A PAGE OF THE BEST SHORT STORIES

The Chivalry of Silas

By PHILIP VERRILL MIGHELS

THE little garden gate complained squeakingly, and tried to sag even lower, for a man came to lean on it beside the woman who was already there.

"You don't s'pose you could no-way say yes, en' settle the whole shebang this mornin', do you?" said he.

The woman was reading a book. She wet her thumb and turned a leaf, reading on slowly until a paragraph was finished.

"Silas Jud," said she, leaning an elbow on the volume to keep it open, "you ain't never yit read 'Sir Beverly, the Knight of the Mystic Moor'?"

"I ain't—never."

"No, I feared ye hadn't. Ye'd be less pesterfyin' if ye had. How kin ye ruminate on matrimony with me, an' you doin' no chivalry deeds?"

"I made Tilly a good husband."

"Y-e-s, but where's yer backbone oozed to since she went?"

He answered with a sort of whispered whistle, that conveyed a skeleton idea of a tune.

"Why don't ye buckle on yer armor, an' fare forth with a chunk of my hair-ribbon in yer helmet, an' prove yer valler, if ye want me so terrible?"

He did not answer, but walked away silently, and she continued to read. That same question he had put to her every week for three months.

Jud was a lorn and a silent man who lived apart from other men in Deer Hollow, and looked indefinitely forward to a small California farm on the hillside for a home. He made his living cutting wood, and even managed to save a trifle against the farm of the future. For a year now, which time had elapsed since the death of his wife, he had spent a great many of his hours in the cabin to which he now repaired.

At the door he paused and listened. No sound he heard, but when he had tiptoed in, a curl-haloed head was raised from a bunk, and one large, violet-colored eye greeted him, its mate being hidden by a chubby fist that screwed vigorously around, rubbing away the few remaining sleep-webs. Then a dear, red-lipped mouth stretched itself into an O as large as a half-dollar.

"Turned back, papa?" said the owner of the fist and eye and mouth and golden hair, and she climbed to the floor.

"Yep, honey-bug," he answered, cheerfully.

"Baby's dress tored," vouchsafed the tot, bringing the garment for inspection.

"Pore li'l' gel, 'tis, ha, ha!" He took it up, jerked a needle as large as a small sword out of the wall, waxed his linen thread, and sat down to sew, stabbing his fingers now and then, but getting on, nevertheless—after his kind. The child sat near, her face in her dimpled hands, looking very "old-fashioned," and altogether wise.

"Baby wants mamma," she said at last, and the utter irrelevancy of this observation seemed not at all apparent to the man.

"What would mamma do for baby?"

"Baby sit on her yap, and mamma sing."

Having finished the dress and put it on her, he took the child up on his knee, holding her tenderly against his rough coat, and rocked himself back and forth as he he sang.

The song, which, fortunately, the little one preferred of all the vast repertoire of the mother who was gone, was the only one he knew. After half a dozen verses of it, the child slipped away.

"Mamma det baby sumfin' to eat."

"Why, en course, my popsy-wopsy blossom." So he fetched a bowl of milk, a can of brown sugar, and some strange "mush" from a pail that hung from a hook over the dying embers in the fireplace, where he had put it to cook before going out. Taking her once more on his knee, he satisfied her hunger, unintentionally hastening matters not a little by using a spoon that was large enough to dig potatoes with.

"What else would mamma do for baby?" he asked, after the wee appetite was appeased.

"Pay on floor wif blocks," said she.

Down he got on "all fours," building matchless structures with the half-peeled cubes, and giving the most desperate descriptions of the animals represented therein.

An eventful week went by. When Wednesday was come, Silas "fared him forth," to do his accustomed wooing. As he neared the cabin of the Widow Harvey, he saw her leaning, as before, on the garden gate, and reading, as usual, in the famous book of Beverly. He took the place that she left for him, saying, after a moment:

"You don't s'pose you could, anyhow, say 'No,' en' settle the whole shebang this mornin', do you?"

She was taken off her guard completely; he had never put it that way before. Turning red and fumbling the book till it shut on her "place," she gazed at him blankly.

