wait, I ain't done—I ain't hardly started!" With flapperlike motions of his hands Mr. Lobel waved him down. "It's easy—a pipe. Listen! To date her salary is paid. The day she went away I gave her a

check in full, and if she done what always before she does, it's in the bank drawing interest. Let it go on staying in the bank drawing interest. So far as we know, she ain't got no people in this country at all. In the old country, in Hungary? Maybe, yes. But Hungary is yet all torn up by this war—no regular government there, no regular mails, no American consuls there, no nothing. Time for them foreigners that they should get their hands on her property one year from now or two years or three. They couldn't come to claim it even if we should notify them, which we can't. They don't lose nothing by waiting. Instead they gain—the interest it piles up.

"Should people ask questions, why then through the papers we give it out that Miss Vida Monte is gone far off away somewhere for a long rest; that maybe she don't take no more pictures for a long time. That should make The She-Demon go all the better. And to-morrow up there in that little rube town very quietly we bury Sarah Glassman, deceased, with the burial certificate made out in her own name." He paused a moment to enjoy his triumph. "Boys, when I myself think out something, am I right or am I wrong?"

He answered his own question.

"I'm right!"

By the look on Quinlan's face he read conviction, consent, full and hearty approval. But Geltfin wavered. Inside Geltfin superstition wrestled with opposing thoughts. Upon him then Lobel, the master mind, advanced, dominating the scene and the situation and determined also to dominate the lesser personality.

"But—but say—but look here now, Lobel," stammered Geltfin, hesitating on the verge of a decision, "she might come back."

"Geltfin," commanded Lobel, "you should please shut up. Do you want that we should make a lot of money or do you want that we should lose a lot of money? I ask you. Listen! The dead they don't come back. When just now you made your spiel, that part of it which you said about the dead coming back didn't worry me. It was the part which you said about the public not standing for it that got me, because for once, anyhow, in your life you were right and I give you right. But what the public don't know don't hurt 'em. And the public won't know. You leave it to me!"

It was as though this argument had been a mighty arm outstretched to shove him over the edge. Geltfin ceased to teeter on the brim—he fell in. He nodded in surrender and Lobel quit patting him on the back to wave the vice president into activity.

"Quinlan," he ordered as he might order an office boy, "get busy! Tell 'em to rush The She-Demon! Tell 'em to rush the subtitles and all! Tell 'em to rush out an announcement that the big fillum is going to be released two months before expected—on account the demand of the public is so strong to see sooner the greatest vampire feature ever fillumed."

Quinlan was no office boy, but he obeyed as smartly as might any newly hired office boy.

If it was Mr. Lobel's genius which guided the course of action, energizing and speeding it, neither could it be denied that circumstance and yet again circumstance and on top of that more circumstance matched in with hue and shade to give protective coloration to his plan. Continued success for it as time should pass seemed assured and guaranteed, seeing that Vida Monte, beyond the studios and off the locations, had all her life walked a way so secluded, so inconspicuous and so utterly commonplace that no human being, whether an attaché of the company or an outsider, would be likely to miss her, or missing her, to pry deeply into the causes for her absence. So much for the contingencies of the future as those in the secret foresaw it. As for the present, that was simplicity.

As quietly as she had moved in those earlier professional days of hers, when she played small rôles in provincial stock companies; as quietly as she had gone on living after film fame and film money came her way; as quietly as she had laid her down and died, so—very quietly—was her body put away in the little cemetery at Hamletsburg. To the physician who had ministered to her, to his good-hearted wife, to the official who issued the burial certificate, to the imported clergyman who held the service, to the few villagers who gathered for the funeral, drawn by the morbid lure which in isolated communities brings folk to any funeral—to all of these the dead woman merely was a stranger with a strange name who, temporarily abiding here, had fallen victim to the plague which filled the land.

Of those who had a hand in the last mortal rôle she would ever play only Lobel's private secretary, young Appel, who came to pay the bills and take over the private effects of this Sarah Glassman and after some fashion to play the rôles of next friend and chief mourner, kenned the truth. The clergyman having done his duty by a deceased coreligionist, to him unknown, went back to the city where he belonged. The physician hurried away from the cemetery to minister to more patients than he properly could care for. The townspeople scattered, intent upon their own affairs. Appel returned to headquarters, reporting all well.

At headquarters all likewise went well—so briskly well in fact that under the urge for haste things essential were accomplished in less time by fewer craftsmen than had been the case since those primitive beginnings when Lobel's, then a struggling short-handed concern, frequently had doubled up its studio staffs for operative service in the makeshift laboratory. Reporting progress to the president, Mr. Quinlan expanded with self-satisfaction.

"I'm fixing to show you something in the way of a speed record," he proudly proclaimed. "The way I looked at it, the fewer people I had rushing this thing through the factory the less chance there was for loose talk round the plant and the less loose talk there was going on round the plant the less chance there was for maybe more loose talk outside. Yes, I know we'd figured we'd got everything caulked up air-tight, but I says to myself, 'What's the use in taking a chance on a leak if you don't have to?'

"So I practically turned the big part of the job—developing and all the rest of it—over to Josephson, same as we used to do back yonder when we was starting out in this game and didn't have a regular film cutter and the camera man had to jump in and develop and cut and assemble and print and everything. Josephson shot all the scenes for The She-Demon—he knows the run of it better even than the director does. Besides, Josephson is naturally close-mouthed. He minds his own business and never butts in anywhere. To look at him you can't never tell what he's thinking about. But even if he suspected anything—and, of course, he don't—he's the kind that'd know enough to keep his trap shut. So I've had him working like a nailer and he's pretty near done.

"Soon as he had the negative ready, which was late yesterday afternoon after you'd went home, I had it run off with nobody there but me and Josephson, and I took a flash at it—and, Lobel, it's a bear! No need for you to worry about the negative—it was a heap too long, of course, in the shape it was yesterday, but it had everything in it we hoped would be in it—and more besides.

"So then without losing a minute I stuck Josephson on the printing machine himself. I'd already gave the girl on the machine a couple of days off to get her out of the way. Josephson stayed on the job alone pretty near all last night, I guess. He had things to himself without anybody to bother him and I tell you he shoved it along.

"Connors ain't lost no time neither. He's got the subtitles pretty near done, and believe it or not, as you're a mind to, but, Lobel, I'm telling you that this time to-morrow morning and not a minute later I'll have the first sample print all cut and assembled and ready for you to give it a look! Then it'll just be a job of matching up the negative and sticking in the subtitles and starting to turn out the positives faster than the shipping-room gang can handle 'em. I guess that ain't moving, heh?"

"Quinlan," said Mr. Lobel, "I give you right."

By making his word good to the minute the gratified Mr. Quinlan derived additional gratification. At the time appointed they sat in darkness in the body of the projection room—Lobel, Quinlan, Geltfin and Appel, these four and none other—behind a door locked and barred. Promptly on Quinlan's order the operator in the box behind them started his machine and the accomplished rough draft of the great masterpiece leaped into being and actuality upon the lit square toward which they faced.

The beginning was merely a beginning—graphic enough and offering abundant proof that in this epochal undertaking the Lobel shop had spared no expense to make the production sumptuous, but after all only preliminary stuff to sauce the palate of the patron for a greater feast to come and suitably to lead up to the introduction of the star. Soon the star was projected upon the screen, a purring, graceful panther of a woman, to change at once into a sinuous python of a woman and then to merge the feline and the ophidian into a sinister, splendid, menacing composite bespeaking the dramatic conception and the dramatic presentment of all feminine

evil, typifying in every move of the lithe, half-clad body, in every shift of the big eyes, wickedness unleashed and unashamed.

Mr. Lobel sitting unseen in the velvet blackness uttered grunts of approbation. The greatest of all film vampires certainly had delivered the goods in this her valedictory. Never before had she so well delivered them. The grunting became a happy rumble.

But all this, too, was in a measure dedicatory—a foretaste of more vivid episodes to follow, when the glorious siren, displaying to the full her powers of fascination over the souls and the bodies of men, would rise to heights yet greater and the primitive passion she so well simulated would shine forth like a malignant jewel in a setting that was semibarbaric and semicivilized, too, and altogether prodigal and lavish. The first of these bigger scenes started—the scene where the queen of the apaches set herself to win the price of her hire from the Germans by seducing the young army officer into a betrayal of the Allied cause; the same scene wherein at the time of filming it Mr. Lobel himself had taken over direction from Colfax's hands.

The scene was launched, acquired headway, then was halted as a bellow from Mr. Lobel warned the operator behind him to cut off the power.

"What the hell!" sputtered the master. "There's a blur on the picture here, a sort of a kind of smokiness. Did you see it, Geltfin? Right almost directly in front of Monte it all of a sudden comes! Did you, Quinlan?"

"Sure I seen it," agreed Geltfin. "Like a spot—sort of."

"It wasn't on the negative when I seen it day before yesterday," stated Quinlan. "I can swear to that. A little defect from faulty printing, I guess."

"All right then," said Mr. Lobel. "Only where you got efficiency like I got it in this plant such things should have no business occurring.

"Go on, operator—let's see how goes it from now on."

Out again two shadow figures—the vampire and the vampire's prey—flashed in motion. Yes, the cloudy spot was there, a bit of murky shadow drifting between the pair of figures and the audience. It thickened and broadened—and then from the suddenly constricted throats of the four watchers, almost as though all in the

same moment an invisible hand had laid gripping hold on each of their several windpipes, came a chorused gasp.

For they saw how out of the drifting patch of spumy wrack there emerged a shape vague and indistinct and ghostly, but taking on instantly the sharpened outlines of one they recognized. It was the shape, not of Vida Monte, the fabled wrecker of lives, but the shape of her other self, Sarah Glassman, and the face it wore was not the face of the stage vampire, aflame with the counterfeited evil which the actor woman had so well known how to simulate but the real face of the real woman, who lay dead and buried under a mound of fresh-cut sods seventy miles away—her own face, melancholy and sadly placid, as God had fashioned it for her.

Out from the filmy umbra it advanced to the center, thus hiding its half-naked double writhing in the embrace of the deluded lover, and clearly revealed itself in long sweeping garments of pure white—fit grave clothes for one lately entombed—with great masses of loosened black hair falling like a pall about the passionless brooding face; and now lifting reproachful eyes, it looked out across the intervening void of blackness into their staring eyes, and from the folds of the cerement robes raised a bare arm high as though to forbid a lying sacrilege. And stood there then as a wraith newly freed from the burying mold, filling and dominating the picture so that one looking saw nothing else save the shrouded figure and the head and the face and those eyes and that upheld white arm.

Cowering low in his seat with a sleeve across his eyes to shut out the accusing apparition, Mr. Geltfin whispered between chattering teeth: "I told him! I told him the dead could maybe come back!"

Mr. Quinlan, a bolder nature but even so terribly shaken, was muttering to himself: "But it wasn't in the negative! I swear to God it wasn't in the negative!"

It is probable that Mr. Lobel heard neither of them, or if he heard he gave no heed. He had a feeling that the darkness was smothering him.

"Shut off the machine!" he roared as he wrenched his body free of the snug opera chair in which he sat. "And turn on the lights in this room—quick! And let me out of here—quick!"

Lunging into the darkness he stumbled over Appel's legs and tumbled headlong out into the narrow aisle. On all fours as the lights flashed on, he gave in a choking bellow his commands.

"Burn that print—you hear me, burn it now! And then burn the negative too! Quick you burn it, like I am telling you!"

"But, Lobel, I'll swear to the negative!" protested Quinlan, jealous even in his fright for his own vindication. "If you'll look at the neg—"

"I wouldn't touch it for a million dollars!" roared Lobel. "Burn it up, I tell you! And bury the ashes!"

Still choking, still bellowing, he scrambled to his feet, an ungainly embodiment of mortal agitation, and ran for the door. But Mr. Geltfin beat him to it and through it, Quinlan and Appel following in the order named.

Outside their chief fell up against a wall, panting and wheezing for breath, his face swollen and all congested with purple spots. They thought he was about to have a stroke or a seizure of some sort. But they were wrong. This merely was Nature's warning to a man with a size seventeen neckband and a forty-six-inch girth measurement. The stroke he was to have on the following day.

Probably Quinlan and Geltfin as experienced business men should have known better than to come bursting together into the office of a stout middle-aged man who so lately had suffered a considerable nervous shock and still was unstrung; and having after such unseemly fashion burst in, then to blurt out their tidings in concert without first by soft and soothing words preparing their hearer's system to receive the tidings they bore. But themselves, they were upset by what they just had learned and so perhaps may be pardoned for a seeming unthoughtfulness. Both speaking at once, both made red of face and vehement by mingled emotions of rage and chagrin, each nourishing a perfectly natural and human desire to place the blame for a catastrophe on shoulders other than their own two pairs, they sought to impart the tale they brought. Ensued for an exciting moment a baffling confusion of tongues.

"It was that Josephson done it—the mousy little sneak!"

These words became intelligible as Quinlan, exerting his superior vocal powers, dinned out the sputtering inarticulate accents of Geltfin.

"He fixed it so that you'd spill the beans, Lobel! He fixed The She-Demon—Josephson. And me trusting him!

"How should I be knowing that all this time him and that girl was secretly engaged to be married? How should I be knowing that he would find out for himself the day after the funeral that she was dead and yet never say a word about it? How should I be knowing that he would have all tucked away somewhere a roll of film showing her dressed up like a madonna or a saint or a martyr or a ghost or something which he took privately one time when they was out together on location—slipping away with her and taking 'em without nobody knowing about it? How should I be knowing that without tipping his hand he would cook up the idea to work a slick fake on you, Lobel, and scare you into killing off the whole thing? How should I be knowing that while he was on the printing machine all by himself the other night that he would work the old double exposure stunt and throw such a scare into you in the projecting room yesterday?"

By reason of his valvular resources Mr. Quinlan might shout louder than Geltfin. But he could not shout louder than Mr. Lobel. Nobody in that section of Southern California could. Mr. Lobel outblared him:

"How should you be knowing? You come now and ask me that when all along it was you that had the swell idee to stick him into the laboratory all by himself where he could play some funny business? You!"

"But it was you, Lobel, that wouldn't listen to me when I begged you to wait and not burn up the negative. I tried to tell you that the negative was O. K. when I'd seen it run off."

"You told me? It's a lie!"

"Sure I told you! Geltfin remembers my telling you, don't you, Geltfin? You're an old bird, Lobel—you ought to know by now about retouching and doctoring and all. You know how easy it is to slip over a double exposure. But it was only the sample print that was doctored. The negative was all right, but you wouldn't listen."

"That's right too, Lobel!" shrilled Geltfin. "I heard him when he yelled out to you that you should wait!"

Quinlan amplified the indictment.

"Sure he heard me—and so did you! But no, you had to lose your nerve and lose your head just because you'd had a scare throwed into you."

"I never lose my head! I never lose my nerve!" denied Mr. Lobel. He turned the counter tide of recriminations on Geltfin.

"Anyhow,—it was you started it, Geltfin—you in the first place, right here in this room, with your craziness about the dead coming back. Only for your fool talk I would never have had the idee of a ghost at all. And now—now when the cow is all spilt milk you two come and—"

"Oh, but Lobel," countered Geltfin, "remember you was the one that made 'em burn up the negative without giving it a look at all!"

"He said it, Lobel!" reënforced Quinlan. "You was the one that just would have the negative burned up whether or no. And now it's burned up!"

Mr. Lobel was not used to being bullied in his own office or elsewhere. If there was bullying to be done by anyone, he was his own candidate always. Surcharged with distracting regrets as he was, he had an inspiration. He would turn the flood of accusation away from himself.

"Where is that Josephson?" he whooped. "He is the one actually to blame, not us. Let me get my hands on that Josephson once!"

"You can't!" jeered Quinlan. "He's quit—he's gone—he's beat it! He wrote me a note, though, and mailed it back to me when he was beating it out of town, telling me to tell you how slick he'd worked it on you." He felt in his pockets. "I got that note here somewhere—here it is. I'll read it to you, Lobel—he calls you an old scoundrel in one place and an old sucker in another."

"Look out—catch him, Quinlan!" cried Mr. Geltfin. "Look at his face—he's fixing to faint or something."

The prime intent of this recital, as set forth at the beginning, was to tell why Mr. Max Lobel had an attack of apoplexy. That original purpose having been now carried out, there remains nothing more to be added and the chapter ends.

CHAPTER VIII

ALAS, THE POOR WHIFFLETIT!

Over Jefferson Poindexter's usually buoyant spirits a fabric of gloom, black, thick, and heavy, was spread like a burying-pall. His thoughts were the color of twelve o'clock at night at the bottom of a coal-mine and it the dark of the moon. Moroseness crowned his brow; sorrow berode his soul, and on his under lip the bull-bat, that eccentric bird which has to sit lengthwise of the limb, might have perched with room to spare. You couldn't see the ointment for the flies, and Gilead had gone out of the balm business. There was a reason. The reason was Ophelia Stubblefield.

On an upturned watering-piggin alongside Mittie May's stall in the stable back of the house, Jeff sat and just naturally gloomed. To this retreat he had been harried against his will. Out of her domain, which was the kitchen, Aunt Dilsey had driven him with words barbed and bitter.

"Tek yo'se'f on 'way f'um yere, black boy!" Such had been her command. "Me, I's plum distracted an' wore out jes' f'um lookin' at you settin' 'round sullin' lak a' ole possum. Ef Satan fine some labor still fur idle hands to do, same ez de Holy Word say he do, he suttinly must be stedyin' 'bout openin' up a branch employmint agency fur cullid only, 'specially on yore account. You ain't de Grand President of de Order of de Folded Laigs, tho' you shorely does ack lak it. You's s'posed to be doin' somethin' fur yore keep an' wages. H'ist yo'se'f an' move."

"I ain't doin' nothin'!" Jeff protested spiritlessly.

"Dat you ain't!" agreed Aunt Dilsey. "An' whut you better do is better do somethin'—tha's my edvices to you. S'posin' ole boss-man came back yere to dis kitchen an' ketch you 'cumberin' de earth de way you is. You knows, well ez I does, w'ite folks suttinly does hate to see a strappin' nigger settin' 'round doin' nothin'."

"Boss-man ain't yere," said Jeff. "He's up at the cote-house. Mos' doubtless jes' about right now he's sendin' some flippy cullid woman to the big jail fur six months fur talkin' too much 'bout whut don't concern her."

"Is tha' so?" she countered. "Well, ef he should come back home he'll find one of de most fragrant cases of vagromcy he ever run acrost right yere 'pon his own household premises. Boy, is you goin' move, lak I patiently is warned you, or ain't you? Git on out yander to de stable an' confide yo' sorrows to de Jedge's old mare. Mebbe she mout be able to endure you, but you p'intedly gives me de fidgits. Git—befo' I starts findin' out ef dat flat haid of yourn fits up smooth ag'inst de back side of a skillit."

Nervously she fingered the handle of her largest frying-pan. Jeff knew the danger-signals. Too deeply sunken in melancholy to venture any further retorts, he withdrew himself, seeking sanctuary in the lee of Mittie May. He squatted upon the capsized keeler, automatically balancing himself as it wabbled under him on its one projecting handle, and, with his eyes fixed on nothing, gave himself over unreservedly to a consuming canker. For all that unhappiness calked his ears as with pledgets of cotton wool, there presently percolated to his aloof understanding the consciousness that somebody was speaking on the other side of the high board fence which marked the dividing line between Judge Priest's place and the Enders' place next door. Listlessly he identified the voice as the property of the young gentleman from up North who was staying with his kinsfolk, the Enders family. This was a gentleman already deeply admired by Jeff at long distance for the sprightliness of his wardrobe and for his gay and gallus ways. Against his will—for he craved to be quite alone with his griefs and no distracting influences creeping in—Jeff listened. Listening, he heard language of such splendor as literally to force him to rise up and approach the fence and apply his eye to a convenient cranny between two whitewashed boards.

Under an Injun-cigar tree which grew in the Enders' back yard the fascinating visitor out of Northern parts was stretched in a hammock, between draws on a cigarette discoursing grandiloquently to a half-incredulous but wholly delighted audience of three. His three small nephews were hunkered on the earth beside him, their grinning faces upturned to his the while he dealt first with this and then with that variety of curious fauna which, he alleged, were to be encountered in the wilds of a strange place called the State of Rhode

Island, where, it seemed, he had spent the greater part of an adventurous and crowded youth.

"Well," he was saying now, beginning, as it were, a new chapter, "if you think the sulfur-crested parabola is a funny bird you should hear about the great flannel-throated golosh, or arctic bird of the polar seas, which is a creature so rare that nobody ever saw one, although Dr. Cook, the imminent ex-explorer, made an exhaustive study of its habits and peculiarities and told the King of Denmark about them, afterward amplifying his remarks on the subject in the lecture which he delivered in this, his native land, under the auspices of the International School of Poor Fish. By the way, I'm sure the Doctor must have visited this town on his tour. Only yesterday, I think it was, I saw an illuminated sign down on Franklin Street which surely was used originally to advertise his lecture. It was a sign which said, 'Cook With Gas!' But speaking of fish, I am reminded of the fur-bearing whiffletit; only some authorities say the whiffletit is not a fish at all, but a subspecies of the wampus family. Now, the wampus—"

"Say, tell us about the whiffletit next," begged one wriggling youngster, plainly allured by the sound of the name.

"With pleasure," said the speaker. "The whiffletit is found only in streams running in a south-northerly direction. This is because the whiffletit, being a sensitive creature with poor vision, insists on having the light falling over its left shoulder at all times. A creek, river, inlet, or estuary which has a wide mouth and a narrow head, such as a professional after-dinner speaker has, is a favorite haunt for the whiffletit. To the naturalist it is a constant source of joy. It always swims backward upstream, to keep the water out of its eyes, and it has only one fin, which grows just under its chin, so that the whiffletit can fan itself in warm weather, thus keeping cool, calm, and collected. Most marvelous thing of all about this marvelous creature is its diet. For the whiffletit, my dear young friends, lives exclusively on imported Brie cheese.

"Did I say exclusively? Ah, there I fell into error. It has been known to nibble at a chiropodist's finger, but it prefers imported Brie cheese, aged in the wood. The mode employed in catching it is very interesting, and I shall now describe it to you. Selecting a body of water wherein the whiffletit resides, you enter a round-bottomed

boat and row out to the middle of it. Then you take a square timber, and, driving it into the water, withdraw it very swiftly so as to leave a square hole in the water. Care should be taken to use a perfectly square timber because the whiffletit being, as I forgot to tell you, shaped like a brick, cannot move up and down a round hole without barking its shins, much to the discomfort of the pretty creature.

"Pray follow me closely now, for at this juncture we come to the most important phase of the undertaking. You bait the edges of the hole with the cheese cut in small cubes and quietly await results. Nor do you have long to wait. Far down below in his watery retreat the whiffletit catches the alluring aroma of the cheese. He swims to the surface and devours it to the last crumb. But alas for the greedy whiffletit! Instantly the cheese swells him up so that he cannot change gears nor retreat back down the hole, and as he circles about, flapping helplessly, you lean over the side of the boat and laugh him to death! And such, my young friends, such is the fate of the whiffletit."

"'Scuse me, suh."

The amateur aspirant for the robe of Munchausen paused from lighting a fresh cigarette and lifted his eyes, and was aware of an anthracite-colored face risen, like some new kind of crayoned full moon, above the white skyline of the side fence.

"'Scuse me, suh, fur interruptin'," repeated the voice belonging to the apparition, "but I couldn't he'p frum overhearin' whut you wuz tellin' the boys yere. An' I got sort of interested myse'f."

"It's Judge Priest's Jeff, Uncle Dwight," explained the oldest nephew. "Jeff makes us fluttermills out of corn-stalks, and he learned us—taught us, I mean—to call a brickbat an alley-apple, and he can make his ears wiggle just like a rabbit and everything. Don't you, Jeff?—I mean, can't you, Jeff?"

"Ah, I see," said the fabulist with a wink aside for Jeff's benefit. "I am indeed delighted to make the acquaintance of one thus gifted, even under the present informal circumstances. In what way, if any, may I be of service to you, Judge Priest's Jeff?"

"That air thing you named the whiffletit—near ez I made out you said, boss, that fust you tolled him up to whar you wanted him wid cheese an' 'en you jest natchelly laffed him to death?"

"Such are the correct facts accurately repeated, Judge Priest's Jeff," gravely assented this affable faunalist.

"Yas, suh," said Jeff. "D'ye s'pose now, boss, it would he'p any ef they wuz a whole passel of folks to do the laffin' 'stid of jes' one?"

"Beyond the peradventure of a doubt. Concerted action on the part of many, guffawing merrily in chorus, assuredly would hasten the death of the ill-starred victim, if you get what I mean, Judge Priest's most estimable Jeff?"

"Yas, suh," said Jeff. "Thanky, suh." He did not exactly smile his thanks, but the mask of his melancholy crinkled round the edges and raised slightly. One who knew Jeff, and more particularly one who had been cognizant of his depressed state during the past fortnight, would have said that a heartening thought suddenly had come to him, lightening and lifting in ever so small a degree the funereal mantlings. He made as though to withdraw from sight. A gesture from the visiting naturalist detained him.

"One moment," said Uncle Dwight. "Might I, a comparative stranger, be pardoned for inquiring into the motives underlying the interest you have evinced in my perhaps poorly expressed but veracious narration?"

The wraith of Jeff's grin took on flesh visibly. It was a pleasure—even to one beset by grievous perplexities—it was a pleasure to hear such noble big words fall thus trippingly from human lips. His answer, tho, was in a measure evasive, not to say cryptic.

"I wuz jes' stedyin', tha's all, suh," he fenced. He ducked from view, then bobbed his head up again.

"'Scuse me, suh, but they is one mo' thing I craves to ast you."

"Proceed, I pray you. Our aim is to please and instruct."

"Well, suh, I jes' wanted to ast you ef you ever run acrost one of these yere whiffletits w'ich played on the jazzin'-valve?"

"Prithee?"

"Naw, suh, not the prith—prith—whut you jes' said. I mentioned the jazzin'-valve—whut some folks calls the saxophone. D'ye reckin they mout' 'a' been a whiffletit onct 'at played on one?"

"Oh, the saxophone! Well, as to that I could not with certainty speak. But, mark you, the whiffletit is a creature of infinite

resources—versatile, abounding in quaint conceits and whimsies, and, having withal a wide repertoire. Sometimes its repertoire is twice as wide as it is, thus producing a peculiar effect when the whiffletit is viewed from behind. On second thought, I have no doubt that in the privacy of its subterranean fireside the whiffletit wiles away the tedium of the long winter evenings by playing on the saxophone."

"Come on over, Jeff, and Uncle Dwight will tell us some more," urged the hospitable oldest nephew.

But Jeff had vanished. He wished to be alone for the working out of a project as yet vague and formless, but having a most definite object to be attained. Stimulated by hope new-born, he was now a sort of twelfth carbon-copy of the regular Jeff—faint, perhaps, and blurry, but recognizable. Through the clouds which encompassed him the faint promise of a rift was apparent.

By rights one would have said that Jeff had no excuse for hiding in a shadowed hinterland at all. The world might have been excused for its failure to plumb the underlying causes which roiled the waters of his soul. Seemingly the currents of life ran for him in agreeable channels. He had an indulgent employer whose clothes fitted Jeff. Indeed, anybody's clothes fitted Jeff. He had one of those figures which seem to give and take. He was well nourished, gifted conversationally, of a nimble wit, resourceful, apt. Moreover, home-grown watermelons were ripe. The Eighth of August, celebrated in these parts by the race as Emancipation Day, impended. The big revival—the biggest and most tremendously successful revival in his people's local history—was in full swing at the Twelfth Ward tabernacle, affording thrill and entertainment every week-night and thrice on Sundays.

There never had been such a revival; probably there never would be another such. Justifiably, the pastor of Emmanuel Chapel took credit to himself that he had planted the seed which at this present time so gloriously yielded harvest. Theretofore his chief claim to public attention had rested upon the sound of the name he wore. He had been born a Shine and christened a Rufus. But to him the name of Rufus Shine had seemed lacking in impressiveness and euphony for use by one about entering the ministry. Thanks to the ingenuity of a white friend who was addicted to puns and plays upon words,

the defect had been cured. As the Rev. A. Risen Shine he bore a name which fitted its bearer and its bearer's calling—at once it was a slogan and a testimony, a trade-mark and a watch-cry.

Proudly now he walked the earth, broadcasting the favor of his smile on every side. For it had been he who divined that the times were ripe for the importation of that greatest of all exhorting evangelists of his denomination, the famous Sin Killer Wickliffe, of Nashville, Tenn. His had been the zeal which inspired the congregation to form committees on ways and means, on place and time, on finance; his, mainly, the energy behind the campaign for subscriptions which filled the war-chest. As resident pastor, chief promotor, and general manager of the project, he had headed the delegation which personally waited upon the great man at his home and extended the invitation. Almost immediately, upon learning that the amount of his customary guaranty already had been raised and deposited in bank, the Rev. Wickliffe felt that he had a call to come and labor, and he obeyed it. He brought with him his entire organization—his private secretary, his treasurer, his musical director. For, mind you, the Sin Killer had borrowed a page from the book of certain distinguished revivalists of a paler skin-pigmentation than his. As the saying goes among the sinful, he saw his Caucasian brethren and went them one better. His musical director was not only an instrumentalist but a composer as well. He adapted, he wrote, he originated, he improvised, he interpolated, he orchestrated, he played. As one inspired, this genius played the saxophone.

Now, in the world at large the saxophone has its friends and its foes. Its detractors agree that the late Emperor Nero was a maligned man; cruel, perhaps, in some of his aspects, but not so cruel as has been made out in the case against him. It was a fiddle he played while Rome burned—it might have been a saxophone. But to the melody-loving heart of the black race in our land the mooing tones of this long-waisted, dark-complected horn carry messages as of great joy. It had remained, though, for the resourceful Rev. Wickliffe to prove that it might be made to fill a nobler and a higher destiny than setting the feet of the young men to dancing and the daughters to treading the syncopated pathways of the ungodly. Discerning this by a sort of higher intuition, he had thrown himself into the

undertaking of luring the most expert saxophone performer of his acquaintance away from the flaunting tents of the transgressor and herding him into the fold of the safely regenerate. He succeeded. He saved Cephus Fringe, plucking him up as a brand from the burning, to remold him into a living torch fitted to light the way for others.

Of Cephus it might be said, paraphrasing the lines about little dog Rover, that when he was saved he was saved all over. Being redeemed, he straightway disbanded his orchestra. He tore up his calling-card reading,

PROFESSOR CEPHUS FRINGE ESQUIRE
The Anglo-Saxophone King
Address: Care Champey's Barber-Shop
SOLE PROPRIETOR FRINGE'S ALL-STAR TROUPE

He enlisted under the militant banners and on the personal staff of the Sin Killer. Amply then was the prior design of his new commander justified. For if it was the eloquence, the magnetism, the compelling force of the revivalist which brought the penitents shouting down the tan-bark trail to the mourner's bench, it was the harmonious croonings of Prof. Fringe as he conducted the introductory program—now rendering as a solo his celebrated original composition, "The Satan Blues," now leading the special choir—which psychologically paved the way for the greater scene to follow after. There was distress in the devil's glebe-lands when this pair struck their proper stride—first the Fringian outpourings harmoniously exalting the spirits of the assemblage and then the exhorters tying his hands to the Gospel plow and driving down into the populous valleys of sin, there to furrow and harrow, to sow and tend, to garner and glean.