"Ahem—Silas—Silas Jud, I mean, hev' I ever read ye how Sir Beverly slew the demon wolf in the black cavern?"

"You ain't—never."

"Well, listen to this," and thereupon she read a scintillating and lengthy description of this marvelous event.

"What'd he do it for, anyway?" he asked at the end.

She was surprised again; Silas sounded rebellious.

"He was a true an' tremenjis knight, an' done it fer his lady fair," she replied, with no small amount of spirit, 'nn' if you was a proper an' courageous man, an' dooly sincere, you'd sew my favor on to yer hat, even if 'twas only a bone button, an' prove yerself noble before ye asked me to say 'Yes' or 'No' or 'Mind yer business,' concernin' this here marryin'. There ain't no way fer me to know yer valler, an' there's no chivalry left these days, nohow, an' those woods might be full of demon wolves, an' never a one you'd kill fer me."

Her words came forth with an unwonted sputter, while she eyed the near-by woods as if expecting to see a demon wolf issue therefrom forthwith. Silas looked upon her oddly.

"If you was my wife, or would promise to splice up along o' me, I'd wear yer ribbon, er button, er anything of your'n, but jist now I'm wearin' a ribbon fer somebody else."

"Oh! so ye are; an' whose may I ask?"

"My little gel's," said he.

"Oh!"

They were silent some time.

"Then you don't think you no-ways could this mornin'?" Silas moved off slowly. And never a turn turned he to look upon her; but the book was neglected, while she watched him, and her lips quivered a time or two.

With the baby mounted high, and chuckling merrily, Jud went forth to his work that morning, grinning and joking the little one, sighing and dropping a long jaw for himself. Soon she was babbling in the woods with her toys—a headless doll, a badly-warped napkin ring, and a long row of fresh chips, clean from the glittering steel, and yet redolent of the pine. From log to log went Silas, hewing his way vigorously, if not valiantly, and glancing at the baby between the scudding bits that flew from the polished edge.

Presently his measure along the log whereon he worked brought him opposite a tree that hid the little one from sight. Well, he would rush it the faster, he thought, and he did. Suddenly, above the noise of his echoings blows, came a shrill call:

"Papa! Mamma! Papa!"

Like one possessed, he bounded over a fallen tree toward the baby. And he nearly reeled with the stroke of his heart, for out of the copse, swaying heavily on its silent feet, came a gaunt grizzly bear, with blazing, hungry eyes.

"Hoi!" Jud halloed, in a fearful voice, rushing madly forward; and he felt his flesh creep all a-chill at the size of the monster.

It stopped, leered at him maliciously, and swung itself erect, with a movement at once active and awkward, coming forward to meet him as if well aware that he must first be dealt with.

Without a sign of fear, Jud leaped straight in front of the beast, and swung his ax at its head. The huge brute dodged, saving its skull, but sacrificing half of its left paw. Enraged with pain, it stood again, and came at him, gory and roaring. Again the axman struck, but not so skilfully, and the bear warded with his other paw with such accuracy and force as to strike the handle a heavy blow that sent the weapon hurtling away, end over end.

With a fiendish snort the bear closed in. The scream of some one who had hurried there, startled by the baby's call, attracted only a second's notice from the animal, but in that moment Jud whipped out a long, keen-edged bowie-knife, and crouched to strike.

Fierce, then, and furious the scene. Grasping the man about the shoulders, daubing him, chest and neck and back, with the bleeding paw; tearing away the clothes and flesh from his breast and arms, raking him again and again with its claw-armed hind feet, the grizzly seemed a very demon indeed.

Into the reeking, hairy body the man drove the steel time after time, but his stabs were far too short, the hide was far too thick, and the bear's vitality most wonderful. Forward they trampled, backward they staggered, in a seemingly endless struggle. Yet it could last but little longer, for the man now bled from gashes deep and long, scored on his arms, legs and body; his strength waned, and his thrusts with the knife seemed almost useless.

Backward Silas went. He knew that he should fall in a moment, and the thought of what would happen was maddening. He lunged again, desperately, stabbing the blade in to the hilt; he felt the huge brute quiver—then somebody came and rapped a furious tattoo on the back of the animal's head with a rattling umbrella, that cracked and bruised in a manner so utterly aggravating that the creature was glad to drop the man and turn. Reeling forward, Jud grabbed his ax and looked.

Strangest of sights! The Widow Harvey was frantically avoiding the clutch of the grizzly, and was slashing with her weapon with a mad, wild energy peculiar to her sex.

An awful sound made the ax as it clove the skull of the monster, and all three fell to earth—two human beings and a mountain of great, dead bear.

* * * * * *

On the following day, as Silas lay, wounded and bandaged, upon a lounge, he said to the widow: "How did you happen to come?"

"Why," she said, "Willie Millett heard the baby scream, an' went to see what was up, an' he seen ye slayin' the demon bear, an', boy-like, run to my house, it bein' nearest."

"Yes; but—"

"An' I hed to go see no harm come to the baby's knight—an' mine."

The Social Secretary.

Long ago it was found desirable to place the work of factory improvement in the hands of a salaried official called the social secretary. This person, a man where girls are in question, serves as where girls are inquestion, serves as a point of contact between the firm and the workers, supervising what may be called the domestic department of factory life to see that abuses which arise because of carelessness or other causes are corrected; that the man or woman has every chance for doing work in such a way as to deserve advancement and to see that it comes; to protect the firm from the wastefulness of keeping on the payroll those who fail to give a day's work for a day's pay, in some cases adjusting salaries according to capacity. Not in the least in the nature of a spy, the social secretary is concerned purely with the business of insuring fair play for both sides, more particularly from the employes' viewpoint.

Firms which employ such a person find the social secretary worth every cent of the good salary commanded.—The Reader.

The Advantages of Reading.

"Beg pardon, sir," said the weary hobo as he stood at the farmhouse door, "but might I sleep in your barn tonight? I haven't had a roof over my head for ten days."

"I congratulate you," said the kindly farmer. "That is a splendid thing. I have just read in one of my ten-cent magazines that it is not too much to say that to the delicate, highly-strung, easily knocked-up individual the advantages of sleeping in the open air are enormous. Pallid cheeks take on a ruddy hue, colds are unknown, nerves are forgotten, and irritability becomes a phase of the past. A small plot and a little perseverance are the only necessaries, and the result is assured. You are very welcome to the use of my potato-patch, and my sky is at your disposal."—Judge.

However, where it takes more than about so much muck-raking to bring the good, the beautiful and the true to the surface, we usually deem it better morals to content ourselves with the goody-goody, the pretty and the conventional, and to the general these answer quite as well.—Puck.

A Jest of Fate

"In Eden sin was yet without a name,
And man, thrice happy, smiled—till woman came."

FALKNER paraphrased, with his best cynical smile. Falkner was of that perennial youth that at thirty eventuates in a piteous seeming of folly. He liked to be thought darkly wicked, a misanthrope, and a genius generally misunderstood. Therefore it was amazing that he had let himself fall in love with Evy Wilton, who was as sunny as a summer day and as wholesome as bread pudding. Falkner's paraphrasing had not been for her—he never wasted misanthropy, and it glided off the mind of his betrothed after the manner of water from a duck's wing. Far otherwise with Aileen Clare—she could both quote and sentimentalize by the yard. It was really a godsend—Falkner's betrothal. Aileen had known of it from the first, and the knowledge had put their intercourse into the category of dangers, thereby giving it a delicious flavor of forbidden fruit.

"You say that because you are a bad man—very, very wicked," Aileen answered, dropping her eyes with a little veiled sigh.

Falkner leaned toward her. "No man is really very, very wicked," he said: "that is, not by nature. The wickedness comes from circumstances—circumstances which are really and truly Fate. They play with us—all of us are their sport. Then when in our misery we strike out blindly, unknowing, uncaring what we do, the world, the blind-bat world, calls us wicked."

"How profound! And how intensely interesting! I never saw it before," Aileen murmured, with a liquid sidewise glance. The glance went to Falkner's head. Leaning still nearer, he possessed himself of her hand, slim and white, and ringless, and pressed his lips to it, saying: "You mean—you had only felt it—in me, for me. You had not let yourself put it in words; but you knew—you understood. If only we had not met too late! I tell you the myth of Tantalus embodies all of human tragedy."