The team had struck its stride early at the protracted meeting so competently fostered by the resident pastor of Emmanuel Chapel, the Rev. A. Risen Shine. To himself, as already stated, the latter took prideful credit for results achieved and results promised. Well he might. Already hundreds of converts had come halleluiahing through; hundreds more teetered and swayed, back and forth, between doubt and conviction, ready at a touch to fall like the ripe and sickled grain in the lap of the husbandman. Wavering brethren had been fortified and were made stalwart again. Confirmed backsliders rubbed their wayward feet in the resin of faith and were

boosted up the treacherous skids of their temptation and over the citadel walls to bask among the chosen in a Jericho City of repentance. Proselytes from other and hostile creeds trooped over with hosannas and loud outcries of rejoicing. Even the place where, each evening, the triumph of the preceding evening was repeated and amplified seemed appropriate for such scenes. For the Twelfth Ward tabernacle had not always been a tabernacle; it had been a tobacco-warehouse—but it was converted. And its present chief ornament, next only to the Sin Killer himself—indeed, its chiefest ornament of all in the estimation of impressionable younger unmarried female members—was Prof. Cephus Fringe.

At thought of him and of this, Jeff Poindexter, reperched on his wabbly piggin, wove his furrowed brow into a closer and more intricate pattern of cordial dislike. For if the main reason of his unhappiness was Ophelia Stubblefield, the secondary reason and principal contributory cause was this same Cephus Fringe. Ophelia's favorite letter may not have been F, but it should have been. She was fair, fickle, fawn-toned, flirty, flighty, and frequently false. Jeff cast back in his mind. He certainly had had his troubles since he became permanently engaged to Ophelia. For instance, there had been her affair with that ferocious razor-wielder Smooth Crumbaugh. In this matter the fortuitous return from the dead of Red Hoss Shackleford, as skilfully engineered by Jeff, had broken up Red Hoss's own memorial services, had also operated to scare Smooth Crumbaugh clean out of Colored Odd Fellows' Hall and leave the fainting Ophelia in the rescuing arms of Jeff. But there had been half a dozen other affairs, each of such intensity as temporarily to undermine Jeff's peace of mind. Between spells of infatuations for attractive strangers, she accepted Jeff's devotions. The trouble was, though, that life, with Ophelia, seemed to be just one infatuation after another. And now, to cap all, she had suffered herself, nay, offered herself, to fall thrall to the dashing personality and the varied accomplishments of this Fringe person. It was this entanglement which for two weeks past had made Jeff, her official 'tween-times fiancé, a prey to carking cares and dark forebodings.

Hourly and daily the situation, from Jeff's point of view, had grown more desperate as Ophelia's passion for the fascinating sojourner grew. He had even lost his relish for victuals which, with

Jeff, was indeed a serious sign. In long periods of self-imposed solitude he had devised and discarded as hopeless various schemes for bringing discomfiture upon his latest and most dangerous rival. For a while he had thought somehow, somewhere, to rake up proofs of the interloper's former wild and reckless life. But of what avail to do that?

By his own frank avowal the Professor had had a spangled past; had been an adventurer and a wanton, a wandering minstrel bard; had even been in jail. This background of admitted transgressions, now that he was so completely reformed and reclaimed, merely made him an all-the-more attractive figure in the eyes of those to whom he offered confession. Again, Jeff had trifled with a vague design of taunting Fringe into a quarrel and beating him up something scandalous. To this end he tentatively had approached our leading exponent of the art of self-defense and our most dependable sporting authority, one Mr. Jerry Ditto.

Mr. Ditto had grown out of a clerkship at Gus Neihiem's cigar-store into the realm of fistiana. As a shadow-boxer he excelled; as a bag-puncher also. But in an incautious hour for himself and his backer, Flash Purdy, owner of Purdy's Dixieland Bar, he had permitted himself to be entered for a match before an athletic club at Louisville against one Max Schorrer, a welter-weight appearing professionally under the *nom de puge* of Slugging Fogarty. It was to have been a match of twelve rounds, but early in the second round Mr. Ditto suddenly lost all conscious interest in the proceedings.

He retired from the ring after this with a permanent lump on the point of his jaw and a profound conviction that the Lord had made a mistake and drowned the wrong crowd that time at the Red Sea. He fitted up a gymnasium in the old plow factory and gave instructions in sparring to the youth of the town. Naturally, his patronage was all-white, but he offered to take Jeff on for a few strictly private lessons at night provided Jeff would promise not to tell anybody about it. But at last the prospective client drew back. His ways were the ways of peace and diplomacy. Why depart from them? And, anyhow, this Cephus Fringe was so dog-goned sinewy-looking. Playing a saxophone ought to give a man wind and endurance. If not knocked cold in the first onslaught he might become seriously antagonized toward Jeff.

But now, in the sportive fablings of the young white gentleman from up North who was visiting the Enders family, he had found a clue to what he sought. The difficult point, though, was to evolve the plan for the plot nebulously floating about in his brain; for while he envisaged the delectable outcome, the scheme of procedure was as yet entirely without form and substance. It was as though he looked through a tunnel under a hill. At the far end he beheld the sunlight, but all this side of it was utter darkness. Seeking to pluck inspiration out of the air, his roving eye fell upon the dappled rump of Mittie May as she stood in her stall placidly munching provender, and with that, *bang*! inspiration hit him spang between the eyes.

To look on her, ruminative, ewe-like, fringed of fetlock and deliberate in her customary amblings, you would never have reckoned Mittie May to be a mare with a past. But such was the case. Her youth had been spent in travel over the continent with a tented caravan; in short, a circus. Her broad flat top-side, her dependable gait, her amiable disposition, her color—white with darkish half-moons on shoulder and flank—all these admirably had fitted her for the ring. When, long years before, Hooper's wagon-shows came to grief in our town Mittie May had been seized by Farrell Brothers to satisfy an unpaid hay-bill.

Through her sobering maturer years she had passed from one set of hands to another, until finally, in her declining days, she found asylum in the affectionate ownership of Judge Priest, with Jeff to curry her fat sides and no more arduous labor to perform than occasionally to draw the Judge about from place to place in his ancient shovel-topped buggy. About her now there was naught to suggest the prancing rozin-back she once had been; the very look of her eye conjured up images of simple pastoral scenes—green meadows and purling brooks.

But let a certain signal be sounded and on top of that let a certain air be played and Mittie May, instantly losing that air she had of a venerable and dignified sheep, became a Mittie May transformed; a Mittie May reverted to another and more feverish time; a Mittie May stirred by olden memories to nightmarish performances. By chance once Jeff had happened upon her secret, and now, all in one illuminating flash, recalling the conditions governing this discovery, he gave vent to a low anticipatory chuckle. It was the first chuckle he

had uttered in a fortnight, and this one was edged with a sinister portent. He had his idea now. He had at hand the agency for bringing the scheme to fruition. But yet there remained much of preliminary detail to be worked out. His plan still was like a fine-toothed comb which has seen hard usage in a wiry thatch—there were wide gaps between its prongs.

Jeff gave himself over to sustained thought. He made calculations calendar-wise. This was the first day of August; the eighth, therefore, was but seven short days removed. This plot of his seemed to resemble a number of things. It was like a piece of pottery, too. First the plastic clay must be assembled, then the vessel itself turned from it; finally the completed product must be given time to harden before it would be ready for use. He must move fast but warily.

To begin with, now, he must create a setting of plausibility for the rôle he meant, in certain quarters, to essay; must dress the character, as it were, in its correct housings and provide just the right touches of local color. Ready at hand was Aunt Dilsey; he would make her, unwittingly so far as she kenned, a supporting member of the cast. She would never know it, but she would play an accessory part, small but important, in his prologue.

Five minutes later she lifted her eyebrows in surprise. As he reinserted himself halfway across the portals of the realm where she queened it his recent moroseness was quite gone from him. About him now was the suggestion, subtly conveyed, that here stood one who, after profound cogitation, had found out what ailed him and, by the finding out, was filled with a gentle, chastened satisfaction. He seated himself on the kitchen door-step, facing outward so that comparative safety might be attained with a single flying leap did her uncertain temper, flaring up suddenly, lead her to acts of hostility before he succeeded in winning her over. He uttered a long-drawn sigh, then sat a minute in silence. In silence, too—a suspicious, menacing silence—she glared at him.

"Aunt Dilsey," he ventured, speaking over his shoulder, with his face averted from her, "mebbe you been noticin' yere lately I seemed kind of downcasted an' shiftless, lak ez ef I had a mood on me?"

"Has I noticed it?" she repeated—"huh!" The punctuating grunt was non-committal. It might mean nothing; it might mean anything.

He cleared his throat and went on,

"An', mebbe—I ain't sayin' you actually is; I's sayin' it with a mebbe—mebbe you been marvelin' in yore mind whut it wuz w'ich pestered me an' made me ack so kind of no-'count?"

"I ain't needin' to marvel," she stated coldly. "I knows. Laziness! Jes' pyure summer-time nigger laziness, wid a rich streak of meanness th'owed in."

"Nome, you is wrong," he corrected her gently. "You is wrong there. 'Ca'se likewise an' furthermo' I also is been off my feed—ain't that a sign to you?"

"Sign of a tapeworm, I 'spects."

"Don't say that, please, Ma'am," he humbly pleaded. "You speakin' in sich a way meks me 'most discouraged to confide in you whut I aims to confide in you. I'm tellin' it to you the fust one, too. 'Tain't nary 'nother soul heared it. Aunt Dilsey, I's grateful to you in my heart, honest I is, fur runnin' me 'way frum yore presence yere jes' a little w'ile ago. You never knowed it at the time—I didn't s'picion it also neither—but you done me a favor. 'Ca'se settin' out yonder in the stable all alone and ponderin' deep, all of a sudden somethin' jes' come right over me an' I knowed whut's been the matter wid me lately. Aunt Dilsey, I's felt the quickenin' tech."

"Better fur you ef somebody made you feel de quickenin' buggy-whup."

He disregarded the brutal suggestion.

"Yessum, I's felt the quickenin' tech. Ez you doubtless full well knows, I ain't been 'tendin' much 'pon the big revival. But even so—even an' evermo' so—the influence frum it done stretch fo'th its hand an' reach me. I ain't sayin' I's plum won over yit, but 'way down deep insides of me I's stirred—yessum, tha's the word—stirred. I ain't sayin' the spirit of grace is actually th'owed me, but I feel prone to say I thinks it's fixin' to rassle wid me. I ain't sayin' I stands convicted, but I aims to be a searcher fur the truth; I aims to stop, look, an' lissen. I ain't sayin'—" He broke off, the floods of his imagery dammed by the skeptical eye which swept him; then made a lame conclusion, "Tha's whut I sez, Ma'am, to you in strict confidences."

"Den lemme say somethin' to you. You figgers it's salvation you needs, huh? I figgers it's vermifuge. Oh, I knows you, boy—I knows you f'um de grass-roots up. Still an' wid all dat, ef you should crave to mend yo' ways—an' de Heavens above knows dey kin stand a heap of mendin'!—I ain't gwine be de one to hender you."

Against her better judgment her tone was softening. For she gave her allegiance unrestrainedly to the doctrine preached at Emmanuel Chapel. She was one of its stanch pillows. Indeed, it might be said of her that she was one of its plumpest bolsters; and Jeff, although admittedly of no religious persuasion, had grown up in the shadow of a differing creed. The winning over of the black ram of another fold would be a greater victory than the reclamation of any wandering sheep who had been reared as a true believer.

"Well, boy," she went on, in this new mood, "let us hope an' pray dat in yore case dey's yit hope. De ways of de Almighty is pas' findin' out. Fur do not de Scriptures say dey's room fur both man an' beast?—de maid servant an' de man servant, de ox an' de ass, dey all may enter in? So dey mout be a skimsy, bare chanct fur sech even ez you is. One thing shore—ef dey's ary grain of contritefulness in yore soul, trust de Sin Killer to fetch it fo'th to de light of day. He's de ole fambly doctor w'en it come to dat kind of sickness. You go to dat tabernickle to-night an' you keep on goin' an' le's see whut come to pass.... Jeffy, dey's a little mossil of cold peach cobbler lef over f'um dinner yistiddy settin' up yonder amongst de shelfs of my cu'board!"

"Nome, thank you," said Jeff. "The emotions w'ich is in me seems lak they ain't left me no room fur nothin' else. Seems lak I can't git my mind on vittles yit. But I shore aims to be at the tabernickle to-night, Aunt Dilsey—I means, Sist' Dilsey. You jes' watch me. Tha's all I asts of you now—jes' watch me!"

Head down and shoulders hunched, in the manner of one harkening to inner voices, Jeff betook himself around the corner of the back porch. Once out of her sight, though, he flung from him his mien of absorption. The overture had been rendered; there remained much to be done before the curtain rose. The languorous shade invited one to tarry and rest, but Jeff breasted the sunshine, going hither and yon upon his errands. Back of a cabin on Plunket's Hill he had private conference with one Gumbo Rollins, by profession a carnival concessionaire and purveyor of amusements in

a small way. No cash actually changed hands, but on Jeff's part there was a promise of moneys to be paid in the event of certain as-yet-problematical contingencies.

Next he sought for and, at the Bleeding Heart restaurant, found a limber individual named Tecumseh Sherman Glass, called Cump for short. This Tecumseh Sherman Glass was a person of two trades and one outstanding trait. By day a short-order cook, by night he played in 'Gustus Hillman's Colored String Band. It is to be marked down in the reader's memory that the instrument he played was the saxophone; also that he was heavily impregnated with that form of professional jealousy which lurks in the souls of so many *artistes*; likewise that he was a member in fair standing of the Rev. A. Risen Shine's congregation, and, finally, that he was a born meddler in other folks' affairs. These facts all should be borne in mind; they have their value.

With Tecumseh Sherman Glass, Jeff spent some time in a confidential exchange of words. Here, again, the matter of a subsequent financial reward, to be paid by the party of the first part, meaning Jeff, to the party of the second part, meaning Cump, following the satisfactory outcome of sundry developments, was arranged. Would there were space to tell how cunningly, how craftily Jeff, in the subtleties marking this interview, played upon three chords in the other's being—the chord of vengeful envy, the chord of malice, the chord of avarice. There is not space.

Four o'clock found the plotter entering the parlor of what once had been the establishment of T. Marshall, undertaker, now the Elite Colored Funeral Home, Marshall & Kivil, proprietors. These transformations had dated from the time Percy C. Kivil (Tuskegee '18) entered the firm. Here was no plain undertaker. Here was an expert and a graduate mortician, with diploma to prove it; also one gifted of the pen. Two inscriptions done in flowing type hung on the wall. One of these inscriptions read:

Oh, Death, where is thy sting When we officiates? Embalming done attentively At standard pre-war rates.

And the other:

Blest be the tie that binds! Tho death thy form may shake. Call in a brother of thy race And let him undertake!

At a desk between these two decorative objects and half shadowed by the bright-green fronds of a large artificial palm, sat Æsop Loving, son-in-law of the senior partner. From his parent-by-marriage Æsop had borrowed desk-room for the carrying on of the multitudinous business relating to the general management of one of the celebrations projected in honor, and on account of, the Eighth of August. He might appear to be absorbed in important details, as he now did. But inside of him he was not happy and Jeff knew the reasons; the reasons were common rumor. This year there was to be more than one celebration; there were to be two; and the opposition, organizing secretly and stealing a march on that usually wide-awake person, Æsop, had rented Belt Line Park, thus forcing Æsop's crowd to make a poor second choice of the old show-grounds, a treeless common away out near the end of Tennessee Street. On top of this and in an unexpected quarter, even more formidable competition was foreshadowed. A scant eighth of a mile distant from the show-lot and on the same thoroughfare stood the Twelfth Ward tabernacle, and here services would be held both afternoon and evening of the Eighth. The Rev. Wickliffe had so announced, and the Rev. Shine had backed him in the decision.