Aileen gasped and moved as if to draw away her hand. She knew he was playing a game, and knew that he knew. But just now the game was worth something—purely as a pastime—this country neighborhood to which, for the time, she was banished was so deadly dull any diversion was most welcome. She wanted the game to spin along, only now and then threatening a climax. There must be no real climax; that would ruin everything. She could find it in her heart to be rather sorry for Evy, if Evy did not so persistently refuse to be jealous. No matter how often Falkner rode, or drove, or rowed with Aileen, Evy only smiled approval, and bade him keep on with the good work. "She's strange here, you know, and besides not very strong. Of course, we must all be nice to her—and I think all she knows is to amuse herself with young men," was what she had said to Falkner the first week of Aileen's visit. In the second week she had repeated it, in the third, the fourth. Now, in the fifth, she added a further monition: "Write a song to her; tell her she's an inspiration. I'm sure your verses and music both are beautiful—and she may sing it after she is back in the city, and so help you to be famous."

Falkner was thinking of the song. He had written verses from his cradle upward—now ambition soared far beyond being a poet. A composer, world famous, his name on all tongues—that was what he aspired to. Really, that was not a bad notion of Evy's. Still he had a sense that he ought to have thought of it himself. Aileen's city circle, he had come to understand, impinged at more than one point upon the world of art and music. Of course, he could not ask for help—not any more than he could confide to her his dreams. But if he could impress his personality upon her, she might begin his exploitation unconsciously, in spite of herself, as it were. It was not as though he were a mere struggler, dependent upon his gifts for bread and butter. Thank heaven and his prudent forbearers, he had enough to be comfortable. Then there was Evy's tidy income—but, somehow, at the thought of Evy his reckoning up of the future always stopped short.

He meant to keep faith with her. They would marry, of course, but only after a while, when he was fully ready. Meantime he was near enough to being in love with Aileen to give his emotions the tang and fillip he was sure they had needed all along. Love, unhappy love, was the keynote of real expression. He must work himself up to a fine frenzy if he hoped to do anything really notable. So he slipped from his seat and knelt beside his enchantress, murmuring, "Temptress! Do you know what you are doing?"

Aileen shivered prettily—it was a feat that had cost her some practice. "I am—living," she breathed rather than spoke, looking at him through half-shut lids. "It seems like a dream," she went on, very low. "Everything before this—I, myself, most of all a dream."

"My dream flies forward; it is a dream of—us two." Falkner cried softly, making to draw her to his breast. She eluded him deftly, sprang up, and darted to the other side of the room, saying in a voice of mild reproof: "You are forgetting yourself—and Evy."

"O! that I could forget Evy!" Falkner groaned. "She is as good as gold—a million times too good for me—

"YOU SAY THAT BECAUSE YOU ARE A BAD MAN VERY VERY WICKED."

but not my soul-mate. You—you only can sit enshrined there—"

"Really!" said a third voice, strange and full of malicious amusement: "Aileen," it went on, "what am I interrupting?—One of your usual soul-tragedies, or private theatricals."

"Why, Dick Harding! You blessed old bear! How—where—when—however did you happen to come?" Aileen cried, rushing at the tall newcomer and flinging herself upon his breast. He put her away almost cavalierly, and said, holding her at arms' length and shaking his head: "I give you up! Clearly you are incorrigible. Didn't you promise me not to think of flirting—to give your whole mind and strength to getting well? Yet I find you—flirting with—this." His eyes measuring Falkner with amused contempt. "If you had to do it, wasn't there at least a man anywhere around? He looks like the usual pinchback genius; surely you've had enough of them?"