It was inevitable, with this surpassing magnet of popular interest so near at hand, that for every truant convert who might halt to taste of the pleasures provided by Æsop Loving and his associate promoters, half a dozen possible patrons would pass on by and beyond, drawn away by the compelling power of the Sin Killer's eloquence. Representations had been made to the revivalist that, with propriety, he might suspend his ministry for the great day. His answer was the declaration that on the Eighth he would preach not merely once, but twice.

By him and his there would be no temporizing with the powers of evil, however insidiously cloaked. Would not dancing be included in the entertainments planned by these self-seeking laymen who now approached him? Would not there be idle sports and vain pastimes calculated to entice the hearts of the populace away from consideration of the welfare of their own souls? Admittedly there

would be drinking of soft drinks. And into the advertised softness some hardness assuredly would slip. You could not fool the Sin Killer. Having taken a firm stand, his rectitude presently moved him to further steps. On his behalf it was stated that he, personally, would lead the elect in triumphant procession out Tennessee Street to the tabernacle between the afternoon preaching and the evening. As an army with banners, the saved, the sober, and the seeking would march past, thus attesting their fealty to the cause which moved them. He defied all earthly forces to lure a single one from the ranks.

And, after the preaching, under his auspices, there would be a mighty cutting of watermelons for those deemed to be qualified to participate therein. By the strict tenets of the Rev. Wickliffe's theology it seemed that watermelons were almost the only luscious things of this carnal world not held to be potentially or openly sinful. Small wonder then that Jeff, jauntily entering the Elite Funeral Home, read traces of an ill-concealed distress writ plain upon the face of Æsop Loving.

"Well, Brother Lovin', you shore does look lak you'd hung yore harp 'pon the willer-tree an' wuz fixin' to tek in sorrow fur a livin'," he said in greeting. "Cheer yo'se'f up; 'tain't nothin' so worse but whut it mout be worser."

"Easy fur you to say so, Brother Poindexter; harder fur me to do so," stated Æsop. "Gallivantin' 'round the way you is, you ain't got no idea of the aggervations w'ich keeps comin' up in connection wid an occasion sech ez this one, an' mo' 'specially the aggervations w'ich pussonally afflicts the director-general of the same, w'ich I is him."

"I been hearin' somethings myse'f," said Jeff. "Word is come to me, fur one thing, that this yere smart-ellicky gang out at the Belt Line Park is aimin' to try to cut some of the groun' frum under yore feet. I regrets to hear it."

"'Tain't them so much," said Æsop. "We couldn't 'spect to go 'long havin' a nomopoly furever. Sooner or late they wuz bound to be opposition arisin' up. 'Tain't them so much, although I will say it wuz a low-flung trick to tek an' rent that park right out frum under our noses 'thout givin' us no warnin' so's we mout go an' rent it fu'st. No, hit's the action of that Emmanuel Chapel bunch w'ich gives me the mos' deepest concern. Seems lak ev'ry time that Rev'n' Sin Killer

open his mouth I kin feel cold cash crawlin' right out of my pocket. Mind you, Brother Poindexter, I ain't got a word to say ag'in religion. I's strong fur it on Sundays, ez you well knows, but dog-gone religion w'en it come interferin' wid a pusson's chanct to pick up a little spare change fur hisse'f on a week-day!"

"Spoke lak a true business man, Brother Lovin'," said Jeff. "Still, I reckin you's mebbe countin' the spoilt eggs 'fore they's all laid. The way I sees it, you'll do fairly well, nevertheless an' to the contrary notwithstandin'. Le's see. Ain't you goin' to have the dancin'-pavilion goin' all day?"

"Yas, but—"

"Ain't you goin' to have money rollin' in frum all the snack-stands an' frum the fried-fish privilege an' frum the cane rackits an' frum the knock-the-babies-down an' all?"

"Tubby shore, but—"

"Ain't you due to pick up a right smart frum the kitty of the private crap game an' the chuck-a-luck layout?"

"Natchelly. But—"

"Hole on; I ain't th'ough yit. Seems lak to me you ain't properly counted up yore blessin's a-tall. Ain't the near-beer—" he sank his voice discreetly, although there was no one to overhear "ain't the near-beer an' the *still nearer* beer goin' fetch you in a right peart lil' income? I'll say they is. An' ain't you goin' do mighty well on yore own account out of yore share of the commission frum Gumbo Rollinses' Flyin' Jinny?"

"Hole on, hole on! How come Gumbo Rollins?"

"W'y tha's all fixed," stated Jeff. "Gumbo he'll be out there 'fore sunup on the 'p'inted day wid his ole Flyin' Jinny an' his ole grind-organ an'—"

"Tain't nothin' fixed," demurred the astonished and indignant Æsop. "'Tain't nothin' fixed 'thout I fixes it. Ain't I had pestermints 'nuff las' yeah settlin' up, or tryin' to, wid that Rollins? Ain't I told him then that never ag'in would I—"

"Oh, tha's settled," announced Jeff soothingly.

"Who settled it?"

"Me."

"You?"

"Yas, me—out of pyure frien'ship fur you. Lissen, Brother Lovin', an' give due heed. I comes to you d'rect frum Gumbo Rollins. He's done seen the error of the way he acked tow'ds you that time. He's cravin' that all the grudges of the bygone past shall be disremembered. Here's whut he's goin' to do: He's goin' give yore organization the reg'lar cut, an' 'pon top of that he's goin' hand you, pussonally an' private, a special extra five pur cent, on all he teks in; that comes ez a free-will offerin' to you. He's goin' 'bandon his plan to run ez a independint attraction on the Eighth down back of the market-house. He's goin' be wid you heart an' soul an' Flyin' Jinny. All he asts, through me, is that he kin have the right to set her up on the purtic'lar spot w'ich he's got in mind out there on them show-ground lots. An' finally an' furthermo' he's done commission me to hand you ten dollars, unbeknownst to anybody, jes' to prove to you that his heart's in the right place an' that he's wishful fur to do the square thing." He felt in his pockets, producing a crumpled bill. "An' here 'tis!"

Æsop pouched the currency on the flank where he carried his personal funds before his commercial instinct inspired him to seek out the motives actuating the volunteer peacemaker. Experience had taught him to beware of Greeks bearing gifts—not of the gifts particularly, but of the Greeks.

"Well," he said, "ef Gumbo Rollins aims to be honest an' open an' abovebode wid us, w'y that puts a diff'unt face on it. But so fur ez I heared tell, you an' Gumbo Rollins ain't been so thick ez all this up till now. I's wonderin' whut does you 'spect to git out of the little transaction fur yo'se'f? 'Ca'se I gives you warnin' right yere an' now that ef you's hopin' to git a split out of me you mout jes' ez well stop dreamin' ary sech a delusion an' become undelirious ag'in."

"Stop, Brother Lovin'," broke in Jeff in the tone of one aggrieved at being unjustly accused. "Has I asted you fur anything? Then wait till I does so."

"All right," agreed Æsop. "I'll wait till you does so an' w'en you does so I'll say no, same ez I's already sayin' it to you in advance. Say, boy, you must have yore reasons fur the int'rust you is displayin' in dis matter."

"Whutever 'tis 'taint got nothin' to do wid lurin' no money out of yore possession," said Jeff. His voice changed to one of deep gravity. "Brother Lovin', look yere at me."

He glanced about him, making doubly sure they were alone. He advanced one step and came to a halt; he made his figure rigid and gave first the grand hailing-sign of the Afro-American Society of Supreme Kings of the Universe, then the private signal of distress which invokes succor and support, and he wound up by uttering the cabalistic words which bind a fellow Supreme King in the vows of eternal secrecy on pain of having his heart cut out of his bosom and burned and the ashes scattered to the four winds. For his part, Æsop Loving arose and, obeying the ritual, made the proper responses. In a solemn silence they exchanged the symbolic grip which is reserved only for occasions of emergency and stress and which unites brother to brother in bonds stronger than steel. A moment later Æsop Loving was alone.

It was not Jeff, the intriguer, who had colleagued with Gumbo Rollins and conspired with Cump Glass, who came in the evening to the Twelfth Ward tabernacle and sought a seat on a bench well up toward the front where he could be fairly conspicuous and yet not too conspicuous; neither was it the persuasive person who had dangled the bait of private profit before the beguiled eyes of Æsop Loving. Rather was it the serious, self-searching, introspective Jeff, who earlier that day had besought counsel and comfort of Aunt Dilsey Turner. He came alone, walking with head bowed as walks one who is wrapped in his own thoughts. He arrived betimes; he remained silent and apart, inwardly communing, one would have said, while the audience rustled in.

So engrossed was he that he seemed to have no eyes even for Ophelia, who perched high aloft, the brightest flower in the hanging garden of color that banked the tiers of the choir division terracing up behind the platform. She, in turn, had no eyes for any there save Prof. Cephus Fringe, who, it should be added, had one eye for Ophelia and the other for his own person. Even by those prejudiced in his favor it was not to be denied that the Professor was, as one might say, passionately addicted to himself. When, with Cephus Fringe accompanying and directing, the opening hymn was offered, Ophelia, lifting high her soprano voice, sang directly at, to, and for

him. From the front this plainly was to be observed; in fact was the subject of whispered comment among some of Jeff's neighbors.

As though he heard them not nor saw the byplay, he gave no sign which might be interpreted as denoting annoyance or chagrin. There was only a friendly and whole-souled approval in his look when, following the song, Prof. Fringe rendered—I believe this is the customary phrase—rendered as a solo on his saxophone one of the compositions bearing his name as author. There was rapt attention and naught else in his pose and on his face the while the Rev. Wickliffe, swinging his scythe of righteousness, mowed for a solid hour in Satan's weedy back yard, so that the penitents fell in a broad swath.

From her place hard by, Aunt Dilsey vigilantly watched Jeff and was, in spite of herself, convinced of his sincerity. She marked how, at the close of the meeting, he passed slowly, almost reluctantly out, stopping more than once and looking rearward as though half inclined to turn back and join the ranks of those who clustered still at the foot of the pulpit, completely and utterly won over. She was moved to direct the notice of certain of the sistren and brethren to his behavior as conspicuous proof of the compelling fervor of the Sin Killer. Swiftly the word spread that Jeff Poindexter magically had ceased to be a horrible example and was betraying evidences that he might yet become what insurance agents call a prospect.

As though to justify this hope Jeff attended Tuesday night; his presence attesting him a well-wisher, his deportment an added testimony that he deeply had been stirred by the outpoured words of the revivalist. Before the service got under way he seized upon an opportunity to be introduced to the Rev. Wickliffe. Many were spectators to the meeting between them, and speculation ran higher upon the possibility that before the week ended he would be enrolled among the avowedly convicted. Again on Wednesday night he was on hand, an attentive and earnest listener.

Prior to the preliminary exercise of song on this night, the Rev. Wickliffe outlined the amplified plans for the great moral jubilation on the evening of the Eighth and invited suggestions from the assemblage to the end that naught be overlooked which might add to its splendors. At this invitation, almost as though he had been awaiting some such favorable opening, there stood up promptly

Tecumseh Sherman Glass, and Tecumseh made a certain motion which on being put to the vote of the house carried unanimously amid sounds of a general approval. Some applauded, no doubt, because of the popularity of the idea embodied in the motion and some perhaps because the brother, in offering it, was deemed to have displayed a most generous, a most becoming, and a totally unexpected spirit of magnanimity toward a fellow professional occupying a place which Cump Glass or any other saxophonist might well envy him.

If at this Jeff's heart gave a joyous jump inside of him, his face remained a mask to hide his real feelings. If, privily, by day he labored to gather up all the loose ends of his shaping design, publicly by night he patronized the tabernacle. He was present on Thursday night and on Friday and on Saturday, and three times on Sunday he was present, maintaining still his outward bearing of interest and sympathy. He was like a tree which bends before the compelling blast yet refuses for a little while longer to topple headlong. This brings us up to Monday, the Glorious Eighth.

With the morning of that day or with its nooning or with its afternooning we need have no concern, replete though they were in variety of entertainment and abounding in pleasurable incident. For us the interest chiefly centers in the early evening and especially in that part of the evening falling between seven o'clock and forty minutes past seven. At seven, prompt on the clock's stroke and as guaranteed in the announcements, the parade fathered by the Rev. Wickliffe, started from the corner of Tennessee and Front Streets, down by the river, and wended, as the saying goes, its way due westward into the sunset's painted afterglow.

This was a parade! A great man had sired it; a tried organizer had fostered it; proved executives had worked out the problems of its divisions and its groupings. At its head, suitably mounted upon a white steed, rode a grand marshal who was more than a grand marshal. For in his one person this dignitary combined two parts: not only was he the grand marshal with a broad sash draped diagonally across his torso to prove it, but likewise he was the official trumpeter. At intervals he raised his horn to his lips and sounded forth inspiring notes. That his horn was neither a trumpet nor yet a bugle but a long, goose-necked thing might be regarded as merely a

detail. Only one who was overly technical would have noted the circumstance at all. Behind him, sixteen abreast, appeared the special tabernacle choristers with large fluttering badges of royal purple. They came on magnificently, filling the street from curb-line to curb-line, and the sound of their singing was as a great wind gathering. The second one on the left, counting from the end, in the front row, was Ophelia Stubblefield, tawny and splendid as a lithesome tiger-lily. She wore white with long white kid gloves and a beflowered hat which represented the hoarded total of six weeks' wages. You would have said it was worth the money. Anybody would.

In the second section rode the Rev. Wickliffe and the Rev. Shine; they were in a touring-car with its top flattened back. You might say they composed the second section. Carriages and automobiles rolling along immediately behind them bore the members of the official board of Emmanuel Chapel in sets of fours, and the chief financial contributors to the revival which this night would reach its climax. Flanking the carriages and following after them marched the living garnerings of the campaign—the converts to date, a veritable Gideon's Band of them, in number amounting to a host, and all afoot as befitting the palmer and the pilgrim. Established members of the congregation, in hired hacks, in jitneys, in rented and privately owned equipages, and also afoot came next.

Voluntarily aligned representatives of the colored population at large formed the tail of the column. Of these last there surely were hundreds. Hundreds more, in holiday dress now somewhat rumpled after a day of pleasure-seeking and pleasure-finding, lined the sidewalks to see this spectacle. Nowhere along the straightaway of the line of march did the pavements lack for onlookers, but nearing the end of the route, and especially where the wide vacant spaces of the Tennessee Street common had been preëmpted by the festal enterprises of Director General Æsop Loving and his confrères, the press became thicker and ever thicker. Here the crowds overflowed upon the gravel roadway, narrowing the thoroughfare to a lane through which the paraders barely might pass. They did pass, though at a lessened pace, until their front ranks had reached the approximate middle breadth of the old show-grounds, with the tabernacle looming against the sunset's dying fires an eighth of a mile on beyond.

It is necessary here and now that, taking our eyes from this scene, we hark back to the Wednesday evening preceding. It will be recalled that on this evening a certain motion was made and by acclamation adopted. The maker of the motion, as we know, was Tecumseh Sherman Glass; its beneficiary, as the reader shrewdly may have divined, was Cephus Fringe. Beforehand perhaps the Professor had had vague misgivings as to the part he was to play in the pageantry on the Eighth; perhaps in his mind he had forecast the probability that he might suffer eclipse—a temporary eclipse—but to an *artiste* none the less distasteful—in the shadow of the Sin Killer, for since the Sin Killer had originally promulgated the idea of the procession it was only natural and only human that the Sin Killer should devise to himself the outstanding place of honor in it.

Be these conjectures as they may be, it is not to be gainsaid that the suggestion embodied in Cump Glass's motion was to Prof. Fringe highly agreeable, insuring, as it did, a fair measure of prominence for him without infringing upon his chief's distinctions. He showed his approbation. I believe I already have intimated that Prof. Fringe was not exactly prejudiced against himself. Any lingering aversions he may have entertained in this quarter had long since been overcome. Nevertheless a fresh doubt, arising from fresh causes, assailed him as the first flush of satisfaction abated within him.

This new-born uneasiness betrayed itself in his voice and his manner when, at the conclusion of the night's services, he encountered Cump Glass in the middle aisle. The meeting was not entirely by chance; if the truth is to be known, Cump had maneuvered to bring it about. The act was his; a greater mind than his, though, had sponsored the act. And Cump Glass, rightly interpreting the look upon Prof. Fringe's large, plump face, guilefully set himself to play upon the emotional nature of the other. With a gracious wave of his hand he checked the Professor's expression of thanks.

"Don't mention it," he said generously, "don't mention it. It teks a purformer to understand another purformer's feelin's. So I therefo' teken it 'pon myse'f to nomernate you fur the gran' marshal and also ez the proper one to sound the buglin' blasts endurin' of the turnout. Seems lak somebody else would 'a' had the sense to do so, but w'en they wuzn't nobody w'ich did so, I steps in. But right soon afterwards

I gits to stedyin' 'bout the hoss you'll be ridin', an' it's been worryin' me quite some little—the question of the hoss."

"I been thinkin' concernin' of 'at very same thing," confessed Cephus Fringe.

"Is that possible?" exclaimed Cump Glass with well-simulated surprise. "Well, suh, smart minds shorely runs in the same grooves, ez the sayin' goes. Yas, suh, settin' yonder after I made that motion, I sez to myse'f, I sez, 'Glass, you done started this thing an' you must see it th'ough. 'Twon't never do in this world fur the gran' marshal to be stuck up 'pon the top side of a skittish, skeery liver'-stable hoss that'll mebbe start cuttin' up right in the smack middle of things and distrac' the gran' marshal's mind frum his business.' I seen that happen mo' times 'en onct, wid painful results. I s'pose, tho, you kin ride mighty nigh ary hoss they is, can't you, Purfessor?"

"Well, I could do so onct," stated Cephus in the manner of one who formerly had followed rough-riding for a calling, "but leadin' a public life fur so long, lak I has, I ain't had much time fur private pleasures. 'Sides w'ich, ef I'm goin' sound the notes I'll be needin' both hands free fur my instermint."

"Puzzactly the same thought w'ich came to me, jes' lak I'm tellin' it to you," agreed Cump. "It teks a musician to think of things w'ich an ordinary pusson wouldn't never dream of. So, fur the las' hour or so I been castin' about in my mind an' jes' a minute ago the idee come to me. I feels shore I kin arrange wid a frien' of mine to he'p us out. I s'pose you is acquainted with this yere Jeffy Poindexter?"

"I has met him," said Cephus with chill creeping into his tones. "An' I has observed him present yere the last two-three nights. But I ain't aimin' to ax no favors frum him."

"You ain't needin' to," said Cump. "I'll 'tend to that myse'f. Besides, Purfessor, you is sizin' up Jeffy Poindexter wrong. He's went an' 'sperienced a change of heart in his feelin's tow'ds whut's goin' on yere. Furthermo'"—and here he favored his flattered listener with a confidential and a meaning wink—"he got sense 'nuff, Jeffy has, to know w'en he's crowded plum out of the runnin' by somebody w'ich is mo' swiftly gaited 'en whut he is, an' natchelly he crave to stand in well wid a winner. Naw, suh, that Jeffy, he'd be most highly

overjoyed to haul off an' lend a helpin' hand, ef by so doin' he mout put you onder a favor to him."

Cephus sniffed, half disarmed but wavering.

"Wharin' could he he'p out? He ain't ownin' no private string of ridin'-hosses so fur ez I've took note of."

"The w'ite man he wuks fur is got one an' Jeffy gits the borrowin' use of her—it's a mare—w'enever he want to, ez I knows frum whut he tells me an' frum whut I seen. Purfessor, that mare is jes' natchelly ordained an' cut out fur peradin'—broad ez a feather-tick, gentle ez the onborn lamb, an' mouty nigh pyure white—perzactly the right color fur a gran' marshal's hoss. Crowds ain't goin' pester that lady-mare none. Music ain't goin' disturb her none whutsoever, neither."

"Whut's her reg'lar gait?"

"Her reg'lar gait is standin' still. But w'en she's travelin' at her bestest speed she uses the cemetery walk. See that mare goin' pas' you w'en she's in a hurry an' you say to yo'se'f, you say, 'Yere you is, bound fur de buryin'-groun', but how come you got separated frum the hearse?' Purfessor, that mare's entitled Christian name is Mittie May. Did you ever hear of ary thing on fo' laigs, ur two, w'ich answered to the name of Mittie May that wuz tricky?"

"Better be mouty sure," said the cautious Cephus, concerned for the safety and dignity of the creature which he held most dear of all on this earth. "'Member, I'll be needin' both hands free—'twon't be no time fur me to go jerkin' on the reins w'en my saxophone is requirin' to be played."

"You's right there," agreed Cump. "Twouldn't never do, neither, fur you to slip off an' mebbe git yo'se'f crippled up. Whar would this yere pertracted meetin' be then? Lemme think. Ah, hah! I got it—the notion jes' come to me. Purfessor, listen yere." He placed his lips close to the other's ear and spoke perhaps fifty words in a confidential whisper. In token of approval and acquiescence the Professor warmly clasped the right hand of this forethoughted Glass.

After such a manner was Cephus Fringe, all unwittingly, thrust into the pit which had been digged for him.

At the point where the narrative was broken into for the interpolation of the episode now set forth, the head of the parade, as

will be remembered, was just coming abreast of the old show-grounds. Now, the head of the parade was Cephus Fringe, and none other. One glance at him, upon a white steed, all glorious in high hat and frock coat and with that wide crimson sash dividing his torso in two parts, would have proved that to the most ignorant. As for his palfrey, she ambled along as though Eighth of August celebrations and a saxophone blaring between her drooping ears, and jubilating crowds and all that singing behind her, and all these carnival barkers shouting alongside her, had been her daily portion since first she was foaled into the world. The compound word lady-like would be the word fittest to describe her.

Not twenty feet from her, close up to where the abutting common met the straggling brick pavement, stood the battered Flyin' Jinny of Gumbo Rollins. It was nearermost to the street-line of all the attractions provided by Æsop Loving and his associates. Here, on the site which he had chosen, was Gumbo Rollins himself, competently in charge. At the precise moment when Mittie May and her proud rider had reached a point just opposite him, Gumbo Rollins elected to set his device in motion and with it the steam-organ which was part and parcel of the thing's organism. Really he might have waited a bit.

Lured by the prospect of beholding something for nothing, most of his consistent patrons temporarily had deserted him to flock out into the roadway and witness the passing by of the Sin Killer's cohorts. Two infatuated lovers, country darkies, sat with arms entwined in a rickety wooden chariot. Here and there a piccaninny clung to the back of a spotted wooden pony or a striped wooden zebra. These, for the moment, were his only customers; nevertheless Gumbo Jones Rollins swung a lever and started the machinery. The merry-go-round moved with a shriek of steam; the wheezy organ began spouting forth the introductory bars of a rollicking *galop*, a tune so old that its very name had been forgotten, although the air of it lived anonymously.

As though she had been bee-stung, Mittie May flung up her head. She arched her neck and pranced with all four of her feet. She spun about, scattering those of the pedestrian classes who hemmed her so closely in. Unmindful of a sudden anxious command from her rider, she swung her foreparts this way and that. She was looking for it. It

must be directly hereabouts somewhere. In those ancient days of her youthful vagabondage it had always been close at hand when that tune—her own tune—was played.

Then above the heads of the crowd she saw it—a scuffed circlet of earth measuring exactly fifty-two feet across and marking the location where the middle ring had been builded when Runyon & Bulger's Mighty United Railroad Shows pitched their tents on the occasion of their annual Spring engagement. That had been in early May and this was summer's third month; the attrition of the weather had worn down the sharp edges of that low turfen parapet; by rights, too, there should have been much sawdust and much smell of the same and a center pole rising like one lone blasted tree from the exact middle of a circular island of this sawdust; there should have been a ringmaster and at least two clowns and an orderly clutter of paraphernalia. Nevertheless there before her was the middle ring. And the music had started. And Mittie May answered the cue which had lived in her brain for fifteen long years and more, just as always she answered it, or sought to, when that tune smote her eardrums.

The startled spectators gave backward and to either side in scrambling retreat as she lunged forward, cleaving a passage for herself to the proper spot of entrance. She whisked in. Around the ring she sped, her hoofs drumming against the flanks of the ring-back, her barrel slanting far over in obedience to the laws of centripetal force, her tail rippling out behind her like a homebound pennon in a fair breeze—around and around and yet again and then some more.

To be sure there were irregularities in the procedure. Upon her back, springily erect, there should have been a jaunty equestrian swinging a gay pink leg in air and anon uttering the traditional *Hoop-la*. Instead there was a heavy bulk which embraced her neck with two strong arms, which wallowed about on her spinal column, which continually cried out entreaties, threats, commands, even profanities. Yet with Mittie May, as with most of us, habit was stronger than all else. She knew her duty as of old. She did it. Accommodating her gait to the quickening measures of the music, she stretched her legs, passing out of a rolling gallop into a hard run. Yet one more thing, or rather the lack of it, perplexed her. Attendants should be bringing forth knockdown fence-panels for her

to leap over and hoops of paper for her rider to leap through. Never mind; out of her imagination she would supply these missing details when the proper moment came. She'd hurdle the hurdles which weren't there. Meanwhile she knew what to do—around and around and around, right willingly, right blithely went Mittie May.

And, with her, around and around went also Prof. Cephus Fringe, but not willingly and by no means blithely. He shed his high hat and with it all lingering essences of his dignity. One of Mittie May's feet squashed down on the high hat and it folded up like a condensed time-card. He lost the last vestige of his vanishing authority when he lost his saxophone. The Professor did not understate the case when he had intimated that he was somewhat out of practice at equestrian exercises. Stark terror convulsed his frame; instinct of self-preservation made him careless of the language he used. Indeed, a good deal of the language he used was bounced right out of him.

Haply perhaps for him—and surely nothing else that happened was for him haply circumstanced—most of the naughty words reached no ears save those of Mittie May. There were sounds which drowned them—sounds which began with a fluttered outcry of alarm, which progressed to a great gasp of astonishment, which swelled and rippled into a titter, which grew into a vast rocking roar of unrestrained joyousness. Children shrieked, old women cackled, old men wheezed, adults guffawed, strong men rolled upon the earth in uncontrollable outbursts of thunderous mirth. As though stricken in all his members, Gumbo Rollins fell alongside his whirling Flyin' Jinny, but failed not, even in that excess of his mounting hysteria, to see to it that the steam-driven organ continued to grind out the one tune of its repertoire. The members of the choir forgot that their mission was to sing. They were too busy laughing to sing. And high and clear above the chorus of their glad outcry rose the soprano gurglings of Ophelia Stubblefield as she leaned for support up against somebody.

You ask, Why did not Prof. Cephus Fringe fall off of Mittie May? He tried to. At first he sought only to stay on; then after a bit he sought to get off; he couldn't. The cause for his staying on was revealed when Mittie May took the first of those mental hazards of hers. As she rose grandly into space to clear the imagined top-rail of the imagined panel and with hind heels drawn well in under her,

descended and continued on her circling way, a keen-eyed spectator, all bent double though he was, alongside the ring, and beating himself in the short ribs, caught a flashing glimpse of a strong but narrow strap which bound the rider's ankles to the saddle-girth and which, through the ordered march of the parade, had been safely hidden from view behind the ornament housings of the broad Spanish stirrups. Cump Glass had done his fiendish work well; those straps strained, but they held.

"Name of Glory!" shouted out the observer. "He done tie hisse'f on! He done tie hisse'f—" Overcome he choked.

With a great sweeping, swooping heave Mittie May made the last leap. And then at the precise second when the music stopped, the leathern thongs parted, and as the burden on her tumbled off and lay struggling in the dust, Mittie May swerved from the ring and, magically and instantaneously becoming once more Judge Priest's staidly respectable old buggy-mare, stood waiting for Jeff Poindexter to come and lead her out of all this shrieking, whooping jam of folks back to her stable. And Jeff came. He had been there all the time. It was against his supporting frame that Ophelia had slanted limply the while she laughed.

Here the curtain is lowered for two seconds to denote the passage of two days. At its rise Jeff Poindexter and Gumbo Rollins are discovered sitting side by side on the back step of a cabin in the Plunket's Hill neighborhood.

"An' so they ain't nobody seen him sence?" It is Jeff who is speaking.

"So they tells me," answers Gumbo. "Ain't nary soul seen hair nur hide of him frum the moment he riz out 'en that ring an' tuk his foot in his hand an' marviled further. Yas, suh, the pertracted meetin' will have to worry 'long the best way it kin 'thout its champion purty man. Well, sometimes it seems lak these things turns out fur the bes'. It suttin'ly would damage his lacinated feelin's still mo' ef he wus yere an' heared folks all over town callin' him the Jazzed-up Circus Rider."

"I got a better name fur him 'en that," says Jeff, "Whiffletit."

"W'ich?" asks Gumbo.

Seemingly Jeff has not heard his friend's question. In an undertone, and as though seeking to recall the words of a given formula, he communes with himself, "Fust you baits him wid the cheese. An' 'en w'en he nibble the cheese, he git all swelled up an' 'en whilst he's flappin' helpless you leans over the side of the boat an jes' natchelly laffs him to death."

"Whut-all is you mumblin'?" demands Gumbo Rollins, puzzled by these seemingly unrelated and irrelevant mouthings. "Is you crazy?"

"Yas," concurs Jeff, "crazy lak the king of the weazels."

CHAPTER IX

PLENTIFUL VALLEY

"So this here head brakeman, the same being a large, coarse, hairy, rectangular person with a square-toed jaw and a square-jawed toe, he up and boots the two of us right off this here freight train."

My old and revered friend, Scandalous Doolan, is much addicted to opening a narrative smack down the middle, as though it were an oyster, and then, by degrees, working both ways—toward the start and the finish. So it did not greatly surprise me that without preface, dedication, index or chapter-heading, he should suddenly introduce a head brakeman and a freight train into a conversation which until that moment had dealt with topics not in the least akin to these. Indeed, knowing him as I did, it seemed to me all the better reason why I should promptly incline the greedy ear, for over and above his eccentricities in the matter of launching a subject, Mr. Doolan is the only member of his calling I ever saw who talks in real life as all the members of his calling are fondly presumed to talk, in story-books and on the stage.

I harkened, therefore, saying nothing, and sure enough, having dealt for a brief passage of time with the incident of a certain enforced departure from a certain as yet unnamed common carrier, he presently retraced his verbal footsteps and began at the beginning.

I quote in full:

"Yes, sir, that's what he does. Refusing to listen to reason, this here head brakeman, which anybody could tell just by looking at him that he didn't have no heart a-tall and no soul, so as you could notice it, he just red lights us off into the peaceful and sun-lit bosom of the rooral New York State landscape. But before reaching the landscape it becomes necessary for us to slide down a grade of a perpendicular character, and in passing I am much pleased to note that the right-of-way is self-trimmed to match the prevalent style of scenery, with maybe a few cinders interspersed for decorations. There is one class of travelers which prefers a road-bed rock-ballasted, and these is those which goes on trains from place to place. There's another

kind which likes a road-bed done in the matched or natural materials, and them's the kind which goes off trains from time to time. And us two, being for the moment in this class, we are much gratified by the circumstance.

"And we sits up and dusts ourselves off in a nonchalant manner while the little old choo-choo continues upon her way to Utica, Syracuse, and all points west, leaving me and the Sweet Caps Kid with all the bright world before us, and nothing behind us but the police force.

"For some months previous to this, me and the Sweet Caps Kid has been sojourning in that favored metropolis which is bounded on one side by a loud Sound and on the other by a steep Bluff, and is doing her constant best at all times to live up to the surroundings. Needless to say, I refer to little Noo Yawk, the original haunt of the come-on and the native habitat of the sure thing, where the jays bite freely and the woods are full of fish. We have been doing very well there—very, very well, considering. What with working the nuts on the side streets right off Broadway and playing a little three-card monte down round Coney in the cool of the evening and once in a while selling a sturdy husbandman from over Jersey way a couple of admission tickets to Central Park, we have found no cause to complain at the business depression. It sure looks to us like confidence has been restored and any time she seems a little backward we take steps to restore her some ourselves. But all of a sudden, something seems to tell me that we oughter be moving.