"Don't snarl so, old bear!" Aileen said saucily, smiling up at him and making to nestle to him. This time he did not repulse her. Falkner stood staring at them, his eyes narrowing till they were but points of flame. He was tall, but so slight it seemed madness to measure himself against the burly bigness of this insulting stranger. Yet he did not hesitate. Straight at him he went, with the leap of a panther, the clinch of a wild-cat. Harding had not even put up his hands—this weakling was equally beneath a woman's fooling and a man's blow. Of course he could stop him—catch him, shake him, if he would, crush him, as a dog shook and crushed a cornered rat. Still he did not want to hurt him. It was all really, no doubt, Aileen's fault. Wheeling half about, he met the onset with a lowered lunging shoulder, and was instantly sorry. Falkner's hands locked themselves about his throat. Falkner himself tugged and strained at the great bulk so fiercely, so madly, the two of them swayed heavily, and were on the point of falling to the floor. Aileen stood supine—her hands over her eyes, low wordless cries dribbling over her lips. What the event might have been heaven, perhaps, knows, if Evy had not chanced to come suddenly to her sweetheart's rescue.

"Donald Falkner! Behave yourself! Let go that man!" she commanded, with a stamp of her sturdy foot. "Will you never learn to curb your temper? Loose that strangle-hold, I say! Don't you see! he's getting black in the face?"

Half a breath Falkner kept his deadly clinch, then slowly, loathly, his fingers unlocked themselves; slowly, loathly, he reeled backward from Harding, and fell prone and senseless at Evy's feet. She knelt and bared his throat, saying with dry lips: "Water! Bring water!" Then as Aileen flew to obey her, without raising eyes or voice to Harding: "I had to send for you; you see you were just in time. Take Aileen away with you; take her as your wife. They have not loved each other—not really—but after this—"

Aileen came back there. Evy bent over Falkner, dashing cool drops in his face. He opened his eyes, and looked past her to Aileen. Aileen turned away her face, and ran to Harding's side. Being a woman she was also a contradiction. Until now Falkner had seemed to her a jest of Fate, a poor one, yet she walked away from him feeling that, if she let herself, she could love him passing well.

Tails, You Lose

By JAMES BARRINGTON

AS a hansom cab stopped at the gateway in a suburban town not far from New York, a trolley car came to a halt before the same house. From the hansom cab there sedately stepped a tall, grave-faced young man. He was carefully, even elaborately dressed, in a formal style. A carnation bloomed in the lapel of his coat—giving the last touch to a masterpiece.

"I'll walk to the house. Return in an hour," he said to the driver, who drove away. As the young man turned toward the gateway he met another young man, who had jumped briskly from the trolley car ere it fully stopped. The second young man's coat was a sack, worn with a careless air; his soft felt hat would have been the better for a brushing, especially now, when placed alongside of the first young man's shining silk.

"Well—how are you, Carson?" said he of the tall hat; and an interpreter of the subtler tones of human speech would have said he meant: "Confound you!"

"How are you, Digby?" responded the trolley passenger, and the hypothetical reader of tones would have declared his real meaning to be: "Oh, the devil take the luck!"

And the two young men stood stock still for a moment or two, in the ardent sunshine of the spring afternoon, staring ruefully, blankly, one at the other.

"Look here, Digby," said Carson, with the stock-broker's energy. "Let's talk this thing over for a minute. If we both go in—what's the use—no fun in that, for either of us. Am I correct?"

"You certainly are, old chap. But perhaps it would be fun for—for Miss Carrollton."

"Oh, no doubt it would—but I, for one, am rather tired of furnishing Miss Carrollton that kind of fun."

"And I am, for another."

"In fact, went on Carson, intently eyeing the other man, "I ran out today to settle up my share in the fun, one way or the other."

The other man started, and replied with a livelier air than he had hitherto shown: "We appear to be getting confoundedly confidential and explanatory—but all right—let it go at that. I came out with precisely the same object in view."

"Old man," said Carson, laying his hand on the other's sleeve, "honest Injun, now, what do you think of your chances?"

"Tell me what you think of yours, Carty, and I'll be in better shape to give you an answer."

"Well, Digby, I know this much—or believe it—the chances lie between us two. No others in sight."

"I am inclined to agree with you," said Digby. "And, to go a step farther, the chap who gets his question in first, has—well—the lead at any rate."

"Guess you're right about that, too," assented Carson.

With a sudden gleam in his eyes, Digby turned to his rival.