"You know how them mysterious premonitions comes to a feller. A little bird whispers to you, or you have a dream, or else you walk into the mitt-joint and hand a he-note to a dark complected lady wearing a red kimono and a brown mustache, and she takes a flash at your palm and seems to see a dark man coming with a warrant, followed by a trip up a great river to a large stone building like a castle. Or else Headquarters issues a general alarm, giving names, dates, personal description, size of reward and place where last seen. This time it's a general alarm. From what I could gather, a downcasted Issy Wisenheimer has been up to the front parlor beefing about his vanishing bankroll and his disappearing breast-pin. You wouldn't think a self-respecting citizen of a great Republic like this'n would carry on so over thirty-eight dollars in

currency and a diamond so yeller it woulda been a topaz if it had been any yellower. But such was indeed the case. I gleans a little valuable information from a friendly barkeeper who's got a brother-in-law at the Central Office, and so is in position to get hold of much interesting and timely chit-chat before it becomes common gossip throughout the neighborhood. So then I takes the Sweet Caps Kid off to one side and I says to him, I says:

"'Kiddo,' I says, 'listen: I've got a strong presentiment that we should oughter be going completely away from here. If we don't, the first thing you know some plain-clothes bull with fallen arches and his neck shaved 'way up high in the back will be coming round asking us to go riding with him down town into the congested district, and if we declines the invitation, like as not he'll muss our clothes all up. Do you seem to get my general drift?' I says.

"'Huh,' he says, 'you talk as if there'd been a squeal.'

"'Squeal?' I says. 'Squeal? Son, you can take it from me there's been a regular season of grand opera. You and me are about to be accused of pernicious activity. What's more, they're liable to prove it. There's a movement on foot in influential quarters to provide us with board and lodgings at a place which I will not name to you in so many words on account of your weak heart. The work there,' I says, 'is regular, and the meals is served on time, and you're protected from the damp night air; but,' I says, 'the hours is too long and too confining to suit me.' I've knowed probably a thousand fellers in my time that sojourned up at Bird Center-on-the-Hudson anywhere from one to fifteen years on a stretch, and I never seen one of them yet but had some fault to find with the place.

"'Whereas, on the other hand,' I says, 'all nature seems to beckon to us. Let's you and me steal forth under the billowy blue caliber of Heaven and make hay while the haymakers are good. Let us quit the city with its temptations and its snares and its pitfalls, 'specially the last named,' I says, 'and in some peaceful spot far, far away, let us teach Uncle Joshua Whitcomb that the hand is quicker than the eye, him paying cash down in advance for the lessons. Tubby sure, the pickings has been excellent here in the shadow of the skyscrapers, and it'll probably be harder sledding out amongst the disk-harrow boys. Everybody reads the papers these days, only the Rube believes what he reads and the city guy don't. I hate to go, but I ain't

comfortable where I am. When my scalp begins to itch like it does now that's a sign of a close hair-cut coming on. I've got educated dandruff,' I says, 'and it ain't never fooled me yet. In short,' I says, 'I've been handed the office to skiddoo, and in such cases I believe in skiddooing. Let us create a vacancy in these parts *sine quinine*—which,' I says, 'is Latin, meaning it's a bitter dose but you gotta take it.'

"'I can start right this minute,' says Sweet Caps; 'my tooth-brush is packed and all I've got to do is to put on my hat. S'pose we run up to a Hundred and Twenty-fifth Street, which is a nice secluded spot,' he says, 'and catch the rattler.'

"'How are you fixed for currency?' I says.

"'Fixed?' he says. 'I ain't fixed a-tall. A'int you been carrying the firm's bank-roll? Say, ain't you?'

"Well, right there I has to break the sad news to him. I does it as gentle as I could but still he seems peeved. Money has caused a lot of suffering in this world, they tell me, but I'm here to tell you the lack of it's been responsible for consider'ble many heartburnings too. Up until that minute I hadn't had the heart to tell the Sweet Caps Kid that our little joint partnership bank-roll is no longer with us. I'd been saving back them tidings for a more suitable moment, but now I has to tell him.

"It seems that the night before, I had been tiger hunting in the jungle down at Honest John Donohue's. Of course I should have knowed better than to go up against a game run by anybody calling hisself Honest John. Them complimentary monakers always work with the reverse English. You are walking along and you see a gin-mill across the street with a sign over the door which says it's Smiling Pete's Place, and you cross over and look in, and behind the bar is an old guy who ain't heard anything that really pleased him since the Martinique disaster. He's standing there with his lip stuck out like a fender on a street car, and a bung starter handy, just hoping that somebody will come in and start to start something. That's Smiling Pete. As for this here Donohue, he's so crooked he can't eat nothing such as stick candy and cheese straws without he gets cramps in his stomach. He'd take the numbers off your house. That's why they call him Honest John. I know all this, good and well, but what's a feller going to do when his is the only place in town

that's open? You've got to play somewheres, ain't you? Somehow, I always was sort of drawed to faro.

"Well, you know the saying—one man's meat is another's pizen. He was my pizen and I certainly was his meat. So now, I ain't got nothing in my pockets except the linings.

"I tells the Sweet Caps Kid just how it was—how right up to the very last minute I kept expecting the luck to turn and how even then I mighta got it all back if the game-keeper hadn't been so blamed unreasonable and mercenary. When my last chip is gone I holds up a finger for a marker and tells him I'll take another stack of fifty, all blues this time, but he only looks at me sort of chilly and distrustful and remarks in a kind of a bored way that there's nothing doing.

"'That'll be all right,' I says to him. 'I'll see you to-morrow.'

"'No, you wont,' he says, spiteful-like.

"'Why,' I says, 'wont you be here to-morrow?'

"'Oh, yes,' he says, 'we'll be here to-morrow, but you wont.'

"'Is that so?' I says, sarcastical. 'Coming in,' I says, 'I thought I seen the word *Welcome* on the doormat.'

"'Going out,' he says, 'you'll notice that, spelled backward, it's a French word signifying *Mind Your Step*.'

"And while I'm thinking up a proper comeback for that last remark of his'n somebody hands me my hat, and in less'n a minute, seems-like, I'm out in the street keeping company with myself.

"I tells all this to the Sweet Caps Kid, but still he don't seem satisfied with my explanation. That's one drawback to the Kid's disposition—he gets all put out over the least little thing. So I says to him: 'Cheer up,' I says, 'things ain't so worse. Due to my being in right with the proper parties we gets this here advance tip, and we beats the barrier while this here fat Central Office bull, who thinks he wants us, is slipping his collar on over his head in the morning. Remember,' I says, 'we are going to the high grass where the little birdies sing and the flowers bloom. Providence,' I says, 'has an eye on every sparrow that falls, but nothing is said about the jays,' I says, 'and we'll see if a few of them wont fall for our little cute tricks.'

"Tubby sure, I'm speaking figurative. I aint really aiming for the deep woods proper. Only I've been in Noo Yawk long enough to git the Noo Yawk habit of thinking everybody beyond Rahway, New

Jersey, is the Far West. I'm really figuring to land in one of them small junction points, such as Cleveland or Pittsburgh. And we would too, if it hadn'ta been for that there head brakeman.

"Anyway, we moons round in a kind of an unostentatious way, with the Kid still acting peevish and low in his mind, and me saying little things every now and then to chirk him up, until the shank of the evening arrives 'long about two A.M. Then we slips over into the yards below Riverside Drive, taking due care not to wake up no sleeping policeman on the way. There we presently observes a freight train, which is giving signs of getting ready to make up its mind to go somewheres.

"A freight train is like a woman. When you see a woman coming out of the front door and running back seven or eight times to get something she's forgot, you know that woman is on her way. And it's the same with freights; that's why they call 'em '*shes*'. Pretty soon this here freight quits vacilliating back and forth, and comes sliding down past where we're waiting.

"'Here comes a side-door Pullman, with the side door open,' I says. 'Let's get on and book a couple of lowers.'

"'How do you know where she's going?' says the Kid, him being greatly addicted to idle questions.

"'I don't,' I says; 'the point is that she's going. To-night she will be here but to-morrow she will be extensively elsewhere; and so,' I says, 'will we. Let us therefore depart from these parts while the departing is good,' I says.

"Which we done so, just like I'm telling you. And for some hours we trundles along very snug and comfortable, both of us being engrossed in sleep. When we wakes up it's another day, and the wicked city is far, far behind us, and we are running through a district which is entirely surrounded by scenery. If it hadn'ta been that something keeps reminding me I ai'nt had no breakfast I coulda been just as happy.

"'Where'll we git off?' says Sweet Caps, setting up and rubbing his eyes.

"'Well,' I says, 'we takes our choice. Maybe Albany,' I says. 'The legislature is in special session there, and a couple of grafters more or less wont make no material difference—they'll probably take us

for members. Maybe Rochester,' I says, 'which is a pleasant city, full of large and thriving industries. Maybe,' I says, 'if this here train don't take a notion to climb down off the track and go berry-picking, maybe Chicago. Of course,' I says, 'Chi ain't quite so polished as Noo Yawk. Chi has been called crude by some. When I think of Noo Yawk,' I says, 'I think of a peroxide chorus lady going home at three o'clock in the morning in two taxicabs, but when I think of Chicago I'm reminded of a soused hired girl, with red hair, on a rampage. But,' I says, 'what's the difference? Everywhere you go,' I says, 'there's always human life, and Chicago is reputed to be quite full of population and very probably we can find a few warm-hearted persons there who are more or less addicted to taking a chance.'

"But you know how it is in these matters—you never can tell. Just as I'm concluding my remarks touching on our two largest cities, this here brakeman comes snooping along and intimates that we better be thinking about getting off. He's probably the biggest brakeman living. If he was any bigger than what he is, he'd be twins. We endeavors to argue him out of the notion but it seems like he's sort of set in his mind. Besides, being so much larger than either one of us or both of us put together, for that matter, he has the advantage in repartee. So he makes an issue of it and we sees our way clear to getting off without waiting for the locomotive to slow up or anything. After our departure, the train continues on its way thither, we remaining hither.

"'My young friend,' I says when the dust has settled down, 'the question which you propounded about five minutes ago is now answered in the affirmative. This is where we get off—right here on this identical spot. I don't know the name of the place,' I says; 'maybe it's so far out in the suburbs that they ain't found time to get round to it yet and give it a name; but,' I says, 'there's one consolation. By glancing first up this way and then down that way you will observe that from here to the point where the rails meet down yonder is exactly the same distance that it is from here to where the rails meet up yonderways—proving,' I says, 'that we are in the exact center of the country. So let us be up and doing,' I says, 'specially doing. But the first consideration,' I say, 'is vittles.'

"You know me well enough to know," interjected Mr. Doolan, interrupting the thread of his narrative for a moment and turning to

me with a wave of his stout arm, "that I ain't no glutton. I can eat my grub when it's set before me or I can let it alone, only I never do. I never begin to think about the next meal till I'm almost through with the last one. And right now my mind seems to dwell on breakfast.

"Well, anyway we arises up and goes away from there, walking in a general direction, and before long we comes to a sign which says we are now approaching the incorporated village of Plentiful Valley—Autos Reduce Speed to Eight Miles an Hour—No Tramps Allowed. I kind of favors the sound of that name—Plentiful Valley. And as I remarks to the Sweet Caps Kid, 'We ain't no autos and we ain't no tramps but merely two professional men, looking for a chance to practise our profession.'

"This here is the first valley I ever see in the course of a long and more or less polka-dotted career that it is all up-hill and never no downhill. Be that as it may, we rambles on until it must be going on towards nine forty-five o'clock, and comes to a neat bungalow on a green slope inside of a high white fence. There's a venerable party setting on the front porch, in his shirt-sleeves. He looks beneficent and well fed.

"'Pull down your vest, son-boy,' I says to Sweet Caps, 'and please remember not to drink your coffee out of the sasser. I have a growing conviction,' I says, 'that we are about to partake of refreshment.'

"'Hadn't we better sell this ancient guy a few Bermuda oats, or something to start off with?' says he.

"'Not until after we have et,' I says; business before pleasure. And anyway,' I says, 'I works best on a full stomach. Follow your dear uncle,' I says, 'and don't do nothing till you hear from me.'

"With that I opens the gate and we meanders up a neat gravel path. As we draws near, the venerable party takes his feet down off the railings.

"'Come in,' he says cordially, 'come right in and rest your face and hands. You're out nice and early.'

"'Suffer us,' I says, 'to introduce ourselves. We are a couple of prominent tourist-pedestrians walking from Noo Yawk to Portland, Oregon, on a bet. This,' I says, pointing to Sweet Caps, 'is Young Twinkletoes, and I am commonly knowed as old King Lightfoot the First. By an unfortunate coincidence,' I says, 'we got separated at an

early hour from our provision wagon, as a result of which we have omitted breakfast and feel the omission severely. If we might impose,' I says, 'upon your good nature to the extent of—'

"'Don't mention it,' he says; 'take two or three chairs and set down, and we'll talk it over. To tell you the truth,' he says, 'I was jest setting here wishing somebody would come along and visit with me a spell. I'm keeping bachelor's hall,' he says, 'and raising chickens on the side, and sometimes I get a mite lonely. I guess maybe the Chink might scare up something, although,' he says, 'to tell you the truth there ain't hardly a bite in the house, except a couple of milk-fed broilers and some fresh tomattuses right out of the garden and a few hot biscuits and possibly some razzberries with cream; for I'm a simple feeder,' he says, 'and a very little satisfies me.'

"He pokes his head inside the door and yells to a Jap to put two more places at the table. So we reclines and indulges in edifying conversation upon the current topics of the day and, very shortly, nourishing smells begin for to percolate forth from within, causing me to water at the mouth until I has all the outward symptoms of being an ebb-tide. But this here pernicious Sweet Caps Kid, he can't let well enough alone. Observing copious signs of affluence upon every side he gets ambitious and would abuse the sacred right of hospitality about half to three-quarters of an hour too soon. Out of the tail of my eye I sees him reaching in his pocket for the educated pasteboards and I gives him the high sign to soft pedal, but he don't mind me. Out he comes with 'em.

"'A little harmless game of cards,' he says, addressing the elderly guy, 'entitled,' he says, 'California euchre. I have here, you will observe, two jacks and an ace—the noble ace of spades. I riffle and shuffle and drop 'em in a row, the trick being to pick out the ace. Now, then,' goes on this besetted Sweet Caps, with a winning smile, 'just to while away the time before breakfast, s'pose you make a small bet with me regarding the present whereabouts of said ace.'

"The party with the whiskers gets up; and now, when he speaks I sees that in spite of him wearing a brush arbor, he aint no real rube.

"'To think,' he says, more in sorrow than in anger, 'to think that I should live to see this day! To think that me, who helped Canady Bill sell the first gold brick that ever was molded in this country, should in my declining years have a couple of wooden-fingered amatoors

come along and try to slip me the oldest graft in the known world! It is too much,' he says, 'it is too much too much. You lower a noble pursuit,' he says, 'and I must respectfully but firmly request you to be on your way. I'll try to forgive you,' he says, 'but at this moment your mere presence offends me. On your way out,' he says, 'kindly latch the gate behind you—the chickens might stray off. Chickens,' he says, 'is not exciting for steady company,' he says, 'but in comparison with some humans I've met lately, chickens is absolutely gifted intellectually.

"'Furthermore,' he says, 'I would offer you a word of advice, although you don't really deserve it. Beware,' he says, 'of the constable in the village beyond. You'll recognize him by his whiskers,' he says. 'Alongside of him, I look like an onion in the face. Ten years ago,' he says, 'that constable swore a solemn oath not never to shave until he'd locked up a thousand bums, and,' he says, 'he's now on his last lap. Keep moving,' he says, 'till you feel like stopping, and then don't stop.'

"Them edifying smells has made me desperate. Besides, not counting the Chink, who don't count we outnumbers him two to one.

"'We don't go,' I says, 'until we gets a bite.'

"'Oh! I'll see that you get a bite,' he says. 'Sato,' he says, calling off-stage, 'kindly unchain Ophelia and Ralph Waldo. Ophelia,' he says, turning to us, 'is a lady Great Dane, standing four feet high at the shoulder and very morose in disposition. But Ralph Waldo is a crossbreed—part Boston bull and part snapping turtle. Sometimes I think they don't neither one of them care much for strangers. Here they come now! Sick 'em, pups!'

"Sweet Caps starts first but I beats him to the gate by half a length, Ophelia and Ralph Waldo finishing third and fourth, respectively. We fades away down the big road, and the last thing we sees as we turns a wistful farewell look over our shoulders is them two man-eaters raging back and forth inside the fence trying to gnaw down the palings, and the old guy standing on the steps laughing.

"So we pikes along, me frequently reproaching Sweet Caps for his precipitancy in spilling the beans. We passes through the village of Plentiful Valley without stopping and walks on and on and on some more, until we observes a large, prosperous-looking building of red

brick, like a summer hotel with a lawn in front and a high stone wall in front of that. A large number of persons of both sexes, but mainly females, is wandering about over the front yard dressed in peculiar styles. Leaning over the gates is a thickset man gazing with repugnance upon a lettuce leaf which he is holding in his right hand. He sees us and his face lights up some, but not much.

"'What ho, comrades!' he says; 'what's the latest and newest in the great world beyond?'

"'Mister,' I says, disregarding these pleasantries, 'how's the prospects for a pair of footsore travelers to get a free snack of vittles here?'

"'Poor,' he says, 'very poor. Even the pay-patients, one or two of whom I am which, don't get anything to eat to speak of. The diet here,' says, 'is exclusively vegeterrible. You wouldn't scarcely believe it,' he says, 'but we're paying out good money for this. Some of us is here to get cured of what the docters think we've got, and some of us is here,' he says, 'because as long as we stay here they ain't so liable to lock us up in a regular asylum. Yes,' he says, pensively, 'we've got all kinds here. That lady yonder,' he says, pointing to a large female who's dressed all in white like a week's washing and ain't got no shoes on, 'she's getting back to nature. She walks around in the dew barefooted. It takes quite a lot of dew,' he says. 'And that fat one just beyond her believes in reincarnation.'

"'You don't say!' I says.

"'Yes,' he says, 'I do. She wont eat potatoes not under no circumstances, because she thinks that in her last previous existence she was a potato herself.'

"I takes a squint at the lady. She has a kind of a round face with two or three chins that she don't actually need, and little knobby features.

"'Well,' I says, 'if I'm any judge, she ain't entirely recovered yet. Might I ask,' I says, 'what is your particular delusion? Are you a striped cabbage worm or a pet white rabbit?'

"I was thinking about that lettuce leaf which he held in his mitt.

"'Not exactly,' he says, 'I was such a good liver that I developed a bad one and so I paid a specialist eighty dollars to send me here. At this writing,' he says, 'the beasts of the field have but little on me. We

both browse, but they've got cuds to chew on afterwards. It's sickening,' he says in tones of the uttermost conviction. 'Do you know what we had for breakfast this morning? Nuts,' he says, 'mostly nuts, which it certainly was rank cannibalism on the part of many of those present to partake thereof,' he says. 'This here frayed foliage which I hold in my hand,' he says, 'is popularly known as the mid-forenoon refreshment. It's got imitation salad dressing on it to make it more tasty. Later on there'll be more of the same, but the big doings will be pulled off at dinner to-night. You just oughter see us at dinner,' he says with a bitter laugh. 'There'll be a mess of lovely boiled carrots,' he says, 'and some kind of chopped fodder, and if we're all real good and don't spill things on our bibs or make spots on the tablecloth, why, for dessert we'll each have a nice dried prune. I shudder to think,' he says, 'what I could do right this minute to a large double sirloin cooked with onions *Desdemona* style, which is to say, smothered.'

"'Mister,' I says, 'I never thought I'd fall so low as to be a vegeterrier, but necessity,' I says, 'is the mother of vinegar. Could you please, sir, spare us a couple of bites out of that there ensilage of yourn—one large bite for me and one small bite for my young friend there to keep what little life we have until the coming of the corned beef and cabbage?'

"'Fellow sufferer,' he says, 'listen here to me. I've got a dear old white-haired grandmother, which she was seventy-four her last birthday and has always been a life-long member of the First Baptist Church. I love my dear old grandmother, but if she was standing right here now and asked me for a nibble off my mid-day refreshment I'd tell her to go find a truck patch of her own. Yes sir, I'd turn her down cold; because if I don't eat enough to keep me alive to get out of here when the times comes I wont be alive to get out of here when the time comes. Anywhere else I could love you like a brother,' he says, 'and divide my last bite with you, but not here,' he says, 'not here! Do you get me?' he says.

"'Sir,' I says, 'I get you. Take care of yourself and don't get foundered on the green truck,' I says. 'A bran mash now and then and a wisp of cured timothy hay about once in so long ought to keep off the grass colic,' I says. 'Come on, little playmate,' I says to Sweet Caps, 'let us meander further into this here vale of plenty of

everything except something to eat. Which, by rights,' I says, 'its real name oughter be Hungry Hollow.'

"So we meanders some more miles and pretty soon I'm that empty that I couldn't be no emptier than I am without a surgical operation. My voice gets weak, and objects dance before my eyes.

"After while they quits dancing, and I realizes that I'm bowing low before probably the boniest lady that ever lived. A gold watch has got more extra flesh on it than this lady has on her. She is looking out of the front window of a small cottage and her expression verges on the disapproving. As nearly as I can figure out she disapproves of everything in general, and a large number of things in particular. And I judges that if there is any two things in the world which she disapproves of more than any other two things, those two things is me and the Sweet Caps Kid.

"I removes my lid and starts to speak, but she merely waves her arm in a majestic manner, meaning, if I know anything about the sign language, 'Exit in case of dog.' So we exits without even passing the time of the day with her and continues upon our way through the bright sunshine. The thermometer now registers at least ninety-eight in the shade, but then of course we don't have to stay in the shade, and that's some consolation.

"The next female land-owner we encounters lives away down in the woods. She's plump and motherly-looking, with gold bows on her spec's. She is out in her front garden picking pansies and potato bugs and other flora and fauna common to the soil. She looks up as the gate-latch clicks, and beholds me on the point of entering.

"'Madam,' I says, 'pardon this here intrusion but in us you behold two weary travelers carrying no script and no purse. Might I ask you what the chances are of us getting a square meal before we perish?'

"'You might,' she says.

"'Might what?' I says.

"'Might ask me,' she says,'but I warn you in advance, that I ain't very good at conundrums. I'm a lone widder woman,' she says, 'and I've got something to do,' she says, 'besides standing out here in the hot sun answering riddles for perfect strangers,' she says. 'So go ahead,' she says.

"'Madam,' I says pretty severe, 'don't trifle with me. I'm a desperate man, and my friend here is even desperater than what I am. Remember you are alone, and at our mercy and—'

"'Oh,' she says, with a sweet smile, 'I ain't exactly alone. There's Tige,' she says.

"I don't see no Tige,' I says, glancing around hurriedly.

"'That ain't his fault,' she says. 'I'll call him,' she says, looking like it wont be no trouble whatsoever to show goods.

"But we don't wait. 'Sweet Caps,' I says to him as we hikes round the first turn in the road, 'this district ain't making no pronounced hit with me. Every time you ast 'em for bread they give you a dog. The next time,' I says,' anybody offers me a canine, I'm going to take him,' I says. 'If he can eat me any faster than I can eat him,' I says, 'he'll have to work fast. And,' I says, 'if I should meet a nice little clean boy with fat legs—Heaven help him!'

"And just as I'm speaking them words we comes to a lovely glade in the woods and stops with our mouths ajar and our eyes bulged out like push buttons. 'Do I sleep,' I says to myself, 'or am I just plain delirious?'

"For right there, out in the middle of the woods, is a table with a white cloth on it, and it's all covered over with the most lucivicious looking viands you ever see in your life, including a ham and a couple of chickens and a pie and some cool-looking bottles with long necks on 'em and gilt-foil crowns upon their regal heads. And a couple of flunkies in long-tailed coats and knee breeches and white wigs are mooning round, fixing things up ship shape. And just then a tall lady comes sauntering out of the bushes, and she strolls up close and the flunkies bow and fall back and she says something about everything being now ready for Lady Gwyndolin's garden party and departs the same way she came. And the second she's out of sight, me and Sweet Caps can't hold in no longer. We busts through the roadside thicket and tear acrost that open place, licketty-split. It seems too good to be true. And it is. When we gets up close we realizes the horrible truth.

"The ham is wood and the chickens is pasteboard and the pie is a prop pie and the bottles aint got nothing in 'em but the corks. As we pauses, stupefied with disappointment, a cheerful voice calls out:

'That's the ticket! Hold the spot and register grief—we can work the scene in and it'll be a knock-out!'

"And right over yonder at the other side of the clearing stands a guy in a checked suit grinding the handle of a moving-picture machine. We has inadvertently busted right into the drammer. So we kicks over his table and departs on the run, with a whole troupe of them cheap fillum troopers chasing after us, calling hard names and throwing sticks and rocks and things.

"After while, by superior footwork, we loses 'em and resumes our journey. Well, unless you've got a morbid mind you wont be interested in hearing about our continued sufferings. I will merely state that by the time five o'clock comes we have traveled upwards of nine hundred miles, running sometimes but mostly walking, and my feet is so full of water blisters I've got riparian rights. Nearly everything has happened to us except something to eat. So we comes to the edge of a green field alongside the road and I falls in a heap, and Sweet Caps he falls in another heap alongside of me, making two heaps in all.

"'Kiddo,' I says, 'let us recline here and enjoy the beauties of Nature,' I says.

"'Dern the beauties of Nature!' says Sweet Caps. 'I've had enough Nature since this morning to last me eleven thousand years. Nature,' he says, 'has been overdone, anyway.'

"'Ain't you got no soul?' I says.

"'Oh yes,' he says, 'I've got a soul, but the trouble is,' he says, 'I've got a lot of other vital organs, too. When I ponder,' he says, 'and remember how many times I've got up from the table and gone away leaving bones and potato peels and clam shells and lobster claws on the plate—when I think,' he says, 'of them old care-free, prodigal days, I could bust right out crying.'

"'Sh-h!' I says, 'food has gone out of fashion—the best people ain't eating any more. Put your mind on something else,' I says. 'Consider the setting sun,' I says, 'a-sinking in the golden west. Gaze yonder,' I says, 'upon that great yellow orb with all them fleecy white clouds banked up behind it.'

"'I'm gazing,' he says. 'It looks something like a aig fried on one side. That's the way I always uster take mine,' he says, 'before I quit eating—fried with the sunny side up.'

"I changed the subject.

"'Ain't it a remarkable fact,' I says, 'how this district is addicted to dogs? Look at that there little stray pup, yonder,' I says, 'jumping up and down in the wild mustard, making himself all warm and panty. That's an edifying sight,' I says.

"'You bet,' says the Sweet Caps Kid, kind of dreamy, 'it's a great combination,' he says, '—hot dog with fresh mustard. That's the way we got 'em at Coney,' he says.

"'Sweet Caps,' I says, 'you are breaking my heart. Desist,' I says. 'I ask you to desist. If you don't desist,' I says, 'I'm going to tear your head off by the roots and after that I'll probably get right rough with you. Fellow me,' I says, 'and don't speak another word of no description whatsoever. I've got a plan,' I says, 'and if it don't work I'll know them calamity howlers is right and I wont vote Democratic never again—not,' I says, 'if I have to vote for Bryan!'

"He trails along behind me, and his head is hanging low and he mutters to hisself. Injun file we retraces our weary footsteps until we comes once more to the village of Plentiful Valley. We goes along Main Street—I know it's Main Street because it's the only street there is—until we comes to a small brick building which you could tell by the bars at the windows that it was either the local bank or the calaboose. On the steps of this here establishment stands a party almost entirely concealed in whiskers. But on his breast I sees a German silver badge gleaming like a full moon seen through thick brush.

"'The town constable, I believe?' I says to him.

"'The same,' he says. 'What can I do for for you?'

"'Lock us up,' I says, '—him and me both. We're tramps,' I says, 'vagrants, derilicks wandering to and fro,' I says, 'like raging lions seeking whatsoever we might devour—and not,' I says, 'having no luck. We are dangerous characters,' I says, 'and it's a shame to leave us at large. Lock us up,' I says, 'and feed us.'

"'Nothing doing,' he says. 'Try the next town—it's only nine miles and a good hard road all the way.'

"'I thought,' I says, 'that you took a hidebound oath never to shave until you'd locked up a thousand tramps.'

"'Yep, he says, 'that's so; but you're a little late. I pinched him about an hour ago.'

"'Pinched who?' I says.

"'The thousandth one,' he says. 'Early to-morrow morning,' he says, 'I'm going to get sealed bids and estimates on a clean shave. But first,' he says, 'in celebration of a historic occasion, I'm giving a little supper to-night to the regular boarders in the jail. I guess you'll have to excuse me—seems to me like I smell the turkey dressing scorching.'

"And with that he goes inside and locks the door behind him, and don't pay no attention to us beating on the bars, except to open an upstairs window and throw a bucket of water at us.

"That's the last straw. My legs gives way, both at once, in opposite directions. Sweet Caps he drags me across the street and props me up against a building, and as he fans me with his hat I speaks to him very soft and faint and low.

"'Sweep Caps,' I says, 'I'm through. Leave me,' I says, 'and make for civilization. And,' I says, 'if you live to get there, come back sometime and collect my mortal remains and bury 'em,' I says, 'in some quiet, peaceful spot. No,' I says, 'don't do that neither! Bury me,' I says, 'in a Chinee cemetary. The Chinees,' I says, 'puts vittles on the graves of their dear departeds, instead of flowers. Maybe,' I says, 'my ghost will walk at night,' I says, 'and eat chop suey.'

"'Wait,' he says, 'don't go yet. Look yonder,' he says, pointing up Main Street on the other side. 'Read that sign,' he says.

"I looks and reads, and it says on a front window; '*Undertaking and Emba'ming In All Its Branches*.'

"I rallies a little. 'Son boy,' I says, 'you certainly are one thoughtful little guy—but can't you take a joke? I talk about passing away, and before I get the words out of my pore exhausted vacant frame you begin to pick out the fun'el director. What's your rush?' I says. 'Can't you wait for the remains?'

"'Keep ca'm,' he says, 'and look again. Your first look wasn't a success. I don't mean the undertaker's,' he says; 'I mean the place next door beyond. It's a delicatessen dump,' he says, 'containing cold

grub all ready to be et without tools,' he says. 'And what's more,' he says, 'the worthy delicatessener is engaged at this present moment in locking up and going away from here. In about a half an hour,' he says, 'he'll be setting in his happy German-American home picking his teeth after supper, and reading comic jokes to his little son August out of the *Fleagetty Bladder*. And shortly thereafter,' he says, 'what'll you and me be doing? We'll be there, in that vittles emporium, in the midst of plenty,' he says, 'filling our midsts with plenty of plenty. That's what we'll be doing,' he says.

"'Sweet Caps,' I says, reviving slightly, remember who we are? Remember the profession which we adorn? Would you,' I says, 'sink to burglary?'

"'Scandalous,' he says, with feeling, 'I'm so hollow I could sink about three feet without touching nothing whatsoever. Death before dishonor, but not death by quick starvation. Are you with me,' he says, 'or ain't you?'