"Look here, old chap; I'll toss you to see who goes first. Man who wins—why he—why he pops the question without any more fuss—right off the bat, and settles the thing."

Carson stared; and then a smile broke out over his handsome face. "Sure! I say—you have more sporting blood than I gave you credit for."

"Oh, I have a little, when I arouse it," said Digby, with an air of modesty. He drew a 50-cent coin from his pocket. "Let's toss this—best two of three wins." Suddenly he paused and looked around. "But, look here, Carty, we may be under observation from the house; rather ridiculous to be seen acting like a pair of newsboys playing pitch and toss. Here, I'll show you a wrinkle. We'll spin the coin on this stone bench here, and call what face falls upward."

"That's good enough for me, Dig—you spin—I trust in Dame Fortune—let her go!"

"Beg your pardon, Carty," said Digby, gravely; "but, as it is my coin, I'd much prefer that you spin first—looks better, don't you know."

"How scrupulous, Dig—but, all right. Here she twirls—what do you cry?"

"I cry tails," said Digby. The silver coin turned like a bubble in the sunshine, and fell with a musical tinkle. "You win, Digby!" cried Carson, a flush mounting into his cheeks. "Now you twist her."

Digby did so. "I'll take a turn at tails—just for luck," said Carson. And the coin turned tails up.

"Last time, Dig," said Carson, setting the coin a-whirling once again.

"Oh, I stick to tails," said Digby—"never like to hedge, you know." And the coin turned date up.

"All right, Digby—good-by, and bad luck to you," said Carson, wheeling around.

With a smile playing oddly about his lips when his broad back was turned, Digby solemnly marched upon the house.

Meanwhile a pair of blue eyes had been watching the young men from a window, and a pair of red lips had been dimpling into smiles, and a fair brow wrinkling into puzzled little frowns. "Harry and Dick, and together—" ran the musings in the nut-brown head: "and to-day, when I thought them far away. What does it mean?" Her heart—helped by sundry recollections of things said by both young men, and of glances given by both—soon whispered a reason for their appearance. Excitedly ringing the bell for her maid, she flew to her toilet table.

Dick Carson marched rapidly and gloomily to a corner saloon for a bracer. As he entered the place, he heard a man say: "See? I leaves it to Mike, here, if I ain't right, heh, Mike? You take a silver coin and twirl it like that on its edge; and nine times out of ten it will fall tails up. Sure; I've spun it a dozen times here." A hand fell upon his shoulder; Carson's hand. "Excuse me," he said; "but I am more than interested. Here, barkeeper, a drink for this gentleman. What is the reason for this behavior on the part of the coin?"

"Why, you see—mixed ale for me, Mike—on one side of the coin there is this here head, with more weight in it than is one the other side. When you twirl it, why she falls heads down. See?"

"I certainly do. Where is your telephone?" cried Dick Carson to the barkeeper. And he made a dash for the machine.

The telephone bell rang in the Carrollton house just as Daisy Carrollton ran downstairs, and she went to the instrument. Just about that moment, Digby was waiting in the reception room.

"Hello? Is this the Carrollton house?"

"It is—why, Richard Carson! I thought you were coming up the drive."

"I was in too much of a hurry," said Carson's voice. "Daisy—answer me this question—the most serious thing I ever said in my life. Answer me quick! Will you marry me, dear?"

There was a pause of half a minute. Then came the answer: "Yes, Dick," said Daisy.

"Hurrah!" bawled Carson's voice, making Miss Daisy's ears tingle again. "When Harry Digby gets to the house—just tell him that tails don't win, after all—will you, darling?"

"Why, of course!" cried Daisy. "Here is Mr. Digby now."

Mr. Digby stood in the hall listening.

"H'm," said he. "It seems a case of tails Carson wins—heads or tails, I lose. Sorry, Miss Carrollton, but I must be returning to town immediately."

Encouraging Neatness.

The movement of the City Improvement Society in its offer to the young people of the schools toward neatness about the school grounds is one in every way commendable. The incentive that is thus held out to the young people toward a better care of the surrounding territory of the school buildings will do much to prevent that carelessness which is proverbial with children, and from which thoughtlessness they can be turned by some such inducement as that so generously provided by the improvement society.—Newburyport News.