"Well, what could you say to an argument like that? Nothing, not a syllable. So eventually night ensoos. And purty soon the little stars come softly out and at the same juncture me and the Sweet Caps Kid goes in. We goes into an alley behind that row of shops and after feeling about in the darkness for quite a spell and falling over a couple of fences and a lurking wheelbarrow and one thing and another, we finds a back window with a weak latch on it and we pries it open and we crawls in.

"Only, just as we gits inside all nice and snug, Sweet Caps he has to go and turn over a big long box that's standing up on end, and down it comes *ker-blim*! making a most hideous loud noise.

"Then we hears somebody upstairs run across the floor over our heads and hears 'em pile down the steps, which is built on the outside of the building to save building 'em on the inside of the building, and in about a half a minute a fire bell or some similar appliance down the street a piece begins to ring its head off.

"'The stuff's off,' says Sweet Caps to me in a deep, skeered whisper. 'Let's beat it.'

"'Nix,' I says. 'You fasten that there window! I'm too weak to run now, and if they'll give me about five minutes among the vittles I'll

be too full to run. Either way,' I says, 'it's pinch, and,' I says, 'we'd better face it on a full stomach, than an empty one.'

"'But they'll have the goods on us,' he says.

"'Son,' I says, 'if they'll only hang back a little we'll have the goods in us. They won't have no trouble proving the corpus delicatessen,' I says, '—not if they bring a stomach pump along. Bar that window,' I says, 'and let joy be unconfined.'

"So he fastens her up from the inside, and while we hears the aroused and infuriated populace surrounding the place and getting ready to begin to think about making up their minds to advance en massy, I pulls down the front shades and strikes a match and lights up a coal-oil lamp and reaches round for something suitable to take the first raw edge off my appetite—such as a couple of hams.

"Then right off I sees where we has made a fatal mistake, and my heart dies within me and I jest plum collapses and folds up inside of myself like a concertina. And that explains," he concluded, "why you ain't seen me for going on the last eighteen months."

"Did they give you eighteen months for breaking into the delicatessen shop?" I asked.

Mr. Doolan fetched a long, deep, mournful sigh.

"No," he said simply, "they gave us eighteen months for breaking into the undertaker's next door."

CHAPTER X

A TALE OF WET DAYS

In the days before the hydrant-headed specter of Prohibition reared its head in the Sunny South I had this tale from a true Kentucky gentleman. As he gave it to me, so, reader, do I give it to you:

"Yes, suh, to this good day Colonel Bud Crittenden ain't never fergot that time he made the mistake about Stony Buggs and the Bear Grass County man. It learnt him a lesson, though. It learnt him that the deceivingest pusson on earth, when it comes to seeping up licker, is a little feller with his eyes fur apart and one of these here excitable Adamses' apples.

"Speaking about it afterwards to a passel of boys over in the swopping ring, he said the experience, while dissapinting at the time, was worth a right smart to him subsequent. Previous to that time he said he was in error regarding the amount of licker a little man, with them peculiarities of features I just mentioned, could chamber at one setting.

"Said he knowed some of the derndest, keenest gunfighters in the state was little men and he'd always acknowledged that spare-built, narrer-waisted men made the best hands driving trotting hawses; but he didn't know, not until then, that they was so gifted in the matter of putting away sweet'ning drams.

"It happened the time we all was up at Frankfort nomernating a Clerk of the Court of Appeals. There'd been a deadlock for nigh on to three days. The up-state delegates was all solid for old General Marcellus Brutus Hightower of Limestone County, and our fellers to a man was pledged to Major Zach Taylor Simms, of Pennroyal.

"Ballot after ballot it stood the same way—fifty-three to fifty-three. Then on the mawning of the third day one of their deligates from the mountains was called home suddenly by a message saying a misunderstanding had come up with a neighboring fambly and two of his boys was shot up consid'rable.

"The convention had voted the first day not to recognize no proxies for absentees, and so, having one vote the advantage, we was beginning to feel like winners, when just then Breck Calloway from

McCorkin County, he up and taken the cramps the worst way. For a spell it shore looked like he was going to be cholera-morbussed. Breck started in for luxuries in the line of vittles soon as he hit town, and between votes he kept filling hisself up on fried catfeesh and red bananas and pickled pigs' feet and gum drops and cove eyesters and cocoanut out of the shell and ice cream and sardines—greasy minners, Breck called 'em—and aig-kisses and a whole lot of them kind of knick-knacks.

"That mout not a-bothered him so much if he hadn't switched from straight licker and taken on consid'able many drinks of this here new-fangled stuff called creamy de mint—green stuff like what you see in a big bottle in a drug store winder with a light behind it. By the middle of the third day Breck was trying to walk on his hands. He had a figger like one of them Mystic Mazes. 'Course, all kinked up that way, he warn't fitten for a deligate, and Colonel Bud Crittenden had to ship him home.

"I heard tell afterwards that going back on the steam cars the conductor told Breck he didn't care if he was a contortionist, he couldn't practise none of his didoes on that there train.

"So there we was, each side shy one vote and still tied—52 and 52. And at dinner time the convention taken a recess until ha'f past three in the evening with the understanding that we'd vote again at foah o'clock.

"Jest as soon as our fellers had got a drink or two and a snack to eat, Colonel Bud Crittenden, he called a caucus, him being not only manager of Major Zach Taylor Simms' campaign but likewise chairman of the district committee. Colonel Bud rapped for order and made a speech. He said the paramountest issue was how to nominate Major Simms on that there next ballot. Said they'd done trying buying off members of the opposition and other regular methods without no success whatsomever. Said the Chair would now be glad to hear suggestions from any gen'elman present.

"So Morg Holladay he got up and moved the Chair to appoint a committee of one or more to shoot up some deligate or, if desired, deligates, in the other crowd. But the Colonel said no. We wuz in a strange town, fur removed from the time-honored institutions of home, and the police mout be hosstile. Customs differed in different towns. Whil'st shooting up of a man for purely political purposes

mout be accepted as necessary and proper in one place; then agin it mout lead to trouble, sich as lawsuits, in another. And so on.

"Morg he got up again and said how he recognized the wisdom of the Chair's remarks. Then he moved to amend his motion by substituting the word 'kidnapping' for 'shooting up.' Said as a general proposition he favored shooting up, not being familiar with kidnapping; in fact not knowing none of the rules, but was willing to try kidnapping as an experiment. But Colonel Bud 'peared to be even more dead set, ef possible, agin kidnapping than agin shooting. He advanced the thought that shooting was recognized as necessary under proper conditions and safeguards, ever'where, but that kidnapping was looked on as bordering on the criminal even in the case of a child. How much more so, then, in the case of a growed-up adult man and Dimocrat?

"Nobody couldn't think of nothing else then, but Colonel Bud 'lowed we was bleeged to do something. There warn't no telling, he said, when another one of our deligates would get to craving dainties and gormandize hisself with a lot of them fancy vittles the same as Breck Calloway had done, and go home all quiled up like a blue racer in a pa'tridge nest. Finally Colonel Bud he said he had a suggestion to advance his ownse'f, and we all set up and taken notice, knowing there wasn't no astuter political leader in the State and maybe none so astuted.

"Colonel Bud he said he was shamed to admit that the scheme hadn't suggested itself to him or ary other gen'elman present before now—it was so plum doggone simple.

"'We got mighty nigh three hours yet,' says Colonel Bud, 'and enduring of that time all we got to do is to get one of them Hightower deligates deef, dumb and blind drunk—so drunk he won't never git back to answer roll-call; and if he does, won't know his own name if he heered it. We will simply appint a committee of one, composed of some gen'elman from amongst our midst of acknowledged capacity and experience, to accomplish this here undertaking, and likewise also at the same time we will pick out some accessible deligate in the opposition and commission said committee of one to put said opposition deligate out of commission by means of social conversation and licker between the present time and the hour of 4 P.M. By so doing victory will perch on our banners, and there can't

be no claim of underhand work or fraud from the other side. It'll all be according to the ethics made and purvided in such emergencies.'

"Right off everybody seen Colonel Bud had the right idee, and he put the suggestion in the form of a motion and it carried unanimous. Colonel Bud stated that it now devolved upon the caucus to name the committee of one. And of course we all said that Colonel Bud was the very man for the place hisse'f; there wasn't none of us qualified like him for sich a job. Everybody was bound to admit that. But Colonel Bud said much as he appreciated the honor and high value his colleagues put on his humble abilities, he must, purforce, sacrifice pussonal ambition in the intrusts of his esteemed friend, Major Zach Taylor Simms. As manager of the campaign he must remain right there on the ground to see which way the cat was going to jump—and be ready to jump with her. So, if the caucus would kindly indulge him for one moment moah he would nominate for the post of honor and responsibility as noble a Dimocrat, as true a Kintuckian and as chivalrous a gen'elman as ever wore hair. And with all the requisited qualifications and gifts, too.

"Needless to state he referred to that sterling leader of Fulman County's faithful cohorts, Captain Stonewall Jackson Bugg, Esquire.

"And so everybody voted for Stony. We knowed of course that while Stony Bugg had both talents and education he warn't no sich genius as Colonel Bud Crittenden when it came to storing away licker; yet so far as the record showed he never had been waterlooed by anybody. And we couldn't ask no more than that. Stony was all hoped up and proud at being selected.

"Then there came up the question of picking out the party of the second part, as Colonel Bud said he would call him for short. Colonel Bud said he felt the proper object for treatment, beyond the peradventure of a doubt, was that there Mr. Wash Burnett, of Bear Grass.

"He believed the caucus would ricolect this here Burnett gen'elman referred to by the Chair. And when he described him we all done so, owing to his onusual appearance. He was a little teeny feller, rising of five feet tall, with a cough that unbuttoned his vest about every three minutes. He had eyes 'way round on the side of his head like a grasshopper and the blamest, busiest, biggest, scariest,

nervousest Adamses' apple I ever see. It 'peared like it tried to beat his brains out every time he taken a swaller of licker—or even water.

"Right there old Squire Buck Throckmorton objected to the selection of Mr. Wash Burnett. Near as I can recall here's what Squire says:

"'You all air suttenly fixing to make a monstrous big mistake. I've give a heap of study in my time to this question of licker drams. I have observed that when you combine in a gen'elman them two features jest mentioned—a Adamses' apple that's always running up and down like a cat squirrel on a snag, and eyes away 'round yonder so's he can see both ways at once without moving his head—you've got a gen'elman that's specially created to store away licker.

"'I don't care ef your Bear Grass County man is so shortwaisted he can use his hip pockets for year-muffs in the winter time. Concede, if you will, that every time he coughs it shakes the enamel off'n his teeth. The pint remains, I repeat, my feller citizens, that there ain't no licker ever distilled can throw him with them eyes and that there Adamses' apple. You gen'elmen 'd a sight better pick out some big feller which his eyes is bunched up close together like the yallers in a double yolk aig and which his Adamses' apple is comparatively stationary.'

"But Colonel Bud, he wouldn't listen. Maybe he was kinder jealous at seeing old Squire Buck Throckmorton setting hisse'f up as a jedge of human nature that-a-way. Even the greatest of us air but mortal, and I reckon Colonel Bud wouldn't admit that anybody could outdo him reading character offhand, and he taken the floor agin. Replying to his venerable friend and neighbor, he would say that the Squire was talking like a plain derned fool. Continuing he would add that it didn't make no difference if both eyes was riding the bridge of the nose side-saddle, or if they was crowding the ears for position.

"'Now, as to the Adamses' apple, which he would consider next in this brief reply,' he went on to explain, 'Science teached us that the Adamses' apple didn't have no regular functions to speak of, and what few it did have bore no relation to the consumption of licker in the reg'lar and customary manner, viz., to-wit, by swallowing of the same from demijohn, dipper, tumbler or gourd. The Adamses' apple was but a natchel ornament nestled at the base of the chin whiskers. He asked if any gen'elman in the sound of his voice ever see a

bowlder on the side of a dreen, enlessen it was covered, in whole or in part, by vines? The same wise provision of Nature was to be observed in the Adamses' apple, it being, ef he mout be pardoned for using such a figger of speech, at sich a time, the bowlder, and the chin whiskers, the vine.

"'It's the size that counts,' said Colonel Bud Crittenden. 'It natchelly stands to reason that a big scaffolded-up man like Stony Bugg can chamber more licker than a little runt like that Burnett. Why, he could do it if Burnett was spangled all over with Adamses' apples and all of them palpitating like skeered lizards. He could do it if Burnett's eyes were so fur apart he was cross-eyed behind. Besides, this here Burnett is a mountaineering gen'elman, and I mistrust not, he's been educated altogether on white moonshine licker fresh out of the still. When red licker, with some age behind it, takes holt of his abbreviated vitals he's shore going to wilt and wilt sudden and complete.

"'Red licker, say about fourteen year old, is mighty deceivin' to a mountaineer. It tastes so smooth he forgets that it's strong enough to take off warts.'

"Well, suzz, that argument fetched us and we all coincided; all but Squire Buck Throckmorton, who still looked mighty dubiousome. Anyway, Stony Bugg, he went out and found this here Mister Wash Burnett and invited him to see if there was anything left in the bar; and Burnett, he fell into the trap, not apparently suspicioning nothing, and said he didn't care if he did. So they sashayed off together t'wards the nighest grocery arm in arm.

"Being puffectly easy in our minds, we all went back to the convention hall 'bout half past two. The Forks of Elkhorn William Jinnings Bryan and Silver Cornet Band was there and give a concert, playin 'Dixie' foah times and 'Old Kentucky Home' five. And Senator Joe Blackburn spoke three or foah times. I never before heard Republicans called out of their name like he done it. Senator Joe Blackburn shore proved hisse'f a statesman that day.

"Well, it got on t'wards half past three, and while we warn't noways uneasy we taken to wishing that Stony Bugg would report back. At ten minutes befoah foah there warn't no signs of Stony Bugg. At five minutes befoah foah our fellers was gettin' shore nuff worried, and jest then the doah opened and in comes that there little

Wash Burnett—alone! He was coughing fit to kill hisse'f. His Adamses' apple was sticking out like a guinney egg, and making about eighteen reverlutions to the second, and them fur-apart eyes of his'n was the glassiest I ever seen, but it was him all right. He stopped jest inside the hall and turned up his pants at the bottom and stepped high over a shadder on the floor. But he warn't too fur gone to walk. Nor he warn't too fur gone to vote.

"'Fore we could more'n ketch our breaths the chairman called for a ballot and they taken it, and General Hightower was nominated—52 to 51—Captain Stonewall J. Bugg being recorded by the secretary as absent and not voting. And while the up-state fellers was carrying on and swapping cheers with one another, our fellers sat there jest dumfoundered. Colonel Bud Crittenden, he was the first one to speak.

"'Major Simms being beat ain't the wust of it,' he says. 'Our committee on irrigation is deceased. The solemn and sorryful duty devolves upon us, his associates, to go send a dispatch to Mrs. Stony Bugg and fambly informing them that they air widows. Stony, he must have choked hisse'f to death on some free barroom vittles, or else he got run over by a hawse and waggin. Otherwise he'd a' been here as arranged, and that there little human wart of a Wash Burnett would be spraddled out on the floor, face-down, right this very minute, a'trying to swim out of some licker store dog fashion.'

"But jest then we heard a kind of to-do outside, and the doah flew open and something rolled in and flattened out in the main aisle. Would you believe me, it was Stony Bugg, more puffectly disguised in licker than I ever expected to see.

"Two of us grabbed holt of him by the arms and pulled him up on his feet. He opened his eyes kind of dazed-like and looked around. Colonel Bud, he done the talking.

"'Stony,' he says, not angry but real pitiful, in his tones, 'Stony, why the name of Gawd didn't you git him drunk?'

"Stony, he sort of studied a minute. Then he says, slow and deliberate and thick:

"'Drunk? Why, boys, I gozzom so drunk I couldn't see him.'

"And as we came on home, we all had to admit you couldn't git a man no drunker than that, and live."

THE END

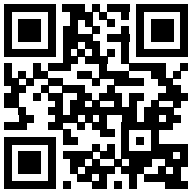
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