The Musician and the Madman

By ROBERT FINDLAY

FIFTEEN years' practice as the only English-speaking physician in a Mexican town had made me familiar with the private lives of most of its denizens.

It was one day in June, during the siesta, when from 12 to 2:30 o'clock all shops close, that there came a knock on the door. In response to my "Come in," Signora Ustedine, a fine-looking woman of middle-age, entered, holding by the hand a young man of perhaps twenty-five years.

"My call," said the lady, when she had introduced herself and taken the chair I offered, "is for both social and professional assistance. My boy"—and here she turned loving eyes upon the fat, high-shouldered, six feet of masculinity beside her—"my boy is unfortunate mentally, and it is one of his peculiarities that he cannot endure music long continued."

"You are in the habit of playing your violin at your window during our siesta, and it annoys him greatly," she contiued.

"Abomiable! Abominable! Abominable!" broke in the "boy."

"I feel that I am somewhat impertinent in making the request," resumed Mrs. Ustedine, with a smile that would make any old bachelor doctor of fifty break his fiddle, "but I know that you, as a physician, will understand."

"I appreciate the situation," I replied, with considerable dignity, "and will see to it that there is no further annoyance of the kind."

"Thank you," she said, with another angelic smile. "The second and main purpose of my call is poor Alfred. Will you kindly make some preliminary examination of him and take charge of his case, if you think treatment will benefit him?"

It was an ugly as well as a silly stare I had from Alfred at this. To make a short story of it, I learned that among Alfred's youthful vices were inordinate cigarette smoking and overapplication of study, the latter as much a vice as any other excess. Alfred had been unusually bright, with an abnormal ambition to know the mysteries of mechanics. Late hours at books and models, with a cigarette always in his mouth, had ruined him. He was now a paranoiac. I saw there was little I could do for him. However, as there seemed to be a streak of ugliness in his case, something rather unusual in paranoia, I said to his mother: "Senora, I can hold out no hope of a cure, and in maladies of this sort there is sometimes developed a dangerous tendency. While we may not cure, we may be able to stop."

A gunshot, followed by a woman's screams, broke the noonday quiet of Calle de Tampico, and we rushed to the door.

On the cement floor of the sitting-room, at the left of the entrance hall lay old Hermann Henkel, while beside him knelt his daughter, Amelia, rubbing his body and screaming most piteously.

Old Hermann, solist of the best orchestra in town, was a dear friend of mine. Often, in the quiet hours of siesta, we had met in my little patio, he performing upon his flute, and I doing my best with my violin; I think that nothing in this life creates stronger love of man for man than such musical association.

As I took a place in the crowd that pressed behind the policeman, my eye happened to rest on Alfred Ustedine. He was rubbing his hands together and muttering: "Fine calculation! A bull's-eye! A bull's-eye! A bull's-eye!" while his face wore a queer mixture of joy, cunning and devilitry.

His mother took him by the hand and led him from the room just as a tall, swarthy, fierce-eyed Mexican sprang through the doorway, threw the crowd this way and that, and pounced upon the corpse of my dead friend.

"Pounced" is the only word to use in describing any act of Captain Juarez Loisa, of the Chihuahua police.

"Murder," he said, pointing to a raw-edged bullet-hole in the old man's left side. "You people clear out. The officer and I will attend to matters here."

But as I was going, his eye fell on me and he exclaimed: "Stop, Senor Doctor! You will completely examine the body and make the scientific report to the mayor to-morrow;" and then, as I took off my coat to make what superficial examination I could, Juarez darted from the house into the street.

Promptly at 8 o'clock the next morning Captain Juarez Loisa entered my office. He seated himself quietly.

"I have the murderers, and merely call for your report on the autopsy," he began, yawning and stretching himself.

"Got the murderers! Who are they?"

"George Rote and his half-breed Yaqui, Ican, across the way."

"Why, man," I cried, "it's impossible! Old Henkel was shot from above. Rote, living on the ground floor opposite him, could not have shot him as he was shot, without going on the house-top, and no one would have been fool enough to do that."

"Listen, Senor Doctor. Rote, as every one in the street knows, was in love with the old man's daughter. Rote and the old man often quarreled."

"But that doesn't prove that Rote would do murder," I broke in.

"Amelia told me yesterday," he resumed with a glitter in his eyes, "that the men had a bitter quarrel the evening before. Henkel drove Rote out with the threat that another should marry Amelia within thirty days, and Rote's parting words were that there would be a corpse in Calle de Tampico before the wedding. Isn't there the motive? It's enough for us in Mexico, anyway."

"Rote must have some explanation," was all I could stammer forth, for I knew that a man once arrested must, in Mexico, prove his innocence.

It is one of my accomplishments to be able to play and think at the same time, and, as I sat in my window sawing away at the "Primero Beso," my mind was turning over the events of the past twenty-four hours. Only the day before the beautiful Senora Ustedine had been in that very room. From where I sat I could see her fine house on the opposite side of the street. She was a widow, beautiful, rich and still young. My bachelor life, full of professional duties though it was, was devoid of much in the matter of companionship and home attractions. Even the association with the old flute-player, Henkel, was at an end, and I began to speculate on a home of my own, with Senora Ustedine presiding over it, for she had attracted me strangely and strongly.

As I sat there turning out waltzes and images of a home with the handsome widow as its goddess, it suddenly occurred to me that I was breaking my promise the very first day.

I arose hurriedly. As I did so, there came a gunshot in the street. There was a sharp click as a bullet tore through the back of the chair in which I had been sitting. I looked down the street. Senora Ustedine and Alfred were standing in their doorway, but from a third-story window of their residence a smoke cloud was floating away in the sunlight.

"Nice calculation! A bull's-eye! A bull's-eye!" was ringing in my ears as I walked rapidly across to the Ustedines.

"Senora," I exclaimed, "I have been shot at from the third floor room of your house, and there's no doubt but poor Henkel was killed by the villain now in that room. I demand instant admission."

She turned white with indignation, but, upon my pointing to the smoke cloud still lingering about the upper window, bade me enter, adding that there was no one in the house have her son and herself.

I sprang up the stairway, Alfred following with a scowl on his face, muttering: "Calculation missed! Calculation missed!" again and again.

Arriving at the third floor, I pushed open a door that led to the front room.

It was a big chamber littered over with odds and ends. Upon benches and chairs, and upon the floor itself were enough machines and parts of machinery to start a railroad repair shop — electrical engines, turbine wheels, circular saws, wires, tools, mechanical contrivances without number—the playthings of the paranoiac, Alfred Ustedine, who followed me closely into his den and led me directly to the front window.

close to the window was as diabolical a contrivance as man's skill could well invent. And Alfred explained its operation to me with pride, and with much repetition of terms and processes.

In the curtain of the window he had cut a small circular hole. Upon a wooden stand rising about three feet from the floor he had fastened one of old rifles picked up by his father. The gun, a muzzle-loader, was one of those which required a percussion cap about as big as a kernel of corn. But Alfred didn't need the cap. He merely loaded the gun from an old ammuntition case that went with it as a relic, filled the large "nipple" with loose powder, and over this fixed an ordinary magnifying glass. When the sun, shining through that hole in the curtain, focussed it rays upon the magnifier, the powder in the nipple was ignited and the gun went off.

Alfred observed the regular hours of Henkel and myself at our windows, with flute and violin, aimed the gun, and the sun did the rest. He had been in my office that day, and killed Henkel from the third-story window across the way. He had stood at his threshold, a few minutes before, and failed to put an end to my music and life, simply because I had moved from my chair.

What a beautiful alibi he had at his command! How pat was his observation that day when he stood over poor old Henkel's body and murmured: "Nice calculation! A bull's-eye! A bull's-eye!"

What an artistic, though strenuous, critic of music.

Rote was freed and Alfred kept in jail for a year—in order to give him a chance to prove his innocence, perhaps. Then they declared him to be insane and dangerous, but freed him.

But I did not think it worth while to propose to her.